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THE REAL THING

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"BIG liner on fire in 55.43 N. and 32.19 W.," shouts the captain, diving into his chart-room. "Here we are! Give me the parallels!"

The first officer and the captain figure busily for a minute.

"North, 15 west," says the master.

"North, 15 west," assents the first officer, flinging down his pencil. "A hundred and seventeen miles, dead in the wind."

"Come on!" says the captain, and the two of them dash out of the chart-room into the roaring black night and up on to the bridge.

"North, 15 west!" the master shouts in the face of the burly helmsman. "Over with her, smart."

"North, 15 west, sir!" shouts back the big quartermaster, and whirls the spokes to starboard, with the steering-gear engine roaring.

The great vessel swings 'round against the night, smiting the faces of the great seas with her seventy-foot-high bows.

Crash! A roar of water aboard, as a hundred phosphorescent tons of sea-water hurl inboard out of the darkness, and rush aft along the lower decks, boiling and surging over the hatchways, capstans, deck-fittings, and 'round the corners of the deck-houses.

The ship hits the fifty-mile-an-hour gale, full in the face; and the engine telegraph stands at full speed. The master has word with the king of the underworld, the chief engineer, and the chief goes below himself to take charge, just as the master has taken charge on deck.

There is fresh news from the operator's room. The vessel somewhere out in the night and the grim storm is the S.S. *Vanderfield*, with sixty first-class passengers and seven hundred steerage; and she is alight forward. The fire has gained a strong hold; and they have already lost three boats, smashed to pieces, as they tried to launch them.

The life-saving apparatus is not so highly efficient as war and the constant menace of the submarine are later to make it.

"—— these old-fashioned davits!" says the master, as he reads the wireless operator's notes. "They won't lift a boat out clear of the ship's side, if she's rolling a bit. The boats in a ship are just

ornaments, if you've not got proper machinery for launching them. We've got the new derricks, and we can lower a boat so she strikes the water forty feet clear of the side, instead of dashing to pieces like a sixty-foot pendulum against our sides."

He shouts a question over his shoulder, standing there by the binnacle—

"What's she doing, Mr. Andrews?"

"Twenty and three-quarters knots, sir," says the second officer, who has been in charge. "But the chief's raising her revolutions every minute. She's nearly on to the twenty-one now."

"And even if we lick that, we'll be over five hours reaching her," mutters the master to himself.

Meanwhile, the wireless is beating a message of hope across a hundred miles of night and storm and wild waters.

"Coming! The R.M.S. *Cornucopia* is proceeding at full speed in your direction. Keep us informed how you are."

Then follows a brief unofficial statement, a heart-to-heart word between the young men operators of the two ships, across the hundred-mile gulf of black seas:

"Buck up, old man. We'll do it yet! We're simply piling into the storm, like a giddy cliff. She's doing close on twenty-one, they've just told me, against this breeze and the chief's down in the stokeholes himself with a fourteen-inch wrench and a double-watch of stokers. Keep a stiff upper lip. I'll let you know if we speed up any more."

The operator has been brief and literal, and has rather understated the facts. The mighty ship is now hurling all her fifty-thousand-ton bulk through the great seas, at something approaching a twenty-two-knot stride; and the speed is rising.

Down in the engine-room and stokeholes, the chief, minus his overalls, is a coatless demigod, with life in one hand and a fourteen-inch wrench in the other; not that this wrench is in any way necessary; for the half-naked men stream willing sweat in a silence broken only by the rasp of the big shovels and the clang of the furnace-doors, and the chief's voice.

The chief is young again; young and a king tonight, and the rough days of his youth have

surged back over him. He has picked up the wrench unconsciously, and he walks about, twirling it in his fist. The stokers work the better for the homely sight of it and for the sharp tang of his words, that miss no man of them all.

And the great ship feels the effect. Her giant tread has broken into an everlasting thunder, as her shoulders hurl the seas to port and starboard, in shattered hills of water that surge to right and left in half-mile drifts of phosphorescent foam, under the roll of her Gargantuan flanks.

THE first hour has passed, and there have been two fresh messages from that vessel, flaming far off, lost and alone, out in the wild roar of the waters. There has been an explosion forward in the burning ship, and the fire has come aft as far as the main bunkers. There has been an attempt to lower two more of the boats, and each has been smashed to flinders against the side of the burning ship, as she rolled.

The operator in the burning ship asks a personal question that has the first touch of real despair in it; and there ensues another little heart-to-heart talk between the two young men.

“Honest now, do you think you can do it?”

“Sure,” says the operator in the *Cornucopia*. “We’re doing what we’ve never done at sea before in heavy weather. We’re touching within a knot of our trial speed—we’re doing twenty-four and a half knots; and we’re doing it against this! Honor bright, old man! I’ll not deceive you at a time like this.

“I never saw anything like what we’re doing. All the engineers are in the engine-room, and all the officers are on the boat-deck, overhauling the boats and gear. We’ve got those new forty-foot boat-derricks, and we can shove a boat into the water with ‘em, with the ship rolling half-under. The old man’s on the bridge; and I guess you’re just going to be saved all right. You ought to hear us. I tell you, man, she’s just welting the seas to a pulp, and skating along to you on the top of them.”

The operator is right. The great ship seems alive tonight, along all her shapely eight hundred feet of marvelous, honest, beautiful steel. Her enormous bows take the seas as on a horn, and hurl them into roaring, screaming drifts of foam. She is singing a song, fore and aft, and the thunder of her gray steel flanks is stupendous, as she spurns the mutilated seas and the gale and the bleak intolerable miles

into her wake.

The second and third hours pass and part of the fourth, in an intermittent thunder of speed. And the speed has been further increased; for now the *Cornucopia* is laying the miles astern, twenty-nine in each hour; her sides drunken with black water and spume—a dripping, league-conquering, fifty-thousand-tons shape of steel and steam and brains, going like some stupendous angel of help across the black desolation of the night.

INCREDIBLY far away, down on the black horizons of the night, there shows a faint red glow. There is shouting along the bridge.

“There she is!” goes the word fore and aft. “There she is!”

Meanwhile the wireless messages pulse across the darkness. The fire is burning with terrible fury. The fore-part of the *Vanderfield’s* iron skin is actually glowing red-hot in places. Despair is seizing every one. Will the *Cornucopia* never, never come?

The young operators talk, using informal words:

“Look out to the south of you for our searchlights,” replies the man in the wireless room of the *Cornucopia*. “The old man’s going to play it against the clouds, to let you see we’re coming. Tell ‘em all to look out for it. It’ll cheer them up. We’re walking along through the smother like an express. Man! Man! We’re doing our trial speed, twenty-five and a half knots, against this! Do you realize it—against this! Look along to the south. Now!”

There is a hissing on the fore-bridge, quite unheard in the roar of the storm; and then there shoots out across the miles of night and broken seas, the white fan-blaze of the searchlight. It beats like an enormous baton against the black canopy of the monstrous storm-clouds, beating to the huge, thundering melody of the roar and onward hurl of the fifty-thousand-ton rescuer, tossing the billows to right and left, as she strides through the miles.

And what a sight it is, in the glare of the great light, as it descends and shows the huge seas! A great cliff of black water rears up, and leaps forward at the ship’s bows. There is a thunderous impact, and the ship has smitten the great sea in twain, and tossed it boiling and roaring on to iron flanks; and is treading it into the welter of foam that surrounds her on every side—a raging testimony, of foam and shattered seas, to the might

of her mile-devouring stride.

Another, and another, and another blank, moving cliff rises up out of the water-valleys, which she strides across; and each is broken and tossed mutilated from her shapely, mighty, unafraid shoulders.

A message is coming, very weak and faint, through the receivers:

“We’ve picked up your searchlights, old man. It’s comforted us mightily; but we can’t last much longer. The dynamo’s stopped. I’m running on my batteries now—”

It dwindles off into silence, broken by fragments of a message, projected too weakly to be decipherable.

“LOOK at her!” the officers shout to one another on the bridge; for the yell of the wind and the ship-thunder is too great for ordinary speech to be heard.

They are staring through their glasses. Under a black canopy of bellied storm-clouds, shot with a dull-red glowing, there is tossed up on the backs of far-away seas, a far-off ship, seeming incredibly minute, because of the distance; and from her fore-part spouts a swaying tower of flame.

“We’ll never do it in time!” says the young sixth officer into the ear of the fifth.

The burning ship is now less than three miles away and the black backs of the great seas are splashed with huge ever-shifting reflections.

Through the glasses it is possible now to see the details of the tremendous hold the fire has got on the ship and, away aft, the huddled masses of the six hundred odd remaining passengers.

As they watch, one of the funnels disappears and a great spout of flame and sparks shoots up.

“It’ll go through her bottom!” shouts the second officer; but they know this does not happen; for she still floats.

Suddenly comes the thrilling cry of “Out derricks!” and there is a racing of feet, and shouted orders. Then the great derricks swing out from the ship’s side, a boat’s length above the boat-deck. They are hinged, and supported down almost to the draft line of the ship. They reach out forty feet clear of the ship’s side.

The *Cornucopia* is bursting through the final

miles of wild seas, and then the telegraph bell rings, and she slows down, not more than ten or twelve hundred yards to windward of the burning hulk, which rises and falls, a stupendous spectacle on the waste of black seas.

The fifty-thousand-ton racer has performed her noble work, and now the rest lies with the boats and the men.

The searchlight flashes down on to the near water, and the boats shoot out in the “travelers,” then are dropped clear of the mighty flanks of the mother ship.

The leviathan lies to the windward of them, to break the force of the seas, and oil bags are put out.

The people in the burning *Vanderfield* greet the *Cornucopia* with mad cheers. The women are heaved bodily into the seas, on the ends of lines. They float in their cork jackets. Men take children in their arms and jump, similarly equipped. And all are easily picked up by the boats, in the blaze of the rescuer’s searchlights that gleam on leagues of ocean, strangely subdued by the floods of oil which the big ship is pumping on to the seas.

Everywhere lies the strange sheen of oil, here in a sudden valley of brine, unseen, or there on the shoulder of some monstrous wave, suddenly eased of its deadliness or again, the same fluorescence swirls over some half-league of eddy-flattened ocean, resting between efforts—tossing minor oil-soothed ridges into the tremendous lights.

Then the *Cornucopia* steams to leeward of the burning ship, and picks up her boats. She takes the rescued passengers aboard, and returns to windward; then drops the boats again, and repeats the previous operations, until every man, woman and child is saved.

As the last boat swings up at the end of the great derricks aboard the *Cornucopia* there is a final volcano of flame from the burning ship, lighting up the black belly of the sky into billowing clouds of redness. There falls the eternal blackness of the night. The *Vanderfield* has gone.

The great ship swings ‘round through the night, with her hundreds saved and begins to sing again in her deep heart, laying the miles and the storm astern once more in a deep low thunder.