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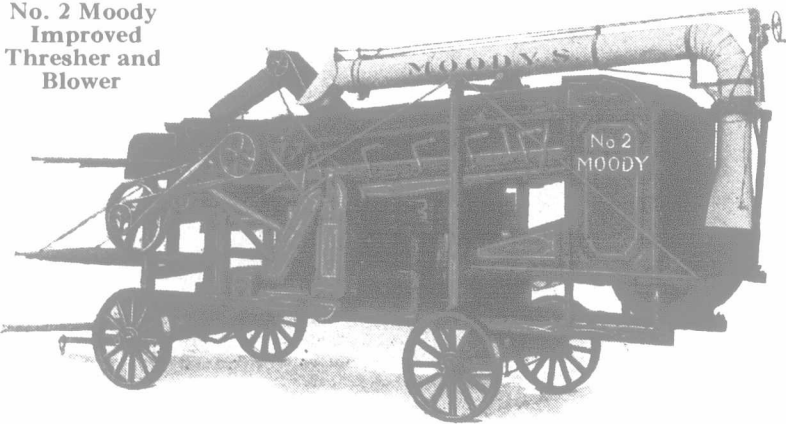
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crawled over to the emergency oxygen container. He opened the faucet and inhaled the fragrant stream of gas. His head began to swim and a sweet fire ran through his veins. Then, with an effort, he rose to his feet. The outlines of the objects around him were strangely distinct, and the faces of the men which were imploringly turned to him—some of them bearded and high-cheek boned, others tender and child-like—appeared to him infinitely and poignantly human.

In the corridor Andrey came across one of the men. The latter stood against the wall and gulped the air like a fish. Noticing the commander, he made an effort to cheer up, and mumbled: "Beg pardon, a bit unwell." Andrey leaned over him and looked into his eyes. A film of death was beginning to veil them. Andrey cursed under his breath and, turning sharply toward the telephone tube, gave a command to rise. Kate shook and dashed upward. The ascent lasted four minutes and a half. Suddenly, Kate stood still, and light fell on the screen of the periscope. The men crawled up to the main hatchway and unscrewed it. Cold, salt air rushed into the boat, swelling the chests of the men and turning their heads. Andrey leaped on the bridge uttering an involuntary cry as he met the strong light. The evening sun was solemnly suspended above vast masses of warm clouds, and the sea was all peace and quiet.

Holding the sextant in his trembling fingers, Andrey began to take observations. Soon a loud buzzing was heard in the sky. It was followed by the measured slight crackling of a machine gun, and from the hull of the boat came a sharp rat-a-tat, as if someone was throwing dry peas on it. A hydroplane was circling above Kate.

Andrey bit his lips and kept on working. About him a squad of his men were loading their rifles. The hydroplane almost reached the surface of the sea, then soared with a shrill "F-r-r-r," and flew right over the boat. A young, clean-shaven pilot sat motionless, his hands on the wheel. Below him an observer gazed down, waiting. Suddenly he lifted up an oblong bomb and hurled it into a tube. The shell flashed in the air and plunged into the sea at the very side of the boat. One of the men fired. The observer threw up his leather-covered arms with spread-out fingers; and slowly circling under the fire of the submarine crew, the aircraft soared upward.

Over the ridge of reddish mountains there appeared another aeroplane, looking like a long thin line. Kate picked her way with grace and ease across the orange-colored waters as if cutting through molten glass. Andrey buttoned his coat, pushed his cap over his eyes, and, walking a few paces on the bridge, said with a grimace, "Well, Yakovlev the mines are behind us, but what are we going to do now?"

"This region, sir, abounds in underwater reefs and sandbanks."

"That is just it and I would not risk sailing under water. . . . Wait a moment. . . ." He raised his hand.

The sun was already in the clouds and, replete with its orange glow, they lit the waters. A violent whizzing sound came from the west. Training his observation glasses on the sunset Andrey ordered greater speed. A grenade hissed on the right, and a jet of water appeared on the quiet surface. Kate tacked sharply toward the darkening mountain ridge, and behind in her shadowy wake, another bomb burst and blossomed out into a small cloud. Kate then turned east again, but now in front of her, on both sides, everywhere, shells burst and spluttered fire. The scouting hydroplane dashed above the submarine like a bat, two pale faces looked down and disappeared. Then right above the stern a grenade burst and the bearded Shubin dropped his rifle, clutched his face, toppled over the railing, and disappeared under the water.

"All hands below, to the devil!" cried Andrey, and watching where the shells fell thickest, began to give his orders. Kate circled like a run-down hare. All along the darkening skyline were seen smoking stacks of mine-layers and destroyers, and their ruthless ring was rapidly tightening about her.

Having lost her wireless mast which was shot off by a shell, Kate was now dashing toward the rocky shore, run-

ning awash. Six sparks blazed up in the dark below the rocks, and six steel-clad demons hissed above the boat. The oblong shadow of a ship was gliding along the coast. Kate shook, and a sharp-nosed, blind torpedo detached itself from her body and glided under water to meet the silhouette of the ship. A moment passed, and a fluffy, mountainous mass of fire and water rose where formerly projected the stacks of the mine layer. Then the mountain sank, and the silhouette disappeared. Kate entered into a baylet among the rocks, submerged, and lay down on the sandy sea-bed.

III

Two weeks Kate lay in the sea inlet, completely cut off from the rest of the world. By day she hid in the deep, and only under the cover of night she rose to the surface to get a supply of air. It was necessary to take the greatest precautions, for there was little hope that the enemy believed her to be destroyed by the mine-ships. Here are excerpts from the diary which Andrey kept during those days aboard the submarine:

"The excitement of the battle lasted three or four days, then all the recent events at once became strangely remote. We all live somewhere on the borderland between life and death, beyond the pale of time and space. I begin to understand the flies which in winter doze between the frozen window-panes. Most of the time the men stay in their berths half asleep, half awake. As for myself, I often lie on my couch with my eyes open and without a thought or a simple image in my head. One feeling pervades me with limitless power—that of sheer being. I feel being not as a tangle of separated episodes and fragmentary pictures, but as an unbroken infinity stretching somewhere above me, beyond the watery wall and beyond the precinct of Time itself. I cannot make it plainer. At times my heart begins to beat faster, as if trembling with the foreboding of a deeper understanding of what being is. It is such a strange and eerie feeling! I envy Yakovlev: he sleeps and dreams of battles and flag-bedecked heavens, of stormy seas and women; he leans over his berth which is right on top of mine and recounts to me all this nonsense in detail.

"The Prince is very ill. The absence of sounds has been preying upon his mind all this time. To-day, the eleventh day of our stay here, he became delirious, and fell down from his upper berth. The men bring him extra allowances of food, and I pretend not to notice it. Our food supply will last us for one week if we keep to a starvation diet. My lads have grown lean and have almost stopped all conversation. They are a meek sort and if they once grasped the reason why, they would die without a murmur. May God spare them unjust suffering. They greatly pity the sick boy.

"Two days later Prince Byelopolsky died. At midnight we rose to the surface with great precautions. Our deceased comrade's body was wrapped in linen, and a shell was tied to his feet. The crew chanted a prayer over him in muffled voices. The first thing I saw when I found myself on the bridge was the stars: huge and thick sown, they shone in the heavens and in the waters of the bay. On the right rose the steep seacoast, the black battlements of its rocks and the dwarfish trees above them looming high into the heavens. From the heights came wafting a strong fragrance of juniper, wormwood and flowers.

"The Prince was taken to the deck of the boat. His sharp profile was noticeable under the linen. The corpse glided overboard and disappeared in the water without a splash. The sailors silently crossed themselves. A bat scurried by.

"Suddenly beyond the mouth of the bay the silhouette of a four-stack ship slid by. 'They' have not yet given us up. From afar off blazed forth a searchlight beam and plunged into a ravine behind us, lighting up crooked twigs, stones and mossy rifts. Then the beam swept the sky and began to search the bay. The birds twittered querulously, and the water sparkled. The beam stopped at a distance of several yards from us. Had the man at the searchlight turned the light but a hair's breadth to the left, we would have been discovered. The bluish light illuminated the