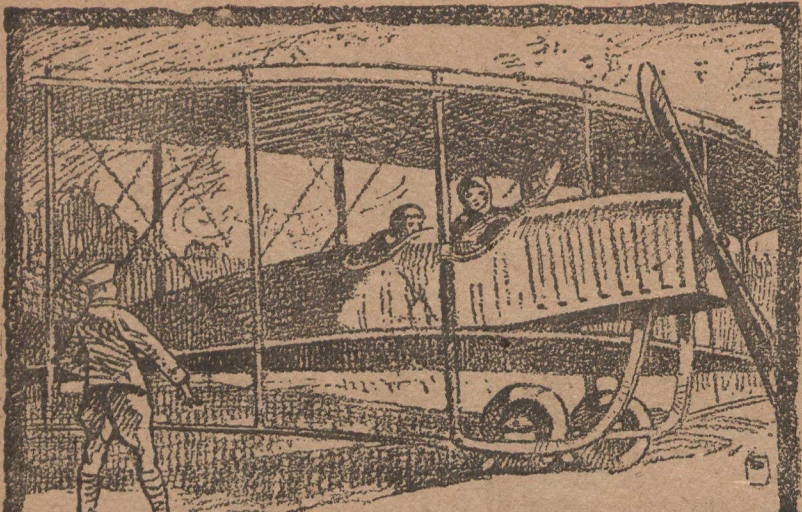




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ship is a mass of delicate machinery to which a highly skilled enemy agent might do almost infinite damage. Dawson has been run off his feet during the past two days; I don't know what he has discovered; but if he does not get to the bottom of the business in double-quick time we shall have the whole Board of Admiralty, Scotland Yard, and possibly the War Cabinet down upon us. Think, too, of the disgrace to this shipbuilding city of which we are all so proud."

"We shall know something soon," I said, "for, if I mistake not, here comes Dawson." The electric bell at the front door had buzzed, and Cary, slipping from the room, presently returned with a man who, to me at the first glance, was a complete stranger. I sprang up, moved round to a position whence I could see clearly the visitor's ears, and gasped. It was Dawson beyond a doubt, but it was not the Dawson whom I had known in the north. So what I had vaguely surmised was true—Cary's Dawson and Copplestone's Dawson were utterly unlike. Dawson winked at me, glanced towards Cary, and shook his head; from which I gathered that he did not desire his appearance to be the subject of comment. I therefore greeted him without remark, and, as he sat down under the electric lights, examined him in detail. This Dawson was ten years older than the man whom I had known and fenced with. The hair of this one was lank and grey, while that of mine was brown and curly; the face of this one was white and thin, while the face of mine was rather full and ruddy. The teeth were different—I found out afterwards that Dawson, who had few teeth of his own, possessed several artificial sets of varied patterns—the shape of the mouth was different, the nose was different. I could never have recognized the man before me had I not possessed that clue to identity furnished by his unchanging ears.

"So, Dawson," said I slowly, "we meet again. Permit me to say that I congratulate you. It is very well done."

HE grinned, and glanced at the unconscious Carey. "You are learning. Bill Dawson takes a bit of knowing."

"Have you any news, Mr. Dawson?" asked Cary eagerly.

"Not much. The wires of the Antinous have all been renewed—the Admiralty won't allow cables to be patched except at sea—but I haven't found out who played hanky-panky with them. It could not have been any one in the engine-room party, as none of them went near the place where the wires were cut. Besides, they were engineers, not electricians, and could have known nothing of the arrangements and disposition of the ship's wires. My man who worked with them is positive that they are a sound, good lot without a sea-lawyer or a pacifist among them; a gang of plain, honest tykes. So we are thrown back on the maintenance party, included in which were all sorts of ratings. Some of them are skilled in the electrical fittings—my own man with them is, for one—but we get the best accounts of all of them. They are long service men, cast for sea owing to various medical reasons, but perfectly efficient for harbor work. Among the officers of the ship is a R.N.R. lieutenant with a German name. I jumped to him, but the captain laughed. The man's father and grandfather were in

the English merchant service, and though his people originally came from Saxony, he is no more German than we are ourselves. Besides, my experience is that an Englishman with an inherited German name is the very last man to have any truck with the enemy. He is too much ashamed of his forbears for one thing; and for another he is too dead set on living down his beastly name. So we will rule out the lieutenant R.N.R. My own man, who is a petty officer R.N.V.R., and has worked on a lot of ships which have come in for repairs, says that the temper among the workmen in the yards is good now. It was ugly when dilution of labor first came in, but the wages are so high that all that trouble has settled down. I have had what you call sabotage in the shell and gun shops, but never yet in the King's ships. We have had every possible cutter of the wires on the mat before the Captain and me. We have looked into all their records, had their homes visited and their people questioned, inquired of their habits—Mr. Copplestone, here, knows what comes of drink—and found out how they spend their wages. Yet we have discovered nothing. It is the worst puzzle that I've struck. When and how the gun cable was cut I can't tell you, but who ever did it is much too clever to be about. He must have been exactly informed of the lie and use of the cables, had with him the proper tools, and used them in some fraction of a minute when he wasn't under the eye of my own man whose business it was to watch everybody and suspect everybody. I thought that I had schemed out a pretty thorough system; up to now it has worked fine. Whenever we have had the slightest reason to suspect any man we have had him kept off the ship and watched. We have run down a lot of footling spies, too stupid to give us a minute's anxiety, but this man who cut the Antinous' wires is of a different calibre altogether. He is A1, and when I catch him, as I certainly shall, I will take off my hat to him."

"You say that the Antinous is all right now?" I observed.

"Yes. I saw her towed out of the repair basin an hour ago, and she must be away down the river by this time. It is not of her that I'm thinking, but of the other ships which are constantly in and out for repairs. There are always a dozen here of various craft, usually small stuff. While the man who cut those wires is unknown I shall be in a perfect fever, and so will the Admiral-Superintendent. We'll get the beauty sooner or later, but if it is later, there may be bad mischief done. If he can cut wires in one ship, he may do much worse things in some other. The responsibility rests on me, and it is rather crushing."

Dawson spoke with less than his usual cheery confidence. I fancy that the thinness and whiteness of his face were not wholly due to disguise. He had not been to bed since he had been called up in the middle watch of the night before last, and the man was worn out.

"If you take my poor advice, Dawson," I said, "you will cut off now and get some sleep. Even your brain cannot work continuously without rest. The country needs you at your best, and needs you very badly indeed."

His dull, weary eyes lighted as if under the stimulus of champagne, and he turned upon me a look which was almost affectionate. I really began to

(Continued on page 30.)