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ALAN, after taking a second cup of coffee, went aft to the car deck. The roar and echoing tumult of the ice against the hull here drowned all other sounds. The thirty-two freight cars, in their four long lines, stood wedged and chained and blocked in place; they tipped and tilted, rolled and swayed like the stanchions and sides of the ship, fixed and secure. Jacks on the steel deck under the edges of the cars, kept them from rocking on their trucks. Men paced watchfully between the tracks, observing the movement of the cars. The cars creaked and groaned, as they worked a little this way and that; the men sprang with sledges and drove the blocks tight again or took an additional turn upon the jacks.

As Alan ascended and went forward to his duty, the increase in the severity of the gale was very evident; the thermometer, the wheelsman said, had dropped below zero. Ice was making rapidly on the hull of the ferry, where the spray, flying thicker through the snow, was freezing as it struck. The deck was all ice now underfoot, and the rails were swollen to great gleaming slabs which joined and grew together; a parapet of ice had appeared on the bow; and all about the swirling snow screen shut off everything. A searchlight which had flared from the bridge while Alan was below, pierced that screen not a ship's length ahead, or on the beam, before the glare dimmed to a glow which served to show no more than the fine, flying pellets of the storm. Except for the noise of the wind and the water, there had been no echo from beyond that screen since the shore signals were lost; now a low, far-away sound came down the wind; it maintained itself for a few seconds, ceased; and then came again, and continued at uneven intervals longer than the timed blasts of Number 25's whistle. It might be the horn of some struggling sailing vessel, which in spite of the storm and the closed season was braving the seas; at the end of each interval of silence, the horn blew twice now; the echo came abeam, passed astern, and was no longer to be heard. How far away its origin had been, Alan could only guess; probably the sailing vessel, away to windward, had not heard the whistle of Number 25 at all.

Alan saw old Burr who, on his way to the wheelhouse, had halted to listen too. For several minutes the old man stood motionless; he came on again and stopped to listen. There had been no sound for quite five minutes now.

"You hear 'em?" Burr's voice quavered in Alan's ear. "You hear 'em?"

"What?" Alan asked.

"The four blasts! You hear 'em now? The four blasts!"

Burr was straining as he listened, and Alan stood still too; no sound came to him but the noise of the storm. "No," he replied. "I don't hear anything. Do you hear them now?"

Burr stood beside him without making reply; the searchlight, which had been pointed abeam, shot its glare forward, and Alan could see Burr's face in the dancing reflection of the flare. The man had never more plainly resembled the picture of Benjamin Corvet; that which had been in the picture, that strange sensation of something haunting him, was upon this man's face, a thousand times intensified; but instead of distorting the features away from all likeness to the picture, it made it grotesquely identical.

AND Burr was hearing something—something distinct and terrifying; but he seemed not surprised, but rather satisfied that Alan had not heard. He nodded his head at Alan's denial, and, without reply to Alan's demand, he stood listening. Something bent him forward; he straightened; again the something came; again he straightened. Four times Alan counted the motions. Burr was hearing again the four long blasts of distress! But there was no noise but the gale. "The four blasts!" He recalled old Burr's terror outside the radio cabin. The old man was hearing blasts which were not blown!

He moved on and took the wheel. He was a good wheelsman; the vessel seemed to be steadier on her course and, somehow, to steam easier when the old man steered. His illusions of hearing could do no harm, Alan considered; they were of concern only to Burr and to him.

Alan, relieving the lookout at the bow, stood on watch again. The ferry thrust on alone; in the wireless cabin the flame played steadily. They had been able to get the shore stations again on both sides of the lake and also the Richardson. As the ferry had worked northward, the Richardson had been working north too, evidently under the impression that the vessel in distress, if it had headway, was moving in that direction. By its position, which the Richardson gave, the steamers were about twenty miles apart.

Alan fought to keep his thought all to his duty; they must be now very nearly at the position where the Richardson last had heard the four long blasts; searching for a ship or for boats, in that snow, was almost hopeless. With sight even along the searchlight's beam shortened to a few hundred yards, only accident could bring Number 25 up for rescue, only chance could carry the ship where the shouts—or the blasts of distress if the

wreck still floated and had steam—would be heard.

Half numbed by the cold, Alan stamped and beat his arms about his body; the swing of the searchlight in the circle about the ship had become long ago monotonous, purely mechanical, like the blowing of the whistle; Alan stared patiently along the beam as it turned through the sector where he watched. They were meeting frequent and heavy floes, and Alan gave warning of these by hails to the bridge; the bridge answered and when possible the steamer avoided the floes; when it could not do that, it cut through them. The windrowed ice beating and crushing under the bows took strange, distorted, glistening shapes. Now another such shape appeared before them; where the glare dissipated to a bare glow in the swirling snow, he saw a vague shadow. The man moving the searchlight failed to see it, for he swung the beam on. The shadow was so dim, so ghostly, that Alan sought for it again before he hailed; he could see nothing now, yet he was surer, somehow that he had seen.

"Something dead ahead, sir!" he shouted back to the bridge.

The bridge answered the hail as the searchlight pointed forward again. A gust carried the snow in a fierce flurry which the light failed to pierce; from the flurry suddenly, silently, spar by spar, a shadow emerged—the shadow of a ship. It was a steamer, Alan saw, a long, low-lying old vessel without lights and without smoke from the funnel slanting up just forward of the after deckhouse; it rolled in the trough of the sea. The sides and all the lower works gleamed in ghostly phosphorescence, it was refraction of the searchlight beam from the ice sheathing all the ship, Alan's brain told him; but the sight of that soundless, shimmering ship materializing from behind the screen of snow struck a tremor through him.

"Ship!" he hailed. "Ahead! Dead ahead, sir! Ship!"

The shout of quick commands echoed to him from the bridge. Underfoot he could feel a new tumult of the deck; the engines, instantly stopped, were being set full speed astern. But Number 25, instead of sheering off to right or to left to avoid the collision, steered straight on.

THE struggle of the engines against the momentum of the ferry told that others had seen the gleaming ship or, at least, had heard the hail. The skipper's instant decision had been to put to starboard; he had bawled that to the wheelsman, "Hard over!" But, though the screws turned full astern, Number 25 steered straight on. The flurry was blowing before the bow again; back through the snow the ice-shrouded shimmer ahead retreated.

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