

roding parts, was found; and its contents scattered about the room served to absorb much of the carbonic gas.

As the pressure rose a further means of disposal was recalled by Rolf. The balance-trough was filled with water, and it gradually became charged with the gas. At the end of a week the barograph showed that it would be safe to open a port to get in touch with the world above.

When no bottles were found in the medicine-chest of a size to be reasonably seen on the waves, and when the other men failed to make any of the empty food-cans floating tight, it was Corrigan who hit upon the expedient of using the oiled-silk cases in which the torpedoes were wrapped.

They spread out the folds of these with their breath and securely tied the ends. Barton put down their position as he had figured it, noting the possibility of error in longitude, and making mention of the hulk—the location of which he thought would probably be known.

The several slips of paper were placed in the bags, of which there were four, and three of them were released at brief intervals. It was believed, since they were filled under forty-five pounds pressure, that they would expand and readily float at the surface above.

The men were now in total darkness. The single light inside had really been extinguished to conserve the battery-power. But it remained so to avoid the catastrophe so nearly precipitated by Corrigan. After the three bags had been launched the engineer, knowing that the air-supply was plentiful, had filled his pipe, and was on the point of lighting it when Rolf observed the action. Plunging headlong at Corrigan he seized the match and demanded all the others that the Irishman might have.

"I was only wishin' a bit av a puff," he protested.

"Puff us all to atoms, would you!" exclaimed Rolf excitedly. "Don't you know this atmosphere is worse than that mine outside? One spark—and it would collapse again to water with heat enough to melt the boat to a chunk of iron."

And Corrigan, aged away, blinking ly, as if seeking to escape contact with such a mysterious thing.

Their fourteenth day of imprisonment came; and still the men had received no intimation of any effort to rescue them. They could not know that the frail, silk bags had burst at the surface and had sunk again, carrying their messages with them. But such a possibility occurred to Rolf when the last of the casings was about to be released.

It was then that Corrigan volunteered to go up in its place.

But he encountered another shock when Barton explained that for all practical purposes they were shut in a caisson—and told him of the dangerous "bends" which must attend a too rapid return to the air. Only when the batteries should fail, and as a final resort, was it his purpose to have them all risk the trip together.

Had he known that the Victory swung at anchor barely a thousand yards away he might have altered his instructions. Of course he could not have been aware of this any more than the watch on the battleship could imagine any connection between the missing submarine and the three sharp reports they had heard in the early morning hours two days before.

Hope for B-23 had long been abandoned, and already the nation had formally honored her dead—when the fourth bag left the little tower. At Rolf's suggestion all the gas had been forced from it except just enough to carry it up.

Regardless of the lost mine-scout the dreadnaughts had been ordered to rim the strait. They were to start the trip which held so much rumored hazard the next day, and had sent their hydroplanes aloft in the vain hope that human vision from their height, like birds, could find the hidden mines.

So when the pilot of the machine from the Victory saw an oviform yellow object pop from the blue sea beneath him, as a pit might be squeezed from a plum, it was not strange that he betrayed his astonishment by allowing the hydroplane to side-slip danger-

ously. Whether the adoption of Rolf's expedient or the sheer tenacity of the hopes that it freighted had given the fabric strength does not matter.

It is enough that it jumped lightly away from the water and came sailing jauntily toward the aviator just as he recovered the machine's equilibrium and his own presence of mind.

Puncturing the bag with a pistol shot, he volplaned quickly to the water. And thereafter recovering the floating silk and reading the paper—he remained, hovering over the spot, as closely as he could judge, whence the small balloon had sent a launch to his rescue. And within another hour the power boat was again putting out from the battleship with diving equipment and a man to go below.

Marsh was on duty in the conning-tower, where for days the men had set a watch, when there came a faint, yet persistent clink.

He had dozed momentarily; and at first it seemed part of his dream. He had returned to his rose-bowered cottage and stood gently knocking at its door, so that his Mary should not be too greatly shocked with surprise. But the reiteration of the sound aroused him; and he turned to meet the nodding Cyclopean eye of the diving helmet peering in at him thru the port.

He shouted to Barton, and they soon had the man inside.

It was decided that all could use the apparatus, if a rope were attached to the leaded feet to drag it down after each trip. Marsh was the first to go up, the diver remaining to show the others how to adjust the suit. When the helmet was removed from the boatswain in the boat above one of its crew fainted at sight of the seeming death apparition incased in the raiment of the man they had sent below.

The diver himself followed; then Corrigan.

For the passage of the lines the big port had to be kept open continuously; and as each man left air also lurched out until the submarine began to ship water dangerously. Already it gurgled deeply in the hold—with great spheres of gas surging upward like a fountain. And at this moment—unthought of before by minds almost hysterically excited—it came to Rolf and Barton as they faced each other in the tower that only one of them could use the suit. For it was impossible to secure it in place without the help of another person.

True to the traditions of the service Barton stepped aside. But Youth, which before had cried aloud for life, now, in the supremacy of its courage, rose indifferent to it.

"You've no right to decide it all alone," Rolf said. "And I cast my vote for her. You first!"

Barton yielded; and the ensign closed him into the cumbersome apparel. The top of the ladder was already awash as Rolf gave the helmet a final twist. He pushed the lieutenant out thru the port hole, and, filling his lungs from the exhausted air, kicked after him.

On the bridge of the battleship her commander watched thru powerful glasses; and as man after man rolled over the gunwale into the launch the gray-whiskered, old sea-dog grumbled a hard-learned text from his Sunday-school boyhood:

"And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and they were judged every man according to his works."

And in his vehement subjoinder there was neither sacrilege nor blasphemy.

"By God! I'd make 'em all admirals—if I had the judgin'!" he said; and the reward for his generous impulse came next day when the mine-firing rumor proved to be false.

The first word that flew from the aerials of the Victory held the whole earth a moment gaping; but the first word that fell from the lips of the rescued men was—to each—a beloved name. All except the ensign, who was dragged into the launch insensible to pain.

Once more—aboard the battleship—he faced death and refought the fight. And when, at last, his heart throbbed thru to triumph, it had gained what such a heart deserved to hold. For of all the queenly company which was visioned in his delirium only one came back with him to the realm of consciousness; and in that hour when he opened his eyes he, too, whispered a woman's beloved name!



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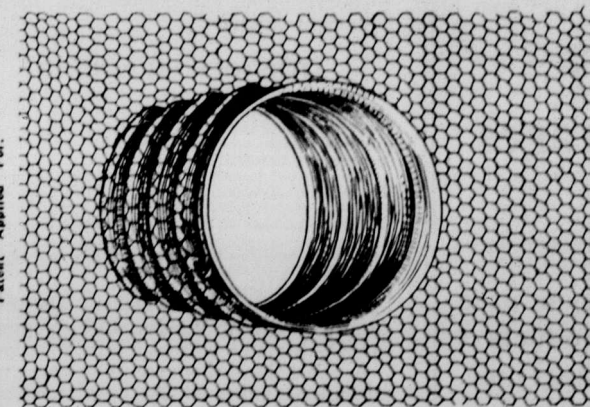
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