

On Land and Sea at the Dardanelles eBook

On Land and Sea at the Dardanelles

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THE OPEN PORT

'Fun!' said Ken Carrington, as he leaned over the rail of the transport, 'Cardigan Castle,' and watched the phosphorescent waters of the Aegean foaming white through the darkness against her tall side. 'Fun!' he repeated rather grimly. 'You won't think it so funny when you find yourself crawling up a cliff with quick-firers barking at you from behind every rock, and a strand of barbed wire to cut each five yards, to say nothing of snipers socking lead at you the whole time. No, Dave, I'll lay, whatever you think, you won't consider it funny.'

Dave Burney, the tall young Australian who was standing beside Ken Carrington, turned his head slowly towards the other.

'You talk as if you'd seen fighting,' he remarked in his soft but pleasant drawl.

Ken paused a moment before replying.

'I have,' he said quietly.

Burney straightened his long body with unusual suddenness.

'The mischief, you have! My word, Ken, you're a queer chap. Here you and I have been training together these six months, and you've never said a word of it to me or any of the rest of the crowd.'

'Come to that, I don't quite know why I have now,' answered Ken Carrington dryly.

Burney wisely made no reply, and after a few moments the other spoke again.

'You see, Dave, it wasn't anything to be proud of, so far as I'm concerned, and it brings back the most rotten time I ever had. So it isn't much wonder I don't talk about it.'

'Don't say anything now unless you want to,' said Burney, with the quiet courtesy which was part of him.

'But I do want to. And I'd a jolly sight sooner tell you than any one else. That is, if you don't mind listening.'

'I'd like to hear,' said Burney simply. 'It's always been a bit of a puzzle to me how a chap like you came to be a Tommy in this outfit. With your education, you ought to be an officer in some home regiment.'



'That's all rot,' returned Ken quickly. 'I'd a jolly sight sooner be in with this crowd than any I know of. And as for a commission, that's a thing which it seems to me a chap ought to win instead of getting it as a gift.

'But I'm gassing. I was going to tell you how it was that I'd seen fighting. My father was in the British Navy. He rose to the rank of Captain, and then had an offer from the Turkish Government of a place in the Naval Arsenal at Constantinople.'

'From the Turks!' said Burney in evident surprise.

'Yes. Lots of our people were in Turkey in those days. It was a British officer, Admiral Gamble, who managed all the Turkish naval affairs. That was before the Germans got their claws into the wretched country.'

'I've heard of Admiral Gamble,' put in Burney. 'Well, what happened then?'

'My father took the job, and did jolly well until the Germans started their games. Finally they got hold of everything, and five years ago Admiral Gamble gave up. So did my father, but he had bought land in Turkey and had a lot of friends there, so he did not go back to England.

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'It was that same year, 1910, that he found coal on his land, and applied for a concession to work it. The Turks liked him. They'd have given it him like a shot. But the Germans got behind his back, and did him down. The end was that they refused to let him work his coal.

'Of course he was awfully sick, but not half so sick as when a German named Henkel came along and offered to buy him out at about half the price he had originally paid for the place.

'Father had a pretty hot temper, there was a flaming row, and Henkel went off, vowing vengeance.

'He got it, too. A couple of years later, came the big row in the Balkans, and the war had hardly started before dad was arrested as a spy.'

'Henkel did that?' put in Burney.

'Henkel did it;' young Carrington's voice was very grim. 'Pretty thoroughly too, as I heard afterwards. They took him to Constantinople, and—and I've never seen him since.'

There was silence for some moments while the big ship ploughed steadily north-eastwards through the night.

'And you?' said Burney at last.

'I—I'd have shared the same fate if it hadn't been for old Othman Pasha. He was a pal of ours, as white a man as you want to meet, and he got me away and over the border into Greece. It was in Thrace that I saw fighting. I came right through it, and got mixed up in two pretty stiff skirmishes.'

'My word, you've seen something!' said Burney. 'And—and, by Jove, I suppose you understand the language.'

'Yes,' said Carrington quietly. 'I know the language and the people. And you can take it from me that the Turks are not as black as they're painted. It's Enver Bey and his crazy crowd who have rushed them into this business. Three-quarters of 'em hate the war, and infinitely prefer the Britisher to the Deutscher.'

'And how do you come to be in with us?' asked Burney.

'I joined up in Egypt,' Carrington answered. 'I went there two years ago and got a job in the irrigation department. I've been there ever since.'

Again there was a pause.

‘And what about Henkel?’ asked Burney. ‘Have you ever heard of him since?’

‘Not a word. But’—Ken’s voice dropped a tone—‘I mean to. If he’s alive I’ll find him, and—’

He stopped abruptly, and suddenly gripped Burney’s arm.

‘There’s some one listening,’ he whispered. ‘I heard some one behind that boat. No, stay where you are. If we both move, he’ll smell a rat.’

‘Well, good-night, Dave,’ he said aloud. ‘I must be getting below.’

Turning, he walked away in the direction opposite to that of the boat, but as soon as he thought he was out of sight in the darkness, he turned swiftly across the deck and made a wide circle.

He heard a rustle, and was just in time to see a dark figure dart forward, the feet evidently shod in rubber soles which moved soundlessly over the deck.

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He dashed in pursuit, but it was too late. Being war time, the decks were of course in darkness, and the man, whoever he was, disappeared—probably down the forward hatch.

Ken came back to Burney.

‘No good,’ he said vexedly. ‘The beggar was too quick for me.’

‘Then there was some one there?’

‘You bet. I saw him bolt.’

‘Any notion who it was?’

Ken hesitated a moment.

‘I’m not sure,’ he answered in a low voice, ‘but I’ve got my suspicions. I think it was Kemp.’

‘What—that steward?’

‘Yes, the chap who looks after the baths.’

‘My word, I wouldn’t wonder,’ said Burney thoughtfully. ‘He’s an ugly looking varmint. But why should he be spying on you?’

‘Haven’t a notion. But I’ve spotted him watching me more than once since we left Alexandria. I’m going to keep my eye on him pretty closely the rest of the way.’

‘Not much time left, old son. They say we’ll be in Mudros Bay to-morrow morning.’

‘Yes, I heard that. Which reminds me. I’m going down to get a warm bath. It may be the last chance for some time to come.’

This time Ken Carrington said good-night in earnest, and went below.

It was early for turning in, and nearly all of the troops aboard were still on the mess deck. Ken got his things from his bag and went down the passage to the bathroom. The ‘Cardigan Castle’ had been a swagger liner until she was impounded by Government to act as troopship, and she was provided with splendid bathrooms.

Carrington opened the door quietly, and was feeling for the switch of the electric, when he noticed, to his great surprise, that a port hole opposite was open.

Needless to say, this was absolutely forbidden. In war time a ship shows no lights at all, and it is a fixed rule that everything below must be kept closed and curtained.

Before he could recover from his first surprise he got a second shock. A tiny pencil of light—just a single beam, no more than a few inches in diameter—struck through the darkness and formed a small luminous circle upon the white-painted wall above his head.

It only lasted an instant, then a dark figure rose between him and the open port, and instantly the beam was intercepted, and all was dark as before.

Through the gloom he vaguely saw the arm of the man who stood in front of the port raised to a level with his head, while his hand moved rapidly.

Instantly he knew what was happening. This man was signalling. Carrington had heard of the German signalling lamp which, by means of ingeniously arranged lenses, throws one tiny ray which can be caught and flung back by a specially constructed mirror. That was what was happening before his very eyes. A glow of rage sent the blood boiling through his veins, and forgetting all about the switch he sprang forward.

As ill luck had it, there was a wooden grating in the middle of the cement floor. In the darkness, he failed to see this, and catching his toe, stumbled and fell with a crash on hands and knees.

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He heard a terrified yelp, and the man made a dash past him for the door.

But the door was closed. Carrington had shut it behind him. Before the fellow could get it open, Ken was on his feet again, and had flung himself on the signaller.

With a snarl like that of a trapped cat, the man wrenched one arm free.

'Take that!' he hissed, and next instant Ken felt the sting of steel grazing his left shoulder. The sharp pain maddened him, and his grip tightened so fiercely that he heard the breath whistle from his opponent's lungs.

At the same time he flung all his weight forward, and the other, thrown off his balance, went over backwards and came with a hollow crash against the door.

The two fell to the floor together, and rolled over, fighting like wild cats.

Ken's adversary was smaller than he, but he seemed amazingly strong and active. He wriggled like an eel, all the time making frantic efforts to get his right hand free, and use his knife again.

But Ken, aware of his danger, managed to get hold of the fellow's wrist with his own left hand, and held it in a grip which the other, struggle as he might, could not break. At the same time, Ken was doing all he knew to get his knee on his enemy's chest.

It was the darkness that foiled him—this and the eel-like struggles of his adversary. At last, in desperation, he let go with his right hand, and drove his fist at the other's head. He missed his face, but hit him somewhere, for he heard his skull rap on the floor, while the knife flew out of his hand, and tinkled away across the cement floor.

Ken felt a thrill of triumph as he heaved himself up, and getting his knees on his adversary's chest, seized him with both hands by the throat.

Before he could tighten his grip came a tremendous shock, and he was flung off the other as if by a giant's hand. As he rolled across the floor, followed a crash as though the very heavens were falling. The whole ship seemed to lift beneath him, at the same time stopping short as though she had hit a cliff.

[Illustration: 'Ken flung himself on the signaller.']

For an instant there was dead silence. Then from the decks above came shouts and a pounding of feet. Half stunned, Ken struggled to his feet, and staggered towards the door. As he did so, he heard the click of the latch, and before he could reach it, it was banged in his face.

Groping in the darkness, he found the handle. He turned it, but the door would not open. In a flash the truth blazed upon him. He was locked in. The spy had locked the door on the outside. He was a helpless prisoner in a torpedoed and probably sinking ship.

CHAPTER II

The last of the 'cardigan Castle'

Ken's head whirled. For the moment he was unable to collect his ideas. He stood, grasping the door handle, listening to the thunder of feet overhead and the shouted orders which came dimly to his ears.

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He heard distinctly the creaking of winches, and knew that the boats were being lowered. His worst suspicions were true; the ship was actually sinking.

This lasted only a few seconds. Ken Carrington was not the sort to yield weakly to panic. He pulled himself together, and felt for the switch.

It clicked over, but nothing happened. The shock of the explosion had evidently thrown the dynamo out of gear. Then he remembered the little electric torch which he always carried, and in an instant had it out of his pocket, and switched it on.

He flashed the little beam across the floor, and its light fell upon the wooden grating over which he had stumbled in his first rush at the enemy signaller. This lay alongside the bath. It was about six feet long and made of four heavy slats nailed on a framework.

It took Ken just about five seconds to lay down his lamp and heave up the grating.

Short as the time had been since the first shock of the torpedo, the ship was already beginning to list heavily. The floor of the bathroom now sloped upwards steeply to the door.

The grating was very heavy, but in his excitement Ken swung it up as though it had been no more than a feather. Balancing it, he charged straight at the door.

The end of the grating struck the woodwork with a loud crash, but the result was not what Ken had hoped. Hinges and lock remained firm. One panel, however, was cracked and splintered.

He retreated again to make another attempt. But the list was growing heavier every moment. It was all he could do to keep his feet. Ugly, sucking noises down below told him that the water was rushing in torrents into the hold of the doomed ship.

There was no question of making a second charge. Balancing himself as best he could opposite the door, he pounded frantically at the cracked panel, and at the third blow it broke away, leaving a jagged hole.

But this was not large enough for him to put his head through—let alone his body. His one chance was that the key might still be in the lock.

Small blame to him that his heart was going like a trip-hammer as he dropped the useless grating and snatched up his lamp.

The list was now so heavy that he had to cling to the door, as he thrust his arm through the gap.



A gasp of relief escaped his lips as his fingers closed on the key. It turned, but even then the door would not open. It was wedged.

Ken made a last desperate effort, and managed to force it open. As he clawed his way through into the passage, the sea water came bursting up through the floor of the bathroom behind him.

Somehow he managed to scramble along the passage, and up the companion to the mess deck. There was not a soul in sight, and the ship now lay over at such an angle that every moment it seemed as though she must capsize.

Up another ladder. He was forced to go on hands and feet, clinging like a squirrel. Then he was on the boat deck, in a glare of white light flung on the sinking ship by the searchlight of a British cruiser which had rushed up to the rescue.

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The sea seemed thick with boats pulling steadily away, and in every direction the searchlights of the escorting destroyers wheeled and flashed, as they rushed in circles, hunting for the submarine which had struck the blow.

But the 'Cardigan Castle' was empty and deserted. With that marvellous speed which only perfect discipline ensures, every soul had already been got away into the boats. So far as he could see, Ken was left alone on the fast sinking ship.

Even so, he was not ungrateful. If he had to perish, it was far better to drown in the open than to come to his end like a trapped rat down below.

'Ken! Ken!'

Some one came rushing up into the searchlight's glare.

It was Dave Burney.

'I've been hunting the ship out for you,' exclaimed Dave breathlessly.

'I got locked in the bathroom,' Ken answered quickly. 'No time to explain now. Tell you afterwards. I say, old man, it was jolly good of you to wait for me, but I'm afraid you've overdone it. All the boats are away.'

'Hang the boats! Here—put this on. Sharp, for she won't last more'n a couple of minutes.'

As he spoke, he flung Ken one of the life-saving waistcoats which are now used instead of the old-fashioned lifebelts.

'It's all right,' he added, as he saw Ken glance at him sharply. 'I've got one, too.'

Ken did not waste a moment in slipping on the queer garment, and blowing it up.

'This way,' said Dave, as he scrambled up the steep deck to the weather rail. Ken followed, and they had barely reached the rail when the big liner rolled slowly over on to her side.

Dave sprang out on to her steel side which was now perfectly level.

'Hurry!' he shouted. 'She'll pull us down if we're not clear before she sinks.'

He sprang out into the water. Ken followed his example, and the two paddled vigorously away. Luckily for them, the ship did not sink at once. She lay upon her beam ends for four or five minutes, and gave them time to get to a safe distance. They were perhaps forty yards away when there came a loud, hissing, gurgling sound.

'She's going!' cried Ken. Turning, he saw her stern tilt slowly upwards. Then, with hardly a sound, the fine ship slid slowly downwards, and a minute later there was no sign of her except a great eddy in which swung a tangled mass of timber, lifebelts, canvas chairs, and all sorts of floating objects from the decks.

[Illustration: 'He sprang into the water.']

'The brutes!' growled Dave. 'This means that the Turks have got submarines.'

'I doubt it. That was probably the work of an Austrian or German craft. Well, thank goodness, they only got the ship and not the men.'

'Ay, we'll get our own back for this before we're through,' growled Dave. 'My word, but it's cold! Hope they're not going to be long picking us up.'

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'No. Here comes a boat,' Ken answered, as the searchlight showed a boat pulling hard towards them. A couple of minutes later they were hauled aboard, and in a very short time found themselves on the British destroyer 'Teaser.'

'Any more of you in the water?' asked her commander, Lieutenant Carey, a keen, hard-bitten young man of about twenty-eight.

'No, sir, I think not,' Ken answered. 'I believe every one else got off in the boats.'

'Yes, I don't think our German friends have much to boast of,' said the other with a smile. 'We can build fresh ships all right, and so far as I know they haven't got a single man. But you fellows look perished. Down with you to the engine-room. Coxswain, get out some lammies for them, and see they have cocoa.'

'Ay, ay, sir,' answered the coxswain.

But Ken paused.

'I have a report to make before I go below, sir.'

The commander looked a little surprised.

'All right. But quick about it. You'll be a hospital case if you stick about in those wet togs much longer.'

Ken wasted no time in telling what he had seen in the bathroom of the 'Cardigan Castle,' just before she was sunk.

Commander Carey listened with interest.

'Who was this fellow?' he demanded.

'I never saw his face, sir, but by his voice I am pretty sure he was Kemp, a steward.'

'Hm, it was rotten bad management, allowing a fellow like that to be aboard a transport,' growled Carey. 'Very well, Carrington, I shall report the matter at once by wireless, and if he is aboard any of the other ships, you may be sure he'll be attended to. And I congratulate you on getting out alive. Now go below and get a warm and a change. I'll land you and your friend in Mudros Bay if I can, and if I have other orders I'll tranship you.'

Feeling very shivery and tired, Ken was escorted below to the genial warmth of the engine-room, where he found Dave already changed, and engaged in putting away a great mugful of hot Navy cocoa.

The coxswain, big Tom Tingle, fished him out a suit of lammies, the warm gray woollen garments which are the regular cold weather wear of the British Navy, and, as soon as he had got into them, put a mug of steaming cocoa into his hands.

[Illustration: A friendly salute in passing.]

[Illustration: The landing party at Sari Bair reached the beach covered by the fire of their own guns.]

‘Prime stuff, ain’t it, Ken?’ said Dave, and Ken, as he felt the grateful warmth creeping through his chilled frame, nodded. Then he and Dave were given a couple of blankets apiece, and with the beat of the powerful engines as a lullaby were soon sleeping soundly.

When they awoke, the gray dawn light was stealing through the hatch overhead, and the smart little ship lay at anchor, rocking peacefully to the lift of a gentle swell.

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'Rouse out, you chaps,' came Tingle's voice. 'Rouse out, if you want some breakfast. The old man's going to put you aboard the 'Charnwood' to finish your voyage. You'll find some of your pals in her, I reckon.'

'Did they get the submarine?' was Ken's first question.

Tingle's honest face darkened.

'No, by gosh. She slipped away in the dark, and never a one of us set eyes on her. What are ye to do with a thing like that? It's like trying to tackle a shark with a shot gun.'

'Here's your khaki,' he continued, 'dry and warm. Shift as sharp as ye can. The old man, he don't wait for nobody.'

Ken and Dave changed in quick order, and as soon as they had finished were conducted for'ard for breakfast. Biscuit, butter out of a tin, sardines, and cocoa. War fare, but all the best of its kind, and the boys did justice to it.

The 'old man'—that is, Commander Carey—was on the bridge when they came on deck. He greeted them kindly, and Ken ventured to ask if anything had been heard of Kemp.

'Not a word,' was the answer. 'He's not been picked up, so far as any one knows. Probably he's food for the fishes by this time. Well, good-bye to you. Wish you luck.'

'Thank you, sir,' said Ken and Dave together. Then they were over the side into the collapsible, and were pulled straight across to the wall-sided 'Charnwood' which lay at anchor less than half a mile away.

Mudros Bay, which is a great inlet in the south of the island of Lemnos, was alive with craft of all sorts. Warships and transports by the dozen, British and French, were lying at anchor in every direction, and in and out among them, across the brilliant, sunlit waters, dashed picket boats and all sorts of small craft.

'My word, this looks like business!' said Dave, as he glanced round at the busy scene.

'It does,' agreed Ken. 'Last time I was here, there were two tramps and an old Turkish gunboat. Not a darned thing else.'

A couple of minutes later they were alongside the big 'Charnwood,' to be greeted with shouts of delight from a number of their Australian comrades who were leaning over the side.

They said good-bye to the destroyer men who had ferried them across, and climbed the ladder to the deck, where they were immediately surrounded and smacked on the back,

and generally congratulated. The two were very popular with the whole of their battalion, and their comrades were unfeignedly glad to find that they had not lost the number of their mess.

Pushing through the throng, they went aft to report themselves to their commanding officer, Colonel Conway. He had, of course, already heard of Ken's adventure with the spy in the bathroom, but took him aside to get further particulars.

'No, nothing has been heard of him,' he said. 'I do not think it possible that he can have been picked up.

'And yet,' he added, 'that's odd, for he must have had plenty of time to get on deck, and, so far as we can learn, we have not lost a man.'

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'Do you think the submarine could have picked him up, sir?'

'Not a chance of it. She went under the very moment she had fired her torpedo. If she had not, the destroyers would have got her.'

'I ought to have got Kemp, sir,' said Ken, rather ruefully.

'You did your best, Carrington,' the other answered kindly. 'And you are to be congratulated that Kemp did not get you.'

Ken went back to join his friends forward, and answer a score of questions as to the struggle in the bathroom. By the remarks of his companions who had, one and all, lost everything they possessed, except what they stood up in, it was clear that Kemp, if still alive, would stand a pretty thin chance should any of these lusty Australians set eyes on him again.

There was no shore leave. No orders were out yet, but the rumour was everywhere that they were to sail that very day.

Presently a tug came alongside with fresh provisions. She also brought a quantity of rifles and ammunition to replace those lost in the sunken 'Cardigan Castle.' Spare uniforms, overcoats, and other kit were also put aboard, and shared up among the shipwrecked troops.

'The old country's waked up this time,' said Dave to Ken, as he tried the sights of a new rifle. 'There's stuff ashore here for an army corps, they tell me. It's no slouch of a job to fit us all out fresh in a few hours. They'd never have done it in the Boer War.'

'My dear chap, the Boer War was child's play compared with this. Willy has set the whole world ablaze. All the same, I agree with you that England is getting her eyes open at last. But it's a pity the people at home didn't realise first off that forcing the Dardanelles was almost as important as keeping the Germans out of Calais. If they'd sent us here two months ago instead of fooling round trying to get warships through the Straits, the job would have been done by now. As it is, they've given the Turks a chance to fortify all the landing places, and I'll bet they've done it too.'

'What sort of landing places are they?' asked Dave.

'Just beaches—little bays with cliffs behind them. And the cliffs are covered with scrub, and so are the hills inland. Ideal ground for the defence, and rotten to attack.'

'You talk as if you'd been there?'

The speaker was a big, good-looking young New Zealander, with a face burnt almost saddle colour by wind and sun. His dark blue eyes gleamed with a merry, devil-may-care expression which took Ken's fancy at once.

'Yes, I've been there,' Ken answered modestly, and was at once surrounded by a crowd all eager for any information he could give. Luckily for him, at that very minute some one shouted.

'We're off, boys. There's the signal to weigh anchor.'

Instantly all was excitement; the cable began to clank home, smoke poured from the funnels, and in a very short time the whole fleet of transports was moving in a long line out of the harbour, escorted by a bevy of busy, black destroyers.

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As the 'Charnwood' passed into her place, the men lined the sides and cheered for all they were worth.

'What day is this?' said Ken to Dave, as the big transport passed out of the mouth of the bay.

'Friday, the twenty-third,' was the answer.

'Twenty-third of April,' said Ken. 'St. George's Day. Then I tell you what, Dave, this is going to be a Sunday job.'

'You mean we'll be landed on Sunday?'

Ken nodded.

'That's about it,' he answered.

CHAPTER III

THE LANDING

'Hallo, what's up?' asked Dave Burney. 'We're off again.'

It was the night of Saturday the 24th of April. For the greater part of the day the 'Charnwood' had been lying off Cape Helles, which is the southernmost point of the Gallipoli Peninsula, while the people listened to the thunder of guns, and watched the shrapnel bursting in white puffs over the scrub-clad heights of the land.

Now, about midnight, she had got quietly under way, and was steaming steadily in a nor'-westerly direction.

'What's up?' Dave repeated in a puzzled tone. 'This ain't the way to Constantinople.'

'Don't you be too sure of that, sonny,' remarked Roy Horan, the big New Zealander who was standing with the two chums at the starboard rail. 'We ain't going home anyhow. I'll lay old man Hamilton's got something up his sleeve.'

'That's what I'm asking,' said Dave. 'What's the general up to? So far as I can see, there are only three other transports going our way. The rest are staying right here. What's your notion, Ken?'

'I don't know any more than you chaps,' Ken answered. 'But I'll give you my opinion for what it's worth. I think we're going to do a sort of flank attack. The main landing will

probably be down here at the Point. Then when the Turks are busy, trying to hold 'em up, we shall be slipped in somewhere up the coast so as to create a sort of diversion.'

'What—and miss all the fun!' exclaimed Dave in a tone of intense disgust.

'You won't miss anything to signify,' Ken answered dryly. 'There are more than a hundred thousand Turks planted on the Peninsula, and you can bet anything you've got left from the wreck that there isn't one yard of beach that isn't trenched and guarded.'

'Where do ye think we'll land?' asked Horan eagerly.

Ken shrugged his shoulders. 'Haven't a notion,' he said. 'There are a lot of small bays up the west coast. Probably we shall nip into some little cove not very far up. There's a big ridge called Achi Baba which runs right across the Peninsula about four miles north. It'll be somewhere behind that, I expect. But mind you, this is all guess work. I don't know any more than you do.'

'You know the country anyhow,' said Horan. 'And that's worth a bit. See here, Carrington, if we can manage it, let's all three stick together. We ought to see some fun—what?'

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Ken laughed. 'I'm sure I'm agreeable. But you see we're not in the same regiment. You're New Zealand, Dave and I are Australians. Still, I dare say we shall all be pretty much bunched when it comes to the fighting.'

Dave, who had been peering out into the night, turned to the others at this moment.

'Yes, there are only four transports altogether in our lot, and so far as I can make out three battleships and four destroyers taking care of us.'

'Now, you men, come below and turn in,' broke in a voice.

It was their sergeant, O'Brien, who had come up behind them.

'Oh, I say, sergeant, can't we stay and look at the pretty scenery?' said Roy Horan plaintively.

'No, ye can't,' was the gruff retort. 'Orders are that all the men are to turn in and take what rest they can. Faith, it's mighty little slape any of ye will get, once you're ashore. Go down now and ate your suppers and rest. I'm thinking ye'll be taking tay with the Turks before you're a dale older.'

'Are we going to land, sergeant?' asked Horan eagerly.

'Am I your general?' retorted O'Brien. 'Get along wid ye, and if ye want to know what it is we're going to do, faith ye'd best go and ask the colonel.'

Orders were orders. The three obediently went below, and, although at first he was too excited to sleep, Ken soon dropped off, and never moved until he felt a hand shaking him by the shoulder.

'Up wid ye, lad,' said O'Brien's voice in his ear, and like a shot Ken was out of his blanket and on his feet.

The screw had ceased to revolve. The ship lay quiet, rocking ever so lightly in the small swell. There was not a light to be seen anywhere, yet all was bustle, and the very air seemed charged with a curious thrill of excitement.

According to orders, Ken had lain down, fully dressed, with all his kit ready beside him. Within a very few moments he was equipped and ready. Then he and his companions were ordered down to the lower deck where the electrics were still burning, and there hot coffee and bread and butter were served out. Also each man received rations for twenty-four hours.

Officers passed among the men, scrutinising their equipment with keen eyes, and presently Colonel Conway himself came along.

He glanced round and his eyes kindled as they rested on the ranks of long, lean colonials.

'Men,' he said, and though he hardly raised his voice it carried to the very ends of the big flat. 'You know as well as I do what you have been training for during the past six months. The day you have been waiting for has come. See that you make the most of it. Speed and silence—these are the qualities required of you to-night. The boats are waiting.'

Ken repressed with difficulty a violent desire to cheer. Next moment came a low-voiced order from his company commander, and he found himself one of a long line hurrying up the companion to the deck.

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There was no moon, but the stars were bright, and it was not too dark to see the cliffs that seemed to rise abruptly out of the sea, about half a mile away to the eastward. They, like the ships, were dark and silent.

Without one unnecessary word, the troops dropped quietly down the ladder into the waiting boats, and presently were being pulled rapidly inshore. Boat after boat came stealing out of the gloom, all loaded down to the gunwales with fighting men, yet all moving with a silence that was positively uncanny. The oars were carefully muffled and no one spoke aloud.

Dave sat next to Ken, but Horan was not with them. He had been ordered into another boat with his company.

Dave put his mouth close to Ken's ear.

'Don't believe there's a Turk in the country,' he muttered. 'Looks to me as peaceful as a picnic'

'Looks are precious deceitful sometimes,' Ken whispered back. 'For all you or I know, that brush is stiff with the enemy.'

'Then why don't they fire at us?'

'A fat lot of good that would be in this light. No, Dave, they know their job as well as we do, and perhaps better. I shall be pleasantly surprised if we're allowed to land without opposition.'

But the boat neared the shore, and still there was no sign from those silent cliffs and thickets. As soon as her bow grated on the shingle, the men were out of her, wading knee deep to the shore. They were as eager as terriers. The only anxiety of their officers was lest they should get out of hand and start before the order to advance was given.

Boat after boat glided up, and men by scores formed up at high tide mark.

'Told you we'd fooled 'em,' whispered Dave. 'This is going to be one o' your bloodless victories.'

The words were hardly out of his mouth before there was a loud hissing sound, and right out of the centre of the precipitous slope facing them something like a gigantic rocket shot high into the air and burst into a brilliant white flame.

It lit up the whole beach like day, throwing up the long lines of troops in brilliant relief. Next instant there was a crash of musketry, and rifles spat fire and lead from a long semicircle behind the spot from which the star shell had risen.

The man next but one to Ken threw up his arms and dropped without a sound. A score of others fell.

'Gee, but you were right, Ken!' muttered Dave. 'Fix bayonets!' Colonel Conway's voice rang like a trumpet above the crackle of the firing.

Instantly came the clang of steel as the bayonets slipped into their sockets. Men were falling fast, but the rest stood straining forward like greyhounds on a leash.

'Not a shot, mind you. Give 'em the steel. At the double. Advance!'

Almost before the words were out of his mouth the whole line rushed forward. A second star shell hissed skywards, but before it broke the men had reached the base of the cliff. Its white glare showed the long-legged athletes from the sheep ranges and cattle runs sprinting up the steep hill-side.

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The enemy rifles rattled in one long, terrible roll. Men dropped by dozens and scores. Some fell where they lay, others rolled helplessly back down the steep slope to the beach. But those left never paused or hesitated. They scrambled desperately upwards through the pelting storm of lead, guided by the flashes from the muzzles of the Turkish rifles.

Ken was conscious of nothing but a fierce desire to get to close quarters, and he and Dave Burney went up side by side at the very top of their speed.

Before they knew it, a dark hollow loomed before them. A rifle snapped almost in Ken's face—so close that he felt the scorch of the powder. Without an instant's hesitation he drove his bayonet at a dark figure beneath him, at the same time springing down into the trench. The whole weight of his body was behind his thrust, and the Turk, spitted like a fowl, fell dead beneath him.

[Illustration: 'He drove his bayonet at a dark figure.']

With an effort he dragged the blade loose. Only just in time, for a burly man in a fez was swinging at his head with a rifle butt. Ken ducked under his arm, turned smartly and bayoneted him in the side.

The whole trench was full of struggling men. The Turks fought well, but good men as they are, they were no match for the long, lean six footers who were upon them. Inside three minutes it was all over. Most of the Turks were dead, the few survivors were prisoners.

'Lively while it lasted,' panted Dave's voice at Ken's elbow.

'You, Dave. Are you all right?'

'Lost my hat and my wind. Nothing else missing so far as I know. Are you chipped?'

'Not a touch. But keep your head down. This is only the first act. There's another trench above this one.'

During the struggle in the trench the firing had ceased entirely, but now that it was over a pestilence of bullets began to pour again from higher up the slope, and Ken's warning was useful—to say the least of it.

'What comes next?' asked Dave, as the two crouched together against the rubbly wall of the trench.

'Get our second wind and tackle the next trench,' said Ken briefly.

His prophecy was correct. A couple of minutes later the order was passed down to advance again.

In grim silence the men sprang out of their shelter and dashed forward. There were no more star shells, but from up above began the ugly knocking of a quick-firer. It sounded like a giant running a stick along an endless row of palings, and the bullets squirted like water from a hose through the thinning ranks of the Colonials.

It was worse than the first charge, for not only was the slope steeper, but the face of the hill was covered with low, tough scrub, the tangled roots of which caught the men's feet as they ran, and brought many down. The result was that the line was no longer level. Some got far ahead of the others.

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Among the leaders were Ken and Dave, who struggled along, side by side, still untouched amid the pelting storm of lead.

But although the ranks were sadly thinned, the attackers were not to be denied. In a living torrent, they poured into the second trench.

There followed a grim five minutes. The Turks who were in considerable force, made a strong effort to hold their ground, shortening their bayonets and stabbing upwards at the attackers. It was useless. The Australians and New Zealanders, savage at the loss of so many of their comrades, fought like furies. Ken had a glimpse of a giant next him, literally pitchforking a Turk out of the trench, lifting him like a gaffed salmon on the end of his bayonet.

It was soon over, but this time there were very few prisoners. Almost every man in the trench, with the exception of about a dozen who had bolted at the first onset, was killed.

'That's settled it,' said Dave gleefully, as he plunged his bayonet into the earth to clean it from the ugly stains which darkened the steel.

'That's begun it,' corrected Ken.

'What do you mean?'

'That we've got to hold what we've won. You don't suppose the Turks are going to leave us in peaceful possession, do you?'

'I—I thought we'd finished this little lot,' said Dave rather ruefully.

'My dear chap, I've told you already that Enver Bey has at least a hundred thousand men on the Peninsula. By this time the news of our landing has been telephoned all over the shop, and reinforcements are coming up full tilt. There'll be a couple of battalions or more on the top of the cliff in an hour or two's time.'

'Then why don't we shove along and take up our position on the top?'

'We're not strong enough yet. We must wait for reinforcements. If I'm not mistaken the next orders will be to dig ourselves in.'

'But we are dug in. We hold the trench.'

'Fat lot of use that is in its present condition. All the earthworks are on the seaward side. We have little or no protection on the land side.'

'Ah, I thought so,' he continued, as the voice of Sergeant O'Brien made itself heard.

'Dig, lads! dig! Make yourselves some head cover. They'll be turning guns on us an' blowing blazes out of us as soon as the day dawns.'

Blown and weary as they were, the men set to work at once with their entrenching spades. It was in Egypt they had learnt the art of trench-making, but they found this rocky clay very different stuff to shift from desert sand.

The order came none too soon, for in a very few minutes snipers got to work again. There were scores of them. Every little patch of scrub held its sharpshooter, and although the darkness was still against accurate shooting there were many casualties.

'They're enfilading us,' said Ken. 'They've got men posted up on the cliff to the left who can fire right down this trench. It's going to be awkward when daylight comes.'

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It was awkward enough already. The Red Cross men were kept busy, staggering away downhill with stretchers laden with the wounded. There was no possibility of returning the enemy's fire, and in the darkness the ships could not help. All the Colonials could do was to crouch as low as possible, flattening themselves against the landward wall of the trench.

'Those snipers are the very deuce, sergeant.'

The voice was that of Colonel Conway, who was making his way down the trench, to see how his men were faring.

'They are that, sorr,' replied O'Brien. 'Tis them over on the bluff to the left as is doing the damage. I'm thinking they've got the ranges beforehand.'

As he spoke a man went down within five yards of where he stood. He was shot clean through the head.

'It's Standish,' said Ken. And then, on the spur of the moment,—

'Sergeant, couldn't some of us go and clear them out?'

There was a moment's pause broken only by the intermittent crackle of firing from above.

'Who was that spoke?' demanded Colonel Conway.

'I, sir,' answered Ken, saluting. 'Carrington.'

'Aren't you the man who knows this country?'

'I have been in the Peninsula before, sir.'

'Hm, and do you think you could find those snipers?'

'I do, sir.' Ken spoke very quietly, but inwardly he was trembling with eagerness. Was it possible that his impulsive remark was going to be taken up in earnest?

The colonel spoke in a whisper to O'Brien, and the sergeant answered. Then he turned to Ken.

'You may pick three men and try it. You'll have to stalk them, of course. If you can't reach them come back. No one will think any the worse of you if you fail.'

'Thank you, sir,' said Ken, his heart almost bursting with gratitude. His chance had come, and he meant to make the most of it.

CHAPTER IV

A RUSE OF WAR

'Dave, will you come?' said Ken.

'Will a terrier hunt rats?' was Dave's answer.

'And I want Roy Horan, sergeant, if he's alive. He's a New Zealander.'

'Pass the word for Horan,' said the sergeant, and the whisper went rapidly down the long trench.

'Who'll be the fourth?' Ken asked of Dave.

'Take Dick Norton. He's a Queensland ex-trooper. He's been in with the black trackers, and moves like a dingo.'

'The very man,' said Ken. 'Where is he?'

Norton, as it happened, was only a few yards away. He came up eagerly, a slim, dark man with keen gray eyes and a nose like a hawk's beak.

A moment later, and Roy Horan's giant form came slipping rapidly up to the little group, and Ken at once explained what was wanted.

'Carrington, you're an angel in khaki,' said Horan rejoicingly. 'I'm your debtor for life.'

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'Which same will not be a long one if ye don't kape that big body o'yours under cover,' said O'Brien dryly, as a bullet, striking the parapet, spattered earth all over them.

'Have ye revolvers?' he asked of Ken.

None of them had, but these were at once provided, together with plenty of ammunition.

'Ye'd best lave your rifles,' said O'Brien. 'Tis a creeping, crawling job before ye, and the lighter ye go, the better. At close quarters the pistols will do the job better than anything else ye can carry. Now get along wid ye. The sky's lightening over Asia yonder, and 'tis small chance ye'll have if the dawn catches ye.'

'Lucky beggars!' growled a big Tasmanian, as they passed him on their way to the north end of the trench. All their comrades were consumed with envy, but like the good fellows they were, they only wished them luck.

A few moments later they had all four crawled out of the trench, and bending double were making steadily uphill towards the spot from which the enfilading fire proceeded.

'We'll go straight,' whispered Ken. 'Less risk, really, for they'll be shooting over our heads.'

There was plenty of cover, for the whole of the steep hill-side was dotted with thick bunches of dense scrub. Barring a chance shot from up above, there was not much risk for the present. That would come later, when they reached the nest of snipers. For the present the great thing was to keep their heads down and escape observation.

Nearer and nearer they came to the spot whence the flashes darted thickest, and all the time the bullets whirled over their heads. At last Ken was able to see through the gloom a low parapet of earth which was evidently the front of a regular rifle pit.

He stopped and beckoned to the others to do the same.

'There must be at least half a dozen of them,' he whispered, 'and very likely more. You chaps wait here under this bush while I go forward. No, you needn't grouse, Dave. I'm not going to do you out of your share. All I want is to make out which side it will be best to make our attack. I'll be back in a minute.'

He crept forward, and as he did so there was a sudden lull in the firing. For a moment he feared that the men in the pit had spotted him or his companions, and he flattened himself breathlessly on the ground.

Next moment he heard a voice. Some one in the rifle pit was speaking.

'I would that they would hasten with that ammunition,' said the man speaking in the Anatolian dialect, which Ken could understand fairly well. 'Allah, but these infidels take lead as though it were no more than water!'

'They are brave men, Achmet,' answered another, 'but even so they will not stand when Mahmoud brings up the guns. Then, as the German says, we shall sweep them back into the sea from which they came.'

'Guns!' muttered Ken. 'This is news.' He lay still and listened eagerly.

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'Does the German himself bring the guns?' asked the first speaker.

'He does, brother. They are two of the best which were sent from Constantinople to Maidos. Most like, they are already in position on the heights above us, ready to rain their shrapnel upon the unbelievers.'

Ken had heard enough. This was news which the colonel must learn at once. Snipers were bad enough, but if the two German 77-millimetre field-pieces were got into position, the trench would be untenable. He waited only long enough to get the lie of the land around the rifle pit, then crept quietly back to his companions.

It took him just about thirty seconds to tell them what he had heard.

'And one of you must go back and tell the colonel,' he added.

There was silence. Not unnaturally no one volunteered.

'It's up to you, Norton,' said Ken.

'Why not rush the pit first?' suggested Norton, 'then we could all go back together.'

'Or all stay here,' answered Ken. 'No, I'm frightfully sorry, Norton, but you're the best scout of the lot of us, and the most likely to get back safely. You must go and tell the colonel.'

Norton was too good a soldier to argue. With a sigh he turned about and vanished in the gloom.

'And now for the rifle pit,' said Ken. 'We must go up on the right-hand side, and take it from the rear. As I've told you, the fellows holding it are out of cartridges. If we can get in on 'em quietly, before they can use their bayonets, we ought not to have much trouble.'

Ken's heart beat hard as he led the way to the rifle pit. The thought that his colonel had given him a job on his own filled him with pride, and though he was nothing but a private leading two other privates, he felt like a captain with a company behind him.

The critical moment came as they reached the front of the pit, and had to swing off to the right. There was little or no cover, and it was necessary to crawl flat on their stomachs. To make matters worse, the ground was rough and stony, and every time a pebble rolled, Ken's heart was in his mouth.

But the snipers were keeping no sort of watch. Of course none of them had the faintest notion that any enemy was nearer than the trench, quite a couple of hundred yards

away. As they snaked along, the attacking party could hear them talking in the low, measured tones peculiar to the Turk.

At last Ken gained his vantage point. He paused and drew his revolver. The others did the same.

Ken sprang to his feet, and with two bounds was in the pit.

There were five men there, and the attack took them utterly by surprise. Before they knew what was happening two were pistolled and one knocked silly by a blow from the butt of Horan's revolver. The two others fought gamely, but they were no match for the three Britishers. In less time than it takes to tell they were both laid out.

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[Illustration: Stores, horses, and munitions were being landed on V. beach.]

[Illustration: Magnificent work was done by the landing parties in their advance inland.]

'Hurrah!' cried Horan gleefully.

'Shut up, you ass!' snapped Ken. 'Do you want to bring every Turk within half a mile down on us. Look out. There's one chap moving. Tie him up, and, Dave, gather their rifles. I must go through their pockets. There's always a chance of useful information.'

'Lively now!' he added. 'They were expecting ammunition, and we shall have visitors in pretty short order.'

'My word, here they are already,' muttered Dave Burney. 'Half a dozen of 'em.'

Ken looked up quickly. A number of figures were just visible, coming along the ridge to the right.

'There are more than half a dozen,' he whispered sharply. 'More like double that number. And that looks like an officer with them.'

'We'd best make ourselves scarce,' suggested Dave quietly.

'Too late for that,' answered Ken. 'They're bound to see us. Besides, if they find the pit empty they'll only put fresh men here, and all the work will be to do again.'

'Let's tackle 'em then,' said Roy Horan recklessly.

'Odds are too long,' replied Ken. He paused a moment, and glanced round.

'I've an idea,' he said swiftly. 'I believe we can fool them. Quick! Take the coats off the dead men, and put them on. Their fezzes, too. In this light they'll never know the difference.'

'But if they talk to us?' objected Roy.

'Then I'll talk back. I know the language.'

As he spoke, Ken was swiftly stripping one of the dead Turks of his overcoat. The others did the same, and within an incredibly short time all three were wearing dead men's clothes. The coats sat oddly on their long frames, but fortunately there was as yet very little light, and in the gray gloom they presented a tolerable resemblance to the late tenants of the rifle pit.



They had hardly completed the change when the officer who was leading the party reached the edge of the pit.

'Why are you not firing?' he demanded, and by his harsh guttural voice Ken knew him at once for a German.

'We are out of ammunition,' he answered readily.

'Schweine Hund! Do you not know enough to say "Sir" to an officer when he addresses you?'

'Your pardon, sir,' said Ken gruffly. 'The light is so bad, and my eyes sting with the powder smoke.'

'They will sting worse if you do not mend your manners,' retorted the German brutally.

Ken, boiling inwardly, had yet wisdom enough to hang his head and make no reply.

'How many are there of you in the pit?' continued the officer.

'Only three, sir,' Ken answered.

'You will retire to higher ground and construct a new pit. This position is required for a mitrailleuse. You understand, blockhead?'

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'Yes, sir.'

The officer turned to the men behind him.

'Bring up the gun,' he ordered.

'Come on,' said Ken to Dave in the lowest possible whisper. He climbed quietly out of the hollow as he spoke, and the two others followed.

'Up the hill there—by those bushes,' said the German curtly. 'And be sharp. Ammunition will be brought you. Understand, your work is to command the beach and prevent supplies being brought to those dogs in the trenches.'

'So that's the little game, is it?' said Roy, as the three gained the shelter of a patch of scrub out of sight of the German. 'A quick firer to enfilade the trench, and snipers for the beach. Say, Carrington, can't we do anything to put the hat on that Prussian Johnny's scheme?'

'We've got to,' Ken answered quickly. 'Once they get that quick-firer posted, it's all up with our lads down below. They'll rake the trench from end to end.'

'Let's wait till it's in place, and rush it,' suggested Horan recklessly. 'We ought to be able to wipe out the gun crew before they nobble us.'

'What's the use of that?' retorted Ken. 'It's the gun itself we want to wreck—not the crew. They can easily get a score of men to work the Q.-F., but it would take some time to get another gun. Jove, if I only had just one stick of dynamite.'

[Illustration: "'How many are there of you in the pit?'"]

'But they had no dynamite, and the outlook seemed extremely gloomy. Worst of all, it was rapidly getting light, and although a mist hung over the sea and the shore, this would no doubt melt away as soon as the sun was well up.

Shots came from a patch of scrub behind and above them, whistling over their heads, and evidently directed at the boats which were bringing ammunition and reinforcements from the ships.

Ken crouched lower, and as he did so some bulky object in the pocket of the Turkish overcoat which he was wearing made itself felt. He slipped his hand in and drew out a black metal globe, about the size of a cricket ball. It had a length of dark cord-like stuff projecting from a hole in it.

It was all he could do to repress a yell of delight.

'What luck!' he muttered. 'Oh, I say, what luck!'

'What the mischief have you got there?' inquired Dave. 'What is it?'

'A bomb. One of the German hand grenades. Quick! See if there are any in your pockets?'

Hastily the others thrust their hands into their pockets and each hand came back with a similar bomb.

'That settles it,' said Ken happily. 'Two for the men, and one for the gun. We've got 'em now—got 'em on toast.'

As he spoke he crept out of the bush, and took a cautious peep in the direction of the rifle pit.

'They're just setting the gun up,' he muttered. 'And the German beggar has gone back the way he came. So far as I can see, there are not more than four or five men with the gun.'

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'That's all right,' said Roy Horan in a tone of considerable satisfaction. 'What do we do, Carrington—just wallop these grenades in on top of 'em?'

'No, they're not percussion—worse luck! We've got to light the fuses before we chuck them. That's awkward for two reasons. They may see our matches, and then we've got to be pretty nippy about using them. If we're not, it's we who'll get the bust up—not the Turks.'

'Sounds, interesting,' remarked Roy coolly. 'See here, Carrington, the best thing, so far as I can see, is for us to slip down to our old place, right under the parapet of the pit. That's our only chance of getting to close quarters.'

'A frontal attack,' put in Dave. 'What price our heads if they start shooting off the gun?'

'They probably won't start until they have light enough to see where they're shooting,' returned Ken. 'Horan's notion is all right. Come on.'

'But mind you,' he whispered urgently, 'we must keep one bomb for the gun. You'd best throw yours first, Horan, and as soon as it's gone off, let 'em have it with your pistol. Then, if there are any of 'em left, you whack yours in, Dave.'

He crept away, the others followed, and a few moments later they found themselves crouching close together under the low parapet of the rifle pit. There was light enough for them to see—just above their heads—the ugly gray muzzle of the mitrailleuse peeping out through an embrasure in the earthen bank.

All of a sudden, without the slightest warning, a tongue of flame spat from the muzzle, and with a deafening rattle a hail of bullets sprayed out over their heads, directed at the trench a bare two hundreds yards away.

'Quick!' cried Ken. 'We must stop that,' and with all speed he pulled out his match-box. The crackle of the firing drowned his words, but that did not matter. The others understood.

Ken struck a match, and Roy held out the fuse of his bomb. Luckily there was no wind. The fuse caught and instantly began to hiss and splutter.

With reckless disregard for danger, Roy sprang upon the parapet. Ken had one glimpse of the tall figure towering over him, one hand raised high overhead.

Then the arm flashed forward as Roy dashed the grenade full into the centre of the pit.

There followed a stunning report—a noise so loud that Ken felt as though his very ear-drums were cracked. At the same time Horan staggered back off the parapet, and the quick-firer ceased firing.

'Now, yours, Dave,' said Ken, and without delay Dave lobbed his grenade, the fuse of which Ken had already lighted, into the pit.

But by this time the survivors from the first explosion had pulled themselves together and collected their wits. Before the second grenade could explode, it was hurled back. It went right over Dave's head and rolling down the hill exploded with a deafening roar.

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On top of the grenade three burly Turks came leaping out of the pit and fell on Ken and Dave.

Ken just managed to get out his pistol in time, and his first shot finished the leader of the three Turks. But a second man came at him with a clubbed musket, and Ken only saved his skull by a rapid duck.

'Dog!' roared his assailant, as he made another savage swing.

Ken leaped away, and the Turk overbalanced himself with the force of his blow. Before he could recover Ken's heavy revolver barrel crashed upon his skull and felled him like a log.

Ken glanced across at Dave, and saw him kneeling on the chest of the third Turk, his long fingers gripping the man's throat. Just beyond, Roy, recovering slowly from the stunning effect of his own bomb, was scrambling dazedly to his feet.

Farther off, he heard the sound of running feet. It was clear that the sound of the two explosions had aroused the suspicions of some supporting party. Reinforcements were coming up at the double.

If the gun was to be put out of service this would have to be done quickly. Without a moment's delay he sprang over into the pit.

The place was a regular shambles. Ken was amazed at the ruin wrought by the one small bomb. Three men lay dead in the bottom. One had his head almost blown off. Fortunately, perhaps, Ken had no time to dwell on such horrors. With all possible speed he got the remaining bomb out, and with a handkerchief tied it to the breech of the quick-firer.

Then he lighted the fuse, and waiting only long enough to see that it was burning properly, made a wild leap out of the pit.

'It's all right. I've fixed the gun. Come on, you chaps,' he said sharply to the others.

The words were hardly out of his mouth before a flash of flame rose from the pit and the loud report of the last bomb sent the echoes flying along the cliffs. Fragments of the broken gun shot high into the air, the pieces falling in every direction.

'That's done the trick,' said Dave gleefully.

'Don't talk. Come on. There's a big party of Turks coming up. Are you game to run, Horan?'

'You bet. I'm all right now. But those bombs are oners. I never reckoned such a small thing would make such a dust up. Gosh, it nearly blinded me, and my head still rings like a bell.'

Ken did not answer. All his energies were needed to steer a course through the scrub which covered the steep hill-side. The morning mist lay thick and clammy. It was impossible to see more than a few yards ahead, and it would be the easiest thing in the world to miss the way back to the trench, and either go over the steep edge to the beach or get in among the enemy snipers to the left.

'Look out!' cried Roy Horan suddenly, and as he spoke four men rose up out of the thick scrub right in their path. And one of them was a German officer, the very same whom they had encountered twenty minutes earlier.

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'Stop!' he snarled. 'Stop, you fools. Where are you going?'

CHAPTER V

PROMOTION

The officer was armed with a repeating pistol while his men all had rifles. For the moment Ken was filled with wonder as to why they had not at once used their weapons.

Then he remembered. It was their Turkish greatcoats which had saved them. In the dim light the German still took them for Turkish soldiers.

But discovery could only be a matter of a few seconds. Even as he watched, he saw suspicion dawn in the pig-like eyes of the Prussian.

'At 'em!' roared Ken, and without an instant's hesitation flung himself upon the officer.

The man tried to fire, but Ken caught his wrist in time, and closed. The two wrestled furiously together, the German breathing out savage threats in his own language.

He was not tall, but a stocky, powerful man, and it was all Ken could do to hold his own. Vaguely he heard shouts and shots, and knew that Dave and Roy were hotly engaged with the three Turks. But he had no attention to spare for them. All his energies were needed to cope with his own opponent.

Ken's first object was to deprive the other of his pistol, and he forced the man's right arm back with all his strength. Stamping and panting, the two worked gradually back down the slope until they had passed the clump of scrub from behind which the German had appeared.

Ken, though breathing hard, was still cool and collected, while the German, on the other hand, had utterly lost his temper. His big heavy face was a rich plum colour, and the breath whistled through his teeth.

At last Ken gained his first object. His fierce grip upon the German's wrist paralysed the muscles of the man's hand, and the pistol dropped from his nerveless fingers.

Instantly Ken tightened his hold, and tried to back-heel his adversary. Before he could succeed in this manoeuvre, he felt the ground crumbling beneath his feet.

It was too late to do anything to save himself. Next moment the earth gave way and he and the German, locked in one another's arms, went flying through the air.

Followed a crash and a thud, and for some moments Ken lay stunned and breathless, though not actually insensible.

In boxing there is nothing more painful than a blow on the 'mark.' It knocks all the breath out of the body, and for some time the lungs seem paralysed. This was practically what had happened to Ken. He had fallen full on his chest, and though his senses remained clear enough, he simply could not get his breath back.

When at last he succeeded in doing so he felt as weak as a cat, and deadly sick into the bargain. It was some moments before he could even manage to roll off the body of the man beneath him.

He struggled to his feet and found that he was at the bottom of a bluff about twenty feet high. To the right was a sheer drop to the sea. He shivered as he glanced over to the fog-shrouded waves, full eighty feet below. The ledge on which he had landed was only four or five yards wide. A very little more, and he and his enemy together must have gone clean over the cliff.

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He turned to the German. The latter lay still enough—so still that at first Ken thought he was dead. But presently he saw that the man was still breathing.

'A hospital case,' muttered Ken in puzzled tones. 'What the mischief am I to do with him?'

'Ken—Ken, where are you?'

The anxious question came from overhead, and glancing up Ken saw Dave Burney's head appearing over the edge of the bluff.

'I'm all right,' he answered. 'What about you?'

'We've nobbled our little lot,' Dave answered with justifiable pride. 'My word, but I'm glad to see you. I thought you'd gone right over into the sea.'

'I wasn't far off it,' said Ken. 'I say, is there any way up to the top again. This is nothing but a ledge?'

'Can't you climb the bluff. It's not so steep a little way to your right?'

'I could, but my German friend isn't exactly in climbing trim. He's rather badly bust up by the look of him.'

Dave glanced round.

[Illustration: "'My German friend isn't exactly in climbing trim.'"]

'It looks to me as if the ledge you're on broadens a good bit to my left. You wait where you are, and Roy and I will come round and give you a hand.'

Dave's head disappeared, and Ken sat down, with his back against the bluff. He had had a bad shake up, and was glad of a few moments' rest. He was quite safe where he was, for the bluff protected him from stray Turkish bullets.

Down below, through the mist, boats were shooting landwards from the transports, bringing more men, stores of all kinds, ammunition, and materials for setting up a wireless installation. He saw that they were under constant fire from the snipers on the cliffs above, and though for the moment the haze protected them, the mist was fast rising. It was going to be precious awkward when the full light came.

In a much shorter time than he had expected, his two companions appeared in sight around the curve of the ledge. In the dawn light he could see that their khaki was torn and covered with stains, while their faces were scratched and bleeding. But both were in splendid spirits.

'My word!' exclaimed Roy. 'This is what you might call a night out with a vengeance.'

'The night's all right,' returned Ken, 'but it's getting a jolly sight too near day to suit me. If we don't get back to our trench before this fog goes we shall be a target for half the Turkish army.'

'It's not far,' said Dave consolingly.

'Far enough, by the time we've carried in this Johnny,' replied Ken, pointing to the German.

Dave looked doubtfully at the corpulent form of the Prussian.

'He's not exactly a featherweight, by the look of him. However, here goes.' He stooped as he spoke and took the officer by the shoulders.

'Catch hold of his legs, Roy,' he said to Horan. 'No, Ken,' as Carrington stepped forward, 'you've done your bit. Roy and I will tote your stout prisoner back.'

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'First, take off those Turkey carpets you're wearing,' said Ken quickly. 'If you don't, it's our chaps will fill you with lead.'

They all peeled off their Turkish overcoats, then carrying the German they started along the ledge. Rounding the curve, Ken found that the ledge widened and merged in the scrub-clad slope opposite the head of the little bay.

He stopped and glanced round. The Turkish snipers were still busy, and the sharp crack of cordite echoed from scores of different hiding-places along the hills. He and his companions had about one hundred and fifty yards to go before reaching the trench held by their battalions, and the light was growing stronger every moment.

In spite of his anxiety to bring in his prisoner, it seemed clear that the risk was too great. Their only chance of crossing the open in safety was to duck and crawl.

'It's no use,' he said regretfully. 'We'll have to leave this chap behind. We'll all be shot as full of holes as a sieve if we try to carry him.'

'Rats, Carrington!' retorted Roy Horan. 'Go home without our prisoner? Never! Besides, the Turks won't shoot their own officer. Come on, Dave,' he said, and before Ken could say another word the two were off as hard as they could go, carrying their heavy burden.

Ken had many doubts as to the Turks refraining from shooting, for fear of hitting the German. In fact, knowing as he did the feeling which existed between the bullying Prussian and the placid Turk, he rather thought the case would be exactly the opposite.

Whatever the reason, at any rate they had covered nearly half the distance before they began to draw fire. Then bullets began to ping ominously close, and little jets of dust to rise from the dry soil all around them.

Suddenly Ken's hat flew from his head, and as he stooped quickly to recover it, the fat German gave a yell like a stuck pig, and kicked out so convulsively that his bearers incontinently dropped him.

In an instant he was on his feet, and running like a rabbit, at the same time giving vent to a series of sharp yelps like a beaten puppy.

'The blighter! He was shamming!' roared Roy, darting off in pursuit, regardless of the bullets.

'It was a bullet woke him up anyhow,' exclaimed Dave, as he scurried after.

The Prussian was beside himself with pain. He had been shot through one hand, and there is no more agonising injury. He ran blindly, and as it chanced almost in a straight line for the trench.

A score of heads popped up to see what was happening, and when their owners realised the truth a roar of laughter burst out all down the trench.

It was not until the German was on the very edge of the trench that he realised where he was. He spun round to bolt.

But Roy was at his heels.

'No, ye don't, fatty,' said the big New Zealander, and catching the man by the scruff of the neck, gave him a tremendous push which sent him flying over into the trench. Roy sprang down after him, and a moment later, Dave and Ken hurled themselves into cover.

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'Is it steeplechasing ye are, or what fool's game is it ye are playing?' demanded Sergeant O'Brien, while the rest shrieked with laughter.

'He—he's my prisoner,' panted Ken. 'And—and, sergeant, did Norton get back?'

'He did. Come along wid ye, and make your report to the colonel.'

Colonel Conway, who had been on foot all night, was taking a few minutes' much needed rest in a rough dug-out. But at sight of Ken, he was on his feet again in a moment.

'I am very glad to see you, Carrington,' he said cordially. 'I had begun to be afraid that you and your companions would not get back. And yet I knew you had succeeded in your enterprise, for the enfilading fire ceased very shortly after you left.'

Standing at attention, Ken gave his report. He made much of the doings of Dave and Roy, but modestly suppressed his own. The colonel, however, was not deceived.

'You have done very well indeed,' he said, with a warmth that brought the colour to Ken's cheeks. 'Your destruction of the machine gun was a particularly plucky and useful piece of work. I shall see that your conduct and that of all your companions is mentioned in the proper quarter. Meantime, you are promoted to corporal.'

Ken's heart was very nearly bursting with pride.

'Thank you, sir,' he said with a gulp, and saluting again turned away.

The colonel stopped him.

'You had better get some food,' he said. 'We shall be moving out of this very shortly.'

'Faith, ye didn't do so badly after all, lad,' said O'Brien. 'Ate quickly now, for I'm thinking 'tis us for the top of the cliff before we're a dale older.'

Bread, bully beef, and a drink of water out of their bottles. That was the simple bill of fare. But Ken's exertions during the night had put a sharp edge on his appetite, and he enjoyed the plain meal.

The fog was fast disappearing under the rays of the newly risen sun, and the firing grew heavier every minute. The hills all round were alive with snipers, but their fire was directed not so much on the trench held by the Australians as on the boats which were landing reinforcements on the beach below.

It was in the boats and on the beach that the casualties were heaviest. The troops that were landed had to run the gauntlet for fully fifty yards before reaching the cover of the

scrub on the cliff, and matters were worse still for the bluejackets pulling the empty boats back to the ships. They were potted at without a chance of returning the enemy fire.

But they stuck it out finely, and already all the wounded had been taken off, while reinforcements had reached the upper trench, sufficient in number to make up for the first losses.

'What's the colonel waiting for?' asked Dave. 'Why don't we go on up and smoke out those blighted snipers?'

'It's ammunition, I fancy. And there's a couple of maxims coming up. We shall need those if we have to dig ourselves in under fire.'

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'More digging—oh, Christmas!' growled Dave. 'I didn't come here to dig. I could do that in my old dad's garden at home.'

Ken chuckled. 'You'll find the spade'll do as much to win this war as the guns and rifles. There's heaps of trenching in store for us, I can tell you.'

There was some delay about the maxims, and time went on without any order to move. The men began to grumble. It was hard indeed to lie and watch their comrades below being picked off, one after another, by these abominable sharpshooters, without a chance of hitting back.

'Look at that!' growled Roy Horan, pointing to a stalwart bluejacket who had just dropped at his oar as the boat pushed off the beach. 'It's murder! That's what it is. Sheer murder! Why the blazes can't the ships turn loose?'

'Because they've got nothing to fire at. You can't chuck away 6-inch shells on the off chance of killing one sniper. You wait until the Turks appear in force. Then you'll see what naval guns can do.'

'I don't believe the swine will ever appear in force,' said Roy, who had lost all his good humour and was looking absolutely savage. 'It breaks me all up to see our chaps shot down like rabbits without a chance of getting their own back.'

There was worse to come. From somewhere high up among the scrub-clad heights came a dull heavy crash, and almost instantly the clear air above the beach was filled with puffs of gray white smoke which floated like balls of cotton wool.

'The guns! The beggars have got those guns up,' ran a mutter along the trench.

'About time for the ships to get to work,' growled Roy, his big handsome face knitted in a scowl.

'Ay, if they only knew where the guns were,' replied Ken. 'But that's the deuce of it. They can't spot 'em without planes, and there are no planes here yet.'

Crash! A second gun spoke, and another shell burst above the beach. From that time on the firing was continuous. The whole beach was scourged with shrapnel, and landing operations became perilous in the extreme.

The men in the trenches fidgeted and swore beneath their breath. There is nothing more trying to troops than to see their comrades suffering and yet be unable to help them.

'Can't we do something?' muttered Dave, as he saw a boat from one of the ships smashed to matchwood by a blast of shrapnel, and her crew and contents scattered into

the sea. 'Can't we do something? It's enough to drive one loony to watch this sort of thing.'

Almost as he spoke there was a sudden flutter of excitement, as an order was passed from man to man down the trench.

They were to advance and take up a new position on the top of the slope.

CHAPTER VI

Guns!

There was no bugle note, no cheer, but at a whistle the men swarmed out of their trench and went uphill as hard as every they could go.

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Their appearance was the signal for a tremendous outburst of firing on the part of the Turkish snipers, and a moment later the two 77-millimetre German guns which had been brought from Gaba Tepe changed the direction of their fire from the beach to the advancing troops.

As the Australians went bursting through the scrub, snipers who had crept in close during the night and hidden in the bushes and behind rocks broke like rabbits out of gorse when the terriers are put in.

They were hunted down remorselessly, and not one of them escaped. Those who were not killed outright were taken prisoners.

It was very fine while it lasted, and the men would have given anything to go on. But Colonel Conway knew the risk too well, and as soon as they had gained the summit of the cliff whistle signals from the sergeants stopped them, and the order came to dig themselves in with all speed.

It is one thing to occupy a trench already made, quite another to dig one under fire. There is no question of standing up and wielding the shovel as if one were digging a garden. Men must lie down and scratch and scrape until they get head cover, then gradually open up a narrow ditch into which they sink slowly.

'I didn't enlist as a blooming navvy,' grunted Roy Horan, who had stuck by Ken and Dave. 'Phew, but it's hot as a North Island beach on Christmas Day!'

As he spoke came an earth-shaking thud, and Ken, who was next to Roy, grabbed him by the collar and pulled him down flat on the ground.

Just in time, too, for next instant the earth three yards away in front burst upwards in a fountain of stones and pieces of broken steel. Ken felt a blast of heat and stinging sand across the back of his neck, while the concussion made his head ring.

'What the blazes?' muttered Roy, as he lifted his head and looked round dazedly.

'It was blazes all right,' answered Ken dryly. 'A high explosive shell, my lad. Lucky that it went pretty deep before it burst.'

'And lucky for me that you pulled my head down in time,' answered Roy soberly. 'Thanks, old man. I shan't forget that.'

The next shell burst behind the line, and the third still farther back. Fortunately for the Australians, the German gunners had not got the exact range, or the losses would have been fearful. High explosive of the kind the Germans use will pulverise the parapet of a trench and kill every one within reach.

The ground was hard, the sun hot, but the men dug like beavers, and within an hour had made themselves pretty safe. But there was no letting up. Colonel Conway insisted upon a regular trench of the latest pattern with proper traverses, and deep enough to give plenty of head room. The men grumbled, but some, like Ken, realised that the game was well worth the candle.

'He's looking for an attack in force later on,' Ken told Dave and Roy Horan. 'You may be jolly sure that the Turks are bringing up reinforcements.'

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'There are quite enough of the beggars already,' said Dave. 'Just listen to the bullets coming over. That scrub in front of us fairly hums with snipers.'

By the time that the trench was finished it was nearly midday. The men were given a rest, and dinner was served out. In spite of the enemy's fire the Army Service men had managed to bring their stores right up to the trench, and there was fresh bread, butter, cheese, and jam for the hungry fighters.

Down below, engineers were at work, making a path up the cliff, while boats travelled up and down with a dogged and admirable persistence.

The enemy fire in front of the new position grew steadily heavier. If a cap was put up on a cleaning rod over the parapet, it was sometimes struck by two or three bullets at once. It seemed clear that the Germans who led the Turks were concentrating their forces in front of the trench, but whether they were new men or not it was impossible to say. The broken nature of the ground and the heavy scrub hid all that was going on a very little way inland.

'This is getting a bit thick,' said Roy Horan, as a fresh crackle of rifle fire burst from a wooded height about a quarter of a mile inland. A maxim carefully emplaced behind sandbags in the trench replied with a storm of bullets, but it was a poor job, firing at an enemy who were quite invisible, and a feeling of slight depression had begun to settle on the occupants of the trench.

'The colonel's having a pow-wow with the other officers,' said Dave. 'Something's going to happen before long.'

Something did happen. Presently the whistles trilled, and a sigh of relief went up.

'Cold steel, bhoys,' said Sergeant O'Brien. 'Don't any of ye wait to shoot. And open order, mind ye!'

Eagerly the men scrambled out of their trench and plunged into the scrub. In a long yet level line they went charging through it.

The snipers had not expected another advance. That was clear enough. By twos and threes and dozens, they sprang up out of their hiding-places, and bolted like rabbits. With exulting shouts the Colonials charged after them, ran them down and bayoneted them.

The slaughter was fearful. As the khaki-clad line swept onwards they left the ground behind them thick with dead bodies. They themselves lost, of course, but only slightly. Their attack was such a complete surprise, and they moved so quickly, that for a time they had matters all their own way. The Turks had no relish for bayonet fighting, and the few who did turn to bay soon paid the penalty.

For a quarter of a mile or more the Colonials continued their career, clearing the whole of the scrub of the plague of snipers. Then, just in the moment of victory, came such a blast of firing that the whole line reeled and swayed, and men fell by the dozen.

'Down with you!' shouted Ken to Dave, who was on his left. 'Down with you!'

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As he spoke, he himself dropped behind a boulder which thrust its weather-stained head out of the thin grass. He glanced round and saw that his companions had followed his example.

A bullet struck the stone just above his head and spattered off in a shower of shrieking fragments. The whole air was thick with lead. It was clear that they had run into a very strong enemy force, no doubt the reinforcements which had been brought up from the east.

'Where are they?' sang out Dave, who was lying in a little hollow with Roy Horan, a few yards to their left.

'There's a ravine ahead. That's where they are. Look out! Here they come!'

The hill-side opposite seemed suddenly to vomit men. They came sweeping out in masses, hundreds strong.

'Rapid fire!' sang out Ken to his squad.

There was no need for his advice. Every man of the Colonials let loose at once, and few fired less than fifteen aimed rounds to the minute. The execution was awful. The attacking force reeled and writhed like a monster in agony.

But the officers behind, in their ugly greenish-gray German uniforms, drove them forward, and though the leading files fell by scores the rest swept onwards. To his dismay, Ken saw more pouring out behind in support. The odds were at least ten to one. It was impossible to withstand such an attack in the open.

Colonel Conway knew it too. Next moment the whistles shrilled again, giving the order to retire.

Slowly the men began to fall back. Their steadiness was wonderful. Raw troops can be trusted to charge, but, as a rule, it takes veterans to retire successfully. These Australians, hardly one of whom had ever been under fire before the previous night, retreated in such magnificent order as made their officers' hearts thrill with admiration.

Every bit of cover was made full use of, the men dropping and firing, then rising again, and gliding back to the next stone or bush. They lost, of course—lost heavily—but for each Australian who fell, four Turks went down.

Ken, dodging and shooting with the best, still managed to keep an eye on his two friends, and saw with relief that neither was hit. Slowly they worked back until they were within fifty yards of their trench.

Here was open ground with practically no cover at all.



'Come on!' shouted Ken. 'A last sprint.'

He saw Dave spring to his feet and make a dash. Then suddenly he stumbled, flung out his arms and fell flat on his face. At the same moment two Turks, big, black-bearded fellows, came leaping out of a patch of scrub, barely twenty yards behind Dave.

Ken spun round, and taking quick aim at the nearest, pulled the trigger. There was no report. He had finished the last cartridge in his magazine.

There was no time to reload. Dave, hurt but not killed, was trying to crawl away on hands and knees, but it was clear that in another moment he would be a prisoner.

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Without an instant's hesitation, Ken charged straight at the two Turks.

They, intent on their prisoner, failed to see him until he was almost on them. Then one, uttering a hoarse cry, sprang forward, stabbing at him with his bayonet.

Ken's blade clashed against the other's as he parried, then side-stepping like a flash, he drove his bayonet into the man's ribs, and with a choking sob he fell dead.

Something whizzed past Ken's head, and a heavy blow on the left shoulder brought him to his knees. The second Turk had struck at him with his rifle butt, and missing his head, caught him on the shoulder. He saw a savage grin on the man's face as he raised his rifle again to finish the job and avenge his comrade. It looked all odds on Ken's brains being scattered the next instant.

Before the rifle could descend a shadow flashed across, and something crashed upon the Turk's head with such fearful force as cracked his skull like an egg-shell. For a moment his body remained upright, then it swayed and fell sideways like a log to the ground.

'Gosh, but I thought I was too late!' panted Roy Horan. 'And confound it all, I've cracked the stock of my rifle.'

'You saved my head from being cracked anyhow,' answered Ken. 'But Dave's hit. Give us a hand back with him.'

'I'll carry him,' said Roy quickly, and dropping his useless rifle, he quickly hoisted Burney on his broad back, and set off at a run for the trench. Ken, whose shoulder felt quite numb, followed, and a moment later all three tumbled safely back into the trench.

Roy laid Dave down gently on the ground.

'Afraid he's got it bad,' he whispered, as he pointed to an ugly stain on the back of Dave's tunic. 'We must get the doctor as soon as we can.'

'Let's see if we can't stop that bleeding. The doctor's full up with work.' As Ken spoke, he bent down and began stripping off Dave's uniform, so as to get at the wound.

Tunic and shirt were both sodden with blood. Ken's heart sank. It looked as if his chum must have been shot clean through the body.

'He's bleeding like a pig,' muttered Roy, as he unwound a bandage.

By this time Ken had bared Dave's back, and with a handkerchief mopped away the blood.

'Well, I'm blessed!' he exclaimed. 'Look at that!'

The two stared, for instead of the blue-edged puncture which a bullet makes as it enters, there was nothing but a shallow cut about three inches long.

'I see,' said Ken suddenly. 'The bullet struck the leather of his braces, and glanced. I say, Dave, old chap, you may thank your stars for those bullock-hide braces of yours. They've saved you this time, and no mistake. It's only a flesh wound which a strip of plaster will put right in a day or two.'

'Thanks be for that, anyhow,' said Dave earnestly. 'It would have broken me all up to lose the rest of the fun. But,' he added thoughtfully, 'I'm sorry my braces are gone up. I'll never get another pair like 'em.'

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Roy burst out laughing.

'You ungrateful beggar. Here, I've got a bit of string, and we'll soon put 'em to rights. Now Carrington, let's have a squint at your shoulder.'

Ken's shoulder was badly bruised, but nothing worse, and he and Dave soon forgot their injuries in the excitement of a big frontal attack by the Turks. For ten minutes they loaded and fired until their rifle barrels were almost red hot; then the survivors of the attacking party took to their heels and ran.

After that there was peace for a little except for shell fire. This, however, grew heavier. Fresh guns had been brought up, and at least three were devoting their whole attention to the trench. They had got the range, too, and the shrapnel was bursting right over the gallant Colonials. Casualties became very heavy, and the doctor and stretcher-bearers were kept busy the whole time.

To make matters worse, another machine gun had been mounted on rising ground to the north and its fire was enfilading the trench. If it had not been for the traverses on which the colonel had insisted, the position would have become untenable.

Ken, flattened against the clay face of the trench, began to feel very uneasy. They had no more reinforcements, and if the Turks got more guns, it began to look as though the whole business would end in failure.

'About time we did another sally to look for that machine gun,' said big Roy Horan in his ear.

'Not in the daylight,' answered Ken, shaking his head. 'We shouldn't have a dog's chance of reaching it.'

'Well, something's got to happen pretty soon,' answered Roy, ducking, as a shell burst almost overhead. 'Something's got to happen, or there won't be enough of us left to hold this blessed dug-out.'

'Things don't look healthy, and that's a fact,' allowed Ken. 'Our only chance is to get some guns to work. And that's just what we haven't got.'

'And can't get, either, until that path up the cliff is finished.'

At that moment a shell pitched full into the next traverse, blowing its two occupants to fragments, and scattering their torn remains far and wide.

'That's poor old Carroll,' growled Roy. 'The swine! How I'd like to get back on 'em!'

Ken did not reply. The horror of it had made him feel quite sick.

At that moment the firing burst out more hotly than ever. It seemed as if every gun and rifle in the enemy's hands spoke at once.

'What's up now?' muttered Roy.

Ken gave a sharp exclamation, and pointed upwards. Looking up, Roy saw a big bi-plane soaring high overhead. It looked like a silver bird as it skimmed across the rich blue of the afternoon sky.

'Hurrah, a plane at last!' said Ken joyfully. 'That means business. She's spotting for the ships,' he explained. 'You'll see something pretty soon, you chaps, or hear it anyhow.'

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All around the plane, the air was full of the white puffs of bursting shrapnel, but the dainty man-bird flitted through them unscathed. The eager Australians, all staring skywards, saw her bank steeply, and at the same time a long white streak shot downwards from her, like a ribbon unrolling in mid air. Then she had turned and was going seawards again at a terrific speed.

'Now look out!' cried Ken, and almost as the words left his lips the battleships outside let loose.

A score of 6-inch guns spoke out at once with a ringing clamour which absolutely drowned all other sounds, and their great 100-pound shells came hurtling inland with a series of long-drawn shrieks.

'Look! Look!' cried Ken again, as great fountains of earth and gravel spurted from the side of a hill a mile and a half away to the left. That's plastering them. Now we're getting a little of our own back.'

There was no doubt about it. The German guns shut up like a knife, but whether they were actually hit or merely silenced, it was, of course, impossible to say.

For twenty solid minutes the grim battleships and cruisers poured forth their storm of shells, until the whole hill-side where the German guns had been posted gaped with brown craters. Then they ceased, and the saucy aeroplane came buzzing inland again to observe and report upon the damage done.

What its extent was the Colonials could not, of course, know, but at any rate the enfiling guns remained silent and the worst danger was at an end.

'That's saved our bacon,' said Ken, with a sigh of relief. 'We'll get a little rest now, perhaps.'

'Maybe ye will, and maybe ye won't,' said Sergeant O'Brien, who came past at that moment and overheard Ken's words. 'But if ye want forty winks, bhoys, now's your time to snatch 'em. There'll be mighty little slape this night for any of us.'

'Why so, sergeant?' asked Dave.

[Illustration: "'Hurrah, a plane at last!" said Ken.']

'Because so soon as ever it's dark we'll have the Turks buzzing round us like bees. And the ships can't help us then, remember,' he added significantly.

CHAPTER VII

'Lizzie' lets loose

Sergeant O'Brien was soon proved a true prophet. Darkness had hardly fallen before the scrub in front was alive with Turks, who came on with a rush, intent on driving the Colonials out of their position.

'Steady, boys!' cried the sergeant. 'Don't fire till ye can see them. Let every cartridge tell.'

Every officer and every non-com. down the long length of the trench was giving the same advice, and the Turks were allowed to approach until their squat forms loomed clear in the starlight.

'Now let 'em have it. Pump it into 'em, lads!' came O'Brien's voice again.

With one crash every rifle spoke at once, and at the same time the maxims turned loose their hose-pipe streams of lead. The Turks seemed to melt and vanish under the concentrated storm of fire. Not one reached the trench.

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'Socked 'em that time,' remarked Dave, with great satisfaction.

'Sure, that was only the overture!' answered O'Brien. 'They were just thrying their luck, so to spake.'

Again he was right. As soon as the survivors of the first attack had retreated the air became thick with the shriek and moan of shrapnel, and the vicious whizz of Mauser bullets. This went on for nearly an hour, then a second attack materialised.

It was in heavier force than the first, and though the steady fire of the Colonials did tremendous execution, some of the Turks actually reached the trench and came plunging in, stabbing wildly with their short bayonets.

Not one of them ever got out again, but they did a good deal of damage, and during the lull that followed the stretcher-bearers were busy. Five separate times during the hours of darkness did fresh masses of Turks sweep down upon the worn and weary Colonials, and twice parties of the latter counter-attacked and drove the survivors helter-skelter before them.

'Jove, I never was gladder to see daylight,' said Ken hoarsely, as a pale yellow light began to dim the stars. His eyes stung with powder smoke, his mouth was sour with fatigue, and every muscle in his body ached.

'Well, lad, we've made good, anyway,' said O'Brien with a smile on his blackened face. 'Just take a peep over, and see what ye can see.'

Ken raised his head cautiously and peered through the embrasure in front. The sight that met his eyes was a terrible one. The scrub for nearly a hundred yards in front of the trench had almost vanished. It had been literally mown down by the storm of bullets which had raged across it all night long. And all the open space was paved with the bodies of dead and wounded men. There were hundreds of them, some on their faces, some on their backs, most of them still enough, a few trying to crawl away, and others moaning feebly.

It was a horrible sight, and for the moment Ken felt almost sick.

'They'll not thry it again just yet,' said O'Brien quietly. 'The next attack will be one in force, and for that they'll need more men than they've left here.'

'And we'll be ready for them then, eh, sergeant?' said Roy Horan cheerfully. 'There's more than ourselves been busy during the night.'

As he spoke he pointed over in the other direction, and Ken, with difficulty withdrawing his eyes from the scene of slaughter in front, looked back down the cliff.



A cry of delight escaped him. A regular road had been made, curving all the way up the cliff, and two field guns had been brought up, and set in position. In spite of the enemies' fire, all sorts of stores had come ashore in the night, and the camp cooks were already busy preparing breakfast.

It was the first hot meal that any of the men had had for thirty-six hours, and it did them all the good in the world. When it was over they were told to take what sleep they could.

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Ken and his two chums needed no second order. They simply pitched themselves down, and no one ever slept better on a spring mattress than Ken did in the muddy bottom of that trench.

What woke him at last was a crash which made the solid hill-side quiver, and dwarfed to insignificance anything that he had previously heard.

In a flash he was up and on his feet.

'Go aisy, lad,' said O'Brien, who was standing up, with a pair of glasses to his eyes and a smile on his lips. 'Go aisy. 'Tis only Lizzie opening the ball.'

'Lizzie?' muttered Ken, still half dazed with the prodigious explosion.

Again came an enormous roar, followed by a sound like a train rushing through the sky. Then from a hill to the left and a mile or so inland a geyser of rocks and soil spouted, and was followed by the same earth-shaking crash which had wakened him.

Ken looked out to sea. Some three miles off shore lay the biggest battleship he had ever set eyes on. Even at that distance her immense turrets, with their grinning gun muzzles, were clearly visible.

'The "Queen Elizabeth!"' he gasped.

'That's what,' said Roy Horan, who had got up and joined Ken. 'They've sent her along to lend us a hand. Oh, I tell you, she's no slouch. Watch her now! Gee, but she's giving Young Turkey something to chew on.'

'Why, there's a regular fleet!' exclaimed Ken, rubbing the last of the sleep from his eyes. 'This is something like. Some of those sniping gentlemen are going to be sorry for themselves.'

No fewer than seven warships were lying off the coast, every one of them smashing their broadsides into the Turkish positions. The noise was incredible, but every sound was dwarfed when the great super-Dreadnought fired her 15-inch guns. The shells, the length of a tall man and weighing very nearly a ton, were charged with shrapnel, carrying no fewer than twenty thousand bullets apiece. Exploding over the enemy's position, each deluged a couple of acres of ground with a torrent of lead.

[Illustration: "'Tis only Lizzie opening the ball.'"]

It was a most amazing sight. The whole sky was full of the smoke of bursting shells—smoke so heavy that the light breeze could not break it, as it swam in masses that seemed quite solid until they struck against the higher ground far inland.

Hour after hour the tremendous bombardment continued. At first the Turkish field pieces endeavoured to reply, but one by one they were silenced, and when at last, late in the afternoon, the thunder of the guns ceased, the silence was only broken by a faint crackle of musketry.

'Now's our chance!' exclaimed O'Brien, who seemed to have an uncanny faculty for understanding beforehand exactly what was in the colonel's mind.

'A charge, you mean?' said Ken eagerly.

'That's it, sonny. Before they've got over the effects of that swate little pasting.'

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Sure enough, a minute later came the order for advance, and, refreshed by their long rest, the Australians and New Zealanders came pouring over their parapet, and with bayonets flashing in the evening sun, rushed forward through the scrub.

For the first two hundred yards there was hardly a check, then all of a sudden the scattered fire thickened.

'They're in the ravine, bhoys,' shouted O'Brien. 'Don't be waiting to shoot. Give them the steel.'

The firing grew heavier. Many of the gallant Colonials dropped, but the only effect upon the rest was to make them race forward at greater speed.

Ken saw before him a dark line seamed with spits and flashes of flame. A bullet clipped past his ear so close that he felt the wind of it. He never paused. Next moment he was over the lip of the shallow ravine in which the Turks had entrenched themselves.

On the two previous occasions when he and his comrades had attacked Turkish trenches, the enemy had defended themselves bravely. Now they seemed no longer to have any stomach for the fight. As the Colonials poured like an avalanche into the ravine the Turks turned, and scrambling wildly up the far side, bolted for their lives.

But the Colonials, with the bitter memory in their minds of all they had suffered during the previous night and day, were not minded to let them escape so easily. With loud shouts they gave chase. The Turks, good marchers but poor runners, stood no earthly chance in this terrible race, and by scores and hundreds were bayoneted or seized and dragged back as prisoners.

Filled with mad excitement, Ken raced onwards in the forefront of the line. His bayonet was dripping, a red mist clouded his eyes, for the moment he was fighting mad.

He stumbled over a log and nearly fell. He realised that he was in a small wood of low-growing trees with wide spreading branches. To his right he heard shouts and shrieks and the sound of shots, but for the moment there was not another soul in sight.

His throat was like a lime kiln. He stopped a moment to take a swallow of water from his felt-covered flask, then went forward again.

He came to an open space, and as he reached its edge saw four men with a quick-firer hurrying frantically across the open to the trees on the far side.

Three were Turks, but the fourth wore the gray-green of a German officer. The latter was short and—for a German—slight. Something about him seemed vaguely familiar.



At that moment he turned and glanced round, and Ken saw his face. He could hardly believe his eyes. The man was Kemp, ex-steward of the 'Cardigan Castle.' There could be no doubt about it. That sallow complexion, the low forehead, and the thick black eyebrows which met above his nose were quite unmistakable.

Without an instant's hesitation Ken flung up his rifle and fired straight at the man. But blown with long running, his hand shook. At any rate, he missed, and next instant the German, the Turks, and their gun vanished into the trees opposite.

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Footsteps came crashing through the dead leaves and dry sticks behind Ken.

'We've got 'em on toast, Carrington,' came the deep voice of Roy Horan. The big fellow was splashed with blood and dripping with perspiration, but in his eyes was a gleam which told of his delight at the result of the charge.

Ken gave a gasp of joy.

'The very man, Horan! Kemp and three Turkish gunners have just gone into the trees opposite. They've got a quick-firer. Are you game to hunt 'em down?'

'Kemp?' exclaimed Roy, who had of course heard the story of the treachery aboard the 'Cardigan Castle.' 'Kemp, that spy scoundrel—are you sure?'

'Dead certain, though I can't imagine how he got here.'

'More can I, but by the Lord Harry, we'll have his scalp all right. Which way did they go?'

Ken pointed and began to run. Roy raced alongside.

It was the maddest enterprise, and if either had stopped to think they would have realised this fact. Two against four, and the latter armed with a quick-firer! And by way of improving matters, the two had outrun all their companions and were far out in a country swarming with enemy troops.

But Ken thought only of vengeance against the traitor Kemp, and as for Roy, he was the sort to fight till he dropped, and laugh at any odds.

'Where's Dave?' asked Ken, as they tore along, side by side.

'All right when I last saw him about half a mile back,' was the answer. 'Which way have those blighters gone?'

Ken, alone, might have been at a loss to follow, but this was where Roy came in. Brought up on a great cattle run, he could track a stray beast over miles of ranges. It was child's play to him to trace the heavy footmarks over the leaf-strewn floor of the wood.

'Go as quietly as you can,' he whispered to Ken. 'Kemp's quite cute enough to ambush us if he thinks we're on his track.'

It was wonderful how quietly the young giant could move, and Ken, naturally light-footed, followed his example easily. The tracks led uphill, and presently the trees began to thin, and the ground to become more stony.

Then the trees gave out altogether, and they found themselves on the side of a great hill seamed with gullies and covered with low scrub and loose stones.

[Illustration: Within No. 1 Fort at Cape Helles in the Dardanelles.]

[Illustration: Tired out, the soldier was sleeping on a bed of live shells.]

'There they are!' said Ken in a low voice, pointing to heads just visible over the edge of one of the shallow gullies. 'I tell you what they're after. They're going to emplace that gun somewhere up on the hill-side, and pepper our people on their way back.'

Roy nodded.

'That's about the size of it. Well, it's up to us to spoil their little game. We must work up along the next gully parallel with them and get a slap at 'em over the edge.'

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'That's the tip,' said Ken, 'but mind, we've got to bust up the gun itself as well as the men with it.'

Bending double so as not to be seen, the two scurried up the parallel gully until they reckoned that they must be on a level with the gun and its crew.

'It's going to be a stalk now,' whispered Roy, and dropping on hands and knees, crept cautiously over the side of the gully.

On the ridge he stopped.

'Hang the luck!' he muttered. 'They've gone a lot farther than I reckoned. They're a couple of hundred yards away, and still moving. What's worse, the two gullies bend away from one another, and there's no cover to speak of.'

Ken crept up alongside, and took a look.

'It's a bit awkward,' he admitted. 'But they're taking it easy. We ought to be able to make fair practice from here.'

Roy nodded.

'All right. You take the left-hand man. I'll try for the right.'

A couple of seconds pause, then the two rifles spoke at once. Ken's man went down like a log, but Roy apparently missed his.

Roy gave an angry exclamation and took a rapid second shot.

'Hurrah—nailed him that time,' as he saw the man go over like a shot rabbit.

The remaining Turk, seeing his companions down, turned and made a dead bolt. Kemp, with a cry of rage which came plainly to their ears, rushed after him, apparently with the idea of bringing him back.

Ken and Roy both loosed off at once, but without success, and next instant their quarry was out of sight over the far ridge.

'Rotten luck! It was Kemp we wanted,' growled Roy.

'We want the gun worse,' Ken answered grimly.

Springing up, he dropped into the far gully and began to run towards the gun.

'Watch out for Kemp,' sang out Roy, as he followed. 'He may be laying for us just over the ridge.'

'I thought of that,' answered Ken. 'I'll slip across and have a look.'

Both crept together over the second ridge, but there was no sign of Kemp or of the third Turk. They might have sunk into the ground for all that could be seen of them.

'Now for the gun,' said Ken, as he dropped back into the gully.

They wasted no time at all in reaching it. Beside it lay the two Turks. They were both quite dead.

'Pity we can't take the gun back with us,' said Ken regretfully.

'Why shouldn't we? I'll sling it on my back. It don't weigh more than sixty pounds.'

Ken shook his head.

'It's too far, old chap. We're all of a mile from our own lines. No, I'll take the breech block off, and if you can find a good-sized stone we'll smash the rest of it enough to make it useless.'

Roy at once hove up a rock the size of his head, and raising it high in air brought it down with a shattering crash on the gun. The stout steel barrel twisted under the tremendous shock, the water jacket burst.

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'That suit you?' he said.

Ken glanced at the ruins, and smiled.

'Take Krupps all their time to make that serviceable again,' he remarked, and the words were hardly out of his mouth before there came a sudden rush of feet, and Kemp, accompanied by no fewer than eight sturdy-looking Turks, came scrambling over the ridge from the right.

'Don't kill them,' shouted Kemp in Turkish. 'Don't kill them. Take them alive. Ten marks apiece to you if you take them alive.'

The men were on them instantly. There was no time to shoot. Stooping swiftly, Roy swung up the broken barrel of the quick-firer, and with a shout sprang at the Turks, whirling the weighty length of steel around his head.

In his powerful hands it was a fearful weapon. The Turks went down like ninepins. Ken, who grasped his rifle by the barrel was in no way behind his chum. The Turks had not been prepared for such a resistance. Inside ten seconds five of them were down, and the three others had had all they wanted. They ran for their lives.

Kemp had taken no part in the battle. He was standing a little aloof on the upper ground. Roy, having disposed of his assailant, whirled round and made for the man.

Kemp whipped out a repeating pistol and levelled it at his head.

'Drop that or I shoot,' he said viciously.

'No, you don't,' cried Ken.

Ken had seen the pistol in Kemp's hand, and had just had time to get his own rifle to his shoulder, the muzzle levelled full at Kemp's head.

'Drop that pistol, or I'll blow your head off,' he said curtly.

Kemp's lips parted in a snarl, showing his white teeth. For a moment it looked as though he would shoot Roy and take his chances.

But his pluck was not quite equal to it, and the grim, determined look on Ken's face daunted him. With a muttered oath, he dropped the pistol.

'And a very pretty toy, too!' said Roy, springing forward and picking it up. 'A nice new automatic, Roy. We'll keep that as spoils of war.'



'Don't waste time over the pistol,' said Ken sharply. 'Collar the chap himself. He'll be better worth bringing back than a cart load of pistols.'

In an instant Roy's great arms were round Kemp, and lifting him clean off his feet he popped him down in front of Ken.

'Tie him,' said Ken.

'I am an officer,' said Kemp haughtily. 'I will not be bound like a common criminal.'

'You were an English ship's steward when I last saw you,' Ken retorted. 'And engaged in the charming occupation of signalling out of the bathroom port to an enemy submarine.'

It was evidently no news to Kemp that Kenneth Carrington was his adversary of the bathroom. Dark as it had been, he must somehow have recognised him. He glared back defiantly.

'I was serving my country,' he answered with a lofty air.

'And what do you think would have happened to a Britisher who had been caught on a German ship, engaged in an act of such abominable treachery?' returned Ken hotly.



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Kemp merely shrugged his shoulders.

'Well, it's not for me to deal with you,' said Ken. 'We'll take him back, Roy, and he'll stand a proper court-martial. Still, as he calls himself an officer, I suppose I must take his parole.'

'Do you give it?' he demanded of Kemp.

Kemp's sallow face had gone white, but whether from fear or rage was doubtful. 'Yes,' he said in a low voice, 'I give my parole.'

They turned, and with Kemp between them, set out at a sharp pace in the direction from which they had come.

From the distance rifles still snapped, and a couple of miles away to the south-west field-guns were booming. But all around was strangely quiet. Ken began to feel a trifle uneasy. He realised that they had got a long way ahead of their comrades, and that the latter had already been recalled.

'Quite nice and peaceful up here, eh, Ken?' said Roy with his cheerful grin.

Before Ken could reply there came a shot from somewhere quite close at hand, and with a sharp cry Ken dropped his rifle.

'Winged, old chap?' said Roy, turning quickly.

As he did so Kemp made a dash, and hurled himself up the slope to the left.

'Never mind me!' cried Ken. 'Catch Kemp. Shoot him. Stop him anyhow.'

Roy flung up his rifle and took a snap shot.

He missed, and before he could pull the trigger a second time, the ex-steward had dived like a weasel into a clump of scrub and was gone.

Roy dashed up the bank in hot pursuit. The moment he showed himself a regular volley of rifle shots rang out, and spinning round he sprang back into the hollow.

'There's about twenty Turks coming hard up the next gully,' he panted. 'We've got to bunk like blazes if we want to save our skins.'

CHAPTER VIII

THE HUNTERS HUNTED

Ken was standing, looking half dazed. His rifle was on the ground, and he was holding his left arm with his right hand.

'Are you hurt, Ken?' asked Roy, and there was real concern in his voice. The two had known one another less than a week, yet each had come to respect and like the other.

'No. I'm not hit. The bullet struck the barrel of my rifle. It numbed my arm for the moment. I'm quite all right, but my rifle's done for, so far as firing goes. Rotten luck, losing Kemp.'

'Never mind Kemp,' said Roy, serious for once. 'These Turkish Johnnies are between us and home. And they're after us. It'll take us all our time to get clear. Which way are we to go?'

As he spoke a shout came from the next gully. It was Kemp's voice, and he was evidently calling his men up to pursue the two Britishers.

Ken glanced round quickly. He saw at once that it was out of the question to make straight back for their own lines. They would be cut off for a dead certainty. The two other alternatives were to make off to the right or to go straight back up the gully.

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But going to the right meant that they would have to climb the right-hand wall of the gully, which was much steeper and higher than that to the left. The result would be that they would be exposed against the sky line to the enemy's fire.

All this flashed through his mind in a couple of seconds, and he instantly took his decision.

'We must go back up the gully, Roy,' he said sharply. 'It's absolutely our only chance.'

'Any way, so long as we don't drop into the clutches of that swine Kemp,' said Roy. 'I fancy I see him giving us any parole.'

He whipped round as he spoke, and the two set to running steadily up the gully. As they passed the scene of their late encounter where the bodies of the dead Turks lay by the broken machine gun, Ken stooped quickly and picked up one of their rifles, and helped himself also to a bandolier of cartridges.

This caused only a few seconds delay, yet before they were under way again, there came a crackle of shots from below, and bullets whizzed uncomfortably close about their ears.

Luckily for them, a few yards farther up was a bend in the course of the ravine, and once round that they were safe for the moment.

Safe for the moment—yes—but the prospect before them was not exactly inviting, and Ken's lips tightened as he and Roy strained onwards up the hill-side, which grew steeper with every yard.

They were going straight away from their own people, right into the heart of the enemy country, and rack his brains as he might, Ken could see no plan for getting back. There was nothing for it but to try to shake off their pursuers and trust to chance for the rest.

Neither of them was very fresh, for they had been fighting and running for the better part of two hours. Even so, they managed to keep ahead of the Turks, and though every now and then a few shots came rattling up from below they had got far enough ahead to be out of easy range.

They were now at a considerable height, but still a long way from the top of the hill. The scrub was thinning out and the ground becoming more and more stony. The worst of it was that the ravine up which they were travelling was getting steadily more shallow. A very little farther, and it ended altogether. Beyond, was nothing but bare hill-side, where they would—barring the scattered rocks—be in full view of the enemy.

Ken dropped to a walk.

'This won't do, Roy. Once we're out in the open, we shall be the very finest kind of targets.'

Roy shrugged his great shoulders.

'There's nothing else for it. We can't make a ravine. What price taking up a position here behind these rocks and trying to fight 'em off? We've got plenty of cartridges.'

Ken shook his head.

'No earthly use. They could get round above us. We shouldn't have a dog's chance.'

'Then we'd best shift on topside,' replied Roy coolly. 'They can't get above us there unless they raise a balloon. Come on, old man, we can dodge in and out among these rocks.'



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Ken glanced back down the hill. Already the first of their pursuers were in sight round the curve of the ravine, barely three hundred yards away. They were jogging along quite steadily. It was clear that they felt absolutely sure of their men—so sure that there was no need to hurry. Kemp, conspicuous in his ugly German khaki, was shepherding them upwards.

Ken bit his lip. Inwardly he vowed that he would never be taken alive by the ex-steward. He had a pretty shrewd idea of what his fate and Roy's would be if they fell into Kemp's clutches.

'Come on, then,' he said desperately, and springing up over the shallow bank of the ravine made a rush for the spot where the rocks seemed to be thickest.

A shout from below told them that their manoeuvre was observed.

'They're spreading out,' said Roy, looking back over his shoulder.

'They're not shooting, anyhow,' answered Ken, as, bent double, he ran hard alongside his companion.

'I suppose they think they've got us anyhow,' said Roy. 'Ken, I'd give a lot to disappoint the dear Kemp.'

Up and up they went, bearing a little to the right because it was on that side that the stones lay thickest. They were still both going strong, and were, if anything, increasing the distance between themselves and their pursuers. A little spark of hope began to dawn in Ken's breast. It seemed just possible that they might still outrun the slower-going Turks, and crossing the ridge, find shelter in the valley below. There was one point in their favour. The sun was dropping low in the west. It would be dark in little more than an hour.

Roy seemed to guess his thoughts.

'We'll do 'em down yet, Ken,' he said.

Almost as he spoke he pulled up short, and flung out his arm just in time to stop Ken from plunging right over the sheer edge of a tremendous gorge that gashed the face of the mountain like a slice from a giant's knife.

For an instant both stood breathing hard, staring down into the darksome depths below. Then Ken turned to Roy.

'That's why they weren't hurrying,' he said bitterly.

For once Roy seemed cooler than Ken. Throwing himself flat on his face, he wriggled forward till nearly half his body was over the edge.

'Hold my legs,' he said, and Ken, horrified at the other's rashness, obeyed.

A moment later he was on his feet again. There was a queer glimmer in his eyes.

'There's a chance yet. I've spotted a ledge. Don't count on it. I don't know whether we can reach it. But it's worth trying. Come on.'

He hurried back down the edge of the cliff for about thirty paces, then looked over again.

'Here it is. It's a goodish way down. But I've tackled places as bad in the North Island mountains. Will you risk it?'

'I'd risk anything rather than Kemp,' Ken answered curtly.

'Then I'll go first. Lie down on your face, and give me your hands. Quickly. Those beggars mustn't see us.'

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Ken obeyed instantly. He knew nothing of mountaineering himself, but realised that Roy did. Without a moment's hesitation Roy turned round with his back to the ravine, and catching Ken's hands, let himself drop quietly till his long body dangled at full length against the face of the cliff.

[Illustration: 'The strain on Ken's arms was awful.']

The strain on Ken's arms was awful. The depths below made his head swim. But he set his teeth, dug his toes into the earth, and held on like grim death.

'Let go,' said Roy briefly.

To Ken it seemed as though he were dropping his friend into the awful abyss. But he obeyed without hesitation.

There was a second of ghastly suspense. Then Roy was standing on the almost invisible ledge, balancing himself, spreadeagled against the face of the rock.

His hands moved slowly, the fingers groping for a hold. He found it, and clutching tightly with his left, raised his right hand.

'My bayonet,' he said quickly.

Ken slipped it out of its socket and gave it him.

Roy took it and carefully and deliberately drove it into a crevice in the rock on a level with his head.

'Chuck the rifles over,' he said. 'You mustn't leave them.'

Ken obeyed. A hollow crash came up from the black depths.

'Now I'm ready for you,' said Roy. His voice was so cool and steady that it gave Ken some confidence. 'Get as good a grip as you can and let go when I tell you.'

For a moment it seemed to Ken that he could not do what was asked. In any matter of fighting he was Roy's equal—indeed his superior, for he was better able to keep his head in the thick of it.

But he had had no experience of heights, and the blood ran cold in his veins at the idea of dropping over this terrific precipice. It seemed to him the only possible result must be that he would knock Roy off his narrow perch, and that they would go crashing together into the yawning depths of the abyss.

'You're not scared, are you?'



The contempt in Roy's tones stung Ken to the quick. He hesitated no longer. Turning quickly, he clutched the rocky ledge and recklessly swung himself down.

'Good man! I knew you could do it. Steady now! I've got you. Let go!'

Once more Ken obeyed. He fully believed that he was going to his doom. Instead, to his intense surprise, he found himself balancing on the ledge beside Roy.

Roy gave a low laugh.

'Sorry I insulted you, old man. I just had to. I know the sort of funk that takes you the first time you try this kind of game. And I give you my word there are precious few chaps would have stuck it at all.'

'Now I'll tell you something to console you,' he continued. 'The ledge widens to my right, and runs in under a big overhang. Once we're under that, we're as safe as rats in a granary. No one can see us from up above or from anywhere else, so far as that goes.'

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Ken hardly heard. It seemed as if every energy he possessed was needed just to cling where he was, flattened like a dead mole nailed on a keeper's gibbet.

Roy went on talking in a low quiet voice, which gradually brought back Ken's confidence, and though his heart was thumping, and he felt as though it was impossible to draw a full breath, he presently managed to follow his companion along the ledge.

As Roy had said, it gradually widened, and after going very carefully for a matter of twenty feet it grew broad enough to walk on with some degree of safety.

A minute later, and they were in a deep hollow—almost a cave and absolutely hidden from all inquisitive eyes.

Roy laughed softly as he dropped to a sitting position.

'Gosh, I'd love to see Kemp's face this minute,' he remarked in a low voice. 'He'll be just about fit to tie.'

Ken did not answer. He had dropped down and sat with his back against the river side of the cavity, breathing hard. His face was very white, and big drops of perspiration beaded his forehead.

Roy glanced at him with some anxiety. Then he fumbled in the pocket of his tunic and brought out a small leather-covered flask.

'I've carried this ever since I left home,' he said. 'I reckoned it would come in useful some time. Take a sip of it.'

It was fine old Australian brandy, and although Ken took no more than a mouthful the effects were immediate. A tinge of colour came back to his cheeks, and his heart steadied at once.

'Proper stuff, eh?' smiled Roy, as Ken handed back the flask.

Ken held up his hand sharply. 'Listen!' he whispered.

Above their heads they heard heavy footsteps. Then came Kemp's voice.

'What's he saying?' whispered Roy.

'He's telling 'em to hunt among the rocks,' answered Ken in an equally low voice. 'He seems to be annoyed. He's using all the bad language he knows, and chucking in German swears where he can't remember the Turkish ones.'

'Must be a bit of a facer for him,' chuckled Roy.

'There's one of the Turks answering him,' said Ken. 'Says we must have jumped over to escape them.'

'Oh, that's Kemp again,' continued Ken. 'He's telling 'em to go down and see.'

'And what's the Turk say?' Roy asked eagerly.

'He says no one has ever been to the bottom, and couldn't get there if they wanted to. He calls it the ditch of Shaitan—in other words, the Devil's Dyke. By Jove, he's started Kemp cursing again. Wonderful flow of language the chap's got.'

Presently the voices above died away.

'So far as I can make out, they're going to have a try farther up the hill,' said Ken. 'It's lucky they didn't think of looking for our tracks. If they'd used their eyes they must have seen the place where we got over. I know I dug my toes in a good two inches when I was hanging on to you.'



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Roy grinned.

'Thank goodness, tracking is about the last thing that would occur to a German. All the same, Kemp is quite cute enough to leave a guard posted here to watch for us.'

Ken looked rather startled.

'I hadn't thought of that, but it's very likely. Then it looks as if we should have to stay here all night.'

'I'd made up my mind to that already,' Roy answered. 'But it might be worse. We've got shelter and we're absolutely safe. Also we have our emergency rations, so we shan't starve. We ought to get a decent sleep for once in a way.'

'What—sleep on the edge of this precipice!'

'Why not? I've slept in worse places before now.'

'Supposing one rolled over in one's sleep?' said Ken with a slight shiver as he peered over into the awesome depths below.

Roy laughed softly.

'Don't worry. You shall sleep between me and the rock. It'll take you all your time to roll over me.'

The sun was down, darkness was already shrouding the depths of space beneath them. The Turks seemed to have left. At any rate, Ken and Roy could hear no more of them. The evening silence was broken only by the mysterious whisper of the evening breeze as it stole down the canon, and by a faint and distant popping of rifle shots.

Roy stretched his long legs and yawned.

'I'm for supper,' he observed, as he took his iron ration out of his haversack. 'We'll share this to-night, Ken, and breakfast off yours in the morning. Luckily I've still got some water in my bottle.'

The emergency or iron ration consists mainly of concentrated beef, biscuit, and chocolate. There is not much of it, so far as bulk goes, but it is very sustaining. Roy carefully divided his into two lots, and they ate slowly, and finished their slim repast with a drink of water.

Then, after chatting a while, they stretched themselves out to sleep. Roy, according to his promise, made Ken take the inner side, and in spite of his nervousness, he slept like a log.

Ken roused at earliest dawn. A thin mist floated beneath them, hiding the depths of the ravine. Musketry still crackled in the distance, but all around was very still.

Ken shivered slightly, for the morning air bit chill. He sat up and shook Roy, who was still sleeping peacefully.

‘Daylight,’ said Ken briefly. ‘Time to get out of this.’

Roy sat up and stretched his great frame.

‘What a life!’ he said with a laugh. ‘Yes, I suppose we’d best be shifting.’

‘Shall we breakfast now, or wait till we get up topside?’ asked Ken.

Roy gave him a quick look.

‘It might be as well to feed now,’ he said quietly. ‘You see, I haven’t a notion how we’re going to get out of this.’

Ken stared. Such a point of view had never occurred to him. He had such implicit faith in Roy’s mountaineering capacity that he had taken it absolutely for granted that Roy could find a way back to firm ground.

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CHAPTER IX

THE BATTLE BY ROCKS

Roy saw Ken's dismay.

'Sorry, old chap,' he said simply. 'I thought you understood.'

Ken smiled back.

'I'm afraid I took it for granted that you had it all pat. You see, I don't know the first thing about mountaineering myself. Can't we get back the same way we came?'

Roy shook his head.

'It's too big a reach. But don't worry. We'll find some way out. Stop here a minute and I'll go and have a squint round.'

Ken looked at him.

'You'll be careful, Roy? Hadn't I better come and give you a hand?'

'I'll call you if I want you,' said Roy. 'I'm going to see where this ledge leads.'

He strolled off as calmly as though walking along a twelve-inch ledge over a two hundred foot drop was as simple as a promenade down the sunny side of Piccadilly. Ken, feeling anything but happy, watched him until he was hidden behind a shoulder of rock.

It was quite five minutes before he came back.

'It's all right,' he said cheerfully. 'True, we can't get up, but I think we can get down. This ledge drops a long way, and there seems to be another below it. Let's have our grub and go along.'

He ate his share of Ken's rations with evident appetite, and Ken did his best to follow his example. But it would be idle to say that Ken felt happy. Glancing down into the tremendous depths that yawned below, he felt that he would infinitely rather charge a score of Turks, single-handed, than try to make his way down the face of the gigantic wall of rock.

Roy finished his food, brushed the crumbs from his tunic, and taking the bayonet which—with the automatic pistol captured from Kemp—were the only weapons they had, walked off along the ledge.

Ken set his teeth and followed.

'Look up, not down,' said Roy quietly, and Ken did his best to obey.

The ledge, though narrow, did not really present any particular difficulties. As Roy said, 'If it wasn't for the big drop below, you wouldn't think twice about it.'

Ken knew this was true, and tried hard to keep it in his mind.

Presently, however, the ledge began to narrow again, and the only way to tackle it was to flatten themselves, limpet-like, against the cliff face, and claw their way onwards, gripping every possible little projection which gave any sort of hand hold.

At last Roy pulled up.

'Capital!' he said. 'You're doing first-rate, Ken. That's as far as we can go on this ledge. We've got to drop to the lower one now. Don't worry. It's not as bad as that first drop we had to do last night.'

As he spoke, he stooped, gripped the edge of the ledge with his hands, and let himself down gently. There was a knob of rock about seven feet down. He got his feet on this, then reached up for the bayonet which Ken held.

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As before, he jammed this into a crevice so as to give himself something to hold by, then signalled Ken to follow.

Ken's heart was in his mouth. The projection seemed hardly large enough for one pair of feet, let alone two. But when he reached it he found that Roy had left it all for him. He himself had stepped off, driving his toes into a mere crevice alongside.

'Keep hold of the bayonet till I tell you to move,' came Roy's quiet voice. 'Afraid we'll have to leave it where it is. We can't shift it again. That's right.'

'Now get your fingers into that crack to the right. I'm going to move your feet for you.'

What Roy was doing Ken could not tell, and he dared not look. But a moment later he felt the big fellow's hands shifting his feet.

There came a sharp rattle of falling stones, a quick gasp.

A spasm of fright clutched him. For the moment he fully believed that Roy had fallen.

'Roy! he cried sharply. 'Roy!'

'All right, old man. It's quite all right. Just a chunk of rock broken out. The stuff's a bit rotten, but I've got good hand hold.'

A pause. Then, 'Now you can move.'

Again Roy's strong hands shifted his feet. Twice more this happened; then just as he began to feel that he could stand the strain no longer, he heard Roy's jolly laugh.

'We've done it. One step more, and you're on the ledge.'

A moment later, and they stood together on a ledge nearly a yard wide. It seemed like a turnpike road compared to the one above.

[Illustration: Tins and barbed wire are cut up in the Dardanelles as 'filling' for bombs.]

[Illustration: Our gallant bluejackets cheered the return of the triumphant submarine after her wonderful achievement.]

Roy drew a long breath.

'That was a bad bit,' he said. 'As bad as anything I ever struck. Don't mind telling you now, Ken, that I was in a blue funk.'

'You didn't show it,' Ken answered rather breathlessly. 'If you had, I believe I should have crocked.'



'You didn't, anyhow. That's the main thing. And I wouldn't ask a better man to go climbing with. You kept your head, and did what you were told. Well, now I think the worst is over. This looks like a regular fault in the strata, and it ought to take us to the bottom.

Roy's judgment was correct. There were still some nasty places, but nothing like what they had already tackled, and within another quarter of an hour they had reached the bottom of the gorge.

A little stream ran down the centre, finding its way among piled masses of fallen rock. On each side the cliffs towered so high that only a mere slit of sky was visible. It was as wild and gloomy a spot as Ken had ever seen.

'I've seen better walking,' observed Roy, as a flat stone slipped under his foot, and nearly pitched him over into the bed of the brook.

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'It's better than that abominable cliff, anyhow,' returned Ken. 'But I'd give something to know where we're going.'

'I can tell you. The sea. If we follow the stream we're bound to reach salt water.'

'But where?' said Ken—'where? I don't know that I've got the points of the compass very clear in my head, and there's no sun visible yet, but if I'm not mistaken, this brook runs east, not west.'

Roy pulled up with a puzzled expression on his face.

'Pon my Sam, I believe you're right. In that case, this is the head waters of some stream that runs out into the Straits.'

'That's my notion, and consequently we're still going plumb in the wrong direction.'

'We can't help it,' said Roy. 'It's no use trying to climb up the far side over the top of the hill.'

'Not a bit. The first thing to do is to get out of this gorge. After that we must see if we can't skirt round the base of the hill, and get back somehow.'

Roy nodded, and for some distance they continued on their uncomfortable way in silence.

'Not much more of it,' said Roy at last. 'We're getting near the mouth now.'

'And that's where our troubles are going to begin,' said Ken with a smile. 'It looks to me as if we were the best part of three miles inland.'

'Which means that we've got to get through the whole bunch of the Turks,' answered Roy. 'I say, don't you wish we'd got our whole crowd up here? We'd take the enemy in the rear and play old Harry with them.'

'No use wishing that. But I'll tell you what, Roy. If we ever do get back we'll have some useful information for the colonel.'

Roy nodded, as he scrambled on to the top of a big rock.

'I can see out of the mouth of the gorge from here,' he said, as he stood on the summit, 'and by the look of the country you're about right as to the course of this brook. We're the other side of the water-shed altogether.'

Ken clambered up beside him. A couple of hundred yards farther down the gorge ended, or rather turned into a shallow ravine, down which the stream found its way into

a broad valley below. A rough track crossed this valley, and Ken pointed to figures looking no bigger than dolls in the distance, which moved along it.

'Reinforcements coming up,' he said. 'They'll be from Kojadere. We must keep clear of that road. Seems to me the best thing we can do is to swing to the right and work round the shoulder of the hill.'

'Yes, if we can find cover. Well, there's nothing to stop us from climbing up here. The bank don't amount to anything.'

He was right, and turning at once they scrambled up the steep rocky slope. It was broken with projecting crags, and almost covered with brush, which gave them ample cover. Reaching the top, they got a sight of the sun, and found that they were facing almost due east. The guns were still thundering behind them, but their sound was deadened by the great mass of hill which lay between them and the sea.

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The hill-side was thick with scrub and there was no difficulty about getting forward. They went on steadily, and had travelled about half a mile when they entered a little wood. Passing through this, they were dismayed to find themselves on the edge of a steep bank about sixty feet high, with the track running at the bottom of it, and, beyond, a wide space of open valley rising again to a hill opposite.

'This is no use,' said Roy. 'We're bound to be spotted if we try to cross that open.'

'No, we must keep on this side for the present,' answered Ken, as he turned back into the trees.

Presently they heard a tramping of feet, and peering through the leaves saw a body of Turkish troops, about a hundred strong, marching stolidly along beneath them.

'My word, if we only had a maxim!' muttered Roy, as he stared at the closely-formed column. 'Couldn't we make hay of 'em?'

Ken did not answer. He watched the men pass on until they were out of sight around a curve in the track. Then he and Roy moved on again.

Round the next bend, they found themselves at the end of the friendly wood, and the ground beyond was a deal more open than seemed healthy.

'We'll have to wait until those chaps are well out of the way,' said Ken, and calmly sat himself down on a big stone, one of many which lay among the tree trunks.

'Hope they'll hurry,' said Roy rather viciously. 'I'm infernally hungry. I want to get back to my dinner.'

While Ken rested Roy stood staring out through the tree trunks.

Presently he turned to Ken. 'Tell you what, Ken, I believe there's a chance for us now. There's another patch of wood less than a quarter of a mile away, and if we watched our chance we might slip across without being spotted. Beyond it, the ground rises again, with a lot of rocks and scrub. Plenty of cover at any rate. What do you think?'

Ken got up and took a long and careful survey.

'It looks all right,' he said at last. 'I'm game to try it anyhow.'

'Then the sooner the better. Those Turks have topped the rise.'

They were on the point of starting when Ken heard a sound which made him seize Roy's arm.

'Steady a minute! There's something else coming up the track.'

They dropped flat and lay waiting. Sure enough, there was a low rumble of wheels, and after a few minutes a team of mules came into sight around the left-hand curve, dragging a field-piece, and accompanied by about a dozen Turkish gunners.

'Just as well we waited,' whispered Roy. 'We shouldn't have stood much show if we'd dropped down under their noses, eh?'

Ken did not answer. He was staring fixedly at the gun. His eyes were very bright.

He turned to Roy.

'That's going to be used to smash our chaps, Roy. Jove, if we could only stop it!'

'Stop it?' repeated Roy in amazement. 'My dear chap, we haven't even got our rifles. They're lying smashed up at the bottom of the gorge. The only weapon we've got left is this automatic.'

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'We've got something better than bullets,' Ken answered very quietly. He laid his hand as he spoke upon one of the big loose boulders which lay in front of him.

'See here,' he went on, 'they'll come right underneath us. If we could get this rock down on the team, it would probably stampede the mules. Then before the men have recovered from their confusion, we ought to be able to give them a couple more. If we could land one on top of the gun itself, it would damage it pretty badly, even if it doesn't smash the mountings and make it useless. What do you say?'

'Say—why that it's the greatest scheme ever hatched, and I'm with you every time,' Roy answered, his face glowing with excitement. 'And, by Jingo,' he added, 'if we'd picked the spot for bringing it off, we couldn't have done better.'

This was true enough. The spot where they were perched was fully sixty feet above the road, and the slope below was next door to perpendicular. For another thing, the supply of boulders was unlimited.

The one to which Ken had pointed weighed perhaps a quarter of a ton and was shaped rather like a gigantic egg. He put his weight against it, and found that it rocked, but even so, he could not be quite certain that their combined efforts could start it over the edge.

'Wait!' whispered Roy, and turning slipped away into the thick of the trees. He was back in a minute, carrying a heavy piece of dead timber.

'This ought to do the trick,' he said softly. Ken nodded.

Meantime the Turks below, all unsuspecting of what was brewing, came slowly and steadily along the road. Slowly, because not only is a 77-millimetre gun with its caisson a heavy weight, but also because the road was merely an apology for one. It was nothing but a deeply rutted track thick with sand and loose stones.

The men were in charge of a non-commissioned officer, a Turk like themselves, and consequently were taking it very easy, strolling along, smoking and chatting.

Roy drove his stake deep under the big rock, and gave a slight heave.

'She'll shift all right,' he whispered in a tone of quiet satisfaction.

'All right. Wait till I give the word,' said Ken, with his eyes fixed upon the long gray gun which came jogging slowly onwards, its grim muzzle swaying and lurching as the wheels took the ruts in the road.

It seemed a long time before it came opposite. Then at last Ken gave one word.

‘Now!’

In an instant they were both on their feet, Roy tugging on the lever, Ken bracing all his weight on the big rock.

It moved, it rolled slowly over, seemed to pause a moment on the edge of the bank, then suddenly shot forward. Ten feet below, it alighted on the slope, rebounded, and at the same time started half a dozen other stones. In a moment a rock avalanche was roaring down the steep. The great stone led the way. In a series of gigantic leaps, each longer than the last, it thundered downwards, at each jump starting fresh tons of the loose shale which covered the bank.

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A cloud of dust rose like smoke, and hid all below. Then from out the cloud came squeals and shrieks.

In their excitement, Ken and Roy actually forgot to send fresh stones to follow the first. There was no need. When the dust cloud cleared, one mule which had broken loose was galloping madly across country, the rest were down and dead.

The gun, dismounted, was half buried in a pile of shale which lay feet deep across the road. Of the men, not one remained. Most were not only dead, but buried. Two only lay clear, and to all appearance they were as dead as their companions.

Roy looked at Ken.

'What you might call a clean bit of work,' he said, but though he tried to smile, there was something like awe in his voice.

'Yes. A ten-inch shell could hardly have done more,' Ken answered. 'Poor beggars! It's rather ghastly wiping 'em out like that, but one has got to remember that that gun would have probably finished ten times the number of our chaps if they'd got it into position.

'We'd better go down,' he added. 'We may find a couple of rifles, and I'll lay we shall need them before we reach our own lines.'

It was an awkward job to get down the bank, for the shale was so loose it kept breaking away under their feet. They had to go quickly, too, for there was every chance of fresh reinforcements or more guns coming up the road.

Fortunately no one else appeared, and in a very few minutes they were busy hunting among the pile of rocks for rifles that had escaped injury. They found three, but only one was serviceable. The sights of the others were damaged. They also found food. It was bread, dark-looking and very stale, and goats' milk cheese.

But they were far too hungry to be particular. They stuffed it into their pockets.

At that moment came a deep groan from among the rocks.

Ken swung round sharply.

'There's one of 'em alive in there,' he said quickly, 'we can't leave the poor beggar to die by inches.'

[Illustration: 'A rock avalanche was roaring down the steep.']

He began rolling the stones aside, and guided by the groans he and Roy soon pulled out a youngish Turk and laid him on the side of the road.



Ken examined him quickly.

'He's got off cheaply,' he said. 'Nothing broken—nothing the matter, so far as I can see, except bruises and a cut on the head. Give him a drop of your brandy, Roy.'

As Roy unscrewed the stopper, the Turk's eyes opened, and he stared up at his rescuers in blank amazement.

'Englishmen!' he muttered.

Roy put the flask to his lips, but he shook his head.

'Water,' he said in Turkish.

'It's against his religion to drink wine or spirits,' Ken explained to Roy, and put his own water-bottle to the man's lips.

'I thank you,' said the Turk with grave courtesy. He sat up and looked round at the ruin on the road.

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'We did not know that your guns were near enough to drop shell upon us,' he said. 'Nor had we any notion that your troops had advanced so far inland.'

'Well, it is Allah's will,' he continued resignedly. 'And our fate for being driven into an unjust war. I am your prisoner.'

'We don't want any prisoners,' Ken answered with a smile, and at his fluent Turkish the man's dark eyes opened in evident surprise. 'You are free.'

The Turk stared.

'Then you are separated from your own regiment,' he said keenly, and by his accent and language, Ken realised that he was a man of some education.

Ken did not answer.

'Your pardon, effendi,' said the Turk. 'I did not mean to ask idle questions. I thank you for your kindness, and I wish you happiness.'

'Come on, Ken,' broke in Roy, who was scanning the country uneasily. 'We are right out in the open here. That chap will be all right. Let's get into that wood as sharp as we can.'

'One moment,' said Roy, and turned to the Turk.

'If you care to do us a good turn, tell us the nearest way back to Gaba Tepe.'

The Turk pointed up the road.

'That is the nearest way, but, I need not tell you, the most dangerous. Our lines lie between here and the British. You must wait for the darkness of the night or you will for a certainty be captured. My advice to you is to conceal yourselves among the trees in the wood, and wait until the sun shall have set.'

'I thank you,' said Ken courteously. 'Is there anything else in which we can assist you?'

'There is nothing, I thank you. I will rest a while, then move onwards. In the name of the Prophet, I wish you a safe journey.'

'What tale was he pitching you?' said Roy impatiently, as he set off at a great rate for the wood opposite.

'He advised us to lie up for the rest of the day, and try to slip through their lines at night.'



Roy grunted. 'And I suppose he'll watch where we go and set his pals on us as soon as they come along.'

'He will do nothing of the sort,' Ken answered rather hotly. 'For goodness' sake, don't go judging the Turk by the German, Roy. That fellow considers that we have done him a favour, and nothing would induce him to betray us.'

'Sorry I spoke,' said Roy briefly, 'but you were so long I was getting into a horrid stew. Even now, one can't tell whether we've been spotted, and it isn't likely that the next German who comes along is going to be kind to us when he sees what we've done to his nice new gun.'

No more was said until they reached the wood and flung themselves panting under the shade of a scrubby live oak.

'Now we can take a bit of a breather,' said Roy. 'And a bit of lunch, too. Here, catch!' He flung a chunk of bread across to Ken.

But Ken had sprung up. He was listening keenly.

'Bunk!' he muttered. 'There's cavalry coming.'

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CHAPTER X

PRISONERS

Roy was on his feet like a flash, for he too had caught the thud of horses' hoofs and the jingle of stirrups. For a moment the two stood, side by side, behind the trunk of the live oak, peering out over the sunbaked plain. Across it a patrol of cavalry, smart in a gray-blue uniform, were cantering sharply.

'They're making straight for the wood,' said Ken quickly. 'They must be after us. Come!'

They both set off at a run, dodging and ducking under the low-growing trees. For a moment they thought they were unobserved, but next instant a shout rudely shattered that illusion. They scurried on as hard as they could go, but the wood was so open and the trees so far apart that it gave mighty little shelter. The patrol had broken into a gallop. The thud of the horses' hoofs grew nearer every moment.

'That thicket over there,' panted Ken breathlessly. 'We'll dodge them yet if we can reach it.'

But between them and it was a good hundred yards of almost open ground, and the leader of the patrol saw their manoeuvre, and shouted an order. His men split out fan-wise and before Ken and Roy were half way across the open, came a thunder of hoofs, and half a dozen of the troopers came galloping upon them from the left.

Ken flung up his captured rifle, and fired slap at the first. The bullet caught the horse between the eyes and down he came with a crash, flinging his rider far over his head.

But the next was too close to dodge. Ken caught the flash of sun on a lancehead bearing straight down upon him. He sprang aside, the lancehead missed him by inches, then the shoulder of the horse caught him with stunning force and hurled him to the ground.

Before he could pick himself up, three of the troopers were off their horses, and had flung themselves upon him. He was hauled roughly to his feet, his rifle snatched from his hand, and his cartridge-pouch torn away. A few yards away, Roy, his face bleeding, was the centre of another group who were disarming him in spite of his struggles.

Ken glanced at his captors. He saw that they were Turkish constabulary, and his heart sank. These men, trained by Germans, paid by them, and soaked in their brutal tenets, were among the small minority of Turks who had really come to share the German hatred of the British.

They glared fiercely at their prisoners.

'British swine!' growled one, and spat in contempt.

'They are spies,' said another. 'We find them three miles behind our lines. Why do we waste time taking them prisoners? Let us hang them and be done with them.'

'Why not let them run and ride them down?' suggested another. 'Sticking with a lance is a fit fate for hogs.'

But the sergeant, a tall, swarthy faced man with a pair of fierce black eyes, pushed his way forward.

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'Fools, these are the men who escaped last night from Captain Hartmann. We have his orders to bring them before him. It will go hard with you if you disobey. Shackle them both, and send them to him under guard.'

He flung down two pairs of handcuffs, and one of the men who was holding Ken picked them up, while another seized his wrists.

It was on the tip of Ken's tongue to protest fiercely against this indignity, but he checked himself. It would be better, he remembered, that these men should not know that he spoke their language.

Roy was fighting like a fury. Three of the troopers had their work cut out to hold him. As it was, he managed to get one hand loose, and before the others could seize it again one of their number lay insensible on the ground with his nose broken and flattened against his face.

'Steady, Roy!' cried Ken. 'These swabs are no better than Germans. They'll only frog-march us or something equally beastly if we resist.'

'But handcuffs!' roared Roy in a fury. 'D'ye think I'm going to be handcuffed like a common criminal?'

'They think we're spies,' Ken answered. 'They're going to take us to headquarters. It's no use resisting. We must wait our chance.'

Sullenly Roy ceased struggling, and the handcuffs were snapped on his wrists. The sergeant who seemed in a hurry, gave brief orders, and galloped on with most of his patrol, leaving a lower grade officer, probably a corporal, with half a dozen men.

These mounted.

'March!' ordered the corporal, an undersized, vicious-looking fellow, giving Ken a prick with his lance. 'And keep going, or, by Allah, it will be more than a prick you will get next time.'

Side by side, Ken and Roy stumbled forward, while their captors cursed or jeered them in language which Roy fortunately could not understand, although to Ken every word of it was only too plain. From something the corporal let drop, he learnt that they were being taken, not to Kojadere, but to Eski Keni, which lies in the middle of the peninsula, about half-way between Gaba Tepe and Maidos.

He told this to Roy, speaking in an undertone, as they tramped rapidly onwards under the threat of the lance-points behind them.

‘And the man they are taking us before seems to be Kemp,’ said Ken. ‘Only they call him Hartmann. It appears he was cute enough to suspect that we had hidden ourselves somewhere last night, and these fellows were sent out to look for us.’

‘And I wish we had both gone over the cliff before they found us,’ Roy answered, gritting his teeth. The disgrace of the handcuffs was biting deep into his soul. Ken had never seen him in such a mood before.

Ken himself was none too happy. It took all his pluck and philosophy to keep going at all. He was aching in every bone, his mouth and throat were parched, and his tongue like a dry stick in his mouth. The dust rose around them in choking clouds, flies bit and stung, yet he could not lift a hand to brush them from his face. What was hardest of all to bear were the jeers and insults flung at them by their captors.

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But they trudged on doggedly, refusing to pay the slightest attention to the taunts or blows showered upon them, and in spite of everything, Ken used his eyes to take in every feature of the country through which they travelled. Small hope as he had of ever seeing again his own lines, yet he missed nothing of importance, storing up each hill, valley, clump of trees, and track in his tenacious memory.

At last they came within sight of a group of squalid hovels in a valley.

'That's Keni,' Ken told Roy.

The brutal corporal caught the word.

'That's Keni,' he repeated in his own language, 'and, by the beard of the Prophet, you shall soon see how spies are dealt with.'

The village swarmed with soldiers, many of them wounded, who stared at the two British prisoners with lack-lustre eyes. The narrow street of the place reeked with filth and foul odours, and swarmed with a pestilence of flies. The two youngsters were thrust roughly into a dirty hovel, and with a final jeer from their brutal jailer, the door was locked behind them.

For a moment Roy stood straight, towering in the centre of the low-roofed room. There was a very ugly light in his eyes.

'Wait, my friend, wait!' he said hoarsely. 'I'll be even with you before I've finished.'

'Steady, old chap!' said Ken quietly. 'Steady! Take it easy while you can. Remember, we've got that little interview with Kemp before us.'

Roy flung himself down with a gasp.

'It's all right, Ken. I'll calm down after a bit. But heaven pity that black-moustached blighter if I ever get my hands on him.'

Ken tried to answer, but suddenly dropped flat on the bare earthen floor. His eyes closed. Instantly he was sound asleep. Roy stared at him vaguely, yawned, and before he knew it had slipped down and followed his example.

So they lay, happily oblivious of their troubles, all through the blazing afternoon. The sun was setting when the door was flung open and the sharp-faced corporal strode in.

He roused them with a kick apiece.

'Get up, British dogs,' he ordered. 'Captain Hartmann awaits you.'

The sleep had refreshed them, and though stiff and sore they were both in condition so fit and hard that they were little the worse for their trying experiences of the night and morning.

Under charge of a guard, they were marched rapidly up the street to where a few larger flat-topped houses stood on slightly higher ground. Through an open door they were driven along a passage and out into a courtyard open to the sky, with a fountain in the centre.

At a table, under the shade of a grape arbour, sat two German officers, one of whom was a typical Prussian, fair, with hard blue eyes and close cropped hair, while the other was their old friend, the ex-steward Kemp, otherwise Hartmann.

An ugly light shone in his deep-set, narrow eyes as they fell on the two prisoners.

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'Soh!' he said, with a evil smile, 'my young friends, the spies! Achmet'—this to the corporal—'you have done well. I will see that your conduct and that of your sergeant is recommended in the proper quarter.'

He turned to his companion.

'Ober-lieutenant von Steegman,' he said formally. 'The prisoners are those of whom I spoke last night to Colonel Henkel. Disguised in the overcoats of Turkish soldiers, they contrived to destroy one of our quick-firers, and to-day they were discovered hiding in a wood behind our lines. They had, it appears, been plundering our wounded, for food and a Turkish rifle were found in their possession.'

Ken could not speak German, but he knew enough of the language to gather the meaning of the man's infamous accusations. 'Liar!' he burst in. 'We were never in Turkish uniform. As for the gun, we took it in fair fight, and as—'

At a sign from Hartmann, Achmet, the corporal, struck Ken across the mouth.

[Illustration: 'Roy brought them down on the man's head.']

It was probably the last thing he ever did in his life, for Roy, raising his shackled hands, brought them down upon the man's head with such fearful force that he dropped like a log, the blood gushing from his mouth and ears.

Instantly all was confusion. Hartmann sprang to his feet, shouting out furious orders. Two of the guard seized Roy and flung him to the ground, two more laid hands on Ken. Another drew his bayonet, and Ken saw it flash in the evening sunlight before his very eyes.

It was Von Steegman who sprang forward and seized the man's arm just in time.

'No. Leave him alone,' he cried harshly. 'The colonel has left express orders that he wishes to see these men before they are executed. Stand aside! It is only a short delay. They will both be shot at sundown.'

Von Steegman, if a brute, had ten times the physical power and moral force of Hartmann. The man obeyed at once, and in a few moments order was restored. Two men carried away the insensible form of Achmet, Roy watching with a grim smile.

Ken had hardly thought of his own danger. His lips were bleeding, and the foul blow had for the moment rendered him perfectly reckless.

'Is this the way you treat prisoners? he thundered, his eyes blazing. 'Small wonder a people who do such things are despised by every other nation on earth!'

'Himmel, you dare to talk like that?' snarled back Hartmann. 'You, a private soldier, venture such insolence to an officer?'

Ken was already ashamed of his outburst.

'An officer!' he said with bitter contempt, 'or do you mean a bathroom steward?'

Hartmann's sallow face went livid with excess of rage. He bit his lip till the blood showed upon it in a thin red line.

'You will sing a different song when you stand before the muzzles of the firing party,' he said in a grating voice.

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Von Steegman, who seemed to be the only man among them to remain quite unmoved, raised his hand.

'All this is highly irregular,' he said harshly. 'Captain Hartmann, it is our duty to interrogate these prisoners.'

'What's the use of interrogating us if you have already made up your mind to shoot us?' retorted Ken.

Von Steegman glared at him.

'Because,' he answered in his harsh German English, 'it is possible that, by giving us certain information, you may yet save the lives which you have justly forfeited.'

Ken stared back, and there was something in his face which made even the German's bold eyes drop.

'I don't advise you to say any more,' he answered grimly. 'You'd better proceed at once with your firing party, you miserable German murderer.'

Von Steegman's hand dropped to his sword hilt, his face went the colour of a ripe plum, for a moment Ken thought—hoped that he was going to have a fit.

Before he could speak there came a stir behind, the door leading from the house to the yard opened sharply, and a stout, coarse-looking man in the uniform of a colonel in the Prussian Army, strode heavily in.

Hartmann and Von Steegman rose like two ramrods, and saluted him. They stood at the salute while he came across to the table.

'So these are the two prisoners,' he said in a thick guttural voice, as he seated himself, 'the two who were captured spying behind our lines.'

He stared first at Roy, then at Ken. As his bloodshot eyes fell upon the latter he started ever so slightly. At the same moment Ken seemed to recognise him, for a look of disgust crossed his face.

CHAPTER XI

THE FIRING PARTY

Hartmann spoke.

'These are the spies, Herr Colonel,' he said with an air of deference. 'They were captured more than two miles behind our lines. We have interrogated them, but they refuse information.'

The colonel looked at Ken.

'Have you nothing to say for yourselves?' he demanded.

'Plenty, but not to you, Colonel Henkel,' replied Ken with a sarcasm he did not trouble to conceal.

Henkel, however, did not lose his temper as Von Steegman had done. He turned to Hartmann and Von Steegman and spoke to them both in a low voice.

'As you wish, Herr Colonel,' said Hartmann presently, but there was an air of distinct disappointment about him.

'Corporal,' said Henkel to the non-com, who had taken the place of the brute whom Roy had finished, 'take the prisoners back and lock them up securely. Set a guard over them.'

'Mind this—that you are responsible for them,' he added harshly.

The man saluted, and Ken and Roy, who had hardly expected to leave the place alive, found themselves marched back down the evil-smelling street and shut up once more in the same hovel as before.

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Roy turned to Ken as the key clicked in the lock behind them.

'This is a rum go,' he said in great astonishment. 'What's it mean? Who is the Johnny with the fat tummy and the bloodshot eyes? Why was he so quiet with you? What—?'

'Steady, old man!' cut in Ken. 'One question at a time. Didn't you hear his name?'

'What—Henkel? Yes.'

He broke off with a gasp.

'You don't mean to say he is the sweep that tried to swindle your father out of his coal mine?'

'You've hit it, Roy—hit it in once. That's the very same chap, though I never knew before that he was a colonel. He recognised me as soon as I spotted him.'

'But what's his game?' demanded Roy. 'I should have thought he would have been only too pleased to get you shot out of hand. If your father is dead, you're next heir to the coal.'

'I'm not very clear what he is after,' Ken answered in a puzzled voice. 'But it's something to do with our property, you may be sure of that. This much I do know—that Henkel was awfully in debt when I last saw him. And I know this, too—that our friend, old Othman Pacha, who is Bey in that part of the country, would refuse to let the property pass without proper title deeds.'

'Then it's clear as mud,' said Roy quickly. 'Henkel wants to get the deeds out of you.'

'That may be it. But anyhow I'm not of age. I couldn't sign anything.'

'Don't, anyhow,' said Roy. 'He can't do worse than shoot us.'

But Ken looked very grave. Inwardly, he was thinking that, if Henkel did actually mean to make terms, he had no right to sacrifice Roy's life as well as his own.

At this moment the corporal came in with a platter of food and a pitcher of water. He planked them down without a word, and went out again.

'No use starving ourselves,' said Roy with his usual cheeriness. 'It's a case of "let us eat and drink for to-morrow we die."'

His pluck was wonderful, and they set to as well as their manacled hands permitted, on the coarse barley-meal bread and goats' milk cheese. They had had nothing since their 'emergency' breakfast and they finished the food to the last crumb.

‘That’s better,’ said Roy. ‘Now I’m ready for anything.’ As he spoke the key turned in the lock, the door opened, and in stumped Henkel. He closed the door behind him, and stood facing the two young fellows.

‘So we meet again, Kenneth Carrington,’ he said. Like most German officers, he spoke excellent English, though with a thick, unpleasant accent.

Ken did not answer. It did not seem worth while. He stood facing the other, watching him with a slightly contemptuous expression in his clear blue eyes.

‘We meet under different conditions from the last time,’ continued Henkel. ‘There is now no Othman Pacha to protect you from your just fate.’

Ken shrugged his shoulders.

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'Why talk that sort of rot? You know just as well as I do that the last thing we shall get is justice.'

Henkel flushed slightly, but he kept his temper.

'What! Do you not shoot spies in your own army?'

'We are not spies. We went too far in the charge yesterday when we smashed up your people. We could not get back. We are prisoners of war and should be treated as such.'

'That is your story,' replied Henkel. 'We have plenty of evidence to the contrary. Any commanding officer would be justified in shooting you out of hand.'

'The evidence against us,' said Ken, 'is that of Kemp, late bathroom steward aboard the "Cardigan Castle," a man who has a personal grudge against me because I caught him signalling to an enemy submarine.'

'Again your unsupported statement,' said Henkel.

'It's the truth,' growled Roy from the background.

'Your evidence in a case like this is valueless,' said Henkel shortly. He turned to Ken again.

'Have you heard from your father since you last saw him?' he asked suddenly.

The question took Ken unawares.

'From my father?' he said, with sudden eagerness. 'No. Is he alive?'

There was a gleam of triumph in Henkel's prominent eyes.

'Yes,' he answered. 'He is alive and—under the circumstances—well.'

'I—I thought' began Ken and stopped.

'You thought that he had been shot,' said Henkel grimly. 'That would indeed have been his fate but for my interference. I used my influence to get his sentence altered to a term of imprisonment.'

Ken changed colour. He found it desperately difficult to keep a cool head. The news that his father was alive had filled him with burning excitement. The two had always been the best of chums, more like an elder and younger brother than father and son.

'Where is he?' he asked sharply.

'At present in Constantinople,' replied Henkel, who was watching Ken keenly. 'But it is likely that he will presently be sent elsewhere.'

'What—into Asia Minor?' said Ken in dismay. Constantinople was bad enough, but nothing to the horrors of the Turkish prisons in Asia.

'Not so far as that. He is to be moved, with others of the British and French, to Gallipoli.'

Ken's cheeks went white. His eyes were full of horror.

'You are perhaps aware,' continued Henkel, 'that the Turkish Government has decided upon this step as a response to the bombardment of unfortified places by your fleet. If Turkish civilians are to be killed, it is only fair that enemy civilians should share their fate.'

'Enver Bey seems to have learnt his German pretty thoroughly,' put in Roy sarcastically.

Henkel's eyes glared as he turned upon him.

'Be silent!' he ordered, with a fury he could hardly repress.

Roy merely smiled, and Henkel turned again to Ken.



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'It lies with you whether your father goes to Gallipoli or not,' he said curtly. 'I have sufficient influence to prevent his being sent there.'

'How do you mean?' Ken asked thickly.

'I will tell you plainly. Your father still holds the title deeds of certain property near Ipsala. This property he has, of course, forfeited since his conviction. I wish to purchase this land from the Turkish Government, but owing to the absence of the deeds, which are, apparently, in a London bank, there are difficulties as to the transfer.

'What I require is a letter from you to your father, asking him to authorise the return of these deeds. In return for this small service I will arrange for you and your companion to be treated as prisoners of war and sent to Constantinople, where you will remain until the end of the war, as will also your father.'

He stopped, and stood watching Ken keenly.

Ken was in an agony of indecision. So far as he himself was concerned, he would not have hesitated a moment in refusing the terms offered by Henkel. But there was his father to think of—and Roy.

His voice was strained and harsh as he spoke again.

'How do you know that my father would agree to any such letter, even if I was to write it?' he asked.

'Because,' answered Henkel, 'your life will depend upon a favourable answer.'

Ken paused again.

'Don't do it, Ken,' broke in Roy. 'I don't know your father, but I'm mighty sure he wouldn't stick for this kind of blackmail.'

Henkel swung round on him in a fury.

'Pottztausend! Keep silence, fool! Your own life as well as two others depends upon Carrington's answer.'

'I wouldn't give sixpence for my life if I had to keep it on terms like those,' retorted Roy.

'Nor would I,' said Ken sharply. 'And I know my father would say the same. Whatever happens, he would never consent to letting you blackmail him, Colonel Henkel.'

'Blackmail, schelm! What are you talking about? Don't I tell you that by his sentence your father has forfeited all right to any landed property under the Turkish Government?'



'Yes, but that country won't be Turkish any more after the war. And then my younger brother, who is at school at home, will inherit. No, we are not going to cut him out and leave him penniless. Do your worst, Henkel.'

Henkel's great coarse face went livid. He burst into a storm of savage profanity.

'Enough!' he cried at last. 'You have brought your fate upon yourselves. You have sealed your own death warrant. You shall be shot within an hour, and as for your father, he shall be taken to Gallipoli within the week, and if he survives the fire of your own warships, I shall find other means of dealing with him.'

He rushed out, slamming the door behind him.

'Got his monkey up pretty thoroughly,' said Roy with a laugh. Then seeing how grave Ken's face was.



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'Don't worry, dear chap. You couldn't possibly have done anything else. And as for a bullet in the heart, what is it? It don't take long and it don't hurt, and we can always feel we've played the game.'

As he spoke he came closer and laid his shackled hands on Ken's shoulder.

'Thank you, Roy,' said Ken in a very low voice. 'You—you've helped me a lot. It—it's father I'm thinking of.'

'I know. But after all he isn't dead yet. And like as not this swab Henkel may get wiped out before he has the chance of doing him down.'

Silence fell between them. They sat with their backs against the wall, their hearts too full to talk. Ken's thoughts were with his father and his younger brother Anthony; Roy's were back in New Zealand, picturing the sunny plains and wild ranges around his home, the brawling rivers and the white sheep grazing on the great grass lands.

The last rays of the sun shone through the one small window of the hut, and presently came the tramp of men outside.

The corporal opened the door, the boys walked out, and guarded on either side were marched once more up the foul, narrow street to the higher ground above.

Beyond the house where their mock trial had taken place was a vineyard surrounded by a stone wall. Against this they were posted while the firing party was detailed.

Henkel, his bloodshot eyes aflame with ill-suppressed rage, stalked up to them.

'I give you a last chance,' he said harshly to Ken. 'I have told the others that you have certain information which I will take in exchange for your lives. Give me your word that you will write that letter, and all will be well.'

'You have had my answer,' said Ken quietly. 'Now go and watch us being murdered.'

Henkel bit his lip savagely.

'Your blood is on your own heads,' he said hoarsely. 'I have given you every chance.'

He stamped away, and as he did so took a handkerchief out of his pocket.

'When I drop this, fire,' he said curtly to the eight Turks who composed the firing party.

'Good-bye, old chap,' said Ken to Roy.

'Oh, I don't know,' Roy answered. 'After all, we're going together.'

Ken hardly heard. He was still tortured with the feeling that it was through him that Roy Horan and his father were to lose their lives. He knew he was right, and yet—'

A sound like a maxim gun in the distance smote upon his ears. It grew louder every instant. All, even Henkel, glanced upwards.

'Only an aeroplane, Ken,' said Roy in a whisper. 'By Jove, though, it's one of our chaps.'

Across the rich blue of the evening sky a great Farman biplane came sailing like a gigantic bird. She was barely five hundred feet up, and heading straight for the village. What was more, she was actually coming lower every moment.

Henkel, the other officer, the firing party, the bystanders—all stood with their eyes fixed upon the plane. The cool insolence of her pilot held them spellbound. For the moment Ken and Roy were absolutely forgotten.

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Henkel was the first to recover himself.

'Shoot it down!' he bellowed. 'Shoot it down!' And the Turks, perhaps not altogether sorry to find some other use for their bullets than the slaughter of two helpless prisoners, raised their muzzles to the sky, and began blazing away furiously. Even Henkel, Hartmann, and Von Steegman hauled out their pistols from their belt holsters and fired for all they were worth.

But a plane travelling at a mile a minute is not the easiest thing in the world to hit, especially when it seems to be coming right at you. Possibly some of the bullets pierced the widespread wings, but no harm was done to the observer or his pilot.

Suddenly Ken seized Roy with his manacled hands.

'Down!' he cried sharply. 'Down!'

Roy understood and flung himself flat upon the ground, and Ken instantly followed his example.

Only just in time. Next second a black streak darted from the plane and shot earthwards. Followed an earth-shaking roar, and a blinding flash of flame.

[Illustration: 'All, even Henkel, glanced upwards.']

Ken, flat on his face, felt the blast of it, and covered his head with his arms. Earth, small stones, debris of all kinds rained upon him, then followed silence, broken only by the rapidly diminishing roar of the engine exhaust.

Ken ventured to roll over. This is what he saw.

Between him and the spot where the firing party had stood, but nearer to the latter, was a great cavity in the ground, a hole ten feet across and perhaps a yard deep. Beyond, half buried in the mass of rubbish flung up by the explosion, were the broken remains of the firing party. All but one were dead, and most were blasted to fragments. The one survivor lay helpless and groaning.

Farther away the three officers were prone and still upon the ground, but whether dead or merely damaged, Ken could not tell. He hoped the former. Farther still, half a dozen other Turkish soldiers lay, twisted in ugly fashion, covered with blood. They had been badly cut by the jagged fragments of stone flung up by the bursting bomb. The survivors, a score or so in number, were running in blind panic towards the village.

'Roy, Roy! Quickly! We've a chance still,' cried Ken, his voice tense with excitement.

He sprang up as he spoke, and Roy staggered dazedly to his feet.

'This way!' said Ken, and in spite of the hampering handcuffs he managed to scramble over the low wall into the vineyard.

Roy followed.

'It's no use, Ken,' he said. 'We can't run with these beastly handcuffs, and they'll be after us in two twos.'

'Not they! Look!'

He pointed to the plane. It had circled wide over the town and was now coming back. The faint popping of rifles was followed by another terrific crash. A second bomb had dropped clean upon one of the larger houses, and exploding on the flat roof had scattered the whole building as a man's foot might scatter an ant's nest. With a roar half the house toppled outwards into the street, blocking it completely.

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'Fine! Oh, fine!' cried Roy. 'That chap knows his business. Gee, but I wish we were alongside him.'

'Much use that would be! A plane can't carry four. But don't you see? He has spotted us. Those bombs are meant to give us our chance. It's up to us to take it. Hurry, Roy! If we can reach that wood yonder, we may be able to hide till dark.'

To run at all with tied hands is no easy matter. To make any sort of pace over rough ground, in such condition, is well-nigh impossible. Yet Ken and Roy, knowing absolutely that their lives depended on reaching that wood before their disappearance was realised, did manage to run and to run pretty fast.

Once more they heard the crashing explosion of a bomb, then suddenly the sound of the plane grew louder until the engine rattled almost overhead.

Ken stopped and looked up. The plane was passing no more than two hundred feet above them.

Over the edge of the fuselage a face appeared, a white dot framed in a khaki flying hood. An arm was thrust out, something dropped from it. There was a quick wave of a hand, then with the speed of a frightened wild duck, the plane shot away, came round in a finely banked curve, and disappeared in a south-easterly direction.

'Roy!' gasped Ken, breathless. 'Did you see that?'

'I saw him drop something—I saw it fall. There—there it is.'

Hurrying on for about fifty yards, he stooped swiftly and picked up something small but heavy.

'The daisy! Oh, the daisy!' panted Roy. 'I'll love that fellow to the end of my life.'

He held up the object which the airman had flung down. It was a hammer and a cold chisel tied together, with a leaf from a notebook under the string.

There was an ancient olive tree against the far wall of the vineyard. Cowering under its shelter, Roy tore the string off with his strong white teeth, then picked up the paper. These were the hurried words scrawled in pencil:— 'Sorry! All we can do for you. Make east. Your only chance.'

'East? That means the Straits. Why is that our only chance?' muttered Ken.

'Never mind that now,' Roy answered hastily. 'We must get our hands free. Confound it! We can't use the chisel. But here's a stone with a sharp edge. Try what you can do with the hammer, Ken.'

Ken took one quick glance in the direction of the village, but there was no one in sight. He caught hold of the hammer in both hands and brought it down with all his force on the link between Roy's handcuffs.

More by chance than skill the blow fell absolutely true, and the steel, either flawed or over-tempered, snapped.

Roy gave a cry of delight, and snatching the hammer from Ken took up the chisel and set to work on his bonds. His powerful hands made short work of the link, and within less than three minutes from the time the man in the plane had dropped the tools, they were both free.

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With a deep sigh of relief, Roy sprang to his feet. 'We're our own men again, Ken. Come on.' He leaped lightly over the wall and raced away towards the trees. Ken followed.

They had no food, no weapons, they were miles from their own people, in the heart of the enemy country. Yet, for all that, there were not at that moment two lighter hearts in the whole of the Gallipoli Peninsula.

CHAPTER XII

ABOVE THE NARROWS

An intermittent thunder of guns had been growing heavier for the past hour. Now, as the two fugitives crouched on the eastern side of a steeply sloping hill, they were so near that they could distinctly see the flashes from the muzzles through the darkness of the night.

'That's either Fort Degetman or Kilid Bahr,' said Ken in a low voice. 'Ah, there are two. The right-hand one—the one to the south—is Kilid Bahr.'

"Then we're opposite the Narrows," Roy answered breathlessly.

"Just so," said Ken, but though he spoke quietly enough, he, too, felt a thrill. For five long hours they had been pushing east, or rather south-eastwards. They had crossed the main road leading to Great Maidos, they had had hairbreadth escapes sufficient to last most folk for a lifetime, and now at a little after one in the morning, they had crossed the whole peninsula, and were facing the famous Narrows, with their double cordon of forts on both sides of the Straits, the nut which for so many weeks all the Powers of the British and French combined had been engaged in trying to crack.

[Illustration: "That's either Fort Degetman or Kalis Bahr."]

Opposite, a few scattered lights showed where lay the town of Chanak on the Asiatic side of the Narrows. From forts along that coast also, there now and then darted a spit of flame, while half a minute or so later the dull roar of the report would reverberate through the night.

"We've gone east," said Roy slowly. "We've done what that chap in the plane told us to do. But I'm hanged if I can see how we're to go any farther."

'Unless,' he added thoughtfully, 'we are going to swim for it.'

'A bit far for that,' said Ken. 'We are just thirteen miles from the mouth of the Straits, and though they say the current runs down at four miles an hour, I don't think either of us could stand three hours in the water.'

'Not me!' replied Roy with a shiver. 'Too jolly cold!'

'We must get hold of a boat,' said Ken with decision. 'That's our only chance.'

'Lead on, sonny,' said Roy—'that is, if you know where to find one.'

'I haven't much more notion than you, Roy. But there's just this in our favour—that I know there's a little cove south of Kilid Bahr. And as all the coast on either side is cliffs, the chances are that boats, if there are any, will be lying in that cove.'

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'So will half the Turkish Army, most probably,' said Roy recklessly. 'Not that I care. The only thing I mind is handcuffs. I'm going to slay the first chap who suggests them.'

Ken was not listening. He was staring out towards the Straits, trying to get the lie of the land. The coast itself he knew well, for he had been up and down the Dardanelles a number of times. But of the land he was ignorant, and it is no joke to find one's way by night over such a country as the Gallipoli Peninsula.

'Come on, then,' he said presently, and turned due south down the hill-side.

Not a yard of their journey had been without its risks, but now they had to be more careful than ever. The whole shore of the Straits was, they knew, a network of forts and hidden defences. There was no saying when they might blunder upon something of the kind.

Half-way down the hill, Ken, who was leading, pulled up.

'Look out!' he muttered. 'There's a pit of some sort just in front of us. Wait, I'll see what it is.'

He dropped on hands and knees and crawled forward. He was away for only a few moments.

'Nothing but a shell hole,' he explained, 'but it's a regular crater. Must have been done by one of our twelve-inch guns. Two dead Turks alongside it.'

'Rum place for a shell to fall,' Roy answered, straining his eyes through the gloom.

'It means there's a fort somewhere near,' said Ken. 'Our people don't waste shells on empty hill-sides, I can tell you.'

'Wish it wasn't so infernally dark,' growled Roy.

'I'm jolly glad it is,' answered Ken emphatically. 'Put it any way you like, it helps us more than the enemy.'

They saw nothing of the fort, if there was one, and after crossing some very broken ground came down into a narrow valley, in the centre of which was the bed of a water-course, now dry.

'That's better,' whispered Ken, as he dropped down into it. 'This ought to bring us out on the beach.'

The bottom was sun-baked mud and dry stones which, together, formed about as unpleasant a combination for walking over as could well be imagined, especially since it

was absolutely necessary to move without a sound. Both were deeply grateful when at last the torrent bed widened, and they heard the lap of ripples on a beach.

'I feel like those old Greek Johnnies,' said Roy, 'the ones who'd been wandering for a year over there in Asia, and who chucked their helmets into the air and yelled when they saw the sea.'

'Well, don't try any tricks of that sort here, old man,' Ken answered dryly. 'Wait a jiffy. I'm going forward to get a squint at the beach.'

He crept away, bent double, and was gone for so long that Roy began to get uneasy. But at last he saw Ken stealing back.

'What luck?' he whispered.

'None,' Ken answered in a tone of bitter disappointment.

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'What—no boats?'

'Plenty of boats, but there are men behind them. I don't know how many, but quite a lot. I don't even know whether they are troops. They are sitting about on the shingle, talking and smoking. Anyhow there are too many for us to tackle.'

Roy grunted. 'That's bad. But, see here, Ken, we've got to have a boat some way or other.'

'We're going to,' said Ken fiercely, 'but I'm afraid it means crawling all the way back up that beastly water-course.'

'Up the water-course?' repeated Roy. 'Great Ghost, there are no boats up there.'

'It's not boats I'm after in the first place, it's a disguise. See here. You know I told you there were two dead Turks alongside that shell hole. My notion is to take their uniforms or just their overcoats, and then walk boldly down to the beach, and tell the chaps there that we have a despatch to take across to Ghanak.'

'Put up a bluff,' Roy answered. 'I see. But surely they have a cable across.'

'They had, but the "Sapphire" cut it. And since it's gone, why I should fancy the only way of getting messages across is by boat.'

'But what about the password?' suggested Roy.

'We'll have to chance that. There are not likely to be any officers about on the beach at night. It isn't as if there was any danger of attack here. They are right under the forts of the Narrows.'

'Well,' said Roy, rising with a sigh, 'it sounds a pretty good scheme. But I'd give more than sixpence to get out of crawling back up that abominable gully.'

'I'm afraid there's no help for it,' replied Ken, as he started.

Both were tired with their long tramp across country, and they were sadly in need of food and rest. It was wretchedly disappointing, after they had at last made the sea, to have to turn back again inland. They were a very silent pair as they toiled back over the cracked clay and loose stones.

There was worse to come. In the darkness they missed the exact spot where they had first entered the gully, and when they reached the hill-side found that they were lost. Neither of them had the least idea of the whereabouts of the shell hole with the bodies of the two dead Turks.



[Illustration: Our boys bring in a Turkish sniper, who by the ample use of foliage has turned himself into a sort of Jack-in-the-Green.]

[Illustration: Reinforcements of Turkish artillery and machine gun batteries to bar the passage of our boys in khaki.]

A good half-hour they wasted in vain search, then Ken dropped behind the shelter of a small bush.

'It's no use, Roy,' he said desperately. 'I can't find it. We're simply wasting time.'

Instead of answering, Roy took hold of Ken's arm with a grip that was like that of a steel vice.

'Hush!' he whispered, and pointed.

Two figures had risen in front, apparently out of the very depths of the earth. They were not more than twenty paces away.

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The boys crouched, breathless. A moment later, two other figures loomed through the darkness, coming down the slope. They came straight up to the first two.

'By Eblis, but thou hast not hurried thyself Ali!' said one of the latter, speaking in Turkish. 'Hassan and I were about to come and seek thee.'

One of the others gave a laugh.

'I am sorry, brother. We slept and no one awaked us. Is all well?'

'All is well. What else should it be? Who but a dog of an unbelieving German would waste men's time in guarding such a place as this?'

'Of a truth it is foolishness,' said the man named Ali. 'The British are far enough away, Allah knows.'

'A good watch to thee,' said Hassan in rather a surly tone. Then he and his companion tramped away uphill, and Ali and the other sank down into what was evidently a trench.

Hastily Ken translated what he had heard for Roy.

'They are sentries,' he said, 'and I suppose there is some underground work here which they have been set to guard.'

'And by the looks of it, they are the only men there,' Roy replied eagerly. 'Ken, I think I see those coats materialising.'

'It might be done,' said Ken. 'As you say, they are probably the only men in the place, whatever it is. And clearly they take their job pretty easily. If we can catch them napping we ought to be able to polish them off.'

'We will catch them napping, and we will polish them off,' Roy said grimly. 'Mind you, Ken, they mustn't shoot.'

He began to creep forward on hands and knees. Ken kept abreast. A minute later, they found themselves at the sloping entrance of what was evidently a communication trench.

'We'd best keep on top,' whispered Roy. 'You go one side, I'll take the other. When we get above them, we must both drop together. Jump right on them, and put 'em out before they know what's up.'

There was no doubt about this being the best plan, and they started at once. Roy went off with his usual confidence, but Ken, more highly strung, felt his heart thumping as he crawled along the rough edge of the deep, dark ditch.

It seemed to him that they went a very long way before he saw Roy stop and lift one hand. He himself peered over cautiously. The stars gave just enough light to see the two Turkish sentries.

They were leaning carelessly against the wall of the trench. One was smoking, the other apparently rolling a cigarette. They were chatting in low voices, and so far as Ken could make out, neither held his rifle.

Roy pointed to the one nearest Ken. Ken nodded, and rose very quietly to his feet.

The Turk firmly believes that certain places, bare hill-sides especially, are haunted by unpleasant bogies which he calls Djinns and Afrits. If ever any Turk was fully convinced that a Djinn had him, it must have been the sentry that Ken jumped on.

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He landed absolutely straight on the man's shoulders, and down he went flat on his face, with Ken on top of him. His forehead struck the opposite wall of the trench, and though Ken wasted no time at all in getting hold of his throat, this was quite unnecessary. The wretched Turk was limp as a wet dish-rag and quite insensible.

'Good business, Ken!' said Roy, and glancing round Ken saw his chum kneeling on the chest of the second man, one big hand compressing his wind-pipe. 'Good business! We've got them both, and no fuss about it. Confound it! These fellows don't run to handkerchiefs. Wait a jiffy. I must get his belt off.'

Neither of the Turks was in condition to put up any resistance, and in a very few moments they were stripped of overcoats, shakos, and haversacks. They were then tied and carefully gagged.

Roy pulled on the overcoat of the bigger man.

'I've seen better fits,' he remarked. 'But it will do in this light. Now for that boat.'

'One minute!' said Ken, 'let's just see what they were guarding.'

He slipped along the trench, Roy after him, and a few yards farther on it sloped downwards, then widened into a deepish semicircular excavation. In the middle of this was a great lump of something which, as they came nearer, resolved itself into a gun of some sort. It was very thick, very short, it stood on a concrete platform, and its squat muzzle pointed almost straight up into the air.

'It's a howitzer,' said Ken.

'Rummiest looking howitzer I ever saw,' Roy answered. 'Looks as if it came out of the Ark.'

'Came out of the Crimea, I expect. They used this kind of thing sixty years ago. It's a muzzle loader, you see.'

'And shoots real cannon balls,' said Roy, pointing to a pyramid of huge iron globes, each about fourteen inches in diameter.

'I wonder where the powder is,' said Ken with sudden eagerness.

'What's up now?' demanded Roy.

'I've got it,' said Ken quickly, as he began pulling a tarpaulin off a pile of canvas bags. 'A rare lot of it too!'

'You're not thinking by any chance of lobbing shot into Maidos, are you?' asked Roy sarcastically.

'Not that,' said Ken. 'Hardly that. But what about setting off this little lot? My notion is this. If we could put a slow match to the powder and then clear out and get down to the mouth of the water-course before it goes off, I believe those loafers down on the beach would all come running up here to see what had happened. That would give us our chance to collar a boat and clear.'

Roy gave a low chuckle.

'Not a bad notion, old son. Not half a bad idea. Yes, it certainly would wake some of 'em up. But what about the slow match? We've got no fuse.'

Ken held out an old-fashioned candle lantern.

'I bagged this from the sentry. There's just half an inch of candle in it. We've nothing to do but lay a train of loose powder up to it.'

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Roy chuckled again.

'You're a bad 'un to beat, Ken. Yes, that ought to work. Let's get at it.'

The powder was just as old-fashioned as the rest of the outfit. Common black stuff, large grained, coarser even than blasting powder. Once they got a bag open it did not take them long to lay the train to the lantern, which Ken placed in a little excavation kicked out right under the front wall of the earthwork.

'Don't think any one will see it there,' he said, as he cut the candle down a trifle and lit it cautiously with a sputtering sulphur match, part of the spoil from the Turkish sentry.

'I suppose those sentries are far enough off to be all right,' he added, as he rose hastily to his feet.

'Bless you, yes. This stuff isn't like high explosive. It'll only go up with a bang and a fizz like a big firework. Skip. We've got to be at the beach by the time she goes off.'

They knew their way by now, and in spite of the darkness, wasted very little time in reaching the ravine. All was very quiet. The Turkish guns, which had been firing probably at some mine-sweeper, were silent again. The only sounds of war were an occasional boom far to the south where the British and French faced the Turks entrenched on the heights of Achi Baba.

Bent double, the two scurried across the waste of cracked clay and loose stones, and in less than half the time they had taken for their first journey, reached the point where it debouched upon the open beach.

Ken dropped, panting slightly, and Roy slipping down beside him, caught a glint of dark water rippling under the starlight.

From somewhere to the left came a murmur of voices, and the breeze brought to his nostrils a faint odour of tobacco smoke.

Seconds dragged like minutes as they lay waiting. The suspense was very hard to bear.

Roy put his mouth close to Ken's ear.

'Afraid your contraption's gone wrong, old son. Don't seem to hear that bust up you promised.'

'Unless the powder was damp—' began Ken. His sentence was cut short by a thunderous boom. The earth quivered beneath them, and sky, sea, even the tall cliffs opposite flared crimson.

The great glow passed as swiftly as it had come, there followed a rattle of falling rubbish, then silence dropped. Silence, however, which lasted no longer than the flash. Almost instantly burst out a hubbub of excited voices, there was a rattle of sandalled feet on shingle and a sound of men running hard.

Roy sprang to his feet, but Ken caught him by the arm.

'Steady! Don't hurry, or you'll give the show away. It's not likely they're all gone.'

'Every man Jack of 'em,' Roy answered, as he walked boldly out on to the beach.

Ken glanced round sharply. It seemed as though Roy were right. So far as he could see, the whole population of the beach had departed for the scene of the explosion.

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'There are the boats,' said Roy. 'Three, four—yes, half a dozen of them. Now we shan't be long.' 'They're great clumsy brutes of things,' Ken answered. Hang it all! There isn't one we can manage between us.'

'Wait. There's a smaller one beyond. That might do us.' muttered Roy, hurrying forward.

Ken followed quickly. As Roy had said, this boat which lay by itself was decidedly smaller than the others. It had, however, been pulled clear of the water.

'Good, she's got a pair of oars,' said Roy. 'Give us a hand to launch her, Ken.'

She was a considerable weight, and the shingle was deep and soft. There is no tide in these waters, so the beaches are dry like those of a lake. In spite of their best efforts, it took them some little time to get her afloat.

They had only just succeeded and Ken was scrambling aboard, when rapid steps came hurrying down the beach.

'Halt!' came a sharp voice speaking in Turkish. 'Who goes there?'

CHAPTER XIII

THE SWEEPERS

'Hurry!' hissed Roy.

'No use,' was the low-voiced answer. 'He'd get us both before we were out of range.' As he spoke, Ken turned and stepped swiftly back to the beach.

'Friend,' he answered, speaking in the same language. 'Despatches for Chanak from Colonel Gratz.'

The sentry, a burly Turk, armed with a Mauser rifle, pulled up opposite Ken.

'Despatches,' he repeated suspiciously. 'Why are they being sent by boat? And who gave you leave to use this boat?'

In a flash Roy saw that this was a man of more intelligence than the average run of Turkish soldiers, and that it would be useless to try and bluff him. The only chance was to put him out.

'We had our orders,' he said. 'You can look at them if you wish.' He pretended to take something out of his pocket, at the same time stepping forward. Then, like a flash, he drove his fist with all his might into the Turk's face.

The man reeled backwards, but did not fall. Next moment he uttered a shout that rang through the night.

'We've done it now,' growled Roy, as he leaped past Ken, and caught the wretched sentry by the throat with a grip that effectually prevented any further sound.

'Take his rifle, Ken,' he said sharply. 'It's all right. I'll gag him. You get into the boat.'

How he did it Ken did not know, but within an incredibly short time Roy had sprung into the water, pushed the boat off, and scrambled aboard.

'I'll take the oars,' he said unceremoniously, and Ken, though himself a useful man with sculls, made no objection. Roy's strength, he knew, was greater than his own.

In a trice Roy had flung off his Turkish overcoat and British tunic. The blades bent as he sent the boat hissing through the water.

There was no tiller, but Ken found a broken scull at the bottom of the boat with which he contrived to steer. He kept her head due south, but fairly close in shore, and what between Roy's powerful efforts, and the strong current which always flows out of the Sea of Marmora into the Aegean, they were soon going almost as fast as a man could run.

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'It'll be Heaven's own luck if no one heard that yell,' muttered Roy, as he bent all his giant strength to the oars.

'I wish it had been your fist and not mine,' Ken replied with some bitterness.

'But I couldn't have got near him,' Roy answered simply. 'You see, I don't speak the lingo.'

The vicious crack of a rifle interrupted the conversation, and a bullet slapped the water just astern, and went skipping away in a series of ducks and drakes.

'They're on to us,' muttered Ken between set teeth. Roy said nothing. He only pulled a little harder. By the way the oars bent, Ken almost feared they would snap.

Another spit of white flame from the beach, another, and another. Still they were unhit, and every moment the distance was increasing. They had got beyond the low beach, and were under the cliffs to the southward.

'We may do it yet,' muttered Ken. 'They can't see us in this light. And there are not more than two chaps firing.'

There was a moment's pause in the firing. Ken's spirits rose. He thought—hoped that the Turks had given it up as a bad job. Then, just as it seemed as though they were really out of range, there rang out a regular volley, and all around them the water splashed in little jets of pale foam. There came a thud, the boat quivered slightly, and white splinters flew near Ken's feet, one cutting him slightly on the shin.

'Hit?' panted Roy, as he saw Ken wince.

'Nothing. It's the boat,' answered Ken briefly, as he bent to examine the damage.

A few seconds later, and they had rounded the projecting point of rock on which stands the old lighthouse. The firing ceased.

Roy slackened a little.

'Much damage?' he asked curtly.

'Holed her badly,' Ken answered. 'She's leaking like a sieve.'

'Rotten luck!' growled Roy. 'And just as we'd dodged the blighters. Can you do anything with it?'

'Ram a handkerchief in—that's all. Of course, I can bale.'

'Well, keep her afloat as long as you can. It won't be exactly healthy if we have to land anywhere here. All forts, isn't it?'

'Yes, down as far as Tekeh. Not that the forts will do us any harm, even if they're warned. We're too small and too close in for gun fire. But there's no place to land for nearly two miles—not until you get to what they call the Fountain.'

Apparently the forts were not warned. As the 'Triumph' had been slamming 12-inch shells into them only the previous night, the chances were that the telephone wires were cut. Roy kept going with long steady strokes, while Ken, working even harder, baled frantically the whole time.

So they drove on without speaking for about a quarter of an hour.

At last Ken straightened his aching back. 'It's no use, Roy. The water's gaining. I can't keep it down.'

'You needn't tell me that. I've been over my ankles the last five minutes, and she's pulling like a sunk log.'

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'What are we going to do?' said Ken—'Try for the Fountain landing?'

'Might as well, I suppose. Any chance of picking up another boat, d'ye think?'

'Pretty slim, I fancy,' answered Ken. 'There are sure to be sentries there. You see, it's the sort of place where our people might attempt a landing.'

[Illustration: "'She's leaking like a sieve.'"]

'Could we try for the other side?' suggested Roy.

'Out of the question,' said Ken. 'We're opposite Sari Siglar Bay. The Straits are nearly three miles wide here.'

Roy gave a short laugh. 'Looks as if we should have to swim for it after all,' he said. 'Well, the only thing is to keep going until she sinks under us. Then we must scramble ashore and take our chances.'

He pulled on again, and Ken betook himself to his everlasting task of baling. He was mortally tired and desperately sleepy. His eyes almost closed as he dipped and dipped in the salt water which, in spite of all his efforts, grew steadily deeper in the bottom of the boat. The lower she sank, the more quickly the water spurted in. Each minute that passed brought the inevitable end closer.

Once he glanced up to see, if possible, where they were. To the right tall black cliffs towered against the night sky, to the left the stars twinkled in the ripples of the deep and wide Straits.

Roy pulled like a machine, but the weight of water made his efforts almost useless. The boat sogged slowly forward like a dead thing.

'She won't last another five minutes,' said Ken.

'And there's no landing place, old chap. We're right up against it.'

'Tell you what there is, though,' said Ken keenly. 'There's a craft of some sort out there. Don't you hear her engines?'

Roy stopped pulling a moment. In the silence a faint chug, chug reached their ears.

'What do you think she is—one of our warships?' he asked in a whisper.

'Haven't a notion. But she's probably British or French. The Turks haven't got much in the way of craft—at least not this side of Gallipoli.'



'Then I vote for trying to make her,' said Roy. 'Right you are,' Ken answered, and began baling harder than ever Roy, pulling on his left-hand oar, got the boat round, and made a last spurt in the direction of the sound.

It seemed a very forlorn hope. They could not even see the craft—whatever she was—and their boat manifestly had but a short time to live. If she sank out in mid-straits there was no earthly chance of reaching the shore. Drowning was certain.

Three minutes passed. The water in the boat was nearly knee deep. Pull as he might, Roy could hardly keep her moving. Ken raised his head and peered out through the gloom.

'I see her,' he said with sudden eagerness. He pointed as he spoke to a dim shape not more than a couple of hundred yards away.

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Roy glanced back over his shoulder. 'She's very small,' he said, 'and she's working upstream. Hallo, there's another just beyond her—a pair of 'em.'

'Two, are there? Then I tell you what they are—trawlers.'

'Trawlers!' echoed Roy. 'What—catching herrings for the Admiral's breakfast?'

'No, you ass—mines. They're mine-sweepers of course.' Roy gave a low whistle.

'I'd sooner catch herrings,' he said. 'But never mind. So long as they're British, that's all that matters.' And he set to pulling again with all the energy left him.

The trawlers were creeping along at very slow speed, and without a light of any sort showing. There was not even the usual glow from the funnel top. Lucky it was for Roy and Ken that they were going so slowly, for they were still some little distance from the nearest trawler when the ripples began to wash over the gunwale of the water-logged boat.

'Help!' shouted Roy hoarsely. 'Help!'

'Pull on!' said Ken, as he still baled frantically. 'Pull on! They can't come round if they've got their sweeping cable out.'

Roy made a last effort, and whether it was Roy's shout or the sound of the oars, some one aboard the trawler heard them.

'Who are you?' came a gruff voice, half-muffled, as though afraid of being overheard on shore.

'Friends—British,' answered Ken. 'Our boat's sinking.'

There came a sharp order echoed from the farther ship. The trawlers both slackened speed.

'Come alongside, if you can. We can't pull out to you,' called the same voice that Ken had heard previously.

A few more strokes, then just as the boat was actually sinking under them, a rope came whizzing across. Roy caught it and a moment later, wet and draggled, they were standing on the deck of the trawler.

'Well, I'll be everlastingly jiggered,' exclaimed a gruff voice. 'Where in all that's wonderful did you fellers spring from?' The speaker was a short, square man, but it was so dark that all they could see of his face was that it was round and clean-shaven.

'Out of the Dardanelles last, and before that from Kilid Bahr,' Ken answered. 'We're escaped prisoners.'

'Gosh, you've been in warm places, young fellers,' said the other, 'but I kind o' think it's a case of out of the frying pan into the fire.'

'Fire's better than water, specially when it's as cold as the Straits,' said Roy with a shiver.

'Well, maybe that's so,' replied the other. 'Get you gone below, the both o' you. You'll find a fire in the galley and the cook'll give ye some hot cocoa.'

'Thanks awfully,' said Ken and Roy in one breath, and hurried off at once.

The cook, a lean, solemn-faced man named Lemuel Gill, showed no surprise whatever at the sudden apparition of two half-drowned strangers. But if he asked no questions he was not stingy with the cocoa, and Roy and Ken put away a quart of it between them, and openly declared they had never tasted anything so good in all their lives.

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Their praise seemed to please Gill, for he proceeded to cut some gigantic sandwiches out of stale bread and excellent cold boiled pork, and to these also the hungry youngsters did justice.

'What ship is this?' asked Ken, when the first pangs of hunger had been satisfied.

"'Maid o' Sker.' Mine—sweeper. Skipper, Seth Grimball,' was the brief answer. Then, after a pause, 'Where did you blokes come from?'

Ken told him, or rather began to, for before he had finished, the steady beat of the engines suddenly slackened.

'Cotched one, I reckon,' remarked Gill briefly, and hurried on deck followed by the two boys.

The 'Maid of Sker' was the ordinary type of North Sea trawler, and so far as Ken and Roy could see, her fellow, whose name Gill told them was the 'Swan of Avon,' was her double. They were moving exactly parallel, at a distance of about a cable (220 yards) apart. Between them towed a thin steel hawser set to a depth just sufficient to catch the mooring cables of the mines which were plentifully strewn in the channel.

'Caught one, you say?' whispered Ken in Gill's ear. 'A mine, you mean?'

'Ay. Look at the cable. She's foul of it all right.'

Certainly the cable was sagging in a curious fashion.

'What do you do with them?' asked Roy.

But Gill had already run aft to assist. Low-voiced orders were heard, and the 'Maid of Sker' began to forge slowly ahead.

'I think they're going to tow it out of the channel,' Ken said to Roy. 'That's what I believe they do.'

'But I thought the beastly things exploded when you touched 'em,' said Roy.

'Some do. That's the sort with steel whiskers on them. The others are what they call tilting mines. They blow up when their balance is upset.'

'And which is this?'

'I don't know any more than you, and I don't suppose the skipper does, either. All these mines swim some way under the surface.'

'What's the betting on her going off?' said the irrepressible Roy.

'She won't,' said Ken confidently. 'These chaps know how to handle her. She—'

He stopped short, and involuntarily flung up his hands before his eyes. A cone of blinding white light had sprouted suddenly from the Asiatic shore, and in its cold brilliance the outlines of the two trawlers, the people on their decks, the cable towing between them, and a wide patch of rippling water stood out as clearly as in the broadest daylight. It was a searchlight from Kephez Point at the southern angle of Sari Siglar Bay.

'Haul up there. Haul on that cable. Sharp now!' bellowed Captain Grimball, and his men sprang to obey. He himself dashed into the little deckhouse and was out again in an instant with a rifle in his hand.

In the dazzling glare a great bulbous mass of dark-coloured metal heaved slowly up out of the water midway between the two trawlers. It was hardly in sight before Grimball had flung his rifle to his shoulder and fired.

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Followed instantly an explosion so terrific that Ken distinctly felt the deck of the trawler lift under his feet. A cloud of thick black smoke shot high into the air, and as it rose a very waterspout descended upon the little ship.

Roy and Ken staggered back, half deafened by the appalling concussion.

'Got that one, anyway,' they heard Grimball exclaim, as he dashed back to the bridge and rang the engine bell for full steam. 'Got him all right. Next question is whether the blighters will get us.'

Both trawlers seemed actuated by the same impulse. Both at the same time surged ahead, while the sweeping cable was either cut or cast loose.

But the searchlight's brilliant beam followed relentlessly, and as the two smart little craft cleared from the area of the black smoke cloud, there came the ringing report of a 6-inch gun followed by the familiar whirr of a heavy shell.

'Rotten shot!' snapped Grimball, as the shell, sailing well over the mast top, plunged into the sea two hundred yards or more beyond.

'Hard aport!' he shouted, and the 'Maid' came spinning round almost as smartly as a sailing dinghy. Next minute she and her consort were legging it southwards at the very top of their speed.

For a moment they were clear of the dazzling radiance of the searchlight, but only for a moment. Then the long pencil of glaring whiteness found them again, and now the guns began to bark in earnest.

The 'Maid' seemed to know her peril. She squattered down into the water, and the foaming wake lengthened, trailing far behind her. Forgetful of their own danger, Roy and Ken watched breathless while the trawlers ran the gauntlet of the forts.

A shell struck the water right under the bows of the 'Maid,' flinging up a fountain which rose as high as the mainmast, and deluging the decks for a second time.

'Mighty wet job this,' said Roy, shaking himself like a great dog. 'Rotten luck we can't shoot back, eh, Ken?'

'Can't even do much running,' said Ken. 'Twelve knots is about our top speed. 'Pon my soul, these chaps have got pluck.'

'The "Swan's" drawing ahead,' said Roy.

Almost as the words left his lips there came a shattering crash and a sheet of flame leapt up from the other trawler. A shell had pitched full upon her armoured wheel-

house, and exploding had not only blown it away, with the steersman, but opened up the whole deck. The poor little trawler, with her steering gear smashed, swung round to starboard, and it was only by the smartest seamanship that the 'Maid' avoided running her down.

'She's done,' said Roy, as he ran forward. 'She's sinking!'

He was right. The big shell had knocked her all to pieces. Grimball saw this too, and in response to his rapid order, the 'Maid's' engines stopped, and four stalwart fellows ran to the dinghy which lay in chocks on her deck.

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In a trice they had flung her over the low rail into the sea; two sprang in and pulled hard for the rapidly sinking 'Swan.'

All the time the guns ashore were rapping and roaring. The sea was thick with spouts of foam as shells big and little struck the surface.

'This infernal searchlight!' growled Roy. 'They're rotten shots, but they're getting the range now.'

They were. Just as the dinghy drew alongside the 'Swan,' another 6-inch plunged straight into her, amidships. It must have exploded in the engine-room. The 'Swan' and all in her vanished from the face of the waters, and when the smoke cloud lifted, the dinghy, upside down, with one man clinging to it, was all that was left.

'A rope. Give us a rope!' shouted Roy. Some one ran forward, but even as they did so a smaller shell caught the funnel of the 'Maid' and carried two thirds of it away. With it went the man with the rope.

At the same moment the survivor who was clinging to the dinghy let go his hold. Stunned by the concussion of the previous shell, he was sinking into the depths.

'I can't stand that,' cried Roy, and with one spring was overboard and striking out hard for the drowning man.

The racket and roar were appalling. Some field batteries behind Kephez had joined in, and the whole night echoed with the quick crashes of the guns, while the air was full of the train-like rattle of flying shells.

But in all the confusion Ken kept his head. Catching sight of a coil of line on the deck close by the forward hatch, he sprang for it, made one end fast to a bollard, and with a shout flung the other towards Roy.

It fell short, but Roy saw it and with a great effort reached it.

'Hang on!' roared Ken at the top of his voice. 'I'll pull you in.'

[Illustration: When the men return from the trenches, they find sea-bathing most pleasant.]

[Illustration: French and British sailors are friends in play-time as in war-time.]

He had hardly begun to haul when the end came. A shell bigger than any yet took the 'Maid of Sker' amidships. There was a fearful explosion, Ken felt himself hurled forward, and next moment the chill waters of the Dardanelles closed over his head.



CHAPTER XIV

G 2

Gasping with the sudden shock, Ken struck out and got his head above water. Only a few yards away, he saw Roy still clinging tightly to the survivor of the dinghy's crew. He swam hard towards him and managed to reach him.

'You!' gasped Roy, who hardly seemed to have realised what had happened.

'The trawler's gone,' panted Roy, as he lifted one hand and dashed the salt water from his eyes. 'Big shell got her. See, she's still afloat, but sinking fast.'

Roy gave a groan. He seemed to be nearly at the end of his strength.

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'The brutes!' he muttered.

'We must get hold of the dinghy again. It's our one chance,' said Ken. 'Here, let me help you with that chap.'

'Why, it's Gill,' he exclaimed, as he caught the man by the other arm, and started paddling hard towards the dinghy, which, caught in the current, was drifting steadily away southwards.

It was at this moment that the searchlight switched suddenly off. Darkness shut down around them, leaving nothing in sight but the overturned boat, a dim bulk among the dull ripples.

Roy was almost done as the result of the exertions he had made in holding up Gill, and Gill himself weighted them terribly. For two minutes or more Ken thought they would never reach the boat.

At last they managed it, and then they had only just strength enough left to haul Gill up across it and, each with an arm across the keel, cling and let themselves drift where the current took them.

'The skipper said it was out of the frying pan into the fire,' said Roy, with a weak attempt at a laugh. 'He wasn't far out, eh, Ken?'

'He wasn't,' Ken agreed. 'I say, Roy, he had pluck, hadn't he? It took grit to stand by the "Swan" under a fire like that.'

'It did,' said Roy. 'God rest his soul,' he added softly.

Silence fell between them. Ken's spirits were sinking in spite of his best efforts to keep them up. The sea was deadly cold, and the boat so small that they were only just able to keep their heads above water. And they knew, both of them, that their chances of life were not one in a thousand.

They were right out in mid-straits, they were still fully nine miles from the southern entrance, and even if a British warship should come up to see what had happened to the trawlers, the odds were enormous against her people spotting them.

Ken strained his eyes through the gloom, but could neither see nor hear any other craft. The waters were bare and silent.

'Roy,' he said at last, and it was all he could do to keep his teeth from chattering. 'Roy, can't we manage to right the dinghy?'

'You and I might. But what about Gill?'

The question was unanswerable. It would take all their united strength to turn the dinghy over. And who was to hold Gill meantime?

No, the case was absolutely desperate. There was nothing for it but to hang on and continue hanging on until at last the deadly cold had done its work, and they dropped off and sank into the darksome depths beneath them. It was a miserable end, and Ken's whole soul rebelled against it.

The guns had ceased firing, there were no lights anywhere to be seen, the only sound was the monotonous slap of the ripples against the hull of the overturned boat and—far in the distance—the dull mutter of the guns down by Sedd-el-Bahr.

[Illustration: "Hallo! Hallo! Who's that?"]

Ken felt a dull stupor creeping over him, a curious sense of unreality. His thoughts began to wander. So much so that at first he hardly noticed the curious sucking splash which came from the water some little distance to the left.



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It was Roy who called his attention to it.

'Ken, there's a thundering great fish out there. Do they keep sharks in these waters?'

Before Ken could reply, the splash was followed by a slight grating sound, then a dull clank, like two metal plates being lightly struck together.

Hope dawned suddenly in Ken's heart, sending a tingling shock through the whole of his perishing body.

'That's no fish,' he muttered. 'That's no fish.' Then raising himself as high as he could out of the water he sent a sharp cry for help peeling through the darkness.

'Hallo! Hallo! Who's that?'

Never had Ken been happier to hear the sound of a human voice.

'Three survivors from the "Maid of Sker,"' he answered. 'Our boat's upset.'

'Hang on!' came the quick reply. 'We'll have you out in a jiffy.'

There came low voiced orders, the low purr of an engine, and a low dark bulk topped by a curious square-looking turret came gliding towards them.

'What is it?' muttered Roy in a dazed tone.

'A submarine,' Ken answered gladly. 'That's her conning tower. Here she comes. Hang on to Gill, or the wash will take him off.'

A moment later, and the long gray craft swam up right alongside of the dinghy. It was the most beautiful bit of steering imaginable. A hand reached out and pulled the dinghy close against the hull, and strong arms gripped and lifted the three aboard.

Ken felt himself swung gently up the conning tower, then he was lowered with equal ease and skill through the open hatch. Within an incredibly short time he was flat on a mattress laid on the throbbing steel floor of the submarine.

A keen-faced officer stood beside him.

'Both the sweepers gone?' he asked gravely.

'I'm afraid so, sir. The "Swan" was knocked all to bits, and we saw the "Maid" sink. I believe we are the only survivors.'

'We heard the firing, but couldn't get here sooner. But you're in khaki. How's that?'

'Horan and I are escaped prisoners, sir. We stole a boat up by Kilid Bahr, and were picked up by the "Maid." Gill is the only man left from the trawler. He was one of the crew of the "Maid's" dinghy that went to help the "Swan's" people.'

'And you?'

'Horan and I were trying to save him when the "Maid" was hit.'

The other nodded approvingly.

'Ah, you're Australians. Good men! But I see you're about all in. I shan't bother you with any more questions now. Williams, see these men have a change, and a tot of rum. And some of you give 'em a good rub down. They're stiff with cold.'

He nodded again and went off.

Williams, a burly torpedo coxswain, at once took charge of Ken. His big hands were as tender as a woman's as he stripped off the boy's soaking clothes and substituted for them a fresh suit of warm lammies. Before putting them on, he gave Ken such a rubbing with a rough towel as sent the stagnant blood tingling through every vein.

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'Thanks awfully,' said Ken gratefully. 'I say, how's Gill? He got knocked silly with the blast of the shell that sunk the "Swan." Is he hurt?'

'He ain't hit, anyway,' said Williams. 'He's swallowed a bit more salt water than suits his innards, but he'll pull round all right, never you fear.'

'Here, drink this down,' he continued, handing Ken a thick mug full of some steaming mixture. Ken swallowed it obediently. It was thick Navy cocoa, laced with a dash of rum.

It sent a grateful warmth through every inch of Ken's body, but its immediate effect was to make him so drowsy that his eyes began to close.

'That's all right,' he heard Williams remark in a satisfied voice. 'Forty winks won't do you no manner of harm.' The last thing Ken remembered was being wrapped in a blanket. Then he dropped back on the mattress and almost before his head reached it was sound asleep.

He woke to the purr of engines and a warm thick atmosphere smelling strongly of oil and illuminated by white electric lamps. For the moment he could not imagine where he was nor what had happened. It was not until he rolled over and saw Roy lying stretched on another mattress beside him, and Gill a little beyond, that any sort of recollection came back to him.

He stretched himself. He was sore all over, but otherwise fit enough and very hungry. Then he sat up.

A burly figure came towards him, walking with that curiously light-footed tread which becomes second habit in a submarine. It was Williams, the coxswain.

'Well, young fellow me lad,' he remarked genially, 'how goes it?'

'Top hole, thanks. A bit empty. That's all.'

'If that's your only trouble, we'll soon fix it. Can you walk?'

'You bet.'

'Then come along forrard, and we'll see what cooky can do for you.'

Cooky's efforts consisted in biscuit, butter, sardines, jam, and lashings of hot strong tea, to all of which Ken did the fullest justice.

'And how d'ye like life under the ocean wave?' asked Williams, who was watching Ken's progress with the eye of a connoisseur.

'First time I ever tried it,' said Ken, glancing round the long, narrow interior which seemed merely a packing case for a maze of intricate machinery. 'What is she? What class I mean?'

'She's G 2, sonny, and don't you forget it. The last word in submarine gadgets. Twenty knots on the surface, and twelve submerged. Carries eight o' the biggest and best torpedoes, any one o' which is warranted to knock the stuffing out o' the "Goeben" or any other o' Weeping Willy's super-skulkers.'

'Where are we now?' inquired Ken with interest.

'Couldn't say precisely. But somewheres about ten fathom below the shinin' surface of the Dardanelles.'

Ken felt a queer thrill. There was something uncanny in the thought that they were spinning along, sixty feet below the sea-level, cut off from all the living world.



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'Pass the word the commander wishes to see Carrington,' came a voice.

'Lootenant Strang wants you,' said Williams. 'Go right aft. Sentry'll show you. And go careful, mind you. Submarines ain't the sort o' shops for foot races.'

Ken went cautiously back past the amazing tangle of spinning, whirling machinery. Where the long interior narrowed to the stern hung a thick curtain. The sentry silently parted it, and Ken found himself in the officer's quarters of G2. They were as plain as the steerage on a liner. Just two bunks and in the middle a table at which Lieutenant Strang sat, busily writing.

He glanced up as Ken entered, and, saluting, stood to attention. Ken noticed, with inward approval, the strength and intelligence in the clean-cut features of the commanding officer.

'Feeling better, Carrington?'

'Quite all right, sir, thank you.'

'Had breakfast?'

'Yes, sir.'

'I want to hear what you've been doing. Let's have the whole yarn.'

Ken told him. He put it as shortly as he could, but gave his story clearly and well. Lieutenant Strang listened with the deepest attention.

"Pon my word, you and your chum have been going it some!" he remarked when Ken at last finished. 'So you're a son of Captain Carrington? How is it you did not take a commission?'

'I didn't think I had any right to it, sir,' Ken answered simply. 'It seemed to me it was the sort of thing one ought to win.'

'Just so. I dare say you are right. I hope you'll get one anyhow. But see here, I can't put you ashore. We're going north, not south.'

'Going up through the Straits, sir?' exclaimed Ken. 'We've gone. We're opposite Bulair this minute, so far as I can judge.'

CHAPTER XV

KEN MEETS AN OLD FRIEND

'Then—then you're bound for Constantinople?' said Ken eagerly.

Strang laughed.

'Not necessarily. No, I am not particularly anxious to charge into the Golden Horn. It's a deal of risk, and not much to be got out of it. Our mission is to cruise in the Marmora and look out for Turkish transports and store ships.'

'Why, what's the matter?' he broke off, noticing how Ken's face had fallen.

'I beg your pardon, sir. It was my father I was thinking of. You see he is in Constantinople—at least, so that scoundrel Henkel told me. I thought I might have a chance of getting ashore and helping him.'

'My good fellow, you must be crazy. Apart from the fact that I should have the greatest difficulty in putting you ashore, you would, of course, at once be arrested and shot as a spy.'

'I don't think so, sir. You see I know the place well, and have friends there. And I talk the language as well as I do English. I know some Arabic, too.'

'The deuce you do!' said the commander, staring at him keenly. 'Then it's possible that you may be uncommonly useful to me during our present trip. No, I shall tell you no more just now. And pray put out of your head any such mad idea as landing at Constantinople.'

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'Very well, sir,' Ken answered quietly. And saluting again, he left the cabin.

Going forward again, he found Roy tucking into an enormous breakfast with every evidence of enjoyment. Williams was acting as host, and listening with interest to Roy's account of their wanderings across the peninsula.

Ken asked for Gill, and heard that he was doing very well, but only fit to lie up for the present.

Roy rose, brushed the crumbs from his lammies and stretched his tall frame.

'Heigh ho, I wish we could get back to our chaps,' he remarked regretfully.

'Well, of all the ungrateful beggars!' said Ken with a laugh. 'Talk of buying a ham and seeing life, you won't see as much in the trenches in a month as you'll see here in a day.'

'Any one can have this steel box for me,' retorted Roy. 'I like to fight where I can see what's coming.'

'Maybe you'll see more'n you want before you're finished with this trip, ye long grouser,' put in Williams. 'This ain't no pleasure picnic, let me tell you. Our old man's hot stuff, he is, and if I knows anything about it, it won't be long before he starts handing out surprise packets to them Turks.'

'Hallo,' he broke off, 'we're for the surface.'

As he spoke, G 2's bow began to rise and the whole long hull took a gentle slope.

'Pretty quick!' exclaimed Ken. 'I thought you had to do a lot of pumping first.'

'Bless you, no,' said Williams with a superior grin. 'Not with these 'ere modern craft. They works with horizontal rudders, sort o' fins along the side. Blime, G 2 can pop up and down mighty nigh as quick as a dab chick.'

'There now,' he continued, as the vessel came back to an even keel. 'She's floating just submerged. I reckon her periscopes is just out o' the water.'

'Could we have a look?' asked Ken eagerly.

'Ay, I dare say. You wait a minute and I'll see.'

He was back in a minute, and beckoned them to come.



There were two periscopes. It was the forward one they were called to. They saw a circular table from which a tube ran up through the top of the submarine. A man in shirt-sleeves—he was the other coxswain—got up from a stool and motioned Ken to take his seat and look through what seemed like a pair of binoculars.

Ken gave a cry of surprise. Instead of the hot, stuffy interior of the submarine with its pale electrics and maze of machinery, he was gazing at a wide circle of small-crested waves which shone gloriously blue under a brilliant sky. Now and then a white-winged gull swooped across the view, but apart from these, there was no sign of life or of land.

'Here, let's have a squint,' said Roy eagerly, and Ken gave way.

'Why, it's like a living picture show,' declared Roy. 'Gosh, I could sit and watch it all day. But I say, can't other craft spot the periscope in all this sunshine?'

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'Not with this bobble on. At least not very easy,' said the observer, as he took his place again.

'Where are we?' asked Roy.

'Somewheres in the Sea o' Marmora,' Williams answered. 'Just in the mouth o' it, so to speak. I expect the old man'll keep pushing along up the north coast, awaiting for them transports out o' the Bosphorus.'

'And you talk about its being dull, Roy?' said Ken with a laugh.

'Well, perhaps I spoke a bit hastily,' allowed Roy. 'I'll grant I'd like to see us get our own back on some of those Turkish blighters. I haven't forgotten last night yet, I can tell you.'

'You wait till we get our eyes on one, that's all,' said Williams,' and you won't wait much longer.'

But the wait lasted longer than Ken and Roy expected. All that day G2 cruised slowly back and forth between the big island of Marmora, where the marble quarries are, and the high coast of the European mainland, yet nothing rewarded her vigilant watch.

There was nothing to do but sit about and yarn, and more than once Roy told Ken that he wouldn't be a submarine sailor for any amount of 'hard lying' money.

It was about four in the afternoon, and Ken had been taking a quiet nap, for he had a lot of arrears of sleep to make up, when he was roused by a sudden sharp order from Lieutenant Strang.

In an instant the drowsy interior of G2 wakened into sudden life, and Ken, springing to his feet, moved forward to where Williams was standing near the forward periscope.

'What's up?' he asked in a quick undertone.

'Craft in sight. Can't tell what she is yet.'

'A warship?'

'Transport, most like, but can't say yet. Sit tight. I'll tell ye when I can see her a bit plainer.'

By the deeper hum of the engines, Ken knew that they had quickened their speed. There was a sort of suppressed eagerness about all the twenty-five men who composed the crew of the submarine. Ken longed to have a peep through the camera of the periscope, but knew it was impossible.



'She isn't much,' said Williams at last. 'Just a tramp of twelve or fourteen hundred tons. Still, she may ha' got troops aboard, and if she ain't, it's grub or munitions for them beggars in the peninsula.'

'Are we going to torpedo her?' asked Ken.

'Not likely. We ain't like Germans, as chucks away a thousand pound torpedo on a pore little fishing smack.'

'But we shan't let her go, surely?'

Williams chuckled. 'Bless your innocence, no! A couple o' shells from our little popper up topside will settle her hash all right.'

Another order echoed from aft. Strang's voice had a curious hollow sound, like a shout in a tunnel. Ken felt the vessel rising beneath him.

Men sprang up the steel ladder leading to the conning tower. A moment later the hatch flew open with a hollow clang, and the sea air gushed in, freshening delightfully the thick oily atmosphere below.

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At the same moment power was switched off the electric engines, and the petrol motor broke into life with an appalling racket. The long, cigar-like vessel trembled under the increased power.

‘Can’t we go up on deck?’ muttered Roy who had joined Ken.

Ken shook his head. He knew that this was impossible, yet all the same it was intolerably irksome to remain below without being able to see or take a hand in what was going on.

More orders, and presently the submarine came to rest, and lay, with hardly a movement, on the surface.

Williams turned and beckoned to Ken, and next moment Ken had his eyes glued to the binoculars. In the circle of sea thrown on the mirror, the first thing he saw was an untidy looking tramp, her rusty plates showing as she rolled slowly to the slight sea.

Aboard her all was wild excitement. Turkish sailors were hurriedly launching boats. Ken almost fancied he could hear the davits squeal as the boats were hastily lowered to the level of the sea. Evidently the men were in a desperate fright, for seldom had Ken seen the slack, leisurely Turks move with such speed.

We ain’t hurrying ’em,’ said Williams in Ken’s ear. ‘We’ve give ’em twenty minutes.’ Here, let your chum have a squint.’

Ken made way for Roy, and as he did so there was a shout from aft.

‘Commander wants Carrington.’

‘You lucky beggar,’ cried Roy, but Ken was gone like a flash.

‘Get along up on deck, soldier,’ said a bluejacket. ‘E’s up there.’

Ken was up the ladder almost before the man had finished speaking, and swinging out through the hatch dropped down on to the narrow deck beneath.

There were four men on the deck, namely Lieutenant Strang, his second in command, Sub-Lieutenant Hotham, and two who stood by the gun, a 12-pounder which had been raised from its snug niche in the deck, and was pointed full on the steamer.

The latter was nearer than Ken had thought, and by this time it seemed that her whole crew were in the boats, and the ship herself entirely deserted.

'Ah, Carrington,' said the commander. 'You're the man who talks Turkish. I can't quite make out whether the skipper of this old tub thinks his boats can make the shore or whether he wants a tow. Ask him, will you?'

The Turkish skipper, a greasy-looking ruffian, was in a boat close by. He was gesticulating wildly.

Ken at once hailed him, and asked the necessary question. The man burst into violent speech.

Ken listened, and there was a smile on his face as he turned to the commander.

'He's only swearing at us, sir, and asking what right we have to sink his ship.'

'Tell him he'd better inquire of Enver Bey,' was the grim reply, and Ken faithfully repeated the remark, only to hear a volley of curses called down on Enver's head as well as on his own.

'He can't do anything but swear, sir,' said Ken.

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'Well, we've no time to waste,' said the officer impatiently. 'Tell him to clear out as quick as he can. I'm not going to waste shells on that thing. A charge of gun-cotton in her hold is all she's worth.'

With much bad language, the Turkish skipper cleared off, and the three boats containing himself and his crew pulled away in the direction of the land, which was just visible on the almost before the words left the commander's lips, and pulling like fury for the steamer.

'Make for the bows,' he heard Strang shout, and he did so.

The distance was nothing—merely a couple of hundred yards. He glanced round over his shoulder, and saw the rusty bows towering above him—saw, too, to his intense relief, that the old man had realised that he was to be rescued and was moving forward.

Ken shipped his sculls. The dinghy glided in under the tall side of the tramp. Ken stood up, and looked round for a rope. He could not see one. There seemed no way of climbing the perpendicular side of the vessel, yet it was quite clear that the old man could not get down unaided.

Ken saw his face appear over the rail. A gasp of astonishment came from his lips.

'Othman!' he exclaimed. 'It's Othman Pacha!'

It was Othman Pacha, his old friend, the very man who had saved him when his father was arrested. How had he come here? How was it he had been left alone to perish by the crew of the steamer? What did it all mean? These and a dozen other thoughts darted through Ken's brain with the swiftness of a lightning flash. But above them all came the desperate resolve to save the old man at all costs.

Othman could do nothing to help himself. That was clear on the face of it. Old and apparently ill, he seemed quite confused and helpless.

Just above his head Ken saw an open port. Standing on the thwart he just managed to reach it. With a desperate effort he drew himself up, and succeeded in getting foothold on the lower rim. There was no way of securing the boat. He had to trust to luck that she would remain where he had left her.

Quickly yet cautiously he raised himself again, and his clutching fingers met the stays of the foremast. Another big pull, and he was level with the rail.

The old Turk stood staring at him, but did not seem to recognise him, and naturally Ken did not wait to explain. Every instant he expected to see the decks burst upwards, and the whole ship fly to pieces. He knew that it could be only a matter of seconds before the explosion took place.



A rope—that was what he wanted most just at that moment, and luckily he had not far to go for one. An untidy coil of line lay close beside the forward hatch.

He sprang for it, whipped it up, and in a trice had put a loop in it, and made a double bight around Othman's body.

'Over you go, Pacha!' he said with a sharpness which at last reached the muddled brains of the poor old Turk.

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Somehow he bundled him over the rail, and lowered him quickly yet carefully into the boat which fortunately remained where he had left it alongside.

'Cast off the rope, Pacha,' he shouted in an agony of impatience, and Othman fumblingly tried to obey. Ken saw that he would never do it in time, so rapidly made fast his own end to the rail, and giving one pull to tighten the knot, sprang over.

Fifteen seconds more and he would have been safe. But hardly were his legs over the rail when the explosion came. There was a stunning shock, the whole ship seemed to melt beneath him. A blast of hot air struck him, and the next thing he knew was struggling in the water.

For a second or two he felt half paralysed, and as if he could not use his muscles. He realised that he was sinking, and this gave him such a shock that somehow he managed to pull himself together and strike out.

He came to the surface, dashed the water from his eyes, and the first thing he saw was the dinghy. By a miracle, she was floating unharmed among a mass of wreckage, but Othman was not in her.

Ken looked round, and saw the old Pacha dangling in the water alongside the swaying steamer. He was tied to her by the rope of which one end was around his body, while the other was still fast to the ship's rail.

It was a ghastly fix, for it was clear that the steamer was sinking fast. Another moment, and down she would go, dragging the unfortunate old man with her and Ken too. He knew well enough that, as she sank, she was bound to pull him also down into the vortex, and that from this great eddy he would never have the strength to rise. His one chance for life was to swim away as hard as he could go.

[Illustration: 'Ken sprang over.']

But Ken was not the sort to leave a job half-done. It was both or neither, and treading water he fumbled frantically in his pockets for his knife.

With a sigh of relief, his fingers closed upon it; he whipped it out, and opening it with his teeth struck out with all his strength for Othman.

It is no easy matter to cut a slack rope with a small clasp knife, especially when the blade is none too sharp. Ken felt as though he would never get it through.

He heard shouts from the submarine, but could not distinguish words. The steamer was settling fast. Already her rail was almost level with the water.

The last strand parted, and dropping the knife, Ken seized Othman, who by this time was quite insensible, and made for the dinghy with all his remaining strength.

He reached it, and got one arm over the stern. But that was all he could do. It was out of the question for him to lift Othman into the boat. He could not even climb in himself. He was completely done, and could only hang on, panting so that every breath he drew was pain.

From the steamer came the sound of a fresh explosion. The air, confined below, was forcing up her decks. Ken knew that now it was only a question of seconds before she sank, knew, too, that escape was out of the question. The dinghy was bound to be drawn down, and it was not as if the submarine had a second boat which she could send to the rescue.

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'All right, Ken. Hold tight. I've got you!'

It was Roy's cheery voice, and Ken suddenly realised that he was there in the water alongside.

'Look out!' Ken managed to gasp. 'You'll only be dragged down too.'

'Not a bit of it,' Roy answered, as he raised himself and caught hold of the boat. 'Don't you worry, old man. I've a rope round me. I'll hold her.'

'Ah, there she goes!' he exclaimed, and as he spoke there was a queer sucking sound, and Ken felt the boat whirl away in the direction of the sinking steamer.

For some seconds it seemed as if he, Othman, and all would be ripped away from the boat by the tremendous suction. Great eddies boiled and swirled in every direction, and a thick scum of oil and coal dust rose and covered the surface of the sea.

'Hold on!' he heard Roy shout again, and somehow he did, though his right arm felt as though it were being torn from its socket.

At last the commotion ceased, the eddies disappeared, and the strain slackened.

'Thank goodness, that's the last of her,' said Roy, with a sigh of relief. 'Jove, but I couldn't have stuck it much longer. That rope round my waist has nearly cut me in two. How are you making it, old man?'

'I'm all right,' Ken answered, but his voice was so weak it scared Roy.

'Here, hand over his Nibs,' he said, as he moved round and took Othman from Ken. 'Now,' he said, 'just hang on a few minutes longer, and they'll pull us in.'

He raised one arm as a signal, the rope tightened gently, and the dinghy and the three holding to it were towed quickly back to the submarine.

Roy handed up Othman and scrambled out himself but they had to lift Ken out of the water. Once on deck, however, he insisted on scrambling to his feet.

'Not damaged?' inquired Lieutenant Strang with a touch of anxiety in his voice.

'Not a bit, sir,' Ken answered.

'I congratulate you, Carrington. It was an uncommon good and plucky bit of work, and I shall see that it is reported to your own commanding officer.'



Ken went below, tingling with a pleasure which made him forget his aching joints and muscles.

CHAPTER XVI

TACKLING THE TROOPER

'Yes, come in.'

Lieutenant Strang, busy plotting out something on a chart, looked up as the sentry parted the curtains of his cabin.

'Can Corporal Carrington see you, sir?' asked the man.

'Certainly. Send him in.'

Ken, looking more like himself in his khaki, which was now thoroughly dried, entered and saluted.

'Well, Carrington, what is it?' The commander's tone was quick, almost curt, yet there was a smile on his keen face as his eyes fell on Ken's upright figure.

'I've been talking to Othman Pacha, sir,' began Ken.

'Othman Pacha—who the deuce is he?'

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'The Turk we rescued, sir. He's a friend of mine. I mentioned his name to you this morning. It was he who got me away into Greece when my father was arrested.'

'Of course. I remember now. But this is a most extraordinary coincidence—to find him on that tramp.'

'Not so much so as you might think, sir. You see he is known to be no friend to Enver Bey and the Young Turks. He was in danger of arrest, so he took the first opportunity of clearing out. He was going over to Adramyti on the Asiatic side, so as to get out of it all.'

'I see. Well, did he tell you anything useful?'

'He did, sir. You have heard that Enver Bey has informed our Chief Command that he intends to send French and British subjects to Gallipoli, so that they will be the first sufferers when we bombard the place.'

'Yes, I've heard that,' Strang answered, staring keenly at Ken.

'Well, sir, the Pacha says that the first lot is to leave Constantinople to-morrow. They are going with a batch of troops in a transport called the "Bergaz."'

'And,' he added—'my father will be with them.'

The commander of G2 pursed his lips in a soundless whistle.

'By Jove,' he said slowly, 'this is worth hearing. This is most interesting.'

He gave a low chuckle. 'Rather a smack in the eye for friend Enver if we can bring it off. Tell me, Carrington, did the Pacha say whether this trooper would have an escort?'

'I asked him that, sir, but he did not know. And he said this—That he would not have told us at all except for the fact that he thinks it brutal of Enver to send civilians into the firing line, and that he hopes, in case you find it necessary to sink the trooper, that you will allow the men to escape with their lives.'

Strang nodded thoughtfully.

'Hm, yes, I suppose I shall have to do that. After all, they won't be much use without rifles or kit, and the chances are that most of 'em will desert as soon as they reach the shore.

'But we mustn't count our chickens before they're hatched, eh, Carrington? We've got to find that transport before we can deal with her.'

He asked a few more questions, then dismissed Ken.

‘You can tell the Pacha I shall respect his wishes,’ he said, as Ken left his cabin.

All that night G2 cruised on the surface, going only at half speed so as to economise petrol, and at the same time re-charge her dynamos. As for Ken, tired out with his exertions, he lay upon the throbbing steel floor, wrapped in a blanket, and slept as peacefully as he had ever slept in his life.

It was broad day when he woke, feeling more refreshed than for days past, and quite ready for the plain though plentiful breakfast that was served out.

A glance which Williams allowed him through the periscope showed an expanse of bright blue sea sparkling under a clear sky and a light breeze, but with no sail in sight, and shortly afterwards G2 was submerged until nothing but her periscope remained above the surface.

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By this time the rumour of the expected trooper was all through the little ship, and there was an air of subdued excitement on every face.

'Where are we now?' asked Ken of Williams.

'Somewhere between Marmora Island and Rodosto. Whatever comes out o' the Bosphorus for the Dardanelles is bound to run past us, and then—' A wink said more than words.

The hours dragged by, and Roy began to growl again at the tediousness of life beneath the ocean wave. Dinner time passed and still there was no sign of the trooper.

'Looks to me as if news had got abroad that we're a waiting for 'em,' growled Williams at last. 'Them chaps as got to land last night must ha' wired to headquarters.'

The other coxswain who was at the periscope at the moment, looked up.

'Then the wires must ha' been down, Joe. She's a coming right now.'

'Let's have a look,' exclaimed Williams, springing across.

'Ay, you're right, Bill. There she is. A big un, too!'

'And, lumme,' he added with a growl, 'a blighted torpedo boat a escorting of her!'

'Tis only one o' them tin Turkish rattle-traps,' said Bill with a pitying air. 'The old man'll slap a tin fish into her afore she knows what's hit her.'

As he spoke, the engines were already quickening, and G2 had begun to glide away at the top speed of her powerful electrics. The deep hum of the dynamos filled the long interior, and on every face was a look of eager expectancy.

As for Ken, his heart was throbbing like the dynamos themselves. The feeling that his father, whom he had hardly hoped ever to see again, was within a mile or so, had plunged him into such a state of tense excitement that it was all he could do to control it.

He turned to speak to Williams, but the latter had gone forward, and was standing by the torpedo in the fore tube.

The other coxswain, too, had gone to his place, and Sub-Lieutenant Hotham had taken his seat at the forward periscope.

For four minutes, which seemed to Ken like four hours, the submarine drove onwards in silence. Then came a sharp order from the commander, and she began to rise.

'What's she coming up for?' asked Roy of Ken in a low voice.

'She's got to, so as to fire her torpedo. You can't fire so long as you're submerged.'

'But if they see us, they'll let loose with their guns.'

'They've only got the periscopes to shoot at. Take more than Turkish gunners to hit them.'

'Stand by!' came the crisp order from Commander Strang. 'Three points to port—one more. Don't miss her, whatever you do, Williams. She's got the legs of us, and we shan't get a second shot.'

'That's right. Steady now. Shut down! Let go!'

Ken heard a sharp hiss as the compressed air drove the long gray Whitehead out of its tube, and sent it flashing away on its deadly errand. Young Hotham sat still as a statue, his eyes glued to the periscope. The rest of the crew seemed hardly to breathe. As for Ken, his mouth was dry. To him, more than to any one else aboard, the success or failure of the shot meant much.

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Five, ten, fifteen seconds—then Hotham gave a sharp cry.

‘Got her. Got her, by the living jingo! Oh, good shot, Williams!’

As he spoke a dull shock made the whole hull of G2 quiver.

‘Hurrah!’ shouted Ken, and the cheer was echoed by a score of voices.

‘Struck her just aft the engines,’ exclaimed Hotham jubilantly. ‘Settled her hash all right. Gad, they’ve got pluck. They’re still shooting. Ah, did you hear that, Carrington?’—as the submarine quivered again slightly. ‘That was a shell. It struck the water not ten yards away.’

‘But that’s the last,’ he continued. ‘She’s cocking her bows up. Phew, the whole bottom’s knocked out of her. There she goes. She’s sinking. Poor beggars, they haven’t time to get out a boat, and we’ll never reach ’em in time to save any of them.’

‘Her stern’s under. Bow’s straight up in the air!’ He paused a moment.

‘All over,’ he added quietly. ‘She’s gone.’ Commander Strang’s voice rang out from farther aft. Ken felt the vessel rising, and a few moments later a slight swaying told that she was on the surface. Up went the hatch, and the terrible clatter of the petrol engines replaced the deep purr of the dynamos.

‘I’d give a finger to be on deck,’ said Ken to Roy, and for once Roy did not jeer. He merely nodded, for he knew how desperately anxious Ken was about his father.

Ken had not long to wait. A few minutes later, an order was passed for Carrington to go up, and Ken darted up the steel ladder like a lamplighter.

Outside, he found the sun gone, the sky covered with clouds, and a threat of rain in the cool air. But it was not the weather he thought of. His eyes were at once fixed upon a large steamer about two miles off to the southward. Clouds of sooty smoke were pouring from her funnels, and a yeasty wake trailed away behind her. Taking warning by the fate of her escort, she was doing all she knew to escape.

‘Will she beat us? Will she get away?’ Ken asked anxiously of one of the gun crew.

‘Will she spread her little wings an’ turn into a waterplane?’ replied the man with a grin. ‘Bless you, soldier, she couldn’t do more’n fourteen knots when she come out o’ the builder’s yard, and that’s two more’n she’s going now. You watch an’ see how far she gets away.’

A very few moments’ watching was enough to convince Ken that G2 was overhauling her prey hand over fist. Within less than a quarter of an hour a mile of the steamer’s

lead had gone. Another five minutes and the distance between the two was barely twelve hundred yards.

'Hallo, they're getting gay!' remarked the big bluejacket, as rifles began to spit and bullets to throw up little jets of spray around the rushing submarine.

Presently one clanged against the conning tower itself. Commander Strang gave an order, and a little row of bunting ran up on the tiny mast of the submarine.

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""Heave to, or I'll sink you," that means,' observed Ken's friend.

The only response was a thicker hail of bullets. But the low deck of G2, flying onwards as she was at about twenty-two land miles an hour, made a poor target, and the Turks failed to do any damage beyond knocking a little paint off.

'Confound 'em!' growled Strang. 'They haven't got sense enough to come in out of the rain. Give 'em a shell, Watson.'

The long gray 12-pounder was ready. Her vicious-looking muzzle swung round. There was a ringing bang, and the shell, small but charged with deadly lyddite, spun away on its errand.

[Illustration: 'A black-browed officer came to the rail.']

Ken, watching eagerly, saw a bright flash light the side of the steamer, close under her stern, and as a cloud of smoke floated up, the crash of the explosion came back to his ears.

The big steamer staggered and yawed right out of her course.

'Capital!' said Strang with strong approval. 'That's hashed her steering. Signal 'em to heave to, or the next will be in their engine-room.'

There were a few more scattering rifle shots, but the officers on the transport soon stopped that. The transport herself, with her rudder in rags, was out of all control. Her engines were stopped, and she lay sullenly waiting for her saucy little enemy.

Strang gave a sigh of relief.

'Glad they had the sense to shut up,' he said to Ken. 'If they'd gone on shooting I should have had to sock it into them, and I didn't want to break my promise to your old Pacha.'

The submarine, smartly handled as usual, glided up close under the tall side of the transport, and Strang hailed her in French.

A black-browed officer, with angry eyes, came to the rail, and answered in the same language.

'You have British and French prisoners aboard,' said Strang sharply. 'You will be good enough to put them all into a boat and send them across.'

'And if I refuse?' retorted the other.

'I shall shell you until you think better of it,' was the calm reply.

The other bit his lips. 'Very well,' he said sullenly. 'I have no choice.'

'Look out for treachery, sir,' said Ken in a low voice. 'That man means mischief, I believe.'

'He is an ugly looking beggar. But what can he do?'

The words were hardly out of his mouth before the black-browed officer flung up his arm, with a pistol gripped in his fist, and fired straight at Commander Strang's head.

Quick as he was, Ken was quicker. As the man's arm came up, so did Ken's, and seizing Strang by the wrist, he jerked him back.

Before the man could fire a second time, one of the bluejackets had raised his rifle and shot him through the body.

'Thank you, Carrington,' said the commander, glancing at the gray splash of lead on the deck, just where he had been standing the previous moment, 'You were right, and I was wrong.'

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'Speak to them in their own language,' he continued coolly. 'Tell them I'll blow them out of the water if they try any more tricks of that sort.'

Ken's announcement was followed by dead silence aboard the steamer. Then a second officer appeared at the rail. He had both hands up.

'We surrender,' he said.

'Bout time, too,' growled the big bluejacket.

Strang repeated his former orders, and this time they were obeyed without hesitation. Ken's heart beat thickly as he watched the prisoners hurrying into the boat which had been lowered from her davits to a level with the deck.

'Do you see your father yet?' Strang asked.

'Not yet, sir,' Ken answered, with his eyes fixed on the fast-filling boat.

'Sixteen—seventeen—eighteen,' he counted mechanically. Suddenly a slight cry escaped his lips, and he started forward.

'Father!' he shouted loudly.

An upright man with keen blue eyes, a man of about fifty, but whose hair and moustache were almost white, was in the act of getting to the boat. At Ken's cry, he started violently, stopped short and stared incredulously in the direction of the sound.

'Father!' shouted Ken again.

'You, Ken?' The tone was one of utter amazement.

'It's me all right, dad,' Ken answered in a voice which shook a little in spite of himself.

Before their eyes the other seemed to shake off ten years of age. He sprang into the boat as lightly as a boy. Three more followed, making twenty-two in all. Then the blocks creaked, and the boat was rapidly lowered to the water.

Oars began to ply vigorously, and she shot across the intervening space, and a minute later was alongside the submarine.

'You must wait there, please, gentlemen,' said Strang courteously. 'I have to deal with the troops at once. Keep well astern.'

Ken was aching to greet his father, but there was plenty for him to do for the moment. He had to translate the commander's orders, which were that all those aboard the

steamer should get away at once in the boats. He gave them twenty minutes for the operation.

They were the longest twenty minutes Ken every knew, but they were over at last. The crowded boats pulled slowly away in a northerly direction, the big steamer floated empty and helpless.

'Do we board her, sir?' asked young Hotham of Strang.

'Yes, I'll save my torpedoes while I can. Put a good charge of gun-cotton in her hold. Quick as you can, Hotham. We may have a destroyer down on us any minute. You may be sure they had plenty of time to use their wireless.'

He turned to the boatful of released prisoners. They were of every sort, young and old—French, English, with even one or two Russians and Belgians.

'Gentlemen,' he said briefly, 'I can't ask you all aboard. The reason is obvious. In a submarine there is only room for a certain number, and I am already three beyond my proper complement. The question is, what I am to do with you for your safety, and I should be obliged if two of you would come aboard to discuss matters with me. One whom I will specially ask is Captain Carrington.'

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Ken's breath came quickly as he watched his father step across out of the boat on to the steel deck of G2, but like the trained soldier that he was, he did not move. Strang, however, had not forgotten him.

'You shall have your father to yourself as soon as we have settled things,' he said, as he passed him.

Mr Ramsay, who had been manager of a British bank at Constantinople, was the other delegate from the boat. He and Ken's father both shook hands with Strang.

'We are most deeply indebted to you, Commander Strang,' said Captain Carrington. 'We never hoped for such luck as to find a British vessel already in the Marmora.'

'Ours is unfortunately the only sort that can get through at present, sir,' said Strang with a smile. 'And after all, I don't know that you have much cause for gratitude. I can't ferry you home through the Straits, for in the first place I can't carry you, and in the second I have my job to do up here. There is only one thing I can think of.' Here he lowered his voice, so that Ken could hear no more. But presently he saw the others nod, evidently agreeing to the proposal, whatever it was.

[Illustration: 'Ken's hand gripped that of father.']

Mr Ramsay went back to the boat, and she was at once taken in tow. The screws began to revolve again, and G2 swung round in a half circle, and headed due east, running on the surface.

Next minute Ken's hand gripped that of his father.

For a moment neither of them could speak. They had not seen one another for two long years, and both had so much to say that they did not know where to begin.

Strang, with his usual kindly tact, touched Ken on the shoulder.

'Take your father for'ard of the conning tower. You can talk there without interruption. We shall be on the surface for the present.'

Ken thanked him gratefully, and they both went forward, and there, leaning against the gray steel of the little turret, with the small waves lapping over the turtle-back forward, Ken told his father how their strange meeting had come about.

Then Captain Carrington gave his son a brief sketch of his two years' imprisonment. It had not been as bad as it might, for the kindly Othman Pacha had used what interest he possessed to get his friend shut up in a fortress instead of the usual horrible Turkish jail. Still it had been bad enough, and the worst of it, the deep anxiety he had felt for Ken.

'Well, that's all over, dad, thank goodness,' said Ken. 'Everything will be all right now. It's only a matter of time before we force the Dardanelles, and—'

'A matter of time,' broke in the other with the quizzical smile that Ken remembered so well. 'Just so, my boy, but I'm afraid you are forgetting something. What are we to do meanwhile? Here we are, in the heart of Turkish territory, and no way out. It's rather early to say that our troubles are all over, isn't it?'



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Ken's face fell. In his delight at meeting his father again, he had quite forgotten the difficulties still before them.

'But—but I thought that Lieutenant Strang had a plan,' he stammered. 'He's towing the boat somewhere.'

His father nodded.

'Yes, I suppose it need be no secret from you. He is taking us, or trying to take us, to a certain cave on the south shore of the sea. It is one of the hidden petrol bases which are supplied by friendly Armenians. But, even if we get there safely, there is always the risk of discovery by the enemy, as well as difficulties of provisioning so many of us. And we may not even get there. Supposing that an enemy ship appears in chase, and the submarine has to submerge, what then?'

Ken gazed at his father blankly. Before he could speak again a sharp hail came from the look-out in the conning tower.

'Ship in sight, sir!'

CHAPTER XVII

THE BOARDING PARTY

Ken and his father were both on their feet in an instant. While they had been talking it had turned misty. It was only a haze, but it blurred the horizon so that at first they could not see the vessel.

But presently Ken pointed.

'There she is. Do you see, dad?'

Captain Carrington nodded.

'I see her, Ken, but my eyes are not what they were. I can't tell what she is.'

At this moment Lieutenant Strang stepped up to them.

'It's just as I was afraid, sir,' he said quietly. 'There appears to be something after us. It's so thick I can hardly make out what she is yet, but in any case it's precious awkward.'



'Very awkward indeed,' admitted Captain Carrington. 'Alone, you would be all right, for you could submerge of course, but if so you leave us prisoners to be picked up again. Still, of course, there is no choice. You must not risk your ship.'

Strang bit his lip. He knew that Captain Carrington was right. But it went bitterly against the grain to abandon the people whom he had rescued with so much trouble. As for Ken, the idea of losing his father again just after he had found him sent his spirits down to zero.

After a moment's thought, Strang spoke again. 'I might leave the boat, sir, and tackle this fellow, whoever he is. It's on the cards I might sink him and come back again and pick you up.'

'That might be worth trying,' answered Captain Carrington. And he spoke as calmly as if the upshot was of absolutely no consequence to him whatever.

Ken, who had been staring hard at the approaching craft, turned quickly to the commander.

'Couldn't you capture her, sir?' he said eagerly.

Strang stared as if he thought that Ken had suddenly taken leave of his senses.

'Capture her?' he repeated.

'Yes, sir. Then you could put all the prisoners aboard her, and they could find their own way to the hiding place. And Horan and myself, too, perhaps.'

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Strang gave a low whistle.

"Pon my soul, it's an idea. Especially as, being an enemy ship, she wouldn't be so likely to be searched."

'It would be very nice for us if it could be managed,' said Captain Carrington with a smile. 'But I suppose it is quite out of the question, Mr Strang?'

'It all depends on what she is, sir,' replied Strang, as he put up his binoculars and focused them on the indistinct patch on the misty horizon.

Presently he put them down.

'She's nothing but a launch,' he said quickly. 'Armed, of course, but probably only a 6-pounder. I'm hanged if I don't try it.'

'Very good,' said Captain Carrington, speaking as calmly as ever. 'I will go back into the boat, and tell my friends. By the bye, how would it do to use us as bait for the trap? If you were merely to submerge, and lie close by with only your periscopes showing, it seems to me that you might manage to take them unawares.'

'I've got a better plan than that, sir,' broke in Ken quickly. 'Put Horan and myself in the boat. Give us some pistols. We'll sham shipwrecked. Most of us can hide in the bottom of the boat. The launch won't have much of a crew. With a rush we might overpower them.'

The boldness of Ken's suggestion made both men gasp. Strang was the first to speak.

'It's a big risk, but it might work. Are you willing, Captain Carrington?'

A grim smile parted the lips of Ken's father.

'Willing! It would make me young again.'

Strang's decision was taken like a flash.

'It goes, then. And I'll lend you a couple of my men as well. Williams and Johnston. Hefty chaps in a scrimmage, and both equal to engines of any kind. But we must be smart. This must be done before the Turks get any notion of what is up.'

He dashed back to the conning tower, and orders flew like hail. The men were equally quick to obey. Williams and Johnston came tumbling up, and Roy hard at their heels.

'What's up?' demanded Roy eagerly of Ken, and when Ken had quickly explained, the big New Zealander's face fairly glowed with delight.

'Fine, oh fine!' he cried. 'I began to think we were never going to get another chance. 'It's the greatest scheme you ever thought of, Ken.'

Two more bluejackets rushed up, with armfuls of cutlasses.

'Commander says these are the jokers for a scrimmage,' one told Ken, as they hurriedly passed them across to the people in the boat.

'He's right,' said Roy, 'but we shall want a pistol or two as well.'

'Plenty here, Horan,' said Williams, the torpedo coxswain, holding up a couple of the big regulation Navy revolvers. 'It's all right. We've got all we want. Come along in, you two soldiers.'

Ken and Roy tumbled aboard the boat, other three of the ex-prisoners, who were too old or infirm to be any use as fighters, were hastily transferred to the submarine.

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Inside of three minutes all was ready, the warp was cast off, and the steel hatch in the conning tower dropped with a clang. In a trice G2 began to sink, and within an incredibly short space of time she had dipped out of sight beneath the sea, and the boat lay alone on the surface, rocking slightly to the send of the small gray waves.

For the first time Ken had leisure to glance round at his companions. Including Roy, himself, Williams, and Johnston, the full number was twenty-three, and of them all there was not one who did not look keen and eager for the fray. All had suffered at the hands of the enemy, some had lost all they had in the world. Every man was anxious to get a little of his own back. By the way they gripped the cutlasses that had been served out, by their grim faces, and eager eyes, Ken felt certain that there would be no hesitation when the critical moment arrived.

'What is the craft?' asked Roy, who was crowding close beside him.

'Nothing but a launch,' Ken answered.

'She looks pretty big for a launch,' said Roy, staring at the vessel which was now near enough to see the shape of her.

'Oh, I dare say she's a fifty-footer. And no doubt she carries a good few men. And a gun, too. It's not going to be any picnic, old chap. Our only chance is a surprise.'

'And there won't be much surprise about it, if we let them see how many men we have aboard,' cut in Captain Carrington briskly. The years had dropped away from him, and he was again the naval officer.

'Get down, Ken, and you too, Horan. Williams and Johnston, hide yourselves under that tarpaulin forward.'

Very shortly all the younger men of the party were stowed away, some under the thwarts, others under a couple of tarpaulins which Strang had put in for the purpose. All weapons were carefully hidden, and the dozen older men, who were all that were left in sight, were directed to loll about, as though suffering from long exposure or fatigue.

The haze was thickening, so there was little danger of the people aboard the launch noticing the manoeuvre.

The launch had, however, sighted the boat. There was no doubt about that, for she had altered her course, and was coming straight towards them.

'Beastly fuggy under here!' growled Roy in Ken's ear.

'Take it easy, old chap. We shan't have long to wait.'

Ken's father heard, and bent down.

'She's within a mile. Mind you don't move till I give the word.'

'All right, dad,' came the muffled response from under the tarpaulin. 'How big is she?'

'A good size. She looks as if she carried a score of men. And there's a 6-pounder in her bows.'

Soon she was so near that Ken clearly heard the beat of her engine. His breath came quick and short. The critical moment was very near.

The revolutions slackened, and a man hailed from the launch, speaking, to Ken's dismay, in harsh German.

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'Who are you? What are you doing there?' the speaker demanded suspiciously.

'We are British and French from Constantinople,' answered Captain Carrington, using the same language. 'We were aboard the Turkish transport "Bergaz" which was sunk earlier in the day by a British submarine.'

'Blitzen!' exclaimed the German angrily. 'Then the message was true after all. Those verdomde British have managed to pass the mine-fields.'

'And where is the submarine?' he demanded savagely.

'She was forced to abandon us. One of your warships hove in sight.'

The German paused a moment. His eyes scanned the surface in every direction. But there was no sign of G 2's periscopes. Either she had gone under altogether, or withdrawn to such a distance that her periscopes were invisible in the mist.

'Train the gun on them,' growled the German officer. Then, raising his voice, 'If this is a trap, every one of you will pay for it with your lives.'

'I have told you the literal truth,' said Captain Carrington coldly. 'You can take us or leave us as you wish.'

Again the German hesitated.

'The safest way will be to haul off and sink them,' he said to a Turk who stood beside him. He spoke in Turkish, but Ken, of course, understood, and knowing the brutality of the average German officer, felt anything but happy.

Apparently the Turkish officer had different views, for after a short conversation the German gave an order, and the launch moved forward again.

Ken, though he could not see what was happening, heard the beat of her screw, and every nerve in his body tingled. As for Captain Carrington and the rest, they sat in their places, not moving an inch, and doing their best to convey the idea that they were quite worn out, and cared not at all whether they were retaken or not.

Yet, under his coat, or in his pocket, each man gripped his revolver, while his cutlass lay handy at his feet.

The launch came on slowly, and her crew fortunately were hardly noticing the boat. Their eyes were busy, searching the misty surface for the periscope of their deadly enemy.

Only the German seemed to have any suspicion concerning those in the boat. When the launch was within about half a dozen yards, he spoke again.

'You there, Englishman, stand up!' he ordered sharply. 'You, I mean, the one who speaks German.'

Captain Carrington rose leisurely to his feet.

'You will be the first to pay for treachery,' said the German fiercely. 'Put your hands up.'

Ken quivered. To him it sounded as though his father's death warrant had been sounded. At the first sign of attack the German would shoot him. Yet he had his orders, and he dared not move.

It seemed an age before he felt a slight jar. It was the launch touching the boat.

'What's under that tarpaulin?' came the sharp question from the German.

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Crack! Crack! Two shots rang out simultaneously. There was a scream and the sound of a heavy splash.

Ken waited no longer. Like a flash he flung aside the tarpaulin, and leaped to his feet. The German was gone, he was struggling in the water and one of their own men was lying writhing in the bottom of the boat.

'Up and at 'em!' came a hurricane yell from Williams, and with one bound the big coxswain had leaped aboard the launch, and was laying about him with his cutlass.

Ken waited just long enough to make sure that his father was not hurt, then followed.

He heard the Turkish officer shout an order for full steam ahead. The launch darted forward, but it was too late. Johnston and another man detailed for the purpose had already flung grappling irons across. The launch drew the boat with her, close alongside.

'Out, ye black-faced blighter!' roared Williams, as he cut down a great burly Turk who was swinging at him with a rifle butt.

Inside ten seconds every mother's son in the boat had reached the deck of the launch, and a regular hand-to-hand battle raged.

The launch was heavily manned, and after their first surprise the Turks pulled themselves together and fought desperately. Though the launch was a big one, yet there was not much room on her decks for nearly fifty fighting men, and Ken found himself literally wedged in the centre of a tight-packed mob, which swayed from side to side as the fighters struggled frantically for elbow room.

In a way this told in favour of the Britishers. The short, heavy Navy cutlasses were much better adapted for a melee of this sort than the rifles and bayonets with which the Turks were armed.

Ken found himself up against a tall, brown-faced fellow who looked like an Arab and was armed with a long sword. He made a fearful slash at Ken, and though Ken saved his head by a guard with his cutlass, he was beaten to his knees.

Up went the Arab's sword again, Ken saw the glitter in his savage eyes, and thought it was all over when, in the very nick of time, a revolver spat and turned the fierce face into a blood-stained horror.

Struggling up, he saw Roy leap past and fire a second time at a man who was swinging at him with a rifle butt. The latter, hit in the shoulder, staggered, caught his heels in the rail, and went backwards into the sea.



On every side revolvers were cracking, there was a confused medley of blows, yells, and oaths. And all the time the launch, with no one at the tiller, and the boat fast alongside, charged wildly across the sea.

Man for man, the Turks were better fighters than the boarders, most of whom were civilians and unaccustomed to the use of weapons. But the latter were fighting for their lives and were splendidly led by Captain Carrington, Ken, Roy, and the two big sailor men. It was really the latter five who carried the day. They were everywhere at once, slashing and shooting like demons, and by degrees the Turks fell back before them.

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Half a dozen or more were driven over the side into the sea, and left perforce to drown.

At last the Turks broke and gave way. Some dropped their weapons and flung up their hands in token of surrender.

'They've surrendered!' cried Captain Carrington. 'Give them quarter.'

At that moment Ken saw a Turkish officer, his face covered with blood, spring out of the crowd aft and rush forward.

'Look out there!' he shouted, and wrenching himself loose from the press, raced after the man.

The officer, however, had a long start, and before Ken could catch him, had reached the gun and was swinging it round.

'Look out!' yelled Ken again, as he realised what the man was after. He was desperate, and meant to turn the gun full upon the packed crowd, destroying friend and foe alike.

He had got the gun round, his finger was almost on the button when Ken reached him, and going at him head down, like a Rugby tackler, flung both arms around his waist.

[Illustration: 'On every side revolvers were cracking.']

With a fierce exclamation, the man hit out with his fist, but the blow fell harmlessly on Ken's back. Then, twining both hands in Ken's collar, he made a frantic effort to break his grip and fling him aside.

Ken held on like grim death. If he failed, it meant death for all his friends. The other was a powerful, wiry man in the prime of life, while Ken had not yet come to his full strength. For some seconds they struggled fiercely, the Turk exerting every effort to reach the gun, Ken straining frantically to hold him off.

Ken's heel caught in a ring bolt. He felt himself falling, but managed to drag the other down with him. But his own head struck the deck with such force as to half stun him, and he felt his grip relaxing.

'Dog, you shall die with the rest!' hissed the other, as at last he tore himself free, and sprang to the gun.

But Ken was not done yet. He had fallen almost under the gun, and swiftly lifting one foot he kicked out desperately at the gray barrel above him.

There was a crash which nearly deafened him, and for a moment he believed that the madman had succeeded in his awful purpose. Then a tall figure sprang across him, and with a shout Roy drove his fist into the Turk's face.

Up went the man's arms, he staggered back and fell into the sea.

'Well done, Ken!' cried Roy. 'That's finished it.'

Ken scrambled to his feet and stared round in amazement.

'W—Where did the shell go?' he stammered.

'Somewhere in the direction of Constantinople,' was the reply. 'Your kick did it, Ken.'

'It's all right,' he added jubilantly. 'The rest of the chaps have given in. The launch is ours.'

CHAPTER XVIII

RUNNING THE GAUNTLET

'It seemed shabby to leave you to do all the fighting, but if I had come into it I'm afraid you'd have been left without a ship.'

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The speaker was Lieutenant Strang, who stood on the deck of G2, which had risen again and was lying alongside the launch.

'It was your fellows who won the battle for us,' answered Captain Carrington cheerfully. 'I wish to congratulate you on the possession of two such men as Williams and Johnston.' Williams stepped forward and touched his cap.

'If you please, sir, the captain here and his son and Horan, they did as much as any. But all on 'em fought like good 'uns.'

'What are your losses, sir?' asked the lieutenant of Captain Garrington.

'Two killed, three rather badly wounded.'

'You got off lightly. There don't seem to be many Turks left.'

'Only nine alive, and of those four are wounded.'

'Are the launch's engines all right?'

'Nothing wrong with them,' answered the captain, 'so Williams tells me.'

'Well, it's getting late and very thick. You had better follow me, and I will escort you to the place we spoke of. The Turks who are sound can take the boat and be towed until we are off one of the islands, when we can cast them off and they can land.'

Ken stepped up to his father, and said something in a low voice. A slightly startled expression appeared on the captain's face.

'You think it possible, Ken?' he said sharply.

'I do. I believe we could get through.'

'Then I will suggest it to Lieutenant Strang.'

'Lieutenant Strang,' he called. 'Before we start I have a suggestion to make. I will come across if you will permit me.'

'Certainly, sir.'

The launch lay so close to the submarine that it was easy for the Captain to spring across. Strang met him, and for some moments the two talked in whispers.

At first the commander of the submarine seemed unwilling to agree to the captain's proposal, but presently Ken, who was watching breathlessly, saw him nod his head.

Then the captain smiled, and turning leaped lightly back on to the launch.

'It's all right, Ken,' he said. 'We are going to try it.'

'Hurrah!' cried Ken in high delight.

'Try what?' demanded Roy. 'Hang it all! Don't keep us in the dark. What's all the mystery about?' Ken glanced at his father.

'All right,' said the latter. 'Every one must know and agree before we start.'

'Gentlemen,' he said, addressing the anxious crowd who surrounded him, 'my son has suggested that we might do something better than go and lie up for an indefinite time in the hiding-place which would be our only possible refuge on these shores, and where we should be in constant danger from the enemy. His idea is that we might make a dash back down the Straits.'

'Mais, it would be ze madness!' exclaimed an elderly Frenchman, with a gray imperial and a blood-stained bandage around his head. 'Zey would sink us.'

'So they would under ordinary circumstances,' agreed the captain. 'But the night and—more than that—the fog are in our favour. Besides this launch is Turkish, and we have several people aboard who can speak the language.'

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'But ze mines!' objected the Frenchman.

'There again we are fairly safe. The launch is of such shallow draught that she will easily pass over the mine-fields. Floating mines we must of course risk, but there are not likely to be many about, for the Turks only send them down when an attack is expected. One other point is in our favour. This launch is fast. With any luck, we shall be through the Straits and in safety long before daylight.'

The Frenchman nodded.

'Vair well, Monsieur le Capitaine. For me, I am satisfied.'

'I think we all are,' said an elderly Englishman named Symons.

The captain looked round, but no one offered any objection.

'Then it is decided,' he said quietly, and proceeded to issue his orders as briskly as he had done, years before, on his own quarter-deck.

The Turks were transferred to the empty boat, and taken in tow by the submarine. Johnston went back to G2, but Williams remained as engineer in charge of the launch. The dead Turks were put overboard, and the traces of the fight quickly removed.

Then Strang bade them farewell and good luck, the engines began to move, the screw churned the water, and the prize, heading westwards, sped rapidly towards the mouth of the Straits.

Williams, who was the sort of man who could tackle anything in the way of machinery, from a sewing machine to a Dreadnought's turbines, soon got the hang of the launch's engines.

'They're a bit of all right,' he said to Ken and Roy, who had volunteered as stokers and oilers. 'Blowed if I thought them Turks had anything as good. But I reckon this here craft come from Germany.'

'She certainly can leg it,' observed Ken, as he noticed how the whole fabric of the little craft quivered under the drive of the rapidly revolving screw.

'Ay, and I reckon we'll need all she's got afore we're through,' replied Williams dryly, as he squirted oil into a bearing.

'We ought to be all right if the fog holds,' said Ken.



'Ay, if it does. I'll allow it's thick enough up here, but there ain't no saying what it'll be down in them straits. Fogs is uncertain things at best and you never can tell when you'll run out o' one into clear weather.'

Williams's warning made Ken feel distinctly uneasy, and every few minutes he kept looking out to see what the weather was doing. But so far from clearing, the mist seemed to thicken, until it was as gray and wet as the Channel on a late autumn day. Night, too, was closing down, and soon it was so dark that one end of the vessel could not be seen from the other.

The distance to the mouth of the Straits was about thirty miles, and the Straits themselves have a length of thirty-five. The launch was good for fifteen knots, and though it would not be possible to go at full speed through the Narrows, they hoped, barring accidents, to do the journey in about five hours.

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Having done two hours' work, Ken and Roy were relieved, and after a much needed wash, went into the cabin for a mouthful of food. Then Ken went forward, to find his father, wearing a rough black oilskin, combining the duties of look-out and skipper. At the wheel was a young Englishman named Morgan, an amateur yachtsman who knew the Straits like the palm of his hand.

'Where are we now, dad?' asked Ken.

'Opposite Bulair.'

'What—in the Straits?'

'At their mouth, Ken.'

'We haven't wasted much time, then.'

'Indeed we haven't. But I am afraid we shall have to slow a bit now. The fog is thicker than ever, there are no lights, and we don't want to come to an ignominious end by piling ourselves up on the cliffs.'

'Still the fog's our best friend,' he continued, 'and we have plenty of time before us. If we average no more than half-speed we should be clear before daylight.'

For another twenty minutes they carried on at full speed through the choking smother, then Captain Carrington rang to reduce speed.

'We're off Gallipoli now,' he said. 'That's where I should have been by this time, Ken, if G 2 had not popped up just at the proper moment.'

'It isn't exactly a salubrious spot,' Ken answered with a smile. 'The "Lizzie" has been chucking her 15-inchers into the town whenever she hadn't anything else to do.'

For the next two hours the launch nosed her way cautiously south-westwards, through the wet smother. Most of the time she kept fairly close under the Asiatic shore. There were fewer forts that side, and less danger therefore of attracting attention.

During the whole of that time she never sighted so much as a rowing boat. The Straits were as empty as a country lane on a winter night.

About eleven Ken, who had done another spell of stoking, went forward again to where his father kept his ceaseless watch.

'Getting near the Narrows, aren't we?' he asked in a low voice.

'We are, Ken. If my reckoning is right Nagara Point is almost on our port bow.'

'There's a light of some sort just ahead, sir,' said Morgan from the wheel.

'I see it too,' said Ken quickly. 'Can it be from the fort?'

Quickly the captain rang to slow still more. With barely steerage way the launch moved noiselessly forward. There followed some moments of breathless silence, while the three stared at the dull mysterious glow which was now almost exactly ahead.

'It's a craft of some sort,' said Ken in a sharp whisper. 'The light's moving.'

'You're right. Starboard a trifle, Morgan.'

Again a pause. Then Ken spoke again.

'It's a tug, father. She's towing a string of barges. She's going across to Maidos.'

'Then I know what they're doing,' said Morgan.' They're taking stores across from the Asiatic side. I heard they had started that game since our submarines began to worry them in the Marmora.'

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'I thought as much,' Captain Carrington answered quietly. 'Then it is up to us to stop it.'

Ken glanced quickly at his father, but there was not light to see his face. It was Morgan who voiced his thought.

'We shall bring the fire of all the batteries down on us,' he said.

'Of course,' Captain Carrington's voice was calm as ever. 'Starboard another point, Morgan. Ken, call Dimmock. He's an ex-gunnery lieutenant, and can handle the 6-pounder.'

'I'm here already, sir,' came a voice out of the gloom. I saw the light, and guessed what was up.'

'I can help, father,' said Ken. 'Ah, and here's Roy.'

All three sprang forward to the gun. It had already been loaded and a dozen spare shells were ready alongside.

'This is luck,' said Roy in a gleeful whisper, as he ranged himself alongside the gun. He, like the rest, was perfectly well aware that the first shot they fired would bring down on them the concentrated fire of all the batteries on both shores, and that their chances of escape were hardly worth considering. But this did not weigh for a moment, if they were able to strike a blow for the Empire.

The revolutions were increasing, the launch moved more rapidly down upon her quarry.

'Three barges!' exclaimed Roy. 'Big 'uns, too! I say, there must be tons of stuff aboard. Jove, won't the Turks be sick?'

'We must get the tug first,' said Dimmock, who, though a man of forty, was as keen as a boy. 'If we can slap it into her first, we can deal with the barges at our leisure.'

As he spoke he was squinting along the barrel, his right hand busy with the sighting screw.

'Hang this fog!' he muttered. 'I can hardly see what I'm shooting at.'

The launch was now within little more than a hundred yards of the tug which was puffing noisily along, her string of barges tailing heavily down the current, and her crew utterly unaware of the hidden danger gliding down upon them through the fog.

'I'm beastly rusty,' continued Dimmock. 'Still, I hardly think I can miss her at this range.'

As he spoke his finger pressed the electric button, and the gun barked with that ear-splitting crack peculiar to the 6-pounder.

The tug staggered and rang like an iron drum.

'Not much miss about that!' cried Roy triumphantly. 'You must have got her slap in the boilers.'

'No, it was too high,' said Dimmock in a discontented tone. 'This gun jumps a bit. Sharp there, with that other shell.'

Roy slipped it in as though it were a toy, the breech-block snicked to, and five seconds later a second report roused the echoes.

'That's better,' said Dimmock, as a flash of flame rose from the midships section of the tug. 'Ah, there goes her funnel! She's a goner.'

He was right. The tug swung round to the current, and, with engines stopped, drifted idly down the Straits.



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'What's the matter? They haven't begun to fire yet,' said Roy quickly, as he thrust a third shell into the open breech.

[Illustration: 'Up shot a sheet of crimson flame.']

'So much the better for us,' Ken answered. 'Mr Dimmock, this one ought to do for the nearest barge.'

Hastily Dimmock sighted again at the blunt, low-lying object which loomed dimly ahead in the wet darkness.

Once more the smart little gun spoke, but the crack of the report had hardly sounded before it was drowned by the most appalling crash. Up from the stricken barge shot a sheet of crimson flame, a blaze of fire which mounted a hundred feet into the murky air, and in spite of fog and mist flung its glare upon the iron cliffs on either side the narrow straits.

The launch shuddered as though she had struck a reef, and the blast from the explosion flung every soul who was standing up flat upon her decks.

Hard upon the roar came a wave, a wave which rose high over the bows of the long, slim craft, and swept across her in a torrent of cold, salt water.

It washed Ken back against the rail, which he clutched at desperately, and so saved himself from going overboard.

Dazed and confused, he struggled to his feet.

'Roy!' he cried thickly, 'Roy!'

'All right. We're all right,' came a hoarse reply, and Roy's tall figure rose from close under the opposite rail, and grasping Dimmock, lugged him to his feet.

'Gad, that's done the trick!' he panted. 'The other barges are gone. So's the tug. We've bust the whole caboodle.'

From aft came Captain Carrington's voice, shouting for 'Full speed ahead!'

Time, too, for the gunners in the forts, recovering from their paralysed amazement, were already getting busy and the roar of great guns was followed by the rocket-like hiss of shells.

Like a frightened hare the launch gathered speed and darted away downstream. Shells, each big enough to smash her to kindling, fell on every side, but the gunners on both sides were firing too high, and by a series of miracles the launch was not touched.

Searchlights sprang out, their white fingers feeling through the murk. But no searchlight ever made will penetrate a thousand yards of fog, and the dull glares only served to warn the steersman of the launch of dangers to be avoided.

'Jove, we'll do it yet, Ken,' cried Roy, shouting so as to be heard above the thunderous din of the guns.

'It will be a miracle if we do,' Ken answered. 'Remember we have to run the gauntlet all the way down.'

'It doesn't follow,' Roy said quickly. 'They haven't seen us, and they'll take it for granted that it must have been a submarine. Why, even the sweepers haven't ventured up here.'

'I only hope you're right,' replied Ken fervently.

'Ah!' he broke off, as a shell whizzed over so near they felt the wind of it. 'That was close.'

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By this they had passed Nagara, and turning due south were rushing past the big fort of Kosi Kale. For the moment the tempest of shell had died away behind them.

'I told you so,' said Roy jubilantly. 'They've chucked it. If we don't whack into a beastly mine we shall get clear.'

Indeed, it almost seemed as though he was right. The firing slackened, then stopped completely, and the launch, still untouched, sped through the gloom. Her crew, almost unable to credit such amazing luck, stood about the decks staring out into the darkness, occasionally exchanging a word or two in low voices.

'We're in the Narrows,' said Ken. 'See that luminous patch over to the left. That's Chanak.'

'Almost the same spot where the trawlers were scuppered,' answered Roy.

'Just so. If Fort Hamidieh doesn't open out, we ought really to be all right. We shall be in broader waters.' He took out his watch and glanced at its luminous dial.

'In three minutes we shall know one way or the other,' he added.

For the next hundred and eighty seconds there was no sound but the steady swish of the bow wave and the beat of the powerful engines.

Ken shut his watch with a snap.

'All right. We're past.'

The words were not out of his mouth before there came a ringing report, and a shell, screaming through the air, smacked into the water about a length astern.

'A twelve-pounder!' said Ken sharply, as he turned. 'Ah!' as a blaze of light sprang out about half a mile aft, 'that's why they stopped firing. There's a destroyer after us.'

CHAPTER XIX

IN THE NICK OF TIME

Ken was right. That was why the firing had stopped. A destroyer, which must have been lying in some cove up the Straits, had been summoned by wireless to take revenge on the bold intruder. She was now dashing headlong in pursuit.

Roy stared at the dull white glare which came momentarily nearer.

'Rotten luck!' he observed disgustedly. 'None of the "conquering hero" in ours, I'm afraid, old man.'

'Afraid not,' Ken answered resignedly. 'The brute's got the legs of us, and it'll only take one o' those twelve-pounders to settle our hash. Still, it's no use crying till we're hurt, and the Turks ain't the best gunners in the world.'

'Crash!' Another shell screamed out of the mist.

'Nearer!' said Roy grimly, as the ugly missile fell alongside, sending up a fountain of brine.

'Watch her, doing the outside edge!' he continued, as the launch curved swiftly to port. 'That'll throw 'em off their shooting. Ah, I told you so'—as the third shell went wide.

'We can't shoot back,' growled Dimmock. 'That's the worst of these rotten little bow guns.'

'No, it's simply a matter of running and dodging,' said Ken, and turning went back to where his father was standing.

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'Poor luck, Ken,' said the latter with his usual calmness. 'The beggar's gaining hand over fist. She's at least five knots faster than we.'

'Well, we've hurt the Turks a jolly sight worse than they can hurt us, that's one comfort, dad,' Ken replied. 'They can't replace that ammunition.'

Before his father could answer, a shell from the destroyer passed so close overhead that the wind of it flung them both down. There was a splintering crash, and the launch quivered all over.

'Hurt, father?' cried Ken, springing up.

'Not a bit, thanks. But I'm afraid the launch is.'

'She's still moving anyhow. No, it's only carried away a bit of the cabin top. We're all right still.'

The searchlight grew clearer every moment. Already the hull of the flying launch began to show up in the misty radiance. Her steersman sent her shooting in wide curves, and so succeeded in upsetting the aim of the Turkish gunners. But it was only putting off the inevitable end, and that was clear to every soul aboard.

[Illustration: 'The deck-house melted in a shower of splinters.']

'It's no use, dad,' said Ken, as another shell cut away the top of the stumpy funnel. We can't get away. Let's finish, fighting.'

'Turn and try to ram her?'

'Yes, and Dimmock might by luck get a shell into her. He's a pretty nippy shot in spite of being out of practice.'

'All right, Ken. I'd rather die fighting than running.'

He raised his voice.

'Mr Morgan, put her hard aport! Dimmock, here's your chance for a last shot.'

Round came the launch, turning on her keel like a racing yacht, and straight she sped for her big pursuer. The latter was evidently taken aback by this unexpected manoeuvre, and for a moment her searchlight lost the launch.

The moment the glare was gone the hull of the destroyer showed up dark against the mist.

'Now's your chance, Dimmock!' cried Ken, and almost instantly the little gun spoke, and the crash was followed by a flash which lit the destroyer's deck.

'Oh, good shot, Dimmock!' exclaimed the captain. 'That shell exploded right under her bridge.

For a moment the destroyer yawed right off her course, but she was under control again in a few seconds, and her forward gun spoke once more.

The flash was followed by a tremendous shock, and the launch, with her rudder and part of her stern carried away, spun round helplessly, and began to drift downstream.

'That's finished it,' groaned Roy.

Again the destroyer's gun roared, and the deckhouse melted in a shower of splinters. Ken, struck on the leg by one of them, toppled over helplessly. His leg felt numb, he could not move. There was nothing for it now but to await the inevitable end.

Crash! Vaguely Ken realised that this was a heavier gun than the 12-pounders of the destroyer. He heard a shell roar overhead, then from the destroyer, now no more than a hundred yards away, rose a blinding flash.



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'Hurrah!' he heard Roy shout, but the reason he could not imagine. He made a desperate effort to struggle up, felt the blood gush hot from his wound. His head spun, he fell back and knew no more.

Coming back to consciousness after being knocked out is always a slow and painful business. The first thing that Ken's muddled brain took in was the surprising fact that he was lying in a real bed between beautifully clean sheets.

He had not been in such a bed for more than six months, and he could not understand it at all.

Slowly he opened his eyes, and looked up at a whitewashed ceiling. Through a window opposite the sun was shining and a warm breeze blowing.

'I suppose I'm dreaming,' he said at last, and was surprised to hear how weak and husky his voice seemed.

Some one rose quickly from a chair beside the bed.

'My dear lad,' came his father's voice.

Ken stared at him.

'Is it real?' he asked vaguely. 'Where am I?'

'Absolutely genuine, my boy,' answered Captain Carrington, smiling. 'You are in hospital in Lemnos, and here you've been for two days. We began to think you were never coming round again.'

'I'm sorry I frightened you,' said Ken, 'but I wish you'd tell me how I got here. I had a sort of impression that I ought to be at the bottom of the Dardanelles.'

'The marvel is that we were not all there,' answered his father gravely. 'It was the cruiser "Carnelian" that saved us at the very last moment by putting a six-inch shell into the Turkish destroyer.'

'But how on earth did she come to be there, right up the Straits?' Ken asked amazedly.

'That was Strang's doing. The good chap sent a wireless asking them to look out for us.'

'Jove, that was smart of him,' Ken said smilingly. 'But Roy, dad? Is Roy all right?'

'Quite right. He has rejoined his regiment.'

Ken's face fell.

'What about me, dad? Don't say I shan't be able to do the same.'

'There is no need to say anything of the sort, my boy,' replied his father quickly. 'The only trouble with you is that you lost more blood than was good for you. The splinter cut a small artery. I have no doubt whatever that you will be able to rejoin in a month or so.'

'A month! It may be all over by then.'

'It won't,' said the other gravely. 'It will take more than a month to open the Dardanelles. You'll get your fill of fighting before this business is over. Those who know best say that it will take three months at least to beat the Turks.'

'That's all right,' said Ken, with reckless disregard for the hopes of the British Empire. 'I want a chance of doing my bit in the trenches alongside Dave and Roy.'

For a moment or two Captain Carrington watched his son in silence.

'You'll be doing your bit under rather different conditions in future,' he said quietly.

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Ken stared. 'What do you mean, dad?'

For answer his father picked up the khaki tunic which hung over the end of the bed, and showed Ken the sleeve.

On it was the star indicating the rank of Second-Lieutenant in His Majesty's Army.