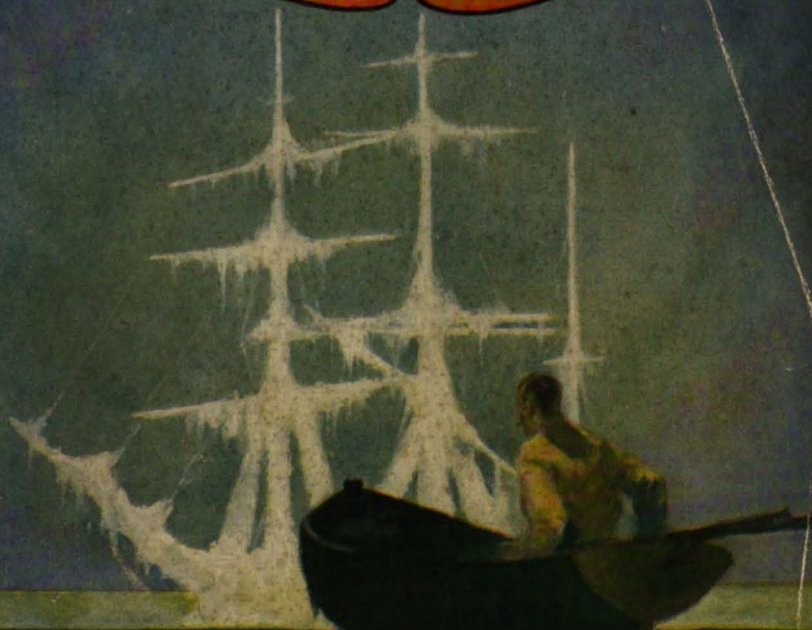



January

25 Cents

# WAYSIDE TALES



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# WAYSIDE TALES

Edited by H. H. WINDSOR

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Volume 21

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# The JUDGMENT OF JOHAN COULL

*A powerful tale of the North Sea and the salvaging of ships which fell prey to German submarines*

By Frederick Sleath

Author of "Sniper Jackson," "The Seventh Vial," "The Hill of the Crows," etc.

Illustrations by Raymond Sisley

IN THE saloon of the Seabird, of the Carn Shipbreaking and Salvage Company, Big Jim Martin, managing director, sat with Davis, his under-manager, and MacArthur and Stewart, skipper and mate respectively, the chiefs of his salvage staff. The Seabird lay, with two sister vessels, at anchor on a North Sea shallows, over a sunken auxiliary cruiser—the Warpindi, a large liner that Big Jim had come to raise. For weeks divers had been busy at her shot holes; she was almost ready for lifting. One of them, straying from his fellows that afternoon, had made a strange discovery. Big Jim and MacArthur were newly returned from a trip to the sea bed to confirm the report that had been brought to the surface.

"There's five of them," he said, and he looked from one to the other of his assistants with the air of a man who had broached a subject that wants a deal of explaining.

"They lie in beauty side by side!" MacArthur murmured.

Davis hitched himself up in his deck chair.

"Do you mean to say," he enquired, "that five German submarines are lying down there, and undamaged?"

He spoke a little querulously, for he was ill from a long spell of overwork ashore, and the heat of a very hot day had tried him, placed though his chair was in the draught of the open larboard and starboard doors. Big Jim reached over and filled his empty glass with iced lime juice before replying.

"If I had not seen them, Davis," he replied, "I would scarcely have believed it myself. But there they are, not forty feet from the stern of the Warpindi—just under us, by Jove! Jackson missed his direction when he went down, and walked straight into them. First one, then two, with one athwart on top, and then the other; almost as if someone had chosen the place and popped them all down together. And not a plate started on one of them—leastways as far as we could see. It's mighty queer, and I've heard of some queer things at sea in my time."

"You said something about a freighter being there as well, MacArthur," he continued, after a pause, and addressing his captain. "I didn't see her. Where was she lying?"

For a moment there was silence, as a wistful, far-away look came into MacArthur's eyes. Then:

"Just beyond the furthest away sub, sir," replied the skipper. "She is on her side, half her bottom torn out amidships, though whether by mine, torpedo, or collision I would not like to say. I found her by tumbling up against a great pile of her coal."

"Did ye happen to notice her name?" Stewart asked him.

"I did—the Artic. But where she hailed from I couldn't make out. The weed has her badly. . . . Been there at least a year before the subs, I should say."

"I missed her altogether," Big Jim admitted. "My light began to get bad just about there, so I hauled out. I noticed you stayed down a bit longer. Reckon we could find a good many of her kind lying about if we liked to look for them. It's the submarines that strike me as queer. I could understand one being there—"

"So could I," interrupted Davis. "Or even two. Some of the Hun boats leaked like sieves under pressure, and might easily have filled—a good many did. But five! It's a bit remarkable. Will you raise them, sir?"

"I don't think so, Davis," replied Big Jim, shaking his head doubtfully. "Though if they are really undamaged except for leaks it would not be difficult, and I must say I'm a bit curious. . . . But shift your chair up now. Steward wants to come in."

The steward had appeared to set the table for the evening meal, and was standing—the cloth on his arm, his hands filled with knives and forks—gazing doubtfully at the deckchair stretched across his pantry doorway. Languidly Davis arose, folded up his chair, and went on deck, his nerves too apprehensive to let him remain through the jarring clatter of the table setting. There he remained until it was done, his elbow resting on the hot deck rail, his gaze on the oily sea, in his mind thoughts of the five mysterious craft beneath him.

How had they come to be there? He

too, had heard of some queer things at sea in his time, but never anything like this.

A MIDSUMMER NIGHT was settling down. Dew was falling. But no coolness was in the air; no evening breeze had come to clear the ship of the heat with which ten days of torrid, windless weather had filled her. He responded unwillingly to the steward's call. Dinner in that stuffy saloon had little appeal to him, and he lingered in the entrance alley, looking in at the men inside, more than ever unwilling to enter; for two engineers had joined the party, and the overcrowded place reeked with tobacco smoke.

MacArthur was telling the newcomers of the submarines; they were listening intently, now and then interrupting him with an eager question. Back to the bulkhead, his great shoulders almost on a level with the portholes, Big Jim Martin sat playing solitaire. The draught from the open portholes was playing on his beard where it lay, parted in two at the chin and pushed out of the way over his shoulders; occasionally loose strands would blow down among his fingers. To push them back again was the only movement he made apart from the playing, so completely absorbed did he appear in his game.

Stewart sat watching him from the other side of the table, but to Davis it seemed that he was far more interested in what MacArthur and the engineers were saying; and at every question asked he would twitch his head around a little, as though the better to hear the reply. Suddenly he turned and put a question himself:

"Did ye notice whether 'Arctic' was the only name that freighter had, MacArthur?" Stewart enquired.

Davis entered, his curiosity aroused. Stewart was a dour old Scots sailorman, who seldom spoke, seldom showed interest in anything, and never asked a question unless for a very good reason.

"Hello, Davis! Been having a squint

overside at those submarines?" MacArthur remarked facetiously, as he noticed the under-manager. "What was that you said, Stewart?" he continued immediately, directing his attention to the mate. "'Artic' the only name? . . . I don't know. It was her stern I looked at, and as she is on her starboard side, the name was pretty high up. All I saw was A-r-c-t-i—the second "c" had dropped off, I expect. Now that you have mentioned it, though, I shouldn't be a bit surprised if there was a second name. There was plenty room for it. The lettering began well to her port side. . . . Jovel that would make her one of old Johan Coull's boats. They were all the Artic-something. . . . Good Heavens!" he added slowly, his manner suddenly becoming solemn. "Young Johnny Coull must be lying down there, and I knew him better than I know anyone here. She must be the Arctic Queen!"

"I was thinking that," said Stewart quietly.

STEWART turned to Big Jim, as though to say something more. Davis had never seen him so animated. But the entrance of the steward to light the lamp preparatory to serving dinner, checked him, and no one else spoke until the man—the curious fellow—had gone away.

They were eager to do so, however, or to listen. The name of Coull was more than well known to them, and MacArthur's disclosure had suddenly made them aware that, all unwittingly, they had stumbled over the threshold of the tragedy connected with it. Old John Coull had been the owner of the Arctic Line, a famous Scandinavian line of many vessels, liners, whalers, and tramps. Although a millionaire, he had commanded several in person, and won great renown by his voyages into the world's least frequented seas. Only two of them had been lost in the war—there lay the tragedy, his own and his son's—the one was a whaler, the other a freighter. Hence MacArthur's

certainly that he had found the ship of his friend.

Young Johnny Coull had followed in his father's way, and bade fair to become the greater sailor of the two. During the war, at one time when ships had almost ceased to cross the North Sea, he had persistently run the blockade to bring the coal so sorely needed by his country. A torpedo had found him in the end. Old Johan had set out in a whaler to bury his grief in the Greenland Seas. A few weeks later a British "Q"-boat had picked up a lifeboat containing all that was left of his crew; a lifeboat submerged to the gunnel, its oars and sails gone, its tanks and bottom pierced with augur holes, its eight occupants dead, save one, unconscious and dying—sure evidence to the allied world of the work of the German submarine.

What had added interest to the story to those aboard the Seabird was the fact that Big Jim had commanded that "Q"-boat, with Stewart as his second in command.

"You were going to say something," Davis reminded the latter, as a clatter of dishes in the pantry broke the silence.

"Do you mind where we picked up that lifeboat, sir?" said the mate to Big Jim.

Big Jim nodded.

"Where?" demanded Davis.

"Just about ten miles North of where we are now," said Big Jim quietly.

"Oh, the swine!" exclaimed MacArthur. "They must have sunk old Johan on top of his son."

"It looks very like it," Big Jim admitted.

He pushed away his cards, and continued in deference to their expectant glances:

"It seems a perfectly extraordinary coincidence," he said. "And perfectly extraordinary that we, of all people, should tumble up against it. I knew Old Johan, MacArthur, even better than you knew young Johnny. But the most remarkable thing to me is those submarines being there as well. Is that coincidence?"

"No, it's not," said Davis. "There's

none of it coincidence at all. It's far too extraordinary. Old Johan must have come here visiting the spot where young Johnny was drowned, and those five submarines caught and sank him. And I'll bet my last dollar he sank them as well."

"How?"

"I don't know. Possibly he and his crew were taken aboard as prisoners, and they scuttled them out of revenge for young Johnny."

"I believe you have struck it, by Jove!" burst out MacArthur. "Old Johan thought the world of young Johnny, and so did the gang who usually sailed with him. It's just the sort of thing they would make up their minds to do as soon as they saw they were going to be collared."

"And what do you make o' that boat-load o' deid folk?" asked Stewart.

"That's the strongest link of all," maintained MacArthur, warming up to his theory. "Those were the people who did not fancy drowning. So they hid. And the Germans simply left them with a sinking ship and stove-in boats, rather than waste time looking for them. It's pretty convincing. Don't you think so?"

"I doubt there is more in it than that," grunted Stewart.

"You could test it, sir, by raising one of those submarines," Davis suggested.

"Aye," Big Jim agreed. "And I admit I'd like to get to the bottom of it. But do you really think it worth while?"

"Rather," answered Davis, without hesitation. "What a story, if it is true."

"We'll see if the weather looks like holding tomorrow," Big Jim promised. "After all, the Warpindi's our game, and we must get her up while the calm lasts. Better not say anything to the hands about what we think, or there will be precious little interest left for her. . . . Now, steward," he continued, raising his voice, "you have heard all we are going to say, so get the food on the table. If you let a word get for'ard, it's in another ship you will do your next trip. Quick's the word!"

THE STEWARD hastily brought in the dinner; the two engineers departed to eat in their own quarters; and no more was said of Johan Coull and his son—nor much of anything else, Big Jim seeming indisposed for conversation, and MacArthur, usually the wit of the party, sombre from thought of young Johnny Coull. But for once Stewart volunteered a general remark at mealtime, and that about the heat: he had never experienced such a spell of it in the North Sea before, he confessed to Davis.

Because of it, and also because of the disturbed nature of his thoughts, Davis could eat little; and the same causes kept him from sleeping, when, at the close of the tedious meal, he could escape to his berth. All the sleep-bringing tricks he could remember or devise he tried; he flung the clothes from him; without either bringing peace to his throbbing mind, or ease to his tortured frame. One after the other he heard his companions turn in. Unable to endure the irritation of the useless struggle any longer, he slipped down from his bunk and went out on deck.

The deck plates were still warm to his feet, but the air was cooler. He took long draughts of it into his lungs. The muscles of his forearms thrilled gratefully to the wetness of the dew as it struck through the thin cloth of his pajamas from the rail. Beneath him the gig gently rubbed against the Seabird's side. The sea lay still and inviting, waveless in the slack of the tides. There were haze patches showing faintly against the darkness of the further waters, but his sailor's eye could note no fog danger. Acting on the impulse, he swarmed down the rope ladder to the gig, cast off, and gently pulled astern.

The gig had been lowered and left in the water for the seams that the heat had opened to close. There were several inches of leakage in her bottom. When about a cable's length from the Seabird he unshipped oars and lay down in it, cool for the first time for days.

So at ease did he feel that he could have slept there, undisturbed even by the faintest remembrance of the grim drama so lately troubling his mind. But at regular intervals he raised his head to judge of his position by the lights of the Seabird and her consorts. Each time he might as well have lain in peace, for the gig hardly moved.

**I**T WAS from no sudden apprehension that he was drifting away, that he rose with a start from the bottom of the boat and looked over the side—not at the Seabird, in the other direction; a chill struck through his body and soul that did not come from the water. His hair rose stiff on his head; his flesh congealed and contracted all down his backbone at the touch of some deep and primordial fear. Not a hundred yards from him was a sight he had never beheld in the wildest of his dreams—a ship rising without a sound out of the depths of the sea.

A full rigged ship! Already her masts and yards were exposed to the level of her main topmast crossrees. Slowly she rose higher, her upper topsail yards breaking above the surface—first the main, then the fore, then the mizzen—she was rising in almost perfect trim; the point of a high flying jib-boom appeared almost simultaneously with the crossjack yard on her mizzen. Soon he could make out her poop and forecastle. There she rode, motionless, her hull submerged, but the lines of it clear to him. For from truck to keel, from counter to cutwater, she glowed with a ghostly, white phosphorescence that clothed every stay, every brace and halliard, and hung in long streamers from every cap and end, and from every point of her dropped in a fine, glittering shower into the sea.

A phantom ship! That was his vision. With the thought departed the physical effects of his fear. He stirred, slid on to one of the thwarts, shipped the oars, stroked into the direction of the Seabird,

then resolutely shut his eyes and rowed away.

He was under the Seabird's stern when next he opened them and the vision had disappeared. Gently he sculled to the rope ladder, and with a thankful exclamation, made fast. He had been afraid—not of that ship, for, after the first involuntary panic, it had been but a warning symptom—but that the rest of his sanity would leave him before he could make good his return. The severity of his illness had at last dawned on him. Ships did not rise from the depths of the sea unless to men faced with nervous breakdown. He had struggled with his angry nerves too long, and now they were bent on their revenge.

He clambered aboard, hurried to Big Jim Martin's berth, and roused him.

"I'd like you to look me over, sir," he said. "I feel a bit queer. Just seen the Flying Dutchman rise out of the sea."

Big Jim was out of his bunk in an instant, and had caught him by the shoulders.

"Stewart!" he called.

The old mate came in, was told the story, and without a remark fell-to to help Big Jim. They stripped off the soaking pajamas, towelled Davis vigorously, and got him into his bunk. They did not attempt to distract him with useless remarks or questions. To them there was nothing strange in his tale. They also regarded it as a warning symptom. Each in his time had seen the Flying Dutchman come tearing up into the gale, and knew the condition that evolved such a phenomenon. Their sole concern was to aid the comrade whose state had called from the deep a still greater phantasm. Deftly Big Jim took his temperature, felt his pulse, quietly put questions. His relief was obvious as he gave the result of his diagnosis.

"I was afraid of sunstroke at first, Davis," he said. "But it's not that, thank goodness. It's your nerves. I bargained on this trip pulling you together a bit, but it is only making you worse. Back



**"Not a hundred yards from him was a sight he had never beheld in the wildest of his dreams—a ship rising without a sound out of the depths of the sea."**



you go tomorrow in one of the other ships, and for any sake stay away from the yard for six months at the very least. Mix him up a drink, MacArthur."

**T**HE SKIPPER had appeared while he was speaking, roused from his sleep by the unwonted stirrings. Without a single curious query, he began the drink mixing; and while he mixed, Davis repeated his tale.

In the midst of it he noticed Stewart, at a sign from Big Jim, follow the latter out into the saloon. Thence came the sound of their voices for a little while, then the sound of their departing footsteps. The gig was tied up not far from his open porthole; he thought he heard men getting into her and the splash of oars, and stopped talking to MacArthur to raise his ear to the opening to listen. But he heard nothing more, and thinking himself mistaken, he lay down again and resumed the conversation. A few minutes later, however, he knew his ears had not tricked him. The gig bumped against the ship's side. The rope ladder rattled as from men scaling it hastily. Quick footsteps sounded across the deck plates and into the saloon, and he leaped from his bunk as Big Jim and Stewart entered.

"Man! It's a ship right enough," the former exclaimed. "And what's more, it's the Arctic Belle!"

"Old Johan Coull's ship!" exclaimed MacArthur, his excitement almost choking him. "What 'private locker o' Davy Jones' is this we have tumbled into?"

"Are you sure, sir?" Davis enquired incredulously.

"Quite sure, Davis," Big Jim replied, now calmer than any of them. "The dawn is coming up. We will be able to see her from the deck in half a minute."

He turned as he spoke, and they followed him out on deck, crowding on each other's heels. Along the eastern horizon a faint lightness was beginning to appear. Against it, dim but unmistakable, hung the silhouette of a ship.

With one accord they made for the

gig, and closed with the stranger. The stars had paled. There was a greater blackness on the face of the waters than the night had imposed. Darkly she towered above them, a great nebulous mass, rank with the tang of sea growths and dead fishes, only the vague outline of her tophammer shell to be discerned; for the phosphorescence which had enabled Davis to see her so clearly had died, save where it glowed faintly in patches of greatest blackness. Yet Big Jim was certain as to whose ship she was, Stewart and MacArthur hardly less certain. They lay on their oars in her loom and waited for morning, awed, silent, afraid to approach her more closely in the darkness.

**T**HE SHADOWS at last came scurrying over the sea. With the rush of the summer dawning, the light of the morn broke above the horizon. The strange craft lay revealed, a ship sunk to the level of poop and forecastle, a monstrous, slimy thing from the bed of the sea. The weed covered her: not an inch of her planking or cordage was visible. It made a sponge of her hull, grew thick round her masts, hung in huge masses from her lower spars, festooned every stay, and interlaced between the yards as close as ever canvas filled them.

"That is why she phosphoresced so much, Davis," whispered Big Jim. "There can't be so much wrong with your nerves, if they could stand what she must have looked like last night."

"Do you think it is the weed that has lifted her, sir?" MacArthur inquired in a whisper.

"No. It's that! Do you see it, Stewart?"

Big Jim pointed to a rounded mass of weed, swelling a little above the surface of the water between the mizzen and the mainmast. Stewart nodded, but did not speak. Still in the same hushed tone that they were all adopting unconsciously, Big Jim continued:

"That's her hatch tarpaulin bellied out.

She must be half full of some kind of gas, and the hot weather has brought her up. One thing certain now—she's the Arctic Belle. Gad! I wonder what is behind it all."

"First the submarines. Then Young Johnny Coull's ship. Now Old Johan's," MacArthur recapitulated. "And she's at anchor, too. Do you notice, sir? Whatever had he been doing here?"

"Aye," growled Stewart.

"We'll get a cradle under while this calm lasts, and try to find out. Back to the Seabird. Quick," Big Jim ordered. "The sun will crackle up that tarpaulin once it gets overhead, and down she'll go."

MACARTHUR and Davis dashed the oars into the rowlocks and pulled strongly away. Boats were setting out from the other vessels, the growing light having discovered to their crews the presence of their strange companion. But at Big Jim's signal they closed on the gig, and he issued his instructions. Ere the sun had well cleared the horizon, the Arctic Belle was safe from any immediate danger of sinking.

The big steel buoyancy cylinders, brought for the Warpindi's raising, had been towed alongside and strapped together in pairs by hawsers passing underneath her keel. Divers were on board, clearing the way to lazarette and fore-peak. There were to be placed the patent flexible air envelopes, which, when expanded, would help to keep her afloat when her hatches were opened. Soon they were in position and filling. Slowly she lifted her bulwark out of the sea.

The waist of the Arctic Belle was filled to the level of her bulwarks with a mass of weed and slime. Strong hose jets from the Seabird cleared it. Freed of so weighty a burden her deck rose flush with the surface of the sea—and continued to rise, slowly, almost imperceptibly.

"It's but a wee hole that sank her, to let the water out again as slow as that," grunted old Stewart. "She will easy

stand the hatches being opened, sir. The pumps will soon suck her dry."

The deduction was incontrovertible, and Big Jim at once led a working party aboard, armed with axes and crowbars for the stoving in of the hatches. Davis noticed that the men walked gingerly, casting nervous glances about them. With the weed hanging rankly from the spars overhead, it was more like entering a grotto raised temporarily from the depths of the sea. And the smell of the sea bottom was stronger, almost nauseating. But the odor of the gas that rushed through the gaps made in the hatches was distinctive enough, and he looked quickly around to see that none of the men were smoking.

"It's acetylene, sir," he exclaimed in surprise.

"Aye. She was lit and warmed throughout with it," said Big Jim, "and the sea has gradually eaten in among her carbide. Go and see how her waterline is behaving."

But the releasing of the gas seemed to have produced no effect on the whaler's buoyancy, and soon two powerful centrifugal pumps were sucking at the water in her hold.

"She's rising fast, sir," reported Davis, leaving the bulwarks and rejoining his chief.

"She must have been scuttled," said Big Jim. "Served the same way as that lifeboat. You know, Davis"—his glance roved over the ruin—"this makes me sad—or savage; I am not sure which. There was not a finer ship afloat. Nor a finer sailor," he added in an undertone. "Somehow I feel he is still aboard. . . Let's have a look into the saloon."

They squelched aft towards the poop and climbed it by a ladder, weed-filled to its rail top. With difficulty their sea boots dug for foothold; their hands slipped on the slimy rails. On the poop itself the weed was knee deep. At nearly every step things wriggled from underneath their soles.

"She will never stand all this top-

hamper when she lifts," said Big Jim, gazing doubtfully from the overgrown poop to the overgrown masts. "Hey, MacArthur," he called, "send the hands aloft to clear her upper rigging. She will turn turtle if we're not careful."

He stopped to watch the carrying out of his order; but Davis waded on, his curiosity too great to allow him to delay. He reached the saloon entrance and passed within. Yet with one foot still lingering on the threshold, he paused there, hesitating.

**I**T WAS a great place, broad, long, and high, unusually so; fit skipper's quarters for the great skipper who had lived there—probably died there! But the under-manager's hesitation sprang from another cause. Outside, the weed had choked the broad decks, fouled the clean timbers, and made grotesques of the stately masts and spars. Here there was no weed. A fine mud overlay each object, making each line and surface more severely straight and plain.

From without sounded the voices of the salvagers, the crash and thud of the falling weed, the splash and gurgle of hold—human sounds. Slowly he began his inspection, treading softly, as though in fear of disturbing some silent sleeper.

But none such remained. The berths were empty, left just as their former occupants had left them when they took their departure, some to die perhaps in that scuttled lifeboat; or in one's and two's to those five. In the under-manager's heart a new wonder had eclipsed the old wonder of those sunken submarines. Big Jim came in, followed by Stewart and MacArthur. Silently he waited for them to make the discovery that he had made.

They came from the berths and joined him, MacArthur last, hardest to convince of the three.

"D'ye ever see anything like it!" he exclaimed in an incredulous amazement. "He has had a harem aboard with him."

It was true. Six of the berths had

contained women—girls, rather; girls who had worn the fine dresses that Davis had seen hanging in the cupboards, and the shapely boots and shoes littered about the floors. And on a whaler, bound for the Greenland Seas!

"There was a woman in that lifeboat," said Stewart. "The kind that would have worn these bits of things in there."

He left them at once, and passed out of sight into an alleyway that led from the forward end of the saloon.

"We said nothing about it for the sake of old Johan," Big Jim explained.

"A straighter man never sailed the seas," murmured MacArthur. "There is a lot more in this than we can see at present."

"It's not a whaler, this, at all," grunted Stewart abruptly, reappearing in the saloon. "Come here."

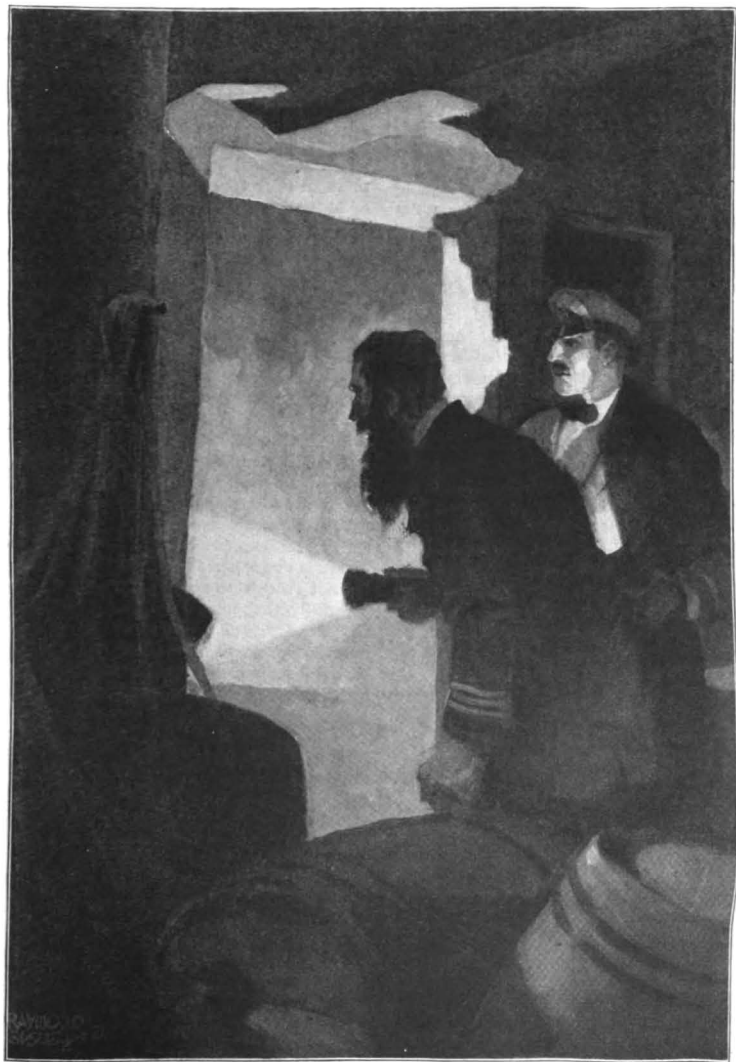
They followed him through the alleyway and down a companion that descended to the 'tween decks, and thence straight on, apparently, to the depths of the ship. But it was onto the 'tween decks he led them, through a doorway that opened from the companion. They saw the great space of the upper main hold stretching before them, still flooded knee-deep, still reeking with the odor of acetylene and fouler gases, but little at first of what it contained, for the only light that lit the place was that streaming scantily through the breach in the hatches, whence the glinting pump pipes descended deep down into the lower hold. And what they did see, they could scarcely bring themselves to believe.

"It's surely never a court?" whispered Davis at last.

"That's what I was thinking myself," grunted the old mate, not nearly so impressed as the others.

"It is," said Big Jim soberly.

**A**GAINST the further wall of the ship was a judge's bench; on one side of it, a juryman's enclosure, a prisoner's dock on the other. Benches and desks, whose purpose was not so readily dis-



**"'There he is,' he said, suddenly, stopping and holding the lamp steady,"**

cernible, stood in between. But the general scheme was clear. Someone had planned to sit in judgment here. Who? And on whom? . . . And to what end? "If they caught him trying this game," Big Jim muttered, "it is easy to understand that scuttled lifeboat."

He plunged boldly through the water in the direction of a door in the forward bulkhead, immediately in front of which point the dock had been set. He moved so quickly that the others could not overtake him. But he stopped of his own accord at the sound of a heavy crash on deck, a crash that was immediately followed by a chorus of shouts and cries from the crew.

"For the love of Mike, come on deck, sir," a man called out, poking his head hastily through the breach in the hatches.

"Gad! I hope no one has fallen," exclaimed Big Jim, turning immediately and splashing toward the companion.

But no one had fallen. The crash had come from a heavy mass of weed that had slithered down from the mainmast, clearing the lower yards as it fell. Beneath the main yard were grouped the crew, unhurt, staring up at something that swung above their heads; something still enmeshed and held together by the weed—the skeleton of a man; a man who had been hanged by the neck.

Stewart and MacArthur hurried forward. Davis started to follow, but seeing Big Jim lift an ax and dart below again, he turned and raced after him.

"Do you think it is Old Johan they have hung there?" he enquired, excitedly, catching up with him at the beginning of the 'tween decks.

"No, Davis," he answered gravely. "It is someone who came out of this door to stand his trial here. . . . Stand clear."

With a swing of the massive shoulders the ax came up and round and down. The whole bulkhead trembled and groaned beneath the blow: the door gave almost the width of its frame. They found themselves sprawling on the

floor of the forehold, a place darker than the one whence they had stumbled. But not dark enough! Davis felt Big Jim grab him and drag him outside—out and away from that silent company into which they had intruded: men waiting to stand their trial like that other, thirty or forty of them, drowned in their chains.

"Young Johnny's death must have made him mad," said Big Jim, solemnly. "A kindlier man never sailed. Go and tell MacArthur to see the hands off the ship. They musn't get to know. Get all gear back to the Seabird, and tow those cylinders clear."

"And the pumps?"

"Leave them. We must find out what happened."

DAVIS went on his mission. When he returned Big Jim had descended the companion again, and stood leaning against the side, gazing pensively down at the receding water.

"He is down here," he said, and Davis did not venture to question him.

Quickly the pumps sucked the water away, and they heard the sound of the leak bursting in. Stewart and MacArthur had joined them by then—Davis had told them. Stewart came direct, but MacArthur from a stealthy visit to that door in the forward bulkhead.

"My God!" he whispered to Davis, shaking his head expressively.

They had brought flash lamps with them. Big Jim took one and pushed on.

"There he is," he said, suddenly, stopping and holding the lamp steady.

A pace or two away was the end of the alleyway. Against a storeroom door, in the act of breaking it down, leaned a huge man.

"It's Johan," murmured Stewart.

Davis drew back, awed. But Big Jim gently took the body in his arms and set it upright away from the door. With his own strength he completed what the dead man had almost done. They looked within. In the light of the lamps three white spouts of water showed gushing

from the vessel's side. A large augur stuck out from a fourth uncompleted. But another sight it was that held their gaze.

In the far corner stood a dead German sailor and a dead girl, locked in each other's arms. . . .

"He was probably an old sweetheart. And she set him free. And he scuppered the lifeboats—the pumps also, very likely, and by night. Then the two went down there to sink the ship and to die together—Old Johan followed them—too late!"

**B**IG JIM was speaking. They were up on deck raising the pumps out of the hold, quite unaided by any of the men.

"Women are wonderful," he continued, speaking almost to himself. "The best and the worst. And the worst more wonderful than the best. That girl down there—a decoy—God knows what—" He checked himself abruptly. "Stove in that forward hatch, Stewart," he ordered. "We'll just let her go down."

. . . Davis stole aft and closed the saloon doors!