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THE LUTINE BELL

by TOM
and GLADYS CLUFF

"GENTLEMEN, gentlemen!" begged Waring. "What is the matter with everyone? It's only propoganda, you fools!— *Please, gentlemen!*"

Waring is pompous and unpopular dean of the under-writers at Lloyd's of London; so dedicated a snob that, with all dogdom to choose from; he raises yapping little pugs, because they are an *established* breed. He and Barclay are the two oldest underwriters in the Room. Barclay is short, ruddy and grizzled, with an old seaman's thatched far-sighted eyes, blue as a child's. Waring is a huge man, heavy and darkly smooth, with the jowls and other characteristics of a blood-hound. He harries without respite for a cathedral hush in his sacred domain. —But voices were reeled full out, in outrage.

For a Satellite ship claimed to have sighted a flagless but allegedly British vessel, *bark-rigged* and *three-masted*, in mid Baltic, heading toward Leningrad! Dodging into a fog-bank when signaled. A secret-weapon ship, proclaimed the Russians, caught red-handed in an attempted attack on Kronstadt!

"We have *no* ship in the Baltic. —Have we?"

"*Bark-rigged?* This is 1951! At least it is in London.

It was a routine, nasty fall morning. Fifty of us, with fifty colds, coughed, and sneezed, and doodled on blotters or milled about the floor of the big Underwriter's Room, quietly discussing insurance rates, the month's losses, the weather, the flu. Innocently waiting for the early wires to come in.

I'm with the Admiralty at Whitehall, where we get Navy and Dominion news direct of course. But Security has to screen general shipping news too, and Lloyd's is the place for that. So twice a day I go over and process their dispatches; it takes only a few minutes to check and stamp them, then I'm free to have morning coffee and afternoon tea in the so-called Captain's Room—and sit in on the hottest shipping gossip in the world.

Barclay, whose desk I borrow, was taking bows for his maiden literary effort, an article in the Sunday Times

passionately deploring the unsolved mysteries of those eighteen hundred or so old ships listed in Lloyd's red-bound files as Missing—and then forgotten. Barclay is no writer, but that piece was enough to turn every man in England with a drop of shipping in his blood or even on his book-shelves, into a skin-diving one-man Crusade.

I cleared a corner of his desk of the usual charts and photostated records of Lost Ships that he can't cram into his pockets—to produce like pictures of his grandchildren—and sat waiting; staring up at the famous Lutine Bell, dredged so long ago from the North Sea bottom, to hang here high and dry under its canopy and toll for dead ships; wondering, with that anticipated shudder that almost shapes a wish, if it might ring today. For the ceremony is as theatrical as some mystic rite of the Middle Ages. The only man who touches the bell, the red-gowned Caller up there on his rostrum, reaches straight above his head and pulls the lanyard that hangs from the clapper. The bell sounds once, vibrating the last inch of air in the room, and in absolute silence everyone rises; *a ship is dead*. Then in a single wave they surge forward to hear *what ship*; how many lives; whose losses. This very bell tolled for the Titanic, the Lusitania—

"Avast below!"

Barclay grinned as I jumped, and a persimmon-haired page boy I hadn't seen around before unloaded an armful of books where I'd been sitting. "Righto, Captain Barclay, another batch." The boy made the Victory sign. "Come in *AGLAIA!*"

"She's the ship I'm working on now, Netherton. I have a hunch that this time—"

But the party was over for Barclay. Waring loomed, monstrous and black and sudden as a thunder-cloud.

I think Waring had intended to ignore the Times affair; he'd been showing around an American visitor quite amiably. But all this hand-shak-

ing for Barclay he couldn't take. "Very cheap sensationalism, Mr. Barclay." (He never acknowledges the Captain.) "Practically an open letter *begging* funds, for *Lloyd's!* A bit too cheap for some of us. You, undoubtedly, would *like* to see *Lloyd's* sponsoring a Treasure Hunt. —I shall issue an official disclaimer of any responsibility or authority for such tommy-rot." He stalked off, with the embarrassed visitor in tow.

Barclay's audience, guiltily avoiding his eye, melted away. For Barclay is a man you love, but Waring is a man you plcate. —An official disclaimer? Then unless Barclay could prove, literally and in immediate reply, the *relevance* of his fanatical concern for these long-forgotten ships, he would be expected to—would as good as *have* to—resign.

Barclay couldn't miss knowing that Waring wanted him out of Lloyd's; it was an old jealousy and I don't think he really cared, Waring wasn't a person he cared about. But this was the first time he'd faced the full truth; that Waring intended, fair means or foul, to get him out. And that would break Barclay's heart.

"Blast the man! He does that, and who's ever going to take me seriously? —Oh well,"—noticing the page's distress—"maybe we'll still find something useful on the *AGLAIA* in time." But he tapped out his pipe and didn't relight it, which I'd never seen him do before in his life. "All I wanted," he said bitterly, "was to interest one younger historian, to carry on after me with this criminally unfinished business. Eighteen hundred old ships *waiting* on the bottom of the sea, and nobody lifting a finger to *find out* about them! How *can* a ship rest till her report is in?"

His eyes burned, partly I suppose with fanaticism, but partly with actual fever; the man was sick, he ought to be home in bed. But Barclay hasn't a relative in the world to look after him, the war made a clean sweep

there. —He had a loyal friend here though; the page distinctly spat “Stinker!” at Waring’s retreating stern, and his face was pure outraged hero-worship—for old Barclay! Who was undeniably an Ancient Mariner, waylaying one with that pointing pipe of his to tell again his tale of some old ship. —Not that Barclay hadn’t meant plenty around here once. In the first war he skippered his own merchant ship, and for years after that, badly shot up, he himself reigned here in the Room; the fourth generation Derek Barclay at Lloyd’s. Until Waring blatantly maneuvered him out. Shelved him. Oh, he still came in every day and wrote a few risks and had his coffee and tea breaks with the regulars. But most of his time he spent contentedly enough in Lloyd’s Library, as self-appointed historian of lost ships; with the actual risk-books of his own grand-dad-dies back to the eighteenth century days when Lloyd’s was a Coffee-House, for source-material. But Waring was *not* contented: when Lloyd’s declared a ship lost it was Lost. Case closed.

Barclay introduced the young redhead. “Albert is our newest, most enthusiastic page, and my invaluable assistant. —Albert, Mr. Netherton here decides what’s good for the press and the BBC to know about shipping—and what isn’t good for them.”

“You spoon out news to the BBC? Yow!—sir,” exclaimed Albert, and stared with such awe and admiration at the notorious Room and all of us privileged to operate in it that I warmed to the lad. I feel that way myself about Lloyd’s of London.

Five minutes later pandemonium broke loose.

“But Waring, we can’t ignore a charge like that!”

“It’s the only dignified thing we can do.”

“Dignified be damned, if one of our

ships has got into the Baltic, God knows how or why, are we just going to leave her there? What about our Allies?”

Waring looked at me. “Properly, Netherton, this is your department, you know. Shall we let the Admiralty cope?”

The Admiralty went along with Waring; hilariously voted it just a particularly juicy hunk of propaganda against the war-mongering west, issued a flat statement that none of His Majesty’s ships were in the Baltic, and washed *their* hands.

But it wasn’t that easy. Satellite ships were sighting the outlandish vessel off Helsinki, off Danzig, in the lower Cattegat. We began hearing from some increasingly uneasy Allies.

Given enough evidence, fantastic or not, if you’ve a stomach like mine you *feel* guilty. I itched for honest England.

And Barclay—in some elusive but important way I *trust* Barclay. An old sailor’s eyes take long steps, maybe from watching the horizon instead of the kerb. I don’t hold that sailors are any more credulous than anybody else. But the vision of a man used to the curved distances of the sea finally shapes to that curve; stretches a bit over the edge we townsmen settle for. And Barclay was *concerned*; far beyond his personal troubles. (Waring’s over-vehement “official disclaimer” had back-fired badly; it happened to have been printed directly opposite the first news of the Mystery ship, and the juxtaposition set people imagining all sorts of hidden motives.)

“Well,” Barclay said mildly, “certainly a disturbing *imitation* of one of His Majesty’s ships is giving a highly disturbing *effect* of being in Baltic waters. That maverick gets around too fast even for Soviet hot-air propulsion. I’m going on a research binge.” He smiled grimly. “I’d *better* come up with an answer. Waring claims it was my article put the Russians up to the whole idea.”

"Good Lord. Forget it, Barclay. Go home and get some sleep."

"Not in hurricane weather. Funny, I have that old mother-hen, *responsible* feeling." And the man trotted off to try to solve our number one national headache in the musty files of a library.

When the continental and then even the American press began to get nasty, we made the whole subject Restricted. But people had already heard too much, and there were amateur wireless sets of course, and unrestricted foreign newspapers for sale—while they lasted.

Notes from the Embassies Demanded To Know. Stiffening Russian threats of retaliation had us each in his private brand of jitters: a postman asininely kept his children home from school and started an epidemic of truancy; pubs showed a fine boom in business: with my sure penchant for the ignominious I was laid up three days with a hideous case of hives. We were putting in a twelve hour day and getting precisely nowhere with a preposterous ghost, that appeared dead set on poking up a war.

And then, bless its stony heart, a Russian cruiser sighted the ship off the Gulf of Riga and sank her! By now we didn't *care* when or where, they *sank* her!

Thank God, we breathed, and unfurrowed our brows and even smiled again experimentally at our fellow men. I called up my stunned wife and invited her to the cinema; she said she didn't recall the voice. Albert must have spent a deliciously successful evening with his estranged Violet, who was willing to wait four years while he put himself through night-school, but had *not* counted on Saturday night alone with her mother. "Fixed it up!" he grinned, and whistled piercingly between his fingers, not ten feet from Waring.

Only Barclay saw nothing to celebrate. If there'd been no ship *in* the

Baltic, then nothing had been sunk. If there *was* such a ship, we'd better be finding whose she was, if we expected to keep any Allies at all. With his muffler, and a steamer-rug that Doris—my wife—had insisted I bring in to him, he went back to that clammy library.

He was right, it was too good to be true. Four days later the same ship reappeared quite unsunk, two hundred miles to westward. —Or else, God help us, there were two of them.

A Washington spokesman stated loyally that the President accepted the British denial; but a featured editorial the same day was captioned, "More U.S. Billions for British Bombs?"

And then the *Danes* sighted her.

A Danish passenger vessel, twenty witnesses, passed a grey three-masted ship steering east off Lithuania, about a mile abeam. No flag, but her lines and rig definitely British.

Western corroboration! That was enough for the Russians. Their Navy, they announced all over the air, was already out, their Air-Force combing the Baltic; the ship—*any* unidentified ship in those waters—would be found and sunk within hours.

There followed in that small fateful monitor's room the silence of complete consternation. This was war talk. In the eyes of the western world too now, our ship was the aggressor, and she was going right on aggressing in defiance of our own allies' protests; and we couldn't do a thing about it because, simply, she *wasn't our ship*.

"The show's up, we can't hush this. The press will *have* to notice a Danish report."

"They'll jolly well have to *not* notice it! That *would* bring on questions in the Commons. And however Churchill cares to explain it, Floating Saucers or Flying Englishmen or tiddleywinks with his daughter by signal-code, *anything's* going to set *everybody* off."

So we agreed to keep it out of the papers for one more week; if we could. But the questions came on in the House anyway, and Mr. Churchill magnificently and simply denied everything, including any knowledge of the Baltic Sea *being* Soviet property in the first place. The Navy, he concluded solemnly, had carefully counted its warships and couldn't find a thing missing.

We had all stayed through to hear the BBC broadcast of this show—which naturally aroused more suspicion than it allayed—and I missed my bus home and had to transfer all over the place and walk two miles, rubbing a brutal blister on my heel. When I did get there Doris had eaten the last piece of chocolate cake, that I'd been telling my blister about for half a mile, and gone to bed and to sleep. I hated her, and everybody else; I could have cried.

The next day was Guy Fawke's Day, speeches all over. But Whitehall had the flu en masse and Lloyd's was a tomb. The limp straw effigy dangling from a molding actively depressed me, I started to rescue the poor chap. It seemed to me he'd had enough trouble while he was alive, didn't we all, without resurrecting it every year forever. But Waring was horrified: "Oh no, that *always* hangs there on Guy Fawke's Day, it's—"

"I know I know I know. An Established Custom," I finished on cue, and jerked the noose tight again, seeing and feeling the miserable little neck as Waring's, with intense satisfaction.

But he was still alive and in a real tizzy by eleven, when we all jostled into the Captain's room for coffee. His fury was not, surprisingly, with the ubiquitous ship, nor the Russians nor the Danes; all mentioned however. —And the Admiralty, (he threw in for me,) what a splendid job *they'd* made of this scandal! But it was the idiot citizens of London whom he utterly failed to understand.

"Why, they're baffled," said Barclay mildly as we found places at the big table. "That alarms them, it's un-English."

"We're all baffled," I said impatiently. . . "We can't find comfortable *authority* for a ship—"

"Let's drop it, shall we, gentlemen?" suggested Waring. Only it wasn't a suggestion, it was an order, and I always begin to itch when he pulls that Let's eat up all our nice rice pudding now, *shall* we? —I was as sick of the damn ship as he was, but way beyond that I was *worried*. And there he sat, crowding me, smug in his role as the Last Upholder of I don't know what, spooning half a bowl of sugar—all there was—into his coffee, slanging my outfit, playing down plain desperation as *gossip*. Waring was being just too patronizingly Waring; I *wanted* to get under his skin.

"Barclay," I said clearly, "you've got a mystery ship of your own on the ways; how's *she* doing? If you'll brief us a bit on yours, maybe we'll find some mutual pattern. Two negatives, you know."

Barclay had been pop-eyed all morning with some hoarded excitement. Maybe, I dreamed, he *had* found something on that *AGLAIA* of his. Eagerly he began hauling out his stuff. But Waring leaned his big shoulder across my starboard bow so abruptly that he upset my lifted cup. It was full and hot. I was burned, wet through, my clothes a mess. —And Waring just half-grunted Sorry, and went on talking past my face and Barclay's to the man beyond us. Shutting me up. Totally ignoring Barclay, who was hurt, and had been hurt enough.

It made me mad. Waring's attitude of holy *identification* with Lloyd's boils down to simple personal vanity. And I don't like his fat hands that ought to be clumsy but aren't. —Sopping and humiliated and furious, I pushed back from the table and

stalked out. For good, I promised myself.

Oh, all of us were fagged to a frazzle. From neglected wives to international relations, everything had been pushed a shade past its limit, by a *non-existent ship*. And Waring is Waring. But suddenly I was fed to the teeth with that gentleman and glad to risk my job letting him know it with a fine bang of the door.

So I got home early, in time for tea.

Doris outspokenly does not share my feeling for Lloyd's. To her it's still a Coffee House, doubling for a Country Club, which she's convinced is going to ruin my kidneys. I explained that Waring, not caffeine, had turned me whatever color she thought I looked, and that her worries were over anyway, I was through with Mr. Waring's private club. Permanently.

I must have sounded good and upset, for without a word she laid out sardines and sea-biscuit and chocolate cake, my favorite tea. —Which I couldn't eat, so then she knew this was serious. "Now drink that tea, Teddy," she ordered. "A sensible cup of tea and you'll wonder what your tantrum was all about. Tomorrow you go straight back there as usual."

"After the epic way I barged out? I see myself."

"How you left is all in your own mind. Messed over with spilled coffee like that I'm sure they just thought you were hurrying to the wash-room. Don't be silly and go cutting off your own nose," she said briskly.

"I can get along without Lloyd's," I sulked.

"Maybe I've made remarks about Lloyd's Coffee House," she admitted. "But it's your other girl, don't you see?" I said she didn't sound too perturbed. "Well I will say I prefer a lot of whiskery old ships to one slinky young secretary. —And they need you. A man who knows by heart the whole history of the Navy clear back to when we lived in caves and

wore woad and probably couldn't even swim!—why you must be worth your *weight* in coffee over there! Here, here's a lovely fat sardine. Don't pay any attention to those stuffed shirts. What do a lot of insurance men know but insurance?"

"Barclay knows plenty more," I said defensively, tucking the obscene great sardine out of sight under a biscuit.

"Yes, I always liked that one," said Doris, who had met him once, for perhaps two minutes. And without a word she called him up and asked him to dinner; then, that night. He accepted, too; he had something terrific to show me. Poor Barclay, he found something terrific on an average of once a month.

It's funny, he was surprised to find me in such a stew, he *had* supposed I was just lamming it to the wash-room, and would be back in. He had this smashing new material on the *AG-LAIA*, and he'd brought the whole business. His eyes shone. "Could you read it tonight, Netherton, and bring it back in tomorrow?" I caught Doris' triumphant eye. "It's terrific! Like hearing of Trafalgar for the first time!"

Barclay worked so hard, so alone, and those deep-socketed child-blue eyes looked so innocently hopeful. But Barclay's lost ships, like new oil-wells, built to peak excitement—and came in sand and water. Still, I did give the stuff a look, after he left. —And poured over it half the night. For the story of the *AGLAIA*, if I was right about the context, was terrific.

The next morning was crisp and invigorating, the sun would be out by noon. We had kippers for breakfast, Leadenhall Street seemed suddenly the most fascinating thoroughfare in all London, and I was so bursting to see Barclay that I got there half an hour early. Even indoors the air smelled zesty from a jug of big yellow chrysanthemums that someone

had brought in, apparently Albert, or else he'd found them irresistible; he was sporting an identical huge blossom in his buttonhole. No Waring yet, and he's always one of the first; the flu must have gotten him down. Which took a little of the wind out of my sails; I'd wanted to watch his face. But this wouldn't keep.

Silently I laid out the brittle, brown-edged old papers on Barclay's desk, and our eyes met. "I can't believe it, you know. But I *have* to." I said.

"I knew you'd see it!" He anchored the pamphlet open with his pipe. "It's *there*. Every detail checks—so far."

"Barclay—do you really expect—"

"Yes," he answered quietly. "Don't you?"

"I honestly don't know. My God man!"

Others were sensing our excitement. A nervous man in a plaid tie breathed over my shoulder. "What's the matter?" he asked. "Is something the matter?"

They all banked in then, and I looked at Barclay.

"You tell them," he said. "I've this beastly cough. And I've heard I'm long-winded."

So I recounted the life and death of *HMS AGLAIA* for a group of wary underwriters and Navy brass, to whom, as they began one at a time, dimly and incredulously, to suspect, this loss which occurred so long ago as to seem pure legend, was—perhaps—*relevant*.

In 1851 the *AGLAIA*, a bark-rigged steam sloop of war, extra-heavily armed for her time, set sail for a North Sea cruise and never returned. She was listed as missing with all hands, a presumptive total loss; the C.O.'s widow was paid sixty pounds by Barclay's great grandfather, a Lloyd's underwriter of the Coffee-House days, for the policy in my hand, on her husband's uniforms and possessions.

"That's all I had on her for

months," Barclay interrupted. "Then I discovered this whole packet of material, properly forwarded by the British Ambassador in Washington to our Admiralty!—And lost in our own library all these years! Filed," he added bitterly, "under Agamemnon."

"I'll summarize," I said, "from this old ship's-log and these letters and papers, and their decoding—they were water-soaked to illegibility—by a Navy technician in Washington; seventy years ago."

They were all listening now.

On November 8, 1851, a Danish brig picked up, floating in the Baltic, a young British naval lieutenant, quite demented from forty-eight hours in that icy water. He could remember neither his name nor that of his ship. Lashed to him was a small keg half full of salt water but containing these ruined papers. The brig, after a stormy Atlantic crossing, put into a little port in the state of Maine for water, and there she left the castaway, still, and to the end of his life, mentally blank on everything previous to his rescue.

He was then a good-looking young chap around thirty, with high color and very black thick eyebrows and some queer accent; at first he was believed to be Irish; a warm, friendly man in his good periods. He turned out to be an expert boat-rigger and to have a fine baritone voice, sang in the church choir; and some of the songs—hymns, from the ring of them—that he sang to himself when he was calm and at rest between his desperate spells of trying to write and send some vital message, were in a strange language. He met every ship that docked, but would go dumb when he got there, and forget what he'd come for, and would hammer his head with his fists and mutter two words that sounded like "folbock" and "folbower." (All this the local padre wrote in the letter he sent to Washington with the man's papers; as I said, seventy years ago.)

The villagers liked and respected and worried about him. They called him Mr. Singer and would have visited him in his solitary cottage; but that wild driven look would come over his face and he'd mumble "Confidential documents, must report," and bolt the door. A naturally sociable man, he lived like a hermit, with only that terrible compulsion to get his message through. That obsession ruined his life. And yet it gave it great purpose. For a dedicated man is lonely but he lives on a high plane, and merely by so living he accomplishes something more, I believe (I said), than he knows. Captain Derek Barclay here is such a man. (The single cheer was Albert's.)

Thirty years later Singer was still trying to send that message. He was standing tongue-tied on the dock holding a scrap of paper as a small coastwise ship steamed out. A girl on the dock called, laughing, to some man aboard, "Come again, Mr. Davis!"

The name shot through Singer like a streak of lightning. *That was his name!*

"Wait!" he cried. "Report! Report! I am *Davis*, of—"

He never noticed where he was, the padre said in his letter. He forgot everything but getting his message to a ship already fifty feet away. He stepped straight off the dock.

They might have gotten to him by hauling in the tethered skiff he struck his head against, if they'd realized in time that the man couldn't swim.

So he drowned, with his paper still in his hand, and the words he'd been trying all those years to say, drowned with him in his throat.

Neighbors found in his cottage the cask of papers and a pile of attempted messages, but only the diary gave any clue. A dim "-S A-L- -A" suggested the name of a ship, so the padre bundled the lot together and sent it to Washington. A technician's report

from there dated 1883 declared the book to be *HMS AGLAIA'S* log. And after no stranger off any ship for thirty years ever spotting Davis' nationality and thus maybe saving his wits, this technician said his exclamations FFwlbach and FFwlbawr were Welch words meaning Little Fool and Big Fool!

The papers were the C.O.'s report: Secret Orders directed the *AGLAIA* to proceed to the Baltic and examine the Russian coast for new fortifications. She was to avoid speaking to any ships, but if attacked should display the British colors and take necessary action. She was *not* to approach the Gulf of Finland, where both entrances were known to be controlled.

So the *AGLAIA* sailed down the Cattegat with fires banked ready to steam, working close in along the Russian coast. On the night of November 5 she anchored to wait for daylight to explore the Riga Strait. At dawn the C.O. gave orders to "Boil the kettle." In a patchy fog she ran out her estimated distance and cleared for action, still unable to see land until, half a mile to port, the southern shore of Osel Island loomed through the fog. —And what they were looking for; a mass of uncharted masonry on the point. As the *AGLAIA* moved under slow bell for the C.O. to diagram this new fortification, she was fired on from shore, the ball falling just short: an order to stop, in any navy's language. But she did not stop, nor return fire.

"She was under *orders* not to stop!" Albert defended her. "Our *colors* hadn't been fired on, she wasn't flying them!"

The log read: 8:53. Full ahead. Half starboard helm to run for nearby fog-bank.

"I say, isn't that awfully f-funny, sir?" stuttered Albert excitedly. "It's exactly like—I mean, right there in the Baltic, and *our* ship, fired on by

the Russians! And the fog-bank—" His voice trailed.

I glanced up. Against the dark panneling the boy's face was pale and oddly still, *held* still, his grey startled eyes wide with that same stillness, as they edged toward something outside their familiar orbit.

"Get on with it, Netherton," impatiently urged an older voice.

8:55 (the log finished.) Salvo from shore. Ordered hoist colors at mizzen. Ordered port broadside return fire. 100 pound solid made two hits within Russian masonry, observed two spouts of sand.

Then came the single survivor's final report; the report he knew had to be made and that he alone *could* make.

And this, gentlemen, is his reconstructed message; the record of an almost-accomplished mission.

"Respectfully report *HMS AGLAIA* split in two by fire from Osel Island fort, which fired on British colors. Captain and Exec. killed. Engine room watch all burned to death from steam. —Entire crew dead. Respectfully submit seven-inch breach-loaders defective in design. —Placed orders and sketch of Osel fortification, dimensions estimated, in cask. Must jump."

And later, added while afloat: "9:12 ensign disappeared, ship sank. Delay in forwarding this report unavoidable. 6th November, 1851."

Lieutenant Davis had put all documents in a cask, lashed it to his body, and either jumped or been washed overboard. That he remained conscious is clear from repeated statements that ship and ensign sank at 9:12, which is believed to be observed time from the two entries, "Watch stopped 9:53," and "Watch sank."

The conclusion accepted by our Washington Ambassador and forwarded to but never read by the Admiralty here—due to erroneous packaging with Agamemnon material—is that the *AGLAIA* sank with all hands

but one at 9:12 by the survivor's watch, November 6, 1851.

"Look!" Albert pointed to the clock above the bell canopy. 10:06, it read. "One hour and six minutes ago *here*, it was the same time and the same date as it was *there, then*, when she went down! 9:12, November sixth—a hundred years ago!"

We all looked up at the clock, some amused at young Albert, some impressed by coincidence, some eyeing Barclay and me oddly. Fifty of us; even the Caller was still down on the floor with us instead of up on his rostrum; setting his watch by the clock.

Then Barclay said, and he was speaking not just to Albert; "But Western Russian time, remember, is an hour earlier than Greenwich. It is *now*, by Western Russian time—" he watched the clock; we all did—"9:12."

At that precise instant *the Lutine Bell rang*.

Automatically we started forward to hear the announcement. What ship was dead? —Then, some suddenly, some gradually, clawing for crumbled footholds, we realized.

For there was no announcement, the wires weren't in yet. There was one of those listening silences, multiplied by fifty.

Conspicuous in his scarlet the Caller stood, open-mouthed, a dozen feet from his rostrum, staring up at the bell. High out of reach its lanyard hung straight down, without a quiver. No human hand had touched it.

But that bell had rung. Fifty men heard it. The air was still vibrating.

No one seemed more stunned than Barclay. He looked at me. "Did you expect—?"

"No!" I said, shaken.

"One hundred years to the second." He discovered, rather than pronounced, the words. —And waited.

Everyone waited, oddly idle, defenseless. A trench-coated die-hard re-examining the log. The nervous man in the plaid tie arguing fundamental

logic with a logic that had become, as of that moment, obsolete. But most of us, cautiously exposing our lungs to the cold-tasting air of a new dimension, simply huddled close together for the comfort of numbers, and the familiar smell of tobacco, and the reassuringly physical scratch of each other's tweed against our knuckles.

We were still standing, Barclay white now, biting hard on his pipe, when the news arrived.

The Russians had sunk the three-master. Beyond all doubt.

For the flimsies began flocking in like snow.

She had been sighted in the Riga vicinity but gone into the fog, then, emerging, had refused all warnings to stop or alter her course toward a military installation. Instead, openly, British colors flying, she had discharged two "atomic-vapor projectiles" into Soviet soil. But there had been no Soviet loss, and Soviet return fire at once cut the ship in two. Whatever secret weapon she carried lay now at the bottom of the ocean. A dud.

This was confirmed by the Installation Commander and an accidental eye-witness, a pilot flying over the area; and a politburo member came on the air to promise that the soil would be analysed in those two strangely empty ten-inch holes in the ground; for the western powers appeared to have devised some means of disintegrating their projectiles.

The incident, announced the Soviet Union in four languages, was ended.

The nervous man giggled nervously. Barclay had not moved; still white around the mouth, he re-focused his staring, shining eyes on twentieth century London and his own desk. He indicated the summarized report. "Netherton, what kind of mark would be left in the ground by the artillery Davis described?"

"A hundred-pound smooth ball

from one of those old muzzle-loaders should leave a hole about ten inches wide and deep, rounded at the bottom, as if by a bowl. —Two hits, two spouts of sand, he said."

"Two round ten-inch holes. —Empty." murmured Barclay dreamily.

"What does that mean?" asked a fat man shrilly. "Do you mean you think—"

"It means the Lutine Bell rang this morning for the sinking of a new ship on her maiden voyage; and to add to the tragedy, her report, without which her whole mission was wasted, took an even hundred years to reach us—due to an officer's loss of memory from exposure in the line of duty, and a mistake in filing by our Admiralty. *Any* ship would be frantic. —Well, it's cleared up at last, thank God. Lieutenant Davis and Mr. Albert Cater and I between us, far from starting the trouble, have probably averted a war. Give *that* to the press. Netherton."

There was an exclamation behind me and fat competent fingers snatched up the pamphlet. "Cancel, Netherton," said Waring stiffly, and tore it across; the mutilated pages drifted to the floor. "Barclay, you're losing grip, you're seeing mermaids. You'll have the papers coming out with *cartoons*—of *Lloyd's*—riding a broomstick over Russia!"

Then Barclay really reared up on his hind legs. "You're not protecting your pedigreed pug bitch from some coarse indignity, Waring! *Lloyd's* of London has survived long and honorably without the insult of *any* protection. But what does your mouse-mind know of the real *Lloyd's*, that traditional inviolate bulwark of the world for shipping *faith*? You, protect *Lloyd's*?"

Albert, with a glare of shocked disbelief, had shouldered Waring out of his way and rescued the fragile half-pages on the floor as if they were the desecrated ashes of Nelson; replacing them on the desk, with high reverence

he laid his—or somebody's—prize golden chrysanthemum over the little pile, and stood beside Barclay like a flaming torch. Here, I saw, in our own Albert, was that "younger historian" who would carry on after Barclay. It was to Albert that I replied reassuringly, "When a Ninth Wave rolls in right at our feet from the deeps of time itself, even Security recognizes new boundaries. The Admiralty does *not* cancel." There was more than a quorum of Hear-hears. "Only a completely ossified mind—"

"That's me." It was the die-hard. "I address my question to Captain Barclay." He stood, pushing out the pockets of his trench coat, feet

planted wide apart; protesting, too belligerently, that he felt steady as a rock. "Do you ask me to believe that *two* British ships—"

"One ship," Barclay corrected him. "The *AGLAIA*."

"Okay, I accept your *AGLAIA* then in *her* time. But just explain this one *now*, that was sunk *today!* The damned Mystery Ship!"

Barclay fleetingly smiled. "The maverick three-master that's been twisting the British Lion's tail for the past month—" He spoke softly. "Not having any better name for the soul of the ship, we'll call that her ghost—shall we?"