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THE SPY IN BLACK

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THE LANDING.

If any one had been watching the bay that August night (which, fortunately for us, there was not), they would have seen up till an hour after midnight as lonely and peaceful a scene as if it had been some inlet in Greenland. The war might have been waging on another planet. The segment of a waning moon was just rising, but the sky was covered with clouds, except right overhead where a bevy of stars twinkled, and it was a dim though not a dark night. The sea was as flat and calm as you can ever get on an Atlantic coast—a glassy surface, but always a gentle regular bursting of foam upon the beach. In a semicircle the shore rose black, towering at either horn (and especially on the south) into high dark cliffs.

I suppose a bird or two may have been crying then as they were a little later, but there was not a light nor a sign of anything human being within a hundred miles. If one of the Vikings who used to live in those islands had revisited that particular glimpse of the moon, he could never have guessed that his old haunts had altered a tittle. But if he had waited a while he would have rubbed his eyes and wondered. Right between the headlands he would have seen it dimly:—a great thing that was not a fish rising out of

the calm water, and then very stealthily creeping in and in towards the southern shore.

When we were fairly on the surface I came on deck and gazed over the dark waters to the darker shore, with—I don't mind confessing it now—a rather curious sensation. To tell the truth, I was a little nervous, but I think I showed no sign of it to Wiedermann.

"You have thought of everything you can possibly need?" he asked in a low voice.

"Everything, sir, I think," I answered confidently.

"No need to give you tips!" he said with a laugh.

I felt flattered—but still my heart was beating just a little faster than usual!

In we crept closer and closer, with the gentlest pulsation of our engines that could not have been heard above the lapping of the waves on the pebbles. An invisible gull or two wheeled and cried above us, but otherwise there was an almost too perfect stillness. I could not help an uncomfortable suspicion that *someone* was watching. *Someone* would soon be giving the alarm, *someone* would presently be playing the devil with my schemes. It was sheer nonsense, but then I had never played the spy before—at least, not in war-time.

Along the middle of the bay ran a beach of sand and pebbles, with dunes and grass links above, but at the southern end the water was deep close inshore, and there were several convenient ledges of rock between the end of this beach and the beginning of the cliffs. The submarine came in as close as she dared, and then, without an instant's delay, the boat was launched. Wiedermann,

myself, two sailors, and the motor-bicycle just managed to squeeze in, and we cautiously pulled for the ledges.

The tide was just right (we had thought of everything, I must say that), and after a minute or two's groping along the rocks, we found a capital landing. Wiedermann and I jumped ashore as easily as if it had been a quay, and my bicycle should have been landed without a hitch. How it happened I know not, but just as the sailors were lifting it out, the boat swayed a little and one of the clumsy fellows let his end of it slip. A splash of spray broke over it; a mere nothing, it seemed at the time, and then I had hold of it and we lifted it on to the ledge.

Wiedermann spoke sharply to the man, but I assured him no harm had been done, and between us we wheeled the thing over the flat rocks, and pulled it up to the top of the grass bank beyond.

"I can manage all right by myself now," I said. "Good-bye, sir!"

He gave my hand a hard clasp.

"This is Thursday night," he said. "We shall be back on Sunday, Monday, and Tuesday nights, remember."

"The British Navy and the weather permitting!" I laughed.

"Do not fear!" said he. "I shall be here, and we shall get you aboard somehow. Come any one of those nights that suits *him*."

"That suits him?" I laughed. "Say rather that suits Providence!"

"Well," he repeated, "I'll be here anyhow. Good luck!"

We saluted, and I started on my way, wheeling my bicycle over the grass. I confess, however, that I had not

gone many yards before I stopped and looked back. Wiedermann had disappeared from the top of the bank, and in a moment I heard the faint sounds of the boat rowing back. Very dimly against the grey sea I could just pick out the conning tower and low side of the submarine. The gulls were still crying, but in a more sombre key, I fancied.

So here was I, Conrad von Belke, lieutenant in the German Navy, treading British turf underfoot, cut off from any hope of escape for three full days at least! And it was not ordinary British turf either. I was on the holy of holies, actually landed on those sacred, jealously-guarded islands (which, I presume, I must not even name here), where the Grand Fleet had its lair. As to the mere act of landing, well, you have just seen that there was no insuperable difficulty in stepping ashore from a submarine at certain places, if the conditions were favourable and the moment cunningly chosen; but I proposed to penetrate to the innermost sanctuary, and spend at least three days there—a very different proposition!

I had been chosen for this service for three reasons: because I was supposed to be a cool hand in what the English call a "tight place"; because I could talk English not merely fluently, but with the real accent and intonation—like a native, in fact; and I believe because they thought me not quite a fool. As you shall hear, there was to be one much wiser than I to guide me. He was indeed the brain of this desperate enterprise, and I but his messenger and assistant. Still, one wants a messenger with certain qualities, and as it is the chief object of this narrative to clear my honour in the eyes of those who sent me, I wish to point out that they

deliberately chose me for this job—I did not select myself—and that I did my best.

It was my own idea to take a motor-bicycle, but it was an idea cordially approved by those above me. There were several obvious advantages. A motor-cyclist is not an uncommon object on the roads even of those out-of-the-way islands, so that my mere appearance would attract no suspicion; and besides, they would scarcely expect a visitor of my sort to come ashore equipped with such an article. Also, I would cover the ground quickly, and, if it came to the worst, might have a chance of evading pursuit. But there was one reason which particularly appealed to me: I could wear my naval uniform underneath a suit of cyclist's overalls, and so if I were caught might make a strong plea to escape the fate of a spy; in fact, I told myself I was not a spy,—simply a venturesome scout. Whether the British would take the same view of me was another question! Still, the motor-cycle did give me a chance.

My first task was to cover the better part of twenty miles before daybreak and join forces with "him" in the very innermost shrine of this sanctuary—or rather, on the shore of it. This seemed a simple enough job; I had plenty of time, the roads, I knew, were good, nobody would be stirring (or anyhow, ought to be) at that hour, and the arrangements for my safe reception were, as you shall hear, remarkably ingenious. If I once struck the hard main road, I really saw nothing that could stop me.

The first thing was to strike this road. Of course I knew the map by heart, and had a copy in my pocket as a precaution that was almost superfluous, but working by

map-memory in the dark is not so easy when one is going across country.

The grassy bank fell gently before me as the land sloped down from the cliffs to the beach, and I knew that within a couple of hundred yards I should find a rough road which followed the shore for a short way, and then when it reached the links above the beach, turned at right angles across them to join the highroad. Accordingly I bumped my motor-cycle patiently over the rough grass, keeping close to the edge of the bank so as to guide myself, and every now and then making a detour of a few yards inland to see whether the road had begun. The minutes passed, the ground kept falling till I was but a little above the level of the glimmering sea, the road ought to have begun to keep me company long ago, but never a sign of it could I find. Twice in my detours I stumbled into what seemed sand-holes, and turned back out of them sharply. And then at last I realised that I had ceased to descend for the last hundred yards or more, and in fact must be on the broad stretch of undulating sea links that fringed the head of the bay. But where was my road?

I stopped, bade myself keep quite cool and composed, and peered round me into the night. The moon was farther up and it had become a little lighter, but the clouds still obscured most of the sky and it was not light enough to see much. Overhead were the stars; on one hand the pale sea merged into the dark horizon; all around me were low black hummocks that seem to fade into an infinity of shadows. The gulls still cried mournfully, and a strong pungent odour

of seaweed filled the night air. I remember that pause very vividly.

I should have been reckless enough to light a cigarette had I not feared that our submarine might still be on the surface, and Wiedermann might see the flash and dub me an idiot. I certainly needed a smoke very badly and took some credit to myself for refraining (though perhaps I ought really have given it to Wiedermann). And then I decided to turn back, slanting, however, a little away from the sea so as to try and cut across the road. A minute or two later I tumbled into a small chasm and came down with the bicycle on top of me. I had found my road.

The fact was that the thing, though marked on the large-scale map as a road of the third, fourth, or tenth quality (I forget which), was actually nothing more or less than three parallel crevasses in the turf filled with loose sand. It was into these crevasses that I had twice stumbled already. Now with my back to the sea and keeping a yard or two away from this wretched track, but with its white sand to guide me, I pushed my motor-cycle laboriously over the rough turf for what seemed the better part of half an hour. In reality I suppose it was under ten minutes, but with the night passing and that long ride before me, I never want a more patience-testing job. And then suddenly the white sand ceased. I stepped across to see what was the matter, and found myself on a hard highroad. It was a branch of the main road that led towards the shore, and for the moment I had quite forgotten its existence. I could have shouted for joy.

"Now," I said to myself, "I'm off!"

And off I went, phut-phut-phutting through the cool night air, with a heart extraordinarily lightened. That little bit of trouble at the start had made the rest of the whole wild enterprise seem quite simple now that it was safely over.

I reached the end of this branch, swung round to the right into the highroad proper and buzzed along like a tornado. The sea by this time had vanished, but I saw the glimmer of a loch on my left, and close at hand low walls and dim vistas of cultivated fields. A dark low building whizzed by, and then a gaunt eerie-looking standing stone, and then came a dip and beyond it a little rise in the ground. As I took this rise there suddenly came upon me a terrible sinking of the heart. Phut-phut! went my cycle, loudly and emphatically, and then came a horrible pause. Phut! once more; then two or three feeble explosions, and then silence. My way stopped; I threw over my leg and landed on the road.

"What the devil!" I muttered.

I had cleaned the thing, oiled it, seen that everything was in order; what in heaven's name could be the matter? And then with a dreadful sensation I remembered that wave of salt water.

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NIGHT IN THE RUINED HOUSE.

You may smile to think of a sailor being dismayed by a splash of salt water; but not if you are a motor-cyclist! Several very diabolical consequences may ensue.

In the middle of that empty road, in that alien land, under the hostile stars, I took my electric torch and endeavoured to discover what was the matter. From the moment I remembered the probable salt, wet cause of my mishap I had a pretty hopeless feeling. At the end of ten minutes I felt not merely quite hopeless, but utterly helpless. Helpless as a child before a charging elephant, hopeless as a man at the bottom of an Alpine crevasse. Ignition, carburettor, what had been damaged? In good daylight it might take me an hour or two first to discover and then to mend. By the radiance of my torch I would probably spend a night or two, and be none the wiser.

And meantime the precious dark hours were slipping away, and scattered all over the miles of country lay foemen sleeping—nothing but foes. I was in a sea-girt isle with but one solitary friend, and he was nearly twenty miles away, and I had the strictest orders not to approach him save under the cover of darkness. Enough cause for a few pretty black moments, I think you will allow.

And then I took myself by the scruff of the neck and gave myself a hearty shake. Had I been picked for this errand because I was a coward or a resourceless fool? No! Well, then, I must keep my head and use my wits, and if I could not achieve the best thing, I must try to do the second best. I ran over all the factors in the problem.

Firstly, to wait in the middle of that road trying to accomplish a job which I knew perfectly well it was a

thousand chances to one against my managing, was sheer perverse folly.

Secondly, to leave my cycle in a ditch and try to cover the distance on my own two legs before daybreak was a physical impossibility. My cycle being one of the modern kind with no pedals, I could not even essay the dreadful task of grinding it along with my feet. Therefore I could not reach my haven to-night by any conceivable means.

On the other hand, I would still be expected to-morrow night, for our plans were laid to allow something for mischances; so if I could conceal myself and my cycle through the coming day, all might yet be well. Therefore I must devise some plan for concealing myself.

Logic had brought me beautifully so far, but now came the rub—Where was I to hide? These islands, you may or may not know, are to all practical purposes treeless and hedgeless. They have many moors and waste places, but of an abominable kind for a fugitive—especially a fugitive with a motor-cycle. The slopes are long and usually gentle and quite exposed; ravines and dells are few and far between and farther still to reach. Caves and clefts among the rocks might be found no doubt, but I should probably break my neck looking for them in the dark. Conceive of a man with a motor-bicycle looking for a cave by starlight!

And then a heaven-sent inspiration visited me. On board we had of course maps with every house marked, however small, and who lived in it, and so on. We do things thoroughly, even though at the moment there may not be any apparent reason for some of the details. I blessed our system now, for suddenly in my mind's eye I saw a certain

group of farm buildings marked "ruinous and uninhabited." And now where the devil was it?

My own pocket map of course had no such minute details and I had to work my memory hard. And then in a flash I saw the map as distinctly as if it had really been under my eye instead of safely under the Atlantic. "I have a chance still!" I said to myself.

By the light of my torch I had a careful look at my small map, and then I set forth pushing my lifeless cycle. To get to my refuge I had to turn back and retrace my steps (or perhaps I should rather say my revolutions) part way to the shore till I came to a road branching southwards, roughly parallel to the coast. It ascended continuously and pretty steeply, and I can assure you it was stiff work pushing a motor-cycle up that interminable hill, especially when one was clad for warmth and not for exercise. Dimly in the waxing moonlight I could see low farm buildings here and there, but luckily not a light shone nor a dog barked from one of them. Glancing over my shoulder I saw the sea, now quite distinct and with a faint sheen upon its surface, widening and widening as I rose. But I merely glanced at it enviously and concentrated my attention on the task of finding my "ruinous and uninhabited" farm. I twice nearly turned off the road too soon, but I did find it at last—a low tumble-down group of little buildings some two hundred yards or so off the road on the right, or seaward side. Here the cultivated fields stopped, and beyond them the road ascended through barren moorland. My refuge was, in fact, the very last of the farms as one went up the hill. It lay pretty isolated from the others, and there was a track

leading to it that enabled me to push my cycle along fairly comfortably.

"I might have come to a much worse place!" I said to myself hopefully.

Though there was not a sign of life about the place, and not a sound of any kind, I still proceeded warily, as I explored the derelict farm. I dared not even use my torch till I had stooped through an open door, and was safely within one of the buildings. When I flashed it round me I saw then that I stood in a small and absolutely empty room, which might at one time have been anything from a parlour to a byre, but now seemed consecrated to the cultivation of nettles. It had part of a roof overhead, and seemed as likely to suit my purpose as any other of the dilapidated group, so I brought my cycle in, flattened a square yard or two of nettles, and sat down on the floor with my back against the wall. And then I lit a cigarette and meditated.

"My young friend," I said to myself, "you are in an awkward position, but, remember, you have been in awkward positions before when there were no such compensating advantages! Let us consider these advantages and grow cheerful. You are privileged to render your country such a service as few single Germans have been able to render her—if this plan succeeds! If it fails, your sacrifice will not be unknown or unappreciated. Whatever happens, you will have climbed a rung or two up the ladder of duty, and perhaps of fame."

This eloquence pleased my young friend so much that he lit another cigarette.

"Consider again," I resumed, "what an opportunity you have been unexpectedly presented with for exhibiting your resourcefulness and your coolness and your nerve! If it had not been for that wave of salt water your task would have been almost too simple. Your own share of the enterprise would merely have consisted in a couple of easy rides on a motor-cycle, and perhaps the giving of a few suggestions, or the making of a few objections, which would probably have been brushed aside as worthless. Now you have really something to test you!"

This oration produced a less exhilarating effect. In fact, it set me to wondering very gravely how I could best justify this implied tribute to my powers of surmounting difficulties. Till the day broke all I had to do was to sit still, but after that —what? I pondered for a few minutes, and then I came to the conclusion that an hour or two's sleep would probably freshen my wits. I knew I could count on waking when the sun rose, and so I closed my eyes, and presently was fast asleep.

When I awoke, it was broad daylight. Looking first through the pane-less window and then through the gap in the roof, I saw that it was a grey, still morning that held promise of a fine day, though whether that was to my advantage or disadvantage I did not feel quite sure. Nobody seemed to be stirring yet about the houses or fields, so I had still time for deliberation before fate forced my hand.

First of all, I had a look round my immediate surroundings. I was well sheltered, as all the walls were standing, and there was most of a roof over my head (the last being a point of some importance in case any aircraft