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## The Second Angel

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# THE SECOND ANGEL

BY LEWIS D. CLARKE

The lifeboat moved uneasily with the swell somewhere in the mid-Atlantic, sinking into the hollows and rising on the oily crests. She was large for a lifeboat, but she served the double purpose of the Captain's launch and a vessel of safety. That she had not been cared for was evident—her lifeline of cork floats had broken in several places and trailed discontentedly in the sea. The name *Cambria* had almost disappeared from her port bow, and patches of paint had chipped off her top-sides, giving her the appearance of being slightly mottled. Her dejection was completed by the ragged stump of a mast which extended for several feet above her forward thwart.

She carried three men as complement; three dressed in the array of mismatched clothing that marks the men of the merchant service. The Captain, Captain Edward Gautier, was qualified by four years of experience as master of a coastal steamer. He was distinguished from the others by an officer's cap, now incrustated with salt, and the bars of his ragged uniform coat. He rose from his place in the bow, and steadied his middle-aged and once plump body against the fragment of mast to take the noon sight. Gautier stood for a moment; then, lowering the sextant, he called to a large, dark man in the stern.

"Lilly, get the chart and mark our position."

Lilly, the chief officer, grumbled forward and towered over the little Captain. "See 'ere, Skipper." He was British and unmistakably cockney. "What bloomin' good will it do? Haccordin' t' yer own calculyations, we've drifted out of all the steamer lanes. Yer bloody

sight proves it. You could 'ave used the pyrotechnics when we was where we had a chance o' gettin' picked up. Now where 'as all your fancy sailin' and such got us. Why," he mimicked the captain's shrill, high pitched voice, "only two thousand miles t' the east in the Frog Coast."

The Captain tried to assume an air of command, always a struggle, now more difficult before the Mate's sharp features and open accusations of incompetence.

"Mister Lilly, I want you to remember that you're still under my command and that you will remain under it until we have been picked up." The heavy clothes gave him a comic appearance and, as he was vaguely aware that his appearance did not help his prestige, his voice took on tones of appeal. "We're in this together and I have to do the best that I can. I have done the best I could. We must all help, Lilly, but I am the one that has to make the decisions. I mean, I have the responsibility."

Gautier handed the sextant to the Mate and worked his way aft, holding on to the gunnel of the life boat to steady himself against the roll. "Mister Spencer." Even the mild exertion of pulling himself over the thwarts caused his florid face to perspire and his breath to come faster. "Mister Spencer!" The slight figure dropped the wrench and a pale face turned toward the commander. "Mister Spencer, how much gas is there in the tank?"

"The same amount that there was yesterday," came the surly reply.

"I know. I know. But how much? If we sight a ship there must be enough to reach her."

The Mate had followed the Captain. He understood the ritual of the engine, and, though he disdained to take part in it, he was vaguely aware of its necessity to Gautier.

"Well, go on." Gautier continued to address the slight, sallow man. "You're the engineer now, although not competent I must say." He knew he could get away with berating the little man, and it added to what little prestige he had left to do so. "Start the engines. Start 'em!" His voice rose an octave in pitch. "We have to run the engines every day. They'll be ready when we're picked up." He seemed to be addressing the one-cylinder engine rather than the engineer. Spencer took up the crank and fell against it, using the weight of his slight body rather than his arm muscles. He could barely turn it over.

The Mate pushed his heavy shoulders between Spencer and the engine. "Ere, out of the way, you." His biceps bulged as he spun the engine over rapidly. The fly-wheel slowed and stopped with a final wheeze while Lilly sat on the thwart before it, panting. Spencer began to fiddle incompetently with the needle valve.

"There's water in the gas, Capt'n."

"Water in what little gas is left in the bloomin' thing." Lilly turned away from the others and seemed to be talking more to himself. "The damn thing wouldn't have done any good. We can see as far as she'd run on that little gas." Captain Gautier shivered as the wind penetrated his jacket.

"Mister Spencer, you're the engineer and you should know how to fix it. Shouldn't you know how to fix it?" he said, unscrewing the cap and peering into the dark interior of the tank. "There's gas in it. I can smell it. It'll run. Fix it, Mister Spencer."

Lilly looked at the jagged wood in the foresheets.

He turned to the big Mate. "Mister Lilly, go forward and rig the mast. We'll sail if there's a wind."

"That's all right. Use the oars. Lash them together." He moved forward again. "We'll make another mast."

"Oh! Yer will, will you. And wot are you goin' to use for a sail? You can't sail the bloody boat without a sail."

"We can use our clothes. No, I guess they won't be enough. The weather's so cold that we must wear them. It's nice, though, except at night. I'm glad that it isn't so cold that we're freezing. It could be hot, too."

He raised his voice. "Mister Spencer, would you rather have it hot or cold?"

"Hot or cold! I don't know what yer talkin' about. Hot or cold, what the 'ell difference does it make?"

Lilly stood with his feet planted against the motion of the boat. "Yes, what the 'ell difference does it make to us? What the 'ell difference when you've played at games ever since she went down." His voice fairly roared as he stood in the open boat against the sky and yelled at Gautier, making it rock as he described arcs against the sky and seat with his arms and all the cords and veins standing out in his neck. "I'll tell you this, Captain Gautier sir. Yer naught but a damn fool! An idiot! Do ye hear me, you blasted old senile, middle-aged, mock of a captain, do ye hear me! I'm telling you that you don't have sense enough to navigate a rowboat in a cesspool!" He

was screeching now. "Yes an ass!" He sat down on the thwart, weak from his exertion. "Yer an ass," he said in a tired voice.

Spencer stood by the engine, awed by the demonstration. He stepped forward, passing the broken Gautier who sat in the bottom of the lifeboat, his face in his hands.

"What's this?" the Second Engineer stopped to pick up the oil-skin packet that had fallen from Lilly's coat. "Here's another. What's in them?"

"Nothin'. Give 'em 'ere. They're mine."

A crafty expression stole over the Engineer's face. "Oh, they're yours, are they. I didn't say they weren't. I just asked what's in 'em.

Lilly tried to placate Spencer. "There's nothin' in 'em, just somethin' personal wot I had with me when the ship went down. Nothin' like food; if 'twas food I would 'ave given it over to split. You can see by the size that it ain't food."

"Well, you shouldn't mind if I took a little look-see, just to be sure - -."

Before he was able to finish, Lilly snatched the packets from his hand, but not before the white powder in one escaped its container and blew away on the wind. Spencer looked at the remainder in the palm of his hand, then back at the Mate.

"So that's it. I had an idea it was something like that. That's what you been keepin' to yourself—that's why you went below. Dope!" His hand shook and he backed away from Lilly. "Dope! You've been smuggling this stuff across and sellin' it. Captain Gautier, look! Look at the stuff! There's the reason for the ship goin' down and the storm blowin' us way out of the steamer lanes." Spencer had turned as white as the spray around him. "Damn you, Lilly. God damn you. You're the cause of all this. You and that evil stuff. You been makin' money off it."

"O' course I 'ave made somethin' from it. And I know a lot of other coves wot 'ave too. A man 'as to pick up a little when 'e can. A man whot's smart."

"A man that's smart! You've been makin' the ship and the rest of us part of your dirty work, don't you know that? It's because of you that we're condemned to this little tub a thousand miles from nowhere. Do you call that smart? Throw the damned stuff away. Throw it away! It's our only chance, you blind, stupid food. Throw it away, before we all burn in Hell for it!" He backed away from the bewildered Lilly, his hand outstretched, pleading. "For God's

sake, throw it away!" He stumbled over the engine, falling to the floorboards. "Can't you see what it will do to us, to you? If you won't think of the rest of us, at least think of yourself."

The Mate looked at the packages and stuffed them into his jersey, turning away from the two in the stern, his face dark. Spencer was crying now, the salty tears mingling with the salt spray on the grime of his face. "Captain, he's got dope. You saw it. Take it away from him and throw it away. Throw it into the sea. It's him that did it; him that brought it. You're the Captain, take it away from him. You have to make him."

Gautier looked at the pathetic figure once, briefly, and hid his head in his hands once more, looking like some broken toy that a child had cast aside. A comical, pathetic, broken toy. "Oh! God." He half sprawled, half kneeled against the engine, breathing broken phrases and sobs.

## II

### THE CAPTAIN

She was a British-built tramp of seven thousand tons, properly classed as an Emergency Fleet Standard Steel Steamship. Outwardly she had the appearance of hundreds of her kind—low in the water when she was loaded, deep well decks fore and aft, high derricks (a holdover from the days when steamers carried a steadying sail) and a high black stack, from which the heavy coal smoke hung dark over the water for lack of a breeze. She would appear ugly to most, yet there was a kind of gracefulness to her long run and high poop deck. Finding her work in out of the way ports, she drifted with the trade and her nondescript crew drifted with her, from Alden to Madagascar, from Bordeaux to New Caledonia. And somehow she paid dividends to her owners.

Captain Gautier joined the *Cambria* at Rangoon. It was purely a temporary arrangement: Captain Eliot had died of a heart attack in the China Sea and she wasn't to pick up her new skipper until Newport News where she was due for an insurance survey and a complete overhaul. Gautier saw the opportunity; he jumped at the chance to escape from the dusky little coastal steamer with its crew of sweating natives. He was accepted without incident by the crew, to whom a change among the officers was as common as the next port of call. Routine went on as it had before as the *Cambria*

steamed slowly around the great continent of Africa and up the western coast.

Thus it was that a Saturday morning found her plowing through a glassy sea at her ever monotonous eleven knots. Gautier donned his coat and uniform cap and walked through the alleyway, picking his way along the white walled passage with the piping overhead until he reached the wheelhouse. The Chief Mate, Lilly, received him without a greeting, only mumbling the course and the last reading of the barometer before he disappeared to the deck below.

"Steward, I think I'll take my breakfast on the bridge this morning. Will you send it up?"

The dishes and silverware rattled on the tray as the steward carried them through the wheelhouse door and set them out on the chart table. The coffee was good and Gautier sipped it slowly as he stood looking out over the slow rising and falling of the bow to the sea beyond. He had come to like that spot in the corner of the wheelhouse where he could stand and watch the men on the fore-decks of the ship and keep an eye on the quartermaster and course. It was better than the cramped quarters on the dirty and odor-laden Malayan steamer of a month ago; here was more room, both in the size of the ship and in the open ocean that she navigated. Gautier liked the distinction of command on a deep water vessel where he could remain aloof from the crew, keeping the relations between master and man clean with an air of formality. Although he was aware that he did not exactly fit the criteria of command emotionally or physically, he could rely on this isolation of office to give him confidence and respect in his own eyes.

The Second Mate appeared on the bridge as the steward cleared away the last of the breakfast and Gautier looked up from the log.

"Oh, yes. Being a rather calm day, Mister, I thought you might have the Boatswain take a party of men and go overside and touch up the rust on the starboard quarter. The plates could be eaten half way through for all the care she's been given."

The young khaki-clad figure stood twisting his hat nervously in his hands. "Capt'n?"

"Well?"

"I though, sir, that perhaps, as we're goin' to lay up as soon as we get in, sir, that we'd better leave that to the yard. They'll just have to go over the whole thing again."

Gautier unconsciously readjusted trousers over protruding paunch. He knew that the details of the deck department were not usually the concern of the captain, but left to the junior officers. "All right, Mister. But find something for the men to do. I can't have any slack discipline on my ship and it's up to the officers to keep the men busy and the ship looking like something. I don't care what they do, so long as she keeps up her appearances. Just find something for them to do, Mister; find something for them to do."

It was evening when the Captain again ascended to the wheelhouse. The moon was just coming up from behind the invisible African shore and it cut a silver swath across the still calm sea. It climbed in the sky, giving a phosphorescence to the sides of the long, smooth combers and a silver, almost ghost-like cast to the plodding steamer, except where the glare from the stokehold skylight painted the superstructure a bloody red. An evening mist had come up, blowing over the water with the gentle breeze. It came in streaks, enveloping the *Cambria* to the rail and leaving the deck houses and bridge plainly visible, as if they had been cut off from the ship and were coasting along the top of the white fog by themselves. Except for those on watch, the crew, upon finishing its daily work had retired from mess to smoke and talk. The *Cambria* was silent except for the occasional slam of a furnace door and the rattle of the ash hoist.

Gautier pulled the cigarette from his fleshy lips and was just in the act of throwing it away when she struck. She didn't fetch up hard, but heeled over slightly with a long, tearing noise, like someone ripping a strip of cloth. In a moment she righted herself and went on. The Captain hardly heard the noise, but he felt the deck tremble under him with a series of peculiar shudders. He entered the wheelhouse, still not believing.

"What the devil have we hit!"

"I don't know, sir. I was just awheeling her when it come. I couldn't see nothin'."

Gautier threw the telegraph to "stop" and rang the engine room. No answer. He turned again to the quartermaster.

"You must have seen it." His voice began to rise. "A ship doesn't just hit something without anyone knowing about it. He rang the engine room a second, then a third time. "What's going on down there? What did we hit? I know you couldn't see it, con-found it, but is it bad? Is she making water? Is there any damage?"

Well, send some one to look up forward." Where's the officer on watch there? I don't know, I tell you, I don't know!"

The Second Mate came running into the wheelhouse his breath coming fast and dark patches coming through his shirt. "Captain! We're making water by the head. It's coming awful fast. I think she's been stoved in the forward hold; I never saw so much water!"

Gautier put his ear back to the telephone. "What? Are you sure there's water coming up? Well try and stop it. Yes, stop it! Stuff something in there. Anything!"

He turned again to the Second Mate. "The engineers say there's water forward of the stokehold bulkhead. She must have flooded the whole forward part of her. She's starting to make water in the firehold. I want you to go down there and make a report on the damage."

"But, Captain!"

"I don't want any 'but Captains' on this ship. I want to know the full extent of the damage to her and I want it quick. Quick! Where's the Mate? Where's Lilly? You see him down there, send him up, do you understand, Mister? Send him up to the bridge. The rest of the men. Send the rest down below. I want that water stopped."

Gautier was standing over the Second Mate as he finished his instructions, bobbing like an inflated seashore toy. He half pushed the younger man through the door.

The Captain half paced and half ran back and forth in the wheelhouse with odd little bouncing steps that shook his whole figure. He called the engine room again: no answer. He couldn't keep still. "Go below with the others. Get out! Get out!" He was ashamed that the helmsman should see him lose control of himself but he couldn't really help it. The *Cambria* was taking on a list now, and his feet slipped out from under him and he fell heavily on the slanted deck. Rising, he reached once more for the black box and the dangling receiver and, turning suddenly, ran out through the wheelhouse door to the deck. Gautier had to climb against the slope of the ship. He ran past the open ports of the bridge deck with his funny, hurried gait, a pathetic figure shaking so that he could hardly hold the rail.

"Lilly!"

"Aye, Capt'n?"

"Where the Hell have you been, Lilly? Tried to find you. Ship's goin' fast. Must clear away the boats."

"Aye. I'll get the men."

"No, Lilly. Listen to me. There'll just be us—the two of us. Can't call the others." He continued in the face of the Mate's astonishment. "There isn't time, confound you, there isn't time! The others'll come up here and swamp the boats, trying to get away. We'll wait for them and we'll all be lost."

The Captain trembled so that he could hardly speak, his brass-buttoned chest heaving jerkily. He stood with his eyes starting out of his head in fear, his flabby face gray with fright, and he held the arm of his First Mate and pointed down to the deserted decks of the ship.

"Look at her, Lilly, look at her! She'll slide under any minute! For the love of God, man, hurry!"

Lilly was a strong man, a good mate, but now he was led by the Captain with the wild, staring eyes.

"We'll take my tender, Lilly, it's larger than the lifeboats." He tore at the falls, cursing when the knots would not come easily.

"But, look, Capt'n, you just can't leave 'em on her. They'll all go down! You just can't leave 'em!"

"Don't be a fool, Lilly. They'll get off. There're other boats. They'll get off. The ship is sinking, Lilly!"

The other man, Mister Spencer, the Second Assistant Engineer of the *Cambria*, staggered to the deck as Gautier and Lilly cleared the falls, and he fell over the gunnel of the lifeboat just as she swung, creaking in her falls, to the water, now not so far below deck. The Captain and the Mate paid little attention to the engineer as he lay sprawled on the floorboards, senseless to his surroundings. The boat drifted away from the ship, a huge dark mass on the silver of the water. They sat dumbly watching as she rolled in the white path of the moon, her masts stark and pleading against the sky and her funnel smoking in a futile attempt. Then the white mist on the water came between them, slowly—at first they could see her outline as through a distortion of some gigantic lens—and then the white enveloped her completely and the three men were alone.

### III THE MATE

Lilly was a lucky man. He always had been. And he came to accept his luck as uniquely his, given to him as a gift, as brown hair

or blue eyes are gifts to others. It was hard for him not to look upon luck as something personal when, as the men knelt on the floor of a fore-castle and the dice rolled his way time after time, his shipmates clapped him on the back: "All right, Lilly, you 'ave me. I don't see 'ow a chap could make a point the way 'e does." Then the dice rolled again and presently the men rose from the floor, shaking the stiffness from their bodies, and Lilly gathered up his winnings, smiling. "Oh, I say, it could happen to anyone." But in his heart he knew that it could only happen to him and the smile came to be for the luck that was behind him, rather than an apology to the others.

Yet Lilly was not only lucky in cards and dice. He could drink and stagger back to the ship almost blind with the liquor in him, and none of the water front toughs chose to pull him back into the shadows of the dingy buildings. Women, too, had Lilly's luck against them when they carefully laid their traps for him in the dimly lighted rooms with the cheap furniture, only to find that he had fallen drunk on the street and refused their proffered assistance. He carried his luck to sea. Once, when a heavy wave washed him from his hold in a howling gale and carried him along the buried deck in its swirling arms, it dropped him, head foremost, coughing and spitting out the salt water, just before it retreated through the scuppers.

And, when Lilly realized the tremendous value of his gift, he came to rely on it more and more. Gambling with the crew—a dollar or a pound at time—was only the beginning. During the war, Lilly found that men paid money, lots of money, for things that were hard to come by. Lilly carried watches or jewelry ashore in his pockets; his luck kept him from the customs officers. After the war he discovered the value of the white powder that some people wanted desperately. It would be a simple matter, he thought, to transport the powder from one part of the world to another and pocket the cash people would pay him for carrying it. He found it a simple matter for a man with his luck; and the money came easily.

But if Lilly was lucky, he was also an excellent seaman. He had been brought up in the tradition of the sea, in the lower east side of London, where the crews of ocean steamers and their families lived. His father, a mate on a coaler, taught Lilly to follow in his footsteps. Now he was chief mate on an ocean cargo vessel at a time when chief mates were easy to find. It was before the last trip,

in the carpeted and oak-paneled offices of the owners, that he had been told of a new steamer that the line was planning to buy and the opportunity of her command. He would be interested? Then the details could be worked out after his next trip.

Lilly thought of the luck that would soon bring him a fine, new job. Saturday mornings after his watch he liked to stroll around the decks and look at the ship. He never tired of watching over her, silently, and without the knowledge of the crew. It wasn't that he wanted to keep a check on them behind their backs or that he was pushing for a promotion; he merely found pleasure in it.

He passed the galley and met Spencer, the Second Engineer, whose watch coincided with his own.

"Well, 'ows things on the bottom side this fine mornin'? Are you monkeys keeping heverything orl neat an' clean, or 'ave you been holdin' another one o' them loud parties wot make so much noise and keeps orl the decent seamen in the ship from gettin' their sleep?"

The little Engineer moved confidentially close to Lilly and answered in a low voice:

"No, things been pretty quiet this watch, the Chief was down there the whole time I was on duty, so we couldn't get away with nothin'. But I still have some of that good Puerto Rican rum that's sittin' in my room just waitin' for me to get to it." He nudged the Mate. "It gets awful hot down there, so I just take a little to put me to sleep." His pale face smiled as he thought of it. "Come along and tip a few with me. I'll have the lot of it gone before long."

"No, you go ahead and 'ave it. I'll just have a bite to eat before turnin' in."

"Say, there's something I wanted to ask you—Gautier, the Skipper—he don't seem to be the right sort somehow. He don't act like a captain, know what I mean?"

"You mean 'cause 'e caught you drinkin' on watch the other day?"

"Hell no, not that. I mean he just don't seem right."

"Well, 'e's only along for this trip, I guess. Least I 'ope so! 'E don't know wot 'es doin', sometimes . . . Say, I caught him muckin' around in my cabin the other day. 'E tells me 'e was lookin' for a polaris, or somethin'. Polaris! I don't know. I don't even think 'e can use one."

"He sure don't act like it."

Well, it's nothin' to be botherin' yerself over. Just be sure,

though, that when you 'and one on tonight you don't wake 'im hup. I don't mind you 'aving a good time for yerself, but heverytime I hears you, I think the ship's in port an' I 'ave to get out the moorin' cables."

Spencer laughed and scurried down the deck, leaving the galley to Lilly.

Later, when Lilly awoke, it was dark. He dressed slowly, then, kneeling beside his bed, tore up the blanket and threw the bedcovers in a heap. Pulling the two packets from their hiding place, he fondled them, turning them over and over in the lamplight. The Captain had been in his room this morning; he might come in again. He couldn't have been looking for anything, yet there was always the chance—well, he couldn't trust luck too far. He had to find a better hiding place.

The moon was rising off the starboard beam, casting long shadows over the port alleyways and decks. Lilly crept forward, watching, the packets bulging in his shirt front. The deck trembled under him with the thrust of the engines. The door, then the alleyway with its dim, red-orange electric bulbs, then the companionway. His hot fingers closed over the cold steel of the rungs as he let himself down into the blackness of the hold. The rumble, the pound, the beat, and the squeal, all the sounds of the machinery and the ship—metal in her making minute adjustments for the constant changes in stress—Lilly heard them as he searched for a hiding place. He thrust the packets in a length of tubing, one of a bundle that was chained down to the plates. He played the flashlight around in the gloom, and as he bent over a crack in the floor plating, the flashlight centered him in its orb. "If a cove could tike a piece of wire, now, and 'ang . . ."

A rending and tearing, the scretch of tortured steel, and the starboard side of the *Cambria* opened as if a giant hand had run its finger along, crumpling the hull in a jagged breach. Lilly fell heavily against a barrel. He shook his head and tried to stand, trying to keep his grip on the smooth wood. Water poured through the gap and cut through the gloom like so many fire hoses. The flashlight had somehow escaped him, but he was able to feel his way to the stacks of piping and recover the packets before the flying water got to them. He lost his footing once again on the now wet flooring and struggled to the companionway ladder. The jets of water increased, throwing the barrels and boxes around in confusion, pushing them to the other

side of the hold, or hurling them away from the opening, leaving them to float, broken by the force of the sea, and spilling their contents into the surging, green water. Lilly hung to the ladder, trying to follow the extent of the damage with his eye and watching the water as it rose, slowly, up the rungs. Not until the gash had been completely submerged and the water rushed into the ship under a myriad of bubbles, did the Mate leave the hold and climb to the deck to find a safe place for the oilskin wrapped packets. The boats. Certainly they would use the boats if the ship were abandoned. Lilly ran for the upper deck to hide the white powder. Then, like the efficient mate that he was, he would help his Captain get the ship under control. But the Captain was already at the boats, shaking and crying as he struggled with the canvas covering.

#### IV THE ENGINEER

Second Engineer Spencer wasn't a particularly good engineer. Most of his colleagues considered him rather poor. In fact, it was a minor miracle among the *Cambria's* engineering staff and black gang that Spencer held license at all. His fault didn't lie with his knowledge of his job, for his understanding of steam engineering, if it weren't spectacular, was at least adequate. The best way to explain his incompetence was in what seamen commonly call "a feel for things." The Chief Engineer, an ancient Scotsman who had been sailing for almost all of his undetermined number of years, had this feel—he could lie in his stateroom under the bridge and come running half-clad into the engine room if his engines paused once in their endless task. He loved and coddled them as a mother coddles a babe, and coaxed them through their struggles. He knew, and could tell you if you asked him, the present condition and state of every rod, bolt, and pinion in the *Cambria's* power plant without bothering to give it so much as a passing glance.

But Spencer did not have his supervisor's feel. It was a job to him—not a very good one at that, and he never failed to complain of it to anyone whom he could get to listen. Consequently his life was a series of different ships and engineerrooms; the crews would just get used to his repining ways when a letter came from the owners: "Mr. Spencer: This is to inform you that, due to an anticipated contraction of our crews, we no longer have need of your services after the first of the month." And Spencer moved on.



Yet Spencer had a whimsical air about him that saved him from complete rejection by his fellow officers. Most of them rather liked him, an unusual occurrence among men who judge their contemporaries by vocational skill. He knew just how to approach people and was easily accepted among them. Spencer was the first to be sought out as a companion for the wild, alcoholic shore leaves which occurred whenever the *Cambria* touched port, and was the only person on board who could claim membership in every clique.

Behind this exterior, though, Spencer was an extremely sensitive person—sensitive to his thin body, to the heavy, sweating, brutish men who made up the black gang, and to the soft sky that hung over the ship as she steamed through the tropical waters. It was this sensitivity, more than anything else, that made him drink more ashore than was good for him and ultimately drove him to keeping the bottle as a constant companion aboard ship.

The blue-black of the coming night crept across the sky from the distant line of horizon as a grimy stoker knocked at Spencer's cabin, entered, and gently shook his sleeping form. "Oot o' it, noo, sor. 'Tis yer watch and the Chief 'll tike yer 'ead orf, do he couth yer 'ear."

"Umm, fine, Hughes, fine. Tell the old boy I'll be down, soon as I get out o'the sack." He shook his head to clear the alcoholic fumes. "Oh . . . oh, my head. And the ship shakin' like she's about to fall apart. I'll spend this watch in m' bed." The Engineer groped for his shoes and rose, fully clothed, to sway against the door jamb. "I guess the best thing would be to take the bottle right down to the job with me. Yes, that's an idea." The bottle, half full of amber liquid, protruded from his pocket as he groped his way down the slippery ladders to the oily mists of the engine room. "My God, is it hot!" He sank into the worn leather chair on the lower gratings and tipped the bottle to his head. He felt sober. His head had stopped spinning; now if he could just hold it still; there, he was all right. Spencer sat still in the chair with the machinery pounding around him. He moved to view the oiler working at the other side of the engine room and immediately he felt the sick feeling return to his stomach. He had to sit perfectly still, his head down to avoid the spinning lights and harsh glare.

When the *Cambria* struck, Spencer, the chair, and the rum went tumbling in a heap on the oily gratings. The impact parred out the circuit breakers and there were a few moments of confusion before

the crew could reset them. The Chief Engineer was at his post almost before the shock occurred, directing the men and beating them verbally with his harsh Scottish accent. Dazed, he lay where he had fallen, slowly realizing that something out of the ordinary had occurred and trying to piece things together. The lights flickered, then went on. Spencer pulled himself up against the steel handrail. He looked around dumbly in the electric-lighted world with the gleaming shafts and rods and the globes overhead throwing their light on the white walls and polished steel, brass, and bronze.

"You, Spencer. Mister, you're supposed to be on watch here!" The Chief paused, the icy blue of his eyes piercing into Spencer's. You're no dom good to us, Mister; Drunk on your watch, you are, drunk and lying on the floor like the sop yer are. Noo get the hell out o' here, Mister, get out and go lay in yer bunk with yer eternal bottle. G'wan, noo, off with ye!"

Spencer pulled himself up over the handrails, swaying and falling against them, but not because of the ship's motion. He faltered in the open companionway, the cool air of the evening blowing over him and lifting the damp hair from where it lay against his perspiring face. The sick feeling returned and he lay against the side of the deck house, choking with vomit. The gray of the decks, gray chipped paint with rust showing through, stretched as far as Spencer could see and he felt it, cold, against him. He rose to his feet, staggering, holding on with both hands while the sea, the sky, and the ship reeled about him. His head bobbed on his shoulders, a rag doll with all the stuffing out of it.

Somewhere, somewhere far up above him, voices were calling, calling and arguing among themselves. Spencer thought they were calling to him. He crawled toward them until he caught sight of two figures with a white lifeboat between them, slowly swinging in its davits. It was all he could do to reach it and sink to the haven of its wooden floorboards.

## V THE BOAT

They had sailed, the three in the lifeboat; they had sailed for many days. The big storm had come and carried away their mast, the gasoline enginer had died of thirst, and they fought and quarreled

among themselves. It had rained, though, and there was food enough in the lockers for a long while with what they took from the sea. They had little to do but think, and most of the day they spent in that pursuit—Lilly sat in the bows, with his craggy head always looking out over the sea, his big hands carefully placed in his pockets and his eyes staring at something beyond. Gautier sat in the stern-sheets, his head bent, looking at the bottom of the boat, thinking and talking to himself. His whole life's history the others heard—of his life on the native tramps, of the steam *Cambria*, and of his helplessness dressed in the blue uniform of captain of the Merchant Service. And Spencer prayed. He sat looking at the useless lump of machinery and prayed, not in the manner of a child asking for a favor, nor as one who stands with his head thrown back at the heavens demanding deliverance from the pit, but as a man who has seen the error of his ways and asks nothing more than a chance to correct them. Spencer started praying the second day, after he began to recover from the agony of a normal life. The recovery occurred two days after he had fallen into the lifeboat as Gautier and Lilly lowered it between them into the water, as it slid into the water slowly, the line creaking through the blocks. They all had drifted in their thoughts.

They were sitting one evening, looking long into the sunset, Gautier looked up, then stood in the lifeboat waving his arms.

"A ship! I see a ship! A ship! The rest of you, look! There she is, off our starboard bow. She heading for us! Look, all of you!"

Spencer joined the Captain, clapping him on the back, shouting, pointing. "She sees us! Look, Lilly, off our bow she is! Look at her!"

Lilly squinted into the evening. "I don't see a bloody thing."

"Look, man, look! There she is, just over there she is! Look at her!"

"But I don't . . . Wyte . . . Wyte . . . I do too! There, over there! I see her!" He rose to join the others and, as he did so, the two oilskin packets shook loose from his jersey and fell, unnoticed, into the sea.

The ship came on. They could see she was a cargo steamer. Rigging, masts, and funnel stood out against the sky. The three danced and waved at her as she drew near. Water boiled around her cutwater and parted away from her long, black flanks as she

rose and fell, easing over the swells. The red from the setting sun painted her bloody and black, and her whole being seemed to shiver with the beating of her engines. She passed close to them, so close that they could see the red rust streaks running down her sides and the seaweed along her waterline. As she drew abreast they could read the letters high on her stern: *Cambria* of Falmouth. And as she passed into the sunset, a lifeboat rocked emptily in her wake.