

THE HUNT FOR  
THE PEGGY C

JOHN WINN MILLER



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## A MASTER WORK OF NAVAL FICTION

This gripping novel full of action and suspense from John Winn Miller, a semifinalist in the Clive Cussler Adventure Writers Competition, introduces Captain Jake Rogers, a hardened smuggler transporting contraband through the U-boat infested waters of the North Atlantic in the beginning phases of World War II.

Rumored to have killed someone in America before beginning his career at sea, he takes on cargo few other captains are willing to carry—if the price is right. But after witnessing the oppression of Jews in Amsterdam, Rogers agrees to take on the most dangerous cargo he has ever transported: a Jewish family fleeing Nazi persecution.

Pursued by Oberleutnant Viktor Brauer, a brutal U-boat captain who will stop at nothing to send Rogers and his crew to the bottom of the ocean, the normally aloof Rogers finds himself drawn in by the family's warmth and faith and is increasingly willing to do whatever it takes to get them to safety—even sacrificing his own ship to defeat the indefatigable Brauer.

*The Hunt for the Peggy C* is a masterful work of naval fiction laced with nail biting tension and unexpectedly heartwarming moments.

## PRAISE FOR THE HUNT

“A rare book indeed! A very well-researched and informative tale about an often-overlooked place and period in history, yet the story never gets lost in the details. Instead, this is a tense, fast-moving and stirring account of men called upon to overcome about the most daunting situations imaginable.”

—*Don Keith, Author, “Warshot,” “Only the Brave,” and numerous other works of WWII History*

“The Hunt for the Peggy C is a tour de force of historical research that has pace, clarity, suspense, fascinating historical data woven in with the narrative, and perhaps most importantly, heart.”

—*Chris Evans, former Random House editor and Author of “A Darkness Forged in Fire” and “Of Bone and Thunder”*

“Pack your seabag and prepare for adventure! This exciting tale is a page-turner from page one and will leave the reader breathless with all the action. This is a must read for historical naval fiction lovers!”

—*Matt Zullo, retired U.S. Navy Master Chief Petty Officer and author, “The U.S. Navy’s On-The-Roof Gang” series*

“Kudos to John Miller for this riveting and suspenseful tale. I was on the edge of my seat reading it! Impeccably researched, this intense sea chase has at its heart a wonderful love story that will keep you riveted until the very end! I could not put it down until I found out how it was resolved. I highly recommend this book!”

—*Robin Hutton, Author, the NY Times bestseller, “Sgt Reckless: America’s War Horse”*

“The Hunt for the Peggy C delivers action, excitement, and romance from the very first page! Amazing in-depth research buttresses this exciting tale of believable people facing unbelievable odds. Occurring during a period of history that few know about, the story both thrills AND educates! Recommended—this is a good one!

—Roger Maxim, author, *“The Long Gray Target” series*

"The Peggy C shows us the Battle of the Atlantic from an unusual perspective, that of the ordinary sailors who faced death by the guns and torpedoes of Hitler's U-boats. Miller takes us on an adventure from the Channel to the Eastern Mediterranean, as an obsessed U-boat commander pursues the equally obsessed captain of a tramp steamer. It's a story Bogart and Bacall would have been proud to star in."

—Dr. Robert Farley, author of *"The Battleship Book."*

*For my wife Margo, whose patience and  
dedicated editing made this possible, and  
for my daughter Allison, who inspired it*



## CHAPTER 1

Captain Jake Rogers' decrepit cargo ship pitched and rolled in a brutal North Sea storm, its engines straining against the churning sea in the middle of a war zone. Mountainous waves crashed into and over the bow in an unrelenting fury.

Rogers had seen plenty of trouble in his years commanding the *Peggy C*, an outdated but usually reliable ship. A three-island tramp steamer, she sailed without a set schedule, the captain going port to port and begging for cargo, and not asking too many questions about what it was or where it was from, only where it was going and how much would he be paid.

Another wave rattled the ship. The *Peggy C* had been through a lot over the years, but the old girl had never let Rogers down.

This time felt different.

Its rusty hull shuddered and moaned every time it plunged from towering crest to trough. The wire rope-stays screeched like violin strings fighting to hold the towering masts aloft. Far too often, the *Peggy C's* propeller raced and whined when a wave thrust the stern out of the water. The North Sea could be treacherous, especially in late autumn when the freezing north winds came howling in from Iceland, chopping up the shallow waters and mudflats around the small islands dotting the Dutch coast. These waters were already troubled by dangerous tides caused when the Atlantic Ocean smashed north through the English Channel into currents rushing south from the Norwegian Sea.

With one hand, Rogers, for balance, clutched the icy railing on the bridge deck outside the three-story high wheelhouse. With the other hand, he struggled to focus his rain-splattered binoculars on something in the murky distance. From his charts, he knew dangerous shoals and shallows were out there somewhere; in his gut, he suspected they were way too close. And his ship couldn't seem to muster enough power to avert the looming disaster.

American flags flapping on the masts and the spotlight ones painted on the

hull showed the *Peggy C* to be from a neutral country. But Rogers worried there was little chance a passing warship, in the dreary fog of war, would be able to see the flags before blasting away at another victim. And, if that wasn't bad enough, there were rumors of rogue mines floating into these sea lanes and sinking cargo ships.

For two years since the war started in 1939, the *Peggy C* and her ragtag crew had dodged the mines and torpedoes and random naval duels from Africa to the North Sea, managing to eke out a living while the competition dwindled. Outside the protection of a convoy, fewer and fewer commercial ships dared ply these waters. Though Germany's focus had shifted to the Russian and Mediterranean fronts, too many trigger-happy U-boat captains still lurked about in search of trophies from sunken tonnage.

The situation was truly dire and desperate. Rogers loved every minute of it.

A ghost of a smile crossed his windburned face, etched with tiny crow's feet around hazel eyes—eyes hardened by years of squinting at threatening storms on the horizon, of staring down edgy sailors with balled-up fists and bad ideas, of calculating the odds in life-or-death situations on an unforgiving sea. All that made Rogers appear older than his thirty-eight years. For captains, sea years were more like dog years.

He was tall and gaunt, with the easy grace of an athlete who'd spent lots of summers on dusty baseball fields, growing strong, quick, and singularly focused on one thing—winning. That penchant had earned him a scholarship to the U.S. Naval Academy, a lucky break for a poor kid from a broken Baltimore family who dreamt and read voraciously about life at sea.

In a raging storm like this, with mast-high spumes of water lashing his ship, the adrenaline, the pounding heartbeat in his ears, the rapid breathing all exhilarated rather than terrified him. Calm seas were the enemy of the mind, leaving way too much time to dwell on the past, on what-ifs, on terrible things

that could never be changed. And nothing so focused the mind as a nearly hopeless challenge.

Rogers glanced over his shoulder at the helmsman in the wheelhouse, a bug-eyed kid standing erect. Though outwardly trying to show fearlessness, he was claspng the large wooden wheel's peg handles so tightly that his fingers had turned white.

"Chief says we've got some power back, but not enough to steer us safely into Amsterdam!" First Mate Ali Nidal shouted into Rogers' ear. "We have to wait out the storm!"

Without taking his attention off the horizon, Rogers handed Nidal the binoculars and pointed off the starboard bow.

"What's that look like?" Rogers asked, hunching forward against the biting ocean spray, holding tight to his white captain's hat.

Nidal pressed the binoculars to his eyes, moving his head left to right and back again before spotting flashing lights. Rogers knew the swarthy Tunisian's pockmarked face, coal-black eyes, and perpetual frown made overworked crew members worry about whether he was staring at them calmly, or menacingly—a quality Rogers actually found useful.

"S-O-S," Nidal said in a slight French accent that sometimes made him hard to understand. But it also was useful for Rogers to have a second-in-command who spoke Arabic, French, Spanish, and English and could more easily deal with a polyglot crew.

"That's what I thought."

"We will pray for their souls," said Nidal, handing back the binoculars, emotionless as always. "Further away from shore."

Rogers peered through the binoculars. "Yeah, that'd be the smart move."

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Rogers, Nidal, and three other sailors in oil-skin jackets and rain hats hung over the *Peggy C's* starboard bulwark on the main deck as they tossed roped life rings to six men in a lifeboat bouncing in the angry sea below. Their crippled cargo ship was nearby giving off its last flickering burst of light and steam before being sucked under the water. The men in the lifeboat stretched out their hands as far as they could for the rings, but the gale-force winds kept blowing salvation out of reach. Out of nowhere, a rogue wave crashed over their lifeboat, swallowing it whole like Jonah's whale. One second it was there with its six forlorn passengers; the next, it wasn't.

"Oh my God! Where the hell did they go?" Rogers asked in horror. He shined a hand-held Aldis message lamp on the foaming gray water and moved it in a circle, checking for any sign of movement, any sign of life, hoping against hope that the hungry sea would relent for just a moment and spit out her quarry. Was that a hand? Hands? Rogers focused the light on the apparitions he thought he saw. Three heads popped up. Three men flailed about in the freezing water, shouting in vain to be heard over the crashing waves and howling wind. "There! There!" Rogers shouted, pointing with the lamp. "Throw the rings over there!"

Nidal and the others hurled the roped life rings into the wind; they kept blowing back short of the fading survivors, who eventually managed somehow to fight the current and grab the rings, holding on for dear life as they were dragged through the frigid water toward the ship. Pulling them aboard was an arduous task for Nidal and his men. The survivors, in their soaked winter coats and boots, felt like 300-pound halibuts thrashing and fighting every inch of the way. As the rescuers fought to haul their catch onboard, the slippery rope tore the skin off their frozen hands. One by one, though, they reeled in the three survivors, stretching them out on the deck and pumping their chests to clear their lungs of the saltwater. The men coughed and choked up whatever they had eaten that day, at the same time fighting for breath.

Rogers kept circling the area with his lamp, searching for the other three men, leaning further and further over the rail to get a better angle. Without warning, the *Peggy C* plunged into a trough, and a wave crashed over the bulwark. Rogers, whose hands were on the binoculars and spotlight, was propelled upward. Looking down at his watery grave and cursing his losing hand, he had no smart move to get out of another mess, no way to fix things, and he almost felt regret as his body was being flung overboard.

The plunge stopped with a sharp jerk, shooting pain from Rogers' right ankle up his spine and then to his neck. His head banged on the steel hull, scraping his face as he was dragged up and over the railing and back onto the heaving deck. A brawny African flipped Rogers onto his back, inspecting him for what damage needed repair, and nodded when it was clear his captain was only bruised.

"Thanks, Obasi!" Rogers shouted, gulping in cold saltwater air to catch his breath. "Again!"

Obasi lifted Rogers to his feet as easily as if he were a doll and patted him on the back, grinning. They both rushed over to help the others tend to the drenched survivors huddled on the deck. A crackling bolt of lightning reminded everyone of an ominous threat: the still smoldering cargo ship had not, after all, entirely disappeared beneath the surface. Its jagged bow lurked just yards away, the equivalent of a steel iceberg waiting to shear the *Peggy C* apart.

Through the pouring rain, Rogers glanced up at the wheelhouse for a hopeful sign, but Able Seaman J.J. McAllister, the helmsman, kept spinning the wheel and raising his hands high, indicating there was nothing he could do without more power. The *Peggy C* would drift wherever the heartless sea damn well wanted to send her.

Below deck, in the dimly lit engine room, Chief Engineer Giovanni Turani took a slippery wrench and turned a bolt on a piston. Sweat pouring down his reddened face, he interspersed whispered Italian curses with louder prayers to

the Virgin Mary. The problem was that the boilers were only able to engage one of the engine's three pistons that powered the single shaft and screw. Turani should have been frantic, but that wasn't in his nature. A methodical engineer, he always worked step by step to solve a problem, knowing that haste created even more problems.

"Move, damn you!" he finally shouted in frustration. "Give me a larger wrench." Assistant Engineer Nathan Dunawa, a mulatto from St. Vincent, dug through a toolbox and handed what he figured Turani wanted. Clank! Turani smashed the wrench on the bolt and pistons. Clank. The piston moved ever so slightly. Turani did a short jump for joy, wiped his face with a dirty rag, and, with Dunawa's help, turned the bolt until the frozen pistons started pumping again. Picking up speed after a moment, the three pistons rumbled to a glorious roar of metal on metal. Dunawa stepped over to the circular engine order telegraph and jerked the handles left and right, to ring the wheelhouse above with the news. He stopped only when the arrow pointed to "full speed ahead."

In the wheelhouse, McAllister, a young Scot, swung the wheel around and, his ruddy face covered in beads of sweat, focused out the windows. This was his first time alone at the helm, a rare duty for someone so young—he had just turned twenty—and who didn't have many voyages under his belt. Rogers had taken a liking to him. What with his sunny disposition and willingness to learn, McAllister reminded him of himself at the same age.

The fired-up pistons vibrated the deck as Rogers wrapped blankets around the three survivors, all staring in horror at the remains of their ship drawing closer by the second. Looking to the wheelhouse above, Rogers saw McAllister give a thumbs up as he steered the *Peggy C* just clear of the wreck. Rogers caught Nidal's attention and winked. The first mate's blank face made it clear he was not amused.

The trembling survivors were moved to the crew's mess, where they were

greeted by Cookie, a portly Brit with molted jowls, tufts of white hair dotting his bald head, and the twinkling eyes of everyone's favorite grandfather. Amiable and a bit daffy, he told everyone he hated his nickname but had learned to live with it because he was, in fact, the ship's cook. He would hasten to add, when introduced, that he was also the ship's chief medical officer, a title he gave himself because he was the only one onboard who knew anything about setting broken bones and patching wounds. By necessity, he was self-taught, having learned anatomy from carcasses, deboning chickens and, for the most part, trial and error.

"Put him on the table and grab him tight," Cookie said, hobbling over on his bad hip. Nidal and Seamus, a timorous red-headed Irishman who always wore both suspenders and a belt, placed one of the survivors on a table and held him down as he moaned and twisted in agony. Cookie leaned over and inspected him from head to toe. "Hold still, mate," Cookie said, nodding for Nidal and Seamus to tighten their grips. "This won't hurt a bit." With a loud snap, Cookie yanked the delirious sailor's right shoulder bone back into its socket. The poor man screamed, then passed out. Nidal did his best to cover him with a ragged blanket.

To the other two survivors, Rogers carried steaming cups of coffee, tins of biscuits, and a slab of butter. Their lips blue, the three survivors sat dazed and shivering at a separate table, clutching blankets.

"Fifteen? For what? I ask you," the larger and younger of the two asked of no one, his face contorted in anguish. "The Old Man said not to worry—"

"Are they all really gone?" the older one interrupted, rising and staggering toward the door. "Let's have a look."

Rogers steered him back to his seat with a gentle arm around his shoulder. "Sorry, old-timer."

"Target practice they made of us," the old timer said. With a wild look in his eye, he snatched Rogers' arm off of him. "We tried to surrender," he said

in a shaky voice. “White flag and all. The boarding party said nary a word.”

“Bloody Brauer’s crew, it was!” his young companion yelled hysterically.

Rogers eyed Nidal and the rest of his crew in the room, grown silent and paying close attention. “Brauer doesn’t exist,” Rogers said a little too loudly for the benefit of his crew and added: “British propaganda. You need to rest.”

“No!” the old-timer screeched, trying to elbow Rogers out of the way. “We have to be ready! U-boats don’t care about neutrals no more!” Tears poured down his face. Rogers held onto him, letting him sob while guiding him to sit and drink his coffee. The captain buttered one of the biscuits and offered it to the old timer, but he pushed it away.

“Fifteen mates. All of ’em gone,” the younger survivor repeated over and over, unable to grasp the enormity of the loss. Pulling a blanket over his head, he slipped to the floor and curled up into a quivering ball.

Rogers had cargo to drop off in Amsterdam and hopes of picking up another load there, but his heart sank as he watched the survivors and realized life had changed. The war, once remote and avoidable, more often than not, was now all too real, and things were heating up. The sinking of the *SS Robin Moor* off the coast of Sierra Leone by a U-boat in May had been the first reported attack on an American merchant ship, but there had been two others since, the *SS Steel Seafarer* in September in the Gulf of Suez, and the *SS Leigh* off the coast of Africa in October. So far, no U.S. merchant ship had been attacked in the North Atlantic or the North Sea. But, within the last month, U-boat wolfpacks had fired on two American destroyers, sinking one and sparking an international incident that nearly drew America into the war.

Maybe, Rogers thought, he should dock the *Peggy C* for good, but then what? The sea was all he knew. The thirty-year-old ship was well past its life expectancy but had been his home for years. And what about the crew? Was it fair to expose them to the horrors these poor survivors had gone through?



Sure, they knew the risks, and they needed the money. Still, Rogers believed their safety was his responsibility. He had always warned his men never to gamble for more than they could afford to lose. Now, despite his concern for his crew, despite all the setbacks, and even despite the war, he decided he still liked his chances.

## CHAPTER 2

The *Peggy C* steamed toward the North Sea Canal connecting the ocean to Amsterdam. The sea was calm and the sun shining in a frigid, cloudless sky. It was a welcome sight for the exhausted crew, and it meant less strain on the old hull.

Smallish for its class, the 2,500-gross tonnage, riveted-steel ship stretched about three-quarters the length of a football field and a little over half that width, a size that made it more vulnerable in heavy seas. From a distance, tramp steamers were often indistinguishable from one another, with tall masts known as King posts fore and aft holding two booms each for hoisting cargo. A wire radio antenna stretched from mast to mast. Raised decks or islands, which were at the stern and bow and amidships, which held a white, three-story-high, rust-streaked superstructure housing sleeping and eating quarters. The wheelhouse was on top. Towering over everything was a wide-mouth funnel that, in the *Peggy C*'s case, was painted red topped by a black stripe bordered by thin white lines.

As the *Peggy C* approached the harbor entrance at the Port of IJmuiden, Rogers and Nidal kept a watchful eye on a U-boat—perhaps from training bases at Hamburg to the north—cruising along. It appeared to have a fresh crew, judging from the formal uniforms and clean-shaven faces of the officers in visored caps gathered on the conning tower. That nearly twelve-foot tower looked like a rook from the front and a boot from the side, with the lower platform in the rear, called a *Wintergarten* like a German bandstand, surrounded by open metal railings. It was topped by two periscopes. The shorter of the two, an observation periscope, was used to scan for aircraft and navigational settings. The attack periscope had a smaller head to make it less detectable to planes and enemy ships, and less of a drag on a submerged U-boat in motion. Running from the tower to the bow and to the stern were thick “jumper wires,” lifelines really, that crews hooked onto while working

on the deck in rough weather, when otherwise they could easily be dumped in the drink. They also served as a wireless radio antenna. The bow wire was used for transmission; the stern's two wires were for reception.

As was common, no Nazi insignias adorned the submarine's hull. Instead, a large red flag with a swastika and iron cross flew from the Wintergarten. The conning tower was adorned with a bright yellow and green frog, an eerily whimsical emblem (*Wappen*) unique to each U-boat, or sometimes a whole flotilla. The figures replaced identification numbers so as to make it more difficult for the Allies to keep track of which U-boat was where.

Most of the submarine crews thought of themselves as above politics, as carrying out orders for the Fatherland, slaughtering civilians and naval enemies with the same efficient indifference. They were proud sailors of the highly selective U-Bootwaffe, not merely of the Kriegsmarine. After extensive medical and physical evaluations, only one in ten volunteers was considered "fit for U-boats." And like Roman legionnaires, their loyalty was to the officers and men of their U-boat, not to the Navy or even the Third Reich.

The knot in Rogers' stomach eased a bit when the *Peggy C* left the U-boat behind and carefully slipped past the half-submerged remains of the *SS Jan Pieterszoon Coen*. Stuck in the sand of IJmuiden's shallow harbor, its two gold and black funnels towered over exposed upper decks. To block the canal's entrance, the Royal Netherlands Navy had scuttled the 159-meter-long passenger ship and several smaller ones between the piers in May 1940. It remained closed until the next year when the Germans removed the ship's stern. That fifty-meter-wide gap gave small vessels like the *Peggy C* access to the locks for the sixteen-mile journey past imposing, heavily fortified concrete bunkers and then on to the Port of Amsterdam.

Large ocean-going vessels and warships were still blocked, and ships from non-Axis countries were rarely allowed entry—something that clearly

worried the normally stoic Nidal. “Are you sure this is a good idea, Captain?” Nidal asked, standing with Rogers on the starboard end of the flying bridge and nodding discreetly at the trailing German S-Boot, a heavily armed fast attack craft similar to an American PT boat.

“We have this,” Rogers said, pulling out an official-looking German document from his pocket. “Somebody with influence must really want what we’re bringing in.”

When the *Peggy C* docked, it was already late afternoon, and the crew had to hustle with the cranes to lift the waterproof canvas hatches from the four holds—two forward and two aft—and offload what few crates and bags they had managed to pick up along the way. Crew members were animated, as only someone who escaped death can be, smiling and chatting like giddy old women at afternoon tea. Grunting with exertion, they stepped lively at Nidal’s shouted commands, trying to outdo one another with their boasts about who knew the most about the pleasures of Amsterdam.

As soon as the gangplank hit the dock with a loud clang, uniformed port authorities and submachine gun-toting German soldiers streamed aboard to search the *Peggy C* for contraband, collect tariffs, and get a full accounting from the ship’s master. Rogers recognized the elderly Chief Inspector De Klerk from previous trips and handed him the manifest and his other papers. All around them, the ship was in a frenzy of action—the grinding of winches, the rumbling of chains, hatches moaning as they were lifted off the raised steel coamings that protected the hatches from water, shuffling feet and scraping crates on the steel decks. Although a steady, icy wind ripped across the water, the sailors were covered in sweat, and there was a strong odor of oil, grease, and coal dust.

The S-Boot idled nearby, all guns pointed toward *The Peggy C*. “Good day, Captain Rogers. Pleasant voyage?” the chief inspector asked in perfect English as he sifted through the papers, glancing up on the sly to make sure

no one was paying close attention.

“Uneventful,” Rogers said. “By the way, there’s a load of bananas in Hold Number One. Probably crawling with tarantulas. I’d hate for anybody to get bitten.”

“Nice of you to worry about my men, Captain. I’ll be sure to warn them away from Hold Number One and check it myself,” the chief inspector said, removing several twenty-dollar bills from between the manifest’s sheets and stuffing them into his pants’ pocket. “I believe you have a package for six-and-a-quarter.”

“Pardon?”

“Oh, sorry, Captain,” the chief inspector said, leaning in closer and speaking softly. “That’s what we call Reichskommissar Arthur Seyss-Inquart.” Seeing Rogers’ confused face, he continued: “He is the Austrian put in charge of the Netherlands by Hitler. To the Dutch ear, his name sounds like ‘six-and-a-quarter.’ It is not a joke he finds amusing.”

“Yeah, we do have something for, for ...” he pulled out the document from his pocket and read aloud, “for Seyss-Inquart from a Ludwig Clauss at the German Consulate in Spain at Huelva.” He handed the paper to the chief inspector, who waved at a German officer on the quay inside a black Opel Admiral Cabriolet, a staff car used by top-ranked officers. The officer strolled onto *The Peggy C* and approached Rogers just as Obasi ran over, holding a suitcase-sized silver metal box with black straps, normally used for shipping delicate photographic equipment.

The officer took the case from Obasi, set it down on the deck, removed the straps, and opened it. Inside, wrapped in blankets, he found a framed painting of angels that, to Rogers, looked very old. Pulling out a large magnifying glass, the officer studied the figures from top to bottom. “Magnificent,” he said in English, looking up at Rogers and the chief inspector. “*Der Eiserne* will be thrilled with an authentic Murillo,” he said of Bartolomé Esteban Murillo, a

seventeenth-century baroque painter from Spain. The officer gently returned the painting to the box, stood, and handed Rogers a thick envelope of cash. He waved away the S-Boot and hurried off to deliver the prize to his boss.

The chief inspector shook his head and chuckled. “Six-and-a-quarter will do anything to make Hitler’s second-in-command happy.”

“*Der Eisern?*”

“Reichsmarschall Göring calls himself that—the Iron Man. Every January, top German officials go to his hunting lodge for his birthday party and try to outdo one another with elaborate gifts, or so I’m told.” The roar of an engine made Rogers and the chief inspector turn around just in time to see the S-boot speed off. “Now, where were we?” he said, glancing down at the papers in his hand.

Satisfied that everything was in order, he took a fountain pen from his shirt pocket and, removing the cap with his teeth, signed several manifest pages with quick strokes, the last one with a flourish. He re-capped the pen and stuffed it in his top pocket, taking a moment to rummage inside it as if to adjust something blocking the way. “Good to see you again. Safe travels,” the chief inspector said. “Oh, I almost forgot. I’m to tell you that your usual shipping agent is not available. Afraid you’re on your own for supplies and cargo.”

Most shipping companies had agents around the world who handled everything from fuel to manifests, and who were essential for cutting through local red tape. The agents Rogers dealt with were almost always cagey about whom they represented; Rogers didn’t care. “The Germans won’t bother you around the dock area,” the inspector said, noticing the concerned look on Rogers’ face. “If you need to go elsewhere and get stopped, just show the document from the German consulate. You’ll be safe with that.”

The chief inspector shook Rogers’ hand a little longer than necessary before doffing his cap with a gallant flourish and returning to his men, shooing

them away from the bow hold to the “far more important” ones at the stern. The bored German soldiers fidgeted and shifted their weight from foot to foot with impatience.

Rogers turned his back, opened his right hand, and glanced down at a note the inspector had slipped him during the handshake. Looking up concerned, he tucked the paper into his shirt pocket.

Two of the rescued sailors nodded farewell to Rogers as they carried the third survivor, deathly pale and still unconscious, down the gangplank on a makeshift stretcher, then trudged away without looking back. Rogers had tried to hire them for the next voyage, knowing they were unlikely to accept given their last journey, but he figured it was worth a try. They just shook their battered heads; broken men done with the sea.

Normally, there should have been at least twenty-one crew members aboard. But times were tough, and Rogers could only muster fourteen sailors; a few were veterans, but mostly they were newcomers who owed loyalty to no one, moving from ship to ship for the highest bidder. That often led to onboard misunderstandings and mistakes because it takes quite a while for a crew to gel and work as one.

Once the unloading was completed, Rogers and Nidal stood at the foot of the gangplank handing out pay to departing crew members. Five of them carried kitbags and suitcases containing all their possessions, indicating that they had no intention of ever coming back. “You sure you don’t want more work, Henk? You’re one of the best bosuns I’ve ever had,” Rogers said, counting out his cash from the envelope the German officer had given him.

The stooped sailor beamed at the compliment. “Too dangerous these days, Cap’n,” said Henk, a taciturn Dutchman who wore a curved bosun’s whistle on a chain around his neck. The narrow brass pipe marked him as boss of the main deck. Men like him used it to blow high-pitched commands when they couldn’t be heard over bad weather or at large ceremonial events.

“Even if the *Peggy C* was in any kind of shape,” one of his fellow Dutch sailors said.

“But mates. It’s all fixed, right, Mr. Nidal?” Rogers said. Nidal looked on, stroking his black goatee, silent.

“Ain’t no amount of fixin’ gonna keep this leaky bucket afloat,” Henk said. “The five of us will try our luck here at home. Sorry, Cap’n. You’ve always been fair.” He and his compatriots snatched their money and headed down the quay to town.

Rogers gave Nidal a wide-eyed look of “why the hell didn’t you help me?”

“They do have a point,” Nidal said, “even if we could find a load.”

“I have a lead on one,” Rogers said, pulling the note out of his shirt pocket and waving it in Nidal’s face. “Once you finish off-loading and get paid, fill out the crew, pick up supplies” He handed him the envelope. “Use whatever you need from this for *special cargo*,” Rogers said using code for contraband. “Then get us ready to sail by midnight’s ebb tide.”

“As you wish, my liege.”

Rogers, a little irritated, gave Nidal a double-take, but otherwise didn’t respond, waving instead at Obasi to follow him off the dock.

Obasi wore a tight-fitting black wool Ozo cap from his native country of Nigeria—something like a watch cap without the folded edges, with a tiny nub on the top. He towered over Rogers as they hustled off the quay together. Nobody knew much about Obasi except that he was one of the Igbo People, and always carried the traditional *abreba*, a seven-inch dagger with a wooden handle decorated with ring-shaped deep cuts and embedded nail heads; its scabbard on his left hip had the same distinctive designs.

Despite broad shoulders and taut biceps that strained whatever shirt he wore, Obasi wasn’t much of a sailor. He barely knew bow from stern and was hopeless around knots. But give him something to pull or shove around a



heaving deck or hoist from the darkened holds, he was indefatigable, no matter the weather—always cheery, always ready to do more than his share. He rarely spoke, nodding without a word at commands or flashing a broad smile after some impossible feat of strength.

How Obasi ended up as a permanent crew member on the *Peggy C* was a mystery. But one thing everyone learned about Obasi was his loyalty to Rogers. He never let him leave the ship unescorted and could be counted on to be Rogers' avenger for any unlucky crew member who muttered complaints about the good captain, no matter how lame or quietly said.

And Lord help the unfortunate crew member who mistook Rogers' frame and shaggy brown curls and striking face—"pretty boy" was what fools called him behind his back—for weakness. The savvy ones knew the signs of Rogers' simmering anger and obeyed orders without hesitation; the slow ones paid the price: Rogers pummeling them with blinding speed.

Though most European sailors had no idea what baseball was, they soon learned that someone who could throw out a runner at home plate from right field could also throw a devastating punch like Joe Louis, and they'd all heard of The Brown Bomber. Rogers knew the men feared his temper, and it worried him a little, knowing that losing control at the wrong time was dangerous. But he was also aware that it took iron discipline to keep in line a crew of often ill-educated, shiftless vagabonds who became sailors only after failing at everything else, including, in some cases, a life of crime.

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Rogers hadn't visited Amsterdam since the Nazis invaded Holland two years before, and he was eager to talk to some of his oldest customers, hoping they were still active traders despite the war. One had left a note for him with the chief inspector on the off chance he ever returned. But with a February

date, that was cause for concern. Who knew what the situation was now? The damn war was changing everything.

It was a splendid city on a rare sunny day in the fall. Its narrow seventeenth-century homes with ornate gabled facades on cobblestoned streets, and the ring of canals lined with houseboats and graceful elms, a spatter of yellow-brown leaves still clinging to their limbs and glittering like tiny jewels in the still waters below, had always been special to Rogers. “This is where it all began,” he said to Obasi, waving his hands around, admiring the scenery. “My first European stop after leaving the States. It’s where I joined the crew of the *Peggy C.*” He tensed. “Something’s off.”

They passed groups of sullen-faced people huddled in long lines outside butcher shops and groceries, clutching what looked like ration cards. The normally bustling streets were half-filled with trucks, bicyclists, an occasional car, and even horse-drawn carts. What few pedestrians there were avoided eye contact when Obasi and Rogers passed them. Many of their faces were emaciated, their clothes threadbare, their gait plodding, as if carrying an invisible weight. The festive spirit of the city that Rogers had so much enjoyed for so long was no longer.

As they strolled into Dam Square in the heart of old Amsterdam, Rogers was aghast at the scene. Bands of German soldiers were stopping people in front of the neoclassical Royal Palace, checking their papers, and shoving some into military trucks. Dutch SS soldiers in black uniforms with double lightning bolt patches, and Grüne Polizei, German police in green uniforms, dragged civilians from the electric trams and marched them away, their hands held high. Other Nazi soldiers in BMW sidecars dashed through the nearby streets shouting for people to get out of their way.

Despite the cold, Rogers and Obasi took a seat at an outdoor table on the square and ordered coffee from a young waiter, who apparently was oblivious to the chaos in the street. “What are the Nazis doing?” Rogers asked.

“Arresting Jews,” the waiter said mechanically. “For what?”

“Being Jews.” The waiter set down the coffees and returned inside without further explanation.

Obasi looked to Rogers for an answer, but he didn’t have one. He, of course, had heard something about the Germans putting restrictions on Jews, but he hadn’t paid it much attention. He just assumed that it was because of the war or was exaggerated by the British. He hadn’t heard anything about the food lines or the roundups.

Dam Square had always been one of Rogers’ favorite haunts. When he first started out and had no money, he had enjoyed wandering around the six-story De Bijenkorf department store and gawking at all the luxury goods he could never afford, even if he had wanted them. Rogers seemed to recall that “The Beehive” was owned by a Jewish family and wondered what had happened to them. And he always stopped in the nearby Gothic New Church to pay homage to the naval heroes buried there, particularly Lieutenant Admiral Michiel de Ruyter, a seventeenth-century folk hero of the Anglo-Dutch Wars who rose from nothing to be considered one of history’s most skilled admirals. When he had time, Rogers browsed the nearby Scheltema bookshop for English-language newspapers and new books, especially first editions. Now, those warm feelings for the square were no more.

“How could people be this stupid over and over? What are they even fighting over?” Rogers said in exasperation. “I blame Napoleon.”

“Who was this Napoleon?” Obasi asked, leaning forward for the inevitable history lesson that he always seemed to enjoy so much.

“They may not teach this in Nigeria, but Europeans have been playing the same stupid game for centuries. A lot of historians say the Seven Years’ War was the first global war. But in my opinion, it didn’t become a never-ending worldwide game until Napoleon became the emperor of France. He conquered almost all of Europe and invaded Russia, and for what? Why did thousands of

men willingly fight and die for him? Do you know what Napoleon said?"

"No," Obasi said, hanging on every word.

"He said, 'A soldier will fight long and hard for a bit of colored ribbon.' Can you believe that? For colored ribbons. For glory. He ended up getting crushed by the Russians and British." He raised his fingers to count off the wars. "Anyway, then there was the Crimean War, the Franco-Austrian War, the Franco-Prussian War, and the War to End All Wars. Just 21 years later, this idiotic war started. Now, the Brits, French, and Russians are fighting the Germans and Italians and Japanese. Confused?"

"Yes," Obasi said.

"Here's all you need to know." To illustrate his point, he grabbed salt and pepper shakers from several tables and moved them around on the one where they were sitting. "It's like a never-ending game of chess with different players moving the same pieces over the same countries with pretty much the same result: lots of dead people and the angry survivors plotting revenge in the next stupid war. Hitler's no different."

He sat back and downed his coffee, and waved at the waiter for a refill.

Rogers tried to stay up to date on events by listening to the BBC when it was in range and by picking up and reading English-language newspapers when he could find them. But he had had no idea how bad things were until he sat at the café watching the roundup of innocent Jews. "How could people be so stupid?" he asked again, taking a final sip of his coffee, and waving Obasi to follow him.

It was getting dark, and Rogers had an appointment to keep. He checked the paper the chief inspector had given him and headed southeast across several canal bridges toward the distant twin spires of the Moses and Aaron Church in the Jodenbuur neighborhood. Once again, he was stunned: a large white sign hung at the neighborhood entrance: "Juden Viertel" on one line and "Joodsche Wijk" underneath, meaning Jewish Quarters in German and Dutch.

Remnants of ten-foot-high barbed wire fences that had blocked many of the streets going into the quarter still stood, and Nazis patrolled the bridges, checking identity papers. Rogers noted the address on the paper and located the café near the Sint Antoniesluis Bridge, which went over the Oudeschans Canal and led onto Jodenbreestraat, the Jewish Broadstreet. Sitting outside, Rogers ordered more coffee for himself. For Obasi, he ordered a beer.

“Captain Rogers?” the waiter asked as he set down the drinks. Rogers jumped up.

“Yes, I’m Captain Rogers.”

“Come this way, please. You have a telephone call.”

Rogers gave Obasi a quizzical look and followed the waiter inside the café. He spoke for a few minutes on the phone and returned to his seat. Leaning over to Obasi, he whispered, “Drink up. It’s going to be a long night.”

As the sun set, Rogers led Obasi on a twenty-five-minute trek northwest through Dam Square and over The Emperor’s Canal, the middle of Amsterdam’s three main canals and, at 102 feet, the widest. They turned right on *Keizersgracht* and started to stroll down the narrow cobblestoned street when Rogers stopped abruptly at the sight of three German soldiers leaning on stacks of bags and wooden crates lining the canal. He turned Obasi around and whispered, “I don’t think they spotted us. Go back across the bridge and wait for me there. But you don’t know me. Understand?” Obasi nodded and wandered off.

The soldiers tensed as Rogers stopped across from them at a building with the word “*Groenlandse*” written in large white letters on a second-story wooden double-door. That was short for *De Groenlandse Pakhuizen*, meaning Greenland Warehouses. The narrow five-story, red-brick building, with stepped gables, was one of three identical and abutting warehouses built in 1620 to store whaling products, including 50,000 liters of blubber in large cement pits in the basement. The buildings had wide double doors on each

floor to facilitate the loading and unloading of goods. As soon as Rogers knocked on the main door, it creaked open, and he slipped inside.

He was greeted by an old man wearing shabby clothes and holding a candle with fingerless gloves. "Are you Mr. Maduro?" Rogers asked. The man didn't say a word. Instead, he waved for Rogers to follow him into a small room at the back of the largely empty warehouse. As he entered, a small lantern lit up, and a man in a long dark coat and fedora rose from behind a desk, extending his hand.

"You must be Captain Rogers," the man said. "I have been hoping you would come for several months now."

Rogers shook his hand, took the proffered seat in front of the desk, and asked, "You have a load for me?" He had learned not to ask too many questions of his customers. All that mattered was the price and the destination. And even though he'd never met Maduro, they had done business through shipping agents many times before. So, Rogers knew he was good for the money. Maduro, who appeared to be in his fifties, steepled his fingers in front of his worried face and studied Rogers through half-closed eyelids.

"I do," Maduro said. "I have a very precious cargo that I need transported to Gibraltar. It is more, shall we say, dangerous than my previous shipments. Is that a problem?"

"Maybe not. How much?"

Maduro reached in a drawer and pulled out a shiny metal bar, tossing it across the desk to Rogers, who caught it in the air. "That is half a kilogram of pure gold. It is all I have. My bank accounts have been seized by the Nazis."

Rogers did the math quickly. There was a little more than two pounds in a kilogram. So, this weighed around sixteen ounces, and the price of gold was \$35 an ounce. So, it was worth between \$500 and \$600, which was a year's salary for some of his men.

"That, of course, is just a down payment," Maduro said. "Our relatives in

Gibraltar will pay you one-hundred times that if you deliver the cargo alive and unharmed.”

“How am I supposed to get this cargo past the Germans outside, and the inspectors at the dock?”

“There will be no problem with the customs officials. As for the Germans, they are following me,” Maduro said, handing Rogers a piece of paper with a map drawn on it. “They will stay outside after you leave and go to the location on this map. There, you will find a truck with a large crate on the back. The driver will take you to the dock. But you must set sail tonight.”

“So, you’re not joining the cargo?”

“I wish I could. But that is not possible given my shadows. They let me come to my warehouse to finish turning it over to a Gentile—the elderly gentleman who greeted you. They think we are signing papers. But they will never let me out of their sight.”

“Really?” Rogers said. “What’s your hat size?”

Outside, the German soldiers jumped up when the warehouse door creaked open. A man in a white captain’s hat stood in the dark doorway and shook hands with another man in a fedora and dark coat with the collar turned up. He kept his back to the Germans as he strolled away. The soldiers shouldered their rifles and marched after him down the poorly lit street. With his face still obscured by the upturned collar, the man scooted across the bridge over the canal, bumped into Obasi, who puffed on his pipe, and dropped a paper on the ground.

“Go find the truck on the map and have it driven to the ship,” Rogers said, looking up from under the fedora. “I’ll meet you there after I shake my entourage.” Obasi bent down and scooped up the paper, glancing briefly at the approaching soldiers. Rogers hurried down the street and cut into an alley. The soldiers broke into a run, not noticing the black man in the shadows, and followed Rogers. The first soldier tripped on something and fell flat on his

face. As the two others helped him up, they found the dark coat and hat that their real target had been wearing. They pulled their rifles off their shoulders, cocked them, and scrambled after Rogers, whose footsteps echoed in the distance.

The evening fog had rolled in, and most of Amsterdam was a ghost town, the residents fearful of the Nazi occupiers even if they had legitimate reasons to be out just before curfew. Rogers knew the Germans would recognize him even if the streets weren't empty. So, he ran flat-out down an alley, panting and pumping his arms, trying not to fall on the slippery streets while checking over his shoulder. He slowed down only to peer around corners. Pounding footsteps echoed closer and closer no matter how fast he ran, no matter how he dodged and weaved through the shadowy alleys and over the narrow canal bridges.

To avoid two Dutch policemen strolling through the square ahead, smoking and chatting and not paying much attention to their surroundings, he flattened himself against a building wall. The footsteps behind Rogers thumped louder and closer, as did muffled voices speaking German. He was trapped. The two policemen turned off the square, leaving puffs of smoke behind them. Rogers had to move. He stuck his head around the corner far enough to glance into the square, making sure it was safe. He looked behind him, judging his chances of outrunning his pursuers as opposed to staying hidden in the dark; he chose to run.

Headlights flashed into the square as soon as he stepped out of the alley, forcing him to leap back against the wall, banging his head on a low windowsill hard enough to see stars. He hoped the driver hadn't spotted him. A flatbed truck, hauling a large wooden crate wrapped in a thick rope, crept through the square, rolling to a stop in front of Rogers' hiding place. He looked back and considered running that way, but the voices were too close. He'd have to gamble and remain motionless, trying to fade into the rough brick wall, doing



the best he could to control his breath and the tell-tale puffs of condensation in the frigid night.

Obasi stuck his head out of the open passenger's door and signaled for Rogers to jump in. Rogers shook his head "no," waving for Obasi to leave the square, pointing his thumb over his shoulder while making a throat-cutting motion with the other hand. Obasi slammed the door shut, and the truck raced out of the square, tires squealing, its cargo bumping up and down.

It was now or never. Rogers sprinted zigzag across the square. Bullets pinged off the buildings near him as he skidded into another dark alley. The three Nazi soldiers from the warehouse ran into the square, shouting and pointing, trying to figure out which way he had gone. They picked the wrong street. Not long after, Obasi's flatbed truck rumbled onto the quay and stopped at the *Peggy C*. It sprang to life; a boom wheeled over the deck and lowered its steel-wire cable and hook. Obasi jumped out and attached the hook to the thick rope lashed around the crate and swung his arm over his head in a circle to signal the crane operator to lift away.

The three Nazi soldiers from the square staggered onto the quay, out of breath and angry, clicking on their flashlights, making their way like blood hounds to the idling truck, as they scanned the faces of sailors stumbling and singing in the dark, and others smoking on the ship decks above. Their cigarette tips flickered like red fireflies.

Cookie and Seamus hustled down the gangplank to help as the boom cranked the crate high into the air. "If this is the last of the load, where's the Old Man?" Cookie asked Obasi, scanning the back of the truck.

Obasi leaped off the flatbed, checked out the approaching soldiers, and raised his eyes up to the sky. Cookie tilted his head to the side, confused. Obasi moved his eyes upward over and over.

"No need to be making faces at me like I'm some kind of drooling idiot. The question is simple enough," Cookie said. Obasi continued the eye roll.

Frustrated, Cookie imitated Obasi and took a glance up: Rogers dangled from the back of the crate, holding on to the rope for dear life.

Cookie and Obasi remained motionless as the Nazis approached, shining flashlights on their faces, under the truck, and into the cabin. One of them inspected the driver's papers; another patted down Seamus and pushed him away. Cookie sweated rivers in the cool night. Rogers sweated above him, hoping the Germans gave up soon. A man only has so much endurance.

"What seems to be the problem here?" asked Chief Inspector De Klerk, stepping out of the shadows like a ghost in full uniform. As he puffed on a pipe, blue smoke swirling around his face, the Germans swung their weapons around in surprise. Seeming to be without a care in the world, the inspector strolled over, took the papers away from the truck driver, flipped to a page, and tapped on it with the stem of his pipe.

"See, everything is in order here. I inspected the ship myself," he said in English and repeated it in German. "Special late delivery to catch the tide. Signed by Reichskommissar Seyss-Inquart himself," he said in English and German as he pointed his pipe up at the crate, indicating a large sticker on the side. One of the Germans shined his flashlight on the sticker and then on the inspector's face. After conferring among themselves, the soldiers snapped off their flashlights and returned the way they had come, dejected and still angry. The truck pattered off behind them.

"Off you go, gentlemen," the inspector said, stepping back into the shadows, watching the Germans depart, and apparently hanging around to make sure the *Peggy C* left safely.

Obasi nudged Cookie, pointing to a puddle under Seamus' shoes where he had pissed himself. They laughed and teased him good-naturedly and hurried to slip the mooring lines off the metal bollards on the dock. Once the last looped end of the thick hawsers splashed into the water, the trio jogged up the gangplank.

As the crate swung over the deck, Rogers let go and dropped down, his knees buckling when he hit the metal with a thud. Ducking his head to avoid the crate as it was lowered into Hold Number One at the ship's bow, he jogged over to help Nidal and a new crew member haul up the gangplank faster so they could avoid any more inspections and catch the ebb tide. Only after they were done did Rogers get a good look at the new sailor with a bushy beard and a bosun's whistle. "What the hell are you doing here?" Rogers yelled.

"You didn't tell us he was captain," the new sailor snapped at Nidal.

Nidal glanced from one man to the other with impatience. "You said get a crew. I did. I found two new firemen and a replacement bosun and his two mates," Nidal said to Rogers, pivoting to the new crew member. "You said you and your mates needed work and had to get out of Amsterdam before the Germans rounded up all the foreigners. I hired all three of you. Now, get to it and weigh anchor. Yalla." Without waiting for a response, Nidal headed up the ladder—what landlubbers call stairs—to the wheelhouse.

Rogers grabbed the shirt of his new bosun and yanked him in close, glaring straight into his eyes, seething and almost unable to control himself. "Do as you're told. You won't get a second chance with me this time," Rogers said, shoving him away.

The new bosun was a weathered American whose full name was William Critchfield, but who everyone always called Bosun. He spat and stuck a cigarette in his mouth, slinking away like a water rat on short bowlegs to organize the crew for departure. His squinty brown eyes and lantern jaw seemed to be in constant motion, a predator on the prowl.

Rogers yelled up to Nidal on the ladder: "Any passengers show up?"

Nidal stopped in his tracks, "We have loaded all the cargo we could arrange on such short notice, but no people."

Crestfallen, Rogers waved for Nidal to continue on his way. They couldn't wait another second to escape. He scanned the deserted dock for any activity,

spotting the chief inspector with his glowing pipe stepping into the light and waving. He searched the nearby roads for headlights as he lumbered along the deck to the stern as the ship pulled away, ending at the very tip of the poop deck. His eyes stayed fixed on the chief inspector until he faded like a melancholy dream into the mist.

### CHAPTER 3

Dawn had arrived some time earlier, yet the sun remained hidden behind a leaden wall of thick clouds, heavy with the promise of snow. The ocean's white-capped swells rolled the *Peggy C* as it made its way south to the English Channel, traveling barely over half speed at six knots so as not to put too much strain on the damaged engine. Chief Turani was always fretting about the engine, complaining he hadn't had enough time in port to pick up all the necessary replacement parts. Now, Turani was forced to wait in the stifling heat below deck like a worried mother hovering over a sick child.

The crew settled into their routines and split up their sea watches, normally four hours on duty and eight off. But there weren't enough men to fill all the watches on the bridge, the deck, the engine room, and the stokehold, where firemen shoveled coal to heat the two Scotch boilers that powered the triple-expansion steam engine. The stokehold was a godawful place where temperatures often topped 120 degrees, and the air was always thick with coal dust.

Nidal divvied up the assignments for "port and starboard watches" of six hours on and six hours off, and each man was also given multiple jobs in rotating watches, including shoveling coal, which created a great deal of angry grumbling. The one exception to the schedule was Cookie. His sole job was to keep the men fed and hydrated. He cooked all the meals, did the cleaning, baked the bread, and dispensed the water rations—28 quarts a week per man from the padlocked hand pump in the passageway. During the first dog watch—one of two two-hour watches between 4 p.m. and 8 p.m.—Cookie served up the biggest meal of the day: a feast of steaming corned beef pie, fried pumpkin, and potatoes, washed down with endless pots of tea and hot coffee, or what passed for coffee in wartime—a blend of coffee beans and chicory, served with a little of the rationed sugar and Nestle's Condensed Milk. At the dinner, half of the crew, except officers, sat together at a long wooden

table and, for the most part, ate in exhausted silence.

Bosun presided at one end of the table, removing a green and gray tweed Irish cap from his sloped forehead, and putting it on the table. As a rule, he would eat in the officers' saloon because he was considered a petty officer fourth in command. But he preferred to avoid Rogers as much as possible, telling everyone he needed to eat earlier than usual because the ship was so shorthanded, and he had to rest before taking over the "Dead Watch," as the Brits called it, or "Midwatch," as it was known by Americans, on the bridge at midnight. No one appeared to believe him, or care, especially Rogers, who tolerated him despite their history from years ago when Bosun's deceitful ways and constant grousing almost triggered a ship mutiny. Nonetheless, he was good at his job as foreman of the deck crew and skilled at marlinespike seamanship—everything to do with knots, splicing, and proper use of ropes—as well as overseeing the never-ending preventative maintenance of the ancient *Peggy C*.

Sitting near Bosun were the new men he brought aboard: Able Seaman Lonnie Evans, a deeply wrinkled Alabaman with a hook for a left hand, and a jug-eared young Welshman who stuttered under pressure named Hywel. He was an ordinary seaman, the lowest ranked sailor with limited skills.

Assistant Engineer Dunawa took the seat next to Lonnie, who sneered and moved across the table. "So, how'd somebody like you get to be a deucer?" Lonnie asked, using the slang for an assistant or second engineer, his southern drawl dripping with contempt.

"I started out as a nipper on British schooners in St. Vincent, and then trained at the Swansea Nautical College," Dunawa said matter-of-factly in a thick Caribbean accent, dropping the "h" in words like "that" and the "g" at the end of words.

"So, you was a British boy and then a college boy," Lonnie said, emphasizing the word boy with a laugh.

“S-s-swanea?” Hywel said. “That’s in Wales, for training m-m-masters.”

“Is that right?” Bosun asked. “How come you ain’t no captain?”

“Captain Rogers was the only one who would hire a negro for something other than a steward. So, I became Chief Turani’s assistant,” Dunawa said as he gulped down some tea. “I will be master of my own ship someday, and you, Able Seaman Evans, can come work as my steward.” The table erupted in raucous laughter; Lonnie shoved a fork full of corned beef into his mouth and glared back with his best bulldog face.

“But engineers can’t become mates,” Bosun said, sneering with a mouth full of bad teeth. “Not the same skills. Nothing alike, I say.”

“I needed the work,” Dunawa said with a shrug. “Besides, I can learn both jobs.”

“No, no, no,” Bosun said, brandishing a fork full of pumpkin at Dunawa as if casting an evil spell. “A deck officer is a profession. An engineer is just a trade. Everybody knows that.”

“Fortunately for me, the Old Man does not see it that way. He says the experience will make me a better captain. And then you can come work for me, too.”

Bosun shook his head in disapproval and changed the subject. “So, anyone know where we’re headed?” During war, it was traditional for merchant sailors to sign onto a ship without knowing its destination.

“Cap’n said set a course for Gibraltar,” said Helmsman Juan Cardoso, a grizzled Spaniard with a thick white beard, sitting at the other end of the table next to Seamus. Next to them were the two new firemen: Shakir and Amar Dogar, Punjab Muslim brothers wearing identical white woven kufi hats with thin black stripes and large, square sweat rags punctured with holes tied around their necks. The rags were issued monthly to members of the “black gang,” as firemen and trimmers, who shoveled coal down a chute to the firemen, were called because of the ever-present coal dust on their face and

hands and clothes.

“And the load?” Bosun asked.

“You saw as much as we did,” Cardoso said, sopping up gravy with a handful of fresh bread. “Looked like the usual sundries: cheese, barrels of fish, coffee, and tea and whatnot.”

“I know that,” Bosun snapped. “I meant the last crate.”

“No idea, jefe,” Cardoso said. “And, if you’re smart, you won’t ask. The Old Man and Mr. Nidal like their secrets.”

“I did some earwiggling and heard ’em talking about a wee bit of Scotch and fags under the table,” Seamus said. “Don’t really matter none. We get paid the same for whatever.”

“Unless we get caught,” Bosun said. “Germans don’t take kindly to contraband.”

“Believe me, we sailed the *Beschmermer* and know Germans don’t care what we carry,” Shakir said in his clipped, hurried Punjabi accent.

“How do y-y-you know, boyo?” Hywel asked.

“A U-boat stopped us near the Bay of Biscay. The First Officer took our papers to the German captain, who said he would have to sink us, though a neutral merchant, because we were carrying contraband. It was not true. We only had general cargo, barbed wire, nails, brass tubes—hardly illegal stuff. But the Germans said it was contraband because we were sailing for South Africa, an ‘enemy country,’ as they called it. They gave us less than thirty minutes to abandon ship,” Shakir said, stopping to take a sip of tea. “Everyone ran to the lifeboats in such a hurry that many forgot their boots, some grabbed kitbags instead of food, and others even left their licenses behind.”

“Good luck getting work on any ship without those licenses,” Bosun huffed, shaking his head.

“W-w-what did they do with the s-s-ship,” Hywel asked.

“What’d you think, you eejit?” Seamus said, slapping the Welshman on



the back of the head.

“I don’t k-k-know,” Hywel said, pushing Seamus’ hand away.

“They blew it up with a torpedo,” Shakir said. “We rowed as fast as we could and barely got out of range before the tin fish hit the old rust bucket. It split in half. A ball of flames rained burning debris down on our heads. And when the bow wouldn’t sink, they shot their deck gun at her until she went under. All the while, something must have fouled the whistle cord because it blew loud as a banshee until it went under. Very sad.” Shakir shuddered.

“But that wasn’t the worst part,” Amar interjected as the two brothers took turns interrupting each other and continuing the yarn. The other sailors put their forks and cups down. “The U-boat pulled up near to us, and the captain shouted through a megaphone that he was sorry, that they were coming off a long mission and had no food or water to spare. He threw us a compass and shouted directions for shore. But the fog wouldn’t lift, and even with a compass, we couldn’t make much headway in the heavy swells. We pulled and pulled the oars until our hands were rubbed raw with blisters but still got nowhere.”

“It was freezing cold in the lifeboats,” Shakir said as his brother took a bite of food. “We were battered by rain and sleet, and the wind whipped up white horses all around us,” he said of the crests on the towering waves that lashed the lifeboat and drenched the men. “Then a mighty comer flipped us over, and we had to fight to right the boat and climb back in. Two of the seventeen mates in the boat didn’t make it, and we lost most of our emergency supplies. We bailed water as fast as we could with our frozen hands and our boots, barely keeping ahead of the waves crashing over the gunnels.”

“For ten days,” Amar added, “we drifted with only biscuits to eat, only a couple of tots of rum a day to keep us warm, and a large tin of cigarettes. We had to use blankets to catch the rain for drinking water. On the third day, one of the young lads from engineering, a wiper I think he was, wouldn’t wake up

to bail. He had been working in the engine room when the captain rang ‘Finished with Engines.’ We all knew that could mean only one thing: Come on deck and abandon ship. In his panic, the wiper hit his head and had to be carried onto the lifeboat. Slurred his words a bit, threw up some, but seemed to do fine for a while. Then he wouldn’t wake up. I told the First Mate at the tiller that I thought he was dead.” His voice faded off. He cleared his throat, staring off into the distance. His mates at the table sat transfixed, worry on their faces like children listening to a bedtime horror story, only one that was too real.

Cardoso, the Spanish helmsman, pulled out a square plug of tobacco, shaved off several flakes, and rubbed them between his hands, taking the shreds and tapping them into his yellow clay pipe. He lit up and puffed in silence.

“I couldn’t find a pulse and his eyes didn’t move,” Shakir said. “But the Mate says to burn his fingers to be sure. He handed me a butt, and I pressed it against the seaman’s hand until it burned a hole in his flesh. A terrible smell, I tell you.” Cardoso looked around the table at the disapproving glares from his mates and tapped out his pipe on the heel of his shoe. Shakir waited for the smoke to die out and resumed his story. “The poor boy didn’t react, so we took the hook out of our boat and the after-hook from one of the others, and scrounged up some Number 7 thread line to tie them to his ankle, and we dropped him overboard. Wasn’t nothing else to do.”

Shakir appeared too shaken to continue, so Amar took up the story. “After six days, we were running out of food. Everyone was exhausted and freezing, especially one of the first trippers, a Somali trimmer, who got all crazy. Kept trying to drink the seawater. We tried to calm him down, but he wasn’t having it—just kept blabbering. When we gave up and let him be, he stood up all of a sudden and stared at the waves and kept saying, ‘the water is so beautiful.’ Then, as calm as you please, he jumped overboard,” Amar said, putting his arm around his despondent brother, who looked around the table and worked

up the strength to finish the yarn.

“By day nine, our feet, without shoes, swelled up like giant bottle gourds,” Shakir said. “My stokehold boots split wide open because my feet had doubled in size. Our legs went numb no matter how we beat them or how we sat on or under the thwarts. Finally, when we were too weak to bail or pull much more, and the water in the boat was up to our waists, another merchant rescued us, praise be to God, and dropped us off in Lisbon. Forty mates survived, although some lost fingers and toes from frostbite.”

Amar held up his left hand to show his missing index finger. “And to top it all, the company said our Articles of Agreement were broken by the sinking of the ship, so we were off duty and wouldn’t be getting paid for those ten awful days adrift,” Amar said referring to the two-year contract some merchant sailors signed with shipping companies. That same contract always stipulated less pay for non-white crew members.

“Bastardos,” Cardoso said.

Bosun looked around the table at the glum and silent men and found a darker cloud instead of a silver lining. “Gibraltar is British, and that makes it enemy territory, too. And we’s heading right for the Bay of Biscay.”

Seamus shrugged. “The manifest I forged for the Old Man said Barcelona is where we’re heading. Gotta pass Gibraltar to get there, I suppose. Besides, it’s not like we’re carrying guns.”

“I wouldn’t put it past Mr. High and Mighty,” Bosun said. “I trust him about as far as I can throw him.”

“Sounds like you know him,” Seamus said.

“Years ago. We worked this ship. He was third mate,” Bosun said. “Wasn’t called the *Peggy C* then.”

“What makes you think he’s dodgy?” Seamus asked. “I has my reasons.”

“Is that w-w-why he y-yelled at you?” Hywel piped in. Bosun glowered at Hywel until the Welshman lowered his gaze and scraped up the last of the

pumpkin. “I don’t give a t-t-tinker’s curse why the Old Man was so mad,” said Hywel, his face turning red, muttering.

“Eat up, mates,” Cookie said, toting a large steaming kettle of food out the door. “Next watch is coming soon.”

Bosun followed him with his eyes. “Why’s he hauling food somewhere now?” he muttered to Lonnie, pushing back his chair with a screech, and following Cookie, careful to make no noise. Stopping for cover behind one of the many tall wide-mouth cowls used for ventilation, Bosun peeked around, the faint smell of warm corned beef in the air.

Obasi, who already had opened the hatch on Hold Number One at the bow, held the kettle for Cookie so he could climb into the hold, then handed the food down to him. Bosun frowned and slipped away.

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In the wheelhouse, a stuffy room of 15-by-21 feet, Rogers slumped in a tall captain’s chair, hands clasped behind his neck, holding up his weary head. In front of him, Helmsman Cardoso kept a steady course through the Strait of Dover, the narrow entrance to the English Channel and one of the busiest sea lanes in the world before the war.

To the right of the wheel on a brass pedestal was the circular engine order telegraph used to send instructions for direction and speed to the engineers down below. Inside the glass-fronted brass frame resembling a roulette-wheel-sized clock were pie-shaped sections indicating speed and direction. When the helmsman pulled the brass handle, a bell would ring until the pointer inside stopped on the appropriate section, which the engineers would see on their engine order telegraph, and confirm that the order had been received by pulling the brass handle from side to side and stopping on the correct space.

The *Peggy C* was going half speed ahead while Rogers and Cardoso gazed

at the fading light through the wheelhouse's seven almost square glass windows. The beginnings of a hard rain, mixed with blowing sleet, obscured their view, forcing Rogers to stand close to the windows for a better look with his binoculars.

"Oh, hell," he moaned.

McAllister and Nidal overheard the comment as they stepped into the wheelhouse from the starboard door to begin their watch. "Quel est ...uh ... What is the problem?" Nidal said, catching himself before he could finish the question in French.

"Another damn U-boat just surfaced," Rogers said. "Maybe it'll pass us by." It was unusual to see a U-boat on the surface in the Channel because it was so heavily patrolled by the British. That's why, despite the possibility of mines, Rogers had chosen this route. But, as luck would have it, the horrible weather and low cloud ceiling made the U-boat almost invisible to passing aircraft.

"Helm is being relieved. Steering two-one-six per gyro," Cardoso said to McAllister, "checking two-one-two per standard. Helm is in hand, rudder amidships, steering off the port pump. And we have oncoming traffic three points to port."

McAllister repeated back the instructions for the gyro and magnetic compasses, direction of the rudder, the steering mode, and which one of two pumps was driving the steering motor, and assumed control of the wheel.

Nidal took Rogers' binoculars and inspected the submarine, still a good distance away. A signal light on its conning tower flashed a message in Morse Code. "They're signaling something. What do they want?" Nidal asked, handing back the binoculars.

"Let's hope not target practice," Rogers said, only half joking. "What?"

"Damn, damn, damn," Rogers said with growing urgency, mouthing the dits and dahs from the blinking light and translating in his head. "They want

to board for inspection.” Rogers rubbed his forehead, frustrated, struggling to figure a way out of this fix if he just rubbed hard enough. “Your orders?” Nidal asked.

After a long, deep breath, Rogers said in a low voice, “Full stop, Helmsman.”

“Full stop. Aye, aye, Captain,” McAllister said, and pulled the two brass handles on the engine order telegraph back and forth, clanking bells down below that alerted Turani to stop. The engineer acknowledged the order by rotating the arrow around the telegraph’s face and likewise halting on “full stop.”

“Prepare the ship to be boarded, Mr. Nidal,” Rogers said, scribbling a note that he handed to him.

“Run this to the radio room. Tell Sparks to repeat S-S-S and our location for three minutes as soon as you see the boarding party get close,” he said, using the code British authorities had set up for ships under submarine attack to signal for help. “Tell him to start on the 600-meter band, but keep changing from the distress frequency to others, and to stop early if he hears a shot being fired over our bow.”

“Captain, they are signaling L-R-L,” Nidal said of the international code letters for “do not use your wireless.”

“They won’t fire directly on us because their men will be too close to the ship, but they’ll warn us to stop transmitting when they figure out they don’t know what frequency we’re using and can’t jam us,” Rogers said. “That should buy us some time.” He ran out the door. “I have to find Obasi.”

Nidal shook his head in disbelief and headed down to the radio room on the next level, across from the captain’s quarters. “On my signal, send this on different frequencies for three minutes or until they fire on us,” Nidal told the radio operator, a quiet, middle-aged Brit named Charlie Jones, who everyone called Sparks, the traditional nickname for wireless radio operators on

merchant ships. The name derived from the tiny electrical sparks caused by tapping the telegraph key on a metal contact to send messages in Morse Code.

“This isn’t going to fool anyone for long, mate,” Sparks said in a thick Cockney accent. He donned his black Bakelite headphones, which were plugged into a gray broadcast receiver with round, black-faced dials, and started tapping away.

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Miserable sleet pelted three German sailors and an officer—all lashed with lifelines to the wire antenna above the slippery wooden-slat deck on the bow of the U-boat and struggling to aim an 8.8 cm gun at the *Peggy C*, the target several hundred yards away. Behind and above them on the conning tower—adorned with a leaping tiger emblem—the bearded U-boat commander with his white-peaked cap fixed his powerful 7 x 50 Zeiss binoculars on the distant ship, spotting a tied-up rubber dinghy from his submarine bobbing in the increasingly violent sea.

On deck, shadowy figures, obscured by the weather and approaching darkness, raised and lowered the *Peggy C*’s cargo hatches. The captain looked at his watch and at the sky, then back at the *Peggy C*. Agitated and impatient, he snapped an order to the sailors below. “Prepare to fire as soon as the boarding party departs!” he shouted, and grouched to himself, “I’ll be damned if we’re going home almost empty-handed.”

With eyes half-closed against the ferocious ocean spray, and beards and eyebrows covered in flecks of ice, the gunners loaded a thirty-three-pound, brass-encased, high-explosive round into the thirteen-foot-long gun and slammed the breech shut. Without the benefit of a range finder, they calculated the elevation and took aim as best they could at the *Peggy C*’s wheelhouse.

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Inside the *Peggy C's* Hold Number One, a bearded German sailor, who was wearing a dark-blue doeskin forage cap with a yellow eagle and swastika on the front and the leaping tiger emblem on the side, held the long thirty-two-round magazine of his MP-40 submachine gun in one hand and the grip in the other. His finger on the trigger, he pressed the stubby barrel against Rogers' back, forcing him past wooden crates, barrels, and neatly stacked burlap sacks in the grimy, dim compartment. A German officer, also bearded and in his 20s, wearing waterproof battledress—green-gray leather coat and pants—and a visored black cap with the leaping tiger emblem, walked alongside Rogers, kicking bags, and tapping the barrels. He moved without a word.

Waving papers at the officer, Rogers tried to talk him out of the search. "Look at my logs," he said. "Everything's in order. You have no right—" The officer shoved him out of the way. Rogers persisted. "I'm American . . . Amerikanisch . . . neutral . . . neutral."

Obasi, carrying a crowbar, scaled down the ladder, catching up with Rogers and the officer, who pointed at one of the large crates with his Mauser M1934 pistol. With the wooden grip marked by dings and scratches, it clearly was a weapon in its own right. "Öffen das," the officer said.

Obasi deftly used the crowbar to open the large crate and pried the wooden side back so the officer could inspect the cargo inside. After holstering his pistol, the German used a small dagger to rip open one of the stacked-up burlap sacks. A torrent of coffee beans came pouring out all over the floor. He stuck the knife back in the sheath on his belt, and moved on to another larger crate. "Öffen das."

Obasi and Rogers exchanged furtive glances; the captain cursing his luck because this was the last crate loaded the night before, the one Obasi had



delivered, the one Rogers rode to safety, the one they snuck onboard to avoid inspection. Holding up his hands and shaking his head, Obasi played dumb.

“Öffen das,” the officer repeated louder, pulling out his Mauser and tapping on the crate, then pointing his pistol at Obasi’s crowbar so there’d be no misunderstanding. After getting Rogers’ nodded approval, Obasi pried open the crate, letting the open side crash onto the steel floor, scattering puffs of dust and frightened mice. The officer kept his pistol trained on Obasi, and stepped around to peer inside. There was little to see—a few sacks and smallboxes stacked in the rear.

Another German sailor stuck his head through the hatch opening above and waved a bottle of Scotch and a fifty-cigarette round tin of Wild Woodbine smokes. He shouted, “*Schmuggler*,” which sounded way too much like “smugglers” for Rogers’ taste. The officer shouted back. This time Rogers had no idea what he was saying. Deliberate footsteps creaked above, followed by running feet. The German sailor leaned over the hold’s edge and held up ten fingers and then five fingers.

The officer narrowed his eyes at Rogers. Suspicious, he spun around, lined himself up with the forward edge of the opening above, and counted off seven steps until a stack of boxes blocked his path. He easily swatted them away. They were empty. With a flourish, he flipped his Mauser, caught the barrel in his right hand, used the handle as a hammer to tap-tap-tap on the wooden wall in front of him, then pressed his ear against it.

Stepping back, the officer crunched something under the cork sole of his black leather seaboot, something not all that unusual in the cargo holds of a ship, especially one as filthy as this one. He looked down and lifted his foot; a girl’s barrette lay in shattered pieces, something that *was* unusual on any merchant ship. Obasi moved closer to the officer’s back, still clutching the crowbar. The officer raised his gun at Rogers and nodded his head at the wall in front of him. “Öffen das,” he said in a harsh voice.

The words were foreign, but by now their meaning was clear. Rogers had no reason to bluff, knowing that he had no choice but to comply. He ran his hands up the rugged wall, probing with his fingers until he found a loose slat, and popped it out. He tugged open a hidden door. The Germans crouched instinctively in defensive positions, guns cocked, keeping an eye on Obasi and Rogers, but aiming at the moving door.

As the door creaked open, the hold's pale light fell on a heart-rending tableau crowded in front of cases of Scotch and cigarettes: three tearful children—boys aged six and eight, and a twelve-year-old girl—and a young woman, all huddled in a shadowy mass around a seated man in his forties with thick glasses on his doleful face and wearing a dark suit and fedora; the man held his hand over the mouth of a young boy, flush with fever, wiggling and moaning in his lap.

At first, the Germans were as surprised as the children, and seemed unsure what to do. As one, they stepped forward, swinging their weapons from the secret compartment to Rogers and Obasi, vacillating about who presented the greatest threat. Gazing into the darkness, the officer strained to identify the glittering object on the neck of the young woman, a diminutive but defiant-looking beauty in her early twenties with long black hair. His eyes widened in recognition. It was a gold necklace with an oddly shaped pendant looking like a distorted version of the Greek letter “Pi” or the Latin letter “M” with the first leg cut in half: it was, in fact, the highly recognizable Jewish word *chai*, meaning life. “Sind Sie Juden?” the officer said, his face turning red.

“I, uh, well, it’s like this,” Rogers sputtered. “You see . . . No, Obasi, no—” The burly African whacked the officer on the back with the crowbar, sending him sprawling to the floor and his gun flying out of his hand. At the same moment, Rogers flung out his left arm and jostled the other German sailor’s submachine gun to the side long enough for Obasi to slam his crowbar on the German’s skull with a sickening crunch, knocking him out cold. Rogers knelt down by

that German sailor, feeling around his neck for a pulse. Obasi stood guard above him, tapping the metal rod in his hand like a riding crop, oblivious to the German officer on the floor behind him.

The children screamed. The officer flew at Obasi, his short dagger nicking Obasi's raised right hand as he half-turned and parried the blow. Rogers spun on the floor and kicked the officer's knee, throwing him off balance, and lunged at the German's back with a furious hail of punches that whirled him around. Then came the punch, the one Rogers hadn't used since his Academy days, a resolute roundhouse to the nose. It was a blow so hard that blood spurted across the room, and the German's head snapped back as if it was going to break away from his crumbling body. The officer rolled on the floor in pain, unable to dodge the savage kicks from Rogers. Obasi wrapped his arms around Rogers and lifted him away as Rogers kicked in the air, holding the captain aloft in his steel-band arms, waiting for him to cool down.

Deafening submachine gunshots burst around them. Rogers and Obasi dove for cover amid more screams from the children. Taking advantage of the distraction, the young woman snatched up the German officer's Mauser from the floor and stuffed it into her skirt.

In a panic, Rogers searched the hold for the shooter, spotting only an unattended submachine gun on the floor. It didn't belong to the unconscious sailor; Obasi had that weapon in his hands. As Rogers bent down to pick up the still-smoking weapon, a uniformed body fell through the hatch and smacked into the deck behind him: another German sailor out of action, the one who must have dropped the submachine gun. Nidal yelled through the hatch opening from above, "So sorry, mon Capitaine. We had a little, shall we say, disagreement on protocol. And we have another guest to bring down."

"The U-boat?" Rogers asked.

Nidal looked over his shoulder. "Maybe too dark to see anything."

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From the conning tower where the U-boat's captain paced, it almost was too dark to see. The sailors manning the deck gun kept the cargo ship in their sights, a job made more difficult by the rough seas and pounding rain. A sailor stuck his head up from the hatch and shouted into the roaring wind, "British aerial patrols have been sighted in the area, Herr Oberleutnant!"

The captain scanned the dark sky for any planes. Seeing none, he scrutinized the *Peggy C*. "What the hell is taking them so long?"

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That was the same thing Rogers was worried about. How much longer would the U-boat wait for its boarding party to return? And what would happen if they didn't? Letting the prisoners go would be a death sentence; keeping them would also be a death sentence. He studied the three of them on their knees, hands behind their heads, under guard by Obasi, Seamus, and Lonnie. The German whom Obasi had beaten lay unconscious on the floor. *Maybe I can negotiate something*, Rogers thought, rolling his lower lip between his thumb and forefinger, an unconscious motion he did when something was about to be decided, for better or worse.

"Now what, sahib?" Nidal asked.

"Captain," Rogers snapped. "Hell if I know what to do."

"Set them all adrift in our lifeboats, perhaps?"

Before Rogers could respond, the young woman sprang up and confronted the much bigger Nidal with surprising ferocity, shaking an index finger in his face. "We pay our way. You have the *verplichting* . . . engagement . . . how you say, obligation."

The man in the hat grabbed her arm, trying to calm her down. "Miriam,

please,” he pleaded.

“No, Uncle Levy,” she said, jerking her arm out of his grip. “I am not afraid of them.”

Nidal took a threatening step toward Miriam. Rogers blocked his way. “If the boarding party doesn’t report back soon . . .” Nidal said, apparently not sure whether to complete the thought in front of everyone. He leaned into Rogers and lowered his voice, but not enough to keep Miriam from overhearing, “Perhaps we could explain this was all a misunderstanding and let them take the, uh, stowaways with them.”

“No!” Miriam shouted, pulling out the Mauser and brandishing it above her head. “You know what they will do to us . . . Mauthausen . . . Buchenwald.”

“*Liefje* Miriam, those are just work camps,” her uncle said, using the Dutch word for “dear.”

“We have received letters from several of our people there, and they said it was hard work, but they were fine.”

“You and the other rabbis and the whole Joodsche Raad wanted to believe that.”

“The Jewish Council did what we had to do to preserve the community,” he said. “The Germans promised.”

“They lied. Why do you still believe them after so many parents have been told their sons, perfectly healthy when they left, died from natural causes in the camps? Why do we never fight?”

“Listen to the rabbi,” Nidal said. “You cannot fight the German Navy.”

In desperation, Miriam pressed the gun against the kneeling officer’s bleeding head. “If I kill him, you must flee,” she said.

A shrill whistle from Bosun’s pipe startled everyone, making them look up and giving Nidal an opening to snatch the gun away from Miriam. “The U-boat’s turning about, Captain!” Bosun yelled.

Nidal turned his back to Miriam and, seeming not to care who heard, tried

to reason with Rogers as he walked him to the dark side of the hold. “Captain, this is not the *S.S. Patna*. There’s no honor in staying. Leave them aboard and we can abandon ship in the lifeboats and slip away in the dark. Take our chances in France. We knew this day would come.”

Rogers wavered, glancing around at the children’s forlorn looks—Miriam’s pleading eyes, the uncle’s sad face, his tense crew, the angry Germans. The angry Germans? His face lit up. Beards. All the Germans had long, bushy beards. “Or,” Rogers said, “we could make a run for it.”

