

"Finest Story I have ever read," says one reader.

THE LAMP OF DEATH

A TELLING STORY OF THE SEA

BY PATRICK MORRIS



But he had conquered; that one last effort had been rewarded. As he fell, the iron shutter, with a grating, jarring sound, had answered to the



MURIEL UNCONSCIOUS IN THE HOLD OF THE "BLACK BARNACLE."

Detective **Seale**, while resting at Swatley Cove, determines to elucidate the mystery of the Lamp of Death, the terror of all the fisher-folk along the coast. He is visited by Muriel Lane, who tells a sad story. Her father, who was in a fair way to make a fortune out of a new submarine boat, has been ruined by the theft of his plans. Blake promises to help Muriel. Only one man—Frederick Seale, a rejected suitor for her hand—knew the secret of the invention. Blake embarks for Calais, by a vessel carrying bullion from the Bank of England. In mid-Channel he sights the light from the Lamp of Death, and immediately afterwards there is a terrific explosion; the steamer is blown into a thousand pieces, and Blake finds himself, like his fellow-passengers, struggling in the water. A dreadful scene of carnage ensues. Several armed ruffians in a boat kill all those persons who have managed to keep themselves afloat. Blake alone escapes by clinging to the stern of their boat. The talk he overhears reveals to him that the Lamp of Death is a submarine boat used by a piratical crew to blow up vessels carrying bullion for foreign exchange. Towed to shore by the pirates' boat, the detective joins a British vessel, the captain of which gives instant chase to the "Black Barnacle," by which name the Finnish submarine freecooters call their vessel. The Lamp of Death is sighted, the "Hepties" torpedoes are got in readiness, and a deadly battle is only avoided by a mutiny of the "Barnacle's" crew. Muriel, while seeking Blake at Swatley Cove, is decoyed by Michael Sweeney to the lair of the submarine pirates, and thence aboard the "Black Barnacle." Her rejected suitor, Frederick Seale, makes passionate love to her, but in vain. Muriel finds a means of compelling him to swear that he will not again molest her. Another ship is sighted; the crew wish to wreck her, but Seale refuses to allow it. There is another mutiny threatened, but Seale's determined attitude reduces the men to submission. Afterwards he decides to permit the destruction of the vessel, and orders the "Barnacle" to the surface to reconnoitre.

In obedience to Seale's directions, the "Black Barnacle" rapidly rose through the water, and as the submarine pirate stood awaiting the arrival at the surface, his face was clouded by anxiety.

Suddenly the water around the lens through which he peered was illuminated by a powerful light, and in another instant Seale gave the word to descend again with all possible speed.

He knew what that light meant.

He recognised it in a second of time as a submerged searchlight, and knew that an avenger was at hand.

But ere his command could be fulfilled, a well-directed shell hurtled through the waters, and, grazing the lens, exploded with volcanic force. It shattered the glass to fragments, and hurled the two occupants of the navigating deck violently against the bulkheads. The shock drove the "Black Barnacle" spinning like a billiard-ball headlong downwards, whilst through the shattered skylight the water poured in in tons.

All on board was confusion and noise. The undisciplined crew were hurled hither and thither by the rebounds of the ship as it spun and plunged. Chairs, tables, crates, and cases were thrown from side to side and smashed like matchwood.

The great anchors and grapples crashed through bulkheads and wrecked all the interior of the vessel, which every second was becoming more completely swamped by the deluge of water steadily pouring in.

Shrieks and groans and curses rose high above the din of splintering timber and splitting steel.

Muriel, in wild alarm, rushed from her cabin at the first shock, only to be dashed from her feet and carried by the torrent of water down the circular iron staircase to the floors below, where, bruised and stunned, she lay wedged between rolling casks.

Seale struggled to his feet, to find his companion crushed almost out of all recognisability—a mere distorted mass of still quivering flesh.

Eren in that awful moment his presence of mind never deserted him.

Clutching a hand-rail to support himself against the rushing water, he fought his way to the lever which worked the shutter over the lens. With both hands he grasped it, and threw his whole weight upon it.

But never an inch it stirred. The grooves in which the shutter worked were bent and twisted by the explosion of the shell, and, in addition, the force of the torrent of water streaming in was

more than mortal man could combat.

And every moment, as the "Black Barnacle" raced staggering downwards, this pressure was increasing, and the hope of stemming the current becoming feebler and feebler.

All this Seale knew, and comprehended at a

glance. To summon assistance was impossible—every means of communication, every instrument, was shattered and wrecked; and, in any case, no assistance could have reached him up the narrow



"TAKE THAT FOR YOUR CONSUMMATE IMPERTINENCE!" HE HISSED BETWEEN HIS CLENCHED TEETH.

companion ladder, down which there now poured a cascade of irresistible force.

He was alone! A frenzy of despair seized him. He grasped the lever afresh; he placed both his feet against the side of the ship, and set his back to the strain.

But never a movement. And still the water rolled in in a seething, roaring avalanche.

He strove and strained with the strength of wild despair. The veins stood out like cords upon his arms; his bloodshot eyeballs started from their sockets; great beads of blood and sweat rolled down his purpled face; the muscles of his thighs and back rose up like knotted ropes, all quivering with the awful strain.

His breath came in short, grunt-like gasps as he struggled. He felt his hands cramping round the lever, felt the sinews of his legs relaxing in overstrained uselessness, and he exerted himself afresh.

The great steel bar was slowly bending beneath under the strain.

He gave one last supreme heave, and fell from the lever

exhausted, used-up, unconscious

upon the deck, thin streams of blood issuing from his nose and eyes, and ears and mouth, and mingling with the water in which he lay.

lever and closed the opening. Yet all was not done, for the formerly watertight shutter had been so battered and distorted by the explosion that the water still leaked in in no mean streams.

Scarcely had the cataract down the companion subsided in some measure, ere the "Black Barnacle" was shaken with a dull thud, followed by a succession of gradually diminishing shocks, which plainly told that she was settling down upon the bed of the ocean, bumping on the rocky floor of the sea!

All this had been the work of but a few minutes. Yet, in that short space of time, the "Black Barnacle" had half filled with water; all its intricate machinery had been thrown out of gear; its interior had been converted into a ruin, and three human beings had lost their lives, whilst several others lay at the point of death.

Amongst the latter were Seale and Muriel. Seale, all through, had been actuated by one motive only; one thought alone had filled his brain; and that thought was not for his own life, not for the lives of his crew, but for the safety of the one who was more to him than all the world. For, deep down in this human fend's heart, there lurked a flame of tenderness and unconquerable love, which elevated him at times to the plane of a hero. And now he lay helpless, dying—the once proud, mercurial spirit of this unswerving stubborn commander was subdued by the hand of Fate. Of all this scene

there was a witness!

It will be remembered that Seale had summoned two hands to attend to the lieutenant whom he had so brutally wounded. When the explosion occurred, one of the men had just reached the navigating deck, and by the force of the shock had been hurled into the map-room. The wounded lieutenant had been washed down the companion, and his mangled corpse now lay upon the deck below.

But the man in the map-room—a cringing, cowardly bully, known by the unfavourable nickname of "the Skunk," his rightful appellation being John Potts—had, unseen, watched the whole of his captain's gallant struggles, too paralysed by fear to move or aid him.

Now that the danger was somewhat abated, "the Skunk" came forward, and, looking for a moment on Seale's prostrate form, relieved his cruel anger by a savage kick on the side of the man to whom he owed his life—the man before whom, in health, he had quailed and cringed, too cowardly even to answer.

Meanwhile, the wild crew below, finding that the rocking and swaying of the vessel had subsided, and that a passage was possible up the companion, rushed on to the navigating deck.

"What's up?" cried Red-handed Pete, glaring savagely at "the Skunk," whose character he well knew.

In a few words "the Skunk" cowed in the presence of one he dreaded, gave an exaggerated account of all he knew.

"And you dared kick the boss, you hound?" roared Pete; for at the recital of Seale's unselfish bravery, as it appeared, his blood was fired, and boiled with indignation at the unprovoked brutality of one who was universally and cordially loathed. At heart, every one of those out-throat wretches had a lurking admiration for

their cold-blooded, daring leader,

and a great shout of approbation went up as they heard of his pluck, which changed into a prolonged, ominous roar of hatred as Pete charged "the Skunk" with his baseness.

Potts slunk back before the threatening group, whilst Pete and Michael Sweeney silently and slowly advanced. Suddenly the roasting bully turned, and made a dash into the map-room, slamming the door after him.

The two avengers rushed forward and hurled their weight against the door; but it yielded not.



BLAKE FINDING THE PAPER NEAR THE SCENE OF THE WRECK.

Again and again they renewed their attack, amidst the plaudits of their companions, who, heedless of everything else, stood watching the

progress of events; whilst all the time, in the map-room, "the Skunk" stood in a paroxysm of terror, knowing well that but a few moments of life were left to him.

Michael seized a great stake which lay near by and stove in one of the panels of the door. In another instant the whole door was smashed to splinters beneath his resounding blows.

"Come out, ye spalpeen!" he shouted, as he dragged the wretched man from his retreat. But now, at bay, "the Skunk" suddenly turned on his assailants, and, drawing his knife, dashed at them.

They stood their ground, and parried his blows. "Stand back, Pete! stand back, and let's have a square fight," cried some of the group at hand, and as he complied, Sweeney and Potts, with an angry growl like wild beasts, closed

in a mortal combat, hand to hand.

Their knives glittered in the air like meteors, and clashed together with the sound of a farrier's shop. Now one, now the other, gained the advantage.



EVERY SECOND THE VESSEL WAS BECOMING MORE COMPLETELY SWAMPED BY THE DELUGE OF WATER POURING STEADILY IN.

The blood streamed from their arms and thighs where ill-parried blows had glanced and gashed the flesh.

"The Skunk" was silent and dogged. His eyes plainly told the tale of his agonised feeling.

Sweeney, on the other hand, kept up a rattle of Irish banter, and was alert as a hare.

Each watched for an opportunity to grasp the other and decide the issue. Suddenly Sweeney slipped on the wet boards, and, in throwing up his arms instinctively to recover his balance, gave his opponent his chance.

In a moment Potts' left hand had seized Sweeney's dagger-hand, and his knife was uplifted to strike the fatal blow.

A sudden dash fell on the onlookers. Red-hand and Pete clutched the knife at his belt and took a half step forward.

"Be jabbers! would ye, me swate little darlint?"

cried Sweeney, as, suddenly dropping on one knee, he caught his adversary with his disengaged hand by the legs, and, lifting him high in the air, hurled him with a sickening crash to the ground.

As he executed this adroit manœuvre, by a subtle turn of the wrist he wrenched his right arm free, and ere "the Skunk" had time to rise, Sweeney drove his knife into his heart!

A great cheer went up as his companions beheld the Irishman's success, and a moment later their attention was attracted to the still considerable leakage overhead. They at once set to work to patch it up as best

they could, whilst Pete and Sweeney tended to their wounded chief.

Meanwhile, Muriel was still lying unconscious, wedged between two casks, to which fact she probably owed her life. For otherwise she could never have escaped being dashed to pieces by the rolling of the vessel.

As it was, the cold water all around her and her wet clothes at length had the effect of reviving her. She came to, and sat up, wondering and shivering, unable to account for her surroundings, and conscious of being bruised and injured all over. She tried to rise, but found herself too weak and sore to move hand or foot, and so she could but lie there, chilled to the bone and racked with pain until assistance came.

She feared to cry out lest some of the crew should find her, for, much as she dreaded Seale, she knew that at least he would treat her kindly. But from the crew she looked for nothing but base brutality.

Presently she heard a great commotion overhead, and excited voices raised high in wild alarm.

There was a tramping of feet, and the crew rushed down and passed close to where she lay.

"How d'ye know, Pete?" she heard one man saying.

"Are you sure?"

"Sure!" replied Pete,

"in course I am. I tell yer from them charts if we drifts another cable's length either way we'll bump right into one of them bloomin' mines the Government shoves down for the protection o' 'arbours. And if we does, w'y, s'welp me bob, we're corpses—every man o' us, strite! And, anyway, it's a thousand chances to one as some o' that blessed liner stirs the bally things up. We're jest lyin' bang atween two o' 'em now, we are." And the men rushed down below.

But Muriel well knew the terrible significance of their words.

AVENGEES ON THE TRACK.

Let us go back to the gunboat and Blake. The Captain has just touched the electric button. A shell with a mighty report darts out from the bows and disappears into the water in the direction of the "Black Barnacle." At the same instant a great cascade of water is shot skywards, and all around the spot the sea is turned into a heaving whirlpool of foam. A cheer arose from the lusty throats of the British tars when it was seen that their shot had told home.

"That's done it!" cried Blake, exultingly.

"Rather!" replied the Captain. "I don't fancy we shall see much more of the 'Devil's Lamp,' do you?"

"No, I don't!" rejoined the detective, with a grim smile of satisfaction.

The waters were already strewn with wreckage from the liner, and to this were now added fragments of the fittings of the "Black Barnacle," finally convincing Blake that its career was at an end.

The news of the destruction of the submarine pirate spread like lightning throughout the land. All that evening Blake and the officers of the gunboat were feted and feasted, and the gloom cast by the loss of the liner was turned into rejoicing at the

destruction of the scourge of the seas.

Late that night Blake was speaking to the harbourmaster.

"Yes, of course," the latter was just saying, "there'll be divers sent down the first thing in the morning to see about the wreck of the liner, and they may as well have a look at the remains of that submarine boat at the same time."

"How do you explain the fact that no bodies or survivors rose to the surface after we had sunk her?" inquired Blake.

"Well, I take it," replied his companion, "that when your shell struck her, she filled at once, and sunk with all inside, and that they had no chance of escape. The divers, to-morrow, will probably find her settled down at the bottom, with a crew of dead men aboard. That's my theory."

Half an hour later Blake was being rowed back to the gunboat. A scrap of waterlogged paper floating on the tide caught his eye, and as the boat passed close to it, he carelessly picked it up—a little souvenir of the day's work. It was a letter, no doubt from one of the two wrecks, and, with idle curiosity, the detective, as he smoked his cigar, tried to decipher the now well-nigh illegible, sea-worn address on the envelope.

Suddenly his cigar dropped from between his lips, a startled exclamation escaped him, and, sitting up, he

closely scrutinised the limp paper in his hand.

Idle curiosity changed to horror and amazement as he deciphered one by one the written words.

(To be continued next Thursday.)



THE FIGHT 'TWTXT MICHAEL SWEENEY AND "THE SKUNK."