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The Passenger

Written by F. R. Tallis

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F. R. TALLIS

The Passenger

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The sea is the favourite symbol for the unconscious,
the mother of all that lives.

(Carl Gustav Jung)

The Crew of U-330

The Officers

Kapitänleutnant Siegfried Lorenz *Commander of U-330,*

addressed as Kaleun, an abbreviation of his full title

Oberleutnant Falk *First Watch Officer*

Leutnant Juhl *Second Watch Officer*

Oberleutnant (Ing.) Graf *Chief Engineer, addressed as Chief*

Leutnant Pullman *Photographer from the Ministry of*

Propaganda. Joins crew for Patrol II.

Warrant Officers, Chiefs, Petty Officers and Seamen

Stabsobersteuermann Müller *Navigator and Third Watch*

Officer

Stabswaffenwart Schmidt *Master-at-Arms. Responsible for*

weapons and crew discipline.

Obermaschinist Fischer *Chief Mechanic*

Elektro-Obermaschinist Hoffmann *Chief Electrician*

Elektro-Obermaschinist Reitlinger *Chief Electrician. Replaces*

Hoffmann for Patrol II.

The Crew of U-330

- Obermaschinistmaat Richter *Senior Mechanic*
Maschinistmaat Neumann *Mechanic*
Oberfunkmeister Ziegler *Senior Radio Operator/Medical
Orderly*
Funkmaat Brandt *Radio Operator's Mate*
Oberbootsmann Sauer *Boatswain (Bosun) and head of the Deck
Department. Addressed as Number One*
Bootsmannsmaat Voigt *Bosun's Mate*
Bootsmannsmaat Wilhelm *Bosun's Mate*
Bootsmannsmaat Danzer *Bosun's mate (control room)*
Matrosenoberstabsgefreiter Werner *Cook*
Obertorpedo-Mechanikersmaat Kruger *Torpedoman*
Torpedo-Mechanikersmaat Dressel *Torpedoman*
Oberhorchfunkermaat Lehmann *Senior Hydrophone Operator*
Horchfunkermaat Thomas *Hydrophone Operator*
Matrosengefreiter Keller *Steward*
Obersteuermannsmaat Stein *Senior Quartermaster's Mate*
Matrosenobergefreiter Krausse *Seaman (compressors, cooling
system, water)*
Matrosengefreiter Schulze *Seaman (periscope, oxygen,
ventilation system)*
Diesel-Maschinisthauptgefreiter Peters *Seaman (right-hand
diesel mechanic)*
Diesel-Maschinisthauptgefreiter Engel *Seaman (left-hand diesel
mechanic)*

The Crew of U-330

Elektro-Maschinisthauptgefreiter Martin *Seaman (batteries)*

Matrose Berger *Seaman (deck division)*

Matrose Wessel *Seaman (deck division)*

Matrose Arnold *Seaman (deck division)*

The above are only the named members of the crew.

A Type VIIC U-boat carried fifty men in total.

Patrol

Kapitänleutnant Siegfried Lorenz looked back at the foaming wake. Pale green strands of froth separated from the churning trail and dispersed on the waves like tattered ribbons. The sea surrounding U-330 had become a gently undulating expanse of floating white pavements and the mist was becoming thicker. He had only been on the bridge for a few minutes, but already his hands and feet were frozen and his beard was streaked with tiny glittering crystals. Diesel fumes rose up from the gratings and lingered in the air like a congregation of ghosts. As he turned, his face was lashed by spray and his mouth filled with the taste of salt.

Below the conning tower sailors were hammering at shards of ice that hung from the 8.8 cm gun. Glassy spikes shattered and transparent fragments skittered across the deck. Others were engaged in the arduous task of scraping encrustations of rime from the safety rails.

‘Hurry up,’ Lorenz called down. ‘Get a move on.’

Excess weight made the boat unstable. It rolled, even in the absence of a heavy swell.

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Juhl – the second watch officer – moved stiffly towards Lorenz; he was wearing oilskins that had become as inflexible as armour. Icicles had formed around the rim of his sou'wester. 'I hope they don't do any damage,' he muttered.

'It'll be all right,' Lorenz responded. 'They're not using axes.' One of the men swore as he slipped and dropped his hammer. 'I'm more concerned about the state of the deck. It's like a skating rink. If one of them slides off the edge there'll be trouble. We'd never get him out in time.'

'Perhaps we should dive?'

Lorenz considered the suggestion. 'The water temperature will be a little warmer, I agree. But I'm not confident the vents will open.'

Juhl peered into the fog and grumbled, 'And all for a weather report!'

Lorenz pulled his battered cap down low and pushed his gloved hands into the deep pockets of his leather jacket. 'What are your plans – after we return?'

'Plans?' Juhl was puzzled by the question.

'Yes. Where are you off to?'

'Home, I suppose.'

'I've been thinking about Paris again. There's a very fine restaurant near the cathedral. A little place on the Isle Saint Louis – only a few tables – but the food is exquisite.'

Stein and Keller (one fixedly monitoring the south quad-

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rant, the other gazing east) stole a quick, smirking glance at each other.

An iceberg came into view. Even though the sky was overcast the tip seemed to glow from within, emitting a strange, eldritch light.

‘I didn’t expect the temperature to drop like this,’ said Juhl.

‘Surprisingly sudden,’ Lorenz agreed.

Veils of mist drifted over the bow and the men below became indistinct and shapeless. The gun rapidly faded until only its outline remained and within seconds they were moving through a featureless void, a white nothingness – empty, blind.

‘This is ridiculous, Kaleun,’ said Juhl. ‘Can you see anything; anything at all?’

Lorenz leaned over the open hatch and ordered both engines to be stopped. He then called over the bulwark, ‘Enough! Down tools!’ The men on the deck were hidden beneath a blanket of vapour. Voigt, the bosun’s mate who was supervising the work party, acknowledged the command.

The boat heaved and the collision of ice floes created a curious, knocking accompaniment.

‘What are we doing, Kaleun?’ asked Juhl.

Lorenz didn’t reply. Paris, Brest, Berlin – the steamed-up windows of a coffee house, fragrant waitresses, billboards, cobbled streets and tram lines – umbrellas, organ grinders,

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and barber shops. They were so far away from anything ordinary, familiar, apprehensible. Eventually Lorenz said: 'We should dive soon.'

'As soon as possible,' Juhl concurred.

'If the vents are stuck,' said Lorenz, 'we'll just have to get them open again – somehow.'

The rise and fall of the boat was hypnotic and encouraged mental vacancy. Lorenz inhaled and felt the cold conducting through his jaw, taunting the nerves in his teeth.

'Kaleun?' The speaker had adopted a peculiar stage whisper. 'Kaleun?'

Lorenz leaned over the bulwark and could barely make out Peters – one of the diesel hands – at the foot of the tower.

'What?'

'Herr Kaleun?' The man continued. 'I can see something . . .'

Juhl looked at Lorenz – tense and ready to react.

The commander simply shook his head and responded, 'Where?'

'Off the port bow, Kaleun. Forty-five degrees.'

'What can you see?'

'It's . . . I don't know what it is.'

Lorenz lifted his binoculars and aimed them into the mist. He was able to detect drifting filaments, a hint of depth, but nothing materialized below the shifting, restless textures. 'All

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right, I'm coming down.' He squeezed past the lookouts, descended the ladder, and walked with great care towards the bow, where he found Peters standing in front of the gun and gazing out to sea.

'Kaleun,' Peters raised his hand and pointed. The commander positioned himself beside the seaman. 'You can't see it now. But it was just there.'

'Debris, a container – what?'

'Not flotsam. Too high in the water.'

'An iceberg, then. You saw an iceberg, Peters.'

'No, Herr Kaleun.' The man was offended. 'With respect, sir. No. It wasn't an iceberg. I'm sure it wasn't an iceberg.'

They were joined by two others: Kruger, a torpedo mechanic, and a boyish seaman called Berger. All of them were boyish, but Berger looked obscenely young – like a child.

'Ah yes,' said Berger, 'I think . . . Yes, I see it.'

'There! There you are.' Peters jabbed his finger at the mist.

Shadows gathered and connected: a vertical line acquired definition. Like a theatrical effect, gauzy curtains were drawn back until a pale silhouette was revealed. The object was a makeshift raft with barrels attached to the sides. A figure was leaning against a central post – one arm raised, a hand gripping the upper extremity for support, his right cheek pressed against his own bicep. The man's attitude suggested

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exhaustion and imminent collapse. Another figure was sitting close by: knees bent, feet flat, head slumped forward.

Lorenz's fingers closed around the safety rail and he felt the intense cold through his gloves. He called out: 'You. Who are you? Identify yourselves.'

A blast of raw wind swept away more of the mist. The figures on the raft did not move. Lorenz tried hailing them in English – but this also had no effect. Above the horizon, the sun showed through the cloud, no more substantial than a faintly drawn circle.

Lorenz raised his binoculars again and focused his attention on the standing figure. The man had empty sockets where his eyes should have been and his nose had been eaten away. Much of the flesh on the exposed side of his face was missing, creating a macabre, lopsided grin. A fringe of icicles hung from his chin, which made him look like a character from a Russian fairytale, a winter goblin or some other supernatural inhabitant of the Siberian steppe. Lorenz shifted his attention to the seated man, whose trousers were torn. Ragged hems revealed the lower bones of his legs. The raft was drifting towards the stationary U-boat and Berger whispered, 'They're dead.'

The milky disc of the sun disappeared.

'But one of them's standing up,' said Peters.

'He must be frozen solid,' replied Kruger.

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Lorenz settled the issue. 'They're dead all right.' He handed Peters the binoculars.

The diesel hand whistled. 'That's horrible. How did it happen?'

'Gulls,' said Lorenz. 'They must have pecked out their eyes and torn off strips of flesh as the raft was carried north.'

'Extraordinary,' Peters handed the binoculars to Kruger. 'I've never seen anything like it. And one still standing . . . poor bastard.'

'Who are they?' asked Berger.

'They're from a liner,' Lorenz replied. 'Look at those life jackets. They're ancient. A warship wouldn't carry life jackets like that.'

The commander and his men stood, captivated, watching the raft's steady approach. Waves slapped against the hull. Lorenz wondered how long this ghoulish pair had been floating around the arctic and he toyed with a fanciful notion that they might, perhaps, have been adrift for years, even decades.

Kruger handed the binoculars back to Lorenz, who raised them one last time. The lopsided grin of the standing figure was oddly communicative.

'Well,' said Lorenz, letting go of the binoculars and clapping his hands together, 'let's move on. We don't want the

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Tommies catching us like this – enjoying the weather and mixing with the locals.’

One of the radio men, Ziegler, stepped out of his room and called out, ‘Officer’s signal.’ Juhl squeezed past some petty officers, collected the message, and set up the decoding machine. He did this with a degree of studied ostentation, supplementing his actions with flourishes reminiscent of a concert artist. The machine looked like a complicated typewriter in a wooden case. In addition to the standard keys, there was a lamp-board, three protruding disc-shaped rotors, and a panel of sockets that could be connected with short lengths of cable. Lorenz handed Juhl a piece of paper on which he had already written the daily code setting. The second-watch officer configured the machine and proceeded to type. His brow furrowed and he turned to address Lorenz. Speaking in a confidential whisper he said, ‘For the Commander only.’ Lorenz nodded, picked up the machine and took it into his nook, where he readjusted the settings according to his own special instructions.

Receipt of a triply encrypted message was an unusual occurrence. Lorenz could hear the muffled whisper of hushed speculation. When he finally emerged from behind his green curtain, he handed the code machine back to Juhl and climbed

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through the circular hatchway that led to the control room. He stood by the chart table and studied a mildewed, crumbling map of the North Atlantic. Altering the angle of the lamp, he moved a circle of bright illumination across the grid squares. Above the table was a tangle of pipes and a black iron wheel.

There was a sense of expectation and men started to gather, all of them pretending to be engaged in some crucial task. Lorenz rolled up the sleeves of his jumper and pushed his cap back, exposing his high forehead and a lick of black hair. 'How confident are you – about our position?'

Müller, the navigator, cleared his throat: 'It's been a while since I've looked up into a clear sky.' He slapped his hand on the sextant box. 'So it would be difficult to . . .'

'You're always being over-cautious.'

Lorenz stepped forward and examined Müller's plot. He took a deep breath, turned to face the group of men that had assembled behind him, and called out an order to change course. The helmsman, seated at his station, acknowledged the command and adjusted the position of the rudder. 'Full speed ahead,' Lorenz added. The engine telegraph was reset and a red light began to flash.

Müller glanced down at the chart and said, 'Iceland?'

'Thereabouts . . .'

'Why?'

The red light stopped flashing and turned green.