The glass had gone down with a thump during the afternoon, and all through the night the destroyer had been steaming home against a rapidly rising gale.

Of how she came to be alone and parted from her flotilla the less said the better. It was due to a variety of circumstances, among them being a blinding rain squall after dark the evening before, in which the officer of the watch was unable to see more than twenty yards, and some temporary trouble with an air pump which necessitated stopping to put it right.

The sea, as is usual with the wind from the south-west, had risen fast, and by midnight it was heavy and steep, while the little ship, punching against it, had pitched, rolled, thumped and thudded as only a destroyer can. The motion was dizzy and maddening—a combined pitch and heavy roll which was the very acme of discomfort. Sometimes the bows fell into the heart of an advancing, white-topped hillock of grey water with a sickening downward plunge, and the breaking sea came surging and crashing over the forecastle to dash itself against the chart-house and bridge with a shock which made the whole ship quiver and tremble. Then, with

[Transcriber's note: pages 41 and 42 missing from source book.]

edged volumes with unerring accuracy on to his long-suffering head.

The only person who really did not mind the motion at all was the wireless operator in his little cubby-bole abaft the chart-house. He, with a pair of telephone receivers clipped on over his ears ready to catch stray snatches of conversation from invisible ships and distant shore stations, sat enthroned in a chair bolted to the deck. His den was hermetically sealed to keep out the water. The smell and the heat were indescribable; but he was reading a week-old periodical with every symptom of enjoyment and calmly smoked a foul and very wheezy pipe filled with the strongest and most evil-smelling ship's tobacco. But "Buzzer," as he was known to his friends, had the constitution of an ox and an interior like the exterior of an armadillo. He could stand anything.

* * * * *

An oil-skinned apparition, dripping with wet, appeared at the chart-house door. "The orficer of the watch says it's daylight, sir," it reported. "There's nothin' in sight, but 'e thinks as 'ow the sea's goin' down a bit."

The skipper, who had actually been asleep for forty consecutive minutes, sat up with a grunt, rubbed his eyes, and yawned. Then, in the dull grey light of the dawn, he surveyed the unsavoury mixture on the floor with his nose wrinkled and an expression of intense disgust on his face. But the sight of the broken cup reminded him of something, and reaching his hand underneath the cushion he extracted a vacuum flask, applied it to his lips, and swallowed what remained of the cocoa inside it. He was hungry, poor wight, for his dinner the night before had consisted of two corned-beef sandwiches and a biscuit. Next, with a little sigh of satisfaction, he produced a pipe, tobacco, and matches from an inner pocket and lit up, examined the chart with the ship's track marked upon it, and glanced at the aneroid on the bulkhead and noticed it was rising slowly.

Two minutes later, with his pipe bowl carefully inverted, he clambered up the iron ladder to the bridge.

"Hail, smiling morn!" he remarked sarcastically, ducking his head as a sheet of spray came driving over the forecastle and across the bridge. "Well, 'Sub,' how goes it?"

"Pretty rotten, sir," answered the sub-lieutenant, whose watch it was. "The wind shows no signs of going down, but I think the sea's a little less than it was. We're not bumping quite so badly as we were."

* * * * *

The motion certainly was less violent, and after looking for a moment at the angry sea and the grey, cloud-wrapped sky streaked with its wisps of flying white scud, the skipper nodded slowly. "You're right," he said. "It has gone down a bit. We're beginning to feel the lee of the land. Work her up gradually to twelve knots and see how she takes it."

The "Sub" did so, and though the increase in speed brought heavier spray and more of it, the movement of the ship no longer synchronised with the period of the waves, and she became steadier.

Before long the sea had gone down even more and the speed was increased to twenty knots. Then, on the grey horizon ahead, appeared the smoke of many steamers, and a quarter of an hour later the destroyer was threading her way through a sea-lane so densely populated with shipping that it reminded one of dodging the traffic in Piccadilly.

The next thing which hove in sight was a red-painted lightship, and half an hour later the destroyer, her funnels white with dried salt, was steaming into the harbour where the remainder of the flotilla were lying. They, having escaped the really bad weather,

had arrived the evening before, and one of them made a facetious signal to this effect as the destroyer secured to the tank steamer to replenish her supply of oil-fuel.

The lost sheep had returned to its fold.