

your name. When did you see Ted Usher last?"

"Why do you ask that?" asked Paul Terhune, not anxious to tell how he had burgled the police station in the night.

"Because I've just had a terrible shock. I hurried to the police station immediately. I left you, only to discover I was too late. Poor Ted Usher passed away during the night!"

"Passed away! You mean he—"

"Yes, he's dead. They found him dead in his cell this morning. Dr Temple says it was heart failure.

"I never even suspected Usher had a bad heart. He always seemed to me a very fit man. It just shows how one can never tell."

Paul Terhune felt a shiver pass through him, and not because of the wind.

"What time—when does the doctor think he died?" he asked.

"He says it must have been about eleven last evening, soon after Thacker locked up and left for the night."

Terhune was doing some fast thinking. He had spoken to Usher himself about 1 a.m., which was two hours later than the time given for the man's death!

## TWO STRANGERS

**T**WO queer-looking men with tanned faces were present at lunch at the inn. They did not speak to each other, nor to the landlord.

Terhune had an idea the latter knew them, for occasionally meaning glances would pass between them.

The meal was hot and good. Paul Terhune felt gloriously sleepy after it, but instead of going to his room he stretched out in a deep chair near the window and the fire, and proceeded to read the daily papers, which only arrived in Holdenwall at midday.

A lot of robberies on the high roads were being reported. Several lorries had been looted, and in one case a lorry driver had been found dead, evidently murdered.

A gang was supposed to be at work on the main lorry routes after dark. They seemed to specialise in goods which could be swiftly carried away in waiting cars.

There was also the report of a warehouse robbery on the outskirts of London. Ter-

hune noticed particularly that several dozen transistor radio sets had been taken.

He lowered his paper, and found two pairs of eyes on him, the eyes of the two strangers who had lit cigarettes and were seated at one of the windows.

"It's pretty quiet here in Holdenwall in the afternoons," he said.

One of the men grunted; the other said nothing, but his fists had clenched.

Terhune was not to be put off.

"Down for the duck shoot- ing?" he queried. "I had an invitation today, but was too

The landlord arrived with a tray, and set it down before them so that two cups of tea were on one side, and one on the side nearest Terhune.

"There you are," he said.

Terhune suddenly leaned forward and pointed over the rooftops opposite.

"A flight of wild geese!" he cried. "I've never seen so many."

Instinctively the others turned round to stare up at the grey sky. They could not see any geese, but neither did they see the swift motion of Terhune's hand as he changed one of the cups on their side of the

Once he fell sideways against his friend, who glared at him in surprise and pushed him upright.

"Probably the heat in here," said Terhune politely. "Would your friend like the window open?"

"Uh-h-h-h! Grr-rrr-rrr!" came from the sleepy one.

The other man shook him, called him by name, and went white with rage. The glance he gave Terhune was positively fiendish, but just then the door opened and the landlord came in gleefully.

"Is he away?" he demanded, then nearly choked when he saw Paul Terhune sitting there as alertly as ever, whilst the still shape of the man filled the cushions.

"Yes, I'm afraid he is," replied Terhune. "Our friend seemed remarkably tired. He dropped off so suddenly that he might have been clubbed.

"Better get him into the big chair and let him sleep it off. I'm going for a walk before it snows. Nothing like a north wind to blow the cobwebs away!"

As he took his hat and coat and went out into the street, he could hear harsh words being spoken in a low tone from the room he had just quitted.

It sounded as though the tanned stranger had turned on the landlord for some reason.

"... I tell you it was the one on the other side!" snarled Jim Windle, and a moment later Terhune saw them peering through the window after him as they supported the other man between them.

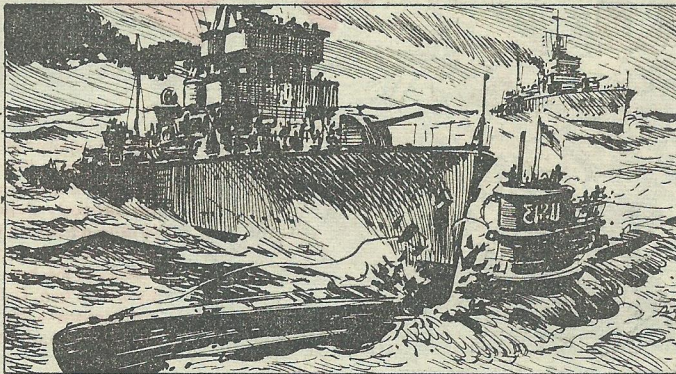
He grinned to himself as he went up the hill. It was very obvious to him that Windle and these two strangers had been in a conspiracy to drug him and make him fall asleep.

Thanks to his suspicions being roused, he had been able to turn their trick back on themselves.

"But I don't like it!" he thought. "This shows they're getting desperate. They'll try other methods. I wish Marshall would turn up. He's bound to be down before nightfall, that's one consolation."

Little did he know that Inspector Marshall had not even received the telegram!

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## BATTLERS OF THE ATLANTIC

lazy to go. You have to be fond of that sort of thing to go wading around those marshes in this weather."

"We're not duck-shootin'!" said the man who had grunted. "What about you joining us in having a cup of tea?"

He reached for the bell before Paul Terhune could refuse the invitation.

The fellow's manner had been so abrupt that it almost startled his listener, and the way in which Jim Windle slid into the room a second later made Terhune suspect he had been listening just outside the door.

"Tea, sir, certainly, sir!" the landlord said.

Terhune crossed the room to sit nearer to the two at the window. He had begun to suspect what was being attempted.

tray for the solitary one on his side.

"Must've been movin' pretty fast!" grumbled the talkative one of the pair, and reached for the nearest cup.

They all drank their tea, and talk became a little more common. Terhune told them how he had been mysteriously attacked on the town wall the other night, and expressed the opinion that lonely places like Holdenwall could drive weak-minded folk mad in the winter months.

One of the men choked over his tea, and they both glared at the speaker, but he prattled on as though he had no care in the world, sipping from time to time at his cup.

Gradually it became apparent that one of the men was falling asleep. His eyes kept closing, and his head kept lolling.

NEXT WEEK—Terhune uses the tunnels under the town, but can't find his way out!