

Sunday 7:38 p.m., September 3, 1939

Oberleutnant Lemp

Fritz-Julius Lemp tracked the approaching ship in his submarine's periscope. It had become a silhouette barely distinguishable against the darkening twilight sky, but Lemp was close enough to see the foaming white wave thrown up by its bow. He smiled when the spray arched higher, signaling the ship had begun changing course again.

"You're right on schedule," he said to the image in his eyepiece.

Lemp's pulse quickened with the knowledge that his war was about to begin. He called out the data that would guide his first salvo – the target's speed, distance, and course relative to his own. His second watch officer fed the details into the submarine's targeting device that electronically relayed a final course to the waiting torpedoes.

Lowering the scope to avoid detection, Lemp tamped down his eagerness and let a minute tick by. When he raised the scope again, the big ship was exactly where he expected it to be. He curled his fingers around the upright firing lever.

"Tube one, fire," he barked into the speaking tube and pulled back on the lever.

A muffled *whoosh* sounded through the submarine's hull, signaling the torpedo and its six-hundred pounds of high explosives had left the tube on its way to the target.

* * *

Chief Officer Copland

Aboard the British passenger ship *Athenia* white-jacketed stewards moved among the tables in the ornate, domed dining saloon reserved for cabin-class passengers. Seated at a round

table with six other guests, the ship's chief officer, Barnet Copland, ordered the curried chicken and resumed his conversation with an older woman to his right.

"To answer your question, Mrs. Penney, we are two hundred fifty miles northwest of Ireland." Copland leaned closer and lowered his voice. "I trust you won't relay that information to the German Navy."

"My lips are sealed," Mrs. Penney said. "Seriously, do you think we are out of danger?"

"I'd say we are fairly—"

A jarring crash shook the room. Copland leaned into the table for support as passengers screamed. Dishes rattled, stemware toppled, the lights blinked and went out. In the dark he felt the room begin to tilt.

"Are you alright, Mrs. Penney?" The flickering light of matches struck by nearby diners illuminated the woman, who remained seated next to him.

"What in God's name was that?" she said.

Copland came to his feet. He ignored the question, intent on determining the extent of damage caused by the crash. Instinct told him it had occurred toward the stern on the port side.

Moving aft, he entered the galley and heard men shouting over the hiss of escaping steam. Copland inched along the bulkhead until he found the service stairway and used the banister to haul himself up. After climbing two flights of stairs, he exited and headed down a carpeted hallway as quickly as he dared in the dark. Distant clanging bells told him *Athenia's* watertight doors were closing.

The sickening realization washed over Copland that the ship's hull had been breached, and he broke into a run.