

Speed, Speed the Cable

by Kage Baker, 1952-2010

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“My friends, it is nothing more nor less than the Tower of Babel come again.” The speaker, a benign-looking gentleman with white side-whiskers, watched as his audience took in the statement. “Consider. Vile Man, in his pride, once more seeks to demolish the natural boundaries placed for his benefit by the Almighty. He does not now say, *I shall build great foundations and ascend through the stars, that the Lord may see I am exceeding great*. No, he says rather: *Time and Space I shall make as nothing, that my voice may be heard when and where I will!*”

“My friends, you know that punishment must be handed down from on high for such sinful ambition. Yet I wonder whether any of you have truly considered the extent of our misfortune, were this Atlantic Cable laid at last!”

Among those listening was a man in his mid-thirties, pleasantly nondescript in appearance. His name was Kendal. The patient observer might study him at length, failing to find anything memorable in his features, save for one singular detail: Kendal’s left ear differed slightly in color from his right. Kendal shifted in his chair, wondering who had written Mr. Hargrove’s speech. He’d heard it all

before, when the Preventers had first recruited him, but Mr. Hargrove spoke with much more elegance now: how the dear old familiar world of our infancy vanished a little more each year, with each unthinking embrace of the Machine in the service of Industry for the pursuit of Wealth. The dark satanic mills were invoked, the horrors of railway accidents and the carnage of steam boiler explosions. Each was a little foretaste of Hell, a warning from Heaven; and yet, that warning went unheeded!

Kendal suppressed the urge to yawn. He knew that half the men in the room with him were wealthy, sons of men who'd amassed fortunes by embracing the Machine. Their clothing had been woven on steam-driven looms; some of them had come here by rail. Kendal was a poor man's son, but he sat there with the rest of them, nodding solemnly as Hargrove spoke, now and again joining in when one or another of them cried, "Hear! Hear!" with evangelical fervor. One man cried out that anything that brought them closer to the Americans—vulgar, ignorant, *expectorating* Americans—was a dreadful idea. Another shouted that worse was to come, if the Atlantic Telegraph Company had its way. What of national security? What should happen, if spies were able to transmit vital information to enemy forces instantaneously? What of the captains and crews of packet ships, who might be expected to lose revenues if the Atlantic cable were laid?

An elderly man stood and declared that he had made a study of galvanometers, and knew for a fact that a cable of such length, passing through such a quantity of seawater, would most certainly deliver a monstrous charge from the larger continent to the smaller and incinerate the whole of Britain in the very moment the first transmission was sent.

Whereupon someone pointed out that only Ireland was likely to be incinerated, since the eastern end of the great cable was to be fixed in County Kerry.

"Even so," said the elderly person, with a sniff.

"My friends!" Mr. Hargrove raised his hands. "We are all agreed in what is essential: that this infernal device *must* be prevented. We want only the financial means to guarantee our victory."

Kendal rose to his feet. Removing his hat, he said: "Gentlemen, while I must commend Mr. Dowd for his heroic actions on the eleventh of August last—" a ripple of applause ran through the room as the saboteur smiled and half-rose to acknowledge his compliment—"I feel obliged to point out that next time, it will require more than simply jamming the release brake to sever the cable. My informants have given me to understand that the paying-out machinery has been completely redesigned at the behest of Mr. Bright. It is now self-regulating. What are we to do?"

"Fear not!" Mr. Hargrove beamed at him. "It is true we have suffered setbacks, but so have our opponents. Mr. Cyrus Field may pop up as often as a Jack-in-the-box, bearing fistfuls of cash with which to advance his infernal design, yet we too have friends among the influential and powerful. For all that, gentlemen, we do require your support as well. Please give as generously as you may when the basket comes before you."

A pair of gentlemen solemn as church elders rose and flanked the audience, sending two baskets up and down the rows of seats. This signaled an informal end to the gathering. Kendal duly dropped in a five-pound-note, but remained seated

until the room had nearly emptied. When Kendal rose at last, making his way to the front of the room, the astute observer would have noticed something more: for he walked with a slight limp. "Mr. Perceval!" Mr. Hargrove extended his hand. "How delighted I am to see you again! We had hoped some would remain steadfast, and answer the call once more."

"I confess I was astonished to receive your letter, sir," Kendal replied. "When I heard about the fire in Bridge Street, I assumed the whole enterprise had been given over."

Mr. Hargrove shook his head. "We thought so, too; yet a new friend has stepped forward to lend us his considerable powers of assistance. You'd recognize his name, sir, if I told you what it was, indeed you would. I have never been so confident of success as I am now!"

"Thank God," said Kendal. "I had some hopes of scotching the damned cable on my own, you see. Even made some inquiries about getting into the Gutta Percha factory to spoil it at the source. It won't do; they're a great deal more particular about whom they hire, now."

"Ah, we know," said Mr. Hargrove ruefully. "No matter; we've quite an ingenious ruse to get around that. Our new friend pointed out that the later we wait to strike, the more of his resources the enemy will waste. Sooner or later we must ruin him completely, if we cut him off from his investors."

"Why, what's the ruse?"

Mr. Hargrove looked around, then leaned close to Kendal, lowering his voice. "A simple and effective one. Not only have we got a man aboard the AGAMEMNON, our new friend has supplied us with the funds for a diving-suit, if you please! When the cable ship comes into Galway Bay, our men will be at hand, disguised as Irishmen, in a fishing vessel. They will sail close and pretend to cheer on the AGAMEMNON, but will note carefully where the cable falls. Then one will slip overboard, descend to the cable, and cut it. Simplicity itself!"

"Yet ingenious indeed!" Kendal pumped Mr. Hargrove's hand. "And will it be Mr. Dowd aboard the AGAMEMNON again?"

"No, alas. He departed under a cloud of suspicion last time. It'll be Mr. Cheltenham."

"Ah! But he's a stout fellow too. You will succeed, sir; I feel it in my heart."

They exchanged cordial farewells.

Kendal emerged from a side entrance, climbing stairs to reach the street, entering the Strand quite unseen at that hour of the night. He had not gone above five paces when a hulking shadow detached itself from the greater darkness within a colonnade, following him.

No human ear could have heard as it came up behind Kendal, for it made no sound; yet Kendal turned his head, acknowledging its presence with a nod. The next pool of lamplight revealed the two men walking side by side. Kendal's companion was remarkably tall, with a long broken nose and pale eyes. But for these distinctions he had been as anonymous as Kendal, one more gentleman in evening dress returning from some amusement.

They had reached Whitehall before the tall man spoke, barely moving his lips.

"Much good?"

“Oh yes,” Kendal whispered. The other nodded, saying nothing more for the duration of their journey, which ended in Craig’s Court at their club. Redking’s occupied premises not nearly so imposing as those of the Athenaeum, nor as cheerful as Boodles’, having as it did an undistinguished brick frontage. The two gentlemen climbed its steps, nodded to the porter who admitted them, and handed their hats to the waiter who met them within.

“Mr. Greene requests your presence at once, sirs,” said the waiter. Kendal cast a longing glance at the dining room, where clinking cutlery suggested some fortunate party was enjoying a late supper. Nevertheless he turned and, with his companion, descended a flight of stairs.

A right turn and then a left took them past a number of undistinguished-looking doors to one bearing a blank brass plate. Kendal heard the drone of a voice within, and recognized the speaker as Mr. Hargrove. Kendal’s companion knocked on the door.

“Come in,” said a different voice, as Mr. Hargrove’s flow of speech went on without interruption.

At a desk within a sparsely furnished study sat a single individual, glaring at the apparatus occupying one corner of the room. It resembled a glass-fronted cabinet, in which could be glimpsed a rotating cylinder. From the cabinet’s top protruded a brass trumpet similar to those used by persons hard of hearing. However, it was presently sending out sound, rather than receiving it.

“...Mr. Cyrus Field may pop up as often as a Jack-in-the-box, bearing fistfuls of cash with which to advance his infernal design, yet we too have our friends among the influential and powerful...”

“Now, whom do you suppose he means?” said Mr. Greene, turning his glare on Kendal and his companion.

“He never said, sir,” said Kendal. They listened to the rest of the conversation. When the voices receded into silence and nothing more was heard but Kendal’s recorded footsteps, Greene rose and took the cylinder from the cabinet.

“Not impossible, I shouldn’t think,” said Greene. “But it should have been unnecessary. That was your business, Bell-Fairfax.”

Kendal’s companion bowed his head in acknowledgment, but said nothing. “He did burn down their headquarters, sir,” Kendal protested. “We had every reason to believe we’d rooted them out.”

“Clearly they were not sufficiently discouraged.” Greene looked meaningfully at Bell-Fairfax. “I expect more drastic measures are called for now.”

“Yes, sir,” said Bell-Fairfax, in a quiet voice.

“We don’t have unlimited resources, man. Have you any idea what it cost to produce enough gytite for the job? Or what we had to bribe the factory, to have it wound into the cable? Or how much we stand to gain, if the cable is laid? They cannot sabotage our efforts again!”

“No, sir.”

Greene returned to his chair, scowling. “So they have a diving suit, have they...? Damn. This wants some planning. The AGAMEMNON sails on the 17th, with its portion of the cable. They’re anticipated at Knightstown the 5th, ergo...” He fell silent. Kendal and Bell-Fairfax waited patiently, until Greene seemed to remember they were there.

“Go on, go to your beds. I’ll have orders for you later. Must think this through.”

“Yes, sir,” said Kendal. As they were leaving, Greene called after them:

“Probably have Bulger work with you on this one.”

Kendal rolled his eyes, but said only, “Yes, sir.” Bell-Fairfax snorted. Neither man having dined that evening, they spoke to the club’s cook before he went off duty and were shortly sitting down to cold chicken and a bottle of hock.

“Thanks for your indulgence,” said Kendal. His hands were trembling as he picked up his knife and fork. Hunger weakened him oddly, had done so since the war. He was a former marine, having served aboard the ARROGANT when Bomarsund was taken. There he lost an ear and his right foot to a bursting Russian shell, and was shipped home, half-deaf and lame, to starve. One day, as he lay dizzy and sick in an alley, he’d been approached by a kindly-looking man who’d offered him food and a doctor’s care, if he’d join something called the Gentlemen’s Speculative Society. Kendal would have done anything the man asked, for a chance of healing his suppurating wounds; and so he allowed himself to be carted off to a clean hospital bed, expecting to be visited by some sort of absurd debaters’ club.

Instead he had seen doctors, a great many of them, and undergone delightfully painless surgeries that had given him a remarkably lifelike prosthetic foot and reconstructed ear.

To say his hearing had been restored would be an understatement; Kendal had lain there fascinated, listening to conversations of tradesmen three streets away from the hospital. He had listened all the more attentively, therefore, when his benefactor returned.

The Gentlemen’s Speculative Society was (as Kendal had been told) merely the modern name for an ancient association of philanthropists who attempted to improve the lot of mankind through scientific invention. The Society owed allegiance to no kings, bent its head to no gods. Many famous men had been members down through the ages since its founding, creating ingenious devices for its agents to use in the great struggle. Universal enlightenment, an end to War, and Paradise on earth were its goals.

Kendal had taken his vows eagerly. The Society had granted him lodging at Redking’s Club, its London home; they fed him and clothed him. He was now in every respect their man. If his portion of the great struggle seemed to consist solely of spying for them, transmitting private conversations through the mechanism implanted in his skull, Kendal had only to remember starvation and deafness to restore his sense of gratitude.

He knew nothing of Bell-Fairfax’s story, other than that he too was a former Navy man. The two men spoke little as they dined, Bell-Fairfax limiting his remarks to an enthusiastic comment on the wine. The waiter had cleared the cloth and they were rising to go to their respective rooms when Bell-Fairfax said, “Was there anything else said that might have identified this *new friend* of the Preventers? Any intimation of his name?”

“I did get the impression he’s providing them with advice, as well as money. Hargrove used to maunder on at those meetings; usual old Luddite cant. Tonight he made his points much more effectively, as you heard.”

“He’s hired a writer, I suppose. Pity.” Bell-Fairfax shook his head.

"I'll tell you what's a pity, is having to work with Pinny Bulger again," said Kendal crossly. Bell-Fairfax suppressed a smile.

Pinwale Bulger was a sailor and professional grotesque. He had taken a faceful of shot at the Battle of Navarino, which had, as he was fond of telling anyone who'd buy him a drink, "spoiled his looks a bit" in that it had destroyed his right eye, cheekbone and ear. Having been discharged, he wandered Portsmouth with a bag over his head, charging a penny for a look at his injuries and tuppence to put the bag back on again.

This paid so well that the representative from the Gentlemen's Speculative Society was hard pressed to persuade Mr. Bulger to submit himself for surgical improvement, though Bulger was willing enough to become an agent when the Society's principles had been explained to him.

Nor need he have worried about losing his livelihood; for the doctors' best efforts, while restoring his hearing and rebuilding his face, had been unable to make him look any less appalling. His prosthetic eye in particular, though affording him vision superior to the undamaged left one, tended to roll and stare unnervingly, and there was an audible shutter click when he took photographs with it. To conceal this he had developed a repertoire of tics, tongue-clacking and muttering to himself, which also helped disguise his transmissions to the Society when he sent them through the apparatus built into his ear. Muttering to himself had become something of a habit, unfortunately.

"Do-de-do-de-dooo. Hello!" He waved cheerily to an ashen-faced pair of young gentlemen emerging from the Queenstown telegraph office. "Mr. Field and Mr. Bright, ain't it?"

They glanced at him and stopped, startled. "How did you know our names?" asked Field, the American.

"Why, ain't everyone heard of the great cable?" Bulger grinned at them. "I was wondering if you had a berth on that AGAMEMNON for an able-bodied seaman."

Bright, the Englishman, looked him up and down in disbelief. With a brief humorless laugh he replied, "If she puts to sea again. Just at present that is very much undecided, my good man."

"We'll persuade them, never you fear," Field told Bright. His confident expression faded as he regarded Bulger. "Ah... tell you what, sir: I'll bet they'd be grateful on board for someone to help them clean up. The AGAMEMNON's just been through some real bad weather. Now, if you'll excuse us, we have business elsewhere. Why don't you go apply to the captain?"

"Aye aye, yankee doodle," said Bulger with an affable leer, and went tottering away to the AGAMEMNON's berth. Field and Bright watched him go, shuddered, and hurried off to catch a fast boat to London, where they had the formidable task of persuading the Atlantic Cable Company's board of directors not to abandon the entire project after two costly false starts.

Bulger, for his part, went aboard and found the AGAMEMNON's first mate only too glad to hire on someone to help clear several tons of coal out of the saloon, where it had accumulated during the most recent attempt to lay cable during a catastrophic storm. Whistling merrily, Bulger stowed his duffel, grabbed a shovel and was soon hard at work.

“Nell Gwynn used these tunnels to visit Charles II, you know,” remarked Greene, as he led them downward.

“Really.” Kendal put a hand to his ear to muffle the echoes of the porter, who went before them with their trunks on a handcar. Bell-Fairfax was obliged to carry his hat and bend nearly double to follow them. They had been descending steadily for the better part of a minute, under vaulted brick arches.

“Oh, yes. Found a few interesting things when we excavated the club’s cellars! We cleaned the tunnels out and extended them a bit... Quite useful, and never more so than now. Ah! Here we are, gentlemen.”

Kendal heard Bell-Fairfax sigh with relief as they emerged into a vaulted chamber, brightly lit. It looked rather like a railway station, full of bustling men; but they were mechanics, rather than travelers, and the immense thing mounted on a track at one end of the chamber was not a locomotive engine but... Kendal peered at it. A wooden fish? A life-size model of a whale, perhaps, crafted in oak and copper and brass?

Plainly the thing was meant to swim, for its track led down into the mouth of a tunnel, from which came the unmistakable reek of the Thames. “The BALLENA,” said Greene with satisfaction. “Cost us a pretty penny, I can tell you, but she’s quite the finest of her kind. Considerable improvement over Bauer’s vessels, and rather safer. Ah! And here’s the Spaniard. Señor Monturiol! Tell him his passengers have arrived.”

This last remark was addressed not to the man himself but to his clerk, who translated the remark. Señor Monturiol, a slightly built gentleman with sea-blue eyes, stepped forward and bowed. He said something to the clerk.

“Señor Monturiol wishes to assure you that the BALLENA is ready to depart.”

“Very good!” said Greene. “Convey that I wish to introduce Mr. Kendal, our communications specialist.” Kendal bowed, extending his hand, and Monturiol clasped it briefly as the clerk chattered away.

“And this is our diver, Commander Bell-Fairfax,” added Greene. Monturiol looked up at Bell-Fairfax, visibly startled by his height, but he bowed and said something courteous. Bell-Fairfax responded in Spanish, shaking his hand.

“Señor Monturiol is a recent recruit for our continental branch,” said Greene. “A self-taught genius. He had the idea, we had the money, and the BALLENA’s the result.”

Monturiol said something in fervent tones, at some length. “The señor wishes to express his joy upon discovering a fraternity of brothers who use wealth, not for their own gain or to advance military objectives, but for the benefit of all mankind. He is honored and gratified to have joined your ranks, and to have the opportunity to develop his idea in your service,” said the clerk.

“*Very good,*” said Greene. “May we go aboard?”

They climbed a scaffold to step onto the upper deck, gripping brass handrails. The BALLENA was the color of a violin, golden oak under thick spar varnish, polished to a glassy shine. Her two fore portholes, set with rock crystal panes, increased her resemblance to a living creature of the sea rather than a vessel. Monturiol led them to a hatch in a snub tower protruding from the top, and, opening it out, indicated that they ought to descend into its interior.

Kendal and Bell-Fairfax climbed down sailorlike, followed awkwardly by Greene, Señor Monturiol and the clerk. Kendal found himself on a narrow walkway that extended the length of the vessel, though his view aft was blocked by a great many brass tanks and apparatus he could not identify. Uniformed engineers paused in their preparations there to stand to attention and salute. The whole was lit by a pair of glass tubes, filled with some sort of blue-glowing fluid, that snaked along the interior hull at roughly eye-level, held in place by copper brackets quaintly shaped to resemble starfish.

Directly to their left there looked to be a lower hatch, to which Monturiol pointed and said something, then gestured forward. "The airlock for the diver," translated the clerk. "If you gentlemen will proceed to the saloon, you will find it much less crowded."

"By all means," said Bell-Fairfax, who was having to crouch once more. They sidled into the area corresponding to a ship's forecabin and there congregated in a tight knot, as the porter carried in the trunks.

"The saloon. Here are hooks for your hammocks," the clerk translated for Monturiol. "Lockers for your trunks are under the benches. A sanitary convenience is in this cabinet."

"It seems smaller inside than it appeared from the outside," said Kendal. Bell-Fairfax translated his remark, and Monturiol's reply:

"That is because we are double-hulled, for safety."

"You needn't fear suffocation either," said Greene, waving an arm at the machinery aft. "She's got an anaerobic engine—produces oxygen, if you please! As well as driving an auxiliary steam engine to propel her. No need for sailors sweating away in close confines at a tedious cranking mechanism. Oxyhydric lamp running off a hydrogen tank, so as to light her way through the depths. She'll descend a hundred and fifty fathoms with ease, and make twenty knots regardless of the weather. Positively swanned her way through her sea-trials!"

The porter had finished stowing the trunks by this time. With his departure hands were shaken all around; Greene and the clerk departed. Monturiol's valet, Arnau, closed and sealed the hatch. From that moment they were isolated from the world, and could not hear the order for launch; they only felt the jolt as all hands without lent their weight to pushing the BALLENA down the ramp. Kendal scrambled to the starboard porthole. He looked down on bowed heads and straining backs for a moment. A lurch, and then the brick walls of the tunnel went sliding past, only to vanish in universal darkness as the BALLENA entered the water. Her engines churned to life, with a vibration that entered Kendal's spread palms where they pressed her inner hull. He felt a thrill of mingled terror and glee. Kendal turned from the window. Monturiol and Arnau had gone aft, Monturiol to the helm amidships and Arnau to assist the engineers. Orders were shouted in Spanish; suddenly the black beyond the portholes lit to a dim green. Bathed in the blue light from the illumination tubes, Bell-Fairfax had sat down and was straightening his back at last.

"For God and St. George," he remarked to Kendal, with a wry smile.

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They surfaced when they were well out into the Thames. Monturiol demonstrated the periscope that allowed them to peer above the surface, thereby avoiding collisions with ships. The young moon had long since set, but the periscope had been fitted with a lens that penetrated shadow, lighting the night with an eerie green glow. At half speed, they traveled downriver cautiously.

By dawn they had rounded Margate and caught the gleam of the North Foreland light, winking pale across the water under the brightening sky. The BALLENA moved out beyond the sands until she swam free in the open ocean. Monturiol gave the order to take her up to top speed then, and she cut through the blue world like a Minié ball from the barrel of a rifle, making for Ireland.

Mr. Field and Mr. Bright having faced the investors, and Mr. Field having worked his eloquent miracle of persuasion, they returned to Queenstown and boarded their respective vessels with permission to make one more attempt to lay the cable. Mr. Field steamed away to the mid-Atlantic rendezvous point aboard the NIAGARA on 17 July as agreed, while Mr. Bright went aboard the AGAMEMNON, whose captain insisted on leaving under sail alone and never even made it out of Church Bay until the 18th. Mr. Bulger had ingratiated himself into a berth by then, since there was still no end of clean-up and repair to be done. It would be a stretch of the truth to say the rest of the crew became used to him, but, preoccupied as they were with catching up with the NIAGARA, they learned to ignore the sight of Bulger shuffling to and fro with a broom, a mop or a bucket of paint.

He had noted one other crew member who sat apart from the other sailors in the mess and was given menial tasks suitable for a landsman. They were on the same watch; accordingly Bulger wobbled up to him and sat, at the evening meal on the fourth day out.

“How-de-do!” He grinned companionably. “I’m Pinny Bulger. What’s your name, matey?”

The other looked across at him and blanched. “A-Anthony Cheltenham.”

“Is it! Well, ain’t that nice. Want some of this here plum duff?”

“No, thank you.”

“Sure?” Bulger spooned up a mouthful and made ecstatic noises, rocking himself to and fro. “Oh, it’s fearful good! Well, more for me. This your first cruise, is it? Come to sea for your health, eh?”

“I did, yes.”

“That’s just what I done, when I was a lad,” said Bulger. “Made me the man you see today. This is a fine cruise we’re having, ain’t it?”

“I suppose so.”

“And just think what it’s in aid of! We’ll get into the history books, sure. I been down helping ’em unstick glued-up cable in the cable-holds, so it’ll run smooth. That’s a sight to see, all them miles of cable coiled up down there!”

“Eleven hundred miles, as I understand,” said Cheltenham, looking at him more attentively. “Tell me, do you need any assistance?”

Bulger’s right eye rolled madly for a moment, until he brought it to focus on Cheltenham. He thrust his head forward and took a photograph of Cheltenham, chattering his teeth on his spoon to obscure the sound of the lens shutter. “Why d’you ask?”

“I would dearly love to get a look at the cable, you see.”

“Why’nt you just take a peep at what’s on the forward deck, then? The guards would let you have a nice close squint at it, I’m sure.”

“Oh, I’ve seen that, certainly, but... I should like to see all of it.”

“I reckon you would!” Bulger gave a cackling laugh, and elbowed him.

“Something to tell the grandkids about, eh?”

“Indeed.” Cheltenham managed a friendly smile. “And I’d be happy to accompany you when next you—”

Kendal to Bulger, Kendal to Bulger, are you receiving? Repeat, Bulger, are you receiving? called the silent voice in Bulger’s inner ear.

“Aye, aye, receiving! Just a-sitting here having a chat with my shipmate Mr. Cheltenham,” said Bulger.

“I beg your pardon?” Cheltenham stared at him.

“I hears voices in my head. Don’t mind me, matey; just a little piece of scattershot from Navarino, what got left in my brains. Always makes me need to go to the water closet, though. Here!” Bulger thrust his helping of duff toward Cheltenham, as he stood up. “You finish it, matey.”

He hurried off, crouched over with his hand to his hear, muttering to himself as he went.

Kendal to Bulger! Did you say you’d found Cheltenham?

“Right enough, I did, and him all eager to get down to the cable holds where there ain’t no guards to watch him. Hey diddle di-do, my son John!” Bulger added, for the benefit of a sailor who passed him. “I reckon you’re in range, now?”

We are directly below the AGAMEMNON. What’s happened? You ought to have been at the rendezvous point by this time!

“Well, that ain’t my doing; Captain Preedy’s trying to save coal and ain’t firing up the boilers. Ring-a-ding deedle, you ladies of Spain!” Bulger reached the fore cable hoist and scrambled up to the recently rebuilt head, where he dropped his drawers and sat cautiously. “There! Now we got some privacy. But it’s the Cheltenham lubber right enough, and up to no good. Any chance Commander Bell-Fairfax can come topside and wring his neck?”

No. Repeat, no. You’ll have to deal with him yourself. Take any measures necessary.

“Aye aye, then. Orders is orders. Singing way-hey-hee-hi-ho!” shouted Bulger, as a foretopman slid down a stay within hearing range. “The way we’re proceeding, I don’t reckon we’ll meet up with the Niagara before the 29th. You lot got enough air and food and such down there?”

Yes. We are all well.

“Jolly good! Wish I could see aboard. Must be funny, looking out and watching the fishes swim by at eye level. As I was a-walking down Paradise Street—”

Kendal signed off, rubbing his ear with a sigh of irritation, and turned his attention to the porthole once more. He was soothed and endlessly entertained by the blue world, with its steady progression of vistas of kelp forests, open sandy wastes and the occasional sunken wreck. Now and again they came upon fish who darted ahead a while, as though fearful of the chase, before falling back and being overtaken. Once they passed a great gray shark, with its dead black passionless stare, cruising slowly in the opposite direction. Even the occasional silver bubbles,

rising from the Ballena's passage, were diverting to watch. Monturiol and Bell-Fairfax had been absorbed in a game of chess, as one of the engineers manned the helm, but gradually set the game aside for conversation. Monturiol was a passionate speaker, undoubtedly eloquent in his own language. Kendal knew enough Spanish to pick out words like Exploration, Revolution, Rationalism, and Utopian. Monturiol's blue eyes shone with belief as he spoke. For his part, Bell-Fairfax answered with nearly evangelical zeal as regarded the Society's objectives. There was a gleam in his pale eyes and a ring to his voice now as he orated on the Society's behalf. The voice got inside one's head, somehow, irresistibly. It made Kendal rather uncomfortable.

"Sandwiches, Señor?" The valet was at his elbow, proffering a tray. Kendal accepted a sandwich and a glass of sauternes. The others broke off their discussion.

"What says our humorous jack tar?" Bell-Fairfax inquired, unfolding his pocket handkerchief to serve as a napkin. Kendal related the substance of their conversation, which Bell-Fairfax then translated for Monturiol's benefit. Monturiol looked horrified and said something emphatic.

"Haven't we enough supplies to get us through after all?" Kendal asked. "I should have thought Greene had planned for delays!"

Bell-Fairfax replied to Monturiol in a conciliatory tone, then answered Kendal:

"No. We've enough. He became rather exercised at the prospect of putting me aboard the AGAMEMNON, however."

"You assured him it wouldn't be necessary?" Kendal held out his glass to be refilled.

"Quite." Bell-Fairfax had a sip of wine. "I expect Bulger will be equal to the task."

He set his glass aside and returned his attention to the chessboard. The blue light reflected coldly in his pale eyes.

Bulger lay in his hammock, snoring to feign sleep. He had, that very morning, taken Cheltenham down to the cable-holds, and shown him the three lower decks, each with its vast coil of cable wrapped about a hollow center cone. He had been on his guard then, watching Cheltenham closely to see what he might do.

Cheltenham had merely looked around, however, apparently satisfied to note how one got in and out.

But now Bulger heard the rustle of Cheltenham's clothing as he sat up, the barely audible creak as he climbed from his hammock. Bulger opened his prosthetic eye and watched, piercing the darkness as Cheltenham drew something from his sea-chest. Thrusting the object into his pocket, Cheltenham took something else from the seachest. A match flared briefly, a moment's glow was quickly concealed; he had lit a shuttered lantern. Cheltenham took it with him as he climbed the companionway, his naked feet making no sound.

Bulger rolled out of his hammock. Reaching into his bolster he drew forth a claspknife. Opening it out, he slipped it between his teeth and followed Cheltenham unseen.

He emerged into the galley just in time to see Cheltenham's feet disappearing at the top of the next companionway. He pursued closely and ducked down on the topmost step, for from this vantage point he could see Cheltenham on deck,

crouching in the shadows between the capstan and the pen that held the topmost store of cable. The cable was braced there in an immense spool, one end threaded carefully through a loosely fitting hatch cover to the compartments below. Bulger watched a long moment, as Cheltenham waited for the attention of the deck watch to stray elsewhere. Ten minutes passed before the watchman gave a furtive look around and hurried forward to the head. Cheltenham scrambled aft to the cable hatch and had it aside in a second, sliding through, dragging it shut above him. Bulger, glancing over his shoulder at the watchman, followed Cheltenham swiftly and silently. He dropped into darkness, his knife drawn, expecting to grapple with Cheltenham at once. Yet he was alone; he felt nothing but the gutta-percha covering of the coiled cable under his bare toes. He heard the echoing breaths that told him Cheltenham had already gone farther down, into one of the lower holds. Bulger grimaced and rapped his right temple two or three times. The deep-night-vision filter in his prosthetic eye dropped into place at last.

Bulger went at once to the hollow cone around which the cable had been wrapped, that gave access to the next tier below. He put the knife back between his teeth and slid straight through to the orlop-deck. Cheltenham crouched there, atop the mass of coiled cable, in the narrow space below the underside of the deck above. He opened one shutter of his lamp, throwing a narrow beam of light on the cable. Bulger heard him fumbling in his pocket, as his breaths came shallow and his heartbeat thundered. Cheltenham pulled out a pair of blacksmith's tongs at last, with a sigh of relief. He pulled up a length of cable and applied the tongs to it, pinching to crimp and fracture the cable while leaving no obvious cut in its guttapercha covering. Clearly his plan was to so damage the cable that it would easily break when fed through the paying-out apparatus. One break wouldn't set the enterprise back much, but Cheltenham had privacy and hours to work on the whole mass of the cable...

Bulger crawled toward Cheltenham, grinning around the knife. "He'oh!" he said, as the beam from the lantern fell upon his fearful countenance. Cheltenham saw him and jumped up, screaming. Which is to say, he tried to jump and tried to scream; both were cut short, the one by violent contact with the underside of the deck above and the other by immediate unconsciousness. Bulger took the knife out of his mouth. "Stroke of luck for me," he told the unconscious saboteur. "Saves me getting blood all over the cable, don't it?"

He hauled Cheltenham up through the tiers, climbing with apelike strength, only pausing at the hatch to assure himself that the watchman was still enthroned forward.

That worthy heard a splash, but as it was accompanied by no shouts he ignored it. When he returned to his post a moment later, he saw Bulger leaning on the rail, peacefully rolling a cigarette.

"Pleasant night, ain't it?" said Bulger.

"Bulger informs me he has dealt with the saboteur on board," said Kendal, as Arnau brought them tea next morning.

"Capital," said Bell-Fairfax. He was shaving, having propped a pocket mirror on a bulkhead shelf. He glanced over at Monturiol, who was amidships at the periscope. "I shouldn't discuss it with our host, were I you. What else did he say?"

“That they saw the lights of the wire squadron at eight bells in the middle watch, and expect to close with the NIAGARA this morning.”

“Very good,” said Bell-Fairfax, just as Monturiol said something in an excited tone of voice. Laying aside his razor, Bell-Fairfax joined him amidships. They conversed in Spanish and Monturiol stepped back from the periscope a moment, in order to let Bell-Fairfax look through its lens. Stooping, he did so.

“And there they are, NIAGARA and all,” Bell-Fairfax announced. “We’re standing off as they rendezvous.”

“At last,” said Kendal. He accepted one of the ship’s biscuits Arnau offered him.

“I don’t believe I could ever tire of the view, but the close quarters have become a little oppressive. Must be rather worse for you.”

“One endures what one must,” said Bell-Fairfax, returning to his shaving mirror.

“And in the best of causes, after all. Think what the world will be like, when everyone’s connected by cable! Instantaneous transmission of knowledge. Wars ending sooner, if the news of treaties can be sent out the day they’re signed.”

“It’s my hope wars won’t start at all,” said Bell-Fairfax. “It will be a great deal harder for nations to lie to one another, when their citizens may telegraph the truth to anyone anywhere else in the world.”

“Though I suppose we’ll use it to make money,” Kendal said, gazing out at the depths, which were steadily brightening as the dawn progressed. “Stock fixing, for example. Assuming the gyttite works.”

“It works.” Bell-Fairfax set down his razor and reached for a towel. “You weren’t involved in that business, but I was; and I can tell you that gyttite conducts at virtually the speed of light. One strand hidden in the cable ensures that *we* receive any transmitted information hours before anyone else. The Society profits, the great work goes forward, and mankind continues its advance to the earthly paradise.”

“So it does,” Kendal agreed hastily.

“Nor is the Society the only beneficiary for the common welfare,” Bell-Fairfax continued, tying his tie. “Consider that scholars and scientists on opposite sides of the world will be able to exchange ideas as easily as though they were walking next door to a neighbor’s. How much more swiftly must civilization progress, in the time to come!”

“They’ll still require translators,” said Kendal.

“Not at all,” said Bell-Fairfax confidently. “Most professional men speak Latin.”

The BALLENA moved in once the cable ships had made fast to each other, hovering at four fathoms in the AGAMEMNON’s shadow. The NIAGARA passed one end of her freight of cable to the AGAMEMNON, and the AGAMEMNON’s electricians set about splicing it to their end.

“I’m watching ’em,” muttered Bulger. “A fine sight it is.”

Is the cable connected?

“Almost,” said Bulger. “Whang dang dill-oh! It’s been spliced together in this big wooden splint. Now they’re a-putting the sinkweight on her. Derry diddle dido! And now they’re a-lifting her to put her over the side! Huzzay! Oh, bugger.”

“What is it?” Kendal demanded, as something hit the water with a splash and shot straight down past the BALLENA.

The sinkweight broke loose. Derry diddle dee! Powerful lot of cursing going on. Mr. Bright's just a-standing there chewing his fingernails. Somebody's saying it's because they didn't weld no lucky sixpences into the splice.

"Have they lost the cable again?" Kendal felt his heart constrict. *No. They're a-hauling it back aboard, splint and all. Haul on the bowlin, Nancy is me darlin'! Here's a lad with another weight. That'll do the job. Haul on the bowlin, all the way to Liverpool—there! She's fixed up proper. There she goes! Lookout down below!*

"It's the cable!" cried Kendal. Bell-Fairfax and Monturiol rushed to his side in time to see the cradle that held the main splice dropping through the water, pulled inexorably by its weight of thirty-two-pound shot. The double line of cable sank. Here came a tiny silvery flash dropping with it, close to the portholes.

"Good God," said Bell-Fairfax. "It's a sixpence."

Monturiol shouted in triumph. He embraced them both in turn; Kendal and Bell-Fairfax shook hands, grinning. *Hey-ho dumpty oh! Mind you, there ain't much cheering going on up here. I reckon they seen this go wrong so often they're afraid to jinx it. Down-a-down-a-down she goes, where she stops—oh. She stops at 216 fathoms. They're doing something, I can't see... lot of shouting back and forth between us and the Yanks... Oh! They wastesting the signal. It's coming through. Stand by below there, they're firing up the engines to go about—*

Those aboard the BALLENA could feel the turbulence as the two great ships prepared to steam away from each other. Monturiol ran to the helm and took the BALLENA to a safe distance as they maneuvered. The NIAGARA set off for Newfoundland, the AGAMEMNON for Ireland, both paying out cable as they went. Four fathoms under the AGAMEMNON's bow coursed the BALLENA, like a dog trotting before its master. There was nothing to do now but pace the AGAMEMNON eight hundred nautical miles, until Galway Bay where the next attempt by the Preventers was expected. The crew of the BALLENA relaxed. Monturiol, who had been at the helm for twenty straight hours, slung up his hammock and climbed in for some well-deserved rest, leaving Arnau at the helm. The engineering crew divided their watch; two slept in their hammocks aft while two observed the dials and gauges, and occasionally made small adjustments to the mechanisms. Bell-Fairfax immersed himself in a copy of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. Kendal returned to his serene contemplation of the depths.

He had lost track of the passing hours when Kendal beheld small silver fish—sardines, he supposed—shooting toward the BALLENA from the waters ahead. A moment later something immense and dark loomed into view. Kendal glimpsed an eye. Before he could open his mouth to exclaim, the BALLENA had been struck with an audible crash and scrape that rocked the vessel. Kendal was thrown to his knees, Bell-Fairfax flung backward against a bulkhead, and Monturiol startled awake as his hammock pitched wildly. Shouts sounded aft.

The BALLENA heeled over, from the impact they thought. All hands braced themselves and waited for her to right. Instead, she tilted at a sharp angle and rose through the water.

Kendal glimpsed sunlight and sky through the portholes. "They'll see us!" he cried. Arnau meanwhile was struggling at the helm, but the BALLENA in her present state was proving almost impossible to steer, veering back toward the AGAMEMNON. Bell-Fairfax climbed to his feet and went aft to seize the wheel,

lending his strength to Arnau's. Monturiol, frantically attempting to get out of his hammock, fell from it at last. On his hands and knees he scrambled to the starboard porthole and peered out. One of the crew, bending over a gauge, shouted to him in Spanish. He shouted a reply.

"What are they saying?" cried Kendal.

"Three of the exterior ballast weights have gone," Bell-Fairfax answered. *What's going on below, there? They can see you!*

"I know! We're in trouble!"

"What?"

"I'm talking to Bulger!"

Bulger, leaning on the rail with the other sailors, watched in horror as the BALLENA shot along the side of the AGAMEMNON, coming perilously close to the steadily dropping cable. "Damn, that's a big whale! What a great awful whale that is, to be sure!" he announced.

"Surely that's no whale," said Mr. Bright, craning his head to watch as the BALLENA, with a flash of her rudder, dove again and vanished, just nudging the cable in passing.

"Aye, sir, that's a, er, brown whale! I served aboard whalers forty years, man and boy, and I seen 'em many's a time!"

On board the BALLENA, meanwhile, Monturiol had got to a chain drive and hauled on it. A metal weight came shuttling forward along a track under the walkway; at once the BALLENA righted herself. Monturiol threw a lever that filled a ballast tank, and she descended. Arnau stood back, gasping with exertion, as Bell-Fairfax swung the wheel around and put her on course again. Monturiol closed off the valve. He rose to his feet, saying something in a satisfied tone.

"What was that?"

"He said he built this fish to save lives, not to take them," Bell-Fairfax translated. Monturiol smiled wearily and went back to his hammock. Thereafter they sped on through an effortless week, weathering gales that caused the AGAMEMNON above them to labor hard on her way. Once or twice there were difficulties with the cable, but the AGAMEMNON's electricians resolved them easily. Just before dawn on 5th August, Kendal woke with Bulger's voice in his head.

There's Skellig Light. That's Valentia Island, by God. We made it!

Kendal sat up in his hammock. Beyond the portholes he saw only night sea, still thinly illuminated by the BALLENA's lamp. Bell-Fairfax had risen and pulled on a suit of woolen underwear; he knelt now beside the trunk that held his diving apparatus. Monturiol, at the helm, smiled. "Do you see any sign of the saboteurs?" said Kendal.

"I beg your pardon? Oh," said Bell-Fairfax.

No sign of 'em yet... only, there's small craft over to port. Let me get my long-distance lens up... A dull thudding sound transmitted to Kendal. Ah! She's a littlesteam launch. Looks like a crew of three. She's making for us.

"Keep watching her, then." Kendal climbed from his hammock and assisted Bell-Fairfax into the immense canvas diving suit. There were innumerable straps to fasten and weights to attach. Bell-Fairfax's face was white and set; Kendal wondered if he was afraid. By the time Kendal had lifted the bronze helmet into

place and fastened the screws that fixed it to the suit's breastplate, morning blue was visible through the portholes.

We're dead on for the strait between Valentia and Beginish islands. And here's the launch, coming up hard to port!

How many? Bell-Fairfax spoke through the transmitter in his helmet. *Who's that? Oh. Morning, Commander sir! All I'm seeing now is two... there was three before. They got a tarpaulin spread aft and I reckon he's lying under it. T'other two are all got up as Irishmen. Red fright wigs and such. Pretending to be fishermen, likely. They're grinning and waving, cheering us on. They're marking pretty careful where the cable's falling, though.*

Bell-Fairfax opened the plate on the front of his helmet and spoke to Monturiol, who nodded and sent the periscope up. He peered into it and evidently spotted the steam launch at once. Calling Arnau to the helm, he came forward to the deck hatch, where he turned a crank. The domed lid of the hatch opened back, like an eyelid over an empty socket, disclosing a round chamber underneath. He stood and gestured to Bell-Fairfax.

Bell-Fairfax removed a long narrow box from the trunk, something like a mapcase. Monturiol looked curiously at it as Bell-Fairfax lowered himself into the diving chamber, but he asked no questions; merely knelt to make the several connections for the tether and air lines.

We're past 'em now, and they've come right up in our wake and dropped a buoy! Sly-like, pretending to be casting nets. Ah! Here's the third bastard after all, sitting up. He's in diving gear. He's got something in his hand. Looks like a pair of hedge-clippers. There he goes, over the side!

Monturiol cranked the hatch back into place. It sealed with an audible hiss. He turned another crank, and the hiss was replaced by a bubbling splash. Bell-Fairfax's lines paid out as he descended. He dropped perhaps five fathoms before they stopped.

"Bell-Fairfax, are you all right?"

Yes. There was a peculiar metallic quality to Bell-Fairfax's voice, as it came over the wall-mounted receiver. *I can see the saboteur. Señor?* He said something in Spanish, and Arnau took the Ballena forward slowly. Kendal went to the porthole and saw, just ahead, the line descending from the buoy the saboteurs had laid. Looking up he saw the bottom of the little launch, gently rocking, silhouetted under a bright morning sky, and what must be their diver's lines going down into the depths.

We're dropping anchor now. Look at them crowds, all turned out to welcome us! It's up to you lot now. Best of luck, commander. Thank you.

Kendal clenched his fists, knowing what must happen next, trying not to imagine it in any detail. When the sudden bubbles came belching up—and some of them seemed to bear a scarlet tinge, that brightened as they broke the surface—he let out his breath and sagged backward. He told himself it was the saboteur's own fault; he told himself that Progress required certain sacrifices. Bell-Fairfax's voice came crackling over the receiver once more, giving what sounded like an order in Spanish. Arnau obeyed, unthinking, though Monturiol cried "Que? No, no!"

His countermand came too late. The BALLENA had gone shooting up to the surface, ramming the saboteurs' launch and capsizing it. Kendal, regaining his

feet, looked out the porthole and straight into the face of one of the saboteurs, whose eyes were wide with astonishment as he struggled in the depths. Kendal had only a moment to register the absurdity of the man's costume—music-hall Irish, green knee breeches and buckled shoes, and on the surface a pair of red fright wigs floating—before a spear came flashing up from below and pierced the man through. Monturiol shouted something in tones both horrified and accusatory. There, another cloud of scarlet came drifting by, just visible through the other porthole. Bell-Fairfax, standing on the bottom, had aimed upward and shot both saboteurs as though they were a pair of grouse.

Trailing bubbles through red swirling water, the saboteurs sank from sight. Monturiol cranked away at the winch angrily, as though to haul Bell-Fairfax up before he could do the dead men any further injury. There was a faint thump on the *BALLENA*'s lower hull, and a moment later Bell-Fairfax sat on the deck beside the diver's hatch, laying his chambered spear gun aside. Kendal worked the screws and got the helmet off.

At once Monturiol unleashed a furious torrent of denunciation. Bell-Fairfax merely sat there, breathing deeply, no expression on his pale weary face. At last he raised his hand.

“Señor, lo hecho, hecho esta,” he said dully. “Esta es guerra.”

* * * * *

The first public message was sent from the London company directors to their American cousins, lauding God and observing that Europe and America were now connected by telegraphic communication. It took all of fifteen minutes to transmit. The next message was sent from Queen Victoria to President Buchanan, was rather more effusive, and took sixteen hours to transmit and receive. On 14 August, a Cunard vessel collided with another passenger ship off Cape Race. The friends and relations of those aboard were unspeakably relieved to learn, in a fraction of the time the news would have traveled without the transatlantic cable, that all lives had been saved.

On the 31st August, the commanding officers of two Canadian garrisons learned, via cable, that the Sepoy Rebellion had been crushed and neither the presences of the 62nd nor 39th Regiments were required in India after all. Her Majesty saved approximately a hundred and fifty thousand pounds in troop transport costs. An anonymous Yankee wrote a fervent hymn of praise, one of whose verses ran:

*Speed, speed the cable: let it run
A loving girdle round the earth,
Till all the nations 'neath the sun
Shall be as brothers of one hearth.*

“Pity about Señor Monturiol,” said Kendal. They were sitting over a decanter of port at Redking's. Bell-Fairfax, who was lighting a cigar, shrugged.

“Yes, shame. Dr. Nennys tried to dissuade him from resigning, but to no avail.”

“You won't be required to—?”

“Hm? No, no, he took the vow of silence. And, you know, he approves of our goals overall; he’s simply unable to reconcile himself with our methods. I admire a man with a conscience.”

“I hope we’re keeping the BALLENA.” Kendal swirled his port in its glass.

“We are. We paid for it. I understand he’s got another one half-built in Barcelona. He won’t have our money any longer, but so it goes. How have the Preventers taken defeat?”

“Cheltenham and the others have been declared martyrs, naturally. Oh, and I found out the name of their new patron, by the way. He wrote them a fine fiery speech, exhorting them not to give up.”

“Rather irresponsible of him.” Edward sighed, exhaling smoke through his nostrils. “I suppose the usual arrangements will be necessary?”

“Well, that’s the thing, you see—” Kendal broke off, startled, for Greene had appeared in the doorway like an apparition of doom. He strode to them, clenching a yellow dispatch-sheet in his fist.

“The damned cable’s dead,” he said. Kendal leapt to his feet.

“Sir, on my honor, the Preventers couldn’t—”

“They didn’t. Some idiot of an electrician tried to boost the signal and sent two thousand volts through the cable. Burned out everything. Even our gyttite strand.”

Bell-Fairfax closed his eyes and swore quietly. “Well, we’ll try again,” Kendal stammered.

“Not for some time. Our usual informants advised us this morning that there won’t be another attempt until 1865. The Americans are going into a civil war, apparently. Freeing their blacks.”

“Really?” Bell-Fairfax opened his eyes. “That’s something, anyway.”

“It’s more complicated than you’d suppose,” said Greene bitterly. “Everything is. You may be sure your Preventers will take this as a sign from God, Kendal. Pay a call on their new money man and put the wind up him, do you understand? Take BellFairfax with you.”

The gentleman was angry. His domestic situation was inescapable misery, and the only manner in which he might let off intolerable pressure was by walking as far and as fast as he might. It was past midnight, but London was unseasonably warm for November, and he was on his fifth circumnavigation of Gordon Square when they caught up with him.

He never heard the other gentlemen coming up behind; they seemed to materialize, one on either side of him. He glanced at the man to his left, then at the one to his right; he had to tilt his head back. He made an incredulous sound.

“Good evening, sir,” said Bell-Fairfax, as they walked along. “May we have a few private words?”

“As many as you like,” the man snapped.

“May I say, first, how much we admire your work? Your efforts on behalf of the poor are laudable. Justice, charity, compassion, reform, have all found a powerful champion in your pen, sir.”

“True,” said Kendal.

“Therefore it pains us to discover you have lent your considerable talents to the destruction of a device certain to improve the lot of mankind.”

"I beg your pardon?" said the man, and then gave Bell-Fairfax a sharp look. "Ah. I see. Well! Let me ask you this, gentlemen: have you ever labored with your hands?"

"We have, sir."

"And were you paid for your labors?"

"Yes, sir."

"The fellow who earns his bread making chairs, do you believe *he* ought to be paid when citizens furnish their homes with his work?"

"Unquestionably, sir."

"The cobbler ought to be paid for every pair of boots that leave *his* shop, then?" The man's eyes flashed with anger. He seemed relieved to have someone with whom to argue. "Therefore—ought not the writer receive payment for the entertainment he provides?"

"And you do, sir."

"Not in America," said the man. "No. In the Home of Liberty, any publisher is at liberty to pick my pocket, sir, without respect of copyright. I'm told my novels are popular, read by thousands who enjoy them in American editions for which I have received not one farthing in royalties. I complained to the American authorities, if they can be described as such; I was insulted, and my character defamed in their press, for my pains!

"And are our own politicians interested in my welfare? No. Literature does nothing to get them into Parliament, and therefore they choose to do nothing on the literary man's behalf.

"My ideas change the world for the better—you yourself said so. Why then am I, their author, not accorded the legal protection an artisan enjoys? And what of American writers? How can they persuade American publishers to buy their efforts at fair prices, when the stolen works of British writers are available free of charge?"

"And now the industrialists seek to break down the barriers of time and distance between nations. I tell you that there is no invention so nobly conceived, that some base rascal will not find a way to corrupt it to his own ends! When a man's property may be transmitted instantaneously to a foreign shore, what laws will protect him?"

"With respect, sir," said Bell-Fairfax patiently, "it would take longer to telegraph the text of one of your novels than it would for a copy to be sent across by packet ship."

"Today," said the man. "But tell me, in good conscience, that it will not be so in twenty years. The telegraph is profitable, it is convenient; the brightest minds of the age will turn their attention to improving its speed and reliability, with no thought of the consequences. And in any case, that is not the point! The work of hands is protected by law; why not then the work of the mind?"

"Sir, you are in some distress, but we must ask you to consider the greater good," said Bell-Fairfax. "The world will progress more surely from barbarism to civilized behavior, if all men may exchange news freely. Copyright laws will adapt, in time. Balance that in the scales, against your lost profit, and bow to the inevitable."

He stopped on the pavement, staring down into the man's eyes as he spoke. The man pulled his gaze away with effort, shivering.

“You’re devilishly persuasive, sir,” he said sullenly.

“It is our earnest hope that you *can* be persuaded with words, sir,” said Bell-Fairfax. “We should be sorry to have to employ any other means.”

His pale gaze traveled past the man, into the courtyard before which they had stopped. “This is your home, is it, sir? Yes, I thought so. The one on the end. You live here with your children.

“I do hope you’ll reconsider your opinion in this matter. Good evening, Mr. Dickens.”

