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All Else Is Folly

A Tale of War and Passion

BY

PEREGRINE ACLAND

WITH A NOTE BY WAY OF PREFACE
BY FORD MADDOX FORD

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To M. L. A.

Even if there were not a
thousand other reasons for doing so,
I would dedicate this book to
you because your criticisms have
been my chief help in writing it.

P. A.

"It is more passion and ever more that we need if we are to undo the work of Hate, if we are to add to the gaiety and splendour of life, to the sum of human achievement, to the aspiration of

human ecstasy."—HAVELOCK ELLIS.

"You I advise not to work but to fight. You I advise not to peace but to victory. Let your work be a fight. Let your peace be a victory...."

"Man shall be trained for war, and woman for the recreation of the warrior; all else is folly."—NIETZSCHE: "Thus Spake Zarathustra."

A NOTE BY WAY OF PREFACE

I do hope that, quite apart from the esthetico-literary considerations that are my usual *tic* and that as a rule prevent the British reader from paying any attention to books that I urge on his attention so that I practically never, whatever may be the case with the United States, write any prefaces for the English editions of books.... I do hope then that a very large public may be found for Major Acland's book on both sides of the Atlantic.

For it is the convincing, mournful and unrelieved account of a simple soul's sufferings in the late War.

And I believe that those sufferings have never been sufficiently brought home to the public as a whole and that is why the late War has not aroused half the horror of war as a whole that it should have aroused.... For the defect of all novel-writing is that, as a rule, the novelist—heaven help him!—must needs select unusual, hypersensitized souls to endure any vicissitudes that he is pleased to make them endure and that makes him lose half the game with the normal reader. I remember very well—for I am not pleading not guilty!—thinking to myself when about half-way through a novel about the late War: "Well, my central character is altogether such a queer, unusual fellow that I do not see how any one is going much to sympathize with him in his misfortunes...." Thoughts to that effect.... And pretty nearly as much can be said of the books of most of my Anglo-Saxon or Latin colleagues, whilst, on the whole, writers from the Central or Slavic Empires emphasize the note by dwelling on the sufferings of mournful but unusual peasants. The result is that the normal man says: "These are not normal people!" and continues to comfort himself either by imagining that the late struggle was for those engaged in it a perpetual picnic varied with sexual jamborees or by ignoring the matter altogether.

That is a misfortune. But it is a misfortune that Major Acland's book may do a great deal to mitigate. For his central character is about as normal in temperament and circumstances as it is possible to be. He is neither high nor low in station; neither hypersensitized nor callous; neither Adonis nor Caliban; neither illiterate nor of the intelligentsia; neither a brute nor a poet, though like so many of us he writes an occasional very mediocre sonnet which fails to cause the lady of his devotion to fall for him. And he is no coward and no hero—though he endures without much squealing sufferings out of which he, like the rest of us, would very gladly have got—wangled, used to be the technical word! ... "If one could only," one used to say innumerable times, "wangle a staff-job." Or a Home Job. Or a week-end's leave in Paris.... Or even a Blighty!

So Major Acland's Falcon would eventually very gladly—but like all of us, how vainly!—have applied for a Staff Job; have been sent home to Canada to train details—with young woman for the use of officer, one, complete.... Then when he is worn and wearied out he is put into the most hellish scrap of all. And gets his Blighty....

But with his bashed in face and mangled limbs his young woman who also is wearied out turns him down and back he goes to Canada—and presumably carries on.

Nevertheless, at the skirl of the pipes: "War-lust again surged through him." As it does for us all. And that really is the lesson of the book—the lesson that our publics and lawmakers would do well to ponder. "Yet now," Major Acland concludes, "with the skirling of the pipes in his ears, he would have signed away his liberty, his life, for another war. It wouldn't have mattered much what the war was about.... Not when this vast hall rocked with the tread of two thousand feet and his hot blood leaped to the pipes...."

I have, myself, by coincidence, felt much the same in Montreal when Major Acland's kilted regiment went by on the street. For the matter of that I felt much the same on the yesterday of this writing when the 165th regiment of United States Infantry went past the Public Library on Fifth Avenue with the equivalent for the King's Colors and the other colors flying and the band playing for St. Patrick's day in the morning.... Of course *not quite* the same feeling....

Towards the end Major Acland's book works up to a very great—a very fine—poignancy of feeling. I imagine that, as a relatively senior officer but a quite junior writer, much as we did during the War, he picked up knowledge of how to handle things as he went along. But I don't of course know. It is, I mean, difficult to say whether the relatively jejune effect of the rendering of English Country house life and women is caused just by timidity of handling or whether it is a masterly *compte rendu* of how a young Colonial (Pardon the word, Major, but there is no other adjective.... *You can't* write Dominionial) footslogging, second loot with bare and hairy knees would feel on introduction to a rather vanished Smart Set.... In any case the effect is the same and the information is very valuable.

Major Acland's is, I imagine, the first really authentic work of imaginative writing dealing with the War to come out of one of the great British Dominions and if I were any sort of publicist I should make a great deal out of that. But I am not, so I don't. Nevertheless, it seems to me that the war of the future, if there is to be one, will pivot round the great British Dominions and, whether to our own country or to individuals desirous to be responsible for turning lately allied nations into those Enemy to our own, ALL ELSE IS FOLLY should present a great deal of food for thought—and for misgiving. For it is a work that is a singularly reliable subjectivization of that matter.

In it you see, really wonderfully rendered, the admirable Canadians going through their jobs, with stoicism, without apparent enthusiasm, with orderliness, discipline—and with what endurance! I saw a good deal of the Canadians in France and liked them really more than any other troops, my own battalion naturally excepted. And I am really in a position to say that Major Acland's rendering is by no means laudatorily colored....

And how admirably it is all done.... When I read of the marching and fighting towards the end of the book, I feel on my skin the keen air of the early mornings standing to, I have in my mouth the dusky tastes, in my eyes the dusky landscapes, in my ears the sounds that were silences interrupted by clickings of metal on metal that at any moment might rise to the infernal clamor of all Armageddon.... Yes, indeed, one lives it all again, with the fear, and the nausea ... and the surprised relief to find oneself still alive. I wish I could have done it as well myself: envy, you see, will come creeping in. But since I couldn't, the next best thing seems to me to be to say that it will be little less than a scandal if the book is not read enormously widely. And that is the truth.

FORD MADDOX FORD.

AUTHOR'S NOTE: ALL ELSE IS FOLLY was first written nearly two years ago. It has been rewritten several times since. Even after Mr. Ford wrote his generous preface, the entire book was again revised, several considerable parts of it were completely re-written, and some important, although brief, additions were made.

PEREGRINE ACLAND
New York City
October 23rd, 1929.

PART I

CHAPTER I

Out in western Canada, in the days before the War, there was no sweeter sound to Falcon than the music made by twenty score of horses' hooves as they rhythmically thudded on the soft and sandy soil. Then he, rising and falling in his saddle as he rode behind the horses, would swirl his long lass' rope until the knotted end flicked the rearmost of those rounded rumps and stung them to a good, sharp trot. Day after day they trotted, a long line of horses following the wagons as these moved about on the round-up ... day after day under blue skies and a sun that scorched even Falcon's leathery face as he, rising and falling in his saddle, sniffed the smell of hot saddle-leather ... while the white dust that was kicked up by the horses choked his nostrils.

Often they passed old, dried-up buffalo-wallows, and he thought of the age that had passed. And sometimes he saw far off, the slowly rising arms of the big black cranes that were working on the irrigation ditch that would one day run right through the middle of the ranch and that would turn that quarter of a million acres of yellow grass and gray alkali into a thousand farms where binders would clack through the tall wheat. And he thought of the age that was passing...

It made him sad, with the sort of sadness that a young man feels who is so strong and so healthy that he is sorry for all things that aren't as live and vigorous as he. It was good, riding there, to feel the pony pulsing hard between his knees.... It was good, swinging his rope.... It was good, as the twilight fell on the endless yellow meadows, to drive the long string of horses down some narrow trail that wound through a rocky coulee, down to the broad, brown sweep of the river ... a long line of horses trotting to the tinkle of the lead-horse's bell.

The ranch where Falcon was wrangling horses, that summer when the War broke out, was in Southern Alberta, just north of the little cow-town of Whoopee. Falcon was in Whoopee the night when he heard about the War.

The town was a long street of wooden houses that looked like giant packing-boxes tumbled out in a row. The packing-boxes faced on the rusted rails of a bankrupt railroad—one of those monuments to private enterprise which embody a long tale of courage, initiative and graft.

While it was unquestionable that no action in the life of that railroad so befitted it as its death, nevertheless, even as the worst scoundrel may leave a sorely bereaved widow who weeps for her lost supporter, so the defunct railroad left a sorely bereaved town. The "City of Whoopee," as it dared to call itself in the too early day of its glory, was cut off from the outside world when the last train puffed away down the tracks of the Whoopee and Big Jaw Railroad. With the railroad went the telegraph operator. Telephones were a luxury as yet unknown even to the most opulent citizen of Whoopee. And with the decline of transportation and communication came the collapse of industry and commerce.

Half the packing-boxes were empty on this particular evening. Yet although the town was—or at least at the time seemed—moribund, there was one institution in it that was not merely an unconscionable time a-dying, but that still showed signs of a robustious activity. This institution could be found—and regularly was found every evening by visitors from the neighboring ranches—beneath a sign which read:

"HOTEL WHOOPEE—MIKE MURPHY, PROP."

On this August evening, as the sun plunged its bloated purple face into the coolness of night, there came billowing through the half-open windows of the hotel bar-room the singing of a harsh-voiced chorus that rose up, at the end of each verse, to a shout.

* * * * *

As he lay, helpless, with his back on the bar-room floor, Alexander Falcon damned the face that grinned drunkenly down at him. He damned the reek of whisky which that face, barely twelve inches above his own, breathed into his

nostrils. He damned the great hands that held down his shoulders. He damned, with the most extravagant flourishes of his imagination, the knee that dug into the pit of his stomach.

He damned loud. He damned long. And as he cursed, he laughed.

Tum-tum-tumtitum.... Tum-tum-tumtitum.

The beating on the wood floor hammered in his ears.

"The harlots of Jerusalem—the harlots of Jerusalem."

A score of voices bellowed to the stamping of their heels. Drunken heels. Spurred heels. Stamping on the floor. Up the room and down again. Across the room and back again. All around the bar-room floor....

Tum-tum-tumtitum.... Tum-tum-tumtitum.

*"The harlots of Jerusalem, Jerusalem, Jerusalem,
The harlots of Jerusalem—the pride of all the na—tions."*

Falcon had a thought; an inspiration. His right leg was free. He lifted his spurred right heel. Swiftly, firmly, hard, he drove the spur into his enemy's rump.

Rage, anguish, bellowed from the face above. One of the ham-like hands that held Falcon's shoulders sprang back to console the injured buttock.

Falcon wrenched himself free, leaped to his feet.

"Blast you, Alec!" the other roared as he, too, struggled up. "I'll rub your nose in the dirt for that. You bastard! You ripped the seat out of my pants."

Cud Browne, the big bronc' twister, laughed as he thundered. Laughed at his own plight. A bare-seated Berserker going into battle.

He lunged at Falcon.

But young Falcon, fresh from college in the East, had learned his rough-and-tumble in better places than bar-rooms.

As Cud Browne hurled himself at him, Falcon swung his body from the waist to one side. Left one leg in Cud's way. Caught him by the back of the shoulders as he stumbled by like a mad bull. Swung him over his hip to the floor.

The cowboys stopped their square dance to cheer.

Falcon stopped scrapping to bow.

One moment too long.

Heels over head he went, back to the floor.

"Cowboys in town! Yip! Yip!" chortled Browne as he bounced his bare buttocks on Falcon's belly.

"Ugh! Ugh!" grunted Alec.

With Browne's hand gripping his nose, rubbing the back of his head in a beer puddle, Alexander Falcon meditated on the vanity of lust for adventure. Why wasn't he at this moment at home, sitting in a large leather chair in a cool corner of his father's library in the East, reading about the lovers of Oraly in George Moore's "Memoirs of My Dead Life," instead of...

"Have a heart, Cud," he protested.

Cud said:

"You gotta buy me a new pair of pants."

Before Falcon could promise anything, they were startled by the sound of hoof-beats. Not on the ground outside. On the floor. It must be somewhere on the floor of that one-story building. It seemed in their very ears.

Then came shouts.

A tremendous sound of ripping and tearing.

A colossal crash.

The floor on which they lay heaved.

More shouts.

The frightened whinnying of a horse.

Still more uproarious shouting.

Then—

Crack—crack—crack!

Above all the stupendous hubbub a forty-five barked out.

One—two—three—four—five—six—seven-eight shots.

It must be a pair of forty-fives talking closely together.

Now, the sound of one man cheering!

The two wrestlers disentangled themselves, leaped to their feet. The other cowboys were crowding pell-mell out of the bar-room, like a mob of steers trying to squeeze through the gate of a corral. Falcon and Cud Browne followed after. All were heading for the main hall of the hotel, towards the shouting and the shooting.

As Falcon jostled with the others, pushing through the long, dark corridor that led from the bar-room to the main hall, he was able to distinguish the cries that alternated with the shots.

"More like Texas every day!"

Crack!

"Cowboys in town!"

Bang!

"More like Texas every day!"

Crack!

Browne said: "That's Gyp Callahan shouting. What put him on the war-path?"

But as the crowd of cowboys burst into the main hall, they, for a moment, could see no sign of Callahan.

Before them stood only the red-faced, furious hotel proprietor.

"Hey, Murphy, what have you done to Callahan?" Cud Browne, at the back, shouted threateningly over the heads of the cowboys as he shoved his way forward.

"What have *I* done to Callahan?" Murphy, the red-faced hotel proprietor, stuttered with rage. "What has Callahan done to me?"

Then Falcon and Browne, breaking through to the front of the crowd, saw Callahan ... all that was left of him.

In the center, not of the floor but of an enormous hole in the middle of the floor, was the head of Callahan.

A yard in front was the head of his horse.

"More like Texas every day!" roared the head of Callahan.

Click! click! went his now empty forty-fives as he aimed them at the ceiling.

A door slammed. Spurs jingled. A voice thundered:

"Who's been doing all this shooting?"

The cowboys turned their heads. A tall constable of the Royal North-west Mounted Police had just closed the main door of the hotel behind him.

"Constable Brazenose," whispered Cud Browne to Falcon.

Falcon looked at Constable Brazenose. He thought he had seen him before, a month ago. Eagle nose, spaniel eyes, and a most magnificent mustache, double corkscrewed, so that each end of it described a complete circle before shooting off into a formidable waxed point. Both his mustachios and his eyebrows were of that distinguished but rarely encountered color—jet black. Last time Falcon had seen Constable Brazenose, those mustachios and eyebrows had been a comfortable, everyday brown.

"What is he like?" whispered Falcon.

"We call him 'Wild Willie,'" said Browne.

"This fellow Callahan ought to be placed under arrest." Murphy, the red-faced hotel proprietor, talked loud and fast to the constable. "He rode his horse right into my hotel—right through the doorway there..."

"More like Texas every day!" shouted the bleary-eyed Callahan.

"Shut up, will you? You're going to be put where you won't talk so much," shouted Murphy. Then, turning again to the policeman: "This new pine flooring was never meant to bear the weight of horses. You can see for yourself what a mess he's made. Crashed right through into my cellar...."

"More like Texas every day!" thundered Callahan.

"And then, look at those holes he shot in the roof. He ought to know he can't get away with that stuff up here in Alberta..."

"More like Tex——"

"Callahan!" Constable Brazenose addressed the head that stuck out of the floor, "I'll have to arrest you on three charges."

Cud Browne shoved himself in front of the constable. "What's that about arresting Callahan?"

The constable glared at Browne. "What business is that of yours?"

"It's the business of all of us." The bronc' twister waved his hand towards the other cowboys. "We're all in the same party—crew of the Bar Ninety-Nine. Having a little drink."

"I don't mind your having a little drink," cut in Murphy, "but..."

"No, I guess you don't mind our having a little drink," snorted Browne. "That's where your profit comes in. Have you figured, Mister Murphy, what will happen to you and to your hotel if you have Callahan arrested?"

"What do you mean?" asked Brazenose boldly.

Cud Browne stepped closer, smiled into Brazenose's face.

"I mean," he said quietly, "you'd better forget about arresting Callahan. You'd better come along and have a little drink."

"I'm not afraid of Callahan," blustered Brazenose.

"No? We all know you, Wild Willie. Reg'lar hell-raiser, ain't you? If you gotta fight, try me.... Just a few friendly wallops," Browne said. Then to Murphy he called, "Don't worry about your floor, Mike, we'll pay the damages. Come on in and have a little drink.... Come on, Brazenose."

* * * * *

Oscar Wilde was guilty of an understatement, Falcon thought to himself as he leaned against the bar, when he said that life was an imitation of literature. It would have been much nearer the truth, this evening at any rate, to say that life is a burlesque of a penny shocker.

Here he had come two thousand miles in search of adventure. And all he had found was this.... The cowboys in their dark woolen shirts, old waistcoats, baggy corduroy trousers, didn't look very different from farm hands. Of course there were, for distinction, the big floppy felt hats, the high-heeled riding-boots, the large-roweled spurs. And the cowboys were more lithe in their movements than farmers. Still, these were hardly the trappings, this was hardly the atmosphere—he sniffed the smell of stale beer which was all around him—for Romance.

"Have a beer, Alec?" The little weazened foreman, a human walnut, with two short, very bowed legs attached, addressed him.

"If you'll allow me, Mr. Bent"—Falcon spoke with the elaborate courtesy of the slightly inebriated—"I'll stick to my simple regimen of whisky and water."

"Sounds good to me," said Mr. Bent. "Here, boy, two whiskies. Long. And make it snappy."

"You don't drink very often, Mr. Bent."

"You've never seen me drink before, Alec. My wife made me swear off drinking on the first day of August nineteen four. I swore off for ten years. Now I can have a drink again."

"Is this the first of August, then?"

"No. I thought it was, but it isn't. You know how we lose track of dates on the range. The hotel man says it's the fourth."

"Oh, well, one day's as good as another to get drunk on."

Falcon wondered if Baldy Bent would get drunk. The cowboys said he used to be a "bad actor" when drunk. He had shot four or five men in the old days, in the South-west. And before he married and "settled down" he had served five years in the penitentiary.

"You said the other day, Mr. Bent, that I had started too late. How early should I have started if I was to become a real horseman?"

"That's hard to say, Alec. I've been in the saddle since I was five years old. That's over half a century ago—down in the old Texas Panhandle. I guess you've got to be born to it."

Bent rambled along in his high, thin voice. Told stories of bringing vast herds, forty years ago, up the Long Trail that wound its way from Mexico to Montana and then up north through the rolling plains of Alberta. A six months' trip. A long, hard voyage in the saddle.

Bent talked and Alexander Falcon dreamed. There had been, thought Falcon, adventures enough in the West in the old days, but there was little left now of romance. Yet there were some colorful characters among these men around him.

Cud Browne would have served for a hero of his boyhood. The blue-eyed, fair-haired Cud stood six feet one, weighed a hundred and ninety pounds, was strong, gentle and courteous. He talked little except when drunk. Probably he had little to say. He knew, indeed, nothing about anything in the world except horses, cattle, whores. He didn't "break" horses in the old-fashioned way. Horseflesh was too valuable for that now, and Cud was too good a horseman. He "gentled" the colts. He had chances enough to show boldness as well as skill when he rode the mean, older horses—horses notorious for bad habits, whom nobody else could ride. He had only been thrown once in the whole summer. That was when he had ridden Snake-eye in another man's saddle with stirrup leathers too short. Even then he had lit on his feet standing. He had followed Snake-eye as that crazy buckskin plunged around the corral, caught the bridle reins and then "gentled" him, changed the stirrup lengths, rode him back to camp.

Beside Cud Browne lounged Long Harry, the cook—a good horseman in his day, but he had given up riding the range for the more profitable occupation of tending the stove. Long Harry stood second in the outfit to nobody but the foreman, Bent.

That animated piece of old saddle-leather, as Falcon knew well, stood second to none. Bent would talk as an equal to Colonel Carson, the owner. Always Bent spoke of "our cattle," "our range." For if Colonel Carson had supplied the money and the business judgment, hadn't he, Bent, supplied the skill in handling cattle, horses, men? Hadn't they built up the Bar Ninety-Nine between them?

Falcon wondered why Colonel Carson hadn't joined them yet. He was to have driven the thirty miles from Lethbridge that day, bringing the ranch mail and news of the outside world. Something unforeseen must have delayed him....

Falcon didn't give more than half an ear to old Bent's stories of his youth. He had heard them all a dozen times before. Besides, most of them weren't true.

Bent at last, satiated with the relation of his Odyssey, came back to the point from which he had started.

"No, Alec, you didn't begin early enough to become a real cow-puncher. You're tanned and you're tough, but you don't look like a cowpuncher. Why, look at your hands! They show you've never done any real work—leastways not with your hands."

Falcon protested. In the spring, when he had come out from college, he had done as much straight spadework, digging for the dipping-vat, as any one in the crew. When he had been out before, he had done all the ax-work in camp,

hauling driftwood from the river or from tumble-down corrals and chopping it up and splitting it for the cook. For the last four winters he had boxed in the University gymnasium. For the last two summers he had pulled an oar in an eight-oared shell. And that was a great deal harder on the hands than cow-punching. He invited Bent to look at the callouses on his palms.

"It's not only your hands that show you're no cow-puncher," Bent went on, stubbornly. "It's your eyes. A cow-puncher's always looking out to see what he can see. Half the time *you're* looking inside your own head."

"Have another whisky with me, won't you?" Falcon wanted to change the conversation. He wasn't annoyed with Bent: he was annoyed with himself. Brought up amongst books, he wished to develop, not in the direction for which his early environment fitted him, but as an adventurer, a man of action....

He was a fool, he reflected, to wish to live like an Elizabethan in the twentieth century. You couldn't be an Elizabethan in the twentieth century even if you were far better fitted for the part than it was his fortune to be. The big adventures were all over. Cow-punching had its fascinating moments, but there was little real adventure to it. The imagination, of course, could always weave about it something of the atmosphere of romance....

*"And when the white, sky-sweeping wings of dawn
Had brushed the gloom from silver mountain-spires,
He had caught his horse and thrown the saddle on
And given rein to his youth's wild desires;
Then, while his heart leaped with the hoof-beats' run,
His spirit rose like the young ardent sun."*

He wouldn't be much of a poet either, he feared, judging by that stuff. He could imagine his former college instructor picking holes in it.... Allardyce, that huge, lumbering scholar with the searching eye for beauty and the generous appetite for smut: "'Silver mountain-spires,' indeed! Trite! Mid-Victorian! Side-whiskered! Your silver spires are worthless except as phallic symbols. And as for 'his youth's wild desires.' ... Really now!"

Falcon saw himself as one of those who could neither mount Pegasus nor leave that difficult steed alone. It was such a plight as he got himself into once six years ago, when, as a youngster of seventeen, he tried to vault to the back of a much less fiery charger, his own top horse, Nigger Baby. Left hand on Nigger Baby's neck, right hand on the horn of the saddle, he had leaped clear from the ground, chaps, spurs and all, with never a thought of stirrups. The way he saw one of the cowboys do. But he wasn't as quick as the cowboy, and Nigger Baby was too quick. That little black streak bolted the moment Falcon's feet left the ground. He, half-way into the saddle, held on hard. Hands gripping neck and horn, right foot just over the cantle, his body hanging half-way to the ground. He cursed as he heard the cowboys laughing. Then as, desperate, he pulled himself at last into the saddle, got a knee grip, found his stirrups, the laughter turned to cheers—grinning cheers, but none the less laudatory. "Ride him, cowboy!" "Well done, Wild Easterner!"

But Pegasus was a tougher horse to ride than Nigger Baby. He would never make that seat. Better count on mounting a good prose hack. And, even that, not blooded.

Old Bent chuckled, then said:

"Looks as if Murphy had forgotten about closing time."

Falcon glanced at the clock. It was past eleven, the hour for clearing out the bar-room and locking up the doors. But nobody paid any attention to the clock, not even Constable Brazenose.

Everybody that Falcon could see in that big bar-room was drunk. Roaring drunk. Singing drunk. Dancing drunk. The same wheezy old gramophone, to which earlier in the evening the cowboys had chanted "The Harlots of Jerusalem," was now squeaking out "The Merry Widow."

Constable Brazenose was waltzing with Vic Fleming. Both were very grave, with a far-away look in their eyes.

Gyp Callahan, not knowing how to waltz, was doing an Indian war dance for the approval of Cud Browne. Big Bob from Mexico stood behind the bar serving drinks. Mike Murphy, the red-faced hotel proprietor, was now the soul of geniality, he was so drunk. He wouldn't take in any more coin. His thick red paw shoved it back with a lordly sweep.

As Falcon raised another tall glass of whisky and soda to his lips, over came Long Harry, the cook.

"You've had enough for a young fella," shouted the cook. He shot up a long leg and booted Falcon's glass—whisky, soda and all—to the ceiling.

Down came a shower of broken glass and dripping soda. But not on Falcon. On Brazenose, the waltzing policeman, just then bumping Falcon's elbow as his partner, Vic Fleming, reversed. It splattered him. Drenched him. Stained his smart tunic.

Brazenose wheeled round, fiery-eyed, alert to seize the cause of his annoyance. Descried immediately Callahan, paralyzed by laughter in the midst of his war dance, one leg still in the air....

"Damn you, Callahan!" Brazenose commenced. "This time..."

"Just a moment, Mr. Wild Willie." Cud Browne swayed in front of him. "If you want to play with anybody, why don't you play with me? ... Look a' here."

Cud lurched over to one of the two new bar-room doors. Bright new yellow pinewood. He heaved his shoulder.... The door was shattered.

Brazenose looked at him. Should he arrest him? It would be rough work. Regulations of the Royal Mounted said you mustn't pull a gun when making an arrest unless the offender had drawn arms first. But even if he had been free to draw his six-shooter, he would have found it ticklish work to arrest Cud Browne. A bad man from Montana had tried to pull a gun on the unarmed Browne. The bad man had gone to hospital with a broken jaw.

So Brazenose looked at Cud. Looked long. Twisted his waxed mustachios meditatively. Said nothing.

Callahan walked up. "Look a' here, Brazenose. See that other door? Watch me smash it."

Brazenose looked at Callahan. Callahan wasn't as big as Cud. He wasn't as big as Brazenose. This was too damned much.

"Stop that, Callahan! Stop, or I'll put you under..."

But Callahan laughed in his face.

He walked across the room, laughing.

He laughed as he smashed the door.

Brazenose was after him. "This is too damned much. This is too damned much," he repeated. "Callahan, you asked for it, and by God you'll get it!"

"Keep away from me," bellowed Callahan, "or by the living Jesus I'll knock you through that window."

"Don't you do it, Callahan. I wanna punch him a bit myself," thundered Cud Browne. "I guess they wouldn't soak me more'n twenty-five bucks for smashing that guy's face. And it'd be worth it. Here's my money right here. It'd be worth it. Keep away from me, you fellows. Leave go of my arms, Alec. Lemme smash his face in. Just twenty-five bucks for smashing in the face of a mounted policeman. Him a policeman!" He spat on the floor.

"Who the hell wants to punch that bronco's face?" squeaked little old Bent, so drunk now he could stand only by leaning against the bar. His voice rose to a shrill, venomous shriek. "What I say is, why the hell don't we shoot the guts out of the son of a bitch..."

Vic Fleming and Falcon jumped on the old foreman as he shoved his right claw into his trouser's pocket.

"Cut it, Baldy," said Vic quietly; "you can't get away with that stuff."

"Hell!" squealed the little old foreman. "I shot five men in the old days, between Texas and Montana. And he's no policeman. The real old Mounted were a pretty good crowd.... By God.... What the hell's that?"

Violent shouting.... Tremendous oaths.... An immense shattering of glass.... Silence.

Turning his back on the broken window, Callahan threw out his chest and looked round the bar-room with a bleary grin of satisfaction. He said: "That's the safest place for him to-night. That pup oughta be thankful I put him in his kennel."

One of the broken doors crashed. Through it strode a big, black-bearded man of forty, in Norfolk jacket and riding-breeches.

"What's all this?" the newcomer demanded. "What are you boys up to?"

"We just had a party with Constable Brazenose, Colonel," Callahan chuckled. As he spoke, he took a tall whisky that some one had left on the bar.

"Where's Brazenose now?" snapped Colonel Carson.

Callahan grinned. He helped himself to another whisky as he answered: "Gone t' bye-bye through the window."

Colonel Carson stormed:

"You've all been behaving like fools. Callahan, you'll get into trouble. Cut for the border."

"Li' hell I'll cut for borry!" Callahan gulped down another whisky—the third since his fight, besides a dozen taken earlier. The excitement over, the alcohol showed its power. He leaned his back against the wall. His knees wobbled. Slowly, very slowly, he slid towards the floor. He hit it, at last, with a thump.

Colonel Carson looked at Callahan and the rest, amused. His anger had quieted—anger caused less by the racket of the bar-room squabble than by the interruption to him who had come with great news.

In his deep, mellow voice, the Colonel commenced:

"If you boys want *fighting*..."

In that room, that night, the reverberation of his words was like the booming of a bell.

As Colonel Carson told of the monster to which the world had given birth, Alexander Falcon grew suddenly sober, alert. It was only half of him that joined in the cowboys' drunken cheering. The other half was seeing visions, planning...

Canada would be in it, he felt sure. He saw the streets of Toronto, Montreal, jammed with excited crowds. He would go East. He would go over with his own crowd. He would go now. Not that he was a patriot. Not that he was an Imperialist. He didn't give a damn about the British Empire or any other empire. He was a Republican. He was a Socialist. Hadn't he started a Social Democratic party at the University? But he was weary of talking about Utopia, reading Fabian pamphlets, debating Revisionism versus Marxism... Here was something definite to be done—a tangible evil, he imagined, to be attacked.... There was seduction, too, in the glamour of it.... "Fighting in the Low Countries." ... Seduction in the very phrase.

Vividly there leaped in his mind pictures of the Highland militia regiment which his great-uncle had founded, in which his father—until prevented by heart trouble—had served. He imagined that regiment parading now!

He recalled his last sight of it in the Armories.

The vast building rocked to the tread of two thousand feet. Black rifle-barrels gleamed above khaki jackets. Dark kilts swayed above naked knees. Officers with black Glengarry tails falling on broad brown shoulders held bright, drawn swords at the carry. Thundered commands rose high above the skirling of the pipes, the throbbing of the drums, the pounding of the marching feet.

Falcon's pulse quickened. His guts tensed. His mind blurred.

War-lust surged through him.

The pipes! The pipes!

*"Come, fill up my cup; come, fill up my can;
Come, saddle your horses and call up your men;
Come, open the West Port and let me gang free;
And it's room ... for the bonnets ... of Bonny Dundee."*

Would Colonel Carson allow him, help him, to get to the railroad, to go East, now, to-night? But as he looked at that stalwart figure he knew the answer. Carson, graduate of Trinity College, Dublin, and of Oxford, classical scholar turned Wyoming rancher, had gone to the Spanish American War, then to the Philippines in quest of adventure. He had there won his majority, his colonelcy, but first, in hand-to-hand fighting with the Philipinos, he had received those knife-cuts about the chin and throat whose scars were now covered with that square black beard. Carson had, of course, turned American. He had remained American, although he was back now, most of the time, under the British flag, devoting more of his attention to his new ranch in Alberta than to its parent in Wyoming. But whether he called himself American or British, there could be no doubt, Falcon felt, of his answer.

Falcon explained very briefly his wishes.

Colonel Carson assented. Knowing something of the reality in which Falcon saw only romance, he assented a little sadly. There must be so many other young men to-night, young University men, active in mind, liberal in spirit, eager to swear away their lives....

"Probably," he said, smiling at the thought, "it will be over long before you get there. Such a great war can hardly last three months."

CHAPTER II

In the half-darkness of the port side of the deck two officers strolled. The length of the ship and back again ... the length of the ship and back again. Adjutant and company commander side by side. And as they walked they talked.

Phrases from their conversation pricked to attention a figure recumbent on a deck chair in the deeper darkness of a corner, well back from the rail.

"... subalterns pretty young in this battalion. Now, in your company..." came the voice of the adjutant.

Down they strolled the length of the ship. Paused a moment to look at the stars, to listen to the lapping of the waters. Back they strolled the length of the ship.

"Oh yes, he's a nice enough fellow," the company commander replied to the adjutant, "but he's too dreamy. He'll never make a soldier."

"I should have thought his Western experiences..." But the rest of the adjutant's speech was lost in the darkness.

The figure in the deck chair rose as the deck before him cleared ... strode down the ship ... away from the adjutant and company commander ... over to the starboard side.

The light that slanted down on his broad, khaki-clad shoulders showed the face of a man in his early twenties. It was a face with a sallow, almost a leathery complexion. The features were large. Thick, black eyebrows jutted out over a big, aggressive nose. A wide, sensitive mouth contrasted with a heavy jaw. The eyes were in shadow.

He, too, leaned over the rail and listened to the lapping of the waters against the ship's side. He felt lonely, very lonely, but there was comfort in listening to the lapping of the waters, and more in looking at the stars—the same stars that he had watched so many nights on the prairie, stars under which he had ridden so many times before dawn.

Not many nights ago he had watched these stars from a canoe as he paddled slowly up the Humber River in Ontario. Silent, mostly. Talking, occasionally, in undertones to the small figure in white curled up on the cushions before him... Phyllis Howard.

For all her Greek boy's head, her Greek nymph's body, Phyllis was neither naiad nor dryad. She was tomboy. Caught once dancing under old elms, she promptly converted the dance into somersaults and finished defiantly, thumb to nose. Always there was flippancy in her wit, roguery in her laughter.

Lying in the canoe, she had said: "I suppose you're going as an officer because it's safer."

He, nettled, snapped back: "Of course. Why otherwise?"

"You must be very careful," she said, "not to get your legs shot off. You look so well in a kilt."

"Damn the kilt!"

"It's such a lovely kilt." He remembered how she had admired its purple and green, and the "cunning little line of silver running through it." The gold sporran with the long black goat's hair and the three white tassels.... She had said: "Won't you leave the kilt and sporran to me in your will?"

"If you'll wear them to my funeral."

"That's a go. But you must arrange to be buried in the summer.... What did your father say when he first saw his Socialist son in a kilt?"

"He said it was the only sensible thing I had ever done. I believe the sight of my bare knees beneath the MacIntyre tartan did him more good than a bull movement in stocks or a dose of digitalis."

"Alec, *don't* talk about him like that. He's so nice. And his heart..."

"I'm tired of hearing about his heart. Every time I have an argument with him, he holds his heart trouble over my head. And I'm beginning to think the sword will never fall—at least for another thirty years."

"You are a loving son."

"Oh, I like him.... But he's so silly about his confounded heart. Why doesn't he do what the doctors tell him? You'd think he'd get a reminder every morning when his shaving glass shows him his red face and his white hair. But he keeps on working heavily, eating heavily, smoking heavily, drinking heavily and playing the stock market for all he is worth. I have tried to tell him..."

"You are a great one for educating your parents, aren't you?"

"Isn't that the chief duty of children?"

Phyllis uttered a wail out of the darkness.

"Oh ... can't you feed me anything but warmed-over Shaw?"

Alec said: "Shaw? Really, I'm not modern at all, you know. I'm a sentimentalist. A devoted son and big brother...."

"Yes, you have certainly humbugged your mother into thinking you an angel. As for your sisters..."

"You can't say Betty and Ann have any illusions about me."

"No, those children have wisdom beyond their years."

They got along well enough that evening while they cheeked each other. But the moment he attempted to be serious, to deliver himself of the thought that had been germinating in him for weeks, they were both the victims of an appalling speechlessness.

At last he spurred up his courage.

"So far I have done nothing," he commenced, "and everything ahead is so uncertain."

But he stopped right there.

She, even younger than he in these matters, seemed embarrassed, gave him no encouragement to proceed.

As he looked down at the broad blackness of the St. Lawrence, he thought it had been, after all, a good point at which to stop speaking. What was the use of entangling this bright youngster in his destiny, whatever that might be...?

It was two days now since the MacIntyre Highlanders had embarked at Quebec. And still the ship rode at anchor in the St. Lawrence. He looked at the Heights above him, saw the dark mass of the all-but-impregnable Citadel outlined against the sky, noted the lights in the Norman-French towers of the Chateau which told of music and dancing....

How long before the whole of Canada's first division would have marched across gang-planks into transports? How long before the fleet would sail?

He took a leather cigar case from his pocket, picked out a cigar, rolled it meditatively in his fingers. Murmured to himself as he lit it and took the first long, satisfying inhalations: "So ... a nice enough fellow. But he'll never make a soldier...."

CHAPTER III

Some four months later, among the women and officers strolling about in the entrance of the Savoy Hotel, in London, stood Falcon. He glanced anxiously at the faces of each couple that entered the hotel through the revolving door, and from time to time looked at his wrist watch.

The black Glengarry which perched cockily on the right side of his head seemed less dark than his bright black hair. His swarthy face glowed with gross good health. Below his broad khaki jacket was a kilt of a dark green plaid with a line of silver running through it, and below the kilt was a pair of knees like columns of bronze.

Everything about him seemed to be built for action except his large, gray, meditative eyes.

During the intervals when he was not watching the doors his eyes relaxed into a dreaminess which suggested less concern with the many-colored spectacle before him than with the thoughts inside his head. It was only as new-comers

entered that he appeared to rouse himself from reverie by spasmodic efforts.

Alexander Falcon was by turns curious, embarrassed and amused at the thought of the meeting that was coming. This luncheon with Elsie Roberts and her fiancé would certainly mark the end of an episode. And that episode as certainly marked the end of a stage in his own development.

In his devotion to the blue-eyed, fair-haired Phyllis Howard, in Canada, he now saw that he had been nothing but a dreamy youngster distantly worshipping an immature Diana. His adoration might have blazed into fire if the War hadn't placed three thousand miles of sea between them. But during those dreary months of training in England he had yearned for something more comforting than the consciously clever letters of a young girl who knew so much more of books than of life.

Never had he endured lonelier evenings than those which he spent sitting on the edge of his cot, in camp on Salisbury Plain, as he wrote on a knee-held pad by the flickering light of a candle, while the rain pattered on the canvas of the condemned army tent and occasional drops dripped through on to his hair or down his neck.

The feeling of loneliness that gathered during the whole day came to a head in those evening hours. For he felt by himself even when most in the midst of a crowd—at company and battalion drill, on the rifle ranges, at sword exercises, in the regimental mess. He felt himself far removed in his interests and in his nature from these alert, snappy young subalterns. To them he must, he knew, appear deliberative, slow-moving, clumsy.

Yet, surely, he had already packed more action and adventure into his life than had most of them...

Still impatiently scrutinizing each couple that entered the hotel, Falcon glanced again at his wrist watch. Seventeen minutes after one! And Elsie had said she and her fiancé would arrive at one sharp.

What would this fiancé be like, and how would he regard one of Elsie's former "friends"? After knowing a girl so intimately as Falcon had known Elsie in the last two months, it would be curious to meet the man who was to marry her. Just how much did this man know?

Stanley Hunter's face, as shown in the photograph on Elsie's mantelpiece, was certainly not that of a simple and gullible spirit. His high, narrow forehead, long, sharp nose and small, pointed ears suggested a fox. The twinkle in the eyes and the wrinkle at the corner of the lips hinted that the fox had a sense of humor.

Of course, he *might* know everything—and chuckle at it. From all the stories that Elsie had told about him, Stanley Hunter must be a cynical devil.

Elsie was in love with Stanley, there was no doubt about that. Her "business career," as she laughingly called it, hadn't been long enough to kill her craving for romance. And in Stanley she had found her hero. She was not merely enamored, she was infatuated ... madly. On many mornings Falcon had a hard time to keep from exploding into laughter as he and Elsie balanced on their knees a tray of tea and toast and bacon and she wriggled her toes and talked about the great and glorious Stanley Hunter.

Falcon could quite understand Hunter marrying Elsie, whatever she had done. He had come uncomfortably close to asking her himself—would have, in fact, if she hadn't prevented him by telling of her engagement.

She was like—she was like...

His eyes, roaming over the figures of men and women in the entrance of the Savoy, paused.

Well, she was a good deal like that tall, slim, dark-haired girl in the snug-fitting black suit with the touch of white at the throat, who was standing across the foyer from him now.

Only that girl, while she was not so very tall, was taller than Elsie; and while her heavy black hair and her large dark eyes reminded him of Elsie, her cheeks were ivory-pale, while Elsie's glowed with health.

On the other hand, this girl, if she did not have Elsie's abounding vitality, had a wealth of quiet charm.

She drew off one of her gloves to take something from her vanity-bag. It was a delight to watch each movement of her long, delicately molded hand. He imagined in her an exquisite sensitiveness.

He wondered who she was and for whom she was waiting. Lucky devil!

He, Falcon, would meet Elsie only to say good-bye to her, and that damned loneliness would return. Nothing but loneliness and then ... France.

The tall, pale girl smiled, her eyes sparkled, as a captain in a Rifle Regiment who had just entered the hotel crossed over to her. A handsome man, but too full fleshed. His flushed face indicated that even this early in the day he had been doing himself too well. As he spoke to the girl the smile faded from her face, her eyes saddened....

Then Falcon noticed her no more.

Dashing through the door came a girl in a dark red suit and toque—bright cheeks, big black eyes and a throat of creamy whiteness. Following her a tall, lean-faced, red-haired British officer of thirty-odd strolled leisurely, quietly humming, as if nothing mattered much these days.

Elsie was breathless and sparkling.... The clear music of her voice charmed Falcon, as it fascinated him when he first met her. That was three months ago, on a week-end leave shortly after the First Canadian Division had arrived in England.

They went in to lunch, Elsie animated, Falcon uneasy, Captain Hunter amused.

"You have heard, of course," said Captain Hunter, "that Elsie has promised to make an honest man of me?"

"Yes," said Falcon, a little stiffly. "I have heard."

"Can't you possibly come to our wedding?" pleaded Elsie. "The day after to-morrow. There'll be hardly anybody there but a few of Stanley's brother officers. And, of course, my father will come down from his farm in Yorkshire."

"It's charming of you to ask me, but I have to go back to Salisbury to-night. It's my last night of leave."

"Lucky dog to be going back to Salisbury," said Captain Hunter. "In four days *I* go back to France."

"I wish I were going with you," said Falcon. "It's such a bore in the training camp, waiting to go out."

"It's a worse bore in the trenches," said Captain Hunter, "waiting to get pipped."

"At any rate, Stanley darling," said Elsie, "you can get lots of champagne when you're behind the lines."

"Yes ... *when*—and if!"

"How long do you think the war will last?" asked Falcon.

Captain Hunter wrinkled his nose at the question. Then he said:

"It's over for most of my crowd now."

For a moment no one spoke.

Then Elsie said to Falcon:

"Stanley says he gets so blue when he knocks about London now. If it weren't for me he wouldn't have taken this leave. So, you see, I do some good."

Captain Hunter smiled. He said:

"Elsie and I are a pair of sinners. We each need one good action to our credit."

He added:

"Of course Elsie has a long record of benefits conferred." He winked at Falcon.

Falcon blushed. He had been sitting stiff, expressionless, trying to conceal the mental disturbance which agitated him.

He had thought that his half-dozen week-ends with Elsie had made him a man of the world. They had certainly given him a self-confidence which, curiously enough, had not only changed his attitude to his brother subalterns, but had transformed completely their manner towards him. But now, face to face with this red-headed cynic, he saw himself as merely a shy youngster of twenty-three.

After lunch, Elsie, who had eaten with her usual zest, exclaimed delightedly over her liqueur. It was dark, chocolate-colored creme de cacao, overlaid with cream—or was it fluffy white of egg?—with a cherry on top.

Elsie said:

"This is topping good 'angel's tit,' Stanley."

Stanley grinned.

Falcon squirmed. Her frankness had been amusing when he and she were alone. Now ... where was her sense of decency?

He alleged that he must be going. He offered a trite excuse ... an old friend waiting...

Elsie, with a smiling frown, said:

"You're not going, surely, without giving me my ... *billet-doux*?"

Captain Hunter chuckled. He said:

"Rather neat! If you can play with two words of French like that, you really ought to learn the whole language."

Falcon, looking from Hunter to Elsie, said, stammering:

"I ... why ... of course..."

Elsie leaped to his rescue.

"Stanley, you run out and find what time the matinee starts. You make Mr. Falcon nervous."

She looked mischievously at Alec. She added:

"He's afraid, Stanley, you will find out about my past."

Captain Hunter shut his eyes and his mouth widened out towards his ears as he shook with silent laughter.

Falcon's swarthy skin reddened again.

"Well," said Captain Hunter, rising, "I'll leave you two alone." He made an elaborate bow to Falcon, as he added with mock solemnity: "I can imagine no one to whom I could more safely entrust my fiancée."

"Run along, old dear," said Elsie.

She turned to Falcon.

"Have you got the cash?"

"Yes, certainly," he answered nervously, fumbling for his wallet. "Here it is. I'm sorry to be so late about it, but we managed to work in more parties than I expected, and I had no idea there'd be such a delay in getting funds transferred from Canada..."

She cut him short.

"Why apologize?" She counted the three large five-pound notes which he handed her. She folded them carefully, lovingly, and put them in her purse. "I have the money in time to buy my trousseau."

For the moment Falcon saw Elsie not as a person, but as an institution. His first "adventure" in Canada, undertaken in a boyish attempt to defy convention, had succeeded only in stamping him indelibly with conventional prejudice. It was with a good-looking, stupid Swede.... He shuddered even now as he felt in memory, the embrace of that giant jelly-fish. For days after it he loathed not merely the thought of the woman, but also the thought of himself as her companion. And Elsie, for all her silks and her prettiness and her charm, was only an exalted member of the same passionless sisterhood. Yet, as if in contradiction, there was her fierce devotion to Stanley Hunter.

He said:

"You two are a hard pair to understand."

Elsie demanded, crisply:

"Why? What's queer about us? I love Stanley. And why shouldn't he like me? Three other men proposed before he did. Nice men, too. One of them a ship's captain..."

"I nearly proposed to you myself..."

Elsie laughed, mollified.

"Yes, I saw that coming. I had to stop you before you became too serious about raising your fallen sister, or I should have slapped your face.... However, you're a good sort, in your way.... Hello! here's Stanley back again."

Captain Hunter smiled down at them like a benignant elder brother.

"Have you two young people settled your differences?"

"We have squared our accounts," said Elsie, patting her purse.

"This time," said Falcon, "I really must be going."

He rose.

"Best of luck, old man," said Captain Hunter. "I hope they'll keep you in a training camp till the war's over."

"I hope *not*," said Falcon. "But my very best wishes to you—to both of you..."

"Wish us long life," said Hunter. "Not that, these days, there's much chance of that..."

"Wish us lots of money," said Elsie.

"Yes," said Hunter. "A captain's pay doesn't go far. But fortunately Elsie is a thrifty housekeeper. She has had plenty

of practice."

Taking the cigarette from her lips, Elsie, with the same sweep of her hand, tossed a farewell kiss.

Falcon mumbled a "good-by" and strode off.

It was depressing to bid good-by to the one friend he had made in England. And he had promised Elsie that he would never, under any circumstances, try to get in touch with her again. She insisted on that....

As he passed towards the door leading out of the restaurant, Falcon noticed the same tall, pale, dark-haired girl whom he had observed earlier in the entrance. She was sitting at a table with the captain of the Prince's Royal Rifles who had spoken to her then.

Again Falcon envied the fellow. To have a girl of such grace ...

He passed near them. The girl's face showed distress. She wasn't crying. Her head was held high. But her eyes were wet and her lips quivered.

Falcon heard the Rifleman say loudly, thickly:

"What's the use of lecturing me? I'll take my fun where I find it. Every man has the right..."

The Rifle Captain paused. His eyes bulged as he lurched forward. At the blow of his drunken fist, the table jumped, silver clashed against glass. Snarling, he said:

"Every man has the right to go to hell in his own way."

* * * * *

While Falcon proceeded on his way towards the door, Elsie, who had been watching the incident from across the room, said to Stanley Hunter:

"Look at that Rifle Captain.... The brute! The poor girl with him is almost crying."

"His wife, of course. Who else would put up with him?" said Hunter. "I hear she is an American and very charming."

"You know him?"

"I know of him. He is famous." He added that before the war the fellow was said to have resigned his commission to save himself from being kicked out of the service. "His name is Hollister."

CHAPTER IV

"Silence in the ranks!" shrilled the little button-nosed company commander to the men who plodded behind him, four abreast, clashing their hobnails on cobblestones. They were in France, on the road to Festubert.

Captain Augustus Rump was the son of a moderately prosperous fish merchant in a town on the south coast of England. After a not-too-distinguished career at a far-from-famous public school—a career terminated by expulsion— young Rump was sent to Canada.

"E's just the sort for the colonies," his father predicted.

But Canada was blind to his merits. For twenty years he drifted up and down the country, backed by remittances from home. He at last found fortune in the person of a lady of ample means and figure—the widow of a butcher, who prided herself on taking a step up the social ladder when she married an Englishman "of the public-school-boy type."

A year after his marriage Rump became active in the militia. It was pleasant to escape from the authority of his wife for two weeks in the year, and to go to bed, every night, drunk. When the war broke out he found himself so completely established in the eyes of his wife, his brother officers in the militia, and himself, as "an Englishman of the public-school-boy type," that there was nothing for him to do but play true to form and volunteer to serve. He hoped the British War Office would use the half-trained Canadian militia only for relieving Imperial troops from garrison duty. A trip to India or Egypt would be pleasant. When the First Canadian Division was ordered to France, Rump bore the blow bravely. He had been left at the base.

Later he was sent to France on a draft that preceded Falcon's by one week. He arrived too late to take part in the actual fighting at Ypres, but in time to spend four days in reserve trenches there. His experiences qualified him to talk down to his subaltern now as a seasoned veteran addressing a fledgling.

"*That's* nothing to jump at," he said to Falcon, scornfully. "That was just one of our own heavies going off behind the hedge there."

Falcon was humiliated. He was certainly afraid, as they marched towards the rumble of guns. He was even more afraid of showing his fear.

Sardonically he looked back to Shorncliffe. Three weeks ago he had been eating his heart out there, resenting the fact that, as a very junior supernumerary subaltern, he had been left at the base with the reserve battalion. He was bitter then because he was not in France, at Ypres, at Langemarck. Well, if he had been at Langemarck he wouldn't be here now. The battalion had gone into the trenches then over a thousand strong, had come out with two hundred and seventy. Had gone in with twenty-one officers, had come out with two. No subalterns!...

He remembered the unshaven, haggard faces, the exhausted slouch of the surviving remnant as he saw them on their first morning back from Ypres.

After all, he would probably get his belly-full at Festubert. There was a big attack going forward, and they, no doubt, would be thrown into it.

"Get in step there!" a sergeant behind Falcon called to his men. "Hep—hep—hep!"

Some of the men wore the regular khaki apron over their kilts. Others wore the kilt without an apron. Some, recently drafted from reserves intended for other units, wore the regulation infantry breeches instead of the kilt. Others, as a compromise with the Highlanders, had cut their breeches short, and showed bare knees between the ragged ends of their breeches and the tops of their puttees.

It was a hastily reorganized battalion, consisting mainly of fresh drafts. Most of the men had never been in the trenches before. They had not had time to get to know their newly appointed non-commissioned-officers and officers. Nor did the latter, in many instances, have more than a nodding acquaintance with each other.

A messenger came to Bump. After reading the message Rump said to Falcon: "We are to deploy behind that row of trees on the right and keep the men in shelter there. The support trenches are all full at present. We'll get orders to move forward later."

Commands boomed out. The men scattered and lay behind the trees.

Falcon, standing, gave instructions to a sergeant who was as green as he.

Suddenly he tensed. A tremendous whirring seemed to be rushing directly towards them. It was as if an invisible flying express, driven at insane speed by a mad engineer, was charging at them out of the clouds.... Cl-l-lang!

Even before the explosion, Falcon and the sergeant threw themselves flat on their faces.

"Tut, tut," said Captain Rump, still standing. "That burst a good five hundred yards to our right. You need to train your ears." He took a swig at his pocket flask as he added, patronizingly: "But we'll make a soldier of you yet."

CHAPTER V

In the darkness an occasional murmur of voices ... a moving about of dimly apprehended forms ... and, now and then, the sucking sound of boots pulled out of wet mud.

The wind blew gently through the long grass in front of the trench, a soft breath on the faces of those who watched for morning. The stars paled. The east, towards which all eyes strained, glimmered with gray ... red ... gold. In the shallow trench the forms of the watchers became ever more distinct ... a band of trowsled tramps.

Alexander Falcon, mounting a pile of empty sand-bags, stood waist high out of the trench and looked through his field-glasses over the long grass. He saw in the distance, three hundred yards ahead, the faint brown line of earth that indicated the new trench that the company had dug last night, occupied now, he knew, though he could see no sign of life in it, by number ten platoon. He took a pride of creation in that trench, though he was only one of its creators. It was the consolidation of six redoubts which he and his platoon had dug and occupied two nights before.

Far beyond the new forward trench he could see dimly, six hundred yards away, the line of the German trench running up, on the right, on a hill.

Damn that hill! Its possession enabled the Germans, even though driven back thus far, to dominate the whole plain.

The hill was clearly visible now. The sky was growing very light.... Far off, tiny dots studded the cut-up farm lands. Nearer, long lumps of clay, some prostrate, some humped over as they had dropped. Fallen Highlanders. Their faces and bare knees, as Falcon knew too well, black-green with decay.

"Pass the word," ordered Falcon, "for number nine platoon to stand down!"

When the business of breakfast and the rum issue was over he could, he felt, doze. There was no question of going into a dugout. In this trench there were no dugouts. The front line here, so soon after the battle of Festubert, was just a ditch dug three feet deep in the mud.

Falcon rubbed the stubble on his chin. Later his sloppy little batman would bring him a mess-tin of cold, dirty water and he would shave. He must, at all times, keep up appearances before his men. He looked at his hands. Gray with clay stains. Mud-caked beneath the nails. What else could you expect in this ditch? He slumped down into the bottom of the ditch, tilted his khaki tam-o'-shanter over his eyes. Was there anything, he drowsily wondered, in this story that the soldiers were to be issued with steel helmets and bullet-proof vests? Great things to dig a trench in!

He felt cold. He shivered. It was lack of sleep that made him so sensitive to cold. The sun was coming up. He would soon be warmer now. He could drowse.

He shrugged his shoulders, squirmed about in discomfort.

"Damn those pests!"

He put a hand inside his collar, down to the greasy neckband, arrested his molester, clicked it out of his life. If the fastidious Phyllis could see him now...!

Phyllis, for all her pranks, was as squeamish as she was charming... If only she hadn't had the misfortune to win that

scholarship in Political Science! From her letters it was plain she was losing her boyishness. She was becoming an Earnest Young Thing.... As a champion of Woman's Rights, she was probably as much of a bore to her friends as he had been as an apostle of Socialism.

Drowsing, his mind blurred the image of the blue-eyed, boyish Phyllis with the dark and vivid Elsie and her throat of creamy whiteness.... They merged into each other and faded and disappeared, and then another figure floated before him. He couldn't quite make out the features. He couldn't remember where he had seen that girl at all.... A tall, pale girl with sad eyes and lovely hands....

Falcon sagged heavily into the mud. He slept. He snored.

"Pardon, sir ... urgent message.... Captain Rump."

He woke to find a runner stooping over him (who could stand in that trench?) with a message.

He would have to go to company headquarters immediately. Confound his luck! At two places in that bit of front line, streams cut right through the trench. Across the streams were planks. But whoever crossed the planks did so in full view of German snipers. Already that morning one stiff form beneath a blanket bore mute testimony to the excellence of their aim. Falcon, therefore, had forbidden all movement up and down the trench. Except, inevitably, of the runners with messages. And, of course, of himself.

He left word with his platoon sergeant that he was going. Then he started to pick his way over drowsing forms, rifles, half-empty jam tins, an open can of butter into which earth and grass had fallen, a multitude of discarded biscuits and bully-beef tins. He had gone past only a few bays in the trench, hadn't come yet to the first stream, when he heard a shot, a cry, a moan.

"Who did they get, I wonder?"

He soon found out. Two bays farther on he came on a corporal and a stretcher-bearer bending over a small, muddied figure with a very gray face and scared eyes. It was little old MacAllister, his own batman. The little old fellow was moaning steadily: short, gasping moans. His eyes were growing wilder and wilder. He looked right at Falcon, but made no sign of knowing him.

"What happened?" Falcon queried.

"He tried to cross that bridge over the stream, sir," commenced the corporal.

"I wonder why? I didn't send him. It was against my order."

"I guess he didn't know what he was doing, sir," said the corporal. "The poor old fellow could never stand his liquor well, and he must have got somebody's else's rum ration besides his own."

Falcon watched the stretcher-bearer as he cut away the tunic and uncovered the wound. A big red hole in the middle of that pallid, unshapely, quivering little body.

"He got it right through the spine," said the stretcher-bearer.

"Could we get him out on a stretcher? Back to the dressing-station, sir?" asked the corporal.

Falcon shook his head.

"Sorry. No. I can't allow it. You would have to cross the open, and the shooting is too good. Between bullets and shells you wouldn't have a chance. It would mean three casualties in place of one. And we're already short of men."

He looked again at the old man with the bloody back.

Not likely to last long, now.

"Poor old MacAllister! ... You boys will stay with him, of course? ... I must be getting on."

In the next bay half the parapet had been blown in by a shell. And the bay itself was full of water ... cold and muddy. Falcon was tempted to get out in the open, to crawl behind the trench. But it would be impossible to conceal himself entirely. The German sniper, catching only an occasional glimpse of his buttocks, mightn't be able to pot him as he crawled, but would certainly be ready for him when he tried to cross the stream. No, he wouldn't crawl in the open. He would slush through the water of the trench.

At the end of that bay he came to the stream. The plank across it showed a splotch of red from old MacAllister's futile meandering. That stain seemed so entirely out of place in the quiet sunlight of this soft June morning.

Falcon hunched for a spring. Leaped for the plank and dashed across it. Threw himself, breathless, in the watery mud of the trench on the farther side.

Behind him bullets spattered the mud. Over him whizz-bangs zipped to their angry detonations.

Not a very audacious way to deal with the danger, reflected Falcon, but he had been up and down that trench yesterday oftener than anybody else in the company, runners included, and he hadn't been hit. After all, the main thing was to get the job done.

Confound old Rump! Why did that fuddlehead always have to call on his senior subaltern whenever there was a difficulty? Why hadn't he the courage to decide anything himself?

A few minutes later, having surmounted the obstacle of the second stream as luckily as he had the first, Falcon, wet and shivering, arrived at company headquarters.

There, a short man with straw-colored hair, tiny, straw-colored mustaches, and small, bloodshot, blue eyes, sat on a yellow sand-bag to protect his breeches from the mud and poured rum from a silver pocket flask down his throat.

Falcon remembered the saying of a private: "If we was to take the rum out of Rump, what would we have left? Nothing but nairrvousness."

In response to Falcon's attempt to salute, Captain Rump gave a convivial wink and grinned.

"Just in time, young Cock o' the North. How would you like to stand out there in your kilt and let the whole German army shoot at you? That's what I want to know."

"What's up?" Alec, shivering, was exasperated with this comic-cut company commander.

"That's what I want to know, I say." Rump winked foolishly as he took another swig at his flask.

The field telephone beside him buzzed. His watery-blue eyes showed terror.

"Yumping Yeesus! Headquarters is driving me crazy."

A signaler handed him the telephone.

"The adjutant, sir."

"Oh yes, yes!" Rump talked fast and nervously into the telephone. "Tell the C.O. we'll go ahead with it at all costs. I have men working at it already.... In the open? No, didn't I tell you they can't work in the open? We're sapping.... Too slow? But ... but ... I don't see what else we can do... Mr. Falcon? ... Yes, he has just arrived.... I haven't had a chance to explain to him yet.... I'll have him call you later."

At last Falcon got the explanation he desired. The job was to run a communication trench out in front, to join up the present front-line trench,—the trench in which he stood—with the new trench, three hundred yards ahead, that they had dug last night and which was now tenanted by number ten platoon.

"If they give us extra help, we can do that in a night," said Falcon.

"Yes, but," spluttered Rump, "they won't wait till night. They want us to dig it now—at eight o'clock in the morning, in broad daylight."

"Do the fools realize," Falcon said hotly, "that whenever a man shows four inches of his head over the parapet he gets drilled sure? How are we going to take a hundred men out into the open—to dig for three or four hours in full view of the Bosches? The idea's preposterous! We'd lose all the men in ten minutes and get nothing done."

"That's what I told the C.O.," fussed Rump, nervously rubbing his snub nose with forefinger and thumb, "but he wouldn't listen to me. Said we mustn't disappoint Brigade. Shut me off sharp."

"What are you going to do about it?"

"We're sapping."

"Sapping? That'll take a year, and as soon as you're past the long grass you'll draw artillery fire."

"But that else can I do?" Rump's eyes showed an agony of bewilderment.

The telephone buzzed again.

"The C.O., sir," said the signaler.

Rump was very meek indeed as he spoke into the receiver.

"Yes, sir, we're going ahead.... Yes, the adjutant was right ... we're sapping... But, sir! sir!!! ..."

He turned to Falcon, terrified. "He won't speak to me any more. He wants to speak you. You tell him. He thinks a lot of you. Told me he was going to recommend you for D.S.O. over that last attack.... You tell him."

Falcon was already talking into the telephone, pleadingly, persuasively.

"No, sir. It's really impossible. We'd chuck away the men and we wouldn't gain a thing. But give me an extra hundred men to-night and..."

The Commanding Officer shut him off.

Rump, his pudgy face puckered in a frown, his bloodshot eyes blinking wetly, said, almost moaned:

"Didn't I tell you...? What shall we do?"

The telephone buzzed again.

"The adjutant, sir, to speak to Mr. Falcon."

Falcon paled as he listened. Presently spoke into the telephone:

"Was I serious? ... Oh yes, I was serious.... How serious? ... Tell the Colonel..."

He hesitated, then spoke with a rush, as if he threw the whole force of his being into the sentence: "Tell him that rather than carry out that order, I'll face a court-martial."

As he laid down the telephone, he said to Rump: "That, I think, will fix it."

"Or fix you," gasped Rump. "Oh, boy! A court-martial! ... No joke!"

Falcon lit a cigarette. Between puffs he discussed with Rump plans for the new trench.

Again the telephone buzzed. Once more it was the adjutant—"for Mr. Falcon."

Falcon's eyes brightened as he heard the adjutant's words. Was he sure he could get that trench built to-night? How many men would he need?

"Send me a hundred men with picks, shovels and sand-bags by nine-thirty," boomed Falcon, "and I'll see that the job's done before the relieving battalion arrives." He went on to give details.

He put the phone down. He smiled at Rump. "I guess that fixes it. But"—his smile lessened—"if I know the C.O., that means no ribbon for me. Not *this* month! ... Now for another mud-bath or two on the way back to number nine platoon.... Just two more rivers to cross.... Pray for me, *mon capitaine*, that I don't get pipped on the way back."

Far-off batteries spoke in a rapid staccato. A prelude to the noises that speedily pressed upon their ears, of forces invisible and vast that swept through the air and, before and behind that trench, rocked the earth with explosions.

The morning "strafe" had begun.

CHAPTER VI

Most of the sun-warmed pebbles were too well rounded for skipping, but at last, as he searched lazily, Falcon discovered one that was large, flat, smooth. Supported by the crooking of his second finger, it was big enough to round out nicely the crescent formed by his forefinger and thumb. A jerk of his right arm sent the flat stone whirring over the yellow sand and the blue waters. One—two—three—four—he counted eighteen skips through the little ripples that hardly merited the name of waves.

The bay was a half-moon, the chalk cliffs reaching out like white arms to welcome the incoming ocean.

At Falcon's feet, in khaki jacket and trousers of dark green plaid, lay Captain Rump. Rump rested on his left side, with his head supported by his left hand. In the yellow fingers of his right hand he held a cigarette. His bloodshot eyes watched Alec skipping stones.

"How can you be so energetic after one of those English breakfasts?" chaffed Rump. He was ruminating on the contrast between bully-beef jack-knifed out of a tin with their recent repast—big silver dishes of cold pheasant and what-not laid out on a mahogany side-board.

Falcon looked down at the pug nose and the puffy face. "Well"—his tone verged on contempt—"one doesn't *have* to stuff."

Rump grunted. "It seems to me, Pious Æneas, you don't do so badly yourself." He lapsed into a grumpy silence. Then, as his thoughts overpowered him, went on: "That was damned good sherry we had for dinner last night, and as for the port..." His tongue clucked at the memory.

"H'm." Falcon made no other answer. He wasn't pleased to be paired with Rump during these weeks of convalescence.

The two of them had been wounded by a shell explosion as they brought their company back from the trenches, after the battalion's last tour of duty at Festubert. Neither was seriously hurt. Falcon had a flesh wound in the hip which had kept him in hospital for a few weeks, and which still made him walk stiffly. Rump had no direct wound from the shell, but had torn some tendons in his ankle as the result, he claimed, of being hit by a flying stone sent hurtling through the air by the explosion. Falcon, who had been at Rump's side at the time, suspected that the injury was received when his half-

drunk company commander jumped, with more speed than skill, into the shelter of a ruined house. They were shipped down to the base hospital together, and, after a few days there, to England. Only the previous day they had been sent from hospital in London to Bendip Towers for convalescence. They arrived at Bendip Towers at a little after four o'clock in the afternoon—just in time, Falcon thought as they neared the Towers, for tea. A motor car met them at the train at Norcaster and brought them through the stone gateway of the estate up a long, shaded avenue. This wound its way through a park where grazing deer raised their heads to look inquiringly at the visitors, and where swans admired their own images as they sailed slowly across a little lake. As the car came in sight of the great gray stone building that was Bendip Towers—the ruins of a castle dating from the War of the Roses, reconstructed by a mid-Victorian architect—Rump put a hand on Falcon's arm as he said, almost shouted:

"Yumping Yeesus! We're in the lap of luck."

Falcon had never before entered a house so impressive as Bendip Towers. His father, in Canada, had a substantial house and a few acres of ground in a suburb near the city where he practiced law. But his father's "estate" would have been lost in the great park through which he had just driven. And his father's house could have been tucked into a corner of the Towers. Alec, however, didn't feel ill at ease as he entered the drawing-room at Bendip. He had been accustomed to meeting a wide range of intelligent and well-traveled people at his father's home. He felt reasonably sure of himself anywhere.

He wasn't so happy, however, to have at his heels Augustus Rump.

As they were shown into the drawing-room, Rump whispered:

"Pretty nice pickings!"

Falcon was hardly conscious of his surroundings except that the room was long, high-ceilinged, and furnished in dazzling grays. His entire attention was centered on his hostess and her two companions.

Lady Bendip, too, was a study in dazzling grays. But she impressed Falcon not by her dress, but by her height. She was as tall as he, and he stood over six feet. With her clinging gray gown and her long, thin face, with its prominent nose, thin lips, and pale, clear skin, she would have seemed to Falcon the coldest-looking woman he had ever known, if it hadn't been for the swift glance of her deep gray eyes, and still more, for the great blaze of color in her hair—a glorious auburn for which the whole room, with its delicate grays, was a background. As he listened to the cool tones of her voice, Falcon thought her typical of a class he had read about but never met—the Englishwomen of the aristocracy.

"I am so sorry," she said to the two Canadians, "that Sir Hector isn't here to welcome you. He will probably come over for the week-end."

Falcon was so engrossed in studying Lady Bendip that he formed only a vague impression of her two guests. The plump one in mauve, a Mrs. Palmer-Jewett, evidently lived near by. There was a sort of faded beauty in her face ... like a flower pressed in a book of verse. He was so oppressed by the melancholy sweetness of her manner, so irritated by the sharp tang of her tongue, that he formed an instant prejudice not only against her, but also against her companion.

This was really absurd, for, as he thought of them afterwards, the slender, low-voiced American in her soft, creamy costume was most attractive. Dark hair framed a pale, delicately molded face and dark, thoughtful eyes. She had given him a slight, he felt an almost disapproving glance, from under lowered lids.... Merely a glance, yet she must have appraised him from head to foot.... A confoundedly superior Bostonian.... He remembered, too, a rather wide mouth with full, sensitive lips ... and fine, quick hands on the teacup. She was a Miss or Mrs. Hollis ... or was it Hollister? The name was entirely unfamiliar to him, but her face ... why did it disturb him with vague memories?

CHAPTER VII

Lady Bendip, reclining in her evening bath, threw one wet knee over the other. Knocking the ashes from her cigarette into the silver tray in the little white table beside her tub, she took a long, meditative whiff.

No, she didn't regret her offer to the Red Cross to look after two convalescent officers, nor was she disappointed in the two who had arrived at Bendip Towers the previous afternoon. Captain Rump, of course, would be worse than a total loss. The little fellow with the watery, blue eyes, the muddy-smudgy face and the perky, under-bred manner would be a daily nuisance.

But Falcon....

With a long, slender foot she reached for the big bath sponge at the far end of the tub and drew it towards her. She placed it behind her back like a cushion, crossed her long legs again and inhaled another whiff of her cigarette, slowly, luxuriously....

Falcon ...

His features were ugly, his skin was leathery, but her imagination was excited by the gladiatorial virility of his body, the shy directness of his gaze.

After dinner that evening when they were drinking coffee around the fireplace and the talk had drifted from war to politics, from politics to poetry, she had found it difficult to direct her eyes away from his big, muscular knees, while he, unconscious of the attention that centered below the hem of his kilt, quoted with enthusiasm from O'Shaughnessy, the fingers of his right hand all the while tapping lightly and quite unconsciously his bare right knee:

*"We are the music makers
And we are the dreamers of dreams,
Wandering by lone sea-breakers
And sitting by desolate streams;

World losers and world forsakers,
On whom the pale moon gleams;
Yet we are the movers and shakers
Of the world forever, it seems."*

Was his fire purely of the intellect? Was he as cold as his manner?

She wondered.

After all, he was young, unsophisticated, a Colonial. It should prove easy to bring him to heel.

Throughout their conversation that evening, his eyes had showed quick appreciation of her attempts at the epigrammatic. Particularly—perhaps because it appealed to his puritanism—when she, in snubbing Captain Rump for a vulgar flippancy, had said:

"So many people who think they are over-sexed are only under-exercised."

He had paid such grave deference to her remarks, he was so obviously flattered by her attentions, that it would be necessary only to play up to his description of her as "a witty English aristocrat."

* * * * *

Lady Bendip stood up out of her bath and reached for a big furry towel whose border was ornamented with more swans than Leda ever dreamed of.

To-morrow would be Saturday.... Hector would be home for the week-end.... Well, she would telephone to Northfield to ask Mrs. Palmer-Jewett and Mrs. Palmer-Jewett's guest, young Mrs. Hollister, to dinner ... Mrs. Palmer-Jewett could gush over Captain Rump. And as for Mrs. Hollister, the quiet, low-voiced American was just the type to please Sir Hector, He would be particularly attentive, since Peter Hollister was nephew and heir presumptive to Lord Willerton.... Poor girl! Did she look so sad because the Germans had captured her husband, or because they hadn't killed him? So handsome, that fellow, but such a rascal....

Slipping into her pajamas, Lady Bendip paused a moment before the cheval glass to admire long white limbs glimmering through black silk.

CHAPTER VIII

Mrs. Hollister, opening the door of the morning room at Northfield, Mrs. Palmer-Jewett's house, found her hostess at ease, her ample form comfortably settled into an ample chair. The printed smock which Mrs. Palmer-Jewett wore, the large straw sun-hat which lay on the floor beside her chair, indicated that she had been gardening. Through the half open door at the far end of the morning room a summer breeze blew gently, ruffling the graying hair above Mrs. Palmer-Jewett's slightly flushed face, and bringing with it from the garden the faint fragrance of lilacs.

"Hullo!" said Mrs. Palmer-Jewett, raising drowsy eyes to contemplate the tall figure of Adair Hollister in her white riding habit, and high tan boots—a striking figure of a girl, with all that white topped off by the smooth coils of black hair beneath her black hat. If only she had a little more color in her cheeks ... well, with her health you couldn't expect ... a better marriage might have helped though.... Now, this Canadian...

Mrs. Palmer-Jewett glanced at the clock. She said: "Is he late or are you early?"

Mrs. Hollister said: "I'm a few minutes early." She added: "He's never late.... Army training."

"So you have to be ready ahead of time?" said Mrs. Palmer-Jewett, tensing her lips to repress the smile which, in spite of her, shone in her eyes. She added, as she noticed two sudden points of color in Adair Hollister's cheeks: "I hope he doesn't take you for too hard a ride.... Not good for your chest, I think."

Mrs. Hollister laughed. "It's the doctor's prescription," she said. She added, "But he does ride hard. I shall tell him...."

"A sort of muscular atheist," said Mrs. Palmer-Jewett.

"Rather pantheist than atheist," commented Mrs. Hollister.

"At any rate, I imagine a terror for exercise and keeping fit.... No wonder Lady Bendip is blossoming out as a devil-may-care horse-woman...." Mrs. Palmer-Jewett glanced keenly at Adair Hollister as she added, "They ride together almost every day, don't they?"

Mrs. Hollister responded with magnificent indifference, "I suppose so ... at least every other day.... Naturally, he's attentive to his hostess."

Mrs. Palmer-Jewett speculated on how much knowledge Adair Hollister concealed ... these Americans could be as stone-faced as any of your county family English ... Bostonian, of course ... but surely she must see that Lady Bendip was using her, Adair Hollister, as a blind ... urging young Falcon to pay some attention to the Bostonian so that people might not notice so much the very ardent attentions he was paying to herself ... quite imperially sure of herself, that woman.... It had taken her less than a fortnight to bring the young Canadian to heel.... He would be easily flattered, of course, by an Englishwoman of title, even though she was only the wife of a jam-and-pickle Baronet....

"I don't see," said Mrs. Palmer-Jewett, "why every one calls her a wit."

"Oh, come," said Mrs. Hollister. "One must be fair even to...." Last Sunday, she said, when Mrs. Palmer-Jewett had entertained the Bendips and their guests at Northfield, Lady Bendip had whipped out more than one good thing. "You must admit she didn't do badly in her comment on one of Mr. Falcon's remarks—you remember? 'Cynicism is sentimentalism turned sour.'"

Mrs. Palmer-Jewett said: "Teh! Did you see how she looked at him afterwards? One admiring glance from him and she labors to bring forth another epigram."

Mrs. Hollister said she hadn't noticed. She had been more occupied in observing Sir Hector while Lady Bendip purred at Falcon.

"Poor Brigadier!" said Mrs. Palmer-Jewett, "he certainly has to pay for being married to his 'witty English aristocrat.'"

"*You* call her that, too!"

"*I* call her that! I was only quoting the devoted colonial.... You know my opinion as to her wit. And she is certainly neither English nor even ... good family."

"Oh, surely..." expostulated Adair.

"Oh, she's not Spanish or Russian or anything romantic like that.... Little as you'd know it from her speech, she's Scotch ... daughter of a wealthy Glasgow plumber."

Mrs. Hollister's sense of fair play ... and of decency to a woman who had been quite charmingly their hostess on a half-dozen occasions in these past few weeks ... had made her take Lady Bendip's part. But her growing antagonism to the woman made her, in spite of herself, willing to lend an ear to Mrs. Palmer-Jewett as that lady, firmly astride the good nag Gossip, was off at a gallop.

Lady Bendip and Sir Hector were such an odd pair, said Mrs. Palmer-Jewett, she so tall with her flaming hair, and he so short with his flaming face.... Heaven alone knew why she married him.... She had had an affair first, it was said, with some artist or sculptor.... Quite famous, and, of course, she wanted to share his fame.... She had, it was rumored, taken desperate measures to capture him.... "That woman would stop at nothing" ... but he, intent on his career, had turned the cold shoulder.... Then suddenly she married Sir Hector. "There may be nothing to the story, of course, but the engagement was unusually short and no one could pretend it was a love match ... at least on her side. The Brigadier, poor man...."

Mrs. Hollister asked whether they had ever got along well together. Was it only recently that...?

"It's only recently that they have got along together at all," said Mrs. Palmer-Jewett, "and that's because they're nearly always apart." She said that when the two were married, five years earlier, the Brigadier had retired from the army to give his time to the family business ... jams and pickles. His efforts to improve the business ended in his losing all he had ... and a part of Lady Bendip's. "The war must have seemed a godsend." He had courage. In spite of his age and his rheumatism, he offered his services. Probably Lady Bendip was even more disappointed than he at the outcome. Instead of being sent to France, he was given command of a base camp in the next county. At any rate, now he only got home for week-ends.

"Poor man!" said Mrs. Hollister. "Did you notice him last Sunday when she fussed over Alec Falcon? He grew positively purple."

Mrs. Palmer-Jewett, feeling a sudden impulse of mischief, said, "I suppose it's compassion for the Brigadier that sends you riding with Falcon this morning?"

Mrs. Hollister flushed slightly, said nothing.

With the twinimps still dancing in her eyes, Mrs. Palmer-Jewett said: "He has magnificent knees."

"The Brigadier? Too short and too fat."

"Oh, come, don't be silly."

Mrs. Hollister's eyes flashed a look of anger.

Undaunted, Mrs. Palmer-Jewett rattled on!

"I'm glad I spoke. The touch of color becomes you. You Bostonians have so many inhibitions."

"No inhibitions, no civilization."

"Yes, but with too many, civilization becomes sterilization. At any rate, I'm sure you, my dear, could do with fewer.... Your color would be permanently better."

Mrs. Hollister's riding crop cracked against her boot....

Mrs. Palmer-Jewett glanced at the clock ... he would be here any minute now ... well, she wouldn't stay ... only in the way ... she would like to see though.... She picked up her sun hat. She would, she said, go on with her gardening. Suddenly, she paused in her walk towards the half-open door into the garden.

"You know," she said, turning, "that young man affords some surprising contrasts."

"Such as...?"

"Oh ... for one thing, his almost mid-Victorian respect for women. So far, he has treated his man-eating hostess as if she were a goddess in marble."

"True enough ... but where's the contrast?"

Mrs. Palmer-Jewett laughed as she put on the broad hat. "I got that," she said, "from Captain Rump. He says the mid-Victorian Falcon is a bit of a rip.... He kept a regular establishment in London."

Mrs. Hollister frowned.

Mrs. Palmer-Jewett said: "Do you find that so shocking?"

"It is hard to believe...." Mrs. Hollister paused. The gravity vanished from her face as she added: "Don't you think something should be done ... to protect poor Lady Bendip?"

CHAPTER IX

Following Isabella Bendip's lead—as they rode together the next day—Alec pulled his horse in from a trot to a walk. He wondered what her motive for reining-in might be. They had just ridden through a village of gray-stone cottages, inland from Bendip Towers, and were coming out on the yellow downs, where he expected a canter.

"Do you think it quite fair to Mrs. Hollister"—Isabella brought her horse closer to his as she, turning shrewd gray eyes towards him, spoke—"for you to be seen going about with her so much? With her husband a prisoner of war in Germany, people are sure to talk."

Alec flushed, annoyed at the interference.

"Mrs. Hollister is almost unknown in this neighborhood. Do you think," he retorted, "people will talk about my riding with *her*?"

Isabella's eyes flashed. "Damn your impertinence!" she snapped, her voice rising to shrillness. Her horse bounded forward at the bite of her spur.

"And damn yours, too," muttered Alec as he galloped after.

Thank God the woman had to go to Norcaster to-morrow. For one day he would be free to ride with Adair Hollister without having to undergo fire from Isabella's eyes before and after his party.

He had to admit that, a month ago, on his arrival at Bendip Towers, he had thought this red-haired Amazon magnificent. When he met her he hadn't seen a woman worth attention since his last leave in London, before he went to France, and that was many months ago. And charming as some of those demi-mondaines were—he still treasured memories of Elsie, with her alluring voice and her mocking eyes—there wasn't one of them who could stir his imagination like Isabella. Her wealth, her wit, her tall grace—a column of white marble crowned with fire, he had imagined—had all made him wish to possess her.... Curious luck that the morning after his first ride with her he received a large photograph from Phyllis Howard, together with some snapshots showing Phyllis on the beach at Murray Bay, in Quebec. But those were easily enough tucked away in a suit-case.... Since he had nothing to his credit but this immature love affair in Canada and conquests bought by bank-notes in London, his vanity was immensely flattered when he found himself gaining ground so rapidly with this—as he had pictured her—English aristocrat, Lady Bendip.

Then something changed him. It was impossible for him, looking back, to say just when the change began. It wasn't due, solely, to the growth of his friendship for Adair Hollister.... He remembered how Isabella at first encouraged him to ride occasionally with Mrs. Hollister, no doubt to keep the neighbors from noticing how much he rode with Isabella ... No, the change in him was due to Isabella herself. As their intimacy grew, she step by step dropped all pretense of yielding to his guile, revealed herself as the aggressor. She treated him openly, with not too much regard for good taste, as a piece of her property. The transition from captor to captive didn't please his pride. He had edged away from Isabella ... towards Adair.

He had found his typical, well-bred Englishwoman at last ... and she was an American. Adair Hollister was the daughter of a Professor at Harvard. A year before the war she had married a Peter Hollister, a retired captain in British Army. Captain Hollister rejoined his regiment at the beginning of the War, and was now a prisoner in Germany. That was all Alec knew about Adair Hollister, for she talked very little about herself and her affairs. He had, of course, learned from Isabella that Peter Hollister was the nephew and heir presumptive of Lord Willerton, whose estates lay just the other side of Norcaster, and he surmised that this accounted for Isabella's attentions to Adair.

Adair—he called her that only in his thoughts, for as his increasing interest in her became evident, she, until these last few days, had been resolute in discouragement of even the slightest attempt at intimacy—dominated his imagination by the subtlety of her beauty to a degree that Isabella could never have achieved with all her force. He had burned to possess Isabella. He had, until these last three days, found happiness in the very thought of Adair, and exaltation in her company—in the low, soft tones of her voice, which stirred him beyond the power of music.

"I suppose, Alec"—Isabella let her horse drop to a walk as they came back round a bill and so in sight of Bendip Towers—"that when I'm in Norcaster to-morrow you'll ride with Mrs. Hollister again?"

"Of course." Falcon spoke almost brutally. "I am very near the end of my leave. I may not have another chance."

"I expect"—her voice showed cold hatred—"that you can be trusted to make the best of your opportunities."

Falcon did not answer.

CHAPTER X

Morgan Hollister was an eccentric, even as a boy at Harrow. At Oxford he developed into a philosophic anarchist. Despising the present order of society, he refused, on leaving Oxford, to accept any allowance from his elder brother, who had inherited the barony of Willerton and the not-too-prosperous estate. Then, having no means of support save a bitter but brilliant pen, he married a lady who was so absorbed in the mysteries of Theosophy that she rarely remembered either to button up her dress or to do up her hair.

From this marriage Peter Hollister resulted. Left to shift largely for himself, he picked up an education of sorts, partly from his father's occasional tutoring, partly from the street-arab companions whom he found in the squalid district around his home, and partly, as he grew older, from the lighter books in his father's library, particularly those dealing with free love. But when he was caught putting into practice with a neighbor's wife some of the principles he had absorbed, his father was furious and turned him out of doors. He would then have starved—or have had to work for a living—if he had not thought of writing to his uncle, Lord Willerton. Just because his greasy-haired anarchist father refused to accept an allowance was no reason why he, Peter Hollister, should suffer.

His letter met a good reception. Lord Willerton, after twenty years of marriage, had no children. He looked on Peter as his ultimate successor. It was necessary, then, to remedy the defects in the lad's education and to turn him out, as nearly as possible, like a gentleman, fit to carry decently the title.

Taking into his home this good-looking, over-grown youngster with the hard mouth and the cunning eyes, he put him in the hands of an able tutor. Later, thinking that military life would be beneficial to a youth who had known so little discipline, he sent Peter to a crammer for Sandhurst. In the army, first in England and later in India, Peter cut a dash which outran his allowance. His uncle's generosity was limited by large responsibilities and narrow means.

After ten years of squabbling over debts, Peter, by now a captain, left the army to go into a far-too-promising business venture. After its collapse, his uncle was only too glad to buy him a first-class passage to New York, wishing him the best of fortune in a land which, the old peer hazily imagined, offered easy millions to any man with "get up and go"—qualities which Peter undoubtedly had in abundance, if only they could be directed into the right channels.... The old gentleman continued his allowance to Peter. He also gave him an introduction to a friend in Cambridge, Massachusetts—a friend who shared Lord Willerton's passion for antiquarian research. This Professor at Harvard was no ordinary University don, the baron assured Peter, but a man of substantial means and considerable influence, who, having a love for scholarship and an enthusiasm for arousing interest in it in others, made teaching his hobby.

So Peter Hollister, coming to the house of her father, met Adair. She, a shy, dreamy young girl, brought up largely in the society of elderly scholars and young students, found her curiosity aroused by this soldier and man of action. She liked to listen to his tales of India, even though he had only been, as he stated with effective modesty, "in a couple of minor scraps on the North-west frontier" of that empire. He was very attractive, with his ruddy face, his golden mustaches and his light yellow hair, graying slightly at the temples. "Showing the white feather," he said, twinkling.... The cold blue eyes, looking out from beneath pale eyebrows, appeared to have seen everything and to have found nothing. The nose, bold, strong, slightly curved, like an old-style cavalry saber. The mouth, hard, dissipated, bitter.

Having a complete contempt for his father's extravagant idealism and his mother's even more extravagant mysticism, Peter Hollister had long since found it expedient to affect an easy-going adherence to the Toryism of his uncle. His expressed Conservatism was warmly welcomed by Adair. In Cambridge, Massachusetts, she had been reared in an atmosphere even more Tory than she would have found in Cambridge, England. People often said her father was more like an English country gentleman of athletic habit and scholarly interests than an American University Professor. And Adair shared her father's tastes and prejudices.... So she was drawn to Peter Hollister by his Toryism as well as by his military dash, his vigor and his fine looks. He was a more romantic figure to her, too, because she linked him with Lord Willerton of Willerton. She had visited the old baron once, with her father, on one of their many trips to Europe, and she had been charmed by the simple courtesy that went so well with the white beard and the gentle eye.

Peter Hollister, for his part, sized up the situation quickly. "She's a good-looking filly," he said to himself, "although not the kind I would pick—too quiet."

But she stood for, he could see very plainly, cash. His mind centered on the winnings, he played his cards with skill.

On their wedding trip in Europe, Peter showed great consideration for his bride, so much younger than himself, and skillfully evoked from her such a wealth of affection as she had not dreamed she possessed. When he spoke of his serious financial difficulties, he presented them in such a way as to arouse her pity for his misfortunes. She didn't hesitate to help him to the limit of her ability. Her dowry was not so large as Peter had hoped, and part of it was tied up in trust, but the remainder was more than enough to pay off his debts and to give him a pleasant six months in Europe.

Lord Willerton, of course, was delighted with the marriage, and was like another father to Adair. But soon he said to Peter:

"What will you do next? You won't, surely, simply loaf on your wife's money?"

"Politics," said Peter. "What the country needs is some Tory M.P.'s with a bit of dash to them, some 'get up and go.'"

The thought of his going into politics, although it would further drain their finances, appealed to Adair. Peter, for his part, was glad to be able to give attendance at political meetings as an excuse for absence from home. He had worn the mask of virtue until it suffocated the real man. His first taste of liberty proved the prelude to a Saturnalia.

Adair was disgusted—less by the extent of his sensuality than by its nature. She protested, pleaded:

"But do you *have* to ... and with such loathsome companions?"

For answer he, through his drunken hiccoughs, proclaimed: "Every man has a right to go to hell ... in his own way."

It was a saying she was to hear more than once.

She was on the point of breaking with him in the early summer of 1914. But the outbreak of war brought him back to decency. He rejoined his regiment and, both he and she being carried away by the emotions of the time, they put aside all differences and parted almost as lovers when he went to France.

Hollister at first did brilliantly at the front. It wasn't so much for love of his country. He wouldn't, in peace time, have cut down his whiskies and sodas to six a day for love of his country. It was love of sensation that drove him. He was lucky in being plunged into an attack immediately on his arrival. Indifferent to ordinary obligations, he responded magnificently to the stimulus of danger. He came out of the attack with a reputation as a cool-headed, daring company commander, and with a D.S.O.... His brother officers whispered that he should have had the V.C....

When Adair heard that he was coming home on leave, she looked forward to a second honeymoon. But after the first night he deserted the boudoir for the bar, and then for lower haunts. Before the end of his leave he reduced her to misery. One day at the Savoy she was brought publicly to tears. From him she could wrest nothing but that old swagger about a man's right to go to hell.

He didn't do so gallantly in the months that followed—months of mucky misery in the trenches. All that mud must have dragged the dash out of him. Nor did constant tipping in his dugout steady his nerves. When, in the next attack, he was wounded, and left in the open by the ebbing tide of bayonets, he forgot his contempt of all who surrendered. He forgot his frequent declarations, banged out in mess after the sixth whisky, that if ever so caught he would die fighting. He allowed himself to be taken prisoner.

"You needn't worry about me," he wrote to Adair. "They treat us surprisingly well." And again, "I have quite recovered from my wounds." A snapshot showed him bronzed, with a tennis racquet in his hand. Of course, Adair thought, he was probably picturing things to her as being much better than they were. The German censors wouldn't allow complaints to pass through....

Adair now divided her time between London and Willerton. From Willerton she latterly went in to Norcaster to visit the wounded soldiers in hospital. So she came into contact with Mrs. Palmer-Jewett, an active figure in Red Cross

work. Later, she accepted that lady's invitation to visit her at Northfield and, as her guest, went frequently with Mrs. Palmer-Jewett to call on her friend, Lady Bendip.

"That woman will put up with anything from me," Mrs. Palmer-Jewett had said once when they were discussing Lady Bendip, "because she thinks I'm 'county family.' And I ... well, she's a trump for Red Cross work."

CHAPTER XI

As she walked away from the telephone in the upper hall of Northfield, Mrs. Palmer-Jewett's house, Adair Hollister felt surprise at the words she had just spoken. A fortnight ago she would not have thought of suggesting that Alec Falcon, instead of calling for her at Northfield, should meet her at the cross-roads on the downs half-way to Bendip Towers. Now she preferred to avoid riding through the village with him. Conscious of a change in her own attitude, she commenced to fear criticism. Alarm and pleasure clashed as she thought of the situation into which she was being swept. She was so tossed about by her emotions she could not believe that others were not watching her actions. She was determined to be most careful. No gossip should cross the county to the Willertons. It would be disgusting to be the center of a scandal.

So Adair rode out to meet Alec. She trotted through the sleepy village street where, here and there, straw-thatched roofs were still to be seen. She trotted out of the village on to the yellow-gray downs, past the gray stone walls and the gray stone cottages. She loved to look out over the gray-blue sea. There was strength and healing in all this quietness.

To-day there was a breeze blowing from the sea. Adair breathed in deep draughts of it.

The breeze drove the clouds before it. No longer obscured, the sun shone over all. The gray turned to gold.

Adair remained depressed.

She urged her horse to an easy canter, then spurred it to a hard gallop, seeking to throw off the depression.

She let the gallop slow down to a canter, the canter to a trot, the trot to a walk.

Alexander Falcon—she lingered over the name, musing on its mingled hardness and softness—had certainly misunderstood her during that last meeting. Not because of anything she had said, but because, she acknowledged it, of what she had left unsaid. To-day she would have to speak very clearly, however, much as it might hurt him—and her.

Her position was difficult. She no longer loved her husband, yet she still retained some affection for him, such as a mother might feel for a son who brought her nothing but heartaches. She saw all Peter Hollister's faults, but blamed them rather on his early training—or lack of it—than on himself.

She detested disloyalty. Little regard as she had for Peter, she remembered their endeavor at reconciliation, their kisses when he returned to France. She would have no self-respect if she were unfaithful now, when he was a prisoner of war.

Yet her attempts to speak of Peter to Alec—attempts repeatedly made in these last few meetings—had not proved successful. In spite of herself, she found a note of deprecation worming its way into each thing that she said about Peter—as if the more her conscience tried to hold Alec off, the more her passion led her towards him.

"Passion"—she detested the word. "Self-respect demands self-discipline," she had repeated to herself a thousand times. She had tried to drive away all thought of him in the day-time ... only to wake in the night, startled.... And here she was now, riding towards him....

After all, what else mattered? Alec, her lover, Alec, adventurer, poet and fighter! She saw in him all that she had

hoped to find in Peter, and more, immeasurably more....

There he was now large-looming and masterful ... her pulse throbbed faster ... at the cross-roads, mounted on a big chestnut gelding.

* * * * *

Riding towards Adair, Alec looked with admiration at her slim figure, so trim in white linen jacket and breeches and high tan riding-boots, mounted on a black mare with a white right forefoot and a white star in the center of its forehead. Riding she seemed almost as tall as he, although on foot her broad white forehead came just to the level of his lips. Her skin was clear and pale as his own was swarthy. An ugly brute he felt himself beside her. His only assets: height and breadth of shoulder. And, of course, the advantages that went with being in a Highland regiment—black Glengarry bonnet with a silver badge sparkling on its side, and dark plaid riding-breeches of purple and green, with a line of silver in them that contrasted with the drabness of his khaki jacket.

He changed his riding-crop to his left hand, the hand that held the reins, as he brought his right to the peak of his Glengarry in salute. His chestnut pranced a little, as if it, too, were electric with the moment.

"Is this to be 'The Last Ride Together'?" There was laughter in his eyes as he put the question.

"Hardly that, I hope. Certainly not that." Her large dark eyes had no mirth in them. "And yet..."

She did not finish the sentence. Put spurs to her horse. Alec, cantering beside her on the soft turf of the downs, felt strength surge in him as he glanced at the slight figure that held so firmly in check the hard-pulling mare. His lips tightened as he drove down an impulse to reach out his arm and draw her to him.

They rode so, absorbed in the pleasure of moments that speech would only spoil.

There was a great flood of passion in him, but the flood rolled back at the unspoken word of this girl who ruled him so completely that he was unaware she ruled him at all.

Yet presently he must speak. They would ride to the cliffs overlooking the rocky cave and the sea. And then...

He had so much ambition for hard achievement that he had always hated the thought of marriage. But with her beside him, surely, his power to achieve would be doubled.

What would she answer? From the unspoken indications, in these last few meetings—her eyes that gravely caressed his face, her small high bosom that palpitated visibly to the deep notes of his speech—he drew courage.

They came to a gray cottage on the cliffs. There were flower-boxes in the small square windows on either side of the doorway. Over the door hung a sign on which was painted a large yellow tea-pot.

Alec dismounted and knocked on the door until it opened. A gray-haired woman in black calico showed her creased red face.

"A boy to hold the horses? Yes, sir." She turned her head as she called into the house to her son.

Touching the soft leather of Adair's narrow boot as he helped her to dismount, taking her cool white hand, Alec thought no day could be sunnier than this, no blue sky could promise better.

A moon-eyed, moon-faced boy came forward to take care of the horses. Alec and Adair walked to the edge of the cliff.

A steep path ran down to the big rocks below. Round the rocks the surf crashed.

"Shall we go down?" Alec pointed with his riding-crop to a square gray mass that rose well out of the sea. The top of it lay flat and smooth in the sunlight.

"That would be pleasant," she murmured.

"Ever since I found this place I have wanted to bring you here," he said when at last, after descending the path and picking their way over the bowlders, they had come to the rock with the table-top.

"Yes?" Her voice trembled a little. She felt so deeply the austerity that lay around them—and between them.

"I have imagined you here with me. I ... wrote some verses about it." Passing her the paper on which he had written in a clear rugged hand, he felt suddenly conscious of the weakness of his efforts. She might see only triteness in phrases which meant so much to him.... But at least, his resolution hardened, the verses would declare his feelings.

She read with lowered lids. Then: "I like that." Her slim white forefinger traced a line in the second stanza of the sonnet:

"Their love unuttered, growing silently."

Alec for a moment said nothing. With the middle finger of his right hand he played with the rowel of his right spur as he half sat, half lay, on the rock, his right knee drawn up towards him, his left leg stretched out straight. Then he commenced hesitatingly:

"Must I always call you only ... Mrs. Hollister?"

Something of the erectness that distinguished her figure as she sat there vanished. Her back curved slightly, her head drooped forward, her breast rose and fell with her short breaths, as she, seeing neither him, nor the sea, nor anything but the mist before her eyes, answered:

"You may call me anything you wish."

Alec, watching her, hearing her words, felt a great wave of joy sweep through him.

Swiftly, firmly, his right hand covered her left as it rested limply beside her on the rock.

"Then...?"

He had so much to say, yet the shock of victory left him dumb.

Before he could find the words he sought, Adair had risen to her feet. It was his firm taking of her hand that brought her so suddenly to clear-headedness.

"No, Alec, no!" The words came fast. "I mustn't be a fool. I mustn't forget. We can't be anything but friends ... at least, until after the War."

"Until after the War?" he responded dully. He would be going back to France, he hoped, in a very few days now. And the life of a subaltern in the trenches averages ... how many months? "That's a long time." He stopped himself from adding: "So much can happen."

"Yes, I know. I'm sorry..." Her speech was crisp and clear as she gave him her hand to help her down from the square-topped rock. For all her slightness, her voice was strong with an inflexible decision: "But it can't, possibly, be anything else."

He assisted her over the rounded bowlders and so up the cliff to the horses.

CHAPTER XII

Standing in front of the dark walnut table in his big bedroom at Bendip Towers, Captain Augustus Rump brushed his heavily brilliantined, straw-colored hair until it lay back flat from his forehead. He then took his Sam-brown belt, whose leather was polished to the hue of old mahogany, and slipped it over his right shoulder. He adjusted his shoulder strap, then brought the shining brass buckle of his belt squarely to the center of his slightly protruding stomach. He played with the ends of his weedy, straw-colored mustache as he looked in the mirror at the reflected warrior. There was a frown on his brow, but it was only one of those terrific frowns that he assumed occasionally when he was alone, as now, to make the image in the glass appear awe-inspiring, irresistible. In his heart he was well content with what he saw. He must be, he surmised, something like one of those handsome blond beasts that that fellow Nietzsche wrote about.

He did not regard his pale blue eyes—now less bloodshot than when he first came to Bendip Towers—as watery. But he would have admitted, under pressure, that his nose was pug. What harm in that? Hadn't some famous men and enchanting women been noted for *retroussé* noses? Even this little barmaid in Norcaster, with the great coils of brown hair, the roving brown eyes, and the fresh-colored cheeks, whom he was now about to call upon ... Falcon called that barmaid's nose a snub. Just like him to do that! He, Rump, wished he could effectively snub Falcon. That young Cock o' the North too often forgot that he was a mere subaltern who owed respect to his company commander.

The bull-headed young fool had got himself into a nice mess now with those two women. Well, he could stew in his own juice for all that Rump cared. An impertinent subaltern who dared to lecture his company commander for having, on a few evenings here on sick leave, taken too many drinks.

Rump wondered just what was up. It was evident, of course, that Lady B. was mad about Falcon. It was natural for her, with her mass of red hair and her pale skin, to pass by a blond like himself and to dote on a leather-faced youngster like Alec. But Rump forgave her. She always laughed at his jokes. Sometimes she laughed even when he wasn't joking. But that's bound to be the fate of a born humorist, as he, Rump, certainly was. "The Laughing Cavalier," he thought as he adjusted his tie before the mirror. Perhaps that name suited him even better than "The Blond Beast."

But Lady B. during these last two days had not laughed ... even at Rump's jokes. She had been silent much of the time, or else pestering Falcon in an undertone with questions, at least half-audible to Rump, about Mrs. Hollister. After a ride that Falcon had had two days ago with Lady B., Lady B. had appeared much upset, her usually pale face flushed, her eyes hard and glittering. Falcon that night had risen out of his customary quietness, had been high-spirited, jovial, as if he had just received, or expected shortly, good fortune.

Next day Lady B. had gone to Norcaster, and Falcon, the sly dog, went riding with Mrs. Hollister.... What could Falcon find to talk about all day with that prim little New Englander? Oh, yes, she had fine eyes and quick, pretty hands, and any one could see she was a thoroughbred, even if she was a Yankee, but far more fun was to be had with barmaids.... At any rate, last night at dinner, Lady Bendip and Falcon changed roles.

The leathery-faced Falcon after his ride with Mrs. Hollister was tense-browed, silent.

"What's the matter?" Rump whispered in his ear as they went in to dinner. "Did she hit you in the stomach with a rock?"

Falcon didn't answer. He didn't even show anger. Nothing, it seemed, could arouse his interest. He was evidently forcing himself to get through the meal at all.

Lady B., at the sight of Falcon's dejection, was manifestly pleased. She kept after Falcon so much that that priggish fellow, who ordinarily refused to touch more than one whisky, helped himself to several stiff ones before the dinner was over.

Falcon's indifference to Lady Bendip was quite to the liking of Sir Hector, just back for the beginning of his week-end leave. Sir Hector beamed through his monocle when Lady B. murmured to him in the hall, after dinner, that Falcon was in a frightful jam over that little Mrs. Hollister. On previous week-ends the poor old Brigadier must have wondered whether Falcon wasn't going to run off with Lady B.—or rather, Lady B. with Falcon.... But it was after dinner, when the

Brigadier was chatting with Rump about British public school-boys and how they prospered in the Colonies, that Rump, glancing across the drawing-room, saw Lady B. tormenting Falcon most.

At last Falcon rose heavily, made his excuses to all on the score of having a headache, and left, ostensibly to go to his room. But when, a moment later, the front door clanged to, Rump guessed Falcon had gone out for a walk. Barely had the door slammed when Lady B. jumped up.

"I have an idea!" she said. Poor Falcon seemed so down at the end of his leave. They would give him a dinner tomorrow night to cheer him up.

The Brigadier murmuring acquiescence, she went to the telephone and called Mrs. Palmer-Jewett, and, later, others.

Long after midnight Rump was wakened by the sound of the door opening into the room next his own—Falcon's room. And when Rump entered that room next morning, in dressing-gown and pajamas, ready to shout "Hello, old bean! Time for officers to fall in," he found Falcon still in uniform, asleep in an armchair beside the bed, with the electric night lamp blazing in his face, and a battered copy of Catullus lying face open on the floor beneath his drooping hand....

That morning the Brigadier wanted to potter around the grounds with the head gardener, so Lady B. was free to suggest a ride to Falcon. Old leather-face didn't look as if he wanted to ride with Lady B., but after such a night his wits were working too slowly to worm a way out of it. They had come back from the ride with Lady B. more fiercely triumphant than ever, while Falcon, sallow, dull-eyed, heavy-jawed, looked as if he had had his guts torn out.

Rump, after that, began to feel compassion for the fellow. Not a bad youngster in his way. Quite a help at Festubert, although inclined to act as if he, not Rump, were the company commander. But Augustus Rump was too big a man not to overlook a little thing like that.

* * * * *

Having finished manicuring his nails, Captain Rump put a monocle in his right eye and studied the result in the mirror. No, he hadn't the courage to try that while Sir Hector was around. The Brigadier looked as if he had worn *his* monocle when he leaped from his mother's womb.

Walking into Falcon's room, Rump found his black-browed subaltern tearing up a long letter on which the ink was barely dry.

"I say, Pious Æneas, if you can't find anything better to do than write letters and tear them up, you had better come into Norcaster with me. Lady B. has lent me her 'bus."

Falcon, weary-eyed, looked over his shoulder at Rump.... At last he said: "Thanks, that's not a bad idea."

"It's a damned good idea," asserted Rump as he strutted around the room and glanced out of the windows at the oak trees below, and beyond them at the cliffs and the sea. "You can come with me to Norchester Arms, and we'll flirt with my little friend the barmaid, and we'll have a few drinks, and we'll get back in time for dinner."

"Yes." Falcon spoke without enthusiasm, almost without animation of any sort, like an automaton which, when opened, reveals steel springs but no heart. "Yes. I suppose we'll have to get back for that dinner."

CHAPTER XIII

The savory on Lady Bendip's plate lay untouched. The long fingers of her lightly freckled hand played nervously with the lorgnette that hung from her neck on a silver chain. No, it wasn't going to turn out at all as she had expected ... this little farewell dinner for Alec.

There weren't, of course, enough people. With twenty at table, she had always been able to make the big dining-room cheery, notwithstanding the darkness of its paneling and the sourness of the faces of the early Bendips, who, done in too dark oils and framed in too heavy gilt, stared down stupidly from the walls. But this evening, far from having twenty at table, she had only six and the room seemed to her as bleak as a monastery in Lent.

From habit, she had telephoned to Mrs. Palmer-Jewett first. Then, since Mrs. Hollister was coming, she would have liked to ask the Willertons, but she didn't know them well enough to invite them at such brief notice and so informally, by telephone. Then she tried others ... but it was too late. She had ended by having as her guests only Mrs. Palmer-Jewett and Mrs. Hollister.

One glance at the rows of tall silver candlesticks and she had seen that the soft flickerings of the candles would never be sufficient to lighten this dinner party. A quick order ... and the room was flooded with light.

Yet that made her feel still less at ease. She was not bothered by the glare on Hector's purple face as he, over his soup, engaged Adair Hollister in a long conversation which, as Lady Bendip gathered from occasional phrases that reached her ears, had to deal with the United States and the possibilities of its entering the War. Nor was she much concerned by the thick-tongued loquacity of Captain Rump as he, with flushed face and voice a trifle too loud, talked to Mrs. Palmer-Jewett. *That* tart-tongued lady was quite able to take care of herself and was evidently doing so, judging by the occasional looks of puzzlement that spread across Rump's face as if he weren't quite sure whether he was being laughed with ... or at...

What did perturb her was the sight of Alec. She had noticed something strange in his manner when he returned from Norcaster with Rump ... with speech almost as thick as that of the silly little captain. Articulate and able to behave himself as usual, but with a slight slurring of his words. And his eyes ... why, he looked as if he weren't seeing anything at all except what was racing around inside his head.... He had been gravely polite to Mrs. Palmer-Jewett and Mrs. Hollister, treating them with an elaborate courtesy as if they were complete strangers. His manner towards herself, Lady Bendip felt, was even more cold ... as if he were merely performing his duty to his hostess.

At the beginning of the dinner he had attempted to talk to Mrs. Hollister, on his right, but Lady Bendip, on his left, always swiftly drew him back to her. It had been amusing, Lady Bendip thought, to place him there between the two of them.... She soon saw that he was suffering in a way she had never intended.... Well, hadn't he made *her* suffer? The other day she would have delighted to strike his face with her riding crop....

Slipping a hand beneath the table and patting Falcon's knee, Lady Bendip whispered:

"Dear boy, what *is* the matter?"

For answer, he twisted restlessly in his seat.

Suddenly from down the table came Sir Hector's voice, raised in high pomposity that commanded the whole table. Indignation flamed through his monocle as he, talking ostensibly to Mrs. Hollister but actually to all those present—if not indeed to the whole British nation—uttered denunciation after denunciation. All directed, as Lady Bendip gathered, against Bellairs Hill, that historian turned military writer whose criticisms were upsetting the digestions of so many generals....

"He has been in France recently, they say, actually lecturing G.H.Q. on how to run the war. Such impudence! If you could see the fellow.... I heard him talk once, in London. A short, thick-set, square-headed chap. He affects the style of a French notary from a provincial town. Yet he was born in England and is, I understand, an old Oxonian. Confounded charlatan ... nearly as bad as that fellow Desmond Law. Worst of all—" Sir Hector wrinkled his nose in disgust—"all the time he talked he sucked his teeth."

"But he has good ideas, hasn't he?" interjected Mrs. Hollister. Her eyes laughed as she wondered why the Brigadier fussed so about the non-essentials of the great writer.

"Oh, he has ideas of a sort! Whether they are good or not, only time will tell. But he certainly has colossal audacity or he, a mere civilian, wouldn't attempt to tell the best minds in the British army how to run the War."

Mrs. Hollister felt that the Brigadier was becoming altogether too bellicose for the dinner table. She must give the matter a lighter turn.

"Perhaps," she said, "General Headquarters needs amusement."

Then, Falcon... Mrs. Hollister shivered a little as she heard him, breaking loose from talk with Lady Bendip, join in their chatter with slow, slurred speech.

"Perhaps," he said, "the *best* minds in the British army welcome ideas—even from a civilian."

Sir Hector flushed to a deeper purple. "The *best* minds in the British army" ... an insult to himself? ... In his own house? ...

Lady Bendip observed him ... like an over-distended frog, about to explode.... She quickly intervened.

"From some of your own remarks to me, Hector, I should think you are as ready to lecture The Higher Command as Bellairs Hill is."

Mrs. Palmer-Jewett said that surely it would be quite different if Sir Hector were to lecture them.... "A General, with a distinguished record in the Boer war."

Sir Hector, acknowledging this compliment with a smile, pointed out that he had been only a colonel at the close of the South African affair.

Then, more inwardly calm, he glanced again at Falcon. Poor fellow! His black eyebrows were drawn together as if he were trying to compress the world inside his head ... or more likely, trying to carry it on his shoulders.... His fingers were nervously playing with the stem of a wine glass, twisting and twitching and twisting again ... why, he must feel like the very devil.... It was Isabella who was doing it all, too.... He could see her leaning over and whispering to Falcon.... Whatever was the matter with the lad, she was plainly making things worse.... Not a bad boy really, for all his occasional chatterings about Socialism ... not very different from some of his own Bendip nephews who had come down from Oxford twittering about ... Fabianism, wasn't it? ... only this fellow didn't twitter, he rumbled ... probably not a bad soldier ... for a militiaman ... quite civilized in his way, for a colonial ... but young, unsophisticated.... Easy meat for Isabella.... H'mph, poor devil....

POOR DEVIL! Why, not long before he had declined to take whisky and there he was now ... plop ... plop ... plop ... he had taken the decanter beside him and was filling his glass with that raw yellow stuff ... right up to the top! The boy must be mad! Isabella must be driving him crazy ... but it would break up the whole party to say anything.... Anyhow, surely he wouldn't drink it all.... No! *Impossible!* ... He had tossed off the whole tall tumblerful as if it were ginger-ale.

Adair Hollister saw the look of consternation in Sir Hector's eyes ... followed his glance down the table.... Horrors! All that raw whisky.... She had heard stories of men dying.... Would it kill Alec?

But he sat there immobile ... gloomy ... wrapped in a cloud of his own broodings ... was he going mad?

She put her fingers on his arm ever so lightly.... He shrank away from her as if she were....

Her lips trembled ... then ... tightened. She would rouse him out of this brooding, she break the spell....

Turning to the Brigadier, she said:

"Did Mr. Falcon ever tell you about his visit to Desmond Law in 1914?"

She guessed that Falcon, who, she knew, saw Desmond Law not as a charlatan but as a messiah, would be roused by mention of his name.

"Why, no? Really?" The Brigadier, feeling the message in Mrs. Hollister's eyes, was affability itself as he turned to

Falcon. He hated Law. That Anglo-Irish dramatist had not merely won himself notoriety by his stage caricatures of British soldiery; he had lately enraged every good Englishman with a pamphlet which was rankly pro-German. A poseur ... willing to sell his country's name if the sale brought him personal publicity.... But he, Hector Bendip, would suppress the bitterness of his feelings.... The conversation must be given any twist that would help young Falcon and keep the party from going to pieces....

"So you saw Law, did you?" he said to Alec. "Do tell us about it."

Falcon spoke slowly, with difficulty. All that raw whisky blazing in his blood ... all those fireflies dancing in his head ... why wouldn't these people let him alone? ... No, he was here at this dinner, he had to go through without showing ... a gentleman must never show his feelings ... not even after forty-eight hours of this.... He had been swollen with passion, with triumph, that day on the rocks ... then, like those heart punches he had got once, when he was a lanky freshman ... thud, thud, thud ... from a heavyweight prize fighter, fifty pounds his better ... thud, thud, thud ... then, too, the world had suddenly grayed.... Well, he had gotten over that.... This now ... if only Isabella hadn't kept pestering him with her "Dear boy...." To be wounded by one woman was enough, but to have another probe the wound...!

But he must keep his attention on this circle of bright, blurred faces that sat politely listening as he stumbled through his narration, telling how, when the First Canadian Division had landed at Plymouth in October, 1914, all the newspapers of Great Britain published editorials of greeting. Varying with the political complexions of the newspapers in which they appeared, these editorials gave widely differing reasons for the arrival of the Canadians. "They have come to fight for the Motherland" ... "To defend the liberty of small nations" ... "To save the Empire" ... "To make democracy triumph."

When Falcon, in London on leave a few weeks after the arrival at Plymouth, called at Desmond Law's apartment at Adelphi Terrace, he learned that other Canadian officers had preceded him in that journey of homage to "the greatest intellectual force in Europe." As Falcon stood looking at Rodin's famous bust of the dramatist, the subject of the bust strode into the room. His entrance was like the flash of a rapier. The glittering gray beard and the long, lean legs streaked across the room as Law, with never a pause for a handshake, commenced talking in his mellow Irish brogue.

"At last," Law said, with a touch of the modesty which had made him world-famous, "I understand the real reason why the Canadians have come to England.... They have come to see me."

Sir Hector frowned.

"I hope you took the conceit out of the fellow..." he commenced. But he saw smiles on all the faces around him.

"What you ought to tell, Alec"—Captain Rump's voice was pitched in much too high a key—"is the story about Law and the other Rodin statue."

"Certainly not," Falcon snapped savagely.

"Why, Alec!" Isabella put a hand on his arm, and again gazed at him as if she were trying to see through the grim mask.

"What story is it, Captain Rump?" Mrs. Palmer-Jewett asked.

"It's about Desmond Law getting photographed in the same pose as Rodin's 'Thinker.'"

"Oh, 'Le Penseur,'" Mrs. Palmer-Jewett corrected.

The Brigadier, wishing to keep the conversational ball rolling at all costs, said:

"Let us hear..."

Rump coughed deprecatingly, then commenced:

"Mr. Falcon, of course, could tell it better, but since he is too modest...."

Falcon, listening to Isabella's murmurs, disregarded Rump.

Rump proceeded: "Mr. Falcon asked Desmond Law where it would be possible to get a copy of the famous Law photograph by Calvin Lindsay Raeburn. You remember reading of the photograph? It created quite a sensation when Law sent it to his lady admirers. It shows him leaving his bath...."

Lady Bendip, hearing Rump's sentences, smiled in anticipation. Sir Hector frowned.

"Raeburn," Rump continued, "apparently conceived the idea of taking Law's photograph in the same pose as 'The Thinker' ... and in the same costume. But Law said he found the pose very difficult to hold, almost impossible. You all remember it, of course? A sitting figure, with back and head bowed, chin in hand, right elbow resting on the knee. Law said the pose didn't suggest thought so much as a somewhat less distinguished..."

"That's enough!" thundered Falcon.

"Mr. Falcon!" The Brigadier, even though he hadn't been attending very closely to the anecdote, was exasperated at this interruption. He would have ordered Falcon from the room if he hadn't realized that it was his own wife's pesterings that had upset the youngster's balance. He turned to Rump and said with a genial nod:

"Come finish your story."

"No, no!" Lady Bendip choked back laughter. "Mr. Falcon is quite right.... Shall we go into the other room?"

* * * * *

Adair hardly knew what chitter-chatter passed between Mrs. Palmer-Jewett and Lady Bendip and herself in the drawing-room during the half-hour or so after dinner before the men rejoined them. The whole evening was to her a nightmare. At first, she had been delighted when she found that Alec was to sit beside her. Then she realized Lady Bendip's strategy. The red headed vixen had put him there only to tantalize him.... Whenever Alec attempted to speak to Adair, Isabella Bendip swiftly intervened.... There had been nothing for her, Adair, to do, but to ignore the situation and talk to Sir Hector ... but all the time she talked to him about ... she knew not what ... she was troubled about Alec.... All the time she was looking at the Brigadier's plump face and pale blue eyes she was seeing the red fires that she had for a moment glimpsed, raging in the gray eyes of the man to her left.... So unlike *him*, who had always shown a passion for self-discipline.... She would have been disgusted if she hadn't known what was so violently distressing him. It wasn't, simply, she felt sure, her assertion that she must remain loyal to Peter.... Although that must have come, when he had looked into her eyes with such triumph, as a soul-shattering shock.... But he had taken that calmly, imperturbably ... would, no doubt, have continued calm and imperturbable ... if it hadn't been for all this harassing from Lady Bendip. What was that woman up to? ... Such pestering might be just enough ... and forty-eight hours of it!

The men rejoined the ladies. The Brigadier gallantly attempted to save the situation with a flow of army gossip.... "You know old Winterbottom? He told me he had gone up, himself, to K. to tell him about shells...."

As he spoke, he was conscious that really he should not repeat this gossip, but under the circumstances ... yet as he looked at the faces round him, he knew that they weren't listening.... All seemed oppressed by the storm that spasmodically flashed its lightnings through the gloom of Falcon's eyes.

Presently Mrs. Palmer-Jewett caught a signal from Adair. Poor girl ... so pale ... ill.... They must go.

Leaving, Mrs. Palmer-Jewett was tempted to treat Lady Bendip to a tongue-whipping with a slow, cold, "*Such a pleasant evening....*"

But then, in Lady Bendip's laughter at one of her own quips ... a most patent piece of silliness ... Mrs. Palmer-Jewett heard the nervous shrillness of hysteria ... she, too, then ... a fool, but suffering for her folly....

Leaving, Mrs. Palmer-Jewett said only, very sweetly, "So sorry." The door closed behind her and Adair.

As the only reason for his presence vanished, Falcon, too, made his excuses to his hostess, murmured apologies.

She replied with a half-sob:

"*Alec!*"

He shook aside Rump's hand offered in aid, trudged slowly, so slowly ... with feet of lead ... with heart of lead ... lead ... lead ... up the stairs ... into the darkness of his room...

Disgraced ... disgraced ... he had disgraced himself utterly, irretrievably ... but what did it all matter ... what did anything matter except to get out of it ... out of it....

"*Out!...*"

Bah! He mustn't shout. He must keep his head.

He raised the window. A soft, salt breeze blew in ... like a cool white hand lightly laid on his forehead.... A cool white hand.... No.

He walked over to his dressing table, opened the drawer, placed his hand on something hard, metallic.... Its hardness felt good to him ... only the hard things were good....

It was still in his hand as he walked back to the window ... the fireflies dancing in his head....

He paused at the window, listening to the ripple, ripple of the oak-leaves gently stirring in the gentle breeze.... He heard, far off, the swing and the surge of the sea on the rocks ... and beyond the sea lay France....

* * * * *

Lady Bendip, pale and weary after the agitation of the evening, lay back amongst the gray and gold cushions of a long gray sofa.

She turned her head listlessly towards Sir Hector. She said: "Such an evening.... I need something to brace me. May I join you and Captain Rump in your 'night-cap'?"

Presently a tray appeared with soda syphon and decanters.

Lady Bendip's tongue tingled as she sipped the golden-brown bubbles.

"Poor Mr. Falcon seemed so upset about saying good-by to Mrs. Hollister." She played with a cigarette as she talked. "I really don't feel easy about his going back to France. Even this evening..." She paused, glanced from Sir Hector to Captain Rump. She had never before spoken quite so fully before Rump. But this evening, what did it matter?

Rump pulled gravely, with fingers from which the cigarette stains were never completely scrubbed, at the two wisps of straw on his upper lip. He was, he felt, being admitted to the family counsels....

Lady Bendip continued: "He had such a queer look in his eyes." Her anxiety trembled in her own. "Do you think ... some one ought to be with him?"

Rump, accepting her suggestion, strode from the room.

After he had closed the door behind him, Lady Bendip turned to Sir Hector:

"Isn't it too bad that Mrs. Hollister played with Alec like that? She hardly seemed the type——"

"Why do you blame.... But if she did it's not entirely to be wondered at. In war-time, of course, such situations...." Sipping his second Scotch and soda, the Brigadier grew garrulous. Told reminiscences of his South African campaign and of the tangles that his friends' wives got into.

Isabella, scarcely feigning attention as she lay back resting, passed her fingers across her eyes. She couldn't quiet her nerves.

She interrupted Sir Hector in his recollections. "Do you think," she said, "Rump has enough tact and presence of mind..."

A shot rang out. A heavy thud.

Isabella leaped to her feet, both hands at her breast.

Sir Hector, older and heavier, set down his glass and rose more slowly.

Neither, for a moment, spoke.

Then Sir Hector, bewildered:

"I can't imagine...."

Isabella, quickly, her voice breaking into convulsive sobs:

"Oh, I'm so afraid...."

She turned and threw herself face downward amongst the cushions.

The Brigadier ran his short, thick fingers over the great coils of her bright hair, very gently. She was beyond his understanding, but not beyond his pity.

Leaving her there, he went up the stairs as fast as his sixty years, his weight and his shortness of breath would permit.

He opened the door to Falcon's room. He saw Rump, silhouetted against the moonlight that shone through the window, bending over....

Rump looked up, came quickly to the door. "He's all right, sir," he whispered as he took the Brigadier by the arm and led him from the room. "He's ... just upset. It ... came very near being a nasty accident."

"Accident?" The Brigadier's eyes questioned Rump.

"Yes." Rump looked very straight at the Brigadier as he replied. "Tell Lady Bendip he was cleaning his automatic ... and he wasn't quite careful."

"Humph," grunted the Brigadier. "He's unhurt?"

"Yes, I came in..." Rump fumbled.

"I see." The Brigadier's eyes were thoughtful. "Poor chap! Well, he'll be going to-morrow. He'll feel better when he gets back on duty.... Is there anything I can do?"

"No, thank you." Rump still stood with his back to Alec's door as if to block entrance. "I think he'd rather not see any one to-night ... any one except me."

"Very well." The Brigadier turned, and commenced to descend the stairs. He saw Isabella standing at the foot, waiting. "It's all right, my dear," he called down cheerily. "Nobody's hurt."

Rump went back into the room where Falcon lay. He wrung out a cold towel. As he laid it on Falcon's head, he examined a swelling beneath the hair.

"You'll feel better in the morning, old Cock o' the North," he muttered to the half-conscious Falcon. "But Yumping Yeesus! that was a hell of a crack I hit you."

Falcon's eyes opened slowly. The corners of his lips twitched slightly.

"You damned fool!" he murmured.

"What's that? What's that?" demanded Rump.

"If you hadn't hit me..." with difficulty Falcon pulled together his wits ... "the gun would never have gone off."

"But I saw you..."

"I was just going to take out the clip—to be on the safe side."

CHAPTER XIV

A thick finger, pointing to a spot on the map, held their eyes. A deep voice, rumbling from behind that finger, made them oblivious to the more distant rumble of guns.

The four company commanders of the McIntyres—of whom Falcon now was one—were gathered about the long deal table in battalion headquarters at Vancouver Lines, five miles back of Ypres. They listened to their Commanding Officer, Colonel Thorsen.

"We have been ordered to raid the Bosch trenches at this place." Colonel Thorsen looked up from the map as he spoke. He had a great, earnest, aggressive head. His men called him The Great Dane. "You see this little bump in the line of their trenches? We have to treat that bump like a sore thumb. Block it off from the supporting trenches and from the trenches to right and left of it. And of course"—his smile was grim—"make an incision in it.

"You are all familiar, I hope, with the details of the trench raid put over by the Royal British Columbians." He looked round the table questioningly, doubtfully. Then proceeded: "It was the first organized trench raid, and we can't do better than follow it in so far as we can."

His slow, heavy voice quickened its pace a little as he described that raid. First, the long preparation for it, extending over so many weeks; the choice of officers, of men; the specific training for it, on patrol in the dark wilds of No Man's Land at night, and later, back in corps reserve, on full-sized dummy trenches modeled from aeroplane photographs of the German lines. Then, the day before the night set for the raid, the long artillery bombardment, ranging up and down the German lines, smashing wire and damaging trenches here and there, but not concentrating on any spot in such a way as to call to it the attention of the German command. Next, the patrol preceding the raiding-party, finding the wire insufficiently cut, after all, by the shell fire, set to work to cut the wire, strand by strand, by hand. A work not of minutes, but of hours. Undertaken by men lying in cold, wet grass on a stormy, rainy night, under the very noses of the German sentries. And as they lay there in the driving rain, straining their hands on the heavy wire-cutters, hot cocoa was brought to them in thermos bottles to warm them, give them energy.

"That's efficiency for you!" Thorsen glowed at the telling of it.

The wire cut, the raiding-party went through, rushed up the parapet of the German trenches. The officer commanding the party found himself clashing and clanging on a piece of sheet iron that some one had thrown across the German trench at that point, from parapet to paradoss. That sheet iron had been put there by the German sentry. He was standing beneath

it to keep out of the rain. At that sudden thundering over his ears he looked out startled, only to be clubbed into unconsciousness by the hard-striking Canadian. The whole party of raiders went about their work with swift precision. These men, dashing down that trench, pulled down sandbags, barricaded the trench against German reinforcements, leveled their rifles over the barricade to hold off all comers. These others, smashing into dugouts, tossed bombs down dark stairways into huddled masses of recumbent sleepers who woke, startled, to greet a bright burst of horror. These others, again, selected as prisoners the likely looking Huns, quietly bayoneted the undesired....

"The most efficient part of that whole raid," commented Colonel Thorsen, "was the taking of prisoners. The raiders planned in advance to take twelve prisoners. A guard in No Man's Land waited to take the prisoners. That guard had twelve empty sand-bags ready. One sandbag was to take the personal effects of each prisoner so that no source of information should be lost. Each sand-bag had a label to bear the prisoner's name. When the raid was nearly over the officer in charge of the guard telephoned to the officer in charge of the raiding-party—there was a field telephone installed by our signalers in the German front line—that only ten prisoners had been taken. So two more were passed out. Just two."

"How many Germans were there in that bit of trench?" asked Falcon.

"Oh, about a hundred! But"—the Colonel grimaced—"you had better not ask me what happened to the rest of the hundred.... Taken altogether, though, it was a beautiful piece of work. And the actual raid took only something like fifteen minutes. No casualties among the raiders, except one man who stumbled over his rifle on the way back and blew a toe off."

A beautiful job, thought Falcon. As brilliant a piece of work as Drake ever executed in an attack on a Spanish galleon. Exactly twelve prisoners. It wasn't so pleasant to think of the rest of the hundred snoring Germans who had been surprised by these audacious adventurers. Left gasping, groaning, dying, body stretched over body, in the deep darkness at the bottom of their dugouts....

"The question now is," proceeded Colonel Thorsen, "who wants to have charge of this raid? It's not going to be made like that which I have described, in a quiet sector of the line, south of Ypres. It's to be made, as you all see, here"—his forefinger went back to the map—"in a part of the Ypres salient with a particularly evil reputation.

"Some of you"—Thorsen, as he said this looked at Falcon—"have had much more experience with reconnaissance work than the rest. But this will be different from regular reconnaissance work. I don't wish to favor any one of you in this matter.

"You all understand"—his gaze traveled around the faces of the four company commanders—"that the company commander who has charge of this raid will be entirely responsible for its organization. During the raid itself he will not be the officer with the raiding-party. That job falls to a subaltern. The company commander will direct the raid by telephone from our own front lines. He will have a relatively 'cushy' job—unless, of course, he gets blown to bits by retaliatory shell-fire from the Bosches, as happened to O'Rourke of the Saskatchewans. Still, taken all round, it's a good job, with not much added danger. And if the raid's a success, the officer responsible for its organization and direction gets a D.S.O. The subaltern in charge of the raiding-party gets an M.C. Now which of you wants the direction of the raid?"

Falcon didn't speak. His name had been recommended for decoration three times before—by officers outside his own battalion. The recommendations had never been supported, because he had always, over one matter or another, locked horns with his superiors.

He didn't speak now. He didn't wish to seem for ever pursuing a decoration.

"You can put my name down," said Murray, a man big as Thorsen himself, but fatter, without Thorsen's fire.

"And mine," said Burns-Gordon, a quiet, thickly spectacled fellow, an architect in civilian life, and an effective soldier if only he had been more aggressive.

"Mine, too," said Henderson, a tall, dark, dashing fellow, a successful salesman of bonds in earlier days, who

applied his knowledge of salesmanship to the problem of getting ahead in the army. It wouldn't do to let old Thorsen think he was scared to tackle this job. Besides, he would have a subaltern who could be cajoled into doing most of the dirty work—all the preparatory business of training men in patrol work in No Man's Land, and that sort of thing. Probably his own job would be safe enough. And he'd get a D.S.O. for it. Worth the risk!

Thorsen looked at Falcon.

"You're the only one I haven't heard from."

"Oh, well," said Falcon wearily, "you may as well put my name down, too." He wasn't enthusiastic. He had to admit to himself that it was more than a matter of not wishing to be called a ribbon chaser. He was inclined to funk the job. He saw it as a big job with a lot of responsibility. And he was tired of responsibility. He had had such a knack of asking for more than his share of it—even before he took command of Rump's old company. Then, too, he couldn't see the job as being so free from hazard as Thorsen pictured it. Not in the Ypres salient. Not if things were done the way he would do them. And he was tired of danger. Very tired of it. He dreaded the thought of it. However, he would have to let his name stand. After all, he mightn't get the job.

"You certainly held out to the last minute," sneered Thorsen. He had pushed Falcon ahead. When Rump wangled a job at the base in England Thorsen promoted Falcon to command of the company. But the very qualities which made his youngest company commander a good leader made him, too, a bad subordinate. Thorsen lost few opportunities for hitting Falcon over the snout.

Falcon flushed at the sneer. Moved his lips as if to protest. Thought better of it. Remained silent.

Thorsen took a sheet of paper from his field pocket-book, tore it into fours, wrote something on one of the scraps, dropped the four scraps into his tam-o'-shanter and juggled it with both hands.

"You may as well draw for it," said Thorsen. "Murray, you spoke first——"

Falcon watched Murray as he put his fat white hand in the hat. What, he wondered, would happen to the raiding-party if Murray had to organize it? How much training would it get in No Man's Land—under Murray's guidance? Falcon had been in Murray's company as senior subaltern, nine months ago, on his return from Bendip Towers. He remembered making a reconnaissance once, at Murray's request, that had given him his first close-quarter fighting with Germans—if you call shooting at seven yards close quarters.... A ludicrous affair, by comparison with one of these elaborate raids. But it made his pulse throb fast enough at the time.

Falcon had only half his mind on Murray as the latter withdrew his hand from the hat, looked at his bit of paper, and threw it away with a negative shake of the hand. Gazing past Murray, Falcon's eyes studied the knots in the blank wall board. He was recalling in all its detail the whole night of that reconnaissance ... in the middle of August, nine months since....

* * * * *

On the evening before it he, in his dugout, had been reading a letter from Adair. A runner interrupted him: "Sir, Captain Murray sends his respects, and can you come to company headquarters at once?" Falcon returned the letter to his breast pocket and stepped out into the trench.

Two minutes later he had raised the empty sand-bag that hung as a curtain over the doorway and brought his hob-nailed right boot out of the damp mud of the firing-trench into the higher, drier clay of Murray's dugout. His body, bending to avoid collision with the top of the low door-way way, followed the mud-caked boot and brought the other boot after it. He made a gesture of salute to Murray, who sat there in the corner on an upturned box that had once held bombs, his fat, pale face illumined by the unsteady light of the candle that cast wavering shadows on the sand-bagged walls....

"Well, Alec, old boy," said Murray, "we've got a real job for you this time. Brigade wants us to reconnoiter that house along the Wyttschaete-Messines road ... to find out if the Germans still hold it. I'd like to go myself, but of

course"—he waved his hand towards the trench—"a company commander's first duty is to his men."

Alec repressed a smile. He had taken Murray out on reconnaissance ... once. He remembered how Murray had acted.

"You know where the house is," said Murray—"straight down the Messines road. On the right-hand side. Two hundred and fifty yards or so out of our trenches. About fifty yards in front of the German wire. The easiest way to get to it would be down the ditch on the right-hand side of the road. But Brigade says that way's no good. An English officer and three men tried it a month ago. The English officer was killed. Two of the men were badly wounded and taken prisoners. Only one of the party got back to our lines."

Alec lit a cigarette. He was conscious of a growing tension, a slight perspiration.... Well, if he had to do it, he had to do it.

"I'm asking you to go," said Murray, beaming, "because you have always been more interested in reconnaissance work than any of the other subalterns...."

Falcon picked his men carefully. A young sergeant with lean, lively face and large, meditative brown eyes—Sergeant Manson. Enterprising and daring, he had been with Falcon on a ticklish reconnaissance before, and had said, on returning from it, near breathless, with a bullet through his kilt, that he would follow him, if need be, to hell. Falcon chose, too, a couple of good riflemen and a bomber.

It was midnight when they started to climb over the parapet. None of them had had more than four hours' rest a night during each of the preceding three nights—four hours of broken rest in wet, cold dugouts whose dampness made the bones ache.... But the powerful exhilaration of danger made them forget, for the time, their fatigue.

Over the muddied sand-bags of the parapet. Down the slope to the wire. Through the thick apron of wire, one at a time, Falcon leading. At last, with very little noise, very little tanging of the wire, they were all outside. Feeling strangely naked. They talked to each other in whispers.

It was one of those gray nights. The moon, hidden by a thin veil of clouds, was not seen, yet illumined everything, like a face visible only in memory.... In the fields that lay on either side of the road the grass was a silver gray. The road itself was a broad ribbon of gray silk dappled here and there by the deeper gray of the faint shadows of the poplars that, like tall gray guardsmen, lined its sides.

Against the bright gray of the fields, the light gray of the road, the dark forms of moving men would make an excellent target for rifles. Reconnaissance by field or by road, therefore, was impossible. The ditch on the right-hand side of the road was, as Falcon had been warned, watched. There remained then only the ditch on the left-hand side.

Down that ditch Falcon started, Sergeant Manson at his heels, the riflemen and bomber following after. All five on their hands and knees.

Alec's heart pounded as his hands paced the cold, damp earth. Suppose this ditch, too, were watched?

He hoped it wasn't, hoped he and his men could crawl down that ditch to a point beyond the house, then slip across the road at the back of the house, perhaps cut off and capture the German patrol....

He wondered what it would be like to use his automatic in action. He had never used it in action. He had had all too little practice with it. His hurried training in 1914 had been so brief. He knew himself to be, at best, a mediocre shot. And that automatic was his only weapon.... However, he had to go forward.

As he crawled along, the long grasses from the top of the ditch brushing his face, the cold mud at the bottom of the ditch dampening his knees, he peered intently ahead, into the long funnel of shadow that the ditch presented to him. He hadn't gone very far—not a hundred yards—before he stopped, held his breath, fascinated by the glow of a tiny red point down the ditch in front of him. Just the size of the end of a cigarette! And not ten yards away.

He gazed at it, reflected that nobody but a fool—or an enemy of overwhelming self-confidence—would smoke a cigarette in that place. He decided to go on. Sergeant Manson, behind him, was already pressing at his heels. Falcon moved forward again—quietly. But he found it impossible to move at all without causing some slight rustling of grasses. All the time his eyes strained in attention to that red point. With his first rustlings in the grass the red point described the downward arc of a circle. Disappeared.

Nothing now being visible ahead but the long grass and the gloom, Alec thought for a moment he must have imagined that red point.... Nevertheless, his hand sought the flap of his holster, found reassurance in touching the butt of his automatic.

He kept pressing forward—through the mud and through the grass. He had gone another ten yards in silence, noting nothing further, when his hand struck something hard, metallic.

An oblong tin box, packed solid. No, he knew by the feel of it that it was not some new-fangled bomb. It was a tin of iron rations. German iron rations. There was light enough on this almost moonlight night to enable him to discern, vaguely, the German lettering on it.

He felt round with his hand. He found nothing else. Except that at the side of the ditch his hand encountered a smooth, flat place, a place scooped out for a man to lie in and shoot from.

So this was the home, by night and perhaps by day, of the man who had smoked the cigarette—if it was a cigarette. That fellow must act here as a sort of advanced listening-post at night—very far advanced, almost under the Canadian parapet. But he wouldn't bring out food on night duty. Probably that tin of meat had been left by some one posted there during the day. It would be an excellent place from which to snipe.

Falcon showed the tin and the sniper's post to Sergeant Manson. Then pressed on forward. After all, it wasn't sufficient to find one German posted so far in advance of the house. His job was to find whether the Germans held that house. He pressed on forward.

As Falcon crawled on down through the gloom of the ditch, stopping every few yards to listen for noises ahead, to scan the gray fields to the left, the gray road to the right, for any indication of hostile figures, he had a growing feeling that he might be, after all, shoving his head into something as final as a steel trap.

He was coming very close to the house now. There loomed before him the hedge which ran out at right angles to the road, across the way from the house. If he could reach that hedge without disaster, if he and his men could pass that hedge unobserved, they might be able to cross the road behind the house, strike their blow....

As he paused for a moment, twenty yards yet from the hedge, he looked across the road intently at the house. A solid red-brick farmhouse once. Now, war-worn. The roof half gone. The corner of one wall dented in. The windows vacant of glass, black, staring. The whole, in the stillness of the gray night, presented an aspect ominous, forbidding....

As his gaze dropped from the house to the tangle of shadows at its foot, his attention was arrested again by a pin-point of red light. Two pin-points. At a spot immediately beside the house, in the ditch on the right-hand side of the road. The very spot, it must be, where the English reconnoitering party had been destroyed, its leader killed.

These Germans must be very cocksure of themselves, to smoke cigarettes in the open. But why had they so suddenly extinguished them? For the two red pin-points had disappeared.

After all, they had been on the far side of the road, thought Falcon. He had had little expectation of finding the house without a guard of some sort, without at least a listening-post in front of it.

His job still was to keep going down the ditch before him, the ditch on the left-hand side of the road. He pushed on forward.

Ten yards forward. Only ten yards now from the hedge. He paused. Manson paused behind him. The riflemen and the bomber, in single file behind, stopped in their crawling. Not a word was whispered. All were listening ... listening....

To Alec, above the soft blowing of the gentle breezes in the long grass that lay so close to his ears came another sound. A sound as of some large animal—perhaps more than one large animal—breathing deeply in the tangled hedge in front of him. There was a sound, too, of slight movement, as of heavy, clumsy forms trying very hard to be still.

Still, no word, no challenge.

Alec's head was clear ... cool. He had indeed slept very little for three nights. Little enough for weeks before that. But he had never been wider awake in his life than he was right now. Every nerve in his body was taut.

He wasn't, though, going to let his nerves play a trick on him. He was certain there were animals behind that hedge, but he wasn't certain those animals were men. After coming all this way, trespassing so far into the German side of No Man's Land, he wasn't going to do as some of his men had once done on reconnaissance—run away from a rat! Not that this sound of heavy breathing could, by any possibility, come from a rat....

He put his hand to the butt of his automatic, made sure it was ready to draw. Gave a gentle pressure with the toe of his boot to the head of the sergeant behind him. Crawled on forward....

He had gone barely three yards, he was scarcely seven yards from the hedge, when there boomed out hoarsely a voice harsh, guttural and challenging:

"Halt! *Wer da?*"

For all that the challenge was far from unexpected, the actual coming of it was a surprise, a shock, a blow to the senses.... He was now about to attempt the killing, not of tiny gray-blue dots half a mile away, but of warm human flesh and blood, breathing so very near to him, vibrating, no doubt, like his at this very moment, with those twin emotions, courage, fear....

Into Falcon's mind flashed the thought, "Can I bluff them into surrender? Can I make them believe they are surrounded?" He tried to remember German, the German words for "Surrender, you are surrounded." In his imagination he saw himself turning rapidly through the pages of a small red German-English pocket dictionary, trying to find those words. He could not find them.... Perhaps, after all, one of the Germans knew English. All sorts of Germans from England, from America, were back in the German army. He would try English.

In prompt response to the challenge, he thundered as if on parade—and the crashing of his words at least gave his men a chance to slip over, undetected, the safety-catches of their rifles:

"Hands up! You are surrounded!" Then to an imaginary support: "Party on the left, close in!"

For answer, out of the night, out of the gloom of the hedge, two flashes and resounding concussions. A rifle, seven yards away, had blazed at the sound of his voice.

With tense fingers he swung loose his automatic, slipped over the safety-catch, steadied elbow in the cool, damp mud....

There were four gun-flashes to aim at now, guns flaming in rapid succession from the hedge, displaying their spasmodic lightnings a yard above the level of the ground.... The Germans must be firing from a kneeling position, behind the hedge. He and his men at least had the advantage of being down in a ditch, prone.

His hand pulsed hard with the heavy barking of the automatic. One—two—three—four—five—six—seven shots sent in as fast and as straight as he could send them.

At his head, over his head, the German rifles were belching.... From behind him the rifles of Sergeant Manson and his men spat fiercely.

Falcon had to reload. Difficult to reload there, with four German rifles blazing at him from barely seven yards. His fingers trembled as he took out the old clip, shoved in the new.

"Hell!" Something had jammed. Dirt, no doubt, from the ditch had done it. The automatic wouldn't work.

Unarmed ... in the middle of a scrap ... on the German side of No Man's Land....

So this was his destiny—to die like a dog in a ditch, unable even to fight it out to the end.

To hell with destiny! He dropped flat to the bottom of the ditch as he struggled again with that automatic.

Then something happened that made him, for a moment, forget the automatic.

An earth-shaking crash. A red-yellow flash that illumined the darkness.

Falcon, nose to earth, was deafened, stunned by the explosion of this bomb that had burst not a yard from his head. For a second he lay there, not sure whether he was hit, hardly certain whether he was living or dead. He lay there, stunned, for a second....

Then moved, found he could move, found himself whole. Discovered, next, Manson, crawling up alongside him.

"God, I thought they'd got you!" Manson drew a deep breath of relief.

"No, I'm all right," Falcon whispered back. "The bomb burst close, but it was up in the field. I was down here in the ditch. I don't think I'm scratched even."

Both were so excited over the bomb that they didn't immediately realize that the firing of the Germans had ceased. Those four Germans had cleared out, or had been shot down.... They would hardly have *all* turned tail. Some at least must have been shot down.... Was that a sound of moaning?

Quite worth going behind that hedge to investigate ... but Falcon was very conscious of the jammed automatic, of his complete nakedness in an armed land. He had risen to his feet now, stood there talking to Manson, who also stood.

He worked with the automatic, futilely, while he asked Manson: "Where's the rest of our party?"

Manson looked behind him down the ditch. No one there.

"They must have cleared out. Probably thought that bomb had got you."

"I thought it had, too." Falcon forced a grin, invisible to Manson, to cover the fact that his whole body was still in a tremor.

"No use in our staying here," said Manson. "Look at that——"

The whole sky was alive with lights—flare lights fired from the German lines, shooting rockets that traced graceful parabolas of light, interlacing parabolas that formed multitudinous patterns of golden lines, growing and glowing and dying, against the midnight sky.

"We've surely got their wind up," grunted Alec.

"Yes, we had better get out of here before they spray this road with machine-gun bullets," said Manson.

It was a relief to Alec to have Manson suggest retreat. He had more respect to-night for Manson's courage than for his own.

"I wish we could have taken a prisoner," said Alec, "but this damned jammed automatic..."

"At any rate," said Manson, laughing as he led the way back along the ditch, "we have found out whether the Germans still occupy that house."

"Halt!" A high, nervous voice threatened the pair of them as they jogged up the ditch toward the Canadian trenches. The white gleam of a bayonet was shoved under their noses.

"It's all right, Simpson," said the sergeant. "It's just the Lieutenant and me."

"I thought you both were killed," the rifleman gasped as he raised his bayonet. "I thought the Germans were coming."

Beyond Simpson, they picked up the other riflemen and the bomber.

"I couldn't throw my bombs," the bomber explained nervously, "the Lieutenant was so close to the Germans. I would have smashed him up, too. So I just cut loose with my rifle like the others. Then, after the Bosch bomb went off, I was sure they had got you, and my magazine was empty——"

Falcon cut short his explanations. The important thing now was to get back without casualties and give an immediate report. Useless to attempt anything further that night. From all those flare-lights still shooting up across the sky, it was evident that the whole German line, for a mile or more up and down, must be standing to arms, expecting, no doubt, an attack!

With a little less care about the clanging of the wire than they had shown when they started out, they picked and ducked their way back through the barbed strands of the apron before their home trench. Up the forward slope of the parapet—an answer to the sentry's challenge—a scramble over the sand-bags—and they dropped down again, all safe, into the trench from which, less than half an hour before, they had started.

Falcon bade a "good-night" to the rest of the patrol, and proceeded to company headquarters to make his report.

So he came again to that sand-bag that flapped in front of the dugout door. Through the coarse brown meshes of the sand-bag came the glimmer of candles. Through it, too, came the sound of voices raised in talk.

Falcon paused before raising the sand-bag.

It was Kerr's voice he heard, dogmatic, assertive, nasal, as that subaltern, so confident behind the parapet, made his point:

"That bomb *must* have got him. Well, he was looking for it, anyhow. Always looking for adventures, nosing around for a decoration. That kind may have luck for a time, but they all get done in at last——"

"Wasn't he upset about some woman?" murmured Murray.

"They say so." Courtney, the battalion machine-gun officer, spoke now. "Thank God, I've nothing like that to drive me on. No reason to chuck *my* life away. I'll sit right here in this trench until I have to get out of it."

"You can't get away with that, Courtney," Falcon said as he entered. "I've seen you take as long chances as any one."

It was not until he was through with his report and had started back to the dugout he shared with the three other subalterns that he realized how utterly tired he was. All the stimulus of excitement gone, he could hardly keep his eyes open as he dragged one foot heavily after the other.

He lit the candle stub on the empty bomb box in the center of the dugout, felt in his pocket for Adair's last letter.

He drew it from his pocket. Then paused. Held it in his hand unlooked at.

After all, then, he had forgotten—forgotten to keep the promise he had made to Adair when he said good-by to her, a month ago, at Northfield, the day after that wretched evening at Bendip. She would write to him, she said. She would write to him regularly—on one condition. He must make it a point, after reading a letter, to destroy it immediately.

"If anything unfortunate should happen," she had said, "no letters must be found."

If he had been lying out in that ditch now, with his head blown off, and one of Adair's letters in his pocket, how embarrassing to her! ... That was a sweet thought to dream on.... So fine, yet so timid.... Did she value reputation above passion? Or was his bitterness unfair? Was she prompted by something more than a mere cherishing of reputation? Was it her hatred of messiness, her fierce, fastidious pride ... the pride that drove her to the stern self-suppression which, as was evident in that very letter, racked her whole body?

From force of habit, he turned to the leather case which held her photograph. To open that case every night—or morning, to gaze into those dark eyes which expressed so much beauty, so much pain, which suggested always so much tragedy.... This had become with him a religion. He had no other.... Did man fight only because he hadn't yet learned how to love?

He lay on his hard bed. He thought of her great mass of dark hair, which he had never seen let down. He thought of the slender whiteness of her body. He slept. He dreamed....

* * * * *

It was nine months now since that reconnaissance, nearly ten months since he had said good-bye to Adair at Northfield. And he had seen her only once since, when he was in London on leave, for a couple of hours at luncheon....

In those long months he had learned something about reconnaissance. But, he reflected, he was as big a fool as ever in dealing with woman. No. That was no way to think of Adair. It wasn't fair to forget that she was fettered by obligations. Not of sentiment perhaps, but....

* * * * *

"Your turn to draw."

The heavy voice of Colonel Thorsen interrupted his reverie.

Falcon drew, looked without great interest at the paper he unfolded. But his thoughts quickened as he found that he had won the draw.

He held up the paper, signified his finding to Thorsen.

"Next thing is," said Thorsen, "whom will you pick to help you? Of course, the whole party will have to be volunteers. But you'll get a wide range of volunteers to choose from."

* * * * *

Back in his own company headquarters, Alec took out the map which Thorsen had given him, looked again at the outline of the small salient which it would be his duty to raid. He knew well the sector of British trench from which the raid would be launched. The first task would be to acquire a thorough knowledge of the No Man's Land that lay in front, and to train men who were accustomed to the comradeship and comparative security of the trenches to work, more or less independently, in the open in the dark. No easy matter. Few men were fitted for such work.... Time after time he had taken out good riflemen on patrols and instructed them to maintain a diamond formation that would protect the flanks and the rear of the party pivoting on him as the leader. Almost always he had found, before a quarter of an hour was up, that the rest of the patrol had forgotten all his instructions, were following him in single file as intelligently as sheep—and with about as much value if they had bumped into Germans and had had to deploy for fighting. As a company commander responsible for the safety of a piece of front-line trench and the men in it, he had indeed had very little reason for venturing out into No Man's Land during recent months. Nevertheless, he had kept up the practice which he had formed when he was battalion intelligence officer, half a year earlier. He knew that, if he used his head, he incurred very slight additional risk by going out on patrol. He enjoyed the brief freedom, the exhilaration of playing with danger. And he profited by earning the increased respect of his men, to most of whom the dim land beyond the most advanced listening-post was a region of mystery and dread.

He had latterly found it most convenient to go out with only one companion. Since the gallant Sergeant Manson, for

whom he had developed not only respect but affection, had been killed four months earlier—not when taking a "long chance" on a patrol, but, as the ironic Fates ordained, when back in a quiet bit of support trench, shaving in front of his dugout—Falcon had found another sergeant to accompany him. An ex-sailor who held a master's certificate in the mercantile marine. Lately, a prospector in the gold-fields of Northern Ontario. Before that, engaged in the mahogany trade in Central America. A quiet-mannered little man with a dreamy eye. Born to adventure. Sergeant Wickham would be the very man for this raid.

Alec's attention was distracted from the field message-book in which he had been jotting down names, ideas, by the steady increase in the pounding of the guns. The Third Division must be getting it heavy, up there in the Salient. A division, too. What were the Germans up to?

Back to his notebook. But another interruption. A shadow fell across the page as a stocky figure bulged in the doorway.

"Beg pardon, sir-r-r!" The company sergeant-major saluted. "The new draft has arrived and the men for B Company have been told off. Would you care to inspect them now?"

Alec rose and followed the C.S.M.

"What do we draw this time, sergeant-major?"

"These lads are from the west, sirrr. A good-looking lot, but they've all been trained with the Ross rifle. Never had a Lee-Enfield in their hands until they reached the base. And haven't had a chance to do anything with it since except lug it up here."

"Lucky we're back in corps reserve," commented Alec.

"That's what I say, sirrr," purred the sergeant-major. "Lorrd, suppose we were going right up into the front line to-night. Suppose the Bosches put on a raid and we had to fight, or to counter-attack, where would the poor fules be, an' them as defenseless as babes? I can't understand why those people at the base——"

"Call the parade to attention, sergeant-major."

"Par-a-ade, h'n!"

Falcon looked them over. A good, upstanding lot. His eye was caught, suddenly, by a familiar face in the rear rank... Again he was looking up into a face that grinned drunkenly down at him ... again he felt the grip of ham-like hands on his shoulders ... again he heard the singing and the shouting: "The harlots of Jerusalem, the harlots of Jerusalem... More like Texas every day."

When the parade was dismissed, he stepped over to speak to Private Cud Browne.

Falcon waived rank for a moment, insisted on a handshake. Browne hesitated, embarrassed, then shoved forward a big red paw.

Falcon said:

"I never bought you that new pair of pants, but now it won't matter."

"A cowboy in a kilt will be a strange sight ... *sir*."

Falcon's smile changed to a frown. He said:

"That's nothing. We've had French-Canadians who couldn't talk English in kilts, we've had Russian laborers from northern British Columbia in kilts, we've even had a negro or two in kilts. There's nothing that people who plan the drafts won't do—except to send us men from our own reserve battalion. Are there any more from the Bar Ninety-Nine

along with you?"

"Colonel Carson was in the same draft, but his detachment has gone to a different company.... He's *Private* Carson now."

"Colonel Carson—Private Carson? What do you mean?" exploded Falcon.

"The old man went in the ranks."

"Why the hell——?"

"He thought it would help recruiting. And it did. He went round the country giving war-talks to help the recruiting officers. He would go in the ranks himself, he said, if the men he was talking to would follow him. Him being such a well-known figure, that had a big effect. When he came out, in private's uniform, the crowds went crazy. Hundreds followed him into the ranks. Now, he says he's honor bound to stay there. At the base he wouldn't even take a stripe."

"That's magnificent ... but damned silly. We can't afford to let a man with his experience stay in the ranks. I must talk to him."

"You'll find him a hard man to change. He's too proud to be anything but a private."

"Sirrrr."

Company Sergeant-major Cunningham was again at Falcon's elbow.

"Would you be good enough to sign these passes for the men?"

Falcon took the handful of passes back with him to his company headquarters, passes that would let the men named go back for a few hours to Poperinghe, baths, good meals, good smokes, a soldiers' club, a few drinks in "estaminets," a little period of forgetfulness of the trenches and of ever-impending danger.

He sat down, took a pencil, commenced to sign the passes.

Another figure appeared in the doorway—not the C.S.M. this time—a trowsled runner from battalion headquarters.

Falcon initialed the message that was handed to him. The orderly proceeded on his way.

The message read:

"All leave canceled."

What was up?

Falcon gave the news to Sergeant-major Cunningham. Then strolled over to battalion headquarters and asked for Colonel Thorsen.

Colonel Thorsen, summoned suddenly, had gone to Brigade.

Alec consulted the adjutant, a small, fair man, through whose spectacles peered short-sighted but observant eyes.

"We don't *know* what's up, Alec," the adjutant said. "I doubt if the staff does either. But there's a rumor the Bosches have broken through the Third Division front. If so——" He paused, made a wry face.

"We counter-attack?" supplied Falcon.

CHAPTER XV

A world of snowy tables, bright with silver, warm with ascending steam, a world of women with long, sweeping curves, peacocking it in richly colored gowns, and of men with straight, square shoulders, all in khaki, save for an occasional adventurer in mufti ... all this surrounded Adair as she sat with Alec in the Carlton, waiting for tea. But she saw nothing of the scene ... she hardly heard the orchestra as it played the popular favorite ... "Are you there, little Teddy Bear? Naughty, naughty-one Gerard!" ... She was hardly listening even to Alec as he spoke in his deep voice, usually quick but to-day, heavy, slow.... She was so intent on seeing him, feeling his presence.

Only six months since she had seen him last, yet now he looked ... middle-aged ... thirty-five? forty? ... he couldn't be more than twenty-five ... he was nearly five years younger than she ... "old enough to be his mother" ... what a riot of laughter that had sent him into.... Now, so grim, so tense-jawed....

*"If you can force your heart and nerve and sinew
To serve your turn long after they are gone...."*

He had told her that he had recited that bit from "The Soldiers' Laureate" to himself a hundred times in that last attack.... Well, he had held on.... By all the stories she had heard, that long column in the *Times*, it was something more than holding on.... "You can hardly imagine," he had written her, "the passion of our men for the good name of the Division" ... yet he was a pacifist ... a pacifist with a ribbon on his chest ... if only she could touch that ribbon, just once ... with her lips.... But his eyes, so utterly weary ... as if he had discovered in that last attack the whole meaning of life ... and found that it was nothing....

No ... she certainly wouldn't speak about her own troubles. A woman could show courage, too, and pride. Not a word would she say about the weeks of anxiety, illness, that lay behind her.... He had admired the high color in her cheeks.... "I have never seen you look so well," ... the dear, big simpleton.... Very well, let him admire.... What did he need to know about thermometers, afternoon temperatures ... let him admire that high color!

She said: "Don't sit away over there. Sit here." Her hand flashed an indication to a place beside her.

"I shall never succeed," she added, laughing, "in playing Beatrice to your Dante."

He, gazing at the scene which she ignored, beheld it all, yet, in the stupor of fatigue from which he had not yet recovered, noted few of its details.

Tidderum ... tidderum ... tidderum ... his fingers drummed lightly on the table.... That orchestra soothed, stimulated.... *Are you there, little Teddy Bear?* ... made him forget the stupendous concussions that had shaken the earth in that last ... what stunning women ... and the men, so well-groomed ... every one of them bathed once, twice, every day ... lavender-scented soap, an odor so much pleasanter in your nostrils than decaying.... *Glad to see you're back, dear Teddy....* Back? Back after that June show at Ypres.... Those writhing bodies ... the dying who called "For Christ's sake, kill me!" ... *Naughty, naughty-one, Gerard.*

The hand of the waiter placed before them pyramids of enticement, then silently vanished.

Adair said: "Thank Heavens we haven't had to cut out tea yet."

Every movement of her hands as she handled the tea things, every glance of her eyes, every ripple from her lips, fascinated Alec, cast a spell over him. The soft green folds of her dress seemed to fall into the cool green light around them.

"They say," she bubbled, "that if those U-boats keep on sinking our supply ships we shall have to turn cannibals." She shot him a glance full of merriment as she passed him his teacup—What *could* she do to raise him from his depression? "I've heard," she added, "that Englishmen taste salty."

But Alec's smile was forced. He had looked forward for so long to seeing her ... but now that she was so near, she seemed so far away. A bright figure in a world of dreams.... "A green thought in a green shade...." There was only one reality.... *P-f-f-f-t pling!* ... *Wh-o-o-o-o plang!* ... Easy enough last night when he taxied from the leave train to his hotel to discard his trench kilt with its thousand vermin in the back of every pleat. Easy enough to lie in the white enameled tub of warm ... ah, *hot!* ... water, and lather big muscles and broad chest with lavender-scented soap ... but not so easy to shake from his spirit the heaviness of that disastrous, though reputedly successful attack.... "The Division has reason to be proud," said the Major-General to the troops on parade.... Proud? Yes ... but what did it matter, what did anything matter? ... He, Alec Falcon, had conducted three firing parties in three days to bury three of his best friends ... slow march ... arms reversed.... Lament for Flodden.... "The Flowers of the forest." ... The Last Post.... The bugles calling.... To-whooo-to-whooo.... *Present arms!* ... Broken earth plumping on strong boxes full of broken bodies.... A big strapping fellow, but all that was left of him went into a gunnysack.... No need to tell his wife.... "You should feel proud of your husband ... met his end like a gallant gentleman." ... Not quite enough of him to fill a sand-bag.... Well, what did it all matter, what did anything matter? ... To bury three friends in three days, without wetting an eyelash ... and one of them killed within a yard of him.... Dry-eyed, griefless, indifferent, he had buried them ... part of his job.... "You ought to go out for a rest," said the medical officer, "I really ought to insist on it." ... Well, why didn't he insist? ... A gentleman couldn't say "Please, send me back." ... A gentleman couldn't walk out.... He would wait till he went for a ride ... on a stretcher.... Anyhow, the battalion was short of senior officers ... and they went into support in the next attack ... not that he was worth much ... afraid he would grovel like an idiot ... but he was there ... the men knew him ... sort of symbol ... and after all, he had come through all right.... He was tough and he was lucky ... here he was on leave ... he was all right ... but dull ... what a dull fool she must think him!

He said: "My coming must have taken you by surprise."

Adair's eyes grew serious.

"Yes." She was so sorry he hadn't been able to let her know earlier. She had postponed her visit to the Willertons once before—when he had first said he hoped to come on leave. Then he hadn't come—until now, unexpectedly. And she could hardly postpone her visit again. Couldn't explain.... "They're very particular in-laws, you know."

There was more to it than that ... so much more ... but she dared not tell him ... she dared not stay.

He didn't seem disappointed ... he seemed as if nothing could disappoint him ... or interest him ... as if nothing greatly mattered....

He said: "Since I have only this hour with you, I must make the best of it. I have a lot to say."

"Yes?" She, too, had a lot to say, but she mustn't say it. She would like to kiss his lips into a smile ... but she mustn't do that either.... This business of having a husband in Germany ... prisoner-of-war? ... *She* was the prisoner of war ... ill, too.... "You must avoid all excitement," said the doctors ... *the doctors* ... "after life's fitful fever." ... What did it all matter, to her any more than to him? What did anything matter but *this*.... This relationship that had given her whole life a new significance ... and what did this matter unless it were held aloft, fine and fragile ... not allowed to drop into the dust ... shattered!

But she must listen to his words as well as his voice. He was telling her that a request had come from Militia Headquarters in Canada the he go back there to take command of one of the new battalions. It would mean a lieutenant-colonelcy. But the C.O. had refused to let him go. Didn't want his organization broken up.

"Surely," said Adair, "it's a compliment to be deemed indispensable."

"Compliments don't defend one from bullets, and," he added, bluntly, "I've had my bellyful of danger ... I wanted to get back to Canada. I thought perhaps"—his gray eyes questioned her—"that you might have been willing to go back with me?"

She shook her head slightly, without speaking. Then: "But in any event, that is all past?"

"No." Now that he was back on leave it would be a simple matter to see the authorities, pull a few wires, secure a

transfer. "But it wouldn't be worth while unless you would come with me."

Adair murmured huskily: "No, I'm sorry. I can't do that. I couldn't possibly do that."

Yet if they had been alone and he had taken her in his arms with hot compulsion ... she would have *had* to go.... But they were here in the Carlton, under the gaze of a hundred eyes. He, far from dominating her, was as easy to control as an exhausted child. She had no excuse for yielding. She *would* not yield....

"No, no, no! You mustn't ask me...."

She paused. She said more slowly: "Do you know, I don't think you really understand yourself? I don't think you would be happy to leave your men and go back to Canada. Not even though, later, you were to go to France again at the head of your battalion."

"No." He laughed a little sadly. "It is you who do not understand me." He was tired of the War, he said, tired of taking any part in it, To him the whole thing was nothing but a gigantic futility, a world-embracing insanity. He would be glad to get out of uniform to-morrow—if he could do so decently. Since he couldn't do that, he would like to get a good safe berth, at the base or in Canada. He would like to live till the War was over, "if only," he said with sudden passion, "to damn it."

He noticed her passing her finger-tips across her forehead, then suddenly, with quick fierceness, pinching the inner corners of her eyes as if to check back ... when she dropped her hand, he saw that her eyes were shining.

But her voice was strong and even as she said: "Won't you go back to Canada anyhow ... by yourself? ... You know I'm neither socialist nor pacifist. I don't want to see the War end till we've won it ... but I do want you to be out of it.... You've done your share."

He answered nothing for a moment. Then with a smile like a gray dawn—the kind of dawn she imagined when they shouted "Stand to" in the trenches—he said: "Perhaps after all you were right when you said I shouldn't be happy to leave my men. Duties to mankind are so nebulous. Duties to men are so definite."

Glancing again at his ribbon, her face brightened. It was so nice, she said, that he had both his Majority and his D.S.O.

"They mean little," he said. He explained that he was only a junior Major—a sort of senior company commander who might, on rare occasions, be called on to fill a vacancy at battalion headquarters. "And decorations are becoming so common. Without one, an officer is 'naked on parade'."

"Do tell me just what you got it for." The *Gazette*, she said, had announced merely "for conspicuous dash and gallantry in leading an attack."

"H'mph." There flashed across his memory a spitting of machine-gun bullets, bullets crackling very close to the heads of his men and himself as they lay out there in the open. He heard himself giving the order to prepare again to advance. The word came back from the Sergeant, "There are only eleven men left who can stand on their feet, and most of them are wounded." He saw himself very desperately raising the whistle to his lips, blowing the signal to advance again to the attack.... A short, hopeless rush ... an attempt to crash through a thick, tangled hedge.... The cries of men who dropped, gutted ... a feeling that to live was to acknowledge defeat ... an order uttered in bitterness ... a new trench dug with frantic fingers by men too dazed with fear to ward off death, yet still mechanically obedient to the hoarse imperatives of their crazy-eyed commander....

He said to Adair, very soberly: "Do you wish to know the truth? ... I was decorated because I was afraid to run away. I was promoted because I lacked the courage to get killed."

"What nonsense!" she said, laughing. "Only a fortnight ago I came across one of your men when I was visiting in a hospital ... he said they would all follow you to the devil."

"Who was it?" asked Alec.

"Some queer name. Choywhinski, I think ... from Saskatchewan. A fat fellow with curly hair, bald on the crown."

"I know the man. I overheard him say, once, that if he ever got the chance, he'd shoot me in the back. The only reason he didn't do it in this last attack was, I suspect, that he was facing the wrong way."

"What a cynic you are!"

"No, only a realist."

"What's the difference?"

At that moment up bounced an expansive lady in a Queen Mary hat.

"Oh, my dear, my dear!" Her gush swept over Adair like a breaker. "You *will* excuse me for interrupting you, won't you? I'm so glad to see you.... And do tell me"—she shot an inquisitive glance at Alec as she cackled at Adair—"how is your poor, dear husband in Germany?"

When at last Mrs. Bonington Burgess bustled away, Adair rose. There was hate in her voice as she said: "That old *gossip*...."

Scandal ... detestable ... not but that, if it hadn't been for her confounded "*poor dear*" husband in Germany, she would have gone to live with Alec ... and not given a *damn* ... but that she couldn't do ... yet ... and she would *not* be the subject of slimy whisperings ... she must leave.... Alec would think her ... well, let him think ... if he didn't know her by this time ... anyhow, she must leave this place....

As people looked at them walking out, she first felt uncomfortable ... then ... chin up ... she so tall and slim with her green toque and her green gown, and he with his dark kilt swinging as he walked, and his gold sporran with its great beard of silky black hair and its three white tassels striking first the right thigh, then the left.

* * * * *

In the half-darkness of a theater, an English Major-General with a keen student's face and a V.C. ribbon leaned over towards Falcon.

"Corking show, don't you think?"

"Yes, sir," responded Falcon, with as much display of enthusiasm as he could muster, "it's the best thing of the sort I've seen for a long time."

That, after all, was true. He hadn't seen a musical comedy for months. And he hoped he wouldn't see one again for years. What a way to waste the afternoon of a day on leave!

That fellow, there, in the center of the stage. Strutting up and down ... strutting up and down. And all those yapping chorines. To go through all those months in the trenches—for this!

Four days had gone and there was little enough to show for it. One hour with Adair, that first day ... then four days of respectable dawdling in London. That would leave four more days for trifling with dinners, drinks and shows. Then back to France—and what?

Rage swept over him. Why devote his whole life to a girl who would hardly spare him an hour of her time? Tea with Adair was far more delightful than breakfast with the most charming demi-mondaine. But he couldn't, again, have tea with Adair.

He murmured an excuse to his companion, rose in the darkness, slipped out of the theater.

Ten minutes later he was standing at the bar of the Prince Rupert Lounge, sipping a long whisky, smoking a long Corona.

He looked around the room. At thirty or forty tables, fashionably dressed women were having tea with officers. Most of the women were too much made up.... But not much more than their non-professional sisters.

The faces of most were empty, silly, unattractive. An evening in their society would change boredom from an irritation to an agony. He, experienced, looked searchingly to find some girl whose charm would rest on a securer basis than rouge. Deliberately, he studied every girl in the room.

His eye, at last, rested on one at a corner table. She, veiled, was drawing off her gloves to take tea when she saw a young English officer coming towards her: a large-nosed, high-voiced youth, with a fine opinion of himself, made plain in his strut. Glancing at him, past him, her eye caught Falcon's. She twinkled.

The English subaltern bent over her, placed his hand on the back of the chair beside her, was evidently going to seat himself at her table. She played the part of Virtue, drew herself together, spoke sternly.... The subaltern slunk away abashed, confused, humbled, a mountain of apologies.

Falcon, surveying the comedy, chuckled inwardly. Smiled outwardly, too, a moment later as he saw her raise her laughing eyes to his.

He crossed over.

She was not quite handsome. Her features were too irregular for that ... high cheek-bones and a wide mouth. But she had very interesting dark eyes. She was dressed with sober elegance ... fastidiously groomed. She chattered in low, seductive tones which tickled his fancy the more because of the foreign flavor of her speech. As she told of the English subaltern so quickly dismissed, her sentences had a humorous quirk to them. She was, thought Falcon, a very charming Russian.

As, a few minutes later, they alighted from a taxi, Falcon was too engrossed in talking to Myra to notice the address. He only observed, vaguely, that it was a very pleasant neighborhood and that the house towards which they had turned had a green door resplendent with clean paint and gleaming brass.

They walked up the stairs a flight to her apartment.

The living-room was large, high-ceilinged, cleverly decorated. Some water-colors on the walls such as might have been executed by a young artist or by an amateur of talent. One striking oil painting in the style of, and, Falcon noted with amusement, boldly signed by an artist who was not less famous for the brilliance of his work than for the freedom of his life.

Myra watched Falcon as he looked at the oil. "I used to be his pupil," she explained.

Falcon made a half-bow to the pupil of the great. He said: "In what capacity, may I ask?"

She laughed. "You do think you're clever, don't you? But I really was an art student for a while. Those are my water-colors. Yes, they're not bad, are they? But I couldn't afford to keep it up. I had only myself to depend on. Oh, yes, of course you have guessed it.... I started as an artist's model. But my mind was too active. I couldn't be content just to pose. I wanted to live a full life...."

"It is too bad you couldn't have kept it up," said Falcon. "You had talent."

"Yes, but not enough, in that way, to earn a living. After all," she said, smiling, "one may show one's talent in other ways than painting. It is not the only art."

"But you must have done not so badly since." He made a gesture towards the handsome furnishings of the room.

Her face sobered. "I became the mistress of a physician.... After some minor adventures on my part, of course ... I was really in love with him. I had a child by him.... She's out in the country now. He was a top-notch. Harley Street and all that. He liked me, too. He was married, but his wife was ... unresponsive. He set me up in this apartment, furnished it for me, came to see me here."

"Ah," said Falcon, "that accounts for these serious-looking tomes in your book-case."

He examined them more closely. Most evident were the several weighty volumes of Havelock Ellis's "Psychology of Sex."

"Indispensable," she said, "to the serious student of the profession."

Falcon chuckled.

"But where's your friend the doctor now?"

Her brow clouded.

"He went into the army, of course. He was killed at Gallipoli. But it's no use talking about that."

She was silent for a moment, then went on:

"He was very good to me. He even provided for me. Left me, as he thought, well provided for.... But with these war prices..." She waved her hands. "After all, I am young, I am full of vitality. I don't know that I could use it better than by giving a few hours of pleasure to some officer home, tired, from the trenches.... Like you, my dear."

A couple of hours of Myra's society only whetted Alec's appetite for more.

"You are, I hope, without any other engagements for this evening?"

"Except such as you choose to make for me."

"Good. Then you're booked for dinner at the Savoy. Theater at ... what's on at Granville Barker's theater? You have been wanting to go there? Splendid! We can decide on supper later.... Trocadero or Frascati's or whatever you prefer. Perhaps the Piccadilly."

It was very pleasant chatting over the sparkling Burgundy at dinner. Their conversation was not all light. Myra surprised Alec by the bitterness of her passion against war. The natural consequence, perhaps, of the loss of her lover.

"Men have no sense," she cried. "They don't, most of them, know what life has to offer, or they wouldn't toss it away—so." She flipped a bread-crumble to the floor. "And the vast stupid mass drag with them the few who might be great lovers, who might make the world beautiful."

At the theater Alec was interested in the play, but he was more interested in an incident affecting Myra.

An evidently thoroughbred, delightfully white-haired and pink-cheeked old lady, with her son, a captain in the Lancers, sat next to them.

The old lady noted Alec's bronzed face, saw his constant attention to the modestly dressed, merry-faced girl beside him, and sized him up very quickly as an officer on leave from the trenches holidaying with his young wife or fiancée.

She was very charming in her little attentions, lent Myra her beautiful opera-glasses, spoke to her about this and that. Before the evening was over, she called her, in a most motherly fashion, "my dear."

After all, thought Alec, why not? He had discovered in himself a great liking for Myra—this girl who lived outside the conventions, who saw life only in terms of passion.

After the theater they decided not to go anywhere for supper, but to return to the apartment.

They talked very little.... For a long time they were altogether still....

Myra spoke presently:

"I don't think I could ever love a man again in the same way that I loved ... my friend who was killed."

She paused. Then added: "But you ... dear, are a very nice playmate."

Laughing a low, soft laugh, he said only: "Myra..."

After a little while, out of the darkness, she spoke to him again.... Now, not with words but with passion....

Lingering over the accents of that language, he believed, for the moment, that he had discovered something richer than he could ever win from that devotion so long, so austere, and so hopeless....

Out of the darkness, answering, he molded her into the image of his dreams.

With light touches of deft hands they fashioned moments that were undying. It was an hour, a night, that would soon pass, that would never perish.

Mutely, she told of the rhythm that sways the vast, slow-moving seas.

Fiercely, she showed him the fire that whirls the stars in their courses.

Limply, she lay when the last wave of passion had burst like a breaker assaulting a cliff, ascending to heaven ... falling.

* * * * *

Alec rose, next morning, to face a drizzling day. The neat, white-capped maid brought in a tray. Alec and Myra sipped their chocolate together.

"I am very sorry to have to go," he said, looking at his wrist watch. The small hand was crawling towards eleven. He said he had promised very definitely to visit that day a wounded brother officer who was the guest, in Oxfordshire, of a celebrated member of the Cabinet popularly known as "Zu-Zu."

He added: "I must see you again, my dear."

She laughed. "Of course. I have put my card in your pocket."

He reached for his wallet.

"No, no," she remonstrated. "You mustn't spoil it all. We have both had a taste of delight. We have created"—she sighed—"a pleasant memory."

"But you must at least," he insisted, "allow me to leave you something with which to get ... a more permanent remembrance." He had not forgotten that she was, after all, a lady with a not quite sufficient independence.

"If you wish it...." She averted her head.

But when he pulled out his wallet and took from it a fat roll of bank-notes, she, spying the roll, had a sudden change of countenance. Those unpaid bills for little Sonia....

Feeling Myra's eyes on him, Alec was a trifle embarrassed, was nervous, awkward, in peeling off the notes. Five of them he was going to give her. And one of the smaller, ten-shilling notes for her maid. But the thin paper notes stuck

together.

Myra laughed at him.

"The more you hurry, the slower you are," she said, "and you trying to catch a train. Here, give them to me. My fingers are quick."

Too quick, thought Alec, as he watched her dexterously strip off not five notes, but eight....

He turned from Myra in her rose-colored dressing-gown, looked out at the driving rain.

Was all that poetry the work of his imagining? Was all her story half a fable?

Nevertheless, he said to himself, as a few minutes later he strolled down the steps and hailed a taxi, that night had been the pleasantest he had ever spent on leave. Perhaps, he reflected grimly, the pleasantest he ever would.

He sagged back wearily in the taxi. His fingers played with Myra's card in his pocket.

Two nights later, Falcon sat in a hotel room in London where half a dozen officers with maple leaves on the lapels of their khaki jackets were entertaining half a dozen women with well-made clothes on ill-made bodies.

Falcon scowled. He had taken this plump waxen blonde on his knee in spite of himself. He was nauseated now as he listened to her quacking away in the harsh accents of rural Ontario.

With utter contempt for her, he poured her, with his free arm, another whisky and soda. The sooner she was completely drunk, the sooner he could get her off his knee and get out of the place.

Dinner-party! Officers' wives!

He snorted. He cursed the brother-officer who had insisted on his coming here. He had left Oxfordshire, foregone the pleasure of a chat with the whimsical Zu-Zu, to keep *this* engagement, to foregather with *these*....

Captains' wives! Majors' wives! Colonels' wives! Lately, no doubt, chairwomen of charitable organizations, sewing meetings, literary clubs. Upholders of respectability in many a flat farming town.

Now celebrating their newly acquired social prestige. Celebrating still more, after so many years of marital stuffiness, independence from husbands placed out there, so conveniently, shoulder-deep in the bloody dirt of battle.

That gaunt female to his right, whose pince-nez wobbled on her inebriated nose as she reeled on the knee of a walrus-toothed captain in the Canadian Army Service Corps ... surely she should be back home presiding at a sewing meeting.

That big fat woman, with the touch of gray in her hair, who was throwing her arms in maudlin fashion around the neck of Homer Smith, that dashing dentist disguised as a subaltern, must be, certainly, the wife of some small-town mayor.

Falcon, who had been known to drink a half-quart of whisky neat between breakfast and lunch without batting an eye, excused himself now on the ground of feeling sick. As indeed he was.

All these women, he thought to himself as he stole out into the cool air of midnight, would consider themselves so immeasurably superior to Myra. He wouldn't, indeed, suggest that any one of them had ever given away that sacred treasure, her virtue. They just indulged in this indiscriminate drunken mawling.

* * * * *

The next afternoon, in his bedroom at the Savoy, Falcon, worried, pressed the button marked "Valet."

"Did you find a card," he asked, "in the left-hand breast pocket of that jacket I gave you to press last night?"

The small, pale-faced man shook his head.

"You didn't give it to me, sir. You gave it to the man who was on duty last night."

"Can I get in touch with him—quickly?" Falcon spoke urgently, jingled coin in his pocket.

The little man was honest.

"I'm afraid not, sir. Last night was his last night here. He's gone to join up. Probably on his way to a training camp by now."

Falcon tipped the valet and sent him away.

He couldn't recollect that address, couldn't recollect, either, Myra's long last name. His only chance of finding her, then, was to visit the Prince Rupert Lounge, and she had said she didn't go there so often. But he had suspected her of fibbing.

Yet, when he arrived at the Lounge, he found no sign of Myra. He lingered a long time over his brandy and soda, but Myra didn't appear. He described her minutely to the barmaid. The barmaid remembered her. Yes. Myra was so different from most of the crowd. But she had not, as the barmaid recollected, come there at all until recently, and then not very often....

He crossed over, finally, to a handsome, red-haired girl. But for all her good looks, she proved a dull companion.

With women, with himself, he experienced suddenly a profound disgust. He lusted for asceticism, for hardihood. Rather than yield any further to the seduction of the senses, he would cut short his leave. He would return now to France, to his men, to the long marches down the cobble-stoned roads, to the long vigils in the trenches. There he could convert this torturing energy into the driving force of ambition. He wondered how many other men felt that way ... the husbands who plunge into war to get away from the bitterness and emptiness and drabness of home ... the young men who clamber over parapets dreaming of beauty they will never embrace ... the old men who thunder in parliaments because their heads are hot and their hearts are cold....

And he thought: does man fight only because he hasn't yet learned how to love?

Returning to his hotel, he went to the desk for his key. Should he tell the room clerk now that he would leave to-night?

The room clerk handed him two telegrams: Isabella Bendip would be in town to-morrow. Could he lunch or dine with her? The second was signed "Beatrice Norton." Oh, yes, he remembered her. A great friend of Phyllis Howard's. Phyllis had mentioned her in letters. Beatrice, he supposed, had come to England to be near her brother. Now, he had heard, wounded and in hospital.... She, too, wanted to see him to-morrow.

He reflected.... He would do two jobs at once—no, three. He would ask Isabella and Beatrice to dinner and the theater together. Isabella would certainly act as if she owned him. Beatrice would quickly enough report the entanglement to Phyllis, and *that* delightful youngster would be under no illusions that his friendship for her was anything more than a friendship.

And the name of Adair would figure in it not at all!

* * * * *

Two nights later Falcon sat slumped in the corner of a first-class coach at Waterloo Station. It was the "leave" train, crowded with officers and men returning to France.

Two English subalterns were opposite him. The taller was fair-haired, with excellent features but with eyes empty of intelligence. The smaller was dark, pimply-faced, insignificant. Both were half drunk.

The small, dark, pimply-faced subaltern was peering out of the window, looking, apparently, for some one on the platform.

"There she is!" he cried. "Good old Stella!"

He jumped up, ran out of the door of the compartment.

Stella was in her early twenties. Bright cheeks. Sparkling eyes that didn't avoid Falcon's as he glanced out at her. A head carried high with the assurance of beauty.

What a sister for such a brother! Falcon couldn't imagine anybody but a sister wasting affection on that pimply little runt.

The guard whistled. Stella and the subaltern exchanged kisses.

The pimply subaltern jumped back into the coach. Flopped down beside his dozing, fair-haired friend. Spoke loudly, with the boastfulness of those who are full of drink and empty of manners, to Falcon:

"See that girl? A fine piece, isn't she? I had her all last week."

Falcon glanced at the one star on the other's cuff.

"I should think," he said lazily, "that you would be too handsomely described by the conventional phrase—a wart on the backside of the British Army."

The human pimple leaped to his feet.

"If you weren't a field officer," he shouted, "you wouldn't *dare*..."

The guard threw open the door. Called to some one behind him:

"Here you are, sir. Here's a seat. Just in time."

A short, plump figure, bright with the gold and scarlet of the Staff, bustled in.

The guard closed the door, locked it. The train started.

Falcon found sitting beside him Brigadier-General Sir Hector Bendip.

Sir Hector nodded cordially to Falcon. Glanced at the other two occupants of the compartment. Saw that they were only subalterns. Ignored them. Turned again to Falcon, who was, at any rate, a field officer. A D.S.O., too. Not that that mattered. Sir Henry himself had received his D.S.O. in the South African campaign, and in the present war had acquired the C.M.G. and half a dozen foreign decorations ... his reward for what Isabella had described as "distinguished service at the rear."

"So sorry," he said, gleaming genially at Falcon through his monocle, "that we weren't able to have you down to the Towers this time." The place, he said, was full of convalescent officers. He feared Isabella was wearing herself out over them. She did see Falcon, though, didn't she, yesterday? She had to come up to town, and she had said she might see him. "I forgot to ask her about it at lunch to-day. I had so much to tell her about my new appointment.... Transferred to France, you know...."

Falcon said "Yes." He had had the pleasure of dining with Lady Bendip last evening. "She is well to-day?"

"She seems somewhat upset. Lobster, or something that she had, yesterday, didn't agree with her. She has a

headache. But no doubt it will soon pass off."

The Brigadier went on to talk of his new appointment. Alec lent half an ear to him, gave his whole mind to thought of Isabella.

He, Alec, had been the lobster that upset her. And, he reflected sardonically, what a lobster!

In his new asceticism he had thrown away an opportunity that would surely never return. After his recent adventures, he saw a fineness in Isabella that he had missed before.

He had never seen her more handsome. Nor more passionate.

A thousand slight hints during the evening, at dinner, at the theater, at supper. Far more than enough to convince the observant Beatrice Norton that Alec's heart was inextricably tangled in those coils of titian hair. And Beatrice would write, no doubt, to Phyllis....

All as he had planned. Yet he didn't feel so very pleased about it.

He had an all-too-vivid memory of his good-by to Beatrice. She, a bright figure standing on the top of the steps leading into the Ritz, called down to him as he turned to go back to the taxi that held Isabella:

"Don't you want to send your love to Phyllis?"

There was little enough in the words, but there was something in her manner of saying them that made him feel as if she had drawn off one of her long white gloves and very coolly, very deliberately, had used it to strike him across the face.

Back in the taxi, he flopped into his corner, thinking, not so very proudly, of all that he had done, of how quickly he had forgotten Phyllis when he gazed into the grave eyes of Adair. Meanwhile, Isabella pressed a silk-stockinged knee against his, talked to him in her quick, impulsive way.

No doubt that was only one of her quick impulses, later, in the sitting-room of her suite at the Carlton. That sudden switching out of the lights....

"Just a good-by from a sister," she said afterwards, as she found him, at best, no more responsive than a brother.

Perhaps she was right. Perhaps that was all it was. Yet he couldn't *quite* imagine a sister putting all that passion into.... Sister! She was ready to envelope him in fire!

He glanced at Sir Hector. Her husband! *That* little round bellyful of port....

"So then I went over to see Sir Henry Cherington at Corps Headquarters..." The Brigadier puffed along, speaking of famous generals with the easy familiarity of one who had known them as cadets at Sandhurst....

Since Sir Hector evidently gave Isabella nothing but boredom, he, Alec, might surely have given her something pleasanter than a headache. It was memory of Adair that had held him back. A light affair such as that with Myra hardly mattered. This other would have been an indelible stain on that loyalty he had once more sworn to himself to hold as a religion....

Loyalty? Religion? Wasn't he an incurable sentimentalist? If he had given Isabella an hour of pleasure, who else would have known? To whom else, not knowing, would it have mattered?

"I ran into that chap Bellairs Hill again"—the Brigadier was rattling along as fast as the train—"when I dropped in at the Second Army school. He was delivering a lecture. I dropped in. He's a clever talker. Lots of ideas, too. But the way he talked you'd think he had more ideas than all the generals in France. He was telling about a trip he had made to Italy. Some special mission for the Government. He made a great deal of it. Told the hundred-odd officers in the room

that what he was going to speak of must be kept absolutely secret. Had them lock all the doors and shut all the windows so that, I suppose"—Sir Hector chuckled—"none of the grooms and batmen could hear. And then he told them——" Sir Hector hesitated, paused. Took off his monocle and polished it. Then proceeded nonchalantly: "I've forgotten just what it was he told them.... I expect it didn't greatly matter."

"Poor muddle-witted old Brigadier!" thought Falcon. And he started chatting briskly about the theaters he had visited on leave.

Sir Hector, for his part, lay back resting. The monocle had dropped from his right eye and was dangling at the end of its cord. His eyelids were half shut and his face looked gray and wrinkled and very old.

Both he and Falcon would be back in France to-morrow, but he wouldn't face in a week a thousandth part of the danger that would confront young Falcon every hour. Nor of the discomforts. Nevertheless, it was a hard life for a man of his age. The constant drive, drive, drive of speeding men and supplies to the front was beginning to tell on him.

Yet he knew it wasn't this which made him feel now so old and so weary. It was the strain of talking about little things when you had a big thing weighing on your heart....

He couldn't believe that young Falcon, with his kindly gray eyes, would have played such a rotten trick on him, his former host, as to have seduced Isabella.... Yet Isabella had come to London, certainly, only for that.... It was a wound less to his affections than to his pride.... But Falcon, if he judged him right, would still guard zealously his devotion to Mrs. Hollister, that sweet girl. Could he, Hector Bendip, ask him about Mrs. Hollister...?

No, no. There are some questions one gentleman must not ask another. There are some thoughts every gentleman must keep to himself.

PART II

CHAPTER I

It might rain to-morrow. It probably would rain. This was such a cloudy night. So oppressive. No stars. No moon. Nothing but darkness. Darkness that pressed against their faces. Smothering darkness.

But he must keep awake ... he must keep awake ... he must keep awake ... for all these men behind him.

In the morning he would sleep. They would all sleep, back in the brickfields, back at Albert. In the morning they would sleep, and in the morning it would rain, and they would all sleep in the rain in the brickfields back at Albert....

As he floundered along in the blackness, he dug, like a blind man, with his steel-pointed staff at the ruined road that undulated unevenly beneath his feet. Found, ever and again, a gaping hollow to right or left. Muttered, heavily, to the man at his heels:

"Ware hole!"

And the hoarse murmur ran down that line of ninety plodding, stumbling men, rippled through the sea of darkness:

"Ware hole!"

"Ware hole!"

"Ware hole!"

So fuddled with fatigue that he could no longer trust either his memory or his sense of direction, Falcon asked the sergeant behind him: "Are you certain we're on the right road, Sanderson?"

"Yes, sir," reassured Sanderson.

At least he had a good sergeant to rely on. But was it right for him.... Was it fair to these men for him to carry on as company commander when he felt all through? Just a shell of himself. Hollow. He knew he hadn't been worth a damn that last tour in the trenches. He had let his senior subaltern run the company....

For the last forty-eight hours they had sat there in the shallow front-line trench expecting an attack, while the Germans shelled, shelled, shelled without intermission twenty-four hours a day. And every few minutes a wounded man or a crazy man crawled past, dragging a broken body or a broken mind back to the dressing-station ... if they ever got back, through all that shell-fire. And all the time, he, Falcon, had sat there, on the shaking mound of earth that covered the spongy body of a dead man ... occasionally licking chunks of bully beef off the end of a jack-knife ... occasionally swigging cold, bitter tea, made in chlorinated water tasting of petrol, out of his mud-caked water-bottle ... occasionally scribbling messages to headquarters.

Of necessity, facetious messages ... with pretty thin humor. "Tell our heavies to lengthen their range. They're dropping cathedrals on our doorsteps. The last one cracked the milk bottles."

When you were nearly crazy, when the men around you were nearly crazy, when crazy men with gray faces and staring eyes were crawling past your feet, you had to make jokes, however rotten they were, to keep yourself sane. And you had to keep sane when you were in command. When, if the enemy attacked, you were responsible for holding that hard-won bit of front-line trench at all costs.... You might let a private, a non-com., even a junior officer, crawl out shell-shocked, but you, the company commander, had to keep sane.

In the end, though, when it seemed as if the enemy were at last about to attack, when the trenches on the left were

smashed flat, when all the telephone wires to the rear were cut and it impossible to get more than spasmodic support from the artillery, when runner after runner sent back with messages had dropped wounded or dead in his tracks ... then it was the courage and initiative, not of himself, but of young Rivers that got the message through, that brought the great pounding of the heavies on the crowded German trenches, that summoned to the skies overhead the score of British planes that drove down every black cross before them....

But the dash and initiative of young Rivers didn't solve *his*, Falcon's, problem. Ypres had taken the guts out of him. The Somme would do him in.

Not that that so much mattered. Nothing mattered much that would end for him this unendurable fatigue, this life of horror.... But was it fair to the men in his charge for him to carry on when he was nothing but a shell—courage, initiative, all gone? Shouldn't he give up command of his company, go in again with the comparative irresponsibility of a subaltern? But in the army you couldn't do that. You just had to keep on going....

His prodding staff told him that they had struck a better bit of road at last. Not so pitted with shell-holes.

What? A dividing here into two roads? He had forgotten that. Couldn't remember ... couldn't remember. He must look at his map. Yes, surely, they were far enough back from the front now. It was safe to turn a pocket-torch on his map.

He halted the men behind him. Grunts of relief came out of the night as half of them dropped to earth where they stood. He pulled a map from his pocket. What a fool he had been ever to waste money on a map case! Where was it he had junked that folly? ... He pulled out a pocket-torch, too.

As he unfolded the map and pressed the button of his torch, he swayed on his feet, drunk with fatigue. He looked at the mass of squares on the map, at all the wavy black lines and red lines and numerals and letters. He tried to force himself to concentrate, to discover the present position of himself and his men.

The squares and the wavy black lines blurred before him as he swayed drunkenly. The heavy lids sagged over his eyes.

Sleep? ... Sleep? ... Sleep? ... *He* mustn't sleep. Let his men, lying there, sleep for a moment. But *he* mustn't sleep. Not *he*, the commander, responsible for all....

Even as he stood, he slept....

But only for a moment.... Then his will forced him back into wakefulness.

Again that battle with fatigue. He wouldn't give in, but he couldn't quite win. He, who prided himself on a very fair skill with maps, wasn't clear-headed enough for this simple task.

He called for Sergeant Sanderson.

"Sergeant Sanderson." A voice in the rear passed along the call.

"Where is he?" questioned another.

"Fallen out," grunted a third.

"No, here he is—sleeping," from a fourth.

"Wake him up. The Major wants him."

Sanderson rose from the road, hastened to Falcon. Refreshed by his moment of slumber, the sergeant succeeded in reading the map.

Falcon gave the word. The men rose to their feet. The company moved forward again, now four abreast.

A murmur presently from the rear.

"Tell the Major we've lost the lieutenant."

"Which lieutenant?"

"Lieutenant Rivers. He was with us up to the last stop."

Alec halted the company again. Sent back a corporal and a man to search. They returned very shortly with young Rivers and six privates.

"Sorry, sir." Rivers alternated laughter with his apologies. "We found the ditch softer than the road. But, when the company moved on, we heard nothing but our own snores."

Again Falcon gave the word of command. Again that band of ninety men, all that was left of the company after four days so empty of sleep but so full of horror, commenced their heavy shuffling.... Shuffling through the darkness ... shuffling out to rest ... shuffling ... shuffling....

* * * * *

The morning sun gleamed on the silver badge of Falcon's Glengarry. Its warm rays glowed on the unshaven skin of his heavy jaw.

It was five o'clock in the morning. Falcon was standing in the main street of a French village talking to his company sergeant-major. He was superintending the billeting of his troops, one platoon going into a barn, another being divided between two farmhouses, a third....

"Sir!" An olive-skinned private with a band on his arm—the battalion interpreter—saluted. "Would you have time to look at company headquarters now?"

"No, not until all these men are in their billets and their breakfast is cooked. You can arrange about company headquarters yourself."

"But, sir, the woman is difficult... She objects..."

"Is there no other house we can use?"

"No other, sir."

"Very well, then. See her again. Be firm, but very courteous. No bullying. Tell her we won't damage her house, and we'll pay her well for everything we eat."

Falcon turned again to the sergeant-major and went on with his discussion of billets. Now about that fourth platoon....

It was the third night out from the trenches. They had been marching out for three nights, resting through three days. They would now probably have three days and nights of "rest" and reorganization in this village. Then three days marching up again, to lead, it was rumored, in an attack. To push forward another half-mile, perhaps, in the slow-rolling Battle of the Somme.

Falcon had gone along the street with the sergeant-major and was inspecting a loft in which twenty men were billeted.

"That roof looks leaky," he commented.

"It's the best place we can get, sir," defended the sergeant-major.

"I know, I know. I wasn't criticizing anybody.... I only hope, though, that it doesn't rain, or those boys will get soaked."

He saw the interpreter coming towards him again.

"Well, Lemieux, is it all settled?"

"No, sir. The woman's hysterical. Won't let the batmen bring in the officers' things, sir."

Falcon meditated.

"Ask Mr. MacGregor to come here. You'll find him with his platoon. You know where it's billeted?"

A few minutes later a handsome, broad-shouldered subaltern swaggered up.

"You want me, sir?"

Falcon nodded, explained the situation, asked MacGregor to interview the woman, to use diplomacy.

"However she behaves, I know you'll treat her with your usual tact."

As he saw MacGregor depart, he felt that that bit of business was settled. If MacGregor's weakness was his vanity, his strength was his courtesy. He had a winning way with the women, even with shrewish farm-wives. And his French was as fluent as his manners were suave.

But in a few minutes MacGregor returned, with a little less swagger.

"Sir, she's absolutely impossible."

Falcon turned to the sergeant-major.

"I'll have to attend to this myself. You'll know where to find me if you need me."

He had seen all the men into their billets. He had seen the cook-wagons preparing breakfast. Now he could straighten out this tangle about sleeping quarters for himself and his officers.

Accompanying MacGregor to the scene of the squabble, he found a large, rambling farmhouse.

"There must be plenty of room there. What does she object to?"

"Oh, there's plenty of room," answered MacGregor. "We would only use three rooms for the five of us and our batmen. That would leave four rooms for her and her old father-in-law and her children. But she says she'll be crowded."

Falcon yawned. The warm sun made him sleepy. He was weary after the night of marching. These day-time naps...

As he walked into the hall of the farmhouse he found himself facing a sour-faced, wild-eyed woman of forty....

He bowed. "Madame," he began....

In the best French he could muster he made his apologies for intruding.... She and her family must indeed be annoyed to have soldiers so often billeted upon them. But he and his officers would cause her as little inconvenience as possible. They would do no harm to her house. They would pay her well for the eggs, butter, milk they would buy from her.... Wouldn't she be so gracious as to allow them to take possession of their rooms now? They had come from a hard tour in the trenches. They had been marching for three nights. They were very tired. Wouldn't she be good enough...

But she only glared at him while he talked. She wasn't thinking of his words. She was thinking of her own troubles.

The moment he had finished she burst out:

"*Mais, Monsieur!*"

She told him, with ever-rising passion, how weary she was of all these officers who used her house as a billet. She hated them all—French, English, Canadian, Australian. She had seen so many in the last two years. They all came with fair promises, but once they were quartered in her house they acted as if they owned it. They treated her not as a decent woman and a person of some importance in the community, the widow of a *sous-officier* who had been killed at Verdun, but as a low-class slut from whom anything could be had for payment ... or without payment. They all promised to pay well for all the eggs and milk and vegetables that they took, but when they were ordered suddenly to march away in the morning...

She was frantically voluble, incoherent, ultimately screaming. Falcon couldn't understand a quarter of what she said. At last he lost all patience. As she shrieked at him, his right hand tightened on his riding-crop, tapped the end of it impatiently against his high riding-boot. He stepped forward, glowered into her face. Had this idiot the faintest comprehension of what he and his men had gone through in the line—in part, at least, to keep the Germans out of her kitchen?

He forgot his French, tossed aside all his courtesy, thundered at her in English, his heavy voice beating her like a bludgeon:

"God *damn* you.... Shut up!"

She quivered ... cringed ... whimpered a little. But she screamed no more.... She dried her tears and went about her housework.

"Bring in those bed-rolls," Falcon bellowed to the batmen.

* * * * *

As Falcon, two days later, entered the farmhouse that served as battalion headquarters, the spectacled adjutant looked up owlishly from a dining-table littered with papers. He shoved a bottle of whisky and a glass towards Alec, drew another glass in front of himself.

"What's the news?" asked Falcon.

"How would you like to go on the Staff, Alec?" The adjutant, as he sipped his whisky and water, watched Falcon over the tumbler.

"Whose Staff?" asked Falcon. He had no wish to play flunkey to their present Brigadier.

"It's Divisional Staff. An appointment open for a G.S.O., third grade. We have been asked to send in a name. An officer who has had at least a year's front-line experience and who is not below the rank of Captain."

"Colonel Thorsen, of course, wouldn't want it?"

"No. He has the battalion. In any event, he's on leave. He started yesterday morning, you know. I couldn't put his name in without consulting him, and I have to send in this recommendation to-night."

"How about Major MacPherson?" Falcon referred to the second-in-command.

"I asked him, but he's not interested. He says he's not cut out for Staff work." The adjutant added in a lower voice, with a glance towards the whisky bottle: "I suspect the change would interfere too much with his habits."

Falcon laughed. "So I'm the next-in-line?"

The adjutant nodded.

"All right," said Falcon, "you can put my name down. I've had enough of the front line to quench my thirst for blood. Staff will give me a better chance to see the war through to a finish—and more chance to get ahead."

"I hope you get the appointment, Alec, but...." The adjutant took off his spectacles and rubbed them, then glanced again at the memo from Brigade Headquarters. "These things take time. And, you know, we have orders to start back towards Albert again to-morrow."

"How did the old man manage to get back on leave?"

"We were told we might be here for a fortnight, after all, and that we could grant a few leaves. The old man missed his last leave, and he was mad to get back to see Mrs. Thorsen. She hasn't been well. So he jumped at the chance.... To-day we had another order. All leave canceled.... I hope the Colonel doesn't get called back before his eight days are up. However..."

"What time to-morrow do we move?" asked Falcon.

"Three o'clock in the morning. The runner's on his way to your headquarters now with the message."

* * * * *

Returning to the headquarters of his company, Falcon found waiting for him a long, rangy, forty-year-old subaltern with iron-gray hair, a horse-like face and great yellow, horse-like teeth. The subaltern tossed up his head as Falcon entered and uttered a sort of whinny of greeting.

"Major! I've got something to show you."

"What is it?" asked Falcon tersely, not too amiably.

Craps, the subaltern, went to the door of the farmhouse living-room that served as company headquarters, opened it, shouted to the batmen outside.

Presently in came two batmen, grinning as they carried a heavy wooden case. They thumped it down as Craps directed. They went out, grinning.

"Twelve bottles of whisky!" boasted the nasal-voiced Craps. "All that was left in the village.... Enough for a real party at B Company headquarters to-night—our last night here."

"Enough for a hell of a good souse," growled Falcon, "and the battalion moves at three ack emma. That means company parade at two-thirty."

"Yes. But, Major, that's to-morrow morning. I'm talking about to-night. Just a nice old-fashioned party...."

"Like hell we will! No drunken parties in this company's mess to-night."

"Come now, Major," wheedled Craps. "Seems to me I've seen you take a drink or two yourself at a party...."

Falcon snorted.

"Yes, I'm as big a fool as anybody, on occasion. But this isn't going to be one of the occasions. It's rotten soldiering to get drunk when you have work to do. And we've got to move to-morrow morning before daybreak."

The door opened. A lithe, keen-eyed subaltern—a youngster hardly half Craps' age—strode in with a smart salute.

"Hello, Rivers!" Falcon greeted his senior subaltern. "You're just the man I wanted to see. As secretary of B Company's mess, will you please send two bottles of this whisky to the officers' mess of each of the other companies, two bottles to battalion headquarters, two bottles to details ... with our compliments?"

Craps, red in the face at this high-handedness, muttered inaudibly, then raised his voice:

"But, Major! That's my whisky...."

Pulling out a roll of notes, Falcon demanded:

"How much did you pay for it?"

Craps sulkily told him, grudgingly accepted the notes.

"Please send those bottles with my personal compliments," Falcon said to Rivers, then went through to his own room.

"What's up with that young pup?" growled Craps, who indeed had been a general in the Mexican army when Falcon was still a schoolboy, and who—a less pleasant memory—had been cashiered from the Canadian Militia long before Falcon had obtained a commission. "I've seen him as drunk as anybody. The morning after that last battalion dinner at St. Omer his batman found him lying on top of his bed, in riding-breeches, boots and spurs, but from the waist up stark naked. I don't know what he's got to be so snotty about. Is he really serious?"

"Yes," said Rivers, as he wrote cards and attached them to the bottles. "Yes, he means it all right. No drinking when there's work to be done." There was a twinkle in his quick blue eyes as he added: "He'll have B Company out shivering in the cold a quarter of an hour before the battalion's ready to move. And if any platoon's *late*..." he finished his comment with a "thumbs down."

* * * * *

Falcon opened his eyes next morning to see his batman, Borden, standing over him, with a lighted candle in his hand.

"Time to get up, sir."

"What time is it?" asked Falcon.

"Twenty minutes past two, sir."

"What the hell!" exploded Falcon. But he couldn't be angry with Borden. He knew Borden too well. If there had been a mistake it couldn't have been Borden's fault. Nevertheless, he was angry. "You were to call me at two o'clock."

"Yes, sir, but the guard only just called me."

"I'll see about that," growled Falcon, cursing.

He pulled on his clothes hurriedly, slashed at his face with a razor, strode into the main room, to find himself the first at breakfast. He gulped down his coffee and clanged out of the room in quest of the sergeant-major.

In the darkness of the village street the dim figures of men with packs and rifles moved about tumultuously, gradually fell into line. The rolls of the platoons were called. Voices husky with sleep answered out of the darkness. Each platoon commander at last announced his platoon as "present and correct." The company was ready to move.

Falcon had mounted his horse. He turned to the company sergeant-major: "We're nearly half an hour late. Put the last man who was on guard under arrest—for forgetting to turn out the company on time."

"I've looked into that, sir," said the sergeant-major, "but the last man on guard says the man before him didn't tell him the right time..."

"Put him under arrest, too," snapped Falcon.

"But, sir," said the sergeant-major—a very young sergeant-major, with thin pale face and earnest blue eyes—"no man who was on guard will admit the mistake was his."

"Did you instruct the corporal of the guard last night?" asked Falcon.

"Yes, sir. And he swore he told every man in the guard."

"Very well. Put the whole damned guard under arrest. And the corporal, too."

Falcon turned in his saddle, uttered a bellow that all but rattled the windows in the quiet gloom of that village street. The company sprang, clanged to attention, sloped arms, formed fours, turned to the right, marched.

Falcon looked at the luminous dial on his watch. Another five minutes would bring them to the battalion rendezvous. They would be the last company there, and it had been his pride, as senior company commander, always to be first.

* * * * *

At five minutes past three, Hugh Rivers, O.C. number nine platoon, was accepting a cigarette from Willard Craps, O.C. number ten platoon, while the men of B Company stood easy, smoked fags, cursed their luck for being rushed through breakfast only to stand still here, at the cross-roads.

"Didn't I tell you," said Rivers, "that he'd have us out here shivering in the cold, waiting for the other companies?"

"What the devil has made them late?" said Craps.

Soon a steady thud, thud, thud on the cobblestones told of another company marching. Presently out of the darkness came a mass of advancing men.

Falcon, who had dismounted and was standing by the side of the road, caressing the smooth black neck of his horse with his gloved right hand, heard the "Company, halt!" of the company commander. Recognizing the voice of his close friend, Alastair Irvine, he strode over to greet that genial giant.

"What held you up, Al? Anything serious?"

Irvine chuckled.

"That was damned good whisky you sent us last night, Alec." They moved to the side of the road to let another incoming company pass them. The company had no sooner halted than its commander came over to Falcon, slapped him on the shoulder.

"Thanks, old man, for that whisky. It was great stuff. We had a good old send-off last night."

The fourth company moved into its place in the gray dawn of a gray day. Its company commander, too, joined the jesting group around Falcon.

"Those two bottles gave us just enough, Alec. Pretty potent stuff, that..."

Major MacPherson and the adjutant rode up. MacPherson, in Thorsen's absence, was in command of the battalion. He had at one time been quartermaster. In that capacity he had excelled in providing not only for the battalion, but also for himself. He was now a man of such immense girth that only the strongest horse could carry his weight. His face was so crimson that his red hair and his short red mustache lost their flame. His small blue eyes, which were so jovial at night, scowled wretchedly now in the morning.

At the bow of his saddle hung a large shell-casing. This went with him every time the battalion moved. It was not, as the men supposed, a sentimental souvenir. Major MacPherson had a use for it. A wag had said that MacPherson had learned moderation. Finding three bottles of whisky a day too much, and one bottle too little, he had accustomed himself to a regular two quarts. At any rate he drank enough to have constant need of this shell-casing as a *vase de nuit*.

MacPherson's scowl vanished as he saw Falcon. He contorted his face into a vast wink as he rode over and huskily spoke:

"Great fire-water, that, but I'm afraid you've got us in wrong with Brigade.... We're twenty minutes late at the start!"

Crap, overhearing MacPherson's remark, turned again to Rivers.

"You see, Hugh," he said, with a grin that revealed his great yellow teeth, "the mischief that's wrought by morality. Now if we had kept all that whisky in B Company, *I* might have drunk myself blind, but the battalion would have marched on time."

* * * * *

Major MacPherson roared commands. The subalterns threw away their cigarettes and took their places. The company commanders mounted their horses. The battalion sprang to attention, sloped arms, marched.

"Tidderum—tidderum—tidderum," went the drums.

"Tidderum—tidderum—tidderum."

Major MacPherson rode at the head of the long column, but behind the pipe-band. The black-browed pipe-major looked back at him inquiringly. The major's huge red right hand, which had been caressing the side of his precious *vase de nuit*, rose to signify assent. The pipe-major raised the pipes to his lips, all the pipers with him...

*"He waved his proud hand and the trumpets were blown,
The kettle-drums clashed, and the horsemen rode on,
Till on Ravelston's cliffs and on Clermiston's lee
Died away the wild war-notes of bonny Dundee."*

CHAPTER II

Falcon tossed about in his Wolsey kit. The thin layer of straw beneath his bedding did little to protect his bones from the hardness of the floor of that old house in Albert.

But it wasn't the hardness of the floor, nor the crackling of the straw, that kept him awake.

He would only have two hours in bed altogether, before he would have to get up, at one o'clock, to go up to the line on that so-called reconnaissance.

He lit the candle, and pulled from beneath his pillow a book on the history of tactics by a French staff officer. His brother officers had laughed at him for reading this book now. This war was so different from all earlier wars. But he at least had learned from it that this was not the only war in which the soldiers sacrificed themselves—not to a sublime cause, but to the blunders of their superiors.

To-night the book failed to hold his attention, couldn't even induce drowsiness.

* * * * *

This *had* been a hell of a three days at Albert.

Colonel Thorsen, ever since he had come back from leave, had been drunk. Thorsen, the best battalion commander in the whole Brigade—or even, as the admiring Falcon thought, in the whole Division—had been drunk, night after night,

three nights in succession. Had come back to headquarters on two of those nights on a stretcher.

A fine thing for the best battalion commander in the Brigade, with a Victoria Cross won—and earned—at Ypres, to come to headquarters like that. Stinking drunk. When the battalion might be ordered to move up to an attack at any hour.

Difficult to explain such conduct, so unlike Thorsen. Falcon could guess at only one reason for it.

Thorsen, with the passion of a powerful man, was devoted to his lovely young wife in England. For months he had longed to get back, on leave, to see her. During all those months he declined such lesser adventures as others sought to ease the strain.... Then, at last, he got away on leave, hurried to London to his wife, found her ill. Before he was with her forty-eight hours a cablegram recalled him to France, to command his battalion in the impending attack.

Back with the battalion, Thorsen lost all reason. He was a madman, less dangerous at night, when he was wholly drunk, than in the afternoons, when he was half sober.

This very day it had been bad enough, when the battalion was rehearsing the plan of attack. The whole thing was bungled, thanks largely to Thorsen's contradictory orders. Thorsen, then, on his horse, summoned the officers round him, and started, in his heavy voice, to denounce them for their stupidity.

Then he caught Falcon's eye. Falcon, at that moment, would have enjoyed knocking Thorsen off his horse. Ought he to put Thorsen under arrest?

Thorsen quickly changed his talk. He was not upbraiding the officers. It was the men who were at fault. He raised his voice to talk to the whole battalion.

"During an attack," he said confusedly, "you can't advance steadily. You have to drop into shell-holes, avail yourselves of what cover offers...."

Dangerous talk this, muttered Falcon to himself. On the very eve of an attack, too. If the men didn't keep going forward, if they held back and lost the protection of the barrage advancing before them, the attack would fail. And the men, ultimately, would suffer heavier losses than if they trudged on forward.

You couldn't, however, dispute with your Commanding Officer on parade.

What made the situation worse at headquarters was that not only was Thorsen drunk, but the second-in-command also, Major MacPherson. That red-faced, red-headed Scotchman, with the tiny blue eyes and the huge red nose, was such a lover of bottled good-fellowship that his red hair was fast growing gray—even now, in his early thirties.

Falcon had been embarrassed yesterday morning when Brigade had asked for the Commanding Officer of the MacIntyres to go up and look over maps so that he might see the position that his battalion would occupy before the attack, and learn the objective to which it would have to advance....

Colonel Thorsen couldn't go. The Colonel wasn't back yet, at ten in the morning, from his debauch of the night before—was still sleeping it off in the headquarters of some other battalion.

And MacPherson was still snoring in the next room.

Falcon went in to MacPherson, and explained the situation. MacPherson, next senior to Thorsen, would have to see the Brigadier.

With cloudy eyes and husky voice, MacPherson protested: "But I can't, Alec. It's no use, I have such a devil of a headache. If I went with this hang-over I shouldn't understand what they told me. It's no use."

Alec at last persuaded him to go for the sake of appearance. MacPherson consented, provided Alec went too, to get the gist of the instructions.

At Brigade the scene was amusing enough—if, under the circumstances, you could call it amusing. A short, fat, Brigadier with a huge black mustache and a voice so deep that its tone obscured his words ... in civilian life a Canadian member of parliament more noted for bombast than for brains ... was trying to explain something he didn't understand himself....

At last, after listening for half an hour to the Brigadier's confused instructions, they turned to go. Falcon was very dejected because he had been able to understand so little....

The new Brigade Major, a natty little fellow with curly fair hair, pink cheeks and a monocle, stopped them at the door. He had said nothing during the Brigadier's talk.

"Here," chirruped the Brigade Major, "I'll show you." Ignoring the Brigadier as completely as a nurse might ignore a spoiled child, he explained to them very clearly, very exactly, the whole plan of the attack.

Quite a pair, those two, Falcon commented to himself. The Canadian Brigadier, who rumbled like an old bull, was little more than a wind-bag. The men called him "Pud." His English Brigade Major, a slight little tea-party dandy, was a soldier who worked at his task eighteen hours a day. Cool, precise, dependable, he was a perfect military machine.... Some one had to earn the decorations that the Brigadier wore.

Now, with this new plan of attack, this new frontage for the battalion, the Brigade had ordered another reconnaissance. The last two, in Falcon's estimation, were fizzles. Colonel Thorsen had ordered that no senior officers take the needless risk of going on reconnaissance. So these two first reconnaissances were conducted only by subalterns. Good youngsters, but lacking in experience. All that they had to do, indeed, was to get up to the front-line trench from which the battalion was to attack, find the best way up to it, learn the condition of the trench itself, ascertain what they could of the German trenches opposite.

In the middle of a battle, of course, that was no simple thing, with shells smashing in the communication trenches, pounding on the front line.... So much of the journeying up to the line, too, had to be done in the open.

The first reconnoitering party had been content to go to the headquarters of the Brigade in the line and look over the situation from there. "Through field-glasses," Falcon had snorted.

The second party had got as far as headquarters of the battalion that held the trench from which the MacIntyres would attack. Better; but not good enough.

Now an order for reconnaissance of the new positions had come through. It had reached battalion headquarters at a time when Alec was temporarily in charge of the battalion, Colonel Thorsen and Major MacPherson both being absent on a bottle-hunt.

Falcon reflected on his Commanding Officer's order that no senior officer should go on reconnaissance.

To hell with that order! He would go on that reconnaissance himself. And the reconnoitering party would do its job thoroughly, in the front line.

He sent out orders then for one subaltern and one sergeant from each company to report to him at one a.m.

He had still—he looked at his watch—over an hour to wait. Again he turned to his book on tactics. He read about Wellington's deployment of troops at Waterloo, his use of enfilade fire ... enfilade ... enfilade.

* * * * *

"Time to get up, sir!"

Falcon twisted, started in his sleep. Woke to find his open book beside him and his batman, Borden, bending over him.

Borden watched over him like a mastiff. No, like a brother. It was a tough job at first to get Borden to act as a batman. His democratic pride had rebelled. In peace time Borden was a skilled workman, a bricklayer. He hadn't welcomed the job of cleaning an officer's boots and cooking an officer's meals. But, long since, he had come to do far more than was required ... out of liking. Falcon had a warm feeling for this small, gray-eyed youth with the deft hand and the serious brow....

Borden handed him hot coffee as he pulled on his breeches and boots.

As Falcon laced his high boots, Borden helping him, he heard a slamming of doors. Big bodies banging against wooden walls. Deep-voiced oaths.

That must be Thorsen coming back, on the arms, no doubt, of a couple of helpers.

Falcon had hoped to get started before Thorsen returned. There might be a row. His going up to the line was in direct contradiction to Thorsen's orders. Well, if there was a row, he was quite ready, if necessary, to put Thorsen...

"Hello, Alec!" hiccoughed the colonel, as he, supported on either side by an orderly, lurched over the bed where Falcon sat lacing his boots. "What the devil are you doing up at this hour? Getting up or going to bed?"

Falcon pushed back the box on which the lighted candle stood, so that Thorsen in his reeling wouldn't knock it over into the straw. Then, rising, he said: "I'm going up the line, sir."

Colonel Thorsen scowled. "What the hell for? Didn't I give orders that no senior officers..." He would discipline this insubordinate pup....

"Yes, sir," said Falcon, "but the last two reconnaissances were fizzles. And the plan of attack has been altered. This last is final. The reconnaissance will have to be thorough."

Swaying unsteadily on his feet, the massive Thorsen glowered through half-shut eyes.

Falcon glowered back. He hated to put his Commanding Officer under arrest, a Commanding Officer with the V.C. ribbon, one of the finest soldiers in the Division ... and one of the best friends Falcon ever had. Still if, in the interest of getting the job through, this had to be done...

Under Falcon's gaze, Thorsen dropped his eyes.

"All right," growled Thorsen as he turned away. "Be careful. I can't afford to lose you ... or any officer ... before the attack."

He rolled on towards his room.

* * * * *

Two hours later, Falcon turned to the subalterns and sergeants behind him in the trench.

"Wait here," he said. "I'll see if this is the right way."

He had called at the newly advanced headquarters of Brigade on his way up. The Brigade Major had given him a map and instructions, but could furnish no guide. "Sorry I can't tell you. You'll just have to find the way as best you can."

Not easy, it proved, in that wilderness of ruined roads and deserted trenches, where no houses stood. An undulating waste ... a Sahara in the heart of France ... where once rich farms...

Thus far they had come, dodging safely all the German shells. Not so difficult a matter that, if you disciplined your party ... sent them across dangerous cross-roads two at a time, each couple running across immediately after a shell had burst.

Now, in the early morning light, they had come over the brow of a hill down into a trench in which they could find no one. No one, that is, who was alive....

Falcon left his party in a safe place and wandered down the trench by himself. It was pleasant, strolling down this trench in the sunlight of a September morning. The smell of the earth, too, would have been pleasant, if it hadn't had another odor mingled with it ... the scent of human decay. And it wasn't so pleasant to find in that trench, every three or four yards, a dead man ... with blackened face and outstretched, stiffened hands. Big green flies buzzing busily above the eyes, nose, mouth. Nothing in that trench but dead men.... Through bay after bay, nobody but the dead.... So silently rotting beneath the blue sky.... Just dead Germans of course.... As if *that* made a difference....

At last Falcon found what he wanted—the communication trench leading to the front line. He returned to his party.

* * * * *

After another three hours he was again in the deep dugout which served as the new Brigade Headquarters. It was not yet nine o'clock in the morning, but the monocled Brigade Major was smooth-jawed, gleaming-haired, bright-belted. He had worked right through the night.

"So you've been all over the front line?" chirruped the Brigade Major. "Were any of your party pipped?"

No, there had been no casualties, answered Falcon. He thanked his stars that, in view of all they had gone through, there had been no casualties. Dashing across open spaces in full view of enemy snipers, crawling through smashed-in communication trenches on which high explosives were pounding; until they had come at last to the crowded front-line trench where, under the heavy bombardment, men were every few minutes being wounded, killed.... No casualties. Partly shrewdness, largely luck.

"That's good work," felicitated the Brigade Major, as he polished his monocle and offered Alec cigarettes. "It's fortunate you did a thorough job. Your battalion moves up immediately, first to support, then to the front line. I can't tell you yet whether the attack will take place to-morrow or the day after."

Falcon sent the subalterns and sergeants on back to the battalion with orders from Brigade to prepare to move.

He himself stayed with the Brigade Major, discussing further details of the projected attack.

CHAPTER III

Tap ... tap ... tap.... Mined? Again? He had heard that soft, barely audible tapping at Ypres, by the canal, before the enemy blew up the right wing of his company. No ... no ... he was back here at Albert ... resting.... He would go on resting ... he was so weary.... He turned over, fell again into the sleep from which he had less than half awakened. He slept very hard.

Tap! tap! tap! ... Adair, then, was coming to him at last? After he had waited so long? Adair, whose eyes were as full of peace as the little lakes in the foot-hills....

TAP ... TAP ... TAP....

Some one was knocking at the door ... hard.

Falcon was wide awake now. He sat up. The afternoon sun was streaming through the windows. He must have slept three hours. It must be fully that long since he had arrived back from Brigade, to find the battalion in a bustle, men with packs on their backs and rifles in their hands crowding the streets, N.C.O.'s calling the rolls, Colonel Thorsen, sober and directing all from his horse.... Fully three hours since the battalion had, by companies, marched out of Albert. It must be

very nearly time for him, too, to go forward.

Crossing through the room, he walked down the hall and opened the door. He found himself facing a tall, white-haired man in a colonel's uniform with black crosses on the lapels.... Thin, clear-skinned cheeks.... Large, luminous eyes.... A sensitive, humorous mouth. The Brigade chaplain, Canon Hargraves, had a face as fine as that of an early Christian saint—and much more human.

As the Canon gave Falcon's hand a warm, friendly grasp, his glance took in the slippers on Falcon's feet.

"My dear fellow," he said, "I'm afraid I disturbed you.... I was just passing by and had hoped to see Colonel Thorsen. I thought he might take a stroll with me."

"The battalion went up the line at noon," said Falcon. "I have just been napping because I was up most of the night on a reconnaissance. I, too, must be going up shortly."

"I must say good-bye, then." The Canon held out his hand.

"I'd like to go with you for a short stroll myself," said Falcon, "if you don't mind waiting while I put on my boots."

He had a great liking for the Canon. He had seen him so many times show such disregard of personal safety, personal comfort, and display such broad humanity in dealing with the most dissipated officers and the most worthless privates....

They didn't walk far. The Canon, after a turn round the block, came on a vacant space where a house had been blown in by a shell. Suddenly he put a hand on Alec's arm. He said:

"Let's step in here a moment. I should like to talk to you. Since you're going up the line into the attack...."

Falcon followed the chaplain, picking his steps over a rubble of bricks. What was the old boy up to, anyhow?

Canon Hargraves stopped and, turning in the middle of that deserted place, faced Falcon.

With four broken walls around them, and a few broken rafters—the skeleton of a roof—between them and the sky, the two confronted each other.

The Chaplain hesitated a little at first, then said briskly:

"My dear boy, before you go into action, I should like very much to pronounce over you the prayer for the Absolution and Remission of Sin."

Falcon was embarrassed. He had been brought up a sound Anglican, but he had long since lost his belief in orthodox Christianity. He had, now, no religion ... except a love for his fellow man. And his being here, as a soldier, was the absolute negation of *that*. He couldn't, however, explain all these things to the Canon. And he did like the sweet old man. He could not offend him.

"Thank you," he replied. "I should be glad if you would."

"Have you, first, any particular sins you wish to confess?"

Falcon hesitated. "N ... why, yes." If he were going to do this at all, he might as well do it thoroughly.

"Drink?" suggested the Canon. The officers in the McIntyres had a certain reputation.

"Yes ... but ... I shouldn't put that first."

The Chaplain was grave, but very kindly as he said:

"Women, then?"

"Yes." Falcon spoke diffidently. He wasn't ashamed of his actions. There were a few memories that he loathed, wished to erase. But these were far more than outweighed by the recollection of the hours spent with Elsie, Myra. He couldn't regard as dissipation hours which had renewed his loyalty to life, aroused in him a warmer glow of friendliness to all humanity. Such communion of flesh had been, too, at least for the moment, communion of spirit. And his devotion to Adair, even if she were another man's wife, was of such a quality that if he had been told it was a sin, his indignation would have prompted scornful laughter. No, he wasn't ashamed ... but he was very loath to offend this lovely old man. He might as well, however, be honest.

"At one time and another," he added, "a good many of them."

The chaplain, looking into his eyes, caught a glimpse of his thoughts, yet was not distressed.

"My dear boy," he said, "I shouldn't let that worry me too much.... I regret it, of course.... But you are all living under abnormal conditions. With the threat of death—or of disablement, perhaps harder to bear than death—all the time hanging over you. You are, all of you, concentrating so much on the development of courage that you become careless about ... the other virtues.... But it is, after all, a life of sacrifice...."

He raised his hand. Falcon bowed his head.

"Almighty God, our heavenly Father, who of His great mercy hath promised forgiveness of sins to all them that with hearty repentance and true faith turn unto Him .."

* * * * *

Down at the bottom of a deep dugout in the reserve trenches the officers of B Company ate at midnight that night their last meal before the attack. By the light of smoky candles they ate their tinned meats and opened their letters, the last mail from home.

Falcon joined them presently. He had been having a busy time, first with his company, later with the C.O. It had been a delight to see the change in Thorsen, now that the attack was actually at hand. Energetic, sagacious, swift in decision ... the model of a good commander.

"Hello, Major!" Craps' yellow teeth gleamed in the candlelight and his long, horse-like face looked more than usually mephistophelian, sardonic. "There's a rumor you've been promoted to the Staff."

Falcon laughed, dryly. "The adjutant says Brigade approved the recommendation and sent it forward to Division. But, of course, nothing will be done about it until after the attack."

"We'll all get promotions then," suggested Rivers cheerfully.

"Of one sort or another," said Craps, with a leer.

"Or decorations—also, of one sort or another," added Falcon. Then he turned to a bald-headed, middle-aged subaltern who sat huddled in a shadowy corner.

"Well, Chep, what are you so down about? Let's have a drink."

He poured three fingers of whisky into the tin mug in Cheplin's hand, then refilled his own.

Solemn-faced, laughing-eyed, Alec raised his mug.

"Chep, here's to the time when we're both bottom-up in the middle of No Man's Land, green and grinning at each other."

"Good God, sir!" Cheplin shuddered. "Don't make me drink that ... I have a wife and baby at home...."

Lucky dog! thought Falcon. He said:

"That's a favorite toast between Colonel Thorsen and myself."

Craps, supporting Cheplin, said:

"I'm not so keen about that bottom-up business, for my part. Perhaps that's because I had my own shot off at Ypres."

Falcon's eyes flashed over the rim of his uptilted tin mug. He said:

"Cheer up, Craps. You'll probably get hit in front this time and leave your bowels dangling on the German wire."

"Major!" This was too strong for even Craps to stomach. He changed the conversation. "You haven't looked at your mail yet, sir." He passed Falcon a package and some letters.

Two letters from home. One from his father boasting of his speculations, complaining of his heart trouble. One from his mother, quiet, humorous, telling of the pranks of the twins. Another letter addressed in Adair's firm, graceful writing. He put this aside. He would read it later when alone.

The parcel he opened. In it was a small tin box, and inside the box, white heather. A card, with the message, "For good luck," was signed "Jennie Borden." ... his batman's wife. A nice "Thank you" for what little he had done for Borden.

Falcon took out the white heather, handed a piece of it to each of his subalterns, put a sprig in his own breast pocket. Then gave a bit of it, too, to Borden, who stood back in the shadows, attendant.

He proposed another toast to the subalterns:

"White heather for luck. Here's hoping we each get a blighty and no one of us goes under the sod."

As he drank his liquor, he told them of another, grimmer toast at Saint Omer. Twelve officers had been present. British, Australian, Canadian. All were possessors of long fighting records. All wore ribbons on their chests. All were bound for the Somme. And all were weary of the war.

The leader, an Englishman serving in the Canadians, who had a whole string of decorations to distinguish him, V.C., M.C., D.S.O., had proposed a toast which was drunk by all standing:

"Here's to the Battle of the Somme. May it bring a bullet to every man drinking this toast. If not a blighty, then a knockout!" ...

Falcon's humor chilled his subalterns to a long silence. Then Rivers said:

"That's a nice bed-time story, Major."

The three subalterns went out to look after their platoons. Alec sat over by a candle and opened his letters.

Adair's letter was unusually affectionate ... and unusually melancholy. She wasn't well. The strain of the war, the strain of ... everything.

So she cared as much as all that. If he came through this attack, alive and whole...

But it was a long war. He could see no way out of it for him until the time came when he would go out, if at all, on a stretcher. There was, though, still some hope of that Staff appointment ... after this attack.

"Are you ready, sir?" the voice of the company sergeant-major called down the stairway of the dugout.

Falcon ascended the stairs to the starlight. Bulky figures loomed large in the darkness. A long row of figures, with

big humps on their backs, huge tortoise-shells on their heads. As they stood, they murmured.

He shouted: "B Company..."

* * * * *

Falcon had always loved the out-of-doors at night ... the thudding of hoofs on the soft turf of the prairie ... the sound of swift waters swirling around rocks.

Here there was no prairie to gallop over, no river to ford. Just a waste of shell-plowed earth to trudge through, on the way up the line. Nevertheless, as he breathed in the cool calm of the air, he loved the out-of-doors at night.

The only objects to break the flat monotony of that dimly visible landscape were tanks ... overturned tanks ... like dead elephants on the battlefield of Cannae.

It was not easy to guide the long file of men across the open. When at last the communication trench was reached, the guiding became easier, but the going became worse. They were now under shell-fire—heavy shell-fire. Shells smashed constantly to right and left of the trench. Fragments of shell zipped frequently into it.

The front-line trench was reached, however, without casualties. That trench was already well-manned ... with the battalion that had been holding the trench, that would continue to hold it during the attack. Now, the trench was jammed.

Rivers said to Falcon:

"If the Hun shelling was good, we'd have an awful lot of casualties before the attack started."

The shelling on the front line was constant, an incessant pounding on the parapet, a steady swishing overhead of shells that went long, exploding behind the parados. Only occasionally a shell burst in the trench, to be followed by gasps, sobs, moans and cries of "Stretcher-bearers! Stretcher-bearers on the double."

Falcon left Rivers posting his platoon, went down a long flight of dark, narrow steps into a dugout illumined by flickering candles, carpeted by the gray greatcoats of dead Germans. It was the headquarters of the company holding that section of the trench.

He found in it a haggard-eyed company commander and a long-unshaven subaltern. He exchanged greetings with them.

"It's been a rough tour of duty," said the company commander.

Falcon expressed sympathy. Inwardly, he envied the other man who wouldn't have to attack. Life in that trench might seem hell, but it would be paradise compared to the attack.

"When do you go over?" asked the hollow-eyed company commander. He spoke very low. There were orders to speak low on all such matters. German detectophones might be listening in on the conversation.

"I don't know," Falcon answered in the same low tone. "The rumor is that we attack at dawn, and that can't be more than an hour away. But we have no definite order yet."

Falcon was busy sending orders and receiving messages. Number twelve platoon, commanded—since MacGregor, the subaltern in charge of it, had been taken ill—by Sergeant Sanderson, had safely reached its destination, a sort of redoubt on the left flank of the company's front. Cheplin, commanding eleven platoon, reported his men in position. A similar message about ten platoon came from Craps. And as Falcon had come in with Rivers and nine platoon, he knew that the whole company was ready.

There was still, however, another platoon to hear from. A fifth platoon, from another Highland battalion, was attached to each company.

Company commanders, of course, could know little of the general plan of the attack. They knew only that, after a heavy bombardment, the attack would be delivered on a front many miles wide, that scores of thousands of men would go over the parapet at the same moment, and that, supporting the infantry, there would be an immense array of artillery, machine guns, aeroplanes, tanks.

Falcon's company was to advance in a series of waves, a platoon in each wave. Falcon himself, as company commander, would go with the last wave.

"Ees eet Major Falcon?"

Falcon looked up from the field message-book on which he was scribbling a report to see a tall, red-haired subaltern in a kilt saluting him. The subaltern reported that he had brought the additional platoon. Where did Falcon wish the men stationed?

Falcon knew this man. A French Canadian with a Scotch name—McLagan or McLaren, was it?—who could speak English only with a strong French accent. A descendant, no doubt, of one of the officers in Wolfe's regiments that were disbanded after the taking of Quebec, and that had settled down near by, intermarrying with the French. This officer, McLagan, he had talked with several times. McLagan was extraordinarily proud of his heredity, more delighted than any other officer in his battalion to be wearing the kilt.

Falcon gave him directions. No. No word of the zero hour yet. It was very nearly dawn now.

"Sir."

Rivers, taut-faced, had descended the steps into the candle-lit gloom of the dugout. He touched his tin helmet. He said,

"We've just had two men killed and five wounded by a shell-burst. All in number three section of nine platoon. Can we afford to send the wounded out on stretchers?"

Falcon tensed his jaw, said:

"Not if they can possibly walk."

"That's what I thought," said Rivers. He went back up the steps that led to the trench, the sky, and the shell-bursts.

Falcon returned to his report ... finished it. He added a final touch to his letter to Adair. It was always well to write, before an attack, a letter that could serve, if need be, as your last. He would send back this letter, and the letters to his father and his mother, by the runner who would take his report to headquarters.

A jubilant voice shouted down the steps:

"I say, Major, they've got me."

Craps limped down to show a big gash above his knee, from which blood flowed freely, and another gash on his arm. His face was pale. He was biting his lips. The wounds must hurt. But whatever the pain, his eyes were joyful. Those wounds meant a good blighty. He wouldn't have to go through the attack. He would get back to England. He might, even, work a trip to Canada.

Falcon, seeing him, thought all this, too. Far from sympathizing with Craps for his wounds, he was filled with rage that this platoon commander should get wounded just before the attack. Damned inconvenient! It would mean a rearrangement at the last moment.

Falcon asked:

"How's Sergeant McIlhinney?"

"He's all right. I left him in charge of the platoon," answered Craps. "With these wounds, of course, I can't..."

"McIlhinney's a pretty green sergeant to be left in charge of a platoon. Especially your platoon ... all those Saskatchewan Russians who can't speak decent English, or understand it. However ... I suppose that's the best we can do."

"This is a pretty nasty leg-wound, Major." Craps again pointed to his leg, which was now being bandaged by a busy-fingered little stretcher-bearer. "How about it? Hadn't I better go out on a stretcher?"

Falcon was gruff.

"Just a flesh-wound, isn't it? You'll have to walk."

"Walk?" expostulated Craps. "It'll take half an hour to get to the dressing-station, floundering around in the dark. And this leg hurts..."

The firmness in Falcon's tone was final as he said:

"We can't spare men to carry you. You'll *have to* walk."

Craps looked at Falcon as if he could have killed him with a curse. Then turned with his bandaged leg and arm, and limped up the steps.

* * * * *

Nine hours later, the attack had not yet started. Falcon and Rivers stood side by side in the front-line trench, chatting to forget the thunder of the German shells. In the sunlight, both were gray-faced.

Falcon looked at his watch. Yes, he would have time for one more cigarette. Though he mightn't quite finish it.

He scratched a match. Lit a cigarette, rather badly. Took a puff or two. Let the cigarette go out. Lit it again.

All up and down the trench where he was standing in the sunlight men were doing that. Lighting cigarettes, letting them go out, lighting them again.

"Just three more minutes," said Rivers.

Falcon nodded.

At last the zero hour approached. Not at dawn, but at noon. Through hour after hour Falcon had waited, expecting the order. A whole night and half a day of waiting. A busy enough time, of course. There had been an abundance of things to attend to, what with casualties, the necessity for rearrangements, and the like....

He had been desperately sleepy all night, but had fought off that feeling. Now, with all his weariness, he was wide awake, tense, alert.

All these men up and down the trench, with pale faces, unshaven jaws, and muddied, crumpled uniforms, must be as weary as he, though some of them, in spite of all the shelling, might have snatched a few minutes' sleep on the firing-step. Twenty-four hours without sleep before an attack—that was almost always the preliminary. You went into it so weary you hardly knew what you were doing ... if it weren't for the immense stimulus of danger.

Falcon again struck a match. Relit his cigarette with fingers that were not quite steady. Looked at his watch.

Rivers exultantly exclaimed:

"By God, look at the planes!"

High in the blue above them rose the British planes, a vast fleet.

A moment of silence. Not quite two minutes of silence. Why, you could hear the scratching of matches all up and down the trench!

Then...

From far, far back came a ripple of sound ... a wave ... a long wave ... a tidal wave of sound.... It swept up ... swept up ... swept over ... and crashed on the German trenches.

Falcon looked over the parapet, disregarding snipers. A vast cloud of smoke and flame and flying earth, a cloud that reached for mile after mile up and down the line, all but obscured the enemy trenches from view.

Falcon, with his eye fixed on his wrist watch, raised his whistle to his lips. Blew a long, shrill note.

The first row of tin-hatted warriors, in their dirty khaki kilts, scrambled over the sand-bags. Pack on back, rifle in hand, they started forward, as they had been trained, two paces interval between man and man, all advancing at a walk. They mustn't run, or they would get tangled up in the Canadian barrage, and be killed by their own artillery. But when that barrage lifted they must be in a position to leap down into the German trenches, use the bayonet vigorously and fast....

Again Falcon blew. A second platoon went over.

With each blast, another platoon.

At the fourth blast the French-Scotch-Canadian McLagan jumped up on the parapet. It was the job of his men to do the dirty work of remaking the trench supposed by now to be captured. Each of his men carried, in addition to rifle and pack, a pick or a shovel. McLagan himself went shovel in hand.

His Gallic nature wasn't content with a farewell shake of the hand, a sober walk into action. As he leaped on the parapet he uttered a loud cheer to his men and waved around his head, as if it had been a glittering sword, his square-bladed ditch-digger's shovel.

Falcon smiled, turned to Rivers. As he blew the whistle for the fifth wave, he gripped Rivers' hand hard.

"Good luck, Hugh."

"Hope to see you later, sir," said Rivers.

With Hugh Rivers and his platoon gone, it was now the turn of Falcon and the last wave ... if you could call it a wave. A group of signalers with a telephone and telephone wires, runners to take back messages ... odds and ends. Really, his company headquarters. It wasn't expected that they would have to do much fighting at this first trench. The early waves would attend to that in this so well-ordered attack. Of course, there would be casualties, and by the time the attackers reached the German second line Falcon would no doubt be in the fight as fully as any junior subaltern.

But supposing all hadn't gone as planned at that front-line trench....

No use thinking of that.

For the sixth time, Falcon raised the whistle to his lips.

CHAPTER IV

It was a day of blue sky and bright warm sunlight. There was a gayety in the weather—gayety such as graced the morning when Alec and Adair last rode together at Bendip. But the sky above these French fields had a deeper clearness than is often found over the gray downs of England. It was more like the skies in western Canada under which Falcon ... it seemed so many years ago ... had driven his herd of cow ponies....

"Steady!"

He could scarcely hear his voice as he shouted to his men. And they, trudging wearily across the field, their shoulders bowed by the heavy packs on their backs and the heavier fears in their hearts, heard him not at all.

They could hear nothing but the stupendous roaring of artillery as the barrage of bursting shells crept gradually forward ... and the swishing overhead of millions of bullets from thousands of machine-guns, concentrating indirect fire on the enemy's supports.

Yet it wasn't what he heard that perturbed Falcon. It was what he saw.

The barrage of bursting shells—the up-sputtings of black earth—had advanced beyond the German trench. He could see that trench clearly now. Battered but far from demolished, it was crowded with Germans, armed, active, defiant.

Where was his own company? The five platoons which had gone over in the last few minutes? He looked around, ahead of him, to right and to left. He couldn't see anywhere a trace of the men who had preceded him, except, here and there, bodies writhing, their cries inaudible beneath the roar of the artillery, and, on the forward slope of the German parapet, other bodies of khaki-kilted Highlanders lying prone on the brown earth, curiously still....

Falcon found his mind now, as if whipped up by a powerful drug, working in flashes.

For him, with his handful of men, to advance straight on that trench crowded with Germans would be not fighting but self-slaughter, a gesture that would accomplish nothing. Yet he couldn't go back. He would have to go forward.

Even now, the German machine-gunner, traversing, was mowing down the men on Falcon's left, was swinging the gun slowly towards Falcon.... That machine-gunner must have wiped out nearly the whole company.

Useless to go up directly against that machine-gun.

Falcon looked to the right, remembered an old communication trench. The trench from which he had jumped off a minute ago was an old German trench, captured less than a fortnight ago by the British. From that trench, at one time, a communication trench had run into the German front line which Falcon's company had just now so vainly assaulted. That communication trench had long since been blocked in, of course, but Falcon could see a stub of it now, running forward like a sap a few yards out of the German line.

For that stub of trench he ran. He had cast aside all thought of orders to advance at a walk. With him he took a runner. He grabbed the runner by the arm, put his mouth to the runner's ear, shouted at the top of his voice, "Follow me."

He had tried to get the attention of his other men with whistle blasts, with signals, but in vain. In the midst of those eardrum-smashing concussions, they couldn't hear his whistle. And they were so intent on their own immediate danger that they didn't see his waving arm.

Followed by the runner, Falcon dashed to the communication trench through a crackle of bullets. Leaped down into the short stub of trench. Found himself confronting three heavily built Germans.

These, startled by the onslaught of this big, black-browed Canadian who had so suddenly thrown himself into their midst, drew back towards the main trench while they swung their rifles towards him.

Falcon pumped back with his automatic.

The Germans stumbled, fell back, disappeared....

"Can you," Falcon roared into the ear of his runner, "lob a bomb into the main trench?"

The runner had a bomb, but he wasn't a well-trained bomber. He was nervous, fumbled, forgot to pull the pin, lobbed a bomb which was no more dangerous than a baseball.

Falcon meanwhile had with speedy fingers reloaded. If only he had a rifle in place of this automatic! ... He looked around. Then ... instinct made him look up.

So now it was coming. Inescapably.

Sailing through the air towards him, describing a neat arc of a circle, came a German bomb.... A "potato masher."

It was well aimed. It would land beside him in that little stub of trench. There would be no way at all of avoiding its explosion.

No time to climb out of the trench. And if there had been, he would have been riddled with rifle bullets in doing it. No, there was no time. He would just have to take what was coming. If only it would be swift and certain death. But to lie there, after it, for minutes that would seem hours, a huddled mass of bleeding eyes, guts, testicles....

During the second that remained before that bomb dropped he would keep on killing. Even as the bomb fell at his feet he banged with his automatic at an incautious, helmeted head that peered around the corner.

By doing that, he lost the one slight chance to pick up the bomb and toss it out of the trench before it exploded.... Unless it exploded in his hand at the very moment of tossing.

Nevertheless, he reached for the bomb. But another peering head just then demanded attention.

Another second had gone. The bomb had not exploded.

A dud! Falcon breathed deeply in relief. The enemy, too, must be nervous, must have forgotten to release the catch....

Falcon picked up the bomb casually, tossed it away.

The problem of capturing that main trench remained unaltered. If only he had more men....

"Hello, Alec!"

A great voice roared in his ears. A hand hit him on the shoulder. He looked into the flashing dark eyes, the handsome, strong-jawed face of his fastest friend, Alastair Irvine. Irvine, commanding the company on Falcon's right, had found the advance of his left flank held up, had gone to help, and so had come to Falcon's aid.

With Irvine was a big, black-bearded private—the only private in the whole battalion who had permission to wear a beard.

Alec, forgetting present ranks, shouted joyously: "Colonel Carson!"

Private Carson, as he released the pin of a bomb, shouted back, "Hello, Alec!"

With Carson's strong, sure arm lobbing bombs into the German main trench, Irvine and Falcon were free to go forward. Following Irvine, as he scrambled up on the right side of the communication trench, Falcon found himself suddenly somehow getting across the German trench, over a rubble of earth and sand-bags, at a point where that trench had been blown in. Irvine and he were, by now, behind the German front line.

They were both lying flat. Shooting into the crowded German trench. Shooting the Germans in the back.

Falcon, in the process of that scramble, had picked up a rifle. A dead man's. Surer to shoot with than his hard-kicking automatic.

Irvine and Falcon picked out, deliberately, the leaders in the German trenches—those who were evidently, by their activity, the best men. Carefully, swiftly, they shot them down.

It was hard to tell, often, whether you hit or not. The Germans, startled by death that came from the rear, had turned on the two Canadians. Falcon would see a face shoved up over the back of the German trench, a rifle leveled at him. He would shoot. The face would disappear....

Men from Irvine's company and a few of the remainder from Falcon's had followed them. There were soon a dozen Canadians behind the German trench, shooting the Germans in the rear.

Falcon aimed at the gray back of the German machine-gunner. A courageous fellow that must be, to be still sticking to his gun even though he swayed in his seat with the pain of a wound. But the braver he was, the better man he was, the greater the need to kill him.

Falcon wasn't bothering to lie down now. He was in a state of such intense exhilaration—an exhilaration not of delight in killing, but of cold terror that if he did not kill he would be killed—that he had no thought of safety. The only thing that mattered was to see the job through.

He knelt. With left elbow resting on his left knee to steady the rifle, he looked through the sights, took careful aim, pulled the trigger.

"I guess we both got him," a private shouted in his ear.

Falcon looked. The private was right.

In the middle of the machine-gunner's back, right between his shoulder-blades, was a big, dark, rapidly growing stain.

But the sight that held Alec, with the peculiar fascination of horror, was the machine-gunner's head.

As the gray-coated body drooped forward, with great convulsive shudders, over the machine-gun, the back of the head opened up and vomited a scarlet torrent.... Brains.... The mind of a man!

"We've got the trench," shouted Irvine. "They're sticking up their hands."

As Irvine jumped down into the German trench, followed by a group of his men, Falcon, looking far down the trench, saw a troop of gray, shovel-hatted figures, a hundred or more of them, clambering out of the back of it, retreating towards the German second line.

They must not escape. If they did, they would have to be fought later. They must be captured now. Or killed. The thing to do was to close in on them with the bayonet, jab a few, make the rest put their hands up, drive the crowd back as prisoners to the Canadian front line.

Falcon turned to the men behind him, shouted at them to charge. But in all that din they could not hear. He ran in front, signaled them, started off to charge the Germans himself in the hope that the men would follow.

But those Canadian backwoodsmen liked rifles better than bayonets. They were kneeling and shooting at the retreating Germans. Falcon, in front of them, came near to being shot himself. A nice thing, that, if an officer attempting to lead a charge got shot in the backside by his own men. Falcon gave up the attempt to rouse his men to a charge, joined them in shooting.

Only a dozen or so of the Germans dropped to earth. The greater part of the hundred escaped in safety and made their way back towards their second line.

Falcon now looked down into the trench near by, where Irvine had lately leaped. In spite of all the killing that had been done, Falcon saw more Germans in the trench now than he had seen there when the attack started. Unarmed Germans with their hands up were pouring out of dugouts. Excited Canadian soldiers were starting to bayonet them, hands up or not. But Irvine was stopping them ... that warm-hearted, cool-headed giant.

A great crowd of Germans for those few Canadians to handle. For even though more of Irvine's company had joined them, there were only a score or so of Canadians to more than a hundred—it seemed like two hundred—Germans. And the Canadians couldn't stay to guard those Germans. They had to advance on the second line.

Irvine and Falcon shouted at the Germans. Pointed back to the Canadian trenches. By a violent waving of arms they indicated that the prisoners must run back to the Canadian lines. That was all that could be done, to chase them back to the Canadian trenches, where the holding battalion could handle them.

Soon all those gray-clad, coal-scuttle-helmeted Germans, lately objects of terror, now of derision, started scurrying back to the Canadian front line. Tall Germans, short Germans, fat Germans, thin Germans. All scurrying, scurrying, with hands held high.

Irvine and Falcon kept their revolvers trained on their prisoners until the whole crowd neared the Canadian line, the foremost dropping over the parapet.

Falcon turned to go on with the advance, on towards the German second line. But just as he was turning, he noted, out of the corner of his eye, an ugly, hard-faced Hun drawing out of the rear of the party of prisoners, falling into a shell-hole, picking up a rifle, looking towards him.

Swinging round with a shout—useful in that hubbub only as a release to pent-up feelings—Falcon aimed his revolver at the Hun and leaped towards him with long strides.

The German dropped the rifle, stood up, shaking. Knees knocking together. Hands again up in the air.

Falcon resisted the temptation to shoot him. A fat, disgusting object. But terror-stricken, pitiable, comic.

Gesticulating violently, Falcon made as if to kick the Hun in the backside. Threatened to boot him, to shoot him, until he saw him run towards the Canadian trench and drop into it.

Falcon, turning to rejoin his men, stumbled over the body of a Canadian private. The upper half of the face was blown away, but below that red mess stuck out a square black beard. And there was only one private in the MacIntyres who was allowed to wear a beard.

Poor old Carson! Without his courageous bombing the success of that whole desperate quarter of an hour of fighting could not have been achieved.

Falcon went on. Only to be sickened by another sight... Alastair Irvine sitting propped up by a private. Jacket and shirt open. A red hole in the middle of his broad white chest.

Falcon ran towards him.

Irvine held out his hand.

"They got me, Alec. Shrapnel."

Irvine's face was pale, but not the grayish-green that hints fast-coming death.

"You'll pull through, old man," reassured Falcon as he pressed Irvine's hand.

"Look after my company," Irvine begged him. "The subalterns are only kids. Good kids, but green."

Falcon gave his word, wished good luck, went hurriedly on.

How long before his own turn would come? But there was no use thinking about that.

There were not many Canadians left in that section of the advance. In place of six waves, one. And that, very thinly manned. Falcon would have to reorganize the line as they advanced.

But before he could go another yard forward there was one thing he had to do. Or burst. The agonies of Gulliver before he put out the flames in the royal castle at Lilliput were nothing to the agonies that Falcon felt now. After the nervous strain of the past quarter of an hour, his whole system shouted for relief.

So he stood there with the green-faced dead around him, with the sweet, evil scent of explosives in his nostrils, with shrapnel ping-pinging overhead—for the Germans, knowing that the Canadians had taken their trenches, were now shelling vigorously their own former front—and amidst all that ruin and all that danger, he poured out a steady stream. Satisfying ... immensely ... so to christen newly captured soil.

Then on he went. Ran about among the men. Broke up groups. Scattered them out into a wave, three yards between man and man. Kept them advancing.

So they went forward three hundred, four hundred yards. Always in front of them the advancing British barrage, that great cloud of grayish-green smoke which hid them from their enemies, and which kept them, too, from knowing what lay immediately ahead.

Looking to the left, Falcon saw that the line there was not advancing. The men were dropping into shell-holes.

With loping strides he crossed over. Bullets crackled around. He and his men must be very close here to the next line of German trenches.

But the men must keep advancing. If they didn't persistently press forward, they would lose all the protection of that barrage. Then, stranded here in the open, they would be easy prey for the Germans.

He must rouse them out of their shell-holes.

Not so easy, when neither his voice nor his whistle was audible. Nor did the pantomime of signals suffice to arrest their attention. He could, then, only run from shell-hole to shell-hole, digging out the men in each, urging them forward....

He dropped into the first shell-hole, found a Lewis-gunner and a private there together.

"Whazzamatter?" Falcon roared in the Lewis-gunner's ear. "Why don't you go forward?"

The Lewis-gunner only half heard him. Laughing hysterically, he shook his fists towards the German trenches.

"The bastards!" the gunner shouted. "They shot the cigarette out of my mouth. And it was the last cigarette I had...."

"We must go forward," Falcon bellowed again into the ear of the Lewis-gunner. "I'm going on to rouse these other fellows to the left. Keep your eye on me. When I go forward, that's the signal to advance."

The Lewis-gunner nodded.

Falcon jumped up—started with long strides towards the next group that he could see in a shell-hole, a dozen yards away.

He had taken one stride, he had taken two, when he became aware that the barrage had lifted, that he was facing, almost running head-on into, the second-line German trench. It certainly wasn't a hundred yards away, not much over fifty. He saw, beneath coal-scuttle helmets, stubble beards on dirty, drawn faces....

He hadn't time to do anything. He could only, in a flash, see all: four Germans aiming their rifles at him. He could see their eyes. Two of the four wore steel-rimmed spectacles. One looked a little like an old cobbler who had done jobs for him at home....

A good target he, Falcon, must make for them. Six feet two in his boots. And so evidently an officer, trying to direct, to lead the attack.

Three steps, four. Would he make the next shell-hole—any shell-hole—with the bullets cracking through the air beside his ears?

Five steps. What rotten shots! But they, too, must be nervous.

Six steps.

"Ah-h-h!"

In the chest. On the left side. Like a steel spike driven in by a sledge-hammer.

So this was it, at last.

Carried along by his rush, he reeled into the nearest shell-hole. Fell there, on his back, gasping.... Bullets still crackled very close to his ears. The Germans, then, didn't know whether or not they had hit him ... were determined to make a sure job.

On his back, in the shell-hole, a copy of the London *Times* seemed to spread open before his eyes. The page headed "Roll of Honor." In the middle of the column headed "F" he saw his name.

"Falcon, Major Alexander, D.S.O., Can. Inf. Battn. Killed in action."

So that was what it would look like, to-morrow, or the day after. That little line of type.

The illusion vanished. Everything was growing confused.

This immense pain in taking breath. This feeling of being smashed in, as if the whole side had been caved in. This bitter gasping for breath. This twisting of the throat. This gasping for breath ... breath.

A stretcher-bearer suddenly was stooping over him. The stretcher-bearer tore open Falcon's jacket, cut open his shirt, looked at a huge hole near the heart. Had that been an expanding bullet?

Or had it, perhaps, struck something in the pocket, turned, gone down so?

The stretcher-bearer bandaged the wound as well as he could. Gave Falcon a quarter grain tablet of morphia.

"Water," gasped Falcon. His throat was so dry with this battle for breath.

The stretcher-bearer undid the water-bottle hanging from Falcon's belt. Put it to the wounded man's lips. Then, the thirst for the moment quenched, he put it in Falcon's hand.

He looked at Falcon, looked at the greenish-grayness of his face.

"Have you any messages to send home?" he asked.

Falcon shook his head.

"I've ... sent them," he with difficulty whispered.

He had attended to all that. He was too seasoned a soldier not to think of all that. Rough business this for his mother and his father. And Adair.... "The strain is beginning to tell," she had written. This wouldn't be good news for her. Now, when she was ill. Afterwards, perhaps, it might ease the strain....

Why hadn't he got a bullet right through the middle of his forehead—as he had dreamed so vividly? ... Months ago

he had dreamed that, back in the days when he used to go reconnoitering in No Man's Land at night. Up near the Wytshaete-Messines road. One morning, sleeping in a dugout that reeked with the stomach-turning smell of dead men, he had dreamed that a German patrol had got behind him on a reconnaissance, that he had had to fight his way through, only, in the end, to receive a bullet right between the eyes. Through many months that dream had stayed in the background of his consciousness, had seemed sure presentiment....

"I'm afraid that's all I can do for you, sir." The stretcher-bearer looked at him regretfully.

"More morphia," murmured Falcon. If he was dying, why not lessen the intolerable agony of this struggle for breath?

The stretcher-bearer shook his head.

"It's against orders, sir, to give more than one tablet. We might think a man was through, yet he might, after all, have a chance. Besides, I haven't many tablets. And there are a lot of wounded."

"I have some," whispered Falcon. "Right-hand breast pocket."

A private had joined them in the shell-hole, was bending over Falcon. Heard his words, opened the pocket, took out the little glass bottle with the morphia tablets.

The private looked at the stretcher-bearer. "Shall I...?"

The stretcher-bearer hesitated. "Well, in this case ... I suppose you might as well."

Falcon took a tablet. Washed it down with a swallow of water poured in by the hand of the private. Another tablet. Another swallow. Another tablet....

He took five times the dose that regulations allowed. The strain of the breathing eased a little.

He was taking a sixth tablet when he realized that the pain was now, at least, endurable.

He spat out the tablet, grinned feebly at the private and the stretcher-bearer. "If there's any chance at all, I'll fight for it."

"Good!" The stretcher-bearer rose. "I'm sorry, sir, but I must go. There are others..."

Falcon himself, before the attack, had stressed the order to the stretcher-bearers in his company not to waste time on the severely wounded, but to give chief attention to the slightly wounded who could go on fighting.... Before everything, the success of the attack.

"Take these tablets with you," he whispered to the stretcher-bearer.

The private, too, had to go. Before going, he propped Falcon up as well as he could. He put the water-bottle in Falcon's left hand, and the automatic, as Falcon requested, loaded, in his right ... "For emergencies."

The private went to rejoin the advancing line. Falcon found it an agony to loosen his grip of that rough hand. He could understand Nelson's "Kiss me, Hardy." It wasn't just Hardy that the stricken Nelson had wished to embrace before he faded out into nothingness. It was the whole warm spirit of humanity.

Now—to die or not to die—Falcon lay alone, on his back, staring at the blue sky and the bright white clouds. The bullets no longer crackled close to his ears as when he had first fallen, but shells continued to swish overhead, to rock with their concussions the ground on which he lay.

A wounded man stumbled into his shell-hole. A big man with a bleeding shoulder and a strained, gray face.

"Why, Alec!" Cud Browne bent over him.

"Can't talk much, Cud," whispered Falcon, pointing to his side.

Cud took Alec's hand. Gripping it, he said:

"I'm going back with this wound. It's nasty, but I can walk. I'll tell them.... Is there anything else I can do for you?"

"How's the line?" asked Alec.

"Pretty thin. We have hardly any men. It looks as if we'll have to fall back."

Falcon shook his head. If the line retreated, he would fall into the hands of the Germans. He didn't want that—in this condition. Still, he had, in his right hand, his automatic. Seven shots in the magazine....

Falcon pointed to the pocket holding his field message-book. He whispered:

"Take a message."

Helped by Cud, he wrote a message to the Commanding Officer of the McIntyres.

"Took first trench with lots of prisoners. Hard fighting. Lost most of company. At German second line now. Very few men left. We can hold on if you send up reinforcements, officers and men...."

He paused. This was the time when a man with any real grit would send a stirring message, but he didn't care now about that. All he cared about was to get back, if he could, alive, to Adair....

He added to the note: "I'm down. Shot through chest near heart. May pull through if you can send out stretcher-bearers."

He signed the message: "Alexander Falcon, Major, O.C. 'B' Company."

Cud Browne gripped his hand again, went on.

A rotten message, thought Falcon.... None of your heroic do-or-die stuff ... just a plea for help.

He had had his chance to write something memorable. And he had missed it. He hadn't had the grit to rise above his own intense pain.

But what else mattered if he got out of here alive? He might then accomplish something worth more....

His vision of blue sky was again blocked by a khaki figure bending over him.

A corporal, his face gray with fatigue, his eyes anxious, troubled, was talking....

"I'm the last N.C.O. left, sir. No officers, no sergeants, no corporals but me. And not more than forty men...."

A fast hour's work, thought Falcon. With that extra platoon his company had been nearly up to strength at the start. Two hundred men with five officers. Now, a corporal and fifty men. "One crowded hour of glorious strife...." Humph! "We can't go any farther forward," the corporal was saying. "We have formed a new line where we lie. But if the Germans counter-attack I don't see how we can hold it. We have so few men. Hadn't we better fall back?"

Falcon shook his head.

"No," he whispered.

He wasn't thinking only of the line. He was thinking of himself. It would be death to be taken, this way, a prisoner. He would fight for his life. The men must fight for the line.

"Then, sir, we'll have to have reinforcements. Officers and men." The corporal spoke imploringly. It was a terrific responsibility for him, so little used to command, to assume ... responsibility for a company's frontage on a battle-field.

Falcon, drawing his slow, labored breaths, looked at the corporal steadily. He whispered:

"I have sent for reinforcements.... Hold on until they come."

The corporal looked at this man from whom he had so long taken orders, heard him commanding even now....

"All right, sir!" He rose from his squatting position, vanished into the rim of the shell-hole as he returned to his men.

Falcon again was left alone. On his back.

Staring at the sky. Water-bottle in his left hand ... automatic in his right.

If the Germans broke through, he, lying there by himself, would never know it until some big figure in field-gray loomed above him, thrust at him, perhaps, with a bayonet.

He could stop that, if he had to, with his automatic. Drop a man or two. Then finish himself with a shot through the head.

Drowsy as the morphia made him, he refused to lose consciousness. Suppose that, after all, stretcher-bearers came for him, saw him lying inert with eyes closed, mistook him for dead and passed on? He must keep his eyes open. He was fighting for life.

Not that it would be so much of a life. From the feeling of the left side he imagined that his entire left lung was destroyed. No further career of adventure for him. But he could, at any rate, turn to writing.... Now, surely, if the stretcher-bearers came for him soon he would have his chance. It was only a lung that was damaged. His head, which was all that could matter in writing, was unharmed....

All the afternoon he lay there, on his back, staring at the sky.

Once, in mid-afternoon, there dropped into his shell-hole a subaltern from Alastair Irvine's company. A bold, energetic youth with bright eyes and with cheeks usually fresh-colored but now pale with weariness. Lucky enough to be still unhit.

"I heard you were here," he said to Falcon. "We'll get you in later, if we can."

"How's it going?" Falcon whispered.

"A bit quieter now, but we've certainly had a rough party. I seem to be the only officer with these two companies. But I had word to expect reinforcements. We're all right if the enemy don't counter-attack before the reinforcements come."

After this brief visit Falcon was again left to himself. Occasionally he would hear footsteps passing close by. A wounded man going back to the dressing-station, or a runner with a message on his way to headquarters. Falcon, not knowing what was happening during the long hours of the afternoon, tried to call to these men. But he couldn't raise his voice. They passed by, unheeding.

Hour followed hour, and no stretcher-bearers came. Falcon lay there, half awake, waiting. It wasn't so difficult to keep awake. The intense pain in his side made sleep impossible.

Sunlight faded into dusk, the blue sky into darkness. Falcon lay, looking at the stars, waiting.

Stretcher-bearers might, after all, on that big battlefield, be quite unable to find him until too late. That subaltern who had come to see him might have been himself killed. No one perhaps would remember in which one of those hundreds of shell-holes he lay.

There was such a lot to be done after an attack, and there were always so few men to do it. So few stretcher-bearers, too, as the advance proceeded....

And if you lay out too long, even if they did in the end find you, you would in all likelihood be rotten with gangrene. And you would be rescued too late.

As the hours of the night passed, and no help came, despair began to settle upon Falcon. Two or three times, at long intervals, he attempted to rise, but movement doubled the violence of the aching in his side. He didn't know anything about chest wounds, but he had heard of people dying of hemorrhages. It would certainly do no good to move, if movement only brought on a hemorrhage. So he remained there on his back, looking at the stars ... afraid to sleep ... waiting ... listening.

Hurried feet passed him, but he could not summon them to his aid. What if those feet were not the feet of wounded Canadians returning, but of Germans advancing, breaking through the newly formed line?

Lying there alone, so long, in the darkness, he couldn't know how the attack went. He pondered the possibility of disaster.

This attack might prove like so many others. You made an advance, but you lost nearly all your men. The enemy counter-attacked. You were too weak to hold your gains. You had to fall back, half-way or farther.

That was what might have happened here.... How could he know—he, who had seen no one, had spoken to no one for hours?

He looked at the luminous dial on his wristwatch. The hands showed a few minutes past three o'clock. It couldn't have been much past one o'clock in the afternoon when he was hit. Now, past three o'clock in the morning. He had been lying out nearly fourteen hours.

After a while the shelling, which for some hours had been light, became again heavy. High explosives—rocking the earth nearer and nearer to where he lay. Not very pleasant. Once more he tried to move. But it hurt his side so. He lay back again. He was probably safer here than anywhere. It wasn't a very deep shell-hole, but even a shallow depression gave some protection from shell fragments. His whole body was below the surface of the ground. Only his head projected a little above the edge of the hole.

The shells now thundered to earth so fast and so quick that they formed a curtain of fire.

Whose barrage? Was it the enemy trying to smash up reinforcements that struggled towards the new British front line? Or was it the British artillery, forestalling attempts at counter-attack by the Germans?

Falcon didn't know. He had no means of knowing where the present British front line was, on which side of it he lay.

He was aware only that the barrage of shells was falling ever closer to his shell-hole. If he didn't get out of here, surely he would get blown up. Yet if he did get out, into the open, he would be naked amongst all those explosions. Better lie quiet until the shelling was over....

A roar and a burst of red-yellow light. A crash that struck him from forehead to chin.

He was dazed, but he was still conscious. The blow had been bad enough, but not nearly so painful as that in the chest. It was rather like a terrific wallop on the head in a boxing match, that knocked you groggy, but didn't knock you out. He had had punches like that when he had been able to keep on fighting afterwards, but had hardly known what he was doing....

This was something like that.... Yet different.

His right eye, surely, must be out. He couldn't see with it at all. The blood was pouring down his cheek. He put his

hand to his right cheek. A gob of warm bleeding flesh hung there. He wondered if that was his right eye?

The end of his nose, too, was cut. Almost cut off. The flesh hung loose.

And his mouth was split in two. Upper and lower lips, split through in the center.

"What a hell of a sight!" he thought to himself.

He had heard of men with no faces. He would be like that. If he lived, he would have to live all to himself. He would see no one, not even Adair. No, he certainly wouldn't see Adair. He would go to some distant city, where nobody knew him. He would live alone. And he would write. With one good eye and one good lung, he could at least write.... Such pictures of the war....

It was a life worth making a try for.

The shelling was not quite so heavy now. The shells were not bursting quite so close.

He must get out of this shell-hole, or he would bleed to death, rot to death. He had no way to bandage this wound that had split his face from forehead to chin. If dirt got into it....

He detached the straps on his shoulders, which he had already loosened, the straps which held the light haversack he had carried in place of a pack. He took a last swig of water from his water-bottle. He left the water-bottle in the shell-hole with the rest of his equipment. He left everything except his automatic. He might need that.

With immense difficulty—and not without starting up again the racket in his side, but he would have to disregard that—he struggled to his feet. He stood up.

With his one eye he looked about, bewildered.

Just where was he? Looking around the horizon, he saw the interlacing arcs of multitudinous flarelights on all sides but one. In that direction he could see only spasmodic flashings of batteries that illumined the rim of the sky. The flashing, surely, from British batteries.

Towards that flashing he headed.

Even if he had been a whole man, it would not have been a simple journey. To wander back at night, over a shell-pitted battlefield, stumbling over corpses, through big shell-holes, up and down trenches that led you knew not where, with shells bursting, very often uncomfortably close. But he would have to take his chances on that. After all, he still had, in his right hand, his automatic.

His left hand he kept pressed against his side. With each step that he took, at the beginning of his journey, the wind seemed to sough from that hole in his side. He supposed that the lung hadn't quite collapsed before ... was still collapsing. Like the pin-pricked bladder of a football.

He was only vaguely conscious of his direction. He floundered along with his left eye fixed on the gun-flashes. He came at last to a trench. No one in it. Except, here and there, a dead man.... Plenty of them.... He stumbled over a corpse. Sat down beside it, on the firing-step, exhausted. Rested a little while. Then rose. Floundered along through that trench a long way. Then came to a place where it was blown in. Struggled out into the open again. Then, after a time, he struck another trench. Or was it the same trench, running at a different angle? There might be some one in it.

He got down into it. He struggled along for a couple of bays. Joy of joys! A living man, a private in the Canadian infantry, stood before him.

Falcon spoke—the only way he could speak—with twisted words out of the left corner of his mouth:

"I'm ... a major ... in the MacIntyres.... Eye out ... lung gone.... Can you help me ... to the dressing-station?"

The private answered in broken English. He was a French-Canadian. He didn't know just where the dressing-station was.

Falcon, almost delirious with the throbbing in his head and the aching in his side, thought perhaps if he could give the man a tip of some sort....

"Here's my revolver.... Take it." He held out his automatic to the private. "It's worth a lot of money.... You can keep it, if you'll take me back."

"Je ne sais." The private was not sure of the way. But he would find out. If ze Major would wait, he, the private, would go and inquire. He would be back very soon.

He took the revolver. He went.

Falcon leaned against the side of the trench, resting as best he could.

It was a long wait. Five minutes passed, ten minutes, a quarter of an hour.

The private didn't come back.

Perhaps he had lost his way. Perhaps he had been himself injured by a shell explosion. Perhaps, having taken that revolver, worth a month's pay, he was no longer interested. At any rate, he didn't come back.

Falcon would have to shift for himself.

He wandered along the trench in the direction the private had taken. He found bay after bay, empty, deserted. Except, of course, for the corpses. He came again to a place where the trench had been blown in by a shell. He clambered up over the debris to the open.

He struggled along in the open, still heading for the gun-flashes. He was near collapse, but he would not give in. Not now, when he must be so nearly home. He had been on his legs, by this time, for nearly an hour, trying to find the way back. His legs would keep on going. Legs which, before the war, had so often done twenty, thirty, forty miles in a day. Those legs, though staggering now, would take him back.

He heard, at last, voices in the darkness—voices that spoke with a strong Scotch burr.

He came on a party of Canadian Highlanders, digging—remaking a trench. Or burying the dead. What did he care which?

Falcon again spoke with his split lips. Told who he was, how wounded, asked for help.

They crowded round him, offering welcome, help. There were no stretchers handy, they explained. All the stretchers were out forward, for bringing in the wounded. But one of the party volunteered to help Falcon down to the dressing-station.

Falcon leaned on the arm of this sturdy Scotch-Canadian. Was piloted by him down through a maze of trenches. So far to walk ... so far....

Dawn was just breaking when they reached the dressing-station, a square-mouthed hole in the chalk-white wall of a railway cutting.

As Falcon lurched through the door of the dressing-station, leaning still on the arm of the private, the first person he saw coming towards him with outstretched hand was the white-haired Divisional chaplain.

Canon Hargraves saw this officer swaying in, one half of his face unshaven, the other half covered with blood, his jacket open, the left side of it drenched.... He looked at the undamaged left eye. He recognized his late penitent.

"By Jove! You fellows...." the old man exclaimed.

The lanky medical officer in charge of the dressing-station came forward. He had worked all night over the hundreds of wounded, but was none the less cheery as he helped Falcon on to a stretcher.

"How about a shot of morphia?"

Morphia ... bandages on his head ... fresh bandages on his chest.

"The eye is still in," said the M.O. "There's a fair chance of saving it."

Falcon napped a little. Woke to find he was being carried out of the dressing-station on a stretcher. Men in field-gray were carrying him—German prisoners. Beside his stretcher walked the Highlander who had helped him back.

It was a bright autumn morning. The sunlight fell very pleasantly on the unbandaged part of Falcon's face and on the white chalk walls of the cut. Less pleasantly, there fell on his ears the swish and crash of high-explosives, the "ping" of shrapnel. Shells were bursting very close, searching this road, so congested with traffic of incoming troops and outgoing wounded.

Had he come through so much only to be finally smashed up on the way to the clearing-station? ... But his good luck, such as it was, held.

The stretcher-bearers brought him out to the high-road, placed him and his stretcher in an ambulance. He dozed and woke, dozed and woke, as the ambulance rumbled over the cobblestone roads. He found himself, at last, being carried into the clearing-station.

"You've *got* to rush this case," he heard someone say. "He's been lying out in the open for God knows how long."

He was placed on a table, beneath a glare of light.

PART III

CHAPTER I

The joyous shadows pursued each other across the great white sheet. He, watching, forgot for a moment the persistent aching in his side. For a little, his spirit rose above that dull depression that was almost always with him, through the day and through the night.

He smiled, a little wanly, at seeing a movie in such a place. Amazing. Incredible as Punch and Judy in Westminster Abbey. Even more incredible to glimpse, immediately in front of him, the bearded face of his host.

In this great darkened room, majestic in its high-ceilinged spaciousness, he felt rather than saw the presence of the hundred other officers who sat there with him. Row upon row of figures barely discernible through the gloom. Officers from Canada, Australia, New Zealand, India. All wounded. Although few, he had observed earlier, in so severe a plight as himself.

An honor for him, Alexander Falcon, to be here. But he found it cursed hard to sit up for so long. His first time in a straight-backed chair for six months—and until a month ago he hadn't been able to sit up even in bed. Couldn't manage this to-day if the nurse hadn't strapped his chest up tight.

But the pictures fascinated him. The first moving pictures he had seen in ... certainly not since he had been in London, a whole man, on his last leave. That was nine months ago. And who bothered with movies on a leave from France? The third leave, too, when you came near being the last of the old crowd, and you knew your luck couldn't hold much longer—if it was luck....

That last leave.... You can always break the commandments provided you observe the conventions.... Gold scattered as if the world would end that week.

Yet, after all, it hadn't ended. He was smashed up. But he was here. Here—of all places to be watching a moving picture!

His old friend, "Tom Brown's Schooldays," unreeled itself before him. Well filmed, too. Great stuff to see those stage-coaches crammed with lively school-boys. Six-horse teams trotting through the snow. You could almost hear that whiteness crunch beneath iron-shod, fast-falling hoofs.

Christmas vacation time. Youngsters snowballing, tooting horns, rollicking with ruddy-faced guards. Sheer joy in life.

To hell with that stuff!

He closed his eyes, exhausted. His weakened head couldn't stand much yet. And he couldn't focus his eye muscles. Probably he had stopped wearing that patch too soon. Everything was a weary blur.

Gradually he came out of the blur, like a man fallen overboard struggling back towards the surface. A voice murmured in the dark. Strong, melodious. Not speaking to him. The man with the beard was talking in an undertone to the figure next to him.

Alexander Falcon had heard that voice once before. Half an hour ago, as he came through the long reception hall. He saw its owner standing, the central figure in that glittering and formidable assembly.

He listened to the voice now, rambling along in pleasant inconsequence in discussion of the pictures. It seemed to reveal a character very different from that which he had surmised. He had seen photographs of this man ten thousand

times ... a man mild-eyed and grave beneath a load of cares. The slave of an empire whose boast is liberty. He had never imagined that the accompanying voice, even when saying polite nothings, would be so deep and unforgettable.

"In what part of Canada did you go to school?" the voice questioned.

There was a pause as if of hesitation. Then out of the gloom the reply came:

"I wasn't educated in Canada, sir.... I am an American—or rather, I was until a year ago, when I entered the British army. And after the War, if I see it through, I expect to go home to the States again. Back to Massachusetts.... As for schools ... I went to Groton and Harvard."

Groton and Harvard! Alexander Falcon was agitated. The same school and college that Adair's younger brother had gone to. Could it be...? No. He knew her brother had come to England a year ago, and now had a commission in the Coldstreams, but there were only wounded Colonial officers here. No Imperials. It would have been amusing, though, if he had met her brother here, at a moving-picture show in this place, of all places, talking to that bearded man in field marshal's uniform....

And Adair—the very thought of her maddened him ... where was she now? Why didn't she write to him—*really* write to him? Why hadn't she come to see him in hospital, not even in those gray days when he was supposed to be dying?

"Dying? Hell, they couldn't kill you with an ax!" the heavy voice of his Colonel had rumbled at him out of six feet three of backwoods vigor. But what good did it do you for your friends to laugh when their eyes were wet?

He had wanted Adair through so many nights and days—and she had not come. During all those hours lying out in the shell-hole, during all those weeks in that white cot in France—and he had been so many times under the knife—one thing had kept alight his old fierce desire to live: the thought that he was coming back to Adair.

And in her letters she hadn't sent herself at all. A kind friend, a good friend. But always, a discreet woman of the world. Not going to endanger her reputation for any man. "After the War was over..." Of course, of course. How sick he was of all that!

Then, hospital in England. Elation! But she hadn't come. Those bloody hemorrhages! "Another one and he's through," whispered the great specialist to the medical officer. "What, another one last night and he's still alive!" exclaimed the great specialist to the medical officer. And she hadn't come.

Even Isabella, whom he had never expected to hear from again after that last night on his last leave, had called at the hospital day after day for a whole month to inquire. She had kept his bedside bright with flowers. Without ever coming up to his ward to see him ... *that* was quite understandable ... she had talked to the doctor and the nurse and the commandant. She had urged his removal from the ward to a private room. And, as Falcon grew better, Isabella had sent Sir Hector, back from France on an eight days' leave, to visit him. And Sir Hector had come, not now as a pompous Brigadier-general, but almost as a father.

Yet Adair.... So true to that noble husband of hers, that hard, handsome libertine safe in a German prison, and playing safe for her reputation.... Adair had not come.

Why think about her? He had said good-bye to a lot of things now, with this smashed lung. Good-bye for a long time to cigars and Martinis, and women, too, good or bad. Good? Bad? Silly talk! He was through with them all anyhow. All that mattered was to get fit again and carve out a career. Through? ... Who said he was through? He would be back in France in six months. Not line, of course. That was too much to expect. But Staff was the place where you got promotions, power, decorations.

A sudden burst of chattering around him brought him out of his day-dream. The pictures were over. His eyes were dazzled with the sudden glare of light.

"Will you please help me to get up?" Falcon hoarsely whispered to a subaltern. "After I'm on my legs I'm all right.

But I can't get up by myself—not yet."

"Sure," said the subaltern. "Say, you certainly got messed up. Where did you get hit? What show?"

"Chest and head. Somme. Last September." When breath came so hard, talk had to be brief. This immense effort to stand! Falcon swayed, exhausted.

The officer who had helped him to his feet glanced at the crown on his cuff.

"Can I help you through to the other room, sir?"

"No, thanks. Those two canes, please. Yes, both. Now I'm all right."

Tall, emaciated, stooping, with staring, frightened eyes and a scarred, gray face that looked fifty years old, Falcon on his two canes shuffled after the crowd.

"What a lark!" he muttered to himself with his twisted lips, "to be in this place on my twenty-sixth birthday!"

He was near the door. But he wouldn't go through with the crowd. He had to keep clear of the crowd. He hated crowds. Fighting, struggling....

"For Christ's sake, shut up!" he muttered to himself. "Try to look at something outside your own head."

Standing soon drained him of his thoughts. Not much blood in him, and that seemed to be all running down into his legs. He felt faint now, weary and faint, but he was still conscious of the crown on his cuff and the ribbon on his chest. He would be damned rather than ask for aid until he got through to the other room and a chair.

Suddenly his vaguely wandering eyes halted. *There* was a face now.... Whose?

Memories tumbled up, confusedly. He was standing at the door of a ranch house in Southern Alberta, looking out across two miles of grassy river bottom. To the right, the broad muddiness of the Belly, in flood that year. To the left, the great gray buttes, whose curved smoothness held for him such a mysterious fascination.

And then far off, down a coulee between two buttes, came dots, rapidly growing larger. A single rider acting as guide. Then the high-piled cook wagon with its four-horse team. The cook with his rawhide, tickling up the leaders and lashing that lazy rump on the off wheel to a good smart trot. Then the bed wagon with a loafing figure on top of it. The half-breed night-wrangler, Joe Spotted Bull. Only half awake. Then the cavvy of horses, over a hundred of them, almost in single file, trotting along, trotting along, trotting along. In the rear a youngster as horse-wrangler, stinging laggard buttocks with the knotted end of a forty-foot rope.

What a lot of fun it had been when *he* had that job! Swinging along all day long behind those hundred horses. Rising and falling in his saddle all day long under the hot sun as he swirled out his rope at those rounded rumps and called "Ee-ahoo! Ee-ahoo!"

He had envied the wrangler that day.

And then, after the wagon had drawn up near the ranch house and the horses were unharnessed and the white tents were up and the smoke from the pipe in the top of the cook tent announced that dinner was cooking—then he had seen other dots coming over the brow of a distant butte. Hundreds of black dots. Thousands of them. The great, slow-moving herd.

At last the herd was in the river bottom. Strung along the river's edge—three thousand rumbling, thirsty throats all clamoring for water.

After that, all but two of the riders had left the cattle. Ten riders galloping up together, a glorious sight as they stuck spurs into their horses and headed for the white tents.

Why should the face of this handsome artillery officer, seen amidst this stateliness, make him think of one of those galloping cowboys?

This fellow was the living image of Gyp Callahan. It must be Callahan. Yet it couldn't be Callahan. Last time he had seen Callahan was in that fight in the bar-room at Whoopee. When Callahan tossed Brazenose through the bar-room window, he had landed himself, so Cud Browne said, in the jug.... Lively, handsome Callahan, in a striped suit, breaking rocks.... That was the last he had heard of Callahan. And Callahan was probably still there. Breaking rocks. Unless.... But what a change in hospitality!

Still, by God! this must be Callahan.

He would catch this fellow on the way through and find out.

Shuffling over to the doorway, he rested on his two canes as he watched the crowd go past.

Presently along came Callahan—or his double—talking to another officer.

Falcon tapped him on the arm.

"Excuse me for interrupting," came the hoarse whisper, "but are you from Alberta?"

"Sure." The ruddy-faced, thick-set gunner lieutenant with the dark eyebrows and the blue eyes turned to glance inquiringly at this gray-faced officer in plaid trousers, who had hobbled up on his two canes. "I sure am."

"Did you ever punch cows for an outfit called the Bar Ninety-Nine?"

"You bet!" The artillery lieutenant looked a little bewildered, a little uneasy.

"You're Gyp Callahan, aren't you?"

"Yes, sir." The lieutenant noted the crown on the other's cuff and stared at him with puzzled, nervous eyes. Then he burst out: "But who the hell are you?"

"Do you remember a youngster from college in the East—

"Christ!" Callahan stared at the other man's one undamaged eye. "You don't mean to say——"

"Yes, I'm Falcon."

Callahan's face relaxed. He put out his hand. Then, noticing Falcon's regimental badges: "I heard that old man Carson went with your outfit as a buck private. Is that right?"

"Yes, that's right." The two men moved along to the door with the crowd.

"God!" said Callahan. "Old man Carson of the Bar Ninety-Nine servin' as a buck private. And him a Yankee colonel in the Philippines.... He *was* a man."

"Yes," murmured the other. "Yes, he was a man."

"Did he come through, or did he stop one?" asked Callahan.

But Falcon didn't answer. He was looking very gray, a sort of greenish-gray. And he was having all he could do to keep himself up on his two canes.

The whole great roomful of Colonial officers and austere beautiful ladies went swimming around him hazily.

Out of the darkness that gathered round him and pressed in upon him came a charming masculine voice.

"You really oughtn't to be standing. Won't you let me take you to a chair?"

He found himself leaning on the arm of a handsome guardsman. White hair and a sweeping white mustache, with a face ruddy, clear-skinned, strong. What a man for sixty!

On this virile arm Falcon was piloted through to the reception-room and across to a corner where two other officers sat: one, an Australian captain without legs; the other, a New Zealand subaltern blind and armless and still very white from his wounds.

It was a sort of "crocks' corner," Falcon thought. Probably he would miss all the fun here, such as it was. But at any rate he would avoid fainting and all that mess.

"Your hospitals really oughtn't to have sent you people, I'm afraid." The white-haired Colonel of the Guards, standing over them, spoke a little anxiously. "Of course, now that you are here, we're all glad to see you." He proceeded to explain that their host held this reception for a hundred wounded Colonial officers every Saturday, but felt anxious about any very badly wounded officers who attended. "He doesn't want them to hold up their recovery by coming out too soon."

Falcon sank back into his chair, resting. The aching was pretty damned bad now. He had that old feeling of having been broken in two and joined together again—not very well. They certainly had carved him. "Carved in a way that all admired."

What was that? Chaucer. No, you silly ass! It was that American. Secretary of State or something. Hays. No, Hay—John Hay. That was it.

*"He out with his 'leven-inch bowie-knife
And he carved in a way that all admired."*

Still, he, Falcon, had got off easily compared with that poor chap Lloyd, up on the top floor of the hospital. Lloyd had had his leg off seven times—and then had passed out. A great fellow ... magnificent athlete ... reduced in his last weeks to a mere bundle of skin and bones and jangled nerves. Crying like a baby, with huge tears rolling down his gaunt cheeks. Poor beggar! He was better out of it.

For himself, he was having a hell of a fine time now, watching all these swanking officers, so many of them with ribbons on their chests and spurs on their heels, and all these gorgeous ladies.... Women with faces as beautiful, as cold, and as kindly condescending as their manners.

There was his host, talking to one group of fifteen or twenty officers. And his hostess, surrounded by another dozen. What were they saying?

He would miss all that. But it couldn't be helped. He would do damned well to stick it for another hour. Then back to hospital—back to that cool white cot. And he would get a shot in the arm, and he would feel deliciously drowsy, and he would forget the pain for a bit, and he would rest.

By Jupiter! There was a handsome woman! Coming directly towards him. One of the ladies assisting his hostess. Tall, eagle-eyed, imperious. An English thoroughbred. Looked as if she would be less bored in the hunting-field than in the drawing-room.... She chatted agreeably. Tea-table chatter. She came from Devonshire. One of his grandfathers hailed from Devonshire, too. Presently she went away to speak to his host's daughter.

And then came the daughter. Very young: only seventeen or so; fresh and simple as the English countryside. And shy. Very shy. Did he like the pictures?

Oh, yes, he liked the pictures very much, thank you.

"Tom Brown's Schooldays" was an old favorite of father's.

It was an old favorite of his, too.

A few minutes of chatting and she passed on to speak to the next officer.

Then Falcon saw an elderly widow approaching. World-famous, once, for her beauty. Still notably handsome even now, in the sunset of her days. His host's mother. She stopped to speak to the man with no legs.

Falcon listened.

He couldn't hear what the handsome old lady was saying. But she looked puzzled as the legless man replied. And then the legless man raised his voice, talked clear and loud, very loud.

Of course, the old lady was deaf!

Terror seized Falcon. Would she come to speak to him? He couldn't talk above a sort of whisper. And it tired him so when he tried to talk even a little louder. It tired him when he tried to talk much at all.

But it was not the elderly widow, it was his hostess, who came. No, she wouldn't allow him to stand while she spoke to him. She was very kind, very considerate. She spoke only for a minute or two. Then passed on. To be followed by her husband.

So this man was coming to speak to him. To him, Alexander Falcon, who had gone to the War not as an imperialist, but as a republican. Who had fought less as a lover of Britain than as a lover of humanity. Who had only become a soldier because he had believed, however mistakenly, that for this once such was the duty of a Socialist.

His love of pageantry rode down all grayer thoughts. In this bearded field-marshal, resplendent in tan and gold, who was coming now so simply to speak to him, Falcon saw....

The bearded field-marshal faced him. Falcon attempted to struggle to his feet.

"No, no. Please keep your seat."

Then, in that deep voice, friendly and strong, came question after question about his wounds, about the last attack. Searching questions such as no civilian could put. Questions such as could come only from a man with a passionate interest in his subject and as intimate a knowledge of it as was possible to one to whom the front-line trenches were forbidden.

At last the talk came to an end. Stimulated by the occasion, Falcon had outdone himself. He must have answered questions for a quarter of an hour.

"You are fortunate to have come through so much and still be alive."

"Yes, I'm lucky to be out of—out of..." Falcon hesitated. He couldn't say "out of it all." An officer talking to the head of the whole British army mustn't say he was lucky to be out of it all. Lucky to be out of that damned mess! He should keep up a bluff of courage. But now, Falcon was so tired he couldn't think what to say. He left the sentence unfinished.

His host read his thoughts and smiled.

"Yes, you're lucky to be here."

Falcon lay back among his cushions, exhausted. He knew he would feel wretched that night—so wretched that this trip would hardly seem worth while ... if it weren't for the courtesy of his host—this man whose crown he wore on his cuff.

CHAPTER II

Falcon, on the train from London to Bournemouth, was reading a novel of Meredith's about a British naval officer whose hot-headed quixotry was his ruin ... an old favorite ... yet it failed to hold his attention.

This would be his first sight of Adair in nearly a year—since that afternoon on his last leave when they took tea together in the Carlton. What would she think of him?

That young doctor at the clearing-station had done a wonderful job with the face. The nose, of course, looked like Cyrano de Bergerac's snout. But the sewed-up lips, although still numb, worked better than he had expected. He could drink a glass of burgundy now without spilling half of it. And the surgeon in the base hospital at Rouen had saved his eye. For the first couple of months in hospital he hadn't been able to use that eye at all, then had attempted to use it, only to find himself violently cross-eyed. When he looked at a door with both eyes, he saw two doors, one slanting beneath the other. Now he no longer saw definite double images except in the evenings, when he was tired. Altogether, the doctors had done an excellent job with his face, ugly as the new creation might be.

They had done an even better job with his chest. Of course, he had had pneumonia and empyema and he had been on the operating table four times during the first two months after he had been hit. But that was what you had to expect, with a wound like that. The main thing was that they had got him through those various crises, his struggle for life and his hemorrhages, and had sent him out of hospital, not perhaps a whole man, but a well-patched one. The scar on his chest looked even now like a raw beefsteak. They had had to cut five inches out of one rib and three inches apiece out of two others. But the lung, relieved of the quart or two of pus that they had drained from it (how many nights he had wakened sick with the sweet stink of his own wound!), had expanded to more than half of normal. His body weight, which had shrunk at one time to ninety pounds, so that it had amused him to talk of going into a side-show as a "Living Skeleton," had come up gradually, although it was still a good thirty pounds short of what it had been before he was hit.

With his remade face, his spindly figure, and his stoop—the pull from the great scar on his chest kept him from standing erect—what would Adair think of him?

Still more annoying, he had to lead this invalidish life. With a large conceit of his energy, he had liked to set a pace that others, less fortunate in build, found it hard to follow. Now, although out of hospital, he still had to spend a large part of his time lying down, was constantly having to excuse himself from doing this or that.

If Adair admired him for his strength, would she respect him now when that strength was gone?

Here he was again, he jeered bitterly at himself, caring so intensely what Adair might think of him. And he had resolved that this should be their last meeting.

Surely, if she had been even his very good friend, she would have come to see him during those six months in hospital—at least, during those last four months in hospital in England. She had, it was true, been unwell. Some sort of nervous collapse. And she had been threatened, she had written, with pneumonia.... But if she had had any real affection for him, she certainly would have come to him as soon as she could travel. Instead of that, she hadn't even written him letters that were more than formal notes. He understood. When his hold on life had been so very uncertain, she wouldn't run unnecessary risks, wouldn't venture on intimacies in letters that might arrive too late, to be opened by others. He understood all, but he forgave nothing. And yet...

"*Odi et amo....*" How could he render that couplet? The conflict in it had puzzled him when he learned it, as a school-boy. Satisfied him now, when he recalled it as a man. He scribbled, crossed out words and scribbled again, on the fly-leaf of the novel on his knee.

*"Why do I both hate and love, you ask me to reveal?
I know not ... knowing only the torture that I feel."*

He must forget Adair. He must train himself to forget her. It would be easier, now that he was out of hospital, and going back to Canada. He would have had no object in staying in England, except to be near Adair. And that, for more than a day or two, she wouldn't allow. And it was, anyhow, his duty to go back to Canada, now that he had the chance, to see his father, so suddenly yet so inevitably stricken. That ruddy-faced, white-thatched old man who had seemed as unshakeable as an oak.... All that talk about his heart, then.... Once back in Canada he, Alec Falcon, would, no doubt, be kept there convalescent for at least six months. Time enough, surely to forget about Adair.... He looked forward to this meeting in which he would bid her good-by.

As the train drew into the station at Bournemouth, Alec, looking out of the window, saw Adair on the platform.

The train jarred to a stop. Alec got out, walked over towards Adair.

He had resolved to steel himself against the seduction of her beauty. He had compelled himself to think of all her imperfections, had taken a grim pleasure in remembering now this fault, now that. So, he had comforted himself, he would gather the strength to break loose for ever from that net of fascination....

Now, as he walked towards her, he noticed faults in her which he had never before observed. During the convalescence from her illness—whatever it had been—her figure had lost something of its slenderness. She did indeed still walk with her old grace, even though she verged on stoutness. There was a touch—a light yet visible touch—of gray in her hair. Her face had lost its delicate oval, was broader, reddened by exposure to the sun. Somehow, in her rough gray tweeds, she didn't seem quite so well groomed....

But when Adair came forward to him, smiling, saying only, "Well, so here you are ... at last," he found himself strangely perturbed at the low, soft tones of her voice. Even in these words, spoken so casually, it seemed to him that she caressed his whole being.

He gazed into the infinite understanding of her eyes, saw the immeasurable tenderness of her lips, noted the undulation of her breasts, on whose magnificence he suddenly longed to bow his head.

Her faults? As seen by him, a scarecrow from the fields of France? ... She was more beautiful than he had ever imagined.

He said, only, quite briskly: "It is pleasant to see you again."

* * * * *

Adair, standing on the platform waiting for Alec, had been wondering just what he would look like when he arrived. She must make herself appear entirely unconcerned. She dared not show sympathy, or she would be carried away by the flood of it.

That was the danger, when you felt strongly. You had to keep away from situations which, you knew beforehand, would break down completely your reserve.

She would have loved to go to see Alec in hospital. But she dared not. The cablegram announcing his wounds had come as a shock at a time when she was already ill ... ill from the long, long conflict.... The anxiety during the weeks that followed, the uncertainty whether or not he would survive each crisis—she had kept herself informed of his progress through the inquiries of friends—quite broke her down. She had longed to get across to France to see him in the base hospital, but that was all but impossible even for the wife of a wounded officer. And she was not his wife. So France, for her, had been out of the question.... She would have written to him more fully, but after her complete nervous collapse, the prostration that had confined her to bed for weeks, she could not write much. She had felt that she could only recover by disciplining herself to restrict all display of emotion. And if she had written more fully, if she had let him know how very severe her own illness had proved, it could only have impeded his recovery.

For her nervous exhaustion had been followed later by pneumonia. Determined not to let Alec know that she, too,

was battling for life, she had said only in her letters to him, to explain her non-appearance at his hospital on his arrival in England, merely that she had been "threatened with pneumonia." Yet on her recovery from pneumonia, the doctors, discovering first a shadow on her lung, then found tuberculosis. They had insisted on a long period of "absolute quiet, absolute rest, freedom from all nervous strain...."

In spite of all their orders, she would certainly have gone to see Alec in hospital in England as soon as she was able to travel if she had not known that to see him then, so wrecked, would have meant for her, in her then state of exhaustion, another complete collapse. Not merely a bad thing for herself, but dangerous for Alec, who was then holding onto life by such a slim thread. No, she had not dared to go.

The letters she had sent him had been mere notes. But the letters she had *not* sent him.... Why, the very fever of her body must have gone into them. She re-read them. They told of her own suffering. She tore them up.... She sent him only notes.

His letters to her, as time went on, had become more and more cool. She supposed he was piqued. How *could* he understand. If that were all, she could soon win him back. But he might, during those long months, have changed. He might no longer care. She wondered.

She wondered not only whether he cared, but also whether, if he did care, marriage between them would ever be possible. She was still resolved, as a matter of pride, not to break with Peter until the War was over. To wait that long was common decency. She was determined that, if she did marry Alec, the marriage must be built on a good solid foundation, with no memory left that might destroy respect and undermine the contract. That was one reason why she could not trust herself to see him, now, for more than a few hours. However battered he was, she knew that, when she saw him, if she found he still wanted her, she would *have* to take him to her, to comfort him.... No, she dared not see him for long, now. She must send him back to Canada and hope that, when the War was over...

Would all, when that time came, be well with Alec and with her? Ought he, so wrecked in health, to marry her, whose health was so unstable? She didn't suppose that he had much money, and her own private income had steadily shrunk, thanks to Peter. She would have liked to be able to enjoy a pleasant social life, but she could do without that if she had Alec—unless the marriage would pull them both down into a slough of misery. For facing her all the time like a sharp-edged shadow was the knowledge that the tuberculosis in her lungs, though quiescent, was not yet conquered....

She couldn't, however, decide all their future at this meeting. Her chief concern must be to make as pleasant as possible these few hours that they would have together.

Alert, eager for a first glimpse of Alec, she peered into the windows of the train from London as it rolled in beside the platform. No sign of Alec! Anxiously, she scanned the passengers alighting from the coaches.

A tall, thin, badly stooped officer with thick black eyebrows above a pale, twisted face, hobbled towards her on a cane. Could *that* be Alec! Yes, he was looking about him in bewildered fashion, as if he didn't see very clearly. Now, he had seen her. He was raising his hand in salute.

The sight of him—although he looked better than she dared to hope—made her feel suddenly ill.

Impossible ... impossible ... impossible ... the word reëchoed through her mind. Marriage with Alec was impossible ... impossible....

She could have cried out. She could have wept. But she must banish this misery. She must treat Alec as if she saw no change.

"Well," she said, trying to laugh cheerily, "so here you are ... at last."

Was that coldness?—was that subdued bitterness?—that she noted in his voice as he replied so briskly with his formal:

"It is pleasant to see you again."

Sitting side by side in the taxi, neither spoke. Each was puzzled by the strangeness of the other. They had been faithful for so long to the images of their dreams. They had seen so little the people after whom their dream images were fashioned.

Then at last Adair, with the word "impossible" reëchoing through the cathedral of her thoughts, said:

"It seems such ages since we used to ride together at Bendip, doesn't it? ... In those days we flirted along very pleasantly."

Flirted? Falcon, who had come resolved to sever their relation, was hurt now that she treated it so lightly. He said only:

"Yes, it's a long time ... but I don't forget so easily."

She looked at him, but she did not speak.

Half an hour later they were lunching together in the hotel where Adair was staying. Their table was in an alcove overlooking the sea.

Adair gazed at the gray waves that galloped up gallantly rank after rank, to spend their lifeblood at last in a swirl of foam on the sand. She shivered.

"It looks so cold," she said.

"I like it so," said Alec.

The sun struggling to break through the clouds at last threw a cold gleam on the cold waters.

"You always like the cold, hard things," said Adair. "When you are away from me, I often wonder whether you aren't all intellect and will."

"What a picture! ... You don't really know me at all."

Adair hesitated, then said slowly, deliberately, as if she were weighing each word:

"We don't either of us know the other very well, do we?"

Noting the manner in which she spoke, Alec thought again of that word "flirting" which had so stung his pride.

He said huskily:

"I thought we knew each other ... that afternoon on the rocks."

With the same quick turn of her head that he had observed that day on the rocks, she looked away. And she saw neither the waves breaking on the shore, nor the lonely brown sail that was far out before them at sea, nor anything but the mist before her eyes.

She said:

"Oh, that day..."

Again desire to dominate her surged in Falcon. He leaned across the table, spoke in quick, short sentences ... simple words ... that scorched his throat.

She drew back. Her lips trembled. The fierce impetuosity of his attack had, for the moment, swept "impossible"

from its preëminence. She said:

"I didn't know you still felt ... it's so long ... you might have changed..."

"Changed?"

He threw the word at her so that it clanged like a steel gauntlet striking a marble floor.

He added:

"Don't you know me at all?"

"I thought perhaps ... I didn't know..." She paused. She fought for delay. She added quickly: "At any rate, it can't be ... yet."

He said:

"We have waited so long."

She said:

"We mustn't spoil it now."

He lit a cigarette with tense fingers. He threw the match away impatiently.

He said:

"I wonder whether I am the dreamer ... or you."

After a few whiffs he dropped the cigarette into the ash-tray. He slumped back in the chair, leaning over a little on the left side, resting.

She noticed his increasing pallor ... his eyes in which the fire now burned so low.... Dreamers? They had both been dreamers.... To whom all things had seemed possible, to whom all things had been possible, to whom now nothing would be possible....

She must look away from him ... she must ... yet, as she turned her eyes away, all that met her gaze was the cold, dark sea, an endless waste of waves tossing about without purpose, without significance.

EPILOGUE

The vast, high-ceilinged hall was bright with innumerable lights, but in it was only one man. And he was not on the floor of the hall. He was in the lofty gallery that looked down upon these empty armories, in this big Canadian city.

A remote figure in a dark blue overcoat and a soft gray hat, he sat in the front row of the gallery with his arms resting on the railing, his chin resting on his arms.

It was ten years since he had been in these armories ... ten years since that day in August, 1914, when the regiment marched out through the shouting crowds. A thousand men swinging out to the music of the pipes, a thousand men with laughing faces and tight throats.

Ten years ... so full of life, and death, and wandering.... Ten years.... "It's a long way to go."

Now again he would see the regiment, returning not from battle but from a peace-time drill. As he leaned forward on the gallery railing, he listened to the skirling of the pipes, swelling steadily as the regiment marched down the broad avenue.

*"So let each cavalier who loves honor and me
Come follow ... the bonnet ... of bonny Dundee."*

The shrill summons of the pipes, now entering the armories beneath him, rose in wild defiance.

Throb—throb—throb—went the drums.

The great building rocked to the tread of two thousand feet. Black rifle barrels gleamed above khaki jackets. Dark kilts swayed above naked knees. Officers with black Glengarry tails falling on broad brown shoulders held bright drawn swords at the carry. Thundered commands rose high above the skirling of the pipes, the throbbing of the drums, the pounding of the marching feet.

Falcon's pulse quickened. His guts tensed. His mind blurred. War-lust again surged through him.

The pipes! The pipes!

*"Come, fill up my cup, come, fill up my can;
Come, saddle your horses, and call up your men;
Come, open the West Port, and let me gang free.
And it's room ... for the bonnets ... of bonny Dundee!"*

Falcon gripped the rail as he watched the kilted battalions in column of companies marching around the armories, as he heard the commands thundered out above pipes and drums: "Number One Company, *Left.... Wheel!*" ... "Number Two Company, *Left ... Wheel!*"

He hated war but he loved the pipes.... It had been fun, marching down to the Somme—hard fun but good. Rolling out at two in the morning ... strong eggs and bad coffee by candlelight... "Compane—'hun!" before dawn. The Battalion rendezvous ... whinnying horses ... the beats of the drums ... the wailing and rejoicing of the pipes. Then, the long khaki-kilted column swinging down the cobblestone road, between the rows of poplars, through the golden morning hours. A pageant of the lust of youth. Youth sweeping forward to spend itself lavishly, riotously ... to what end? "Expense of spirit in a waste of shame," punned Shakespeare. And wasn't war, too, a pouring out of spirit into gutters...?

Yet now, with the skirling of the pipes in his ears, he would have signed away his liberty, his life, for another war. At this moment, it wouldn't have mattered, much, what the War was about. Not when this vast hall rocked with the tread of two thousand feet and his hot blood leaped to the pipes....

*"Come, fill up my cup; come, fill up my can;
Come, saddle the horses and call up the men;
Come, open the gates and let me gae free,
For it's up ... with the bonnets ... of bonny Dundee!"*

* * * * *

At last he grew cold, very cold, with the thrill of it.... It wasn't his side only that ached with an old scar as he watched ... quite another battalion marching ... a mud-stained, blood-stained battalion ... gravely marching ... silently marching ... marching without bugles or rifles or swords.... No, it wasn't his side only that ached as he looked again on the gray-green faces of dead comrades....

And she, too ... yes, she, too, had been killed by the war....

Stab the drums!

Slit the pipes!

* * * * *

But that was no job for him, suckled at the breast of Sir Walter's muse. Too much like cutting his mother's throat... Yet he knew men would never forego their lust for war until the paint was scraped off the cheeks of the drab and the pocks were revealed in all their filth...

Then there rose before him the thought that had troubled him many times in the trenches.... Now, it flared up and burst in a shower of light over those memories of ruin and death:

Does man fight only because he hasn't yet learned how to love?

THE END

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Transcriber's note:

The edition used as base for this book contained an apparent typographical error. In the fourth paragraph of Ford Madox Ford's preface, we have made the following correction:

"If one could only," one used to say innumerable times, "wrangle a staff-job."

=>

"If one could only," one used to say innumerable times, "wangle a staff-job."

The reason for this change is that in the preceding sentence Ford uses "wangled", which he describes as a technical word: the change restores coherence to the passage.

Chapter XIV includes the following sentence:

When Rump wangled a job at the base in England Thorsen promoted Falcon to command of the company.

The wording of this sentence supports the correction we have made in the preface.

[End of *All Else Is Folly*, by Peregrine Acland]