

Men Without Country

*This is a Story of
Desperate Men and of a
Rare Kind of Patriotism*

CHARLES NORDHOFF
and
JAMES NORMAN HALL

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by

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to the brave men
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MEN WITHOUT COUNTRY

Chapter I

Glancing down from his second-floor window in the London offices of the *New York Times*, Manning saw the car he was expecting draw up at the curb. It was an eight-horsepower Fiat in military service, with an enlisted man at the wheel and a lieutenant in the uniform of the Royal Air Force beside him. They were prompt to the moment; it was exactly a quarter to six. Manning took up his bag and hurried down to the street. Having introduced himself to the lieutenant, he produced his papers, which the latter glanced over hastily.

"Right, sir. You don't mind my sitting in front? I'll have to show the papers all the way down." He nodded to the driver, the car drew away from the curb and joined the thin stream of traffic typical of this wartime London. The lieutenant turned in his seat. "I was told to apologize for the escort," he added. "Headquarters explained, I believe?"

Manning nodded. "No apologies are necessary. I am honored."

"You were to have gone with a staff captain, but it seems they had no one to spare at the moment. I happen to be rejoining my squadron not far from your own destination; so they asked me to take you down."

Manning was about to ask, "And what is my destination?" but he thought better of it. He would soon know—in an hour, perhaps, or two hours, three hours; there was no estimating in advance the length of motorcar journeys in these days, with England a fortress from Land's End to John o' Groat's. Having crossed the river, their direction was steadily south. They were bound, evidently, to some place on or near the Channel coast.

Manning felt grateful for his present assignment. Since the collapse of France, Americans at home had been told little of those Frenchmen who had refused to accept defeat; who had escaped to England to be reorganized, under the leadership of General de Gaulle, for carrying on the war to final victory. Only some scattered units and fragments of units of the French armies had managed to reach British soil, and they had since been branded as traitors by the Vichy Government. With the prestige of the *New York Times* behind him, Manning's chief had been able to persuade the authorities that it would be to England's advantage to let Americans know something of what had happened to these exiles. Now permission had come, via the G.O.C. Royal Air Force, for a visit to an unspecified aerodrome. So there were, evidently, French airmen in service once more. Where? How many? Would they be flying their own planes, in their own squadrons, or were they, perhaps, scattered through British units? Manning wanted to satisfy in advance a little of his own curiosity, but no suitable opportunity offered and he decided to let these questions answer themselves, later.

He studied the profile of the young lieutenant in front of him as he turned his head for an occasional remark. "Not over twenty," Manning thought. "Might easily be my own son as far as years go; and proud I'd be to have one here, in that service." The young man gave no information about himself except to say that he was returning from thirty-six hours' leave, and was in his fourth month of active duty with a Spitfire squadron. What stamina these kids had! Manning thought of his own career as a pursuit pilot in the war of 1914-1918; of the accumulating strain of combat patrols, particularly during the great German drive in the spring of '18, when pilots were often in the air six hours a day. They had considered it heavy work, but what was that strain compared with the grueling, never-ending tension these English boys were subjected to, fighting the Battle of Britain day and night, against such appalling odds? There must be some exceptional quality bred into them as a result of the experience of their World War fathers, but which their fathers had never had. They seemed to be made of stainless steel; there were manganese, tungsten, in their blood. And these were the sons of the decadent English, as Hitler had called them! In that case, long live decadence!

Progress was slow as they moved further into Kent, and Manning examined the country with increasing interest. He knew it well, though he had not been down this way since the evacuation of Dunkirk. A different country it looked now with its trenches, tank barricades, and village fortresses. Not a signpost remained on any road, and as their course did not follow the main highways, Manning soon acknowledged himself lost. The driver proceeded with confidence

along lanes that were not, certainly, built for motor traffic. At last they drew up at the side of a road in a stretch of country that looked as peaceful in the mellow light, as untouched by the hand of war, as though it were ten thousand miles from London.

The lieutenant turned in his seat. "Here we are, sir."

Manning stared quietly to right and left. "At the aerodrome?" he asked.

"Yes."

Manning was still incredulous. Before them lay two gently rounded hills connected by a low ridge, hiding the view to the south and east. Nearer at hand, meadows of rich grass, as level and smooth as bowling greens, were marked off by hedgerows into plots scarcely large enough to contain a modern bomber, to say nothing of offering room for a take-off. No hangars were visible—no planes, no barracks, no wind-sleeves, no tarmac runs; nothing was here to indicate that the peaceful countryside had ever seen an aeroplane. Manning turned to his escort with a faint smile.

"Those cows," he said, waving a hand toward three or four grazing in the meadows. "Squadron mascots, no doubt?"

"Yes, sir. They've brought us any amount of luck. They're English, of course; merely on loan to the Frenchmen here since they couldn't very well bring their own cows with them. Jerseys, sir; the milk is excellent, if you care for milk."

"Well, Lieutenant, I must say I'm rather surprised. This is something new in my experience of military aerodromes."

"The quiet, you mean? We don't mind it. As a matter of fact, we rather enjoy it."

"I should think it very likely. I don't suppose it's always as peaceful as we see it now?"

"No. Now, if you like, I'll take you up to Captain Freycinet's billet. He's a liaison officer between this French outfit and our own."

"There's only one squadron here?"

"That's all at present. We rather hoped we'd have their complete Air Force over before they signed their armistice. Most of them seem to have missed the bus, as Mr. Chamberlain would say. Or perhaps they had no busses to miss."

Manning saw no one as they followed the path to a stone farmhouse, completely hidden in a grove of trees. They entered by way of the kitchen, where several enlisted men, in French uniform, were busy with preparations for dinner. He followed the lieutenant into a room at the front of the house where a table had been laid for three. Here Captain Freycinet was awaiting them. He was a man of about fifty, stoutly built, with a clear ruddy complexion set off by a shock of thick gray hair. A black patch covered one eye. He greeted the lieutenant with the engaging bonhomie which seems to come as second nature to some Frenchmen, but Manning noticed a difference in the manner toward himself. It was the perfection of courtesy, but there was no warmth in the voice which assured him, in easy colloquial English, that he was welcome.

"I must push on, now," the lieutenant was saying, a moment later. "Good-bye, sir. *Au revoir*, Captain."

"But you must stay for dinner!" Captain Freycinet replied. "You see? There's a place laid for you."

"I'm sorry. I really can't. You'll excuse me?"

"Of course, if you must go. Good luck!"

Alone with Captain Freycinet, Manning felt more than a little uncomfortable. He could see that his host was making an effort to appear cordial. He began to explain the purpose of the visit, but Captain Freycinet interrupted him with a wave of his hand.

"I already know, Mr. Manning. Word came yesterday from R.A.F. headquarters." He smiled faintly. "You have come to see the French traitors, as Monsieur Laval would call us. Well, here we are, a few of them!"

"Do you believe that Marshal Pétain considers you traitors, as well?"

Captain Freycinet hesitated before replying.

"Evidently ... and yet ... I try to be charitable in my judgments, Mr. Manning. I try to remember that Marshal Pétain is an old man now, and we must remember that he is in the hands of the barbarians. You have seen him, in these late years?"

"No, but I did once, years ago, during the Verdun battle. He visited my squadron, then at Senard, at the foot of the Argonne."

Captain Freycinet gave him a quick glance.

"You were flying in the last war?" he asked.

"Yes. I was a pilot in the Escadrille Lafayette."

The stiffness in Captain Freycinet's manner vanished at once.

"*Tiens, tiens!*" he exclaimed, quietly. "With the Escadrille Lafayette! Then we are all but compatriots, Mr. Manning! France has never forgotten those American volunteers. You must have had your training with us?"

"Yes; first at the Blériot School, near Versailles; then at Avord and Pau. I went to the front from the G.D.E. at Plessis Belleville."

Captain Freycinet sat forward in his chair, listening with keen interest.

"But ... we are old comrades, Mr. Manning! I too was a *pilote de chasse*, in Spad 26 of the Cigognes Group. Many a time did I see the Indian-head insignia of your squadron, while on patrol. And now we meet for the first time!" His one eye twinkled as he added: "And you are nothing but a journalist!"

"Horrible, isn't it? But what can middle age do?"

"Precisely. I too have a confession to make. No more than yourself am I a soldier by profession. For the past twenty years I have been serving my country as a wine peddler in London. It is only this past year that I have been in uniform again." He was silent for a moment; then he added: "I apologize for dining alone with you here. Had I known that you are an old *pilote* of our service, we would have messed with the squadron."

"It's quite all right," Manning replied. "I may see them later, perhaps?"

"Of course." Captain Freycinet nodded toward a closed door on his right hand. "They're in that room. Have you noticed? Not a sound from the mess. You remember, in the old days, the laughter, the gay talk in every *popote*, the phonograph going full tilt? And now..." He sighed. "*Les pauvres diables!* We're all that, now, we Frenchmen. We find it hard to be merry."

"They're bombers, I believe?"

Freycinet nodded. "Long-range Farmans, type 223. They crossed the Channel as a unit the day the armistice was signed."

"And you came with them?"

"My dear Mr. Manning, you flatter me. I am fifty-three years old and blind in one eye. You may have noticed that my waistline is on a par with your own. No, no; I am nothing but a liaison officer, and I reached England by another route."

Presently a pushing-back of chairs was heard in the adjoining room, and a moment later Manning had a glimpse of several of the airmen as they passed the window outside, their figures outlined in silhouette against the evening sky. The two men lingered over their meal as the afterglow faded slowly and darkness came on. An orderly knocked at the door and entered with a small kitchen lamp which he placed on the table; he then drew the heavy curtains at the windows.

Captain Freycinet glanced at his watch. "Shall we go to the hangars?" he asked.

The moon, a little past the full, was well up as they left the farmhouse. They turned into a path which bore to the right and followed the windings of a narrow vale descending to the north. Presently, Manning found himself overlooking the green meadows he had last seen lying so peaceful and somnolent in the sunset light. Now the hedges were gone, the cows were gone, and at one side of the wide field eight bombers were ranged, their powerful motors idling, their propellers making circles of white radiance in the moonlight. The field was alive with men servicing the planes, which were all but ready for departure.

Manning had never before seen these modern French bombers. They were high-winged monoplanes with a span of 110 feet, provided with twin fins and rudders and powered with four 1100-horsepower engines, tandem paired, in nacelles under the wings. High in the nose was the glassed-in cockpit for the bomber navigator and radio operator. In the leading edge of the wing sat the two pilots at dual controls. In the fuselage, aft, was the cockpit for the rear gunner, who had a field of fire to cover attack from all sides save directly forward.

"Not much like the Farmans of the last war," Captain Freycinet was saying. "You remember them? And the old Voisins that we called the flying baby-carriages? They were heroes, the pilots and gunners of those old trucks."

They fell silent as they watched the busy scene before them; then Captain Freycinet nodded toward the group of airmen receiving last-minute instructions from their squadron commander.

"If I must speak of heroes," he said, "what of all the pilots of this war? They have superb ships and can depend on their engines as we never could. But when I think of what they have to meet in the air and from the ground! ... *Bon Dieu!* We may be well content, Manning, that we were airmen twenty-odd years ago."

"What is the performance of these Farmans?" Manning asked.

"They have a ceiling of twenty-six thousand feet, a range of fifteen hundred miles, and carry a bomb load of better than four tons. If we had five hundred of these ships, *now*," he added, ruefully, "think what we could do, of the help we could give England! If, if, if! It is the word of all Frenchmen in these days."

The crews were separating to climb into their ships. As Manning watched them, he was conscious of the old feeling of excitement, of nervous tension, he remembered so well from his own flying days. He noticed that every man, before mounting to his place, stepped aside to pump ship, and that was quite as it used to be. One man, rear gunner of the plane nearest, seeing Captain Freycinet, came over for a word with him. The moonlight brought into clear relief the beak-like nose and the strong jaw; the eyes, in shadow, were mere wells of blackness. His voice had a curiously harsh vibrant quality.

"Alors, à demain, mon Capitaine."

"Bonne chance, Matrac."

They watched him climb to his place; then, one after the other, the great bombers taxied down the field until they were lost to view in the moon-lit haze. They came roaring back so closely overhead that Manning's heart was in his mouth lest they should not clear the rise before them. When the last one had passed, Captain Freycinet gave a sigh of relief.

"Now we can breathe easy for a few hours," he said. "As for them..."

"Where are they bound?"

"Four to Hamburg and four to Berlin."

The two men walked slowly back to the farmhouse, each engaged in his own sober reflections. They halted at the top of the rise where they had a wide view over the land falling gently away to the Channel coast. The sky to the northwest was illuminated fitfully by flashes of gunfire, and the earth trembled with the detonation of large-caliber bombs. Leading the way to the room where they had dined, Captain Freycinet called the mess orderly, who brought them liqueurs and a pot of coffee.

"I'm thinking of that gunner," Manning remarked, presently. "The man you spoke with just before the take-off."

"Matrac. He impressed you?"

"I've never seen a stronger face, or a stranger one. Not a fellow to take liberties with, I should say."

"No."

Captain Freycinet turned his head, in a listening attitude, as the air quivered once more with the throb of high-powered engines. Manning thought there must have been three score, at least, in that flight. Anti-aircraft batteries of the coastal defenses thundered into action once more, but gradually the tumult at hand died away as the planes passed on to some destination far inland. The Frenchman sipped his coffee in silence for a moment, then set down his cup.

"I could tell you a story about Matrac," he said, slowly. "Would you care to hear it?"

"By all means!"

"For the moment, I will ask that you keep it 'off the record,' as you journalists say. It is for your private ear. Later, I think it might be told. Very well, then.

"This is the story of a little group, of whom Matrac is one. There were four others ... no, six others, but one of them doesn't count. For many years they suffered every pain, humiliation, and indignity that France could heap upon them: half-starvation, the most brutal and degrading of prison disciplines, solitary confinement, and forced labor in that worst of penal colonies, Cayenne."

"You tell me they were convicts?"

"Yes; but when they learned that France, the country which had cast them off, was again fighting for existence, they escaped, through jungles and over stormy seas, with one thought in their minds—to serve her.

"I chanced to meet these men ... but let that come in its place. You have never been to French Guiana, I suppose? It is the most corrupt and neglected of all our colonies. There, in a steaming, equatorial climate, amongst jungles and swamps seamed by muddy rivers, live five or six thousand convicts, many of them the veritable dregs of society. The hardest cases amongst the latter are confined on the ironically named Wholesome Islets: St. Joseph and the Île Royale. The others, on the mainland, are forced to labor like galley slaves, half-naked in the forests, tortured by insects, shivering with fever—the most wretched, hopeless, miserable beings that could be found the world over. Can you imagine men who have suffered the worst that Cayenne has to offer having any spark of patriotism left in their embittered hearts?"

"Pretty hard, I admit."

"It's unbelievable; nevertheless it's true. I'm convinced, at least, that it was true in this case. When I have finished the story, you can give me your own opinion. You can decide for yourself which were the better patriots: these convict outcasts, or Monsieur Laval and his associates at Vichy."

Chapter II

I had been living in England for nearly twenty years when war broke out. The British have always liked their

claret, and my business, a branch of our family concern in Bordeaux, was a thriving one. I crossed to France in the first week of September, hoping to get into active service once more, but my years, my one eye, and my waistline were against me. At last, I accepted a job where I could free a better man for combat work. I was appointed non-flying C.O. of a detachment of six old bombing and reconnaissance planes, sent out for service in our colony in the antipodes—New Caledonia.

It's a stagnant little place, about as far from France as one can go without sailing off into space. Once there, I soon realized that I was a fifth wheel: my senior pilot was quite competent to take command. So I pulled what wires I could, and in due time received orders to return home to act as a liaison officer with the British Expeditionary Force. This was in April when shipping in the Pacific had become disorganized. My only chance for a passage home was by an old cargo boat of the Messageries Line, the *Ville de Nancy*. She had taken in a cargo of nickel ore and was then at Nouméa, ready to sail.

The *Ville de Nancy* was one of those venerable tramps which wallow across the backwaters of the world year after year. She was a coal burner, and, as I was to learn, her ancient reciprocating engine broke down every fortnight or so. The seamen were French; the stokers were New Caledonian blacks. She wore the customary coat of rust-streaked black paint. The Captain and his two mates had their cabins on the bridge deck, and the wireless room was there as well. Below, on the same "Monkeys' Island," were the small dining saloon and two cabins for passengers. I had a cabin to myself. The other was shared by Commandant or, as you say, Major Duval, and a Lieutenant Lenoir, both of the *Infanterie Coloniale*.

Duval was tall and heavy-set; his gray moustache, sweeping out on either side of a big bluish nose, gave him the appearance of a retired *gendarme*. When sober he stood very much on his dignity. In his cups, when in the company of men he considered his equals, he went to the other extreme and became horribly jocose and familiar. He was a perfect example of what our Army does to men of a certain type. Such narrow disciplinarians have a boundless respect for those in authority above them, and take delight in making life wretched for those below. They detest initiative, look forward to promotion in the strict order of seniority, and to automatic retirement on a pension. Lenoir, Duval's lieutenant, was from Aries, or thereabout. He was short and swarthy, with close-set hazel eyes and a bottom considerably broader than his shoulders. He was what you Americans call a yes-man; he hung on the Commandant's remarks as though they were treasures of wit and perspicuity. Both officers liked Nouméa, where they had managed to dig themselves in very cozily. I fancy that the orders for their relief and return to France had not been received with unmixed joy.

They seemed glum enough, at any rate, when we assembled for dinner on our first evening at sea. The dining saloon was just large enough for the mess boy to perform his duties around the table. Captain Malo, a stout, ruddy Breton, the best of old fellows, placed Duval on his right hand and me on the left. The mates messed with us, of course, as well as the chief engineer and a pimply-faced youth, Jourdain by name, who proved to be the wireless officer. I gathered, during the meal, that there was a good deal of friction between the bridge and the engine-room, but this is not uncommon in tramp steamers making long voyages, when men are cooped up for months together.

Jourdain brought in the latest wireless bulletins. The news was depressing enough, but the war was not then the sole and tragic subject of conversation it has since become. That France, with her invincible armies and her Maginot Line, might be in danger of invasion, never entered our minds. The chief engineer shared Duval's hatred of England, and repeated the German saying that Britain would fight to the last drop of French blood. Captain Malo as well as his mates took strong exception to this attitude, and Malo tried to explain to deaf ears the immense importance of sea power, and that Britain's casualties, thus far, had been much heavier than those of France. The air was rather tense until a bottle of wine and a couple of brandies had dispelled Duval's sour mood. He was a raconteur of Marseilles stories—you know the kind, all about Marius and Olive. They were dirty, but he told them well, and some, I'll admit, were funny. The Captain's big belly shook, and Lenoir, who must have heard the yarns scores of times, wiped his eyes at every pause and exclaimed: "*C'est crevant! Vous me tuez, mon Commandant!*" while Duval leaned forward, elbows on the table, with a gleam of triumph in his eyes.

This was the atmosphere in which I was destined to make a voyage halfway around the globe. The Captain's presence made the voyage bearable. The old Breton, rough, simple, the soul of honor and decency, was as sound—I was about to say as the Bank of France. I could see that the chief disliked him, but that was all in Malo's favor. The mates and the seamen were very fond of their "old man."

We crawled doggedly eastward, halted by an occasional breakdown which the engine-room took in its stride, as a matter of course. Winter was setting in in those latitudes, and the trade wind was beginning to set the big blue-and-white rollers on the march, across from South America, five thousand miles distant. We touched at Raiatea, in the leeward Society Group; we put in at Tahiti, where it was hard to believe that that lovely island, with its dreamy life, was on the same planet with the Europe of today. We stopped again at Atuona, in the Marquesas, and resumed our voyage over an immense and lonely sea, traversed only by a few French ships of the Messageries Line, of which our old freighter was destined to be the last.

We got newspapers at Panama and read them with sinking hearts. Our own wireless bulletins had been bad enough, but Jourdain knew no English, and now for the first time I had a glimpse of the British and neutral point of view. The world we had known was falling apart. Of our passage through the Canal, I remember only the shabby British tramps, westward bound for New Zealand and Australia, after who could say what perilous crossings of the Atlantic. They looked as old and dirty as the *Ville de Nancy*, and, like ourselves, each one had its three-inch gun aft, under a tarpaulin.

The last newspaper I obtained before we left Colon was dated the tenth of June. Paris was about to be abandoned, but the Government had announced that France would fight on, from the colonies, if it should come to that. Events were happening with a swiftness that stunned me; like other men, I could not help reflecting upon them in the light of my own small personal affairs. My prospects as a liaison officer attached to the British armies in France were not of the most brilliant, to say the least.

As if to render the suspense still more unbearable, the *Ville de Nancy* indulged in one of her routine breakdowns, two days out of Colon. Her engines stopped shortly after midnight, and dawn found us floating on the Caribbean in a calm so profound that the ship might have been frozen in a lake of ice. I had finished coffee and was having a walk with the Captain when the lookout hailed the deck. He was pointing to the south'ard with an air of excitement.

"What do you see?" Malo bellowed, impatiently.

"Can't make it out, sir. Looks suspicious."

The gun was manned at once; there was a run for binoculars, and a moment later I was focusing mine on a motionless object that looked suspicious indeed, at first glance. It stood out clearly against the glassy sea every time a swell passed beneath it, but we were soon convinced that it was no submarine. It was a boat, or a canoe of some kind, with its mast broken off a few feet above the gunwales. As the visibility improved we saw what was, unquestionably, a solitary figure huddled on the thwart by the mast. This figure raised an arm and dropped it again, as though in making that feeble gesture the man had used up his last ounce of strength.

A boat was lowered at once and we followed it eagerly with our glasses, wondering what so small a craft could be doing so far from land. Our first thought was, of course, that it might contain survivors from some ship torpedoed and sunk long before. The boat returned at last, towing a dugout canoe, and as it came alongside we saw that it held five men, all of them at the last extremity. Only one was able to stand, and even he had to be hoisted to the deck. All were half naked and burned black by the sun. Their trousers were mere rags. Their condition seemed to be due to starvation rather than thirst, but their lips were black and swollen and it was plain that another day under that pitiless sun would have finished them.

The one man still able to speak looked to be about thirty-five. Despite his sufferings, there seemed to be a power of life still in the wasted body. Weak though he was, he managed to sit erect on the deck while his companions lay inert about him. A stiff brandy and water was given each of them and it was pathetic to see the fierce eagerness with which they gulped it down, save one, so far gone that he had to be fed a teaspoonful at a time. The sitting man was then able to say: "*Merci, mon Capitaine*. I needed that."

"You are French?" Malo asked. The man nodded, and said: "We have had no food for twelve days, nor water for two."

The poor fellows were so exhausted that no further attempt was made to question them. They were carried to the auxiliary wheelhouse, aft, where there were some empty bunks, sometimes used by deck passengers, in the tropics. Captain Malo ordered hot broth to be prepared, and when they had been fed, we left them to the rest and sleep they so

desperately needed.

You can imagine our curiosity as to who these men could be. Had we been living in the days of the Spanish Main, I would have been in little doubt, for it seemed to me I had never laid eyes on a more obvious set of brigands. The man who had spoken was, obviously, French, and I suspected that his comrades were, as well, but there was something about the five of them that set them apart from ordinary castaways. Naturally, they provided us with the main subject of conversation at lunch; we were even able to forget the war for a little time. The Commandant began as we were having our *apéritifs*.

"Captain Malo," he said, "what is your opinion of these fellows? Are they French?"

"One of them is, at least," said Malo. "But what could they be doing in an Indian canoe? They're not seamen, that's plain."

"They might be, I think," the first mate put in. "You noticed their tattooing?"

Malo shook his head. "It's not seamen's tattooing, but I'd be stumped to say what kind it is."

"If we were off the African coast," said Lenoir, "I'd wager ten to one that they were deserters from one of our disciplinary battalions. What's your opinion, Captain Freycinet?"

"They're a hard-looking lot, certainly," I replied. "I agree with the mate. I think they're seamen."

"Then how do you explain the canoe?" asked Malo.

"You have me there. We must wait and let them explain for themselves."

"They'll have more than that to explain," said Duval.

"You appear to have formed your own opinion," remarked Malo.

"So I have." Duval looked from one to another of us, emphasizing his words by pounding on the table with the cushion of his hairy fist. "Lenoir is on the right track. I have no doubt that some of these fellows have served in our disciplinary battalions, but not recently.... Gentlemen, they are convicts—*évadés* from Cayenne, without the shadow of a doubt!"

"From Cayenne? Impossible!" Malo exclaimed. "We're at least fifteen hundred miles from Cayenne. Do you tell me they've made such a voyage as that in a small open canoe?"

"You don't know these fellows, Malo. I do—the type, I mean. I was stationed at Cayenne a dozen years ago. A more depraved, desperate set of scoundrels than the convicts there are not to be found. But I'll say this: they have courage. They will run any risks to escape, even with the odds a hundred to one against them."

Malo shook his head, incredulously. "No, no, Commandant; it can't be so. You have a right to your opinion, of course, but we must not judge them in advance. Let us wait till we hear what they have to say for themselves."

The men were awakened at nightfall for a more substantial meal, after which they fell asleep once more, and it was not till mid-morning of the following day that Malo, Duval, Lenoir, and I went aft to question them. Food and sleep had greatly refreshed them, and they had been provided, by Malo's orders, with rough clean clothing. Some of the seamen had loaned them shaving materials, and one of them, at least, looked less forbidding than he had at first. All five rose as we entered and stood until the Captain bade them be seated.

"Well, boys," he said, pleasantly, "you seem to be a long way from home."

"*Oui, mon Capitaine.*"

"You're French? The lot of you?"

"Yes, sir."

Their spokesman was a slightly built fellow whose restless black eyes looked unusually large because of his emaciated condition. His name, he said, was Maillot.

"Where are you from?" Malo asked.

"Pardon me, Captain. I will explain that in a moment. We have been long at sea. What is the news from France?"

"You've heard something from the crew, no doubt," Malo replied.

"Yes, but we can't believe what they say. The Boches are not in France, surely?"

"Not only in France, but at the gates of Paris."

The Captain spoke briefly of recent events while the five men listened in stolid silence; then one of them, a powerfully built man of fifty, or thereabout, shook his head with an air of stubborn unbelief. "*Non, non!*" he said. "*Pas vrai, quoi? Pas vrai!*" I could detect a note of genuine anguish in his voice. He was little more than five feet tall, with a small round head set close upon a pair of shoulders that seemed grotesque in their breadth. His eyes were like a pair of pale glass beads, completely expressionless, which made the vehemence of his words seem all the more strange. That huge peasant with his low wrinkled forehead, who looked the complete type of Neanderthal man, had spoken for the lot of us. We were all Frenchmen together, torn with anxiety over what was happening to our country; refusing to believe that such things could happen. If Duval shared the feeling, it seemed to be only momentarily, for he said:—

"Enough of the war, Captain Malo. Perhaps these men will now tell us who they are and where they come from?"

"Willingly, sir," their spokesman replied. "We are gold miners from Venezuela. Three of us, though born in France, are naturalized Venezuelans. The other two are Venezuelans by birth, of French parentage."

"I see," said Duval, dryly. "Well?"

"We were working a placer claim three hundred miles up a branch of the Orinoco. Doubtless you've never been there, sir. It is deep in the forests; you reach it by canoe. We heard of the war only two months ago."

"*Pardieu!*" old Malo exclaimed. "It must be a wilderness, that place!"

The man nodded. "No settlement, no radio—nothing; not a white man within one hundred miles."

"And how did the news reach you?" Malo asked.

"It was pure chance, Captain. There are Indian rubber-gatherers in that region. Three of them, coming in from the coast, stopped at our camp. We bought a few supplies from them—among other things, a machete wrapped against the damp in a Caracas newspaper many months old."

"What paper was that?" Duval asked, sharply.

"The Caracas *Diario*. I even remember the date: November third. Our first news of the war told of a raid from the Maginot Line, in Alsace."

"Very odd," said Duval. "And you were interested?"

"Naturally, sir. We are Frenchmen, like yourselves. We wanted to go home—to fight for France."

Then, with a wealth of circumstantial detail, Maillot told of their adventures from that day. They had two hundred ounces of gold dust. They also possessed a good-sized *cayuco*, the same craft in which we had found them. Their plan was to descend the river to the sea, and sail westward to a town where they could catch a boat for Panama, and thence to France. During the river journey they ventured to shoot a rapid in which their canoe was upset, and an iron box, containing their gold dust and their passports, was lost. They righted and repaired the canoe, and proceeded

nevertheless. To avoid the great shoals at the river mouth, where the surf is extremely dangerous, they were forced to sail far out, beyond sight of land. Before they could return to the coast, they were caught in a southwesterly gale and scudded before it for several days. Thereafter they were lost, helpless, mast gone and sail gone. This had happened three weeks before we sighted them.

Duval sat rigidly erect, his arms folded on his chest, as we listened to this story. At its conclusion, he stared intently at the men, first one, then another; then he turned to Maillot.

"You are one of the naturalized Venezuelans?" he asked.

"Yes, sir."

"Where was your home, there?"

"In Bolivar."

Duval turned suddenly to a dark wiry little chap who wanted part of one ear and had an ugly scar, like a knife wound, on his left cheek. He had a bold, rather humorous face and an air of complete self-possession.

"*Cómo se llama usted?*" Duval asked, thinking, perhaps, to catch the man off his guard.

"*Jorje Garou, a su servicio,*" the man replied.

I speak a bit of Spanish myself, and there was no doubt as to the authenticity of the fellow's accent, which was much better than that of the Commandant.

"And you've no papers of any sort? No proof of identity?"

"No, Commandant," Maillot put in. "As I have said, they are all at the bottom of the Orinoco."

"Hmm! And what regiment did you expect to join upon reaching France?"

"For all our French blood, we are foreign subjects, of course. I suppose there's nothing but the Legion open to us?"

"You're right, there." Duval paused. "Well, Captain Malo, I have nothing further to say to these men. Perhaps you wish to question them?"

Malo shook his head. I could see that he was nettled by the manner in which Duval had taken command of the situation. He turned to Maillot.

"You have what you need, here?"

"Yes, sir. You've been more than good to us."

It was then nearly lunch time. I returned to my cabin and soon joined the others in the saloon. Jourdain came in with the latest bulletins and we discussed them for a few moments. The situation was even more critical than it had appeared the day before. The fall of Paris seemed inevitable. We finished our meal in gloomy silence; then, to distract our thoughts, we turned once more to a discussion of the castaways.

"Well, Commandant," said Malo, "you've heard their story. Do you still think them convicts?"

"I was never more certain of anything in my life. You don't tell me you believe them?"

"Yes. Why not?"

Duval grunted disdainfully. "You're more gullible than I would have thought possible. They're finished liars, of course—all convicts are; but they've not taken *me* in. I know that kind too well."

Malo shook his head. "What do you think, Captain Freycinet?"

"I'm of your own opinion," I said. "Even if I were not, I would give them the benefit of the doubt."

"Why?" Duval asked.

"Convicts or not, they are loyal Frenchmen. They want to fight."

Duval gave a scornful snort. "To fight? Such rogues as these? The last thing in the world they want is to go to the front."

"So I think," Lenoir put in. "They're a bad lot. I don't believe a word of their story."

"Then what do you propose that we should do?" Malo asked.

"Turn them over to the police, of course, the moment we arrive in Marseilles. If they're honest men they have nothing to fear. If they're convicts they'll be sent back to Cayenne."

"Not with my consent," said Malo.

The Commandant bristled up. "What do you mean by that, sir?"

"Just what I say. Don't you think they've earned their freedom? And what time is this to pry into the past history of any Frenchman? Every man is needed."

The chief engineer now put in a word. "I agree with the Commandant," he said. "If I were in command here I'd lock them up at once."

Captain Malo's face reddened. "No one will be locked up in my ship," he replied, quietly.

During the next few days the *Ville de Nancy* ploughed eastward at her customary five or six knots. As soon as they had recovered their strength the castaways took part in the ship's routine duties without waiting for orders. They chipped rust with the seamen, helped in the galley, and did whatever was required of them with a cheerfulness that made a favorable impression upon all but the chief engineer and my two fellow passengers. Duval took his customary walks the full length of the deck, and I noticed that he passed these men without the slightest recognition of their presence. In his eyes, they were already condemned. The Captain, on the other hand, went out of his way to be decent to them, and the relationship between the two men became more and more strained as the days passed. In my own case, the more I saw of this band, the more I was forced to acknowledge, in my heart, that Duval might well be right. To Maillot I was glad to give the benefit of the doubt. He had the speech, manners, and appearance of a Parisian of the middle class; you might even have taken him for a schoolmaster, a notary, or a superior clerk of some kind. The others bore the unmistakable stamp of the underworld. I was, naturally, curious about them, and relieved the monotony of the voyage by spending a part of my evenings in their company, which I found preferable to that of my fellow passengers. At first they were more than reserved, but little by little they began to tolerate, then to welcome my visits. I asked no embarrassing questions, and they volunteered no further information about themselves.

I would not have you think that they tried to impress me with a show of patriotism. On the contrary. Remembering, no doubt, that they had shown concern when Malo had given them the news of the German invasion, they now went out of their way to appear indifferent. They tried to make it appear that the resolve to return to France had been prompted largely by the boredom of their lonely life in the Venezuelan forests. They wanted to fight the Boches; they acknowledged that, but they were not going to have me believe there were any high-minded motives behind the desire.

I was more than ever disturbed at thought of the probable fate in store for these men. Duval meant to keep his word: that fact became clear in his further comments at mealtimes. I hope I have made it plain that my relations with this major of colonial infantry were far from cordial. I know his kind from long experience. Every army, not ours alone, produces them in all too generous numbers, but France may have more because of the extent and the nature of our colonial possessions. Third-rate men, placed in positions of power over Senegalese, Annamites, New Caledonians, and the like, are able to forget their own insignificance and develop into petty despots. Duval was a complete example of this type.

I speak of this because of a resolution I made at this time (let me add, with Captain Malo's consent), which was nothing less than to inform the suspected convicts of Duval's intentions concerning them. I felt a slight twinge of conscience at thought of doing this behind Duval's back, but no other course was possible.

It was on the night of June 16. The news had been a little more encouraging that day, for we learned that President Roosevelt had given Premier Reynaud renewed assurance of all possible help. Duval and Lenoir were playing piquet in the dining saloon; I knew they would stop there for an hour at least. About eight o'clock I went out for my evening walk, and as luck would have it I found Maillot standing at the rail behind one of the lifeboats. He was an interesting fellow to chat with at any time, and I had already discovered that he was well read. It was inevitable that our talk should swing to the war, and presently, apropos of nothing in particular, he made a most startling confession. He told me that, in 1914, when he was still a mere boy living in France, he had volunteered for military service, lying about his age, and had later deserted.

He had enlisted in no spirit of youthful adventure. He hated violence and bloodshed, but he hated Germany more—the nation of barbarians and the foe of all peoples struggling toward a new world order to be based upon tolerance and peace. In the course of six months, during which time his regiment had been through all the slaughter of the first Battle of the Marne, he discovered, to his horror, that he was a physical coward, in his own eyes, at least. It was an appalling discovery; he fought in vain against the impulse to get away from the horror somehow, anyhow. At last he was able to desert, and after hiding for some weeks in Paris, he managed to stow away on a cargo steamer bound for the United States. The shame of his action had preyed upon his mind ever since, and I could detect in him a kind of grim joy at prospect of the opportunity he hoped soon to have for redeeming himself.

In any case, here was my chance. I told him, briefly, that Commandant Duval believed him and his companions to be *évadés* from Cayenne, and planned to turn them over to the Marseilles police. He heard me through, and his manner convinced me that Duval's suspicions were justified. A moment later he excused himself, begging me to wait until he could return.

I waited a good ten minutes before he came back to ask if I would join his companions in the wheelhouse. The only light in the place was a small unshaded electric bulb suspended in the middle of the cabin. The men had been playing cards on a chest placed between the bunks. They pushed the chest back against a wall, and the little fellow, Garou, who had been on the nail with his Spanish when questioned by Duval, asked me to be seated. Their faces, in the dim light, appeared wooden and unmoved, unless I took a kind of numb despair for woodenness. They were ill at ease and could think of nothing to say at first; then Garou broke the silence.

"*Mon Capitaine*, Maillot has told us what you said, and we've been talking here, together.... *Il n'y a rien à faire*.... It's true. We're convicts—*évadés* from Cayenne."

The short, immensely powerful man I've spoken of before raised his head, sullenly. They called him Le Petit. I could perceive the difficulty he had in putting his slow thoughts into words. "*Quoi donc?*" he said. "We're Frenchmen. Convicts or not, we can kill Boches. What's more important than that?"

One of the others, known as Marius, cut him off. "Shut up!" he said. "What do you know about anything?"

But Petit was not to be silenced at once. He rolled his small head from side to side. "We're as good Frenchmen as a lot that's never been sent to Cayenne. We're not soft, us convicts. We can kill Boches."

"Keep out of this, Petit," said Marius. "Let somebody talk who can." He turned to me. "Why have you told us this, Captain?"

"To put you on your guard, of course."

They regarded me silently, incredulously.

"You're for us, then?"

"Yes. France needs men like you."

It was pathetic to see the doubt still clouding their faces. They could not believe that a fellow countryman, in

uniform, might be a friend.

"You knew we were convicts?" Garou asked.

"What does it matter?" I replied. "The question is: What are you going to do?"

A man who had not yet spoken now put in a word. This was Matrac, the one who still had life in him on the day when we picked them up. I had not heard him speak a dozen words since they came on board, but I could see that he was the natural leader of the group.

"Are we going straight to Marseilles?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Then we're done for," said Garou, bitterly. "*Ce cochon de commandant!*"

"What good will it do him to give us up?" Petit asked.

"What good, you half-human—can't you see? He'll get a reward."

"He'd do it for nothing if it came to that," said Garou. "I know his kind. *Nom de Dieu!* We're bitched, that's certain!"

My heart went out to the poor devils; I could see little hope in their situation. Nevertheless I suggested that, if we entered Marseilles harbor at night, they should slip overboard and swim ashore before the port authorities came out.

Marius shook his head, glumly. "*Non, mon Capitaine*; this brute of a Petit can't swim." He was silent for a moment, then he added: "But Matrac and I can. Listen, you others. I know Marseilles. I was born there. If we're lucky, it'll be a good hour before the police come out. If we're luckier still and come in at night, Matrac and I will swim ashore, like the Captain says, and come back with a boat. Trust me to find one. Then I'll take you where they'll never find us, right in Marseilles at that."

"And suppose we don't get in at night?" said Garou.

Marius gave a harsh laugh. "That'll be just too bloody bad!"

"Why think of that?" said Petit. "We'll manage. We've got to!"

"I can tell you this," I said. "The Captain's for you. I think you can count on our getting in at night."

They stared at me with the same expression of amazed unbelief.

"What! The Captain?" said Garou. "You're certain?"

I nodded. "He takes you at your word, that you're coming home to fight."

If I had had doubts before, I was now convinced, not only of the sincerity of their intention, but also that they had escaped with that definite purpose in mind.

"It's done, *mes copains!*" said Marius. "Trust me for that! I've got friends in Marseilles. I'll get forged papers for the lot of us: *états civils* that'll fool even the police. Then we'll go to Bordeaux or Brest and all join up in the same regiment. With the papers, it won't have to be the Legion."

I stayed with them not a moment longer than was necessary. Duval and Lenoir were still playing cards when I passed the saloon on the way to my cabin.

It is now time that I told you something more of these men and what I learned, later, of their story. Maillot, to

whom I was indebted for most of it, may have been the man's real name. The other names were, obviously, aliases or nicknames. What Maillot had told me of his desertion and the sojourn in America was true, but not the whole truth. He filled in the gaps, afterward. He was sixteen at the time of his desertion. What preyed upon his mind particularly, in addition to his cowardice, was that he had made his way to Paris from the *Zone des Armées* by means of papers stolen from a comrade who was about to go on leave. After several weeks in hiding he had stowed away on a freighter bound for Philadelphia. In America he learned the trade of wireless operation and repair, and when radios came into general use he became an expert at this new vocation. Ten years later he returned to France and opened up one of the first radio shops in Paris. The business prospered and he was on the road to fortune when he became interested in Communism. He threw himself heart and soul into the cause. Curiously enough, in view of his confession of early cowardice, perhaps because of this old rankling memory, he was willing to take any risks in the Party's interests. He soon became known to the police as one of the boldest agitators in Paris, and at the time of the Cagouard riots he was arrested for his part in a violent demonstration against the *Croix de Feu*. He was known and bitterly hated by influential members of this organization, and the result was, according to his story, that he was railroaded to Cayenne for fourteen years. Five years of the sentence had been served at the time of his escape.

Garou had been transported at the same time with Maillot. He was in his late twenties and, like Maillot, was an expert mechanic as well as a professional racer of motorcars. But his real trade, that of burglar and housebreaker, had brought him to Cayenne. Garou was excellent company, lively and full of a mordant wit, but he was an out-and-out enemy of Society with a capital S, and made no bones of the matter. I had no doubts about his resolution of character, and was not surprised when Maillot told me that even solitary confinement in that worst of hells on the Île St. Joseph had not broken his spirit. Of five years served, two had been spent there.

Le Petit belonged to Savoy. This formidable-looking peasant came from one of those families that have lived on the same piece of land since the days of the Revolution. There was something purely animal in his love for the farm; in forty years he had never traveled a dozen miles away from it. The farm lay at the bottom of a narrow valley where, as luck would have it, the Government decided to build a dam and set up a hydroelectric plant. Over his half-articulate protests, his land was seized under the law of eminent domain, and when the dam was completed his little farm was submerged ten fathoms deep beneath the waters of the newly formed lake. You can imagine the man with his smouldering anger, his carefully nursed sense of wrong, hanging about the place month after month, incapable of leaving it and equally incapable of establishing himself elsewhere. His slow mind brooded over the situation until he was goaded to the point of action. On the day the great dynamos were started in the new plant, he appeared, armed with an enormous iron bar. The employees of the station tried to seize him; he killed one, badly maimed another, and the rest took to their heels. Before the police arrived he had made a wreck of the place. Instead of being guillotined, he was transported for life.

Le Petit's particular friend was Marius, the man from Marseilles. He struck me from the first as being the worst rogue of the lot. I doubt if there exists any kind of petty knavery he had not set his hand to. His chief source of income seems to have been from cargo thefts and the smuggling of opium. Four arrests and convictions sent him automatically to Cayenne for seven years.

Matrac, the fifth of the band, was in every respect the most remarkable. What his crime was I never learned, for his companions maintained a complete silence on that head. He was what is called an "ace" in prison slang: a man of unbreakable spirit whom no guard could cow and who forced even the prison authorities to respect him. He was known as a killer and had knifed two bullies while confined in the infamous *Case Rouge*. Not a fellow to trifle with. He rarely gave you the direct glance, but when aroused, his pupils seemed to dilate and glitter with a cold light impossible to describe. You could never forget that glance. It was, in all truth, ferocious.

As you see, I have named five men: those we picked up in the canoe. There was one other, and I am far from sure that he is not the hero of this story. They called him Grandpère.

He was a *libéré*; perhaps you don't know what that means. Under an iniquitous system known as *doublage*, a man sent to Cayenne for seven years or less is compelled at the expiration of his sentence to remain in the colony as a *libéré* for an equal number of years. At the end of this time he may leave the colony if he has the means of leaving, which rarely happens. Those sentenced to terms above seven years are freed at the end of their time, but may never leave. The condition of the *libéré* is more hopeless than that of the convicts in the prison camps. The latter are fed and clothed, at least, whereas the *libéré* is turned adrift to fend for himself in a land where the task of winning even the barest necessities of life is all but impossible. These wretched creatures are sometimes able to earn a few sous by

acting as porters, scavengers, men-of-all-work about the squalid settlements, but jobs of any kind are scarce since nearly every task is performed by convicts still under sentence and whose labor costs nothing. The Government shows no concern for the *libérés*, and whether they live or die is a matter of no consequence save to themselves.

Grandpère was a *libéré* for life; at the time of which I speak he had been thirty-five years in the colony but had never given up hope of eventual escape. He had made two attempts while serving his sentence and was caught each time. He then realized that his only chance was by sea, and so began the long painful task of saving money for the purchase of a dugout canoe. These could be had from the Negroes of the interior at a cost of from two to three hundred dollars, sums all but impossible for a convict without friends to acquire in a lifetime. Nevertheless, Grandpère began to put by a tiny hoard, literally sou by sou. He was more patient and resourceful than most *libérés*, and he had the will to live, which so many of them lack. As you may know, all the Guianas are famous for their beautiful butterflies, and brokers from Europe or America visit the seaports to purchase them from time to time. Grandpère became a butterfly catcher, and in the end an expert one. After five years at this trade, he had saved enough money for the purchase of a smallish canoe in which he hoped to reach Venezuela, but before he could make the purchase his money was stolen. Once more he began the laborious task of saving, and six years later he again had a sum sufficient for another attempt at escape. He resolved that there should be no hitch in his plans this time. He had been robbed, before, by a *libéré* he had taken into his confidence, and he could not make up his mind whom to trust.

There was a quality in the nature of this old man which I must now speak of, for it has an important place here, as you shall see. He was, apparently, one of those men whose love of country is impossible to kill, perhaps because of the simplicity of his character. He thought of France not in terms of premiers, ministers, senators, deputies. All officialdom, whether civil or military, he feared and hated, but the Country—that was another matter. It was symbolized in his eyes by the heroic female figure that appears on the posters in wartime, under the black skies of the German menace, one hand holding the Tricolor high above her head, the other grasping the sword. This France was the defender, the fostering mother of *all* her children. It was not she who had cast him off, who had deprived him and his fellow convicts of freedom, citizenship, and all civil rights, but those in high places who professed to represent her.

As a *libéré*, Grandpère was free to come and go as he chose, within the borders of the colony. Sometimes he was at Cayenne, sometimes in or near the labor camps of St. Laurent, on the Maroni River, fifty miles to the westward, along the coast. Maillot, Petit, and the others were serving their time at St. Laurent. Grandpère chanced to be in this place in the late autumn of '39, following his business of butterfly catching. One day when the labor gangs were having their noonday rest in the forest, Grandpère happened to meet Maillot, Petit, and Garou and to fall into conversation with them. As they were sweating in the windless stifling air, slapping at flies and mosquitoes, Petit remarked that he wished he could be in France, killing pigs of Germans instead of mosquitoes. The others spoke up as well, and it may be that they expressed more patriotic fervor than they actually felt at the time. However that may be, Grandpère was deeply impressed. Here were three Frenchmen, at least, who felt as he did about *La Patrie*. Given the chance, they would fight for France with joy and enthusiasm. For himself, he was past sixty-five and useless as a possible soldier, but if he could help these men to escape, to return home, he would be serving the country in the only way open to him.

For all that, he said nothing at the time. He waited, studying and testing them in further talks until he was thoroughly convinced that these three men were genuine patriots and meant what they said. He then opened his mind to them.

Grandpère was not well known to the convicts of St. Laurent. He was merely one amongst hundreds of *libérés* whose condition seemed even more wretched than most of the others. Maillot, Petit, and Garou had not supposed he had two sous to rub together. You can imagine their amazement and joy when he convinced them he had money enough hidden away, not only to purchase a canoe, but to store it with a month's supply of provisions as well.

They started at once laying plans. Petit begged that his friend Marius be let into the secret and permitted to go with them, vouching for the quality of his patriotism, and Grandpère consented to this. There was one other, Matrac, agreed upon by all as an indispensable member of the party. They lacked a leader, and Matrac was the man. With him, they could be all but certain of success. At this time Matrac was serving a sentence of six months' solitary confinement on the île Royale, but his time was two-thirds up. They must wait until he was out again. Meanwhile Grandpère was to scout for a suitable canoe, buy it, and proceed with the other preparations.

Two months later Matrac was again at St. Laurent and everything was in readiness. Grandpère was awaiting them with the canoe in the swamps of the Maroni, and the night when the break was to be made had been agreed upon. I

must pass over the details of the escape for the reason that both Maillot and Garou, who gave me most of the story, were more than vague about that part of it. My belief is that someone was hurt, and badly hurt, before they got clear of the camp. This I do know: one other convict, a fellow they referred to as Crapule, got wind of their plans on the very night when they were to put them to the proof. To be certain of his silence, they agreed to take him with them.

They found Grandpère with the canoe at the appointed place. The weather was perfect for their needs. There was a moon behind the clouds, but the sky was heavily overcast, with a fine rain falling, and the night was all but pitch-dark. They had a journey down the river of from twenty to thirty miles before reaching the sea, and they pushed off without a moment's delay. You can imagine, no doubt, the kind of welcome the convict Crapule received from the others; he was in the party but not of it. Furthermore, the only canoe Grandpère had been able to buy from the wild Negroes of the forest was not large enough. With Crapule, they were dangerously loaded even in the calm waters of the Maroni. They paddled on, in sullen silence. By the time they reached the sea, they knew that someone had to go.

You can guess, perhaps, who that man was. The nickname, Crapule, seems to give some indication of his character. Garou told me he was a hulk of a fellow who weighed close to two hundred pounds. When they reached the mouth of the river, in the small hours of the morning, they were obliged to put ashore to make a better stowage of their supplies. They hurried with this work, not wanting to be caught by daylight. When they were again ready to push on, Garou said, Crapule was "missing."

At dawn they were some miles to the westward along the coast. Not daring to proceed, they went ashore, hiding the canoe, to wait for nightfall.

My information of that day's happenings came chiefly from Maillot, and he made them memorable enough. By the time they reached a suitable halting place, at the mouth of a swampy tidal creek, all of them knew that they were still one too many for the canoe, but no one spoke of the matter. They lay there throughout the day, each man aware of what was in the minds of the others, each hoping that one of his companions would bring up the question that must be decided before they could proceed. I can well picture the scene as it was described to me by Maillot: a sandspit covered with low scrub, backed by the forests and near the mouth of a creek where the canoe was hidden. It was their first outpost on the road to freedom, and the greatest of their dangers, that of actual escape, was behind them. They had an excellent canoe and an ample supply of provisions. Granted any kind of luck, they were as good as clear from Cayenne—free men, their own masters once more. But they were still one too many. Even under the exceptionally favorable conditions of the night before, they had nearly come to grief, after leaving the Maroni. And they had before them six hundred miles of open sea. Who was to be sacrificed now?

Toward nightfall the breeze made up, fresh and fair. The sky was now clear and they had the moon, nearly at the full, to light them on their way. And still no one had spoken. They waited and dawdled, Maillot said, until the moon was an hour high. They squatted on the beach. The canoe had been brought from the creek and was drawn up on the sandspit, ready for departure. Petit sat with his chin resting in his great horny palms. Presently he raised his head.

"I know what the rest of you are thinking," he said. "I'm heaviest..."

"You're right," said Garou. "Hard luck, Petit, but you're elected. Eh, Matrac?"

"Leave Petit?" said Marius. "When we're going home to kill Germans? What d'you say to that, Grandpère? Whoever stays, it can't be him."

"He weighs more than any two of us," said Garou.

"So he does," said Maillot.

Matrac was sitting cross-legged on the beach, letting the sand trickle through his cupped hands.

"Speak up, Grandpère," he said, sharply. "It's your canoe, after all."

"That's right," said Marius. "If it wasn't for Grandpère there'd none of us be going."

"And who did he speak to first?" Maillot asked. "Not you, Marius. You weren't even present."

"What's that got to do with it?" said Marius. "Look at me; I'm nothing but skin and bone. Even Garou will weigh a good ten pounds more than I do."

"You weigh enough to lighten the canoe all that's needed," said Garou.

"Shut up, the lot of you," said Matrac. "Well, Grandpère?"

The old man was squatting on his hams, his stubbly chin resting on his knees. For all his sixty-five years, he was sturdily built, and would have weighed more than either Marius, Garou, or Maillot. He regarded them with his faded blue eyes, and the feeling in his heart must have been close to despair. Remember that, for thirty-five years, his one hope in life had been to escape. And this was his last chance; there could never be another.

"Lads," he said, "Petit's going, and the rest of you with him. It's me that stays."

According to Maillot, they all protested at that—and, I believe, in good faith; but the more they talked, the more stubbornly the old man clung to his resolve. He professed, of a sudden, to be afraid of the sea.

"I'm scared, that's the plain truth," he said. "I thought I'd have enough courage to make this voyage if ever I had the chance. I see now I ain't."

"You lie, Grandpère!" said Matrac. "You can't fool us. You're coming."

"You're a coward, Grandpère?" said Garou. "I'd swap my guts for yours any day!"

"No, *mes gars*," said the old man. "Maybe I could stand the voyage, if it came right down to it, but the fact is I've changed my mind. I don't want to go. This place is kind of home to me now. I'd miss my old *copains*."

Furthermore, he was too old, he said. Of what use would he be in France? They wouldn't have him as a soldier, and that was the whole purpose of the escape: to reach France and join the Army.

The others continued to protest, for decency's sake, perhaps, knowing the deepness of their debt to this old man. Matrac suggested that the four of them draw lots to see who should stay, but Grandpère wouldn't hear of this. And there was an end of it: he simply refused to go. How strongly he was urged I can't say, of course, but there is no doubt that they abandoned him with genuine regret. And so they left him in that desolate, solitary place, to make his way back to St. Laurent on foot, as best he could. I've heard of sacrifices, of generous actions, many's the time; but, considering the circumstances, I know of none to be compared with this.

They had fair winds all the way to the delta of the Orinoco, and made the voyage in fourteen days. As you know, the Orinoco at its mouth is broken up into a maze of channels, bordered by low, swampy, fever-stricken coasts. With a chart furnished by Grandpère they sailed and paddled fifty miles inland, to the settlement of Tucapita, where a number of Cayenne *évadés* had established themselves. The place was well known as a halfway station for escaping convicts. With three hundred francs, also furnished by Grandpère, they laid in additional supplies. They had hoped to steal a seaworthy boat at Tucapita, but none were to be had, so they took the long chance of continuing the voyage in the canoe. They planned to call at Trinidad and steal a boat there, but in their ignorance of navigation they missed the island. The rest you know, save for the miseries of the voyage that followed. We picked them up two hundred and fifty miles off Colon. Another day in the canoe would have finished them.

I now return to the *Ville de Nancy* on the morning of June 17. I need not remind you of what happened on that day, the blackest in the history of France. We were just sitting down to lunch when the news came. Captain Malo had taken his dingy napkin from its ring and tucked it in at his collar when Jourdain entered. His face was a pasty white as he handed the typewritten newssheet to the skipper. Malo read it slowly, and then, without a word, passed it to Duval. The Commandant stared at the paper as though it had been written in some unintelligible language, and passed it on to me. France, under the leadership of Marshal Pétain, had asked Germany for an armistice.

Grave as the news had been for three weeks past, no one of us had dreamed of sudden and utter defeat. For the rest of the day we were all in a kind of stupor. Whether or not the others came to meals, I can't say. I know I did not.

By the Captain's orders, the crew had not yet been informed. The next day we agreed with Malo that further concealment was useless.

When I was able to think coherently once more, I went aft to see the convicts. I don't know exactly why I went; perhaps it was to avoid the company of Duval and his lieutenant. These two, once the first shock was over, seemed to approve of Pétain's choice of a Ministry. They were thinking less of France than of the political situation following her collapse, and of its possible effect upon their careers. Both men thought highly of Laval. That name alone emitted an exhalation in which I found it hard to breathe, even in the wide air of mid-ocean.

I found a different atmosphere in the wheelhouse. Stunned as they were, the five convicts were thinking less of themselves than of France. Petit could not get the truth through his thick skull, and the others seemed to find some relief for their own feelings by trying to pound it in. Petit appealed to me, his low brow wrinkled by the unaccustomed effort at thought.

"How's this, *mon Capitaine*?" he asked. "It's not true, is it? We're not licked?"

"I'm afraid we are," I said.

"*Les sales Boches*! They're not in Paris?"

"Yes, you half-wit!" said Marius. "Can't you understand plain speech? They're not only in Paris. They're halfway to Bordeaux by now."

The peasant shook his close-cropped head, still unconvinced. "*Non, non! Jamais! Impossible!*"

Their information was what had been passed on to them by the seamen, and I now explained as much as I myself knew.

"And England—she's given up, too?" Matrac asked.

"No," I replied. "England is fighting on, so far, and her colonies with her."

Matrac's eyes lighted up. "Good, by God! There's guts for you!"

"But they can't win without us," said Garou.

"*Non, non ... Jamais*. They're done for, without France," said Petit.

"How do you know that?" asked Matrac. "They're tough, the English. They can lick the bastards alone." He turned to me with the strange fierce light in his eyes that I have spoken of. "But what's happened to us? Can you explain that? What?"

"God knows," I replied.

"Dirty work somewhere," said Garou. "You can't tell me French soldiers would ask for an armistice. Some skunk of a general has let us down."

"They've taken Lille?" Petit asked. "And Amiens, and Boulogne? There's none of the country left for us?"

"A little, I think. No one knows, yet, how much."

"As long as there's a little we can still fight."

"But there's an armistice, you idiot!" said Marius. "The war's over. We've quit."

"The colonies haven't quit, have they?" Garou asked.

I explained that the situation with respect to the colonies was not yet known, adding: "They may, or may not, give in."

"There's one that wouldn't give in: Cayenne," said Garou. "I don't mean the guards or the filthy brutes in charge of them. The convicts and *libérés*, they'd never give in!"

"*Oui, oui*," said Petit. "You said something, Garou. They'd fight, all right! Why wouldn't they give us a chance?"

"What'll happen to Cayenne now?" Maillot asked. "If France is beaten, won't the colony be cut off?"

"I should think it more than likely," I replied. "The English blockade will be extended to our shores and French shipping swept from the seas to prevent its falling into German hands. No doubt Cayenne will have to depend upon its own resources from now on."

Maillot shook his head. "You don't know the conditions there," he said. "Cayenne is nothing but forests and jungle. Nearly all the food and supplies come from France."

"Think what it'll be if they are cut off!" said Garou. "There's better than six thousand of us in Cayenne, *mon Capitaine*, counting the *libérés*. They'll starve without the ships from France."

"Christ!" said Matrac. "I wish we hadn't left!"

"What!" said Petit. "You'd want to be back there?"

"Can't you see why? They'll revolt, that's sure. The guards can't handle six thousand starving men. Guns or no guns, we could kill the lot! I'd be willing to starve, afterward, to have a hand in that!"

"Me, too!" said Garou. "Suppose, with their machine guns and all, they killed a thousand of us before we got the last one of them: we'd still have five thousand men. You're right, Matrac. Think of those soft rats of guards at St. Joseph and the Île Royale! They'll be for it now! Would I like to be there, to help rip their fat guts out!"

For the moment they had forgotten my presence, and I saw them as they were, with their masks off. I saw, too, by implication, the degradation and misery they must have suffered at the hands of their jailers in the solitary confinement cells, in the labor gangs in the steaming forests. Their turns of speech were not of the most elegant, to be sure, but I could well understand the bitterness in their hearts, and their joy at the thought that their comrades, still at Cayenne, might now have their chance for revenge.

"Here's a strange thing," Maillot was saying. "Convicts are men without a country—no rights, no citizenship, nothing. Well, all Frenchmen are in the same boat now."

"Where's the comfort in that?" Marius asked.

"I'm not offering comfort. I'm stating a fact."

With an oath, Matrac struck his knee a sharp blow with his fist.

"We've gone through all this to get to France," he said; "to kill rats of Germans. Now where are we?" He gave a short harsh laugh. "The joke's on us. There's no France left to go to."

"Oh yes, there is," said Marius. "The Captain's said it. The Boches haven't got it all ... not yet."

Of a sudden Garou's face lighted up. "Listen," he said. "I've got it! I know what we'll do!"

"Well, spit it out."

"You heard what Maillot said: all Frenchmen, convicts or not, are in the same boat now. The Boches are snouting all over our Country like a million hogs. Is that right, Captain?"

I nodded. "It's close to the truth, certainly; but there's a small part, I believe, that they haven't dirtied so far."

"Exactly—and that's the part we'll go to, somehow, as soon as we can get there."

"A bright idea that is!" said Marius. "And then what do we do?"

"Wait ... let me finish. We won't have to crawl into holes and corners and skulk along alleys like a pack of mangy dogs. No, by God! We'll make for the first town that's still France, and we'll go to the mayor, like honest men. Then we'll say: "*Monsieur le Maire*, it's like this: We're convicts, *évadés* from Cayenne—we tell you that, straight. We escaped because we wanted to come home to kill Germans. We've had the devil's own time getting here, but no matter for that. Now, then, give us guns and tell us where our men are still fighting."

Marius gave him a sour smile. "Bright boy, bright boy! And what do you think the mayor would do? He'd shake our hands and say: 'My brave lads, God bless you! Excuse me one minute, please, while I phone the police.' And five minutes later we'd be nabbed by a squad of *gendarmes*."

"Never—not now. The Frenchmen that's left outside will still fight, won't they? It stands to reason. They'll be glad of any help they can get till the filthy Germans are drove back where they come from."

"Listen to him!" said Marius. "Trustful, what? Convict 51,628, and you'd say he was some kid just home from his First Communion!"

"He's not such a fool," said Maillot. "The plan might work. I'd say it was worth a trial."

"Where's the good of talking of it?" said Matrac. "Can't you understand what the Captain's said? They've *all* quit—laid down their arms. France is done for, and so are we."

Four days later there was no longer any question of that fact. The armistice had been signed. On the evening of that same day we learned that General de Gaulle had set up a French National Committee in London and was appealing to Frenchmen throughout the world to organize under his leadership and continue the war at England's side. A strong appeal was made to the French Navy and the governors of the French colonies to refuse to recognize the armistice. The news gave me a thrill of hope, but it was received differently by Duval and, of course, by Lenoir, who took his cue in everything from the Commandant. That evening, as the four of us were sitting on the small deck outside the wireless room, we divided sharply on this issue.

"Who is this de Gaulle?" the Commandant asked. "What right has he to set himself up as the leader of France?"

"What does it matter?" Malo replied. "Aren't you glad that France has such a man at a time like this?"

"I'm a professional soldier, Captain Malo. I've no use for upstarts in our service who go over the heads of their superior officers. Marshal Pétain is our leader now."

"In my opinion," I said, "a man of eighty-four, no matter how illustrious his past, is no longer capable of leadership at a time when the very existence of our Country hangs in the balance."

The Commandant gave an indignant snort. "I beg to differ with you," he said, heatedly. "As for de Gaulle, he is a man of no standing in our Army. I hope and believe he'll soon be put in his place."

"No standing?" I said. "You've not read his book?"

"Book? What book? I know nothing about it."

"*Vers l'Armée de Métier*. He's the greatest authority we have on the subject of mechanized warfare. Had we listened to him years ago, France would never have been defeated."

"He's a nobody," said Duval, contemptuously. "I've no use for literary officers."

"Nor I, *mon Commandant*," said Lenoir. "Wars are not won by reading books, or writing them."

"I know nothing of this general," Captain Malo put in, quietly; "but thank God for the stand he has taken! He offers a rallying point, at least, for those who feel as we do."

"Speak for yourself, Captain Malo," said Duval, sharply. "I'll not be included in that *we*."

"Nor I," said Lenoir. "It is our duty to follow Marshal Pétain now."

Captain Malo gave an exasperated sigh. "Armistice or no armistice, the war's not lost. We've a magnificent fleet; and the colonies will be loyal—mark my words!"

"Loyal? To whom?" Duval snapped. "Those who work against Marshal Pétain's orders are no better than traitors!"

"Then I'd thank you, Commandant, for your opinion as to what Frenchmen should do now."

"Do? Submit to authority, of course. Avoid all risks of civil strife. Suppose we should be divided amongst ourselves by this de Gaulle: can't you see what would happen? There would be no security. Banks would fail. Business would be at a standstill. Pensions, both civil and military, would be discontinued. Our situation is bad enough now, but at least it is not complete anarchy."

"You can think of your pension at a time like this?" Malo asked.

Duval bristled up at once. "What do you mean by that, sir? I think of the future stability of our Country."

Malo rose abruptly and went to the bridge. I followed a moment later, wondering how many heated discussions of this kind were then taking place wherever Frenchmen were gathered.

While I was shaving, the following morning, the mess boy knocked at the door to say that the Captain wished to see me. I found him aft, by the gun, taking a reading of the taffrail log.

"I've asked you to come here, Captain," he said, "so that we may be out of earshot of our two friends. I must make a decision and I want your advice.

"This is what I have in mind. If I follow my orders and go to Marseilles, you see what may well happen? My ship and her cargo will fall into German hands. You can imagine how delighted the Boches would be with a gift of six thousand tons of nickel ore. Well, they're not going to get it, or the *Ville de Nancy*, either. We go to England. What do you say?"

I grasped his hand, warmly. "I've been thinking of the same thing half the night," I replied. "But what of Duval and his follower?"

"They're to know nothing about it; at least, not now." He smiled faintly. "Think of their joy when we dock at Liverpool!"

"You mean to keep this a secret?"

"From them, yes, if I can. My mates will know, of course. They will be as pleased as yourself. I can count on every one of the seamen; but the engine-room ... they're not to be trusted, least of all the chief. You know how he hates the English."

"There's another I'm far from trusting," I replied. "Your wireless man."

Malo nodded. "He's a weasel. If he knew, he'd inform the Commandant at once. But at this distance the change in course will be slight, and I think the mates and I can keep him in the dark."

I parted from the Captain with feelings of profound relief. I knew very well what he would do upon reaching England: place himself and his ship at the disposal of the British Government. I could not flatter myself that my own services would be as warmly welcomed, but with some French troops in England, under General de Gaulle, I hoped that I might, after all, fill the post of a liaison officer. I had yet another reason for contentment with the Captain's plan, because of Matrac and his friends. I longed to give them the good news, but that was out of the question, of course. During the next few days I made what tentative plans I could for them, in advance, for I had no doubt that they would

yet have their chance to fight for France. From this day on I saw as little as possible of Duval and his satellite, and derived a good deal of pleasure in picturing their astonishment and dismay upon our arrival off the coast of England.

But the secret could not be kept, thanks to the wireless officer. The alteration in course had not escaped the eyes of this ratlike youth.

One morning, after our early coffee, the Captain and I were taking the usual walk. The seamen, with the convicts assisting, were at the never-ending task of chipping rust. That sound—the sharp clink of chisels and hammers against corroding iron—had accompanied us all the way from the Southern Hemisphere, and I sometimes wondered whether there would be anything left of the *Nancy* to chip at the end of the voyage. The Captain and I were completing a turn of the well-deck when we met Duval, who was waiting for us.

"Captain Malo," he said, "I understand that our course has been changed?"

"*Eh bien*. Who told you that?"

"The wireless man. You have received new orders?"

"That's my business, sir."

"I have studied your chart. We are no longer heading for Marseilles."

Malo gave him a steady look. "Correct, sir."

"For what reason? We shall run the greatest risk of being picked up by a British destroyer."

"Would you consider that so great a calamity?" Malo asked.

"I would consider it a great misfortune, certainly. France has no ships to spare for England."

"You'd prefer the Germans to have her, perhaps?"

"It is not a question of what I prefer," said Duval. "Your orders were to proceed to Marseilles."

"What are you driving at?" Malo asked, sharply.

Duval put on his blustering major-of-infantry manner. "This, sir. I'll not beat about the bush. I suspect that you would be well content to lose your ship to the English. I believe you are heading for England now."

"So I am," Malo replied, quietly. "We're bound for Liverpool."

Duval stared at him. "You will make a present to England of your ship and cargo?"

"Yes; and of myself as well, if they'll have me."

Duval was so taken aback by this cool acknowledgment that he was unable to speak. I believe that I understand this kind of Frenchman, though I confess that his point of view is hard to explain. It is based upon respect for authority, even for such German-directed authority as now exists in France. In Duval's case there was another element—his deep-seated dislike of England. Two wars in which Frenchmen and Englishmen fought side by side have by no means sufficed to eradicate this ancient distrust. It was inborn with Duval. I should not wonder if, in the bottom of his heart, he did not feel more in sympathy with the Prussian mentality than with the English.

"Captain Malo," he said at last, "I'll not mince my words. Your decision borders upon treason, if I know anything about it."

"I care nothing for your opinion, sir," Malo replied, coolly; "and I'll thank you to mind your own business." With that he turned and walked away.

In my interest in this conversation I had forgotten there were others on deck beside ourselves. None of us had

noticed Marius, at work behind a lifeboat, well within earshot of where we stood. That evening, I learned that he had overheard the whole of the conversation. He said nothing to the seamen, but in strict secrecy informed the other convicts of the new destination. Some time after dark, one of them found occasion to speak with me, and I accompanied him to their bunk-room. With the door closed, and speaking in low voices, I discussed with them the changed situation. Not only that. I felt justified in assuring them that they were no longer in any danger from the law. They were certain to be accepted by the National Committee in London as loyal Frenchmen, with no questions asked. Their reaction to that assurance warmed my heart. I could not help contrasting their kind of patriotism with that of Duval and Lenoir who considered these convict outcasts unfit to breathe the same air with them.

On the morning of June 26, I was awakened by the profound silence that had settled over the ship. I attributed this to the old cause, engine trouble, and thought no more about it except to wonder how long we would be adrift this time. Fortunately, the sea was calm; there would be no wearisome rolling as had happened a time or two before. I lay in my berth for another ten minutes, then rang for the mess boy to bring my shaving water. Opening the door of the cabinet where I kept my razors, I discovered that my army pistol was missing. I had no suspicion that anything was wrong. The first mate and I often joined in pistol practice with bottles or empty tins as targets, thrown from the bow by the mess boy while we potted at them as they floated past. Evidently, he had borrowed my pistol, but I thought it a little strange that he had not spoken of the matter.

The mess boy failed to appear, so I rang again. I tried the door, and, to my surprise, found it locked on the outside. I thought, of course, that this had been done by accident, and began to pound on the door to attract attention. A moment later I heard the sound of footsteps; then the wireless man addressed me through the door.

"You're not to come out, Captain Freycinet," he said.

"What the devil do you mean?" I demanded. "Who locked my door?"

"I did, Sir."

"For what reason? Unlock it at once!"

"Commandant Duval's orders, sir."

Even then I was slow in realizing what had happened. You may think it strange, but for thirty seconds I was as mystified as I was angry. Then I understood. By the Lord! Duval had seized the ship! He must have believed that, once in control, he could force Malo to obey his orders. I had no further doubts when I heard the Captain himself pounding on the door of his cabin, which was directly over mine. The wireless man had said there were guards at my door, so I called: "Who is there?"

"*Moi, Monsieur. Toi restez là,*" said a voice, in the pigeon French of our black stokers. A moment later the door was unlocked, and there stood the second engineer with my pistol in his hand, backed by two Caledonian blacks armed with heavy spanners.

"You're to come with me, Captain," he said, shortly.

My dislike for this fellow and his chief dated from the beginning of the voyage, and was as heartily returned. Without weapons, there was nothing I could do but obey. He stood aside and motioned me to precede him down the port ladder. At the same moment I saw Captain Malo, guarded by the chief engineer and another pair of stokers, coming down the ladder on the starboard side. The mates, our cook, and the six white seamen were already assembled on the well deck, under guard. Malo's ruddy face was an even brighter red than usual. His lips were set and his eyes blazing, but, for the moment, he said nothing. Standing at the machine guns, one in the waist on the port side, the other mounted on top of the wheelhouse, were Duval and Lenoir, covering us with their weapons. Forward of the wheelhouse, under the leadership of the third engineer, were the rest of the stokers, armed with spanners and other wicked-looking pieces of ironmongery.

There was a gleam of triumph in Duval's eyes as he looked down upon us from behind his gun.

"Captain Malo, you have brought this upon yourself," he said. "From now on you will navigate this ship under my orders." Malo made no reply, and Duval added: "I shall take and keep command until we reach Marseilles."

"This is piracy, Duval," said Malo.

"I am willing to let that question be decided by the authorities at home. Now then, if left at liberty, will you give me your word of honor to take the ship to Marseilles?"

"Certainly not!" said Malo.

The ship had been stopped for the reason that her officers and seamen were under arrest, and the engineers and Caledonian stokers, all of Duval's party, were needed on deck. Captain Malo, the mates and myself, with the seamen behind us, were on the starboard side of the deck, where we made a compact group, under the muzzles of the machine guns. Malo had himself well in hand. I knew that he must be cursing himself for having been so neatly caught, but it had occurred to none of us that Duval would go to such lengths as this. The convicts were not on deck and we took it for granted that they were locked inside the wheelhouse and under guard there.

Duval now started a harangue, blustering and threatening like a drill sergeant, but he didn't get far with it. Of a sudden we heard a terrific banging and smashing aft, and warning yells from whoever was on guard there. Duval turned his head in that direction; so did the chief engineer. Captain Malo took advantage of this split-second opportunity to rush and grapple with the chief. The mates, the seamen, and I followed his lead, and in an instant the deck was filled with milling, struggling men. My antagonist was Jourdain. He had youth on his side, but I had weight, not all of it superfluous fat, and I soon bore him down. Lenoir at his gun was unable to use it because of the mêlée, and the black stokers, bewildered by the uproar from the wheelhouse and taken aback by Captain Malo's resolute action, did nothing for a time just long enough to save us. Duval was dancing about, shifting his machine gun this way and that, but he dared not fire. Then Matrac appeared from behind him with a wooden mallet in his hand. He was on Duval in a flash and dropped him with a blow on the head. Matrac seized the grips of the machine gun, whipped it round to bear on Lenoir, and gave him a burst that brought him down in a heap.

At the same moment Petit appeared from behind the wheelhouse with the butt end of an oar in his huge fist. Garou, Marius, and Maillot were close behind. Petit swung his weapon with such ferocious skill that when three stokers had been felled the others fled. Meanwhile, Garou had seized Lenoir's machine gun and the ship was ours again. I doubt whether three minutes had elapsed between the beginning and the end of the battle.

Luckily, no one was killed. Duval's thick skull had not been seriously damaged. Lenoir was bleeding badly from a bullet wound in his fat buttocks and another through the fleshy part of his right thigh. Matrac, out of consideration for Captain Malo perhaps, had aimed at the man's legs. Four stokers were laid out on deck, one of them unconscious, but he came round within the half hour. Malo, the mates, and I gave the wounded first aid; then Duval and his lieutenant were carried to their cabin, where they were confined during the remainder of the voyage. The three engineers were completely subdued; for all that, Captain Malo kept them to their own part of the ship, but they were permitted to come on deck at stated times for a breath of fresh air. To the convicts he gave the honor of guarding them and the stokers, and well they fulfilled the duty.

As I think of it now, there was something faintly comic about the whole affair, but the tragic aspect overshadows this. There we were, Frenchmen in a French ship, our Country defeated and laid waste, and we could find nothing better to do than to fight amongst ourselves. It was an example in miniature of what we have all been doing from that time to the present.

We had a quiet passage and a lonely one across the rest of the Atlantic. So empty was the sea that I began to wonder if there was any shipping left. As you know, the vessels of belligerent nations are forbidden to use their wireless except in cases of emergency, so there was none of the usual crisscrossing of messages at all hours of the day and night. Maillot, by the way, was now our wireless officer. He proved vastly more competent than his predecessor, and I could see the pride and pleasure he took in being honestly at work once more.

The last week of the voyage seemed endless. As we approached the coast of England, Malo was never off the bridge. He hoped to fall in with some convoy, but we had no luck. The weather was dull and misty throughout the week, and the visibility poor. We were about fifty miles from Land's End when we had our first contact with Europe.

It was on a morning of heavy, low-hanging clouds, broken by occasional gaps through which the sunlight streamed in bright shafts. Malo paced the bridge constantly. You can imagine his concern, in those sub-infested waters;

furthermore, he was ignorant of the location of the British mine fields, to say nothing of those strewn at random by the Germans. Every man had his life-belt ready, and some wore them as they went about their work. The bosun and his mate remained on the alert at our three-inch gun, and the two machine guns were ready for instant action. If you have done any wartime voyaging in European waters, you will know the tension we were under as the old *Ville de Nancy* pushed slowly on toward St. George's Channel.

About ten o'clock we heard the sound Europeans are only too familiar with: the far-off droning of aeroplane engines. They were above the clouds and coming steadily nearer. Presently we had a glimpse of four planes, in close formation, as they crossed a gap in the clouds a little to starboard of us. Whether English or German we could not tell. A moment later another came in sight. Her pilots caught sight of the *Nancy*, banked steeply, dived through the opening in the clouds, and headed straight for us. It was a flying boat, a monoplane, with German crosses on the great wings.

It passed over us at less than a thousand feet, where, to my more than anxious eyes, it looked huge enough to be Sinbad's roc, capable of flying off with an elephant. And the venom in the four black eggs she dropped would have been worthy of that legendary bird. They were small, as bombs go nowadays, but their detonations made the old ship quiver and sent up columns of water that showered our decks. The plane banked and headed for us once more.

This time, I thought we were done for. Our machine guns had not been idle, but it seemed incredible that they could have any effect upon this flying fortress. To our astonishment, instead of bombing us again, she skimmed low and raked the decks with concentrated machine-gun fire. Woodwork was splintered and the steel decks rang as though beaten with a thousand hammers. All save the men at the guns sprang for shelter, but two of the Caledonians fell as they ran. Glancing round from where I crouched by the bulwark, I saw that one of our guns was standing idle; both the gunner and his number two had been hit. Before I could reach the gun, Matrac had seized the grips and was pouring a long burst into the oncoming plane.

Then the incredible happened. Matrac was on his knees, firing steadily, with the greatest coolness. I would not have given three sous for either of our chances at that moment. The plane passed so low that the sound of her engines was deafening; then, as she banked to return, she zoomed up of a sudden, fell off on a wing, and plunged into the sea about three hundred yards away. Even with the sight of the floating wreckage there before us, we could scarcely believe that she was down. Captain Malo, almost out of his senses with joy, performed a kind of Celtic war dance on the bridge, shouting and waving his stubby arms.

"*Voilà, les salauds!*" he yelled, suddenly, and one after another we saw three half-drowned Germans emerge from the sea and drag themselves onto the floating wing. They crouched together, gazing toward the ship. All the German stiffness and arrogance had gone out of them. They huddled on the wing, maintaining their positions with difficulty as the flying boat, her fuselage almost completely submerged, rose sluggishly to the cold gray swells. At that moment we heard a long steady burst of machine-gun fire, and the three airmen slumped down under a hail of bullets which whipped the sea white around them. It was Matrac who had fired before a hand could be lifted to prevent him. The Captain came running aft; he was breathing hard and for a moment he could not speak.

"Assassin!" he exclaimed. "What are you about? You have killed helpless men!"

Matrac showed no sign of emotion, but I saw in his eyes the glitter of ferocity I have mentioned before. "Look about you, Captain, and tell me who are the assassins," he said.

On the well-deck, three of the stokers lay huddled in pools of blood. Matrac's friend, Marius, shot through the head and chest, tried to raise himself to a sitting position and slumped down once more. One of the seamen at the gun Matrac had fired was dead, the other badly wounded. Malo stared around him, and then at the German bodies on the floating wing.

"*Bon Dieu! Bon Dieu!*" he exclaimed. "But you shouldn't have done it, man! The fight was over."

We had been steaming on this while at our customary six knots, and the wrecked plane was soon almost out of sight. Malo was debating whether or not to turn back when we saw a plume of smoke on the horizon. We soon made it out to be a destroyer, bearing down upon us at top speed. We examined her anxiously, through our binoculars, and the moment Malo was convinced she was British he gave orders to the man at the wheel, and the *Nancy* was headed back toward the plane. The destroyer reached it before we did. She swept across our bow and came to a spectacular halt

not fifty yards off. We saw the officers on the bridge examining the plane and ourselves through their glasses.

"Well done, Captain!" one of them shouted through his megaphone. "Who are you?"

"*Ville de Nancy*, from Nouméa."

"Messageries Line?"

"Yes, sir."

"What's your cargo?"

"Nickel ore."

"Splendid! Half a minute, Captain, and we'll board you."

The half minute proved almost literally the case. The C.O. and a young officer sprang into their small launch as she was lowered from the davits, and no sooner had it touched the water than it headed for the German plane. The great wing was all but awash, and only one body now remained on it. A seaman stepped onto the wreck and went hastily through the pockets of the dead man, whereupon the launch made for the ladder we had put over the side.

The C.O. of the destroyer was a youngish man, about thirty, and his sub-lieutenant, scarcely out of his teens. Both were roughly dressed. They looked thoroughly dependable, and, somehow, the mere sight of them gave us a feeling of confidence and security. The elder man shook Malo's hand warmly, and we retired with them to the Captain's stateroom. The mess boy placed glasses and a bottle of brandy on the table but the Englishman shook his head.

"Sorry, Captain, but this is no place for a quiet chat. Now tell me what happened."

Malo related the experience briefly.

"Good work! You know what your bag is, I suppose?"

"Can't say I do."

"A Dornier, type twenty-four. It's these fellows that have been laying the magnetic mines. You were incredibly lucky to get him with machine-gun fire. You were bound for Marseilles, you say? A bit off your course, aren't you?"

Malo then gave him a hasty account of our voyage, ending with Duval's rebellion. The Englishman heard him through in silence.

"We could do with more of your kind, Captain," he said. "Our friends are rather scarce just now.... Well, I'll leave my sub-lieutenant aboard to pilot you into Bristol. Go there instead of Liverpool. By the way, what's your speed?"

"I've had her up to seven knots."

The C.O. gave a low whistle. He smiled grimly as he added: "In that case, we won't count on the nickel ore till we get it there."

"What about my prisoners?" Malo asked.

"What do you want to do with them?"

Malo hesitated. "I hardly know.... They're my countrymen, of course. They did what they thought was right..."

"And you did what *you* thought was right. They must be a nuisance on board here. I'll take them if you say so. We're due at Portsmouth tomorrow, and I could turn them over to the authorities there."

"What will become of them?" Malo asked.

"They'll be well treated. Have no fears on that score. They will be repatriated if the chance offers, but I can't say when that will be."

You can imagine the feelings of Duval when informed that he was to leave the ship for a British destroyer. Because of his wounds, Lenoir was given the choice of staying or going. As there was no choice for Duval he elected to go with his leader. Malo decided to send the chief engineer with them, and a moment later all three were brought on deck, Lenoir carried in an improvised litter. Duval was all but speechless with indignation.

"You will regret this, Malo! Mark my words! The day will come when you will very bitterly regret it!" He stared truculently at the British officer, and dotted lines of venom seemed to dart from his eyes like bursts of machine-gun bullets. "As for you, sir, you are exceeding your authority beyond all bounds. Be sure that I shall demand satisfaction from your superiors the moment I set foot on shore!"

The Englishman's face remained completely wooden, and his manner was courteous.

"The opportunity shall not be denied you, Commandant," he replied. The ghost of a smile appeared at the corners of his mouth.

"There is no hope, I suppose, that you may wish to change your mind? You would not care to join your compatriots who are still loyal to France and fighting with us?"

Duval's face took on an all but bluish tinge.

"Loyal?" he exclaimed. "Loyal to France, those traitors? I'll live to see the day when every man of them will face a firing squad!"

"That's a matter of opinion, sir... And now we must be pushing off. This is not a healthy place to stop."

The British officer took leave of us, and Duval, still protesting, climbed clumsily down the ladder, followed by the chief engineer. Lenoir was handed down. The destroyer was close alongside. The launch was quickly hoisted in, and the larger vessel's powerful screws churned the sea white as she gathered way. She tore off to the eastward at all of thirty knots, and soon the *Ville de Nancy* was alone once more.

But we got safely to Bristol, and never have I been more content to set foot on land. The officer who piloted us in smoothed over the formalities of our arrival. Two of the seamen wounded by the Boche airmen were sent to hospital. Our dead, including Marius, had been buried at sea. Three days later I accompanied Matrac, Garou, Maillot, and Petit to London. From the windows of our second-class compartment, I saw what you have seen this afternoon: an England changed in the course of a few months from the most peaceful country in the world to a land beleaguered, and prepared for the worst that may come. Englishmen themselves, I discovered, had undergone an even greater change. I shall always remember, as one of the greatest privileges of life, my return to that England.

It was comfort beyond expression to find that same spirit in the hearts of my own countrymen then in England. The headquarters of the French National Committee in London were on the Victoria Embankment. The anterooms were filled with our compatriots: civilians as well as men of all ranks in uniform. I saw upon those faces the same expression of incredulity, weariness, anguish, grim determination. We were still dazed, all of us, by the swiftly moving events that had made us homeless, whether at home or abroad.

You will understand the strangeness of that experience; and if it seemed strange, unreal to me, what of my four companions? Remembering the horror of their lives in Cayenne, I tried to think myself into their minds at the moment; to imagine what my own feelings would be if I stood in the place of any one of them. I came nearest, perhaps, in Maillot's case, but I don't think I succeeded very well even there. One thing I was convinced of, however: during those first days in England, the fact of being free, their own men once more, outweighed everything else. The fortunes of war or the fate of nations bulked small in their minds compared with this precious liberty. No more would they hear, "Convicts, on your knees! Caps off!" No more would they run and fight for their slops of food in the blockhouse or the *Case Rouge* at the command of "*Pousse!*" They could move about at will, heads up, human beings once again. To see the incredible truth coming home to them little by little would have touched a harder heart than mine.

I have said that, with the exception of Maillot, they bore the unmistakable stamp of the underworld, but already

they were beginning to lose it. As they sat among other Frenchmen in the anteroom at de Gaulle headquarters, what chiefly distinguished them was the deep tan on faces and hands. Petit was remarkable for his powerful frame and grotesque breadth of shoulders, but I realized that he looked no less intelligent than many another hard-handed peasant. Garou resembled the man he was, in fact—a first-class mechanic; he might have stepped out of any munitions or aircraft factory. But Matrac fell into no category. I noticed that he attracted immediate attention in the anteroom. The others waiting there eyed him with a kind of speculative interest, trying, perhaps, to classify him.

We waited our turn, and were at last ushered into the presence of a major of infantry. I told my white lie—at least, I considered it white—concerning Matrac and his friends. They were supposed to be survivors of a torpedoed ship: Petit one of the seamen, and the others Frenchmen from South America who had been on the way home to volunteer their services. The story was accepted without question. As we walked out of the dingy building, I felt that here, at least, the heart of France was still beating—the France that lives and is free.

Chapter III

Captain Freycinet broke off and glanced at his watch.

"The Hamburg flight should be in soon," he remarked.

"You will understand my interest, Captain," Manning said. "Have you time to draw in the threads? Matrac is here, as I know. What happened to the others? And where is Captain Malo?"

"Malo was kept in command of his ship and ordered to Canada for a cargo of wheat, but the *Ville de Nancy's* days were running short. She was torpedoed not two hundred miles from where the German Dornier was brought down. Most of the crew were saved, including Petit, whom Malo had taken with him. Malo is now in command of a mine-sweeper manned by French seamen. They work in the Channel. Petit is one of the crew, still safe, insofar as I know. I saw them both a fortnight ago at Dover.

"Garou is here with the squadron. He proved to be a superb mechanic. Dompierre, the C.O., tells me they could hardly function without Garou. He knows these complicated Hispano-Suiza engines and can repair one as neatly as he can pick a lock. As for Matrac, he's an ace gunner as he was an ace among his fellow convicts at Cayenne. Beaumont, one of the co-pilots of his plane, tells me he has a pair of eyes like ten-power binoculars. That plane has shot down three Messerschmitts, and Beaumont says that Matrac deserves full credit for two of them."

"What of Maillot?"

"I hoped to have him assigned to the squadron with the others, but no radio operator was then needed here, so Maillot was kept in London. He has since been assigned to work of the most dangerous sort. He has twice been set down in France, once by plane, once by a fast powerboat on the coast, near Bordeaux. Each time he returned with extremely valuable information, so I have been told. He may have gone again, for anything I know to the contrary. I've seen him once since coming down here. It was after his first journey to France. You will understand that I watched with a good deal of anxiety for evidence of the old fear that had conquered him as a youth. No trace of it did I see. He has mastered it, I firmly believe. God knows, he needs courage for the work he is now doing!"

The two men were silent for some little time; then Manning said: "It's a strange story, Captain.... By the Lord! They were—they are patriots!"

"I think they've well earned the right to be called so."

"Do the others here know the truth about them?"

Captain Freycinet shook his head.

"Malo and I agreed that there was no reason why anyone should be told. But it wouldn't have mattered. I'm convinced of that, now. It may well be that Duval spilled the whole of it out to the authorities in Portsmouth. If so, no heed was paid to the story. At least, we've heard nothing of it here."

"Do you know what happened to him and his lieutenant?"

"Not definitely. I think it likely that he has been returned to France via Portugal, with other Pétainists who chanced to be in England. I wish them joy of their German allies."

"Old Grandpère," said Manning, musingly. "Where will he be now, I wonder?"

"I knew you'd be thinking of him. I have, many's the time, and the others with me. How pleased he would be if he could know that they came through safely. Maillot would have tried to reach him by letter, but none of them knew his name.... Grandpère, the Unknown Soldier of Cayenne ... Well, shall we go—down to the field?"

They turned off from the path they had taken before, and Captain Freycinet led the way down the northern slope to the nearest of the hangars. Manning now saw that room for it had been partially excavated in the slope. The roof was so cunningly contrived that it seemed a part of the hill itself. The great curtain of green canvas was now drawn aside. The hangar, lighted by one small electric bulb at the inner end, looked enormous. Mechanics and ground crews walked about aimlessly, with the air of suppressed excitement and anxiety common at military aerodromes, as the hour approaches for patrols to return. At sight of Captain Freycinet, one man detached himself from the group near the entrance of the hangar.

"*Bon soir, mon Capitaine,*" he said.

"*Bon soir, Garou. Alors, ça marche?*"

Freycinet turned to the American.

"Mr. Manning, this is Caporal Garou, the best mechanic in Great Britain, French or English."

Manning took the other's small hard hand, studying his face with interest in the moonlight.

"Garou is our one indispensable *mécano,*" Freycinet added. "Give him some scrap iron, a bit of wire and some old aluminum pots and pans, and he'll build you a plane in three hours."

The man grinned. "*Non, mon Capitaine,* you exaggerate. It would take me four hours, at least."

"And how's the sick Farman?"

"*Ça gaze le tonnerre!*" He stopped short to listen. "*Voilà!* They're coming!"

Manning felt the thrill he had known so often in his own flying days, when on the ground, with patrols coming home but still far distant. How many would there be? What luck had they had? With the others he stared into the moonlit sky, but nothing could be seen as yet. The drone of the distant engines was not coming from the direction of the Channel but from the north. He understood the reason for that: pilots flying from a field so near the coast would want to conceal their base. Now the backfiring of the engines of the nearest plane could be heard, though it was still invisible in the deceptive moonlight. Then the pilot switched on his lights and came swooping down to a good landing. The light was immediately cut off and the Farman taxied away to its hangar, followed by a swarm of mechanics who looked like gnomes, their bodies dwarfed by the great bird they pursued. Within the next quarter of an hour the other planes of the Hamburg flight were safely down, and Manning and his host joined the group gathered round the pilots and gunners who were stripping off their heavy combination suits. They were deafened, speechless at first, after their long flight. They flexed arms and necks, stamping the ground as though doubtful that they had good Mother Earth under their feet once more. One stout, humorous-looking fellow shook imaginary water from his fingers in the familiar Gallic gesture. "*Bon Dieu!*" he exclaimed. "That barrage was something tonight! Please tell me—am I home again?"

"Who got the big oil tank? Was it you, Rocroi?"

"Of course. Who else?"

"Many thanks for the light. We made good use of it."

Despite their easy bantering talk, Manning could detect the utter weariness in the voices of these Frenchmen. A sense of the strangeness, the incredibility of this 1940 aerial warfare came home to him at that moment as never before. While he had been sitting with Captain Freycinet in the snug little room at the farmhouse, these kids—they were scarcely more than that—had made a flight of nearly a thousand miles, facing death every mile of the distance. From what he had seen of anti-aircraft barrages in the London area, he was able to imagine the kind of reception met with over Hamburg. As for the planes that had gone on to Berlin, their experience would be even worse. Worst of all, surely, would be the release of their own bombs—three hundred, five hundred, one thousand pound bombs, with the full realization of the havoc they might wreak upon women, children, the helpless old, even expectant mothers. How long could human beings on the ground endure these horrors? How long could young men, of whatever country, continue to rain down the bombs and still remain human? Manning thought of Mr. Churchill's last speech in the House of Commons: "But let all strive without failing in faith or in duty, and the dark curse of Hitler will be lifted from our age." Yes, it must go on, all this, until the originator, the glorifier of such monstrous Evil, and all those who believed in it with him, had been beaten down with their own monstrous weapons. Until that had happened there could be no hope for the world.

Far off across the Channel, the sky was paling; the freshness of dawn was in the air, and presently a few clouds were touched with ghostly light. Now they heard once more the faint throbbing of Hispano-Suiza motors, and a moment later the first plane of the Berlin flight was seen low in the north, coming in not five hundred feet above the downs. Two other planes landed within the next ten minutes. Dompierre, C.O. of the squadron, was co-pilot of the third to land. He stood for a moment at the foot of the ladder, rubbing his eyes and tousling his hair vigorously with his open hands. Freycinet and Manning strolled over to where he stood.

"*Heil Hitler!*" said Freycinet.

The other smiled, faintly.

"Where's Beaumont?"

The airman shook his head. "He'll be along." He glanced toward another of the pilots who now joined them. "That was good work, Raoul."

"You were able to get through the barrage?" Freycinet asked.

The other nodded, wearily.

Freycinet introduced his companion, and the four men chatted for a moment, turning their eyes northward, and pausing to listen.

"Why not turn in, Dompierre?" Freycinet asked. "I'll let you know as soon as they've landed."

"I'll give them another ten minutes. I'm as fussy as an old hen with one chick missing.... *Tiens!* Here she comes!"

The fourth plane was sighted almost as soon as they heard her engines. She was flying with a heavy list, with one of the motors silent. The men on the ground waited tensely as the pilot eased down to a landing and cut his remaining motors. The Farman rolled to within fifty yards of the hangar. For a moment there was no sign of her occupants, then the hatch to the bombers' compartment was lifted and a head was thrust out.

"*Alors, Émile?*" Dompierre called.

"Stretcher-bearers! Matrac's washed out. Beaumont's hit—not bad, I think. Through the shoulder."

The co-pilot now looked down from his cockpit. "Make it fast," he said. "He's bleeding all over the place."

The ladder was quickly raised and the wounded co-pilot lifted out and eased to the ground. His face was white

and his eyes misty with pain. The squadron medical officer was in the crowd, and as the pilot was laid on a stretcher he knelt beside him for a hasty examination. Then he turned to the stretcher-bearers.

"Off with him," he said, curtly. "Get him undressed at once. I'll be along in a moment.... It's all right, Beaumont, a clean wound. You'll live to fight another day."

The young pilot managed a wry smile. "*Bon Dieu, Doc!*" he said. "Do you call that consolation?"

The surgeon turned at once to the other stretcher where Matrac lay in his bloodstained combination. His eyes were open, and he seemed to be staring with an intent, puzzled expression at a few ribbed clouds, all golden in the light of the still hidden sun. The surgeon got to his feet and stood for a moment looking down at the dead gunner. In the group gathered there, Manning saw Garou staring at the body of his friend with something of that same intent and puzzled expression. Then he turned away, and disappeared in the direction of the hangars.

Early in the afternoon of the same day, Manning and Captain Freycinet stood with the group of exiled Frenchmen gathered by the open grave where Matrac's body lay. The pilots, gunners and navigating officers of the squadron were all present, and as many of the mechanics as could be spared from duty. Among the latter Manning saw Garou, now looking as unconcerned as though he were a mere spectator at a ceremony that had neither significance nor interest for him. The grave had been made in a spinney on the southern slope of the hill, and through the trees could be seen the long sweep of the downs falling away to the Channel coast.

As he listened to the words of the chaplain, Manning was seized by the confused and painful sense of time moving in an endless circle, which comes when events of long ago seem to repeat themselves. How often had he stood thus, at gravesides and among French airmen, during the first four-year period of a World War still in progress, which seemed destined never to have an end. The open grave, the flag-draped coffin, the chaplain, pilots, gunners and mechanics grouped about, all seemed a replica of one of those funeral services for airmen who had been in their graves for nearly a generation. Only the Cross of Lorraine, on the tricolor flag laid over the coffin, was there to indicate the reality of 1940 and the somber change in fortunes wrought by the passage of twenty years and more.

When the chaplain had finished his prayer, the squadron commander stepped forward to pay his respects to the dead. Heads bared, the company listened to the few and simple words which French soldiers know so well how to choose for such an occasion. He paused.

"*Adieu, Matrac. Adieu, mon ami ... notre ami! Vous avez bien gagné l'admiration et l'hommage de vos camarades, de tous les soldats de la France Libre.*" Raising his head, he turned to gaze southward where the slate-blue sheen of the Channel was visible beyond the slope of the land.

"*Et maintenant ... Vive la France!*"

Manning, too, gazed away to the south, but what he saw, in his mind's eye, beyond the sunlit haze of the autumn afternoon, was not the far-off, hidden coast of France. He saw the lonely figure of old Grandpère, standing on a sandspit backed by the jungle-covered swamps of French Guiana.

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