

MURDER IN THE SAHARA, A BOOK-LENGTH NOVEL

BLUE BOOK

SEPTEMBER

25 CENTS



Painted by HERBERT MORTON STOOPS

"A Wyoming Huckleberry Finn,"

by JAMES EDWIN BAUM • FULTON GRANT
ELLERY QUEEN • R. G. KIRK • H. BEDFORD-JONES

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Title: Death Gave Him His Chance

Date of first publication: 1939

Author: Henry Bedford-Jones (as Captain L. B. Williams) (1887-1949)

Date first posted: Jan. 31, 2022

Date last updated: Jan. 31, 2022

Faded Page eBook #20220154

This eBook was produced by: Alex White & the online Distributed Proofreaders Canada team at <https://www.pgdpCanada.net>



In this thirty-third story of "Ships and Men," the new propeller wins a dramatic tug-of-war against the paddle-wheel—and wins love and fortune for Dan Lowry.



Lowry, scarcely marked, looked down at the Killer.

Death Gave Him His Chance

SHIPS and MEN

By CAPTAIN L. B. WILLIAMS

and H. BEDFORD-JONES

Captain L. B. Williams is a pseudonym of Henry Bedford-Jones.

Illustrated by L. R. Gustavson

First published *Blue Book*, September 1939.

The tale is to tell of Dan Lowry and the steam propeller.... Dr. Franklin fathered the idea of propelling ships by pumping water in at the bow and out at the stern, and the Royal Navy made good use of it later, but Dan Lowry did even better.

For, when death gave him his chance, he leaped at the opportunity.

He was designer and builder for old Jock Cummins, down the Thames below Greenhithe. Today it is practically all London Docks, but a hundred years ago it had green fields and country lanes and cows and river-pirates. Cummins had a little struggling shipyard of sorts, stubborn backward brain, and no family except some distant relatives with some sort of title. He was a hard and ugly old man.

The works had built a paddle-wheel collier for one firm, and they had ordered a duplicate ship built. Dan Lowry's work was good, and Lowry was the man who did the actual work. He tried to induce Cummins to install a propeller instead of paddles; Cummins laughed and sneered at propellers, which he had never heard of, and swore at Lowry.

In the upshot, they had a terrific scene. Cummins told Lowry he was being fired in the morning, and meant it. An hour later, old Jock Cummins toppled over in the street, dead from heart-failure.

Now, Dan Lowry was a bit under thirty, and intelligent. He was powerfully built and could use his fists, for he had worked up from nothing; but when he went back to his lodgings on this late afternoon, he had lost hope and ambition together. Unaware that Cummins was dead, the future looked dark to him.

When he climbed to his own rooms, he flung down his things and sank into a chair, bitter-eyed. The strong bony lines of his face set hard. He was a man beset by the devil, if ever one was!

Rather, beset by a dozen devils. Fired in the morning, eh? Old Cummins had meant those words, too. His position was gone, and his future was gone with it. Debt held him enchained; debt and a lost dream. He had no family, no prospects, no influence; without these, his common origin damned him in the London of a hundred years ago.

Rising at last, he went to the cupboard and flung open the door. The fading daylight glistened on metal, on glistening brass: the flanges of a huge propeller that stood there; it was his own design, though not his invention, for the propeller had broken the hearts of many an inventor ere now, and had come to no good.

"Your chance is gone, and mine as well," said Lowry in despondent gloom. He kicked moodily at the shining brass. "For a year past, I've sunk every farthing I could rake and

scrape, to get you made. On your account, I'm deep in debt to boot. And now I'm discharged! Back to the gutter that spawned me, says he; and the bitter old man said a true word there. The only friends I know are in the gutter—I'm off for the same place, here and now!"

He caught up his cap, and departed.

In his morose mood he wronged himself. He had made friends, plenty of them, in the office and in the little shipyard, with men who knew Cummins, with the shipping firm that had ordered the new collier. But, at the moment, the words of that bitter old man burned like fire, for Jock Cummins had ever a harsh tongue.

Along the river, in those days, was no lack of gutter, from Limehouse to Rotherhithe; packet-rats, foreigners, thieves, river-pirates galore.

Hungry and tired and savage, Dan Lowry stumbled into what, long ago, had been the Bellerophon public-house; now it was the Bell & Ruffian, and deserved the second part of the name. He plumped himself down and called for supper.

"Dan Lowry's back! Lowry, lads!" went up the word.

Hard drinks and a hard world, but loyal in its own fashion. Years ago, Dan Lowry had left off all drinking but tonight he had left off all hope. Now he drank deep to banish the misery of broken ambition, and full well he banished it!

An hour later you might have seen him at it, hammer and tongs, with the Limehouse Killer. Both men were stripped to the waist under the glaring gaslights, bare-knuckled, and ten quid to the one who could last the longer. All the aristocracy of the river-scum were gathered thickly, obscene jests flew fast, cruelty was uppermost; men and women alike had the tongues and faces of hell.

Lowry, scarcely marked at all, took the ten gold-pieces and looked down. The Killer lay stretched out on the bloody canvas, an old woman hugging his head and moaning at his ear, and not a soul noticing them. All tongues were for Dan Lowry, slaps on the back, drinks proffered, eager hearts swelling to him. He shoved them roughly aside and went to the old woman, and pressed the gold-pieces into her hand.

"Take what your lad fought to earn, granny," said he. "You need it sore, and I don't."

He had been fuddled enough when the fight began, but his head was clear now. As he headed out for the street, sickened by the sight and smells and sounds of the place, a tap came at his shoulder. He turned to see Slasher Grimes.

"I'll walk with you, lad," said the Slasher, "and we'll finish our bit of business."

Dan Lowry, only vaguely recalling their conversation, growled something as Grimes fell into step with him.

He knew that Slasher Grimes, who had made a name and many a golden guinea fighting, was now the biggest man along the river, drawing tribute from all the dark sources that hid in dark places from the law. To those in the know, Slasher Grimes had a gang of river-pirates that laughed at the Thames police. Not always, but sometimes the laughter turned sour—and of late the police had done a lot of damage among the liberty-loving heroes of the docks.



“No,” he said, and turned. . . . The stick belted him over the head in fury.

Grimes aped the gentleman in dress and speech; perhaps he had once been a gentleman at some time. He was dark and sinewy and strong as an ox.

“One minute, my lad,” he said, pausing, as they came to the dark and empty docks. “For a hundred quid, says you, I could have the secret of a snug river craft that’d show her heels to any police boat on the river. Here’s your money.”

Dan Lowry looked at the extended notes, then at Grimes. It all rushed back on him; he had told the Slasher the truth. That propeller in his room, or a smaller one like it, fitted to a tiny steam-launch, would turn the trick.

Aye, he had poured it all out, thanks to the liquor and his mood, though he had not told the exact secret. Now it was different. He had recoiled before the filth of the ghastly gutter; the fight, the night air, had cleared his head.

“Sorry, Slasher,” said he, refusing the money. “It was the drink in me talking.”

“Don’t lie,” rejoined Grimes harshly, tapping Dan Lowry’s chest with his gold-headed stick. “Liquor doesn’t lie. If ye have what ye say, lad, this hundred is only a starter; it means wealth, to you and me both. Come, out with it!”

Wealth? With everything lost as it was, Lowry was tempted by the word, and had the temptation come earlier, he might have yielded; but his little dip into the life of the gutter had caused revolt to rise in him. He saw things as they were, now; he saw from what he had arisen in these years, knew he had worked himself up to a new and totally different level. He was no longer a creature of the gutter.

“No,” said he, and turned. The hand of Grimes clutched at him. He struck it away. The stick belted him over the skull in fury; then he let Slasher Grimes have it right and left, to go sprawling and slithering in the slime of the street.

“You’ll hear from this,” gasped the voice of Grimes, with a volley of oaths.

Not unlikely, he thought, as he went to his lodgings. Despair settled upon him again, because he had reverted for this little hour or two into the old life. The one decent thing he had won in these long years, was sullied and tarnished. Was he, after all, doomed to gin and tatters and sordid filth for the rest of life?

“By heavens, no!” he told himself savagely. “It’s a good thing, perhaps, that I took the dip tonight; it’s made me realize what I am and might have been. Good! We’ll start fresh from the bottom tomorrow.”

But, getting home, he heard that old Cummins was dead.

And he had not been fired. Instead, he was now the unquestioned head and authority in the struggling little shipyard with its one boat a-building, its little offices and its three accountants and boy. Across the desk of old Jock Cummins, which was now his desk, the lawyer told him so; the dry, precise Queen’s Counsel, an eminent man and well tailored.

“For the present, Lowry, carry on in full charge; it’s the wish of the heirs,” said he. “I talked with them this morning. They’re highly placed and titled, though lacking in money. They can’t afford to have the name linked with this place, or to have it known that they own it. At least, such are the orders for the present.”

“Too blue-blooded to be in trade, eh?” commented Dan Lowry. “Thank God, I’m not! Will they put money into the business, perhaps?”

“They need what the business earns for them, in order to live,” said the lawyer. “Can you carry on this ship to completion?”

Dan Lowry laughed harshly. “More than that. If Cummins had listened to me, I’d have made money steadily for him. Give me the authority to buy those barges tied up at the next dock. I can repair ’em in the spare time of the hands, and sell ’em in a fortnight. Give me authority to do a dozen things that need doing—”

He named them. The eminent lawyer departed somewhat dubiously, but returned that same afternoon, bringing a young woman with him, a Miss Colson.

“You shall have full authority,” said he, “provided you give Miss Colson a place in the office, to handle all accounts on behalf of the heirs. I don’t think you will regret it.”

Regret? Dan Lowry wanted to kick the man out and then laugh in his face. What—set a woman to spy and interfere? Put a woman into a business office? It was unheard of, and an absurdity! Suddenly he recalled that Cummins had used those same words about his propeller.

She was a quiet but capable young woman, and her shy smile conquered his instinctive dislike. He agreed, since he must. Miss Colson went down to the waiting cab, and the lawyer paused for a word regarding her.

“You’ll find her rather exceptional, Lowry, in that she has a gift for business. I might add that she comes of a very good family; a gentlewoman in distress, if I may say so, who is compelled to support herself.”

Dan Lowry merely grunted, being skeptical of gentlewomen, especially in distress. . . .

To his astonishment, he discovered that Miss Colson was not only intelligent in business ways, but had a swift comprehension of what it was all about. She interfered not at all. She assented to all the reforms and changes he had vainly urged on old Cummins, and even suggested a couple herself. Their relations were not inimical, but friendly.

When she vetoed his proposed contract with a supply firm at Limehouse, he was furious, but assented with a growl. A week later, he found the firm was in trouble with the Admiralty. She only nodded when he told her. She had known this all along.

“And how, may I inquire?” he demanded.

“That I can’t tell you, Mr. Lowry. I have family connections, and I use them.”

“Well, you were dead right!”

He came to have a vast admiration for her ability, in fact. So did the clerks. The dingy old office became clean, and even took on an air of well-being. The hands always had a smile and a touch of the forelock when she hove in sight. Dan Lowry learned very little about her personally, and was too busy to try: besides, she had an air that discouraged any curiosity. A lady, as the clerks said; the word spoke volumes.

Meantime, two things pended: the ship on the ways, and Slasher Grimes.

With the ship, things had come to a point of decision; for here, Dan Lowry trembled under a temptation that was tremendous and overpowering. Either he was to put in the paddle-wheels, as Cummins had planned, or he was to put in the new propeller—as he had it planned. He could go ahead and do this, and say no word about it to Miss Colson; but he scorned the evasion. But he had to do something, and do it immediately. The audacity of his temptation, the audacity of what he planned, did not occur to him as such. He had even brought the big brass propeller up to a corner of the office, pending decision.

While it pended, Slasher Grimes walked in on him one noonday. He was alone in the office with Miss Colson, who was eating her luncheon in the inner room. Grimes strode in and came up to his desk, hard-eyed, and extended a sheaf of banknotes.

“Well, Dan Lowry? Here’s your hundred quid. Do you keep your promise or not?”

“I thought you’d forgotten all that,” said Lowry.

“I forget nothing, my lad—nothing!” was the significant reply. “Yes or no?”

“And supposing it’s no?”

“You’ll have the week-end to ponder, this being Friday. Bright and early on the Monday morning,” said Slasher Grimes cheerfully, “I’ll offer you the hundred quid for the third and last time. If ye say no, I blow my whistle, and up pops the devil! In other words, gents with a warrant for your apprehension. No doubt you’ve forgotten the little matter of Magistrate Herriott and the case o’ schnapps. But the law, my lad, never forgets. Like me—never! Think it over, till the Monday morning; it’s friends or enemies, your own choice.”

And, cocking his beaver over one ear, he walked out.

Dan Lowry sat, white to the lips, eyes blazing, a sick dismay in his heart. He looked up to see Miss Colson staring at him from the doorway of the inner office.

“Who was that man, Mr. Lowry?” she asked. “What did he mean, about the schnapps?”

Lowry swallowed hard, and drew a deep breath.

“God help me!” he said, then squared his shoulders and smiled into her eyes. “I can’t tell you now; there are feet on the stairs—the clerks are returning. I’ll tell you later, this evening. Perhaps you’ll have supper with me. But it’s a dismal tale—nothing for a fine lady like you to hear from a gutter-rat like me.”

His bitter words belied his smile.

She nodded slowly.

“I’ll be very glad to have dinner with you, Mr. Lowry. But that’s not what’s been worrying you all day, and yesterday too?”

“No,” said Lowry, as the two accountants reentered. With an effort, he put away all thought of Slasher Grimes, for the moment. The dikes were broken, now; out poured all the flood of his perplexities, which had suddenly taken second place. A warrant, and jail!

“Draw up your chair, Miss Colson; rather, let me draw it up for you,” said he, and suited action to words. Then he produced a portfolio of diagrams, designs, figures, and spread them all out; and with them, his dreams.

He talked to her, low-voiced, quietly, steadily, for an hour or more. His enthusiasm was quenched, now; nothing mattered, for a man who was going to prison on the Monday.

There in the corner was his propeller—his own, for which he was still heavily in debt. He showed her the calculations, the theories; he showed her the proofs gained by other propellers, and discarded; he showed her letters, his rebuffs from the Admiralty, from ship-owners, from builders. He showed her the comparative costs, the cheapness of the propeller as opposed to paddle-wheels.

“I talked with the firm who ordered this collier from us,” he said. “They agreed that if Cummins, meaning this firm of ours, wanted to install the propeller instead of paddles, they’d accept the craft subject to its efficiency. Cummins is dead. I’m in charge.”

“The contract covers such substitution?” she asked. He nodded. “And you could do it?”

“Not honestly, Miss Colson, without your consent. I believe there’s no risk at all, but the owners of this business depend upon it, I understand; if anything went wrong—well, you see what it would mean. Monday morning, we have to know whether the propeller is to be installed or not; the work now depends on this.”

“It would cost no more; it might mean a tremendous improvement. Hm! If it’s as you say, the Royal Navy should use propellers instead of paddles.”



“Monday morning,” he told her, “I may be gone—to prison.”

Lowry laughed. “Admiralty clerks laugh at innovations, as you should know.”

“Indeed I do,” she agreed. “But if I authorize the substitution—”

“Then we’ll go ahead.”

She hesitated. “Let me borrow all these papers until Monday. I’ll not be down in the morning; I’m spending the week-end with relatives at Richmond. Monday morning, I’ll give you my ideas about it. Yes?”

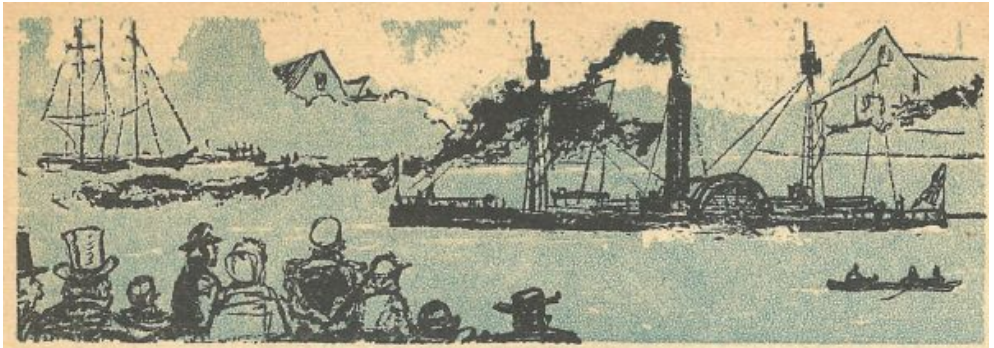
“Yes, by all means,” he agreed. Leaning forward, he picked out one of the papers and showed it to her. “There are figures covering two craft of approximately equal tonnage.

They're correct. They prove that this ship on the ways, when finished, could actually tow backward any equal ship equipped with paddle-wheels! That is, with my propeller."

"Oh!" A trace of color leaped in her cheeks, and her eyes danced. "What an idea! I'd love to see it tried out here in the Thames!"

"But,"—and his face darkened with sudden recollection,—“be here early Monday morning, please. If you're late, I may be gone.”

"Where?" she asked in surprise.



"To prison," he curtly rejoined, and walked out of the office to oversee the yard work. But her eyes followed him in memory—her eyes, wondering, incredulous and hurt.

They bore the same hurt look that evening, as they faced him across the dinner table. He spoke with plain blunt words, not bitter, but strong and forthright as his strong face and level eyes.

"I'm no genius, Miss Colson. I didn't invent that propeller, as I told you today; but I've perfected it, and I've perfected the engine connections, as I've perfected a lot of things, including this little shipyard; but I can't perfect myself—that is, in eyes like yours."

She regarded him steadily, as if searching the meaning behind his words.

"Do you think it necessary?" she asked in her cool way, which might have meant anything.

"Perhaps not. My father was a ship captain; I grew up along the wharves of this river. I was left alone when young, and went with the only crowd I knew. I forged ahead little by little; meantime, I had to live. I did odd bits of thieving at times."

"Who hasn't?" she asked idly. "I stole apples, once, and got a sound birching."

His eyes darkened impatiently. "I don't mean childish things; I mean actual theft. Once, with some river-pirates, I broke into a warehouse. A case of schnapps was stolen; we were caught; because I was no more than a boy, Magistrate Herriott gave me only five years in prison, instead of life. I never reached prison—I got away."

"Oh!" Her eyes dilated upon him. "So that was it! How long ago?"

"Nine years, when I was eighteen. It was nothing of great account, perhaps; still, the whole thing taught me what I needed. I went in for fighting, boxing, and broke away from the river gangs. I made a little money, and went to work, leaving fighting behind me. Step by step, you see. Every step meant cruel work."

He traced those steps for her, sparing himself nothing in the accounting, spurred on by her interest and attention. Then he came to the evening when old Jock Cummins had fired him,

and told her what had been said.

She nodded.

“I know. He left a memorandum to discharge you in the morning. I found it among his papers one day.”

“What? And you said nothing?”

“Don’t be silly.” She smiled slightly; and not for the first time, he noted how a smile transfigured her whole face and lighted it. “Go on, please.”

“All right.” With that, he plunged, and did not spare himself here, either. That wild idea of turning over his propeller, or one like it, to the river-pirates, was not so wild as appeared; the Thames police would have been helpless before any thieving launch so equipped. He told about the fight, and then, hesitant, skipped to his interview with the Slasher.

“Wait.” She checked him. “Where are the ten sovereigns?”

“I—well, I gave them away,” he said lamely, and told how. Her eyes warmed, and she nodded. He finished his story, and told just what Grimes had said this morning, and there it was all out.

“You see,” he concluded, “the rascal thinks he has me in a cleft stick.”

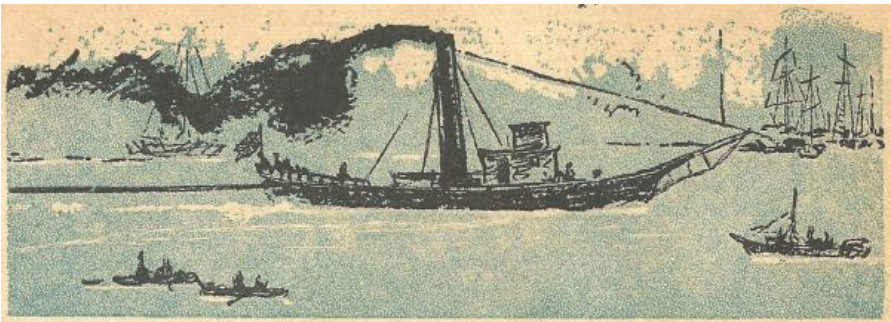
“Hasn’t he?”

“Devil a bit of it. I’ll take my medicine, though it’ll be hard. The law has no mercy, and I’ve no influence.”

“You have what’s better,” said she. His brows went up inquiringly, and she smiled. “I don’t think there’s anything so terrible in all you’ve said, really.”

“You? A lady?” He threw out his hand. “Me—a product of the gutter?”

“Well,” she observed with staggering perception of values, “until the present reign, our royal family has been remarkably content to remain lower than the gutter; and if you knew the origin of our noble families, you’d realize that some of them have come far, very far, from the accident of birth! You shouldn’t be so conscious of inferiority that does not exist.”



“I’m not!” he disclaimed swiftly. “It’s not that; it’s only that there’s no chance for me. Now I’ll be a prison bird, and down goes Dan Lowry for good. I’m telling you all this because it’s your due. You can take proper action on behalf of the owners, when I’m gone.”

“Is that the only reason?” she asked, looking at him.

He flushed slowly.

“No, by God!” he began impulsively, and flushed more deeply. “No. But it’s all I can say now, except that—well, we’ve been friends.”

“Not have been, but are,” she said, and smiled again. “Now, let’s forget the whole thing, please. What shall you be doing between now and Monday?”

“Completing plans and designs for the work, if you decide to go ahead with my scheme. There’s a lot to do on them. Then, my plans for the shipyard. If this collier succeeds, I’d thought of taking on the adjacent land and going in for larger operations.”

“Tell me about it,” she begged, and he complied.

When Dan Lowry went home that night, he found himself light-hearted despite the doom that overhung him.

Monday dawned ominously, with a drizzle of rain; and there was no Miss Colson at the office. Instead, a messenger boy arrived, bringing the portfolio of plans and a note.

Dear Mr. Lowry:

I am not returning to the office at once. You have my authority to install your propeller in the new craft, and the owners have also consented. I wish you the best of luck.

Cecily Colson.

Dan Lowry swallowed hard.

The best of luck! And prison facing him. And she was not returning at once. She, a fine lady, had heard a bit too much of his story. When he was safely stowed away, and gone from the place, she would show up again; or the owners would come and take over, noble name and all. And they would profit by his work, if this propeller did its work.

With a harsh laugh, he gave the orders, and sent the foreman his designs.

The office was bleak without her. When he told the clerks she was not coming back at once, their faces fell; a feeling of absence was upon the whole place. And then came a tread of heavy feet upon the stairs, and Dan Lowry faced about with heavier heart. As he feared, it was the Slasher. Into the office came Grimes, and smiled wickedly at him.

“Ready, my lad? It’s touch and go, so speak up prompt. Is it yes?”

Dan Lowry came up to him. “Slasher, you wouldn’t do it? You wouldn’t turn me in?”

“Like a shot, my lad, if you don’t come across—”

“Then do it and be damned to you!” said Dan Lowry, and cut loose.

Grimes did have a whistle, and blew it shrilly, before Lowry knocked it down his throat. The Slasher put up a creditable fight, but it did him no good at all; the ferocity with which Lowry tore into him was something unholy to watch.

The whistle brought no runners or constables. It did bring a tall, elegantly attired gentleman with chiseled features and an air of authority, who came into the doorway and stood leaning on his stick with an air of keen enjoyment as he watched proceedings. He even lifted his voice in delight, as the Slasher went staggering.

“Well hit, well hit! A noble right, man! Again!”

Lowry flung him a glance and continued, hoping to get his money’s worth before he was torn off. And he got it. Grimes was no coward, but not the bravest could stand long to the fearful punishment he took. As he went down for the last time and tried unavailingly to get on his feet again, the stranger stepped forward.

“Mr. Daniel Lowry, I believe?”

“I’ve no time for business now.” Lowry turned to him. “Who are you?”

“Patrick Lowther.” The stranger gestured at Grimes. “Have your clerks throw this rascal out.”

“Eh? He has men downstairs—”

“I’ve dismissed them, Lowry.”

Then, suddenly, Dan Lowry felt that name crash through his brain. Patrick Lowther! The famed jurist, of course—Lord Durwent, Lord Chancellor of the Queen’s Bench, one of the greatest men in London! While the two clerks hustled the Slasher out and away, Dan Lowry stood staring. Then the visitor smiled.

“Very well done, Lowry; I follow the fancy a bit myself, or used to do so in my younger days. Rather lucky that I showed up, what? This business of yours—Magistrate Herriott and the case of schnapps, you know. It’s been brought to my attention.”

“It’s—what?” stammered Dan Lowry. “Your attention—you—Lord Durwent? Your attention, My Lord?”

The other chuckled. “Yes, I understand that one of your people here brought it to the right quarter, and I was asked to handle the matter. I have done so. In due course, the entire affair will be written off and the case closed, though it may be necessary to obtain a pardon from the Crown. You may rest assured, Mr. Lowry, that you have nothing more to fear. By the way, my men below will hold that rascal; you may care to prosecute him for attacking you.”

“He didn’t,” Dan Lowry said dazedly. “He didn’t. I attacked him.”

The visitor laughed heartily, bowed, and departed, still laughing. When Dan Lowry rushed to the stairs, wakening from his daze, he reached the bottom to see a dispersing crowd and a coach vanishing down the street.

He shut himself in the private office and sat staring at nothing. “*One of your people.*” The phrase buzzed in his head. Miss Colson, of course. She must have acted quickly. She had reached the owners; even though impoverished, the nobility could work wonders. And they had somehow reached Lord Durwent.

In a glow, Lowry reached for pen and paper, and wrote her a letter of thanks. He wrote a long, long letter, and poured out a great deal of himself in the words; he begged her to return, and gave her a dozen excellent reasons why she should return. He wrote so much, in fact, that the penny post would not serve and to send the letter cost him thruppence.

Then he went down to the shipyard and hurled himself into the job there.

Three days later came a short reply; she was detained by illness and would come back to the office when and if possible. It was a curt and formal note, but had a postscript of a few words: “*Your letters are lovely. Write again.*”

He read that, grunted to himself, and went back to work. These days, work absorbed and swallowed him; he was rushing the collier to completion as fast as possible; and he was a new man. The past had been wiped away by a word from her. He wanted to rush up to the City, see the estate lawyers, and find her; half a dozen times he even started, only to come back and hang up his hat with a grim shake of the head. . . .

They launched the craft, with no ceremony at all, and began to finish the job and get the engines installed. Dan Lowry was with the work day and night. He could not wait to get those engines turning over and make sure how his propeller worked. One night he made a try of it, in secret, with three of the hands whom he could trust. They got a fire going, got steam up—enough to run her for two minutes. When she nearly tore her cable out of the riverbed, he

knew all was well; and he raked out the fires. The propeller worked. The real tests would come in another fortnight.

But before they came, arrived a hansom at the street door, and a tall, weather-eyed gentleman whose card said he was Captain Sir Adolphus Brett, R. N., of the Admiralty.

"We've heard something about this craft you're building, Mr. Lowry," said Brett very pleasantly. "In fact, I have copies of your correspondence with the Admiralty, sometime in the past, regarding a proposed propeller."

Dan Lowry eyed him in bewilderment.

"I never got to dock-ends with your Admiralty clerks," said he.

"I am not an Admiralty clerk," Brett rejoined. "In fact, I've been ordered to handle this matter and propose to you a certain test. We're much interested in this steam propeller. The First Lord of the Admiralty himself, I may say, has it under advisement."

"My God!" said Dan Lowry. "It's like a fairy tale!"

He could not realize it, even when Brett broke out laughing and informed him that while the Admiralty was slow, it was after all sure. It let nothing escape its eagle eye, and so forth—an affable and quite convincing speech.

"The test," said he, "should be very simple. Out here in the reach of the river. A cutter with paddles will pass a hawser to your craft; they'll be of approximate tonnage; they'll pull in opposite directions. I warn you, sir, that the general opinion is that the cutter will pull your craft very easily, which will mean the end of your steam propeller."

A spark leaped in Dan Lowry.

"Very well, Captain Brett," said he, and named a day for the test. "Do your best, and it'll mean the end of paddle-wheels in the Royal Navy!"

It was arranged as simply as that. Dan Lowry plunged back into his work, carried on from day to day by a heart-hurried smother of eagerness. The craft was finished, her engines were tested, all worked like a charm. And then came the day.

To Dan Lowry, it was like a dream. He could not believe it was actually happening to him, out there in the long reach of the river. He was aboard the craft himself; so was a party of Admiralty men. An Admiralty launch hovered near with gold lace showing on a uniformed figure: old Admiral Duckworth, they said, the First Lord himself.

The hawser was passed, the trim navy cutter churned and churned, her paddles slapping the water. Dan Lowry shouted at his engineer. The hawser tautened, grew rigid as steel; a huge fourteen-inch hemp, brand new. An inch or two, a foot or two—slowly, puffing and churning, the Navy cutter moved astern. The collier moved forward, gained speed and power and momentum, and dragged the trim cutter a half-mile before the hawser broke asunder. No more was needed. . . .

An hour later, Dan Lowry sat in his private office, alone. The day was dying. The clerks had gone. He was trying to scratch a letter to Miss Colson. For the whole future had burst gloriously open, and he could hardly realize it.

A light, quick step on the stairs. He looked up, startled. The door opened, and she stood there, smiling at him.

He leaped to his feet.

"You! You! I was just writing you," he cried. "It's really you!"

"Really me, Dan Lowry," she said, and laughed as she gave him her hand. "Oh, it was a grand sight to see! I was watching it all. You've won, you've won!"

Before he knew it, he had won more than he had ever dreamed. Somehow, it happened they were clinging together, looking at one another hungrily.

"I can't realize this crowning marvel!" he said huskily. "That you should care—"

"A lot, Dan Lowry," she broke in upon him. "Don't you?"

"Don't I? With every breath in me, with everything that I am and have!"

"That's plenty," she said. "And will be more, before long. Fame and wealth and new horizons—all ahead of us, Dan Lowry. Agreed?"

"With all my heart," said he, and met her lips with his.

Then she drew back.

"You're no longer worried because—because I'm a lady, as you used to say?"

"Lady be damned!" said Lowry fervently. "You'll be my wife."

"Praise God," she said softly. "And you'll be my husband. . . . Now—I'll have to tell you something—a confession. It's hard to make. I fear you'll hate me for it; I do indeed." She eyed him anxiously. "I've never lied to you, Dan, but I have deceived you a little, and now I'm in fear to tell you of it, lest you resent it."

He broke into a great laugh.

"Hate you? Resent it? My lass, my lass, I love you with my whole heart! Nothing you could say or do, nothing now or in the past or in the future, could waken any such feeling within me!"

"Swear it!" she said, doubtfully. "Hold up your hand and swear it, Dan!"

He did so, smiling and yet deeply earnest. She drew a long breath.

"Very well; then you'd best have everything at one blow. I'm Cecily Colson; I needed the money that I earned here, it's true. I'm also Lady Cecily Colson; except for this place, I was dependent on the charity of my uncle, Admiral Duckworth, the First Lord. That's how I was able to help you, in one way or another. I did it because I knew you loved me, Dan Lowry, and because I loved you. And now don't you dare to jilt me!"

Dan Lowry came out of his daze to find her in his arms. And, as he should very properly have done—he kept her there.

THE END

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

The name of this story is not obvious, the table-of-contents for the magazine gave it as Death Gave Him His Chance.

The sentence *Not al- sometimes the laughter turned* was partially obscured in the scans. The missing words have been assumed to be *always, but*, so it reads: *Not always, but sometimes the laughter turned*

[The end of *Death Gave Him His Chance* by Henry Bedford-Jones (as Captain L. B. Williams)]