NOCTURNE MILITAIRE

ELLIOTT WHITE SPRINGS

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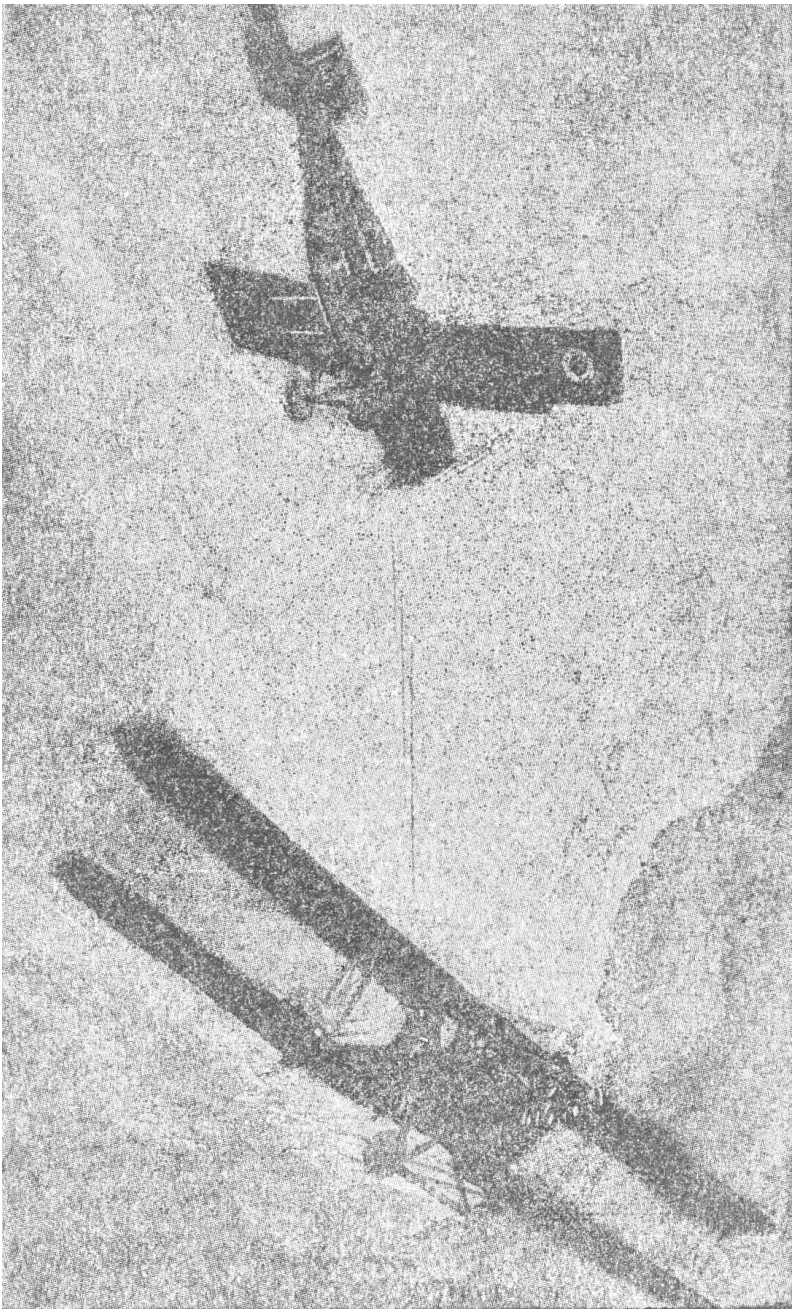

NOCTURNE MILITAIRE

BY

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LEAVE ME WITH A SMILE

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BIG EYES AND LITTLE MOUTH

To Jake Stanley

I: BIG EYES AND LITTLE MOUTH

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At odd times during my trip abroad with the A.E.F. and B.E.F. I made some notes. And at odd times since I have taken up these notes and tried to piece together a connected narrative dealing with some of the events and persons that appeared on my horizon. But I was never able to finish one story until recently, when Chance, or perhaps Fate, made a tale of what was but a few scattered names and dates, and furnished a climax to some drab events.

But this is not strictly a war story. It is a story which may bring back to you the distant rumble of the guns or stir the memory of some long-forgotten music; but it is not martial. My friends do no great deeds of valor. They are not called out before the regiment and kissed on both cheeks by General Foch. They are not invited to lunch with the Prince of Wales. With this assurance you may proceed.

There are several sheets of notes made in Scotland. Back in January of 1918 there were twelve American Flyers stationed at Ayr, at the Royal Flying Corps School of Aerial Fighting and Pilots' Pool. My notes mention names, approximate flying time and the number of statues of Robert Burns in Ayr. Then there is a long list of funerals and a part of this strange tale.

Ayr was the last step in the training of the British pilots before they were sent to the front. After an officer had taken his ground school course at Oxford or Reading for eight weeks, had learned to fly at the training squadrons, and had passed his aerial gunnery tests at Turnberry, he was sent to Ayr to be taught the delicate art of aerial maneuver and stunting *de luxe*. There he was kept until needed at the front.

The twelve of us were the first contingent of a hundred and fifty Americans who had been sent to England from the American flying fields in midsummer to take the complete training course with the R.F.C. This we had done. We had taken the ground course at Oxford, the machine-gun course at Grantham, and learned to fly at Hounslow, Croydon, and London Colney. Now we were getting the final polish and waiting for orders to the front.

Tap Johnson, Jim Watson, and I were rooming together. We had done so off and on for nearly a year. We had met at the Curtiss school at Newport News where we began our careers as pilots under Vic Carstrom, whose tragic death was one of our first shocks of the war. We were sent to different Ground Schools and met again at Mineola to be mobilized for the trip to

England. We were together at Oxford and had spent our holidays together in London when the weather was too bad for flying at the squadrons in the suburbs. Now we were trying to arrange to go out to the front together.

We had finished the necessary stunt flying and were awaiting orders from the American Headquarters in Paris. But Paris would have none of us. We hoped to go out with the R.F.C. We did not share General Pershing's ambition for an Army all our own. We considered ourselves a part of the R.F.C. and we liked the British. And to us it seemed that the British had a real grievance against the Huns. We saw the wounded and gassed, and witnessed a few bomb raids. Our own reasons for entering the war were rather obscure to us.

The British Officers—Canadian, Australian, New Zealand, and South African, as well as English and Scot, passed through in several days. On a good day at the front, when the skies were clear, rival patrols would meet high above the clouds, and several dozen of the youngsters would be sent out to take the places of those who did not return. A week of bad weather at the front when no flying was possible, and several hundred would be waiting. It was a perpetual wake, as every night there must be a farewell party to those who left on the midnight express.

While we waited we kept in practice by fighting sham battles over the harbor. We flew the little Camels, so called because they had a hump on the body where the two machine guns were mounted. They were very small and very fast. One man could just squeeze in behind these guns which fired straight ahead through the propeller. They were so small that the torque of the big hundred and forty horsepower rotary motor would turn them over if the pilot took his hands or mind off the controls. And for that reason they could not turn to the right, which was against the torque.

We had a week of good weather and bad flying. The little Camels killed six good pilots who, like Lot's wife, turned—not back but to the right. The younger pilots were nervous and avoided the airdrome. Those who did venture aloft were unduly careful. And this in the face of the impending trip to the front where undue care was not welcome! Careful pilots were good only as instructors, and we were not to be instructors until we had lost our nerve or a limb. The colonel diagnosed this condition as a common complaint—the "wind-up." It must be cured, so he ordered all pilots on the airdrome.

Now this particular colonel had lost a leg and an eye. He wore the V.C. and the D.S.O. There was a rumor that he came by all these things when he

was doing something that the others were afraid to do. And it had required the unerring aim of the great Richthofen himself to stop him.

The colonel herded us together and made a little speech. He told us that there was no need to be nervous over a Camel. They were very gentle little machines, a mere toy in the hands of a good pilot. And they would turn beautifully if we would only do it properly. All we had to do was to hold the nose up and skid—very simple—watch, he would show us!

He limped out to a machine and, without donning either helmet or coat, took off. As he cleared the trees he pulled up in a steep climb, called a zoom, and gently pulled his nose over to the right with the rudder. It was a skid, not a turn, and nothing but the powerful motor pulled the little Camel around to the right and straightened out its course just as the nose began to drop. Then he went wild. He looped and rolled so low that he would appear to be diving into the ground just as he would pull up with a roar. Then he would climb and spin, first to the right and then to the left, coming out into a quick dive and a roaring right skid only when it looked too late. We were all dizzy when he landed and advised us to practice these simple tricks which would help us in a tight corner at the front.

He told Jim to go up and show us what he could do. Jim was pretty good. He could fly upside down longer than any one else at Ayr. So he got in the same machine and took off. He skimmed over the surface of the field until he had his full speed and then pulled up in the same zoom and skid. His zoom was steep and his skid sharp. As his nose wavered he pulled it sharply to the right. He was nearly straight again when his motor choked and cut off. Then we saw him push the nose of the machine down to try to regain his speed. The motor was spluttering as his right wing dropped and it came on again with a great burst of smoke. But it was too late. There was a terrific crash as he hit the ground, and a pillar of flames shot into the air a hundred feet. We could see it from where we stood.

With leaden feet Tap and I walked over to the line of machines and inspected them in a perfunctory way. Then we, too, went up. We stunted madly, following each other wildly from loop to dive in an effort to avoid the horrible nightmares that otherwise would have followed us. For to see a crash is often to lose your nerve. The sooner you fly again and dispel the phantom of fear, the sooner you will get over it. Some men have put off this test flight for a day—and have never flown again.

Then came the funeral and the official inquiry. We were ordered to pack Jim's effects, pay his debts, examine his mail, and write to his family. It was

a gruesome task and reduced us to a shameful state of drunkenness before we finished it. We opened his mail and extracted all valuable enclosures and bills. The letters were burned unread. They were mostly from his wife, who had married him in New York four days before he sailed. We contemplated this fresh victim of war and became maudlin.

There was a package from London. It contained a handsome wrist-watch, with a card inscribed: "Love from Sheila."

I knew all about Sheila. Jim had met her at a dance at the Grafton Galleries and was much excited about her. She had proceeded to fall madly in love with him, and he had spent most of his time in London with her after that. He said something about having her come up to Ayr and take a house. This brought on a long argument. I told Jim that I thought it was pretty rotten sportsmanship.

"But," said Jim, "haven't you heard the news? There's a war on! All is fair in love and war. And here we have a surprising amount of both of these commodities. I didn't start this war and I won't finish it. I am the proverbial bystander that always gets crowned by the flying fragments. Shall I bury my talent? My allotted span of fourscore years and ten is about to be all shot to hell to make Democracy safe for the Belgians. What do I get out of it? Requiescat in pace! All right, but I am not dead yet. Haven't you seen the pictures of the boys picking flowers on their way up to the front? Well, that's me. And, oh, boy, what an armful of tiger lilies and snapdragons I have picked! Sometimes I think that war is not as bad as it has been painted. If it just wasn't so dangerous!"

"Yes," I said, "that's all right for you. Some like 'em hot and some like 'em cold. But you forget that your wife is entitled to something more than a ring. You might at least have a little dignity."

"It's a shame you haven't a wife. You and Tap could uphold all the traditions that you so painfully view me upsetting."

"Then why did you get married?"

"Oh, there are lots of things that will ever be obscure. Why did you enlist? Now don't tell me, I'll guess. By the way, she has a friend, a nice well-behaved little friend who just loves aviators. I am going to give you the privilege of making it a foursome."

"No, thanks," I told him; "I am virile enough to pick my own. I pity your wife."

"No need to," he replied. "Can't you see that as far as she is concerned I am dead already? She's in America. You know what chance any of us have of getting back. We're half ghosts already."

And so the argument had ended. But he and Tap got quite heated on the subject and after that it was avoided.

"I guess," said Tap glumly, as we discussed the wrist-watch and went over his personal property, "there may have been something in what Jim said, after all. If there is anything to make this damn war worth while, I'm for it from now on. The more the powder, the brighter the fireworks. I vote we save her a pair of his wings to go back with the watch. And we ought to write her, too."

"All right," I said, "but just how will you address her? I haven't the faintest idea what her name is or where she lives. Have you?"

"No," he admitted, "I haven't. I've never met the lady. But we'll keep them and find her when we get to London."

But this didn't solve the problem. Several letters came from Sheila and then a telegram: "Where are you?" But we couldn't answer, so there was nothing to do but wait.

The weather was rotten during January and but little flying was done. We sat around the Dalblair Bar for a few days and mourned for those who followed Jim on the back of the Camel. Then Carol Banks came over from Turnberry and moved into Jim's room. We were glad to see him, and he set out at once to inject the necessary cheer into our dismal mess by making gallons of eggnog.

Our orders came through the last of February, and we went down to London to get our back pay and new assignments. We were not to go out to the front yet; Paris had not decided what they would do with us; but the British were short of pilots and were to use us to ferry planes to the front.

We inquired for Sheila without success and in three days I got the first assignment. I was to go to Norwich and get a Camel from the factory and fly it over to the front via Folkestone and Boulogne. Then I would get an old one and fly it back. It would be used for a school bus. This was the job of the ferry pilot and, outside of the thirty miles over the Channel, was pretty easy.

I ran into some bad weather, and it was five days before I was back in London. Tap was still at the Savoy and was well wrecked. His eyes were bleary and his hand shook as if he had crashed. He said he had. I got the

story out of him with some difficulty and it required much unraveling. It was hard to tell which was Tap and which was the liquor speaking.

It seemed that the day I left he had gone into the Savoy lobby looking for some one to eat lunch with him. There was always a crowd there—pilots on leave, pilots out of hospitals for the afternoon, headquarters officers and various girls—always some one we knew. But Tap didn't see any one that he knew, and pilots are always lonely. He was sitting over by the window trying to make up his mind whether to go on into the bar and light up or use the telephone, when a very pretty girl sat down beside him. Here the story would halt indefinitely. Tap wanted to convince me that she was beautiful. I would admit it but he would refuse to leave the subject. She had big blue eyes and a little rosebud mouth. That was all he seemed to have noticed.

And lots of blonde hair of a rather uncertain shade. She certainly wasn't a lunch-eater, Tap decided, but he couldn't take his eyes off her. He was fascinated. Finally she spoke to him:

"I can see that you are an aviator," she began. "Would you mind talking to me a little?"

Tap assured her that nothing else in the world would give him as much pleasure at that moment. Then she asked him where Jim Watson was. Tap told her rather carelessly. She blew up and got hysterical. Tap got her out of the Savoy and into a taxi and rode her around for a while. He tried to soothe her, but you couldn't imagine Tap soothing any one.

"There, there," said Tap, making a few passes at her shoulder, "don't cry. We've been looking for you everywhere. You've heard of us from Jim, haven't you? Well, we've been trying to find you but we didn't know your name and we didn't know your address and we couldn't find any one that knew you, so we couldn't very well tell you about it, could we? But we knew how cut up you would be over it and we brought you his wings and the wrist-watch you sent him. They are at the hotel, and I'll get them for you later."

Tap said she didn't seem to like this a bit. She wanted to know how he got the wrist-watch and why. She wanted to know just how he happened to hear of her and exactly how much he knew about the whole matter. She made him go over it several times and still she wasn't satisfied. She began to cry again, and Tap tried another tack.

"I suppose you know he was married," Tap said, but she only cried the more. "Yes, married just before he sailed. We never saw her as it was sort of sudden." This seemed to really upset her, so Tap tried to soothe her by going on:

"You mustn't let that worry you. Everybody at home got so excited about the war and tried to get married. All the girls wanted to marry a soldier—any soldier would do. It was supposed to be patriotic. Meant little or nothing. Just a game of catch-as-catch-can. Not as much as you and Jim. I dare say Jim was lots fonder of you. Oh, yes, he was. Must have been. Talked about you a lot. He was a prince, Jim was. Everybody liked him. But I thought I had better tell you about his wife and tell you not to write home to his people. A girl did that when Kester was killed and it caused no end of trouble. So don't write his family. That's a good girl. I knew you wouldn't. Be a good girl and stop crying, too. You give me the willies. I'll be wishing I was Jim in a few minutes. It's after hours and we can't get any lunch, but we

can get some tea in the Court, and you ought to have something to eat. It will make you feel better, and I have some real sugar in my suite."

She did quiet down and he took her up to his suite in the Savoy Court. Nothing could be served in the dining-room after hours, as the new Food Control Regulations had gone into effect. The Savoy Court was an annex of the Savoy Hotel and contained only suites. We all used to stay there when in London and usually turned the Court into a large house-party.

Tap ordered some tea, and the girl began to pull herself together. A little brandy seemed to help her and suddenly she started out in a new direction.

"It's rotten of me," she said, "to take on like this. I won't do it any more, for I am a big girl now. Please excuse me. I act as if I were the only woman who has lost her—er—lover. And it is not very kind to you. You are still here and I mustn't make you sad—give you the willies, I believe you said. I ought to be cheering you up, for you must carry on until it is your turn. Your last days in London should be gay. They must be gay! Tell me about yourself. Is there some one to look after you and weep when you crash? Is there some one at home to wait for you in vain? Some one who is dreadfully patriotic? Maybe you won't be killed and then you'll be in a worse fix! You aviators seem to have a bad time in between funerals. Is she blonde or brunette?" She was biting her lips to keep back the tears but conquered them at last and tossed her head derisively in victory.

"No," said Tap, "I'm a free-lance. I don't want anything to interfere with the business at hand. Women always seem to ruin a good pilot—take his mind off his work. And besides that, I've never noticed that traffic was jammed by any rush in my direction. The only person who worries over me is an aunt in Georgia and even she is unable to give the job her undivided attention. Let's have a little more of this brandy. I'm a bit shaky, if you don't mind my saying so. I saw the crash and it has stuck with me longer than I expected."

"None for me," she told him, "but help yourself if that will do you any good. And you are shaky. I don't blame you. I must have given you a bad time. But I'll make up for it now."

The tea was brought in, and they talked on for some time. Tap told her all about himself. She was a good listener, and he poured out all his joys and fears under the stimulation of her gentle smile. For she did seem interested and would prod him gently with some question whenever he would stop.

For the first time in months Tap realized that he really was lonely. The excitement had kept away the pangs, but now he knew there was something missing. And the girl before him made the pangs acute. He was fascinated by her presence, and just a little embarrassed by it as well.

"But surely you get homesick sometimes," she told him, "even though you don't have much time for it."

"Yes," he admitted, "sometimes when the other fellows get their mail from home I feel right blue. It must be sort of nice to have some one to really care what you are doing."

"All right," she told him and joined him on the sofa, "from now on I am going to worry over you. That is, if you'll let me. And I'll do my best. You can't go on alone. It isn't right. I won't let you. I am going to make up to you what you'll miss, while there is still time. And you will help me over the bumps. We'll help each other along the way. And I need you more than you need me."

She was crying again, and Tap thought she was going to get hysterical. But she didn't. Something seemed to have hit her. He tried the "there, there, little girl," but it was out of place. Before he knew it, his arms were around her and his lips sought hers.

Then his head cooled off and he pushed her away. He apologized.

"Please forget it," he told her, "I am very sorry. But you looked so lovable that I forgot myself."

But Tap assured me several times that she didn't seem to be the least bit in need of his apology. In fact, she rather liked the treatment. Tap told her she was out of her head and insisted on taking her home. She refused to go. He told her she was not behaving properly, that as far as he was concerned she might as well be Jim's widow. She asked him what difference that would make, and he couldn't think of an answer. Finally, she left him open-mouthed, after declining his offer of escort with the information that she would meet him for lunch the next day.

Of course, Tap got drunk. What else could he do? And he got mad. How dared she flirt with him? He had a vague idea that she should be mounting the funeral pyre or something of a like nature. Instead of that, as soon as she got her tears dried she had started to flirt with him. And he had fallen for it! Well, there were plenty of men in London, and she could have her pick of them! But not him!

He was fighting a fearful hangover when he met her for lunch. She was bright and gay and almost charmed him out of his determination. He was afraid he was in love with her and it made him mad. He had never loved any woman and he was determined that the woman he would some day come to love must be a little better and a little finer than those he had known. She must be worthy of the great love he would give her. And yet here he was in the throes of a peculiar power which was drawing him towards a woman he could never love—and a light-hearted flirt at that!

He drank too much, and when she tried to display some little affection he quite lost his temper. So she had left.

Then he knew he loved her. But he also hated her for cheating him of his dream of love.

So he got drunk again, this time very drunk.

The next day she came around to the Savoy again for lunch. She was very jauntily dressed and seemed very gay.

"Please go away and leave me," he begged her, after lunch, "I'm not myself. You made me get drunk. Can't you see I love you? Well, go on away. You can't be mine. You'll never love me. This is cheap. I won't have it. I can't treat you like Jim did! And you shan't treat me as you did him!"

Tap would break down at this point of the story and become entirely incoherent. So I never found out exactly what happened next. She put her hand over his mouth to stop him and then gently quieted him down.

"Don't you dare think my love is cheap," she told him, "but you are too much of a fool to think otherwise. You don't know love when you see it. I see my mistake. You are right—I can never be your little Elsie. So I'll leave. But I'll get news of you and I'll worry over you. And I'll love you—for a long time." And she had kissed him and left.

So my last few days with him were not very pleasant. He insisted that I might help him find her. But it was a hopeless task, and we wandered about in vain.

"She's crazy," he kept telling me, "just plain knocked cuckoo. His death just unbalanced her mind. My God, how she must have loved him to have felt it like that! You'd have to look at her to realize how far she is knocked. Why, man, she practically offered herself to me. I suppose she just wanted some one to take his place. Well, why not? But there's no reason why she should love me. But she said she did! And I let her go! I'm cuckoo myself.

Women and war! They get you sooner or later. Well, bring on your war, the Hun has lost his sting!"

By the third day he had made up his mind to sit in the Savoy lobby and wait until she should come in again. He said he would wait forever, or longer if necessary.

Paris finally decided we were to go out to the front with the R.F.C. as regular British pilots, which news brought great joy and the excuse for a series of farewell parties. Ten of us were ordered to France at once. Tap was sent to Birmingham to ferry Bristol Fighters. He was disgusted with this luck and cursed the big two-seaters and the Paris office and himself and everything.

"But I'll have more time to find her," he consoled himself, "and I'll find her, too. She's got big blue eyes and a little mouth. I'll find her."

I was delayed a while in London and then went out from Hounslow with an S.E. squadron when the Huns broke through and started for Amiens and the call came for all available pilots. Sixty-two machines were lost the first day of the fighting.

2

The flying corps at the front was one big family. A pair of wings made us all brothers. And we all spoke the same language and had been along the same road. We had the same joys and fears, as well as the same friends and memories. So it was not surprising that news traveled fast up and down the front. For on every dud day when no flying was possible, everybody went calling. Transportation was plentiful and rapid. We dined out at other squadrons about half of the time. We moved frequently and always lived with another squadron for a few days while we were getting settled. There was usually another squadron living with us. And every one gathered at Charlie's Bar or at the Folkestone in Boulogne.

Henri, who presided over the bar at the Folkestone, was the newspaper of the flying corps. He knew everything. If some one shot down a Hun in flames, Henri would announce it to the gathered pilots within the hour. He could tell you the details of a wedding in your home town and when the Huns would attack again, meanwhile shaking your cocktail. He would tell you anything except how he concocted his drinks and where he got his rye. If, by chance, there was some obscure bit of information you wanted that Henri could not give, there were any number of pilots present that could supply the deficiency. For every rainy afternoon they all came in for a coffee

cocktail and news of the war. There were pilots just over from England going to the pool, pilots on leave and from the hospital at Wimmeroux; and later on Americans from everywhere—usually lost.

And so it was at the Folkestone that I got news of Tap. His letters were brief and simply stated that he was still ferrying. But from Henri and others I heard a different story.

Wherever he went there was a beautiful lady with him. They had been seen together in far places. They were seen at the few fashionable places that were open in London, at Brighton and Eastbourne, on the terrace at Skindles, and in electric punts on the river at Maidenhead. One pilot had seen them at Liverpool. Another saw them at Oxford. All claimed that she was very beautiful and had tried to meet her, but none had succeeded. Tap was very wary and guarded his lady carefully. They were always alone.

They drank champagne in large quantities. Several times they had been seen leaving a dance just between a waver and a stagger. There was even a rumor that she flew with him on his ferry trips, disguised as a mechanic. But no one really believed this as it was too hard to do. I know of one pilot who did it, but he had a crash the second trip and was caught. The British fined him ten shillings, or some such terrible punishment, and issued orders that all passengers in ferry planes be registered. They became quite a famous pair, did Tap and his beautiful lady, and I heard much of them for the next two months.

In May Tap came out to a Bristol squadron located near us. I had been transferred to a Camel squadron. Every one was afraid of Camels at that time. We were losing men faster than any of the other squadrons, and the Camel was avoided as a war chariot. This machine was much slower than the Hun Fokkers and was often forced to fight against odds. And when the Camels joined a fight they couldn't leave, whereas the faster S.E. scouts and the Bristols could run home at will. Every one liked to pick his fight and leave when he had enough. But, on the other hand, the little Camels could put up a stiff fight against odds when cornered, and the Hun pilots liked them no better than we did.

We were having a big binge in honor of our new colonel, and Tap came over for it. A binge consisted of a formal dinner in the squadron mess. Special invitations were issued, and the guest of honor was usually a colonel or a general. There was not much food available, but there was plenty of "likker" to make up for it. Every one present was supposed to make a speech, particularly our guests. The game was to ply the guest of honor with

potent beverages until he was sufficiently enthusiastic to abandon his dignity and lead the frolic. Sometimes we would call in a body on another squadron. We would usually be resisted by force, and a battle with signal pistols would follow. Sometimes the opposing major would discover to his horror that he was rubbing sand into the face of his commanding general. This would give us a technical victory, and we would proceed to raid their bar. Or perhaps we would stage a miniature battle in the old trenches back of the hangars where the infantry, in their haste, had left a plentiful supply of hand grenades, Mills bombs, and aminol. And sometimes another squadron, thirsting for revenge, would raid our mess and break up our party. Later on in the summer, the guest of honor at one of these binges was killed by a Very pistol, and we were ordered to disarm.

Tap refused to tell me very much of what had happened. “Oh, yes,” he admitted, “she came back to see me again. I asked her to marry me. She said she would never marry any one that had anything to do with a plane. But I couldn’t give her up. And I didn’t. That’s all, except that she has taken a house on the River down at Maidenhead and is going to wait there for me. I’ll get leave in three months. I’ll marry her then.”

I was a flight commander now and had six machines and six pilots in my flight. I had just lost two men, so I suggested to Tap that he join my flight. I knew I could get him transferred, as American Camel pilots were scarce. But he didn’t seem to care for the idea.

“You Camel merchants can go on with your suicide clubs,” he told me; “you all seem to be having a private war of your very own. Don’t let me cheat the Fokkers out of their daily cold meat, but I have business to attend to after the war is over. No, thanks, you can keep your Camel; I’ll stick to Bristols. They have some chance.”

“You certainly have changed,” I said. “The old fire-eater has cooled off and the old warhorse has got stall feet. But why come out at all? Accidents have happened to Bristols. I saw three go down last week on one show. And it was the little Camels that saved the other three. You may draw a dud observer in the back seat, and then what price big eyes and little mouth?”

“Oh, shut up and pass me the champagne and give me the dope on top patrols. We’re supposed to look after you little fellows. How high can you get?”

We were at dinner, and the meal was about over. Every one was more or less mellow and jovial, and the next thing in order was a speech from the guest of honor, a colonel.

The colonel began with the usual squadron speech. He announced that the Children's League had petitioned him to substitute malted milk for our issue rum. This was a jab at our major who was not yet twenty-one.

"And I am really in quite a quandary," he went on when the laughter had died down, "over the strange behavior in the Bristol family. Quite a breach of discipline over there. Really quite shocking. One of the Bristol pilots has been seen kissing his observer. This is contrary to all regulations. I have not ascertained whether this was done as sheer force of habit or whether I am missing something and not getting the proper respect as your colonel." There was a terrific uproar at this, and the colonel sat down amid great applause. There were cries of "Speech, speech" directed at Tap who had turned a brilliant scarlet and was trying hard to laugh.

The major arose and introduced Tap as the man who combined business with pleasure, war and peace.

"Mr. President," began Tap, "I know there is no honor among thieves, but my observer, who guards my tail in deadly combat, has been insulted. Neither he nor she, as the case may be, is here to uphold my character. Therefore I am bound to demand satisfaction, and I challenge my accuser to a duel with Very pistols at fifty yards."

There was a cheer at this, and the colonel at once accepted the challenge. Seconds were appointed and we all went out on the airdrome with a large supply of Very pistols. These were large single-barreled affairs which fired different colored signal lights.

The colonel and Tap took their positions and were given twenty-five cartridges each. We retired to a respectful distance, and they opened fire at the signal.

We were beginning to enjoy the fun when there was a terrific explosion just behind us and we were covered with a shower of dirt. Some one shouted, "Lie down, it's a Hun!" But we were already on our faces before the next bomb burst several hundred yards away. A Hun night-bomber had seen the lights from aloft, had shut off his motor, and glided down unheard to drop bombs at close range. Then there was a rattle of machine-gun fire, and we all dashed for the dugout as two more bombs burst nearby.

There were several flesh wounds in the party but no one was seriously hurt. The colonel and Tap declared their honor thoroughly satisfied, and the colonel invited some of us to dine with him the next night.

Three weeks later I was leading a high patrol about two hours after sunrise. We had just crossed the lines when I saw a flight of five Bristols about ten miles over. They had apparently been on one of their long reconnaissance trips into Hunland and were now coming back against the wind. There were a number of Fokkers picking at them from above. It was a good fight, but the Fokkers had the advantage of wind and sun and were using it. The Fokkers held their altitude and refused to dogfight. Instead, they were diving on the rear Bristols. This would force the leader to turn and fight and then the lower Fokkers would zoom away while the others dove on the leader. But the Fokkers were single-seaters, which gave the Bristols the advantage at close quarters where two or more of them could fire at the same Fokker.

The Bristols were making little progress and we hurried to join the fight. The Bristols saw us and began to dive at once. This was done so as to bring the Fokkers under us, as well as to get cover. Then the Bristols would pull up and turn and come back to help us. It was a good maneuver and well executed, but one Bristol lagged behind at death grip with a Fokker who was sticking under him for a last shot. As I dove on the Fokker the Bristol slowly turned over and stalled, and then went spinning down in a cloud of smoke—the Fokker pouring in both guns. I lost sight of it as I closed with the Fokker.

That night I learned it was Tap. He was posted dead as his machine was observed from the ground. It spun down all the way and never stopped smoking. I got in touch with the Red Cross headquarters in Paris, and they made inquiries through Switzerland. Word came back that he was dead, and I began to taste the real bitterness of war.

Several weeks later I got a letter from London. It read:

> Dear Lieutenant:
>
> I have just come over from America to get the body of my husband. I learned at Headquarters that you were instrumental in packing his effects and arranging the military funeral. I want to express my sincere appreciation of your kind offices. I also wished to thank Lieutenant Johnson, but have been told that he has been killed. Will you please write me if this has been confirmed beyond a doubt? Surely one of you three will be spared, and I will pray for you every night.
>
> Yours,
>
> Sarah Watson.

I had nightmares for a month. I kept seeing Tap spinning down into the river at Maidenhead and Jim's wife drinking eggnog with the colonel at Ayr.

4

The Armistice found me at Toul where the rest of the British-trained pilots were organized into three squadrons. Most of them were under arrest, and a few more joined them every day. They were all very much fed up and had declared war on the United States Army. We were all ordered to buy new regulation uniforms, and some brilliant staff officer decided that since there were no planes for us to fly, we ought to learn some infantry drill. If this had not been so strenuous it might have been funny. Every morning and afternoon about sixty pilots, hardened by months at the front, would be lined up on the tarmac in front of the hangars, regardless of rank, health or previous experience, and put through the movements of an infantry company by a lieutenant fresh from West Point. It was a question as to which was maddest, the pilots or the West Pointer.

Then some one else decided that our quarters were not properly kept. A tour of inspection by some staff major revealed the fact that our barracks were stuffed with a year's accumulation of equipment, souvenirs, and junk. We were ordered to get rid of all superfluous material and to clean up the barracks. A few earnest souls made a half-hearted attempt to comply with this order, but for the most part the outfit simply packed their voluminous baggage and departed. I have heard strange stories of their adventures and wanderings. Some of them are still in France; one died of pneumonia in a military prison, and one has never been heard of since. But the majority of them managed to get home four or five months later. Three of them actually got to New York without being stopped but were arrested at Hoboken and sent back to France for court-martial.

I heard a piece of news one day: Tap was alive and in Paris. I packed what I could, gave my souvenirs to my sergeant, and went to Paris by the truck route.

I found Tap in the New York Bar. He was a complete wreck and looked worse. He had been shot through the lung and the leg. His observer, also wounded, had been able to get the plane out of the spin and pull the nose up just before it hit the ground. They had crashed and been bent up some more, but were not killed. They were in a Hun field hospital for six weeks, and the observer died. Tap would have died, too, except for a doctor who had once practiced in Chicago and who had him moved to a private hospital. So the

Red Cross had never had word of him. He had been back a week now and was supposed to be in a hospital.

He had no news from Maidenhead. He had written and wired. I called his attention to the fact that she had thought him dead for six months and would naturally not leave a forwarding address for him. Where was her home? He didn't know. She would never talk much about herself. He had asked permission to go to London and had been refused. London was out of bounds for all American troops.

"But I am going," he told me, "as soon as I get my back pay. I've got over a thousand dollars due and I can get it to-morrow. I suppose she has been trying to do her bit by cheering up some other poor devil. Probably some naval aviator. I hear London is lousy with them. All over the place! Well, it doesn't make any difference. I must find her. But, my God, to think that for six months . . ."

"Well, what else do you expect?" I asked him. "You can't expect her to sit around and mourn for you forever. Dead men tell no tales, but that is not the only thing they fail to do. There are now two dashing young aviators that have looked upon her in the cool of the evening and then gone far, far away. She has probably brought the same luck to several others by this time. Personally, I'd be afraid to go near her. Cheer up, be a man—those that love so long and so well should stay at home. You don't want to find her. You'd probably be another Enoch Arden!"

"Well, what of it? Will you come to London with me?"

I would cheerfully have gone to the North Pole to get out of France. A million Americans, freshly arrived, were celebrating their victory everywhere, all over France; and arresting each other daily as an evidence of their personal importance. I had nothing to celebrate and I wanted to get away from it all. London, I heard, was mourning for her lost ones and I wanted to go and do likewise. For I was the only one left of those first ten.

Our first attempt to leave Paris ended in a night at the Bastille. We were released from the jail only after considerable argument and much talk of further investigation. So we abandoned the idea of a trip by train. A British colonel that we had once met in London was on his way to Boulogne in a car, and he took us along with him. Once out of the city gates it was easy. We dropped off at Marquis and found an old friend in charge of the ferry pilots. We had no trouble in getting a plane to fly over.

London was indeed in mourning. There had been some celebration the first week of the Armistice, but then the repressed mourning of four years overwhelmed the city. Those who had laughed during the war were now sad, for there was no one that grief had not touched. We saw old friends, but they could talk only of those we missed.

Tap's search was fruitless. I suggested he trace her by the checks. But he had given her no checks. He had never given her any money. No one had seen her. We went to all the head waiters who had served them. They all remembered her, oh, yes—the beautiful lady who would exchange American sugar for meat tickets! But they had not seen her, no, not since the lieutenant had gone away. The proprietor of Skindle's gave us a hint.

"I know nothing," he told us, "but I did hear a rumor. No, I would not repeat it. But if you will find the agent who rerented the house perhaps he may help you."

We located the agent without much difficulty. Yes, he had taken the lease from the beautiful lady. Where had she gone? He regretted to tell us that we had best be discreet. Our acquaintance with the lady might lead to trouble. Well, if we must know, the lady had been arrested and imprisoned as a spy.

Tap was pretty bitter about it. He was very quiet for a while. "I see a lot of things now," he told me later, "that I didn't see before. There was something funny about the whole thing, and I've been puzzling over it. I didn't think it was my face and I didn't think it was my figure and I knew it wasn't the way I danced. I couldn't figure out what that woman saw in me. Well, now I know. It was information! That was why she always loved an aviator. Pretty clever! And as soon as one went West she had to grab another one quick to keep her job. So that's why she wouldn't talk! That's why I couldn't find out anything about her. Well, I am indeed the prize sucker in the big pond. But if you had seen her you would have been a sucker, too. And damn glad to be one! And damn proud to have been one! Well, that's that. Thanks for helping me prove myself a worthy successor to the great saps of the ages. Some day I'll have the laugh on poor old Jim. But maybe she is already with him. Let's go and find out. Let's see the whole show!"

So we went down to Scotland Yard. The officials there were not too cordial. They were more interested in questioning us than in answering our questions. They declined to let us see the files. One of the department chiefs was softened by Tap's tearful pleas and tried to help us out.

"Young man," he said, shuffling through the files, "there's a lot in here about you. Quite a bit. I find that you were held back from the front for

observation for a while. Does that interest you? It should. You were suspected. When you did go out we took your correspondence. It seems to have cleared you. But not the lady. When you were reported killed there was no need to delay longer, and she was arrested. She was an alien and could not prove a residence. Her credentials were forged. The other charges against her were dismissed. She was charged with entering the country with false credentials and was deported. There are quite a few of the papers missing, the most important ones, in fact. I find a note here which says they were taken out by the Foreign Office. You can consider yourself very lucky, young man. The story of your iniquity is here, but I can assure you that no one can ever read it. I may have it destroyed. Now that your mind is relieved, will you come out and have lunch with me? I like you Americans. Perhaps you will tell me a story. So jolly, your stories!"

We thanked him profusely but declined the luncheon invitation. Tap was visibly affected.

"Maybe, maybe, maybe," he kept mumbling to himself, "but I'm not sure. But I'm telling you she was the world's greatest actress. That girl used to cry by the hour and I'll never believe she was faking it."

The next day we ran into an officer who was organizing the Polish Air Service and badly in need of experienced pilots. Tap offered his services at once. But when he reported for an examination the doctors laughed. They told him to pick out a nice quiet hospital and save the ambulance fee.

I don't know how it would have ended if Tap had not got pleurisy from the wound in his lung. The house physician at the hotel advised me to get him to a hospital at once. So there was nothing to do but go down to Headquarters and give ourselves up. We were both sent down to Lancaster Gate Hospital. Tap had a hard fight for his life and was still very sick when I was sent home. I had a bad time for a few days with Headquarters and was up for court-martial but managed to get off with a reprimand. I had no trouble getting orders home.

5

I went down to Washington in April to see what was left of Tap. He was in the Walter Reed Hospital and was pretty far gone. An aunt was doing her best to look after him and, as there was nothing I could do to help, I did not stay long. When he got stronger he went out to Arizona and lived on a ranch for eighteen months. He liked being a cowboy, and I had several rather cheerful letters from him.

I went to work in the investment department of a small New York bank and, when Tap came on nearly two years later, I was at the head of a subdepartment. He was looking better than I had ever seen him. His face was bronzed, his frame had filled out, he was really looking quite fit. He wanted a job in New York, and I had no difficulty in arranging to get him one with me. We rented an apartment in the Village and lived the usual life of bond salesmen.

The work suited Tap very well. A bond salesman must be congenial and convivial. Tap was all of that. And there was a party somewhere nearly every night. Every one came to New York that year. At least every one that wasn't there already. Old classmates at college, friends from home, army friends, the chance acquaintances of a lifetime, all greeted us afresh as we speeded the parting guest. And they all demanded high-powered entertainment.

Tap flourished. He broke all records selling bonds. His customers seemed to respect his judgment on account of his indifference. He never cared whether they bought or not. His opinions were unbiased by the desire to make a sale.

And he was always in great demand. He could make excellent gin from strange ingredients and knew all the best bootleggers intimately. He was organizer-in-chief of most of the parties. But they never seemed to satisfy him. He had a wild look in his eyes and was always searching for news of the woman he loved. He kept a sharp lookout for any of the old crowd from London. Under cover of reminiscences he would question them adroitly. Had they ever met a beautiful lady with big eyes and a little mouth? Perhaps they had seen him with her? Yes, that one. Well, had they ever seen her since?

He had found out from a clerk at the American Embassy that she had been turned over to the American authorities because it was an American passport that had been forged. So she had been sent to this country. The clerk knew nothing more.

Nearly every one knew some one who would vaguely answer Tap's requirements. Could they get her address now? Oh, yes. But it was always some one else, some one very different—never the shadow that was cast over Tap's mind. But he was always eagerly optimistic. He went to Buffalo once to see a cabaret singer and another time to Philadelphia to see a nurse. Both were strangers. He joined strange clubs and attended all sorts of reunions and conventions. Always he was searching. He attended various

conventions of the American Legion and even went down to Atlantic City for a beauty contest. He resorted to advertising. He tried Washington, but there was no record of her anywhere.

His ardor was never dampened. Every one who bought a bond had to answer that question, "Did you ever know a girl with big eyes and a little mouth that was once in England?"

"Sometimes," he told me, "I think it is all a dream. It seems to be just part of the funny things I used to see in Germany. But if it isn't, I'm going to find her. And if it is, I'm going to dream some more. Sometimes I do. Spy or no spy, I want her and I'm going to have her! The war is over!"

After such an outburst he would drink too much of his gin and go out to look for some one else to question.

He even tried selling bonds to women in the hope that he might get news of her. But one very comely lady reversed the procedure and wanted to know if he could give her news of her long-lost aviator. Tap could not, but neither could he convince her that he wouldn't do just as well. She would call at the office quite frequently to arrange her investments, and it got to be quite a joke.

Another lady gave him too much real gin and persuaded him to tell her all about the war. Then she made a newspaper article about it that was rather embarrassing. So Tap gave up that method.

And the months dragged on.

6

One of our customers from Boston was in town and asked me to come up to his hotel to discuss some matters in relation to changing a trust fund. I took Tap along to handle the bonds which were involved.

Our customer was an elderly gentleman and a thorough Bostonian. He was so charming and pleasant that we soon got off the subject of investments and wandered far afield. He was quite pleased when he learned we were ex-aviators and asked us many questions about ourselves and the war. He was very interested in Tap's stories and Tap talked more than I had ever heard him. Tap enjoyed entertaining him and even let his imagination make a good story out of everything he told.

"How very interesting, indeed," our customer had remarked approvingly as Tap finished telling him about the night patrol at Stamford; "you must

really both stay to lunch. I will send for my daughter. She must know you. She must hear you."

"No," said Tap rather rudely, "I'll feed you all the funny stuff you want if you like it, but I really don't perform for the ladies. They like sob stuff and I usually overdo it. My question answerer is worn out."

The old gentleman was actually wiping his eyes. "My daughter," he said with some dignity, "will never ask you a question about the war, I am quite sure. I only wish she would. I doubt if she will even join us. If she does, you can tell her you are Chinese bandits, if you like. Let us return to the municipal bonds you were advising."

"I am sorry that I spoke," said Tap, with his face blazing. "I beg your pardon, sir. But I love to talk about the war and I talk about it too much. The women try to make a sideshow out of it and make me feel like a fool. They never understand. By the way, did you ever know a girl with big eyes and a little—"

Tap choked, and his eyes bulged. The old gentleman had risen to his feet as a young woman was coming towards us.

Tap grabbed my arm. "It's her," he whispered, "it's Sheila!"

"It can't be," I told him. "Your damn funny gin has affected your sight as well as your brain."

The old gentleman presented us to his daughter. I bowed. Tap took her hand.

"Surely," he said very slowly, "we do not have to be introduced."

"Perhaps not," she told him sweetly, "but I am sorry that I can't place you. Did I meet you at the races or was it in Maine? Were you one of the Yale men on the house-party?"

"Yes," said Tap, "I was all of those." And dropped her hand quickly.

We went in to lunch and it was not a very pleasant affair. The old gentleman was interrupted constantly by his daughter. He was scarcely able to finish a sentence. Tap would not talk at all, and I was not encouraged. Our customer was visibly disappointed. He was unable to control the conversation and finally began talking bonds to me. But he had something else on his mind.

"My daughter," he told me, "had a strange experience during the war. She wanted to nurse abroad, but after she had completed her training they

refused to permit her to go because of the objection to relatives of men in service. Her husband was in the air service abroad. She forged some credentials and changed her name and went in spite of this restriction. She was in England for four months nursing and then was detected. They thought she was a spy and actually kept her in jail for some time. It was very distressing and caused a great deal of trouble. But my friend Senator Lodge __"

There was a shuffling of feet under the table, and his daughter interrupted to ask the time.

"We must hurry, father," she told him, "as I must pack at once and I have some things in the room for you to see. Please ask for the check."

"But, my dear," he said in surprise, "you haven't seen the Watsons yet and you really must; you promised, you know."

"Well," she said, "I have changed my mind. We are going home on the three-thirty. I forgot to tell you."

And so our luncheon was over. The old gentleman gave us an order for some securities and promised that we would hear more from him.

Tap and I took a taxi down to the apartment.

"It's her," he kept telling me, "I'd know her anywhere. Did you see her eyes? Did you see that mouth? And she knew me, too. She couldn't take her eyes off this scar. She knew me! Even if my face is a bit messed up. But she didn't want to see me. Well, she needn't. Has to leave town, eh? Afraid I might call on her. Elegant Boston lady! No wonder that accent fooled me! So that's the answer to the works, is it?"

As soon as we reached the apartment he began to make some gin.

"I think," he announced to me, "that I am going to get very drunk. I think it fitting and proper. Will you join me? I need a pacemaker."

I saw that he needed me and gave up all idea of returning to the office, but went out after some oranges instead. Tap was still fuming when I came back.

"She knew me all the time," he told me again as he was filtering his gin. "I found her foot under the table. She kicked my ankle."

"Why didn't you kick her back?"

"I did. Then I got her hand, and she scratched me." He held up the offending hand, which showed a long scratch.

“I must say,” I told him, “that you deserve that and considerably more. I had no idea you were such a fool. Jim lived here in New York. His wife came down from Boston to marry him. He met her when he was at Ground School at Teck. Don’t you remember? Don’t you see it all now?”

“Yes, since lunch. And she’s still cuckoo. It’s all my fault. But how was I to know? And now a promising young bond salesman is about to resign a very lucrative position and journey on to parts unknown. Here, try this beaker of the golden juice of California and—”

There was a loud knock at the door. It was the old gentleman from Boston. He was quite red in the face and much distressed.

“My daughter sent me,” he told us, “and she is acting very queerly. She has changed her mind again, and we are not going to Boston this afternoon. She wishes to see about some investments at once and sent me to find you. Your office said you might be here. She told me to come and wait until you came in. She said you would understand about the investments—some future transaction, I gathered. And I don’t understand. Will you please explain it to me?”

“All right,” said Tap as he reached for his hat, “you stay here with Mr. Wilson and he will tell you a lot of funny stories and explain the theory of gravitation. And I will run up and see if I can find out what is wrong with your daughter. Maybe I can sell her something.”

And he did.

NOCTURNE MILITAIRE

To Billy Bishop

II: NOCTURNE MILITAIRE

We were sitting under a bridge, Keller and I, arguing aimlessly. It was back in the spring of 1918, and we were in France, up at Dunkirk with the 185th squadron of the Royal Flying Corps. We had commissions in the United States army but after much shifting about and six months' training in England we had ended up at the front with the R.F.C.

Dunkirk, about twenty-five miles from the lines, was a great place for bomb raids. The convergence of four canals with the harbor made it an easy target. An arsenal and three big forts, as well as the railroad terminal and harbor docks, were located there; also seven airdromes—two Belgian, one French, and four British—so the Huns could drop their bombs anywhere and be sure of doing a reasonable amount of damage. They usually went after bigger game—Calais, Boulogne or London—but on the way over they used Dunkirk as a focus to set their bomb sights, dropping a couple of bombs to check them, and if they failed to reach their objective they bombed Dunkirk on the way back as a parting expression of ill-will. As they made several trips every clear night, and the anti-aircraft batteries put up a continual barrage, we didn't get much sleep while we were there.

This night there was a bomb raid on, which explains our presence under the bridge that crossed the canal on the edge of the airdrome. The sandbagged dugout was full of nervous mechanics—though there is no possible protection anywhere from the direct hit of a bomb. We figured that the bridge would ward off nose fuses and fragments of shrapnel, and the sloping banks would protect us from flying bomb splinters. So we had decided in favor of a grandstand seat and the open air.

The Huns were giving us a good strafing. We judged that there were at least ten of them about and that they were after the Handley-Page airdrome just across the canal. As it happened, the Handleys, big twin-engined bombers, were over in Hunland on a bomb raid of their own. The Huns didn't know this or they didn't care, for one Hun shut off his motor and glided down right over our heads until he passed over the canal, which could be seen plainly at night. Then he dropped a magnesium flare on a parachute which lit up the whole place like an arc-light.

"Lie down," yelled Kel. "We're going to catch hell now." But I was already flat on my face—trying to burrow.

As the flare floated down the Huns flew low, dropping their bombs all over the Handleys' airdrome and hangars. They hit one of the hangars with a phosphorous bomb, and it blazed at once. The anti-aircraft guns were

keeping up a terrific fire while the searchlights were trying in vain to hold the big Gothas in their beams. It was fairly raining nose fuses all about us. As the hangar blazed brighter, we began to feel very naked, for our own hangars showed up clearly. One enterprising and particularly obnoxious Hun pilot came over and dropped his load on our side of the canal. The concussion was so terrific I thought for a moment I was hit on the head.

"Are you hit?" I yelled at Kel above the noise.

"Not yet," he reassured me. "But I'm awful scared. Are you scared?"

"Can't you hear my teeth chattering?" I yelled back. "I'm a regular bowl of jelly. Do you reckon they'll hit us?"

"Sure they will. There's a Hun up there now that can look right into your face. I hope he likes it."

The light from the burning hangar was getting too bright and was reflected on the wings of the Huns, so they pulled away, out of range of the machine guns and Archie. Archie, the anti-aircraft guns, never hit anything. During the three months we were at Dunkirk, they never brought down one plane. But they were very disconcerting when they began getting too close with a barrage. And they must have hit something occasionally. I don't know how much trouble they caused the young Hun pilots but they certainly kept us in a fret.

The barrage continued, and we knew the Huns would be back with some friends. So we lay where we were.

"This is sure a great war," Kel said as he draped against a pillar. "And I wouldn't miss it for a new pair of roller skates. But I wish it wasn't so dangerous. If they keep up this sort of foolishness somebody is going to get killed. I'm ready and willing enough to die, but I'd rather not pass out in this particular manner. I've got to please the folks at home and go down in battle. I want to do this bereaving stunt properly. We might as well be in the poor bloody infantry as here!"

"Yes," I said. "The recruiting officer never told me about this, and I want to see Paris before I go to join Harry Tate. But so far it's certainly been a good war—as good as any I ever heard about. I wonder if it's worth it."

"Sure it is. At least I've got nothing to regret—all my bills are paid. No, I'm wrong, there's one thing I do regret."

"What's that?"

"My last week in London. I drank too much one night."

"One night! Weren't you there but one night?"

"Oh, yes. But one night I had more than too much. You remember the night we all had dinner at Murray's with Sam? Sam insisted on individual bottles for everybody, you remember. I think you had to go out to Hounslow afterward, or at least you said you did, and I went out to the Blue Court Hotel to see poor old Stone who'd been carved for appendicitis about a month before. It was way the-hell-and-gone from Piccadilly. He was not only up and about, but was giving a little party to some friends at the hotel. It was a pretty good party, and I got quite a skinful before it was over. I finally started back to the Savoy, and there was a thick pea-soup fog sticking to everything. There were no taxis about, so I started to walk. The next thing I knew I was lost. I wandered around for a while, but I couldn't find anybody, so gave it up and sat down in a doorway and went to sleep. I didn't much care where I slept anyway.

"After a while somebody shook me, and as I tried to figure it out, he sat down beside me. I struck a match. It turned out that my companion was a British artillery captain, soused to the gills. He looked at me through his monocle and hiccoughed a couple of times.

" 'Why, hello, America,' says he. 'How's your hatchet? Ought never to go out without it. Hic. How's it happen that I find you here weeping for your lost love—so far away—far, far away? Well, don't weep for her as long as she's so far away—see that window yonder—the one with the light? That's a sign that my love is not lost as yet—nor far away. She's sitting up waiting on me. I'm going to get a strafing when I get in.'

" 'All right,' I told him. 'That's easy. You get me down to the Savoy. I've got a big suite down there in the Court. I'll put you up for the night. I'm lost, myself.'

" 'Ah, I've got an idea,' he tells me. 'My wife's windy, all right, but she's a lady. Yes, sir, a lady. And once a lady, always a lady. She never tells me off before strangers. You come on home with me and help me out.'

"I objected at first but the doorstep was getting very uncomfortable, so in the end I went along with him.

"He had a nice big place—and his wife was up waiting for him, all right. And she wasn't a bit pleased about the matter. We were received coolly—very coolly.

" 'We just hurried home to see you, my love,' the captain told her. 'I've just been telling George Washington, here, what a fine wife I have, and I just

brought him on here to prove it. What about a bottle of bubbly in honor of our gallant ally?'

" 'All right,' she told him. 'I'd like a little myself.' So she brought in a bottle of vintage champagne and we all lit into it. I think the captain must have exaggerated her meanness, for she warmed up considerably in a few minutes. She knew some people that I did, and we got very friendly and had to have another bottle to drink to them. We both remarked that it was a very small world after all and got very chummy. By that time the captain was done in, so after we'd stretched him out, I departed. She told me the way to the Savoy, and this time I found a stray taxi."

"Like hell you did," I told him.

"Shut up until I finish. I had a suite over in the Court, and by the time I got there I was good and tight. I just did make it and that was all. I couldn't find any lights so I tried to undress in the dark. I had on those tight boots of mine and gave one of them a terrific pull. I must have gone over backwards and hit my head against something sharp, for everything went black.

"When I came to, and the room stopped whirling so fast, I was propped up against the bed with blood all over me, and my head felt like it had just exploded. But now comes the meat of the whole story. Here's a whole regiment of niggers in the wood pile. There was an eighteen-carat, aged-in-the-wood angel putting cold towels on my head and wiping the blood off me. Lord, she was a knock-out! Big eyes, golden hair, hot damn Willie!

" 'Excuse me, please,' I sort of murmured, 'there's a mistake. I'm in the wrong room. Don't get scared. I'll go right quick. I'm sorry to have busted in here.'

" 'No,' she says, 'that's all right. It's your room. I'm the one that doesn't belong here. Hold your head back and let me see if I can make a bandage for it. You've got a nasty cut, but I'm afraid to call a doctor at this hour. And I'm sure it's nothing serious.'

"I tried to look at her, but my eyes wouldn't focus. She was sort of blurred all the time, but even at that she was one of the seven wonders of the world. The thing that got me was the fact that she was wearing pajamas! I thought at first that the likker was tricking me. But, sure enough, they were pajamas—and they were my pet purple pair, too!

"While she was bandaging my head I dozed off again, but she woke me up and got my boots off and got me to bed. Once my head went down, it stayed down. To save my immortal soul I couldn't raise it from that pillow. I

tried to thank her and made a couple of passes at kissing her hand, and then drew a complete blank. When I woke up she was gone. Now, what do you think of that?"

"It's a good story," I admitted. "Am I supposed to believe all of it?"

"I don't give a damn whether you do or not."

"Well, what next?"

"That's all. I came to next morning like a thunderstorm. I had the sorest, biggest, softest, heaviest head that mortal man ever achieved. A doc took three stitches in the gash on top of it. I went on out to Hounslow feeling like Atlas himself. The lady left a note. She said:

> "DEAR SIR: Thanks for the accommodations. Such gentlemen are rare! When the cock crew this morning, I decided that you would live and abandoned you to your fate. The good die young—and sleep well.
>
> "A FOOLISH VIRGIN."

"Can you beat that? Listen, here come the Huns again!"

The anti-aircraft batteries were putting up a barrage, and again we were deluged with nose fuses and shell fragments.

This time the Gothas left us alone and went after Fort Mardick about two miles away. There were only three or four of them, and they dropped their bombs quickly and went out to sea.

Soon Mournful Mary, the siren in Dunkirk, sounded the All Clear. We crawled out from under the bridge and went back to the mess.

All the officers were gathered at the bar, laughing at two of them who had just come back from Calais in the squadron car. One of them was telling what had happened:

"Just as we passed through Gravelines, Rosie, who was driving, had to turn on the lights to get through a bad piece of road there."

"Didn't you fools know," interrupted the C.O., "that there are a dozen special orders against showing any lights at night within a hundred miles of the lines?"

"Yes, but there're some big holes in the road there, and we'd never have gotten through without the lights. So we took a chance. We came through,

and as we were turning the corner we heard a Hun coming down, and Archie opened up. It must have been a small two-seater because he came right on down. Rosie got excited and yanked the switch so hard that he broke it and couldn't get the lights out. So he stepped on the petrol, and down the road we went, hell bent for election, with this damn Hun chasing us and machine-gunning us for all he was worth. We could see his exhaust and his guns spurting right above us. Rosie yelled for me to get the pistol, but I got under the lap-robe. Then Rosie got a brilliant idea and stopped the car and kicked the lights out."

"Served you bloody fools jolly well right," said the C.O. "And I hope you've got the wind-up proper. Where's Rosie?"

"He went out to see the damage on the airdrome and see if any of his blessed hangars are hurt."

"Right-o. Let's all go have a look. But no cigarettes or matches. There may still be a couple of the beggars about somewhere."

We all trailed out on the airdrome in the moonlight and found three big bomb craters, twelve feet in diameter and six feet deep. They were just in front of the hangars, which were damaged some by the fragments.

"Damn rotten aim these blighters have," the C.O. commented. "But here're three fine marble holes. Let's have a game. No, we'll have a battle of our own. 'A' flight can take this hole. 'B' flight can take that one. And 'C' that one over there. We'll have a real pukka offensive. Hurry up, every one in your fort."

Every one jumped into a crater, and the C.O. counted noses.

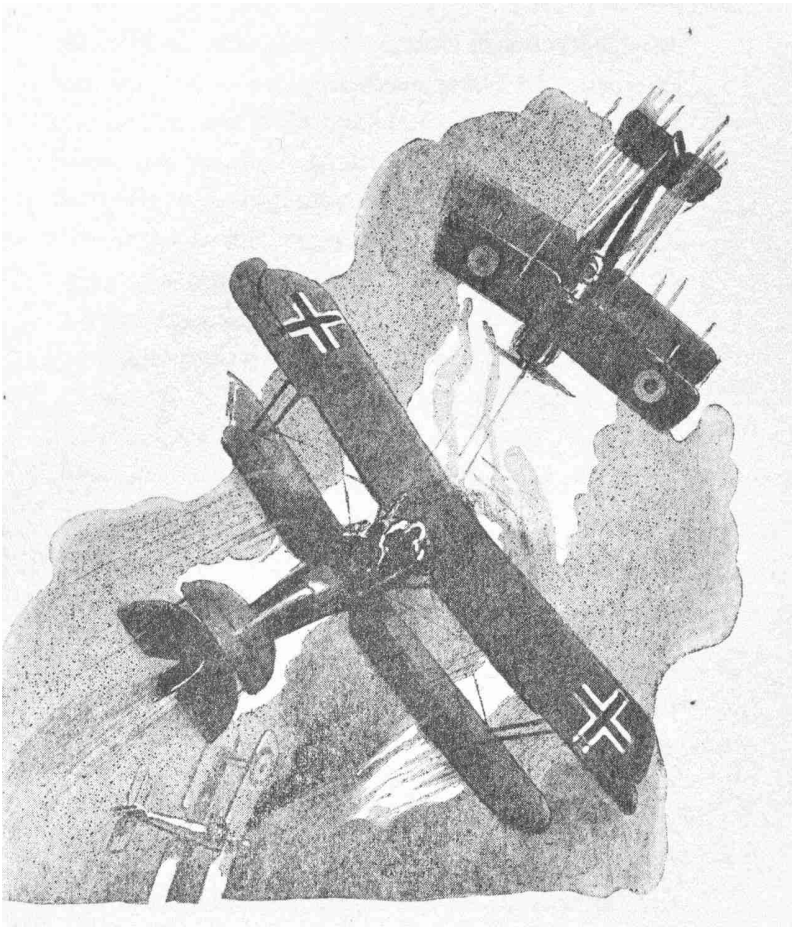
" 'C' flight is short a man. I'll fight with 'C.' That makes four apiece. Get your scouting parties ready and whoever captures the other's fort gets a bottle of pop on the King. Ready—go."

For half an hour we wrestled and fought in the dark. There was only one serious casualty. The C.O. bit Kel's ear, and Kel gave him a terrific crack on the chin which nearly put him out. We threw each other into the craters and howled and yelled until 219 Squadron from the other side of the airdrome dashed over and joined us. The C.O. executed a flank movement, and by a masterly bit of strategy withdrew his men, leaving 219 fighting over one shell hole. Then he led his forces in a surprise attack on 219's bar. The movement was successful, and by the time 219 realized what had happened their bar was completely despoiled.

Then we went over to watch the Handleys coming home. Every time one of them would try to land the landing lights would be switched on for a moment to show them an airdrome covered with bomb craters—twenty-four in all. So the poor old Handleys either had to go over and try to land on the beach in the dark, or stay up all night. They had a hard time, for one bomb had fallen directly on their dugout and killed thirty-two officers and men.

"Yes," said the C.O. as we started home, "there'll be dirty work at the crossroads over this night's business. The brigade will order the wing to do a reprisal, and we'll have to do the reprising. We'll have to go over in daylight to their airdrome and shoot it up and chase the mechanics around on the ground. Damn this sector anyway. Three weeks up here and not a pukka dogfight yet."

A couple of days later Kel and I were out doing a high patrol. It was a very cloudy morning, and the flight commander had sent us off because he thought there would be nothing to do. We were flying single-seater scout planes; I was leading and climbed up through gaps in the clouds to fifteen thousand feet where it was clear. Crossing the lines at that altitude, we went ten or fifteen miles into Hunland. We flew up and down in front of our sector for an hour, but saw no signs of hostile aircraft.



"Kel came straight down from above."

I was about to wash out and go on home to breakfast when I sighted a tiny speck down low between two big clouds on the other side of Estaires. I watched it and saw that it was moving. It was well in Hunland, but was getting no Archie, so I concluded it was a Hun two-seater trying to sneak over under the clouds to reconnoiter. I waved to Kel and signaled that I saw a Hun. I pointed at Estaires. When he waved back that he saw it, too, I warmed up my guns and started down.

The Hun saw us when we were still three thousand feet above him. He turned and dove for home at once. I soon overtook him and dove in front of him as I came down, forcing him to pull up and turn. Then I went under to get at his blind spot. As I came in close and opened fire, Kel came straight down from above with both guns going and flew right at his cockpit. The

observer was standing up shooting at me—I saw him crumple and drop as Kel pulled out of his dive. There was a puff of smoke, a cloud of flame and the two-seater started down in a vertical dive, leaving a comet-like tail of smoke and flame in its path. My heart was in my throat as I released my triggers; I rose up in my seat and in exultation gave a yell which the wind and noise from my engine drowned before it could reach my own ears.

Then I turned on my side and watched the Hun as he hit. A big pillar of flame spouted up from the ground and died down immediately. Suddenly I became sick at my stomach as I thought of what we had done to two human beings.

Archie and the pompoms were getting our range, so we scurried home through a cloud of bursting shells and incendiary bullets.

That was the first "flamer" that the squadron had brought down, and, being still considered novices, we were naturally very proud of ourselves. The C.O. said that since we were so good we could do the ground strafe when we went after the Hun airdrome.

Shortly after our show Kel got a letter. He let me read it:

> Dear Lt. Keller:
>
> Your virtue must be its own reward, for I hear that you shot down a Hun in flames. Congratulations! I'm cheering for you—I knew you could do it.
>
> I think I'll adopt you and be your *marraine*. I tried this French pastime once before but my young knight missed the idea and came home on leave with the wrong kind of affection. It was very embarrassing. So this time I shall avoid any such complication by remaining incognito. You don't mind, do you? Maybe I'll knit you some socks and maybe I won't. Maybe I'll send you a box of food and a case of port. And I can write you very affectionate letters if I want to, which will cost me nothing. I shall share your triumphs, and when the King decorates you I shall be there to applaud and maybe kiss you on both cheeks like Papa Joffre. So tie my glove to your wing and take me with you on your trips above the clouds. Get me another Hun soon.
>
> The Foolish Virgin.

"Can you beat that?" Kel asked, when we were discussing the letter afterwards.

"No," I admitted, "I can't even tie it. The wench is all broken out with romance. Such a thing ought to be enough to make you quit drinking. Wonder what she is anyway. It's a shame you can't remember what she looks like."

"Damn good, anyway."

I held the note paper up to the light. There was a crest and a fancy border.

"She uses good note paper, at least," I told him, "and she writes a good hand. It's postmarked London. I'll bet she's not one of the regular night club crowd."

"No, I don't think she is, either. Imagine one of that outfit leaving before breakfast! Beats me. But what was she doing down at the Savoy? And why was she in my room at four o'clock in the morning in my pajamas? And after she got there why did she leave like that and write me cuckoo letters? Is she Lady Bountiful or is she going to blackmail me? I'll bite either way. Come on, let's get ready for tea."

The day for which the ground strafe was scheduled, arrived. This show was one we didn't care for particularly. It meant coming down to the ground twenty-five miles in Hunland and strafing the hangars, and then coming back all the way at five hundred feet, with the whole Hun army shooting at us.

But it came off rather well, as it happened. Three squadrons of us went over in high formation. A squadron of Bristols dropped bombs on the hangars first. Then we went down to the ground with phosphorous bombs and shot up the machines on the ground. Three Hun planes tried to take off to fight, but we shot them down before they had enough altitude to maneuver. Two hangars caught fire. And though we lost two men who were hit from the ground on the way back, it was counted a successful raid.

We moved south the next week to a sector where there was more fighting and less night bombing. One morning Kel and I were out together, Kel leading. We had been up for perhaps an hour when I saw a speck above the clouds over by Armentières, twenty-five miles in Hunland. I fired my guns to attract Kel's attention and pointed to the speck. He waved back, indicating that he saw it, and we both started for it. The plane was a Hun two-seater, apparently getting altitude preparatory to coming over high to take pictures. The pilot saw us a long way off and started to dive away from us. But we had altitude on him, and speed, so we gained rapidly. I had the

better engine and reached him fifteen or twenty seconds before Kel did. I did our usual stunt—dove and opened fire on a level with his tail and then went under him to make him turn, in that way holding him for Kel. He turned, and Kel came down from the other side with both guns spitting incendiary bullets into his fuselage. The Hun didn't flame, he just turned over slowly and went down in a vertical dive.

I knew that we were a long way over in Hunland, but that was all. My compass was spinning around madly, and my motor was missing. The clouds were so heavy that we could get only an occasional glimpse of the ground. I was considerably below Kel and losing altitude, so I decided to go on down below the clouds and have a look.

I came through the clouds right in the middle of six Hun scouts, and I went right back up again. My motor picked up and I climbed to where it was clear. I got a good dose of Archie later and ran into a thunderstorm before I got my bearings and found my way home.

There was no news of Kel all that day, and it wasn't until nearly dark that we got word of him. His gas line had been hit by the Hun observer and he had been just able to get back to our side of the lines on his emergency tank. He had such a small margin that he was forced to land in a field of stumps. He was badly smashed up. Before any of us had a chance to see him, he was sent back to Boulogne. Later he was sent to London, and we heard from the London headquarters that he was having a hard time.

The first thing I did when I got my leave was to go to London to look for Kel. I found him at a hospital in the suburbs. He was still in bed, with his face and arm bandaged. I talked to his nurse before I saw him.

"Don't talk about the front to him," she told me. "His nerves are in a terrible state. I have a lot of trouble with him."

Now this was no ordinary nurse. She was so soothing to the eyes that I stared at her in open-mouthed wonder until she began to blush.

"I can't imagine how you would have trouble with him," I told her. "One good look at you, and any man ought to eat out of your hand."

There were tears in her eyes as she said: "You don't know, then, that he will probably never see again. That's his main trouble—eyes. He'll be all right otherwise. The machine gun butt hit him in the face."

“My gosh, that’s tough,” I said. “Poor old Kel. But isn’t there any chance that his eyes will pull through?”

“There is a chance but it’s very slim. And it will be a long time. He doesn’t know it yet. Don’t you tell him, whatever you do. He’s enough trouble as it is.”

So it was with a heavy heart that I went to his room and tried to cheer him up.

“Say,” I began after a moment’s greeting, “how do you rate a special nurse and a private room? Who are you, anyway?”

“Oh, the head nurse fixed it up for me. I’ve got an awful drag with her. After I was here about a week she moved me in here and gave me a special. And the special is awfully good to me. That’s the one that brought you in. I can’t see anything with this bandage. Tell me, what does she look like?”

“Well, she’s got the usual number of eyes, ears, and teeth, with but a single nose and one mouth. I can recommend them all highly. However, I’ll tell you more about her after I take her out to dinner.”

“No, you don’t,” he said quickly. “You leave her alone. She’s too nice a girl to be going out with you, and I won’t have it.”

“Oh, is that so? How do you know how nice a girl she is?”

“You leave her alone. She’s a nice girl, I tell you. She told me so. Go on down to Murray’s with your crowd and leave her be.”

“All right, if she’s your private property. But why the righteous indignation at me? I never kidnaped anybody. She’s free, white, and twenty-one. And speaking of perfect ladies, did you ever hear anything more from your Savoy girl? Here’s her chance to be really romantic and nurse you back to health.”

“She still writes to me. She found out I was here and sends me flowers and candy sometimes. But she hasn’t come to see me yet. She writes me wonderful letters. That’s about all that keeps me going. Sometimes I wish I hadn’t tried to level off at all, but just gone on in the ground. I knew I couldn’t make it. You bums out at the front don’t appreciate life.”

“Oh, shut up! You’re damn lucky. Nearly everybody else is dead. What have you got to crab about?—17 lost nine men last week, and 148 lost eleven—three of them in flames. And you lie here with a beautiful madonna or prima donna, as the case may be, to pat your hand—yet you want a chance to gripe. Poor Mathews got hit by a hundred-and-twenty-pound

bomb last week, and Tommy Herbert sat on a tracer bullet. The other day Mannock got killed from the ground; Earl Hammer went down in flames; and you want to gripe because you've got to enjoy female society for a few weeks. Did you hear the stunt Bim and Bob pulled?"

"Yes," he told me. "I heard all about it. My Savoy girl wrote me about it."

We talked on, swapping news and gossip, and he brightened up considerably. Finally the nurse came in and told me it was time to leave.

In looking for my cap and gloves, I knocked over a box of paper on the bureau. I was picking it up when I caught sight of a sheet of paper.

"Whose paper is this?" I demanded.

"I'm sorry to have to chase you away," said the nurse, ignoring my question, "but you've been here quite a time." And she pushed me gently into the hall.

"I'll wait outside," I told her. "I want to see you."

"But I don't want to see you," she returned. "Kel has told me already what a bum you are."

"All right then, I'll tell him whose note paper that is. I know it."

"Then wait a few minutes for me." She was blushing furiously as she hurried away.

"So," I said, when we were seated outside on the porch, "you are the romantic lady of the Savoy! The *marraine de luxe*! Have you a little sister by any chance? Well, well, tell me more. How did you work it?"

"Very simply," she told me. "I have a friend who is doing stenographic work at the American headquarters. That's how I knew where he was and kept track of everything that happened to him. I'm a Canadian and came over with a Canadian hospital unit. My people have some influence and it was no trouble at all to get transferred and arrange to be his special nurse. Now don't you go and spoil it all by telling him. It would break his heart if you took away his illusion about the beautiful lady who writes him letters about everything that happens. He thinks he has a date with her."

"What about the Savoy?" I asked. "He told me about the meeting."

"In the first place," she said, coloring prettily, "it's none of your business. And in the second place, he shouldn't have told you. And in the third place, it was all wrong."

“I know all that, but tell me more. I’m curious.”

“I suppose anything is better than what you imagine. I had been over here a year—working hard all the time. All the other girls were having a lot of fun, I was having none. It was a pretty drab life, and I thought I was entitled to a little fun. And the war was on my nerves. I was in a hospital up at St. Albans; all the other nurses used to come down to London with their friends, and I couldn’t see why I shouldn’t, too. But I was brought up very strictly and somehow or other I couldn’t break away from my raising, no matter how much I wanted to.”

“What did you say your name was?”

“I didn’t say. But it’s Allyston.”

“From Montreal?”

“Yes.”

“Any relation to the fellow who used to race those big boats?”

“That’s my father.”

“Well, well, go on with the story. I am all attention.”

“All the girls had some one to worry over out at the front and send things to and get letters from. It was sort of their war and it wasn’t mine at all. I wanted somebody out there, too. So, like the French girls, I adopted an infantry captain. All went well for a while and I began to take more interest in the war and not hate my work so. Then he came back on leave and wired me to meet him in town. Of course I went, though I was scared to death. He was rather nice, and we had a jolly dinner. I guess I drank a little too much champagne, for when it was time to catch the last train to St. Albans I wasn’t a bit ready to go. Oh, it wasn’t his fault. He said he’d get a suite at the Savoy and it would be all right. So we did end up at the Savoy after dancing all evening at Murray’s.

“But when we got up to the suite it was different. He didn’t understand at all. He thought I was accustomed to doing that sort of thing. He got affectionate, and when I resisted him he thought I was just being coy. So when he wasn’t looking I ran out of the door. I saw a door half open opposite and stepped inside, locking it behind me. This suite was unoccupied, although there was a lot of officer’s luggage about and I found some orders on the desk with Kel’s name on them. I was really frightened, you know—I think I would have jumped out the window before I would

have gone back into the hall. So I decided to wait there and throw myself on the mercy of the owner of the room when he came in.

"But he didn't come in. I decided that he was out for the night and that I might as well get some sleep. So I slipped on his pajamas and went to sleep. It never occurred to me that there might be two doors to the suite. I had locked only one of them. I was awakened by a crash and got up to find him on the floor. So I took care of him, finished my nap, and went home in the morning. By that time the whole thing struck me as being rather funny. I had certainly proved to be a bungling amateur and I couldn't resist leaving a note behind to that effect. That cured my yearning for amorous adventure and interest in strange men."

"But apparently it didn't," I said. "For here you are again exposing your charms to a young and very susceptible officer."

"But you don't understand. Women can't do any of the fighting, so we must take care of those that fight for us. If he doesn't recover his sight I'm going to marry him, maybe. Some one has to take care of him. He doesn't know it yet, but I have arranged to take him back home as soon as he's able to go. Does that satisfy your curiosity? I'm glad you are a flyer because you probably won't live long enough to disgrace me."

"All right, that licks me. The alibi is perfect. But what if he recovers his sight?"

"I'll leave him beforehand, and he's none the worse off. But somebody must take care of him until then. After that night at the Savoy he wouldn't ever care for me and he'd be sure to recognize me. He'd never believe my story."

"Yes, Kel is sort of narrow-minded and righteous at times. But listen, bright eyes, if he ever gets a look at you and doesn't immediately fall, just you wire for me if I'm still about. I'll buy your shoes any time. And I'll keep your secret. Kel is sort of hard to handle, I know. You'd better make those letters a bit wanton and get Kel disgusted with the lady. Better kill off your rival."

"Thanks. I've got to go now. Don't let Kel ever kid you about his righteousness. As long as he's drunk or blind I can handle him. Well, good-by-e. Dodge Archie, but don't be too careful. Amnesia would be a godsend to you."

And she was gone with a smile and a wave of the hand.

LONG DISTANCE

To Bob Kelly

III: LONG DISTANCE

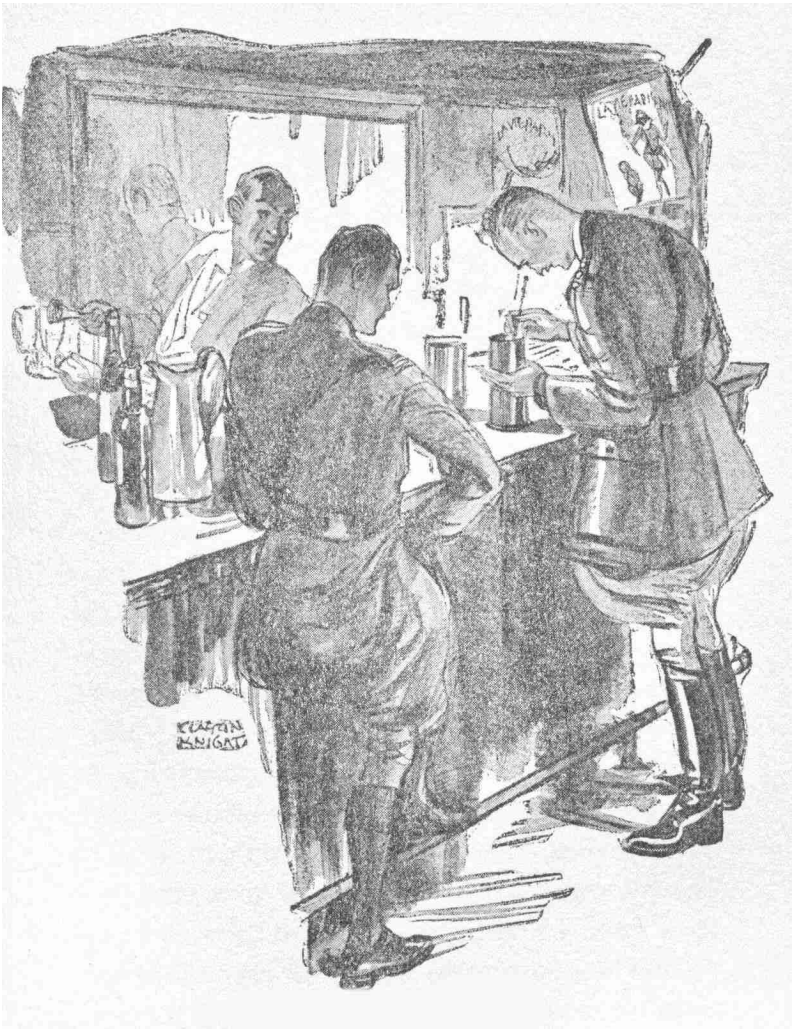
1

Yes, I know Carol Banks had the reputation of being a rumhound and a roughneck, but there's more to it than appears on the surface. People back in his home town say that he got just what was coming to him, and after what they heard about his parties in London and Paris, no one could be surprised. And he used to be such a quiet, well-behaved lad, too, before he joined the army. Bah!

They don't know the half of it and what they do know is wrong. I knew Carol well, roomed with him off and on for over six months—he's put me to bed many a night. Neither one of us could ever turn in until the other one was brought in because we couldn't get off our boots alone. You know those snappy English boots! I've forgotten where I first met him, maybe it was on the boat going over, maybe it was at Oxford or around the Savoy bar. We were all over England for about three months at various squadrons learning to fly as officers of the Royal Flying Corps, though we were really only American cadets. But the meaner our own army was to us, the nicer the British treated us and they made us officers automatically.

It was up in Scotland that we got to be good friends. I was up in Ayr in February at the Stunt School, the last step in training before going out to the front. Every one was on the way to the front, the pilots and instructors were both sort of careless up there, and we had some bad luck.

There were about sixty officers at Ayr when I arrived—fifteen of them Americans—and we buried four of them my first week. We lost six Americans the next week and that made a funeral every day—we could only hold one at a time on account of having only one American flag. More Americans came in from Turnberry every day, so our outfit kept increasing in spite of the wholesale interments. It was bad enough to have to be pallbearers every day for our own men, but then some United States naval officers came up to take the course and we had to bury them, too.



"Fishhouse Punch."

My roommate got killed one day, and the next morning Carol breezed in and announced he was my new roommate. He helped me pack up my roommate's kit and looked the situation over. He decided that we were all looking like we had the pip and it was high time some one provided a little cheer before we went out and dug our own graves.

Now that was where Carol shone brightest—cheer-leading. He had made, bought or stolen an elaborate set of American bar utensils, which he carried around with him wherever he went. He had shakers, squeezers, egg-beaters, strainers and an assortment of odd extracts, essences, and substitutes. He would be sent to a station where gin-and-bitters was the only

mixed drink, and by the time he left even the village loafers would be calling for a Remas fizz or a Fishhouse punch. Wherever a sprig of mint grew he would make a julep, and wherever a hen cackled he would produce eggnog. He had a knack, a sort of system of organizing binges wherever he went, and I never saw him fall down on the job.

There were about thirty of us quartered in a big house in Ayr, and before dinner that night Carol came up into the anteroom with a big bath pitcher full of Bronx cocktails. Where he got the ingredients was beyond me but he always had them. You could put him down in the desert of Sahara, and he'd be cracking ice in ten minutes.

Instead of repeating the last words of poor old Bill, everybody was shortly engaged in hitting the high notes on "Keep the Home Fires Burning."

After dinner we all went to the little vaudeville show that was the only public amusement the town boasted and made ourselves very noisy and obnoxious. There was one act that consisted of two Hawaiians playing steel guitars and a girl doing a hula and thumping a ukulele. That made us homesick, so we decided we'd give them a party afterward. Carol went behind the scenes to arrange it. He came back, walking across the stage, climbed into the box by stepping on the bass drum, and announced that the two men would be pleased, but the lady couldn't accept our invitation. She was sister to the big guitar player and he didn't allow her out late.

So we took the two Hawaiians and their guitars around to the house, and Carol mixed up some punch. When I say "punch" I flatter him. I helped him mix it and after I saw what went into it I never expected to drink any of it. But after I tasted it I apologized. It was made of Scotch whisky, some odd fruit juices, French vermouth, Benedictine, and champagne. In spite of that, it tasted like it came out of a cut-glass bowl with a silver ladle.

Carol worked on the Hawaiians overtime. They were really from Chicago and in a half-hour they had told us their real names and were doing things to their guitars that made them sound like steam calliopes.

Carol edged me away and said, "Keep those two birds full of punch for a while. If they try to leave, trip 'em up and hold them until I get back."

I kept them full, all right. One of them got up on the piano and fell off and broke his guitar, and kept sobbing around the rest of the evening over it. Swore he couldn't get another one nearer than Honolulu and that a six months' tour would have to be canceled.

I don't remember much about the rest of it but I do recall putting a Scotsman to bed. He had on his kilts and we laid him down on some springs and covered him up not thinking that he would get cold from underneath. He came to next morning with his knees frozen.

I woke up and looked over at Carol's bed. He jumped up as bright and fresh as a daisy.

"Well," said I, "what happened to you along in the cool of the evening?"

"I'll give you three guesses," says he.

"I don't need but one," I told him. "You had a date with the sister. Has she a friend?"

"Bright boy," says he, "go head." And that was all I got out of him.

But that's the sort of fellow Carol was. Always up to mischief, always organizing a party, but never passing out himself. He was just naturally alcoholic—he loved liquor and all that went with it. But he wasn't a drunkard. He never got sloppy and came unraveled. Liquor was just his natural medium and he worked with it like a sculptor thumping his clay.

He was a good natural pilot and had a fine education, so he had no difficulty with his routine work. The only responsibility he ever assumed was the office of bartender, which duty he performed in a manner that soon won him the hearts of all the officers and landed him in the seat on the right of the C.O.

One day he and I were sitting out on the airdrome idly watching a plane maneuvering at about a thousand feet. It was a Sopwith Camel, and the pilot was trying to stay in firing position on the tail of an S.E. The S.E. did a steep right hand climbing turn, but when the Camel tried to follow, it fell off in a quick spin. Twice around went the Camel, its nose pointed down, then we saw it straighten out. But the pilot must have been nervous, because he overdid the checking, and the Camel began to spin to the left as fast as it had to the right. He was very low now and, as he checked the left turn, the Camel dove into the ground before he could pull the nose up.

"Another funeral," I remarked sorrowfully, as the ambulance dashed across the airdrome.

"Poor devil," said Carol. "Wonder who it was. Probably another sailor. I've buried so many American naval officers I ought to draw a navy pension."

"I think I'll write Daniels and tell him a Sop Camel won't turn to the right."

"Well, somebody ought to tell him that before he runs out of navigators. Rotten business, this. We're losing half our men before we even get to the front, and I understand out there the average life of a pilot is forty-eight hours. I hope I last the average time, at any rate. Why in hell did I ever pick the flying corps?"

"I'll bite—why did you?" I asked him. "I picked it because I could already fly and didn't fancy walking."

"A woman," said Carol.

"Don't kid me," I told him. "No woman ever persuaded you to get into this suicide club."

"No, she didn't persuade me, she forced me."

"How come?"

"Well, it was this way. I'd been crazy over this girl for years. One of the finest girls in the world, but a flirt, and she had my number. She could wrap me around her little finger any time she wanted to. But she didn't seem to want to all the time. The only time that girl would ever show any interest in me was when I was about to trot away. Then she'd use a little come-hither salve, and I'd come running back to be discarded again. She'd break my heart about twice a year regularly. But she would always patch it up when I was about to recover and keep me hanging around. I used to get mad as the devil at myself for letting her do it but—hell, I couldn't stop. When she'd come back to me she'd make up for all the heartaches she'd given me. And I really did love her. I didn't know anything about how to handle women then."

"Are you an expert now?" I cracked at him.

"No, but I'm able to hold my own, all right. In the first place, I'm so hard-boiled now that I don't let any sweet-and-low interfere with my ideas. And in the second place, as long as I don't care anything about the girl I can usually handle the best of them without any trouble. It's when you let your heart interfere with your head that the trouble arises."

"But I still don't see how that made a pilot out of you."

"Well, Agnes and I had a big scrap. There was some talk of war then but nothing definite. I told her that this was the last time—I was through for good. She laughed and said that when she wanted me again she'd send for

me and I'd come running back. That made me mad because I knew it was true. But I decided I'd fool her this time. I went out and got a couple of drinks and enlisted in this damn Aviation Section to make sure I wouldn't go back to her.

"I saw her a couple of times after that, but I was always careful to be thoroughly soused, and she disapproved of drinking so heartily that the matter was settled right there on that basis. I've been drinking and going to funerals ever since."

"I was sitting in jail with my back to the wall,
And a red-headed woman was the cause of it all,"

I sang for him.

"Shut up," said he, "and let's go find out who that was in the Camel."

2

We went down to London shortly after that and fooled around town for a couple of weeks waiting on orders. Carol made good his boast about being a success with the ladies and punished a goodly supply of liquor before we were sent out to the front. We went out to an S.E. squadron near Amiens and after some preliminary training began doing regular patrols.

Carol was good, there was no denying it. He got a Hun in flames the third week and was given command of the bar. He organized parties all over Northern France and collected a couple of citations. He and the flight commander were out looking for two-seaters one day over by Armentières and ran into five Pfalz scouts. They got two of them, and Carol fought the other three in a rearguard action while the flight commander flew his crippled plane back, to crash back of the lines. Another day he set fire to two balloons and came back with his plane so full of holes it looked like a Swiss cheese.

He was pretty reckless at first and annoyed the C.O. continually, but after he learned how to get out of his own trouble the C.O. gave him plenty of rope and let him go where he pleased.

One afternoon I found him in the bar sucking at a peach julep that he'd made in a big three-inch shell case.

"Why the bun in the heat of the afternoon?" I asked. "You'll draw a blank early."

“Mail,” he said, passing me the julep. “Just got a letter from Agnes. Need stimulation. She’s decided ’twas time I came back to the fold and has opened her campaign accordingly.”

“I believe you’re scared of her.”

“Sure I am. Mustn’t weaken, though. Going to get drunk and write her an insulting letter. Going to write and tell her I don’t want her—got a big blonde with blue eyes over here. Going to burn another bridge.”

And he did. He read me the letter before he mailed it, and I begged him not to send it. But he insisted on doing it before he got sober enough to repent. After getting that letter, no self-respecting girl should ever have mentioned his name again. That was one of the few times I ever saw him really drunk.

When an American squadron was organized on the British front, it was no surprise to anybody that Carol was made a flight commander in it. He’d earned the honor.

I didn’t see much of him after that as his squadron was working over a different sector. But I heard of him from time to time. He flew down to Paris once and brought back twenty gallons of gin for a special party in honor of a general who was about to send them down to the American front. The general repented after the party and gave Carol permission to fly over to London in his Bristol and bring back a load of real port. Another time he persuaded a colonel to give a real party for the whole sector, and Carol rented an entire hotel in Dieppe for the evening.

If you want to hear about that party, ask anybody who was in the Royal Flying Corps during the war. Eleven court-martials grew out of it, and two majors were killed in a wreck on the way home. Carol drank the mayor of Dieppe under the table and then went off with his wife.

3

I came down to Paris the day of the Armistice. Those who were in Paris that memorable week will always carry a vivid picture of that historic celebration with them. It was an International Fête. Democracy broke its bonds, and all the people surged into the streets to give vent to their feelings—so long pent up. Everywhere there was a huge parade. People sang and danced in complete abandon. All classes mingled with all nationalities. The cafés were noisy and packed to the doors. An orgy of kissing was indulged in by young and old alike. The Americans were particularly favored in this regard, perhaps because there were so many of them, or because they

entered into the spirit of the thing more than the others. In return the French girls began stealing the doughboys' funny little misshapen, misfitting, coxcomb caps. For a week every one was happy, noisy, and energetic.

I had a set of orders which should have been sufficient to take me across France on a private train. They were issued by the British G.H.Q. and were supposed to take me, by any route I saw fit, to Toul and Colombe le Belle, where I would be assigned to a squadron. Our squadron that had worked on the British Front was disbanded, and we were being returned to the American Army after eighteen months with the British. My friend, a colonel, had loaned me his car to get to Paris in exchange for some sugar and flour which I was to get for him at the American Commissary. I got the supplies for him and had just emerged from the splendor of the tonneau veil, when an American Military Policeman stopped me as I was entering the Hotel Continental. This M.P. was certainly hard-boiled. In the first place, he didn't like my uniform, which was perhaps a bit individual as I had gotten it from a New Zealander and the alterations were hardly sufficient to make it regulation. He couldn't fathom some of my insignia, which ranged in pattern from the War of 1812 to Gallipoli. But I had left home in a private's uniform eighteen months before, and I was not posted on "What the Well-dressed Young Aviator Will Wear."

The M.P. requested a look at my orders. He had a supreme contempt for all officers and a particular grade reserved for pilots. I doubt if he had any liking for even his own Marine brand. My orders brought forth a derisive snort.

"Aw, anybody can tell yer," he spluttered, "that no damn Britisher kin give orders to Americans. It's agin the Constitution. And that ain't no uniform to show in Paris. I guess you better come with me."

I glanced at his armament—two .44 caliber automatic pistols, a large serviceable club, and what looked like an Indian scalping knife—and I decided I had better go quietly.

He took me, baggage and all, to the Police Headquarters in the Hotel St. Anne. The place was crowded, and I was not welcome. Most of the officers were pilots and were complaining bitterly of the treatment they were receiving. I found a couple of friends who had been there several days and they advised me to take off my wings and cease to be an aviator. But even so, I failed to impress the lieutenant, who eventually called me before him and assigned me to a cell. Then I became violent and offered to start another war of my own. I defied him to prove I was an American and demanded that

I be sent to the British provost marshal. As my orders were British, I was finally sent over under a heavy guard and many suspicions. Fortunately the chauffeur was there who had driven me down and identified me. The British provost marshal rescued me at once, gave me a drink and a bundle of passes, and offered to loan me his own uniform until he could get a set of orders from the American adjutant of Paris for me. So I was free in Paris and though I couldn't leave again until I got a new set of orders, I was not worrying, and returned to the Continental to enjoy a few days of peace and plumbing.

The next morning after my arrival I strolled into the dining-room of the hotel for a late breakfast and found Carol eating alone. I hadn't seen him since a party at Boulogne. He was wearing two decorations and a wound stripe now. After a noisy greeting I sat down, and we swapped odd bits of news. I noticed he lacked enthusiasm and his mind seemed to wander a bit.

"But, why so glum, old man?" I demanded. "We'll all be home in six months."

"Oh, hell," was all the reply I got.

"Hangover?" I asked, and he nodded.

"That's funny. You never used to have them. Well do I remember your corrugated constitution and cast-iron gut lining."

"But this isn't from likker," he told me.

"Remorse? Repenting of the Huns you sneaked up on without blowing your horn?"

"Don't be funny so early. I can't stand it."

"Well, tell me about it."

"It's a long story."

"Well, I have nothing to do until noon, when I must call on my friend and compatriot, the provost marshal of Paris. And there is a great dearth of light amusement around here this morning. Tell me your troubles. I've heard them many times before."

"Oh, it's nothing much. I just feel rotten all over. Last night we had a big binge—a regular celebration. There was enough wine, women, and song for a regiment. As usual, I swam in it. I slept from four until seven and then filled up on ice water and cognac and tried to get back to sleep. I dreamt of Agnes. It wasn't much of a dream but it got me going. We were just together

again and things were peaceful, and she put her arms around me and kissed me like she used to."

"Isn't Agnes the one who used to write you the comic letters that always made you get drunk and pass out in the afternoon?"

"Yes, after flirting with me for years, while I was burning with true love and casting myself regularly at her feet, she suddenly changed her tactics. I think there were times when she used to be quite fond of me. She used to make me think so, at any rate. I guess I used to be a considerable bore at that—any young kid in love is a bore. Well, I was still in love with her when I joined the army. But I had such a good time and so much else to think about that I soon got over it—at least I thought I had. When I'd get a letter from her it would get me all stirred up and then I'd get mad and get drunk and think of her in a contemptuous sort of way and write her back a few insults. I never expected to see her again, and each time I wrote I never expected an answer. But she got worse and worse. She began knitting things for me and sending me all sorts of indigestible concentrated food. After I got a few Huns and the news got home that I had been decorated she decided that I was her own true love again and that she would claim me as such. This struck me as being rather humorous. If she had known the sort of life I was leading, she would have gone out and washed her hands.

"I've had a glorious time—been stone-cold sober about three nights since I landed over here eighteen months ago, and I was in hospital then. Now think of the position I'm in. I've lived through the war! I've got to go back! The party is over, the house is pinched, and I'm restored to life!"

"Well, so far," I told him, "it looks some like an old-fashioned, head-splitting hangover, brought on and induced by, overindulgence in alcoholic stimulation. The cure is the hair of the dog that did the biting."

"But, man, don't you see? This morning I realized that I've just been kidding myself and that I'm still in love with the woman. Isn't that funny? She's three thousand miles and two years away and yet she can completely upset my ideas and spoil my party by a series of dumb letters."

"You'll forget her after the third drink."

"No, I won't. I've got her in my system and I've lost my thirst."

"Well, go home and marry her. You can all right with those medals—you barber pole."

"Yes, that would be great! I'd be a hot bridegroom and she'd be a fine wife for a man with a wandering disposition and an ingrowing thirst. I used

to think she was the only girl I could ever marry, but now I see the matter in a different light."

"Then, for Pete's sake, what are you worrying about? You don't want to marry her, and you don't have to. That's that."

"It's just this. Now that we've got peace, I find that my exuberant spirits were due to the war. With death staring me in the face I could laugh at anything—and did! I got used to it and I liked it. I was sure I was going to get killed, and everybody else thought so, too, and there was nothing to worry about. I was wild and I liked my women weak and my likker strong. I enjoyed scrapping because I was ready to die. Death I can laugh at, but I'm not prepared for life. For a long time I've looked forward to going West with only the hope that it would be at the hands of a better pilot than myself. Now I've lost my nerve. I can't tell the whole world to go to hell any longer. I'm little and insignificant and scared and I guess I need Agnes.

"And so I contemplate my future life—summed up, it means just a kiss from the only woman that can cause me a palpitation without flaunting her femininity. Well, it doesn't appeal. It's flat. But for a long time I have neglected to consider just what life really means. I'm not exactly a drunkard, but all my joy has been coming out of a bottle. My 'Song of Songs' has been orchestrated by the popping of corks. Now that we have begun to speak of to-morrow again, there is something bitter in the taste. And I hear that these god-damn patriots at home are going to make the world dry for Democracy! God, I hate to think I fought for them! Now there is nothing left but women in some form or other! How do you feel these days?"

"Oh, I've always had some business to attend to after the war. Maybe that's why I didn't get the Huns you did, though I always was a better pilot and a damn sight better shot and usually sober enough to see what I was shooting at—which is more than you could ever say. But hell is saving you until the new annex is finished. So all I've got to do is to learn to sleep in a good bed again and do without my likker. Why not give matrimony a try, old fellow? You admit that you are tired of sowing the delectable oats and it may not be as bad as people make out. You seem to be thoroughly ripe for it."

"No, I've got one more chance. I think I've got the con. One lung has been behaving pretty bad lately. And my liver is fairly well hardened up."

"Go see a doctor, you fool."

"No, I'm afraid I may be all right and I want to save the balm as long as I can."

"Well, if you've got consumption, you'll have to marry her in spite of hell. Just picture our young hero returning home with the con to be nursed back to health by his faithful sweetheart!"

"Oh, shut up, I can see by her letters that this soldier stuff has gone to her head. She warmed up perceptibly when I got my first Hun."

"Are you sure she intends to marry you?"

"That seems to be the idea. I used to beg her to do it all the time, and now she has got around to apologizing for the way she used to treat me. Yeah, she was just teasing me!"

"Then you better give in gracefully."

"Oh, I suppose I will. There's no finer girl in the world. After all, what else is there? There's nothing left out of the wreckage, if I've got to go back to using a calendar. I guess I might as well. I'm glad that's settled. I feel better. Thanks, old man, for letting me talk to you this way. Now that I've come to a decision, let's stroll up towards the Opéra and I'll buy her some lace handkerchiefs. She wrote she would like some."

He seemed much relieved by his decision, and we walked down the Rue Castiglione in high spirits. In the Place Vendôme a big crowd was listening to a group of doughboys, tommies, and poilus singing popular songs in a half-dozen different languages. We joined a parade which surged down the Rue de la Paix and broke up by running into another parade which promptly encircled us. Still another parade of schoolboys and cadets was coming around the Opéra dragging two captured German minnewerfers and headed by a poilu blowing a bugle. Both parades broke up, and every one joined a snake dance around the artillery. Then a new parade started down the Boulevard des Italiens.

Carol and I dropped out and went into the Maison Blanc. We were promptly kissed by all the salesgirls and lost a couple of buttons and a shoulder bar. We endeavored to continue this manifestation of good spirits but were told that it was entirely impersonal and *pour la victoire*. However, if we felt that way, too, we could have a few more kisses. Between us we bought six dozen handkerchiefs and took about ten of the girls over to the Café de la Paix for a few magnums of champagne. Then we tried to figure out where to send the handkerchiefs, and in our befuddled condition had the initials of every girl we knew embroidered on them and left all sorts of directions and addresses in French. The fact that they were in French has saved me much embarrassment since.

Then we strolled over to the New York Bar and pushed our way up to within range of Charlie. A few deft twists, a quick shake, and two porto flips were before us.

"Good morning, Mr. Banks," Charlie greeted Carol, "and how many liters of gin does your squadron require this time?"

"None, thanks, Charlie," Carol told him, "we've got to obey orders from now on. They won't need us any more. West Point can do all the rest of the fighting."

Charlie pointed to a huge placard pasted up behind the bar and smiled. It was a copy of an order forbidding Americans to take more than light wines and beer. I glanced around and counted fifty Americans, ranging from privates to two colonels. None of them were drinking wine and beer.

"I wish I could sell some of my wine and beer," said Charlie sadly. "I bought a lot when that joke came out and now I can't sell it. Did you get a note for you, Mr. Banks?"

"No, Charlie, I didn't know there was one. How come?"

"A British officer left it." And he produced a note from the cash register.

"Well, of all the crazy ideas," said Carol. "Why should any one leave a note for me here when I am not supposed to be in Paris?" He opened the note and read it aloud:

> BANKS:
>
> I was just flying down from Lille with "C" flight and landed at your airdrome for petrol. They said you had taken a side-car and gone to Paris. So, I brought your mail on to you. Didn't know where to find you, but one of our M.P.'s said he could find any American and I got his help. I told him you used to get a lot of gin for us down here and he told me that this was the only place you could get it. So I am taking a chance you are going to be able to walk this far in the next few days. Come around to the Pyrene. We are having a big binge and we want you to mix us some stuff. You'll never get your mail if you don't. Cheerio,
>
> MAC.

"Good old Mac," said Carol, "he's got the idea that I'm lost. I'd rather be shot than go on a party now. I've reformed. Don't laugh. You never heard me say that before. I am now a model young man."

"You're going after your mail, aren't you? There may be a letter from her to bolster up your heroic resolve."

"No, the next one isn't due for ten days."

In the end we did go around to the Pyrenées Hotel. A large party was in progress. Six British officers from our old squadron had taken half a floor of the hotel and proceeded to invite various friends to join them. There were several American officers, five English chorus girls from a London show then playing in Paris, and a half dozen French girls. The indications were that a small but thoroughly efficient riot was brewing.

We got a noisy welcome. Two of the chorus girls had been at some of our parties in London, and one of the Americans had known Carol at college. The British contingent demanded eggnog. Carol had been bartender in the squadron and his eggnog was famous. Mac insisted upon telling the story of how Carol had plied a hard-hearted general with it, prevailing upon him to give the squadron new Dolphin machines in place of their old Spads. Thus he became the savior of the squadron and was hailed as such. The general had qualified his promise by saying he would send them Dolphins after they had crashed their old Spads or lost them in action. But that was a mere detail, and for the next days the front lines were strewn with Spads.

Carol objected that he couldn't possibly get the necessary ingredients, but his objections were overruled and scouts were sent out in all directions to beg, borrow or steal what was needed. I went over to the American commissary to get the sugar.

I had some trouble getting as much as was needed, but with the assistance of some nurses, who exchanged sugar for candy, I got the necessary amount and hastened back to the hotel.

I found Carol in the bathroom, astride the tub, beating the eggs furiously with a beater improvised from two fly swatters. His eyes were not focussed, his face was flushed, he looked as if he had a head start on the world.

"What ho!" I cried, as I surrendered the precious sugar. "Where is our model young man? Where is the eager young bridegroom?" He gave me a dirty look and handed me an envelope. Two girls pounced on the sugar, and he was having a hard struggle defending it while I took a newspaper clipping from the envelope. It read:

> At a delightful afternoon tea given by Miss Euphemia Wattles, the guests were surprised and delighted by the announcement of the engagement and approaching marriage of Miss Agnes Trescott,

> daughter of Mr. and Mrs. B. Nelson Trescott of Scott Avenue, to Lieutenant Battles Golightly of Kansas City. Lieutenant Golightly has been stationed at the "Camp" for the past six months and has become famed for his popularity. He is now in the Quartermaster Corps but expects shortly to transfer to aviation and go "Over There."

I glanced at Carol. He was himself again. One of the girls was helping him stir the eggnog, which half filled the tub, while they both sang "Madelon." He passed me a sample without a word as I returned the clipping to him.

So the Battle of Paris was resumed.

FAINT HEART—FAIR LADY

To Cy Caldwell

IV: FAINT HEART—FAIR LADY

"This sheik stuff is all the bunk," remarked Hy Hardwell, as he filled up his glass again. "Women don't fall for that caveman stuff anywhere but on the printed page. It never pans out except on a typewriter, and I'm referring to the instrument and not the pilot. If you give an imitation of a poor consumptive looking for bail, you'll get their sympathy and bank account, but if you try to understudy Mr. Piltdown, you'll get a crack on the cerebellum with a bronze candlestick."

"If you believe that, then you don't know feminine psychology," I interposed. "A woman's maternal instinct may be aroused by the poor devil behind the bars, but the man she loves is the man that can beat her up and does so freely."

"Bunk," says he again. "Bunk! And I can prove it. Did you ever hear of a man in jail or out of a job losing his wife? No. It's the rich Bennie on the avenue that has to keep nets under his windows."

"You're all wrong," I told him. "Women love to play the clinging vine. They want to be ruled. You're judging by outward appearances."

"Bunk again," Hy insisted. "A woman won't stick to any man who doesn't make her think he needs her. I remember once—well, I'll tell you the story."

I settled myself to listen.

Back in the spring of '18 I was up at Cranwell, a hundred miles north of London, at a Royal Flying Corps training squadron. It was a night-flying outfit and was equipped with FE2B's, commonly known as Fees. Everybody at the squadron was an expert pilot, so the only training we did was in night work. We were also Home Defense and supposed to chase any Gothas that came over bombing. The airdrome had flood lights on it, and the regular equipment of rockets and flares. Every plane carried a parachute flare, which was a big ball of magnesium on a parachute, and it would light up when dropped through the tube and give plenty of illumination to make a forced landing by.

We were having some bad weather for a spell and everybody was loafing about and catching up with their drinking.

The chief instructor was a bozo who'd been out at the front for ten months and could find his way around on a dark night better than most

people could in daytime with a guide-book. Most men who'd been out at the front for a long time got awfully calloused and, when they came back to instruct, didn't care what happened to their pupils. They'd take them up for a few hops, give them some good advice about not mixing drinks, and push them up solo, either to kill themselves or to become pilots and go out and get killed by the Germans. In neither case would the instructors keep track of the details.

But this instructor, Cap, was different. He was as tender a nurse as ever a Hun had. We called all pupils Huns in England because they crashed so many British planes. Cap was a good instructor because he didn't ever want to go back to the front. He'd had enough of it to see that no man could last indefinitely, no matter how good he was, and that every one would be killed off if the war lasted long enough. He figured out that the only boys who would live through the hostilities were those who stayed away from the scrapping. And he'd got over that first flush of patriotism that makes a man want to die for his country. He saw he wasn't serving anybody but the munitions makers and bully-beef tinners and he decided that it was high time he picked a soft berth for himself and dug in like the rest of the smart ones.

So, when his time at the front was up, he made up his mind he was going to be the best instructor in the flying corps and make himself so indispensable in England that they couldn't get along without him. He succeeded in doing just that thing. He was so good they let him run the whole squadron and the major never came out of the bar except when some general came to inspect.

One afternoon he was up with a new Hun, letting him take a look at the surrounding country and pointing out emergency fields to him. They were about five miles from the airdrome when the motor sputtered and conked cold. Cap took over the controls and pancaked in a meadow beside a big country house. They got out and tinkered with the old Beardmore motor and found water in the gas.

You see it now, do you? All right; good! There was a girl who lived in that big house, who was as pretty as a silver Albatross in the afternoon sun. You know what complexions English girls have? Well, this one was enough to make any pilot take his mind off the controls. She came out to see what was going on, and both our young heroes called it a day and accepted her invitation to tea.

Before they'd bitten into two biscuits, both of them were down out of control. They were both captains and there wasn't much to choose between them. The Hun had been out in France since '15, and had got his captaincy by seniority with the poor bloody infantry before he got tired of the mud and decided to end it all by joining the flying corps. They both had the gift of gab and knew in a general way how to appear pleasing before the female by spreading their tales like peacocks. As the modern child would say, their sex appeal was about fifty-fifty.

They swilled tea and whisky-and-soda until dusk, and then got going again. They flew out of the meadow and stunted that Fee for half an hour. It's a wonder they didn't pull the wings off that old crate the way they threw it around. The girl watched and waved and realized how easy it was to love an airman. Times have changed, but in those days a pair of wings was just like a love philter.

For the next month those two bozos were as busy as the sergeant-major of a Chink construction company in a bomb raid. They cracked up two Fees in the vicinity of that meadow, and there never was more than one of them around the squadron at a time. We got confidential bulletins that it was a dead heat and it was so serious that neither one of them could be kidded about it.

She came over to watch the flying often, but while she was there neither one of them would take the air. Hairpins were found in several planes, so the squadron knew that she was getting her share of joy rides.

After about a month of that we had some fine weather for night hops, and Cap announced he was going to send up his pupils for their first solos at night. Jimmy, the Hun captain, was among those scheduled to go up, and the girl came over that night to watch. Both of them hovered around her till they looked like a mob, and the most delicate eye couldn't detect any favoritism on her part. She thought they were both just fine, and it looked like it was just a question of which one got bumped off or ordered to the front first. Neither of them had been able to hit on the right method to coax her head over on his shoulder.

Two pilots took off in two machines—Jimmy and a little Scotsman—and Cap went up in another bus to look after them. It was a bright moonlight night and the ground showed up as well as on a cloudy day.

Everything was going fine upstairs until Cap noticed that a wind had sprung up and was blowing in a ground fog. You know how quick a fog can come rolling in up there, don't you? Cap fired his signal pistol for them to

come down at once, but before he got down himself there was a light fog about fifty feet thick lying over the airdrome. He landed all right, and so did the Scotsman. Then Jimmy came down to land; but as soon as he struck the fog he lost his nerve and opened the throttle and went up again. Cap had taxied on up to the hangars and stood watching and waiting and listening. Jimmy tried it again, but his nerve failed and he wouldn't come through. The girl dashed over to Cap and was trembling so she could hardly talk.

"He's going to be killed!" she cried to him. "He can't get down! What will he do?"

"He's all right," Cap reassured her. "It's only a light fog. Don't get frightened."

When Jimmy tried it again and didn't get down, Cap got in his machine and went back up to get him. It takes nerve, mind you, to go up in a fog, but Jimmy was his pupil and he was going to look after him. He picked him up above the fog and got in front of him to lead him down. The rockets were coming up through the fog and it was easy to locate the airdrome. Cap led him right over the airdrome and came in to land. He came in with a little motor and held his nose up and sank down through the fog and pancaked, to show him how to do it and let him see that it was only about fifty feet through the fog.

But Jimmy wouldn't come down. He didn't like that fog and he wasn't going to try it again. The girl ran out to see which one it was that landed, and when she saw it wasn't Jimmy, she let out a terrible shriek.

"Never you mind," says Cap, "I'll go up and get him and take him over out of the fog and we'll land where it's clear. Don't worry!"

“Jimmy followed Cap back to the airdrome.”

So he went back up and picked Jimmy up again. They both had lights on their wing tips but they could see each other in the moonlight, anyway. Cap led him over about ten miles, where there was no fog, picked out a nice field and dropped his flare over it and went down and landed. Jimmy watched him do it and then circled up above and, dropping his flare, started to come down himself. But he’d never made a forced landing at night and he wouldn’t do it. He got right down over the ground and then gave it the gun and went back up.

By that time, of course, he was in a panic. And he should have been, too, because he had only the one flare and he was helpless now if he had to land anywhere else but on the airdrome. Cap knew it; so he took off in the dark to lead him back to the airdrome and the flood lights.

He picked him up once more, and Jimmy followed Cap back to the airdrome. Cap came down through the fog and landed, but Jimmy wouldn't even try it. He was as good as dead now, because a panicky man in a plane is as good as dead in the daytime, to say nothing of a fog at night.

The girl was crazy now. She was sobbing and shouting, and Cap stood by and watched her and meditated.

"I've done all I can," he told her. "He won't come down until his petrol gives out or God takes over the controls. He's good for about three-quarters of an hour more."

Everybody stood around and waited, listening to his motor moaning up above, and occasionally his wing lights could be seen through a break in the fog. The ambulance was cranked up, waiting; but it was a hearse that ought to have been there, not an ambulance.

There wasn't much use in going up again, but Cap felt he'd rather be up in the air than on the ground with the girl. He ordered rockets sent up every ten seconds and took with him a mechanic with a couple of flashlights.

He flew up close to Jimmy's machine and had the mechanic turn a flashlight on him so Jimmy could see him plainly. Then he motioned to him to follow close behind. Jimmy had calmed down by that time and got the idea and flew right behind him. Then Cap got way back and came flying in low at an even pace and gradually throttled down. Just at the right moment Cap waved the flashlight frantically and cut his motor off. Jimmy could see him, but not the ground through the fog, and they both sank on through it and pancaked in the middle of the field. Jimmy bent up an axle and dragged a wing, but that was all. The mechanics and pilots came running to meet them and clamored around Cap and congratulated him as if he'd shot down a Zep. It was a pretty good show.

But the girl went straight for Jimmy and cried over him like he'd been killed. She didn't even look in Cap's direction, she was so intent on dragging Jimmy away from that field before something else happened to him.

Cap walked on back to the mess all alone and sat down by the fire. The major came bustling in to congratulate him.

“That was a jolly stout effort, my lad,” he told him. “If you were out at the front you’d get the D.S.O. for less than that. No chance to wangle anything for you up here in that line, but I can arrange something for you and I shall report the matter in full to the brigade. Is there anything I can do for you?”

“Yes,” said Cap, looking up in disgust, “there is. You can tell the steward to bring me a double whisky and put in my application for transfer back to the front.”

So, if you want to win a woman, don’t waste any time trying to make her think you’re Napoleon. That won’t get you anywhere. Just get into a perambulator and act like it’s feeding time. Give your inferiority complex full sway!

“That’s a good story,” I remarked, when he ended. “It has all the earmarks of intimacy. But, tell me, Hy, which one were you—the instructor or the Hun?”

He eyed me contemptuously. “That’s none of your business. I was proving a theory, not making a confession.”

BELATED EVIDENCE

To John Wentworth

V: BELATED EVIDENCE

I was sitting out on the terrace at the club sipping a Tom Collins with Jim Whitney when I heard the familiar drone of a distant airplane motor and looked up to locate the plane.

"It's further to your right," Jim advised me. "Look right over that big sycamore. You never get over it, do you? They may get to be as common as automobiles, but we'll always look up to see what they are doing and shiver with the pilot if anything goes wrong. It still makes my heart skip a beat to see one with extensions and no dihedral."

"Do you ever fly any more?" I asked him.

"Oh, occasionally. I still get a kick out of it. Particularly if it's a machine I don't know. I always get a thrill out of the first ride in a new type of plane. How long since you've had your hands on a stick?"

"Seven years," I told him. "I guess I'm through for good. I'd never have the nerve to handle a plane again. Times have changed. I wonder why some of the old crowd never stopped. I know of several who kept on until they were done in. It couldn't have been love of excitement, because they were burnt out as far as thrills were concerned. Take that bunch that went to Poland, for instance. They all had plenty of money and they certainly didn't do it for patriotic reasons. And this crowd that's gone down to fight the Riffs recently. What's their idea?"

"Probably each man had a different reason. I guess most of them simply had flying in their blood. Those that really like it never quit. To some of them it's simply a profession. I know of one man who—well, that's a long story."

"Shoot."

"No, this is another story with a gripe against the army, and I know you're tired of hearing them. Everybody has been telling them for eight years. Time to quit. Hereafter, if I can't say something good about the army, I'm going to keep still. So I keep still."

"Come on," I urged. "Be Tommy Tucker and sing for your supper. Tell me the story, and I'll give you another drink. I've only got one drink left in this flask and I'll give it to you for your story. Otherwise you'll have to wait until you get back to town or go in and bum some synthetic belly-wash."

"All right," agreed Jim. "That's a bargain. And the captain said, 'Antonio, tell us a story.' But you won't believe this. I've told it to a few

people and they laughed at me and said I was a rotten romancer and a hophead."

In anticipation of the promised drink, he began.

You know, I was sent up to the front early in the spring to join one of the first squadrons that the Americans organized. A little later they got together three squadrons and formed a group. It was mostly composed of men who'd been trained by the French and some of them had seen service with the Lafayette Escadrille. A number of the old pilots transferred to the United States army. A couple of them were old Légion Etranger men and had done a lot of fighting. Then there were some regular majors that came up to superintend the show but they didn't know anything about actual war flying, though they sure were demons for paper work.

The commander of one of these squadrons was an old hand at the game. He'd been flying with the French for two years and he knew the combat game from A to appetite. But he didn't know anything about the United States army. He couldn't even draw his pay because he couldn't fill out a pay voucher. He saluted like a Frog and he couldn't have gotten an iron ration from a quartermaster to have kept himself from starving. His idea of paper work was limited to the French for "charge it" and he had to depend on his adjutant to do all the equipping and operating outside of flying. He nearly had to leave his car in Paris once because he didn't know how to get any more petrol for it. He couldn't do any drill and his conversation on military subjects was about the same as a mule skinner's. This didn't please the tin-soldier, regular crowd, who'd been taught that the Prussian drill-sergeant was the ideal soldier and thought that membership in the West Point Alumni Association was a vital requirement of a command at the front. But they couldn't do anything about it at the time because they had to have somebody who knew something about war to run the flying end of it. One of our most illustrious generals has recently written a book on the war. He expressed surprise when he noticed that the French privates back of the lines didn't jump to attention when an officer passed by. He said he couldn't see how such soldiers could fight! Try and trump that.

Well, in spite of his profound ignorance on certain subjects, Kep got along with everybody but one major. His name was Cotton and he was senior to Kep, who was a major, too. They had a lot of arguments over morning reports and discipline, and Cotton thought he was hopeless. From his angle, I guess he was. But he sure did take a bunch of green ham-handed

fledglings and make a good bunch of fighters out of them. And that was no mean accomplishment, either. Their morning reports looked like a Chinese laundry ticket, but their combat reports were as good as Henry Ford's financial statements.

Things rocked along for a couple of months and we settled down to a regular routine of scraps, funerals, and inspections. Occasionally we were taken sober but not often enough to hurt our reputations.

We were up in the Toul sector, and our airdrome was near Nancy. Consequently we spent a lot of time in Nancy. Two patrols a day was our entire tour of duty and if the weather was dud we were practically on leave. If you wanted to go to Nancy, you went; when you got tired or broke, you came back. Life was pretty simple in those days.

Kep had a girl in Nancy that he was very fond of. She was a pretty little French thing named Germaine, and when Kep found her, she was a cashier in a café. We all knew her and everybody made a fuss over her, but nobody could dislodge Kep. You can imagine how it was: every officer that came into the place would try and date her up. Sometimes she'd go out with them and sometimes she wouldn't, but after Kep got the inside track no one could even horn in for lunch. Kep drove up nearly every night in the squadron car, and after a while she left the café altogether. That, I dare say, has a bad sound now. But in those days it was different, and nobody thought any the less of them.

There were two classes of women in France in 1918. There were those who hadn't got mixed up in the war personally and tried to live as they had before the war. They still used calling cards and would no more think of speaking to a doughboy or inviting unknown Americans to their homes than a Newport dowager would now. They were very cordial to any one who came armed with a letter of introduction from the President or their wealthy sister-in-law in St. Louis, but the casual officer had the same chance of getting into their drawing-rooms as the Kaiser had of getting to Paris. Of course, they were patriotic and did their share of war work. They nursed in hospitals and rolled bandages at home and served in canteens and lent a ministering hand when they were called upon. But they were like the girls in the fashionable motor corps over here.

Then there was the class that constitute the glory of France. There were the women for you! They were warriors! They had been seared by the war, they hated the Germans with a mighty fierceness that wasn't academic, and by the same token they loved any one who was fighting to free their beloved

France. And when French women love or hate, believe me, they put their minds on their work! Oh, I know that's not the general idea the army brought home with them, but remember that this was while the actual fighting was going on and the casualty lists were growing heavier every day and there wasn't much optimism about the outcome. Most of the doughboys only remember what was happening long after the Armistice. Conditions changed, and no foreign army on your soil is popular, no matter what it came for. These women burned with the intensity of the actual conflict. People back here don't realize what war in your own country means. And remember that the Germans held about one-sixth of France. The women couldn't enlist but they sure did volunteer. They were the comrades, nurses, and lovers of the soldiers. More power to 'em! If that be immorality, make the best of it!

Of course, human nature is the same the world over and a lot of them were mercenary. They raised prices in the stores and wine shops and estaminets and some of them were not above collecting a dower from the wealthy doughboys. But I've heard the same criticism directed against some of our own virtuous communities. Oh, yes, they removed the francs from the hard-boiled Yanks, as we used to sing, but they weren't altogether to blame. We came over to a poverty-stricken, war-ridden country, bulging with good United States gold and started out to buy everything that was for sale and tried to outbid the other fellow.

But to get back to Nancy. There was an American hospital there with a lot of American nurses in it, and there the trouble started. That was where a lot of the hell of war originated—American nurses had a habit of causing trouble. They could ride in army cars, you know, when they were in uniform.

One night I was dining in Nancy with Bill Simpson and a couple of nurses who had not abandoned their social proclivities and aspirations to the title of "the belles of the front." I don't know how much nursing they did, but they sure did run the boys ragged entertaining them. A dance was scheduled for the next week in one of the group hangars and they were planning to strut their stuff over there.

During dinner one of them caught sight of Kep and his mademoiselle over in the far corner.

"Oh, there's the major," she gurgled, "and he's got a pretty little French girl with him. Do ask him to bring her over here. I do so want to talk to one

of them." She said this with an air of bestowing a great favor in offering the privilege of her society.

"She doesn't speak English," Bill cut her off.

"Oh, doesn't she? Well, I speak French," said the nurse. "How does it happen that you know so much about her?"

"I'd know more if I could speak French," said Bill. "That's how Kep got the inside track on me."

"Do invite them over," the other nurse insisted. "I think he's awfully nice."

We tried to put them off because we knew it would never do to mix up American nurses with any French girls up around the front. Nurses didn't understand things and when they found out, there'd be a hell of a row. But these two insisted, so we invited Kep over rather than make any explanations. He was quite embarrassed, but had to accept, and brought Germaine over to our table to have their coffee with us.

The nurses were much intrigued with Germaine, and she had them so far outclassed that there was no comparison. She was as fresh and pretty and artless as a rosebud. The nurse that had her eye on Kep didn't even get a second glance from him. He looked into his coffee cup and said nothing.

The nurses kept talking about the dance. They asked Kep if he was going and he said that he was.

"And, of course, you're going to bring Mademoiselle Germaine!" they exclaimed, and then discussed the matter with her. There was nothing else for Kep to do but say that he would, and they thought that was just grand! Kep explained it to her, and she nodded seriously but without much joy. They left shortly after that.

The dance came off, all right, and was a great affair. Everybody got full of champagne, and a good time was had by all. Several officers of high rank got stewed to the gills, and one nurse passed out cold.

Kep brought Germaine but didn't stay long. I don't suppose he was there a half an hour. The nurses made a great fuss over her, but when no one was looking, Kep took her home. Everybody grinned and made some wise crack and that was all there was to it. I don't think Kep wanted to give the rest of the boys a chance to renew their acquaintance with her.

News of that party leaked out and got noised abroad. The reports were exaggerated, and rumor made the whole party a regular Roman orgy. To

some extent it was, but nothing like the scandal that got out about it. It was really no worse than a lot of parties I've been to around here thrown by some of our best people. There was some talk of a general investigation about this one, and several officers were called up and buzzed about it. I think the hospital authorities made some kick.

Cotton looked wise and pretended to investigate. Before anybody knew what had happened, he preferred charges against Kep for conduct unbecoming an officer and a gentleman and specified that he had brought a common woman to the dance. Then there was a racket. You know that military law calls for an investigation of all charges before a court-martial is ordered and then, if the facts warrant it, the proper officer orders it. If not, the charges are dropped. This matter was up to a colonel, and he ordered the investigation; or, rather, he investigated it himself. He sent for Bill and me and discussed it with us. We told him what we knew and added a bit that we heard. This colonel was all right.

"What about the girl?" the colonel asked Bill. "You knew her, didn't you?"

"Yes, sir," Bill admitted, "and as far as I know, she's all right. She didn't have any trouble resisting my manly charms. And I've had success with some that could go to any dance in France and wouldn't go to a lot of them in the U.S.A. Of course, I guess you could get evidence that she's no virgin if you want to, but I'll guarantee that she doesn't get excited when you show her a hundred-franc note."

"That's what I've been told," said the colonel. "I can't let this thing come to a trial. If this were a precedent, I'd have to court-martial myself first, and after that there wouldn't be enough officers left in the A.E.F. to inspect a corporal's guard. Cotton's a fool. I'm going to shut this thing up. Keep your mouths closed, though. How are the Huns up your way?"

He was a wise bird, that colonel was, and knew what he was about. The charges were filed, and the thing was more or less forgotten. Kep was relieved of his command, but I guess he had it coming to him anyway. He didn't care—after two years at the front no man can take paper work seriously, and he was glad to give up his job and stick to flying.

But that wasn't the last of it. Two months after the Armistice was signed, some inspecting officer ran on the charges and raked the whole thing out. He passed it on to the attorney-general of the A.E.F. and there was a big strafe. Polite questions were asked about who shelved the charges, and some very impolite reprimands were passed out. Then a general court-martial was

ordered. Cotton had learned the difference between an officer and a gentleman by that time and saw the matter in an entirely different light. He tried to stop the proceedings, but it was too late. You know the American army had gotten awfully virtuous by that time. A lot of investigators had come over and hung around the Casino de Paris for a few days and had then gone home to inflame Congress. This thing was hauled out as an example to wayward commanders.

The trial was held at Chaumont and attracted a lot of attention. A long list of witnesses was called, but most of them had gone West or back home. Bill and I were there, so were Cotton and a couple of others. And, gosh, how efficient that judge advocate was!

I talked to Kep before the trial. He said he had no defense to offer as he'd have to admit that he did bring her to the dance and that he had associated with her. That was the second specification of the charges. I asked him if he was going to bring her to the trial and he said certainly not, and he'd kill any one that did. I asked him where she was and he said he didn't know. He hadn't seen her since August when the squadron moved down for the Saint-Mihiel show. When he got back to Nancy in November she was gone, and he couldn't find out what had happened to her.

The judge advocate sent for us before the trial. It was easy to see that he was going to try and make a name for himself. The war had ended without placing his name among the immortals, and he now saw a chance to give the home papers something to say about him before it was too late. We told him that we'd say we saw her at the dance but would swear until hell froze over that we'd never seen her before or since.

The court-martial was just like a big sensational murder trial. Kep pleaded not guilty but had no real defense. He claimed that she was a perfectly proper companion, and the whole case hinged on that. He admitted that he had brought her to the dance and that he'd been seen in public places with her repeatedly. Then the judge advocate submitted a photograph of her, which was identified as the girl in question. Next, he introduced as evidence a French yellow ticket. That made every one gasp. It had a picture on it that was a dead ringer for the one that was identified. I saw the thing myself and it was dated 1916. The name wasn't exactly right but it was close enough. I was looking at Kep when this license was brought out, and he acted as if he'd been slapped in the face. He grabbed that license when it was shown to him, took one look, and wilted. He broke down and actually cried. One of the judges told me later that every one of them was convinced that it was a surprise to him. I know it was.

That was all there was to the trial. The judges had no option—they found him guilty, but gave him such an insignificant sentence that it wasn't even a slap on the wrist. Everybody was very sorry about the whole thing and very much relieved when it was over. No one knew where it was going to end. The failure of the court to sentence Kep was practically an acquittal, but that didn't make any difference—the story was all over the army.

Kep resigned promptly, and his resignation was accepted at once. He joined the Polish Air Service and went up to fight the Bolsheviks.

Now here comes the funny part of the story. Everybody I've ever told it to has laughed at me. But I swear that this is the gospel truth.

I went up with the Army of Occupation for a couple of months and then came back down to the battlefield district with the Graves Identification Service, trying to check up some pilots' graves. One day I stopped for lunch at a little town that had been more or less spared the heavy bombardment and was getting back to normal again. I went to a café for lunch, and who should I see behind the cashier's desk but Germaine! She fell on my neck like I was a long-lost brother. She wanted to know all about Kep. Various rumors had reached her, but she didn't know the whole truth. That afternoon I took her out to a little park, and she made me tell her all the details of the trial. And the poor little kid sure was cut up. She was as bad as Kep was when he saw that license.

Then she told me the real story. That license wasn't hers! It was her sister's. Yes, I know that spoils a good story, and I must have dreamt it or made it up. But that's what she told me, and what's more she proved it to me. She took me to the mayor's office and showed me the birth certificates.

At the beginning of the war the Germans took the town. She was fourteen, her sister seventeen, daughters of a well-to-do shopkeeper. She was too young and escaped, but her sister suffered the usual fate of girls in occupied territory. The Germans fell back after the battle of the Marne, and the French took the town again. She and her sister went to Nancy to live with a cousin. Her cousin wasn't able to support them, so they went to work as waitresses in a café. The sister got sick and couldn't work. She got the con and took to the streets, and did have a license. She died in 1917. Germaine stuck to work and remained more or less of a good girl, though she didn't boast about it particularly.

She was nearly crazy over what she had done to Kep and made me write to him and send him a copy of the birth certificates. I don't know whether he

ever got the letter or not. I never had an answer from him, and he was killed that summer when he pulled the wings off an Albatross.

That's the story, but I don't expect you to believe it.

"Is that all?" I inquired.

"Sure. What more do you want?"

"What happened to Germaine?"

"Can't you use your imagination?"

"Not accurately enough. I want details."

"Well, as the old story goes, I got the job. Is that enough?"

"No; where is she now?"

"Dead!" he told me sorrowfully. "She got the con, too, just like her sister. She died in 1920. Does that satisfy you?"

"No. When did you come home?"

"Say, listen here. Haven't you got enough entertainment for that one drink? Give me that flask and I'll tell you the one about the girl who'd never been in an upper berth before."

ODYSSEY 1918

To Hugh Fontaine

VI: ODYSSEY 1918

One day, not so long ago, I was driving through Asheville in the heart of the Blue Ridge Mountains and I stopped at a signal from a traffic policeman. A diminutive French car drove up and stopped beside me, and I looked down at the smart little roadster and smiled at the saucy tilt of the bonnet. A young man was driving it, and seated beside him, trying to look very serious, was a tiny girl of about three years. She looked up at me and smiled coyly. Then I caught sight of the driver's face. It looked vaguely familiar.

"Hello, you blarsted old blighter," he shouted to me. "Cheerio, and where did that one go to? Come to see me! Come have dinner with me to-night. My name's in the directory——" The sign flashed "go," and he was gone before I could recover from my astonishment.

Bennie Billings! What a flood of memories his face brought to me! It so confused my mind that I very nearly rammed a flivver that shot out in front of me from a side street into Pack Square.

Bennie Billings! Six years since I had seen his face, yet I should have known it as well as my own. We were once comrades-in-arms; we had fought side by side at the Battle of London. We had staunched each other's wounds at the Siege of the Savoy and the Retreat from Murray's. We had shared the same hut, courted the same barmaid, drunk from the same bottle, and lied like gentlemen to each other for our mutual honor. The sound of his voice brought back the smell of powder to my nose and like the old war horse, I was champing at the bit.

Bennie Billings! The ace of pilots and the pilot of aces. We had been separated at the front and never got together again. The Armistice found him down at Toul with an American squadron, and I was still up on the British front. I was lucky and got back in February.

I went on South as soon as I got my discharge, and in April I read in the New York papers that he had landed.

Then I had a letter from him in May:

Dear Old Pin-whiskers:

Last week I got home with my discharge in one hand and the $60.00 from a grateful country in the other.

There isn't a congenial spirit around here, and I am looking forward to going nuts at an early date.

How do you feel about settling down in the old home town? Have you any sort of playmate, either male or female, or a good dog you can take out for a walk and tell him all about it? I think I'll have to buy a pup.

The old wound throbs occasionally, but my heart throbs more.

Have you been around shaking hands with every one in town, telling them that lie about how you are glad to get back to the old town, always with that infernal grin on your face? If I could play poker with that face, my fortune would be made.

What's the answer to it, Bill? Just crawl into your own small individual hole and forget that people are living in an outside world?

Come on out here and if I have a little playmate by that time you can have her, and if not, I'll get you one. The liquid is pretty weak but there's still a little left.

Cheerio,
BENNIE.

It wasn't until winter that I saw him again. I was in New York a couple of weeks on business and was staying at the Club. One night late he came up to my room.

"Hey, wake up and say hello," he shouted as he shook me. I had been asleep for an hour or so. "What sort of an old maids' convention are you attending? This is a new way to go to bed with the chickens. Come on, get up and put your clothes on, and we'll go out on a bender."

He had been drinking but was still fairly sober.

"What's the big idea?" I yawned.

"Just heard you were in town. Saw Jake Stanley at some low dive, and he told me you were here. Came right around to get you. Come on, we'll go out and put our feet in the trough together."

"Nothing doing. I've got to work to-morrow. Gotta sell a lot of surplus tent canvas to a bunch of Jews for embroidery. Need my wits. Don't you use any sleep these days?"

"Not much. This damn insomnia is driving me nutty."

"Well, sit down, and we'll chew the fat a while. You look like you were on the verge of some fatal disease. What have you been doing? Trying to drink yourself to death?"

"No. I find a little of this drug store likker goes a long way. I am a little run down, though."

"Don't you want to stay here with me?"

"No, thanks. I've got a suite over at the Biltmore, and, besides, there's a very charming lady passed out in the car downstairs and there'll be hell to pay when she comes to. I've got to sober her up and get her home. Drop in to-morrow and we'll play pop-goes-the-weasel and give this sad town the once over."

He left me and the next day at noon I went up to the Biltmore and found him in his room. We poured out highballs in memory of old times and began swapping yarns.

"What're you doing in town?" I asked him.

"Oh, just looking about."

"Looking about what?"

"About the town. I came on here with the idea that I might do a little more flying. I may be a rotten business man but I know I can fly. I thought I might be able to get a job piloting the air mail. But they looked me over and turned me down on account of this weak lung. The docs tell me that the best thing I can do is to go somewhere that's high and dry and catch some health. I've got a pulse like a speeded up Vickers gun and I haven't got the wind of a vacuum tube. But I don't know where to go and I don't want to go there alone. Why don't you pull up stakes and come along with me so I won't have to take up with any strange people? I can stand anything but being alone. I get so lonely I nearly go crazy. I ended up last night riding up and down in the elevator, talking to the elevator boy. What about coming with me?"

"Not a chance," I told him. "I've got to do some serious work. My finances are in a spin."

"Well, that's where I shine. You see I went back home and found that the family fortune consisted mostly of a tire factory. It's been doing well lately, and I was supposed to run the damn thing. It was built the year father died and was just getting going good. I tried to run it for a while but, hell, I'd

never make a tire manufacturer! One of the big companies had their eye on the plant and made me a pretty good offer for it. I doubled the offer, and to my great surprise they came across. They are paying me in installments to save income tax. So I've got enough for us both. We can't travel on our own yacht, but at the present rate of exchange you and I couldn't drink our way through half the income in gay Paree. I'll split it with you if you'll come along."

"Thanks, old top, but I can't swing it," I told him sorrowfully. "I couldn't stand the pace to begin with, and I've got my work before me. You'd better settle down in some quiet place and take it easy for a while."

"That's just what I'd like to do if I could find the right place. I'm looking over the time tables and travel catalogues now. I'll go anywhere but I've got to have company. I'm afraid to be alone."

"Come on home with me."

"Thanks. But I'm afraid I'm too restless. I've nearly been crazy the last four months."

The telephone rang and he stopped to answer it. I heard him talking to a girl, apparently the one that was out with him the night before. I gathered that she was coming to have lunch with us.

"By the way, what happened to you in Paris?" I asked him. "I heard some rumor about you licking three M.P.'s. Then I lost track of you. How'd you get home?"

"By devious ways and means," he told me; "and some of 'em wouldn't bear close scrutiny. I didn't hide up any trees or wear any petticoats, but otherwise Bonny Prince Charlie had nothing on me when it came to traveling under difficulties. I walked a little and I rode a little and I swam a little and I flew a little. Did you ever hear of the A. W. O. L. Club at the Savoy in Paris?"

"I think so," I admitted. "Wasn't Jack Walsh one of the charter members?"

"Yeah. I think Jack finally ended up in Palestine bombing Arabs." I poured myself a highball and urged him to tell me the whole story. "Well, I was the club's first president," he went on, "and also its first victim. We were all in Paris and we couldn't get out except via a term in Leavenworth. That sounds funny but it wasn't so comic at the time. You see, I came down from the front two days after the Armistice and I got to Paris on my way south and I couldn't get any further. My old wound got infected and they

tucked me in bed in one of those torture chambers the Red Cross was trying to run. I was really loony then. I'd been through hell up at the front. Our machines weren't worth a damn, and we were shot all to hell every day and Sunday. I thought it was a pretty good war until I got shot down a couple of times and then got hit myself. My nerves were all frazzled out, and then poor old Mac got killed while just he and I were out together. You know how we were—just like Damon and Pythias. I thought the world of him. After he got killed, I went all to pieces. He still comes back and sits on my bed at night and talks to me. He was leading that day and took me way over in Hunland to go down on a two-seater. We got the Hun all right but Mac never came back. Every time I get the D.T.'s I miss him so. Mac sure was a comfort when the top of your head was unhinged. He always knew just what to give me. Mac was a great pilot—something funny must have happened to him. I got separated from him in the clouds and ran into a thundershower and never saw him again. Maybe lightning struck him. Maybe his motor cooked, maybe he ran into some Hun—there were a lot of them about. Poor old Mac—the Red Cross found his grave, but no one has ever found out what happened to him, and I never think to ask him.

"I didn't find out definitely that he was dead until just after the Armistice, in Paris. I nearly went crazy in that hospital. I guess I did, for I tried to jump out of the window the second week. Then they moved another ex-aviator in there with me to keep me company. I wonder if you ever knew him—Bob Fenner? That boy was born crazy. And the war hadn't improved any on nature's gifts. His specialty was shooting balloons and dice. You know a man has to be crazy to go after a balloon on his own hook. This loose screw used to go down and set fire to a balloon and then follow the observer down and shoot up his parachute. He's the boy that shot the twenty thousand francs down at Issoudun. He came out on a natural, went down to Monte Carlo with his winnings, and tried to buy the place. It was cheap in those days. Came back in three weeks stony broke. Always claimed it was worth it.

"Well, Bob was a godsend. We lay there and played blackjack until Christmas. One day I'd have all his money, and the next day he'd have all mine. He was in with a busted ankle and got well first but he wouldn't leave me. My whole system was poisoned and it took a long time to shake it off. We both got discharged together and got orders for Tours. So to Tours we went, after that row you heard about. Bob was awfully mean when he got tanked, and a smart little provost captain tried to get funny. We were off side and I had to lick the captain. Then Bob turned around and gave me a terrible licking. We slid out of Paris in a hurry by the O'Sullivan route.

"There was a nice mess down at Tours. We took one look at that camp and went back into town and took a suite at the Hotel de l'Univers. I was being paged frantically by the adjutant-general all over France, and after I got tipped off to that, we had to lie low. I didn't want to see that captain again. We had about forty francs between us and our daily bill was over a hundred. We didn't dare go near an army paymaster for fear we'd be trailed and sent back to the Bastille.

"We heard what was going on in the S.O.S. All the rest of the gang were doing squads east and squads west at concentration camps until they could get room on a boat, and there wasn't going to be any room for them for three months. So they had to stick around in the mud with regular army majors amusing themselves by court-martialing them every other day. The Air Service was certainly popular then. All you had to do to get arrested was to wear a pair of wings. There were over two thousand pilots in the A.E.F., and only about four hundred got to the front. The others fought the Battle of Paris, and the rest of the army was sore as a boil at them. And they took it out on us. We heard some awful tales from Issoudun and Brest and Havre. One of our best pilots, a man with over ten Huns to his credit, was court-martialed at Issoudun over an incident that grew out of his leaving a coat on his bed in the barracks. Bob took a new pair of boots and my gold cigarette-case and went out to the camp and found a crap game. He came back with two thousand francs and two extra pairs of boots.

"I heard that Sam was over at Issoudun, so I wired him and asked for dope. He wired back to stay clear of Issoudun by all means and to get out of France quick. He said I was being paged over there and things were rotten. Everybody was under arrest.

"The whole bunch had a pretty hard time, so I've heard. All the time we were up on the northern front, we never had an officer under arrest and never even held a summary court for an enlisted man. The only trouble we had in six months was in keeping an old marine from going A.W.O.L. every pay-day from force of habit. We cured him by fining him his pay in advance. After we moved south everybody was under arrest from the C.O. down to the barber, and we had more court records than combat reports. The regulars sure did know all about court procedure. They should have sent them out to put the Germans under arrest to win the war sooner.

"But to get back to Tours and our two thousand francs. We decided that we'd better be starting out for somewhere, as Bob was just in the act of getting himself in trouble with a French colonel's girl. We took a chance and went out to the adjutant's office and asked for orders to a port. We figured

that the further we got into the S.O.S. the better off we'd be. While we were waiting in the outer office, four aces from the American front came in. They had about three Huns apiece and were welcomed as if they were bringing in the Kaiser's body. They had decorations all over them and they were as hot as an electric suit. The general himself came out and received them and asked how they would like to go home. They said they'd like to visit London on the way. The general said all right and told them to go on back to their hotel and he'd bring their orders down to them that night. I had eight or nine Huns and Bob had a few and a couple of balloons, but we'd done our dirty work up on the British front and nobody had ever heard of us or cared about us after they did hear. The only decoration we had was the D.F.C. the British gave us and nobody down there knew what that was. They thought it was a Mexican Border ribbon. You and I both know that decorations are all the bunk, but they sure do help when you want to take a short cut. A little shavetail received us and told us we would have to wait a couple of weeks until orders could come through from Chaumont and then we'd be sent down to Havre or Brest to wait our turn for a couple of months. That didn't suit us at all, for various reasons. We decided that we'd like to see London again ourselves. I'd left a couple of packages over there and a blonde that I was yearning for and I could just save myself the trip back. We thanked the shavetail and went on back to the hotel and paid our bill and threw away all our kit except a suitcase each and a couple of black crosses off a Hannoveranner that I brought down at Cambrai. Then we lit out.

"We didn't have any trouble getting into Paris but we sure met unsurmountable difficulties getting out. We got on a train twice and got chased off both times. Then Bob decided that he wanted to stay in Paris anyway, and I couldn't leave him. That was when the A. W. O. L. Club was organized. There were about a hundred others in the same fix, so we banded together for our mutual protection and swapped orders and identification cards. There was a new rule in force. All American soldiers were forbidden to come to Paris on pain of death; it was so full of the Y.M.C.A. and the Red Cross and the K. of C. and the Marines and the Peace Conference, that there wasn't any room for the A.E.F. There weren't enough women to go around, so they banished the poor benighted fighting men to southern France so they wouldn't interfere. You had to have a pass with your picture on it and had to have it stamped at the Hotel Sainte-Anne with your orders. No orders were good for more than twenty-four hours and they were too busy at the Sainte-Anne to ever try anybody. If you had a bad photograph on your identification card, into the Bastille you went and there you stayed until you escaped. We couldn't get any orders, so we thought up another scheme. I

had a friend at the Crillon; we went down there and got a job on the Peace Commission. That solved the pass question for a while. I don't think we'd have had any trouble if Bob had behaved himself, but that was against his religion.

"He was much infatuated with an Egyptian Princess that he'd met down at Monte Carlo. And she took quite a shine to him. I think her name was Amo-ank-hook. She was Egyptian, all right, and very handsome in a brunette way. Some French general had brought her back from the Nile and taught her to drink bubbly instead of pearl juice. She was a high stepper and, as the general was out at Saloniki for a few days, she entertained us in the meanwhile in the regulation royal style.

"He'd see our uniforms and say 'Cheerio.' "

"One night the three of us were having dinner in one of those little close-fitting cafés where they add the date in with the check, and there were some

French and American officers dining together at the next table. As the wine was flowing freely, we got into conversation with them and some words passed. They all admired Amo extravagantly, but Bob got it into his head that they were kidding him about her complexion. Something was said about the Nile being north of her home. Bob got up and told the entire party that if they'd step outside with him for a few minutes he'd administer a much needed spanking and rub their noses in the ground. I got up and got ready to take my licking, too, but a very nice French officer pushed me back into my seat telling me that he and my friend would retire and settle the matter and that, if I wasn't satisfied, he'd go out with me later. So he and Bob retired. They came back in a few minutes smiling very agreeably and sat down in the best of humors. I knew something was wrong, because Bob loved a fight too much to let anybody argue him out of one.

" 'What happened?' I asked him.

" 'All that bird had to do to lick me was to tell me his name,' said Bob.

" 'Well, what was the magic name?' I inquired.

" 'Carpentier!' says he.

"I don't know whether it was the story of that party or not, but that provost captain found out we were back and we had to leave Paris in a hurry. By that time we knew the ropes fairly well. You remember Armstrong, the wild Australian up at Ayr? We ran into him about that time. Like all the rest of the Australians, he'd decided to see the world for himself, thirty inches at a time, and had been loose for a month. We departed for London together. Bob and I had British trench-coats with no insignia on them and R.F.C. caps and field boots. So once out of Paris we became British officers and let Army do the talking for us. When a British M.P. or R.T.O. would get inquisitive about orders, we'd open up our trench-coats and scream like an eagle, he'd see our uniforms and say 'cheerio,' and we'd say 'chin chin' and climb aboard whatever was handy. We got to London, but the Lord turned His face from us again. I got sick as soon as we got there—picked up the flu. Bob and a house doctor nursed me through it. I was a sick man for a few days and it ended up with pneumonia. But the Lord was peeved and wouldn't take me. I got up and dragged myself around a few days and staged a pretty fair comeback. The flu didn't get me, but it took my blonde. She certainly was a beauty. You remember her, don't you? We were just about to start our reunion when we both went down.

"We were more or less out on a limb, so I looked up Jim who had transferred from the air service to the judge advocate's office after his crash.

Jim thought he could fix us up and took me to see the provost marshal of London. His assistants wanted to go home at once and he was looking for some officers who would be willing to stay over and see it through. Jim told him that I would fill the bill as I knew every dive in London and had a latchkey to the side entrances. He told me to see him the next morning and he'd fix it up with us if Bob could qualify.

"I brought Bob to see him the next morning but not for the aforementioned purpose. That night Bob ran into some old friends down at the Savoy and got well illuminated. I couldn't do anything with him at all. He left me and went down to Murray's and got into some arguments with Jack May. Just about that time an assistant provost marshal happened along and tried to quiet him down. Bob crowned him casually and strolled on out. The A.P.M. followed him back to the hotel where I was breathing hard, to arrest him. But it wasn't so easily done as that. Bob was all for killing him, but I persuaded him to let himself be placed under arrest quietly. Then out of gratitude, the captain asked for my orders and when I couldn't find them no matter how hard I looked, he put me under arrest, too, and told me to bring Bob along and join him the next morning at headquarters.

"So we called on the provost marshal but not about getting a job. The P.M. was so shocked at our delinquencies and his assistant's black eye, that he sent us to the chief-of-staff at once. He was a colonel; he took one squint at me and I could see the gates of Leavenworth opening. He was that major that trailed us all over London in the spring of '18. You remember him, don't you? Big fellow with a disappointed face. He had me arrested once at a dance for wearing slacks. He had a fine time bawling us out, and we had no alibi. We had no orders and our uniforms were about as non-regulation as you could get. We had fur collars and bellows pockets and Royal Flying Corps wings and caps. Bob was so hung over that all he could do was to stammer. So the colonel ordered him out and detained me for further conversation. He asked me if I had anything to say before he sent for the judge advocate to put the skids under us. I thought fast. Then I asked him if he heard Bob stutter. He said that he had noted the thick tongue. I told him that he had been doing that ever since he got hit on the head in a crash, that he was nutty, and I was trying to get him home quietly. I told him that whenever he got violent he began to stutter. The colonel snorted. He said he'd heard that alibi ever since he was a corporal. But that colonel was a good sport and said he'd give us a chance by having us examined right then. He ordered us taken to a doctor, and I slipped away to see Jim. Jim knew all about it as he had been selected already to prosecute at the trial. He was so sure that we were cooked that he'd ordered flowers.

"I went back and joined Bob. I found him up in the doctor's private office; they were sitting back with their feet on the table drinking the medicinal whisky and swapping funny stories. They had roomed together at some college before the war when Bob was working his way through it by dancing in a cabaret at night! The doctor wrote out a report that we were both suffering from neurasthenia and sent for an ambulance to take us out to the Lancaster Gate Hospital.

"We stayed there in hospital two days, and then I saw that the sooner we got the uniform off, the better it would be for all concerned. We said good-by to London and toured on to Liverpool. There were only a couple of thousand casuals there ahead of us, so it looked as if we were going to spend the spring and summer at the Midland Adelphi. It was a nice place, but Bob took up with a little blonde who thought aviators were just grand and wanted one for a husband. Bob was flattered and not a bit unwilling. About that time our friend, General Eugene, joined us. He and Bob had met down at Monte Carlo and were rivals for the favor of Amo. And they had some other strong bond of sympathy between them. I think the general was on the wrong end of a fight in Paris one night and was about to get trimmed when Bob charged the whole gang and rescued him. He was a stout lad, that general. No, he wasn't one of the S.O.S. *embusqués*. This was a real fighting man. He'd gone over with the Canadians in 1914 and had been at the front ever since. He transferred to the American army at the front and ended up as a brigadier. He was a real soldier, all right. He was the first man to stage a trench raid and he got a lot of barnacles for doing it. He ought to have been shot instead—he and the mad major who invented ground strafing.

"I happened to discover that the general was the ranking officer at Liverpool. The rest was easy. We went down and took command of the good ship *Celtic* and moved into the best suite—a sitting-room and two bedrooms, connected by a private bath. We came home in style. I became adjutant, and Bob became supply officer and confiscated all the liquor on board. I'll say we came back in style! We had ten days of blackjack and no arguments. We didn't get into any trouble because we had our meals served in our room and didn't go out much. I got sick again.

"When we got to New York, we had a private tug to meet us in the harbor and the next day we were out of the army. At Mineola I got into a row with a major who was rating me for future reference. He was trying to find out in a few minutes just how much good I'd be to the country in the next war. I wouldn't answer any of his fool questions and asked him to give me the lowest rating he had and let me go. He asked me what my decoration

was, and I told him it was none of his business. He got mad and told me he was tired of men who came back with the idea they ought to have the world handed them on a silver tray just because they'd been sent up to the front for a few days. I told him that all I thought I ought to have was a discharge and, if he didn't hurry up and sign it, I wouldn't even get an honorable one. He asked me if I'd take a reserve commission. I told him I'd rather take poison. Oh, we had a nice little party. They certainly did treat the returned heroes rough out there. But I did find out why they wanted me so badly in France. They wanted to give me the D.S.C.! Can you beat that? They finally mailed it to my uncle. I think he still has it."

"What became of Bob?" I asked.

"The last I heard of him he was in jail in St. Louis for hitting the referee over the head with a polo mallet."

We talked on at random until the telephone rang and announced our luncheon guest. She came up in a moment. She was very pretty, startlingly so. And particularly well-groomed. But I couldn't make her out. She was young, very young, but there was an undue sparkle about her eyes, a curl to the lips, and something about her that didn't look right to me.

She nodded to me and threw her gloves on the table.

"You said you would call me up," she said to Bennie complainingly.

"I'm surprised you remembered," he said, smiling.

She walked around the table and poured out a generous drink from the bottle of whisky.

"Don't drink that!" he snapped at her. "It's time you were learning some sense. Put it down!"

She raised the glass to her lips with a contemptuous smile. "And why, my lord?" she mocked.

A perfectly blank look came over his face as he picked up a book from the table. He was looking far beyond her as the glass was knocked out of her hand and spattered its contents on the table and floor. Her eyes snapped fire and she seized the bottle and threw it at his head. He ducked and smiled absently as it crashed against the door. His smile was enough to enrage any one; she sprang at him and tried to claw his face with her nails. He shook her quite violently until her face went white and she fainted. He laid her down on the couch carelessly. Then he turned to me and his face relaxed.

"Nice quiet girl," he remarked.

"I should say so," was all I could say. "Since when have you been understudying lion-taming?"

"Oh, one has to be amused. And she's not as bad as she seems. Just a little impulsive."

"She looks like trouble in capital letters to me," I remarked.

"Oh, no. You've got her all wrong. She's really a very nice girl."

"You've got funny ideas about nice girls, then."

"Say, haven't you been back long enough to find out that fashions in women have changed since you and I were young, Maggie? It's no longer fashionable for young ladies to be nice. They've all got tougher than a gunner-sergeant. They're as hard-boiled as an open-faced shirt. It's the style. *C'est la guerre!* You and I are back-numbers. We still try to be polite to a lady. But that's all wrong now. Our youth is flinging itself about like a whirling dervish. That's the way to put on dog nowadays. They like to have their iniquity taken seriously, which is a lot more than it deserves. For they are rotten sports, not like the ones abroad at all. They'd pin a shotgun wedding on you without a moment's hesitation. Rum lot, all of them."

"For a tire manufacturer, you seem to have made a lot of observations," I remarked. "I've noticed the symptoms you speak of, though. But not so violently. I've been down South where they haven't got so emancipated yet. But I do remember insulting a girl back in 1916 by offering her a drink and I saw the same girl carried out of the country club not a month ago. Before the war her whole family would have been kicked out of the club, now they only laugh at such things. Our girls certainly aren't the shy young nymphs they used to be."

"No, they believe in getting their man dead or alive. That bit of fluff over there is a nice girl when she hasn't got the Bustanoby complex. Her family are quite raspasass and live in a big château up the avenue. They think that little daughter is a saint on roller skates. And little daughter lives in fear and trembling that some one will mistake her for a lady. She needs the guiding hand applied properly. Do you remember Big Walton at Oxford? Well, she's his cousin. Couldn't imagine anybody kin to him being so good-looking, could you? And she can dance like a blimp in the breeze. But there are times when she certainly needs a spanking."

She stirred on the couch now and got up.

"Well, let's see you do it!" she challenged. "You certainly were gentle. I guess I was a bit hasty, though I'm frightfully hung over; fix me a bit of a

pick-me-up, will you?"

"You've had enough," he told her, "and I told you that you had to behave if you were going out with me. You've shocked my friend here so badly that he'll never recover."

"Not if he's the one you've been telling me about. Isn't he the one that passed out at the funeral?"

"Yes," he said, "but he's not accustomed to seeing nice girls forget their manners."

"You give me a pain," she told him. "That's what he gets for reading *Godey's Lady's Book*. The wild women have vamped all the men, and we've got to steal their stuff to make you feel at home when you get back. If we girls tried to uphold our dignity now, you'd all be in jail. You like pepper but don't want to sneeze."

"Have it your own way," he told her, "but you've either got to learn to drink decently or get another spreeing partner. I won't be responsible for you any more. Last night, I either had to let you go on lapping up stingahs or make a scene before your friends. So I let you go ahead and then got you out. Well, you ought to know now that stingahs were not made to wean little girls. And just because the country is dry, don't think that you've got to do all your drinking right away. There'll be plenty left for your old age. Here's a small snifter. Come on, I'll buy you a lunch and take you to a matinée."

We went downstairs for lunch and ended up by having a very pleasant day. What Bennie had told me about her was more or less true. She really was a very sweet girl when she wasn't being professional, and was excellent company. She and Bennie had met only several days before and were just starting out to paint the town a brilliant scarlet. It looked to me as if it was going to be a very thorough job.

I had to go on home, so that was the last I had seen or heard of him.

Now, over six years later, we had met by accident in a place strange to us both. I wanted to see him again very much and had no plans for the evening, so when I reached my hotel later I called up and left word that I would accept his invitation to dinner.

He had a cottage several miles out of town on the side of a mountain, and I arrived late in the afternoon. He seemed very glad to see me. He was looking much older, his eyes were sunk deep into his head and his cheeks

were hollow. He didn't look very healthy. We went into the house and had a highball for the sake of old times. A nurse brought the little girl I had seen in the car to say good night. She was a pretty, chubby little thing and she kissed him sweetly and curtsied to me. As she went out with the nurse, I asked, "Is she yours?"

"Yes," he said after a moment's reflection, "she's mine. I suppose I should have written you about it but I didn't feel like it. However, I'll tell you about it now to make up for it, if you like. It's a long time since I've really talked to any one. I may bore you, but it will do me good. Fill up your glass whenever you're ready.

"After you left me in New York the party raged on for a couple of months. Delphine and I were just like a couple of sardines that had jumped into the same can. She was twenty-one or -two and had plenty of rope. You've seen these spoiled belles that are overripe for any sort of devilment! Well, she was one of 'em. I could find the devilment, and she would shake it up. We raged all over the countryside for the next two months. I had a young bar fitted up in the car and wherever there was hell hopping, there you'd find us in the thick of it with a corkscrew. We danced twenty miles a day, and the White Rock Company declared an extra dividend. Sometimes we took along our own orchestra as well as our own bar. We took in all the sporting events and played a few week-end stands at house-parties. Then we proceeded to fall in love with each other, and I saw it was time for me to be moving on. I had no intention of settling down anywhere and becoming a family man, and she knew it as well as anybody. The wanderlust was in my blood—I was free, white, and twenty-one, as you say, and I wasn't going to fasten up my own harness. She was convinced on that point but that didn't simplify matters. So I decided I'd go back abroad before I got poisoned or married.

"I tried to get her to go abroad with me. At first she said she would, and I made all the necessary arrangements. Then she said she wouldn't unless I'd marry her first. She made no claims to being orthodox but she said if I knocked off her halo, I'd have to give her a wedding ring in place of it. I balked at that. I didn't want to go off and leave her, but I didn't like to have this marry-me business sprung on me at the last minute. I was fed up on bum sports. I told her if she didn't love me enough to come along as is, she couldn't qualify as a traveling companion. She said if I didn't love her enough to marry her, she didn't want to go along. Then she tried to trick me into marrying her, and I got mad. I didn't realize that she did it because she loved me so much. All I saw was the rotten sportsmanship.

"So I sailed alone. I was mad but, oh, Lord, how I did hate to say good-by to her. It was just like parting with my right arm.

"I found a congenial crowd on the boat and we certainly had a good party going over. It's surprising what good likker will do for your constitution. I landed in London feeling like the Prince of Pilsener. It's this bad stuff that makes your teeth fall out.

"The old crowd was still in London just as we left them. There was no change except a few vacant seats due to the flu, broken spars, returned husbands, and bootleg dope. Everybody asked about you. I saw your redhead once, but she wasn't very complimentary. I was sort of lonely at first—being without my blonde and Delphine too, but I soon took up with a wild crew and tried to drown their memories in drink.

"In spite of the continuous party I couldn't get Delphine off my mind. She worried me all the time and made me drink a lot more than I should have. She absolutely spoiled my party. Finally, in desperation, I cabled for her. She answered that she would come only on her conditions. I didn't even acknowledge it.

"I went up to Scotland and spent a month at Ayr. The place was exactly the same as we left it except that the airdrome is back as a race course and the grandstand is no longer an engine shed. The barmaid at the Dalblair was married, and the one at the Station Hotel had left. You remember her, don't you? I've forgotten her name, but we used to call her Bubbles. She was the one that wouldn't give you another drink after your eyes got out of focus. She used to make me read a line of the 'Dora' backwards like an oculist does. Every night I used to help her close up at nine and then take her to a movie. And she always used to cry when the boys stopped in for a farewell drink before catching the eight-fifty for London and the front. She and I were great friends back in '18, and I found out that she was still living in Ayr. I got her to take her old job back temporarily and it was just like the good old days for a while. Every morning I would be waiting for her to open up and then I would ask her what I had better have. She would look me over carefully and tell me that my eyes were red and I'd better try a Suissess first. Or she'd say that my hand was shaking too much and I'd better have a Major Bailey to steady it. I'd pretend that I was waiting on the crowd to come back from the field for lunch. You remember how we all used to stop in there every noon. I'd order drinks for you and Mac and Cush and Andy and Cal and Hash. Bubbles would insist that I had ordered the wrong things and tell me exactly what you really liked. I enjoyed myself up there though I was as crazy as a cuckoo clock on daylight-saving time. The last thing I saw

of Ayr in 1918 was Bubbles on the platform crying, and that was the last thing I saw in 1921. I went on up to the North of Scotland for a while and came back down to London much improved. I ran into some Australians and had a very pleasant spring and went over to Paris with them.

"But Paris was too much for me. After about three weeks I began slipping and one day I was sitting in front of the Café de la Paix and the lights went out. When they came on again I was in a hospital breathing hard. I had empyema, and the doctors seemed to think I was done for as my lungs were no good. They wanted to notify my family and wouldn't believe me when I told them I didn't have any. They insisted on cabling somebody that I was dying, so in a moment of semi-delirium, I gave them Delphine's name and address and told them to be damned.

"When the curtain went up on the next act, there sat Delphine beside me holding my hand. I couldn't believe it was really her at first and she said I cussed at her something terrible. I blamed Mac for bringing her. When I got better I tried to get her to go on back home, but she wouldn't do it. She said she was never going to leave me again. It wasn't her fault when she did.

"The doctors told me that I would have to go up to some place in the Alps and sit out in the snow and sunshine and nothing else. So we took off for Switzerland. We rented a little chalet on the top of a medium-sized Alp and proceeded to become the two happiest people in the world. For nearly four years we lived there and I got sane in mind and strong in body. As soon as I got my strength back, we began taking week-end trips all over Switzerland to amuse ourselves. Nothing could have been more ideal. Her father got wind of it and oiled up the family shotgun and came over after us. He liked living with us so much that he stayed three months, and we had a hard time sending him back home then. We'd already gotten married, but we had really forgotten about it. We just happened to be in a cathedral on a beautiful day and wanted to do something to celebrate it. I suppose it was legal, though we didn't get a receipt for the money I gave the old fellow for his Latin verse.

"After little Delphine was born, we were even happier than before. I calmed down and began to enjoy living again.

"But such things are too perfect to last. Six months ago when we were out skiing, Delphine, who was a remarkable jumper, took a long fall and injured her spine. She died three days later.

"I packed up and brought little Delphine on back. I had managed to pick up T.B. during my struggles and had to come up here to live. The doctors

say that I may be able to live a couple of years, but they doubt it. Little Delphine and I are making the most of life while we can and then her grandfather is going to take her and make a great lady of her.

"I know you'll be surprised to hear it, but I've turned spiritualist. Yep, I get all the manifestations and I'm not a bit sensitive about it. Mac comes to see me often and sits on the bed beside me and tells me what's going on. Delphine is getting impatient waiting on me and has taught Mac how to play bridge. Billy is there, too, and Mac says he has to watch his step because she gets jealous of Delphine. Kindley and Clay are still arguing over that Sunken Canal fight and they've found a Hun who was in the scrap and led the top flight that leapt on us.

"Would you like me to give Mac any messages for you? He'll come to see me soon and I'll be glad to. But I seem to remember that you were a hard-boiled realist. Do you think I'm very silly to be telling you all this?"

"No," I assured him, "I don't think you're silly. I would have five years ago, but we live and learn. They had to take me to pieces and put me together again a couple of years ago, and I spent a couple of days with Mac myself. You remember how Hash used to promise that he'd fix me up some day if he didn't get bumped off? Well, he came back from a German prison camp and finished his medical course and did the job for me. Took out my stomach. A nice example of fancy hemstitching!"

"Good old Hash. I wish he was a lung specialist. We'll have to have a drink to him. Here's dinner ready. Better have another highball as I haven't any cocktails. I can't abide this synthetic gin and, besides, I'm very moderate now."

And that's how I dined with the ghost of Bennie Billings. As we sat on the veranda eating, and looking far below at the lights of Asheville in the dusk, I felt that here was that Greek country, Purgatory, where the fallen warrior, with his sword sheathed, awaited his fate. Surely Mac steered him safely on.

CAVEAT EMPTOR

To Larry Callahan

VII: CAVEAT EMPTOR

George Tilly and I were sitting in a night club, formerly known as a cabaret, getting a bite to eat after a belated party. The hour was late, but we were not ready for bed as we had been thoroughly bored all the evening and were just now waking up. I sat idly watching the whirling dancers when suddenly I caught a glimpse of something which excited my interest. Perhaps it was her face, perhaps it was her expression, but I found my eyes following one girl about the floor. She was a pretty flaxen-haired child and as she danced she tilted her head back and looked up at her partner as only a child can. Her partner was a callow youth, probably a junior up for the week-end from some academic country club nearby, and every time she would smile up at him and snuggle a little closer, he would get his feet tangled up. But she was a beautiful dancer, and his worst tripping failed to dislodge her from his shirt front or dim her trusting little smile. Never have I seen such a beautiful dancer! As I watched them, I thought first of going over and advising him to take her out of such a place and then I thought I would like to dance with her myself. I called George's attention to her. He scowled in her direction for a few minutes.

"What about her?" he asked.

"Got no business in a place like this," I said. "That boy ought not to have brought her. Wonder where her mother thinks she is at this hour."

"Don't fool yourself," George remarked with a shrug. "I'll bet he's the one that needs his mother. You never can tell about that kind. Fool you to death. That baby stare is nothing but a union card."

"You think she may not be what she seems?"

"It's more than likely. You can't always sometimes tell. Better men than you have been fooled. I remember a dead ringer for that girl in London. My eyes aren't what they used to be or I'd say it was the same one. Used to be able to tell the color of a Hun's eyes at a hundred yards, now I can hardly read the street signs. She was much prettier than this girl, though. And, oh, boy, how she knew her gold digging! Tim White looked into her big blue eyes just once and was ready for the fool killer. He was overripe anyway."

"What happened?" I asked.

"It's a long story. When I get to talking about London, I can ramble on all night. London is the Suwanee River to me."

"Well, I'd just as soon listen. I don't feel like going to bed for hours. Come on, tell me about it."

And this is the story as George told it to me.

In the first place, we had a house. That was enough to get us all into trouble. We came down to London in March of ’18—Tim White, Ham Hampton, and myself. We had just finished our training with the Royal Flying Corps and were on our way out to the front. We were in the American army, but had come over in September and been attached to the Royal Flying Corps for the full course of training. There were a hundred and fifty in that outfit, and we were at the ground school at Oxford, the machine-gun school at Grantham, and with several flying squadrons. The School of Aerial Fighting at Ayr, up in Scotland, was the last step, and we had just been given our commissions. We’d been with the R.F.C. so long that we were a part of it, and no one could tell us from Colonials unless they looked at our uniforms—and we sometimes wore regular British tunics. We still got our pay from the American army, but that was all. Our orders all came from the British.

We’d been together for so long that we hated to get split up. We thought we had it arranged to go out to the front together, but that plan fell through. We had an Australian captain for an instructor at London Colney, about twenty miles from town, and we had played around the fleshpots with him in January and February. He had been out at the front the summer before with the greatest of British pilots, who was now back organizing a picked squadron to take out to the front again. They let the major pick his own men, and he took this captain as a flight commander. That was in February, and we had just finished our five hours on service machines. The captain apprised the major of our prowess and wanted us in his flight. The major went to the American headquarters and asked for us, but the proposition was turned down. G.H.Q. hadn’t quite decided at that time what to do with us and was planning to send us out to the front according to a plan devised by some erudite colonel in Texas. So the captain went down to Hounslow, and we went on up to Scotland to complete the regular course.

About that time the Hun pushed for Amiens, and the R.F.C. was well shot up. The reserve pilots were quickly exhausted, and then they asked for us. You see the British, in training a hundred and fifty of us, had sort of got behind with their own training. That was about the time Pershing agreed to turn over our men to the Allies, so it was decided that we were to go on over as regular British pilots and fight with R.F.C. squadrons.

We saw the captain and the major as soon as we got to London. They were ready to go out but had lost some of their pilots. Three of them had been killed on the airdrome, flying Dolphins, among them being a full-blooded Sioux Chief and an East Indian Prince; and five had been taken away and sent on over to plug the holes made by the assaulting Hun. Again Headquarters said nothing doing.

So we reported to the Yard the next morning. A captain was assigning pilots to different services. Some were to go on out to the Pool in France and some were to ferry machines over. When he came to our names, he looked up a special note and told us that he was sorry, but we were not sufficiently skilled in the art of aerial maneuver to go out and do battle with the Hun and we'd have to have further training. We protested violently and swore by our wings and the forty holy majors that we could shoot down Huns with the best they had. I explained my Spad crash at Ayr, and Tim had a good alibi for the Avro he crashed at Northolt. I pointed out that he had just sent a man to France that I had taught to fly. But it didn't get us anything, and we were sent over to the training brigade for reassignment. We still protested but were given orders to report at Hounslow. That seemed funny, and we didn't get the straight of it until we got there. The major had simply had a friend in the office mark our reports unsatisfactory and arranged for us to be sent to his squadron for further training. The rest was easy. We were never again passed as qualified pilots and had been out at the front for five months before Headquarters inquired for us. By that time, one was dead—killed in an aerial duel high above Armentières—one was in hospital nearly blinded, and the third was leading a flight of his own.

The major told us to keep out of sight until the squadron was mobilized again. That suited us very well, so we went back to town. The subway came right to the gates of the airdrome.

Rumor around the Savoy bar had it that we were chosen for this signal honor because of our outstanding ability as pilots, but modesty compels me to admit that such was not the case. The captain had the greatest mistrust of our flying, mine in particular. I hung him upside down in a loop one day when neither one of us had on a safety belt, and he never forgave me. Here were we, hanging by our toes and finger-nails, and he was cussing a blue streak at me through the speaking tube. His cushion slipped forward and jammed the stick and we did a regular falling-leaf upside down. The old Avro finally flopped over, and after that I was solo. No, it wasn't our gentle touch on the controls that got us into that select company of ruffians; it was something more important than that to the flying corps. Tim was one of the

greatest extemporaneous gymnasts that ever insulted the ivory keys outside of a freak museum; he could play anything or nothing with a rhythm that would bring tears to the eyes of its original composer. I had learned from that greatest of all teachers, Mother Necessity, to concoct our favorite and most vital beverages from the scanty ingredients that I could secure in England, and the fruits of my efforts had fallen neither upon barren ground nor dry palates. I could make an excellent julep from a little spearmint or some fresh fruit, and cognac; with condensed milk, saccharine tablets, eggs, and rum, I could mix an eggnog that would have taken a prize at the Likker Valley Club. Ham was a born entertainer; the kind you meet once in a lifetime. He could entertain without organizing and he had the knack of getting together the queerest assortments of people and making them all have a good time. He was a regular Pied Piper when it came to gathering a crowd and he was the greatest smasher of dignity outside of Russia. He kept everybody laughing and he was a catalytic agent to any gathering he honored or collected. The women ate out of his hand, and he never denied them an opportunity.

That was why the major and the captain wanted us to go out with them.

Tim and I had a suite at the Savoy Court, and Ham had a temporary apartment just off Piccadilly Circus. That night there were a dozen people, more or less, up in our suite after dinner and we were wondering what we could do to kill a little time without jeopardizing the family fortune. Some one suggested that we take a furnished house and give a house-party as there was no reason for pouring gold into the coffers of the Savoy when we could have a house for less than the price of a suite. We thought the idea was fine and asked where such a house might be procured. A girl named Cora spoke up and said that Lord Aluminum was going out to his country place and we could get his house reasonably. She offered to arrange it for us and did so the next day. So we moved into a four-story house in Berkeley Square, the most fashionable district in London, and found ourselves in possession of an establishment complete with two servants and a telephone.

The tidings spread like wildfire, and the crowd moved in with us. To appreciate that crowd, you'd have to know London in 1918. London was the capital of the world then. Paris was all war—a military headquarters and a military sideshow. New York was all business, hysteria, and righteousness. But London—London was its old self with its pulse quickened by the youth of the allied world that poured into it and through it. You could stand on the corner at Trafalgar Square in those days and see every one you had ever

known. It was still a city, though, and not a camp; there were uniforms and martial accents, but there was no hostile army at its gates.

There was a war on, yes, but London had seen wars before, expected to see more, and refused to be stampeded by it, though it was forced to bow its head in sorrow and live in misery. Food was scarce, sugar and meat were possible only in small quantities with ration cards; the wise virgins were denounced for hoarding, and their oil was confiscated. Gasoline was forbidden; the buses ran on coal gas carried in huge balloons on their tops; a few taxis existed on a slender allowance of petrol by picking their fares carefully, and private cars were abandoned or commandeered by the army. Air raids were frequent and annoying and kept the city in gloomy darkness. The whole country was organized for war, but the individual was still free. They were all in the military service, but the military service was not in them. An Englishman after four years in the trenches was not as seriously military as an American trying on his first uniform.

London was a huge melting-pot for the troops of all the Allies who sojourned for a few days within its hospitable portals before tackling their final grim task. The town was always full of officers, some back on leave, some on the way over, and some going home, broken in body, but gay in spirit.

But to understand wartime London, you must understand its women. They flitted in and out of the house, sometimes without our even meeting them—friends of friends or, simply and frankly, strangers looking for a bright light in a foggy town whose hospitality ceased by law at ten o'clock sharp. I doubt if such women ever gathered in any other town in the history of the world. For the most part they were easy of approach, but they were ladies, nevertheless. They didn't mind dining with an officer as long as he was introduced as a gentleman and behaved as such. They had various and sundry means of support. Some of them were in London doing war work, some were on the stage, some had money from their families or from men at the front, and some had no visible means of support at all. I know of two who were in the secret service, and one was so prosperous that she reckoned her pearls by the yard. I presume that most of them had had affairs; some had been married or were married at the time, but I am quite sure that none of them could have been bought. If some dashing young officer took their fancy and wanted their company in his suite at the Ritz—perhaps, yes, but it was nobody's business but their own and nobody need presume on his knowledge to suggest likewise. Oh, no, I don't believe in Santa Claus, but I had many opportunities to observe these girls and with a few exceptions

they behaved themselves as ladies should—and better than many do. Of course, there were the inevitable women of the streets. London was full of them, but they didn't have the entrée into this exclusive society I'm talking about. And believe me, this crowd was exclusive. They wouldn't be seen on the same side of the street with any of the women that Mr. Bok met on his trip abroad. They may have had different standards from the débutantes of Newport, but they were just as particular about them. These were the women you met at the best hotels and the night clubs and at the dances at the Grafton Galleries, the Élysée Garden, and the Albert Rooms. Perhaps the whole crowd numbered less than a hundred. They were the girls that the American officers met and liked—some even loved them. We had been in England long enough to know our way around even better than the Colonials and we chose these girls in preference to all others. For we were full of life then, of the life that we were leaving every day, and we wanted the companionship and love of women—not necessarily our own kind of women, preferably not, but ladies if possible. We had been raised as gentlemen, and street women didn't interest us. Twenty of our crowd had been killed already and more were going West every day at the front. Also remember that this was in the day before the great emancipation and we were fascinated by women who could meet us on an equal footing and send back as good as they received. We were all the flotsam and jetsam of a mighty struggle that had uprooted us and faced us with Eternity. Death laughs at all conventions. So we really preferred these women, for we were adventurers, flirting with death by day and vaguely restless for adventure by night. Small wonder that aviators wanted women with spirit!

"They brought their girls with them."

So when the rest of the boys came down to London and heard about our house, they all came around after the public places closed and brought their girls with them. Sometimes the girls brought them after they learned the way.

And the women liked the Americans, too. It's a notorious fact that we treat our women better than any other race does. They are all known to be spoiled. That's one more reason why the American officers were so infatuated with the women abroad. They were so appreciative. And then, too, we had no home ties nearby, no axes to grind, and asked little in return for our hospitality. It was a bargain easily struck.

Well, that was the crowd that gathered at the house every night, and a good time was had by all. We were pilots by day and went out to Hounslow conscientiously when the weather was good, which was not often, and took up a Dolphin to keep our hands in. By night we were Caliphs and entertained royally. Then there was a change.

Tim came in one night just as Ham and I were getting into bed. He was all lit up but it wasn't from likker. He had been out all evening and he wanted to talk, so we had to let him.

"Let me tell you birds something," he started in, perching on the bed, "I just met a girl to-night that knocked me all the way home and back. My God, she is a beauty! I never laid my eyes on anything like her before. She was with a crowd down at the Savoy. Allen, who had charge of Christ Church at Oxford, was at the table and invited me over. So I left Nigger and Mac and joined them. Then we went up to some Canadian colonel's suite after dinner. By that time I was in a flat spin. She looks like a combination of Marguerite Clark and Mary Pickford, but better than both of them and she acts like Madge Kennedy—so cute that you want to pick her up and put her in your pocket and take her home with you. She ought to live in a doll house. She's been on the stage and is waiting now for 'Very Good Eddie' to open up. I've got a date with her to-morrow."

"Has she a friend?" asked Ham, as was the custom. "They always hunt in pairs."

"Say, she isn't that sort. Anyway, she was alone to-night."

"All right," I said, "you can find out to-morrow. We want some sleep. Get out of here. Did you get her glove to put under your pillow?" He made a pass at me, then left us to our slumbers.

The next night Ham and I dined with a couple of officers of the Canadian staff and came in early and were sitting around the fire when he came in with a crowd. There was an R.F.C. instructor from Ayr and three Americans: Tommy Herbert, Paul Winslow, and Bob Kelly, and three girls. I saw right away what Tim was talking about the night before. And she was a beauty, too. Never have I seen such a perfect type of clinging vine, nor as pretty a one—not even that girl out there to-night, though my eyes are not keen like they were then. She was very young and very sweet. She used no make-up and her pretty blonde bobbed hair seemed scarcely to have been cut, so evenly did her curls cling about her temples.

Tim brought her up to the living-room, and I could see that he was down out of control. He waited on her as tenderly as if she were an invalid, as she sat by the fire and sipped her port daintily. Wherever she went, he carried her and she was a very fetching little armful. Ham and I paid our respects to her but we weren't received too cordially. Her eyes were all for Tim. She spoke with a slight lisp and said very little. But why did she need a tongue when she had such big brown eyes?

Tim showed a marked change the next few days. His flying was very erratic and he turned an S.E. over on its back for no reason at all except that he didn't have his mind on his flying. It was back in London with the girl. He was at her feet constantly. He cabled home for two hundred pounds and spent it on her at once. He bought her orchids and strawberries and a fur coat, and he paid the rent and the instalments on her furniture. Then he cabled for five hundred more. He took her to dinner every night, and wherever there was music for dancing, there they could be found till the last note.

One night Cora came around to the house with some friends. I was over in one corner with a bottle of port, but otherwise alone. She came over and joined me to libel the other visitors. She and I had a habit of retiring to the sidelines and swapping nasty cracks about the rest of the gathering.

"Your blue-eyed boy friend seems to be in a bad way," she remarked, after a few references to the ancestors of some of the newcomers. She always considered all our other friends blackmailers, dope fiends, gold diggers, and octogenarians, but was seldom specific in her charges. "Can't you pry him loose from that brainless wonder? Thank God, alcohol is your weakness! Most of you Americans come to London and meet a lady with a formal declaration of love in one hand and the keys to the room in the other."

"I've noticed you girls shy away from her," I said.

"Did it ever occur to you that there was a reason?"

"Professional jealousy! She looks just like all you old hags want to appear and she's got Tim where all of you would like to have some poor devil. I don't see what business it is of mine to pry him loose. He's enjoying it, and I can't see any harm done. He's free, white, and twenty-one."

"All right," said Cora, "but don't ever say I didn't warn you."

"Warn me about what?"

"About getting Tim loose."

“Well, what about her? I’m suffocated with smoke; show me the fire. I’ve been hearing rumblings about her; Tim swears she’s straight.”

“That’s what every man says about a girl that holds him off. How old did she tell him she was?”

“Eighteen. Why?”

“My Gawd!” says Cora. “The nerve of it! I’m going to claim I’m Gaby from now on. Well, listen to me but keep it to yourself. In 1915, when the Duke of —— was killed, she was thrown out in the street. I felt sorry for her and took her in with me until she could get off her back and on to her feet again. And how does she repay me? Well, I won’t tell you—you think I’m such a cat. But you saw that dirty look she gave me when I came in, didn’t you? She had reason to, for she knows what I’ve got on her. Oh, yes, I was Lady Bountiful once. Yes, indeed! I used to rescue the perishing. I could afford to, then. I didn’t always have to wear the same furs all season. In 1914 I lived at the Plaza and had a box at the Metropolitan. But times have changed. Heigh-ho! Not one pigeon-blood have I left and I scarcely know where my next string of pearls is coming from!”

“Santa Claus will bring you one.”

“Well, don’t choke the neck off that port bottle, you pin-whiskered piccolo player, and go get me a glass.” I brought the glass and shared the port with her. “Take a tip from me,” she went on, “and steer Tim away from that brainless wonder. She’s not your kind. She cheats.”

“Tim swears she’s a good girl; says he’s convinced of her essential purity, whatever that is. I’ve been kidding him about it. Look at them dancing together now. She certainly is a beautiful dancer. Damn if they don’t dance together twelve hours a day. If they didn’t like to dance so much, I wouldn’t believe Tim’s story about their innocent parties. We don’t see him often now.”

“All right. Call me a cat if you want to, but remember what I said. I know it won’t make any of you cry, but if you have her around much, you are going to lose the companionship of us girls in spite of the fact that we love your likker and you feed us well. But we have our reputations to consider.”

“Do you mean to tell me that that sweet little thing over there can affect the reputations of this unholy crew that you flay nightly with that flaming tongue of yours?”

"*Caveat emptor*," murmured Cora. "Go get another bottle of port, like a good boy; it'll make me fat, but what's a figure between friends anyway?"

I knew Cora would never slander any one without reason, so I sounded out Tim the next morning on the way out to Hounslow on the tube.

"You're getting quite daft about your brainless wonder, aren't you?" I began.

"I suppose so," he said non-committally, "but she's not as brainless as you think. She's at least got sense enough to keep her mouth shut when she's got nothing to say. She's a sweet child, isn't she?"

"Aren't you going it a bit strong?"

"Oh, perhaps so: I've never known a girl like her before, and she appeals to me so. She's so helpless. I don't know what's going to happen to her when I go off and leave her. And she's relying on me to take care of her. Poor kid, she's had a hard time. I don't know what to do. She just burns me up sometimes! I wonder if she knows how she inflames me? I hope not!"

"But are you sure that all that glitters is pure gold?"

"You mean the dirty cracks the rest of the crowd take at her? What do I care? My mind is at ease on the subject. Besides, what difference does that make? As long as she loves me—or rather, as long as I love her, what's the odds? You can't expect to raise any lilies from the kind of seed we've been sowing! But don't get excited. I don't think I'll marry her. None of us will last long after we get out to the front, you know that; and nobody can kid me about the kindness of leaving a widow behind."

"My God, you aren't considering marrying her, are you?" I gasped.

"Well, I never saw a girl I really wanted to marry before."

"But what would your family say?"

"My family aren't going to hell with me, are they? So what can they say?"

"Well, I'm not trying to discourage you solely on that account—but, for God's sake, look before you leap."

"I will. I've cabled home for five hundred pounds. When it comes, I'm going to take her down to Brighton. If she will go with me and stay with me until we go out to the front, she can have what's left of it. If she won't go, I'll marry her and bring her around to the house to live. That's fair enough,

isn't it? Those that don't like it can go to hell with my compliments. Here we are. What are you going to fly to-day?"

There was no use arguing with him, though I tried it again several times during the next few days. There was some hitch about the cable, and we were all broke for a couple of days while Ham and I cabled, too. I tried to cultivate the girl and get a line on her, but she studiously avoided me.

One night there was a big party at the Savoy, and we all went down. Eight of our original crowd were going out to the front the next morning and were having a farewell party.

Tim, who had overestimated his capacity a little, was very drunk at dinner—he had been drinking port all afternoon—and insisted on leaving immediately afterward. I knew where he was going, but I couldn't stop him. I knew he could take care of himself, so I didn't try to follow him. Besides, I was in no shape to look after anybody else.

We collected a crowd later and went back to the house after everything else was closed. I was downstairs arguing with some stray colonel over the proper way to approach a redhead, when the front door opened and in came Tim. His face was white as chalk and his eyes were bloodshot. He'd lost his cap, his hair was disheveled; but he was sober, very sober. He nodded to us and asked who was upstairs. I told him. While we were talking, he picked up a bottle of cognac, about a quarter full, and, to my great amazement, drank it down without taking his mouth from the bottle. That wasn't like Tim. He didn't usually drink like that. Then, without a word more, he climbed the stairs slowly and went to bed.

The next day he refused to answer any questions and was gloomy and morose for three or four days.

About three nights later the Brainless Wonder came around to the house with some other people. She asked where Tim was and what was the matter with him. I told her he was upstairs, fed up about something. She asked me to tell him she wanted to see him.

I went upstairs and told Tim what she said.

"Thanks," he said. Then he took a five-pound note from his pocket and wrote something on it. "Give her this for me, will you please, old man, and tell her good night."

I took the note down to her and told her there was a message for her. She opened it and read it without changing her expression.

“So sweet of him,” she murmured, lisping prettily. “I wish he wouldn’t drink so.” And she put the note in her bag. A few minutes later she left with one of the officers who had brought her. I went upstairs looking for Tim. I found him in his room on the top floor. He was sitting on the bed staring straight ahead and looking very miserable. He refused to talk to me; not a word could I get out of him about her. In two or three days he was back to normal, and of the Brainless Wonder we saw nothing more.

A week later we went out to the front.

We stopped at Lympe for lunch, had tea at Marquis, near Boulogne, and fifteen of the nineteen of us landed at our airdrome at Dunkirk. The other four had trouble and came straggling in two or three days later. We had dinner with 211 Squadron on the other side of the airdrome, and they put us up for the night.

It was a great relief to feel that we had achieved our ambitions and were now going to earn our salt, for many had fallen by the wayside. We were now at the front! On our shoulders rested some of the brunt of battle! The greatest sport in the world—man-hunting—would now be our daily occupation; in a plane with two machine guns we would soar above the clouds, stalking our prey! At least, that’s the way we felt about it at the time. It turned out very differently, but by the time we knew better, we had learned many other things also, and were old, old men. You age quickly at the front.

Ham and I each borrowed a motor-cycle from the 211th and went foraging. We returned with a huge dairy bucket, five gallons of cream and milk, twelve dozen eggs or so, and a case of cognac. We got some wire from the supply room to make a beater and swapped a bottle of cognac to the sergeant’s mess for sufficient sugar. In two hours the 211th, the 48th, and the 88th were playing leapfrog with us, and some one had pushed the major into the canal.

The mechanics arrived with the baggage several days later and every man blossomed forth in a unique uniform of his own design. The machines were put in order, guns were tested, and we were given ten days to practice patrols and learn the terrain and the position of the lines.

With the able assistance of Ham and me, the major went out alone and brought down a Hun two-seater over Ypres. The dairy bucket was overworked again, and the rest of us began making plans to do likewise. One man was killed before the week was over.

That was Captain Benbow, an Englishman who seemed to have stepped off the American stage. He always wore a monocle and even flew with it, scorning goggles. His remarks were always droll and unexpected. He left the airdrome about dusk one afternoon and when he returned, in two hours, his face was covered with oil but his monocle was still in place. He told us, with picturesque profanity, that six Hun Pfalz scouts had attacked him and chased him back to the lines. He was infuriated and held them personally responsible. The next afternoon he went out again alone and came back even more furious than the day before. We were informed that he had found the same six Huns and had got between them and the sun, and attacked the rear man before any of them saw him. Both his guns jammed and he had been chased home even more ignominiously than before. He spent the entire next day working on his guns and I saw him leave the airdrome about the same hour, his face like a wooden Indian and his monocle perfectly poised. Two days later the infantry south of Ypres notified us that he had been seen coming out of Hunland with five Huns on his tail and that just as he reached the lines, one of the Huns fired a burst at close range and his left wing collapsed. He crashed into the ground and was killed.

We had a number of dog-fights and lost several more men; then we started doing regular patrols from the coast to Ypres and escorting the daylight bombers over to Zeebrugge and back. Then we moved on south to Saint-Omer, when the Huns showed signs of starting a push in front of Hazebrouck. We had been at Saint-Omer about two weeks when Intelligence reported that an attack was expected at Bailleul. That night after dinner we received some curious orders. Six machines were to go out at dawn with a protecting flight about them, to reconnoiter the Bailleul-Armentières road at one hundred feet. The idea was that one machine out of the five would get back with definite information about what sort of an attack was to be made. As a matter of history, this attack was a feint on the part of the Hun to draw troops up from the south where they did attack later.

Our flight was chosen to do this low reconnaissance. Instead of being pleased with this honor, we felt that under the circumstances we were being picked on. Just because the other two flights had lost men, and we hadn’t, was no reason to deliberately knock a few of us down. And it was sure death for somebody.

After dinner, Ham, Tim, and I were over in our hut sewing maps and compasses into the lining of our flying suits, so that if we got down alive and were taken prisoner, we might have some chance of escaping later.

“Hell,” said Ham, “I can’t kick. I’ve been worrying myself for a year for fear I was going to die in bed or get bumped off in some damn little accident. Now I can die for dear old Rutgers, just like I’ve wanted to. Still, I’d rather be shot down in a fight than hit from the ground like a poor jaybird. I would like to last a little while longer, though; I’d like to live until the last week of the war so as not to miss anything. After that there won’t be anything to miss. There’ll never be a war like this again.”

“It doesn’t make much difference,” remarked Tim, “how you get hit as long as you get hit hard the first time. I don’t want to go through life on crutches and I don’t want to have to spend any more time in Germany than I can help. I don’t want to go to Germany until all the Huns have been chased to Russia.”

“I’ll send you candy every week if you’re a prisoner,” I told him.

“Thanks, and what can I do for you if you become the model for the marble statue in the home town square?”

“Look up my girl, if you get back and I don’t,” I told him. “Lie like hell about me to her. Tell her I wore all the luck charms she sent me. Tell her the socks she sent fitted fine. Tell her that there are no lips in all the world like hers. Tell her I sent you back to her.”

“Shall I kiss you or crown you?” asked Ham in disgust. “What do you think you are—the Queen of the May? Put down that daisy chain ere I swoon. If you two bums are fortunate enough to live through this fracas and get back to the dear old hog and hominy, drop around and call on my folks. Don’t tell them what a great hero I was and how I died ‘for God, for Country, and for Yale.’ Tell them the truth—that I died happy—probably cussing as I went down. That I think it was a damn good exit from a damn rotten scene. If they ask you to tell them about some glorious stunts I pulled off, tell them about the time the general brought his girl around to the house. Tell them how she was the toast of the town—a fine lady who had a Rolls even in wartime. Tell them who the general was, with medals all over his chest and handles in front and in back of his name. Tell them how crazy he was about her. Then tell them how I was a newly commissioned shavetail on the way to the front, and then tell them how the general went home alone and why. By the way, Tim, you’ll probably be made into fertilizer tomorrow; before you go I wish you’d tell me what happened to you that night you left us at the Savoy and came back acting funny and wrote the note on the fiver. Come on—nobody gives a damn now, but I’m curious.”

“I didn’t think that I’d ever tell anybody about that,” said Tim, “but I guess I might as well. I was pretty nutty over that girl. I was the one that was the brainless wonder in that case. I was awfully drunk down at the Savoy, as I had a good foundation of port, and I had no business drinking that mixture that Bim and Alex concocted. After dinner I got the idea that I wanted to see the Wonder and tell her just how sweet she really was. So I went around to her flat. She wasn’t in. I decided I’d come on back, but the street was sort of circling by me and I lost my way. A girl came by and took my arm. She asked me if I would go up to her flat with her and do her a favor. She said it wouldn’t take five minutes. I said all right. She steered me up to her flat and got me to telephone some squadron and ask for the commanding officer and say I was somebody’s cousin and that his father was sick and would he please send him in to town the next day. I got away with it all right. But after that I couldn’t get up. I just drew a complete blank.

“I guess I was out for an hour. When I came to, she was putting cold towels on my head and holding ammonia to my nose. My pulse was all wrong, and she was worried about me.

“About that time there was a knock on the door. She put a screen around me and opened it. I heard the conversation. It was a girl with a lisp and she said:

“ ‘I’ve got a young officer with me upstairs that I picked up. He’s on his way to the front and all he’s got is traveler’s checks.—Do you know anything about them? I never saw one of them before. He wants to give me one of them for five pounds. Look at it and tell me if you think it’s any good.’

“ ‘Take the check, you little fool,’ the other girl told her, ‘if it’s no good, what’s the odds? He’s in the army, so what the hell? Better him than the bloody Germans; and if it wasn’t for the likes of him, that’s what you’d have and not be getting no five quid for it neither. Good-by.’

“Even in my drunken stupor I recognized that lisp.

“ ‘Who was that?’ I asked.

“ ‘A little girl that lives downstairs,’ she told me. ‘Damn little gold-digger, and that isn’t the half of it! By the way, she’s got her claws on one of you Americans. She told me that she was going to pull something big this time. You Americans must have soft heads. She’s hocked everything he’s got that don’t grow on him.’

“That’s all; I didn’t need to hear any more. I had recognized the Wonder’s lisp. And I learned about women from her! So I called all bets off and bought some damn Liberty Bonds with the money. What would you have done?”

“Well,” says Ham, “maybe you got your five pounds’ worth doing it the way you did. And again maybe you’re just a plain liar. As for me, I think I would have emulated the example set by the late Major-General Hannafield.”

Then we sang a couple of verses of:

> “She has gone, let ’er go, God bless her,
> I’ll be lonesome wherever I be,
> For the only girl I ever loved,
> Has just gone back on me.”

We sang the chorus over a few times and turned in. That’s the story of one pretty little doll. Don’t let that one fool you.

“What ever happened to the girl?” I asked after he had finished.

“I don’t know. I never inquired. Let’s get the check and get out of here. I’m ready to turn in. If we sit around here, I’ll talk your arm off.”

We paid our check and on the way out we had to pass the table where the little girl had been sitting. She was out on the floor dancing, and the table was unoccupied. As we passed, Jim stopped suddenly and bent over to look at something on the table. Then he hurried out. As we stood at the elevator, I noticed that his face was deadly white.

“What’s the matter?” I asked.

“The ghosts are walking,” he said shakily. “Let’s get out of here quick. I just saw Tim’s cigarette-case on that girl’s table. My eyes seem to be going fast these last few months.”

ILIAD 1918

To Bim Oliver

VIII: ILIAD 1918

You asked me last week what turned my hair gray. I didn't have time to tell you about it then but I'll give you the tragedy of my auburn locks now. Get your hands off the controls and look out for that rudder. All clear!

Sometime in the spring, during the late unpleasantness, I was doing my bit for democracy and prohibition by flying S.E.'s up on the British front with the 185th Squadron of the Royal Flying Corps. You've seen an S.E., haven't you? It was a fast single-seater scout with a big Hispano-Suiza motor—beautiful thing to fly, fastest thing at the front at that time, and a steady platform to shoot from. I thought I was pretty good on S.E.'s and kept telling the C.O. about it, trying to persuade him to take me along with him when he went out hunting. Huns were scarce right then as most of them were down on the Marne delivering the invitations that Ludendorf was issuing for a party in Gay Paree; and to shoot down a Hun, you first had to find one. The C.O. had eyes like a telescope and could always go out and find something, so I wanted to tag along behind and let him do my looking for me. But I couldn't convince him that I could do anything about it after he found the Huns for me.

Just think of anybody complaining about Huns being scarce! You can't beat that! But that was in the spring, and I was a young man then with a fine head of good virile hair.

One day I went hunting by myself to see what I could do for my country. I found one Hun two-seater and I was so intent on getting him that I didn't see six little Pfalz scouts until it was too late to do anything about it but pray. I finally got away, but my motor was well shot and when I got back to the airdrome I had to land with a dead stick. The C.O. was just taking off, and we locked wings in one of the prettiest crashes ever accomplished since Wilbur and Orville invented the undercarriage. Both machines were complete write-offs and the only things they salvaged were the magnetos. The C.O. graciously admitted that it was not my fault as the dead stick gave me the right of way, but I felt pretty bad about it as it was my third write-off in two months and it was beginning to look as if I hadn't found out where the ground was located. An alibi on that subject was like the girl and the wet grass. The C.O. wasn't any too pleased about the matter either, for we had just completed the fifteenth and sixteenth crashes on our own airdrome. This wasn't the sort of record we were after, as the colonel had kindly pointed out after Brown crashed his third bus in the same rough spot on the cinder path.

I got a new bus from Marquis and soared aloft again. The Huns began coming back, having decided against the fleshpots of Paris, and we gave up hunting and took up dodging. About three weeks later I got caught diving on a two-seater over by Armentières. I got underneath him according to the instructions and blue prints from G.H.Q.—see page 14, paragraph 6, "How to attack a two-seater." I was all set to hit him with my first burst, but when I pressed my triggers nothing happened. Both guns had jammed and so did my heart! While I was trying to clear my guns, the two-seater began to maneuver, and before I woke up to what was happening, the observer had taken a good long crack at me and the hot oil was streaming back in my face to call attention to the fact that my oil lead was hit. I started back at a thousand feet with the whole Hun army shooting at me and those that weren't shooting were throwing rocks and old shoes. My motor froze up when the bearings melted and I just did manage to glide over the bayonets and crash gracefully in a shell hole. The motor stayed there but the fuselage and the guns went on with me and festooned themselves prettily around my neck. I had a stiff neck for the rest of the war—and the rest of my life, as far as I know. I was a bit bent up, so before sewing me up they shot me full of anti-tetanus serum which had gotten soured by being off the ice so long. And you know what that stuff does to you! You look and feel as if you had been stung by a million mosquitoes—inside as well as out.

When I got out of hospital I found I had been promoted and made a flight commander in an American Sopwith Camel squadron that was being organized for service with the British. I had the C.O. to thank for a hearty recommendation, and I still think it was a dirty trick. Any major ought to know all about Camels. The only thing I knew about them was a song:

"Oh, mother, put out your Golden Star,
Your son's gone up in a Sop,
The wings are weak, the ship's a freak,
She's got a rickety prop;
The motor's junk, your son is drunk,
He's sure to take a flop;
Oh, mother, put out your Golden Star,
Your son's gone up in a Sop."

Flight Commander in a Camel squadron! Deck-hand for Charon and raw meat for Cerberus! An S.E. was the grandstand seat of the war, for a good one would do a hundred and thirty level; it was as comfortable as a limousine and didn't vibrate at all. You could fly it without goggles, and it had no bad habits. When you got tired of fighting you could pull out and run

home. A Camel was a little half-portion that could do a bare hundred and gave you chills and fever when you looked at it on the ground. It was so small that even a pocket-edition pilot had to be fitted in with a shoe horn, with a petrol tank at his back, a rotary motor in his lap, and two machine guns level with his face. If he misjudged a landing or had any unexpected contact with the ground, the engine and tank came together to the great detriment of his kidneys, the machine guns slapped him in the face, and the ground patted him firmly on top of the head. Naturally, no one wanted to fly them, and everybody had a good alibi. Some claimed to be too big, others claimed to be too little. All of them claimed they got vertigo from the constant stream of burnt castor oil that the motor sprayed back in their faces. Some men's pulses would jump twenty beats at the mere mention of the word Camel or the sight of Mr. Sopwith's picture. And they were so hard to fly that more men were killed in training trying to master the right hand spin than ever got to the front to give the young Huns target practice. You couldn't run home in a Camel, you had to fight your way home and that was just like outrunning a cannon ball.

In addition to all my other objections, I had never examined a Camel up close and was getting to the point where I thought I was good on S.E.'s. But my arguments didn't get me a thing, and after a lot of kicking and dodging I had to go on up to Dunkirk and take charge of my new flight of six planes and seven pilots.

Bim Oliver arrived the same day to take command of another flight and he was two degrees hotter than I was and had a whole truckload of disgust with him. He had been with the 184th Squadron which had S.E.'s and he considered himself just as good on them as I did myself. I don't think Bim was really any madder than I was, but he had a much better vocabulary. All he knew about Camels was learned from that old song:

"Beside a Belgian 'staminet, when the smoke had cleared away,
Beneath a busted Camel, its former pilot lay;
His throat was cut by the bracing wires, the tank had hit his head,
And coughing a shower of dental work, these parting words he said:

" 'Oh, I'm going to a better land, they binge there every night,
The cocktails grow on bushes, so every one stays tight,
They've torn up all the calendars, they've busted all the clocks,
And the little drops of whisky come trickling through the rocks.'

"The pilot breathed these last few gasps, before he passed away,
'I'll tell you how it happened, my flippers didn't stay,
The motor wouldn't hit at all, the struts were far too few,
A shot went through the gas tank, and let the gas leak through.

" 'Oh, I'm going to a better land, where the motors always run,
Where the eggnog grows on the eggplant and the pilots grow a bun.
They've got no Sops, they've got no Spads, they've got no Flaming Fours,
And the little frosted juleps are served at all the stores.' "

We didn't either one of us know how to fly a Camel, but we didn't want our pilots to find that out, so we went on down to the aircraft depot at Marquis to get our planes without asking any questions about them. We got some Ak Emmas to show us how to work the gadgets and finally got up our nerve to try and fly them. Bim got off all right. He swung crosswind when he used too much rudder and he pulled the old dive-and-zoom, but he did get off with his nose bobbing up and down, and circled around above to wait for me, doing the funniest flat turns I ever saw. He didn't know the way home so he had to wait for me. I was a regular customer down there and knew the map.

An Ak Emma was sucking in gas for me when a mag shorted, and the motor started up and threw him about twenty feet. They put his remains in an ambulance, and some one told me they often shorted and advised me to try another. The next one worked better, and I staggered off and joined Bim. We found an old deserted airdrome near Calais and practiced landings on it. When we thought we were good enough to get on the ground by the third bounce, we went on back to our own airdrome at Petit Synthe and landed.

You know, a Camel was so short that it would roll of its own accord, due to the torque, and naturally a rotary motor increased and emphasized the torque. Flying a Camel was just like riding a gyroscope that was out of

balance. They vibrated like a hula dancer's empennage and smelled like the inside of a motorman's mit. When we got back we were well shaken up—shaken up and fed up—and we certainly told the cock-eyed world our opinion of Mr. Sopwith's little nightmare. We resigned, retired, deserted, and quit, but it did no good. We called attention to the fact that at least ten Americans had been trained on Camels, but had ditched them and were now out in British S.E. Squadrons. We offered to resign in their favor and give them our captaincies and chances for eternal glory. These lucky gentlemen flew over in their S.E.'s and threatened to shoot us down in cold blood if we divulged their names.

Major Fowler, an American who had a job trying to wear out a Cadillac, came over to see us. He was so good at his job that after the third Cadillac they made him a colonel. If the war had lasted long enough and the supply of Cadillacs had held out, he'd have been a field-marshal. He told us to stop bellyaching and go out and bring down some Huns. What a chance! On our first patrol the whole outfit kept getting into right-hand spins, and the Huns thought we were giving an exhibition. The first Hun we saw looped a couple of times to show us that he could stunt, too. And when I tried to fight with him, he opened his throttle wide and left me racing with the clouds. Every time I'd make a turn to the right, I'd have to postpone the battle until we got out of the spins and climbed back into formation.

Henry Clay, who was the third flight commander, had flown Camels before for five months and thought they were fine. We couldn't get any sympathy out of him. The C.O. had a Belgian police dog with mange, distemper, and fleas, and he was too worried about the dog to pay any attention to Bim and myself, so we had to seek an audience for our grievances elsewhere. Every evening we would take one of the squadron cars and go calling on our S.E. friends. We would always find a binge somewhere and entertain them with stories about our Camels. That was meat to the S.E. pilots, as a lot of them had been trained on Camels and felt as we did about them. Bim had a big filling to come out of a tooth while he was in the air and he always carried it around with him and exhibited it proudly as evidence of what a Camel could do when it really wanted to vibrate. We had a regular line like the end men in a minstrel show and each one would play up to the other's gags. Then we would close the performance by singing as a duet an old English ballad that never failed to cause much mirth. It went:

"Oh, the bards they sing, of an English king,
A many a year ago,
How he ruled the land with an iron hand,
Though his mind was weak and low.
He loved to hunt the bounding stag,
Within the royal wood,
But most of all he was exceedingly fond of guzzling the royal food.

"His only summer garment was a woolen undershirt,
With which he tried to hide his hide,
But he couldn't hide the dirt.
His chest was hairy and full of fleas,
His tangled beard hung down to his knees;
God save the Royal King of England!

"Now the queen of Spain was a sprightly dame,
And an amorous dame was she;
Oh, she loved to pull His Majesty's wool,
So far across the sea."

Oh, you've heard it, have you? Well, I won't go on with it then. But the Britishers used to think it was great, though very disrespectful. They used to make us sing it over and over. They say it was written by a famous English poet when he was a school boy and that official and royal notice was taken of it.

One afternoon Bim and I were down on the tarmac in front of the hangars cussing Camels as usual, when a Bristol landed in the middle of the airdrome and lost its prop. The pilot came strolling into the hangars and asked for mechanics to go out and bring in his bus. He had on a dirty trench coat with the new R.A.F. insignia on it, and we thought he was a second lieutenant. We sent a couple of Ak Emmas out to his plane, and while we were waiting for them to bring it in, he asked us how we liked Camels. Bim told him what he thought of them, I made a few pertinent remarks, and then Bim took another turn. He produced the filling and told its history with footnotes and glossary. Our visitor was much perturbed.

"It's quite ridiculous," he told us. "The Camel is one of our best machines; you don't know how to fly them, that's all."

"Oh, is it?" says Bim. "Well, you take my Camel and I'll take your Bristol and if I don't chase you all over the sky and ride your tail into the

ground, I'll give you my sword and spurs. You Bristol pilots know a hell of a lot about war anyway."

"But I'm not a Bristol pilot," the visitor explained. "I'm from G.H.Q., and I came up to find out what all the bally wind-up is about. The whole sector is buzzing with it. I hear that your Camels fall to pieces in the air, that they are unsafe, and there's dreadful chaff about it. It almost sounds like enemy propaganda. Of course, the Camel was the only machine available for your squadron as we are giving our squadrons the new Snipes and had these left over, but Major Fowler agreed with me that they were better than none and perfectly suited to your purpose. So I decided to send them to you. Where is your commanding officer?"

"He's washing his dog," Bim told him, getting madder all the time. "If you're the piccolo player that got me put on these damn self-oscillating, elastic sarcophagi with the St. Vitus dance, you'd jolly well better waft yourself home before I tell my sergeant on you. Maybe you'd like to swap with me? I don't know what purposes you have in mind for us but if it's getting slapped in the face with a spade, then they are sure suited—"

But he was gone by that time and Bim was still cussing at the wide, wide world when the orderly came out for us. We found the C.O. spluttering incoherently—the visitor proved to be a general; the new R.A.F. insignia had fooled us. A gold stripe indicated a lieutenant, whereas a blue stripe was a general. The general took advantage of our embarrassment and took our hides off. He concluded with the information that we were ruining his *ésprit de corps* and that henceforth we had better register some affection for Mr. Camel's bloody airplane or he'd send us to Paris. And we knew what happened to little boys that got sent to Paris—some of them had to stay there two or three months waiting for orders. Major Fowler dashed over in his Cadillac and told us we'd better shut up or he'd send us home as instructors. The C.O. threatened to make us wash the dog if we didn't quit knocking the Camels. Just remember, though, that none of them were flying them.

The general had the best of it until he started to leave. It was a hot July day; he got all wrapped up in his fur suit and boots for high altitude where it was cold and got in his Bristol. But for some reason it wouldn't start. For an hour he sat there and sweated while everybody tinkered with his motor. He seemed to suspect that Bim and I had disconnected a wire somewhere, but we hadn't. When he looked as if he was going to melt entirely at any moment, Bim stepped up and politely offered to lend him a Camel to get home in. He declined with equal politeness and, after tinkering with his Bristol a while longer, he gave it up and went home in the squadron car.

After that we proclaimed that the Camel was the apple of our eye, but I don't think we fooled anybody.

We did a few practice patrols and then began doing regular offensive work, managing to knock down a two-seater and a couple of Pfalz. Then we moved south for the big push in front of Amiens.

Mind you, my hair was a nice shade of brown with a slight auburn tint; but things happened fast down there. One day I was leading a patrol and dove on a bunch of the new DVIII Fokkers. I knew we could lick the Pfalz, but none of the new Fokkers had been up in our sector at Dunkirk. As we mixed in with the Fokkers about ten more that had been hiding up in the morning sun leapt on us, and I began to realize just how good an S.E. was. For we had to lick all those Fokkers to get home. We'd all have been rotting in the Somme right now if a squadron of Dolphins hadn't come down while we were milling around and rendered us valuable assistance; in fact, they removed three Huns from my tail. And three was bogey in those days.

I had been chased down low and had started back, when Ralston flew down beside me and fired his guns. That was the signal for Huns, but I couldn't see a Hun anywhere. He was making funny motions with his left arm, waving it around in a circle, and then he'd roll and hold up his left hand. It finally sunk through my head what he was talking about—my left wheel was shot off. I couldn't see, of course, but I made sure by some signs that it was gone and Ralston headed for home. I followed him slowly. My first idea was to go over and land in the ocean but I didn't care about drowning, so decided against that. Then I decided to pancake in the woods and try to jump for a limb as I hit, but that had no charms either, for I had landed in woods once before—you can't jump for a limb after you've hit a trunk.

About two weeks before that, when we were down in the Horseshoe Wood at Allonville, I had seen a Dolphin come in with a wheel gone. But this pilot didn't know it and made a fast landing. Now a Dolphin had twenty-four inches of back stagger and a low top wing, so the pilot sat with his head and shoulders above it, sticking up where the center section should have been. As soon as this pilot flattened out, his axle dug into the ground, and over he went. His head, the highest thing right side up, was now the lowest thing with the south side north and that Dolphin did a half turn on its back and wrung his neck before it settled.

The thought of that Dolphin crash was just about as comforting to me as remembering how affectionate my girl was. I kept thinking about this all the

way back—the Dolphin, not the girl—with an occasional panorama of my past life flickering before me just as it's supposed to occur to a drowning man. It was more complicated than drowning, though, because I had half an hour to think it over, and by that time I was pretty shaky. Remember, this was a Camel I was going to land and it wasn't any too easy with both wheels. There were some bright spots in my past that made a future seem fairly desirable. I thought of all the drinks I had refused and all the kisses I had fumbled, and I decided that life was sweet and that the best thing I could do would be to land where help was nearest and maybe they could salvage some of me.

When I got to the airdrome everybody was running around with wheels for me to see. The ambulance was out in the middle of the field, and the men were digging out a pilot who had just crashed a Camel. They all opened up on me with signal pistols and waved their left hands and I signaled that I understood and came in to land. I cut my switches and turned off the gas lines so I wouldn't catch fire, and it was just as well that I did, for, if I hadn't, I'd have lost my nerve and gone back up again. Luckily there was a good breeze blowing and I came in crosswind with my bad side into it. I kicked on full rudder as she settled and closed my eyes and waited. The next thing I knew I was hanging by my safety belt and counting my teeth.

I wasn't hurt, but poor Ralston had been in such a hurry to get back with the news and get the ambulance ready for me that he crashed badly in landing and wrote off the plane. His reputation suffered severely, and he got a good crack on the top of his head.

As I told you before, my hair was still a nice shade of brown. But things kept on happening.

An American colonel came over to inspect us, and my top sergeant and the colonel's chauffeur got drunk and got into a fight. My sergeant knocked him out. So the colonel was detained for a day and night with us, and the C.O. was anxious to entertain him. The C.O. sent for me early in the afternoon. He announced that we were going to have a big binge that night and I must produce a large quantity of Bronx cocktails, because the general was coming over for the binge and he had specified Bronx as his favorite drink. In fact, the general had demanded Bronx.

A binge was the British idea of how to spend the evening. It began with a formal dinner. There were always guests of honor, and every one had to make a speech. After dinner, when everything had been thoroughly drunk, there was either a free-for-all fight with the home team against the honored

guests, or every one joined in the pleasant pastime of smashing the furniture. Then we would go call on the neighbors and endeavor to divert them long enough to steal their choice trophies. I remember one night we had a British colonel to dinner, and he distinguished himself by stealing 211 Squadron's bass drum.

"But, Skipper," I told the C.O., "we haven't any vermouth or oranges—how can I mix any Bronx?"

"Well," said he, "go get them. What do you think you're bartender in this squadron for anyway?"

"The only vermouth in this sector," I told him, "is down at 185 Squadron. I bought four cases for them when I was their head bartender and they haven't had any gin to go with it lately, according to Callahan who was up here yesterday. But they wouldn't give anything to a Camel squadron that wasn't contagious. I might swap them some gin for it; we've got plenty of gin."

"All right," says he, "but if you don't feed the general Bronx, he'll probably send us over on an airdrome strafe; if he does, I'll make you lead it. We can get some ice off the fish, and I'll send the car to Boulogne for oranges."

Some brilliant general at G.H.Q. had issued orders that all Camels should be fitted with bomb racks and that we were always to carry four twenty-pound bombs thereon, to drop on surprise targets at close range. So I took the pills off my racks and fitted in their places four half-gallon bottles of gin, and flew down to 185's airdrome, which was about forty miles from ours. The squadron was at tea when I arrived with my gin and my proposition. They were unanimously in favor of accepting it, the only condition in the exchange being that I should mix them some punch with the gin right then. They were getting ready to celebrate their fiftieth Hun, which Callahan had brought down accidentally that morning. They had now destroyed more Huns than S.E.'s, which was certainly worthy of a celebration, so we had a right good party.

I made up a good punch, out of peaches, rum, benedictine, gin and champagne, that not only tasted like nectar, but had the authority of a field-marshal. The C.O. did himself proud and kept pouring it down me.

"It's too bad, Sprinx," he announced, as the punch began to take hold, "that the bally Camel merchants don't appreciate you. You've been skidding about the sky since Moses was a lance corporal in your little hearse and you

haven't even got an Albanian Croix de Guerre to show for your trouble. Your grandchildren will have nothing to lament you by. When they ask you, 'What did you do in the Great War, Daddy?' all you can do is to show them your loose teeth. You ought to have a medal or two, so come on and do a show with us and I'll fix it up. We've got to do a patrol at five-thirty; suppose you come along as decoy. The blue-striped Fokkers are on the Armentières' airdrome. You go fly over there at twelve thousand feet. We'll be up above you at eighteen thousand in the sun, and the Fokkers will never see us and will hop on you. You can fight them for a minute or two and then we'll come down on them like a ton of bricks and we'll all bag a brace apiece. It's about time somebody clipped their wings. I hear young Richthofen is leading them. I'd like to get a crack at him from above."

The idea seemed all right to me, so we staggered down to the airdrome, and I got my four bottles of vermouth tied on to the bomb racks and took off. They were to give me five minutes' start, and then we were to rendezvous over Estaires. I got up to twelve thousand and waited around, but I couldn't see any signs of 185. The cold air congealed me quickly, and when I finally saw a bunch of S.E.'s, I waggled my wings to them and headed straight for Armentières. I found the blue-stripers all right, or rather they found me and leapt onto my tail with great glee and gusto. I flopped over on my back and waited for the S.E.'s to make a killing—nothing happened except that the Fokkers began to spray the sky with lead, mostly in my direction. I turned and twisted and squirmed, but I couldn't get away from those Fokkers. A Camel could turn inside a Fokker at that altitude, so they were having considerable difficulty in hitting me, but I had to keep turning to keep their sights off me and I was getting no nearer home—and still no S.E.'s. Those blue-stripers were good and knew how to fight a Camel. When I would turn or pull up, one of them would overshoot, turn and take me head on, so as to give the others a good shot at me from the rear. Then there was nothing for me to do but flop over on my back and pray. If I had tried to get my sights on any of them and do any shooting, I'd have been shot down in a second, but fortunately I had no personal ambitions and devoted my entire time to keeping their sights off me. I was ready to call all bets off, when some Bristols came up and diverted the Fokkers' attention long enough for me to get into a steep dive and come on home. I got back all right—all but one bottle of vermouth which got hit and a couple of bolts from my propeller boss that an enterprising Hun had picked off. I called up 185 to tell them what bums they were and found out that they hadn't left the ground at all. Two machines had collided on the ground and the C.O. called the show off, as he said there was a heavy fog

about the place. I guess there was in his immediate vicinity. The S.E.'s I had seen were from 19 Squadron, returning from a patrol out of petrol. Headquarters was all excited because the 19th had reported that the Huns were using our planes. They had run into a lone Camel that had immediately run away from them and flown straight on to Armentières and joined a squadron of Fokkers.

The Brass Hats got their Bronx and I got the heebie geebies and the screaming meemies. But my hair was still a nice shade of brown when I viewed it the next morning.

The next week I enjoyed myself by shooting off my own prop twice before I could convince the gunnery officer of the exact difference between a Kauper and a Constantinesco gun gear.

We were having a lovely time that month. The valley where we had our mess was infested with a million small French yellow jackets that had been starved for four years. As we had no screens, we had to fight for every morsel of food. We'd start a spoonful of food for the oral cavity, and before it would arrive, there would be a dozen yellow jackets riding on it. We got stung until we were swollen out of recognition. However, I couldn't eat much in those days, anyway.

And we had a plague of earwigs. They were nice bedfellows. Before we would go to bed each night we would knock several hundred of these little visitors off the walls of the tent but in a few minutes another regiment would crawl up out of the grass. Their idea of a wonderful time was to crawl up the side of the tent and then drop in your ear. Once in your ear, they had a pair of tweezers like a lobster's claw and then would at once dig in, take a firm hold, and prepare to do battle. Sometimes a little hot oil would get them out, and sometimes it wouldn't. After two weeks of desperate battles some genius solved the problem by putting cotton in his ears before going to bed, and we all did likewise.

And don't get the idea that all I had to do was to fly. Our mechanics were practically all privates, and the squadron organization called for about twelve master sergeants and sergeants, first class. So we decided to do a little promoting which should have been done a year before in Texas. That sounds easy, but the ease is all in the sound. To make a man a sergeant, first class, you must first give him a written examination and investigate his domestic life and talk to his mother about it. As the old story ends, I got the job. I had been to a military school once and all it got me in the army was jobs like that. Before I could give them a written examination, I had to teach

them something to write about. I gnashed away three one-thousandths of an inch of dental gold on that job.

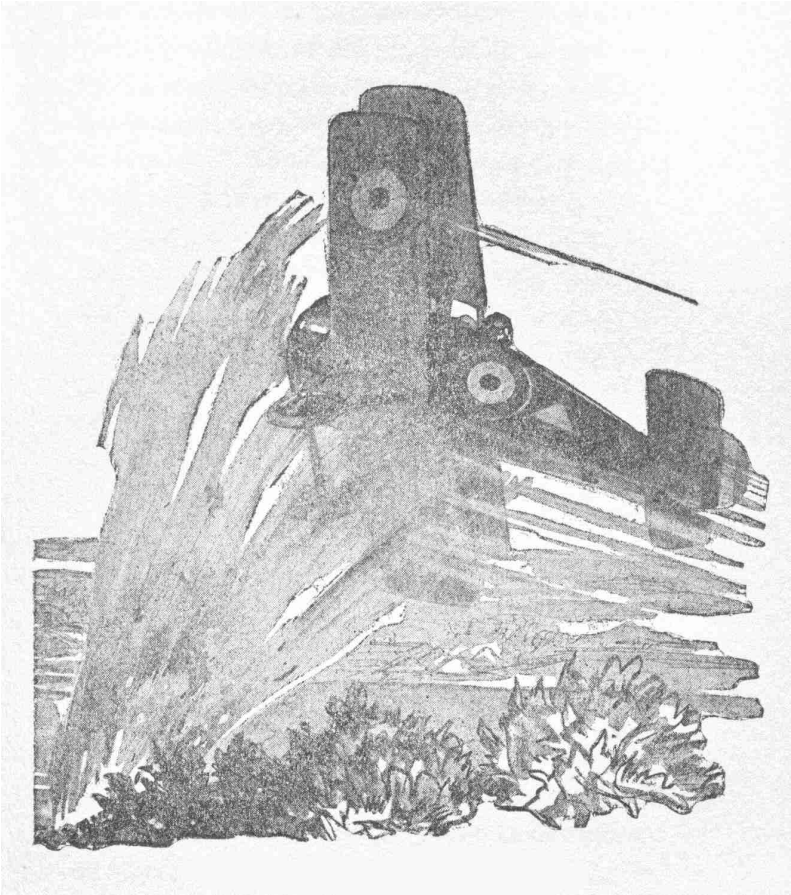
Then there was the curse of society. Society at the front? I should say so! Every time we moved into a new sector certain formalities were absolutely necessary. About the third night after we moved, the general of the brigade would invite the C.O. and the three flight commanders over to his château for dinner and a binge. And when a general invited you over to a binge, he expected you to binge! No piking or shortskating allowed! Then the next night the colonel of the wing would extend to us the same invitation, with the same end in view. We usually got back in time for the dawn patrol, and the cold morning air used to feel awfully good on the fevered brow. Then we would have to have the general and his staff over to our mess one evening and give them a chance at our furniture. Another evening would be devoted to the colonel and his fellow drinkers and appropriate entertainment furnished. And it was more trying than it sounds. The Brass Hats didn't have to lead any dawn patrols, so they wanted to be amused all the time and required assistance in cheering themselves up. It was always my job to stay close to the colonel and try to convince him by any means possible that Camels, particularly Clerget Camels, were not the proper things to send over twenty miles into Hunland at a thousand feet with no protection upstairs. I remember one colonel got the idea that he wanted to stage a daylight raid on a Hun airdrome at Busigny, in retaliation for a night bomb raid they had staged on one of his airdromes where he was attending a movie. Now Busigny was about thirty miles across the lines, and in addition to two squadrons of Fokkers on it, the old circus of Richthofen's had moved into the neighborhood and were looking for cold meat. As soon as a big patrol would cross the lines, the news would be telephoned back to them, and if they overlooked any man on the way over, they'd get him on the way back. The colonel was going to solve that difficulty by not sending out a big patrol. He was just going to send over eight or ten of us without anything above us, just let us sneak over and shoot it up and fight our way back alone. By that method we might get over, underneath or above some clouds, but we'd never come back. However, that was our lookout. All he was after was to destroy that airdrome and get even with the Huns for spoiling his movie and killing his chauffeur. If it worked, it would be a big feather in his cap. If it didn't work so well, it would mean a lot more Iron Crosses for the Huns. It took me ten days to persuade that colonel that there was a better way to arrange it. And I nearly got the D.T.'s doing it. He actually issued the orders for it, but I got him to modify them by adding that, if we saw any Huns on the way over, we could stop and fight with them and if the formation split up

simply to do an offensive patrol instead. We started for Busigny at least twenty times, but you'd be surprised at the bad luck we had; somehow or other we always ran into a bunch of Huns up high before we got there, and we never could seem to get back into formation again. I think the colonel got right discouraged about the matter, for it looked like he was going to take to drink over it. Meanwhile, everybody in the squadron was needing two hands to get a glass to their faces and having angina pectoris every time the phone would ring.

And we had to teach all the Brass Hats to shoot crap. That not only took time, but it frequently required a couple of months' pay. It always took time because those Brass Hats couldn't take their crap or leave it alone. They wanted to shoot all night, and they had the luck of a left-handed red-headed girl with crossed eyes.

But such things are only sent to try us, and I had plenty of other troubles to take my mind off my social duties. We still got mail from home.

One day I had just crossed the lines under some clouds when I spotted a two-seater down low doing an artillery shoot. I dove straight on him and as I was losing altitude at about two hundred, I remembered that I still had my four little bombs on. I gave the Bowdoin control four yanks to release my little calling cards and went on down. A Camel wouldn't maneuver with that extra weight. Meanwhile, I was headed straight down on the two-seater. He had a good start on me and did some fast diving himself and landed before I got a good crack at him. I dodged Archie and some pompoms and came on back to the lines to climb up again. Callahan had come up from 185 to be a flight commander, and he dove down beside me and began firing his guns, making funny motions and pointing underneath me. I couldn't see another Hun anywhere, and then I got his meaning.



"There was a terrific explosion."

"Sweet glory," I thought to myself, "surely I haven't lost another wheel!" But that seemed to be what Callahan was trying to explain to me, so when I waved back that I understood he turned and beat it for home. I wasn't particularly worried this time, because I thought I knew how to land on one wheel.

When I got back to the airdrome there was no one in sight. Callahan's plane was out in front of the hangars, but there was no sign of him or any of the mechanics. Even the ambulance was abandoned. This didn't look right, so I came down low to investigate. I located the squadron—they were all in the bomb-proof dugout; I could see them grouped around the entrance, and they waved at me frantically.

I thought at first there was a daylight bomb raid on, but I couldn't see a Hun or any sign of Archie. I had cut off to come in and did a quick turn over

the treetops. There was a terrific explosion which blew me fifty feet in the air and nearly looped the Camel.

Then, and then only, did I figure out what it was all about. When I pulled my bomb release I was diving vertically, and the bomb must have got caught in the undercarriage bracing wires. The safety pin was released, and the safety wind vane screwed down and would have gone off when I landed. And as I usually landed right in front of the hangars, every one had taken shelter. That was why Callahan had hurried back to warn every one as it might have dropped off at any time. It took me several minutes to figure it all out, and then I really got scared. I had the wind-up proper and it kept getting worse. I didn't know whether there were any more hanging on there or not, so I went up and looped and rolled and spun in an effort to shake off imaginary bombs.

I saw the squadron coming out of the dugout, so I decided it was safe for me to land. I was expecting to find that the wheels were gone or the fuselage was hanging by a wire, but everything was all right and I managed to land. I had just enough strength left to get out of the plane and walk down to the bar alone, but I had a pulse like the tide.

As I told you before, I had a fine head of hair—brown in color and free from dandruff—thanks to the daily shampoo in castor oil from the motor.

About three weeks later, I was out in front of the hangars getting off a patrol in place of the C.O., who was busy washing his dog. We had had a hard time those three weeks and I was feeling pretty low. Jenkinson, Siebald, and Forster had gone down in flames at my side and Frobisher had been killed before our eyes. Curtis, Kenyon, and Mandel were missing. Callahan had been shot down and spent the day in a shell hole with a dead German, and when he came back he certainly made death realistic. May, Dorsey, Zistell, and Wiley were wounded and in hospital; Kindley was saved from boredom by having his goggles shot off, and the C.O.'s dog had bitten him absent-mindedly. Clay and I had been licked decisively twice by the new Hannoveranners, and the new B.M.W. Fokkers were having a regular field day shooting down Camels.

The field was muddy, and a flight had taxied to the far end of the field and was taking off towards the hangars. Kindley was leading, and just as he got above my head, I saw a big black lump detach itself from his fuselage and come straight down to where I was standing. I let out a yell to warn the others and flopped on my face in the mud and oil and waited for the bomb to explode. They say that I got my head and shoulders completely buried and

that they had trouble in pulling me out. I waited for an eternity for the bomb to explode and then decided that I was dead and didn't know it. Everybody was laughing at me as I tried to get the mud out of my eyes.

"But the bomb! The bomb!" I gasped. My knees were shaking so I could hardly stand up. They pointed to a big lump of sod and mud about twenty feet from me. Kindley's tailskid had picked it up taxiing, and it had come loose and fallen off when his motor began to vibrate.

I walked slowly on down to the bar and gazed at myself in the mirror. My beautiful auburn-tinted locks were as you behold them now—a salt-and-pepper gray.

THE END

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

Illustrations have been relocated due to using a non-page layout.

[End of *Nocturne Militaire* by Elliott White Springs]