

WINGS OVER
ENGLAND



ROY J. SNELL

* A Distributed Proofreaders Canada eBook *

This eBook is made available at no cost and with very few restrictions. These restrictions apply only if (1) you make a change in the eBook (other than alteration for different display devices), or (2) you are making commercial use of the eBook. If either of these conditions applies, please check with a <https://www.fadedpage.com> administrator before proceeding. Thousands more FREE eBooks are available at <https://www.fadedpage.com>.

This work is in the Canadian public domain, but may be under copyright in some countries. If you live outside Canada, check your country's copyright laws. **If the book is under copyright in your country, do not download or redistribute this file.**

Title: Wings over England

Date of first publication: 1941

Author: Roy J. Snell (1878-1959)

Date first posted: May 11, 2019

Date last updated: May 11, 2019

Faded Page eBook #20190521

This eBook was produced by: Al Haines, Stephen Hutcheson & the online Distributed Proofreaders Canada team at <https://www.pgdpCanada.net>

WINGS OVER
ENGLAND



ROY J. SNELL



That was a Capital Stroke, Dave

WINGS OVER ENGLAND

BY
ROY J. SNELL

Eight Full Page Illustrations
By
GLEN SHEFFER

THE GOLDSMITH PUBLISHING CO.
CHICAGO NEW YORK

*Copyright 1941, by
M. A. Donohue & Company
Printed in the United States of America*

Contents

I.	<u>Cherry</u>	1
II.	<u>Catbirds and Hawk</u>	11
III.	<u>Dolls and Nazis</u>	17
IV.	<u>Hans Schlitz</u>	25
V.	<u>The Young Lord</u>	34
VI.	<u>Lady Spies</u>	44
VII.	<u>Enemy Sighted</u>	57
VIII.	<u>Roll Out the Barrel</u>	67
IX.	<u>The Hideout</u>	80
X.	<u>First Blood</u>	91
XI.	<u>Cobbler or Spy?</u>	105
XII.	<u>“The House Is Gone”</u>	113
XIII.	<u>Lull Before the Storm</u>	123
XIV.	<u>A Dungeon Night</u>	131
XV.	<u>Until the Very End</u>	144
XVI.	<u>Fiddlin’ Johnny</u>	152
XVII.	<u>Playing War</u>	166
XVIII.	<u>Dave’s Strange Craft</u>	175
XIX.	<u>Thrilling Sky Drama</u>	182
XX.	<u>Dave Comes Marching Home</u>	188
XXI.	<u>The Lark Defends His Home Town</u>	194
XXII.	<u>Roll Out the Barrel</u>	203
XXIII.	<u>Victory</u>	213
XXIV.	<u>Searchers of the Sea</u>	218

Illustrations

<u>That Was a Capital Stroke, Dave</u>	<i>Frontispiece</i>
<u>We Do Have a Spy</u>	49
<u>Everybody Sing</u>	77
<u>Tat-tat-tat—Down Goes Hun</u>	99
<u>Only Three Walls Remained</u>	117
<u>The Dog Had Found the Fugitive</u>	135
<u>Shots Tore Into His Right Wing</u>	161
<u>Alice-Alice—I Know Your Voice</u>	233

Chapter I

Cherry

It was one of those rare autumn days in England. The sky was blue as blue. The trees cast dark shadows across the hillside. The sheep wandered contentedly along the slope. To Cherry Ramsey, for one full moment it seemed that nothing could possibly be wrong with the world.

Then with a sudden light spring she shot from her sunny corner to scan the sky and to exclaim softly to the collie at her feet:

“Flash old boy, it’s an airplane. Perhaps it’s a bomb-bomber.” That last word always choked her. How she hated those Nazi marauders! No, all was not right with the world! Perhaps it never would be again for a long, long time!

“But Flash old boy,” there was hot fire in her voice, “we must all do our best and trust God. That’s what mother always says, and she’s nearly always right.”

2

Flash, the splendid golden collie, stood up, appeared to listen, then whined as if he had truly understood. And who will say he did not?

For one more full moment the scene remained just as it had been. In the foreground were low hills and sheep feeding. Beyond that lay a level field where two grown youths in their late teens bent over their task of harvesting Brussels sprouts. Beyond all this were trees and barns a farm home,—Cherry’s own home.

As she stood there, lips parted, ears straining in their attempt to build up a mental picture of the rapidly approaching airplane, she saw the two boys straighten up, then gaze skyward.

“Ah! They hear it!” she whispered. Then she tried with a sudden flash of the imagination to picture the thoughts running through the minds at that moment of those strangely different boys. The plane proved to be a German bomber.

Then suddenly her heart stood still. The plane had come zooming out from behind the nearby hills, and in a flash she had caught sight of the hated cross on the right of the plane, the swastika on its tail.

3

At that same instant the taller of the two boys turned to his companion to say:

“I suppose that’s what you call a bomber?” His was the sharp, brisk accent of a Midwest American.

“Not precisely that,” was the slow drawling reply of his typically English companion. “It’s a Messerschmitt 110, I’d say. They do use them for daylight bombing. But that plane is really a fighter. The best the Jerries have. If our boys go after one of them when it flies over to do a little bombing, it lays

eggs and puts off at a fearful rate, or turns in for a scrap.

“And I say!” his voice rose, “There’ll be a scrap! There’s a Spitfire after her. Good old Spitfire! Go after ’em, old boy! Here we are, with a ringside seat!” He dropped back to take his place on a bag of Brussels sprouts. The tall, dark, curly-haired American youth stood where he was, watching the two planes. His eyes were wide with excitement and wonder. This was but his third day in England. Until this moment he had seen nothing of the war. Even now, with the peace of open country all about him, it did not seem possible that those two silver ships up there in the sky would really fight an air duel, that men might come hurtling down from out the sky to a terrible crushing death.

4

An exclamation from his companion brought him back to reality.

“Oh! I say!” came in sharp, rising tones. “There’s another of our fighters! Now there’ll surely be a scrap! That Messerschmitt can’t escape both of them! That,” he said with a sudden intake of breath, “is one of your American fighters. It’s called a Tomahawk.”

“Are they good?” Dave asked, his eyes still on the sky.

“Good!” Brand exploded, “Of course they’re good! Air cooled engine. Do 350 per hour. And can they climb! Practically straight up! It’s going to be grand!” he exclaimed, his eyes glued upon the spot where the three planes were circling. “They’ll do that old Messerschmitt in before you can say Jack Robinson.”

5

“They should. Two to one,” Dave Barnes, the other boy spoke slowly, no sarcasm in his voice, only cool appraisal. He was an American. This was not his war. For him this was but a ringside seat to something rather big.

The lips of the English boy, Brandon Ramsey, drew into a tense white line. This *was* his war. Perhaps he knew the men in those one-seated fighters. He could not be sure of that, but there was an airbase for fighters not three miles from his home. He knew nearly all the fliers. As for the enemy plane, why was it here? To drop bombs on defenseless villagers, or to spy out targets for some other plane that carried tons of explosives. Who could say?

“Two to one.” His was not a happy laugh. “There are three men in that Messerschmitt. They’re in an armored cabin. Our boys are right out there in the open.” There was a touch of anger in his voice.

“I—I’m sorry,” Dave murmured, brushing a hand before his eyes. “I’ve been in England for so short a time. Guess I don’t see things your way just yet.”

6

“That’s all right,” was the prompt and generous response. Brand gave Dave’s knee a slap. “You’ll pick it up fast. That is,” he added, “if that Messerschmitt isn’t still carrying its bombs and if he doesn’t land one of them right on us.”

“Why would he do that?” The American boy’s eyes opened wide.

“Lighten his load. Besides, a bullet might strike a bomb. Then whew! He’d fly into a thousand pieces. He—”

The English boy stopped suddenly, for at that instant there came a sput—sput—sput from the sky.

“They’re at it!” Dave’s voice was low and tense.

The burst of fire which was short and sharp had come from the Spitfire.

“Short, broadside,” Brand explained. “You can’t do much with a broadside. Other plane’s going too fast. They’re out of range, just like that. They—

“Look!” he exclaimed in a voice tense with emotion.

“The Tomahawk is going after that plane from behind!

He—

7

“Nope.” He let loose a low hiss of disgust.

“He’s gone into a power dive.”

It was true. All the planes had been high, perhaps up 15,000 feet. Now the Messerschmitt slipped into a dive that took it half the distance to earth. The American boy was ready to dodge and run for it when just as suddenly as it had gone into the dive the Nazi plane came out of it to level off just above the farm home.

“Look!” Brand gripped his companion’s arm hard. “He’s dropped a bomb!”

Terror stricken, fascinated, white-hot with anger, the English boy watched a silver spot against the dark blue sky go down—down—down.

And on the hillside, far above her home, tall, slender, beautiful twenty-year old Cherry Ramsey, with the color gone from her cheeks, also watched the terrifying missile speed from the sky.

“Where will it strike?” Her alert mind registered the question her lips did not speak, while her eyes took in the house, the barn, the out-buildings, the orchard—every spot dear to her childhood.

8

And then the silence of the countryside was torn by a sudden burst of sound that made the very hills tremble.

For one full moment while the trio on the hillside kept their places, breathless, expectant, a cloud of dust and smoke obscured the view.

During this moment Cherry became conscious of the dog that lay whining at her feet. Bending low, she patted his sleek head. “Yes, I know it’s terrible,” she soothed. “You don’t like it. We don’t either. But we all must endure it for England’s sake.”

As if he understood, the dog nestled silently at her feet.

The smoke cleared. The girl sighed with relief. The bomb had fallen in the orchard. A single apple tree, one of the early pippins, had been uprooted. A slight loss. The tree was quite old.

And then with a shock it came to her that everything—the house, the barn, the dovecotes,—all about the place was old, old and very dear.

Then again her lips parted in sudden fright, for a second silver spot, larger than the first, had appeared against the sky. Watching its swift descent, she grabbed at her painfully beating heart. At first it seemed that it must fall upon the house. "Alice is there," her reeling brain registered the thought. Then came a sense of relief. The house would be spared. Then it was to be the barn where two fine colts were housed that would receive the full force of the blow.

9

"No," she sighed. "Farther up the hill."

The bomb fell not ten feet from a small square building. Like a tree, uprooted by the blast, this tiny house leapt high in air, then collapsing, crashed to earth. At the same instant dust and smoke concealed all.

As if struck a blow from behind, the girl leapt forward, stood there tense, motionless for a period of seconds, then disregarding the loyal collie whining at her heels, went dashing down the hill.

The apparently insignificant building had once been a smoke-house. Perhaps that had been fifty years before. When Cherry was a child it had been converted into a playhouse. There, hours on end, she and her sister Alice had played with their dolls and at keeping house. They, to be sure had abandoned both dolls and playhouse long ago. But from time to time other children had come to live on the Ramsey Farm. Both playhouse and dolls had been theirs. At this moment two cute children, Tillie and Peggy, from the London slums, were staying at the Ramsey Farm. This old smoke-house was their favorite haunt. As Cherry sped down the hill

10

allowing herself not one glance at the brightening sky, she dared not ask the question that haunted her terror-stricken mind. “Oh, God!” she whispered, “It can’t be true!”

Chapter II

Catbirds and Hawk

From the spot where Dave and Brand stood the ancient playhouse could not be seen. That tragedy might have befallen some member of their household they did not so much as dream. Enough that by some miracle the house and barns had been spared and that the hated enemy plane, having delivered its load, was now speeding away.

But not so fast. The speedy British Spitfire had made a broad circle and was prepared to meet the enemy head on.

As Brand Ramsey stood stiffly at attention, watching every move of those fighting planes, his fingers clenched and unclenched nervously. Not so his American companion. Standing at ease, smiling a little, his lips parted, he might have been at a tennis match.

How often, during his early days on an American farm this boy, Dave Barnes, had watched a fight between two catbirds and a hawk. How insignificant the catbirds had appeared, how terrifying, with curved beak and needle-like claws, the hawk. And yet how often, quite disheartened, the gray intruder had soared away. In the fight being fought above them now he saw the battle of catbirds and hawk.

Which would win? His sympathies had ever been with the catbirds. It was so now. And yet he whispered to himself, “It’s not my war.”

His war or no, he followed every move of those birdlike things that whirling, zooming, dipping, soaring, appeared at any moment ready to crash head on and burst into flames.

Now the Spitfire was beneath the enemy, coming up. Now! Oh! Now! The boy drew a deep breath. Now the Spitfire was on the Messerschmitt’s tail. “Now!” he breathed.

Once more a sharp exclamation escaped his lips, for banking sharply, the enemy slid out of the trap. At that instant, with tail to the enemy, the Tomahawk was doing a broad circle to re-enter the scrap.

“Oh! Oh! Watch out!” Brand, the English boy shouted, as if he could call a warning to the pilot in the American plane. The Messerschmitt had turned the tables and was at the Tomahawk’s back. Brand wanted to stop his ears from the rat-tat-tat that he knew must come. Instead, he stood there mute, staring with all his might.

13

And then it came, a ripping, tearing burst of sound, as if the very sky was being torn to shreds.

“He—he got him!” Brand’s lips went white as the Tomahawk, after banking so sharply it seemed to stand on its right wing, went into a spin.

Only then did the American boy realize to the full that this was a battle, not a show affair that these were men and planes,

not birds, and that the brave fellow in that spinning airplane was apparently about to be beaten to a pulp on the cruel earth of the hillside. Instinctively he closed his eyes and began to count,—“One—two—three.” Thirty seconds, he thought, then all will be over.

He had counted only to fifteen when a sharp cry
—“Hooray!” sent his eyes wide open again.

14

“He—he came out of it!” Brand exulted with a wild wave of his arms.

It was true. The apparently doomed pilot had somehow pulled his plane out of that fateful spin. What was more, he was not leaving the field. Instead, he was once again climbing rapidly.

“Look!” Brand exclaimed. “That Messerschmitt has had enough! She’s climbing! She’s afraid of that Tomahawk. Thinks she can outclimb him. The Tomahawk’s motor is not so good at dizzy heights. But, boy! How they can climb! Half a mile a minute!”

They were climbing now, all three planes. The enemy plane had the lead by many hundreds of feet. First after her came the Spitfire. Then the Tomahawk.

It was an all but perpendicular race, a glorious thing to see. Slowly, surely, the game little Spitfire, seeming only a nighthawk at that distance, closed in upon the enemy. Behind her, closing in faster, faster, ever faster, was the Tomahawk.

“See! What did I tell you!” Brand’s voice rose with enthusiasm. “That Tomahawk is a climber! You

15

Americans should be proud of that ship!”

“I suppose we are.” Dave scarcely heard. A born mathematician, he was trying by some occult system to determine the outcome of this strange race.

“In twenty seconds,” he pulled out a thin gold watch, “the Tomahawk will pass the Spitfire. Forty seconds more and—well—you’ll see.” His lips trembled as his words trailed off.

Hardly had he finished speaking when the small planes were abreast. Brand even imagined he saw the Tomahawk’s pilot wave to the other as he passed.

Forty tense seconds and then there came a ripping of the sky, longer, more terrifying than any they had yet heard. Half below, and half on the Messerschmitt’s tail, the Tomahawk was finding sweet revenge.

“That’s enough. No ship can take that and keep on flying!” the English boy breathed. At the same instant the attacking Tomahawk slipped away in a graceful spiral glide.

16

“What a ship!” the American boy breathed. “It can take it, and dish it out!”

The Messerschmitt had had more than enough. Black bits of wreckage began dropping from the mortally wounded plane. Among these were three larger spots, darker than the rest. Presently above these three white mushrooms blossomed against the sky. “Parachutes!” Brand exclaimed. “They’re coming down! Land somewhere up the slope. Come on!”

We've got to get them!"

Gone from Dave's mind was the thought that this was not his war, as he sped after his companion. Two facts were registered on his mind as he raced ahead—a one-legged man using a crutch had stopped his plow-team in the field and was racing toward the slope—a large collie dog was scooting across a low meadow. The dog appeared intent upon joining the one-legged man.

Chapter III

Dolls and Nazis

In the meantime, quite ignoring the battle in the sky, two streaks of red and gold—Cherry the girl, and Flash the dog—had gone racing down the slope. In her golden sweater and red plaid skirt the girl seemed little more than a sprite. The collie might well have been her golden shadow. That she was quite a real person she herself knew full well. Her painfully beating heart told her that.

Even as she raced on, her eyes were searching the ruins that had once been the playhouse of her childhood. They were looking for some trace of red or blue calico,—shocking proof that her fears had been well founded and that two small girls had been in the playhouse at the time the bomb fell.

It was only after she had reached the top of the stile leading from the field to the house that she caught a loud: “Yoo-hoo! Yoo-hoo, Cherry!”

18

One look, and she crumpled down on the stile steps to burst into a flood of tears, tears of pure joy.

All gay in red and blue calico Tillie and Peggy stood in the farmhouse doorway. A moment more and they had left the

house to come racing toward Cherry.

In the meantime the fighting planes had gone beyond the hill, quite out of her sight. Soon she was hugging two tumble-haired young sprites to her bosom, and exclaiming: "Tillie! Peggy! You are safe! I was, Oh! So afraid!"

"But the playhouse is all blowed up." Tillie dabbed at her eyes.

"Yes!" exclaimed Peggy, dancing a jig. "But were we bombed! And was it exciting! Just like fireworks! Only bigger! Much louder! There was smoke, and then Oops! Up went everything!"

In vast astonishment Cherry stared at this small bit of humanity from the slums of London. Her eyes were on the child for a full minute. Then, mustering up her courage she managed a low chuckle. Then, springing to her feet, she cried: "Come on! Let's go see! We'll make it a race!" And so the four of them, three girls and a dog, went racing away.

19

When at last they stood by the ruins of what had once been a grand playhouse, almost a living thing to her, Cherry was ready to weep.

How very much that playhouse had meant to her! It was only an abandoned smoke-house, with the pleasant odor of burning wood and smoking meat still clinging to it, but she had made of it a sort of second home. What grand times she and Alice had known there! And of late, how Tillie and Peggy had gloried in it! They had called it "Home of our Dolls."

“The dolls!” Cherry exclaimed as she recalled it all. “Where are they?”

As if in answer to her appeal, the dog, Flash, went racing about to return almost at once with the remains of a doll held lightly between his teeth.

“Oh! Poor Wilhelmina!” Peggy cried. “She has lost her head!”

“Yes,” said a sober voice behind her. “And if those terrible Nazis had succeeded as they hoped to, in dropping a bomb on our house you and I would have been minus our heads too.” It was a tall, strongly built girl in her late teens who spoke. She wore a blue calico apron. Her hands were white with flour. 20

“Alice!” Cherry demanded, as a look of terror came into her eyes. “Do you really think they meant to bomb the house?”

“Of course they did!”

“Why? What have we done?”

“They did it because we belong to England. They hate all of England. They will destroy every bit of England if they can!” The girl’s voice rose. “But they can’t! They shall not. There will always be an England!”

At that moment the plain, strongly built girl with flour on her hands appeared transformed. No Joan of Arc could have looked stronger, more daring, than she.

Cherry looked at the headless doll and was silent.

In the meantime, racing breathlessly, the two boys watched the drifting of the white enemy parachutes across the sky. It had seemed at first that they would land not so far from the spot where they had stood. But a brisk wind carried them farther and farther away.

21

“It’s going to be a race,” Brand panted, “but we’ve just got to make it. They may—may be spies. They—they must not escape!”

After climbing the sloping pasture they came to a place of scattered shrubs and trees. At last the parachute nearest them vanished behind a broad beech-tree.

“Come on!” Dave spurred ahead. “It’s now or never!”

At last, bursting out from behind a clump of trees they came upon a silken bag lying on the ground. At the same time a dark shadow vanished into a clump of low shrubs. Without a word the boys separated, one going right, the other left. The clump was small. One or the other would come upon the man. And then—

It was Brand’s luck to meet the man face to face. He was young,—not more than two years Brand’s senior. There was a savage, haunted look on his face.

22

“All right!” he growled, showing his teeth like an angry dog, “You asked for it. You get it!” All this in guttural English. An automatic gleamed in his hand. The English boy did not move.

The automatic rose, jerkily but steadily. Now it was aimed at the boy's feet,—now at his thigh—his belt—and now—

At that instant something with the force of an avalanche struck the Nazi flier across the knees. As he went crashing to earth the automatic exploded harmlessly, then fell into the tall grass. Ten seconds later both Brand and Dave were holding the man down, as Brand panted:

“Tha—that was a capital stroke, Dave! I sup—suppose you'd call that a tackle!”

“Right,” Dave agreed. “It's really quite old stuff. They do it in the movies. I guess you'd call it a part of our American way of living.” He laughed softly.

Brand went over the Nazi flier for weapons. Finding none, he searched in the grass, found the automatic, then turning about, said:

23

“You may get up.”

The reply was an ugly snarl. But the man, who wore a pilot's insignia, stood up.

“Mind leading the way?” Brand said to Dave.

“Certainly not.” Turning his back on the prisoner Dave started toward the farmhouse.

“All right, you. March!” Brand snapped. The prisoner followed Dave.

With Brand bringing up the rear, they had not gone a dozen paces when from somewhere, not far distant, there came a most astounding roar.

Starting in sudden shock, Brand all but dropped his weapon.

“Wha—what’s that?” Dave’s voice trembled as he came to a dead stop.

“That’s old Jock! Something terrible is happening. Here!” Brand thrust the automatic into Dave’s hand.

24

“You know how to use it. Press the handle, that’s all. March him down into the pasture. Don’t hesitate to shoot. This is war—our war!” He was gone. As he dashed through the brush, Brand felt his blood fairly boiling in his veins. “If anything serious has happened to good old Jock,” he thought savagely, “if one of those devils harms the old man I’ll tear him to pieces with my bare hands!”

Since no further sound reached him, guided only by that one agonizing roar, he made his way as best he could along the slope. Then breaking through a cluster of young beech-trees, he stopped short to stare. The little tableau before him seemed unreal. It might have been taken from some picture.

A young man dressed in civilian clothes, minus a coat, lay flat upon the ground. His eyes gleaming, white teeth showing in a snarl, a golden collie lay with his fore-paws on the prostrate man’s chest. Over them, leaning on his crutch, towered a great gray-haired one-legged Scot. He was saying: “Keep ’im Flash! Don’t ye let ’im stir an inch!”

At the same moment, from the pasture below came the

confused murmur of many voices. This was followed by a shout: “Come on, men. They’re ’iding up ’ere somewheres!”

Chapter IV
Hans Schlitz

While the sound of voices from below grew louder, Jock said in a steady voice:

“He was changin’ to civies.”

“His uniform must be hidden somewhere close,” suggested Dave.

“Aye. That it must,” Jock agreed.

Brand was not long in locating the uniform half hidden by dead leaves. In a pocket he found an automatic.

“It’s good he didn’t have that in his hand,” said the sturdy Scot, “else I shouldn’t ha’e been here. I caught him doin’ the lightnin’ change act.

“Plannin’ to do the spy act, eh?” He spoke to the man on the ground. The answer was a surly curse.

“All right.” Brand spoke quietly to the dog. “Let him up.”

Flash looked at Jock, read an answer in his eyes, then left his post.

“Get up.” There was a sound like clinking steel in the English lad’s voice.

“He knocked me over,” Jock explained quietly. “That was easy enough, an’ me with but one leg. Then he went on to finish me off. He’s got astonishin’ strong hands, that lad has. He’s all for shakin’ a man. If it hadn’t been fer good auld Flash now—”

“He would have killed’ you.” Chilled hate was in Brand’s voice.

All of a sudden hands parted the branches of a small oak and there stood the brawny blacksmith from Warmington, the village below Ramsey Farm. He carried an antique fowling-piece.

“So you got one of ’em? That’s grand, me boys!” he approved. “Where now would you say the others be?”

By that time a dozen members of the Home Guard had gathered in.

“My friend from America, David Barnes, has one of them just up here a little way,” Brand replied.

“I’ll say you’ve done a fine job of it,” the blacksmith approved.

27

“And now then.” He turned to the prisoner. “What may your name be?” He drew pencil and notebook from his pocket.

For a moment the Nazi stood sullenly silent.

“Come now,” the blacksmith insisted. “It’s part of the regulations.”

“Hans Schlitz,” came in a low, defiant voice.

“Hans Schlitz!” The words sprang unbidden from Brand’s voice. “That’s the name of the prisoner who worked on our farm during the World War!”

“I’m his son,” the prisoner snarled. “I’ve paid you a visit to square accounts. I’m sorry we missed.”

“So you meant to bomb our house!” Brand stared almost in unbelief.

“Why not? Your father treated my father, a prisoner of war, like a dog.”

“That,” said the gray-haired blacksmith, “is not the truth. I mind it well. He was housed and fed as one of the family. He worked no harder than the men of the household. He—”

“That’s a lie!” the prisoner snarled. A crimson flush o’erspread the giant blacksmith’s face. He took a step forward. Then he muttered low—“No. It won’t do. Not at all it won’t do. Not to be brawlin’ with a swine like him.”

28

He stood there for a moment, head bowed as if in prayer. Then his head lifted as he said:

“Here you, Bill and Hugh, take this fellow to the guard house.

“The rest of you,” he waved an arm, “spread out an’ search

for the one that's still free. There was three of them, you all mind countin'."

There was a murmur of assent. Then they were away. "Come on," Brand said to Dave after the first man they had captured had been turned over to the blacksmith and a companion. "All this leaves me a bit groggy. Think of their deliberately planning to blow our house off the map!"

"Terrible!" Dave agreed.

"And my father did treat that prisoner well," Brand said. 29
"I remember his telling of it many times. We saw where their plane cracked up." Brand's voice rose. "Finding that plane is important. That third fellow may have been there and finished wrecking it. If not, we'll be the first to look it over."

The discovering of the wreck was no great task. The plane had cut a path through a cluster of young trees. In doing this it had stripped off its wings, but its cabin, motor, and instrument board had been left in fair condition.

"The R. A. F. will want to look at this," Brand said. "They'll want to know if the Huns have discovered any new tricks,—a bomb sight, or something like that."

He tried the cabin door. It stuck. Seizing a bar from the smashed landing gear he pried the door open. As he did so something fell at his feet. It was a long, flat pigskin billfold.

Throwing back the flap, he pulled out a handful of papers. The first of these appeared to be some sort of flying orders. He could not read the German print, but the names, written in

by hand, were plain enough.

“Fritz Steinbeck,” the boy read aloud. “That may be the darkhaired fellow we caught first.”

30

“What are the other names?” Dave asked.

“Hans Schlitz, and Nicholas Schlitz. Sayee—” Brand stared. “They may be brothers.”

“And they are!” he exclaimed in a low, tense whisper ten seconds later. “Look! Here’s their picture together.” He held up a thin card.

“Look almost like twins,” Dave suggested.

“Nope,” Brand concluded after a second look. “The one we caught is the older of the two. I only hope,” his brow wrinkled, “that they get this fellow Nicholas. If they don’t—well—” he heaved a deep sigh. “His name may be Nicholas, but for us, if he harbors a grudge, as his brother surely does, he may prove to be Old Nick, the devil himself.” He did his best to suppress a shudder. “I’ll put this in my pocket.” He stowed the billfold away. “Turn it in at the airport tomorrow. Mother will be down tonight. I want to talk the affair over with her.

“Hey, you!” he called a moment later as a boy who could scarcely have been past sixteen put in an appearance. “You’ve got a gun.”

“That I have,” the boy grinned.

31

“Want a job?”

“That I do. I’m tired of tramping.”

“Right. You just keep an eye on this wreck until someone from the R. A. F. comes along.”

“A Royal Air Force man.” The boy grinned again. “I’ll sure enough be glad to meet one.”

“You’ll get a chance, all right,” Brand promised. “They won’t miss this.”

To Dave he said: “Come on. We’ll go down now.”

They made their way through the shadows cast by young trees in silence. Arrived at the upper side of the broad meadow overlooking the homestead and the village beyond, as if struck by the beauty of the view, they paused to stand there motionless.

How different were their thoughts at that moment!

The American boy was thinking: “How strangely beautiful it all is, as if it had been arranged with great care so that a famous artist might paint it.”

It was just that—the farmhouse built of native stone, centuries old, stood in the midst of orchards and gardens all green and gold with the colors of autumn. Brightest speck of all was Cherry sitting on the gray rocks.

“How like a sprite she is,” Dave was thinking. “And how like

an angel she can sing!”

Beyond the farmstead was a broad, green pasture dotted with black and white cattle. To the right of this its walls shattered but still upright, a great, gray Norman castle cast a long, dark shadow.

“It’s like the shadow of war on a weary world,” the boy thought.

As his gaze turned to the left his face brightened. “The village,” he whispered. Never before, he thought, had there been such a village. With its winding street following the whimsical meandering of a narrow stream, with its houses set irregularly along hillsides that sloped away on either side, with gardens running back to the edge of a great grove of beech, oak and yew trees, it all seemed part of a picture-book dream.

“And yet,” he thought, “the people in that village are quite human. They are kind, simple and good. The baker, the blacksmith, the cobbler, and all the rest,—how really wonderful they are! And so kind to a stranger! And yet,”—He was thinking what it might be like tomorrow, or the day after—if the war lasted. And it would last!

33

As for Brand, he was thinking quite simply and steadfastly, “That’s my home down there. It’s always been my home—has been the home of my people for generations. And yet, if the purpose of one man, or perhaps two, had been carried out on this perfect autumn day, it would have been no home—only a pile of rocks. And beneath that pile would have been

the crushed forms of three persons I love.”

“This,” he said aloud, “is war. Come on.” His voice was hoarse. “Let’s get on down.”

Chapter V
The Young Lord

The house in which the Ramseys lived was large. Its kitchen was immense—large as the entire first floor of a modern American home. Its fireplace took a five-foot log at its back. Walled round with two-foot thick stone, with flagstone floor and massive beamed ceiling, this room seemed the inside of a fort. And that, in days long gone by, it might very well have been, for a moat—in these days dry and grown up to shrubs—ran round the house.

It was in this great room, when the day's work was done and night had shut out both the beauty and the horror of the day, that the family gathered about the cherry fire.

Over the massive glowing logs a teakettle sang. By the hearth lay Flash, the golden collie. Back of him, on a rug, the two young girls played at jacks. Dave, who sat nearest to them, noted with approval that their hair was now neatly combed, their dresses clean, their faces shining. “That’s the part Alice plays,” he thought with approval.

35

As his eyes swept the circle, Alice knitting, Cherry smiling over a book, Jock and Brand talking about cattle that had strayed, he thought: “This is indeed a happy home.”

At that moment there came the sound of a motor, followed by a loud honk. At once Cherry, with cheeks aglow, was at the door.

She ushered in a young man of medium height, with smooth dark hair and smiling black eyes.

“Good evening, everybody,” he exclaimed. “Thought I’d just drop by to see how you liked the bombing. Stirred you up a bit. I’ll bet on that. I—” He paused as his eyes fell on Dave. Dave was new to him. So too were the small girls who stared up at him.

“Lord Applegate,” Cherry began, “I want you—”

“Forget about the Lord part,” the young man laughed.

“I’m not yet a lord. If ever I receive the title it will never fit. Call me Harmon, as you’ve always done, or Lieutenant Applegate of the R. A. F.”

36

“That,” Brand exclaimed, “is an honor indeed. I only wish—” He did not finish but stared enviously at the Lieutenant’s uniform. “I’d be content if I were only a private,” he whispered under his breath.

“Well, anyway,” Cherry laughingly began all over, “I want you to meet David Barnes. He’s from America. His uncle is a war reporter who knew father in the World War. And so—”

“So he’s paying you a visit. That’s fine.” The young lord who wasn’t yet a lord but was a Lieutenant in the Royal Air Force shook hands with Dave, then accepted a place beside him.

“Where did you get the children, Cherry?” Applegate asked, looking down at the pair who had resumed their game.

“Oh, they are Alice’s,” Cherry laughed.

“Nice work, Alice,” the young Lord said. “It must have been a very long time since I was here.”

37

“It has been,” Alice agreed. “Quite too long. But these children,—they are refugees from London. Bombed out, you know.

“You should have seen them when they came!” she added in a low voice, with a grimace. “Their mothers came with them. But they couldn’t stand the eternal silence of this place.”

“So they left you the children?” said Applegate. “Good old Alice!”

“Oh, they’re really a joy!” The girl’s face lighted.

“But Harm!” Her face sobered. “That plane dropped a bomb on the old playhouse. Blew it to bits. You know, you used to come and play with us sometimes long ago—with dolls and things,” she added teasingly.

“With dolls! Good heavens!” he exclaimed.

“And today the dolls had their heads blown off,” Cherry added. “Just think! It might have been our heads that were blown off!”

“Yes,” the young man’s face sobered, “it might have

38

been. That was a real scrap. Didn't come out so badly on the whole. Did they catch the men who bailed out?"

"Two of them." Brand's brow wrinkled. "The Home Guard tells me the other got away."

"Oh, they'll catch him," Applegate prophesied cheerfully.

"I'm not so sure about that." Brand did not smile. "They did find his parachute and his uniform half hidden under leaves."

"Oh! Fixing to turn into a spy!" Applegate's face sobered.

"Alice," the younger of the two children called. "What is a spy?"

"A spy," said Cherry, "steals secrets."

"And blows up castles and bridges. A terrible man!" said Alice. "I know all about it. I'll tell you a story about a spy when it's time for bed."

"Ooo." Peggy gave a delectable shiver. "After that we won't dare go to sleep!"

"The most astonishing thing,"—Brand leaned forward in his chair—"is that one of the men we captured today is the son of the prisoner who worked on this farm more than twenty years ago."

39

"What?" Applegate exclaimed. "It can't be possible!"

"How do you expect us to believe that?" Cherry demanded

with a wave of the hand.

“I’ll leave it to Dave and Jock,” Brand defended.

“That’s right,” Jock agreed. Dave nodded his head.

“See?” Brand’s voice was low. “What’s more, I’m almost sure the fellow who eluded us is his brother. If you don’t believe that, look at this picture.” He passed the paper and the photo around.

“Hans Schlitz,” Applegate said, musingly, “That’s the name, right enough. I’ve often heard my mother speak of him. Gloomy, brooding sort of fellow, he was. Probably went back to Europe after the war to tell his sons vile tales of the way he was treated. Poisoned their minds with hate.”

“Oh—ah!” Cherry shuddered. “Gives me the creeps to think of that son of his prowling about here at night.”

“Oh come!” Applegate sprang up. “It’s not as bad as all that. Come on, Cherry.” He put out his hands. “How about a song. I’ll do the honors at the old grand. Happy days.”

40

“I’d love it!” said Cherry, allowing herself to be led away to the corner where a huge grand piano loomed out of the shadows.

Taking up a candle, Alice carried it to that corner, set it on the piano, then tiptoed back.

With this pale light playing across their interesting mobile faces the young Lord and Cherry took their places.

The moments that followed will linger long in David's memory. Never before had he seen or heard anything like it. The pale light playing on two bright happy faces, eager for all life, and most of all the perfect blending of mellow tones from the ancient piano with the fresh, free joy of Cherry's voice. Ah! That was something indeed! More than once, without knowing it, he whispered:

“Oh Cherry! I didn't know you could sing like that!”

From moment to moment the mood of the music changed. Now the girl's slender form was swaying to “It's a Lovely Day Tomorrow,” the next she was bringing back for good old Jock's sake a song loved by all those of twenty years before:

41

“There's a long, long trail awinding
Into the land of my dreams,
Where the nightingale is singing
And the white moon beams.”

And then, springing to a place on the long piano bench she cried: “Now! Let's all sing, Roll out the barrel.”

Long before this songfest was over Dave found himself bursting with a wonderful plan. No, it was not his war. But he could do his bit, couldn't he? And he would.

When quite out of breath after her last rollicking song Cherry was led to her place by the fire, she exclaimed:

“Oh! It's wonderful just to live!”

“Yes,” the young Lord agreed. “It is grand. And yet, perhaps tomorrow we die.

“Come!” He took Brand by the shoulder. “Let’s go out and see the holes those bombs dug for you. I’ve got to report to my C. O. about them.” And so the two of them disappeared into the night.

42

“Come Peggy. Come Tillie,” Alice called. “Time for a goodnight story. And then to bed.”

“Will you really tell us a spy story?” Peggy begged.

“Perhaps.”

“A real, true spy story!” Tillie was fairly dancing.

“Yes, I guess so.”

At that Alice, the two children, and Flash, the dog, marched into the small dining room to close the door behind them.

“It was the young Lord who piloted that Tomahawk plane this afternoon,” Jock said in a hoarse whisper. “I have it on good authority, the very best.”

“And he said never a word about it!” Dave marvelled.

“He’s like that.” Cherry’s lips went white. “He never tells of such things. But just think! He nearly crashed!”

43

“So near I closed my eyes,” Dave replied admiringly. “Young Lord,” he thought. “Not a bad name for a chap like that!”

Chapter VI

Lady Spies

When Jock had gone stomping out to follow the young Lord on his tour of inspection, Dave found himself alone with Cherry.

“Listen, Cherry.” He was more excited than the girl had ever known him to be. “I’ve got a grand idea!”

“That’s what England needs right now,” the girl laughed nervously. “Just think what happened today, and is likely to happen more and more.”

“That’s just it!” Dave leaned forward eagerly. “In all of England there are thousands of anxious people, millions, really, who need a touch of youthful cheer. And you can give it to them!”

“I?” The girl caught her breath. “How?”

“By singing for them as you sang for us tonight—singing over the radio.”

“Oh—o!” Cherry drew in a long breath. “I hadn’t thought of doing that. You—you see, I’m only a local song bird in a little country village. Easter at the church, you

know, Christmas carols, parties, and all that. But the radio! I—I—just—”

“Don’t say you couldn’t,” Dave pleaded. “Please say you’ll try. We must each do our bit.” He had forgotten for the moment that this was not his war.

“Yes, I know,” Cherry breathed. “There’s mother, you know. She was a World War nurse. Now she’s directing an entire ward. Alice has her refugee children. And I—I just sit in the sun and tend the sheep.”

“Yes. And you might be the most talked-of girl in England!” Dave was bursting with his new idea. “Just go up to London with me tomorrow. My uncle has a trans-Atlantic news broadcast. He’ll arrange it all. Wi—will you go?”

“Sure! Shake on it.” The girl put out a slim hand.

“It’s just as I thought,” declared the Little Lord, as the men came stomping back into the room a moment later.

46

“Those bombs were rather small. A Messerschmitt can’t carry a heavy load. But they can keep all of England on edge with their nuisance flight.”

“Cheerio!” Cherry sprang to her feet. “At least one Messerschmitt has ceased to be a nuisance, and that, I’m told, is because a certain young Lord learned how to fly long ago.”

“All part of a day’s work,” the young Lord grinned. “I’d like just such a scrap every morning before breakfast.”

At that the cook brought in cakes and steaming coffee and

they all took seats by the great broad three-inch thick table that had served the Ramsey family for more than a hundred years.

In the meantime Alice was telling her young refugees the promised spy story.

“Once,” she began, “in that other terrible war, the one in which my father and your grandfather fought, there were two spies named Louise and Charlotte.”

“Oh!” Tillie exclaimed with a sudden start. “Are there really lady spies?”

“To be sure,” was the quiet reply.

47

“Goody!” Tillie clapped her hands. “I’m going to be a lady spy!”

“Yes sir!” Peggy broke in with her high, piping voice. “We’ll both be spies. You be Louise, and I’ll be Charlotte!”

“Wait and see!” the story teller warned. “Let me tell you the story. Then you may not want to be a spy at all!”

“Oh, yes we will!” Tillie insisted. “Aunt Alice (they called her aunt) do we have a spy right here on our farm?” The child’s voice was low, mysterious.

“Hush!” Alice warned. “Don’t dare to breathe a word about that.”

“Tillie!” The younger child’s voice rose sharply, “Let her tell

the story!”

And so, while the children lay back among the cushions, Alice told the story of Louise and Charlotte.

“They had lived in France.” Her voice was low and mellow. “Then had come the terrible German soldiers. Louise fled before them. Charlotte hid in a cellar.

48

“Louise was very bright. She had been a teacher. She could speak French, German and Belgian.

“A great soldier asked her to be a spy. This frightened her nearly out of her wits. But she said ‘all right. I will do it.’

“One dark night a great giant of a man named Alphonse, who had been a smuggler and was a friend of her country, took her hand and said: ‘We will go.’”

“Wh—where did they go?” Tillie was growing excited.

“They went to the border.” Alice smiled. “At the border there was a very high barbed wire fence. You couldn’t go over it. If you tried to go under it you might touch an electric wire that would sound an alarm. Then you would be shot. If you tripped on something it might set off a mine, and you’d be blown to bits.”

“And wa—was—” Tillie got no further. Her sister’s fingers were on her lips.

49



"Alphonse knew all about these things," Alice went on. 51
"He made a hole under the fence. The earth was very loose. He had gone under before. They got across safely. Then they were in the land where German soldiers were. And, just when they were breathing easy, a blinding white light swept along the barbed wire fence. It was searching for them."

"And—did—"

"Alphonse and Louise dropped flat and lay there hiding their faces in the damp earth. The sweeping searchlight came and went, came and went, then came to go away for good."

"Oh—oo!" Peggy breathed. "They didn't get them."

Just then Tillie sat straight up. "Aunt Alice!" she cried. "We *do* have a spy on our farm. I saw his face at the window. I really did, just now." At that same instant the dog Flash growled softly.

Visibly shaken, Alice managed to regain her poise. "Shish!" was all she said. Then she went on with her story.

"When this loyal French girl reached her home where German soldiers now were living, she began making lace and selling it from town to town. What was more important, she was finding friends to help her work as a spy. One was a scientist who could do strange things with chemicals, magnifying glasses, cameras and printing presses. Another was a map maker who in shorthand could write three 52

thousand words with invisible ink on a piece of transparent paper so small Louise could paste it to a spectacle lens and carry it across the line that way.”

“What for?” Tillie breathed.

“So none of the German spies could read it,” Alice explained.

“You see,” she went on, “things were happening over there that great French and English officers needed to know. And Louise could tell them. Once there was a terrible battle. Thousands of Germans were wounded. How many? Louise must find out.

“There was a house close to the railroad track where all the cars filled with wounded soldiers were passing. Someone hid in the dark room. Every time a car passed, she’d tap on the floor, tap, tap, tap. In the next room, seeming to study her lessons, was a school girl.”

53

“Just like you and me!” Tillie squeezed Peggy’s arm.

“This school girl was making marks on paper,” Alice went on. “Four marks, then one across, four more and one across.”

“Keeping track of the taps. I could do that.” Tillie was growing excited again.

“When all the trains had passed,” Alice whispered, “Louise counted up all the marks. Then she multiplied that by the number of wounded men in each car, and so she knew how many thousands had been badly wounded. But how was she to get that number across the line?”

“Paste it on her spectacle,” suggested Tillie.

“Not this time, she didn’t,” Alice smiled. “She wrote it on a paper and hid it. You’d never guess where.”

“In her shoe—in her glove—in her hair—” Tillie exploded.

“Nope. None of these.” Alice shook her head. “Let me tell you all about it, then you may guess.”

54

“Al—all right.” Tillie drew a long breath as she settled back.

“You see,” said Alice, “Louise was going down a dark road in the night. In one hand she carried her bag of laces, in the other a lantern. It was a tin lantern. The tin was all full of holes. Inside a candle flickered. It didn’t give much light, just enough. Suddenly a gruff voice commanded:

“‘Halt!’

“Louise was taken to a rough cabin where a short broad German spy woman lived. Everyone called her Le Grenouille, the frog. Louise and Charlotte feared and hated her.

“‘Take off your clothes’, that’s what the Frog said to Louise.

“Before obeying, Louise carefully blew out the candle in her lantern, then set it in the corner.

“All her clothes were taken off. Everything was searched,—dress, stockings, shoes,—everything. Nothing was found.

“‘All right. You may dress and be gone,’ said the Frog.

55

“When Louise had dressed she went on her way. That night our High Commander way across the line in France knew how many Germans had been wounded in that battle.”

“Louise, the spy, had told him,” Peggy whispered.

“She showed them the paper on which the number had been written,” said Alice. “Where do you think it was hidden?”

“In her basket!” Tillie cried.

“No.”

“In her hair,” Tillie guessed again.

“I know!” Peggy jumped up and down. “In her candle!”

“Good! That’s right! How did you guess?” Alice’s face shone.

“She—” Peggy did not finish. At that instant old Flash leapt from his corner, dashed up to the window which was above his head, and barked angrily.

At the same instant Tillie cried: “We do have a spy on our farm! I saw his face in the window! Saw him plain as day!”

56

They all rushed to the kitchen where the others were talking. A few excited words and the boys, with Flash at their heels, were out searching in the night.

But for one thing they might have succeeded in making a capture. The moment they stepped outside, the sky was lit by

a sudden flash. Then came the roar of an explosion.

“They’re at it again,” Young Lord murmured.

“Here Flash!” Brand called. “Go find him!” But Flash only whined at his feet. The roar of that distant explosion had paralyzed him. And so, in the end they returned empty handed.

“Aunt Alice,” Peggy whispered as she was being tucked in bed, “will you tell us more about those lady spies?”

“Sometime perhaps,” was the quiet reply.

Chapter VII

Enemy Sighted

After they returned from the futile search the three of them, Dave, Brand and the Young Lord stood for a time beside the car. They had talked for a moment. Then Brand walked away to the barn for one more look about before he retired for the night. It had been a strange, exciting and momentous day. Nothing quite like it had ever happened at Ramsey Farm before. He felt restless and ill at ease.

After he had gone the Young Lord asked Dave a strange question:

“What are you doing in England?”

“Why—I—nothing really,” Dave hesitated. “You see my uncle is in the news service here. He was coming over in the Clipper. He invited me to come along. So here I am. Perhaps it wasn’t quite as simple as all that, but he fixed it up.”

“I see,” the Young Lord murmured.

58

Did he? Dave doubted that. He made a second start. “You see I’ve had two years in college. Didn’t like it any too well, the class-room part. Oh, math was well enough. In fact I really

liked it. But the rest,” he heaved a sigh. “Well, I majored mostly in football, basketball, tennis and golf. So—oo,”

“So they didn’t care much whether you stayed on?”

“I suppose not. Anyway, all the colleges in America have been crammed with fellows who haven’t anything else to do but go to college now,—”

“All that will change fast,” said the Young Lord. “The way things are going over there now those boys are going to have things to do. Ever do any flying?” he asked abruptly.

“Yes—a little—quite a bit in fact. Uncle was a flyer in the World War. Not an ace exactly, but he got to like flying. He’s always had a flying crate or two about, and naturally I had to have a turn at them.”

The Young Lord guessed, and quite shrewdly too, that Dave was being too modest about his flying.

59

“I’m trying out a new plane tomorrow,” he said slowly. “It’s a two-seater. Want to go up? Just a little sky patrol. Nothing’s likely to happen.”

Dave seemed to see that Tomahawk of the afternoon plunging downward apparently headed for destruction. He wanted to say “no”. For some reason his tongue wouldn’t form the word. So he said:

“Yes. Sure. I’d like to.”

“Righto.” The Young Lord reached for the door of his big old

English car. "I'll be after you in this bus at 10:00 A. M."

His motor roared. He was away.

"Now why did I say that?" Dave asked himself aloud.

"Say what?" He started. Brand was at his side.

"I promised to go up with Applegate tomorrow."

"Sayee! That's corking! Just what I'd like to do! In fact,"
Brand's tone was sober, "I want to join up. Since this
afternoon I want to more than ever. Mother objects. Says I'm
needed to manage the farm. Says the army needs our butter
and fat cattle. This farm! Of course, we love it. All of us do.
But when all of England is threatened—when the others are
doing their bit—to be tied to the sail! God!" Brand stamped
his foot.

60

"It's all the way you think, I guess." Dave laughed lightly.
"Well, I'll be up having a look at your native land from the
clouds in the morning. So, goodnight." Half an hour later, in
his bed beneath the rafters of that ancient house, Dave was
asking himself: "Why did I come to England?"

The answer seemed simple enough. This war was too big to
miss—that is—miss seeing. But why had he persuaded
Cherry to go with him to London where bombs were falling?
Why had he promised to go up with the Young Lord in the
morning? He did not know the answers. All he knew was that
he felt like a fly caught in a web. The web did not have a very
strong hold on him yet. He could break away if he wished.
But did he wish? Not knowing the answer, he fell asleep.

In another corner of that broad upstairs, her door leading into the children's room ajar, Alice was hearing a shrill childish voice cry:

“You're a spy, a little lady spy. I'm a frog, a great big black frog. I'm going to swallow you—swallow you right down. Here I come!”

This was followed by a low, half-suppressed exclamation, a giggle, then a loud “Shish.” After that all was silent.

Alice was nearly asleep when suddenly from far overhead there came the roar of powerful motors. London was in for one more beating. Would those terrible bombings never end?

It was with a strange thrill tickling his spine that Dave climbed into the rear of the lord's two-seater plane the next day. This, he knew, was a fighting plane, his very first. This plane carried a sting in its nose, eight guns capable of firing nearly ten thousand shots per minute.

“Of course,” he thought, “this is broad daylight. Not much chance of picking up an enemy. And yet, there's yesterday.”

After fastening his safety belt with great care, he waited for the takeoff. It came with a roar. They were in the air. Some ship!

He studied it with great care. It had a dual control. If something happened, just happened to go wrong with the Young Lord, he could bring the ship to earth. He might, in a pinch, do a great deal more. The firing of those guns seemed simple. He had had a great deal more flying experience than

he was willing to admit,—at least 200 hours.

Seeming to read his thoughts, Applegate gave a slight squeeze at his firing button. In no uncertain tones the guns spoke. Dave was thrilled to his fingertips.

He began studying the electric switches, the emergency boost, the petrol switch, the air-speed indicator, the directional gyro, the climb indicator, and all the other instruments. A born mechanic, he could study these out one by one, eliminate the ones least needed, then picture himself guiding the ship.

Watching a mirror, studying his face, Applegate nodded in approval to the sky. As they climbed to 10,000 feet Dave saw London in the distance. Smoke hung over it. There had been a bombing, fires started. Homes of simple, honest, hard-working people who had not asked for this war had been destroyed. He hated all that.

63

White clouds, like distant snowbanks, were drifting through the blue as blue sky.

“Take her for a minute, will you?” The Young Lord spoke in a matter-of-fact voice.

Dave’s hands trembled as he gripped the controls. He kept the ship going on an even keel while his companion, after unstrapping heavy binoculars, studied the sky.

Suddenly Applegate threw out a hand. Swinging it to the right, he directed Dave into a fluffy white cloud.

“That’s it,” he approved. “Now just lurk around in here for a

bit.”

With a tickling sensation at the back of his neck Dave “loitered round”. At the same time he was asking himself, “Why did I let myself in for this?”

Twice they came out of the cloud, but on the wrong side. At last, after one more wave of the lord’s hand, Dave headed straight out, on the side from which they had entered. 64

He caught his breath sharply as, on breaking out into blue sky, he sighted an airplane beneath and beyond them. He trembled as he saw the hated swastika on its tail.

“Will there be a scrap?” he asked himself. Strangely enough he felt quite cool about it. The Young Lord took the controls. The motors roared. This gave Dave time to study land and sky. As near as he could tell the other plane which was slowly circling, was just about over Ramsey Farm. “That’s why Applegate is putting on such speed,” he thought.

Just then, like a squirrel darting for shelter, the enemy plane leapt upward and into a cloud.

“You better!” Applegate growled, at the disappearing enemy.

Only when they were near the cloud did he slacken his speed. Then, like a dog waiting for a squirrel, he loitered about in the sky.

“If the enemy really wished to get away,” Dave thought, “every advantage is with him.” A whole string of clouds was drifting in from the distant sea. Was he glad or sorry? At 65

that moment he could not have told.

After a time, like a dog watching clumps of bushes where a rabbit is hiding, the Young Lord began skirting that long procession of clouds.

They had followed almost to landsend and the shore when suddenly the Young Lord pointed to a black speck against the distant sky. Dave heaved a sigh of relief. Turning about, they headed for the airdrome.

“He was bashful, that Hun,” Applegate laughed into his mouthpiece. “Perhaps he came over to find his pals who paid us a visit yesterday. Sorry to disappoint him. Even the wreck has been carted away.”

“One of his friends is still at large,” Dave suggested. “Might have set up a signal. Black cross cut from the sod would do the trick.”

“That’s right,” Applegate agreed. “Anyway,” he laughed as they began circling for a landing, “we’re back just in time for lunch. It’s cold beef and plum pudding. You’ll stay, I hope.”

66

“Oh! Sure!” Dave agreed.

His visit to the flying corps’ mess was one not soon to be forgotten. He had read magazine stories of these fighters. Loud, boisterous, wild and a bit coarse, that was how they had been pictured. To his surprise he found them a simple, kindly lot, with manners that would have put many a college group to shame.

“You’ve really got to be up to things to be aflying in this squadron,” the Young Lord explained. “And in any other, for that matter. Drinking, loud laughs, roughness—well, it doesn’t seem to go with life-and-death flying, that’s all.

“You have to be a man,” he added after a pause. “And a man’s nearly always a gentleman as well.”

Chapter VIII

Roll Out the Barrel

When late that afternoon Dave walked with Cherry to the village to catch the bus to London, he carried a parcel under his arm. “My hiking boots,” he explained. “These hard roads have worn the soles thin.”

“Oh! I’m glad,” Cherry exclaimed. “You are going to like Uncle John. He’s our shoemaker. We call him that though I’m sure he’s really uncle to no one. He’s very old and still does all his work the hard way, by hand. Wonderful work it is, too.”

Dave did like Uncle John. Seated there at his bench, a leather apron on his lap and nails between his teeth, he seemed to have just moved out of a very old story book.

“Do you still make shoes as well as repair them?” Dave asked.

“Oh, yes, now and then.” The old man’s smile was good to see. “I’ve made all the Young Lord’s shoes since he was a baby.

“But then,” he sighed, “times have changed. You can’t get the

leather any more. It used to be that I could make a pair of shoes and guarantee them for five years. Those times are gone.

“But perhaps it is best that it should be so,” he added cheerfully. “Nowdays people like change. If you only pay one pound for a pair of shoes, you can afford more than one pair.” Taking a tack from his mouth, he drove it home, then another.

“He lives in two small rooms behind the shop,” Cherry said when they were outside. “His little wife was just like him, always cheerful and kind. She died three years ago.

“Nearly all the people in the village are like that,” she added as they walked on. “The butcher has his stall in front of his home. The baker’s shop is in his basement. So is the grocer’s. Everyone works. All are kindly. They never have much, but they make it do—and are happy.”

Dave was to recall this picture with a sudden pull at his heartstrings in the days that were to come.

69

The bus came lurching in. They climbed aboard and were away for London.

Arrived in London they hurried up to the radio studio for Cherry’s audition. Singing in a bare studio with a strange accompanist, the girl was far from doing her best. For all that the director gave her a small spot on the “People’s Choice” program at 9:00 P. M.

Once more on the street where shadows had grown long and dark, and people by hundreds were hastening home before the

air raid siren sounded, Cherry gripped Dave's arm as she said in a tragic whisper: "David, I never can stick it out. It will only be a dismal failure."

"Nonsense!" Dave laughed. "It's only stage-fright. Come on. My uncle took me to a rare little basement eating place once. They serve good old American coffee and waffles with maple syrup. That will put you on your toes."

In the quiet of the sub-cellar, they drank great quantities of coffee and ate their waffles joyously.

70

"I—I guess I'll make it now," Cherry murmured. Once more they were on the deserted streets.

Then, as if to crush her high hopes, all hell let loose. The roar of powerful motors, the scream of sirens, the boom and bang of anti-aircraft guns filled all the night with terror.

"I can't let you in 'ere now," said a burly guard at the entrance to the broadcasting station. "It is quite impossible. You shouldn't be 'ere at all."

"But this lady is to sing over the radio at nine!" Dave protested.

"Can't be 'elped." The guard was firm. "Orders is orders. No ladies hallowed in the station during an alarm. If you'd ask me sir, I'd hadvise a subway station at once, sir. Yonder's one not 'alf a block haway."

The words were scarcely out of his mouth when there came a low, whining sound, followed by a flash that lit all the sky.

Then came a roar fit to burst their eardrums, and a tremendous push that tossed them to the pavement five yards away.

Without a word Dave scrambled to his feet, picked the slight girl up in his arms, dashed half a block, and was down two flights of stairs to the subway station before he fully realized what he was doing.

71

Seated on the hard floor of the station, with thousands of people all about them, for a full moment they were completely silent. Then Dave began to laugh. Cherry joined in, and the spell was broken.

The laugh over, they looked about them. The whole long platform was filled with people. Young and old, rich and poor, salesgirls in thin, shabby coats, gray-haired ladies in mink and ermine, they all were there. And all, it seemed, were bent on making the best of an unpleasant situation. Bye and bye they would do their best to snatch a little sleep, for tomorrow would be another day.

“Look at them.” There was a catch in Dave’s throat. “They seem almost happy.”

“Yes.” Cherry’s chin went up. “They’re not going to let Hitler get them down. He wouldn’t be pleased if he could see them now!”

In a bright corner four old men were playing cards. In the shadows a shopgirl was whispering to her young man. Sitting on their bedrolls, two sedate matrons were knitting. Children were everywhere, and all of them whooping it up in hilarious fun.

72

“Excuse me,” said a smiling young lady. “Aren’t you Cherry Ramsey?”

“Why—why yes, I am.” Cherry looked into a pair of eager blue eyes.

“I knew it!” the young lady exclaimed. “I heard you sing at Lady Applegate’s home once. It was truly quite wonderful. Now—” she hesitated, “well, you see, I’m just helping out down here, sort of social service work, don’t you know. And I thought you might not mind, well, you know,”—she hesitated—“well, perhaps you wouldn’t mind singing a song or two for these people. They’d think it quite the berries if you would.”

“Well, that—” Cherry laughed, “that’s what I came to town for, to sing on the radio. But the guard wouldn’t let us go up to the station.”

“I shouldn’t wonder,” Miss Meeks, the social worker murmured. “Listen!” There came a deep, low rumble like the roll of distant thunder. “You can’t help loving these people, don’t you know.” Her tired face brightened as she spread out her arms. “Not one of them knows whether his home will be standing in the morning. But you see how they are.”

73

“Yes—yes I see.” Cherry swallowed hard.

“The radio,” Miss Meeks murmured. “Now I shouldn’t wonder. Will you sing for them, Miss Ramsey?”

Cherry nodded.

From somewhere a small piano was made to appear. A little Irish girl with a tumbled mass of red hair took her place before it. A small platform—a heavy packing box—was placed beside the piano.

After shedding her heavy coat, Cherry stood before her strange audience. All lovely in gold and blue, she caught their eyes at once. Leaning over, she whispered to the girl at the piano, giving her the name of her first song. The social worker clapped her hands for silence. Deep, appreciative silence followed.

“Miss Ramsey, a friend of Lady Applegate, from Dorset way, will sing to us,” Miss Meeks announced. “Let’s give her a hand.” The applause was tumultuous.

74

Somehow, a light, not too strong, was made to play on the slender girl as she sang.

“In the gloaming, Oh my darling,
When the lights are dim and low.”

She sang the song through to the end. The applause that followed drowned out the sound of exploding bombs.

“More! More!” came from every corner.

The social worker slid a microphone before the singer. Bending over, a smile on her lips, Cherry once more whispered a title. Then, lifting her voice high, she cried: “Roll out the Barrel! Everybody sing! Let’s make it ring!”

Everybody did sing,—more people than Cherry will ever

know, for through the microphone that had been placed before her, Cherry was at last singing on the radio. From end to end of England the song boomed on: “Roll out the Barrel.”

Every platform in the subway had its radio. Station by station they joined in until the whole tube, miles on end, echoed with the song.

75

“Roll out the barrel! We’ll have a barrel of fun
Roll out the barrel! We’ll put the blues on the run.”

It seemed to Dave as he listened after that song was over, that even the Fuhrer must have heard the applause that followed, heard and shuddered.

Dropping into a mellow mood for the oldsters who recalled that other terrible war, Cherry sang:

“There’s a long, long trail a-winding
Into the land of my dreams,
Where the nightingale is singing
And the white moon beams.”

Then, scarcely pausing for breath, leaning far forward, a bewitching smile on her face, she sang: “No! No! No! Papasista.”

When the roar of applause had died away, Dave heard a gray-haired lady in a Persian lamb coat say:

“Such a vulgar song!”

“Quite,” agreed her mink-coated friend. “Vulgar and

76

wonderful. I quite love this war. It has given me one more chance for a fling at life.”

“All out for England!” Cherry called into the megaphone. “Everybody sing, ‘We’ll roll the old chariot along’.”

They sang. They roared. They sang.

“If Hitler’s in the way, we’ll roll it over him.
If Tubby’s in the way, we’ll roll it over him.
If Il Duce’s in the way, we’ll roll it over him.
If the devil’s in the way, we’ll roll it over him.
We’ll roll the old chariot along
And we won’t tag on behind.”

In the hush that followed, Cherry announced in a low, husky voice: “God save the King.”

There followed a shuffling of feet. Every man, woman and child was on his feet. Even the enemy planes above seemed to hush as the glorious National Anthem rolled over England from Dover to Newcastle.

There were tears in the social service worker’s eyes as she took Cherry’s hand. “You’ll come again, won’t you?” she said in a low voice full of meaning. “Often and often.”



“Everybody Sing”

“If—if you need me,” was the quiet reply.

79

“And you said you couldn’t do it!” Dave laughed happily as he guided her up the stairs and back to their sub-basement for one more cup of good American coffee.

80

Chapter IX
The Hideout

That night members of that motley subway throng shared their beds with their new-found friends. Dave found a place with a young disabled veteran of the battle of Flanders. They slept on a thin pad and were covered by blankets none too thick. The subway was cold and drafty. For two hours Dave lay there thinking. Those were long, long thoughts. Back to the pictured walls of his mind came the peaceful pastures of Ramsey Farm, the racing planes overhead, the falling bombs, and the drifting parachutes. He rode once more with young Lord Applegate in that two-seater. His blood raced again as they played hide-and-seek with an enemy plane in the clouds. Again he heard the thundering crash of a bomb that had exploded, not, he supposed, more than two blocks from where he and Cherry had stood. What if it had been only one block, or no block at all? He tried to think this last question through, and could not quite make it. Nor could he answer to his complete satisfaction, his second and third questions,—why had he come to England? And why did he not go home? There would be a plane for Lisbon the day after tomorrow. Would he take it? He doubted it. And yet it seemed to him a voice whispered, “It is to this or no other. Think it over.” He did not think. Instead, he fell asleep.

Cherry had been given a welcome by a bright young lady who sold shoes in a great store. This young lady was wondering whether a bomb had scattered her shoes over a city block, and her job with them. In the midst of her chatter Cherry fell sound asleep.

Before they could leave the subway next morning two people were after them.

The manager of the radio station, who the night before had given Cherry such a lukewarm reception, came bustling down the stairs. She, he said, had been “Splendid! Splendid! Quite remarkable indeed! How the people had taken to her! There had been wires, phone calls,—everything. Would she come back at nine that night and sing at the studio? She should have a competent accompanist and every courtesy. Would she come?”

“No.” Cherry favored him with her brightest smile. “I won’t sing in your studio. I can’t sing in a stuffy little box with no one about except a man in a glass case who waves his arms, pretends to cut his own throat with his fingers, points to the tip of his nose, and goes through all manner of other contortions just to tell me what to do.”

All this left the man staring at her, speechless.

“But if,”—Cherry burst into a merry laugh—“if you’ll let me sing on my box with my glorious red-headed Irish girl to tickle the ivories, I’ll come back, not tonight, but very soon, and often.”

“Oh! My dear child!” the manager exploded. “You are

generosity itself. But the subway is cold and drafty.”

“No place,” said Cherry, and she did not smile, “can be cold where so many warm hearts are beating as one.”

83

The man stared at her in speechless silence for a moment. Then he murmured, “May God forgive me if this child is not a genius.”

But here was her mother. She too had heard the broadcast and thought it marvelous. This was her day off. Her small car was just around the corner. She would take them back to Ramsey Farm in time for scrambled eggs, coffee and scones. And she did.

Mrs. Ramsey, David realized at once, was a strong, efficient person, with a will of her own. She directed the affairs of her household as the O. C. directs his squadron. Breakfast over, she called in the entire group to discuss farm affairs. She commended Jock for his fine job of plowing, and the boys for their work in the turnips and Brussels sprout patches.

“England is going to need food,” she declared. “We must all do our best. The nights are growing cold. We may get a freeze at any time, so—oo—”

“So it’s the potatoes next.” Brand gave vent to a good-natured groan. He hated picking up potatoes. Stooping over made his back ache. But theirs was a fine crop, and it must be gathered in.

84

Jock got out the potato plow. Soon they were all hard at work. David joined in. So too did Alice. Even the “enfants terrible”,

Tillie and Peggy, helped a little. They were, however, at their best throwing clods, so in the end they were banished.

The place where the potatoes were stored held for Dave a real fascination.

“We call it the Hideout,” Alice explained, dropping down on a sack of potatoes for a short rest. “It’s as old as the hills. Did you note the moss on the roof?”

“Six inches thick,” Dave agreed. “And look at the walls! Solid masonry!”

“We believe it goes back to Feudal days.” Alice’s eyes took in the one large room, its broad stone fireplace, two narrow windows, and massive beams. “In those days it was a real hideout, I shouldn’t wonder,” she murmured.

“And might be again,” Dave suggested.

“Yes, if the Huns really come,” she agreed. “But they’ll never get this far—England will beat them back even if they swarm in on the shore like the waves of the sea.”

85

All that day Cherry sat curled up in a great chair before the fire in the farmhouse kitchen. She sometimes slept, sometimes thought soberly, and sometimes dreamed. To this her wise mother offered no objections. Cherry, she realized for the first time, had a great gift. She might, it seemed, be of extraordinary service to all England. She could bring them the spirit of youth, buoy them up, give them courage for the great ordeal that lay ahead.

The potatoes were stored in a narrow, dark underground tunnel that one entered through a door at the back of the Hideout.

“A grand air raid shelter,” suggested Dave.

“Hope we never need it,” Alice replied soberly, “but you never can tell.” Her brow wrinkled. She was thinking of the hole in the ground where an ancient playhouse had once stood. “How about a tramp to the village?” she suggested.

“O. K. by me,” said Dave. “I’ll see if my boots are finished.”

86

The boots were not finished. But then, boots at the cobbler’s never are—at least, not the first time you call.

“You’ll have to pardon the delay,” the old man apologized. “So many boys from the airdrome have brought in their boots.

“But things will go faster now.” His face brightened. “You see I have a helper.”

For the first time Dave noticed a short, sturdy young man sitting in the corner. He was sewing on a sole and never once looked up.

Dave thought with a start, “He has a vaguely familiar look. But I’ve never seen him before, that’s certain.”

“He does very fine work.” The old man rubbed his hands together. “Very fine indeed.”

Appearing a little disturbed by Dave's lingering look at the stranger, old John followed him out of the shop to close the door behind him. "He's quite proper," he said, jerking a thumb backward toward the shop. "He looks like a German, but he's a refugee, a Hollander. You understand?"

"Yes,—I"

"His papers are in perfect order. I saw to that you may well believe." The old man laughed a trifle uncertainly. "Our local magistrate looked over those papers for me," he went on. "We can't take chances. But this, you see, is a rare opportunity. I've never made any real money, not in all my long life. And now, with all these fliers coming in—"

"Gives you a break," said Dave. "I wish you lots of luck." As it turned out, the old man was to need it,—lots and lots of luck.

When the cobbler opened the door to retrace his steps, Flash, the collie, who had come up as a sort of vanguard to Alice, put his nose in at the cobbler's door, gave a long sniff, then uttered a low growl.

"Well now, I wonder what he means by that?" Dave thought as he hurried away to join Alice.

That night, after the others had retired, Mrs. Ramsey, Dave and Brand sat for a long time silently watching the fading glow of the wood fire.

"Mother," Brand said suddenly, "I'd like to join the Royal Air Force."

“Oh! No!” The mother’s words came short and quick. “You are needed here. Besides, there’s little enough for our aviators to do now. After the beating up we gave them, the Jerries, as you call them, are only coming over at night. You can’t find them at night. That’s work for the anti-aircraft batteries.”

“I’m not so sure of that,” Brand murmured beneath his breath. “But mother,” his voice rose, “the Huns may come over, a million of them, by air and sea, perhaps tomorrow. We must be prepared!”

“And we must be fed,” his mother replied quietly. “Perhaps later—” She did not finish. She knew a great deal about war, did the brave-hearted English mother.

“Wars,” said David, speaking before he thought, “are wrong. There should be no wars.”

Instantly the woman’s slow, steady gaze was upon him. “She’s angry with me,” he thought. His lips were parted for the words, “I’m sorry.”

But she spoke first. “You are exactly right, David. Wars are terrible. I should know. Wars have cost me those I loved far more than life. Now another war may cost me my son, and perhaps my daughters.

89

“Some of us,” she went on, “did what we could to prevent this war. We failed. Why? Perhaps none of us will ever know for sure.

“However,” her voice was steady and sure, “we have a war. We have no choice but to fight it. We must fight or be

enslaved. Our enemy has left no room for doubt there. England has always been free.”

After that for some time, save for the slow, steady tick—tock—tick—tock of the dependable old English clock in the corner, there was silence in the great room.

Later, as they stood outside beneath the stars, Brand told Dave that for more than a year the Young Lord had been training him, teaching him how to become a fighter. “And he’s a real fighter himself, you may be sure of that.” His voice was low and strong. “He’s no braggart like some of those flying Huns. He has a real record all the same. He flew in France during the Blitzkrieg. Sometimes it was ten Messerschmitts to his one Hurricane. He got two of them. That was just one time. There were many others. You just wait!” His voice rose sharply. “I’ll be right up there beside him in a Tomahawk one of these days!”

90

Would he? Dave wondered.

91

Chapter X

First Blood

Next day, just after lunch, feeling very much like a small boy slipping away to go fishing, Dave made his way toward the airdrome. He wanted, he told himself, to study a Spitfire. He had seen that one in action over the farm on the day of that air battle. It had fascinated him. Truth was, he hoped to run across the Young Lord and perhaps to be invited for one more ride in that two-seater. There was, he realized, a slight element of danger in such an excursion, just enough to give it tang, like a frosty morning.

He was not to be disappointed. Lieutenant Applegate was just having the machine rolled out.

“Greetings!” he cried. “Just in time! But then,” his voice changed. “I must not tempt you too much. This, you will understand, is our life. It is easy to ask too much of one who is not in on the great game.”

92

“I’ll be glad to go up again,” Dave said quietly. “To tell you the truth, that’s what I had hoped to do.”

“Righto! Climb in!” Applegate exclaimed. “You see,” he added, “we’re just giving this ship a tryout. Perhaps after

we've done a stretch of patrol, we'll ask the ground crew to run up a sky target and I'll let you have a try at it with a few bursts of machine gun fire."

"Oh!" Dave caught his breath sharply. But if he had known!

"We've always got more men than ships," Applegate went on. "So if two men in a ship like this, by dividing the things to worry about, like dials, controls, gun-sights and all, can accomplish more than one, why then, that's the berries. What say? Shall we be away?"

Dave nodded. Then they were off and away into the blue.

As on that other day, the sky was magnificent—bright blue, with clouds like huge cotton balls floating through it. Dave could not recall a moment in his life he had enjoyed so much. There was the thrill of speeding through space at three hundred and better miles an hour, and of looking down upon a world that was entirely new to him. Added to this—a real dash of red pepper—was the possibility that they might—just might bump into an enemy craft. Did he wish the last? He could not tell. Flying was strange. It was like a game, basketball or football—you went into it cold. As your blood warmed, a certain reckless daring came over you. You didn't will it, perhaps did not, in your sober moments, so much as want it. It was there, and for the time being you could but yield to its urge.

Today it was just like that. Now diving into a fleecy cloud, they were lost to the entire world. But not for long. Like a dove flying from a cloud in a picture postcard, they glided

once more into the bright sunshine.

Little patches and squares, forests, fields, homesteads, lovely villages all lay beneath them.

Seized with a sudden impulse, Dave spoke hoarsely into his mouthpiece: “Let me take her for a minute.” Ten seconds later he was working the joy-stick and Applegate, like an old lady in a wheelchair, was lolling back in his place. 94

But not for long. Suddenly Applegate straightened up, shaded his eyes, stared straight ahead, reached for his field glass, looked again, then said in a cheerful voice:

“See that long white cloud over to the left?”

“Ye—yes.” Dave’s heart pounded, he scarcely knew why.

“Swing over into it, then stay in it, going straight down it toward the channel. It must be all of four miles long. I—I rather smell a Hun.”

Dave obeyed instructions. The world was again lost to view.

Their journey along that cloud could scarcely have lasted two minutes, but to Dave that seemed a long, long hour. 95
What was beyond the other end of the cloud? Something, he was sure. Did it mean a fight? He hadn’t counted on that. This was not his war. Was he sorry? He did not know. The ways of a human mind are past finding out.

Then, as if their plane had given a sudden leap, they were out of the cloud. And there, off a little to the right, was a dark

spot against the blue of the sky.

The Lieutenant made one gesture, a stiff arm, pointing. That was all.

They were a full ten minutes coming within striking distance of that large plane. Every second of that exciting race Dave expected his companion to take over his controls, and all the time he remained silent, impassive.

At last, in a calm, even tone, he spoke: “That’s a Dornier. London took a terrific beating last night. Many women and children were killed or injured. That Dornier’s been taking pictures so they can find fresh spots to bomb. His pictures must not reach Allemond. We must get him.” His words were like rasping steel. Even then he did not take the controls.

A strange, cold wrath took possession of Dave’s entire being. “Women and children killed and injured.” He did not want the Young Lord to take the controls. And he knew what was to be done. He wanted to do it, at all risks.

96

Dropping a little below the flying level of the Dornier, he added a little speed, then streaked straight on. His heart was pounding, but his head was clear. At last, having risen to the attack, they were within striking distance.

“It’s football,” he was thinking calmly. “That Dornier’s got the ball. But in the end, it’ll be thrown for a loss.”

Even as he thought this, the Dornier banked sharply to soar away to the left. At the same time the air was ripped,—rat—rat—rat. The side shots from the Dornier went wild.

Once again they were after the foe. Once more they were all but upon the enemy's tail when he swung sharply to the left. From the Dornier's side came a wild burst of gunfire.

“Wasting his slugs,” Applegate exulted. “Keep right after him.” His hand was on the firing button. One push and eight guns would spray death, nearly ten thousand shots a minute. He could wait. It took just ten seconds when everything was right. 97

On the tip of Dave's tongue were the words: “Here, take the controls.” He did not say them. His tongue would not waggle that way.

The Dornier took a nose-dive. When he came out of it the two-seater was with him. He tried climbing. No use. They could outclimb him, two to one.

Once again he straightened out, then curved to the right.

Recalling how so very often a football runner will repeat a pattern, a dash to the right, one to left, then straight ahead, Dave worked out a plan. Would it succeed? Only time, a terribly short time, could tell.

True to his pattern the Dornier pilot banked first right, then left, and after that went into a power dive.

Measuring this dive with greatest accuracy, Dave managed to come out of his own dive just in time to glide squarely up on the enemy's tail.

Squinting through his sight, the Lieutenant gripped his 98

gun control and waited. Dave found himself counting, “One—two—three.” Then came a sudden burst of sound that all but startled him into a tail spin.

Regaining his control, he shot heavenward.

The Dornier had received a ten-second burst of gunfire, hundreds of slugs, straight down her pencil-like fusilage. What would be the result? They must wait and see.

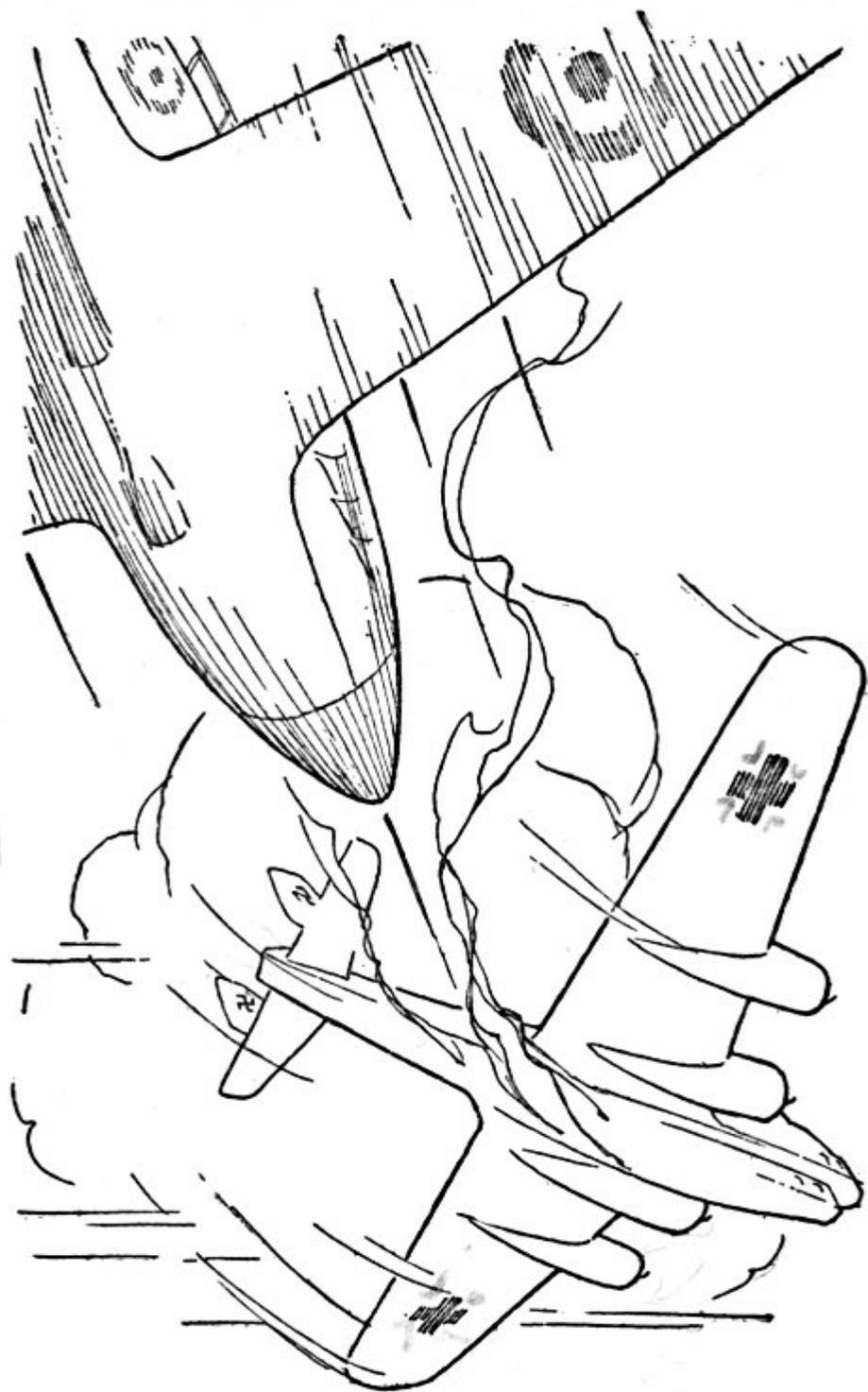
The Dornier lost its steady, straight onward flight. It began to smoke, then to lose altitude. Just then it went into a cloud.

“Dumb!” said Harmon.

Fearlessly Dave drove into that cloud. It was a long one. A full minute passed, another, and they were out.

Beyond them now was all clear, blue sky. There was no spot against that patch of blue.

The Young Lord took the controls. They spiralled downward toward the sea. At last they were beneath the cloud. There was nothing hiding there. But on the surface of the sea was a white spot. It was not foam. There were no white-caps.



“Good!” exclaimed the Young Lord. “We’ll head for

101

home. If we hurry a bit we’ll be in time for tea.” And they were.

“We got that Dornier right enough,” the Young Lord whispered the minute they were on solid ground again. “But not a word about this! It’s frightfully irregular, I’m afraid.”

“I’m sure it is,” Dave agreed.

“And after all, it’s not your war,” his companion added.

“No. Of course not,” Dave agreed. “It’s not my war.” For the first time in his life those words seemed a bit strange.

At headquarters Dave asked for coffee and got it, good coffee served by a bright faced English girl.

He had just taken his first swallow when two young men entered. At once the Young Lord was on his feet.

The slim, dark-eyed one of the new arrivals said: “As you were.” At once tension relaxed.

“Commander Knox,” said the Young Lord, “I want you to meet my friend Dave Barnes from America. He thinks he can fly.” He grinned slyly.

102

“All Americans think that.” The Squad Commander chuckled. “Didn’t you ever notice that?”

“Yes—yes I have,” the Young Lord agreed. “And mostly they can’t. But this chap,”—he gave Dave a quick grin—“I shouldn’t wonder if he could fly. Oh, just the least little bit.”

“You wouldn’t be spoofing us?” said the red-headed companion of the Commander. He was grinning broadly.

“No one could spoof you!” the Young Lord laughed. “You’ve already been spoofed.”

“Dave,” he said, turning to his companion, “meet the singing murderer. We call him the Lark because he sings as he flies. You should hear him roaring away! He sings ‘On the Road to Mandalay’ while he swoops down on the tail of some unsuspecting Messerschmitt and blasts him from the sky.”

“That,” said the Lark without smiling, “may be a joke. 103 It works for all that. I learned the trick when I was a boy fishing for salmon in Scotland. If I could whistle, carrying a tune, while I was landing a big one, I’d not get excited and I’d land my fish. It’s the same with the sky fighting. If you can carry a tune in the thick of it—”

“If you can,” laughed Dave, “then I’ll say you’re good!”

“He’s right as he possibly can be,” said the Commander.

“The good old Leader of Squadron 73 over in France used to say: ‘Boys, you may have as many good points as you like, but two are absolutely necessary: courage that will stick, and an unflinching sense of humor. Nothing keeps up a fellow’s sense of humor better than a song.’”

“Guess we’ll have to toddle along.” The Commander moved away. “Good to have met you, Barnes. If you can really fly, and I must say you do look the part, we’ll sign you up just any time you say.” At that he and the Lark vanished through the swinging doors.

As Dave stared after them, awed respect was registered in his eyes. “So he was with Squadron 73!” he murmured.

104

“Sure was.” Applegate beamed. “In France, all the way, right through the Blitzkrieg. That was the fightingest aggregation that ever flew in formation. They shot down more than a hundred planes for sure, and sent a likely hundred more limping home.”

“How many came back to tell the story?” Dave was visibly impressed.

“Nearly all,” was the reply. “I think they lost two commissioned and two non-commissioned officers. That was all.”

“Sayee!” Dave murmured. “Air fighting is almost as safe as football!”

“Absolutely,” his companion agreed. “Providing you know your stuff and have been born in the air.”

“And that,” Dave thought, as he started for home some little time later, “is how I keep out of this man’s war. I’d better look up the plane schedule to Lisbon tomorrow.” But would he?

Chapter XI

Cobbler or Spy?

Dave walked toward Ramsey Farm in a thoughtful mood. Always for him, in the past, the ability to do a thing well had meant a clear track ahead. “But now,” he whispered, stopping stock still in the road to think. With the Young Lord’s help he had accomplished something that in this war-shattered land seemed rather more than well worth doing.

There was nothing startling about the part he had played. Back in America his uncle, a World War ace, had put him through his paces, that was all. In a staunch old two-seater they had banked, rolled, power dived and looped the loop until he really knew how. What fun it had been! He had not thought of it as preparation for anything. Yet today, when the test came, he was prepared. Yes, the ability to do a thing had always meant “Go ahead.”

“I could do it all again,” he assured himself as he thought of the day’s adventure.

106

For a moment more he stood there looking at the blue sky, white clouds, and gay autumn leaves that were England at her best. “This is England,” he whispered, “Bit by bit it is being destroyed by one man’s hate and lust for power.”

“Damn!” he swore softly. Then he hurried on.

He decided to take the long way home, the road that ran through Warmington. “Shoemakers,” he thought, “always have your work finished the second time, never the first. My boots will be done.”

“Here you are, sir,” said old John, handing out a neat package and taking the pay. “I ’opes you find them satisfactory, sir.”

“Oh, I shall, I am sure,” Dave said absent-mindedly. He was not thinking of the boots. His eyes were once more upon the young cobbler in the far corner. As before, his face hidden, he was bent low over his work.

“I ’opes you’ve ’ad a pleasant afternoon,” said old John.

“Oh! Very!” said Dave.

107

“If he only knew,” he murmured with a low laugh after he had left the shop.

Across the street was the village Pub. Its sign proclaimed it to be Ye Old Angel Inn. How long did an angel have to live in order to be considered really old, Dave asked himself whimsically. He had thought of angels as being ageless. Perhaps there weren’t any angels after all. He had once seen a picture of a French war plane going down in flames, and of two angels waiting, with hands crossed, to catch the unhappy pilot as he fell. “Shall I ever be in need of two angels?” he asked himself dreamily.

He crossed the street to enter Ye Old Angel Inn. He liked

these English Pubs. They were village clubs. There was about them a pleasant aroma of beef roasting over an open fire, of hot toddy and strange English tobacco. He could, he thought, stand for one more cup of coffee. The weather had suddenly turned cloudy, damp and cold.

The coffee was good. He lingered over it, then ordered a second cup.

As he sat there he heard voices. Two villagers sat at a table in the corner drinking hot toddy.

108

“I’m tellin’ ye now, James,” one voice rose sharply, “’e’s nothin’ more nor less than a bloomin’ Jerry. ’E’s a spy, that ’e is.”

“Aw now, Danny,” the other admonished, “you know what old John told you ’e is. ’E’s ’Ollander, no more, nor no less, ’is papers they is all in horder.”

“I know. I know,” Danny agreed petulantly. “But that don’t make it so. You know as well as I know ’ow easy as nothin’ it is fer a Jerry to git papers fixed to suit ’is own self.

“Now look, Jimmy.” Danny’s voice dropped. “Ye mind the last war. There were our castle, Warmington Castle, as fine an hedifice as there be in all Hengland. An’ what ’appens? Ramsey, over at the farm, ’e ’ires ’imself a Jerry, a prisoner of war ’e was. ’E treats ’im like a long-lost brother, Ramsey does. An’ what ’appens? I asks you, what ’appens?”

“It weren’t never proved that it were this Jerry that signaled to the bloomin’ airplane that come over an’ blasted the castle,”

James protested.

“I know—I know. But who would doubt it?”

109

And so the argument ended. Dave finished his coffee, then wandered out into the chill of falling night. Danny and James had given him fresh food for serious thought.

Cherry was booked for a return to her subway studio on the following evening. Dave spent the greater part of that day teaching her a new song. He knew the tune and could pick it out for her on the piano. By great good fortune he found the words written out in longhand on a scrap of paper in his Sunday clothes.

“It’s not a new song,” he told her. “In fact, it’s more than twenty years old. An orchestra leader named Orrin Tucker dug it out of the file and gave it to his little five-foot singing doll named Bonnie Baker. It’s gone across America like a Nebraska cyclone. This is it:

“Oh! Johnny! Oh! Johnny!
How you can love!
Oh! Johnny! Oh! Johnny!
Heavens above.”

“Catchy,” said Cherry, beginning to hum it.

110

Catchy was right, and Cherry was the one person in all the world to set England on fire with it.

That night in the chill damp of the subway, she sang it over and over. Next day in the airdromes and factories, barracks,

schools, stores and on the street, one might hear: “Oh! Johnny! Oh! Johnny!”

The song was made. So too was Cherry. In the days that followed she was to become the sweetheart of all England. Newspapers were to print her picture in color. These pictures were to appear on the rough board walls of cantonments all over England, and in the cabins of boats, large and small, sailing the dangerous North Sea.

She was to be taken up by the nobility. Lady Perkins, a friend of the Young Lord, who lived in London, was to make her a part of her household, with privilege of coming and going as she pleased.

Only now and then did she sleep with some working girls in the subway. Most nights after the “all clear” had sounded, she sped away to creep beneath downy covers in a wing of Lady Perkins’ mammoth old home.

“It’s not that I crave magnificence,” she confided to Dave, “It’s just that I must have rest. It—well, you see—it all must seem so simple and easy, my singing. And it truly is, but,”—she heaved a sigh—“when it’s all over, I’m a rag.”

111

“I know,” Dave agreed. “It’s always that way. The thing you do with apparent ease because you have yourself under perfect carefree control, is just the thing that takes it out of you.”

By himself later, Dave recalled words of a great old poem:

“If you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue,
And walk with kings, nor lose the common touch,—”

“That,” he told himself, “is just what Cherry can do. And nothing can ever spoil her.”

If he had quoted from that same poem:

“If you can meet with Triumph and Disaster
And treat those two impostors just the same,—”

he would have been telling Cherry’s fortune, for Cherry was to meet with both Triumph and Disaster.

112

113

Chapter XII
“The House Is Gone”

It happened, or shall we say began, on a Sunday night. During the many days previous to this, things had picked up little by little in Cherry’s subway radio studio. One evening the little Irish girl who played the piano had brought in a young fellow with a shabby violin case under his arm. “Can you play it?” Cherry asked.

“A little,” was the modest reply.

The young fellow, who had gone through all the horrors of the Battle of Flanders and Dunkirk, was Scotch. He could do weird things with that violin. With it alone he could make you believe that a score or more of bagpipers were marching down the street. And when it came to that mellow old Scotch song:

“Flow gently, Sweet Afton
Among thy green braes
Flow gently. I’ll sing thee
A song in thy praise.”

114

he could bring a happy tear to many a tired eye. So he was given a place on the program, and weary Cherry sang a little less than before.

Other musicians wandered in. Where they all came from no one will ever know. Next there came a cellist, then a drummer, two bass viols, two clarinets, two more violins, a gypsy girl with tambourine and castanets,—all these and half a dozen others wandered in. After that they had an orchestra. There was not an “artist” in the hard and fast meaning of the word among them all, but they could roll the barrel, set Johnny loving, swing the chariot low, roll the old chariot along, and do a hundred other songs dear to the hearts of the good common people of old England and to many another who did not consider himself quite so common.

All this gave Cherry a breathing spell now and then. 115
But when the members of the orchestra had each done his bit for just so long, there would come calls from all down the subway:

“Cherry! Cherry! We want Cherry! We want the Singin’ Angel.”

The Singin’ Angel, that is what they came at last to call her. That was because of Sunday nights, for on that night they left the Old Chariot at home, put lovin’ Johnny to bed early, rolled the barrel far back in the corner, and pushed “The Old Rugged Cross” right out in front.

No one seemed to mind. Indeed they appeared to love that hour of the week best of all. In times such as this people cling to their religion. One moment “Rock of Ages, Cleft for Me” would go rolling on and on from end to end of the subway.

Some one in the orchestra would start “Throw Out The

Lifeline to danger fraught men.”

Then Cherry in her strong young voice would sing:

“When all my trials and troubles are o’er
And I am safe on that beautiful shore
That will be glory, be glory for me.”

“Now!” she would cry. “Everybody sing!”

116

“Oh! That will be glory for me,
Glory for me, glory for me.”

Yes, religion seemed very real on these Sunday nights. On this particular night, it was midnight when Cherry reached Lady Perkins’ home. She remembered it afterward, for at that very moment Big Ben was gloriously booming the hour of twelve.

She had walked home alone. It was not far. She let herself in with her latchkey. The “all clear” had sounded, so, feeling weary and happy all in one, she stretched out on her bed fully dressed, and fell asleep.

She was dreaming of quiet, sleepy hours, with Flash at her side, while her sheep wandered over the hillside at Ramsey Farm, when suddenly it seemed that a mighty thunderstorm had stolen upon her unawares and that the very hill was being rocked by its roaring.

She awoke standing in the center of the room. Her knees trembled so she could scarcely stand. The floor beneath her vibrated like a ship in a storm. From all about her came

strange crashes like walls falling one upon another.



She tried to call, but could only whisper. A narrow crack of light appeared before her. A board in the door had been split. She stepped to the door and opened it. Then, catching herself, she started back to whisper in dismay:

119

“It’s gone! The house is gone! Only my room is here!”

That was not quite true. Of that spacious home only three rooms remained—her own and two others. A half-ton bomb had scattered the rest.

Recalling that the French windows of her room opened out on a court, she sprang to the nearest one. Then she was out and away.

A weird light from a flare sent down by the enemy illuminated the street. Once on that street she began to run. In all her fright and confusion she had a vague plan. Dave was spending the night with his uncle. She knew the address. Was it far? She did not know. All she knew was that somehow she must get there.

She had gone but a block when she ran squarely into the arms of a six-foot policeman.

120

“Here now, Miss! What’s this?” His voice had a kindly rumble.

“The house!” she cried. “Lady Perkins’ house! It’s gone!”

“Yes,” he agreed. “It was a terrible bomb. The firemen are

just there now. Thank God Lady Perkins and all were away.”

“No!” Cherry whispered. “I was there.”

“You?” The Bobby looked her over. “You were there? And who now might you be?”

“I—I’m Cherry.”

“What? The Singin’ Angel?” He looked her in the face.

“Bless me heart it is now! What do you know about that! Bless the Lord you are safe.”

“I can’t talk.” The girl’s head drooped. “I can’t sing. I—I want to go to Dave’s Uncle’s place.” In her fright she was like a child.

“And where would that be?”

She gave him the address. He read it, then blew a whistle. A man appeared.

“Jim,” he said, “this is Cherry, the Singin’ Angel. God’s own child she is.”

121

“The Singin’ Angel!” Jim’s jaw dropped.

“None other,” said the Bobby. “An’ you’re to take her to this address. Mind you drive careful, careful and steady as ye would if it were the Christ Child you’re ’avin in yer car.”

Jim’s car was old and dilapidated, but to Cherry it was the latest model of a Rolls Royce and its cushions as soft as

down, for was it not taking her to her friends?

Arrived at the house, in the presence of Dave's tall, gray-haired uncle, she disgraced herself by throwing herself in Dave's arms. Then she wept like a child.

This storm over, she felt better. Two cups of strong tea revived her spirits but not her voice. She could only whisper as she said: "Dave, please take me home, back to the farm."

"At this hour of the night?" Dave stared.

"I'll have a car for you at once," said the kindly gray-haired uncle. "Dave, my boy, London's no place for a girl who has gone through what this girl has tonight."

122

All the way home Dave had an arm about Cherry. She cuddled close to him, as a scared child would and they were not ashamed.

Arrived at the farm, they quietly dismissed the driver. Arousing no one, they sat before the half-burned-out kitchen fire for a time. When at last Dave felt the trembling quiver of her shoulders pass away, he said huskily:

"You'd better turn in for a little sleep."

"Dave," she whispered. "My voice is gone. I can't sing any more."

"Fright. That's all." Dave tried to reassure her. "It will come back."

Would it? He wondered as he watched her make her way slowly, dreamily, like a sleep-walker, up the stairs.

Chapter XIII

Lull Before the Storm

Until one P. M. the next day Cherry was lost to the world. At last she stirred beneath her rare old English blankets, opened her eyes, stared about her, tried to remember, then began trying to forget.

In slippers and bathrobe she crept down to the kitchen where the cook served her with very strong tea and a small, delicious meat pie. After that she curled up in the big chair before the fire and once again fell asleep.

It was only on the morning of the second day that she found courage to face life as it was. The home in London in which she had been given royal welcome was gone. She could barely whisper. Would her voice come back? What of her people there in the subway? The little Irish girl, the Scotch fiddler, and all the rest, were they carrying on?

“Yes,” she assured herself as a fresh glow of hope overflowed her being, “They are right there doing their bit.”

124

Breakfast over, with Flash at her heels, she once again led her small flock of sheep out to the frost-bitten, sunlit pasture.

There, after spreading a blanket on a rock, she lay for a long time staring up at the sun. It seemed to her, at that moment, that all that terrible war was but a bad dream, that it never had happened, that all the world was as much at peace as was her sunny pasture.

The drone of airplane motors, followed by machine-guns tearing at the sky drove this illusion from her mind. The war was real, terribly real. It must be faced with eyes open and mind alert.

It was there on the rock that her brother found her. “So they drove you out of London? The dirty Huns!” he exclaimed, dropping to a seat beside her. “Cherry!” There were lines of fierce determination in his face, “I’m going to join up with the Royal Air Force.”

For a full minute she made no reply, just sat staring at the cloudless sky. Perhaps she was thinking of the good times they had had together, fishing and swimming in summer, tobogganing and skiing in winter. And on rainy days there had been games before the open fire.

125

“Yes,” she whispered at last, as color flooded back into her face, “you must join up, Brand. Everyone must. Those marvelous people, the women, the children must come out of the subway. They must sleep again in their own homes in peace.”

“I—I’m glad you feel that way.” Brand swallowed hard. “That—that’s going to make it easier. You and I have been pals, Cherry, all these years.

“I’ll tell you,” his voice picked up. “It’s a great secret. We’ve been training, Dave and I, training for two weeks. Training like everything.”

“D—Dave,” she whispered. “Why! He’s an American! This is not his war.”

“That’s what he thought,” Brand laughed low. “Perhaps he still thinks it, in a way. But he’ll join up. You wait! The young Lord says he will, and he usually knows.”

“The—the young Lord?” Cherry whispered.

126

“Yes, there’s part of the secret. He’s had two week’s leave. He’s been training us in the back pasture. Of course we’ve each done a lot of flying but this is special, regular fighting stuff, parachutes and everything. And, Cherry, cross your heart and hope to die if I tell you?”

“Cross—cross my heart.”

“All right. Dave’s already been in a day fight. He and the young Lord got a Dornier! Boy, that was great! I wish I’d been in it with them.”

“Dave in an air battle?” The girl stared.

“Certainly was, and did his part nobly.”

While Cherry sat listening, breathless, Brand described Dave’s adventure in the clouds that day over England and the channel.

“Dave never whispered a word about it to me,” she said when the story was told. Her shining eyes showed that the American boy stood out in her mind as a hero.

“Dave can keep a secret,” said Brand. “That’s why we all like him.”

“But you shouldn’t try to drag him into the war,” Cherry replied thoughtfully. “England is not his country.”

127

“He’ll decide about that for himself when the time comes.” Brand sent a small rock skipping down the hill. “He talked it all over with his uncle in London two weeks ago. His uncle advised him to get all the flying experience he could. He thinks America will be in the war soon. Then Dave will be in it for sure. Great old boy, his uncle, a real sport. He was in the other war, an ace flyer. Thinks the air service is trumps. And who wouldn’t?” Brand’s face shone with enthusiasm. “Boy it’s great! All of it.” He sprang to his feet. “Even baling out. First time I stepped into space with a parachute on my back I thought my heart would jump out of my mouth. But when the old silk took hold and I drifted slowly down, Baby! That was swell! I’ve baled out twenty times since then—just practice you know. Now it’s as natural as swimming.”

“Brand?” Cherry whispered. “I’ve lost my voice. They say it will come back. I—I don’t know. Can’t do my share. You’ll have to carry on. How I wish I’d been born a boy!”

128

“Buck up, old girl!” Brand exclaimed cheerfully, “you’ll be

right back in there again before you know it.

“And even if you aren’t,” he added soberly, “you’ve already done more than any other gal in Merry England to help folks keep heads up and hopes high. That’s a whole great big lot.”

At that he went marching back down the hill.

“Great doings these last two weeks,” he thought to himself. They had worked hard all of them. Truck loads of Brussels sprouts, turnips, carrots, apples and pears had been sent rumbling on their way to London. All their winter’s supplies had been safely stowed away. Beside this they had found time each day for two hours of practice flying. “There’s mother,” he thought soberly. “Somehow, I’ll have to win her over.” Had he but known it his hated enemies, the Jerries, were to give him a lift with his mother.

Dave too had been thinking of his mother. As he sat by the open fire with Cherry that evening, he said:

129

“Just had a letter from my mother.”

“I hope she’s well,” Cherry replied in her polite, English manner.

“Oh! Always!” Dave laughed. “She’s closing our New England home and going with my aunt to Florida. She has an independent income so she gets about.”

“What does one do in Florida?” Cherry asked.

“Oh, bask in the sun until you’re brown, swim, play tennis, go

tarpon fishing,” Dave drawled lazily.

“Sounds rather dreamy.”

“It is, and unreal too. Do you know?” Dave exclaimed, “I haven’t thought of it before but since I came to England I’ve really just started to live.”

“I—I’m glad,” Cherry whispered. “I’ve often thought—” She broke off to listen.

“Enemy planes,” she whispered.

“Bombers!” Dave nodded.

“Sound as if they were right overhead. And they seem so low.” Cherry shuddered.

A half minute followed without a sound save the tick-tock of the tall old clock and the drone overhead.

130

Then, of a sudden, with a throaty whisper ten times more startling than a cry, Cherry sprang from her seat.

The stillness of the countryside had been shattered by a crash that appeared to come from their own farmyard. Truth was, a bomb had fallen on their village two miles away.

131

Chapter XIV
A Dungeon Night

There came a second blast. A deathlike silence followed. This was soon enough shattered by the anxious call of the cook, demanding to know if all were well and by the excited cry of the children. Then, from outside, came the honk of an auto horn.

The door swung open. A voice shouted:

“All out for a moonlit visit to the ancient Norman castle.”

It was the young Lord Applegate. “Pile into the car, all of you.” His tone was sharp, commanding. “This is going to be bad. A dozen Jerry bombers circling around looking for targets, and the moon making everything bright as day. Your broad roof shows up all too clearly.”

Dashing to the corner of the room, Dave seized two buckets of water to drench the fire. They were to recall this act later, with thanksgiving.

132

In an incredibly short time they were all crowded into the big car and away.

Through the back window of the racing car Alice caught a

fleeting glimpse of her home, the only home she had ever known. Standing there in the cool, shadowy moonlight, with great trees banked behind it, the old house seemed a thing of indescribable beauty. Yet the word that came to the girl's mind was "lonely". For a space of seconds it seemed to her that she must leap from the car and race back to be with the dear old house in its great time of trial.

This was but a fleeting fancy. A turn in the road shut the place from her view. She heard the young Lord saying:

"I've fixed up an air raid shelter in the dungeon of the castle. It's thirty steps down, walled over with massive rocks. Even had an oil heater installed. We'll be safe and comfortable there."

"Safe and comfortable," Alice thought angrily. "In an insane, upside down world such as this, who wanted to be comfortable and safe?"

133

This too she realized was a wrong slant on life. "Comfort and safety," she assured herself, "are two of the great necessities of life. For, on the morrow, there is work to be done." At that she did not know the half of it.

Warmington Castle, a great, square mass of masonry, looming a hundred feet above the meadows, greeted them as they took one more curve in the road. A minute more and there they were.

With the droning of heavy motors still in their ears, they hurried down one narrow stairs, then another, to find themselves in a rather large windowless room where candles

blinked at them from every corner and an oil stove glowed warmly up at them.

Lady Applegate, a frail, nervous little lady, greeted them with jittery handshakes and an uncertain smile. Her husband had died from wounds received in that other war. And now this! “Poor soul,” thought Alice.

As if to guard her from bombs, the Lady’s servants, butler, cook, and two maids, sat clustered about her.

134

Dave was not long in the dungeon. Having wished to witness an air-raid he took the thing by the bit and hurried back up the stairs. Flash, the collie, it would seem, was of the same mind. He followed him out.

As if in search of fresh targets, just any roof gleaming up from the moonlit night, giant planes were still circling. Dave strained his eyes for a glimpse of them.

“That’s the plague of it,” he grumbled. “If you could see them you could blast them from the sky even at night.”

Backing away, he studied the mass of masonry above him. More a fort than a castle, it had stood there for hundreds of years. Bombs had shattered it more than twenty years before. But the tower, with stairway leading to the top, still stood. He was considering climbing those stairs for a better view of the sky, when, a sudden discovery left him standing there quite motionless. From the very top of that tower had come a flash of light.

135



“Spy!” His mind registered like a recording machine.
“Flashing signals!”

That was enough. Two steps at a time, with the collie at his heels, he went up those stairs. What was he to do? There were times when he believed in revelations straight from the Divine Will. He would know what was to be done when the time came.

Approaching the top, he went on tiptoe. Unfortunately Flash could not know the need for breathless silence. He uttered a low growl.

Instantly there came a crash. Something had fallen. There was the sound of shuffling footsteps.

The tower, a mass of standing pillars and tumbled stone, offered a splendid hiding place. One might hide from a man, not from a dog. Dave had, for the instant, forgotten the dog. Springing forward, he all but fell over some large, dark object. Bending over, he picked the thing up. “Some instrument, perhaps a—”

His thoughts broke off. The dog had found the fugitive. There came a muttered guttural curse, a sound of a solid impact, the howl of the dog, and after that scurrying footsteps.

At that instant the instrument in Dave’s hand gave forth a flood of light. The light fell full upon the fleeting figure of a man. The man turned half about. Having caught the fellow’s profile in bold relief, Dave recognized him instantly. And

then the fugitive, with the dog at his heels, plunged down the narrow, winding stairs.

Dave was fast, but not fast enough. Once, as he raced down those stairs, he caught a glimpse of man and dog. Then he tripped over a broken step, plunged downward, hit his head against the wall, was out for thirty seconds, and so lost the race.

He arrived at the castle door just in time to see two fleeting shadows, a man and a dog, lose themselves in the deeper shadow of a small, low stone structure fifty yards or more from the castle.

As he stood balanced on the threshold he suddenly became conscious of a tremendous roar overhead. It seemed that one of those tri-motored bombers must crash against the castle's tower. And then?

139

In sudden terror he fairly tumbled down two flights of stairs, banged against the massive iron-bound door to the dungeon, tumbled through and slammed the door behind him, just as a terrific blast set the castle shuddering from towers to dungeon.

In the moments that followed they could hear the dull thud of masonry falling. But it all seemed very far away, like part of a bad dream.

There came a second crash, a third. Then all was silent and the ghosts that perhaps haunted this dungeon, spirits of those who suffered here in solitary confinement centuries ago, might, Dave supposed, walk in peace.

It was Alice who broke that silence. Her voice was as calm and restful as it would have been were she seated before the fire in her own kitchen. She was speaking to the two waifs from London's slums. They were curled up beside her on an ancient stone bench.

“Yes, children,” was her answer to a whispered question, “Louise and Charlotte, the two lady spies, lived and worked as spies for a long time. They performed many daring feats.”

140

“You know,” she went on, and they were all listening now, “Louise and Charlotte always had messages to carry across the line. In places there was a river to cross. Always there was the terrible wall of barbed wire and traps. Louise, who could not swim and dared not trust a boat, went across the river many times on a large chopping bowl.”

“Funny little boat,” Peggy whispered.

“They used strange devices for hiding their messages.” Alice had a good memory. “Once when Louise was arrested she threw a black ball of yarn into the brush at the side of the road but held to the end until it had landed. The message was wound inside the ball of yarn.”

“They didn't find it. That was good!” Tillie whispered. “Go on! What else?”

“Once the two girl spies seemed to be going on a picnic. They were munching bread and sausages as they marched along. Once more they were searched. Nothing was found. The message was in Louise's sausage.”

141

“Oh yes,” Alice drew a heavy sigh. “Those two girls did marvelous things for their country. They set up a secret radio and sent over messages. They trained carrier pigeons to take messages across the line. Daring Frenchmen were carried over the line in airplanes to spy out the enemy’s defenses. Louise helped them.

“And after that,” the story teller sighed more deeply, “there came darker days. The enemy counter-spies wove a web of evidence about them. They were arrested. Evidence was produced. They were court-martialed. The sentence was: ‘For Louise, death. For Charlotte, death.’”

“And—and were they really shot?” Peggy whispered with a shudder.

“Not yet.” Alice’s voice was low. “Their prison keeper had come to respect and love them as if they were his children.

“‘Poor souls’,” he said, ‘So they have condemned you to die? Ask what you will. It shall be granted.’

“When the day for their execution was near,” Alice went on, “they requested that they might spend their last night on earth together.

142

“The keeper carried this request to the governor. He returned with a radiant face. ‘He has refused it,’ he whispered to Louise. ‘Thank God! It means that they will not shoot you in the morning. Otherwise he would not have denied you.’”

“Oh, good!” Peggy breathed.

“That morning,” Alice went on after a time, “another beautiful girl, Gabrielle Petiti, was to be shot as a spy. Louise and Charlotte heard her walking to the place of her execution and they heard her cry: ‘Salut! O mon dernier matin!’” (Salute, O my last morning!)

“Oh!” Peggy whispered.

“And were—” Tillie began.

“No, Louise and Charlotte were not shot.” There was a catch in Alice’s voice. “Because of their loyalty and great bravery they were sent to prison for life.

“Two months and two days before the great war ended Louise died in prison. Charlotte lived on and went back to keeping shop. Perhaps she’s living still.”

143

“And now perhaps she’s a spy again.” Peggy shuddered with ecstasy. “I’m going to be a spy some day.”

“Alice, my dear,” said Lady Applegate, “that’s no story to tell to a child.”

But Tillie whispered very low, “I—I think it is wonderful, Alice. I—I’d like to kiss you.” And she did.

Just then there came a scratching at the door. “It’s Flash!” Cherry cried. “We’ve all forgotten him.”

As she threw the door open the dog went creeping across the floor to curl up, still whining low, at Alice’s feet.

Chapter XV

Until the Very End

For some time the dog lay quietly at Alice's feet. At last, once more at ease, he rose, stretched himself, walked twice across the dungeon floor, then, marching up to Dave whined low.

"What's this?" Dave demanded. "You want to go out again? Haven't you had enough for one night?"

In answer the dog walked to the door, then whined again.

"O. K.," said Dave. "I don't hear any motors. Perhaps the big show is over. Let's get going."

"I'll go with you," Brand said quietly.

Arrived at the outer castle door, Dave took one look, then let out a low whistle. "Old boy," he said in a hoarse voice, looking down at the dog, "how did you escape?"

"What do you mean, escape?" Brand asked.

145

"Look!" Dave pointed to a dark spot in the brightly lighted meadow. "See that black hole? What stood there two hours ago?"

“Say!” Brand stared. “A stone building stood there.”

“But then,” he added after a thought, “what does it matter? It was just an empty old out-building.”

“I’m not so sure it was empty,” Dave replied soberly. “Last time I looked at that building a man and a dog were going through the door. That was less than two minutes before the first blast. There,” his was a dramatic gesture, “question is, where’s the man? If he is at all any more.”

“Stop talking in riddles,” Brand’s voice rose. “This has been a bad night.”

“Sit down and I’ll tell you,” Dave invited as he dropped to a place on the well-worn door sill.

The story of his visit to the top of the tower both astonished and thrilled his companion.

“And the fellow who went into that shack,” Dave added with a flourish of his arm, “was none other than the assistant to old John, the shoemaker. What’s more, his real name is Nicholas Schlitz.”

146

“No!” Brand sprang to his feet. “It can’t be!”

“It is!” Dave insisted. “Remember that picture you took from the wrecked plane? The picture of two young fellows?”

“Yes, I remember.”

“They were clear enough. You couldn’t make a mistake if you

saw one of those men. I saw Nicholas tonight, by the bright light of his own signal torch. I couldn't be mistaken. In the shoe shop he was always bending over, half hiding his face. Tonight I really saw him."

"Where's his signal torch?" Brand asked suddenly.

"That's right," Dave sprang up. "Where is it? In my excitement I might have—

"Yes. Here it is." He drank in a deep breath of relief. "I must have put it down. I—I was afraid he had come back for it."

"He never will," said Brand.

"You can't be sure," Dave replied thoughtfully. "Flash went in with him. If Flash escaped, how about Nicholas Schlitz, the spy? After all, there were three blasts. There was some time between the first and last. Who's going to say whether the first or last made that hole out there?"

147

To this question Brand found no answer.

Brand stood up, gazed at the sky, north, south, east and west, listened for a full minute, then said: "Storm's over. Let's see if we can't get them all to go home."

It took little persuading to get Alice and Cherry started. Soon they were all on their way.

It was only as they rounded the last curve that brought them in full view of their home that the full significance of Heinie's work that night burst upon them.

They greeted the scene that lay before them in tragic silence. The home that had housed the Ramsey tribe for a dozen generations was a wreck. A bomb had landed on the east end and torn it completely away. Gone was the prim little parlor with its very formal furniture, gone the cozy dining room with its array of ancient willow-ware and rare glassware. Gone was the big four-poster bed on which Cherry and Alice had slept since they were tiny tots, and gone all the countless treasures that had adorned their rooms.

“Le—t—, let’s have a look.” Brand climbed out of the car. He was trying to be nonchalant about the whole affair and making a bad job of it.

Dave climbed out after him. Then, after ten seconds of listening, he flashed on the spy’s powerful light. At once the whole wrecked place stood out in bold relief.

By some miracle the great chimney had withstood the shock. The fireplace had been blown clean of ashes.

“Dave, you were a gem.” These were Cherry’s first words. “If there had been a spark of fire!”

“It’s a miracle that anything is left,” said Applegate. “Of course you’ll all come up to live with us.”

“Oh, no.” Alice spoke slowly. “The children would worry Lady Applegate. I—I’m sorry. We still have furniture and cooking things. I’m sure quite enough. And there’s the Hideout up at the foot of the hill. It’s quite large and hidden among the trees. We may,” she hesitated, “may need to borrow a few dishes. We—we don’t seem to have

any.”

“There are whole china cupboardsful at our house. I’ll have a car full of them down first thing in the morning.”

“Sure that’s all?” the young Lord asked anxiously.

“No, not quite.” Cherry smiled a shy smile as she whispered hoarsely. “I—I’m quite sure that Alice’s dream-robcs and mine have gone to grace the Milky Way.”

“That also shall be attended to,” said the young Lord, after they had enjoyed a good laugh.

The trusty old farm truck was backed out of its shed. Beds, chairs, blankets, pots, pans, and quantities of food were piled on. Then they rattled away up the hill to the Hideout.

After building a fire on the wide old hearth they put things in such order as they could for the night.

After the others had been made comfortable and were asleep Dave and Cherry still sat by the fire.

150

“We’re always last,” Cherry whispered hoarsely. “It takes time for our nerves to run down. They’re like a cheap old alarm clock, I guess.” She laughed.

“That’s it,” Dave agreed.

“Brand and I are signing up tomorrow,” he said after a time.

“I thought Brand would, after this night. Who wouldn’t?” Her

whisper was tense with emotion. “It’s his country. But why you? It’s not yours.”

“In America,” Dave replied soberly, “we have a saying, ‘A man’s home is where he hangs his hat’. Your home has been mine. It has been bombed. And so—”

He did not finish. Just sat there staring at the fire. “There’s a lot more to it than that,” he went on after a time. “It’s easy enough to say, ‘It’s not my war’, when you’re far away. But when you are here, when you see how this war is being fought, defenseless women and children who never harmed anyone being killed and country homes bombed. Good God! How can you help wanting to fight?”

“And there’s still more to it,” he added after a moment’s silence. “This flying sort of gets you. I’ve been within its grip since the first time I went up.

151

“And flyer fighting.” He took a long breath. “It’s like our American football. It’s a game. The other fellow has the ball. You go after him. You have the ball. He goes after you. You dodge this way and that. You stiff arm him if he gets close. You lean like the Tower of Pisa, you zigzag and weave like a sapling in the wind. Flyer fighting is like that.”

“But the score?” Cherry whispered.

“Ah, yes,” Dave murmured. “The score must always be heavy on your side.”

They were silent. At last Cherry whispered:

“I seem to hear applause, the way you hear it on the radio. Perhaps—perhaps it’s the applause of angels. Perhaps the applause is for you. Anyway, here’s wishing you luck.” She put out a slender hand to seize his in a quick, nervous grip.

A quarter hour later the girl was beneath the blankets beside her sister and Dave, rolled in a thick, soft rug before the fire, was fast asleep.

Chapter XVI
Fiddlin' Johnny

Two nights later they were all seated about the fire in the Hideout. Their new home was small but not too crowded for company. Young Lord Applegate and two of his flying buddies were there. Beside the Lord, whom Dave had met some days before, there was a flyer they had nicknamed Fiddlin' Johnny. Johnny was slender, fair-haired and dreamy-eyed. "Just the sort that doesn't seem to belong in the air," Applegate had said to Dave. "But he's got a real record. You'd be surprised."

"Give us a tune, Johnny," Brand urged, as Alice's tea warmed their souls.

"Oh, all right!" Johnny rose awkwardly. "I'm not much of a fiddler, but anything to please."

After blowing on a strange little pipe, he tuned his violin, then was away to a good start.

The moment his bow slid across the strings Cherry knew they were in for a rare treat. Paying little attention to his audience nor even to their applause, Johnny launched into a series of quaint, melodious, old tunes. Like a slow-

flowing river he drifted from one to another and yet another. All unconscious of those about him, he played on and on. He appeared to play not for them but for the few birds lingering among bare branches of wind-lashed trees outside, or perhaps to the angels in heaven.

“Oh!” Cherry breathed, when at last he returned his violin to its battered case. “Why didn’t you tell me?” She turned to the young Lord. “Why didn’t you bring him to one of our subway songfests?”

“Johnny!” The young Lord laughed. “He’d never remember when to stop.”

“Stop!” the girl exclaimed in her hoarse whisper. “Who would want him to stop? That—why that was divine.”

“Oh! Thank you! Thank you!” Johnny’s face flushed.

“He’s just the same when he’s in the air fighting,” said the young Lord. “Flies as if he were in a dream and never thinks to stop. He—”

154

Suddenly he broke off. Someone had turned on the short-wave radio. It was low. Reaching over, he turned it louder.

“Get an earful of this.” His lips were curled in scorn.

The man on the radio was saying in fairly good English, “The quality of the British fighters is laughable.”

“How do you mean?” a voice on the radio asked.

“That’s Helmuth Wick, the boasting Hun,” the young Lord whispered.

“They merely try to stay out of our reach, those English fighters,” said the boasting German pilot. “This shows that the best English pilots have already been shot down. They fire furiously but never hit anything. It must make them very annoyed.”

“Well, thank you, Major Wick,” said the interviewer on the air. “That’s all we have had time for now. Nice to have had you with us.”

155

“That broadcast is for America,” the young Lord explained. “It is nice they had him with them tonight. He won’t be with them long. We’re all after him. No one loves a boaster. Besides, he’s a dirty fighter.”

“And does he boast!” The Lark put in. “Claims fifty planes shot down, or is it sixty. No matter. He’s head of a flight and sees to it that he stays ahead. One of his fighters always protects him from behind. If he sees one of our planes that’s shot up and wobbling, he just steps in and finishes them off. And that’s number forty-seven, or fifty-seven. Or what—”

“We caught up with him once,” the young Lord laughed. “The Lark here downed the man who protected him from behind. I would have polished him off right then but I got a slug in my motor. Oil started spurting. So I had to make a crash landing.

“Too bad, Johnny wasn’t with us,” he added with a good-natured laugh. “Johnny’d been up there fighting yet.”

“I’ll be with you next time,” Fiddlin’ Johnny said, and he did not laugh. “Tomorrow,” he went on, “we’ll be up with the dawn. The O. C. told me that just before I left. Said we could go up in five formation.”

“Who?” Dave sat up quick.

“You’ll be in on it,” Johnny grinned. “You and Brand. Only the O. C. said we were to watch and see that you don’t do anything rash.”

“You watch them! That’s a joke.” The Lark gave Johnny a slap on the shoulder. “All you can see when you’re in the air is crosses and swastikas.”

“All the same,” the young Lord insisted, “Johnny’s one swell little fighter.”

A half hour later they were gone, leaving Cherry to wonder how many of them would return, and how soon.

At dawn five Spitfires left the landing field. They flew in formation, first the young Lord, then the Lark. After these came Dave and Brand. Fiddlin’ Johnny brought up the rear.

It was a beautiful morning. Red still streaked the eastern sky. Did they see the sky? Perhaps Johnny did. He saw and heard everything that was beautiful. Dave did not see the sky. He saw only his instrument board, thought only of that which might be ahead. For they were the dawn patrol. And out of many a dawn, when the thin clouds were still red and gold, had come death. Dave shuddered at the thought but kept straight on his course.

Of a sudden he caught the young Lord's voice in the phone. It was high and cheerful as he shouted:

“Enemy ahead. Let's tap in.”

‘Tap in’, Dave knew meant ‘have a good time.’ Would they have a good time? Would they? He wondered. Then, as if he had taken a breath of pure oxygen, his spirits soared. Have a good time? Why not? This was a game. In this game one must have a good time or die.

They were putting on speed. At first he did not see the enemy. Then he saw them all too well. Five Messerschmitts came zooming out of a thin cloud. The rising sun struck their wings and turned them to burnished silver.

“Whoops!” shouted the Lark. “Up and at them, boys!”

158

In a low, sober note the young Lord said, “Boys that's the bragging Hun, Wick, or I'm a liar!”

“Correct!” shouted the Lark. “His identical formation, V shape, one behind on his right, three behind on the left. In a scrap he's safe. Perfect, I'd say for a hero.” Then in a roaring voice this red-headed pilot sang, “It's a long way to Tipperary. It's a long way to go.”

Dave didn't want to sing. Truth was, he could not have said a word. His tongue at that instant was glued to the roof of his mouth. Only the night before a veteran fighter had said to him, “Wick may be a coward. I wouldn't doubt that. But he's been a long time in the air. And that means just one thing, he knows how to pick brave men to do his fighting for him.”

“Brave men,” Dave whispered as he clutched his ‘joy-stick’ with a firmer grip. Then, through his radio headset, above the roar of motors, he caught a familiar sound. It was one of the tunes Fiddlin’ Johnny had played back there in the Hideout. It was “Londonderry Air.” Startled, as if expecting to see the strange boy fiddling as he flew, he glanced back. Johnny was in his place, all right, staring straight ahead.

“Whistling!” Dave murmured. “How do they do it?”

“Those Messerschmitts are looking for bombers, not fighters,” he told himself. “Haven’t seen us yet.”

The young Lord barked an order into his receiver. “We’ll climb into the sun, then drop down upon them.”

They climbed. They circled until the sun was at their backs. Then, with motors booming, they swept down upon the enemy.

With a sudden burst of speed the Messerschmitts scattered. Two planes alone remained in formation.

“That will be Wick and his bravest guard,” Dave told himself as a thrill coursed up his spine.

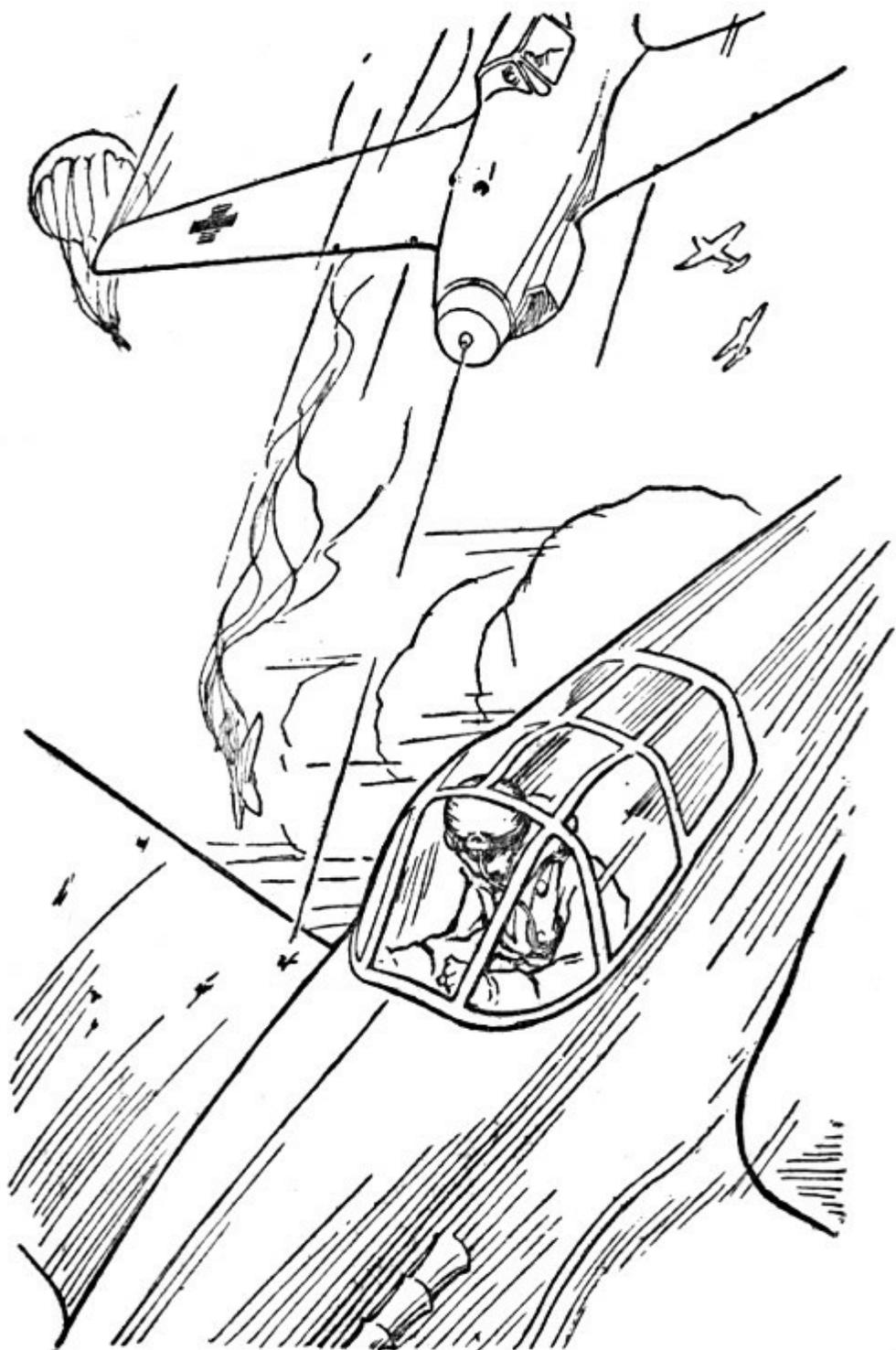
He was all for the fight now. Gladly he would have followed that pair, but it had been agreed that in a case of this kind the flight leader and the Lark, most experienced men of the flight, should step in where danger called most loudly.

With the hot blood of battle at last coursing in his veins, Dave went after a single, fleeing Messerschmitt.

He was faster than the enemy. Now a mile lay between them, now a half mile, a quarter. The enemy darted this way, then that. “Trying to shake me off,” Dave muttered. He was thinking at that moment of their shattered home. He should have sweet revenge.

He was all but upon the Messerschmitt. One more burst of speed. Now it was time to press the button. One thousand shots a minute! No! He’d better drop a little, to come up from below. Three hundred and fifty miles an hour. This was life.

Suddenly the air was torn by the rip and rattle of machine-gun fire, not his fire but another’s. Slugs tore into his right wing. Gripping his emergency boost, he set his plane banking madly to the left. Forty seconds of this, then he let go that emergency lever.



“Shots tore into his right wing”

Standing on one wing, he executed a mad whirl, then righted himself.

163

“What had happened?” As his eyes swept the sky he heard again that weird whistle, the Fiddler’s, doing “Londonderry Air.”

Next instant he spotted the Whistler. Right on the tail of a plane, he was at that very instant gripping the firing button. Once again the sky was torn with the haunting rip-rip-rip that spelled death.

What effect did the fiddler’s shots have upon the enemy? Dave was not to know, at least not for a long time. At that instant he caught sight of a Messerschmitt zooming up from behind and below his comrade. He watched with horror as a great burst of fire seemed to blot Fiddlin’ Johnny from the sky.

One second the Messerschmitt was there. The next it was gone. With sinking heart Dave saw Fiddlin’ Johnny’s plane go into a spin, then spiral down, down until it was lost in a cloud.

He listened. Save for the roar of his own motor, a muffled roar it was now, he caught no sound. The whistle was dead. But what of the whistler?

Not until then did Dave become conscious of his own motor. He was losing altitude. His hand was brown with oil. His motor had been hit, perhaps more than once. Just

164

when a Messerschmitt came zooming at him he slipped into a cloud.

He was thinking hard and fast now. He was out of the fight, that was sure. Was he too far out over the ocean to make landing before his motor died? Where was land? A glance at his compass, a slow half-swing about, then he flew straight ahead.

He was losing altitude faster now. In vain did he attempt to get more power from the motor.

There was the sea, and there, seeming far, far away, was land. He'd never make it. A cold, calm sea lay beneath him. How long could one live in that water? He'd have a try. Unsnapping his safety belt, he waited. How long before his ship sank? Not long, he guessed.

Then his eye caught something on the surface of the sea. A boat? Perhaps. Didn't look quite like that. At least it was fairly large and it floated.

Swinging half about, he went into a slow spiral, that would land him, he hoped, close to that mysterious, floating gray spot.

165

It did. Leaping from his plane, he did a slow crawl, waiting to see if his plane would sink. Three minutes more and it was gone.

Turning, he swam toward that floating thing. What was it? He could not tell. All he knew was that once he reached it he would escape from the bitter, biting chill of the sea.

Chapter XVII

Playing War

Meantime the young Lord had gone streaking after the self-appointed ace of the Huns and his most trusted guard. The Lark and Brand had remained in formation behind their leader. A fast and furious race had followed. The Nazis had climbed to dizzy heights. Turning on the oxygen, the young Lord and the Lark followed on their tails, but always a little too far behind for attack.

Unaccustomed to the climb, Brand was thinking of dropping out. Turning to look back, he caught his breath, stared again, then leveled off for greater speed. He had seen Fiddlin' Johnny go into a spin and had read in this disaster for his good pal Dave. He went to the rescue but too late. By the time he reached the scene both Dave and pursuer had vanished into the clouds.

Swinging about, he searched the sky for the young Lord and his fighting companion.

167

“There! There they are!” he exclaimed excitedly. “They win!” He was just in time to see an enemy plane go streaking down all in flames. At the same instant, some distance away, he saw a second enemy craft vanish into a cloud.

“Tough luck,” the young Lord grumbled into his speaker as Brand came up. “We got Wick’s favorite guard but the big boaster got away. Well, better luck next time. Where’s Dave and the Fiddler?”

“Johnny’s gone for good.” Brand’s voice was low and solemn. “He seemed a real fellow. I—I’m sorry. He went down in a spin, quite out of control. He can’t have come out of it. It’s taps for him.”

“Taps for poor old Johnny.” No more shouting today for The Lark. The flight’s scant triumph had cost them too dearly.

“I lost Dave in a cloud,” Brand went on. “I—I don’t know about him.”

“We’ll drop down and have a look,” said the young Lord. They did have a look. They fairly scoured the sea. All that met the eye was wide stretches of leaden, grey sea—that and a lone flock of wild ducks streaking away to the south.

168

“Ducks. Little old wild things,” The Lark grumbled. “Got more sense than humans.”

And so, with heavy hearts, they turned their planes landward. After that not a word was spoken until their Spitfires bump-bumped on the landing field.

That same afternoon Cherry walked alone to the village. She wanted time to think. And, indeed there was need for thinking. That morning her mother had driven out and had taken her to the city. There they visited the office of a famous

specialist.

“This,” said Mrs. Ramsey, “is Cherry.”

“Cherry, the Singing Angel!” exclaimed the doctor. “I am surely glad to meet you. It’s a wonderful work you are doing.”

“That I *was* doing,” Cherry whispered hoarsely.

“Why! What’s up? Voice troubling you? Let’s have a look! We’ll fix it up right away.”

After a long and painstaking examination the good doctor looked at her with trouble in his eyes. “Nothing the matter with your throat, absolutely nothing,” he said solemnly.

169

“But I can’t talk. I—”

“Yes, yes, I’m not doubting you.” The doctor walked slowly back and forth. “It’s just one more case of war shock.

“You see,” he began, after waving the ladies into chairs, “it’s like this. You, my child, are not afraid of bombs. That is, you are determined not to be. So are we all. We won’t let the enemy get us down. That’s grand! Magnificent! The true British spirit.

“But, my dear,” his voice dropped, “that is all in your mind. Your body has other things to say. It is truly afraid, and you can do nothing about it.

“In such a case your body breaks down at its weakest point. In your case it is your voice. I have a patient who buys old stamps. He’s forever peering through a glass, examining stamps, using his eyes. He wasn’t afraid of bombs. But his body was. He went totally blind. Since he was an American, I packed him into the Clipper and sent him home. And now,” the doctor spread his arms wide, “he’s quite all right again.”

“But doctor, what am I to do?” There was agony in Cherry’s whisper.

“Go to America. Two weeks there and you will be well. Then come back and take up your work once more. It’s your only chance. Is it worth the trouble?”

“But I can’t. I—”

“Yes, you can.” Mrs. Ramsey was on her feet. “I have it. The very thing! The boat sails next Monday.”

“The boat? What boat, mother?” Cherry stared.

“They have chartered a boat to carry refugee children to America. I was discussing the sending of Peggy and Tillie this very morning. The welfare workers wish to send a grown person with each group of ten children to look after them, direct their play, keep them cheerful and happy. Cherry, you shall be one of these. I shall see to it at once.”

“But mother!” Cherry’s whisper was pathetic. “It’s so sudden. I must have time to think.”

“Very well,” said her mother, dismissing the whole affair for a moment by a wave of her hand. “Think as much as you please until this time tomorrow.”

And so now Cherry, as she walked slowly toward the village, was thinking hard. Could she do it? Leave Alice, Brand, and Dave, all her friends to embark on this strange adventure? She had a horror of the sea, yet, if she went she must be cheerful all the way. “It’s the war,” she was thinking. “When there is a war we have no choice. Duty calls. We must go.”

Rounding a curve, a young cyclist came rushing toward her. He slowed up when he was near. It was Brand. There was a look on his face she had seldom seen there before.

“Going home?” she asked simply.

“No. Just for a ride.”

A question was on her lips. She did not ask it. There are times when we do not ask questions of those we love.

“I’m going to the village,” she said simply. “Perhaps I’ll meet you on the way back.”

172

“Perhaps.” Again he was on his wheel and away.

“Riding something down,” she told herself. “Something rather terrible.” Then, as if a chill blast had swept in from the hills, she shuddered.

At the village she came upon more tragedy. Where the shop of Old John, the shoemaker, had stood was a pit of darkness.

On a stake stuck in the ground someone had hung a bit of black crepe. This was enough. Turning she walked straight toward home. Her courage was now at the sticking point. She would go on that ship with the children. It was the only thing she could do to help. And everyone must do something.

“Perhaps,” she thought, “I shall go to visit Dave’s mother in Florida.”

Florida. At once she was dreaming of soft, lapping waters, gleaming sands, waving palm trees, and the eternal breath of spring. When one is young it is not natural to be sad for long.

She had not gone far on her homeward jaunt when a group of school children on their way home from school caught her eye. Their actions amazed her. One moment they were marching along engaged in merry chatter, the next, like a flock of birds escaping a hawk, they dashed from the road.

173

At the side of the road was a deep, dry ditch. Into this the children tumbled pell-mell. When Cherry came opposite them they were staring open-mouthed toward the sky.

This held for a full minute. Then one pair of eyes wandered. “Cherry!” a piping young voice cried. “It’s Cherry!” A small pair of legs disentangled themselves from the mass and a child came racing up to Cherry. It was Tillie. In the mass, Cherry had not recognized her. Peggy followed on her heels. Soon, one on each side of the older girl, they were marching toward home.

“What were you doing in that ditch,” Cherry asked.

“Playing war,” was Peggy’s quick response. “It’s loads of fun. We play there is a bombing plane right overhead. One of the boys can whistle just like the siren. You should hear him! He’s wonderful! After that we all tumble into the ditch and watch for the plane.”

174

“Of course,” the little girl added thoughtfully, “it never comes. But perhaps some day it really will come.”

“Yes,” Cherry thought. There was a tightness in her throat. “Yes, some day perhaps it will. And then—”

Yes, she would go with those children to America. She must. It was her duty.

175

Chapter XVIII
Dave's Strange Craft

That boat-like affair on which Dave climbed after a short swim from the spot where his plane had sunk was strange indeed. Some sixteen feet long by eight wide, it rested on the surface of the sea. It was not a boat, for though it had a small cabin above and a large one below, it was provided with no form of propelling power, not even oars.

The fact that struck the boy with the force of a blow was its unquestioned Nazi origin. On its side was painted the hated cross. The cabin below was fitted with all manner of articles for comfort and convenience, blankets, towels, boxes of biscuits and chocolate, bottles of soda water, all that a man could ask. Yet even here was the dreaded swastika. It was woven into towels and blankets and stamped into the biscuits.

“A Jerry hotel of the sea, a one man's paradise,” he thought.

176

Then, of a sudden it came to him. It was a float. He had heard of them. They were for the benefit of Nazi airmen who fell into the sea.

“Well,” he sighed, “I'm no Nazi, but I am cold and wet. So

here goes!”

After stripping off his water-soaked garments he slipped into a coarse, heavy shirt bearing the hated insignia, a pair of blue trousers, coarse wool socks and heavy shoes. The shoes were too large, but that did not count.

“Now,” he sighed, “what next?”

It struck him with sudden shock that the next thing might well be a routine visit to the float by an enemy patrol boat. After that he would be “Somewhere in Europe” for the duration of the war.

Climbing to the narrow deck, he scanned the sea. A mist had settled down over the water. There was a freshness in the air which suggested impending storm. Here he was. Here he would stay unless—He sat down to think.

Ten minutes later he sprang into action. There was a compass in the lower cabin. He studied the wind, then consulted the compass.

177

“O. K.,” he muttered. “If only—”

On a shelf he found a hammer and a box of wooden pegs. These, he concluded, would be for stopping up holes made by machine-gun bullets.

Taking the hammer, he began examining the floor of the lower cabin on which he stood. The covering was, he discovered, composed of fiber. To rip it up was but the work of minutes. And there—he uttered a sharp exclamation of joy,

—there, countersunk in the solid steel keel of this unsailing craft, was a heavy steel nut. “Thought so,” he murmured.

He had reasoned that, since this float did not move it must be anchored by a cable or chain. The cable or chain must be fastened by a ring-headed bolt with a nut inside the float. And so it was.

Now to remove the nut and let the float go free. He blessed his stars that from early childhood he had monkeyed with tools. A large nut, he had discovered years ago, can be turned off simply by hammering at the corners, thus turning it around little by little, a slow, tedious process, but sure of success in the end.

178

For more than an hour, the empty world of sea and air might have heard the patient tap—tap—tap of a hammer on steel.

Now and then he paused to listen. Only the ever-rising song of the wind—welcome sound—greeted his ears.

Once he consulted the compass, then climbed to the upper deck to face the wind. After that he resumed his tapping with increased speed.

At last, as a sigh escaped his lips, the nut slid to one side. At the same instant a wave larger than all the rest tilted the float half on its side. There came the grating sound of the threaded bolt slipping from its place. Then a thin fountain of water spurted up.

“Hurray! Free! We win!” he exulted.

“Not bad,” he murmured as, after stopping the hole with a towel, he wrapped himself in a blanket and stretched out for a rest.

This did not last long. He was in no mood for inaction. The battle among the clouds had set his blood racing. His imagination was fairly running riot. The storm was picking up, but not half fast enough. What if the Nazis caught up with him here? They had provided the place with all manner of comfort but no weapons. Perhaps, after all, this float had been intended as a trap. 179

There was a short-wave radio in the corner. After a brief inspection he discovered that it was both for sending and receiving. Twice his hand was on a dial. Twice, as his fingers trembled, he removed it. He did long to get in touch with headquarters. By this time the remnant of their flight would be back. They would be wondering, dreading, hoping. He could put these uncertainties to rest at least as far as he was concerned. A few well-chosen words would assure them that he was safe and that it was taps for the beloved Johnny.

His heart ached as he recalled his one brief glimpse of the fiddler’s smashed plane before it sank forever beneath black waters. He had seen no sign of life. Yes, the fiddler was gone. God rest his soul.

“But that Wick!” he asked himself. “What about him?” 180

Yes, he thought he could get that radio going and tell the boys at headquarters about things. But what would the Heinies be doing all that time? Checking his location, beyond a doubt.

Sending out a fast little craft to pick him up. Oh, no! Not yet. Some things were best left alone.

After a time he made himself a cup of hot chocolate, then drank it, at the same time munching biscuits and chocolate bar. Very thoughtful of those Nazis to spend so much time and thought on his comfort.

There was even a checker-board and a deck of cards. He played himself a game of checkers, then switched to solitaire. This lasted a long time.

When darkness at last settled down upon the sea, he climbed to the upper deck. Clinging to a rail he watched the waves roll in. Seldom had he witnessed a wilder scene. Racing clouds, racing sea and a moon that appeared to race with them.

Once again he checked the direction of the wind. Yes, unless he had miscalculated, he should land at last on the English coast. When? He had no way of knowing. One thing was sure, if this storm kept up he'd know well enough when he did arrive. One good bump would tell him that.

181

In the meantime? Well, tomorrow would be another day. He'd be needing all his senses. Might as well sleep while sleeping was good. After fastening his strange craft down good and snug for the night he rolled up in a half dozen heavy blankets and fell asleep.

182

Chapter XIX

Thrilling Sky Drama

That night watchers on the rooftops of London, those hardy men who all night long, with bags of sand at their side, scan the skies for bombing planes, witnessed a moving picture against the sky that they would not soon forget.

A few minutes after the alarm had sounded, just as Big Ben rang out the hour of nine, the thunder of powerful motors was heard.

At this instant, far above them in the sky, there appeared a light that was like the bursting of the sun. A flare beyond a doubt, but such a flare as had never before been seen. Every housetop, turret and tower stood out in bold relief. Beneath the flare, but far up in that sky, like a gigantic silver bird, a four-motored Nazi bomber appeared to hang motionless.

As the watchers stared speechless something very like a silver bat appeared to drop straight down from the sky.

183

“It’s a Spitfire,” muttered one hardy watcher.

“An’ it’s suicide,” exclaimed his mate.

As the silver bat curved down toward the bomber it let out a

sound as of the ripping up of every sidewalk in London.

At this every watcher threw himself flat on his face, for from above came such a roar as had never been heard before, no, not even in London.

A moment more and fragments of metal came showering down far and wide.

The flare above was still burning. One watcher, braver than the rest, scanned the sky. What he saw was a pair of balloons belonging to a balloon barrage, a trap set for enemy planes. Between the balloons ran cables that in this strange light shone like threads of silver. The thing that caught and held the watcher's eye was a silver spot clinging to those cables.

“That will be the Spitfire,” he said to his mate who now was sitting up. “The blast from that exploded bomber blew him there. I told you it was suicide. I said—

184

“And now may the Saints be praised!” His voice rose as he turned his eyes. Some distance below that silver spot a ghost-like circle had appeared.

“A parachute!” the watcher exclaimed. “And may the Nazis be confounded! That pilot of the Spitfire is still alive.”

“You're quite right, Tim, me boy,” the other agreed. “What's more, if I judge the movement of air rightly, he'll be landin' just about here.”

The roof on which the men stood was broad and flat. As the two men watched, the parachute and the dark spot hanging

beneath it, which appeared to be the pilot, grew in size. Carried first to the right, then to the left, as if directed by the very breath of the Gods, it came ever closer to that broad rooftop on which the watchers stood.

“Sure he’s alive,” Tim murmured. “I saw his arm move.”

“He—he’s almost down now,” muttered his companion.

“There now, he—” Breaking short off the speaker dashed for the far side of the roof.

185

Just as the daring aviator’s feet touched the roof a sudden, violent gust of wind caught his parachute and sent it skyward. Lifting him off his feet, it carried him forward at a rapid rate. Then, as if to complete its work of destruction, over empty space the parachute collapsed.

The parachutist found himself balanced on the parapet, leaning back with all his might, but apparently doomed to crash to the earth a hundred feet below. Then, of a sudden, a voice said:

“Here, young man, where y’ think y’re goin’?”

A pair of husky arms were wrapped about him and he was dragged to safety. His savior was Tim’s powerful companion.

“Why, you’re little more than a boy!” The big man exclaimed after peering into the rescued one’s face.

“I’m more than that,” the youth replied huskily. “If I were to tell you who I really am you might be a little surprised. But I’m not telling.”

“Whoever you are,” said Tim with a wave of his strong arms, “you’re a darling of the gods. What you done tonight no other man could do an’ live.”

186

“What’s more,” Tim’s partner added, “you’ve saved the life of many a woman an’ child. There was two tons of bombs in that big ship an’ she was ’angin’ over blocks an’ blocks of tenements. It was early. The first alarm had ’ardly sounded. They don’t get to the subway that quick, the women an’ the children, they don’t.”

The young flyer was pulling at his chute. It caught and tore. “Here,” he exclaimed impatiently, handing the strings to the big guard, “take this home to your Missus. There’s some fine silk in it. And now how do you get down from this place?”

“It’s right over ’ere,” said the astonished Tim as he led the way to a trap door. “You just go down that stairway. There’s a door at the bottom. You’ll find stairways leadin’ to the ground floor an’ the back outside door’s got a spring lock. Spring it an’ you’re outside.

“An’ ’ere’s wishin’ ye luck,” the big man added. “Ow about shakin’ your hand?” Two hands met in a hearty grip. “’Ere’s ’opin’ we meets again,” said the watcher.

187

Five minutes later the mysterious flyer reached the good earth once again to lose himself at once in the avenues of darkness that are London in the blackout.

188

Chapter XX
Dave Comes Marching Home

Next morning Brand, whose time schedule for the day included only a short practice flight in the afternoon, asked permission to cycle over to the Hideout in time for breakfast. Still terribly upset by the losses of yesterday he wished to be among his own people.

While breakfast was preparing he told of the sad misadventures resulting from their first patrol flight.

“Bad business,” he murmured at the end. “The Fiddler gone, Dave gone, soon our flight will be at an end.

“But we’ll fight!” His voice picked up. “We’ll fight to the last man.”

For a time after that all were silent. Then Cherry asked, “Brand, did you hear the late news broadcast last night?”

“No. What was up?”

189

“The strangest thing happened. It sounds like a miracle. A bright flare, brightest ever seen, hung over a bomber ready to help destroy London, when a single Spitfire plunging down, down, down, loosed a burst of fire at the bomber. Then came

a terrible explosion in midair.” “Got him!” Brand’s eyes shone. “But the Spitfire?”

“He was blown against a balloon cable. He baled out. He landed on a roof. Then he vanished. Who does that sound like?”

“Like Fiddlin’ Johnny,” Brand whispered. “But the Fiddler is dead and so is—”

He did not finish for at that moment the door opened. Cherry, who stood facing the door, let out a hoarse whispering cry, then barely missed throwing herself in the new-comer’s arms.

“Careful, Cherry,” said a calm voice. “I’ve had a lot of trouble and a heap of luck these last hours. I couldn’t stand much more.” It was Dave.

“Dave! Are you really alive?” It was Alice who asked this remarkable question.

“Why—yes. I—I think so.” Dave looked from one to the other across the room. “At least that’s the way I like to feel about it.” At this they all burst into a merry laugh and somehow life seemed to begin all over again.

190

“Tell us about it, Dave,” Cherry commanded.

“Wait. I’ll have to phone headquarters.” Dave looked about for a phone. Then he remembered, there was no phone in the Hideout.

“We’ve had the phone down at the house repaired,” Alice

said.

“I—I’ll be back for a cup of coffee.” Dave was away on the run.

* * * * *

At that moment the Commander at the airdrome had just dropped to a place beside the young Lord in the squadron mess room.

“Applegate,” he said soberly, “why did you do it?”

“I had to.” There was a stubborn look on the young Lord’s usually cheerful face.

“Why?” The Commander’s eyes were on him.

“It got on my nerves, those Jerries bombing women and children every night and nothing being done about it.”
The young Lord did not look up.

191

“So you decided to commit suicide by doing something?” The Commander’s voice was low.

“Well, I’m here.” A smile played about Applegate’s lips.

“But you wouldn’t be again. Not one time in a million. Wars are not won that way.

“Look here, Applegate,” the Commander’s voice softened a little. “I’ve always liked you, been proud of you. You were not raised like the rest of us. When the war came you joined

up and you've played your part like a man.

“This fighting in the air is different.” The Commander paused to look away. “It’s a little like the old days that Walter Scott wrote about, Ivanhoe, Kenilworth, Richard the Lionhearted, all that. Each man got him a sword and fought it out with the first enemy he met.

“It’s the same here in a way. You can’t always fight in formation. But you *do* have to fight under orders. You must, I must, everyone but the King must. And he’s not so free either.

192

“Last night,” his voice fell, “you took your ship without orders and did a stretch over London. Why?”

“I—I couldn’t stand myself.” The young Lord’s head was bowed. “Going out with five men, coming back with three. Not getting the man I was after. Losing the fellows we all love. What kind of fighting is that?”

“It comes to all of us.” The commander’s voice was gentle now. “One over in France—

“Wait!” He sprang up. “There’s the phone.”

In the corner the young Lord heard the Commander exclaim into the receiver, “What? Who? Say! That’s great! How’s that? Yes. Certainly. As long as you like.”

The Commander’s voice was deep with emotion as turning back to the young Lord he said:

“That was Dave. He’s back safe. He’s over at Ramsey Farm. They’re just having their biscuits, marmalade and coffee. Want you to join them.”

The young Lord stood up. He tried to speak but failed. With a bow and a salute he left the room. Three minutes later his big car was burning up the road leading to Ramsey Farm.

193

194

Chapter XXI

The Lark Defends His Home Town

It was truly a jolly party that sat down to breakfast in the Hideout that morning. Dave had been dead. Now he was alive again. Who could help being happy? It seemed good to be together again, to laugh over recent adventures and to talk in serious tones of the future.

“There really isn’t so much to tell,” Dave insisted, when they pressed him for his story. “I had luck, that was all.”

He told of his landing, the sinking of his plane, his discovery of the Nazi’s float and his work at setting it adrift.

“After that,” he added, “it was just a matter of time and a little more luck. I fell asleep. Of course, I woke up now and then. Who wouldn’t? All I heard was the whistle of the wind and the rush of waves so I dozed off again.”

“After midnight the sea settled down a bit. Just at dawn my crazy craft bumped on a sandy beach. Of course I was up and out in a hurry.

“And there!” He laughed. “Leave it to the Home Guard! There on the beach, armed with heavy old-fashioned rifles all

pointed straight at me, were three old men. And you could tell by the look on their faces that they'd just as soon shoot me as not."

"What did you do?" Cherry whispered.

"Do? Why! I let them take me prisoner. What else could I do? There I was on a float marked with the Nazi cross and wearing a Nazi swastika on my shirt.

"I threw them a line and, when a big wave broke on shore, they hauled me in.

"Then I invited them to take breakfast with me. I had bacon in tins, biscuits in a box and a jar of marmalade, also coffee. It was a grand feed. And did those old men eat? They'd been on watch since sundown."

"And after that?" Cherry whispered.

196

"Then I showed them my water-soaked uniform, my American passport in a waterproof pocket and my identification tag."

"And then they wanted to shoot you more than ever." Brand laughed.

"No—no, they didn't." Dave leaned back in his chair. "They were regular old sports. Took it all as a huge joke. Had a good laugh over it.

"Then," he added, "I traded them my float for a ride home in a dilapidated old car. And here I am."

“That float will make them a nice outpost station all winter.” Alice sighed with content. She wanted everyone to be comfortable and happy.

“I’m going to America,” Cherry said. “The doctor advised it for my voice. He says it’s nerves.

“There’s a boatload of children going. I’m to take Peggy and Tillie.”

“Oh—o,” Dave breathed softly. “That will be swell.” And so it would, he thought, for Cherry.

“But you, Alice?” The young Lord turned to the older sister. “Shall you be going also?”

“No—o.” Alice spoke slowly. “I’m staying right here. There’s the dairy, you know. Jock will care for the cattle and tend to the milking. I’ll make the butter. It all goes to your mess, I suppose you know? The butter, I mean. Or didn’t you know?”

197

“I could have guessed,” said the young Lord. “Our butter’s been uncommonly good of late.”

“Thanks a lot.” Alice made a neat bow. “Anyway we’ve all got to carry on. I shall be quite all right here with old Jock and Flash.”

“And we’ll all welcome an opportunity to drop in for a chat now and then.” Dave added with a genuine sigh of satisfaction. “We’ll always be needing someone to listen to our tall tales or to offer us consolation when we’ve met with

defeat.”

“All quite true,” said the young Lord. And he did not laugh.

Strange days followed. The R. A. F. in war time is no respecter of persons. Though the young Lord was of noble birth, he must suffer for his breach of discipline. He was grounded for five days. His battered Spitfire was taken down from the balloon cables and repaired. Armor plate was added to his seat and fitted about his motor, so the time out was not all loss.

198

Every day the two “cubs”, Dave and Brand went up with the Lark as their leader. Their field of patrol was narrow. Since their last battle the Jerries seemed to avoid that little patch of the sky over England.

One day an enemy dive-bomber wandered into their “Sphere of Influence.”

Seeing the direction the bomber was taking, the Lark let out a wild whoop, barked “Tallyho!” into his receiver and then they were away. Climbing into the sun they prepared to head the intruder off.

This time neither was, in the matter of speed, a match for the Lark. There was a reason. The town for which the bomber was headed was Renton-by-the-Sea. In that small city the Lark had spent his happy boyhood days. Neither an industrial town nor a seaport, it was one of those charming little cities where tired business men and their families spend their weekends at play.

“My home town!” the Lark roared into the receiver.
“He’ll send some of the very houses I’ve known and loved for years spouting into the sky! Only he won’t.” Dave could hear his teeth crack.

And then the strange fellow’s voice boomed forth in song.
“It’s a long way to Tipperary. It’s a long way to go.”

The Lark was now flying straight away from the sun. The dive-bomber’s pilot had not seen him. He was circling like a gull preparing for a sudden dive when the Lark came straight at him. Not troubling to get on his tail, the brave young defender of his home town let out a burst of fire, then went swooping past him.

An answering burst rattled against the Lark’s plane but did no harm. Banking sharply, the Lark came up beneath the bomber, stood his Spitfire on its tail, let out a second burst, then gripping his emergency lever he thundered out from under and away.

He was not a second too soon. The bomber heeled over to rocket toward the earth. It burst into flames then blew up with such force that Dave, some distance away, was set into a spin and barely escaped a crash.

Once more singing Tipperary, The Lark led the way home. After a time he broke off to shout:

“The small boys of my home town will be hunting souvenirs from that bomber for weeks to come. Oh, boy! How I wish I was a child again, just for tonight.”

When there was time off Dave enjoyed striding Brand's bike and riding away to the Hideout. It was good to drop back into the old, quiet, nearly normal life. Alice and Cherry were there and sometimes the children. Cherry seemed to take her trip to America very quietly, as a matter of duty. She spent hours sitting by the fire asking Dave about his native land, but always in that quiet, matter-of-fact whisper of hers. The children were vastly excited about the trip and eager to be away.

At times Dave thought of the days to come when Alice would be alone with the aged veteran and the dog, Flash. The thought troubled him a little. There were, he supposed, enemy spies about. He had come into contact with one of these.

201

Ramsey Farm seemed to have been marked for destruction. He often asked himself why. A prisoner of war had once worked here. He had been treated with kindness and as an equal. Why should he have gone away embittered? "Twisted sort of mind, I suppose," was his final conclusion.

Had this spy, Nicholas Schlitz brought destruction upon himself that night by the castle, or was he still prowling about? This question needed answering.

Late one afternoon he rode over to the castle. Coming upon a workman who cared for the castle grounds, he stated his problem.

"Perhaps this will answer your question," the man said simply. He held out a metal disc. There was a name and

number on the disc.

“Tom and I found it two days after the bombing,” the man said. “There was more to it than that, but I needn’t trouble you with the details. Tom and I, we figured it all out and reckoned the least said soonest mended.

“We reported this ’ere business to the proper authorities, sir,” he went on. “It’s all in order, sir. We should have turned the tag in at headquarters. You’ll be doin’ us a service if you’ll attend to that for us, sir.”

202

“And,” he added after a moment, “you’ll put in a few words of explanation. Words come handier to you than they does to Tom and me. I’m a thinkin’ you know the details.”

“I shouldn’t wonder.” Dave spoke slowly. “Thanks a lot. I’ll feel better about Alice being over at the Hideout with only old Jock and the dog to protect her.”

“No doubt of that, sir,” the man agreed as they parted.

War, Dave thought, was strange.

203

Chapter XXII

Roll Out the Barrel

Sunday came and with it the knowledge that before dawn of the next day the good ship Queen Bess would be on her way to America. And on that ship would ride Tillie, Peggy and their escort, Cherry.

Early Sunday morning the social worker from the subway and the little red-headed Irish pianist arrived in a car before the door of the Hideout.

“All the people of our subway have read in the paper about your trip to America,” the social worker said to Cherry. “They want you to attend a farewell party.”

“But I can’t sing. Can’t even speak out loud,” Cherry whispered.

“We know that,” exclaimed the little redhead. “They know it and are sorry for you. But you can still smile.”

“Yes.” Cherry proved her answer by a happy smile.

204

“That’s all that matters,” exclaimed the social worker. “Then you will come?”

“Yes.” Cherry swallowed a happy lump in her throat. “I’ll come.”

“We’ll all go down in my car,” the young Lord said later in the day. “When the party is over it will be about time for you to take the train for your port.”

“And we’ll all go down to the port to see you off,” Alice added with a grand smile.

That party in the subway was like nothing that ever happened before. So happy were the people at sight of their Singing Angel that they stood on their feet and shouted for a full five minutes.

It was Sunday night, but as if they must crowd weeks of joy into one wonderful night the people took the program in their own hands and sang everything from “Roll out the Barrel” to “God Save the King” and from “I’ve got my Eyes on You” to the “Glory Song.”

Ah yes! That was a night Cherry would not soon forget. One moment they were bowing before the Old Rugged Cross, the next they were Rolling the Old Chariot along. When at the very end someone started “God be with you till we Meet Again,” many an eye was moist. But at the very middle of the song a huge man who could stand no more emotion roared out in a terrific basso:

205

“We’ll roll the old chariot along.” And so, with a glorious shout they once again rolled the old chariot. Then the party was at an end.

It was a jolly party that, as Big Ben struck the hour of ten, boarded the train bound for the seaport town where the Queen Bess lay at anchor. Children with their sponsors filled every compartment of the train.

When they at last reached their destination and swarmed out on the platform the children began singing:

“Roll Out the Barrel.” And no one said, “Hush, this is Sunday.” But everyone took up the song. For this was the children’s hour.

There was no singing as, after finding their compartment for them, the little group from Ramsey Farm prepared to bid goodbye to Cherry, Tillie and Peggy.

206

Every one of them knew that their little group was breaking up and perhaps forever. They had shared joy and sorrow. A brother, two sisters, a lifelong friend, a new-found pal from across the sea and two little waifs from the slums of London, they silently shook hands in the dark, then whispered, “Goodbye—Goodbye! Goodbye! And lots of good luck!”

On the way back on the train Alice whispered to Dave, “I wish Cherry hadn’t gone.”

“Why?” Dave stared.

“I don’t know. I just wish it, that’s all.”

And so, through the blackout, the little English train carried them back to London.

Next day Alice returned to her improvised buttery and her churn. But the song that so often had enlivened her task as the dasher went up and down was silenced.

For Dave the joy of flying increased with every morn. To climb up from the earth, to greet the dawn, to lose himself in the clouds, ah! that was joy beyond compare.

207

“If it only weren’t war,” he whispered to himself. And yet war did give it an added tang. It was like the nipping frost in the air that greets the ice-skater or the singing of the sled runners that delights the ears of the dog-team racer. He did look forward to the day when the young Lord’s penalty should be paid and the four of them would again be in the air.

The day came and they thundered away with the break of day. On this day, however, Heinie apparently was content to stay at home. Not a speck marred the blue of that little patch of the sky over England they claimed as their own.

“We’ll meet them again,” the young Lord’s tone was confident, as at last they returned to earth.

“Wolves, weasels, skunks, and all kinds of varmints visit the same little corner of the earth time after time. So do the Jerries. That big boaster, Wick, will return. And then!” It was clear that he had not forgotten the loss of his most beloved flying mate, Fiddlin’ Johnny.

208

“I wonder,” Dave said thoughtfully. “Does Wick always fly his men in that V-shaped formation?”

“Always, I am told,” was the answer.

“He assumes that we want to get at him and that we’ll go for the man protecting his tail,” Dave said thoughtfully. “That gives his other men a chance to close in and clean us up. Supposing we fooled him by taking off his three men on the other line, one at a time?”

“It’s an idea,” the young Lord replied. “Perhaps we’ll try it. Yes, I think we shall—when the time comes. And it will come, never fear!”

“Alice must be lonesome with Cherry and the children gone,” Dave suggested to Brand that evening. “Let’s go over.”

“I can’t tonight,” was Brand’s reply. “The Lark is giving me a lesson on handling a Brownie. You can’t learn too much, you know, not in this man’s war.”

“Nor half enough,” Dave agreed.

209

Mounting Brand’s bicycle, Dave rode over the pleasing country roads to Ramsey Farm. Night was just falling. There was a glorious freshness about the night air. The war seemed far away. “As if it couldn’t touch any of us,” he thought. How wrong he could be at times.

He found Alice doing the dinner dishes. Flash was curled up by the fire. Old Jock was at the stables. Dave grabbed a drying towel and helped with the dishes. Then they sat by the cheerful fire. He spoke of his day’s work. “No luck,” he concluded. “Perhaps tomorrow. Brand and I are getting better with our planes every day. We’ll be fighters yet.”

Alice smiled.

“Tonight *they* seemed very far away,” she said, after a moment. Her voice was low. “It’s the first time Cherry and I have been parted for long.”

He knew who she meant and was silent.

From outside came the sound of a car. It stopped. There was a hand on the latch. Mrs. Ramsey stepped into the room. A large, healthy, good-natured woman, on arriving it was her custom to shout a cheery greeting. Tonight there was nothing of that.

210

“You’re here, David?” she said as she took his hand. “I’m glad.” She gave Dave her heavy coat, then took a place by the fire.

“It’s a bit chilly outside tonight,” said Alice.

“Quite.” Mrs. Ramsey’s voice seemed strange.

“But still and peaceful,” Dave suggested. “As if there were no war.”

After that for a full minute there was silence.

When at last the mother spoke her voice was high-pitched and a little strained. “I don’t know how to say it,” she began. “I’m not good at such things. I’m always too blunt about my speech. ‘Out with it’, that’s been my motto.

“You must know how I feel,” she went on after a pause, “So why all the beating around the bush? A rather terrible thing has happened. The Queen Bess has been attacked and sunk.”

Dave started and stared, yet neither he nor Alice spoke a word.

“It came to me by secret message,” Mrs. Ramsey went on. “The general public doesn’t know about it yet.”

211

“And did—did—” Alice’s words stuck in her throat.

“We have only the most meager details,” the mother said. “It was a sea raider that did it, not a submarine. The raider came in firing a broadside. Then it vanished into the night.

“In twenty minutes the Queen Bess was gone, down by the bow. There was a sea on. Some of the lifeboats were swamped. The children were magnificent! Perfectly magnificent!” Mrs. Ramsey swallowed hard. “All of them sang ‘Roll out the Barrel’ through it all.”

“Oh—o!” Alice breathed, then hid her face.

“That’s all there is to tell.” Mrs. Ramsey rose. “I must get back. I practically ran away. There was a frightful raid last night. All our wards are full. We—we’ll hope for the best.” She was gone.

They sat there in silence by the fire for a long time, the boy and the girl, in a troubled world.

At last Dave rose to walk slowly back and forth across the well-worn floor.

212

It was Alice who at last spoke. “Dave. She is not gone. She’s out there somewhere. You can’t kill such a spirit as Cherry’s.

You just can't."

"That's right," Dave agreed. "It can't be done." He meant just that. "Well," he sighed, "I'll be going back. Let me know about things. I—I'll bring Brand tomorrow night if we can make it."

"Dave, I'm sorry," Alice said as she clasped his hand in farewell. She was thinking of him just then, he knew that. She was trying to tell him she was sorry their happy evening together had been spoiled. How sort of magnificent she was! How marvelous these English girls!

Chapter XXIII

Victory

When Dave told Brand and the young Lord the news of the sinking, true to their British tradition they had little to say. Next day, however, they appeared on the field prepared for the dawn patrol. Dave saw new, hard lines about their lips.

“I’d hate to be their enemy today,” he thought, as a thrill ran up his spine.

They had been cruising, four of them, the young Lord, Brand, The Lark, and Dave, for an hour when out of a very small cloud, for all the world as if it had been waiting there for days, came that same formation, five planes in a V-shape. One plane following the leader on the right and three on the left.

“Can I believe my eyes?” The Lark shouted into his speaker.

“You can.” The young Lord’s voice was low. “Not another word. No shouting, please. You all know how we planned it. I’ll take the talk man of the three on the left. You know the rest. Tallyho!”

214

“Tallyho,” came echoing from the others. They were away.

Since they were a thousand feet above the enemy and in the end they came swooping down from above. They were not seen until the young Lord was all but upon his victim. His was a murderous assault that could have but one ending. As if in rehearsal, The Lark slipped into the place left vacant by the young Lord as he dropped into a power-dive. The Lark's man went down in flames. Deserting his post, the third man tried flight, but with the luck of a beginner, Brand shot downward, then climbed straight up to riddle the Messerschmitt's motor and send it down in a cloud of yellow smoke.

As for Dave, the whole affair had gone off with such speed that he found himself in a half daze, headed straight for the side of a gleaming Messerschmitt. Then his eyes registered an astonishing fact. He was facing the boasting Wick himself, he who called himself a deadly killer. On the tail of his plane was a black blotch. Dave knew this to be fifty-six black lines, one for each victim Wick claimed. For a space of seconds Dave's blood was turned to ice. Then, with a rush, it was like molten steel. 215

They were close now, dangerously close, yet each was out of range of the other. Suddenly gripping his emergency lever, giving his motor its last ounce of power, Dave banked sharply, saw the terrible Wick rise into his sight, pressed the firing button, heard for one brief second his machine-guns speak, then went into a spin. Whirling over and over and going down, down, down where the good soil of Merry England lies, he thought, "This is the end!"

He was wrong. He came out of the spin. How? He would never know.

After levelling off he looked up, then down. To the right of him a Messerschmitt was falling in flames. Even as he looked it exploded in mid-air.

Far in the distance the one remaining enemy was speeding away. Off to the left the young Lord's line was forming. Climbing slowly, Dave at last joined that line. Then, in the Sky Over England that was once more England's own, they cruised the blue until the young Lord gave the word and they went thundering home. 216

As they left their ships on the landing field the young Lord walked over to Dave, put out a hand, gripped Dave's hand, then without a word walked away. It was enough. Dave understood and was glad.

Just at mess time that evening an old man, member of the Home Guard appeared at headquarters. Under his arm he carried a flat, paper-wrapped package.

"Thought you might like it, sir," he said as he placed it in the young Lord's hand.

As the others gathered around the flight leader unwrapped it, then handed it to Dave. It was the tail of a Messerschmitt. On it had been painted two letters, H. W. Below these letters were 56 long, black lines.

"This," said Dave, "should be yours." He gave it back to the young Lord. "All trophies belong to the leader of the flight." 217

"To the entire squadron," the young Lord replied huskily.

“Come. We’ll put it up where all may see.” He placed it on the mantle. “Not that we need to boast,” he said quietly, “but that all men may know that the Sky Over England is England’s alone.”

Chapter XXIV
Searchers of the Sea

Next morning the squadron commander received a strange request. Young Lord Applegate walked into his quarters, saluted, then said:

“Commander, I wish to ask for a transfer.”

“A transfer?” The Commander sat forward in his chair.

“Why? You are doing magnificently. Only yesterday—”

“Begging your pardon, sir,” Applegate broke in, “that has no bearing on the case. I ask for a transfer to the bomber service that patrols the sea. I was trained for that work, had a full year’s training. That should be enough.”

“But you are a born fighter.”

“Perhaps,” the young Lord admitted. “And perhaps too one may fight with a twin-motored bomber.”

“There’s seldom an opportunity on sea patrol.”

219

“We will make an opportunity. My men, Ramsey, Barnes and The Lark, wish to go with me. Old Jock, from Ramsey Farm, a gunner, first-class, who lost a leg in Flanders, will join us.”

“I still don’t see—”

“Commander,” the young Lord’s face was tense with emotion, “with me this is a personal matter. You’ve heard of the sinking of the Queen Bess?” The Commander nodded.

“Cherry Ramsey was on that ship. You know her, I’m sure.”

“I have met her. A charming girl. She was doing a grand piece of work. Was she lost?”

“Her name is not on the list of those rescued. But it is believed,” the young Lord’s voice rang with hope, “that one life-boat, not swamped by the storm, remains unreported.

“If I am granted a transfer to the Sea Patrol I shall ask that we be allowed to patrol that portion of the air over the Atlantic beneath which the Queen Bess was fired upon and sunk.”

“I see.” The commander’s face was thoughtful.

220

“That is not all.” The lines on the young Lord’s brow deepened. “I shall ask that we be allowed to carry two five-hundred pound bombs and be commissioned to search for the merciless sea raider that sank that shipload of children. It is still at large.”

The commander nodded. “She attacked a convoy last night. Gave no warning. Sank three ships, then was away.”

For a moment the commander sat staring at the wall. “It’s very irregular,” he murmured.

“This is an irregular war, not fought by rules. Fought by men. Thank God for that!” The young Lord’s chin was up.

“All right. I’ll see what I can do.” The commander stood up.
“Report to me here at noon.”

The young Lord saluted, then marched away.

An hour later he was engaged in a heated argument with his good friend, Alice. “But, Alice!” his voice rose. “It’s impossible! A woman on a sea-patrol bomber! Suppose we catch up with that ruthless pirate.”

“All right.” Alice stood up sturdy and tall. “Suppose we do?”

221

“It won’t be a one-sided fight. That raider carries anti-aircraft guns. Death may be waiting at those crossroads of the sea.”

“Death.” Alice’s voice was low. “In this war not just young men are giving their lives for the land they love. Men and women and children are. It’s everybody’s war.

“Harm!” (She seldom used that name of other days. In her soul was written traditional homage to nobility.) “It is Cherry who is out there on those black waters. Our Cherry! Peggy and Tillie are with her. A woman’s eyes are always sharper than a man’s. Always when we were children it was my eyes, not yours, that saw the lark soaring skyward or the finches hiding in the hedges. Harman, let me go!”

“But the farm, Alice?” The young Lord was weakening.

“Surely you can spare Jeff Weeks and his wife for a few days to look after this farm.”

“A few days? Yes. But suppose it is forever?” The young Lord’s voice was low. “Alice, more important than our search for Cherry, much as we all love her, is to be our hunt for the sea-raider. And if we find it there will be no quarter! It shall be that ship or our plane. Such is war.”

222

“If it is to be forever?” There was a smile on the girl’s lips. “We die but once. The farm will not matter. Let me go!”

The young Lord threw up his hands. “I surrender,” he whispered hoarsely.

And so it happened that, when the transfer had been granted and the young Lord had been put in command of a sea-scouting bomber, one of the fastest in the service, and when it sailed away into the blue, it carried not five but six men. One of these “men” had short, bobbed hair, and as he stood by the one-legged, gray-haired rear gunner, he looked remarkably like a girl.

At dawn, in a bomber that made their little Spitfires seem like gulls, the young warriors rose high in air, far above the clouds, to zoom away.

When land was lost from sight the young Lord studied his compass and his chart, set a course south by west to at last drop down close to the sea.

223

After that, hour after hour, with eyes that burned from watching and hearts that ached with longing, they studied the

dark surface of the never-ending sea.

Twice they came upon British ship convoys and dipped low to greet them. Once they thought they saw a life-boat and hope ran high. But, as they dropped low, the supposed boat submerged.

“Whale or a submarine?” the young Lord barked into his receiver.

“Whale,” was old Jock’s instant response. So they soared on.

It was only after their gasoline supply began running low that they at last rose into the blue to go zooming to a landing field in the north of Scotland.

There, after darkness had fallen, Alice slipped away to a little hotel where no questions were asked. When, however, she told what she dared of their mission, she was accorded the hospitality due a queen and in the morning not a cent would her hostess accept. 224

“It’s our own war,” said the good lady, “and may the good Lord bless you.”

The second day was more than half gone. The girl’s eyes were red with watching when she called in her phone, “I—I hear the sound of firing.”

Every headset was removed.

“Not a sound but the motors. Not a sound,” was the report.

“Climb. Then shut off your motors,” Alice insisted.

It was done, and from the west to their listening ears came the roar of heavy guns.

“Prepare for action,” the young Lord barked. “See that the bombs are in their place. Make all fast.

“And,” he added softly, “say a prayer.”

Their ship was fast. Smoke loomed on the horizon. Ships, a large convoy, took form. A minor sea-battle was in progress. Doughty captains of freighters were pitting their small guns against the heavy ones of a raider.

They were rapidly approaching the scene when with a joyous battle cry the Lark sang out, “Man! Oh, man! They’ve spotted us. Look! There they go! Running at full speed.”

225

“We’re after them.” The young Lord’s lips were drawn into a straight line.

Old Jock was at the bomb controls, Dave and Brand at the one-pound cannons, the Lark at the radio.

They climbed a thousand feet, three, five, then twenty thousand feet. They were all but above the fleeing raider now. Dave tried to imagine the wild commotion and the frenzied preparation on board that raider at that moment. Just what the young Lord meant to do, he knew. Life and death hung in the balance.

As for the young Lord, his brow suddenly wrinkled. He had caught a glimpse of two specks against the sky.

“Here,” he called to Alice. “Have a look through the glass. Off to the right! Enemy or friend? Tell me—Quick!”

One look and she told him. “Enemy! Twin motor interceptors. Two of them.”

226

“Good! We’ll show them how it’s done.”

Ten seconds later he barked, “All set for a power dive!”

The big ship’s nose pointed toward the sea. Far below the raider seemed a speck. As it grew in size it could be seen to zig-zag this way, then that.

“All or nothing,” had been the young Lord’s order. “When I give the signal release both bombs.”

As Dave watched it seemed they could not win. Yet the young Lord had a keen mind. He had been well trained.

To the roar of the motor and the screaming of the plunging plane was added the burst of anti-aircraft fire. Death rode the air.

And then Dave realized that the instant had come. Fascinated, he watched a bomb glide from its place, then another. A second later there was a lurch as the plane began coming out of its dive.

To Dave, the time of waiting, only a few seconds,

227

seemed endless. Then came a boom, followed almost at once by a second. And then a roar far greater than the others. There was a push that lifted them high, then all but dropped them into the sea.

“Right on the nose!” The Lark roared from his tail gunner’s position. “Blew up their magazine. Raider, whose captain has a heart of stone, has met its end.”

“We’ll let those Nazi planes get what satisfaction they can out of that,” said the young Lord in a surprisingly quiet tone of voice. “We’ll just hop over and do what we can for that convoy.

“But stay in your places. Man your guns,” he warned. “Those planes may attack. If they do, give ’em all you’ve got!”

The enemy planes did not attack. Perhaps they had seen quite enough.

Thankful to be alive, the young Lord and his men flew to the rescue of those British seamen whose ships of the convoy had been sunk. Never before had Alice been so close to war as now. Helping these cold seamen, some of them frightfully wounded, from the water into the wings and into the cabin of their plane, then to the ships that had escaped the raider, she realized for the first time what it was costing these men to keep her native land fed, defended and free.

When their two hours of rescue work were over and they were prepared to take to the air once again, she was shocked to find that in her work for others she had quite forgotten her bright-eyed sister who must at this moment be drifting on this very

sea or sleeping far beneath its waves.

It all came back to her like a sudden shock of pain as they rose above the sea.

Another hour of futile search, then the big ship pointed her nose toward the home base.

“Orders,” the little Lord explained, “just came in on the radio. The news of our good stroke has reached London. We are to come in for re-assignment.”

“Re-assignment!” Alice stared but said never a word.

Chapter XXV

The Rescue

The news of their success had gone on before them by radio. At the airdrome they were given a royal welcome. Congratulations were the order of the day. The entire crew was invited to the Squadron Commander's home in a near-by village for dinner.

Somehow the word that Alice had been on the bomber at the moment of its triumph had got about. Ignoring every precedent, the commander's wife invited her to the dinner and fitted her out with a dress suited to the occasion. She was quite the queen of the occasion.

For all her gayety, deep down in her soul the girl was broken-hearted. A half hour before they went in for dinner the young Lord had told her in steady, even tones that only served to reveal his hidden emotion that the invasion of their land seemed near at hand, that the R. A. F. was sadly in need of heavy bombers for breaking up troop-concentrations on the other shore. "Five powerful bombers are waiting, all equipped, on American shores," the young Lord had said. "My orders are to pick up crews for these bombers—they are waiting for me at a Scottish airdrome—and to fly these crews across the Atlantic."

“No—no more search?” Alice’s tongue had gone dry.

“Perhaps a little coming and going,” he replied, striving to ease her pain. “We shall sail over those same waters.”

“Then I shall go with you,” she flashed.

“That is as the Commander may decide.” Once before the young Lord had tried refusing her. Never again.

“He can’t deny me that much.” Alice’s words were steady and sure. Nor was she wrong.

As the plane took off next day for its long hop across the Atlantic, it carried twenty-six men and Alice.

231

Perhaps she had been commissioned to prepare and serve hot drinks for the long journey. No one knew or seemed to care. She was there. That was all that mattered.

Every man of the company knew her story. When the time came to sail over the waters close to the spot where the Queen Bess went down for a full hour every eye was on the sea. Nothing showed, so at long last they settled back for the hours that were yet to come.

One hour out of every three Alice busied herself serving refreshments. She slept a little and thought a great deal. Long, long thoughts those were. Then they were at their secret destination, a cold, bleak shore somewhere in North America.

A few hours of sleep, then again they were away. This time six powerful ships zooming away toward the distant skies that are England’s own.

After weary hours of waiting they found themselves once more above the waters from whence had come the last S. O. S. of the good ship, Queen Bess. There were five of them now, Alice, Dave, Brand, the Lark and the young Lord.

As Alice studied first the compass, then the chart, she looked at the young Lord who was at the controls and he understood.

232

He wanted to say, “Alice, your hopes last too long. Forget the boat. It can’t be there.” But “forget” he knew full well was one word not to be found in the girl’s vocabulary. So, pointing the ship’s nose toward the sea, then stepping down its speed, he sailed close to sparkling waters. It was midday. The sun was bright. They could see for miles.

A half hour passed. Hope seemed all but gone when, of a sudden, Alice gripped the young Lord’s arm.

“Harm!” she screamed in his ear. “Off to the right! See! There’s something white!”

The young Lord saw nothing. He did bank away to the right.

Then they all saw it, a white spot. It seemed to move backward and forward. Every muscle tense, they waited. The spot loomed larger. Beneath it appeared a dark form.

233



“A boat!” Alice cried. “It is a boat! There are people, living people! They are waving something white!”

“Steady, girl.” The young Lord framed the words with his lips.

Yes, she knew. Other ships had been lost, other life-boats had wandered away. And yet. It just must be true. It must be the boat from the Queen Bess.

As they dropped to the surface of the sea, she found herself holding her breath. On the prow of the life-boat was a name. Two words. It must be ‘Queen Bess.’ The first letter of each word was large.

“Yes!” she cried at last. “Q. B.—Queen Bess!”

Above the sound of the taxiing motor someone heard her cry. That someone stood up in the life-boat and screamed,

“Alice! Alice! I know your voice! Oh, thank God we are saved!”

Three minutes more and the girls were in one-another’s arms.

“See what a haul we made,” the young Lord exclaimed sometime later. “Seven children, one young lady and fifteen able-bodied seamen.”

“And all because one little lady named Alice would not give up,” Dave replied huskily.

Having watched them as they made their search and noted their landing, the pilot of a huge four-motored bomber came circling back. By code messages they made contact with their headquarters. Plans were made and orders given. The big bomber that had turned back was to supply the young Lord with extra gasoline, then was to pick up the seamen and bring them to England. The young Lord and his crew were to carry Cherry and the seven children to America.

“And after that,” the Squadron Commander’s voice boomed over the air, “the young Lord Applegate and his crew are to have a two-weeks’ leave in America. Good-luck and fine flying!”

“Cherry,” Alice teased, when their supreme moment was at an end, “you have your voice now. You should go straight back to England.”

“Oh, no!” Cherry threw up her hands. “I—I started to America. I’m still on my way. Beside,” she added soberly. “There are the children.”

237

Ah, yes, there were the children, Tillie, Peggy and five others. How brave they had been through all the long hours, only Cherry could tell. As they climbed aboard the plane, all undaunted, Peggy, the little alley rat from the London slums, struck up, “Roll out the Barrel.” And they all joined in.

“But, Cherry,” Dave asked when once again they were headed for America, “how did your voice come back?”

“Oh!” Cherry laughed. “It was the night our ship was attacked. We had been fired upon, the ship was sinking. Boats

were being swamped by the waves. But through it all we must keep the children calm and in line. There's nothing like singing in a time like that. I thought of a song, a silly, terrible, glorious song. Its words were on my lips. I opened my mouth. The words came out, 'Roll out the Barrel.'

'And we'll all have fun.
When we roll out the barrel.'

"The children sang. We all sang. We all remained calm.
And we got away.

238

"Some of us got away," she added soberly. "But my voice, that was a miracle, I guess. God knew I needed it so very, very badly for that trying hour."

A week later Cherry sat in a great easy chair before a broad window. She was looking out upon a scene of matchless beauty, the broad lawn to Dave's big old-fashioned, New England home in winter. The first snow. They had decided upon this spot because there, of all places, they could really find rest and peace.

As if dressed for a party, the hedge and great evergreen trees were decked with white. "It is beautiful! Glorious!" She murmured. "And yet—"

Beside her on a small table lay a letter just finished. She had written to her mother. Among other things she had said, "Mother, don't be troubled. We are going to win the war. We are not alone. More and more, everywhere I go in America I am told that people are coming to feel stronger about this war. They will send us guns, ships and planes. We shall win. We

are not alone.”

For some time she sat there quite alone looking away at the winter landscape. Their journey to America had been a glorious adventure. They were being royally entertained. Just now Alice was in the kitchen with the children popping corn. Brand, the young Lord and the Lark had gone hunting.

239

Yes, they were having a grand time. But her thoughts were far away. Only that morning she had received a letter from her mother. It was full of news. A flying repair squad had put their house back, good as new. “We now have a home again,” was the word. “How good that seems! They are asking for you at the subway. All England calls for their Singing Angel.”

“All England,” she whispered softly.

Slipping in from another room, Dave took a seat beside her.

“Beautiful, isn’t it?” He spread his arms to include all outdoors.

“Yes,” she agreed. “So beautiful it makes your heart ache. But, Dave, I’m eager to be back in England. I—I just can’t stand the silence. There’s no excitement, no great cause. It—it’s strange. War is terrible! But when you belong in it you want to be there. You just ache to be there. It—it is very strange.”

240

“You’ll be on your way in a week. Your subway crowd will be waiting for you. But a week, that’s soon enough,” he insisted.

“And you?” Her voice was low.

“I?” He looked into her eyes. “What do you think?”

“I have no way to know.”

“There are many people here in America,” He spoke slowly, thoughtfully, “who say this is not our war. Perhaps it is not. Who knows? That question must be decided by older, wiser heads than mine. But as for me,” his shoulders straightened, “*this is my war. And I’m going back.*”

“I’m glad,” she whispered.

“You’ll come to America again sometime,” he whispered after a while.

“Yes, I hope so.”

241

“Perhaps for good and all?” His voice was low.

“Who knows?” She was staring dreamily at the lovely landscape. Perhaps she was seeing into the future. If so, what did she see? Dave dared not ask.

Had he but known it, at that moment words from a very old book were running through Cherry’s mind, “Whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge; thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God. Where thou diest, I will die, and there will I be buried.”

And so that bright day grew dim with the shades of night.

Transcriber's Notes

- Copyright notice provided as in the original—this e-text is public domain in the country of publication.
- In the text versions, delimited italics text in underscores (the HTML version reproduces the font form of the printed book.)
- Silently corrected palpable typos; left non-standard spellings and dialect unchanged.

[The end of *Wings over England* by Roy J. Snell]