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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE FIGHTING STARKLEYS; OR, THE TEST
OF COURAGE ***



THE FIGHTING STARKLEYS

STORIES BY

*Captain
Theodore Goodridge Roberts*

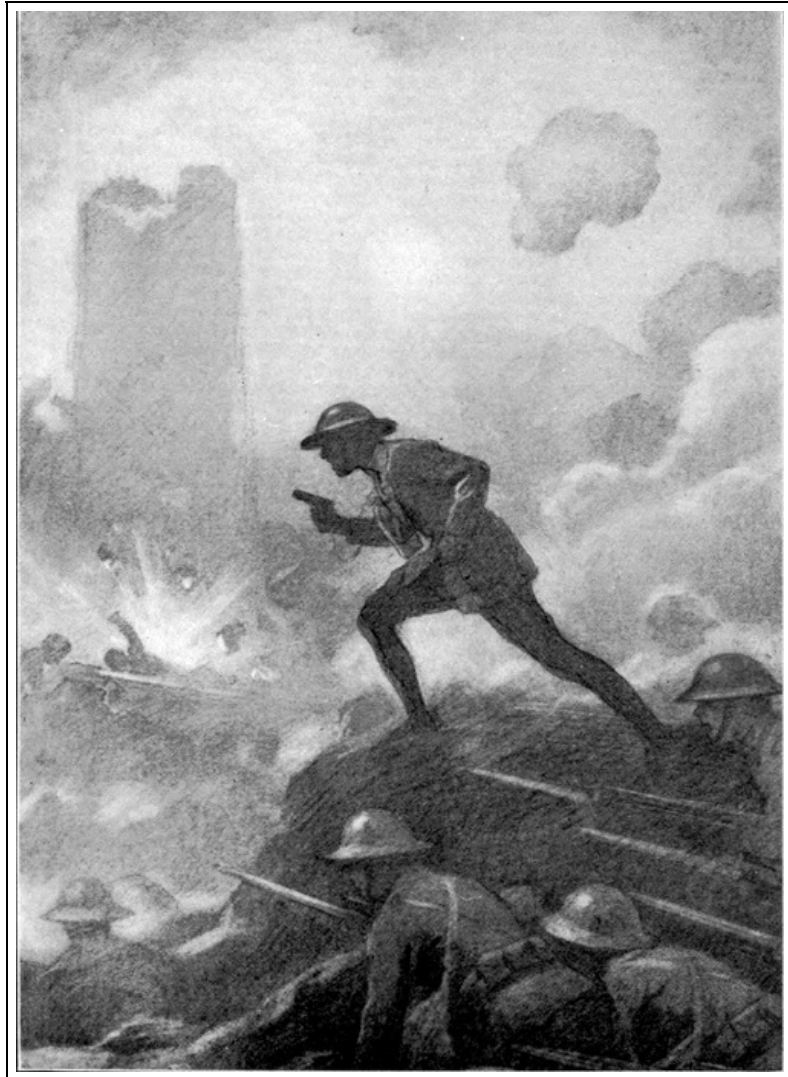
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**"HE SAW HIS BOMB BURST BESIDE THE STUMP OF
CHIMNEY." (See page 194)**

The FIGHTING
STARKLEYS

Or, THE TEST OF COURAGE

BY
CAPTAIN THEODORE GOODRIDGE ROBERTS
Author of
"Comrades of the Trails," "Red Feathers," "Flying Plover," etc.

ILLUSTRATED BY
GEORGE VARIAN



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The Fighting Starkleys

CHAPTER I THE CALL COMES TO BEAVER DAM

BEAVER DAM was a farm; but long before the day of John Starkley and his wife, Constance Emma, who lived there with their five children, the name had been applied to and accepted by a whole settlement of farms, a gristmill, a meetinghouse, a school and a general store. John Starkley was a farmer, with no other source of income than his wide fields. Considering those facts, it is not to be wondered at that his three boys and two girls had been bred to an active, early-rising, robust way of life from their early childhood.

The original human habitation of Beaver Dam had been built of pine logs by John's grandfather, one Maj. Richard Starkley, and his friend and henchman, Two-Blanket Sacobie, a Malecite sportsman from the big river. The present house had been built only a few years before the major's death, by his sons, Peter and Richard, and a son of old Two-Blanket, of hand-hewn timbers, whipsawn boards and planks and hand-split shingles. But the older house still stands solid and true and weather-tight on its original ground; its lower floor is a tool house and general lumber room and its upper floor a granary.

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Soon after the completion of the new house the major's son Richard left Beaver Dam for the town of St. John, where he found employment with a firm of merchants trading to London, Spain and the West Indies. He was sent to Jamaica; and from that tropic isle he sent home, at one time and another, cases of guava jelly and "hot stuff," a sawfish's saw and half a dozen letters. From Jamaica he was promoted to London; and as the years passed, his letters became less and less frequent until they at last ceased entirely. So much for the major's son Richard.

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Peter stuck to the farm. He was a big, kind-hearted, quiet fellow, a hard worker, a great reader of his father's few books. He married the beautiful daughter of a Scotchman who had recently settled at Green Hill—a Scotchman with a red beard, a pedigree longer and a deal more twisted than the road to Fredericton, a mastery of the bagpipes, two hundred acres of wild land and an empty sporran. Of Peter Starkley and his beautiful wife, Flora, came John, who had his father's steadfastness and his mother's fire. He went farther afield for his wife than his father had gone—out to the big river, St. John, and down it many miles to the sleepy old village and elm-shaded meadows of Gagetown. It was a long way for a busy young farmer to go courting; but Constance Emma Garden was worth a thousand longer journeys.

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When Henry, the oldest of the five Starkley children, went to college to study civil engineering, sixteen-year-old Peter, fourteen-year-old Flora, twelve-year-old Dick and eight-year-old Emma were at home. Peter, who was done with school, did a man's work on the farm; he owned a sorrel mare with a reputation as a trotter, contemplated spending the next winter in the lumber woods and planned agriculture activities on a scale and of a kind to astonish his father.

On a Saturday morning in June Dick and Flora, who were chums, got up even earlier than usual. They breakfasted by themselves in the summer kitchen of the silent house, dug earthworms in the rich brown loam of the garden and, taking their fishing rods from behind the door of the tool house, set out hurriedly for Frying Pan River. When they were halfway to the secluded stream they overtook Frank Sacobie, the great-grandson of Two-Blanket Sacobie, who had helped Maj. Richard Starkley build his house.

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The young Malecite's black eyes lighted pleasantly at sight of his friends, but his lips remained unsmiling. He was a very thin, small-boned, long-legged boy of thirteen, clothed in a checked cotton shirt and the cut-down trousers of an older Sacobie. He did not wear a hat. His straight black hair lay in a fringe just above his eyebrows.

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"Didn't you bring any worms?" asked Flora.

"Nope," said Frank.

"Or any luncheon?" asked Dick.

"Nope," said Frank. "You two always fetch plenty worms and plenty grub."

He led the way along a lumbermen's winter road, and at last they reached the Frying Pan. Baiting their hooks, they fell to fishing.

The trout were plentiful in the Frying Pan; they bit, they yanked, they pulled. The three young fishers heaved them ashore by main force and awkwardness—as folk say round Beaver Dam—and by noon the three had as many fish as they could comfortably carry. So, winding up their lines, they washed their hands and sat down in a sunny place to lunch. All were wet, for all had fallen into the river more than once. Dick had his left hand in a bandage by that time; he had embedded a hook in the fleshy part of it and had dug it out with his jack-knife.

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"That's nothing! Just a scratch!" he said in the best offhand military manner. "My great-grandfather once had a Russian bayonet put clean through his shoulder."

"Guess my great-gran'father did some fightin', too," remarked Frank Sacobie. "He was a big

chief on the big river."

"No, he didn't," said Dick. "He was a chief, all right; but there wasn't any fighting on the river in his day. He was Two-Blanket Sacobie. I've read all about him in my great-grandfather's diary."

"Don't mean him," said Frank. "I mean Two-Blanket's father's father's father. His name was just Sacobie, and his mark was a red canoe. He fought the English and the Mohawks. All the Malecites on the big river were his people, and he was very good friend to the big French governors. The King of France sent him a big medal. My gran'mother told me all about it once. She said how Two-Blanket got his name because he sold that medal to a white man on the Oromocto for two blankets; and that was a long time ago—way back before your great-gran'father ever come to this country. I tell you, if I want to be a soldier, I bet I would make as good a soldier as Dick."

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"Bet you wouldn't," retorted Dick.

"All right. I'm goin' to be a soldier—and you'll see. I'm going into the militia as soon as I'm old enough."

"So'm I."

Flora laughed. "Who will you fight with you when you are in the militia?" she asked.

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The boys exchanged embarrassed glances.

"I guess the militia could fight all right if it had to," said Dick.

"Of course it could," said Frank.

For four years after the conversation that took place on the bank of Frying Pan River Flora and Dick and the rest of the Starkley family except Henry lived on in the quiet way of the folk at Beaver Dam. The younger children continued to go daily to school at the Crossroads, to take part in the lighter tasks of farm and house, to play and fish and argue and dream great things of the future.

Peter spent each winter in the lumber woods. In his nineteenth year he invested his savings in a deserted farm near Beaver Dam and passed the greater part of the summer of 1913 in repairing the old barn on his new possession, cutting bushes out of the old meadows, mending fences and clearing land.

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That was only a beginning he said. He would own a thousand acres before long and show the people of Beaver Dam—including his own father—how to farm on a big scale and in an up-to-date manner.

Henry, the eldest Starkley of this generation, had completed his course at college and got a job with a railway survey party in the upper valley of the big river. He proved himself to be a good engineer.

In the spring of 1914 Frank Sacobie, now seventeen years of age, left Beaver Dam to work in a sawmill on the big river. Peter Starkley invested his winter's wages in another mare, two cows and a ton of chemical fertilizers. He ploughed ten acres of his meadows and sowed five with oats, four to buckwheat, and planted one to potatoes. The whole family was thrilled with the romance of his undertaking. His father helped him to put in his crop; and Dick and Flora found the attractions of Peter's farm irresistible. The very tasks that they classed as work at home they considered as play when performed at "Peter's place." In the romantic glow of Peter's agricultural beginning Dick almost resigned his military ambitions. But those ambitions were revived by Peter himself; and this is how it happened.

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Peter planned to raise horses, and he felt that the question what class of horse to devote his energies to was very important. One day late in June he met a stranger in the village of Stanley, and they "talked horse." The stranger advised Peter to visit King's County if he wanted knowledge on that subject.

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"Enlist in the cavalry," he said—"the 8th, Princess Louise, New Brunswick Hussars. That will give you a trip for nothin'—two weeks—and a dollar a day—and a chance to see every sort of horse that was ever bred in this province, right there in the regiment. Bring along a horse of your own, and the government will pay you another dollar a day for it—and feed it. I do it every year, just for a holiday and a bit of change."

It sounded attractive to Peter, and two weeks later he and his black mare set off for King's County to join the regiment in its training camp. In his absence Dick and Flora looked after the sorrel mare, his cows and his farm. Two weeks later Peter and the mare returned; the mare was a little thinner than of old, and Peter was full of talk of horses and soldiering. Dick's military ambitions relit in him like an explosion of gunpowder.

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Then came word of the war to Beaver Dam.

The folk of Beaver Dam, and of thousands of other rural communities, were busy with their haying when Canada offered a division to the mother country, for service in any part of the world. Militia officers posted through the country, seeking volunteers to cross the ocean and to bear arms against terrific Germany.

Peter, now in his twentieth year, wished to join.

"And what about your new farm and all your great plans?" asked John Starkley.

"Dick and I will look after his farm for him," said Flora. "We can harvest his crops and—"

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Just then she looked at her mother and suddenly became silent. Mrs. Starkley's face was very white.

"If the need for men from Canada is great, other divisions will be called for," said the father. "At present, only one division has been asked for—and I think that can easily be filled with seasoned militiamen."

"Some one drove past the window!" exclaimed Flora.

The door opened and a young man, in the khaki service uniform of an officer, entered the room. He halted, removed his cap and grinned broadly at the astonished family.

"Henry!" cried Mrs. Starkley, pressing a hand swiftly and covertly to her side.

Her husband found nothing to say just then. Dick and Flora and Emma ran to Henry and began asking questions and examining and fingering his belt, the leather strapping of his smart riding breeches, even his high, brown boots and shining spurs.

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"What are you, Henry?" asked Flora.

"A sapper—an engineer."

"Are you an officer?" asked Dick.

"Lieutenant, 1st Field Company, Canadian Engineers—that's what I am. Hope you approve of my boots."

"Are you going, Henry?" asked Peter, with a noticeable hitch in his voice and a curious expression of disappointment and relief in his eyes.

"Yes, I'm to join my unit at the big mobilization camp in Quebec in ten days," replied Henry.

John Starkley put a hand on Peter's shoulders. "Then you will wait, Peter," he said.

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"You're needed here—and we must keep you as long as we can. One at a time is enough."

"I'll wait now, but I will go with the next lot," said Peter.

Henry had nine days in which to arrange his affairs, and no affairs to arrange. He was in high spirits and proud of his commission, but he put on an old tweed suit the next morning and helped with the last of the haying on the home farm and on Peter's place. When the nine days were gone he donned his uniform again and drove away to the nearest railway station with his mother and father and little Emma. He wrote frequent entertaining letters from the big camp at Valcartier. On the 29th day of September he embarked at Quebec; the transports gathered in Gaspé Basin and were joined there by their escort of cruisers; the great fleet put out to sea—the greatest fleet that had ever crossed the Atlantic—bearing thirty-three thousand Canadian soldiers to the battlefields of Europe instead of the twenty thousand that had been originally promised.

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At Beaver Dam Peter worked harder than ever, but with a look in his eyes at times that seemed to carry beyond the job in hand. A few weeks ago he had experienced a pardonable glow of pride and self-satisfaction when people had pointed him out as the young fellow who had bought the old

Smith place and who was going to farm in a big way; now it seemed to him that the only man worth pointing out was the man who had enlisted to fight the swarming legions of Germany.

[pg 18

He did not invest in any more live stock that fall. He sold all of the oats and straw that he did not need for the wintering of his two mares and two cows. He did not look for a job in the lumber woods. His potatoes were a clean and heavy crop; and he went to Stanley to sell them. That was early in October.

The storekeeper there was a man named Hammond, who dealt in farm produce on a large scale and who shipped to the cities of the province. He engaged to take Peter's crop at a good price, then talked about the war. One of his sons, a lieutenant in the militia, had sailed with the first contingent. They talked of that young man and Henry and others who had gone.

"I am off with the next lot," said Peter.

"That will be soon enough," said the merchant thoughtfully. "My daughter, Vivia, has been visiting in Fredericton, and she tells me there is talk of a second division already. Jim says he is going with the next lot, too. That will leave me without a son at all, but I haven't the face to try to talk him out of it."

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Peter accepted an invitation to have dinner with the Hammonds. He knew the other members of the family slightly—Mrs. Hammond, Vivia and Jim. Jim, who was a year or two older than Peter, was a thickset, dull-looking young man with a reputation as a shrewd trader. He was his father's chief assistant in the business. Patrick, the son who had sailed with the first contingent, had a reputation as a fisherman and hunter, which meant that he was considered as frivolous and that he had no standing at all as a business man. Vivia, the daughter, resembled Patrick rather than Jim. She was about seventeen years old. Peter, who had not seen her for twelve months, wondered how such a heavy duffer as Jim Hammond came by such a sister.

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During the meal Peter paid a great deal of attention to everything Vivia Hammond said, and Vivia did more talking than anyone else at the table; and yet by the time Peter was on the road for Beaver Dam he could not remember a dozen words of all the hundreds she had spoken. Likewise, he attended her with his eyes as faithfully as with his ears; and yet by the time he was halfway home his mind's picture of her was all gone to glimmering fragments. The more he concentrated his thoughts upon her the less clearly could he see her.

He laughed at himself. He could not remember ever having been in a like difficulty before. Well, he could afford to laugh, for, after all, he lived within a reasonable distance of her and could drive over again any day if his defective memory troubled him seriously. And that is exactly what he did,—and on the very next day at that,—half believing even himself that he went to talk about enlisting, and the war in general, with her heavy brother. He did not see Jim on that occasion, and during a ten-minutes' interview with Vivia he did not say more than a dozen words.

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On the 4th of November Peter read in the Fredericton Harvester that recruiting had begun in the city of St. John for the 26th Infantry Battalion, a newly authorized unit for overseas service. The family circle at Beaver Dam sat up late that night. Peter talked excitedly, and the others listened in silence. Dick's eyes shone in the lamplight.

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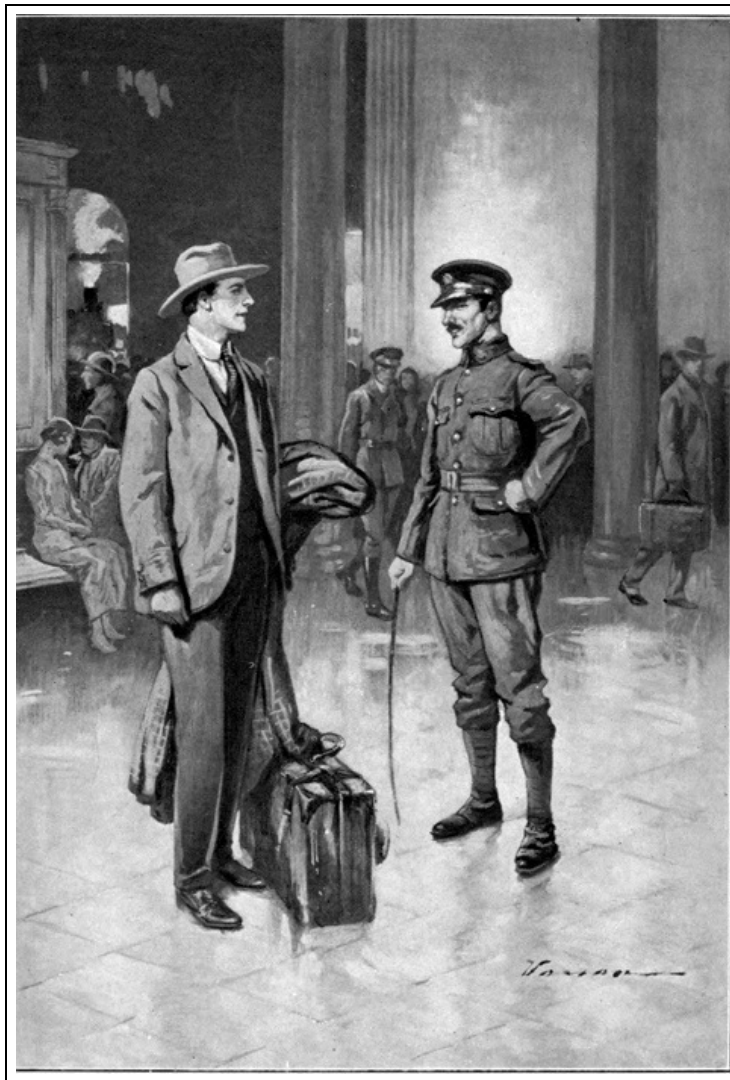
Peter drove over to Stanley early the next morning and there took the train to Fredericton, and from Fredericton to St. John. He felt no military thrill. Loneliness and homesickness weighed on him already—loneliness for his people, for the wide home kitchen and bright sitting-room, for his own fields.

He reached the big city by the sea after dark. The traffic of the hard streets, the foggy lights and the heedless, hurrying crowds of people added bewilderment to his loneliness. With his baggage at his feet, he stood in the station and gazed miserably around.

Peter Starkley did not stand there unnoticed. Dozens of the people who pushed past him eyed him with interest and wondered what he was waiting for. He was so evidently not of the city. He looked at once rustic and distinguished. But no one spoke to him until a sergeant in a khaki service uniform caught sight of him.

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"I can't make you out," said the sergeant, stepping up to him.



"I CAN'T MAKE YOU OUT,' SAID THE SERGEANT."

"I can place you," he said. "You're a sergeant."

"Right," returned the other. "And you're from the country. Your big felt hat tells me so—and your tanned face. But I can see that you're a person of some importance where you come from."

Peter blushed. "I am a farmer and a trooper in the 8th Hussars, and I have come here to enlist for overseas with the new infantry battalion," he said.

"That's what I hoped!" exclaimed the sergeant. "Come along with me, lad. You are for the 26th Canadian Overseas Infantry Battalion."

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The sergeant, whose name was Hammer, was a cheery, friendly fellow. He was also a very keen soldier and entertained a high opinion of the military qualities of the new battalion. On reaching the armory of the local militia regiment, now being used as headquarters of the new unit, Hammer led Peter straight to the medical officer. The doctor found nothing the matter with the recruit from Beaver Dam. Then Hammer paraded him before the adjutant. Peter answered a few questions, took a solemn oath and signed a paper.

"Now you're a soldier, a regular soldier," said the sergeant and slapped him on the back. "Come along now, and in half an hour I'll have you fitted into a uniform as trim as my own."

Within a month Peter Starkley had distinguished himself as a steady soldier; he had attained to the rank of lance corporal, and then of corporal. His steadiness was largely owing to homesickness. Of his few intimates the closest was Sergt. Hammer.

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Jim Hammond did not join the regiment until close upon Christmas. He was found physically fit; and, as a result of a request made by Peter to Hammer and by the sergeant to Lieut. Scammell, and by the lieutenant to the adjutant, he became a member of the same platoon as Peter. Not only that, he became one of Hammer's section, in which Peter was a corporal.

Peter felt that he should like to be good friends with Jim Hammond, but he did not give a definite reason even to himself for that wish. Jim, in his own person, was not attractive to him. Peter felt misgivings when Jim, within two days of donning his uniform, began to grumble about

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the severity of the training. Three days later Dave Hammer, in his official capacity as a section commander, fell upon Jim Hammond in his official capacity as a private soldier. Reason and justice, as well as authority, were with the sergeant. Jim came to Peter that evening.

"Look a-here, who does Dave Hammer think he is, anyhow?" he asked.

"I guess he knows who he is," replied Peter.

"Well, whoever he is," Hammond declared wrathfully, "I won't be bawled out by him. I guess I'm as good a man as he is—and better."

"You'll have lots of chances, from now on, to show how good a man you are. Acting as you did on the route march this afternoon doesn't show it." [pg 27]

Hammond's face darkened.

"Is that so?" he retorted. "Well, I'll tell you now I didn't come soldiering to be taught my business by you or any other bushwhacker from Beaver Dam. You got two stripes, I see. I'd have two stars if I took to licking people's boots the way you do, Peter Starkley."

Peter bent forward, and his lean face hardened, and his dark eyes glinted coldly.

"I don't want to have trouble with you, Jim," he said, and his voice was no more than a whisper, "but it will happen if you don't look out. I don't lick any man's boots! If I hear another word like that out of you, I'll lick something—and that will be you! Do you get me?"

He looked dangerous. Hammond tried to glare him down, but failed. Hammond's own eyes wavered. He grunted and turned away. The next morning he applied for a Christmas pass, which was refused on the ground that the men who had joined first should be the first to receive passes. He felt thoroughly ill-used. [pg 28]

CHAPTER II

JIM HAMMOND DOES NOT RETURN TO DUTY

PETER STARKLEY got home to Beaver Dam for New Year's Day on a six days' pass. Jim Hammond had also tried to get a pass, but he had failed. Peter found his homesickness increased by those six days; but he made every effort to hide his emotions. He talked bravely of his duties and his comrades, and especially of Dave Hammer. He said nothing about Jim Hammond except when questioned, and then as little as possible.

He polished his buttons and badges every morning and rolled his putties as if for parade. The smartness of his carriage gave a distinction even to the unlovely khaki service uniform of a British noncommissioned officer. He looked like a guardsman and felt like a schoolboy who dreaded the approaching term. He haunted the barns and stables of the home farm and of his own place and tramped the snow-laden woods and blanketed fields. In spite of his efforts to think only of the harsh and foreign task before him, he dreamed of clearings here and crops there. The keen, kindly eyes of his parents saw through to his heart. [pg 30]

One day of the six he spent in the village of Stanley. He called first at Hammond's store, where he tried to give Mr. Hammond the impression that he had dropped in casually, but as he had nothing to sell and did not wish to buy anything he failed to hoodwink the storekeeper. Mr. Hammond was cordial, but seemed worried.

He complimented Peter on his promotion and his soldierly appearance. [pg 31]

"Glad you got home," he said. "Wish Jim could have come along with you, but he writes as how they won't give him a pass. Seems to me it ain't more than only fair to let all the boys come home for Christmas or New Year's."

"Then there wouldn't be any one left to carry on," said Peter. "They've fixed it so that those who have been longest on the job get the first passes; but I guess every one will get home for a few days before we sail."

"Jim says the training—the drill and all that—is mighty hard," continued Mr. Hammond.

"Some find it so, and some don't," replied Peter awkwardly. "I guess it's what you might call a matter of taste."

"Like enough," said the storekeeper, scratching his chin. "It's a matter of taste—and not to Jim's taste, that's sure."

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Peter felt relieved to see that Mr. Hammond seemed to understand the case. He was about to elaborate on the subject of military training when a middle-aged man wearing a bowler hat and a fur-lined overcoat turned from the counter. He had a square, clean-shaven face and very bright and active black eyes.

"Excuse me, corporal," the stranger said, "but may I horn in and inquire what you think of it yourself?"

"You can ask if you want to, Mr. Sill," said Mr. Hammond, "but you won't hear any kick out of Peter Starkley, whether he likes it or not."

"It's easier than working in the woods, either chopping or teaming," said Peter pleasantly, "and I'll bet a dollar it is a sight easier than the real fighting will be."

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"That's the way to look at it, corporal," said the stranger. "I guess that in a war like this a man has to make up his mind to take the fun and the ferocity, the music and the mud, and the pie and the pain, just as they come."

"I guess so," said Peter.

The stranger shook his hand cordially and just before he turned away remarked, "Maybe you and I will meet again sooner than you expect."

"Who is he, and what's he driving at?" asked Peter, when the stranger had left the store.

"He is a Yank, and a traveler for Maddock & Co. of St. John, and his name is Hiram Sill—but I don't know what he is driving at any more than you do," replied Mr. Hammond.

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The storekeeper invited Peter to call round at the house and to stay to dinner and for as long as he liked afterwards. Peter accepted the invitation. The Hammond house stood beside the store, but farther back from the road. It was white and big, with a veranda in front of it, a row of leafless maples, a snowdrifted lawn and a picket fence. Vivia Hammond opened the door to his ring. From behind the curtain of the parlor window she had seen him approach.

At dinner Peter talked more than was usual with him; something in the way the girl listened to him inspired him to conversation. At two o'clock he accompanied her to the river and skated with her. They had such parts of the river as were not drifted with snow to themselves, except for two little boys. The little boys, interested in Peter as a military man, kept them constantly in sight. Peter felt decidedly hostile toward those harmless boys, but he was too shy to mention it to Vivia. He was delighted and astonished when she turned upon them at last and said:

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"Billy Brandon, you and Jack had better take off your skates and go home."

"I guess we got as much right as anybody on this here river," replied Billy Brandon, but there was a lack of conviction in his voice.

"You were both in bed with grippe only last week," Vivia retorted; "but I'll call in at your house and ask your mother about it on my way up the hill."

The little boys had nothing to say to that. They maintained a casual air, skated in circles and figures for a few minutes and then went home. For ten minutes after that the corporal and the girl skated in an electrical silence, looking everywhere except at each other. Then Peter ventured a slanting glance across his left shoulder at her little fur-cuddled face. Their eyes met.

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"Poor Mrs. Brandon can't manage those boys," she said. "But they are very good boys, really. They do everything I tell them."

"Why shouldn't they? But I'm glad they're gone, anyway," he replied, in a voice that seemed to be tangled and strangled in the collar of his greatcoat.

When Vivia and Peter returned to the house the eastern sky was eggshell green and the west, low along the black forests, as red as the draft of a stove. Their conversation had never fully recovered after the incident of the two little boys. Wonderful and amazing thoughts and emotions churned round in Peter's head and heart, but he did not venture to give voice to them. They

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bewildered him. He stayed to tea and at that comfortable meal Mr. and Mrs. Hammond did the talking. Vivia and Peter looked at each other only shyly as if they were afraid of what they might see in each other's eyes.

At last Peter went to the barn and harnessed the mare. Then he returned to the house to say good night to the ladies. That accomplished, Vivia accompanied him to the front door. Beyond the front door, as a protection against icy winds and drifting snow, was the winter porch—not much bigger than a sentry box. Stepping across the threshold, from the warm hall into the porch, Peter turned and clutched and held the girl's hand across the threshold. The tumult of his heart flooded up and smothered the fear in his brain.

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"I never spent such a happy day in all my life," he said.

Vivia said nothing. And then the mischief got into the elbow of the corporal's right arm. It twitched; and, since his right hand still clasped Vivia's hand, the girl was jerked, with a little skip, right out of the hall and into the boxlike porch.

Two seconds later Peter pulled open the porch door and dashed into the frosty night. He jumped into the pung, and away went the mare as if something of her master's madness had been communicated to her. The corporal had kissed Vivia!

Peter returned to his battalion two days later. In St. John he found everything much as usual. Hammer was as brisk and soldierly as ever, but Jim Hammond was more sulky than before. Peter considered the battalion with a new interest. Life, even away from Beaver Dam, seemed more worth while, and he went at his work with a jump. He wrote twice a week to Vivia, spending hours in the construction of each letter and yet always leaving out the things that he wanted most to write. The girl's replies were the results of a similar literary method.

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The training of the battalion went on, indoors and out, day after day. In March, Jim Hammond went home for six days. By that time he was known throughout the battalion as a confirmed sulker. The six days passed; the seventh day came and went without sight or news of him, and then the adjutant wired to Mr. Hammond. No reply came from the storekeeper. Lieut. Scammell questioned Peter about the family. Peter told what he knew—that the Hammonds were fine people, that one son was an officer already in England, and that the father was an honest and patriotic citizen. So another wire was sent from the orderly room. That, like the first, failed to produce results.

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The adjutant, Capt. Long, then sent for Peter. This officer was not much more than five feet high, despite the name of his fathers, and was built in proportion. It tickled the humor of the men to see such a little fellow chase ten hundred bigger fellows round from morning until night.

"You are to go upriver and find out why Private Hammond has not returned to duty," said the captain.

"Yes, sir," said Peter.

"Inform me by wire," continued the captain. "Use your brains. I am sending you alone, because I want to give Hammond a chance for the sake of his brother overseas. Here are your pass, your railway warrant and a chit for the paymaster. That's all, Corp. Starkley."

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Peter saluted and retired. He reached Fredericton that night and the home village of Jim Hammond by noon of the next day. He went straight to the store, where Mr. Hammond greeted him with astonishment. Peter saw no sign of Jim.

"I didn't expect to see you back so soon," said Mr. Hammond.

"I got a chance, so I took it," replied Peter. "How's all the family?"

The storekeeper smiled. "The womenfolk are well," he said.

Peter saw that he had come suddenly to the point where he must exercise all the tact he possessed. He felt keenly embarrassed.

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"Did you get a telegram?" he asked.

"No. Did you wire us you were coming?"

"Not that, exactly. You see, it was like this, Mr. Hammond: when Jim didn't get back the day he was due the adjutant sent you a wire, and when he didn't get an answer he sent another—and when you didn't reply to that he detailed me to come along and see what was wrong."

The storekeeper stared at him. "I never got any telegram. Jim came home on two weeks' furlough, and he has five days of it left. You and your adjutant must be crazy."

"Two weeks," repeated Peter. "It was six days he got."

"Six days! Are you sure of that, Peter Starkley?"

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"As sure as that's my name, Mr. Hammond. And the adjutant sent you two telegrams, asking why Jim didn't return to duty when his pass was up—and he didn't get any answer. If you didn't get one or other of those telegrams, then there is something wrong somewhere."

Mr. Hammond's face clouded. "I didn't get any wire, Peter—and Jim went away day before yesterday, to visit some friends," he said.

They eyed each other in silence for a little while; both were bitterly embarrassed, and the storekeeper was numbed with shame.

"I'll go for him," he said. "If I fetch him to you here, will you promise to—to keep the truth of it quiet, Peter—from his mother and sister and the folk about here?"

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"I'll do the best I can," promised the corporal, "but not for Jim's sake, mind you, Mr. Hammond. Capt. Long is for giving him a chance because of his brother, Pat, over on Salisbury Plain—and that's why he sent me alone, instead of sending a sergeant with an escort."

"I'll go fetch him, Peter," said the other, in a shaking voice. "You go along to Beaver Dam and come back to-morrow—to see Vivia. When Jim and I turn up you meet him just like it was by chance. Keep your mouth shut, Peter. Not a word to a living soul about his only having six days. He's not well, and that's the truth."

A dull anger was awake in Peter by this time.

"Something the matter with his feet," he said and left the store.

Here he was, told to be tactful by Capt. Long and to keep his mouth shut by Mr. Hammond, all on account of a sulky, lazy, bad-tempered fellow who had been a disgrace to the battalion since the day he joined it. And not a word about stopping for dinner!

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He crossed the road to the hotel, made arrangements to be driven out to Beaver Dam and then ate a lonely dinner. He thought of Vivia Hammond only a few yards away from him, yet unconscious of his proximity—and he wanted to punch the head of her brother Jim. He drove away from the hotel up the long hill without venturing a glance at the windows of the big white house on the other side of the road.

The family at Beaver Dam accepted his visit without question. No mention was made of Jim Hammond that night. Peter was up and out early the next morning, lending a hand with the feeding and milking.

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After breakfast he and Dick went over to his own place to have a look at his house and barns.

"Frank Sacobie came home last week," said Dick. "He's been out to see us twice. He wants to enlist in your outfit, but I am trying to hold him off till next year so's we can go over together."

"You babies had better keep your bibs on a few years longer," said Peter. "I guess there will be lots of time for all of you to fight in this war without forcing yourselves under glass."

They rounded a spur of spruces and saw Sacobie approaching on snowshoes across the white meadows. He had grown taller and deeper in the chest since Peter had last seen him. The greeting was cordial but not wordy. Sacobie turned and accompanied them.

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"I see Jim Hammond yesterday, out Pike Settlement way," he said.

"That so?" returned Peter, trying to seem uninterested.

"No uniform on, neither, and drinkin' some," continued Sacobie. "Says he's got his discharge from that outfit because it ain't reckoned as first-class and has been asked to be an officer in another outfit."

Then Peter forgot his instructions. Jim Hammond too good for the 26th battalion! Jim Hammond offered a commission! His indignant heart sent his blood racing through him.

"He's a liar!" he cried. "Yes, and a deserter, too, by thunder!"

Dick was astonished, but Frank Sacobie received the information calmly, without so much as a flicker of the eyelids.

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"I think that all the time I listen to him," he said. "I figger to get his job, anyway, if he lie or tell the truth. I go down to-morrow, Peter, and you tell the colonel how I make a darn sight better soldier than Jim Hammond."

Peter gripped the others each by an arm.

"I shouldn't have said that," he cautioned them. "Forget it! You boys have got to keep it under your hats, but I guess it's up to me to take a jog out Pike Settlement way. If you boys say a word about it, you get in wrong with me and you get me in wrong with a whole heap of folks."

They turned and went back to Beaver Dam. There they hitched the mares to the big red pung and stowed in their blankets and half a bag of oats.

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"I can't tell you where I'm going or what for, but only that it is a military duty," said Peter in answer to the questions of the family.

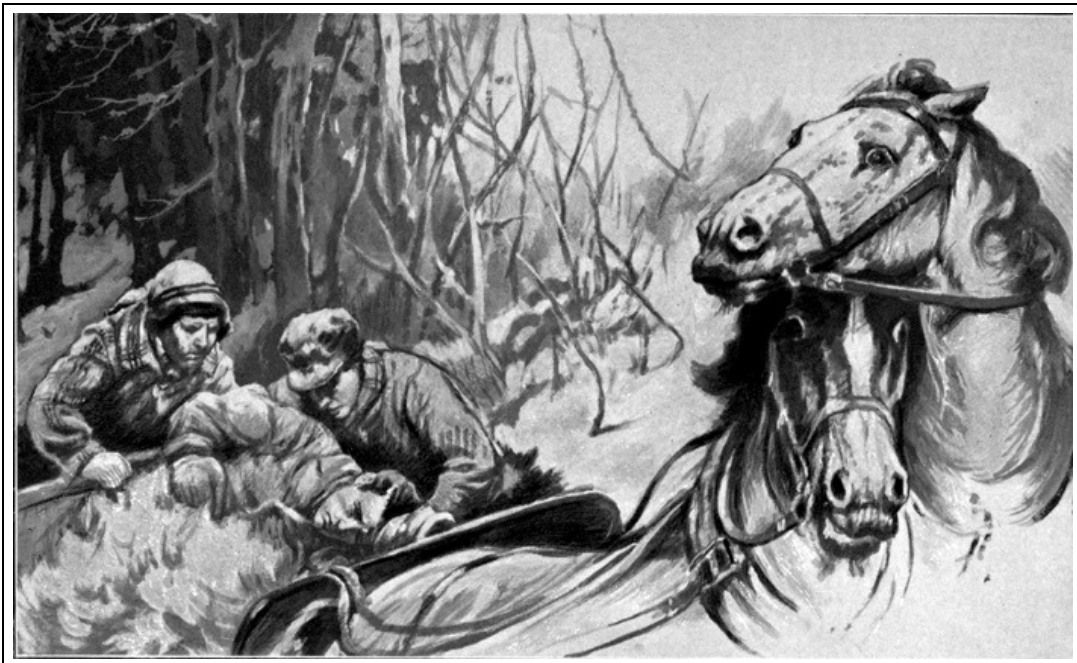
He took Dick and Frank Sacobie with him. Once they got beyond the outskirts of the home settlement they found heavy sledding. At noon they halted, blanketed and baited the mares, boiled the kettle and lunched. The wide, white roadway before them, winding between walls of green-black spruces and gray maples, was marked with only the tracks of one pair of horses and one pair of sled runners—evidently made the day before. Peter guessed them to be those of Mr. Hammond's team, but he said nothing about that to his companions.

Here and there they passed drifted clearings and little houses sending blue feathers of smoke into the bright air. They came to places where the team that had passed the previous day had been stuck in the drifts and laboriously dug out.

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They were within two miles of the settlement, between heavy woods fronted with tangled alders, when the cracking *whang!* of exploding cordite sounded in the underbrush. The mares plunged, then stood. The reins slipped from Peter's mittened hands.

"I'm hit, boys!" he said and then sagged over across Dick's knees.



"I'M HIT, BOYS! HE SAID."

They laid him on hay and horse blankets in the bottom of the pung and covered him with fur robes. Then Sacobie got in front and drove.

No sound except the rapping of a woodpecker came from the woods. Peter breathed regularly. Presently he opened his eyes.

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"It's in the ribs, by the feel of it—but it doesn't hurt much," he said. "Felt like a kick from a

horse at first. Remember not to say anything about Jim Hammond."

They put him to bed at the first farmhouse they reached. All his clothing on the right side was stiff with blood. Dick bandaged the wound; and a doctor arrived two hours later. The bullet had nipped in and out, splintering a rib, and lay just beneath the skin. Peter had bled a good deal, but not to a dangerous extent.

Before sunrise the next morning Dick and Frank Sacobie set out on their return journey, taking with them a brief telegram and a letter for Capt. Long. Peter had dictated the message, but had written the letter with great effort, one wavery word after another.

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Mr. Hammond and John Starkley reached Pike Settlement late at night. The storekeeper seemed broken in spirit, but some color came back to his face when he saw Peter lying there in the bed at the farmhouse with as cheerful an air as if he had only strained his ankle.

"I must see you a few minutes alone before I leave," he whispered, stooping over the bed.

"Don't worry," answered Peter.

John Starkley was vastly relieved to find his son doing so well. His bewilderment that any one in that country should pull a trigger on Peter almost swamped his indignation. The more he thought it over the more bewildered he became.

"You haven't an enemy in the world, Peter—except the Germans," he said. "But that was no chance shot. If it had been an accident, the fellow with the rifle would have come out to lend a hand."

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"I guess that's so," replied Peter. "Maybe it was a German. It means a lot to the Kaiser to keep me out of this war."

His father smiled. "Joking aside, lad," he said, "who do you suppose it was? What was the bullet? Many a murderer has been traced before now on a less likely clue than a bullet."

"Isn't the bullet on the table there, Mr. Hammond? The doctor gave it to me, and I chucked it somewhere—over there or somewhere."

They looked in vain for the bullet. Later, when the guests and the household were at supper, Mr. Hammond excused himself from table and ran up to Peter's room. He closed the door behind him, leaned over the bed and grasped Peter's left hand in both of his.

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"I did my best," he whispered. "I found him and told him you had been sent because the officer wanted to give him a chance. But he had been drinking heavy. He wasn't himself, Peter—he was like a madman. I begged him to come back with me, but he wouldn't hear reason or kindness. He knocked me down—me, his own father—and got away from that house. What are you going to do, Peter? You are a man, Starkley—a big man—big enough to be merciful. What d'you mean to do?"

"Nothing," said Peter. "I came to find Jim, and I haven't found him. I got shot instead by some one I haven't seen hair, hide or track of. It's up to the army to find Jim, if they still want him; but as far as I am concerned he may be back with the battalion this minute for all I know. I hope he is. As for the fellow who made a target of me, well, he didn't kill me, and I don't hold a grudge against him."

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Mr. Hammond went home the first thing in the morning. John Starkley waited until the doctor called again and dressed the wound and said he had never seen any one take a splintered rib and a hole in the side so well as Peter.

"If he keeps on like this, you'll be able to take him home in ten days or so," said the doctor.

So John Starkley returned to Beaver Dam, delivered the good news to his family and heard in return that young Frank Sacobie had gone to St. John and joined the 26th.

CHAPTER III

THE VETERANS OF OTHER DAYS

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WHEN Peter was able to travel, he was taken home to Beaver Dam, and there a medical officer, a major in spurs, examined him and congratulated him on being alive. Peter was given six months' sick leave; and that, he knew, killed his chance of crossing the ocean with his battalion. He protested, but the officer told him that, whether in bed in his father's house or with his platoon, he was still in the army and would have to do as he was told. The officer said it kindly and added that as soon as he was fit he should return to his battalion, whether it was in Canada, England or Flanders.

Jim Hammond vanished. The army marked him as a deserter, and even his own battalion forgot him. Confused rumors circulated round his home village for a little while and then faded and expired. As Jim Hammond vanished from the knowledge and thought of men, so vanished the mysterious rifleman who had splintered Peter's rib.

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Spring brought the great news of the stand of the First Canadian Division at Ypres—the stand of the few against the many, of the Canadian militia against the greatest and most ruthless fighting machine of the whole world. The German army was big and ready, but it was not great as we know greatness now. The little Belgians had already checked it and pierced the joints of its armor; the French had beaten it against odds; the little old army of England, with its monocles and its tea and its pouter-chested sergeant majors, had outshot it and outfought it at every meeting; and now three brigades of Canadian infantry and a few batteries of Canadian artillery had stood undaunted before its deluge of metal and strangling gas and held it back from the open road to Calais and Paris.

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Lieut. Pat Hammond wrote home about the battle. He had been in the edge of it and had escaped unhurt. Henry Starkley, of the First Field Company, was there, too. He received a slight wound. Private letters and the great stories of the newspapers thrilled the hearts of thousands of peaceful, unheroic folk. Volunteers flowed in from lumber camps and farms.

In May Dick Starkley made the great move of his young life. He was now seventeen years old and sound and strong. He saw that Peter could not get away with his battalion—that, unless something unexpected happened, the Second Canadian Division would get away without a Starkley of Beaver Dam.

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So he did the unexpected thing: he went away to St. John without a word, introduced himself to Sgt. Dave Hammer as Peter's brother, added a year to his age and became a member of the 26th Battalion. He found Frank Sacobie there, already possessed of all the airs of an old soldier.

Dick sent a telegram to his father and a long, affectionate, confused letter to his mother. His parents understood and forgave and went to St. John and told him so—and Peter sent word that he, too, understood; and Dick was happy. Then with all his thought and energy and ambition he set to work to make himself a good soldier.

Peter did not grumble again about his sick leave. His wound healed; and as the warm days advanced he grew stronger with every day. He had been wounded in the performance of his duty as surely as if a German had fired the shot across the mud of No Man's Land; so he accepted those extra months in the place and life he loved with a gratitude that was none the less deep for being silent.

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In June the Battalion embarked for England, in strength eleven hundred noncommissioned officers and men and forty-two officers. After an uneventful voyage of eleven days they reached Devenport, in England, on the twenty-fourth day of the month. The three other battalions of the brigade had reached England a month before; the 26th joined them at the training camps in Kent and immediately set to work to learn the science of modern warfare. They toiled day and night with vigor and constancy; and before fall the battalion was declared efficient for service at the front.

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Both Dick Starkley and Frank Sacobie thrived on the hard work. The musketry tests proved Sacobie to be one of the best five marksmen in the battalion. Dick was a good shot, too, but fell far below his friend at the longer ranges. In drill, bombing and physical training, Dick showed himself a more apt pupil than the Malecite. At trench digging and route marching there was nothing to choose between them, in spite of the fact that Sacobie had the advantage of a few inches in length of leg. Both were good soldiers, popular with their comrades and trusted by their officers. Both were in Dave Hammer's section and Mr. Scammell's platoon.

One afternoon in August Henry Starkley turned up at Westenhanger, on seven days' leave from France. He looked years older than when Dick had last seen him and thinner of face, and on his left breast was stitched the ribbon of the military cross. He obtained a pass for Dick and took him up to London. They put up at a quiet hotel off the Strand, at which Henry had stopped on his frequent week-end visits to town from Salisbury Plain. As they were engaged in filling in the complicated and exhaustive registration form the hall porter gave Henry three letters and told him that a gentleman had called several times to see him.

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"What name?" asked Henry.

"That he didn't tell me, sir," replied the porter, "but as it was him wrote the letters you have in your hand you'll soon know, sir."

Henry opened one of the envelopes and turned the inclosure over in quest of the writer's signature. There it was—J. A. Starkley-Davenport. All three letters were from the same hand, penned at dates several weeks apart. They said that before her marriage the writer's mother had been a Miss Mary Starkley, daughter of a London merchant by the name of Richard Starkley. Richard Starkley, a colonial by birth with trade connections with the West Indies, had come from Beaver Dam in the province of New Brunswick. The letters said further that their writer had read in the casualty lists the name of Lieut. Henry Starkley of the Canadian Engineers, and that after diligent inquiry he had learned that this same officer had registered at the Canadian High Commissioner's office in October, 1914, and given his London address as the Tudor Hotel. Failing to obtain any further information concerning Henry Starkley, the writer had kept a constant eye on the Tudor Hotel. He begged Mr. Henry Starkley to ring up Mayfair 2607, without loss of time, should any one of these letters ever come to his hand.

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"What's his hurry, I wonder?" remarked Henry. "After three generations without a word I guess he'll have to wait until to-morrow morning to hear from the Starkleys of Beaver Dam."

"Why not let him wait for three more generations?" suggested Dick. "His grandfather, that London merchant, soon forgot about the people back in the woods at Beaver Dam. Since the second battle of Ypres, this lad with the hitched-up-double name wants to be seen round with you, Henry."

"If that's all, he does not want much," said Henry. "We'll take a look at him, anyway. Don't forget that the first Starkley of Beaver Dam was once an English soldier and that there was a first battle of Ypres before there was a second."

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The brothers, the lieutenant of engineers and the infantry private, had dinner at a restaurant where there were shaded candles and music; then they went to a theater. Although the war was now only a year old, London had already grown accustomed to the "gentleman ranker." Brothers, cousins and even sons of officers in the little old army were now private soldiers and noncommissioned officers in the big new army. The uniform was the great thing. Rank badges denoted differences of degree, not of kind. So Lieut. Henry Starkley and Private Dick Starkley, together at their little luxurious table for two and later elbow to elbow at the theater, did not cause comment. Immediately after breakfast the next morning Henry rang up the Mayfair number. A voice of inquiring deference, a voice that suggested great circumspection and extreme polish, answered him. Henry asked for Mr. Starkley-Davenport.

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"You want the captain, sir," corrected the voice. "Mr. David was killed at Ypres in '14. What name, sir?"

"Starkley," replied Henry.

"Of Canada, sir? Of Beaver Dam? Here is the captain, sir."

Another voice sounded in Henry's ear, asking whether it was Henry Starkley of the sappers on the other end of the line. Henry replied in the affirmative.

"It is Jack Davenport speaking—Starkley-Davenport," continued the voice. "Glad you have my letters at last. Are you at the same hotel? Can you wait there half an hour for me?"

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"I'll wait," said Henry.

He and Dick awaited the arrival of the grandson of Richard Starkley with lively curiosity. That he was a captain, and that some one connected with him, perhaps a brother, had been killed at Ypres in 1914, added considerable interest to him in their eyes.

"Size him up before trying any of your old-soldier airs on him, young fellow," warned Henry.

They sat in the lounge of the hotel and kept a sharp watch on everyone who entered by the revolving doors. It was a quiet place, as hotels go in London, but during the half hour of their watching more people than the entire population of Beaver Dam were presented to their scrutiny. At last a pale young fellow in a Panama hat and a gray-flannel suit entered. Under his left shoulder was a crutch and in his right hand a big, rubber-shod stick. His left knee was bent, and his left foot swung clear of the ground. His hands were gloved in gray, and he wore a smoke-blue flower in his buttonhole. Only his necktie was out of tone with the rest of his equipment: it was in stripes of blue and red and yellow. Behind him, close to his elbow, came a thin, elderly man who was dressed in black.

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"Lieut. Starkley?" he inquired of the hall porter.

At that Henry and Dick both sprang to their feet and went across to the man in gray. Before they could introduce themselves the young stranger edged himself against his elderly companion, thus making a prop of him, hooked the crook of his stick into a side pocket of his coat, and extended his right hand to Henry. He did it all so swiftly and smoothly that it almost escaped notice; and, pitiful as it was, it almost escaped pity.

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"Will you lunch with me—if you have nothing better to do?" he asked. "You're on leave, I know, and it sounds cheek to ask—but I want to talk to you about something rather important."

"Of course—and here is my young brother," said Henry.

The captain shook hands with Dick and then stared at him.

"You are only a boy," he said; and then, seeing the blood mount to Dick's tanned cheeks, he continued, "and all the better for that, perhaps. The nippiest man in my platoon was only nineteen."

"Of course you remember, sir, Mr. David had not attained his twentieth birthday," the elderly man in black reminded him.

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"You are right, Wilson," said the captain. "Hit in October, '14. He was my young brother. There were just the two of us. Shall we toddle along? I kept my taxi."

Capt. J. A. Starkley-Davenport occupied three rooms and a bath in his own house, which was a big one in a desirable part of town. The remaining rooms were occupied by his servants. And such servants!

The cook was so poor a performer that whenever the captain had guests for luncheon or dinner she sent out to a big hotel near by for the more important dishes—but her husband had been killed in Flanders, and her three sons were still in the field. Wilson, who had been Jack's father's color sergeant in South Africa, was the valet.

The butler was a one-armed man of forty-five years who had served as a company sergeant major in the early days of the war; in rallying half a dozen survivors of his company he had got his arm in the way of a chunk of high-explosive shell and had decorated his chest with the Distinguished Conduct Medal. He had only the vaguest notions what his duties as butler required of him but occupied his time in arguing the delicate question of seniority with Wilson and the coachman and making frequent reports to the captain.

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The coachman, who had served forty years in the navy, most of the time as chief petty officer, claimed seniority of the butler and Wilson on the grounds of belonging to the senior service. But the ex-sergeants argued that the captain's house was as much a bit of the army as brigade headquarters in France, and that the polite thing for any sailorman to do who found a home there was to forget all about seniority; and that for their part they did not believe the British navy was older than the British army.

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Captain Starkley-Davenport introduced into this household his cousins from Beaver Dam, without apologies and with only a few words of explanation. In spite of the butler's protests, the valet and the coachman intruded themselves on the luncheon party, pretending to wait on table, but in reality satisfying their curiosity concerning the military gentlemen from Canada whose name was the front half of the captain's name. They paused frequently in their light duties round the table and frankly gave ear to the conversation. Their glances went from face to face with childish eagerness, intent on each speaker in turn. The captain did not mind, for he was accustomed to their ways and their devouring interest in him; Henry was puzzled at first and then amused; and Dick was highly flattered.

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"There isn't anyone of our blood in our regiment now, and that is what I particularly want to talk to you chaps about," said the captain, after a little talk on general subjects. "My father and young brother are gone, and the chances are that I won't get back. But the interests of the regiment are still mine—and I want the family to continue to have a stake in it. No use asking you to transfer, Henry, I can see that; you are a sapper and already proved in the field, and I know how sappers feel about their job; but Dick's an infantryman. What d'you say to transfer and promotion, Dick? You can get your commission in one of our new battalions as easy as kiss. It will help you and the old regiment."

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"But perhaps I shouldn't make a good officer," replied Dick. "I've never been in action, you know."

"Don't worry about that. I'll answer for your quality. You wouldn't have enlisted if the right stuff wasn't in you."

"But I'd like to prove it, first—although I'd like to be an officer mighty well. That's what I

intend to be some day. I think I'll stick to the 26th a while. That would be fairer—and I'd feel better satisfied, if ever I won a commission, to have it in my own outfit. Frank Sacobie would feel sore if I left him, before we'd ever been in France together, to be an officer in another outfit. But there is Peter. He is a corporal already and a mighty good soldier."

He told all about Peter and the queer way he was wounded back in Canada and then all about his friend, Frank Sacobie. The captain and the three attendants listened with interest. The captain asked many questions; and the butler, the valet and the coachman were on the point of doing the same many times.

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After luncheon Wilson, the elderly valet, took command gently but firmly and led the captain off to bed. The brothers left the addresses of themselves and Peter with the captain and promised to call at every opportunity and to bring Sacobie to see him at the first chance.

Dick and Frank Sacobie continued their training, and in July Dick got his first stripe. A few members of the battalion went to the hospital, and a few were returned to Canada for one reason or another. In August a little draft of men fresh from Canada came to the battalion.

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One of the new men kept inquiring so persistently for Corp. Peter Starkley that in the course of time he was passed along to Dick, who told him about Peter.

"I'm downright sorry to hear that," said the new arrival. "I saw him in Mr. Hammond's store one day and took a shine to him, but as you're his own brother I guess I'm in the right outfit. Hiram Sill is my name."

They shook hands cordially.

"I'm an American citizen and not so young as I used to be," continued Sill, "but the minute this war started I knew I'd be into it before long. Soldiering is a business now, and I am a business man. So it looked to me as if I were needed—as if the energy I was expending in selling boots and shoes for Maddock & Co. would count some if turned against the Kaiser. So I swore an oath to fight King George's enemies, and I guess I've made no mistake in that. King George and Hiram Sill see eye to eye and tooth to tooth in this war like two coons at a watermelon."

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In spite of the fact that Mr. Scammell's platoon was already up to strength, Sill worked his way into it.

He had a very good reason for wanting to be in that particular platoon, and there were men already in it who had no particular reason for remaining in it instead of going to some other platoon; so—as Sill very justly remarked to Dick, to Sacobie, to Sergt. Hammer, to Lieut. Scammell and to Capt. Long—he did not see why he could not be where he wanted to be. Friendship for Frank Sacobie and Dick Starkley and admiration for Sergt. Hammer and Lieut. Scammell were the reasons he gave for wanting to be in that platoon.

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"He seems a friendly chap," said the adjutant to Mr. Scammell. "Will you take him? If so, you can let the Smith with the red head go over to Number Three, where he will be with a whole grist of lads from his own part of the country. What d'ye say? He looks smart and willing to me."

"Sure I'll take him," said Mr. Scammell. "He says he admires me."

So Hiram Sill became a member of Number Two Platoon. He worked with the energy of a tiger and with the good nature of a lamb. He talked a great deal, but always with a view to acquiring or imparting knowledge. When he found that his military duties and the cultivation of friendships did not use up all his time and energy, he set himself to the task of ascertaining how many Americans were enrolled in the First and Second Canadian divisions. Then indeed he became a busy man; and still his cry continued to be that soldiering was a business.

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CHAPTER IV

PRIVATE SILL ACTS

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ON the night of September 15, 1915, the brigade of which the 26th Battalion was a unit crossed from Folkstone to Boulogne without accident. All the ranks were in the highest spirits, fondly imagining that the dull routine of training was dead forever and that the practice of actual warfare was as entertaining as dangerous.

The brigade moved up by way of the fine old city of Saint Omer and the big Flemish town of Hazebrouck. By the fourth day after landing in France the whole brigade was established in the forward area of operations, along with the other brigades of the new division. On the night of the 19th the battalion marched up and went into hutments and billets close behind the Kemmel front. That night, from the hill above their huts, the men from New Brunswick beheld for the first time that fixed, fire-pulsing line beyond which lay the menace of Germany.

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The battalion went in under cover of darkness, and by midnight had taken over from the former defenders the headquarters of companies, the dugouts in the support trenches and the sentry posts in the fire trench. There were Dick Starkley and his comrades holding back the Huns from the throat of civilization. It was an amazing and inspiring position to be in for the first time. In front of them, just beneath and behind the soaring and falling star shells and Very lights, crouched the most ruthless and powerful armies of the world.

To the right and left, every now and then, machine guns broke forth in swift, rapping fire. When the fire was from the positions opposite, the bullets snapped in the air like the crackings of a whip. The white stars went up and down. Great guns thumped occasionally; now and then a high shell whined overhead; now and then the burst of an exploding shell sounded before or behind. It was a quiet night; but to the new battalion it was full of thrills. The sentries never took their eyes from the mysterious region beyond their wire. Every blob of blackness beyond their defenses set their pulses racing and sent their hands to their weapons.

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Dick Starkley and Frank Sacobie stood shoulder to shoulder on the fire step for hours, staring with all their eyes and listening with all their ears. Hiram Sill sat at their feet and talked about how he felt on this very particular occasion. His friends paid no attention to him.

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"This is the proudest moment of my life," he said. "We are historic figures, boys—and that's a thing I never hoped to be. In my humble way, I stand for more than George Washington did. This is a bigger war than George ever dreamed of, and I have a bigger and better reason for fighting the Huns than Gen. Washington ever had for fighting the fool Britishers."

"Did you see that?" asked Dick of Sacobie. "Over in the edge of their wire. There! Look quick now! Is it a man?"

"Looks like a man, but it's been there right along and ain't moved yet," said Frank. "Maybe it's a stump."

Just then Lieut. Scammell came along. He got up on the fire step and, directed by Dick, trained his glass on the black thing in the edge of the enemy's wire. A German star shell gave him light.

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"That's a German—a dead one," he said. "I've been told about him. There was a bit of a scrap over there three nights ago, and that is one of the scrappers."

Hiram forgot about Gen. Washington and mounted the fire step to have a look. He borrowed the officer's glass for the purpose.

"Do his friends intend to leave him out there much longer, sir?" he asked. "If they do, it's a sure sign of weakness. They're scart."

"They are scart, right enough—but I bet they wouldn't be if they knew this bit of trench was being held now by a green battalion," replied Mr. Scammell. "They'd be over for identifications if they knew."

"Let them come!" exclaimed Private Sill. "I bet a dollar they wouldn't stay to breakfast—except a few who wouldn't want any."

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At that moment a rifle cracked to the right of them, evidently from their own trench and not more than one hundred yards away. It was followed close by a spatter of shots, then the smashing bursts of grenades, more musketry and the *rat-tat-tat* of several machine guns. Bullets snapped in the air. Lights trailed up from both lines. Dull thumps sounded far away, and then came the whining songs of high-flying shells. Flashes of fire astonished the eye, and crashing reports stunned the ear.

"They're at us!" exclaimed the lieutenant. "Open fire on the parapet opposite, unless you see a better target, and don't leave your posts. Keep low. Better use the loopholes."

He left the fire step and ran along the duck boards toward the heart of the row.

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Dick and Frank Sacobie and Hiram Sill, firing rapidly through the loopholes, added what they could to the disturbance. Now and again a bullet rang against the steel plate of a loophole. One or another of them took frequent observations through a periscope, for at that time the Canadian

troops were not yet supplied with shrapnel helmets. Dave Hammer, breathless with excitement, joined them for a few seconds.

"They tried to jump us,—must have learned we're a green relief,—but we've chewed them up for fair!" he gasped. "Must have been near a hundred of 'em—but not one got through our wire. Keep yer heads down for a while, boys; they're traversing our top with emmageses."

At last the enemy's artillery fire slackened and died. Ours drubbed away cheerily for another fifteen minutes, then ceased as quick and clean as the snap of a finger. The rifle fire and machine-gun fire dwindled and ceased. Even the up-spurting of the white and watchful stars diminished by half; but now and again one of them from the hostile lines, curving far forward in its downward flight, illuminated a dozen or more motionless black shapes in and in front of our rusty wire. Except for those motionless figures No Man's Land was again deserted. The big rats ran there undisturbed.

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Sacobie looked over the parapet; Hiram Sill and Dick sat on the fire step at the Malecite's feet. They felt as tired as if they had been wrestling with strong men for half an hour. Dave Hammer came along the trench and halted before them.

"Those Huns or Fritzes or whatever you call them are crazy," he said. "Did you ever hear of such a fool thing as that? They've left a dozen dead out in front, besides what they carried home along with their wounded—and all they did to us was wound three of our fellows with that first bomb they threw, and two more with machine-gun fire."

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"Their officers must be boneheads, for sure," said Hiram. "War's a business,—and a mighty swift one,—and you can't succeed in business without knowing something about psychology. Yes, gentlemen, psychology, queer as it may sound."

"Sounds mighty queer to me!" muttered Sacobie, glancing down.

"You must study men," continued Private Sill, not at all abashed, "their souls and hearts and minds—if you want to make a success at anything except bee farming. Now, take this fool raid of the Huns. They were smart enough to find out that a bunch of greenhorns took over this trench to-night. So they thought they'd surprise us. Now, if they'd known anything about psychology, they'd have known that just because we were new and green we'd all be on our toes to-night, with our eyes sticking out a yard and our ears buttoned right back. Sure! Every man of us was on sentry duty to-night!"

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"I guess you've got the right idea, Old Psychology," said the sergeant.

The 26th spent five days in the line on that tour. With the exception of one day and night of rain they had fine weather. They mended their wire and did a fair amount of business in No Man's Land. The enemy attempted no further raids; his last effort had evidently given him more information concerning the quality of the new battalion than he could digest in a week. At any rate he kept very quiet.

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At the end of the tour the battalion went back a little way to huts on the bushy flanks of Scherpenberg, where they "rested" by performing squad, platoon and company drill and innumerable fatigues. The time remaining at their disposal was devoted to football and base-ball and investigations of villages and farmsteads in the neighborhood.

Their second tour in was more lively and less comfortable than the first. Under the drench of rain and the gnawing of dank and chilly mists their trenches and all the surrounding landscape were changed from dry earth to mud. Everything in the front line, including their persons, became caked with mud. The duck boards became a chain of slippery traps; and in low trenches they floated like rafts. The parapets slid in and required constant attention; and what the water left undone in the way of destruction the guns across the way tried to finish.

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It was hard on the spirit of new troops; they were toughened to severe work and rough living, but not to the deadening mud of a front-line trench in low ground. So their officers planned excitement for them, to keep the fire of interest alive in their hearts. That excitement was obtained in several ways, but always by a move of some sort against the enemy or his defenses. Patrol work was the most popular form of relief from muddy inaction. Lieut. Scammell quickly developed a skill in that and an appetite for it that soon drew the colonel's attention to himself and his followers.

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By the end of September, even the medical officers of New Brunswick had to admit that Corp.

Peter Starkley was fully recovered from his wound. As for Peter himself, he affirmed that he had not felt anything of it for the past two months. He had worked at the haying and the harvesting on Beaver Dam and his own place without so much as a twinge of pain.

Peter returned to his military duties eagerly, but inspired only by his sense of duty. His heart was more than ever in his own countryside; but despite his natural modesty he knew that he was useful to his king and country as a noncommissioned officer, and with that knowledge he fortified his heart. He tried to tell Vivia Hammond something of what he felt. His words were stumbling and inadequate, but she understood him. And at the last he said:

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"Vivia, don't forget me, for I shall be thinking of you always—more than of anyone or anything in the world." And then, not trusting his voice for more, he kissed her hastily.

Vivia wept and made no attempt to hide her tears or the reason for them.

Shortly before Peter's return to the army he had received a letter from Capt. Starkley-Davenport, telling of the reunion of the cousins in London and virtually offering him a commission in the writer's old regiment. Peter had also heard something of the plan from Dick a few days before. He answered the captain's letter promptly and frankly, to the effect that he had no military ambition beyond that of doing his duty to the full extent of his power against Germany, and that a commission in an English regiment was an honor he could accept only if it should come to him unavoidably, in the day's work.

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Peter reached England in the third week of October and with three hundred companions fresh from Canada was attached to a reserve battalion on St. Martin's Plain for duty and instruction. Peter was given the acting rank of sergeant. Early in December he crossed to France and reached his battalion without accident. He found that the 26th had experienced its full share of the fortunes and misfortunes of war. Scores of familiar faces were gone. His old platoon had suffered many changes since he had left it in St. John a year ago. Its commander, a Lieut. Smith, was an entire stranger to him, and he had known the platoon sergeant as a private. Mr. Scammell was now scout officer and expecting his third star at any moment. Dave Hammer, still a sergeant, and Dick, Sacobie and Hiram Sill also were scouts. Dick, was a corporal now and had never been touched by shot, shell or sickness. Sacobie had been slightly wounded and had been away at a field ambulance for a week.

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Peter rejoined his old platoon and, as it was largely composed at this time of new troops, was permitted to retain his acting rank of sergeant. He performed his duties so satisfactorily that he was confirmed in his rank after his first tour in the trenches.

On the third night of Peter's second tour in the front line, Dave Hammer, Dick and Frank Sacobie took him out to show him about. All carried bombs, and Sergt. Hammer had a pistol as well. They were hoping to surprise a party of Germans at work mending their wire.

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Hammer slipped over the parapet. Peter followed him. Dick and Sacobie went over together, quick as the wink of an eye. Their faces and hands were black. With Dave Hammer in the lead, Peter at the very soles of his spiked boots and Dick and Sacobie elbow to elbow behind Peter, they crawled out through their own wire by the way of an intricate channel. When a star shell went up in front, near enough to light that particular area, they lay motionless. They went forward during the brief periods of darkness and half light.

At last they got near enough to the German wire to see it plainly, and the leader changed his course to the left. When they lay perfectly still they could hear many faint, vague sounds in every direction: far, dull thuds before and behind them, spatters of rifle fire far off to the right and left, the bang of a Very pistol somewhere behind a parapet and now and then the crash of a bursting shell.

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A few minutes later Dave twisted about and laid a hand on Peter's shoulder. He gave it a gentle pull. Peter crawled up abreast of him. Dave put his lips to Peter's ear and whispered:

"There they are."

A twisty movement of his right foot had already signaled the same information to the veterans in the rear. Peter stared at the blotches of darkness that Dave had indicated. They did not move often or quickly and kept close to the ground. Sometimes, when a light was up, they became motionless and instantly melted from view, merging into the shadows of the night and the tangled wire. Now and then Peter heard some faint sound of their labor, as they worked at the wire.

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"Only five of them," whispered the scout sergeant. "They are scared blue. Bet their skunks of officers had to kick them out of the trench. Let's sheer off a few yards and give 'em something to be scared about."

Just then Dick and Frank squirmed up beside them.

"Some more straight ahead of us," breathed the Indian. "Three or four."

Hammer used his glass and saw that Sacobie's eyes had not fooled him. He touched each of his companions to assure himself of their attention, then twisted sharp to the left, back toward their own line, and crawled away. They followed. After he had covered about ten yards, Dave turned end for end in his muddy trail, and the others came up to him and turned beside him. They saw that the wiring party and the patrol had joined.

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"Spread a bit," whispered Dave. "I'll chuck one at 'em, and when it busts you fellows let fly and then beat it back for the hole in our wire. Take cover if the emmagees get busy. I'll be right behind you."

They moved a few paces to the right and left. Peter's lips felt dry, and he wanted to sneeze. He took a plump, cold, heavy little grenade in his muddy right hand. A few breathless, slow seconds passed and then *smash!* went Dave's bomb over against the Hun wire. Then Peter stood up and threw—and three bombs exploded like one.

Turning, Peter slithered along on all fours after Dick and Sacobie. The startled Huns lighted up their front as if for a national fête; but Peter chanced it and kept on going. A shrapnel shell exploded overhead with a terrific sound, and the fat bullets spattered in the mud all round him. He came to another and larger crater and was about to skirt it when a familiar voice exclaimed:

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"Come in here, you idiot!"

There was Dick and Frank Sacobie standing hip-deep in the mud and water at the bottom of the hole. Peter joined them with a few bushels of mud. A whiz-bang whizzed and banged red nearby, and the three ducked and knocked their heads together. The water was bitterly cold.

"Did you think you were on your way to the barns to milk?" asked Dick. "Don't you know the machine guns are combing the ground?"

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"I'll remember," said Peter. "New work to me, and I guess I was a bit flustered. I wonder where Dave Hammer has got himself to."

"Some hole or other, sure," said Sacobie. "Don't worry 'bout Dave. He put three bombs into them. I counted the busts. Fritz will quiet down in a few minutes, I guess, and let us out of here—if our fellows don't get gay and start all the artillery shootin' off."

Our fellows did not get gay, our artillery refrained from shooting off, and soon the enemy ceased his frenzied musketry and machine gunning and bombing of his own wire and the harmless mud beyond. So Peter and Dick and Sacobie left their wet retreat and crawled for home. They found Sergt. Hammer waiting for them at the hole in the wire. He had already given the word to the sentry; and so they made the passage of the wire and popped into the trench. Hammer reported to Mr. Scammell, who was all ready to go out with another patrol; and then the four went back to their dugout in the support trench, devoured a mess of potatoes and onions, drank a few mugs of tea and retired to their blankets, mud and putties and all.

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That was the night of the 3d of December. In the battalion's summary of intelligence to the brigade it read like this:

"Night of 23d-24th, our patrols active. Small patrol of four, under 106254 Sgt. D. Hammer, encountered ten of the enemy in front of the German wire. Bombs were exchanged and six of the enemy were killed or wounded. Our patrol returned. 2.30 A. M. Lieut. Scammell placed tube in hostile wire which exploded successfully. No casualties."

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The next day passed quietly, with a pale glimmer of sunshine now and then, and between glimmers a flurry of moist snow. The Germans shouted friendly messages across No Man's Land and suggested a complete cessation of hostilities for the day and the morrow. The Canadians replied that the next Fritz who cut any "love-your-enemy" capers on the parapet would get what he deserved.

"Peace on earth!" exclaimed the colonel of the 26th. "They are the people to ask for it, the murderers! No, this is a war with a reason—and we shoot on Christmas Eve just as quick as on any other day."

The day passed quietly. Soon after sunset Mr. Scammell sent two of his scouts out to watch the gap in the German wire that he had blown with his explosive tube. They returned at ten o'clock and reported that the enemy had made no attempt to mend the gap. The night was misty and the enemy's illumination a little above normal.

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At eleven o'clock Lieut. Scammell went out himself, accompanied by Lieut. Harvey and nine

men. They reached the gap in the enemy wire without being discovered, and there they separated. Mr. Harvey and two others moved along the front of the wire to the left, and a sergeant and one man went to the right. Mr. Scammell and his five men passed through the wire and extended a few yards to the left, close under the hostile parapet.

The officer stood up, close against the wet sandbags. Dave Hammer, Dick, Peter, Hiram Sill and Sacobie followed his example.

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Then, all together, they tossed six bombs into the trench. The shattering bangs of six more blended with the bangs of the first volley. From right and left along the trench sounded other explosions.

Obeying their officer's instructions, Scammell's men made the return journey through the wire and struck out for home at top speed, trusting to the mist to hide their movements from the foe.

Scammell rid himself of three more bombs and then followed his party. The white mist swallowed them. The bombers ran, stumbled and ran again, eager to reach the shelter of their own parapet before the shaken enemy should recover and begin sweeping the ground with his machine guns.

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Sacobie and Dick were the first to get into the trench. Then came Sergt. Hammer and Lieut. Scammell, followed close by Lieut. Harvey and his party. By that time the German machine guns were going full blast.

"Are Sergt. Starkley and Private Sill here?"

"Don't see either of 'em, sir," Sergt. Hammer said in reply to Mr. Scammell's question.

"Perhaps they got here before any of us and beat it for their dugout," said Mr. Scammell. "Dick, you go along the trench and have a look for them. If they aren't in, come back and report to me. Wait right here for me, mind you—on *this* side of the parapet. Get that?"

Then the officer spoke a few hurried words to Sergt. Hammer, a few to the sentry, and went over the sandbags like a snake. Hammer went out of the trench at the same moment; and Frank Sacobie took one glance at the sentry and followed Hammer like a shadow. The mist lay close and cold and almost as wet as rain over that puddled waste.

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Mr. Scammell found Peter and Hiram about ten yards in front of the gap in our wire; the private was unhurt and the sergeant unconscious. Sill had his tall friend on his back and was crawling laboriously homeward.

"Whiz-bang," he informed Mr. Scammell. "It got Pete bad, in the leg. I heard him grunt and soon found him."

They regained the trench, picking up Hammer on the way, and sent Peter out on a stretcher. Sacobie came in at their heels; and no one knew that he had gone out to the rescue.

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That happened on Christmas morning. Before night the doctors cut off what little had been left below the knee of Peter's right leg.

CHAPTER V

PETER'S ROOM IS AGAIN OCCUPIED

[pg 10]

LIFE was very dull round Beaver Dam after Peter had gone away. John and Constance Starkley and Flora and Emma felt that every room of the old house was so full of memories of the three boys that they could not think of anything else. John Starkley worked early and late, but a sense of numbness was always at his heart. There were times when he glowed with pride and even when he flamed with anger, but he was always conscious of the weight on his heart. His grief was partly for his wife's grief.

He awoke suddenly very early one morning and heard his wife sobbing quietly. That had happened several times before, and sometimes she had been asleep and at other times awake. Now she was asleep, lonely for her boys even in her dreams. He thought of waking her; and then he reflected that, if awake, she would hide her tears, which now perhaps were giving her some

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comfort in her dreams.

But he could not find his own sleep again. He lighted a candle, put on a few clothes and went downstairs to the sitting room. There were books everywhere, of all sorts, in that comfortable and shabby room. The brown wooden clock on the shelf above the old Franklin stove ticked drearily. It marked ten minutes past two. Mr. Starkley dipped into a volume of Charles Lever and wondered why he had ever laughed at its impossible anecdotes and pasteboard love scenes. He tried a report of the New Brunswick Agricultural Society and found that equally dry. A flyleaf of *Treasure Island* held his attention, for on it was penned in a round hand, "Flora with Dick's love, Christmas, 1914."

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"He was only a boy then," murmured the father. "Less than a year ago he was only a boy, and now he is a man, knowing hate and horror and fatigue—a man fighting for his life. They are all boys! Henry and Peter—Peter with his grand farm and fast mares, and his eyes like Connie's."

John Starkley got out of his chair, trembling as if with cold. He walked round the room, clasping his hands before him. Then he took the candle from the table and held it up to the shelf above the stove. There stood photographs of his boys, in uniform. He held the little flame close to each photograph in turn.

"Three sons," he said. "Three good sons—and not one here now!"

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A cautious rat-tat on the glass of one of the windows brought him out of his reveries with a start. He went to the window without a moment's hesitation, held the candle high and saw a face looking in at him that he did not recognize for a moment. It was a frightened and shamed face. The eyes met his for a fraction of a second and then shifted their glance.

"James Hammond!" exclaimed Mr. Starkley. "Of all people!"

He set the candle on the table and pushed up the lower sash of the window, letting in a gust of cold wind that extinguished the light behind him. He could see the bulk of his untimely visitor against the vague starlight.

"Come in, James," he said. "By the window or the door, as you like."

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"Thank you, Mr. Starkley," said Hammond in guarded tones. "The window will do. No strangers about, I suppose? Just the family?"

"Only my wife and daughters," replied the farmer, and turned to relight the candle.

Jim Hammond got quickly across the sill, pulled the sash down, and after it the green-linen shade. He stood near the wall, twirling his hat in his hand and shuffling his feet. When Mr. Starkley turned to him, he swallowed hard, glanced up and then as swiftly down again.

"Queer time to make a call," said Hammond at last. "Near three o'clock, Mr. Starkley. I was glad to see your light at the window. I was scared to tap on the window, at first, for fear you'd send me away."

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"Send you away?" queried the farmer. "Why did you fear that, Jim? You, or any other friend, are welcome at this house at any hour of the day or night. But I must admit that your visit has taken me by surprise. I thought you were far away from this peaceful and lonely country, my boy—far away in Flanders."

The blood flushed over Jim's face, and he stared at the farmer.

"You thought I was in Flanders," he said. "In Flanders—me! So you don't know about me, Mr. Starkley? Peter didn't tell you about me? That—that's impossible. Don't you know—and every one else?"

"I don't know what you are talking about," replied Mr. Starkley, as he pushed Jim into an armchair. "I can see that you are tired, however, and in distress of some sort. Why are you here, Jim—and why are you not in uniform? Tell me—and if I can help you in any way you may be sure that I will. Rest here and I'll get you something to eat. I did not notice at first how bad you look, Jim."

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"Never mind the food!" muttered young Hammond. "I'm not hungry, sir—not to matter, that is. But I'm dog-tired. I've been hiding about in the woods and in people's barns for a long time—and walking miles and miles. I—you say you don't know—I am a deserter—and worse."

"You didn't go to France with your regiment? You deserted?"

"I didn't go anywhere with it. Why didn't Peter tell you? I came home on pass—and gave them the slip. I—Peter was sent here to fetch me back. And he didn't tell you! And you thought I was in France! I came here because I was ashamed to go home."

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He suddenly leaned forward in his chair, with his elbows on his knees, and covered his face with his hands. His shoulders shook. John Starkley continued to gaze at him in silence for a minute or two, far too amazed and upset and bewildered to know what to say or do. He felt a great pity for the young man, whom he had always known as a prosperous and self-confident person. To see him thus—shabby, weary, ashamed and reduced to tears—was a most pitiful thing. A deserter! A coward! But even so, who was he to judge? Might not his sons have been like this, except for the mercy of God? Even now any one of his boys, or all three of them, might be in great need of help and kindness. He went over and laid a hand gently on his visitor's shoulder.

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"I don't know what you have done, exactly, or anything at all of your reason for doing it, but you are the son of a friend of mine and have been a comrade of one of my sons," he said. "Look upon me as a friend, Jim. You say you are a deserter. Well, I heard you. It is bad—but here is my hand."

Jim Hammond raised his head and looked at Mr. Starkley with a tear-stained face.

"Do you mean that?" he asked; and at the other's nod he grasped the extended hand.

Mr. Starkley asked him no more questions then, but brought cold ham from the pantry and cider from the cellar and ate and drank with him. The visitor's way with the food and drink told its own story and sharpened the farmer's pity. They went upstairs on tiptoe.

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"This is Peter's room," said Mr. Starkley. "Sleep sound and as long as you please—till dinner time, if you like. And don't worry, Jim."

The farmer returned to his own room and found his wife sleeping quietly. He wakened her and told her of young Hammond's visit and all that he knew of his story.

"I am glad you took him in," she said. "We must help him for our boys' sakes, even if he is a deserter."

"Yes," answered Mr. Starkley, "we must help him through his shame and trouble—and then he may right the other matter of his own free will. We'll give him a chance, anyway."

It was dinner time when Jim Hammond awoke from his sleep of physical and nervous exhaustion. He was puzzled to know where he was at first, but the memory of the night's adventure came to him, bringing both shame and relief. He had no watch to tell him the time, and there was no clock in the room. He had brought nothing with him—not a watch, or a dollar, or a shirt—nothing except his guilt and his shame. He flinched at the thought of meeting Mrs. Starkley and the girls.

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A knock sounded on the door, and John Starkley looked in and wished him good morning. "If you get up now, Jim, you'll be in time for dinner," he said. "Here is hot water and a shaving kit—and a few duds of Henry's and Peter's you can use if you care to. Set your mind at rest about the family, Jim. I have told my wife all that I know myself, and she feels as I do. As for the girls—well, I will let them know as much as is necessary. We mean to help you to get on your feet again, Jim."

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The deserter shaved with care, dressed in his own seedy garments and went slowly downstairs. He entered the kitchen. Mrs. Starkley and Flora were there, busy about the midday dinner. They looked up at him and smiled as he appeared in the doorway, but their eyes and Flora's quick change of color told him of the quality of their pity. They would feel the same, he knew, for any broken and drunken tramp in the ditch. But he was a more despicable thing than a drunken tramp. He was a deserter, a coward. They knew that of him, for he saw it in their eyes that tried to be so frank and kind; and that was not the worst of him. He could not advance from the threshold or meet their glances again.

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Mrs. Starkley went to the young man quickly and, taking his hand in hers, drew him into the room. Flora came forward and gave him her hand and said she was glad to see him; and then Emma came in from the dining room and said, "Hello, Mr. Hammond! I hope you can stay here a long time; we are very lonely."

His heart was so shaken by those words that his tongue was suddenly loosened. He looked desperately, imploringly round, and his face went red as fire and then white as paper.

"I'll stay—if you'll let me—until I pick up my nerve again," he said quickly and unsteadily. "Keep me hidden here from Stanley and my folks. I'll work like a nigger. I am a deserter, as you all know—and I know that Peter didn't tell you so. I'd do anything for him, after that. I'm a runaway soldier, but it wasn't because I was afraid to fight. I'll show you as soon as I'm fit—I'll go and fight."

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It was my beastly temper and drink that did for me. I've been near crazy since. But I'll show you my gratitude some day—if you give me a chance now to work round to feeling something like a man again."

Flora and Emma were tongue-tied by the stress of their emotions. They could only gaze at their guest with tear-dimmed eyes. But Mrs. Starkley went close to him and put a hand on each of his drooped shoulders.

"Of course, my dear boy," she said. "You are only a boy, Jim, a year or two younger than Henry, I think. Trust us to help you."

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During dinner they talked about the country, the war, the weather and the stock—about almost everything but Jim Hammond's affairs.

"What do you want me to do this afternoon?" asked Jim when the meal was over. "I don't know much about farm work, but I can use an axe and can handle horses."

"I was ploughing this morning; and this may be our last day before the frost sets in hard," said Mr. Starkley. "What about hitching Peter's mares to a second plow?"

"Suit me fine," said Jim.

It was a still, bright October afternoon, with a glow in the sunshine, a smell of fern and leaf in the air and a veil of blue mist on the farther hills. Frosts had nipped the surface of things lightly a score of times but had not yet struck deep. Jim Hammond, in a pair of Peter's long-legged boots, guided a long plough behind Peter's black and sorrel mares. The mares pulled steadily, and the bright plough cut smoothly through the sod of the old meadow. Over against the fir woods on the far side of the meadow John Starkley went back and forth behind his grays.

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Jim rested frequently at the end of a furrow, for he was not in the pink of condition. He noticed, for the first time in his life, the faint perfume of the turned loam and torn grass roots. He liked it. His furrows, a little uneven at first, became straighter and more even until they were soon almost perfect.

As the red sun was sinking toward the western forests, Emma appeared, climbing over the rail fence from a grove of young red maples. She carried something under one arm. She waved a hand to her father but came straight to Jim. He stopped the mares midway the furrow.

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"I made these gingernuts myself," said Emma, holding out an uncovered tin box to him. "See, they are still hot. Have some."

He accepted two and found them very good. The girl looked over his work admiringly and told him she had never seen straighter furrows except a few of Peter's ploughing. Then she warned him that in half an hour she would blow a horn for him to stop and went across to her father with what was left of the gingernuts. Hammond went on unwinding the old sod into straight furrows until the horn blew from the house.

After supper he played cribbage with Mr. Starkley; and that night he slept soundly and without dreaming. He awoke early enough to do his share of the feeding and milking before breakfast. The ploughs worked again that day, but the next night brought a frost that held tight.

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The days went by peacefully for Jim Hammond. He never went on the highway or away from Beaver Dam and Peter's place. Sometimes, when people came to the house, he sat by himself in his room upstairs. He did his share of all the barn work, twice a week helped Mrs. Starkley and the girls with the churning and cut cordwood and fence rails every day. He never talked much, but at times his manner was almost cheerful. And so the days passed and October ran into November. Snow came and letters from France and England. The family treated him like one of themselves, with never a question to embarrass him or a word to hurt him. He heard news of his family occasionally, but never tried to see them.

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"They think I am somewhere in the States, hiding—or that's what father thinks," he said to Flora. "Some day I'll write to mother—from France."

December came and Christmas. Jim kept house that day while the others drove to Stanley and attended the Christmas service in the church on the top of the long hill. A week later a man in a coonskin coat drove up to the kitchen door. Jim recognized him through the window as the postmaster of Stanley and retired up the back stairs. John Starkley, who had just come in from the barns, opened the door.

"A cablegram for you, Mr. Starkley," said the postmaster. "It was wired through from Fredericton."

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He held out the thin envelope. Mr. Starkley stared at it, but did not move. His eyes narrowed, and his face looked suddenly old.

"No call to be afraid of it," said the postmaster, who was also the telegraph operator. "I received it and know what's in it."

Mr. Starkley took it then and tore it open.

"Peter wounded. Doing fine. Dick Starkley" is what he read. He sighed with relief and called to Mrs. Starkley and the girls. Then he invited the man from Stanley in to dinner, saying he would see to the horse in a minute.

"You can't expect much better news than that from men in France," John Starkley said to his wife. "Wounded and doing fine—why, that's better than no news, by a long shot. He will be safe out of the line now for weeks, perhaps for months. Perhaps he will even get to England. He is safe at this very minute, anyway."

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He excused himself, went upstairs and told Jim Hammond the news.

"That is twice for Peter already," he said, "once right at home and once in Flanders. If this one isn't any worse than the first, we have nothing to worry about."

"I hope it is just bad enough to give him a good long rest," said Jim in a low voice.

The postmaster stayed to dinner, and Emma smuggled roast beef and pudding up to Jim in his bedroom. No sooner had that visitor gone than another drove up. This other was Vivia Hammond; and once more Jim retired to his room. Vivia had heard of the cablegram, but nothing of its import. Her face was white with anxiety.

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"What is it?" she cried. "The cable—what is it about?"

"Peter is right as rain—wounded but doing fine," said John.

Vivia cried and then laughed.

"I love Peter, and I don't care who knows it!" she exclaimed. "I hope he has lost a leg, so they'll have to send him home. That sounds dreadful—but I love him so—and what does a leg matter?" She turned to Mrs. Starkley. "Did he ever tell you he loved me?" she asked.

"He didn't have to tell us," answered Mrs. Starkley, smiling.

"He does! He does!" exclaimed the girl, and then began to cry again; and Jim, imprisoned upstairs, wished she would go home.

CHAPTER VI

DAVE HAMMER GETS HIS COMMISSION

[pg 13]

BY the middle of January, 1916, Peter was in London again, now minus one leg but otherwise in the pink of condition. Davenport, with his crutch and stick and shadowing valet, visited him daily in hospital. He and Peter wrote letters to Beaver Dam—and Peter wrote a dozen to Stanley.

Capt. Starkley-Davenport had power. Warbroken and propped between his crutch and stick, still he was powerful. A spirit big enough to animate three strong men glowed in his weak body, and he went after the medical officers, nursing sisters and V. A. D.'s of that hospital like a lieutenant general looking for trouble. He saw that Peter received every attention, and then that every other man in the hospital received the same—and yet he was as polite as your maiden aunt. Several medical officers, including a colonel, jumped on him—figuratively speaking—only to jump back again as if they had landed on spikes.

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As soon as he regarded Peter as fit to be moved he took him to his own house. There the queer servants waited on Peter day and night in order of seniority. They addressed him as "Sergt. Peter, sir."

Over in Flanders things had bumped and smashed along much as usual since Christmas

morning. Mr. Scammell had read his promotion in orders and the London Gazette, had put up his third star and had gone to brigade as staff captain, Intelligence; and David Hammer, with the acting rank of sergeant major, carried on in command of the battalion scouts. Hiram Sill had been awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal for his work on Christmas morning and the two chevrons of a corporal for his work in general. A proud man was Corp. Sill, with that ribbon on his chest.

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The changes and chances of war had also touched Dick Starkley and Frank Sacobie. Lieut. Smith had persuaded Dick to leave the scouts and become his platoon sergeant; Sacobie was made an acting sergeant—and the night of that very day, while he was displaying his new chevrons in No Man's Land, he received a wound in the neck that put him out of the line for two weeks.

Henry Starkley—a captain now—managed to visit the battalion about twice a month. It was in the fire trench that he found Dick one mild and sunny morning of the last week of February. The brothers grinned affectionately and shook hands.

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"Peter has sailed for home, wooden leg and all," said Henry. "I got a letter yesterday from Jack Davenport. Except for the sneaking Hun submarines, Peter is fairly safe now."

"I hope he makes the farm," said Dick. "He was homesick for it every minute and working out crop rotations on the backs of letters every night, in the line and out—except when he was fighting."

"There was something about you in Jack's letter. He says that offer still stands, and he seems as anxious as ever about it."

Dick sat down on the fire step, thrust out his muddy feet on the duck boards and gazed at them. He scratched himself meditatively in several places.

"I'd like fine to be an officer," he said at last. "Almost any one would. But I don't want to leave this bunch just now. Jack's crowd will want officers in six months just as much as now—maybe more; and if I'm lucky—still in fighting shape six months from now—I'll be better able to handle the job."

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"I'll write that to Jack," said Henry. "He will understand—and your platoon commander will be pleased. He and the adjutant talked to me to-day as if something were coming to you—a D. C. M., I think. What happened to your first adjutant, Capt. Long, by the way?"

"Long's gone west," replied Dick briefly.

"I'm sorry to hear that. Shell get him?"

"No, sniper. He took one chance too many."

"I heard at the brigade on my way in that your friend, Dave Hammer, has his commission. I wonder if they have told him yet."

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"Good! Let's go along and tell him. He is sleeping to-day."

They found Dave in his little dugout, with the mud of last night's expedition still caked on his person from heel to head. His blankets were cast aside, and he lay flat on his back and snored. His snores had evidently driven the proprietors of the other bunks out of that confined place, for he was alone. His muddy hands clasped and unclasped. He ceased his snoring suddenly and gabbled something very quickly and thickly in which only the word "wire" was recognizable. Then he jerked up one leg almost to his chin and shot it straight again with terrific force.

"He is fighting in his dreams, just the way my old dog Snap used to," said Dick. "We may as well wake him up, for he isn't resting."

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"Go to it—and welcome," said Henry. "It's an infantry job."

Dick stooped and cried, "Hello, Dave!" but the sleeper only twitched an arm. "Wake up!" roared Dick. "Wake up and go to sleep right!" The sleeper closed his mouth for a second but did not open his eyes. He groaned, muttered something about too much light and began to snore again. Dick put a hand on his shoulder—and in the same breath of time he was gripped at wrist and throat with fingers like iron. Grasping the hand at his throat, Dick pulled a couple of fingers clear. Then the sleeper closed his mouth again and opened his eyes wide.

"Oh, it's you, Dick!" he said. "Sorry. Must have been dreaming."

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He sat up and shook hands with Henry. When he heard of his promotion he blushed and got out of his bunk.

"That's a bit of cheering news," he said "I'll have a wash on the strength of that, and something to eat. Wish we were out, and I'd give a little party. Wonder if I can raise a set of stars to wear to-night, just for luck."

Henry went away half an hour later, and Dick returned to the fire trench. Capt. Keen, the adjutant, came looking for Hammer, found him still at his toilet and congratulated him heartily on his promotion.

"Come along and feed with me, if you have had enough sleep," said the adjutant. "The colonel wants to see you. He had a talk with you yesterday, didn't he—about to-night's job?"

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"Yes, sir; and it will be a fine job, if the weather is just right. Looks now as if it might be too clear, but we'll know by sundown. I was dreaming about it a while ago. We were in, and I had a big sentry by the neck when Dick Starkley woke me up. I had grabbed Dick."

"The colonel is right," said Capt. Keen. "You're working too hard, Hammer, and you're beginning to show it; your eyes look like the mischief. This fighting in your sleep is a bad sign."

"The whole army could do with a rest, for that matter," replied Hammer, "but who would go on with the work? What I am worrying about now is rank badges. I'd like to doll up a bit for to-night."

They went back to the sandbagged cellar under the broken farmhouse that served as headquarters for whatever battalion held that part of the line. On their way they had borrowed an old jacket with two stars on each sleeve from Lieut. Smith; and in that garment Dave Hammer appeared at the midday meal. The colonel, the medical officer, the padre and the quartermaster were there. They congratulated Dave on his promotion, and the colonel placed him at his right hand at the table on an upended biscuit box.

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The fare consisted of roast beef and boiled potatoes, a serviceable apple pie and coffee. The conversation was of a general character until after the attack on the pie—an attack that was driven to complete success only by the padre, who prided himself on the muscular development of his jaws. The commanding officer, somewhat daunted in spirit by the pastry, looked closely at the lieutenant.

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"You need a rest, Hammer," he said. "Keen, didn't I tell you yesterday that Hammer must take a rest? Doc, just slant an eye at this young officer and give me your opinion. Doesn't he look like all-get-out?"

"Looks like get-out-of-the-front-line to me, sir," said the medical officer. "A couple of weeks back would set him on his feet. You say the word, sir, and I'll send him back this very day."

"But the show!" exclaimed Hammer. "I must go out to-night, sir!"

"Hammer is the only officer with his party, sir," said Capt. Keen to the colonel. "As you know, sir, we held the organization down this time to only one officer with each of our four parties—because officers are not very plentiful with us just now."

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"That's the trouble!" exclaimed the colonel. "They hem and haw and chew the rag over our recommendations for commissions and keep sending us green officers from England who don't know the fine points of the game. So here we are forced to let Hammer go out to-night, when he should be in his blankets. But back he goes to-morrow!"

Dave had intended to sleep that afternoon, but the excitement caused by the news of his promotion made it impossible. He who had never missed a minute's slumber through fear of death was set fluttering at heart and nerves by the two worsted "pips" on each sleeve of his borrowed jacket. The coat was borrowed—but the right to wear the stars was his, his very own, earned in Flanders. He toured the trenches—fire, communication and support—feeling that his stars were as big as pie plates.

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Sentries, whose bayonet-tipped rifles leaned against the parapet, saluted and then grasped his hand. Subalterns and captains hailed him as a brother; and so did sergeants, with a "sir" or two thrown in. As Dave passed on his embarrassed but triumphant way down the trench his heart pounded as no peril of war had ever set it pounding. No emperor had ever known greater ache and uplift of glory than this grand conflagration in the heart and brain of Lieut. David Hammer, Canadian Infantry.

He visited his scouts; and they seemed as pleased at his "pips" as if each one of them had got leave to London. Even Sergt. Frank Sacobie's dark and calm visage showed flickers of emotion.

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Corp. Hiram Sill, D. C. M., who visioned everything in a large and glowing style, saw in his mind's eye the King in Buckingham Palace agreeing with some mighty general, all red and gold and ribbons, that this heroic and deserving young man should certainly be granted a commission for the fine work he was doing with the distinguished scouts of that very fine regiment.

"I haven't a doubt that was the way of it," said Old Psychology. "People with jobs like that are trained from infancy to grasp details; and I bet King George has the name of everyone of us on the tip of his tongue. You can bet your hat he isn't one to give away Distinguished Conduct Medals without knowing what he is about."

Hiram joined in the laughter that followed his inspiring statements; not that he thought he had said anything to laugh at, but merely to be sociable. [pg 14]

That "show" was to be a big one—a brigade affair with artillery coöperation. The battalion on the right was to send out two parties, one to bomb the opposite trench and the other to capture and demolish a hostile sap head—and together to raise Old Ned in general and so hold as much of the enemy's attention as possible from the main event. The battalion on the left was to put on an exhibition of rifle, machine-gun and trench-mortar fire that would assuredly keep the garrison opposite occupied with its own affairs.

As for the artillery, it had already worked through two thirds of its elaborate programme. Four nights ago it had put on a shoot at two points in the hostile wire and front line, three hundred yards apart, short but hot. Then it had lifted to the support and reserve trenches. Three nights ago it had done much the same things, but not at the same hours, and on a wider frontage. The enemy, sure of being raided, had turned on his lights and his machine guns on both occasions—on nothing. He could do nothing then toward repairing his wire, for after our guns had churned up his entanglements our machine guns played upon the scene and kept him behind his parapet. The batteries had been quiet two nights ago, and Fritz, expecting a raid in force, had lost his nerve entirely. Our eighteen pounders had lashed him at noon the next day, and again at sunset and again at eleven o'clock; and so he had sat up all night again with his nerves. [pg 14]

At four o'clock in the afternoon of this day of Dave Hammer's promotion the batteries went at it again, smashing wire and parapets with field guns and shooting up registered targets farther back with heavier metal. When hostile batteries retaliated, we did counter-battery work with such energy and skill that we soon had the last word in the argument. The deeds of the gunners put the infantry in high spirits. [pg 14]

The afternoon grew misty; shortly after five o'clock there was a shower. At half past seven scouts went out from the 26th and the battalion on the right and, returning, reported that the wire was nicely ripped and chewed. At eight the battalion on the left put on a formidable trench-mortar shoot, which quite upset the nerve-torn enemy. Then all was at rest on that particular piece of the western front—except for the German illumination—until half past twelve. [pg 14]

Half past twelve was Zero Hour. A misty rain was seeping down from a slate-gray sky. Six lieutenants in the fire trench of two battalions took their eyes from the dials of their wrist watches, said "time" to their sergeants and went over, with their men at their heels and elbows. The two larger parties from our battalion were to get into the opposite trench side by side, there separate one to the left and one to the right, do what they could in seven minutes or until recalled, then get out and run for home with their casualties—if any. They were to pass their prisoners out as they collared them. The smaller parties were made up of riflemen, stretcher bearers and escorts for the prisoners. The raiding parties were commanded by Mr. Hammer, with Sergt. Sacobie second in command, and Mr. Smith, with Sergt. Richard Starkley second in command. Corp. Hiram Sill was in Hammer's crowd. [pg 14]

Captain Scammell from brigade, the colonel and the adjutant stood in the trench at the point of exit. Suddenly they heard the dry, smashing reports of grenades through the chatter of machine-gun fire on the left. The bombs went fast and furious, punctuated by the crack of rifles and bursts of pistol fire. S. O. S. rockets went up from the German positions; and, as if in answer to those signals, our batteries laid a heavy barrage on and just in rear of the enemy's support trenches. The colonel flashed a light on his wrist.

"They have been in four minutes," he said.

At that moment a muddy figure with blackened face and hands and a slung rifle on his back scrambled into the trench, turned and pulled something over the parapet that sprawled at the colonel's feet. [pg 15]

"Here's one of them, sir; and there's more coming," said the man of mud. "Ah! Here's another. Boost him over, you fellers."



"'HERE'S ONE OF THEM, SIR; AND THERE'S MORE COMING,' SAID THE MAN OF MUD."

Into the trench tumbled another Fritz, and then a third, and then a Canadian, and then two more prisoners and the third Canadian.

"Five," said the last of the escort. "Us three started for home with eight, but something hit the rest of 'em—T-M bomb, I reckon."

"Sure it was," said the Canadian who had arrived first. "Don't I know? I got a chunk of it in my leg." He stooped and fumbled at the calf of his right leg. The adjutant turned a light on him, and the man extended his hand, dripping with blood.

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"You beat it for the M. O., my lad," said the colonel.

Five more prisoners came in under a guard of two; and then six more of the raiders arrived, two of whom were carrying Lieut. Smith. The lieutenant's head was bandaged roughly, and the dressing was already soaked with blood.

"We did them in, sir," he said thickly to the colonel. "Caught them in bunches—and bombed three dugouts."

He was carried away, still muttering of the fight. By that time the majority of the other parties were in. Several of the men were wounded—and they had brought their dead with them, three in number. The Germans had turned their trench mortars on their own front line from their support trenches.

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"They're not all in yet," said Capt. Keen. "Hammer isn't in."

Just then Dick Starkley slid into the trench.

"That you, Dick? Did you see Mr. Hammer? Or Frank Sacobie? Or Bruce McDonald?"

"I have McDonald—but some one's got to help me lift him over," said Dick breathlessly. "Heavy

as a horse—and hit pretty bad!"

Two men immediately slipped over the top and hoisted big McDonald into the trench. Hiram Sill put a hand on Dick's shoulder.

"Dave Hammer and Sacobie," he whispered, "are still out. Hadn't we better—"

"Right," said Dick. "Come on out." He turned to Capt. Scammell. "Please don't let the guns shorten for a minute or two, sir; Sill and I have to go out again."

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Without waiting for an answer they whipped over the sandbags. Hiram was back in two minutes. He turned on the fire step and received something that Dick and Frank Sacobie lifted over to him. It was Dave Hammer, unconscious and breathing hoarsely, with his eyes shut, his borrowed tunic drenched with mud and blood and one of his bestarred sleeves shot away. Capt. Scammell swayed against the colonel and, for a second, put his hand to his eyes.

"Steady, lad, steady," said the colonel in a queer, cracked voice. "Keen, tell the guns to drop on their front line with all they've got—and then some."

To the whining and screeching of our shells driving low overhead and the tumultuous chorus of their exploding, passed the undismayed soul of Lieut. David Hammer of the Canadian Infantry.

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Heedless of the coming and going of the shells and the quaking of the parapet, Sacobie sat on the fire step with his hands between his knees and stared fixedly at nothing; but Hiram Sill and young Dick Starkley wept without thought of concealment, and their tears washed white furrows down their blackened faces.

CHAPTER VII

[pg 15]

PETER WRITES A LETTER

IN March, 1916, Sergt. Peter Starkley got back to his own country, bigger in the chest and an inch taller than when he had gone away. He walked a little stiffly on his right foot, it is true—but what did that matter? His letters to the people at home had, by intention, given them only a vague idea of the possible date of his arrival. They knew that he was coming, that he was well, and that his new leg was such a masterpiece of construction that he had danced on it in London on two occasions. Otherwise he was unannounced.

He went to the town of Stanley first and left his baggage in the freight shed at the siding. With his haversack on his shoulder and a stout stick in his right hand, he set out along the white and slippery road. Before he got to the bridge a two-horse sled overtook him, and the driver, an elderly man whom he did not know, invited him to climb on. Peter accepted the invitation with all the agility at his command.

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"You step a mite lame on your right leg," said the driver.

"That's so," replied Peter, smiling.

"Been soldierin', hey? See any fight-in'?"

"Yes, I've been in Flanders."

"That so? I've got a boy in the war. Smart boy, too. They give him a job right in England. He wears spurs to his boots, he does; and it ain't everyone kin wear them spurs, he writes me. This here war ain't all in Flanders. We had some shootin' round here about a year back out Pike's Settlement way. A young feller in soldier uniform was drivin' along, and some one shot at him from the woods. That's what *he* said, but my boy—that was afore he went to the war—says like enough he shot himself so's to git out of goin'. He's a smart lad—that's why they give him a job in England. Army Service Corps, he is—so I reckon maybe he's right about that feller shootin' himself."

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"What's his name?" asked Peter quietly.

"Starkley. Peter Starkley from Beaver Dam."

"I'm asking the name of that smart son of yours."

"Gus Todder's his name—Gus Todder, junior. Maybe you know him," was the reply.

"No, but I've got his number," said Peter. "You tell him so in the next letter you write him. Tell him that Sergt. Peter Starkley of the 26th Canadian Infantry Battalion will be glad to see him when he comes home; tell him not to cut himself on those spurs of his in the meantime; and you'd better advise him to warn *his father* not to shoot his mouth off in future to military men about things he is ignorant of. Here's where I get off. Thanks for the lift."

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Peter left the sled, but turned at the other's voice and stood looking back at him.

"I didn't get the hang of all that you was sayin'," said Todder. He was plainly disconcerted.

"Never mind; your son will catch the drift of it," replied Peter. "I am too happy about getting home to be fussy about little things, but don't chat quite so freely with every returned infantryman you see about your son's smartness. You call it smartness—but the fellows up where I left my right leg have another name for it."

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Opening the white gate, he went up the deep and narrow path between snow banks to the white house. At the top of the short flight of steps that led to the winter porch that inclosed the front door, he looked over his shoulder and saw Todder still staring at him. Peter grinned and waved his hand, then opened the door of the porch.

As he closed the door behind him, the house door opened wide before him. Vivia stood on the threshold. She stared at him with her eyes very round and her lips parted, but she did not move or speak. She held her slim hands clasped before her—clasped so tight that the knuckles were colorless. Her small face, which had been as pale as her clasped hands at the first glimpse, turned suddenly as red as a rose; and her eyes, which had been very bright even to their wonderful depths, were dimmed suddenly with a shimmer of tears. And for a long time—for ten full seconds, it may have been—Peter also stood motionless and stared. The heavy stick slipped from his fingers and fell with a clatter on the floor of the porch. He stepped forward then and enfolded her in his khaki-clad arms, safe and sure against the big brass buttons of his greatcoat; and just then the door of the porch opened, and Mr. Todder said:

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"I ain't got the hang of yer remarks yet, young feller."

"Chase yourself away home," replied Peter, without turning his head; and there was something in the tone of his voice that caused Mr. Todder to withdraw his head from the porch and to retire, muttering, to his sled. Vivia had not paid the slightest heed to the interruption. She drew Peter into the hall.

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"I was afraid," she whispered. "I didn't know how much they had hurt you, Peter—but I wasn't afraid of that. I should love you just as much if they had crippled you,—I am so selfish in my love, Peter,—but I was afraid, at first, that I might see a change in your eyes."

"There couldn't be a change in my eyes when I look at you, unless I were blind," said Peter. "Even if I were blind, I guess I could see you. But I am the same as I was, inside and out—all except a bit of a patent leg."

Just then Mrs. Hammond made her discreet appearance, expressed her joy and surprise at the sight of Peter and ventured a motherly kiss. Mr. Hammond came in from the store half an hour later and welcomed Peter cordially. The man had lost weight, and his face was grim. He got Peter to himself for a few minutes just before supper.

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"Jim is still on the other side the border somewhere, I guess," he said, "though I haven't heard from him for months. I've kept the shooting business quiet, Peter—and even about his deserting; but I had to tell his mother and Vivia that he wasn't any good as a soldier and had gone away. I made up some kind of story about it. Other people think he's in France, I guess—even your folks at Beaver Dam. But what do you hear of Pat? He isn't much of a hand at writing letters, but was well when he wrote last to his mother."

"I didn't see him over there, but Henry ran across him and said that he is doing fine work. He's got his third pip and is attached to headquarters of one of the brigades of the First Division as a learner. He has been wounded once, I believe, but very slightly."

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"And I used to think that Pat wasn't much good—too easy-going and loose-footed," said Mr. Hammond bitterly. "My idea of a man was a storekeeper. Well, I think of him now, and I stick out my chest—and then I remember Jim, and my chest caves in again."

They were interrupted then by Vivia; so nothing more was said about the deserter. After supper Peter had to prove to the family that he could dance on his new leg.

"I'll hitch the grays to the pung," said Mr. Hammond when about eight o'clock Peter got ready to go. "It's a fine night, and the roads are a marvel. I'll drive you home."

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"And I am going too," said Vivia.

Dry maple sticks burned on the hearth of the big Franklin stove in the sitting room of Beaver Dam. Flora sat at the big table writing a letter to Dick; John Starkley and Jim Hammond played checkers; and Mrs. Starkley nodded in a chair by the fire. Emma had gone to bed. John Starkley had his hand raised and hovering for a master move when a jangle of bells burst suddenly upon their ears. Flora darted to a window, and the farmer hastened to the front door; but by the time Flora had drawn back the curtains and her father had opened the door Jim Hammond was upstairs and in his room.

Jim did not light the candle that stood on the window sill at the head of his bed. He closed the door behind him. The blind was up; starshine from the world of white and purple and silver without sifted faintly into the little room. He stood for a minute in the middle of the floor, listening to the broken and muffled sounds of talk and laughter from the lower hall. He heard a trill of Vivia's laughter. What had brought Vivia out again, he wondered. News of Peter, beyond a doubt; and good news, to judge by the sounds. He seated himself cautiously on the edge of the bed.

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Now he heard his father's voice. Yes—and John Starkley was laughing. There was another man's voice, but he could hear only a low note of it now and then in the confused, happy babble of sound. A door shut—and then he could not hear anything. He wondered who the third man was and decided that he probably was some one from the village who had just arrived home and who had brought messages from Peter. Perhaps, he thought, Peter was even then on his way from England.

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Jim sat there with the faint shine of the stars falling soft on the rag carpet at his feet and thought what wonderful people the Starkleys were. They had taken him in and treated him like one of the family—and like a white man. Now that Peter was coming home and would be able to help with the work, he would go away and show John Starkley that he had found his courage and his manhood. He had made his plans in a general way weeks before. He would go to another province and enlist in the artillery or in the infantry under an assumed name; if he "made good," or got killed, John Starkley would tell all the good he could of him to his family in Stanley. Already he felt lonely, a dreary chill of homesickness, at the thought of leaving Beaver Dam.

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A door opened and closed downstairs, but Jim Hammond was too busy with his thoughts and high resolves to hear the faint sounds. He even did not hear the feet on the carpeted stairs—and a hand was on the latch of the door before he knew that some one was about to enter the room. He sat rigid and stared at the door.

The door opened and some one entered who bulked large and tall in the pale half gloom of the room. The visitor halted and turned his face toward the bed.

"Who's there?" he asked; and Jim could see the shoulders lower and advance a little and the whole figure become tense as if for attack.

"It's me, Peter!" whispered Jim sharply "Shut the door quick!"

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"You! You, Jim Hammond!" said Peter in a voice of amazement and anger. "What the mischief are you doing here?" Without turning his face from the bed he shut the door behind him with his heel. "Light the candle and pull down the shade. Let me see you."

Jim got to his feet and reached for the shade, but Peter spoke before he touched it.

"No! The candle first!" exclaimed Peter, with an edge to his voice. "I don't trust you in the dark any more than I trust you in the woods."

Hammond struck a match and lit the candle, then drew down the shade and turned with his back to the window. His face was pale. "I didn't figure on your getting home so soon," he said in an unsteady voice. "I didn't intend to be here. I thought I'd be gone before you came."

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"What are you doing here, anyway?" demanded Peter. "What's the game? Sitting in my room, on my bed, quite at home, by thunder! And your father thinks you are in the States. Does my father know you are here?"

Jim smiled faintly. "Yes, he knows—and all your folks know. I've been here since about the middle of October, working, and sleeping in this room every night. My people don't know where I am—but when I get to France you can tell them. Your father doesn't know that it was I who fired that shot—and when I found you hadn't told him that, or even that I was a deserter, I felt it was up to me to do my best for you while you were away. So I've worked hard and been happy here; and I'll be sorry to go away—but I must go now that you're home again. Don't tell my people I'm here, Peter."

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"You have been living here ever since the middle of October, working here, and your own father and mother don't know where you are?"

"Your people are the only ones who know."

Peter eyed him in silence for a minute.

"Why did you shoot me, Jim?" he asked more gently.

"How do I know?" exclaimed Hammond. "I was drinking; I was just about mad with drink. I liked you well enough, Peter,—I didn't want to kill you,—but the devil was in me. It was drink made me act so bad in St. John; it was drink made me desert; it was drink that came near making a murderer of me. That's the truth, Peter—and now I wish you'd go downstairs, for I don't want my father or Vivia to find me here—or to know anything about me till I'm in France."

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"Shall I find you here when I come back?" asked Peter.

"I'll come downstairs as soon as they go," said Hammond.

Peter was about to leave the room when he suddenly remembered the errand that had brought him away from the company downstairs. It was a photograph of himself taken at the age of five years. Vivia had heard of it and asked for it; and before either of his parents or Flora had been able to think of a way of stopping him he had started upstairs for it. Now he found it on the top of a shelf of old books and wiped off the dust on his sleeve.

"Vivia wants it," he said, smiling self-consciously.

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He found Flora waiting at the head of the stairs for him.

"It's all right; I've had a talk with him," he whispered, and when he reached the sitting room he met the anxious glances of his parents with a smile and nod that set their immediate anxieties at rest.

It was past midnight when Vivia and her father drove away. Then Jim came downstairs, and Peter shook hands with him in the most natural way in the world.

"When we met in my bedroom we were both too astonished to shake hands," explained Peter.

"You must sleep in Dick's room now, Peter," said Mrs. Starkley.

"Only for one night," said Jim, trying to smile but making a poor job of it. "I'll be off to-morrow, now that Peter is home again—just as I planned all along, you know. I—it isn't the going back to the army I mind; it is—leaving you people."

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He smiled more desperately than ever.

Mrs. Starkley and Flora did not dare trust their voices to reply. John Starkley laid a hand on Jim's shoulder and said, "Go when it suits you, Jim, and come back when it suits you—and we shall miss you when you are away, remember that."

The three men sat up for another hour, talking of Peter's experiences and Jim's plans. They went upstairs at last, but even then neither Peter nor Jim could sleep, for the one was restless with happiness and the other with the excitement of impending change. Peter would see Vivia on the morrow, and Jim would meet strange faces. Peter had returned to the security that he had fought and shed his blood for and to the life and people he loved; Jim's fighting was all before him, and behind him a disgrace to be outlived.

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After a while Peter got up and went to Jim's room in his pyjamas; he sat on the edge of Jim's bed, and they talked of the fighting over in France.

"I've been thinking about my reënlistment," said Jim, "and I guess I'll take a chance on my own name. It's my name I want to make good."

"Sounds risky—but I don't believe it is as risky as it sounds," said Peter.

"Not if I go far enough away to enlist—to Halifax or Toronto. There must be lots of Hammonds in the army. I'll take the risk, anyway. It isn't likely I'll run across any of the old crowd. None of our old officers would be hard on me, I guess, if they found me fighting and doing my duty."

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"Capt. Long is dead. A great many of the old crowd are dead, and others have been promoted

out of the regiment. Remember Dave Hammer?"

"Yes. If I could ever be as good a soldier as Dave Hammer I think I'd forget—except sometimes in the middle of the night, maybe—what a mean, worthless fellow I have been."

"I'll tell you what, Jim," said Peter suddenly, "I'll write a letter for you to carry; and if any one spots you over there and is nasty about it, you go to any officer you know in the old battalion and tell the truth and show my letter. I guess that will clear your name, Jim, if you do your duty."

"You don't mean to put *everything* in the letter, do you?"

"Only what is known officially—that you went home from your regiment here in Canada on pass, started acting the fool and deserted. That is the charge against you, Jim—desertion. But it is the mildest sort of desertion, and reënlistment just about offsets it. The same thing done in France in the face of the enemy is punished—you know how."

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"Yes, I know how it is punished," said Hammond. "You wouldn't worry about that if you knew as much about how I feel now as I do myself. Of course I've got to prove it before you'll believe it, Peter, but I'm not afraid to fight."

When Peter had gone back to his room, he sat down to write the letter that Jim Hammond was to carry in his pocket. It was a long letter, and Peter was a slow writer. He spared no pains in making every point of his argument perfectly clear. He staked the military reputation of the whole Starkley family on James Hammond's future behavior as a soldier. He sealed it with red wax and his great-grandfather's seal and addressed the envelope to "Any Officer of the 26th Can. Infy. Bn. or of any Unit of the Can. Army Corps of the B. E. F." When finally he had the letter done, it was morning.

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CHAPTER VIII

THE 26TH "MOPS UP"

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AFTER Jim Hammond went away from Beaver Dam he wrote to Mrs. Starkley from Toronto, saying that he had enlisted in a new infantry battalion and that all was well with him. That was the last news from him, or of him, to be received at Beaver Dam for many months.

The war held and crushed and sweated on the western front. Every day found the Canadians in the grinding and perilous toil of it. In April, 1916, the Second Canadian Division held the ground about St. Eloi against terrific onslaughts. Then and there were fought those desperate actions known as the Battles of the Craters. Hiram Sill, D. C. M., now a sergeant, received a wound that put him out of action for nearly two months. Dick Starkley was buried twice, once beneath the lip of one of the craters as it returned to earth after a jump into the air, and again in his dugout. No bones were broken, but he had to rest for three days.

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Other Canadian divisions moved into the Ypres salient in April—back to their first field of glory of the year before. That salient of terrible fame, advanced round the battered city of Ypres like a blunt spearhead driven into the enemy's positions, will live for centuries after its trenches are leveled. British soldiers have fallen in their tens of thousands in and beyond and on the flanks of that city of destruction. From three sides the German guns flailed it through four desperate years. Masses of German infantry surged up and broke against its torn edges, German gas drenched it, liquid fire scorched it, and mines blasted it. Now and again the edge of that salient was bent inward a little for a day or a week; but in those four years no German set foot in that city of heroic ruins except as a prisoner.

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The 26th Battalion celebrated Dominion Day—July 1st—by raiding a convenient point of the German front line. The assault was made by a party of twenty-five "other ranks" commanded by two junior officers. It was supported by the fire of our heavy field guns and heavy and medium trench mortars.

Sergts. Frank Sacobie and Hiram Sill were of the party, but Dick Starkley was not. Dick could not be spared for it from his duties with his platoon, for he was in acting command during the enforced absence of Lieut. Smith, who was suffering at a base hospital from a combination of gas and fever. The men from New Brunswick were observed by the garrison of the threatened trench while they were still on the wrong side of the inner line of hostile wire, and a heavy but wild fire was opened on them with rifles and machine guns. But the raiders did not pause. They passed through the last entanglement, entered the trench, killed a number of the enemy and collected considerable material for identification. Their casualties were few, and no wound was of a serious

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nature. Hiram Sill was dizzy and bleeding freely, but cheerful. One small fragment of a bomb had cut open his right cheek, and another had nicked his left shoulder. Sacobie carried him home on his back.

It was a little affair, remarkable only as a new way of celebrating Dominion Day, and differed only in minor details from hundreds of other little bursts of aggressive activity on that front.

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Later in the month a Distinguished Service Order, two Military Crosses, four Distinguished Conduct Medals and five Military Medals were awarded to the battalion in recognition of its work about St. Eloi. Dick Starkley and Frank Sacobie each drew a D. C. M. A few days after that Lieut. Smith returned from Blighty and took back the command of his platoon from Dick; and at the same time he informed Dick that he was earmarked for a commission.

The Canadians began their march from the Ypres salient to the Somme on September 1, 1916. They marched cheerfully, glad of a change and hoping for the best. The weather was fine, and the towns and villages through which they passed seemed to them pleasant places full of friendly people. They were going to fight on a new front; and, as became soldiers, it was their firm belief that any change would be for the better.

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On the 8th of September, while on the march, Dick Starkley was gazetted a lieutenant of Canadian Infantry. Mr. Smith found his third star in the same gazette, and Dick took the platoon. Henry visited the battalion a few days later and presented to the new lieutenant an old uniform that would do very well until the London tailors were given a chance. Dick was a proud soldier that day; and an opportunity of showing his new dignity to the enemy soon occurred. That opportunity was the famous battle of Courcelette.

From one o'clock of the afternoon of September 14 until four o'clock the next morning our heavy guns and howitzers belabored with high explosive shells the fortified sugar refinery and its strong trenches and the village of Courcelette beyond. Then for an hour the big guns were silent. The battalions of the Fourth and Sixth Brigades waited in their jumping-off trenches before Pozières. The Fifth Brigade, of which the 26th Battalion was a unit, rested in reserve.

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Dawn broke with a clear sky and promise of sunshine and a frosty tingle in the air. At six o'clock the eighteen-pounder guns of nine brigades of artillery, smashing into sudden activity, laid a dense barrage on the nearest rim of the German positions. Four minutes later the barrage lifted and jumped forward one hundred yards, and the infantry climbed out of their trenches and followed it into the first German trench. The fight was on in earnest, and in shell holes, in corners of trenches and against improvised barricades many great feats of arms were dared and achieved. A tank led the infantry against the strongly fortified ruins of the refinery and toppled down everything in its path.

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Lieut. Dick Starkley and his friends gave ear all morning to the din of battle, wished themselves farther forward in the middle of it and wondered whether the brigades in front would leave anything for them to do on the morrow. Messages of success came back to them from time to time. By eight o'clock, after two hours of fighting, the Canadians had taken the formidable trenches, the sugar refinery, a fortified sunken road and hundreds of prisoners. The way was open to Courcelette.

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"If they don't slow up—if they don't quit altogether this very minute—they'll be crowding right in to Courcelette and doing us out of a job!" complained Sergt. Hiram Sill. "That's our job, Courcelette is—our job for to-morrow. They've done what they set out to do, and if they go ahead now and try something they haven't planned for, well, they'll maybe bite off more than they can chew. The psychology of it will be all wrong; their minds aren't made up to that idea."

"I guess the idee ain't the hull thing," remarked a middle-aged corporal. "Many a good job has been done kind of unexpectedly in this war. I reckon this here psychology didn't have much to do with your D. C. M."

"That's where you're dead wrong, Henry," said Hiram. "I knew I'd get a D. C. M. all along, from the first minute I ever set foot in a trench. My mind and my spirit were all made up for it. I knew I'd get a D. C. M. just as sure as I know now that I'll get a bar to it—if I don't go west first."

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Dick, who had joined the group, laughed and smote Hiram on the shoulder.

"You're dead right!" he exclaimed. "Old Psychology, you're a wonder of the age! Be careful what you make up your heart and soul and mind to next or you'll find yourself in command of the division."

"What do you mean, lieutenant?" asked Sill.

"You've been awarded the D. C. M. again, that's all!" cried Dick, shaking him violently by the hand. "You've got your bar, Old Psychology! Word of it just came through from the Brigade."

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Sergt. Sill blushed and grew pale and blushed again.

"Say, boys, I'm a proud man," he said. "There are some things you can't get used to—and being decorated for distinguished conduct on the field of glory is one of them, I guess. If you'll excuse me, boys,—and you, lieutenant,—I'll just wander along that old trench a piece and think it over by myself."

The way was open to Courcelette. The battalions that had done the work in a few hours and that, despite a terrific fire from the enemy, had established themselves beyond their final objective, were anxious to continue about this business without pause and clean up the strongly garrisoned town. They had fought desperately in those few hours, however, and the enemy's fire had taken toll of them, and so they were told to sit tight in their new trenches; but the common sense of their assertion that Courcelette itself should be assaulted without loss of time, before the beaten and astounded enemy could recover, was admitted.

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At half past three o'clock that afternoon the Fifth Brigade received its orders and instructions and immediately passed them on and elaborated them to the battalions concerned. By five o'clock the three battalions that were to make the attack were on their way across the open country, advancing in waves. German guns battered them but did not break their alignment. They reached our new trenches and, with the barrage of our own guns now moving before them, passed through and over the victorious survivors of the morning's battle.

The French Canadians and the Nova Scotians went first in two waves.

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Dick Starkley and his platoon were on the right of the front line of the 26th, which was the third wave of attack. "Mopping up" was the battalion's particular job on this occasion.

"Mopping up," like most military terms, means considerably more than it suggests to the ear. The mops are rifles, bombs and bayonets; the things to be mopped are machine-gun posts still in active operation, bays and sections of trenches still occupied by aggressive Germans, mined cellars and garrisoned dugouts. Everything of a menacing nature that the assaulting waves have passed over or outflanked without demolishing must be dealt with by the "moppers-up."

The two lines of the 26th advanced at an easy walk; there was about five yards between man and man. Each man carried water and rations for forty-eight hours and five empty sandbags, over and above his arms and kit. The men kept their alignment all the way up to the edge of the village. Now and again they closed on the center or extended to right or left to fill a gap. Wounded men crawled into shell holes or were picked up and carried forward. Dead men lay sprawled beneath their equipment, with their rifles and bayonets out thrust toward Courcelette even in death. The "walking wounded" continued to go forward, some unconscious or unmindful of their injuries and others trying to bandage themselves as they walked.

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Col. MacKenzie led them, and beside him walked a company commander. The two shouted to each other above the din of battle, and sometimes they turned and shouted back to their men. Other officers walked a few paces in front of their men.

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A bursting shell threw Dick backward into a small crater that had been made earlier in the day and knocked the breath out of him for a few seconds. Frank Sacobie picked him up. The colonel gave the signal to double, and the right flank of the 26th broke from a walk into a slow and heavy jog. Sacobie jogged beside Dick.

"Just a year since we came into the line!" shouted Dick.

"We were pa'tridge shootin' two years ago to-day!" bawled Sacobie.

The colonel turned with his back to Courcelette and his face to his men and yelled at them to come on. "Speed up on the right!" he shouted. "The left is ahead. The 25th is in already. Shake a leg, boys. If they don't move quick enough in front, blow right through 'em."

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At the near edge of the village a number of New Brunswickers, including their colonel, overtook and mingled with the second line of the 22d. Our barrage was lifted clear of Courcelette by this time and set like a spouting wall of fire and earth along the far side of it; but the shells of the enemy continued to pitch into it, heaving bricks and rafters and the soil of little gardens into the vibrating twilight. Machine guns streamed their fire upon the invaders from attics and cellars and sand-bagged windows. The bombs and rifles of the 22d smashed and cracked just ahead; and on the left, still farther ahead, crashes and bangs and shouts told all who could hear the whereabouts of Hilliam and his lads from Nova Scotia.

Dick Starkley saw a darting flicker of fire from the butt of a broken chimney beyond a cellar full of bricks and splintered timber. He shouted to his men, let his pistol swing from its lanyard and threw a bomb. Then, stooping low, he dashed at the jumble of ruins in the cellar. He saw his bomb burst beside the stump of chimney. The machine gun flickered again, and *spat-spat-spat* came

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quicker than thought. Other bombs smashed in front of him, to right and left of the chimney. He got his right foot entangled in what had once been a baby's crib.

There he was, staggering on the very summit of that low mound of rubbish, fairly in line with the aim of the machine gun. Something seized him by some part of his equipment and jerked him backward. He lit on his back and slid a yard, then beheld the face of Hiram Sill staring down at him.

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"Hit?" asked Hiram.

"Don't think so. No."

"It's a wonder."

Five men from Dick's platoon joined them in the ruins. Together they threw seven grenades. The hidden gun ceased fire. Dick scrambled up and over the rubbish and around what was left of the shattered chimney that masked the machine-gun post. In the dim light he saw sprawled shapes and crouching shapes, and one stooped over the machine gun, working swiftly to clear it again for action. Dick pistoled the gunner. The three survivors of that crew put up their hands. Sergt. Sill disarmed them and told them to "beat it" back to the Canadian lines. Fifty yards on they found Sacobie and two privates counting prisoners at the mouth of a dugout.

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"Twenty-nine without a scratch," said Sacobie.

"Find stretchers for them and send them back with our wounded, under escort," said Dick. "Put a corporal in charge. Is there a corporal here?"

"I'm here, sir."

"You, Judd? Take them back with as many of our wounded as they can carry. Two men with you should be escort enough. Hand over the wounded and fetch up any grenades and ammunition you can get hold of."

Capt. Smith staggered up to Dick.

"We are through and out the other side!" he gasped. "Get as many of our fellows as you can collect quick to stiffen this flank. Dig in beyond the houses—in line with the 25th. The colonel is up there somewhere."

He swayed and stumbled against the platoon commander. Dick supported him with an arm.

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"Hit?" asked Dick.

"Just what you'd notice," said the captain, straightening himself and reeling away.

"Go after him and do what you can for him," said Dick to one of his men. "Bandage him and then go look for an M. O."

Dick hurried on toward the forward edge of the village, strengthening his following as he went. The shelling was still heavy and the noise deafening, but the hand-to-hand fighting among the houses had lessened. Dick led his men through one wall of a house that had been hit by a heavy shell and through the other wall into a little garden. There were bricks and tiles and iron shards in that garden; and in the middle of it, untouched, a little arbor of grapevines. Dick passed through the arbor on his way to the broken wall at the foot of the garden. There were two benches in it and a small round table.

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Dick went through the arbor in a second, and then he sprang to the broken crest of the wall. He had scarcely mounted upon it before something red burst close in front of his eyes.

Dick was not astonished to find himself in the old garden at Beaver Dam. The lilacs were in flower and full of bees and butterflies. He still wore his shrapnel helmet. It felt very uncomfortable, and he tried to take it off—but it stuck fast to his head. Even that did not astonish him. He saw an arbor of grapevines and entered it and sat down on a bench with his elbows on a small round table. He recognized it as the arbor he had seen that evening in Courcelette—the evening of September 15.

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"I must have brought it home with me," he reflected. "The war must be over."

Flora entered the arbor then and asked him why he was wearing an officer's jacket. He thought it queer that she had not heard about his commission.

"I was promoted on the Somme—no, it was before that," he began, and then everything became dark. "I can't see," he said.

"Don't worry about that," replied a voice that was not Flora's. "Your eyes are bandaged for the time being. They'll be as well as ever in a few days."

"I must have been dreaming. Where am I—and what is wrong with me?"

"You are in No. 2 Canadian General Hospital and have been dreaming for almost a week. But you are doing very well." [pg 20]

"What hit me? And have I all my legs and arms?"

"It must have been a whiz-bang," replied the unknown voice. "You are suffering from head wounds that are not so serious as we feared and from broken ribs and a few cuts and gashes. You must drink this and stop talking."

Dick obediently drank it, whatever it was.

"I wish you could give me some news of the battalion, and then I'd keep quiet for a long time," he said.

"Do you want me to open and read this letter that your brother left for you two days ago?" asked the Sister.

She read as follows:

"Dear Dick. As your temperature is up and you refuse to know me I am leaving this note for you with the charming Sister who seems to be your C. O. just now. She tells me that you will be as fit as a fiddle in a month or so. Accept my congratulations on your escape and on the battle of Courcelette. I have written to Beaver Dam about it and cabled that you will live to fight again. Frank Sacobie and that psychological sergeant with a D. C. M. and bar are booked for Blighty, to polish up for their commissions. I called on them after the fight. They are well—but I can't say that they escaped without a scratch, for they both looked as if they had been mixing it up with a bunch of wildcats. Sacobie has a black eye and doesn't know who or what hit him." [pg 20]

"Do you remember Jim Hammond? He came over to a battalion of this division with a draft from England about four months ago. He looked me up one day last week and told me a mighty queer story about himself. I won't try to repeat it, for I am sure he'll tell it to you himself at the first opportunity. He is making good, as far as I can see and hear. Pat Hammond has a job in London now. He was badly gassed about a month ago. I will get another day's special leave as soon as possible and pay you another visit." [pg 20]

"Your affectionate brother, Henry Starkley."

CHAPTER IX

FRANK SACOBIE OBJECTS

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WITHIN ten days of the battle of Courcelette, Lieut. Richard Starkley was able to see; and twenty days after that he was able to walk. His walking at first was an extraordinary thing, and extraordinary was the amount of pleasure that he derived from it. With a crutch under one shoulder and Sister Gilbert under the other, bandaged and padded from hip to neck, and with his battered but entire legs wavering beneath him, he crossed the ward that first day without exceeding the speed limit. Brother officers in various stages of repair did not refrain from expressing their opinions of his performance.

"Try to be back for tea, old son," said a New Zealand major. [pg 20]

"Are those your legs or mine you're fox-trotting with?" asked an English subaltern; and an

elderly colonel called, "I'll hop out and show you how to walk in a minute, if you don't do better than that!"

The colonel laughed, and the inmates of the other beds laughed, and Dick and Sister Gilbert laughed, for that, you must know, was a very good joke. The humor of the remark lay in the fact that the elderly colonel had not a leg to his name.

Day by day Dick improved in pace and gait, and his activities inspired a number of his companions to shake an uncertain leg or two. The elderly colonel organized contests; and the great free-for-all race twice round the ward was one of the notable sporting events of the war.

At last Dick was shipped to Blighty and admitted to a hospital for convalescent Canadian officers. There Capt. J. A. Starkley-Davenport soon found him. No change that the eye could detect had taken place in Jack Davenport. His face was as thin and colorless as when Dick had first seen it; his eyes were just as bright, and their glances as kindly and intent; his body was as frail and as immaculately garbed. Dick wondered how one so frail could exist a week without either breaking utterly or gaining in strength.

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"You're a wonder, Dick!" exclaimed Davenport.

"It strikes me that you are the wonder," said Dick.

"But they tell me that you stopped a whiz-bang and will be as fit as ever, nerve and body, in a little while."

"I stopped bits of it—but I don't think it actually detonated on me. All I got was some of the splash. I was lucky!"

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"You were indeed," said the other, with a shadow in his eyes. "I was lucky, too—though there have been times when I have been fool enough to wish that I had been left on the field." Then he straightened his thin shoulders and laughed quietly. "But if I had gone west I should have missed Frank Sacobie and Hiram Sill. They lunched with me last week and have promised to turn up on Sunday. You'll be right for Sunday, Dick, and I'll have a pukka party in your honor."

"How are they, and what are they up to?" asked Dick.

"They are at the top of their form, both of them, and up to anything," replied Davenport. "Your Canadian cadet course is the stiffest thing of its kind in England, but it doesn't seem to bother those two. Frank is smarter than anything the Guards can show and is believed to be a rajah; and Hiram writes letters to Washington urging the formation of an American division to be attached to the Canadian Corps and suggesting his appointment to the command of one of the brigades."

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"Those letters must amuse the censors," said Dick with a grin.

"I imagine they do. Washington hasn't answered yet; and so Hiram is getting his dander up and is pitching each letter a little higher than the one before it. Incidentally, he has a great deal to say to our War Office, and his novel suggestions for developing trench warfare seem to have awakened a variety of emotions in the brains and livers of a lot of worthy *brass hats*."

Dick laughed. "What are his ideas for developing trench warfare?"

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"One is the organization of a shot-gun platoon in every battalion. The weapon is to be the duck gun, number eight bore, I believe. Hiram maintains that, used within a range of one hundred and fifty yards, those weapons would be superior to any in repulsing attacks in mass and in cleaning up raided trenches. He is a great believer in the deadly and demoralizing effects of point-blank fire."

"He is right in that—once you get rid of the parapet."

"He gets rid of the parapet with the point-blank fire of what he calls trench cannon—guns, three feet long, mounted so that they can be carried along a trench by four men; they are to fire ten- or twelve-pound high explosive shells from the front line smack against the opposite parapet."

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"It sounds right, too; but so many things sound right that work all wrong. What are his other schemes?"

"One has to do with a thundering big six-hooked grapnel, with a wire cable attached, that is to be shot into the hostile lines from a big trench mortar and then winched back by steam. He expects his grapnel—give him power enough—to tear out trenches, machine-gun posts and battalion headquarters, and bring home all sorts of odds and ends of value for identification purposes. Can't you see the brigadier stepping out before brekker to take a look at the night's haul?"

"My hat! What did the War Office think of that?"

"An acting assistant something or other of the name of Smythers and the rank of major was inspired by it to ask Hiram whether he had ever served in France. Hiram put over a twenty-page narrative of his exploits with the battalion, with appendixes of maps and notes and extracts from brigade and battalion orders, and, so far as I know, the major has not yet recovered sufficiently to retaliate."

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"Well, I hope Frank Sacobie has left the War Office alone."

"Frank writes nothing and says very little more than that. He seems to give all his attention to his kit; but I have a suspicion that he is a deep thinker. However that may be, his taste in dress is astonishingly good, and his deportment in society is in as good taste as his breeches."

"So he has a good time?"

"He is very gay when he comes up to town," answered Davenport.

"He deserves a good time, but he can't get it and at the same time doll himself up, even in uniform, on his pay. How does he do it?"

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"You have guessed it, Dick."

"I think I have."

"Then there is no need of my saying much about it. I live on one sixth of my income. That leaves five sixths for my friends; and often, Dick, it is the thought of the spending of the five parts that gives me courage to go on keeping life in this useless body with the one part. Sometimes a soldier's wife buys food for herself and children, or pays the rent, with my money; and the lion's share of the pleasure of that transaction is mine. Sometimes a chap on leave spends a fistful of my treasury notes on dinners for himself and his girl; and those dinners give me more pleasure than the ones I eat myself. I haven't much of a stomach of my own now, you know; and I haven't a girl of my own to take out to one—even if Wilson would let me go out at night. It is not charity. I satisfy my own lost hunger for food through the medium of poor people with good appetites: I have my fun and cut a dash in new breeches and swagger service jackets through the medium of hard fighting fellows from France. I am not apologizing, you understand."

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"You needn't," said Dick dryly; and then they both laughed.

Hiram Sill and Frank Sacobie called on Dick at the hospital soon after ten o'clock on Sunday morning. They had come up to town the evening before. The greetings of the three friends were warm. Sacobie's pleasure at the reunion found no voice, but shone in his eyes and thrilled in the grip of his hand. Hiram Sill added words to the message of his beaming face. He expressed delighted amazement at Dick's appearance.

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"I couldn't quite believe it until now," he said. "Neither could you if you had seen yourself as we saw you when you were picked up. Nothing the matter with your face, except a dimple or two that you weren't born with. All your legs and arms still your own. I'd sooner see this than a letter from Washington. With your luck you'll live to command the battalion."

Dick grinned. His greetings to his friends had been as boyishly impulsive and cheery as ever; yet there was something looking out through the affection in his eyes that would have puzzled his people in New Brunswick if they had seen it. There was a question in the look and a hint of anxiety and perhaps the faintest shade of the airs of a fond father, a sympathetic judge and a hopeful appraiser. Frank and Hiram recognized and accepted it without thought or question. The look was nothing more than the shadow of the habit of responsibility and command.

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Hiram talked about Washington and the War Office, and discussed his grapnel idea with considerable heat. Frank Sacobie took no part in that discussion and little in the general conversation. Soon after twelve o'clock all three set out in a taxicab for Jack Davenport's house.

The luncheon was successful. The other guests were three women—a cousin of Jack's on the Davenport side and her two daughters. The host and Hiram Sill both conversed brilliantly. Frank was inspired to make at least five separate remarks of some half dozen words each. Dick soon let the drift of the general conversation escape him, so interested did he become in the girl on his right.

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Kathleen Kingston seemed to him a strange mixture of shyness and self-possession, of calmness and vivacity. The coloring of her small face was wonderfully mobile—so Dick expressed it to himself—and yet her eyes were frank, steady and unembarrassed. Her voice was curiously low and clear.

Dick was conscious of feeling a vague and unsteady wonder at himself. Why this sudden interest in a girl? He had never felt anything of the kind before. Had this something to do with the wounds in his head? He could not entertain that suggestion seriously. However that might be, he felt that his sudden interest in this young person whom he had not so much as heard of an hour ago greatly increased his interest in many things. He was conscious of a sure friendship for her, as if he had known her for years. He knew that this friendship was a more important thing to him than his friendships with Hiram Sill and Frank Sacobie—and yet those friendships had grown day by day, strengthened week by week and stood the test of suffering and peril.

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She told him that her father was still in France, but safe now at General Headquarters, that her eldest brother had been killed in action in 1914, that another was fighting in the East, and that still another was a midshipman on the North Sea. Also, she told him that she wanted to go to France as a V. A. D., that she had left school six months ago and was working five hours every day making bandages and splints, and that she was seventeen years old. Those confidences melted Dick's tongue. He told her his own age and that he had added a little to it at the time of enlisting; he spoke of night and daylight raids and major offensive operations in which he had taken part, of the military careers of Henry and Peter and of life at Beaver Dam. She seemed to be as keenly interested in his confidences as he had been in hers. In the library, where coffee was served, Dick continued to cling to his new friend.

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The party came to an end at last, leaving Dick in a somewhat scattered state of mind. Before leaving with her daughters, Mrs. Kingston gave her address and a cordial invitation to make use of it to each of the three. Before long Wilson took Jack off to bed. Then Hiram left to keep an appointment at the Royal Automobile Club with a captain who knew some one at the War Office. That left Frank and Dick with Jack Davenport's library to themselves. One place was much the same as another to Dick just then. He was again wondering if he could possibly be suffering in some subtle and painless way from the wounds in his head. With enquiring fingers he felt the spotless bandage that still adorned the top of his head.

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Sacobie got out of his chair suddenly, with an abruptness of movement that was foreign to him, and walked the length of the room and back. He halted before Dick and stared down at him keenly for several seconds without attracting that battered youth's attention. So he fell again to pacing the room, walking lightly and with straight feet, the true Indian walk. At last he halted again in front of Dick's chair.

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"I am not going back to the battalion," he said.

Dick sat up with a jerk and stared at him.

"I am not going back," repeated Sacobie. "I shall get my commission, that is sure; but I shall not be an officer in the battalion."

"Why the mischief not?" exclaimed Dick. "What's the matter with the battalion, I'd like to know?"

"Nothing," replied the other. He moved away a few paces, then turned back again. "A good battalion. I was a good sergeant there. But I met Capt. Dodds, on leave, one day, and we had lunch together at Scott's; and he feel pretty good—he felt pretty good—and he talked a lot. He told me how some officers and other ranks say the colonel didn't do right when he put in my name for cadet course and a commission. You know why, Dick. So I don't go back to the infantry with my two stars."

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"Do you mean because you are an Indian? That is rot!"

"No, it is good sense. You think about it hard as I have thought about it day and night. They don't say I don't know my job. The captain told me the colonel was right and everybody knew it when he said I should make the best scout officer in the brigade; and the men like me, you know that; but the men don't want an Injun for an officer. They are white men. I am a Malecite—red. That is right. I don't go back with my officer stars."

"Do you mean that you won't take your commission?" asked Dick.

"No. I take it, sure. But not in the 26th."

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Dick did not argue. He had never considered his friend's case in that light before, but now he knew that Sacobie was right. The noncommissioned officers and men would not question Frank's military qualifications, his ability or his personal merits. His race was the only thing about him to which they objected—and that appeared objectionable in him only when they considered him as an officer. As a "non-com" he was one of themselves, but as an officer they must consider him impersonally as a superior. There was where the New Brunswick soldiers would cease to consider their friend and comrade Frank Sacobie and see only a member of an inferior race. Their point of view would immediately revert to that of the old days before the war, when they would have

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laughed at a Malecite's undertaking to perform any task except paddling a canoe.

"Will you transfer to another battalion?" asked Dick, as a result of his reflections.

Frank shook his head but made no reply.

"Then to an English battalion?" Dick persisted. "There are dozens that would be glad to have you, Frank. A Canadian with your record would not have to look far for a job in this war. Jack Davenport's old regiment would snap you up quick as a wink, commission and all, I bet a dollar."

The other smiled gravely. "That is right," he said. "Capt. Davenport is my friend and knows what I am; but most English people want me to be some kind of prince from India. I am myself—a Canadian soldier. I don't want to play the monkey. Two-Blanket Sacobie was a big chief, with his salmon spear and sometimes nothing to eat. His squaw chopped the wood and carried the water. I am not a prince, nor I'm not a monkey. I come to the war, and the English people call me rajah; but the Englishman come to our country and hire me for a guide in the woods and call me a nigger. No, I am myself with what good I have in me. I can do to fight the Germans, and that is all I want, Dick. I try to be a gentleman, like Peter and Capt. Davenport, and the King will make me an officer. That is good. I will join the Royal Flying Corps. Then they will name me for what I am by what I do."

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Dick gripped Frank's right hand in a hearty clasp of respect and admiration.

"You're a brick!" he said. "Jack was right when he said you were a deep thinker."

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"I got to think deep—deeper than you," said Frank. "I got to think all for myself, because my fathers didn't think at all."

CHAPTER X DICK OBLIGES HIS FRIEND

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BOTH Hiram Sill and Frank Sacobie completed the cadet course and passed the final examinations. After one last fling at Washington and one more astounding suggestion to the War Office, Mr. Sill went back to France and his battalion and took command of a platoon. Mr. Sacobie transferred, with his new rank, to the Royal Flying Corps and immediately began another course of instruction. His brother officers decided that he was of a family of Italian origin. He did not bother his head about what they thought and applied himself with fervor to mastering the science of flying.

Dick recovered his strength steadily. He saw Davenport frequently and the Kingstons still more frequently. His friendship with the Kingstons—particularly with Kathleen—deepened without a check. No two days ever went by consecutively without his seeing one or another of that family—usually one.

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On a certain Tuesday morning near the end of November he left the hospital at ten o'clock in high spirits. He had that morning discarded his last crutch and now moved along with the help of two big sticks. The dressing on his head was reduced to one thin strip of linen bound smoothly round just above the line of his eyebrows. It showed beneath his cap and gave him somewhat the air of a cheerful brigand. Though his left foot came into contact with the pavement very gingerly, he twirled one of the heavy sticks airily every now and again.

Dick found Jack Davenport in the library. A woman and two little girls were leaving the library as he entered. The woman was poorly dressed, and her eyelids were red from recent tears—but now a look of relief, almost of joy, shone in her eyes. She turned on the threshold.

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"Bill will have more heart now, sir, for the fighting of his troubles and miseries over there," she said. "If I were to stand and talk an hour, sir, I couldn't tell you what's in my heart—but I say again, God bless you for your great kindness!"

She turned again then and passed Dick, and the butler opened the big door and bowed her out of the house with an air of cheery good will.

Capt. Starkley-Davenport sat with his crutch and stick leaning against the table. On the cloth within easy reach his check book lay open before him. He was dressed with his usual completeness of detail and studied simplicity.

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"Have you been boarded yet?" asked Jack.

"To-morrow," replied Dick. "All the M. O.'s are friends of mine, so I expect to wangle back to my battalion in two weeks."

Jack smiled and shook his head. "Your best friend in the world—or the maddest doctor in the army—wouldn't send you back to France on one leg, old son. Six weeks is nearer the mark."

"I can make it in two. You watch me."

"And is it still your old battalion, Dick? I have refrained from worrying you about it this time, because you deserved a rest—but I'm keener than ever to see you in my old outfit; and your third pip is there for you to put up on the very day of your transfer."

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"I've been thinking about it, Jack—and of course I'd like to do it because you want me to. But the colonel wouldn't understand. No one who does not know you would understand. People would think I'd done it for the step, or that I hadn't hit it off, as an officer, with the old crowd. I want to stay, and yet I want to go. I want to fight on, as far as my luck will take me, with the 26th, and yet I'd be proud as a brigadier to sport three pips with your lot. As for doing something that you want me to do—why, to be quite frank with you, there isn't another man in the world I'd sooner please than you. Give me a few months more in which to decide. Give me until my next leave from France."

Dick had become embarrassed toward the end of his speech, and now he looked at Davenport with a red face. The other returned the glance with a flush on his thin cheeks.

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"Bless you, Dick," he said and looked away. "Your next leave from France," he continued. "Six or seven months from now, with luck. They don't give me much more than that." Dick stared at his friend.

"I had to send for an M. O. early this morning," Jack went on in a level voice. "Wilson did it; he heard me fussing about. By seven o'clock there were three of the wisest looking me over—all three familiar with my case ever since I got out of hospital. They can't do anything, for everything that could be removed—German metal—was dug out long ago. A few odds and ends remain, here and there—and one or another of those is bound to get me within ten or twelve months. So it will read in the *Times* as 'Died of wounds,' after all."

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Dick's face turned white. "Are you joking?" he asked.

"Not I, old son," said the captain, smiling. "I have a sense of humor—but it doesn't run quite to that."

"And here you are all dolled up in white spats! Jack, you have a giant's heart! And worrying about me and your regiment! Jack, I'll do it! I'll transfer. I'll put in my application to-day."

"No. I like your suggestion better. Wait till your next leave from France. I have taken a fancy to that idea. You'll come home in six or seven months, and you'll ask me to let you put off your decision until you return again. Of course I shall have to say yes—and, since I am determined to see the Essex badges on you, I'll wait another six or seven months. I am stubborn. Between your indecision and my stubbornness, the chances are that I'll fool the doctors. That would be a joke, if you like!"

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Dick hobbled round the table and grasped Jack's hand.

"Done!" he exclaimed. "I am with you, Jack. We'll play that game for all it is worth. But you didn't seriously believe what the doctors said, did you?"

"Yes, until five minutes ago."

"Two years ago they said you would be right as wheat in six months; and now they say you will be dead in a year. If they think they're prophets—they are clean off their job. Would they bet money on it? I don't think! One year! Fifty years would have sounded almost as knowing and a good sight more likely."

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Dick stayed to luncheon, and he remained at the table after Wilson had taken Jack away to lie down. Wilson came back within fifteen minutes and found the Canadian subaltern where he had left him.

"Sir, I am anxious about Capt. Jack," he said.

"Why do you say that?" asked Dick.

"Sir Peter Bayle and two other medical gentlemen of the highest standing warned him this very morning, sir, that he was only one year more for this world; and now he is singing, sir,—a thing he has not done in months,—and a song which runs, sir, with your permission, 'All the boys and girls I chance to meet say, Who's that coming down the street? Why, it's Milly; she's a daisy'—and so on, sir. I fear his wounds have affected his mind, sir."

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"Wilson, I know that song and approve of it," said Dick. "If Sir Peter Bayle told you, in November, 1916, that you were to die in November, 1917, of wounds received in 1914, should you worry? Nix to that! You would seriously suspect that Sir Peter had his diagnosis of your case mixed up in his high-priced noddle with Buchan's History of the War; and if you are the man I think you are, you, too, would sing."

"I thank you, Mr. Richard. You fill my heart with courage, sir," said Wilson.

Dick reached the Kingston house at four o'clock and was shown as usual into the drawing-room. The ladies were not there, but an officer whom Dick had never seen before stood on the hearthrug with his back to the fire. He wore the crown and star of a lieutenant colonel on his shoulders, a wound stripe on his left sleeve, the red tabs of the general staff on his collar, on his right breast the blue ribbon of the Royal Humane Society's medal and on his left breast the ribbons of the D. S. O., of the Queen's and the King's South African medals, of several Indian medals and of the Legion of Honor. His figure was slight and of little more than the medium height. A monocle without a cord shone in his right eye, and his air was amiable and alert. Dick halted on his two sticks and said, "I beg your pardon, sir."

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The other flashed a smile, advanced quickly and in two motions put Dick into a deep chair and took possession of the sticks. Then he shook the visitor's hand heartily.

"Glad to see you," he said. "There is no mistaking you. You are Kathleen's Canadian subaltern. I am Kathleen's father."

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Dick knew that there were plenty of suitable things to say in reply, but for the life of him he could not think of one of them. So he said nothing, but returned the colonel's smile.

"Don't be bashful, Dick," continued the other. "I was a boy myself not so long ago as you think—but I hadn't seen a shot fired in anger when I was your age. It's amazing. I wonder what weight of metal has gone over your head, not to mention what has hit you and fallen short. Tons and tons, I suppose. It's an astounding war, to my mind. Don't you find it so?"

"Yes, sir," replied Dick.

"And you are right," continued the other. "I wish I were your age, so as to see it more clearly. Stupendous!"

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At that moment Mrs. Kingston and the two girls entered. It had been Dick's and Kathleen's intention to go out to tea; but the colonel upset that plan by saying that he was very anxious to hear Dick talk. So they remained at home for tea—and the colonel did all the talking. Dick agreed with everything he said about the war, however, and then he said that Dick was right—so it really made no difference after all which of them actually said the things.

During the ten days of the colonel's leave he and Dick became firm friends. They knocked about town together every morning, often lunched with Jack Davenport and every afternoon and evening took Mrs. Kingston and the girls out. Dick dined at home with the family on the colonel's last night of leave. After dinner, when the others left the table, the colonel detained Dick with a wink.

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"I won't keep you from Kathleen ten minutes, my boy," he said. "I want to tell you, in case I don't see you again for a long time,—meetings between soldiers are uncertain things, Dick,—that this little affair between you and my daughter has done me good to see. You are both babies, so don't take it too seriously. Take it happily. Whatever may happen in the future, you two children will have something very beautiful and romantic and innocent to look back at in this war. Though you should live to be ninety and marry a girl from Assiniboia, yet you will always remember this old town with pleasure. If, on the other hand, you should continue in your present vein—that is, continue to feel like this after you grow up—that it is absolutely necessary to your happiness to have tea with my daughter every day—well, good luck to you! I can't say more than that, my boy. But in the meantime, be happy."

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Then he shook Dick vigorously by the hand, patted his shoulder and pushed him out of the room.

Dick handled the medical officers so ably that he and his transportation were ready for France

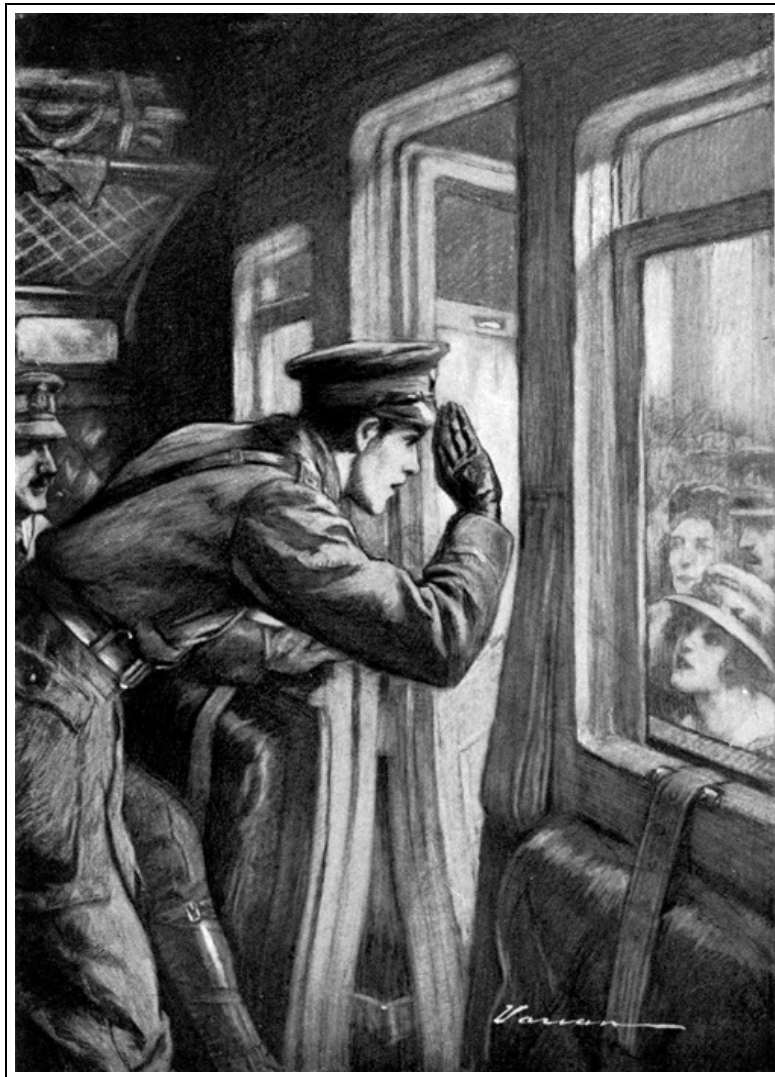
on New Year's Day. The Kingstons saw him off. He found a seat in a first-class compartment and deposited his haversack in it. Then the four stood on the platform and tried in vain to think of something to say. Even Mrs. Kingston was silent. Officers of all ranks of every branch of the service, with their friends and relatives, crowded the long platform. Late arrivals bundled in and out of the carriages, looking for unclaimed seats. Guards looked at their big silver watches and requested the gentlemen to take their seats. Then Mrs. Kingston kissed Dick; then Mary kissed him; and then, lifted to a state of recklessness, he kissed Kathleen on her trembling lips. He saw tears quivering in her eyes.

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"When I come back—next leave—will it be the same?" he asked.

She bowed her head, and the tears spilled over and glistened on her cheeks. Standing in the doorway of the compartment, Dick saluted, then turned, trod on the toes of a sapper major, moved heavily from there to the spurred boots of an artillery colonel and sat down violently and blindly on his lumpy haversack. The five other occupants of the compartment glanced from Dick to the group on the platform.

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**"STANDING IN THE DOORWAY OF THE
COMPARTMENT, DICK SALUTED."**

"We all know it's a rotten war, old son," said the gunner colonel and, stooping, rubbed the toes of his outraged boots with his gloves.

Dick found many old faces replaced by new in the battalion. Enemy snipers, shell fire, sickness and promotion had been at work. Dick acted as assistant adjutant for a couple of weeks and was then posted to a company as second in command and promised his step in rank at the earliest opportunity. In the same company was Lieut. Hiram Sill's platoon. Hiram, busy as ever, had distinguished himself several times since his return and was in a fair way to be recommended for a Military Cross.

The commander of the company was a middle-aged, amiable person who had been worked so hard during the past year that he had nothing left to carry on with except courage. At sight of Dick he rejoiced, for Dick had a big reputation. He took off his boots and belt, retired to his blankets and told his batman to wake him when the war was over. The relief was too much for him; it had come too late. The more he rested the worse he felt, and at last the medical officer sent him out on

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a stretcher. Fever and a general breakdown held him at the base for several weeks, and then he was shipped to Blighty. So Dick got a company and his third star, and no one begrudged him the one or the other.

The Canadian Corps worked all winter in preparation for its great spring task. The Germans fortified and intrenched and mightily garrisoned along all the great ridge of Vimy, harassed the preparing legions with shells and bombs and looked contemptuously out and down upon us from their strong vantage points. Others had failed to wrest Vimy from them. But night and day the Canadians went on with their preparations.

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Word that the United States of America had declared war on Germany reached the toilers before Vimy on April 7; and within the week there came a night of gunfire that rocked the earth and tore the air. With morning the gunfire ceased, only to break forth again in lesser volume as the jumping barrages were laid along the ridge; and then, in a storm of wind and snow, the battalions went over on a five-division front, company after company, wave after wave, riflemen, bombers and Lewis gunners. The Canadians were striking after their winter of drudgery.

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One of our men, a Yankee by birth, went over that morning with a miniature Stars and Stripes tied to his bayonet. We cleared out the Huns and took the ridge; and for days the water that filled the shell holes and mine craters over that ground was red with Canadian blood, and the plank roads were slippery with it from the passing of our wounded.

Dick went through that fight in front of his company and came out of it speechless with exhaustion, but unhit. Hiram Sill survived it with his arm in a sling. Maj. Henry Starkley was wounded again, again not seriously. Maj. Patrick Hammond was killed, and Corp. Jim Hammond was carried back the next day with a torn scalp and a crushed knee.

On the tenth day after that battle Lieut. Hiram Sill and his company commander were the recipients of extraordinary news. Mr. Sill was requested to visit the colonel without loss of time. He turned up within the minute and saluted with his left hand.

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"You are wanted back in the U. S. A., Hiram, for instructional purposes," said the colonel, looking over a mess of papers at his elbow. "You don't have to go if you don't want to. Here it is—and to be made out in triplicate, of course."

Hiram examined the papers.

"And here is something else that will interest you," continued the colonel. "News for you and Dick Starkley. You have your M. C."

Hiram's eyes shone.

"And Dick seems to have hooked the same for his work on the Somme—and I had given up all hope of that coming through. I recommended him for a D. S. O. last week. The way these recommendations for awards are handled beats me. They put them all into a hat and then chuck the hat out of the window, I guess, and whatever recommendations are picked up in the street and returned through the post are approved and acted upon. I know a chap—come back here!"

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Hiram turned at the door of the hut.

"Do you intend to accept that job?"

"Yes, sir."

"You have a choice between going over to the American army with your rank or simply being seconded from the Canadians for that duty. What do you mean to do?"

"Seconded, sir. I am an American citizen clear through, colonel, but I have worn this cut of uniform too long to change it in this war."

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Hiram found Dick in his billet, reading a letter. Dick received the news of the awards and of Hiram's appointment very quietly.

"Jack Davenport has gone west," he said.

Hiram sat down and stared at Dick without a word.

"This letter is from Kathleen," continued Dick. "She says Jack went out on Monday to visit some of the people he helps. He had taken on six more widows and seven more babies since the Vimy show. On his way home toward evening he and Wilson were outside the Blackfriars underground

station, looking for a taxi, when a lorry took a skid fair at an old woman and little boy who were just making the curb. Wilson swears that Jack jumped from the curb as if there were nothing wrong with him, landed fair in front of the lorry, knocked the old woman and kid out from under, but fell before he could get clear himself."

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"Killed?"

"Instantly."

Hiram gazed down at his muddy boots, and Dick continued to regard the letter in his hand.

"Can you beat it?" said Hiram at last.

Dick got up and paced about the little room, busy with his thoughts. Finally he spoke.

"Sacobie is flying, and you are booked for the States, and I am going to transfer to Jack's old lot," he said slowly.

Hiram looked up at him, but did not speak.

"Jack wanted me to," continued Dick. "Well, why not? It's the same old army and the same old war. A fellow should make an effort to oblige a man like Jack—dead or alive." He was silent for several seconds, then went on: "Henry has been offered a staff job in London. Peter is safe. Sacobie has brought down four Boche machines already. What have you heard about Jim Hammond?"

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"It's Blighty for him—and then Canada. He'll never in the world bend that leg again."

For a while Dick continued to pace back and forth across the muddy floor in silence.

"We are scattering, Old Psychology," he said. "This war is a great scatterer—but there are some things it can't touch. You'll be homesick at your new job, Hiram,—and I'll be homesick with the Essex bunch, I suppose,—but there are some things that make it all seem worth the rotten misery of it." He glanced down at Kathleen's letter, then put it into his pocket. "Jack Davenport, for one," he ended.

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"A soldier and a gentlemen," said Hiram.

THE END

Transcriber Notes:

Throughout the dialogues, there were words used to mimic accents of the speakers. Those words were retained as-is.

The illustrations have been moved so that they do not break up paragraphs and so that they are next to the text they illustrate. Thus the page number of the illustration might not match the page number in the List of Illustrations, and the order of illustrations may not be the same in the List of Illustrations and in the book.

Errors in punctuation and inconsistent hyphenation were not corrected unless otherwise noted.

On page 142, "comissions" was replaced with "commissions".

On page 243, "harrassed" was replaced with "harassed".

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE FIGHTING STARKLEYS; OR, THE TEST OF COURAGE ***

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