THE BOY SCOUTS TO THE RESCUE

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They sent the message quickly, accurately.

THE BOY SCOUTS TO THE RESCUE

By
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CHAPTER I
FROM SHELL CRATER TO FIRST AID

There were three figures lying in the bottom of the great shell crater that yawned close to the German line. It had been made by a French shell, so a great mound of dirt had been cast up on the side next the enemy. One of the bodies in the close group lay in the stiff, distorted attitude in which a sudden and horrible death had frozen him. The second lay quite limp, unseeing, uncaring—the attitude of a man desperately hurt. Only the third, rather small and slender, lay curled up

much as a vigilant cat might, trying to give the impression of sleep or death, but with every faculty and nerve like live wires. His eyes were open, and with every ounce of force in him he was listening, plotting and planning.

Under the thick mud the uniforms worn by the different men were indistinguishable. The coating was a thick, slimy, even gray. The figure whose alert, piercing eyes studied his surroundings so carefully shivered steadily. He was chilled to the bone. As it grew darker, he rolled slowly over on his back, and for a while studied the edge of the crater as its rough edges showed dark against the sky. All seemed well. Not a head, not a bayonet, could cut that jagged line without his knowing it. The Huns would not make a sortie now. Exhausted themselves, they were depending on the exhaustion of the French for a short, unspoken truce of a few hours.

The living figure in the crater rolled over and on hands and knees crept to the body nearest him. He felt over it carefully. The face, drained of blood, was ghastly cold in the steady, fine rain that beat on it; but there was life in that still body. If he could only get help!

He laid the head back on its slimy resting place and crawled carefully to the top of the crater next the French trenches. He must get help! Otherwise the Lieutenant would die. The wet ground gave with him, but he persisted and with a mighty effort raised his face over the edge. Then with a stifled cry he dropped back. Another face, dim and strange in the darkness, was there. It met him eye to eye, not three inches from his face.

The cold, drizzling rain fell steadily into the sodden trench chilling the soldiers who crouched and huddled against the streaming sides of the shelter, if shelter it could be called. The trench was very close to the enemy. An almost constant succession of flares sent up by the Germans lit the racked and tattered landscape. In the fitful light it looked unreal, impossible.

Torn fields, shattered trees, ploughed fields everywhere, with yawning shell craters on every side.

The expanse of ground between the lines was made terrible by the shell craters. Day was ending, and in the dim, yellow half light the uneven, edges of the deep and ragged holes threw narrow, black shadows that seemed to gash the riven fields. Above, a couple of French airships circled. The German planes had disappeared, and the Frenchmen flew in widening circles above the enemies' lines. The roar of the guns had diminished to an occasional popping, with once in a while a bellowing roar as some iron giant launched its terrible missile. All day the Huns had hammered at the stubborn line; all day the French, with their American allies, had hammered in return. It had commenced, this big battle, at

daybreak; all day had it raged without lull or pause, now from the trenches, now frightful conflicts in the open. Now, as though both sides acknowledged exhaustion though not defeat, a lull had come. The men in the trenches, almost delirious with fatigue, dropped in the mud and water and slept. Red Cross bearers came splashing along with their burdens. Men wounded to the death whimpered pitifully and babbled of home, or bore their agony in stony silence. Out somewhere in No-Man's-Land, the terrible stretch lying between the two lines, out there in the gathering darkness, a clear, high tenor voice commenced to sing:

"We're going home, we're going home,
We're going home to-morrow."

Clear and sweet the voice sounded. Another flare went up; then a German gun commenced to drop shells in the direction of the voice. It was as though they would gladly waste a dozen shells on the chance of stilling that sweet singer. The voice went on, growing gradually weaker, but lifting true, sweet notes until there came a little break and—stillness. A last venomous shot whined toward the spot where the singer lay, his young voice hushed forever.

The darkness deepened, and the flares, increasing in number, gave the place an unreal, ghastly light, like some gigantic and unending nightmare. Something that could not be possible, *must* not be possible, but which was to go on and on and on endlessly, relentlessly.

At last it was black night.

A sergeant made his way along the trench, slipping and sliding through the mud and ooze. He gave commands in muffled whispers, and a number of the exhausted men turned and followed him when he returned to the outlet of the trench. Lying so close to the border of No-Man's-Land, across which it was possible for an occasional spy to invade their trench, the greatest care was taken in every possible way to discover and check such invasion. When there was no firing to cover the sound, the men talked in whispers when they talked at all, which was seldom. The bitter business of war had seemed to strip from them all desire to talk.

They were moving stealthily along when a slight figure bounded into the trench and slid and tumbled to the bottom. He hurried back and forth the length of the trench, then plunged like a human ferret into the small, twisted tunnel that led down and down twenty feet or more underground to the rest house, a scooped-out chamber of clay where there was actual safety unless—unless the tunnel caved! Looking in on the group of wounded and exhausted men who occupied the space, he spoke a name. No one answered. The men paid no attention.

They were wholly wrapped up in their own misery. He climbed once more into the trench, then, glancing round to see if he was observed, he scrambled lightly up the side and in another moment was over the top and, flat on the ground, was wriggling a cautious, snake-like way across the horrors of No-Man's-Land.

His heart beat heavily; it seemed as though it could be heard twenty feet away. He was bent on a fearful and almost impossible errand; an errand that might cost him his life. And life was sweet to the boy who proceeded to work his way across the terrible stretch of No-Man's-Land.

He had no reason for going, no plan; simply something told him the direction to take in his strange quest. Every time a flare burst against the murky sky he dropped flat on his face and, assuming some strained, distorted position, lay motionless until the light died out once more. This happened every two minutes or so. It took endless patience to work his way forward. He was impelled to hurry, to take the chance of continuing his course even under the bright light of the flares. But he knew that it would be death to him and possible death to the one he sought. As he wormed his way forward he turned slowly to the right. Stronger and stronger he felt the strange certainty that never failed to tell him that he was right. He was approaching the person whom he sought.

The feeling of coming success buoyed him and gave him courage. He scarcely dared to breathe. Slower and slower he crawled, worming his way along, over and around the horrors in his path. The moments seemed like hours, the hours like days. Finally he came to a huge shell crater. He approached its edge and looked over as a flare, brighter than usual, lit the desolation of No-Man's-Land. And as he looked, a face, mud covered, bruised yet familiar, looked into his. So close were the two faces that they nearly touched. Just for an instant the face in the deep ditch drew back; then two voices, whispering in a low tone, said, "Hello!"

The fellow in the crater sagged wearily against the steep incline of the side of the pit. He looked at the other and sighed a sigh of unutterable relief.

"Gee, I thought you would never come!" he said in a low tone.

"Keep still!" whispered the other, taking the boy below him by the collar and scarcely breathing the words aloud. "Are you hurt?"

"Not a scratch!"

"Well, take a hand and come along out. This is no place for us; and you have some tall explaining to do to the General!"

"We have to take the Lieutenant with us," said the boy in the crater.

"What Lieutenant?" demanded the other.

"Lieutenant Bogardus. The General sent me after him. That's why I am here."

"What ails him?" demanded the boy on the ledge.

"All shot up," said the other. "Darned if I know how badly. He is unconscious but was alive the last time I felt of him."

The boy on top turned cautiously around and slid, feet first, into the slippery, oozy pit. He followed to the side of the unconscious man, and as the next flare illumined the sky he ran a hand delicately over the tattered body. He shook his head.

"Not much hope, I should say," he whispered.

"It doesn't matter," declared the other; "we have got to get him back to our lines."

"All right!" said the other.

Together they lifted and pulled the limp body to the level of the ground, and then as carefully as they could they lifted it and, stumbling and swaying and falling, they made their way back. They could not wait for caution; the flares went up unheeded. A sharpshooter near the enemy's line discovered the strange, shambling group and commenced peppering at it as each flare brought them into view. The bullets whined over and around them. One cut its way through the sleeve of one boy, but did not touch the skin beneath. They felt no fear. The man whom they were carrying was thin and rather small, but his limp body weighed cruelly on their young muscles. With set teeth and streaming faces they kept on in their flight. At last when their breath cut them like knives and their knees almost refused to support them, they reached the safety of their own line and, laying their burden down on the edge of the trench, they slipped down and in a moment were surrounded by helpers. The wounded man was hustled into the nearest shelter and given first aid, while a quick little corporal scrambled off and was back almost at once with stretcher bearers and a canvas litter. The two boys accompanied the wounded man back to the First Aid Station, an underground, roughly boarded chamber where desperate looking men worked silently at their task of keeping life in the tattered forms brought in to them.

While they labored over the still form just brought in, the boys dropped wearily down on the wet ground outside the first aid room, and looked at each other.

A pale glow from the first aid room below them shone upward on their white faces. They were caked with mud and grime but even through that mask a marvelous resemblance could be seen. Feature for feature, line for line, they were alike. Even their gestures were alike. As they sat staring at each other, they looked like some queer, repeated design; a double boy smirched and hollow-eyed.

They stared steadily at each other, then the boy on the ledge cleared his throat and spoke, still in the guardedly low tone that gets to be a habit with the men in the trenches.

"Well, Porky, old sport," he said, affectionately patting the other's soggy

knee, "you gave me a nice little old jolt this time for fair! How in the name of time did you get out there in that shell crater? Gosh, if it wasn't for my hunches I dunno where you would be when you pull off these stunts!"

"What's the matter with *my* hunches?" demanded the boy called Porky. "I don't see but what I have about as many as you have. I was waitin' for you. Knew you would hunt me up if I gave you time."

"Gave me *time*!" exclaimed the boy addressed. "Gave me *time*! I hustled out there as soon as I commenced to feel you wanted me. Honest, I don't see how people who are not twins ever get along. But I tell you they are laying for you at headquarters. The General is mad; just plain honest-to-goodness mad at you. I don't see why you had to pull off this and get us in all wrong." He leaned forward and whispered. "There is something doing up there—something big; and I think we are in on it. I don't know just how, but I heard enough to let me know that much. Perhaps you have queered it by cutting up this caper. Honest, Porky, what possessed you?"

"Possessed me?" exploded Porky. "Possessed me! Why, all I did was what I was *told* to do!"

"According to the General, you were sent on an errand that should have taken you half an hour. Instead you stay all day and I have to come dig you out of a shell crater about fifty feet from the German line. That's a peach of a way to do!"

"Say, hold up a minute!" said Porky. "Just you hold on! Of course I was sent on an errand! Know what it was? I was told to go get Lieutenant Bogardus and fetch him over to the General's headquarters. Well, I'm bringing him, ain't I? I have got him this far, anyhow. I am doing the best I can. I wish you could have seen me chasing that loon all over the place. I'm all in! I tell you, Beany, I have had some time! It makes me sore, too. I might have brought in a prisoner all by myself if I hadn't had to fool with the Lieutenant. Go down and see what they are doing, will you, please? I'm dog tired, and I've got to get a move on and report to the General as soon as I know whether Bogardus can go along up there with me. I bet he can't; and I was told to bring him back with me!"

He leaned back and shut his eyes while Beany slid down to the first aid room. A glance showed him the condition of the unfortunate Lieutenant, and he hurried back to his brother.

"He won't go anywhere with you *this* evening," he said with the unconcern of those who are used to terrible scenes and fearful wounds.

"Let's get on, then," said his brother, rising stiffly and moving off in the darkness.

The other followed, and without further conversation they wound their way through the ruined streets of a devastated village where unsightly heaps

of stones and mortar marked the site of pleasant homes. Stumbling along over the shell-ploughed, uneven ground, they walked for perhaps a mile until they turned into what had been a magnificent private estate. Nothing but cracked and crumbling posts were left of the splendid gateway. They passed onward through the ruins of a wonderful old park where they were twice stopped by vigilant sentries who demanded the countersign and turned a flashlight on their muddy faces. Turning and twisting, they followed the path up to the ruined castle which stood on a little rise of ground.

At the door, a high carved portal hanging and swaying on one hinge, they were stopped by another soldier, who recognized them, saluted, and stepped aside. They were not delayed again. Through what had once been a magnificent entrance hall they went, turned down one passage after another, sometimes finding themselves in unroofed and utterly wrecked portions of the great building. At last they were in a narrow, covered hallway, at the end of which was a door.

The hall was quite dark; they could just see to make their way along. As they approached the door at the end, the form of a man stooping against the panels slipped aside and seemed to disappear into space. There was no turn, no further passage down which he could have gone. One moment he was outlined against the white surface; the next he had vanished.

The boys stopped involuntarily and turned to each other.

"Did you see that?" said Porky. "Or am I getting batty?"

"Where did he go!" said Beany quickly for answer.

They slowly approached the door. There was a little L in the passage at the end but no outlet, no doorway. The walls, heavily faced with ancient oak, had no opening.

"What was he doing?" said Porky.

"Listening, I should say," said his brother.

They looked the door over carefully, and listened with keen ears pressed against it. Not a murmur could be heard through its heavy surface. It was queer. Behind that door was the council room and private office of General Pershing. No one without proper credentials was ever allowed to enter the passageway leading to it. Yet both boys had seen the stooping figure, and both boys had seen it apparently vanish into space.

"Come on in," said Porky at last. "I have got to make my report."

"You go on," said Beany. "I don't have to report anything, and I want to look into this a little. It looks mighty queer to me. Where do you suppose that guy went?"

"Search me!" said Porky. "I know where *this* guy will go if I don't get on something dry and have a chance for a little sleep. Go ahead, prowl around and

see what you can find."

He knocked, using a peculiar shuffling rap on the white panel. The door was instantly opened by a soldier and Porky stepped into the presence of the Commanding General.

CHAPTER II
THE PANEL IN THE WALL

A pair of piercing yet kindly eyes were fixed on Porky as he came to attention and awaited permission to approach the huge table at which sat General Pershing and several members of his staff. Porky was conscious of something serious in the air. The faces that looked up as he entered were serious, and some of them frowning. Colonel Bright threw him a glance, then continued his restless tramp up and down the further end of the large apartment. Only General Pershing seemed wholly at ease. He beckoned the boy. Porky came and stood opposite the General, the width of the table between them.

"Your report," said the General.

Porky breathed more freely. He was to be given a chance to explain his tardy arrival, at least, before being reprimanded.

"I report, sir, that I brought Lieutenant Bogardus as far as the First Aid Station in trench D," he said. "He is unconscious and could not come here. They think he will not die."

"He is unconscious," repeated the General, while Colonel Bright stopped his steady stride and stared at the boy.

"Yes, sir," said Beany.

"Did you find him at the wireless station?" asked the General.

"No, sir," said Porky.

"Where then?" snapped the officer with seeming impatience.

"In a shell crater, sir, just outside the German lines," said the boy.

The General started to his feet, then settled back in his chair.

"Make your report," he said quietly. "Make it unofficially, in your own way. I can follow it better."

"Yes, sir," said Porky, saluting again. He was so tired that he swayed, and involuntarily he caught at the edge of the table. The keen eyes watching him noticed.

"A chair!" he demanded, and some one shoved a seat toward Porky, who gratefully sank into it. He passed a weary, shaking hand across his brow.

"It is a pity to make you tell your story now," said the General kindly. "I am sorry. When you have finished you shall have a rest for a few days. But time means everything just now."

"I don't mind, sir," said Porky. Some one offered him a cup of hot tea and he drank it greedily. It revived him.

"I'm awfully obliged, General, sir," he said gratefully. "I guess I can tell the story clearer if I tell it sort of plain and fast.

"I went away from here, and went straight to the wireless station where you told me. I found the men all working over the instrument. One of the pins had come loose and had fallen out. They couldn't find it anywhere, and they were having a great fuss.

"The planes were trying to communicate with them, and signaling them to answer. One plane came so low we could see that they were crazy to say something. We didn't find out what they wanted, at least I didn't, because I started on after Lieutenant Bogardus. He had left the station just before I got there. I kept after him all afternoon. It seemed like every place he went, I got there just after he had gone on. He had that bunch of papers you gave him, General, and was leaving them all around at the different sectors and with the different officers you had had them addressed to. He certainly was a busy chap. I never *could* catch up with him. I guess I walked a million miles. It was fierce, too. Wherever I went, I found trouble. Just one of those days, you know, General."

"I know," said the General, smiling strangely.

"Well, sir, just before dark I was up in that opening between the trenches, just beyond the next village, you know, where the church used to stand. Somebody had told me that Lieutenant Bogardus had been seen walking that way, and it struck me that perhaps he had a few hours' leave, and was just roaming around for a rest. But I knew I had to collar him, so I went on looking, and pretty soon I saw somebody way ahead sort of going along among the tree trunks, as though he didn't care much to see anybody. He had on our uniform, and I had a hunch it was Lieutenant Bogardus. So I followed.

"He went on to a rise of ground, and before I could get close enough to see who it was, he whipped out a little bit of a pistol that made a funny little pop when it went off, and he shot it off; all the shots it held, I guess. He made a sort of code of it like a telegraph. Right off there was a couple of little pops in the same sort of voice, from over by the Germans. I thought it came from a tree over there. Anyhow, the man I was following looked around, didn't see anybody, and started right across in the open. Well, sir, that was pretty queer, it seemed to me! *Some* one in our uniform walking around out there and it made

me forget all about Lieutenant Bogardus, and I commenced to follow. Only I got down and crawled. It was getting darker, but I could see perfectly plain. Then I guess somebody saw us, or a plane reported, or something. Anyhow, all at once both sides commenced to shoot. Well I thought I was a gone goose, sir. They hit everything but me, I should say. Then the Germans commenced to throw smoke bombs, and I nearly lost my man. But I hurried and most caught up to him, when I saw a German captain come sneaking along, and I guessed I would wait before I spoke to Lieutenant Bogardus, if it *was* him. Of course I was sure I was on the wrong trail by this time, but I thought as long as I was there I had better see what was doing, and look for Lieutenant Bogardus when I got back. I knew something pretty important was up, because those men wouldn't risk moseying around right in daylight almost. Gee, I didn't feel as big as anything!

"And in a minute I felt smaller than ever because a shell the size of a church came along from our lines, and *bing*! I was all dirt, and cut up with little stones, and when I could look around, there ahead was a big shell crater. I ran over and looked in. There was a bayonet lying there right on the edge, and I grabbed it. I don't know why, except you know how you feel about having a stick or something to hold and I was pretty glad I did afterwards. The man I had followed was lying there in the shell crater, on his back. I could see he was hurt pretty bad. A flare went up, and I saw it was Bogardus. He looked pretty bad. But what got my alleys, General, was that the German was beside him, and he was going through his pockets just like lightning. The German had a broken leg himself, but I didn't know that. Well, I let out a yell that was some yell, and I jumped down, bayonet and all, right on the German's neck. I was so mad I didn't think what I did. And I guess I sort of twisted his neck or something, because he crumpled right up, and I thought I had killed him. So I tried to straighten Bogardus out, and I put the papers that the Germ had back in his pocket, and what to do next I didn't know.

"And all at once I felt something behind me, and it was the other man. He had come to, and was trying to get his revolver out of his pocket. Gee, he looked at me ugly! I said as polite as I could, 'You cut that out!' but he got it loose, and shot at me, and he just *did* miss me and that was all. And then he tried again, and I had to do something quick, so I just took that bayonet—just took that bayonet—"

"All right," said the General. "All in the day's work, my boy. Go on!"

Porky swallowed hard a couple of times.

"Well, sir, there I was with Bogardus, and your orders to have him report to you; and he was not in any condition to report to *anybody*. So I had to wait until my brother could come and help me."

"How did he know where you were?" demanded the General in astonishment.

"He always knows," said Porky. "We are twins, and we always know when the other is in trouble of any sort. So I knew he would find me, and I just sat tight, and I did get a little worried, but I knew he would come, and he did."

Porky chuckled.

"And when he looked at me over the edge of that crater, I most threw a fit. I was looking for him so hard that it scared me when I saw him. Anyhow, there he was, and it was dark pretty soon, and we brought Bogardus back."

"You carried him?" asked the General.

"Yes, sir. He is pretty thin," said Porky simply.

"What became of the German?" asked the General.

"Back there in the shell crater," said Porky, frowning.

"I wonder if he had any valuable papers on him," mused the General.

"I don't know, sir," said Porky, beginning to fish in his pockets. "I thought of that, so I just went through him and took everything he had." He commenced to lay things out on the table in little piles. The men watched him with interest.

The collection was well worth while. Several official letters, some maps, a number of orders, and some codes. There was also a packet of blank paper that Porky put carefully aside. The General leaned over and picked it up.

"Nothing here," he said, tossing it down.

Porky picked it up.

"I don't know, sir," he said. "We had something like this at home awhile ago. We came near missing out on it, too. If you will excuse me!"

He leaned over and held the first page near the heat of the candle. On the instant the sheet was covered with fine writing.

The General gave a muttered exclamation and leaned back in his chair. "What next?" he demanded.

"That's about all," said Porky. "Bogardus is in hospital by now, I suppose, and I'm sorry it took me so long. I certainly did seem to miss him all around. I'm real sorry, sir. Next time you give me anything to do, I will try to do better."

"That would be impossible," said the General. "Just a moment, my boy, while I make a note or two, and then you can be relieved from all duty for forty-eight hours. You have earned a rest. We will have to go through these papers and plans carefully before we can decide anything for your future reference. Just sit there while I write."

He turned to his desk and, pulling a sheet of paper toward him, commenced covering it with his strong, distinctive handwriting. Porky, in the big chair opposite, watched him for a little, then he rested his head on his hand and commenced to think of all the events of the long, gruelling, wearisome day.

And presently he did not think at all; just listened to the steady scratch, scratch, scratch of the General's pen and the steady tramp, tramp, tramp of the

Colonel as he softly paced up and down the length of the somber room. And presently that sound died away. Porky was asleep.

Beany, left to himself in the hall, went cautiously and with noiseless touch over every portion of the oak paneling. He could not find a joint or crack that looked like a secret door or hidden entrance. Then he examined the floor. It too appeared solid. But Beany had one of his hunches. It *looked* solid but he felt that it *wasn't* solid. The man he had seen was not a ghost. He was certainly too solid to disappear into thin air. He had come from somewhere, and he had gone somewhere. Benny made up his mind that he would find out if it took all night. He stood thinking. Then he whistled in an offhand manner, and walked loudly down the hall to the turn. Round the turn he went, until well out of sight. Then Beany tried a trick of his boyhood days. He knew from experience that any one watching for any one else always fixes his eyes about where they expect to see the face appear, never lower than that.

So Beany, dropping flat on the floor, worked his way back to the corner, flattened himself out to his flattest, and with face against the tiles waited patiently, his eyes fixed on the distant doorway. The hallway was lighted with a small and feeble kerosene lamp set high on a bracket. It gave a dim light, but Beany could see the door distinctly and the high wainscot on either side.

He stared at it steadily—so steadily and so long that when at last a narrow panel in the woodwork slid noiselessly over and a face looked out into the hall, Beany did not start; he did not feel surprised. All he was conscious of was a sort of triumph. He wanted to sing out for his own benefit, "I told you so."

The face staring from the panel looked straight down the hall, as Beany had known it would. A pair of bright, ferrety eyes stared at the turn, but not once did they drop to the floor where Beany's bright eyes watched every move. Beany had to smile, it was so funny. The unknown person leaned from the panel and watched four feet above Beany's face, while in plain sight on the floor Beany lay motionless and unnoticed.

He watched while the person (he could not tell at first whether it was a man or woman) looked and listened. Then as if assured that the coast was clear, the man, (for it was a man), stepped out of the dark slit in the wall, carefully closed the panel, and once more stood listening at the door. He listened intently, then stooped, and bending in a comfortable position on one knee, looked fixedly through the great old-fashioned keyhole.

Beany watched breathlessly.

For a long time—it seemed days to Beany—the man held his stooping position. Beany wished he too could see what was going on inside that door. He was sure, however, that it was nothing more exciting than Porky's account of his chase after Bogardus; and as Porky was an aggravatingly low talker, he was

pretty sure the man at the keyhole would not be able to hear very much. Just the same, Beany knew that here was something serious and threatening. The man listened and looked so intently that Beany seriously thought of trying to creep up behind him, give the alarm, grab him and hang on, trusting to luck that the door would be opened soon enough to prevent the man from killing him. It was a crazy idea and Beany banished it. It was well that he did, for at that moment the panel, which had been left partly opened, slid wide and a second man appeared. He was a tall man, apparently in uniform. What his uniform was, Beany could not see. It was closely covered with a long, closely-buttoned linen coat and a non-descript cap covered his head. He tapped the man at the keyhole sharply, and the fellow straightened to a stiff salute. Beany could not help admiring their utter coolness in the face of discovery. At any moment the door might open; at any moment some one might come down the hall. Of course in that case, reflected our self-appointed sleuth, they would walk over his legs, and stop to make a fuss, during which the two men would pop into the wall again.

Then while Beany watched, there followed a violent, soundless discussion between the two. One and then the other stooped to the keyhole. Then the second man noiselessly stepped back into the hole in the wall and closed the panel after him.

By this time Beany was so excited that he had no conception of time. It seemed a long while before he saw the man at the door turn his head and look at the panel. Then at last Beany saw what he so wanted to see—the secret of its opening. The man's hand sought something in the upper left corner, Beany could not see in the poor light just what it was, but the man pressed hard, swinging considerable weight against it, and the panel slid smoothly back. Another figure appeared. It was a little, stooped woman. She had a worn broom in her hands.

Beany recognized her at once as the deaf and dumb peasant woman who pottered around the offices brushing up and doing what odd jobs they could make her understand about.

At the present moment, however, she was anything but deaf and dumb. She seized the man at the door by the shoulder and shook him violently, whispering a stream of comment in his ear. She waved her broom threateningly, with an eye on the door meanwhile. Beany wondered what she would do if any one *did* come out.

He felt sure she would manage to carry off the situation.

Whatever she said was badly received by the man. He pulled back and shook his head violently. She stamped her old foot noiselessly. He still rebelled, but she insisted in a continuous rush of whispered words, while Beany felt his mouth sag open and his eyes bulge with amazement. Even in the midst of his surprise he could not help wondering just what personal remarks he and Porky

had made about her on a dozen different occasions in the few weeks that they had been there. However, there was *one* happy thought. He and his brother had spoken in English, a tongue that must as a matter of course have meant nothing to her ignorant old ears.

Beany was not to learn for a long while that the old, stooped, ugly peasant, looking so typically French and so pitifully silent and stupid, had once been a famous German actress, as well as one of the most brilliantly educated women of her time. Once there had been a day when her parlors in Berlin had been filled with the most renowned and high-born men and women in the world. Not only members of the highest circles of Germany, but representatives from every other country. To be asked to the home of Madame Z—— was the dream of every young diplomat, writer, artist and court favorite.

Yet now, perfectly disguised, stooped, bent, and old, clad in rags, she stood clutching in one hand a coarse home-made broom, while with the other she kept a tight grip on the shoulder of the rebellious man beside her.

At last he nodded, and she turned and shoved him before her into the passage in the wall, following close behind and closing the panel.

Beany was alone.

He leaped to his feet and tiptoed down to the door, a cautious eye on the panel. He lifted a hand to knock on the door, then paused, and in his turn applied an eye to the keyhole. It was a huge old keyhole, made in the days when keys were large enough to almost take the places of trench billies. He could see most of the room. The General sat writing at the desk. Across in an armchair Porky leaned on the table, sound asleep. There had been nothing for the spies to see this time, at any rate. Then a wild thought came into Beany's head.

He did not wait to consider it. It was a crazy thought, but to Beany in his excited state it was a sane idea.

He approached the panel, felt carefully in the upper corner, pressed a dozen carvings and then, just as he despaired, felt the heavy wood give under his touch. He pushed the trap open and without a moment's hesitation entered and closed the door behind him.

The passage was pitch dark.

CHAPTER III
MARKING TIME

Sitting at his great carved table, once part of the fittings of a glorious old library and now a desk littered with official papers and maps, in the room of one of the greatest commanders in the world, the General finished the paper he was filling out with so much care, and lifted his eyes to the boy sitting so silently across the table. Then a smile lighted the General's tired eyes.

"Asleep!" he said. "Brave lad, he is worn out! Can't we manage to get him off to bed without waking him?"

He pointed to a room opening off the one they were in. "There is an extra cot in my room," said the General. "A couple of you take him in there." He beckoned his orderly. '"Get him undressed and cover him well. Let him sleep as long as he may."

So it came about that this was done; and in the General's own room, Porky, like the healthy boy that he was, slept and slept and slept. He did not dream of the past hard hours. He did not think of home, the pleasant house so far away where the dear father and mother, Mr. and Mrs. Potter, lived their busy, helpful lives, trying not to let each other know just how they longed for the two splendid boys they had given to their country. But like others who had given their all, each knew just how the other felt, and so tried by countless little unaccustomed acts of tenderness to help each other along. Nor did Porky dream of the other boys, or the famous swimming hole. There were no nightmares of school; no visions of Professor Wilcox bearing a sheaf of examination papers. Porky just slept and slept!

Night passed, breaking into such a wild and storm-tossed morning that it was scarcely light at all. There was a lull in the fighting that day and, except for the sound of distant guns booming at close intervals, the place was silent enough. The office work went on quietly. A couple of typewriters clacked busily. It might almost have been an office on Broadway. The General sat long at his desk, then mounted and rode off, accompanied by his orderlies.

Colonel Bright, after scribbling a note which he addressed to "the Potter boys" and left on the desk, also took his horse and went clattering away toward Paris.

Noon came. Still Porky slept, but at about two o'clock he was awakened by the most faithful of all the alarm clocks that a boy can have. He was hungry, he was frightfully hungry, and his eyes came open with a pop as he rose to his elbow and tried to place himself.

When he recognized his surroundings, he bounded to his feet in a moment, and after some prodigious stretching, hurried into his clothes, which he found nicely dried and on a stool by his cot. There was a table by the cot, and on it a good breakfast; cold, of course, but it was food, and there was plenty of it. What more can a fellow ask?

When he went out into the office expecting to find the group he had left the night before, there were only a couple of Captains, strangers to him, officers who had just been transferred. Porky, found the note from Colonel Bright.

It said simply:

"*Boys*:

"General Pershing has gone away for a conference. I am off on almost the same errand, in another direction. When you wake up, Porky, you are to do as you like for forty-eight hours. It is a leave given you on account of your good work yesterday. I have not seen Beany at all to-day. I enclose a pass that will take you wherever you want to go within the lines. Don't go to the outer trenches. Better take time to write some letters home. We are in for some hot work here. I don't mind telling you that there is a leak somewhere. Keep your eyes and ears open.

"**Your friend**, "COLONEL BRIGHT."

Porky folded the note and put it deep down in his pocket. Then he turned to look at the two officers. One of them was running the typewriter like a veteran; the other, with a puckered brow, was stabbing the keys with his middle fingers. He was making awful work of it.

Porky watched him for a while, then he went over and saluted.

"I would be glad to write to your dictation, sir," he said. "That is, if it is nothing personal."

"Well, I should say not!" said the officer. "I am Captain Dowd, and this is a letter to a military journal back home. They wrote me some time ago for some dope, and I jotted down something then. It is on scraps of paper, and they couldn't read it as it is now written. I wanted to put it in shape, and then add something of our later experiences. Do you think you can do it, and do you want to take the trouble?"

"Yes, sir," said Porky heartily. "I just woke up, and there is nothing for me to do until my brother blows in. There is no use for me to go after him, because he knows where I am. I can write it for you in no time."

"That's fine!" said the Captain in a relieved tone. "At the rate I can work that old machine, the war will be over about the time I finish; and that's not hurrying the war any too much either. I have a page done. You may go on from where I left off if you will."

Porky sat down and the Captain drew up a chair, and lighted a cigarette while he scanned the soiled, ragged sheets of paper in his hand.

"Here we are," he said. "Fire away!"

"We are now getting the finishing touches to our training, and you can rest assured that it is of the most finished description, and we are ready to get into the big fight at any time. Our regiment, one of the first over, was inspected by General Pershing the other day, and we feel that he was fully satisfied with it. We have been told so at any rate. Our regiment has learned the French open order drills which is by sections instead of squads. We have also had any amount of rifle shooting and certainly know how to shoot. Then, besides, we have had practice in throwing live hand-grenades until our arms ached, but the use of this deadly bomb is of the utmost importance for close fighting as one grenade properly thrown among the enemy is liable to wipe out a hundred men. Besides this, we have been taught to shoot hand-grenades and automatic rifles, and do about everything that is infernal in warfare. Our regiment and many of the others have all been supplied with steel helmets, which have been dubbed 'tin lizzies.' They are not so very comfortable to wear, but they have proved extremely valuable, just the same, and have saved many lives and more bad head wounds.

"We understand that the gas we are to greet the Germans with is a better article than their own. We surely do hope it is. We have had trench work galore, with dugouts and wire entanglements, some of them close on the enemy's front, and others in our own training area. We have marched about ten miles to the trenches, relieving other battalions about three A.M. and holding the trench until about six P.M. next day. At that time we are relieved by another battalion and get back to our billet about ten P.M. and by that time, what with trench work and the tramp of twenty miles, oh how precious we do find sleep!

"When we are within our training area, we do everything exactly as it is done on the firing line, including the guard work, which is divided into two reliefs, and everybody turns out at dawn, which is the usual time the enemy makes his raids, and we must be on the alert.

"We have had long marches, battalion, regimental and divisional maneuvers, and we always march with full pack and a gas mask slung over each shoulder."

The Captain laid down his papers and rolled another cigarette. Porky rested his hands on the desk.

"They have some new kind of mask, haven't they?" he asked.

"Yes; haven't you seen them!" asked the Captain.

"No, sir," said Porky. "I just heard them talking about them."

"They are similar to the old ones, but I believe they last longer," said the Captain. "They have a filter can for the air that is strapped at your belt Then

there is the usual tube to your mouth. There is a rubber cap that sets over the front teeth and fits close to the gums, with little rubber dew hickeys to bite on so you won't lose it out. There are automatic rubber lips that close tight if you try to breathe in any outside air, but open for the air from the filter can."

Once more he picked up his papers.

"Our gas masks and our rifles we consider our best friends and never lose them.

"Perhaps some data regarding the numerous details of the military life we have to meet here may be of interest, and I will give you some of it.

"Stringent orders have been given to all organization commanders that they will be held strictly responsible for any dirty or rusty arms and equipment found among their men, and they must also see that their men are clean-shaven and that their billets are clean and orderly.

"A number of men who have disregarded orders have been seriously injured while riding on the top of cars. The French tunnels are very low, and the men have been knocked off. Other men, through carelessness, have fallen out of the cars. The failure to assemble organizations at the time set before the departure of trains has resulted in the leaving of a number of men behind, and the provost guards have had the job of rounding the men up and forwarding them to their command.

"Even in France the destination of the detachment must be kept absolutely secret throughout the journey. No matter how long or how short the journey turns out to be, the preparations are the same. Organizations must entrain with two days' field rations on the person of each man, two days' travel rations for each man in the car with men, and ten days' field rations in the baggage car.

"The field train of the organization entraining, must accompany it, with all its wagons loaded for the field, especially with the cooking utensils, water cans, paulins, three days' field rations for each man, together with two days' field rations for each animal.

"The French town major points out the training area and no other area can be used. Distances to other posts will generally be found on posts on the side of the road, shown in kilometers. A kilometer is five-eighths of a mile.

"All time commences at naught, and ends at twenty-four. Thus, for instance six P.M. would be eighteen."

"That's what gets my goat!" said Porky, stopping to fix the ribbon. "It does make the longest day, even after you get the hang of things, so you know whether you are in to-day, or some time next week."

"It would seem something that way," said the Captain, laughing. He continued to read from his paper.

"All troops proceeding to the front will have issued to them a small quantity

of firewood with which to cook one meal on detraining. In the area of concentration a supply train will be forwarded each day to the rail head, from which supplies will be carried to the troops by the wagons of the train. All arrangements for the movements of troops and supplies by rail are made by the railway transport officer at the base port."

"Gee, some busy officer!" commented Porky.

"I'll say so," said the Captain, and went on reading.

"French military trains are made up as follows: One passenger car (first- or second-class, or mixed), thirty box cars, or third-class cars; seventeen flat or gondola cars; two caboose; total, fifty. Third-class cars are not provided for troops. They will carry eight men to a compartment. Box cars are usually provided for the troops. They will hold from thirty-two to forty men. Sometimes seats are provided, sometimes straw to lie on. Spaces at each end of the car are to be left clear for rifles, travel rations, and accouterments, the rifles being secured by a temporary rack made with screw rings and a strap for same. The horse cars hold eight horses in two rows of four, facing each other. The central space between doors is used for saddles and harness, forage, water cans and buckets, as well as the two men who travel in each car. Flat cars usually accommodate one, but sometimes two, wagons."

The Captain folded up the paper.

"Is that all?" asked Porky. "It sounds mighty interesting."

"I would like to add something more, if you don't mind writing it," said, the Captain.

"Of course not," said Porky. "I'm mighty glad to do it."

"Thanks," said the Captain. "It is certainly a relief to me." He leaned back in his chair, stared up at the ceiling, and commenced to dictate.

"The pages sent under this cover were jotted down by me some time ago. I can not give you the exact date, and up to the present time have not had the opportunity to put my notes in readable order or to get them mailed. We are now doing very interesting work at the front, living underground. We have very comfortable and well ventilated quarters, and are sleeping in bunks, on clean bed sacks filled with clean straw. The only objection is the rats, of which there are great numbers, but we have a cat and two dogs. The cat is a crackajack. I don't know how many rats he averages a day—would be afraid to say, in fact—but he is on the job all the time, and is wearing himself thin over it. The two dogs, small and of no known breed, run the cat a close second.

"I have never seen the boys happier than they are now. They feel as if they were really doing something worth while. I have heard the German shells and have seen German territory, and it certainly puts pep into a fellow, but as yet I can't say I've been scared.

”This place has seen some very heavy fighting, and the ground is covered with all sorts of debris. For many square miles there is not a single tree to be seen which has not been hit and killed. The ground is torn up to such an extent that there is no grass to be seen, and the only way I can describe it is to say that it looks like the ocean on a very rough day. The shell holes run into each other, and are often ten or twelve feet deep and thirty feet across. This place, which was once a French village, has been taken from the Germans, and the ground is covered with unexploded shells, hand-grenades, German helmets, old rifles, and all sorts of things that would make wonderful souvenirs if we could only get them home. In every little village around here, there is not a house or tree standing. I am writing in a room in the wing of what was once a magnificent old castle. It was evidently saved from destruction by the Germans, who wished it for the accommodation of their higher officers. We are using it for that same purpose.

”One of the most interesting things here is to watch the airplanes, both ours and the Germans. They are very hard to hit, and they usually don't pay much attention to the firing, but we watch the little bursts of white smoke from the French shells, and the black smoke from the Germans. I have often seen twenty-five or thirty little puffs of smoke at the same time around one machine, but have never seen one hit. The other day a German came over in a cloud while other German planes attracted the attention of our guns.

”He went right up to one of our observation balloons and fired his machine gun into the balloon, setting it on fire. The two men, an American and a Frenchman, came down in a parachute. They said they didn't mind it. Perhaps they didn't, but both were about as pale as they could be. I watched the whole performance. To-day we sent up another observation balloon with exactly the same result, except that the balloon didn't burn, but both men jumped out, coming down in two parachutes.

”It was exciting and a very pretty sight to see the white silk parachutes open up and glisten in the sun. Both landed safely, and wanted to go up again immediately, but could not, owing to the damaged balloon.

”There is some firing going on most of the time, even when there is no pitched battle, and our guns shake the dugout a bit, but we are supposed to be safe here underground and, anyway, the Boche shells don't seem to come this way, though we often hear them. By the way, our machine guns drove the Boche planes off this afternoon, and the balloon was pulled down safely.

”Another day, if I remain unhurt, which I have every intention of doing, I will give you further details of the life and work. As I said in the beginning, the men are well and happy. Strange as it may seem, there is much less illness than there in the training camps at home. I can't make this out unless the men as a general rule reach here greatly benefited by the sea voyage. Certainly the work is

much harder, the conditions no better, and I guess 'sunny France' is an invention of the poets. However that may be, our splendid fellows are fit and fine, trim, and hard. We are going to win!"

The Captain leaned over and clapped Porky on the shoulder. "Kid, you're a brick!" he said. "That's all, and thank you a thousand times. It ought to hold 'em for a while, don't you think?"

"I should say it was some letter," said Porky. "And you are perfectly welcome." He rose and looked at his wrist watch, frowning as he did so. "Most night again," he said. "Seventeen o'clock by their queer old way of counting. It's mighty funny where my brother is." He walked restlessly to the window and with unseeing eyes stared hard at the ragged uptorn world outside.

CHAPTER IV
WHERE WAS PORKY?

Where *was* Beany?

Beany himself, trussed up neatly with many cords and wearing a scientific gag which made speech or yells impossible, yet which did not hurt him very much, would have been glad to have been able to answer that question.

Where was Beany? Beany didn't know where Beany was, and also he felt a natural and lively curiosity as to where Beany was *going* to be in the near future.

He had entered the passage in the wall on the spur of the moment; he had acted without counting the possible cost or the probable consequences.

Usually the boys acted together; if possible, they always left some clue for the other to follow. Hence they had hitherto come out of some pretty dark and serious scrapes with whole skins and a desire for further adventures. But this time Porky, in the General's office, Porky, sound asleep with his head on the General's desk, could not know that his twin brother was faring forth alone on a desperate adventure. If he had known at the moment what was happening, if any warning could have pierced his sleep-drugged brain, well, this story would not have been written.

Beany popped into the secret passage and slid the panel shut behind him with a careless backward-reaching hand. His eyes and his thoughts were on the pitchy dark before him. He thought with a sense of relief that he had a tiny flashlight in his pocket, but whether it would flash when required to do so was

quite another matter.

Beany was bitter on the subject of flashlights, knowing well how apt they are to respond to every touch when not required particularly to do so, and having learned by sad experience that it was when the festive burglar was *in the room*, the pet kitten *down the well*, or the diamond *in the crack* that they would not flash at all. So he merely felt of the pocket where the flash reposed, and stood silent, back against the panel, waiting to accustom those marvelous eyes of his to the dense darkness.

Beany Potter had a gift given to few—eyesight that served him almost equally well by day or by night. There was scarcely a limit to his strange focus. And at night, like members of the cat family, he was able to make out not only forms, but in many cases features and colors as well.

When he had become used to the pitch blackness of the tunnel, he discovered that he was in an arched stone passage just wide enough for one person to walk without brushing the sides. It wound forward on an incline, and ten feet from where Beany stood turned a corner. Still forgetful of danger, he ran noiselessly forward and gained the turn, where he stood listening. There was not a sound to guide or warn him, so he went on, scarcely breathing. His footsteps made not the slightest sound, and he could feel that there was something soft and deadening under his feet, either fine sand or bran, or something of that nature, that had been spread for the purpose of stifling the sound of passing steps. Now he could clearly hear voices above, and decided that he was near or right under the room where the General had his office and held all his staff meetings.

Beany stopped at once and commenced tracing the sound. After a little he found the source. At one side of the passage a common funnel was set in the wall. Beany placed his ear to the funnel and was startled by the clearness with which he was able to distinguish sounds in the General's office. He could hear the scratching of the pen as the General wrote, the steady tramp, tramp of Colonel Bright as he paced the room. Even the steady breathing of his sleeping brother was plainly audible.

Beany seized the edge of the funnel and was about to tear it loose but decided that it was better to leave it apparently untouched. So he rammed his handkerchief tightly down the neck of the funnel, and chuckled to note that the sounds from the room were suddenly silenced. If any one should come behind him and try to listen, they would get one good big surprise, but no information, for the handkerchief was packed well out of sight.

This done, Beany turned and, smiling over his precious information, started back, when a sound, a far distant sound, rooted him to the spot. It was a woman crying in a low stifled tone. "Oh, oh, oh!" cried the voice with choking sobs.

Then another voice spoke, and a sneering, low laugh floated back to Beany.

The sobbing voice cried out again in English.

"Oh, don't! Oh, please! Oh, I can't tell you because I don't know! Don't hurt him! Don't hurt him!"

Beany forgot that he was alone, unarmed, a boy. He forgot the dark passage; he forgot caution. Afterwards he wondered why he did not think to call up the funnel for the help he needed. He just turned and, trusting to his wonderful eyes to take him safely over the black unknown path, he ran swiftly in the direction of the voice.

Around a corner, down a short, straight passage, around another corner, then through a low, narrow door that swung half way open, Beany shot into a large room or cavern. He did not stop to see where he was, but continued his chase across the space. There was another door beyond. A light shone through this door and Beany headed for it. From within the choked sobbing continued. Half way he smashed into something—a piece of heavy furniture of some sort. He rebounded as if from a blow, and staggered. Before he could get his balance again, a form appeared against the light in the door ahead and another form seemed to take shape from the dark bulk of the piece of furniture he had stumbled against. He was seized in a pair of steel-muscled arms, a heavy cloth was thrown over him and rolled tightly around him.

In the instant he was made helpless, powerless.

He heard rapid orders. Through the thick cloth he could see a dim glimmer of light. He was laid down on a couch of some sort, and tied, hands and feet.

Then and only then was the heavy cloth removed, and Beany, blinking in the glare of half a dozen electric lanterns, stared at the group around him.

He was lying on a great bed that was occupying the middle of the room. It seemed a funny place for a bed, but later Beany noticed that the moisture was thick on the walls and was dripping down the corners. The middle was about the only dry place. The covers had been luxurious—soft and silken comfortables padded with feathers, and delicate blankets, but they were soiled and torn by careless spurs. At the foot of the bed, staring at him with amazement in her face, was the old scrubwoman. It was evident that she recognized him. She had seen him often enough, Beany reflected. He returned her look and nodded. A big man, the one in the duster, standing close at Beany's side, noted the nod and rasped out a remark, directing it at the old woman. She did not condescend to notice him. Two other men were there. From the inner room the sobbing continued. Beany scowled. He fixed his eyes on the old woman.

"Somebody is being hurt," he remarked.

No one spoke. Beany did not take his eyes from the woman's face.

"I know you can hear," he informed her, "and I bet my hat you speak English! I wish you would talk and tell me who is getting hurt. I can't do any harm

just at present."

The woman continued to stare at him for a moment, then bared her toothless gums in a cackling laugh. She nodded quite gaily.

"No, you can't do much harm either now or later, my little sparrow-hawk."

She spoke in clear, perfect English, with only the slightest accent to betray her German blood.

"I liked you two boys, up above. You were always agreeable to the poor old deaf and dumb woman. No sneers, no jokes about her, always nice and pleasant. Two nice boys! Made just alike, and such fonny names—Peany and Borky; so fonny!" She laughed again.

The man in the duster commenced to swear in German. Beany knew it was swearing, and recognized it as German.

The old woman raised her hand.

"Calm yourself, Excellency!" she said, with the air of royalty. "There is no need for excitement. Why should I not say what I please to this foolish child who has made such a great mistake; ah, such a great mistake?"

"It iss his last!" snarled the man in the duster, breaking into English. "His last; his last!" he kept repeating.

"Calm yourself," said the old woman, frowning. "We know that; it is all so easy; why do you annoy yourself? I am only sorry that it is one of those nice boys. Such pleasant, *polite* boys! The other will feel the lonesomeness very much; is it not so, my little sparrow-hawk?"

She smiled in the boy's face. Then she came to the side of the bed, and with a not ungentle hand arranged him in a more comfortable position. Then she touched the man in the duster, whom she called Excellency, and together they went into the farthest corner of the big room and whispered for a long time, while the two other men stood motionless beside the bed and watched Beany as closely as though they thought he might float off through the ceiling. Presently, as though they had come to a decision, Excellency returned, the old woman, whom he called Madame, at his side. They too stood and looked long at the boy.

"How did you get here?" asked Madame finally.

"Through the panel," said Beany, who knew there was no use keeping back anything they could so easily find out for themselves.

The old woman started to ask another question when the low sobbing in the other room was accented by a moan. With a glance at Beany's cords, the group beside him all went out of sight through the open doorway. In a few moments there was silence, with the sound of heavy breathing.

"Drugged!" guessed Beany.

Presently the two men returned. They took Beany from the bed, and sat him down in a chair, binding his legs tightly and, after searching him for a pistol,

released his arms. A cord cunningly wrapped around his waist held him firmly in his seat. Beany was glad to have his hands free.

Hours passed. Beany felt cramped and was furiously hungry. His brain milled round and round in a ceaseless effort to find some way out of the situation. He did not feel proud of this last exploit. He had acted rashly and without the least glimmer of caution. He knew well that he was doomed. There was no possible finish but death, and if it could be a swift death without torture, it would only be on account of the ray of friendship that Madame felt for the two youngsters who had respected her infirmities and age.

Beany was against a blank wall. Knowing that he had no possible chance of escape, Madame climbed up on the bed, the three men disappeared in the inner room, and finally, to his amazement, Beany too dozed off, although he could not help thinking that it was not at all the thing to do under the circumstances.

When he woke, he was dazed and stiff. His legs, strapped tightly to the chair, felt asleep. Madame, fully dressed, as she had lain down hours before, sat blinking on the side of the bed.

"Well! Wie befinden sie sich?" she said, grinning at the prisoner.

Beany accepted the friendly tone, although he did not understand the words.

"Morning!" he offered in return.

Madame clapped her wrinkled hands sharply.

The man who had stared through the keyhole appeared.

"Coffee!" said Madame abruptly. It was a command.

The man saluted and withdrew, to return with a tray and a. steaming cup. Madame sat sipping the boiling draft, gazing at the boy meanwhile.

"It is really too bad," she said finally, in her careful, clear English. "Such a boyish, *silly* thing to do! And you see how it is. You are such a nice boy; I do hate to let them kill you, yet you cannot go back; you must see that. However, you shall have an easy way. I shall assert my authority. You look surprised. Do you think it strange that so old a woman, so *frightful* an old woman, should still have authority? Even so, I have plenty of it. I am powerful. If I chose, I could call the Emperor cousin. What do you say to that?"

She seemed to expect an answer. Beany did not know what to say, but after a pause in which she stared at him unwinkingly, he managed to retort, "Some dope!"

"Indeed, yes!" said Madame, to whom the slang was Greek. "Indeed, yes! Well, your coming has spoiled nothing but your own life. We have the information that we want, we have two prisoners who are most valuable. The others will go on to-day, while I, the cousin of an emperor, will for the time continue to wait on those pigs of officers upstairs. Deaf and dumb!"

She laughed silently, with queer little cackles. Then setting down the empty cup, she went into the inner room.

Beany sat thinking the big thoughts that come at hours so filled with doom. Yet somehow it did not seem possible to him that he was to be snuffed out so soon; he, Beany Potter! He looked at his wrist watch. The crystal was broken but the watch was still running. Beany started to wind it, then stopped. What would be the use?

"Well, it may as well go as long as I do," he reflected, and finished winding it. It sounded loud as thunder in the quiet room.

He commenced to think of his brother with all his might. His spirit called to him over and over. He thought again of the time and remembered that although he had looked at his watch, he had not noticed the time at all.

Once more he looked. To his amazement it was noon.

Beany commenced idly feeling through his pockets. If he could only find some way of communicating with Porky before it was too late! All at once his fingers closed on an object that he knew. His face lighted..... If there was any way—Oh, if there was *any* way!

Then Beany's clean boy soul went down upon its knees, while Beany, lashed to the chair, closed his eyes and prayed. Earnestly, humbly he prayed for help; and then, feeling that he had done all he could in the way of asking, opened his eyes and set his whole mind on Porky. He kept his hand in his pocket closed on the object he had chanced on.

Presently the two men came back, untied the cords that bound Beany to the massive chair, tied his hands behind his back, untied his ankles and led him into the inner room. Beany flashed a curious glance around it.

The room was not dark, like the room he had just left. It was well lighted by grated windows overgrown outside with heavy underbrush. Beany guessed that they were away from the ruined castle itself and somewhere out on the grounds. There was more furniture, and another bed like the one in the room that he had just left.

On this tumbled couch lay a form closely covered with a blanket.

"Dead, whoever he is," said Beany to himself.

Facing him was a straight chair and in it, bound and gagged, was a young man in the uniform of the French army. He was trussed up until movement of any sort seemed impossible. Most of his face was covered with the cloths that formed the gag, but over the bandages a pair of sharp, intelligent eyes flashed a message to Beany. He had been buffeted and racked, threatened with all the horrors imaginable and subjected to some of them, but from out those eyes looked a spirit that blows could never break and death itself could never quell. Beany returned the look with a long gaze. He underwent a new agony. Not only was he

unable, through his foolhardy action, to save his own life, but here was another as well that he could not save. For he knew that the youth before him must be doomed. His gaze roved to the bed. There was something strangely graceful and soft about the outlines of the form under the comfortable. He felt his hair prickle on his head. All at once he knew. It was a girl! It had been *her* voice he had heard sobbing. As he looked, he hoped and prayed that she was indeed dead. He stifled a groan.

Madame gave an order. He was once more fastened securely in a chair and the old woman came beside him and offered him a paper and pencil.

"You may write a note to that twin brother of yours," she said. "We are through with this underground hole. It is damp, anyway. I do not need any further help. But you shall write and tell your brother where to look for you. I will see that he gets it in good season. Not to-day, nor yet to-morrow. Little boys in these war-times must be taught not to meddle. Write what you will."

Beany took the pencil obediently, and wrote:

"Open panel at right of office door by pressing upper left-hand carving. Send some one else to look for me. Love to Mother and Father. Good-by.

"BEANY."

Madame took the brief note and read it. "That is short, but it will do," she said. Then she turned to the others. "As soon as it is dark take your prisoners to the foot of the garden. There will be a French car there. The girl, as you know, is to be taken unharmed. Go to our own base. We will make her speak when we get her there. You know what to do with this other."

She picked up a broom and grinned down at Beany. "I am going up to see what they are doing above. Don't you wish you had had the sense not to meddle?"

As she passed him Beany strained forward against his bonds and caught her by the dress. He clasped her knees in his agony.

"Please, *please*, Madame!" he cried. "*Please* don't let them kill me! I promise that I won't tell!" His voice went up in a cry that was almost a whine. The old woman broke away from him in disgust.

"Bah! You are all alike! live, live, live always! Why don't you learn to die, you Americans! That is what we have got to teach you!" She struck him smartly across the face, and moved to the door with a backward look of command.

"Be ready when I return," she said. "In the meantime *not a sound*!" She

grinned at Porky. "I will see you once more, young man," she chuckled, and left the room.

As the door hid her from view, Beany drew a long breath. He seemed strangely excited and relieved. Once more he consulted his watch. It would be at least an hour before dark. There was a fighting chance. Death or life? Life or death? His fate was trembling in the balance.

Where was Porky?

CHAPTER V
TO THE RESCUE

Porky was getting worried. It was growing late, and there was no sign of Beany.

He asked a couple of the aides when they came in if they had seen anything of his brother, but no one had any news for him. Porky looked into the narrow hall at intervals, and twice he went out and wandered around the grounds that surrounded the castle. But nothing of Beany!

Finally he returned to the office, and took up his station at the window where he could see far down what had been the drive. The office was in a room in what had been the wing, and jutted out into the space now soiled and useless, which had once been a lovely, widespread garden of lawns and flowers, but which now looked worse than any ploughed field.

Something kept pulling at Porky's heart. He knew the feeling, had had it often; and it told him, as it always did, that his twin brother, whom he loved so well, was in trouble and needed him. Usually he felt something that impelled him to go in a certain direction in search of Beany; something, a *force* directing him—he never could tell just what it was. But he always obeyed it, and so did Beany, to whom the same feelings came. But now Porky sat irresolutely at the window, baffled and worried. He felt anchored to the spot, yet knew in his heart that his brother's need was great. Every time he got to his feet and started out of the room, something pulled him back. Finally in despair, he settled down and stared with unseeing eyes into the growing darkness of the ruined gardens.

His heart beat heavily. His mind and soul called his brother, demanding an answer from the silence and the night. The officers and aides who had been in the room left it, and Porky was alone. Presently, as the waiting grew almost more than the boy could endure, a slight sound caused him to turn around. It was the

old scrubwoman, broom in hand.

"Hullo!" said Porky, and turned back to the window. He was too badly worried to be polite.

"Hay-loo!" said the old cracked voice in broken English. Porky looked around again. She was standing at his side, smiling at him, a queer grinning leer not at all pleasant. Porky felt an insane desire to ask her if that was the best she could do. But he did not. He simply stared at her, at the wrinkled face and bright, twinkling, keen eyes. Porky felt that those eyes were almost too keen, almost too intelligent for that old peasant woman.

They looked steadily at each other, Porky wondering more and more at the expression on the old mask of a face. She was little, bent and feeble; she scarcely came to tall Porky's shoulder; yet to the sensitive, worried boy as he gazed at her there came a feeling of something wicked, powerful, and threatening. There seemed to the alert senses of the boy that there was a knowing twinkle in the old eyes when she looked questioningly around the room, and said, "Your brodder. Ware iss he?"

"I don't know," said Porky slowly. "You didn't see him outside, did you?"

"No, I dit not see heem outsite; me, I have seen nozzing outsite."

She smiled and wagged her old head, looked piercingly at Porky again, and turned away. Porky watched her squat old bent figure, then drew his breath sharply as something caught his eye! It was something caught on one of the ample folds of her ragged skirt, something that glittered! All the blood in Porky's body seemed to make a mad rush to his head, then ebbed back to his heart. He started toward the old woman, then stopped and thought, staring at the object on her skirt. He knew it well. The old woman stooped to pick up something and the object on her skirt swung free and glittered in the uncertain light. Porky drew a sharp breath as he recognized his brother's message. For a message he knew it to be. The little glittering object was a leather fob strap. At the end dangled a swimming medal that Beany had won long ago. He had always carried it as a pocket piece, and in some way it had accompanied him on the Great Adventure. It had never been out of Beany's pocket.

Yet there it was, hanging to a fold of the old woman's tattered dress swinging and glittering! Evidently she did not know that it was there.

Porky, suddenly alert, started to his feet and took an impulsive step toward the old woman. Then, before she had time to notice his action, he stopped. He could not remove the dangling medal without letting her know that something was up, and his only move was to watch her when she left the room. Somewhere, Beany was in trouble! Porky realized that the message of the medal was a desperate, last resort. A million to one shot, he told himself anxiously; but it had reached him, and while he lived there was hope for Beany. He studied the

old scrubwoman with a new understanding. She no longer appeared harmless, stupid and ignorant. The keen twinkle in her old eyes; what had it meant? The seemingly simple and innocent question, "Your brodder. Ware iss he?" was just to sound him, the boy decided. He knew, all at once, that she knew all about Beany. To follow her was to find his brother, alive, or ... Porky could not say the rest even to his own soul. He *would* follow her! He would *find* the brother whom he loved better than his own life! His blood boiled when he thought of the condition he might find that dear one in, and he set his jaw in a way that promised desperate things.

Old Elise went pottering around the room, unconscious of the glittering eyes bent steadfastly on her, and ignorant of the glittering trifle fastened to her dress. Porky felt that he would gladly barter years of his life to know how it came to be there, but he clung to the happiest reason that he could think up: Beany himself had in some way fastened it on the old woman. Porky decided to obey the summons as he imagined them to have been sent. By hook or crook, he would follow the old woman, sly and crafty as he now believed her to be. By hook or crook, he would find his brother. Starting towards the old woman, he waited until she stooped over the General's table, wiping off the papers with a careful, shaking old hand. Porky, suspicious of everything now, fancied that she swiftly read the words on the uppermost pages, but he was busy with deft fingers unfastening the fob from the tattered skirt. He slipped it in his pocket, picked up a pencil and pad from the table, and once more sat down by the window. A few minutes later, while the old woman still pottered around, Porky rose and idly left the room, whistling as he did so. He unconsciously repeated Beany's performance in the dusky hall. He went to the turn, and dropping on one knee, bent a steady gaze on the door he had just closed. He was rewarded in a moment by a sight of the old woman. She came out of the General's office, softly closing the door behind her, and commenced feeling over the secret panel. It opened, and she entered, closing it as she went, but not before Porky was beside it, his eye on the spot he had seen her old fingers press. He waited for what seemed to him an eternity, then pressed the carved ornament of old oak. It gave, and the opening panel disclosed the passage in the wall down which Beany had so recklessly followed his quarry.

Porky was cautious, yet determined. Noiselessly he trailed the old spy until they reached the great chamber where the big bed was. Not once did she look behind. It did not occur to her that she could possibly be watched or followed. She had grown careless. She did not even mind the fact that she had left the heavy door swinging ajar behind her. Why, indeed, should she? Was not the door in the panel too cunningly contrived for any one to find, except perhaps that Boy Scout who now sat fettered in his chair waiting his end? His brother ... bah! She

had left him above. She crossed the room, and stooped to reach a shawl she had thrown on the high bed. As she bent, something light and strong and cat-like leaped upon her seizing her wrinkled throat in a vise-like grip. She could not scream. In a second the curtain of the bed was wrapped over her, fold on fold. She struggled furiously, but to no avail. She was nearly smothered. Porky didn't much care. He worked in a frenzy of haste. He pulled down the thick cords that had been used to pull the bed curtains open and shut, and tied his human bundle securely. Then with a cautious thought he shoved her under the high bed, and made for the inner room.

It was silent. A single candle burned on the table. Beany sat in his chair. He was bound and gagged. As Porky sped across the room he saw the diabolical contrivance hanging above the boy's head.

A massive blade with a heavily weighted handle hung directly over the boy, point down. The cord which held the weapon passed through a pulley to another pulley, and from there to the table. There it was fastened to a short stick that was strapped to the alarm key of a common alarm clock. As Porky's quick glance took in the whole scene, the little alarm clock gave the cluck that precedes the striking of the alarm. Porky made a dash across the room, as the alarm commenced to sound and, seizing his brother's chair, swung him aside as the whirling alarm key tightened the cord. One after another, with deadly swiftness, the cords tightened until a quick pull on the smallest cord of all, a mere thread, snapped it.

The heavy blade seemed for a moment to balance in air, then it dropped down and buried its razor point six inches deep in the old floor.

Not until then did Porky slash the cords which bound his brother, and as Beany shook himself free, with many faces to ease his tired jaw where the gag had pressed it, Porky dropped limply into a chair and mopped his brow.

"The sword of Damocles!" was all he said.

"Don't know the gent," said Beany huskily. "Did some guy play this trick on him! If he felt as nervous as I did before you came, I feel good and sorry for him. Gosh, I have been sitting all trussed up there for about a year! Let's get out of this!"

"No special hurry," said Porky wearily. He could not recover at once from the shock, but Beany was chipper as a cricket.

"Well, I don't know," he said, "I have not grown so fond of this little old dungeon that I want to reside here long. Besides, perhaps you don't know the old lady who sweeps upstairs as well as I do. She is apt to be up to almost any trick."

"Not if the Court knows himself, and he thinks he does," said Porky positively. "I left her under the bed in the other room with about a mile of flossy curtain cord twined around her. She is safe enough. We will go up and report

this little affair, and get a couple of men to come down and take her to the General. She is a hard character. A spy, in fact."

"I guess I know that!" said Beany, rising and rubbing his stiff legs and arms. "I have a lot more to report than you have. Let's be off!"

Together they hurried into the first chamber, and made for the door leading into the passage. Porky, in passing, looked under the bed. Then with a gasp he looked again and, dropping on one knee, seized a bundle of ragged clothing and a tangle of crimson curtain cords.

He looked at them, turning them over and over. Then he shook them. Then he looked under the great high bed again.

"What ails you?" demanded Beany impatiently.

"She's—she's gone!" said Porky feebly.

The old woman had vanished.

CHAPTER VI
DEATH CLOSE BEHIND

"Cut for the passage!" cried Porky as he realized that his quarry had escaped and knew that her release meant fresh dangers for them. Instinctively he held on to the bundle in his hands, and with Beany at his heels raced through the door and up the narrow passage that led to the secret door in the panel.

They found it closed tight. Furiously the boys shook and tugged at the heavy handle which was wont to turn and release the sliding panel. It did not budge. They shook and banged.

"It's no good," said Porky finally, as they paused, gasping and out of breath. "We are trapped!"

"Some one will hear us if we bang long enough," said Beany, kicking at the secret door.

"Not so you would know it," said his brother bitterly. "You can't hear a sound. That paneling is six inches thick along here. Made so on purpose, I suppose. We had better go down and try to get out by the passage that leads into the garden."

They turned and hurried back, retracing their steps through the passage and the two underground rooms. As Beany passed the great sword, he dragged it from its upright position in the floor and took it with him.

"I guess this belongs to me as much as to any one," he said grimly. "I'll take it home to Pop."

As he, spoke, the candles on the table shook in a sudden draft and went out.

"That's about the last straw!" said Porky, falling over a chair.

"Gimme your hand!" said Beany. "I know where the passage is and it is short, because I counted the number of steps they took before I heard the outside door open and smelled the outside air. I know it opens into the castle garden because I heard them talking about going out that way. Oh, I have a long story to tell you, Porky, but it will have to wait until we are well out of this. I don't feel any too happy yet."

He clasped his brother's hand in his with a sudden close pressure. Porky returned it, and laid an affectionate arm around his brother's shoulder as together they went cautiously toward the passage leading to the garden.

They found it easily; Beany had used his eyes to good advantage. Feeling carefully as they went, they reached the end where a massive, rough door barred their way.

Porky drew a box of safety matches from his pocket, and by their feeble light they examined the heavy barrier. There was no sign of a latch or keyhole, but the door was securely fastened on the other side.

They were trapped!

"Well, what do you know about that!" muttered Beany, scowling. He felt slowly along the crack of the closely set door and pressed the barred surface, but it did not give under his touch.

Porky flipped a match out of his fingers as it burned him, and the boys stood motionless in the darkness, wondering what to do next. Beany leaned on the hilt of the long sword; Porky traced figure eights on the wall beside him with the tip or the scorched finger that had held the match.

Beany leaned over and tapped his shoulder.

"What's the noise back there?" he whispered.

"Didn't hear anything," answered Porky after a breathless pause of listening.

"I certainly heard something," declared Beany. "Let's pussyfoot back and see if we can find out what it was. I *know* I heard something. Perhaps our dear friend the old dame is somewhere around."

"There was nothing for her to hide in or behind," said Porky. "The bed was the only piece of furniture large enough and, besides, I feel sure she skipped out the other passage. What would she come back for? She must have known that we were here."

"There is mighty little she *doesn't* know if any one should ask you," an-

swered Beany. "Oh, just wait until I have a chance to tell you the whole yarn! Only it is not finished yet. There were a couple of prisoners in the room I was in, a young fellow in uniform and a girl. They must have carried them into the garden when they turned my chair around so I could look toward the way you came in. I heard them scuffling about."

"Well, let's go take a look," said Porky.

They silently retraced their steps back to the great chamber where the bed stood. Carefully, with their backs to the wall, they lighted a couple of candles they had taken from the table. The room was empty, but with the keen trained sensitiveness of young animals, they sensed danger.

"I bet it is the bed," said Porky as though answering a question. "Let's look it over."

Beany, holding the candles, stood by as Porky carefully removed the tumbled and tattered fragments which had once been satin and down coverlets fit for queens to dream under. He cautiously lifted the top feather bed in his arms and laid it on the floor. Beany gave a gasp and, reaching forward, almost flung himself on a black object which rolled down into a depression in the under bed. He fumbled with it, then stood erect, his face glistening with a cold sweat. He pointed to the object in silence.

Porky stooped over it. It was a time bomb, large enough and vicious enough to wreck the entire wing.

"That's funny," said Porky. "You turned the trick that time but it does seem they are taking a lot of bother just to get rid of us."

"Why, you're crazy!" said Beany. "What's over this room? The General's office, of course! That was the trick. They had us in here, and after she got away, the old woman came back and set that thing where she thought we would never think to look for it. I think she heard us in the passage that goes to the garden, and thought we would stay there fussing with that outside door. If this thing went off, of course it would wreck this room, and even if we were not killed by falling stones, we would be trapped in there like a couple of rats. Well, it will never harm any one now, but we have got to get out of here somehow or other."

Both boys were unnerved and shaken They stood looking at each other. They knew that it must be very late, but overhead they could hear the muffled tramp of booted feet in the General's office. They stood gazing at the oak paneled ceiling. A big square directly over the high bed was sagging, and it was there that they could hear the sounds from above. Porky commenced to study the situation.

The bed was a four poster, hundreds of years old. When the castle had been shelled, it had been brought down from some upper room of state.

The high, massive posts, beautifully carved, supported a great roof of heavily carved black oak.

"Look here," said Porky. "Can't we shin up on top and beat on the floor with the hilt of that sword?"

"What good would that do?" demanded Beany. "They wouldn't know where to find us. I don't believe we could make enough racket anyhow so they would pay any attention to it."

Porky thought a moment, then to Beany's disgust he commenced to caper around in a manner that Beany thought little befitted their serious position. He knew that when the explosion failed to occur, some one would be sent back by the master spy, and Beany could not doubt that that would mean a quick death for them both.

"What ails you?" he demanded.

"Just this," said Porky. "We will rap out a call for help in the code—the Morse code. Half the fellows in that office understand it. If there is any one there at all, they will catch on."

"Honest, Porky—" said Beany, then he stopped. He certainly was proud of Porky but decided not to tell him so.

Porky chuckled. He knew what his brother was thinking. "Some little nut, eh?" he asked, patting his own head.

"Tell better after you have tried it," growled Beany, shinning up the post nearest him. Porky started after him.

"Wait!" said Beany. "We will have to have a chair. You can't reach high enough."

It was difficult to get one of the massive carved chairs aloft. They had to tear the bedding into ropes and pull it up in that way; but once on the top, Porky shinned hastily up and mounted it. He was rather quicker at telegraphy than Beany.

He wrapped his handkerchief around the blade of the long sword, so he could grasp it, and beat heavily on the paneled ceiling. Then he shook his head.

"Listen to that!" he complained. "That loose panel will have to come down. You couldn't hear that little clack a foot away. Steady me."

He handed the sword to Beany and, springing up, clutched the loose sagging edge of woodwork in his lean, muscular hands. It sprung up and down under his weight, but did not give.

"Grab my feet and pull!" he ordered over his shoulder.

Beany obeyed.

There was a sharp tussle but the old, centuries old wood was not proof against the fresh young strength measured against it. It suddenly gave way and a couple of yards fell with a clatter and cloud of dust, hurling the boys flat on the top of the bed canopy, which swayed in an alarming manner.

They shoved the paneling over the edge, and stood up. Once more their

candles were out, but Porky lit a match and soon the little flame made a light about them. Beany kicked something with his toe.

"What's that?" he said.

"Don't know," said Porky, rubbing his hands together. "There's a couple more of them.

"Don't bother with that junk! Bundles of rags, I suppose. We have got to get out of here. You don't know what those spies will be up to next."

But Beany, always curious, ripped a hole in the side of the rough, pouch in his hand.

"It's full of gold money," he said.

"My word!" said Porky, looking down from the chair. "Scoop 'em all into your pockets, for the love of Mike!"

"Pockets!" said Beany scornfully. "There's a couple of *quarts* of stuff in these three bags!"

He slipped out of his blouse and, tying the sleeves together, made a sort of bag in which he carefully placed the sacks. Then he stepped carefully across their swaying platform and steadied the chair on which his brother stood with the sword hilt thrust between the huge rafters against the floor above.

The tramping in the room overhead sounded quite clear now that the paneling was gone. It annoyed Porky, who was trying the best he knew to make his pounding heard.

"Why don't the geezers sit down?" he complained. And as though in answer, there was a sudden silence above.

"It won't be so funny if they have all gone away," said Beany, listening intently.

"You bet it won't!" said Porky, beating still harder.

"They are all there," said Beany. "If they had gone out, we would have heard the steps all turning in the direction of the door, which is over there behind you."

"Well, here goes!" said Porky, pausing a moment to rest. "I am going to give the wireless call for help."

Then while both boys almost stopped breathing, Porky slowly and distinctly tapped out the thrilling summons that turns great ships out of their courses to race across leagues of angry sea to help the perishing.

"S.O.S! S.O.S!" Over and over, carefully, slowly Porky rapped, pausing now and then to listen.

"No go!" said Beany despondently.

"Wait," whispered Porky; "they are stirring up there."

Once more he rapped out his message, and gave a groan of relief as faintly but distinctly a spurred heel on the floor above beat the answer:

"We hear. Where are you? Who speaks?"

As rapidly as he dared Porky, who was an expert in the code, explained their position, gave the necessary directions for opening the secret door in the panel, received an "All right!" from above, and the boys, leaving the chair standing in its lofty position, slid down the bed post, Beany still clinging stubbornly to the sword.

As they stood for a moment beside the great bed, a gust of fresh air entered the room.

"The garden door!" Beany hissed in his brother's ear. "They are coming! Run for it!"

The boys turned and raced for the passage leading to the upper hall. As they ran Porky stumbled against a chair. It went over with a crash. They turned as they hurried through the door leading into the passage.

Behind them, just perceptible to their eyes now accustomed to the darkness, three forms came running in relentless pursuit. One form reached them just as they turned into the passage. Beany paused in his flight and blindly hurled the heavy sword full at his pursuer, then slammed the door and followed Porky, now several yards ahead of him. Death was close behind.

CHAPTER VII
THE IRON BOX

There was no need for silence now. The boys heard a stumble as though someone had crashed over some obstruction. The door behind them was flung open. Swift feet pursued them.

"Hope the door's open!" gasped Porky, as he ran fleetly on up the uneven, winding passage.

In the office above there had been an anxious period. Two members of a staff, even though they are only boys, cannot disappear as though the earth had swallowed them without a suspicion of foul play. When General Pershing received the report, he at once sent couriers and scouts to every station where the boys might have gone. On being questioned, the sentries one and all declared that the two boys had not been seen outside of the building. This resulted in a combing out of every cranny that could possibly hold a boy alive or dead.

The hours dragged on. There was a continual passing to and fro for hours until at last there seemed to be absolutely nothing more to do until morning.

The tired staff threw themselves into the office chairs, while the General, at the typewriter, commenced a letter. Out of respect to him, there was a complete silence in the room.

On and on clicked the typewriter while the waiting men dozed or smoked or thought of home.

"What's that?" said one of them suddenly, listening intently.

The General stopped writing and looked at the speaker.

"What's what?" questioned a captain, frowning.

"That tapping," said the first speaker. "Sounds like *code*."

"You have been asleep," said the captain, grinning.

"I hear it," said the General.

There was a general gathering up of forces, as the whole room tried to place the faint, monotonous tapping.

"The call for help!" said the first speaker triumphantly. "I *knew* I heard it. The code is my native language almost. It sounds as though some one was calling from below the floor."

"Send an answer, Lieutenant Reed!" ordered the General.

The young officer obeyed, while his hearers listened breathlessly. Tap-tap went the spurred heel, dash and dot, dash and dot in many combinations.

The reply followed swiftly. The Lieutenant, rather pale, turned to the General. "It's the boys!" he reported. "They are together, in a closed chamber,—a dungeon, I take it—right below us. They are in danger. Don't say what. Something about spies and dynamite. Want help instantly."

"How?" asked the General

"There's a secret door in the oak panel in the hall. They gave directions for opening it."

"Go at once, six of you—you six nearest the door!" The officers designated rose.

"Rush!" said Lieutenant Reed crisply. For the moment he was in command. He alone knew how to open the panel. They hurried outside, where Reed felt swiftly but carefully in the place described by Porky. Twice he went over the heavy carving, pushing here and there unavailingly. Then without a sound the secret door opened and before any one could enter the passage that yawned in inky blackness before them, there was a rush of running feet and the two boys, carrying Beany's coat between them, bolted into the hall. Porky made a motion for silence, and listened.

There was no sound.

"Somebody chased us!" he panted. "Somebody was close behind us in the dark!"

"Men?" asked an officer in an excited whisper.

Porky wanted to say "No, sir, *rabbits*!" but he knew that every one felt nervous and edgy and, besides, he did not want to be disrespectful to the officer who had spoken.

"They came in through the other door," he said. "A door at the other end of the passage that is on the other side of the two big rooms down below there."

"Let's go down," said one of the men, loosening his revolver.

"Please don't try it!" begged Beany. "We could never get down without light and then they would have the drop on us. It's no use now. Besides, they could go out of that outside door without the least trouble after they had shot us all up."

"The kid is right," said Lieutenant Reed. "He knows how the land lies down there. Come up to the General, boys, and make a report. He will tell us what he wants done."

Sliding the panel shut, the Lieutenant called a guard and, leaving the hallway patrolled by a couple of stalwart Americans, the group surrounding the two boys entered the office and saluted the General.

General Pershing bent his serious, keen gaze on the boys, then a bright, sudden smile lighted the strong, handsome face that had grown sad and still in the troubled, anxious months at the front.

"Always up to something, boys," he said. "Well, your friend the Colonel warned me how it would be. Now suppose you tell me all about it."

Beany with a sigh of relief lifted his blouse and deposited it on the table. It struck the surface with a clank and as he pulled the cloth away a regular flood of gold pieces covered the papers where the General had been writing.

"Part of the story, sir," said Beany. And then talking together, or taking turns, as the spirit moved them, the boys pieced out the account of their adventures. The part that Beany kept harking back to was the presence of the prisoners in the big room. He described carefully and accurately the appearance of the young soldier and told as well as he could about the limp, unconscious girl who had been carried out into the dark garden. Beany shuddered as he spoke.

"I am sure the girl was dead, sir. She laid there for hours, I guess, and she never moved at all, never batted an eyelash. And she was white.... I never saw anybody so white. It was as though all her blood had been drained out of her."

"Was she wounded?" asked the General.

"She must have been, sir," answered Beany. "I saw blood, just a little of it running down her wrist under her sleeve. She had nice clothes on, and I had a hunch all the time that I ought to know who she was; but I couldn't tell. Wish we knew what they did with them. When it comes light, General, I can show you just where the door is. I am sure I know where it opens."

"It is light now," said the General, pointing to the window. Every one

looked. Sure enough, the whole sky was a mass of pale gold and pink and greenish blue, as lovely and soft and joyous as though the distant rumble of the big guns was not shaking the casement as they spoke. It was light; morning had come.

The General ordered coffee and rolls and insisted on both boys eating something. They were tired and heavy eyed but excited at the thought of unraveling perhaps a little more of the mystery of the past night.

When at last the General dismissed them with a few terse orders, they sped ahead of their escort through the silent garden, fearless and curious and unconscious of the careful marksmen who followed, protecting each foot of their advance.

Beany had spoken the truth. With the sureness of a young hound he took his way through a wilderness of stones and bricks and beams and plaster through the tangled, torn old garden, and round to a spot marked by what seemed to be a clump of dense bushes like low growing lilacs. Approaching this, Beany parted the branches and peered in. Then he drew back with a cry of horror.

"Look!" he whispered.

It was indeed the ambush set over the outside entrance to the dungeons. Down in the depths of the hole that yawned under the encircling bushes something was tumbled in a pitiful, distorted heap. Eagerly a half dozen men leaped down and with careful hands straightened out the two forms lying in the bloody ooze. One after the other they were lifted to the surface.

The man was quite dead but the girl still lived, though breathing feebly.

Placing her on an improvised stretcher, a couple of the men hurried away with her to the hospital while a couple more knelt beside the dead boy and searched carefully through his torn and blood-stained clothing for papers, letters—anything that could be used as clues to his identity. There was not a scrap left to guide them. The young officer's pockets had been turned inside out. Even the hems in his tunic and breeches had been slit and the soles had been torn from his shoes. If there had been papers of any sort secreted about him, they were gone—carried away by the ruthless hands that had slain him.

Leaving a guard beside the body, the others leaped boldly into the shallow pit and lifted the heavy bar which held the massive nail-studded oaken door. It opened inward, and Beany led the way through the passage into the chamber where he had sat bound, gagged and waiting for the relentless hands of the clock to reach the moment of his doom. He showed the device, and then, lighting the stubs of candles, they went into the inner room. The dungeons were dark as midnight, even in the clear morning light.

A careful search was made of the rooms. They stamped on the floors, rapped on the walls with pistol butts, ripped up the silken covers and the thick

mattresses, but found nothing. The men finally stopped their search, and gathered in a group around the massive table. Beany, sitting on the edge of the table, jounced up and down and thought that he had never seen a piece of furniture quite so solid. He took out a penknife and tried to whittle the edge but the keen blade scarcely made an impression on the ironwood seasoned for ages. Porky, watching his brother, listened to the conversation.

"Somewhere down here there is a hiding place for papers or money, or perhaps both," said one of the officers, a keen-faced, thoughtful man, studying the room as he could see it in the flickering light of the two candles which, now burned down to the merest stubs, afforded a dim, uncertain light.

"We have given it a pretty thorough combing over," said another officer, frowning.

"I can't help it," stubbornly answered the other. "It is in just such places as this where valuable secrets are often hidden."

"What about the dynamite?" demanded some one else. "It does not seem as though they would hide anything of any value to themselves in a spot that they were willing to blow up."

"A bomb that size would not have wrecked this room. Did you notice the thickness of the walls?"

The talk went on while Beany whittled and pried away industriously at the table edge. He found a crack in the wood and pried his knife blade into that. The blade entered in a tantalizing manner, slipped smoothly along, then struck metal. Beany pushed. Porky, who was watching, came closer and peered down the crack. Beany pushed harder, pushed as hard as he could, and suddenly felt himself flung off the table as the big top flew up and hurled him aside.

Powerful springs had opened the two heavy slabs of oak that formed the table. Two pieces now stood open like a pair of doors and within lay a long, flat box which completely filled the space. The box was of iron, heavily barred and padlocked. Four soldiers pried it from its place and, escorted by the whole party, it was carried to General Pershing, still working at his desk.

Once more the boys had unearthed a mystery.

CHAPTER VIII

THE CELLAR'S SECRET

Porky and Beany were too tired to care what happened next and, taking quick advantage of a brief smile and nod of dismissal from the General, they made their way to their quarters and soon were as sound asleep as though they were lying on the softest down. They slept and slept, losing all track of time, and by the General's orders were undisturbed. When they finally woke, really wide awake, they found that a whole day and a night had passed since the early dawn when they had staggered off to bed.

They woke at the same instant, as was their habit, and sitting bolt upright, stared unblinkingly at the young officer sitting at the window writing.

"Morning, Lieutenant," said Porky, rubbing his eyes.

"What's the time, sir?" said Beany, looking curiously at his wrist watch.

"Yours stopped too?" asked Porky. "Mine has. Funny!"

"Not so very funny," said Lieutenant Parker, closing his writing tablet. "You have been asleep since yesterday morning, and I imagine the watches ran down."

"Yesterday morning!" gasped Porky. "Why didn't some one call us?"

"General's orders," said the Lieutenant. He laughed, "Gee, I wish he would order me to bed for a week. You can bet I would go!"

"Well, it makes me mad to sleep like this," said Porky in irritation. "What all have we missed, anyhow?"

"Nothing much," said the Lieutenant. "The biggest drive of the war is on and to-morrow General Pershing with his staff will make the trip along the front line trenches. I hope he counts me in on that."

"You liked to be in the trenches, didn't you?" asked Porky, stooping to lace his puttees.

"You are right I did," said Lieutenant Parker, wrinkling his smooth young forehead. "I came over to fight, and it was just my luck to get this measly scratch on my head, and blamed if they didn't put me here in this office doing paper work!"

"Well, you got to give your skull time to get well, haven't you?" asked Beany. "It was cracked, wasn't it?"

"No, just a piece scooped out of it," said the Lieutenant in a bored tone.

The boys grinned. Lieutenant Parker was one of the best friends they had, and they had learned that nothing teased him like being quizzed about the deep, palpitating scar that creased his dark head, the truth being that he had received the wound in an encounter that had won him the coveted French war cross with the palms. Porky and Beany considered modesty in others little less than a sin. They were always so thirsty for tales of blood and glory that they could not see why any one should hesitate to tell every possible detail of any adventure. It happened, strangely enough, that they did not apply the same rule to their own conduct. To get details out of the Potter twins was, as their own father said, like

drawing nails out of a green oak board, accompanied by screeches of protest. The boys had had the Lieutenant's story, however, and they harked back to the news of the day.

"I am going on that hike," said Porky, standing up and stamping himself comfortably into his clothes.

"So'm I," said his brother, likewise stamping.

"Try for something else, kid," said the Lieutenant. "You can't get in on this. It is strictly staff."

"Watch me!" said young Porky, the cocksure. He hurried to the door and disappeared, while Beany, a trifle slower in his dressing, roared, "Wait for me!"

A muttered response of some sort was the only satisfaction given.

Beany grinned. "He is always so sudden!" he complained, addressing the Lieutenant.

"Might as well stay here until he comes back. I never like to butt in on Porky's talky-talks. He most generally knows what he wants to say, and he don't need any help in getting it out of his system. I certainly hope we can go with the General. You are always yelling about that old silver plate you have on your topknot. Look at us: seems like we just can't get into a trench. Honest Injun, I'm so sick of this old chateau—"

"I never did see such a pair!" said Lieutenant Parker. "Didn't you have enough of an adventure the other night to last you two or three days?"

He was going on, when Porky burst into the room. He threw up his hat.

"Better, much better than I ever hoped," he crowed.

"Hand it out!" demanded Beany anxiously.

"Why, I was going to give the General a great line of talk, and I didn't have a chance to do a thing but salute. He was talking to a French officer and the minute he went out, the General just said, 'All right to-day, young man?' I said, 'Yes, sir,' and he said, 'No time to talk! Report in the courtyard to-morrow morning five-thirty, field equipment, for special duty with my staff.'

"I saluted again and turned to come out, and the General said, 'Potter, this is in the way of a reward for that little affair in the dungeons,' and I said, 'Thank you, sir, but the pleasure was all ours, sir,' and he said, 'No, not quite all; because some of the papers you unearthed *WILL HELP TO TURN THE TIDE*.' How's that, old Beans, *will help to turn the tide*. Gosh! you did it with your little penknife, didn't you?"

"Well, never mind that," said Beany, wriggling. "Don't you know anything about this trip to-morrow?"

"Nary word," said Porky, "but why should we worry? Main fact is clear, we are going to be among those present."

The boys spent a restless day getting their traveling equipment in order

and taking it apart again to put it together in some way they fancied would make an eighth of an inch difference in some of its dimensions. They strutted a little perhaps. It was truly a wonderful thing to go with General Pershing on a trip of that sort. They marveled at their good luck.

That good luck had hinged entirely on their ability to keep their own counsel. That desire some have to tell all they know, a lot that they guess, and a few things that they fear, did not exist in the Potter twins. They could keep a secret without being told to, and that's some test. Whatever they overheard was safe. When they saw things that were not intended for their eyes, they ignored them, or made an effort to forget all about them. This high sense of what was honorable and right was noticed immediately by the General as well as by others whom they met daily.

So they spent the long day patting each other on the back, and wondering at their great good fortune.

They kept closely to the rooms frequented by the officers. As Porky pointed out to his brother, there was one old lady at least who was not wasting any love on them, and they didn't want to give her a chance to turn a key on them and spoil all their fun. They had at least gained a little caution, but how very little the trip was going to show.

It was barely five next morning when Porky and Beany, like two shadows, slipped from their quarters and went silently down to the courtyard. Several automobiles stood ready, heavily guarded, and a couple of mechanics were busily tightening nuts and testing various parts of the machinery. No one spoke. The boys crossed the open space, and in accordance with an agreement made previously, sat down back to back on a ledge of the broken fountain. They were taking no risks of surprise or attack from the rear. Silently the minutes passed. The steady tramp of the sentries and the grating of metal on metal as the mechanics worked quietly on the cars made so little sound that distant noises were loud and acute.

The guns of the enemy had been silent for twelve hours. Even Porky and Beany sensed something big and terrible in the air.

"Want to bet something!" asked Porky, poking his brother with a backhand jab in the ribs.

He never found out whether Beany was game to bet or not for the door of the chateau opened and a group of officers came out. General Pershing led the group. The boys leaped to salute, the sentries stopped and presented arms. Even the mechanics straightened to their feet. There was perfect quiet, however, and five minutes later they started away full speed in the darkness. On and on they went, passing first through a country which showed very little of the effects of war. It was a sort of spur that had escaped the enemy's assaults in the beginning

of the struggle, and which, since the arrival of millions of Americans, had been lying too far behind the lines to suffer.

The sun rose: it was day. They stopped in the shelter of a dense grove and breakfasted on the provisions put up for them by the cooks back at headquarters. While they ate the drivers of the cars watched the clear morning skies for airplanes. The sandwiches and coffee, boiling hot in big thermos bottles, tasted good to the hungry boys, although they were eaten in silence, and in silence the journey was continued. Now they commenced to see signs of the frightful struggle. First great shell craters, then trees uprooted or hacked down, and village after village lying a mere mass of wreckage. There were worse things too; sad reminders that made the boys turn pale with horror.

The stop for dinner was made the occasion of a careful examination of all the parts of the cars, as any accident in the next few miles might be most dangerous and disastrous. One of the aides announced to the several groups of officers that a start would not be made under two hours so the boys wandered about, looking at the ruined landscape and picking up here and there sad little mementoes of friend and foe. Buttons, scraps of jewelry, mostly cheap rings that girls might have worn and given to their departing sweethearts. There were dozens of crushed and stained pictures too, so many that the boys did not bother to pick them up after the first dozen or so. Pinned to one picture of a chubby child was a little sock. Across the back of the picture was written, "A year old to-day. My son. Wish I could see him."

"Gosh," said Beany, "I sure do hope he didn't get his! Perhaps this just fell out of his pocket."

"Why didn't he sign it?" demanded the practical Porky.

"Well, I suppose he didn't have a hunch we would want his address," said Beany. "I'm going to keep this and send it back home to one of the papers. They will be glad to copy the picture of the fat little geezer, and p'raps it will get back to his folks."

The boys wandered on. Coming from a country rich in magnificent old maples and elms, the ruin, so cowardly and so ruthless, of the great trees seemed one of the most terrible aspects of the war. Not only were they torn by shells, but mile after mile stood dead and dying from the effects of the gas attacks of the enemy. The gas seemed to be as fatal to the trees as it was to human beings. Not only had the leaves curled up and fallen, but the trunks themselves were blackened and dead looking. It was like a country in a nightmare, everything in the way of buildings flat on the ground, literally not one stone left on another. The dead and dying trees, leafless and twisted, let the sunshine down upon it all with scarce a shadow.

The boys reached the site of what had evidently once been a fine farm. It

was a total ruin. They went clambering over the loose heaped-up stones of what had once been a fine old dwelling, and sat down for a moment on a flat block that had made the broad and generous doorstep.

"Gee, this must have been an old place," said Porky. "See the way the edge of this stone is worn—and it is granite at that."

"Look at the size of it, too," said Beany.

They sat studying the stone when a faint feeble wail was heard. They looked at each other, startled.

"Aw, gee, there's a kitten shut up some place," said Beany, jumping up. "Let's find it."

"Sure we will," said Porky, "but we can't take it along. I don't suppose General Pershing would want to add a cat to his traveling party."

"It sounded most dead," said Porky. "Kitty, kitty! Here, kitty," he called in his most persuasive, voice.

Another little cry answered him and gave them the direction. "It's the cellar," said both boys together, and with one accord they seized a couple of stout timbers and commenced to pry away part of the wreckage in what seemed the likeliest entrance to the pitch black: hollow under the bent and broken floor timbers, on which still rested masses of stone.

Suddenly, in response to their efforts, a huge stone, mate to the one they had been sitting on, tipped sidewise and slowly slid down into the darkness, followed by a shaft of light.

There was a sharp cry from below, and the boys looked at each other, a sort of horror on each face.

"That's no kitten!" gasped Beany.

For answer Porky slid feet first in the wake of the big stone, landed on it, and stepped off into a gloomy chamber now feebly lighted from above. In a moment his eyes were accustomed to the dim light, and he stepped aside, making way for Beany, who came helter-skeltering down behind him.

What they saw was a room that had been used as a store-room for the farmhouse. By some trick of fate the falling walls, while they had made a tight prison of it, had spared the most of the shelves of provisions, and rows of preserves and tins of fruit still stood safely in their places.

A thin, emaciated figure lay in the corner on a pile of dirt over which a cloak had been spread. The sunken eyes fixed themselves on the two boys, but there was no recognition in their glassy depths. What looked like two little piles of rags were huddled close, and as the boys came nearer, the dying woman, for it was a woman and she was close to death, clutched them convulsively. The bundles stirred, and a couple of small heads were raised. Two children, tousled and covered with dirt, lifted frightened eyes and clung frantically to the prostrate

figure.

Porky crossed swiftly and dropped on his knees by the dying woman. Very gently he slipped an arm under her heavy head and lifted her a little on his strong young arm.

"Get a move on!" he flung at Beany, and that young man scrambled up the pile of debris where the big stone had fallen and instantly disappeared. Porky, left alone with the woman and the two terrified children, who tried frantically to burrow out of sight under the mother's nerveless arm, could think of nothing better to do than clasp the woman closely to him in an effort to give her some of his own heat and vitality. She seemed already stone cold.

Almost at once Beany returned with some of the officers. They came down and with tender hands lifted the sufferer out of the chilly dampness of the cellar, and laid her on a pile of coats and cushions. Some one carefully fed her a few drops of the hot coffee still left in the thermos bottles. It was very evident, however, that her moments were numbered.

One of the French officers in the party knelt beside her. Softly, tenderly, pityingly, he spoke to her in her native tongue.

The weary eyes opened, and rested on his face.

CHAPTER IX
A VEXING PROBLEM

The boys, who had attained a good working knowledge of the French language, listened breathlessly. The gentle questions of the officer were easy to follow, but without pressing too close to the sad group they were unable to hear the whispered, broken replies of the woman. That the story was a sad one, one of the uncounted tragedies of the invasion of a cruel and heartless enemy, they could easily guess by the break in the French officer's voice and the unashamed and manly tears that filled his eyes. Slowly, painfully she told her story, the two tiny children clutching her closely the while. Fainter and fainter grew the feeble voice. Porky and Beany knew instinctively that they were standing in the presence of death; not the glorious and gallant passing that the soldier finds on the battlefield, but the coming of release from a long and undeserved agony. As the little group watched, one bloodless hand reached up and drew the thin shawl away from her breast. There was a wound there; a cruel death wound that she

had stanched as best she could and had covered from the eyes of the two babies. As though her story was all ended, the pitiful eyes fixed themselves on the face of the officer who held her. Rapidly he made the sign of the cross, then with his hand held high, he spoke to the dying woman. It was enough. A smile of peace lighted the worn face, one long look she bent on the two children, and turning her head as if for protection toward the blue tunic against which she rested, she closed her eyes, sighed, and was still.

Reverently laying down his burden, the officer rose to his feet. And while the group stood with bared heads, he told the story as he had just heard it.

The dead woman's name was Marie Duval. For two hundred years her people had lived in simple ease and comfort on the well tilled farm.

In rapid, thrilling sentences, he sketched the story of their happy, blameless lives, through Marie's innocent childhood, her girlhood, and up to the time of her meeting with young Pierre Duval. Pierre had a good farm of his own down the valley, and there they lived in simple happiness and prosperity. Three children were born, the two little creatures crouching before them and one a little older, now dead.

When the war broke out, Pierre put on his uniform and went away. For a while, like other heroic women, she tilled the little farm until one night when a small scouting party of Huns swept down, burning and destroying all that lay in their path. She escaped with her children under cover of the darkness and made her way back to her father's house. For a long time they escaped the tide of war, and lived on and on from day to day, the old, old father and mother and the young mother waiting for news from Pierre. It came at last.... He was dead.

"Then," said the French officer, "then her heart seemed to die too, but she knew that she must live for the sake of the little ones. Already she could see that the agony and terror of it all was killing the aged parents. Four sons were fighting, and one by one they followed Pierre to death.

"Nearer and nearer came the German lines until one awful day a horde of heartless warriors swept over them.

"Sirs, you know the rest," said the French officer, his fine face twitching with emotion. "It is the same old story, the old man ruthlessly tortured and killed, his old wife kept alive just long enough to see him die. The oldest grandchild was with her. He too was tortured while his mother, hidden and imprisoned in a portion of the cellar under the smoking ruins of the farmhouse, heard his childish screams of agony.

"She tried frantically to free herself from the ruins. A soldier saw her, brought the fainting child almost within reach of her hand and killed him. Then with the same weapon he made a savage thrust for her heart, but could only reach close enough to inflict a deep wound. Then making sure that she could

not escape from the cellar, he rode away after his troop. She became unconscious, and for days the two little children must have lived on the vegetables stored about them. When she regained consciousness she found strength to drag herself to the shelves where the family provisions were stored. All that was not spoiled she fed to the children, but they were without water save for the rainwater that dripped down upon them. She felt herself growing steadily weaker as the untended wound grew worse. The whole neighborhood seemed abandoned, and their feeble cries brought no help. The children pined, and suffering as they were from shock, soon gave way to the cold dampness and insufficient food.

"Marie herself lived solely through her determination not to leave the two helpless babies to their fate. She prayed that they might die first, and she was glad to note their failing strength, so fearful was she of leaving them alone to a horrible, lingering death.

"She herself grew so weak that much of the time she lay almost unconscious with the little ones huddled against her. She commenced to see visions. Pierre came and comforted her and promised that she should soon be free to be with him. The little martyred son clasped her in his loving little arms, assuring her that he no longer suffered. The old mother and father sat beside her and told her to be brave and patient. But with all her courage she felt that her end was near. She could not endure much longer."

The French officer bowed his head.

"Then came deliverance," he said softly, "deliverance from all her pain and anguish. She has been released. She is with Pierre!"

One of the officers stepped forward and tenderly covered the still figure with his cloak. He took the younger child in his arms, but it screamed and struggled while the other one fought off the friendly hands stretched down to it. The French officer spoke to them pleadingly, but they only stared stupidly at him.

"They are almost done for," said one of the officers. "We have got to get them away from here and right away." He made another effort to take the older child but the little fellow fought with the fury of a little wildcat. One after another tried in vain to get hold of the terrified little fellow, who grew more and more frightened.

Porky and Beany, standing modestly in the rear of the group, watched the proceedings with growing uneasiness. Finally Porky stepped forwards, saluting as he did so.

"Will you please let us try?" he asked, and taking a worried nod from the Captain for answer, he sat down beside the dead mother, and for a long time, as it seemed to the watching group, stared idly ahead, without so much as a glance at the trembling children.

Then he turned, nodded as though he had just noticed them, and taking

a cake of chocolate from his pocket, bit off a piece and then broke off a small corner for each child. It was only a taste, but as the delicious morsel melted on their tongues, they crept to Porky like a couple of starved kittens. He showed them the rest of the chocolate and hitched off a few feet. Beany came after. The children followed, and Porky broke off another small bit for each. Some one brought water from the cars for them to drink and in fifteen minutes the thing was done. Porky and Beany, each with a little skeleton in their arms, wandered well away from the spot where unaccustomed hands were awkwardly digging a grave for the dead young mother.

"This," said Porky, as the child in his arms sagged on his shoulder and seemed to sleep, "this is the worst thing yet!"

"You bet!" said Beany dismally. "Say, did you see me cry back there? I did!"

"Well, what of it?" demanded Porky. "Didn't everybody? I'd like to know how they could help it!"

"I wasn't looking," said Beany. "Oh, gosh, they didn't have to do things like this."

"Who, the Huns?" asked his brother. "Why, it's all like this and a million times worse!"

"Well, I wish I was grown up," mourned Beany. "To think we can't do much of anything! I want to get even! I want to look some of those fellows in the face!"

"What's your idea? Want to tell him what you think?" Porky laughed unpleasantly, as he shifted the weight of the child. "What's worrying me now is what is going to be done with these poor little kids. Isn't the one you have a pretty little thing? Even all the dirt and hunger can't hide her looks. I suppose they will have to go into some asylum!"

"I don't see why," said Beany suddenly. "Do you remember Mom and Pop said they wished if we brought them anything from across, it would be something good and worth while? They didn't want German helmets and junk like that. What do you suppose they would say to a couple of dandy little kids like these?"

"For the love of the board of health!" said his brother solemnly. "It's a great thought, sonny, but do you suppose Mom *wants* to start in bringing up another lot of children! You know if she ever started, she would make a good job of it; you know how thorough she always is."

"Yes, she is thorough, all right!" grinned Mom's son. "Look at us!"

"She did the best she could with us, anyhow," retorted Mom's other son solemnly, "and I think, no, I *know* she would be tickled to death to do something as real and important as taking these two little chaps to bring up. And we could help support them if we had to, later."

"That's silly," said Porky. "You know Dad has made a lot of money. And he could afford to bring up six of them if he wanted to."

"Well, all *he* ever wants is what Mom wants," said Beany.

"I guess that's so too," said Porky, "but perhaps some of those officers will have some other plans for them."

He looked down at the child on his arm. Already he felt a tenderness for the starved, sickly little creature who had trusted him.

"One apiece," he said, looking at Beany.

"One's a girl, though," said Beany.

Porky wanted to be fair.

"That's so," he said. "Well, we can draw straws to see which has to take her."

"Straws nothing!" said Beany. "She came to me, so she is mine. Darned if I know what to do with a girl, though! Can't teach her to play ball or marbles, and besides that she can't be a Boy Scout."

"Well, she can be a girl one. You know they have 'em, and if she can't play ball she can learn to swim and dive and ride and shoot, and it will be pretty handy to have her round the house when it comes to buttons and things. Mother must get tired sewing for three of us."

"Wonder how long it takes 'em to grow up to button size," said Beany, studying the tiny bundle in his arms.

"Don't know," said Porky. He looked anxiously at his brother. His generosity in accepting the care of the little girl worried him. He had to watch Beany, who was always more than generous and self-sacrificing.

"Why can't we both have both kids?" he asked. "I don't want you to be stung with a girl all the time. It isn't fair."

"Stuck with a girl!" said Beany. "Why, Porky, I *like* it! I never could see why when any one has a baby, everybody says, 'Gee, it's a boy! Isn't that bully!' or else 'Huh, it's a girl, too bad!' I never could see it. Course when they get *our* size they mostly are silly pills, but if *I* have a hand in bringing up *this* girl, why, you just watch her, that's all! I bet when she's fifteen she won't look cross-eyed at a boy. I bet she knocks their blocks off! She is going to have some sense!"

"Looks as though you mean to make a scrapper of her," laughed Porky.

"No, she has got to grow up just as much like Mom as she can."

"Well, Mom likes boys all right," was Porky's reminder.

"Yes, but I bet when she was young she never googled at 'em or passed notes or accidentally sat down in the same seat with them or any of that. She isn't that kind. You can *see* she isn't." And Beany, whose wavy hair and clear blue eyes had already caused him to suffer, nodded his head vigorously.

"Go ahead!" said Porky, "I think it's great having an assortment, only I didn't want you to feel as though you had the worst end of the bargain."

"Not a bit of it!" said Beany. "Not a bit, and I'll lend you my girl to look at

or play with whenever you want."

"Much obliged," said Porky, "but I can't help thinking it might be a good plan to break the news to somebody."

"Your kidlet is asleep, so he won't notice. Suppose you go back there and see what they are doing."

"I can see from here," said Porky with a slight shudder. "They are sort of boarding up a place to put the youngster's mother. They have no way of getting a casket or even a box for her."

"It will be fixed all right," said Beany. "The Captain does everything all right. He will fix it just as well as ever he can. I'd like to go over and see just what they are doing."

"Better not; you might wake the baby, and we don't want her to see her mother again."

"Well, anyhow, one thing is settled. The pair is ours," said Porky with a sigh.

"They are ours if we can have them," said his brother.

"You watch me!" said Porky grimly.

CHAPTER X
DECIDING DESTINIES

Tired of carrying the children about, the two boys sat down on a bench beside what had once been a large barn. The destructive fire started by the invaders had apparently been checked by a heavy rainfall as the half burned structures and charred timbers testified. There was still a chance to rebuild and save enough from the wreckage to enable the owners to start their lives afresh. But alas, of those owners but two were left—the two tiny, terrified, war-racked creatures in the arms of the two Boy Scouts. While their little charges slept, the boys continued their talk in a low tone. Their arms, unaccustomed to such burdens, were tired and stiff by the time one of the officers left the distant group and approached them.

"Why don't you lay the poor little cubs down somewhere?" he asked, looking round vainly for a fit place.

"No place to put 'em, sir," said Porky, "and every time we start to move them, they clutch us and start to scream. As long as we sort of keep 'em hugged

up tight, they sleep."

"It's awful—awful!" said the officer. "I wish I knew what to do with them now. There's not an asylum of any sort, not a place fit to leave them within miles and miles, and what's to become of them *I* don't know. Every orphan asylum in France is crowded."

"Oh, that's all right," said Porky. "We don't intend they shall go to any asylum. Our mother has adopted them."

"Your what?" asked the captain after a prolonged stare.

"Our mother," repeated Porky.

"Your mother has *WHAT*?" said the captain. "Just repeat it all."

"Our mother has adopted them," said Porky patiently and distinctly. The captain pushed back his cap and stared.

"Where is your mother?" he asked.

"Home," said Porky.

"New York state," added Beany. "She wanted something to remember the war by, so we are going to take her these. She didn't want any German helmets or anything of that sort. She said she didn't want ever to be reminded of helmets, so we will take her these instead."

"But, good heavens!" said the officer. "You ought not do anything like that! She would have to bring them up."

"That's all right, too," said Porky. "Mom has had experience. She has had us, and one of these is a girl. Girls ought to be easier than boys."

"No, she won't mind and, anyhow, we are going to do all the hard work ourselves. Teaching them swimming and baseball and all that."

"The girl will like that," said the officer dryly.

"Course she will!" said Beany, looking proudly down at the future baseballess.

"It's like this," said Porky. "Our people always trust us, and we know it will be all right. I do hope you can fix it for us, Captain."

"It would be a wonderful thing for those poor little orphans," mused the Captain. "But how would you get them home?"

"That's easy," said Porky. "Our time is up pretty soon. You see we were only allowed a limited stay. That was the agreement when we came, and we can take the kids over with us. Won't you *please* get General Pershing to fix it up for us? There will be some woman on board to tell us what they ought to eat, and when to put 'em to bed and all that."

"It would be a wonderful thing," said the Captain again. "If you are sure about your mother. It's a good deal to wish off on her."

"Feel in my left pocket," said Porky. "Feel that letter? Now take it out and read it. It's all right. She wouldn't mind, and I'm proud of mother's letters."

The Captain drew out the letter which was much thumbed and soiled, and read:

"*My own dear boys*:

"It was good to hear from you both again after the long time between letters. A whole month, in which we received not so much as a post card. But something told me that you were safe and well, so I did not worry. You know, dears, I am not the worrying kind when it comes to that. Your dad, who boasts continually that he never worries over *any*thing, does all the fussing for the whole family, but as long as he doesn't know it, and we never tell him, why, I suppose it is all right.

"I wrote you a long letter yesterday, telling you all the news of the neighborhood, and this is only a note to acknowledge your letter at once because in my letter I said that we had not heard in a long time.

"Well, dears, it will not be very many weeks now before we will hope to see our boys again. I am counting the very days. I wonder what souvenir of the war you will bring me. It will be something I will love to have, I know, and not a horrid helmet or anything of that sort. Of course the thing I would like best you can't possibly bring me, and that is a house full of those poor pitiful little Belgian refugees. When I think of our big house, this splendid home we have built since you went away, when I think that soon it will be finished, and we will be in it, just we four, I can scarcely bear it. So *many* little children homeless!

"Well, some day, boys, we must manage to do something for some of those suffering little ones. I know of no other way in which to thank God for our two boys and our many, many blessings. Your father is prospering more and more in his business, and we both feel that we must all four unite in doing for those less fortunate than we.

"However, I know I can't hope for a couple of Belgians just at present. After the war, we will go and collect a few!

"Take care of yourselves always for the sake of the two who love you so well.

"**Your always loving** "MOTHER."

"Well, I declare!" said the Captain as he finished the clearly written page.

"Doesn't that about fix it?" asked Porky triumphantly. "Of course these are

French, but I guess she won't mind that. They couldn't be worse off in the way of parents or more destitute, no matter *what* they were."

"Mother will be in her glory," Beany cut in. "I hope they don't get fat before we get them home."

"I should say not! The thinner, the better as far as mother is concerned. She snaked a private right out of the camp hospital last summer and took him home. He had had pneumonia and looked like a sick sparrow. Mother fed him and nursed him and he gained seventeen pounds in three weeks."

"Well, it does beat all!" said the Captain. "Of course, you understand there may be some reason that will make it impossible for you to take these children out of the country."

"All I can say is, there hadn't *better* be," said Porky, thrusting out his square jaw. "Think I want to give up my kid after it came to me and I lugged it around for an hour?"

"And do you suppose I want anybody but mother and me to bring up this girl?" said Beany, awkwardly hugging the sleeping mite in his arms closer.

"Besides," said Porky, "what about mother! It's up to us to bring her what she likes best, and you read that letter. What she wants is *orphans*, and she's *got* to *have* 'em if we *steal* 'em! So long as we are around, mother has got to have what she wants."

"I should think that nearly settled it," said the officer. He laughed but there was a queer gleam in his eyes that looked suspiciously like tears. "I am going to report this to the General now," he said. "Of course we cannot take the children with us, and some way must be found of sending them back to headquarters. I don't see just how it is to be done, as it would be a pity to make you go back with them when this trip is only beginning and be a wonderful thing for you."

"No, we hate to lose the trip," said Porky wistfully. "I don't suppose two other Boy Scouts in the whole world ever had such a chance and we sort of earned it."

"Stay here," said the Captain, "and I will be back presently."

He walked away, and the two boys, holding the two children, sat quietly on the old bench planning in low tones for the future.

"This girl is going to be a peach," said Beany proudly. "See the way her hair crinkles up? She is rank dirty, but you wait till mother gets her cleaned up."

"My word!" said Porky. "She's got to be washed before *that*! Why, they have to have a bath right off as soon as we get hold of a nurse or some woman who understands enough about kids to do it."

"Yes, it's an awful job," said Beany. "All the soap gets in their eyes and nose, and there's the mischief to pay. And I want an expert to wash this kid. It makes their eyes red to get soap in 'em, and I don't want hers spoiled."

"Wonder what their names are," said Porky.

"Oh, they are named all right. I suppose we didn't get 'em soon enough to attend to that, but we can call 'em what we like. Don't you know how it is with a registered dog? Don't you remember the two collies Skippy Fields has, one named Knocklayde King Ben and the other Nut Brown Maiden, and Skippy's folks called 'em Benny and Nutty. I bet they each have about thirteen names apiece, but while I'm bringing her up, this girl's going to be called Peggy."

"And this is Bill," said Porky without the least hesitation. "Bill. Just *Bill* so you can yell at him good and easy."

They went on planning while behind them, over the soft, uneven ground the staff approached unheard and stood watching the little group.

Presently, still unheard and unnoticed by the boys, they turned away.

"And there are those," said General Pershing solemnly, "who do not believe that a special Providence watches over children! The boys *shall* take those two orphans home to that good mother of theirs, if it takes an Act of Congress. You say," he continued, talking to the French officer in his own musical tongue, "you say that poor woman said that all her people were gone?"

"All dead, all lost in this war," answered the Frenchman.

"Well, if this was only in a movie show," said the great General, "we would presently see a car headed for the rear, coming around that bend ahead, and we would be able to—well, I declare," he exclaimed, as one of the officers laughed and pointed. "That's positively *too* much!" as the group laughed with him.

A large car *was* coming along around the bend, it *was* headed for the rear, and in the tonneau sat a couple of nurses in their snug caps and dark capes!

The General himself halted it, and in a few words explained the situation. A couple of the officers, accompanied by the nurses, went over to the boys and at once the children, still sleeping the heavy sleep of exhaustion, were transferred to arms more accustomed to holding them, and carried back to the car. Almost before they realized it, the car was off and Porky turned to the General, saluting.

"Out with it, young man," said the kindly General, smiling down into the eager and troubled face.

"We will get 'em back, won't we, sir?" he asked. "They can't work some game on us, so we will lose 'em?"

"We lost a pup that way once," said Beany dolefully, also coming to salute.

"Well, you won't lose your orphans," the General promised. "I wish I could see your mother's face when your little party appears."

"Why, we will write you what she says if you will let us, sir," Porky volunteered.

"She will be crazy over Bill and Peggy," added Beany, looking fondly after the car vanishing with their new possessions.

"Beel ant Pekky!" groaned the Frenchman.

"Wee, Mussoo, we have named them already," said Porky proudly. "We know they have some other names, kind of names, they were registered under, but that kid has to have *something* easy to yell at him when he makes a home run, and Beany picked on Peggy right off."

"That about settles it," laughed the General. "We must be off if we reach our first sector by nightfall."

CHAPTER XI
WHISPERS IN THE NIGHT

It was nine o'clock when they reached the first post of observation in their journey, an outpost on the top of a densely wooded hill where they were to remain as long as the General wished to stay. It was a splendid post of observation. A vast battle-torn valley stretched below them for miles and miles. From their vantage point they could see it brilliantly lighted at short intervals by the flares of the enemy. The flares lit the trenches—black, ragged gashes running along the earth—and beyond, where the awful desolation of No-Man's-Land stretched, peopled only with its dead. Seen with field glasses, the plain drew near and they could see the torn surface and the tumbled groups here and there. A great battle had been fought and both sides were resting. Rest was absolutely necessary. The Allies had advanced three miles, pushing back a foe that stubbornly contested every step of the way. The Germans had brought vast numbers of reserves into action but even then the whirlwind tactics and savage rushes of their oversea foe had driven them back rod by rod.

Porky and Beany looked on and trembled with excitement. There ahead, hidden in the darkness, were the Huns. There were the barbarians who had shown a civilized world how men can slip back into worse than savagery. Wasted lands, ruined homes, orphaned and mutilated little children, butchered old people. All the unspeakable horrors of war trooped through the boys' minds, a hideous train of ghosts, as they looked across the valley. Ahead lay the heartless and ruthless killers, wolves that had come to worry and tear the sheep, but behind in the darkness, the boys knew with a thrill, every possible mode of transportation was swiftly bringing up the reserve American troops, thousands and thousands of them; men in their prime and beardless boys grim, determined, yet

light-hearted, ready to fight as only Americans can fight. Men from the farms, farms in the east where fifty well-tilled acres was a fine homestead; farmers from that great and spacious west where a man called miles of land his own. Professional men, clerks, divinity students, adventurers, all welded by this great need into a common likeness. Eager for life, yet fearlessly ready to die if need be, a mighty army was on its way, was drawing nearer and nearer to the tired troops below. Overhead an adventurous plane or two hummed in the darkness.

"And we can't help!" said Porky mournfully. "Not a thing we can do, not a thing!"

"Oh, well, we are doing all we can," said Beany. "I don't just see what *more* we can do. We can't help our age."

"No, but if we are not told just *where* to stay, and *where* to go, I mean to take a little stroll around to-night," said Porky.

The boys went over to the General, who stood looking across the valley and saluted. He looked, and gravely returned the salute.

"Good-night, boys," he said.

"Good-night, sir," said the boys, and then as an afterthought, "May we walk around a bit, sir?"

The General was busy studying the vast field below him as the flashes of light revealed it.

"Yes, if you don't get lost," he said absently, "and be on hand at eight to-morrow morning. I may be ready to go on then."

"Yes, sir," said both boys cheerfully. What luck! The General certainly didn't know what he was getting himself into.

"The whole night to ourselves, and no bounds, and only we mustn't get lost!" chuckled Porky.

"Peach pie!" murmured Beany. "Let's be off! Where will we go first?"

"Down there," said Porky, waving a hand widely over the valley.

"That's where I thought. But we can't get into any scrape on account of the General. You know he wasn't thinking about us at all when he spoke, and, besides, there would be an awful fuss if we got into any trouble. It would be good-by to our little trip. We would be sent back quicker than they sent Bill and Peggy."

"Who wants to get into any scrape?" said Porky. "All I want to do is to see—to see—well, to see just what I *can* do."

"Well, come on," said Beany mournfully. "I bet we are in for some fun, because when we look for things we generally find 'em."

"What hurts me," said Porky, "is not carrying weapons of any sort. It's a good safe rule for the Boy Scouts, but I'd be glad of some little thing like a sling shot or a putty blower."

"I don't need anything," said Beany, "I've got the neatest thing you ever *did* see." Quite suddenly he drew something from his hip pocket and shoved it under his brother's nose. Porky side-stepped.

"Ha!" said Beany. "It works!" He showed Porky his weapon. It was a monkey wrench from the auto tool chest. In his hand it looked like a revolver.

"Pretty neat," said Porky. "Is there another one in the box?"

"Yes, I saw another," said Beany. "I don't see any harm in this. Any one might carry a monkey wrench," and replaced it carefully in his pocket.

"Sure thing," said Porky, making for the car, followed by his brother. "Didn't the Reverend Hannibal Butts get up to preach one Sunday, and dig for a clean handky to wipe his face with and come up with a bunch of waste and use it before he saw what he was doing?"

"I remember that," said Beany. "I thought I'd die! And so did everybody else. It 'most broke up the meeting."

"Well, when you flashed that monkey wrench I thought it was a revolver sure enough. But it was only an innocent little wrench, and here is the mate to it!" He pocketed the tool, and slipping cautiously out of sight of the group of officers, they went scrambling noiselessly down the steep trail into the valley. Reaching the foot of the hill, they struck cautiously out toward the entanglements, dropping on their faces whenever a flare went up. Presently Beany, a little in the rear, pulled his brother's leg. Porky stopped, and waited for Beany to wriggle up. He muttered, "What?" but did not turn his face. He knew too well that a face turned upwards in the darkness can be seen by an observant watcher overhead in some prowling plane.

"Men whispering over toward the right," said Beany of the marvelous ears.

"No business for any one to be there," said Porky, listening intently. "We are well on our side yet."

"It's over there on that little hillock," said Beany positively, "and I think they are whispering in German."

"Why, they *can't* be, Bean," said Porky. "We are away inside our lines, and we wouldn't have men out there and, besides, they wouldn't be whispering German or anything else. When our men are supposed to keep still, they *keep still*!"

"I can't help it," said Beany. "They are whispering in German."

"All right," said Porky, reluctantly turning toward the spot indicated by Beany. "We'll go over and see what it is, and if there are any Germans holed up around here, we'll sick on a few troops."

They did not stand up again, but slowly and with the greatest caution approached a small hillock that stood slightly away from the steeper hills. It was not wooded enough to afford any shelter, nor was it high enough to be a good

spot for a gun. For that or for some other reason, the enemy had failed to shell it.

On the side toward the Allies a pile of high boulders was tumbled. The rest was grass grown. Beany, whispering softly in his brother's ear, insisted that the voices came from this place.

"Then they are underground," whispered Porky in his turn.

Slowly, ever so slowly they crept up to the little hill and lay in the darkness, listening. Certainly through the grass and stones of the mound came the muffled sound of cautious voices. If they had been speaking English, it is probable that even Beany's wizard ears would not have caught the sound. But the harsh guttural German, even when whispered, seemed to carry far.

"I don't see how you heard 'em," breathed Porky. "It's hard enough to believe now. What do you suppose it all means!"

"Search me!" Beany breathed in return.

"What they doing over on our side?" wondered Porky.

"It's a good place all right," said Beany against his brother's ear as they lay close to the grass.

They were silent for a while, when the unbelievable happened. It was so amazing, so stunning, that both boys at first could not believe that they heard aright. They heard a sound like a windlass or crank turning, a few clods tumbled down on them, and a voice once more whispered hoarsely three words:

"Gee, it's hot!"

"*Gee, it's hot!*" said the German voice and the simple words seemed to the astounded boys to ring across the valley! On the contrary, they were spoken in a low whisper.

Another voice replied. "He won't like it if you speak English, you know."

"I can't help it," said the first speaker. "We are two to one anyhow, and I am tired of talking that lingo. I'm a good German all right, but I wasn't brought up to *speak* German and it comes hard. And this is the hottest place I ever did get in. I don't like it. Do you know what will happen about to-morrow? I'll tell you. We will find ourselves miles behind the Allies' lines, and then what do you propose to do, Peter?"

"Bosh!" said the man called Peter. "You think because a handful of Americans are here that the tide has turned. Be careful what you think. I tell you *no*. What can a few hundred of these fellows do against the perfect, trained millions of the Fatherland?"

"You don't know them," said Fritz.

"Yes, I do," said the man Peter. "Now let me tell you. For years I was in England; sent there to study those foolish bull-headed people and to create all the unrest I could. It was *so* easy. I saw these Americans there, crazy, loud-mouthed,

boasting, always boasting. They talked fight, they told wild tales about the bad men of their west, always boasting. So I tried them. I am a big man, Fritz, and strong; I was not afraid of a little fight, me, myself. I tried them. I slurred their government, sneered at their president, laughed at their institutions. What think you? They laughed. They *laughed*! Quite as if I said the most kindly things. I said, 'What I say is true, is it not?' and they said, 'Perhaps, but it is so funny!' That is what they said, '*so funny*!' They should have slain me where I stood."

"They don't care what you say or what the rest of the world says," whispered Fritz. "They are too big. Their country is too big. When they fight.... Wait until you have seen them fight! They fight with grunts and gasps and bared teeth. They do not need trenches, they will go over the top with a shout. You will see, friend Peter. They are back there in the darkness now. I feel them!"

"A few of them, only a few," said Peter. "This little castle of sod and stone is getting on your nerves, my friend. Look you! Do you think the Highest would deceive us? Never, never! There is nothing to this talk of the Americans coming over here. To be sure, they have declared war, but what of it? They are no good. They have no army. All their boasted possessions, all their harbors, all their wealth, yet they have no army. No army! That shows how inefficient they are. Never fear, my Fritz. Not a hundred thousand will reach this soil. I have it from our commanding officer himself."

"Then here's hoping for a quick release from this hole," said Fritz bitterly.

"To-morrow," said Peter; "to-morrow our hosts will sweep across this valley, and we will be with our own again."

"Oh, I hope for some release. It's the hardest duty I have ever been given."

"But think how we have been able to guide our guns, talking as we can to the airplanes through the clever arrangement of our three little trees on top of our delightful little hill." He laughed. "How clever it all is! And no one will ever suspect!" He paused again to chuckle, and Porky quite suddenly shoved a sharp elbow into Beany's ribs.

"Well, I'm sick of it," said Fritz still in his low, hoarse whisper, and seemed to move away from the side of the hill where he had been standing.

The boys with the greatest caution wriggled away.

"Now what do you think of *that*?" said Porky when they were in a position where they could talk in safety. "*What do you think of that?*"

"Anyhow," said Beany, "they aren't spies. I'm sort of fed up on spies. I can stand for most anything else."

"No, they are not spies. I can't make out just what their little game is. It's important, though; you can see that. And we have got to stop it somehow."

"That ought to be easy enough. Just go back and get the bunch and a few soldiers, and take 'em."

”What’s the time, anyhow?” asked Porky. He answered his own question by fishing his wrist watch out of his pocket. He had put it there for fear the luminous dial might be seen.

”Only eleven,” he said. ”Plenty of time.” He sat staring into the darkness. There were very few flares now, although the night was usually kept bright with them.

”Wonder why that is,” Porky said.

”Something to do with our little mud house, don’t you think so?” said Beany.

”Yes, I do,” answered his brother, ”I wish I could make it out. Give us time, give us time!”

”Well, come on! I want to get some one on. the job,” said Beany. ”I feel fidgety.”

”Sit still,” said Porky. ”I want to think.”

”What you got in your head now?” said Beany. His voice sounded anxious.

”We are going to take those men prisoners with our own little wrenches and just by our two selves.”

”Three of them?” gasped Beany.

”Three of them!” said Porky. ”Come on!”

CHAPTER XII

TAKING THREE PRISONERS

”Come nothing!” said Beany slangily. ”You stay right here until we can talk this thing over, and make some sort of a plan. I don’t propose to go into something we can’t get out of.”

”Well,” said Porky, ”the only plan I have is so crazy that I’m sort of afraid to tell you about it. But it would certainly be sort of nifty to take those men ourselves instead of running back to the bunch for help. It would kind of put a little gilt on things and would be something to tell Bill and Peggy about when they grow up a little.”

Beany was impressed. ”I hadn’t thought of that,” he said. ”Looks like we haven’t much to tell them about, nothing but the submarine and the secret passage and that sort of thing.”

”And the spies back home,” added Porky. ”No, we ought to wind up with

something else. Beside, if I don't get hold of a Hun or two after what we saw and heard back at the Duval farm, I don't think I'll ever live."

"Well, I'm with you," agreed Beany. "Now let's plan. We sure have got to get a prisoner or two our own selves. What's next?"

For twenty minutes the boys, heads close together, whispered rapidly. Then they rose and went noiselessly toward the false hillock.

The last hundred yards they crept, lying flat and motionless whenever a flare lit the sky. They were not frequent, however, and the boys made good progress. When they reached the mound, Porky, who was the best climber, crept to the top. He used the most infinite caution, and there was not a sound to betray his slow, sure progress. Gaining the top, he found what he had expected to find. A sodded opening, like a double trap door, operated from the inside, was slightly opened for air. So cleverly was it arranged with small bushes and grass growing on the trap doors, that it would have been impossible to detect it. Porky felt cautiously about the edges. Then he listened. From below came an unmistakable sound—the noise of a couple of men snoring. The sound was so muffled by the thick steel walls, the earth and stones and sod outside them, that they were able to sleep without fear of detection. Porky shook his head admiringly. He was forced to acknowledge that the ingenuity of the foe seemed to know no bounds. Again he tried the trap doors. They were balanced to a hair and moved upward at his touch. He felt in his pocket, arranged something in either hand, then swung the doors both upward.

It would be untrue to say that a flash of doubt did not pass over the reckless boy at that instant. He thought of the General and of the way in which that great man trusted them to do their part in keeping out of trouble. He had surmised that there were three men below. There was room for a dozen. He had taken it for granted that he and Beany could pull off a stunt that instead might end in their immediate death or worse. But there he was, perched on the top, the heavy trap doors swinging wide, and below in the dense darkness the sound of men snoring. Porky took time to listen. There were snores from two, that was clear, and still another man talked and muttered fretfully in his sleep. Porky could hear no others.

He took a long breath, leaned over the opening, and turned a flashlight below.

As though electrified; three big men sat up and blinked in the glare of the flashlight.

Two of the men cried, "Kamarad!" and instantly held up their hands. The third said calmly, "Thank the Lord! I surrender!" and stood up.

"Not so fast!" said Porky in his deepest tones. He fiddled with the button on his flashlight. The light wavered. Porky kept his face to the men and called

back over his shoulder:

"Sergeant, something's wrong with my flash. Send up another!"

"Yes, sir!" answered Beany as gruffly as possible from below. He waited a moment, then scrambling up passed his flash to his brother. Porky put his in his pocket, and bent the light on the men below. An ax stood in one corner with a coil of rope. In another corner was a rough table loaded with strange instruments that Porky did not understand.

"Turn out your pockets!" he commanded, and three revolvers were tossed up, one after the other.

"See that rope?" demanded Porky, pointing his flash directly at the man who had spoken English. "You tell those other fellows to tie you up quick, and tell them to make a good job of it!"

"I surrender," said the man Fritz. "Please don't tie me up, sir!"

"You hear!" said Porky grimly. He called back over his shoulder. "Forward ten paces, Sergeant!"

"Yes, sir," said Beany, and Porky almost giggled as he heard his brother scuffling violently around trying to sound like a squad. But he dared not look away from the men below, who were hastily tying up the man called Fritz. They did a good job, eager to make good with the unseen and most unexpected captors. If the officer above with the boyish voice wanted Fritz tied up, tied up he would be so he could not move. When they finished, the bulky form looked like a mummy.

"Is that a door in the side?" Porky demanded of Fritz.

"Yes, sir," said Fritz.

Porky waited a little. The worst was coming now.

"Tell those men to open that door, and step outside, and if they value their lives, to keep their hands up."

Fritz spoke rapidly in German. What he said was, "These are Americans, you fools! The officer says to step outside, and keep your hands up. You had better do it, if you want to live. They would rather shoot than eat. I know them! Obey, no matter what they tell you."

When he had finished, one of the men, lowering one hand and keeping the other well up in the air, pressed a long lever and a narrow door opened, dislodging a little shower of stones and earth as it moved outward.

"Vorwarts zwei!" cried Porky, making a wild stab at German.

It was understood however. Fear makes men quick, and the two walked briskly out and stood side by side. One of them had stepped through a loop of the rope, and it came trailing after him.

"Tie those men's hands and tie them together. Sergeant," said Porky. He watched, cold with a fright he would never have felt for himself, while Beany, keeping as much out of the light as possible, tied the men, and sawed off the end

of the rope.

"Close the door!" demanded Porky.

Beany did so.

"Don't leave me here, sir," cried the man below suddenly. "If the Germans find that we have allowed this spot to be discovered, they will shoot me. If the enemy comes I shall be shot. I will come quietly. I am glad to surrender."

"That's all right," growled Porky. "You are safe for a while. I am leaving a guard here. We want a few English-speaking prisoners, so you are quite safe for a while."

"One of those men outside speaks English also," cried Fritz.

"All right," said Porky. "I advise you to keep still. Sergeant, detail a guard for this place with orders to shoot him at the first outcry."

"Yes, sir," said Beany. He retreated under cover of the darkness, thoughtfully going around the corner of the mound as a flare brightened the sky, and he remembered, in the nick of time, that it wouldn't do to let the two men, carefully bound as they were, see him roaring directions at an imaginary squad. He returned in a minute and saluted, although his form was only a darker shadow in the darkness of the night.

Above, Porky closed the trap doors, and as he did so, cut the ropes by which they were opened and closed. Not even with his teeth could the trussed up prisoner below open them.

Beany had already shut the door in the side and wedged it with a broken piece of gun-carriage.

"Come with me, Sergeant," said Porky, for the benefit of the English-speaking prisoner. "Vorwarts!"

It was a strange group that gave the password a half hour later and advanced to the General's tent. The tent, hidden from observation by blankets and thick masses of boughs, was brightly lighted. General Pershing seemed to scorn sleep. Surrounded by his staff and a group of officers from the lines below, he sat puzzling over the reports they had made. Information was steadily leaking across. Every move they made was reported correctly. Only that very night as soon as it was definitely decided that no attack would be made, the flares from the enemy's lines almost ceased and their guns were silenced, as though they were glad to be assured of a few hours of peace. The positions of the American guns, no matter how cleverly camouflaged, were speedily discovered and gun fire trained on them.

The thing had assumed a very serious look. Losses were piling up. The General listened in worried and puzzled silence.

It was at this moment that the flap of the tent was suddenly opened, and two Germans, their hands tightly bound, stumbled blinkingly into the light. Behind

them stood the two boys. There was a moment of surprised silence broken by the older prisoner, as he accustomed his eyes to the light. He glanced about the group, then his eyes rested curiously on his captors.

A look of fury and amazement crossed his face.

"Kinder, kleine kinder!" he muttered scornfully.

The other man was silent.

General Pershing gave a sigh.

"Those twins again!" he said. The boys saluted. "Where shall we leave these, sir?" said Porky respectfully. "We left another back there." He waved into space. *Back there* might have been anywhere on the continent, as far as his direction showed. "It's sort of a queer place, sir, and we would like some one to see it, because we can't tell what it's all for, and we don't know that we could make the other fellow tell. He speaks English."

Rapidly the General gave the necessary orders. The two men were led off a short distance and placed under close guard. An escort, with a couple of captains and an expert electrician, was named for the boys, and without a question from the General, who knew how to bide his time, the little party filed out of the tent and went back down the trail.

When they were out of hearing, the General laughed and spoke.

"I often wonder," he said, "how those two boys pass the time in their own home. I don't mind trying to run an army, but running those twins is a bigger task than I like to tackle. I am glad they don't know just how glad I will be to hear the story they will tell us when they get the job finished. Three prisoners, and they want an escort of officers and an electrician! Well, they are on the trail of something, I'll be bound! I would like to question those prisoners but I won't spoil the boys' innocent pleasure in what they are doing. But I must say that I want one of you to keep an eye on them every second now until we return to headquarters. They are to be shipped home from there with a special passport, and I will be able to sleep better."

"They came with General Bright, did they not?" asked a Captain.

"Yes, and when he was called to Paris, I foolishly offered to let them stay at headquarters. I thought they would play around and kill time until Bright came back. That's what I get for overlooking their records. Things are bound to happen wherever they go."

"All boys are like that more or less, but this is a lively pair," said the Captain. "They seem to want to know everything. They are studying all my books on the French and English guns now, and I heard one of them say the other day that he had some good ideas on airplanes."

"I hope he takes them home then," said the General. "They are good youngsters, and I'll be glad to get a receipt from their parents for them. They are per-

fectly obedient, and strict as any old regular about discipline, but no matter *what* good care we try to take of them, they are always getting into tight places."

"Their coming over here seems a strange thing," said one of the officers. "Sort of irregular."

"There is a reason," said the General. "They don't know it themselves. They were sent across because it seemed a good thing to have a boy's point of view for the boys over there of things over here. When I say they were sent, I do not mean that their expenses were paid. The Potters are amply able to spend money, but it was a good and patriotic thing for them to risk the lives of a fine pair like Porky and Beany. I don't even know their real names. Not that it matters. They would make themselves felt if they were called Percy and Willie. They are that sort."

Talk drifted to other things and time passed until a stir and footsteps outside made it evident that the expedition had returned. The door flap opened and the party filed in, the remaining prisoner in their midst.

The General glanced at him, then bent a steady, steely look on the man's face.

"You!" he said. "A German prisoner, you—"

The man's face lighted.

He stood erect and made an effort to salute with his bound hands.

"Yes, sir," he said in a low tone. "If I'm to be shot, sir, won't you let me tell you how it all happened?"

The General glanced at his wrist watch.

"It is three o'clock," he said. He nodded toward the sergeant. "Take this man in charge. To-morrow at seven o'clock bring him to my tent and I will talk with him."

He turned away and did not glance again at the prisoner as he was led away.

"He knew you," said a Captain.

"He worked for me four years on my apple ranch in Oregon. The foreman wrote me that he and seven others had left suddenly soon after the beginning of the war. I think we will get some very interesting information out of that young man. In the meantime," he turned to the two boys standing as stiffly at attention as their fagged out bodies would permit, "in the meantime, boys, can you tell your little story in half an hour? It is very late, and we have a hard day before us to-morrow."

"It won't take that long," said Porky. "We just went down a little ways, inside our own lines, General, so you wouldn't worry, and Beany, he hears things just like a cat, and there was a little hill, with these men inside, and I climbed on top and talked to them through the trap door, and Beany made believe he was a

squad."

"And Porky had two of 'em tie up that Fritz fellow," interrupted Beany, "and made 'em come out the door, and we just made 'em think the squad was guarding the hill, and we brought 'em up here, and they came too easy. And we didn't try to carry arms, General, we just had a couple of monkey wrenches, and say, Porky, I've lost mine! That chauffeur will murder me!"

"A few details missing, however," said the General. "However, that will do for to-night. In the morning, if you like, you may be present when I see the prisoner. Good-night!"

CHAPTER XIII
THE PRISONER'S STORY

Some three minutes later (so the boys thought), some one shook them awake. It was morning.

"Six o'clock!" said their tormentor, prodding them viciously. It was the driver of their car. "Say, did youse have my monkey wrench!" he demanded of both boys.

"Sure!" said Porky quickly. "Here it is!" He handed out his wrench, while Beany tried to pretend to sleep again. The chauffeur looked it over.

"Naw, that ain't me wrench," he declared. "Same size and shape but it ain't me wrench!"

"Why not?" asked Porky. "One of us took your wrench last night, and if this is the same size and shape, why isn't it the same wrench?"

"Because it ain't," said the man. "That ain't got the same feel as my wrench. You can't wish off any strange wrench on this guy! I gotta have me own wrench! If General Pershing is goin' to let youse kids go stealin' wrenches, I'll—I'll—well, you'll *see* what I'll do, discipline ner no discipline!" He glared at the boys and at the unoffending wrench.

Beany sadly allowed himself to wake up.

"I had your old wrench," he said, "and I guess I lost it. I will buy you a new one if I can't find it."

"You find it!" said the man. "I don't want no new one! I know the feel of me own tools, and no others need apply!"

He went off grumbling, and the boys, now wide awake, watched him.

"I told you how it would be," groaned Beany. "He'll never let up on me. Wonder where I could have dropped it. In No-Man's-Land probably, where it would be as easy to find as a needle in a haystack, and where we can't go anyhow, now it's light. Look there! Oh praise be, I believe he has found it himself!"

It was so. The man suddenly pounced on an object lying on the ground, took it up, examined it with a tenderer care than would usually be bestowed on a tool, and with a scornful look turned and waved it at the watching boys. "Got it!" he called.

"Good!" said Beany affably.

"No thanks to you!" called the chauffeur. He stalked away.

"I would never let myself get so wrapped up in a little thing like that," said Beany. He threw himself back on his bed.

"Don't do that," said Porky. "We are going to the General's tent at seven, you know, to hear what the Fritz person is going to say for himself. I bet he tells the truth anyhow. If the General fixes his gimlet eye on him once, he will tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth."

"I would in his place," said Beany. "It wouldn't seem just healthy to lie to the General." He commenced the simple process of dressing as practiced by soldiers in the field. It consisted of very brief bathing in a couple of teacups of water in a collapsible, and usually collapsing washpan, made of canvas waterproofed, and after that the simple drawing on of breeches, canvas puttees and shirt. A soldier sleeps in his underwear, but sleeping in his outer garments is very strictly forbidden, no matter how cold the weather may be.

The boys reached the General's tent at ten minutes to seven, and although they knew that the great man had been up for a couple of hours, they sat quietly outside until their watches told off the very tick of the expected hour. Then, just as they saw the guard bringing up the prisoner, they tapped on the tent flap, and at a word of summons entered.

The General, looking as though he had never stirred since the night before, sat in his accustomed place at the head of the table, over which a number of papers were strewn. He bade the boys good morning and nodded them to seats. In another moment the prisoner entered.

For a few moments the General took no notice of the man, keeping his eyes on his papers, while the fellow shifted uneasily from one foot to the other.

Then General Pershing looked up.

"Prisoner," he said, "it is not customary to accord a prisoner of war the sort of interview I am about to give you, but the circumstances alter this case. I want the truth, and the whole truth."

Porky and Beany nudged each other slyly.

"I want some of the information that it is in your power to give me, and I

want it straight. You know you are in my power. There is always a firing squad for men like you. But I want you to unravel this puzzle. I want you to commence when you left the ranch—yes, even before that."

The prisoner spoke eagerly. "I *will* tell you the truth, sir. I am glad to be here, no matter what you do to me. And I swear to tell you the truth." He held up his right hand, and the boys saw it tremble. They commenced to believe him. It was evident that the General did, for he nodded and the man plunged into his story.

It held the boys breathless.

"There were eight of us working for you, General, before America went into this war. Eight men of German ancestry or birth. Most of them were naturalized, but one night a man came to my house and commanded me to meet him in a certain place. He was a German officer and of course I was curious to know what he wanted. When I arrived at the meeting place I found the others there. The officer, showing credentials of his rank that we could not doubt, told us that we were wanted as interpreters. Just that, General. He explained that Germany was obliged to use all the men within her borders as fighting men, and as they were most anxious to have no misunderstanding with America, they were picking a German born, or German bred man here and there as they could without rousing suspicion. They were taking them from the farms rather than from the cities. He said that several hundred would be needed. He assured us that education was not necessary. It sounded very plausible, General, and the salary we were promised was magnificent. We all bit, General, and he took us away that very night in a couple of automobiles."

"The foreman told me," said the General, "that you went away in the middle of the busy season without giving warning."

"Yes, we did, General. I am sorry, and I was sorry then, but the pay—it was a *great* temptation. We have been punished since. We went down through Mexico and took ship. There were five hundred men on board who were all going over to be 'interpreters.' And we never guessed, poor fools, that ship after ship was bearing each a like load. We never suspicioned the outcome. When we reached German soil, we were scattered, two going one place, two another, and instead of having any interpreting to do, we were outfitted as soldiers and attached to different regiments. Men kept coming day after day. I dare not say how many thousands of Germans have been taken out of the United States in this way. We were virtually prisoners. Of course to the most of us it did not matter much. After all Germany was our fatherland before America adopted us. As long as we were fighting the French and English and the Russians, we did not care.

"But then, when we were already very tired, came the news that President Wilson had declared war.

"General, it is not yet believed in Germany. All of them, the highest officers, even the Emperor, on occasion, all have addressed the troops and have explained that war was declared solely for political purposes and that no troops were to be sent over sea.

"They know now, do they not?" asked the General.

"Very few of them, General. They think that the English have adopted the American uniform as a blind."

"What did you think, Fritz?" asked the General.

"I saw them fight, and I knew," said Fritz simply. "I know them; I know how they fight. I told the others so. And when they came across the plain I wanted to hurrah. I suppose I will be shot as a German prisoner, but I could not help it. All my mistake was in the beginning. I would have deserted if I could have done so. Why, General, if those fellows over there behind the German lines knew the truth, a third of them would walk right over here. They are lied to again and again."

"How is the army faring as regards food!" asked the General.

"There is not enough to feed a third of the men. All Germany is dying slowly of substitutes. Substitutes for bread, for meat, for tea, for sugar, for coffee, for milk. At first the army was fed well, at the expense of the civilians. Now all suffer together, and no man in the world works well or fights well on an empty and aching stomach." He groaned.

"What were you doing ont there in that hillock?" asked the General.

"We were well behind the German lines a few days ago," said Fritz, "but whether they retired purposely or not, I cannot say. Since then, however, we have been kept there to communicate with the airplanes. It was possible to signal them by means of electric flashes down on the floor of our hiding place, through the open trap doors on top. Peter was in command. He took and sent the messages, and repeatedly he crept out in the night. I was never allowed to do anything, but if the Allies took the plain, and those ridges beyond it, Peter said we would all go out in American uniforms and learn what we could. We were expected to discover things too cleverly hidden from the airplanes."

"This is interesting at least, Fritz," said the General. "It would be still more interesting to know just how true it is that the German army in general does not know that we are seriously in the war. There are two millions of us here now, Fritz, and more coming."

"Two millions!" echoed the astounded prisoner. "Two millions! When they learn that, the war is over. But how will they ever learn it? Your airplanes scattered leaflets along the front several times. Not where I was stationed, but I heard the order that any man who saw another stoop to pick up one of those leaflets, any man who was caught reading one was to be shot dead by the nearest soldier,

who would receive the cross for doing it. I tell you, sir, they are doing *everything* they can to keep the army from learning that you are in the fight."

"I wonder how true all this is," mused the General.

Porky and Beany watched him narrowly. They were sure he had some plan, but it was clear that he wanted the prisoner to speak first.

"It is *all* true," said Fritz. "General, won't you let me earn my life, set me free for two hours—only that? And I will prove it to you."

"You will disappear just as you did from the ranch, I suppose," grated the General in a harsh voice. "Why should I give you any chance?"

"I don't deserve it," said the prisoner, "except that if my plan fails, I will certainly be shot by the Germans."

"What do you propose?" asked the General.

"Two, perhaps three hours of freedom!" begged Fritz. "And if I can reach the German lines alive, I will return with twenty prisoners to prove to you that every man who is told that the Americans are here and are promised that they will not be shot, will follow me across."

"They are having a skirmish now," said the General, listening, "and a thunder storm is coming beside." He was lost in thought. "Fritz, make good!" he said. "I release you. You are but one man, no loss to us, but you have told me a story of what amounts to kidnapping. I would like to know if this is true. Just one thing. Prove it to me by bringing twenty men back; but while you are there *set the word free that the Americans have arrived.* Two millions, remember, perhaps three." He smiled. "And do not attempt to go or come until nightfall. I will remain here until midnight to-night. You are under guard until dark. You may go." He rapped sharply on the table, the guards entered and removed the prisoner.

The General began to smoke.

"What do you think, boys? Will he come back?"

"Yes, sir," said both boys together.

"Why?" asked the General.

"Why, he was telling the truth!" said Porky,

"They don't look like that other times," said Beany. "He was straight, all right."

"He will have to prove it," said the General grimly. "Men who leave a job without warning, no matter what the needs of the situation, do not fill me with confidence."

"I guess he is sorry now, anyway," said tender-hearted Beany.

"We will hope so," said the General. "Porky, you may typewrite these letters for me, and you, Beany, may check up these lists. If you can do this properly, it will release a man for other duty."

For two hours the two boys were too busy to know what went on in the

tent. When the task was done the General dismissed them with strict orders that they were not to go more than thirty feet in any direction from his tent.

When the Germans had occupied that side of the valley, they had also used the hill as a temporary headquarters. Porky and Beany, like a pair of very restless and inquisitive hounds, went over the ground inch by inch. They could not help feeling that something good must be waiting for them within their screen of trees. The fighting miles away went on all day, and the time dragged for the boys until about three in the afternoon.

And then Porky found it—a tiny piece of wire sticking out of the ground under a root of the big tree under which they were sitting, feeling like a couple of prisoners themselves. They had never been on such close bounds before, and they didn't like it.

Porky started to pull the wire, when Beany fell on him with a yell.

"A bomb!" he cried, flinging Porky on his back.

"My word! You have scared me to death anyhow," said Porky.

Together they dug around the wire and followed it down and down until they almost gave up. At last, however, they had their reward, a square black tin box which they carried carefully to the General's tent.

Even then the greatest care was taken in opening it, for fear of an infernal machine of some sort. It opened easily, however, and without harm and disclosed a mass of papers. So many that the German officer who had been in charge of them, fearing capture, had evidently buried them, thinking that with the turn of battle he could easily reclaim them from the earth.

Among the papers were several cypher keys, and one of them was found to fit the papers found by Beany in the oak table in the dungeon at the chateau back at headquarters.

Even the General was delighted, as a little study disclosed the most important plans of the coming campaign and a scheme for the expected drive, which now could be met point for point.

It was dusk before the General and his staff finished with an examination of the papers, fitting the new keys to the papers already in their possession.

Porky allowed himself to crow. "Guess we are sort of little old Handy-to-have-around!" he chortled. "Guess we get to go all the way with *this* distinguished mob!"

"Looks so," said Beany, "but you never can tell."

And they couldn't.

CHAPTER XIV
ORDERS ARE ORDERS

Night fell dark and stormy. As soon as it was dusk Fritz begged to be released and, receiving the General's permission, slipped away.

"I doubt if he comes back," said the General, "but it will spread the news at least. No, it is too much to expect that a man will persuade a couple of men, to say nothing of twenty, to give themselves into the hands of an enemy they have been taught to believe is ruthless, but if he does, we will know that the conditions in the German army are worse than we dream."

Time dragged away. The boys, still believing in Fritz, sat at the head of the only trail, watching. They almost wore their watches out looking at them, and trying them to see if they were wound. Time seemed to stand still and yet, somehow, ten o'clock came, and eleven and a quarter past. At half past the drivers prepared the cars for their silent night journey to the next sector. The tents were down, all but the screen of blankets behind which, with a closely shaded light, the General sat.

Ten minutes and the boys looked once more at the illuminated dials, and sighed.

"I'd have bet on that duck, if I was a betting man," said Porky sadly. "I bet he *meant* to come."

"Hark!" said Beany, listening.

Porky listened too. He could always hear what Beany heard, if Beany called his attention to it. A soft tramp of feet could be heard. The boys leaped to their feet. Tramp, tramp, scuffle, scuffle, up the hill in the darkness!

"They are coming!" gasped Beany.

They were.

A flash of lightning preceding the storm that had hung off all day split the sky, and in its momentary glare the boys saw a small squad of American soldiers come out into the little clearing. The boys stood aside as they passed. Another squad brought up the rear, and between them—yes, between them marched, or rather staggered, a dismal company of twenty haggard skeletons headed by Fritz!

He had kept his word. The men were evidently frightened badly and Fritz

kept talking to them as they advanced. The General came out of his shelter and surveyed them by the light of his flash.

"Here they are, sir," said Fritz. "Ask them what you like."

The General spoke to the weary men and they replied rapidly in harsh, hoarse voices. Porky and Beany stood in an agony of curiosity, wishing that they had studied German instead of Latin in high school.

Finally the General took time to explain to the officers who did not understand.

He gave orders to have the prisoners fed, and soon the strange little company wound off down the hill again on its way to the prison camp. Fritz, as a sort of trusty, was given special privileges.

"It is quite true, gentlemen," said the General. "The conditions in the enemy's army are most serious. They are only half fed, poorly clothed and letters occasionally smuggled from home report a frightful state of affairs—famine, disease and intense suffering among the families of the soldiers. This alone you know will break the morale of their troops.

"And Fritz said he could have brought five hundred men as well as this twenty, but they are taught that we torture them and always shoot our prisoners sooner or later. That is why they fight so desperately.

"They think death awaits them in any case, and that death on the battlefield is far preferable to that which we will mete out to them if taken prisoners.

"Fritz assured me that he had set the ball rolling, however, the news of our millions of men in the field. This has been a surprising experience but we are already late. We must be off!"

Rapidly the party took their seats in the automobiles. The first was about to start when a motor was heard in the darkness. It was approaching, apparently from headquarters.

"Word for the General!" was the whispered word, and sure enough, the driver of the swift, low car had a letter for the General. He read it and called the boys.

"News for you, young men," he said regretfully. "General Bright has been recalled to the States, and you are to return with him. This cuts your stay several weeks and, I regret to say, makes it impossible for you to continue with us. You are to return in this car."

The boys, desperately disappointed, hopped out, found their field kits, and advanced to say good-by to the General.

He shook hands heartily and patted each on the shoulder.

"I shall miss you, boys," he said. "You have certainly done your bit! Some day, when we are all back in America, I shall expect you to come and see how *real* apples grow on a ranch in Oregon."

The boys thanked him. They could not say much. It was a great disappointment.

They settled back in the car which was to take them back to General Bright. They heard the other cars glide quietly and swiftly away in the distance. They too shot out at high speed.

Soberly they stared into the darkness. Their thoughts flew forward to the tiresome trip to the port of embarkation, the long ocean voyage with its deadly inaction. They had been living in confusion, danger, and uncertainty. They commenced to see before them their home, their father and mother, the familiar fellows.

"We have to get Bill and Peggy," said Beany.

"Yep!" said Porky briefly.

They could just *see* their mother, with oceans of love for them and plenty for the two orphans beside.

For the first time a great wave of homesickness swept over the boys. That they were to have a pleasant, safe trip would not have interested them if they could have been told of it. They were homesick. Silently they rolled on and on in the dark. Presently Beany slipped an arm around the hunched up shoulders of his twin.

"Wish we were home *now*!" he said huskily.

"Gosh!" said Porky.

FINIS

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