

THE CURIOUS

By

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*"Coincidence," You Say? But
Then, All Life is a Coincidence
—from the Cradle to the Grave!*

LUCK

OF THE

EARL OF PUGWASH

DENNIS EARLE wanted to see London while there was some of it left to see, so he got a two-day leave from the O.C. and went up to town. They had brought a group of Lockheed bombers across the pond and were waiting among the ruins of Liverpool for a ship back. Canadian pay being better than English, Earle was fairly well heeled.

He got up to London about five in the afternoon, but by the time he reached the Houses of Parliament, darkness and the blackout spoiled his view; so he just wandered on up toward Trafalgar Square.

When the Moaning Minnie cut loose with its warning, Earle followed the nearest figures and crowded into a shelter, somewhat excited by walking right into an air raid. No one else was excited, however. The people around cursed the Jerries for starting to work two hours ahead of the usual time, and getting the dinner hour all messed up.

A bad sign, Earle gathered from the talk. Fires would be set by these first raiders, and the flames would be used as guides by the bombers following it. It would be a hard night. Earle, in his trim uniform, listened. He was good looking, being rangy and high-boned in feature; only a year out of the backwoods, in fact.

But the backwoods of Nova Scotia breed hard men at an early age.

The shelter was dimly lit. Earle felt a touch on the elbow; a woman was beside him, looking at the R.C.A.F. insignia and letters.

"You're a Canadian?" she asked. Her voice was soft. She was young, not pretty, not well dressed, but she had a nice face, thought Earle. She wore a hat something like a Scots bonnet, with a feather perking the front up; a red feather, a red hat, tired brave eyes.

"Yes," said Earle. "That is, of a sort. Nova Scotia. Ever hear of Pugwash?"

To his surprise, she smiled a little, in assent.

"Yes, but I've never been there. My folks lived down near Sheldon."

"Sheldon? Good lord! I've been there many a time. Did you know Cap'n Bruce there? And the McFees?"

"My father was a McFee," said she. "But he died a long time ago, and my mother too, and I came over here with a show company and—well, it's not so good these days. Mostly, I use the shelter at the Temple or the Bank, when the raids come. I got caught here going home from work—oh, there it is now!"

The long-drawn, whooshing All Clear was sounding. People were flocking out.

Earle wanted to keep in touch with her, but a swirl of the crowd separated them, and with a wave of her hand she was gone. He could not very well pursue her, he thought. Then he suddenly wished he had, and went plunging frantically after her, but it was too late.

He was out in the dark streets again. Here and there the sky above the buildings was lurid; fires had been started, all right. Earle wandered on—whither, he did not care a snap. This was London, and he was here; and presently he forgot all about the girl in the red bonnet, except to think of the curious chance of meeting someone who knew Pugwash.

Hunger was making itself felt. He could not find a pub, for everything was blacked out; he wanted a drink and he wanted dinner, and had no chance of getting either. But he could find a fire, and did, for engines were clanging and flames were rising, and he came into a street swarming with people and fire-fighters and wardens and Auxiliary Ambulance Corps women, desperately trying to get the fire under control before the raiders returned. Earle wanted to get directions, and hesitated.

A man came toward him, a rather stout man in a derby hat and evening clothes with a cross-barred waistcoat. He saw that the man was going to speak to him, and so it happened.

“Beg pardon, sir, but you’re an officer?”

“Air Force,” said Earle, which was answer enough. He was framing a question when the other spoke earnestly.

“Very good, sir. If you’ve not dined, will you have the kindness to come to dinner? His lordship—that is to say, Lord Mortimer—sent me out to find an officer and ask him to dinner. His lordship is extremely put out when forced to dine alone.”

“What sort of a game is this?” demanded Earle. Then he saw that the other was serious; a long-faced, solemn fellow with no humor whatever. “Look here, I’m a stranger in town, a Canadian. I don’t want any of your tricks.”

“I assure you, sir, it is no trick,” replied the other with dignity. “I am Jenkins, his lordship’s man. It is a whim of his lordship’s to invite any officer within touch to dine of an evening, sir.”

Earle regarded him with some astonishment, then capitulated to reality.

“Well, I’ll be damned! All right, Jenkins. If this turns out to be a hoax, you’ll get a bloody nose. Lead on, and if you make good on the bet, it’s money in your pocket.”

Apparently Jenkins was accustomed to incredulity and amazement on the part of his guests. With perfect aplomb he led Earle back to the corner and down the next street, and turned in at a house which seemed of some size. He held open the front door and asked an apologetic question.

“His lordship will be at table. Whom shall I announce, sir?”

“Dennis Earle, of Pugwash.” From the looks of the candle-lit house, whose glassless windows were all shuttered, the adventure seemed to be coming true. With some amusement, Earle thought he might as well get some credit for his native town in these purlieus of the landed aristocracy.

“Beg pardon, sir?” Jenkins, taking his cap, gave him a startled glance.

“Pugwash,” repeated Earle. “A name famous in Nova Scotian annals, my man. Pugwash. Dennis Earle, of Pugwash.”

“Very good, sir. This way, sir.”

Having a healthy Canadian mistrust of Belgravia and the aristocracy in general, Earle was on the alert for trick or trap. He was disillusioned, when he was led into a magnificent dining-room, glowing with

candles, rich with paneled oak and silver, the table perfectly appointed and a man sitting at the head, who rose to receive him.

A MAN gaunt and gray, with white mustache over a square, uncompromising jaw, the miniature jewel of an order glinting under his white tie, and rather savage gray eyes.

“His grace, the Earl of Pugwash,” announced Jenkins, discreetly adding: “A Canadian title, my lord.”

“Delighted to meet you! An honor, sir, an honor!” Earle, blinking, found Lord Mortimer at his side, welcoming him with hearty words and cordial handclasp. “Any of His Majesty’s officers honors this house by his presence, and particularly a colonial. You must pardon me for not getting the name aright; I’ve never been in Canada. Pugwash, I think!”

“Dennis Earle, of Pugwash; that’s it,” exclaimed Earle. Then, realizing the error, he tried to put it right. “But look here, I never meant to say—”

“Nonsense, my lad! Sit down, sit down, Pugwash—hm! I do seem to know that name. I must have heard it somewhere. The cocktails, Jenkins; and mind the wine is chilled aright.”

“Very good, your lordship,” assented Jenkins, and left the room.

Earle was seated, was trying to orientate himself. Everything was real; it was out of the Arabian Nights, perhaps, but it was real.

“Look here, sir,” he exclaimed desperately. “There’s a mistake. I didn’t mean to tell him that I was the Earl of Pugwash! That’s all nonsense. My name’s Earle, Dennis Earle. I told him I was Dennis Earle of Pugwash, and . . .”

Mortimer was eyeing him keenly with those sardonic gray eyes. Comprehension

flashed in the old face, his lips twitched, then he lifted a hand and spoke hurriedly.

“I see, I see . . . but not a word more! Damme, it would never do. Never! Jenkins would never forgive himself. I’d not have him know for the world! Pugwash you were, Pugwash you must be, at least within his hearing.”

“Oh! I get you,” said Earle. “He does seem to take himself damned seriously. Okay, then; so long as you understand, it’s all right. I was out on the Banks one season in a Lunenburg craft with two skippers. Cap’n John had shipped his brother, Cap’n George, who was a bit dotty but fancied himself the skipper and never knew the difference; all hands humored him in it, and if things came to a pinch he took orders from his brother meek and mild!”

“Right,” said Mortimer, a twinkle in his eye. “Here are the cocktails; I don’t fancy the cocktail idea myself, but it seems to be in fashion these days.”

The glamorous dinner began to a proper understanding, at least, and Earle relaxed. He was a bit uncomfortable until Mortimer got him at ease with talk of ferrying bombers over from Newfoundland; and the drinks helped, and then everything went off swimmingly.

There was something fresh and alive and vigorous about Dennis Earle; small wonder that the older man took to him strangely. Age is lonely, and lonely age is damnable, yielding gladly to the interest of youth. Mortimer could talk of Magersfontein and Ypres, and Earle could talk of prismatic air compasses and the wide Atlantic, and between them they made the hour fly and were old friends by the time Minnie interrupted.

The wailing banshee cry penetrated to them, and Jenkins came with a needless, anxious announcement.

"I'll let no damned Hun disturb my dinner," said Mortimer. "Be damned to them! Serve the port, Jenkins. Draw the curtains in the other rooms, and close the doors."

They talked on, against a background that became more fearsome with every minute. It was Earle's first experience of siren bombs. They cut through all the tumultuous roar of shells and barrage; they reached into the brain and wrenched it with torturing clutch. Lord Mortimer smiled grimly, seeing Earle's gaze flicker.

"They're not close; the sound falls in a descending scale. It's when the wail rises that one must look out. After a bit we'll take a walk and see what's going on, eh?"

"We'll—what?" Earle looked up very sharply. "Why, I had a notion that nobody dared go out during an air raid!"

"Stuff and nonsense. You'd not cower in a cellar because of a blasted Hun?"

"Well, I wouldn't stick my neck out too far." Earle's eyes twinkled. "However, if you say walk, I'm with you. But mind, I'm no hero!"

Mortimer laughed with keen relish. "Come along; cigars in the library."

They left the table and passed into a long, low room studded with books. The Havanas were remarkable; Earle sank into an easy chair and made himself comfortable.

He had gathered, in the course of the dinner, that Mortimer was alone in the world, except for some distant relatives a whom he disliked heartily. A son had been killed in Flanders during the last war.

Now, relaxing, Earle noted an exquisitely painted portrait on the wall; the portrait of a young woman whose features seemed to come alive in the soft light of the candles. He could not take his eyes from it. There was a certain vague familiarity in it that puzzled him. Mortimer, noting his gaze, nodded grimly.

"My daughter Irene," he said. "A wayward lass who married beneath her. Being a damned old fool, I did the most regrettable action of my life; cut her off completely. He was a fisherman—a fisherman, d'ye understand?"

"I was, too," said Earle stoutly. "My people were fishermen on the Banks. My Dad used to say we had a lot in common with St. Peter."

Mortimer looked at him, hard; the grim features softened.

"Well said, my lad. But, twenty years ago, I was a harsh and intolerant man. She was as proud as I was, too; so were her new people. When age and loneliness had bashed in my cursed pride, I learned she was dead. There was a child, but it was lost to sight or deliberately hidden from me. Last year my solicitors offered a thousand pounds for information about the child, and got nothing."

"Too bad," said Earle, sympathetically. "You don't strike me as such a bad sort of guy. That portrait reminds me of somebody; can't think who, though."

Dust seemed to come out of everything on a sudden. The house quivered. The air shook from some nearby concussion, but the duller sound of the bomb was almost lost under the inferno of sound hammering from the skies. A drumming as of ragged rifle-volleys came sharply from overhead.

"Shrapnel on the slates," commented Mortimer casually. "We'll need tin hats when we go out." He paused over his cigar, and glanced up at the portrait. "Yes, a beautiful girl. Sargent did that likeness. She died somewhere in a province of Canada."

"Oh!" said Earle. "What was her name? I mean her married name."

"McFee," replied Mortimer, with a grimace as though the sound of it hurt him.

Something leaped in Earle's veins. McFee! And the tired, brave eyes—

“By, damn!” he cried out. “Now I know! The red bonnet and the red feather . . . the McFees of Sheldon, sure!”

A gust of excitement shook him. Mortimer did not notice.

“Correct. Nova Scotia. They call ‘em bluenoses. Do people there actually have blue noses?”

“Hell, no!” Earle exclaimed, with a gusty laugh. “Used to paint the bows of the fishing vessels blue. Why, that girl would be your granddaughter, wouldn’t she?”

THE shaggy gray brows knitted. “What girl? Whom are you talking about?”

“I told you the picture reminded me of some one!”

“It was a girl I met tonight. Her name was McFee. From Sheldon. She came over here a couple years ago—it was in an air shelter—”

Earle poured out the tale of that chance meeting underground. Mortimer forgot his Havana; the sardonic gleam died from the hard gray eyes. Then he shook his head.

“Stuff and nonsense! By the laws of heredity, a daughter seldom looks like the mother.”

“Damn heredity!” said Earle. “Facts are facts. I tell you, her face looked like this one on the wall—might almost be a picture of her! And with the name and the place and all, what more could you ask?”

Mortimer laid down his forgotten cigar and rose.

“No more, perhaps; a great deal more, if it came to my solicitors. All right, my lad. We’ll go see this young woman. Where to find her?”

Earle stared at him blankly. “Find her? How the devil do I know?”

“But you said—”

“I said what she said; that was all. There wasn’t any more. Hold on, though!” He thought desperately. “She did say that

she usually used the shelter at the Temple or the Bank when the raids came.”

“That’d be underground stations, eh? And there’s a raid tonight, no doubt of that. Could you find the spot where you met her?”

“No. Not a chance.”

“Then it’s the underground. May still be running. Hm! We’ll try the Temple, Bank and Cannon Street stations. You’d know her again if you saw her?”

“Of course! The red bonnet and a feather—”

Mortimer pressed a bell and Jenkins appeared.

“My things, Jenkins. And the tin hats. What about it, my lad?”

Earle nodded, his eyes alight. “For the honor of Pugwash, you bet! Not that I like the prospect, though.”

He liked it less when they got out in the streets, Mortimer enveloped in an old-fashioned inverness and a shooting cap. From a policeman who advised them to take shelter, they learned the underground was running; the trains would stop at ten, however, so Mortimer hustled away.

The shrapnel from the anti-aircraft barrage fell by fits and starts. The noise of the guns was deafening; lurid glares lit the horizon to tell of fires. The hideous screams of siren bombs mingled with the duller bursts, but there was none close by. Even so, Earle felt the terrific pull of it all. Mortimer linked arms with him and shouted.

“Demoralizing, what? Don’t let it get you. Saps the vitality out of a man; the strain is beyond comprehension. How these poor devils in public shelters can stand it night after night without breaking down, is simply extr’ordinary. Hello! There’ve been fire pellets dropped hereabouts, eh?”

The glare-lit streets were by no means empty. Parties of men and women were

fighting the deadly little thermite spurts of flame, ambulances were on the move, air raid police and wardens were going about their business. It was almost with astonishment that Earle found a tube station opening before them and heard the roar of a train as they descended.

Now the hell of fire and battle and bomb was shut out; the silence seemed peaceful and terrible. And, with barely space to step, the huddle of humanity outspread before them like a sea; people crowded everywhere in solid masses, sometimes to the very edge of the tracks. The platforms were jammed with men, women, children, on blankets and pillows and bare concrete.

And most were asleep. The voluntary curfew which ended all amusements and singing had long ago been imposed. Earle wrinkled his nose at the foul air; then a train came in with a crash, and Mortimer was shoving him aboard.

They got off at the Temple and the train drew out.

"You've picked us a job," said Earle. "Well, go to it! Red hat and red feather that perks it up in front. That's all I can tell you."

They separated, and the weary search began. Even to pick a way among these sprawled human masses was difficult; babies were squalling, half-clad people resented disturbance, the air was thick enough to cut with a knife. Half an hour of it exhausted the possibilities and left Earle all but sick, as he made his way to the entrance where the tall figure in the inverness awaited him.

"Last train coming through in a moment," said Mortimer. "Best make for the Bank, eh?"

A few moments later they were plunging through the darkness again, while far above death rained down, relentless.

When they stepped out amid new yeasty masses of humanity, the scene was different. No sleep here, no peace, no escape! The city was catching it hot and heavy this night, shelters had been hit or emptied. The platforms here were surging masses . . . hurt people, refugees from fire and wreckage. Surgeons and Auxiliary Ambulance women were bustling about.



To Earle, it was at first ghastly confusion and panic; then he began to understand. Groups broke into singing; waves of song roared along under the tunnels. Wan-eyed men cursed the Jerries, women talked excitedly, children scrambled about, but there was in reality neither panic nor confusion. As he roved about, keeping an eye cocked for red feather and bonnet, he comprehended that there was even a certain orderly grouping among these people. In the main, they had their own nooks and corners here, to which they came night after night.

Long weeks and months of this cave-dwelling life had given them mutual acquaintance. The long platform was like a vast club of the unfortunate. Rough hilarity and comments were exchanged among groups. From these ranks had been recruited spotters and fire-fighters; places were even reserved for some absent ones.

But there was never a sign of the red bonnet with its perky feather.

Up and down and across, Earle wended his way, even searching the corners for that telltale headgear, until glances began to follow him uneasily. A

man came sauntering after him, then another man; when at length he took note of them and turned, half a dozen others were crowding forward.

“Lookin’ for something, matey?” came the question. “Might be we could help.”

Earle became aware of the figures, of the questioning faces and eyes. He perceived that his activity had been noted and resented. A smile came to his lips.

“I am,” he replied. “For a young woman named McFee. I don’t know where to locate her; thought she was here. She has a red bonnet with a feather in it.”

“S’elp me if ‘e aynt a bloody optimist!” rose a voice. “Red bonnet wif a feather—go look in St. Jymes Park, lad!”

There was an outbreak of laughter. Earle’s frank explanation, however, had relieved the tension. News of his quest was handed on by a dozen voices. A woman came pushing forward.

“And wad it be a Canadian lassie?” she demanded.

“Aye!” said Earle eagerly. “You know her?”

Plenty knew her, it seemed. Information dinned upon him. She had been here an hour earlier; then she had gone to serve in the rolling kitchens being installed against the morrow’s need. Yes, she was a friend of many here—

“The kitchens? Where are they?” demanded Earle.

“Aldwych Close, off Bishopsgate. Just up the way.”

Earle swung around. On the opposite platform he saw the tall black figure of Mortimer striding about; he shouted, others shouted. He waved his arm toward the entrance and Mortimer replied with a wave of comprehension. Followed by a storm of plaudits and hearty wishes, Earle pushed his way through the throngs.

He met Mortimer, imparted his news breathlessly, and they mounted to the

street. A policeman held up his hand.

“We’re having it a bit thick in this district,” he said warningly. “Better stay under cover unless it’s urgent.”

“It’s urgent,” said Mortimer, his voice brooking no dispute. The policeman touched his tin hat and stepped back.

Then it hit them like a blow—the barrage, the continuous shell-burst in golden splashes above, the hammering, thudding roars, the lurid glare that turned night into hideous hellfire. Mortimer, luckily, claimed to know the way.

The wide street was a mass of rubble; houses were ablaze, firemen at work. Shrapnel showered in all directions. Earle was absolutely appalled by the inferno above and around. A siren bomb screamed. The scream grew and grew; Mortimer yanked him bodily into an areaway—the horror burst just across the street. A house there simply went all to bits and showered, but the area saved them from the concussion. Earle wanted most desperately to turn and run for it; fear was in him like a crawling weight.

They kept on. Just ahead, a house and its shelter had been hit. Firemen, wardens, women with ambulances; all were frantically at work, the ambulances skittering off with wounded. Mortimer got directions and Earle followed him on, unhappily. They dodged from house to house, daring the shrapnel where they must. It was a miracle, thought Earle, that they got through alive.

But they did get through. Mortimer pointed, during a paused wait, to an open court ahead, just across the street.

“There it is,” he shouted. “They’ll have a shelter—”

The scream came in a terrific crescendo; they were hugging a doorway close. The burst was across the street—just where Mortimer was pointing. Fire leaped against the lurid heavens. The concussion

flattened them where they stood, as though an invisible hand shoved them against that door; bricks and stone came down all around. A tremendous crash hit Earle's steel hat, and he crumpled momentarily, then was up, wiping blood from his face. Mortimer tugged at him. Everything across the way was gone in jumbled skeleton ruin.

A man came at them, running, gasping, screaming.

"The shelter!" His voice was like a whisper against the tumult. "Come down atop, the 'ouse did—fair atop—"

Other men, several women, came in wild panic. Mortimer's voice blared at them like a bugle. He broke their terror, got them in hand. Earle seconded him. They flung themselves at the smoking ruins opposite. Smoke flickered up into flame.

Earle had them all going at it like a wrecking crew. He went at it himself. They fought the flames frantically, with anything at hand. They dragged out beams, stones, bricks. Other men came along with tools; the steel helmets of firemen glittered. Earle looked around for Mortimer and found him gone, his voice gone.

Two women had lifted him to one side. Earle went to him and knelt in swift dismay. A bit of shrapnel had dented into the helmet; nothing worse. Earle left him to the two women and flung himself back into the work. It was maddening, frantic work. A bomb crunched across the street and fragments showered around, striking down two men.

Somebody screamed . . . an arm was extending from the rubble, a limp naked arm. They dug around it. Earle lifted out a body. A woman, with no head. He went violently sick and turned aside. But, after a bit, he was working again with spasmodic horror clutching at him. Had that headless

figure been the girl? No way of telling.

They were making headway amid the ruins, but there was gas in the air; an evil omen. If it ignited, God help the poor souls beneath! Everyone held back, breathless, panting. Earle plunged at it; he passed out the stones and bricks, others tailed on and lifted the beams. Splintered wood, furniture, metal—a man who knew the place was guiding their work.

Earle crumpled up, exhausted, gas-stricken. He was pulled out of the way and another took his place. He stood off at one side; somebody held a flask to his lips, and the liquor helped clear his head. He was trembling, yet impatient to be back at it.

And presently he was back. Cheery word arrived that a full fire-crew were coming. Two more bodies were lifted up, both men. The ruins of a staircase showed emptily. It made a tunnel down into the debris and muck. Walls above were toppling, others were threatening to tumble at each instant. Below there, said the guide, was the door to the shelter.

A fireman with an axe shoved past Earle. A cry burst from him; shrapnel cut through his body. Earle caught up the axe and dropped into the deathly tunnel, just as a wall came crashing down. A stone struck his back; he thought he was done for, but recovered, found the axe again and crawled down.

Here was the end; the glare in the sky showed him what blocked everything. A doorway with a beam athwart it, holding it. Not a large beam, thank heaven! He fell to work at it, chopping in the confined space.

Screams of warning filtered down from above, and a crash, stones toppling all about him. He chopped on. There was a pounding at the other side of the door; all alive in there! The axe was through the beam at one side; he attacked the other. His tin hat was gone, blood smeared his

eyes, his body was wrenched with pain, but he chopped and chopped, grimly desperate, holding himself to it through aching agony.

UNEXPECTEDLY, those on the other side of the door gave assistance. The door opened toward him with weight behind it, the beam flew asunder . . . and the severed portion rushed at him, struck him across the head, laid him flat. Frantic people trampled over him to escape. He was helpless to move or speak.

Someone, however, had an electric torch, and the flashlight found him, revealed him. The rush stopped. He was extricated, and as the light swept across his grimed and bloody features, as he wiped the blood from his eyes and tried to speak, he heard a cry.

“You! Oh, it’s you! Canuck!”

The beam of light swept to her. She was beside him—the McFee girl—the red bonnet with the feather! Earle tried to say something, but he was too far gone. He just collapsed in a heap and everything was darkness for him.

When he wakened, it was to a more confining darkness; presently he realized that he was in bed. Yet there was a weight on his eyes, and his head hurt dully. He put up a hand and touched a bandage, and understood.

“Hello! Awake, are you?” It was the dominant, uncompromising voice of Lord Mortimer.

“I seem to be, yes,” said Earle. “Hospital?”

“No; my house.” Mortimer gripped his hand heartily, and sat on the bedside. “You’re a bit banged up about the head; you’ll need those bandages for a few days, so take it easy.”

“But look here!” exclaimed Earle in alarm. “I only had a two-day leave, you know—”

“I’ve attended to that already; a word in the right quarter took care of everything. Your leave’s extended indefinitely, or will be; think no more about it.”

“Okay.” Earle relaxed with a sigh of relief. “Good of you to attend to it.”

“Good of me? Why, you confounded young rascal! I’m in your debt for life! Hello, here’s Jenkins with a spot of lunch . . . it’s getting on to noon, you know. We’ll have you sitting up in a few minutes, and the nurse can lend you a hand at feeding.”

The nurse? Earle recollected everything now, and shivered at the memory of blood and fire and hell. Then he heard the voice of Jenkins. “Will you have your coffee white or black, my lord?”

Mortimer touched his wrist, significantly.

“He’s speaking to you, Pugwash,”

“Oh!” Earle laughed a little. “Black, thanks.”

He was raised, pillows were stuffed behind him. Mortimer spoke again.

“All right, lad. Jenkins has gone. Put out your left hand.”

Earle obeyed, gropingly. His hand was caught in soft fingers.

“The nurse?” he questioned. “Look here! I want to ask about that girl—did you get in touch with her? Was she the right one?”

“Right as right,” said Mortimer. “And a thousand quid in your pocket to boot. That was the advertised offer, you know.”

“Oh, damn the money!” Earle exclaimed. “I want to see her again. I liked her face, her eyes—tired, brave eyes they were.”

He heard a laugh; and the soft fingers tightened on his hand.

“You’ll see her soon enough, Canuck,” she said. “I’m the nurse, understand? I owe you a lot, too.”

“Oh! I get it. Took advantage of a

blind man, did you?" Earle squeezed her fingers. "And all because Jenkins picked me up on a street corner. Talk about luck!"

"I'm not so sure," rejoined Mortimer. "There's a saying: You never know your luck! You may call it luck, my lad, but I'd call it destiny, damme if I wouldn't! Now, young lady, get some of that food into him. At the moment, your job is to feed the Earl of Pugwash!"

SHE laughed softly, and obeyed. You never know your luck! Those words recurred to Earle of a morning, later on, when Diana McFee came to him with a newspaper and, white-cheeks, pointed to an Admiralty announcement. Earle glanced at it, and caught his breath. A

west-bound ship gone, and most of those aboard gone with her—Canadians, Americans—flyers who had ferried the bombers across and were heading back for more bombers. He looked up at her and met her eyes.

"Why, it was my gang!" he muttered. "My gang—and I'd be with them, if I hadn't been held here! I'd have been on that ship."

"But you're here," she said, gravely. "And a lucky thing, if you ask me."

"I'll ask you, all right!" Earle's eyes twinkled. "Yes, I'll ask you; I'll push my luck, never fear! Luckiest man in the world, that's what I am."

And he had no cause to doubt it, when he did ask her.