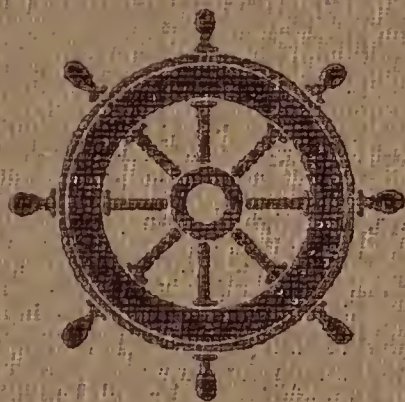


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On The
RIVER





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GENERAL GRANTS' HQ.

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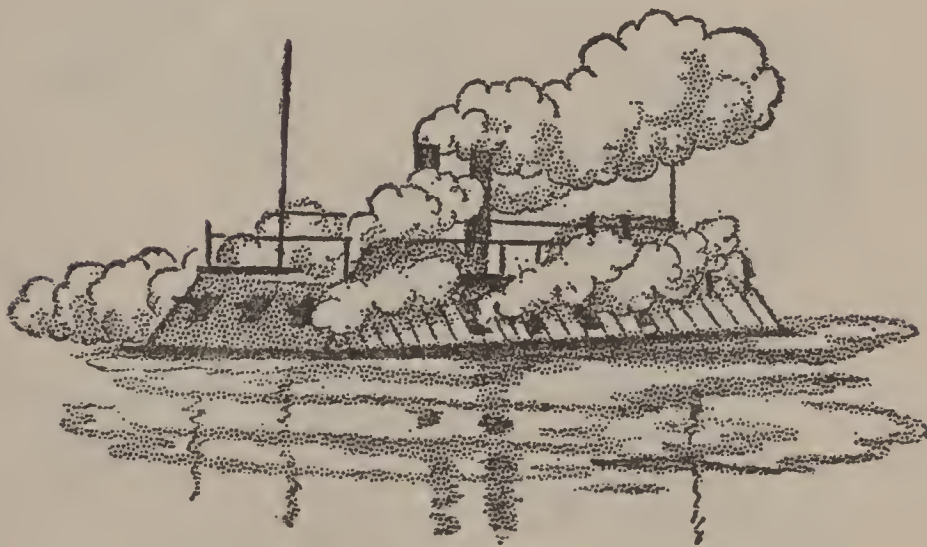
"Look out! His right hand! He's got a knife"

PILOT *on the* RIVER

By

LEWIS S. MINER

Author of MIGHTIER THAN THE SWORD



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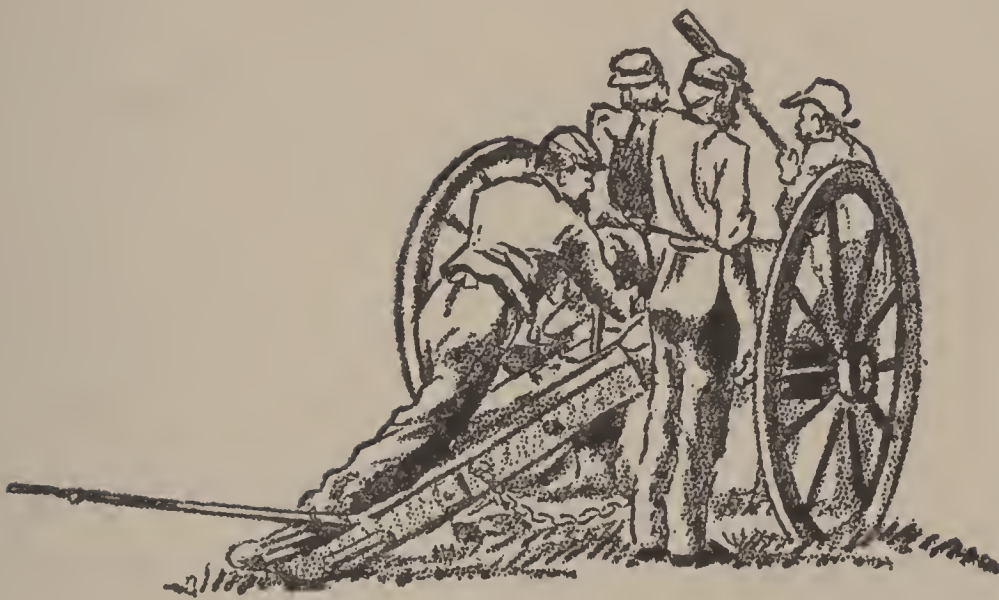
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FOREWORD

PILOT ON THE RIVER is the story of Bill Wingate, a boy who lived during the Golden Days of steamboating on the Lower Mississippi during the 1850's and bore the tragedy of the War Between the States in the 1860's.

Part of Bill's story is fictional because Bill, his father and most of his friends are creatures of the imagination, just as are the steamboats *Cotton Belle*, *River Queen* and *Magnolia*. The rest of Bill's story is fact. All the events in this book either did happen or could have happened.

To assure myself that the facts in this tale are accurate and that the fictional portions could have happened or did happen to real people, I consulted two experts, an historian and a former river pilot.

At Vicksburg Military Park which overlooks the river where the Confederate River Defense Fleet and the Union Western Flotilla battled, I received the gracious assistance of F. F. Wilshin, Junior Research Technician of the Park staff. Later Mr. Wilshin, by scholarly reading of the manuscript, made sure of its historical accuracy and fairness to both Southern and Northern points of view.

In the Memphis Library I studied over files of the Memphis *Appeal* with Joe Curtis, River Editor of the present-day Memphis *Commercial Appeal*, often turning to peer out the windows and watch a towboat sweep by on the Wolf or farther out, on the Mississippi. Joe Curtis also read the 'script and reported that it was accurate as to technical details of the boats and their pilots as well as faithful to the traditions of those old days before and during the War.

FOREWORD (Continued)

I am also indebted to many other men and women, both north and south of the Mason-Dixon Line. There was E. E. Ezell of the U. S. Engineers Office, War Department, at St. Paul and other members of the Engineers Corps farther down the river who furnished valuable advice and assistance; Mr. Carl Vitz and his staff of the Minneapolis Public Library provided important material as did the libraries at St. Paul, Memphis, New Orleans, Chicago and other points; Mrs. C. J. Lignon of *Elmscourt* near Natchez carried me on a fascinating excursion back into ante bellum days; and, at every place I stopped, from the Falls of St. Anthony to the delta below New Orleans, pilots, mud clerks, stevedores, field Negroes, householders and loafers alike answered my questions enthusiastically and revealed the important part the river plays in their lives.

To Paul, Ethel and Bart Mueller, F. D. Knapp, and my wife, I owe a special kind of gratitude for the many indispensable kindnesses and aids that made it possible for this book to be written, and made the writing a thoroughly pleasant experience.

LEWIS S. MINER

Minneapolis, Minnesota



"You're from the Marine Brigade?"



Chapter I

OFF FOR ST. LOUIS

THE fading spring twilight enveloped the *Cotton Belle* as she chuffed upriver away from the levee at Quincy. Reluctantly, Bill Wingate and his father rose from the crate on which they had been sitting and began to thread their way among piles of freight up toward town.

The boy, tall for his fifteen years, held back respectfully for the man whose thin, sallow face bore out the weakness of a slender frame. One block up the steep road they stopped for Jack Wingate to rest. As they looked back at the full, rushing river,

throwing back last flashes of soft red, the man rested a thin hand on the boy's firm shoulder.

"I hate to see you go, Son," he spoke slowly in brittle Yankee.

Before Bill could answer, a tall spare Negro shot from behind a sugar barrel his eyes popping as he shouted, "Oh, Mistuh Bill! Kin yo' help me?"

Bill's father turned to the frightened darkey, "Calm down, Marcellus. What's the trouble?"

"Ah—ah shouldn't bother yo', suh, but I'se 'fraid to go home. Marse Harkness'll whip me sho'!"

"What for, Marcellus?" Mr. Wingate did not see the guilty look on his son's face.

"It wasn't all Marcellus' fault, Dad," he broke in. "We were fishing over on the Missouri side. The fish were biting, and I guess we just got back too late."

"Didn't you know Marcellus was supposed to be doing his work up at Judge Harkness' instead of fishing with you?" he demanded severely of Bill.

"Yes, sir. But it was mighty nice on the river and Marcellus had Judge Harkness' skiff."

Bill could see his father understood how he felt but still realized he had done wrong.

"Come," Mr. Wingate went on, "we'll go and see Judge Harkness. I'll try to put up a good argument

as attorney for the defense even though you two should be ashamed of yourselves.”

As the Judge's name was mentioned Marcellus shuddered, but gulped out, “Yas, suh,” and followed along meekly.

Jack Wingate marched straight up the front walk and rattled the knocker when they reached the Judge's large, square white house standing back from a black iron fence. Bill and Marcellus stood behind him, both fearing the Judge.

“Good evening,” Mr. Wingate bowed to the portly figure of Judge Harkness as he came at the summons of his servant.

“Ah, good evening, Mr. Wingate. And what can I do for you? I trust the spring is bringing you a good business?”

“Very satisfactory, Judge, but I came about a small matter of discipline. It seems that my son was fishing with your Marcellus here when Marcellus was supposed to be working. Since it was at least partly Bill's fault, I felt it was fair to come up and explain.”

At that moment, Judge Harkness spied the Negro behind Jack and Bill Wingate. With surprising speed he snatched the slave's arm, jerked him roughly onto the threshold, cuffed him brutally across the face with the back of his hand.

“Your Bill’s fault, huh?” he snarled. “I’ll wager this ungrateful loafer told him to tell that story. The good-for-nothing!”

Mr. Wingate’s voice took on a hard edge. “I walked up here purposely to avoid Marcellus’ being punished too severely for something that was partly my son’s fault.”

The Judge drew himself up haughtily, glared at Jack Wingate. “I’ll treat this scoundrel as I please without your suggestions, sir,” he bellowed. “I’ve stood enough from him. Family or no family, I’m going to sell him down the river.”

The agony in Marcellus’ eyes cut Bill deeply as Judge Harkness yanked the Negro into the hallway and slammed the door in their faces.

“Will he really sell Marcellus downriver away from his family?” Bill asked miserably as they started home.

“I’m afraid it’s very likely. That,” Jack Wingate went on thoughtfully, “is the kind of man that makes slavery a cruel, inhuman institution. Something is going to come of such situations. And before long, too.”

Those words still ran through Bill’s mind as they rounded the corner and turned into a doorway beside a frame store marked in fading whitewash:

JACK WINGATE—GEN'L MDSE. He hurried upstairs and lit a candle in the tiny, neat front room. Then he returned to follow his father back through the kitchen into the bedroom whose open window silhouetted the flickering riding light of the ferryboat.

The boy threw himself down on the rope-bottom bed along the wall on his side of the square, low-ceilinged room. He quickly pushed a bright green-and-red carpet bag onto the floor. But he could contain himself no longer as he looked up at his father:

"I can hardly wait, Dad," he began excitedly, then broke off as his father pointed to his own bed.

There lay a new outfit of navy blue serge, complete even to black-visored cap, shining black leather shoes and white linen shirt.

Bill could hardly believe his eyes. People from St. Louis, sometimes the Mayor and the Judge in Quincy wore clothes like that, but never the son of a river-front merchant. Gaily he clapped on the cap and ran his fingers over the short jacket.

"Oh, Dad!" his brown eyes gleamed. "You shouldn't have done all this for me!"

Pleasure lit up Jack Wingate's lean face. "Can't expect a young man to ride on the river in linsey-woolsey breeches, can you?"

It all seemed like a dream to Bill, more like his

imaginings than reality could possibly be. He gazed gratefully at his father.

“And you do this when I’m going away and leaving you alone?” Bill asked. “You shouldn’t—”

Grinning, Jack cut the boy off with a wave of his hand. “Forget it, Son. I wish I could do more.”

Bill tried to protest, but Jack Wingate only shook his head with finality and began to prepare for bed.

After the candle was out, Bill lay staring up at the moonlit ceiling, his mind much too full for sleep. St. Louis. Capt. Horace Merriman and a berth on the *Magnolia*. New clothes. The sadness of leaving his dad and his friends in Quincy, the joy of becoming a steamboatman, of spending his life on the river instead of in a small-town store. It all merged into a happy blur as the deep whistle of a passing packet floated up softly from far out in the channel.

Faint dawn next morning found Bill tumbling out onto the rough floor, diving into the new blouse and trousers after a splash at the washstand, quickly, but neatly packing his carpetbag. A hurried breakfast, and he was down in the store to join Yankee Jack, his father’s nickname.

Shrill and powerful, a whistle sounded from the levee. The *River Queen*. Bill rushed to his father, already at his high desk.

“Time to go now,” he cried. “That’s the *Queen!*”

Yankee Jack slid carefully off the stool, extended his right hand and thrust a banknote into Bill’s pocket with his left.

“Good luck, boy,” he said simply. “Might write me a card when you get to St. Louis and meet Capt. Merriman.”

“Good-bye, Dad,” Bill tried to keep his voice steady, his handshake firm. “I’ll write you all the news.”

For a moment father and son stood motionless. Then Yankee Jack Wingate spun the boy around by the shoulders and playfully pushed him forward.

“Hurry along, fellow,” he laughed, “or you’ll miss the boat.”

Bill stepped into the doorway, seized his carpet bag and was off toward the levee.

Familiar sights thrilled him now as never before. He paused at the top of the levee. The *Queen* sparkled white in warm sunlight, stacks pounding out great rings of pitch black smoke, escape pipes hissing with released steam.

Rousters trotted up and down the swaying plank from bank to forecastle, loading and unloading many-sized bales and boxes. Draymen and farmers rattled over cobblestones with last minute consignments.

The mate flogged all along with biting tongue and harsh flaying words.

Above, the captain, megaphone in hand and ready for the departure, watched the scene with the same pride as the townspeople that were clogging up traffic. Serene in the glass palace, crowned with carved scrollwork and gilt, the pilot, stovepipe hat resting jauntily over one eye, surveyed the scene with scornful tolerance.

But Bill paused only briefly. No longer would he be watching all this from a levee. Perhaps he would be sitting up on that high bench behind a pilot—or at least be waiting in the doorway of the office where the mud clerk even now held out the folding slate that was the *Queen's* register.

“Bill Wingate! Where’re you headed for?”

Bill tapped a friendly punch to the quill’s ribs. “Jerry Baxter! When did you come onto this line?”

“My first trip,” he announced proudly. “I’m taking over as first clerk when we touch St. Louis. But where did all those fine clothes come from? We never had anything like that when I lived in Quincy.”

Bill couldn’t help puffing out his chest a trifle. “Going to St. Louis to ship with Capt. Horace Merri- man on the *Magnolia*. Dad used to know him on the river.”

“Well, aren’t you lucky. Starting out on the *Magnolia* steamboatin’ like a nabob. Cub pilot, I suppose.”

Bill nodded modestly. “I hope so.”

“If that doesn’t beat all—”

A portly banker and his family arrived just then, and as Bill stepped to one side, Jerry became the perfect clerk with his “Yes, sir,” and “Mighty pleased to have you, sir.”

Then a Negro came to get their bags, and Jerry pointed to Bill’s luggage. “Take that up to my cabin on the *texas*, Ike.”

Bill waved a hand, then moved to the forward guard to watch the last lines being cast off. Soon the *Queen* was backing into the current and setting her sternwheel ahead into the wide, swift-moving stream.

At last I’m started, Bill mused happily. His muscles tightened sadly as he watched Quincy and the Illinois bank grow smaller, but he turned his mind toward St. Louis. He’d won his fight to go. Now his job was to prove that he could be more useful to his father on the river than in the store at home.

After a gay, generous dinner as Jerry’s guest, Bill mounted to the hurricane deck. A worried glance at the sun reassured him that they still had plenty

of time to get down to St. Louis before five o'clock when the *Magnolia* was scheduled to start down river. In fact, Capt. Walters of the *Queen* guaranteed connections with all the evening boats out of the city.

Then, on his right, Bill spied a great stream pouring into the river, churning brown water, meeting the bluer Mississippi, the colors running parallel so that there was brown on his right and blue on his left. It was the wide Missouri, that connected the rapidly growing West with its base in the East.

Jerry, arriving at a trot, panted before him.

"Have to get back pretty soon to get ready for landing. That's the Missouri, you know."

Bill nodded. "Thanks for everything, Jerry."

"Glad to. You'll find the *Magnolia* on the down-river end of the line. Cotton bale between her stacks. Easy to find." He turned and hurried toward the larboard companionway. "Good luck," he tossed over his shoulder.

Bill smiled at the hurrying lad who had only a year before been the laziest boy in school. Steamboatin' changed people, he thought, getting his bag and trying to calm his excitement by stretching out in a rocking chair.

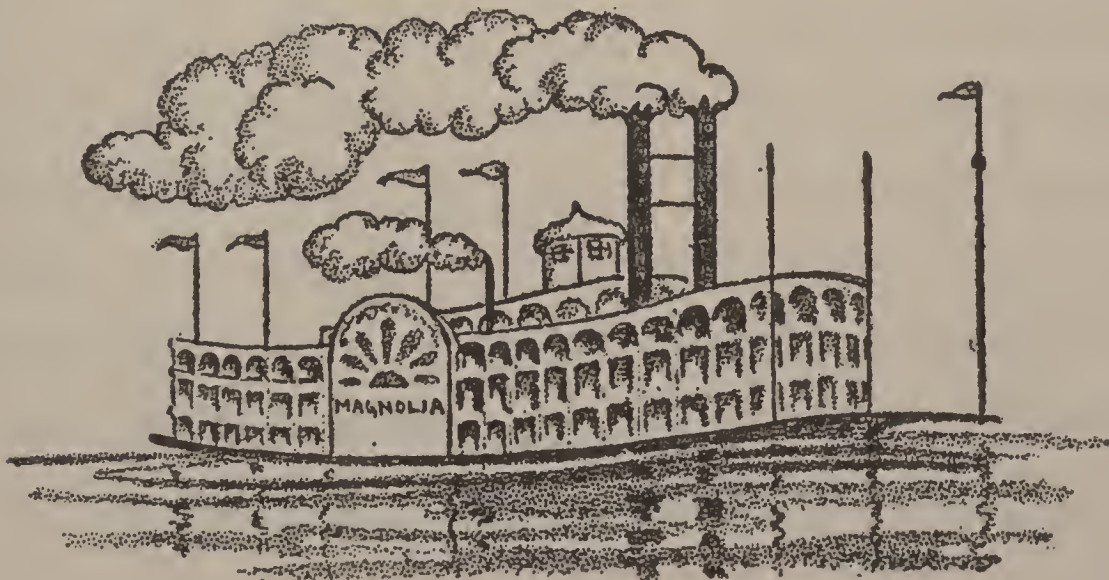
Then, behind the bend ahead, he could see a heavy

cloud of black smoke. A few minutes more, and he could make out towering black chimneys.

He shot to his feet, strained his eyes as they crossed the river to avoid a long towhead. As if drawing away a curtain, the *Queen* swept past the screen of willows that covered the towhead and revealed the glittering scene of the St. Louis levee.

White paint, gleaming bronze and gilt, dancing, puffing steam, wide rows of brick buildings, gay costumes—all flashed before Bill's eyes with a brilliance, a gripping excitement he would never forget. Who could ask for more than to be an important man in a glorious world like this one that lay ahead?

Bill's happiness was complete as the *Queen* ran past the long line to her berth. For he had already seen the long, gleaming side-wheeler. There she was, the name *Magnolia* painted on her paddle boxes atop a six-foot picture of the flower, sparkling in fresh green, cream and yellow.





Chapter II

A NEW VISTA

Never in his life had Bill Wingate seen so many steamboats, so many people, such tall buildings, such a mad scramble and haste.

The levee and its solid-packed line of steamboats stretched for blocks. Long, powerful, shallow-draft stern-wheelers were already swarming with men, women, children, household goods, domestic animals, even birds in cages; all headed for the new lands of the West up the Missouri. Gay, hoopskirted ladies, mitted fingers resting on elegantly-clad arms of gallant Southern planters—ascended gangplanks. The

ladies were met with an effusive courtesy from captains and clerks that would continue until the fleet side-wheelers made special landings at downriver plantations. Negroes shuffled everywhere, toting freight onto shabby, dinky steamers that would inch up winding tributary streams, bearing merchandise and news from the outside world.

Bill's mind flashed back to the faded atlas in his Quincy schoolroom. Those wriggling lines representing rivers and the descriptions of commerce at St. Louis meant something to him now. For here was the end of the line for the boats plying upriver to faraway St. Paul, bringing lead from Galena and Dubuque, farm products from Iowa and Illinois, sometimes furs from icy Minnesota. Here at St. Louis foreign goods from the whole world arrived from the port of New Orleans. Even railroads were realizing the importance of this booming city's location. Now, seeing it before his own eyes, Bill could understand why.

It was a long walk back from the *Queen's* berth to the plank of the *Magnolia*, but Bill enjoyed every foot of it. He felt like a king as he set foot on the gleaming red paint of her gangway. Proudly he mounted the forecastle. A heavy-set, grey-haired gentleman, high hat in hand, mopped a wide brow

with a fine linen handkerchief and rumbled instructions to the mate. Bill waited respectfully until the mate returned to the crew, then spoke:

“Capt. Horace Merriman?” he asked.

A smile of welcome arched across the wide, weather-tanned face.

“Yes, Son. And what can I do for you?”

“My name is William Wingate. From Quincy, Illinois. I think you know my father. They called him Yankee Jack Wingate when he was on the river.”

“Yankee Jack? And you’re his son?”

Bill nodded anxiously. What if Capt. Merriman wouldn’t remember? “You knew him, didn’t you?”

Suddenly the strong arms clasped him around his shoulders. “Know him? *Know him?* Why bless you, yes. We were shipmates once, years ago! And I was captain on his *Faith A. Wingate* before she was lost.”

Bill’s heart warmed to this hearty man who forgot his dignity right in front of all his passengers.

“Dad thought you might be able to start me out on your boat. I want to be a pilot.”

“Just like your dad, eh? Hankering for the river. How is he?”

“Better than he was, sir. But I reckon he’ll never be any too strong.”



"Capt. Horace Merriman?" he asked

“At least he’s better. That’s something if—But here now,” the captain interrupted himself. “We can’t stand here talking with the boat due to leave any minute. We can talk later.”

“Of course, sir,” Bill returned although he did want to have Capt. Merriman come to some decision about him before he shipped on the *Magnolia*.

“Isaiah!” the captain suddenly bellowed with a voice like the roar of an angry bull. “Isaiah! You lazy dog. Pick up this young gentleman’s bag,” he called to a tall, pitch-black Negro shuffling gracefully around the capstan. “Put him up on the texas in with Jo Hartley. And have Jo come up to his cabin at eight right after his watch.”

“Yassuh. This way, suh.”

Bill started to follow, but the captain stopped them for a moment. “Jo’ll take care of you. He’s about your age. A second engineer. Son of a friend of mine in Memphis. Then you and I will have a talk in the morning. We’ll figure out something.”

“Thank you, sir. At your cabin?”

“At my cabin. And have Isaiah fix it up with the clerk so that you have a place at table for the meal tonight.”

With a wave the captain turned to greet a prosperous-looking couple who were trailed by two male

and one female slaves tottering under the load of packages, bags, and hatboxes.

The cabin was like a dream come true. Spotless white woodwork and double-deck bunks with fresh linen and with a neat washstand on one wall; a compact chest and small chair flanking the other. Even a small rug on the floor and a tiny writing table and chair fitted into the snug room.

Brush and comb, razor and a tintype, neatly arranged atop the chest, were the only signs that the room was occupied, plus a pair of slippers tucked under the lower bunk. And half of this was his! Bill forgot Isaiah altogether until turning shamefacedly, he saw the Negro had already disappeared.

Sliding his bag into a corner, Bill clambered into the upper bunk and sank happily into the blankets. It was the softest bed he had ever tried, and this, the nicest room he had ever seen. Compared with the dull, creaking walls of the home over Yankee Jack Wingate's store, this little space represented the height of luxury. It even outshone Jerry's cabin on the *River Queen*.

But Bill could not stay quiet for long. After tidying up quickly, he hurried below to the mailbag with a hastily written note to his father, than found a spot near the bow on the hurricane deck. Already Capt.

Merriman had mounted the roof with his megaphone and begun to direct the mate and the pilot. Stern lines, breast lines, finally all but one head line were cast off. Both paddle wheels turned over slowly, slithering a slight wash up the levee. Last minute arrivals hurried up the plank until, at last, the runners signalled all their prospects were aboard.

The last heavy line came over the bow with the stage. A chord from the strangest, most attractive whistle Bill had ever heard, and the *Magnolia's* wheels began to inch her slowly astern. Deft, swift, chanting rhythmically under the torch of the mate's vocabulary, black rousters made fast the stage and leaned panting against the capstan. Another blast from the whistle set off a burst of rich song from Negro throats. The Farewell Song, echoing, mingling with farewell songs of other departing steamers, brought cabin and deck passengers alike to the rail, waving. Some even joined in the infectious tune. Bill found himself singing, then letting his voice fade away as they came around and slipped down the broad river. For a moment the passengers lingered, then broke into chattering groups as they made for the immaculate dining tables and the heavy, abundant food.

Through the evening feast, Bill Wingate watched, almost too amazed to eat. A clerk and a tall, strik-

ingly-dark young cub pilot welcomed him at the table, but Bill's mind could not rest on conversation that night. Giant crystal chandeliers, flooding the long cabin with soft light, advanced in an apparently endless row from stem to stern. Thick, flowered carpeting moved from the bow end of the room down through the slow curve of the floor to the rise of the overhang, placing the diners fore and aft higher than those amidships. Bill mentally compared this arc with the fleet, graceful lines of the *Magnolia's* outer guards.

Countless courses, rich with sweets and hotbreads, all fascinating to a northern boy, appeared like magic on the arms of swift, white-jacketed waiters. A string band blended into strange chords with the steady roar of voices. Only after Bill came back to his chair on the hurricane and felt the evening breeze whipping through his hair could he convince himself all this was real.

As it grew darker, as the *Magnolia* slid past bluffs and the twinkling lights of tiny settlements, Bill's mind drifted back over the events of the day. At sunrise he had been saying good-bye to his father in Quincy. Now he was already many miles below St. Louis. Next morning they would be in Cairo, then in Memphis and finally in New Orleans. Each

hour was taking him farther away from Quincy. Every minute so far had brought its own thrill, but what about the future? What if Capt. Merriman couldn't find him a place as a cub?

The boy shivered a little as he tried to drive these thoughts from his mind. Determinedly he straightened his shoulders and paced off toward his cabin.

"Just a minute," a voice rumbled out behind him.

Bill wheeled in surprise, expecting he had been accosted by at least the first mate.

"Aren't you William Wingate, the new man on the boat?"

Bill peered through the darkness. All he could see was a chunky, chestnut-haired boy about his own age. But, strangely, the barrel-like voice issued from that short figure.

"Capt. Merriman requested that I meet you. My name is Hartley, Josiah Hartley of Memphis, Tennessee, second engineer."

Bill accepted the cordial handshake. "It's a pleasure to make your acquaintance, Mr. Hartley. I'm from Quincy, Illinois. I hope to become a cub pilot on this boat."

Hartley nodded, then grinned. "And pretty soon I'll be taking orders from you, then. That's all pilots are for—to make an engineer's life miserable."

At a loss for a reply to this sudden change from dignity to banter, Bill said nothing. Hartley took him by the arm. "Let's sit down here and talk it over. If we're going to bunk together, we might as well get acquainted. They call me Jo, and I suppose you're Bill."

"Yes, when they don't call me Will. Which I don't like at all."

For an hour they talked. Bill felt himself warming to this chubby, sunny lad who enjoyed his life down in the grease and filth of the engines and furnaces. The two of them seemed to hit it off perfectly. Soon Bill knew all about Jo's school companions in Memphis, the dance given for his sister at the Gayoso Hotel, even about the golden-haired Melissa up on Poplar Avenue whose eyes were as blue as Lake Pontchartrain on a sunny May day.

In return came stories of Quincy and Yankee Jack, and Bill at last spoke of his mother.

"Do you remember her?" Jo asked sympathetically.

"No. I wish I could. It all happened in a steamboat explosion. Above New Orleans, when I was only a few months old. Dad has told me about it lots of times."

"That wasn't the explosion of the *Faith A. Win-gate*?"

Bill nodded silently.

“You still hear about that night,” Jo went on. “Your mother and father showed everybody that couldn’t get into the yawl how to take off cabin doors and keep themselves afloat until they could be picked up. Your father and mother were ready to leave when the boat snagged and turned over. Mr. Wingate got you ashore, but Mrs. Wingate was drowned.”

“And besides having his back hurt bringing me in, Dad lost almost all his money when the *Faith* went down. It was the boat’s first trip—fourteen years ago—and Dad’s been tied to a riverfront store ever since.”

“Hard going,” Jo agreed, gravely.

“But it’s not going to be,” Bill now was on his feet facing Jo, jaw square, new authority in his voice. “That’s why I came onto the river. Dad ought to be out of that town, running a boat of his own with me to help him!”

“But how?”

“How? By making money. Two hundred and fifty a month as a pilot, and saving most of it. He’ll never make any money at the store, and he’s not healthy enough to come back to any hard work on the river. It’s up to me to do it for him.”

“You make it sound simple, but don’t fool your-

self. It won't be simple. At least not as much so as you think."

"I know it's not going to be easy, Jo," Bill insisted. "But if I work hard and save, I don't see what can stop me."

"Lots of things. There's a plenty of people in both the North and the South that think all these arguments between the two sections are going to spoil everything, including the steamboat business. And the Pilot's Association may wreck the piloting game yet, even though it's helped it so far by putting up wages and all."

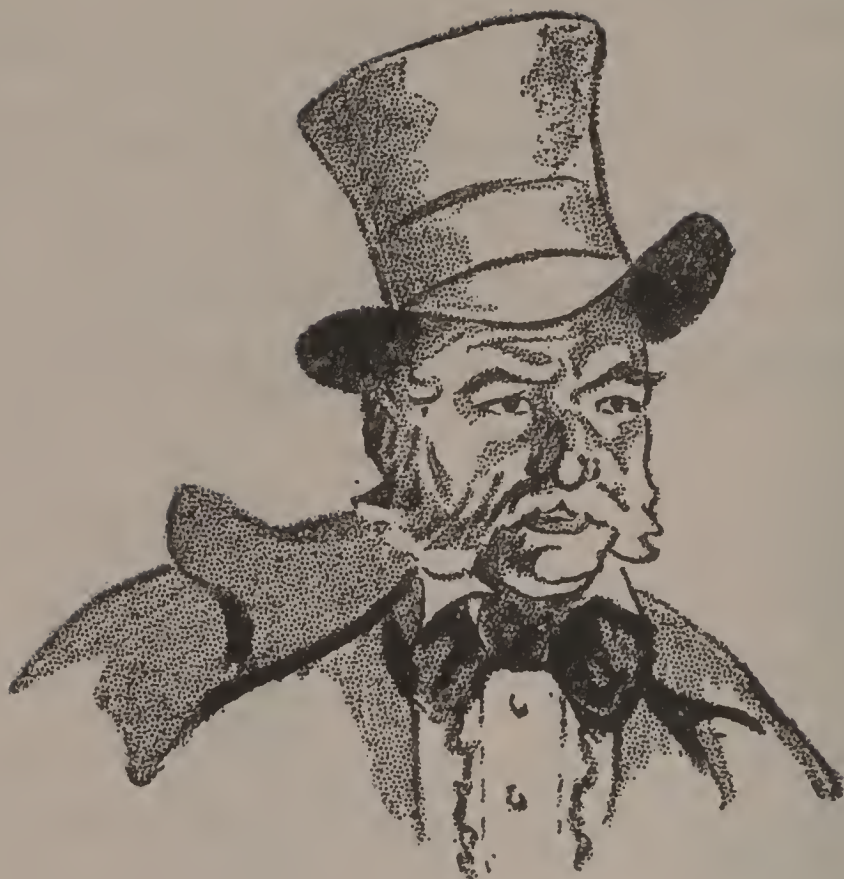
"I shouldn't have to worry about the Association. And I can't see how all this argument about slavery and new territories is going to affect business on the river any."

"You just wait," Jo's voice lowered ominously. "After you've been around steamboats for a couple of years the way I have, you'll have heard plenty from passengers and crews and from people on shore. Things aren't as pretty as they seem. Look at all the people up East that are shipping fugitive slaves from farm to farm 'way up into Canada on that Underground Railroad business. The South doesn't like that a bit."

"I know," Bill admitted. "We've hidden escaped

slaves up around Quincy. But that isn't going to stop me. Dad's got to have a new start, and I'm going to get it for him." Now Bill's voice took on that hard, determined tone. "Nothing can stop me!"





Chapter III

MR. LEXINGTON

Bill, drifting off to sleep that night to the easy movement of the *Magnolia*, knew he had a friend.

When he called upon Capt. Merriman next morning, his hopes rose higher still. The captain's Negro steward was just helping the captain into his long, tailored coat.

"Sorry I didn't have more time to talk to you yesterday, Son," the master greeted. "I've got too much work for three men. Welcoming important passengers, entertaining shippers, seeing that our schedule is kept up, trying to make this boat show a profit—I hardly have time to sleep or eat."

Bill remembered the luxurious meal Merriman had surrounded the evening before but made no comment.

“And I talked last night with Andrew Lexington—he’s one of our pilots—” abruptly he turned to the Negro. “Saul! My hat and gloves! What’s keeping you?”

Grinning widely, the darkey stepped out of the wardrobe with the stovepipe hat and kid gloves. “Jus’ a-polishin’ them, Cap’n.” Bill moved restlessly in his chair. What had Andrew Lexington told Capt. Merriman?

“As I was saying,” the officer went on calmly, “I was speaking with Mr. Lexington last night. He has no cub under training and might consider taking one. Though he said he’d have to see you first. He knew your father, but making a pilot is no easy job, you know.”

It seemed strange that the captain would have to consider so respectfully the wishes of a man in his employ, but Bill remembered how Jo had told him good pilots were scarce and had to be treated with proper respect.

“I understand, sir,” Bill put in. “But what sort of an arrangement should I suggest to him when we talk?”

“It’s customary, when a youngster approved by a pilot for training doesn’t have an over-supply of banknotes, for the boy to offer four or five hundred dollars for the training, to be paid out of his first wages earned as a licensed pilot.”

Without waiting for an answer, Capt. Merriman opened the cabin door, tilted his high hat a little to starboard and signalled for Bill to follow him.

Their stroll aft along the hurricane deck took on the appearance of a royal procession. The shining Merriman beaver swung down again and again in return to greetings from gaily clad young ladies promenading arm-in-arm under frilly parasols. Members of the crew supplied their brisk “Good morning, sir.” The Negro texas tender, dancing down the ladder from the pilothouse balancing half a dozen empty coffee cups, grinned until the corners of his wide mouth seemed to meet the curly wool above his ears.

Bill’s eyes darted about the spacious glass house. Windows all around. High bench astern flanking speaking tube and bell pulls for starboard and larboard engines. Gleaming oilcloth on the floor. High wheel of beautifully polished wood and brass, standing almost as tall as the elegant figure whose glistening boot rested easily on a lower spoke. Astern, a stove enclosed in a metal closet.

The *Magnolia* sailed majestically, easily down the center of the full river, beyond need of any work by her pilot, but Andrew Lexington's grey topper did not turn. Capt. Merriman did not interrupt.

Almost a minute passed before Lexington lazily swung partially around and looked at his visitors.

Elegance spoke out from the crisp ruffles of Andrew Lexington's shirt bosom to the sleek cut of trousers and tailed coat. The glance of cold, blue eyes, the set of thin lips and patrician nose, framed in shining black hair and sideburns revealed a man accepted by the world as an aristocrat.

Before Lexington spoke, Bill wondered how he, a small-town landsman, could ever earn a place under this haughty figure in whose slender hands rested the *Magnolia* and the lives and property aboard her. The suit of which he had been so proud in Quincy now seemed rough, loutish.

"What is your pleasure this morning, Captain?" Lexington at last remarked, in a calm, almost insolent, tone.

"This is the boy I spoke to you about last night, Mr. Lexington. William Wingate. Yankee Jack Wingate's son."

Bill felt like taking to his heels as the cold blue eyes raked him from cap to shoe, slowly, scornfully.

The captain broke in hurriedly. "I must be getting below." Then softly to Bill, "There're other jobs on this boat beside piloting." A guilty look over his shoulder at Lexington, and he was gone.

"Where are you from?" The pilot's face still did not change its distant expression.

"Quincy, Illinois, sir."

"And you expect to learn the river from me?"

"I thought I could be of help to you after the first few months. And I'll pay you five hundred dollars out of my first wages as a pilot."

"Meaning that I wait a year at least for the five hundred?"

"I'm—I'm afraid so, sir," Bill hopelessly replied.

Another long look from the cold eyes. Then with sudden, surprising brusqueness:

"Take this wheel! Keep her on that woodpile on the right bank."

Fearfully Bill gripped the smooth spokes, feeling those penetrating eyes boring through his back. Never before had he turned a wheel. The safety of thousands of dollars worth of steamboat, scores of crew and passengers lay under his fingers. Yet Bill had grown up on the river, felt the Mississippi seep into his very blood. He knew what this rushing, yellow channel could do to a boat—and to a boat-

man who defied it. So, concentrating on this new struggle with the river, he forgot his fear of Andrew Lexington.

Bill did not wrench at the wheel, tensely fight the line of the current. Instead he left the *Magnolia* in her marks; then eased her gently to larboard, pulling down a spoke lightly, to meet the force of an eddy against her bow; then back a spoke or two as the pressure of the eddy passed. Why, the feel of this wheel was hardly different from the feel of a tiller on a skiff!

The *Magnolia* had not slipped from Bill's touch, had hardly left a straight course as she came within a hundred yards of the towhead. Bill did not change the course, even though they seemed destined to sail straight through the clump of willows ahead. Fear shot through him again as the trees drew closer and closer.

"I'll take it now," Lexington finally broke in. "We cross here."

The pilot's crossing to the other bank was deft, effortless, beautiful to watch. Soon they were charging down the middle of the river again, and Lexington turned to Bill.

"If you'll promise to stay with me until you get your license, I'll agree to make you ready for it. But

I won't stand for pounding the river into your head and then having you sneak out just when you're some good as a steersman. And forget the money."

"I promise to stay. But the money—"

"Forget the money!" The flat voice now snapped out like a lash. "And don't get the idea you're a pilot already, just because you didn't fetch her up in a cornfield!"

"But, Mr. Lex—" Bill tried to put in.

"Quiet! Now go down and get that buck-toothed black up here with some more coffee. And a stogie. And don't forget to come back yourself. You start right now."

Shakily wiping the perspiration from his forehead, Bill rushed below to the galley aft on the main deck, passing the boilers and engines on the way. Quickly he made arrangements to have coffee and a cigar sent up to the pilothouse and started back above more slowly. From the engines came a hail:

"What's the hurry, Mr. Wingate?"

The voice sounded like Jo Hartley's barrel bass. A greasy, round figure waved from the starboard throttle. "Are you a pilot now?" Jo went on.

Bill nodded. "Have to hurry."

"If you expect to stay healthy, it might be wise," Jo advised.

A sudden jangling of bells put Jo to work on his throttle, and Bill hurried for the hurricane. On the forecastle companionway, Capt. Merriman stopped him.

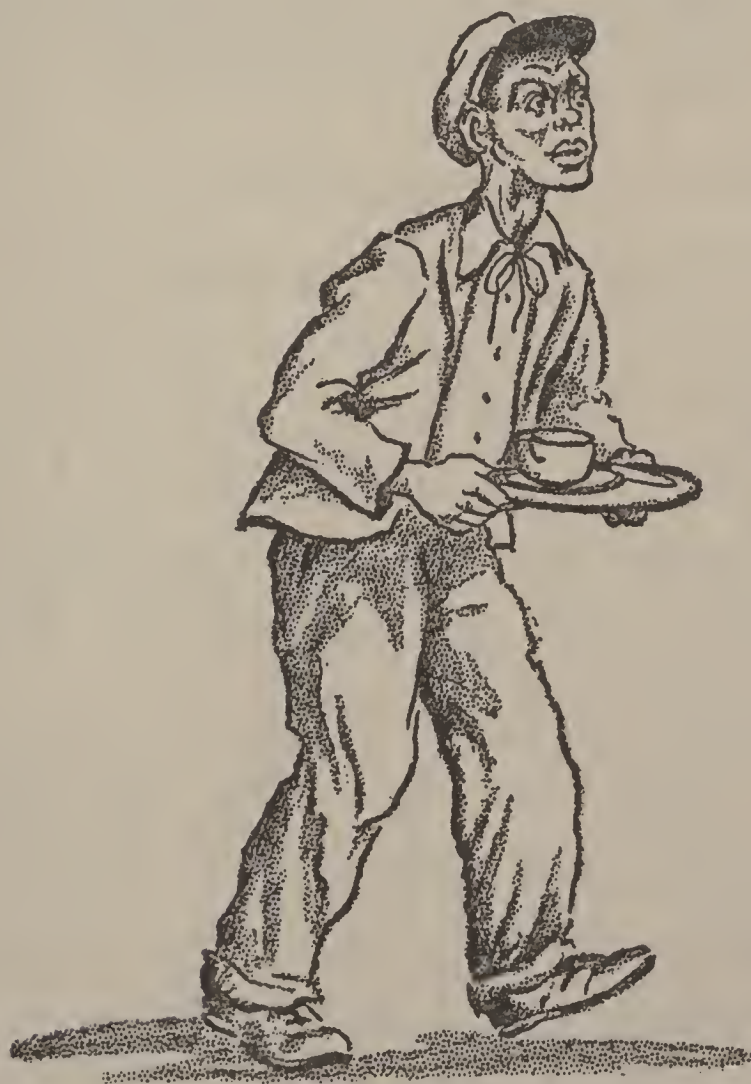
“All right with Lexington?” he inquired anxiously.

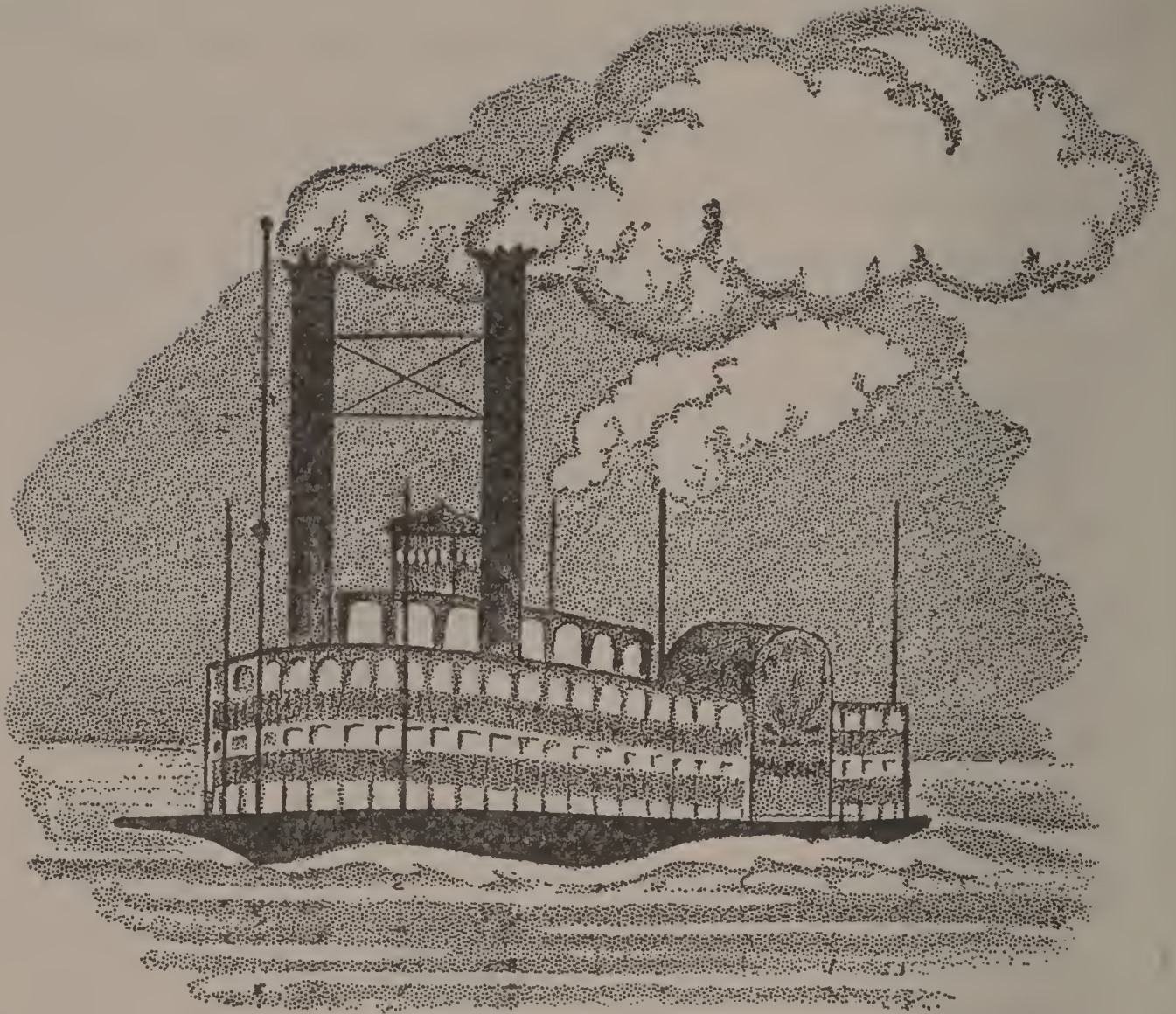
“Fine, Captain. And I want to thank you.”

“Don’t let that temper of his bother you. It doesn’t mean much, and he’s one of the best pilots on the river.”

“I’ll do my best, sir.”

“That’s the ticket. Now get above before he bursts a cylinder.”





Chapter IV

BILL STANDS HIS FIRST WATCH

Still groggy from his mere four hours of sleep, Bill stumbled up to the pilothouse for his first night watch. It lacked five minutes of midnight, and Pilot Lemuel Birch with his cub Daniel Fotheringham were finishing out their watch.

Bill had begun to doze when his chief stepped lightly through the doorway and took over the wheel without a word of greeting. Already young Wingate had learned Lexington's scorn of Birch's careless dress and his tender handling of the purse-

proud Daniel Fotheringham. The pilot at the wheel did not turn or speak when Birch mumbled the captain's orders.

"We land at Warner's woodyard. About five miles above it now."

But, before Birch had spoken, Lexington seemed to know their position, at least he steered the *Magnolia* as if it were daylight instead of total darkness.

The whole valley up to the treetops was a solid chunk of blackness. No stars or moon penetrated the sky or picked up the high, wooded bluffs. Not a light was visible from the pilothouse, and the pilot seemed to steer from instinct rather than from what he could see.

Only minutes of peering outside accustomed Bill's eyes to the darkness and made it possible for him to find the outlines of the *Magnolia* and the shape of the river. The shape of the river was about all he could see, that and a black ball mounted on the jackstaff. He noted that his chief raised or lowered this ball on the pole by means of a rope running back to the pilothouse, but he dared not ask its purpose.

Then, mysteriously, the boat pulled over to the darker line that was the left bank, and the pilot jangled both bell pulls for half speed. As the wheels slowed, an overhanging cottonwood limb brushed

across the *Magnolia's* upper guards. Bells again and the wheels slowed, then stopped. Capt. Merriman's voice rose from the bow:

"Now get that wood aboard. Smartly now!"

Rousters and firemen, deck passengers, who earned part of their passage in this way, scurried ashore, and the thumping of four-foot chunks grew into a roar. Surprisingly soon, the *Magnolia* again rode full speed down the channel.

An amazed Bill stood behind Lexington as the latter settled into his usual easy stance at the wheel.

"How do you do it?" Bill couldn't help asking.

"Do what?"

"Keep in the channel. And land at a woodyard when it's this dark."

"Don't you approve of my piloting?" Lexington reached for the gold toothpick on his watch chain.

"Of course. I'm—I'm just wondering how it's done. Will I ever be able to learn?"

The pilot's voice hardened. "You'll learn if I have to take it out of your hide! You'll know every woodyard and every half-submerged island, every towhead and every wreck in fifteen hundred miles of river."

Bill looked puzzled. He wanted to know all these things, but he still didn't see how knowing them would help him to see in the dark, and said so.



An amazed Bill stood behind Lexington

“You don’t have to see much. Not if you know, almost feel, the things you should. Take this wheel, and I’ll show you.”

The pilot stood aside as Bill grasped the spokes. “Now keep her jackstaff on that spike of dead tree right ahead. And the stern on that dip in the trees on the other bank. When the tip of the tree disappears behind the ball on the jackstaff, fetch her to starboard quick and head right downstream with the stern still on the dip behind you. Then I’ll take her.”

Carefully Bill began to do as he was told. Squinting at the black ball as it stood silhouetted against the lighter sky, he waited tensely until it seemed to eclipse the peak of the dead tree, then spun the wheel briskly to starboard. Before he could speak, he was pushed bodily from the wheel, his chief shouting:

“Snatch her! Larboard. Quick, you dunderhead!” At the same time he jingled the engineer to back the larboard wheel, come full ahead on the starboard.

Frantically Bill helped Lexington pull her up until the pilot thrust him away. He retired to the high bench to wait for his tongue-lashing. Strangely none came, only silence, silence that Bill could stand no longer.

"What—what did I do wrong?" he asked in a low voice.

"Couldn't you see the black ball? Didn't I tell you to wait until it covered up that spike of tree?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then any cloth-head but you could have done it right. If this hadn't been a full river, we'd stuck up on that towhead to starboard and laid there till doomsday. You brought her around too soon. I doubt if you'll ever learn the river."

Bill made no defense. His hopes of becoming a pilot and earning money to buy a steamboat faded. He was a thoroughly discouraged boy. Lexington's silence that continued for another hour made matters no better.

Finally the chief spoke, and this time most of the anger had disappeared from his voice.

"Do you still think you carried out my orders when you had the wheel back there?"

"I don't know." Bill was completely bewildered by this new attitude.

"Well, you should know because you did carry out my orders to the letter. But you remember I said you should *know thoroughly*, almost *feel*, the things you should know?"

"Yes, sir."

“There’s the difference. I could never tell you, until you *learn* the river, how to run a crossing or even a straight channel at night any more than I could keep you from tripping over roots by telling you the landmarks on a new forest trail at Quincy. But, if you knew that trail instinctively, because you had used it so often, you wouldn’t trip over any roots or stumps. You’d feel inside just how you should walk it. Understand?”

Bill thought of the old winding paths up through the bluffs at home. “You mean you have to know the river by instinct? So you don’t really have to see it?”

“That’s the word. Guess schooling has its uses after all,” Lexington agreed grudgingly. “You just have to jam the marks and points and soundings of the Mississippi into your head until it’s fit to explode. You’ll be used to the river by then. By that time, it’ll all be different.”

“All different?”

“That’s what I said. High water changes everything. Cuts whole towns off the river. Moves farms from one state to another.”

“And I have to keep track of that?” Bill began to feel a little dizzy with this staggering mass of information he would have to use—instinctively.

“Then low water changes it all in the other direction. You’ll see that in a couple of months. If you last that long.”

Lexington’s last words set Bill fuming with resentment. “I’ll last. I’ll learn this river or have a brainstorm trying.”

Lexington turned about to regard Bill with an interested stare. “Fill up that stove,” he said at last. “And don’t keep the slide up all night doing it.”

“Why that slide?” Bill asked after tossing some wood into the potbellied stove and lowering the front of the metal box in which it was enclosed.

“If a pilot has any light around him he can’t see the water properly. That’s why they have canvas over the skylights forward and shield the riding lights; and keep the light from the open furnace doors bottled up in the fireroom. The ball on the jackstaff is black because, if it were white, it wouldn’t be darker than the sky. Now get down below and raise some coffee.”

Bill tumbled into his cabin at the end of the watch trying to decide whether he’d rather murder Lexington on the spot or just give up piloting and be done with it. He had not come to a decision during the thirty seconds it took him to get undressed and climb into his bunk.

Before Bill knew it, Jo was pummeling him into consciousness. "Hurry, sleepyhead. Let's get started in time to have a real breakfast this morning."

As Bill, fresh from a diligent scrubbing, stepped out into the brisk morning, that tense four hours in the pilothouse after midnight the night before dissolved under the sparkling beauty of sunshine on water, the smooth progress of the *Magnolia* along a high bank of newly-leafing trees. He drew in a deep breath and waved to Jo. "Let's eat!" he shouted.

Stretching out in the sun for a few moments before going on eight o'clock watch, the boys rubbed full stomachs contentedly.

"Old Lexington doesn't seem to have bothered you much so far," Jo remarked.

Bill described the events of the midnight hours at the wheel. He finished, "It all looks impossible to me. But I suppose all I can do is to keep trying."

"Don't worry," the roaring voice fell to a mere rumble. "You just keep your ears open and your mouth closed. You can't expect to learn the river in two days. But twelve hours of it every day in the pilot-house and more of it every minute that you're not asleep will do the business. Work your hardest to remember everything you hear, and at least some of it will stick."

"I reckon that makes sense."

"Of course it does. Take your time. After all you have a good many years ahead of you."

"But I'm not taking them."

"That's the spirit," Jo rolled him off the bale of cotton on which they lay. "Now let's get to work."

The next few days rushed by, so that Bill could jam in only short talks with Jo between watches, meals and sleep. Lexington had not eased his tactics. Past Memphis' mountains of cotton, down into the plantations of Mississippi, the pilot's whipping sarcasm—but never profanity—had beaten Bill again and again from the wheel onto the high bench where he had waited unnoticed, like a child sent to stand in the corner.

New piles of cotton weighted the *Magnolia's* hull deeper as Bill's chief rang for full speed below the bluffs of Vicksburg. The lad waited to take over when bright laughter floated up from the hurricane. Lexington heard it too, and his foot went onto the wheel as both his fine hands set to smoothing his stock, flipping a speck of soot from his sleeve. Capt. Merriman escorted two gay young girls up the ladder. Booming, pompous, now he was the gracious host, not the man who had fled from the pilot after asking him to consider Bill as a cub.

“And this is the pride of the *Magnolia*, ladies. Mr. Andrew Lexington, the finest, fastest pilot on the Mississippi.”

This time, Lexington turned quickly, bowed deeply.

“The Misses Constance Harrison and Lucy French, Mr. Lexington, the lovely daughters of Oaknoll and Vista, the noblest of the Southern plantations.”

“A pleasure,” Lexington bowed deeply again, pointed to Bill. “And this my steersman, Mr. William Wingate.”

“Aren’t they both nice, Constance? But they couldn’t be as nice as Capt. Merriman. No, suh,” the shorter of the two girls giggled infectiously.

Her companion smiled, with a grace and quiet that matched perfectly her deep brown eyes and hair, her leisurely, yet decisive carriage. To Bill that smile spoke volumes more than the chatter of the doll-like, blue-eyed Lucy.

“We think it’s wonderful the way you can go back and forth from St. Louis to New Orleans so fast.”

“We’re proud of that compliment, Miss Harrison,” Capt. Merriman beamed. “And we’ll try to run the trip faster still if you will promise us another speech like that.”

A tinkle of laughter, and they were gone.

“Nuisance, these passengers,” Lexington’s voice grated. But Bill noticed he still smiled. Then he promptly forgot his chief. How, he wondered, does a cub pilot go about getting acquainted with a passenger like Constance Harrison?





Chapter V

A RESCUE ASHORE

Constance Harrison and her jolly companion, Lucy French, did not re-visit the pilothouse during the rest of the day although Bill caught a glimpse of them as he hurried on an errand through the mass of whirling couples during the ball that evening. Both seemed engrossed in the correct steps of their high-collared escorts.

In the morning as Bill came onto the hurricane, the panorama of river and plantations that spread before his eyes could have been a different country from that which he had seen in the sunset the evening be-

fore. Now the *Magnolia* seemed to ride on a high platform with the sweeping fields of sugar cane stretched out at ground level at his feet. Suddenly he knew that he had come into the real levee country, that the boat had risen high above the actual shore level because the river, restrained by levees had raised it like an elevator. Before the banks and bluffs had generally been higher than the water. Now the artificial walls of earth had squeezed the mighty Mississippi above its natural banks.

Bayous—narrow winding streams—meandered off into tangles of cypress and moss-draped live oak. Apparently boundless fields were broken only by stately, white-pillared plantation houses, backed by their rows of rough log slave cabins. Sometimes a road topped the levee, otherwise flights of wooden steps led from the bank to private boat landings.

“Do you like our scenery, Mr. Wingate?” a quiet, musical voice sang from behind him.

Bill spun around. The young lady was Constance Harrison, promenading the deck with her Negro mammy. Bill bowed deeply, sweeping off his cap in a gesture he hoped equalled that of his chief. “Good morning, Miss Harrison. I’m having my first view of Louisiana.”

“Then you’re new to the boat?”

“Yes, Miss Harrison. I come from Quincy, Illinois.”

“But you do like what you have seen of Louisiana? Things like that magnolia tree yonder.”

Bill followed her eyes to the great, spreading boughs radiant with gleaming white blossoms reflected in shining leaves.

“It’s beautiful. I’ve never seen such big flowers growing on a tree.”

“It’s still a little early for them. You’ll see more on your uptrip.”

“Mr. Wingate is very fortunate this morning,” a familiar voice broke into their conversation.

“Oh, good morning, Mr. Lexington,” Constance curtsied. “I was just showing Mr. Wingate the beauties of the delta country.”

“Of which, if I may say so, Miss, you are one,” the pilot put in gallantly.

Blushingly, confused, Constance thanked him and turned to her mammy. “Come, Hattie. Father must be waiting for me. Good morning, gentlemen.”

Almost before Bill had finished his farewell, Lexington took him by the arm. “You’ll never learn piloting that way,” he bit out. “Her father owns a good share of Mississippi. And you’re only a cub pilot. You’ve got no time for girls. Not if we’re

going to get this boat into New Orleans before noon."

Steaming down around the long crescent of the river into New Orleans brought to Bill Wingate the thrill his father had promised it would. Algiers, its factories and shipyards to the right, and the city of New Orleans to his left, were both larger than any city he had ever seen.

Wharves and brick buildings up to six or seven stories high stretched for miles along the shore line of the river. Scores of steamboats flanked the water's edge. White, fleecy bales of cotton tumbled from the long line of cotton boats onto the Julia Street Wharf. There were solid banks of towering smokestacks that had disgorged thick black smoke from Louisville and Cincinnati, from St. Louis and Memphis, down to this first rank American port. Farther on, past Canal Street, lines of craft stretched down to St. Louis Street. Then came tall, black-hulled craft from foreign lands—steamers and lofty-masted sailing ships. Over it all for Bill hovered the excitement and hurry of St. Louis multiplied many-fold.

Capt. Merriman had no more than called from the bridge, "All right, Mr. Lexington" when Bill's chief made for the ladder. "I'm going ashore," he instructed coldly. "Won't be back until we shove off. Plan

to stay on the boat at night and be here ready to leave at five on Wednesday evening."

"Yes, sir." Bill stood aside for Lexington to precede him, but the pilot hesitated.

"Got any money?" he demanded.

"Yes-yes, sir. Ten dollars my father gave me when I left."

"Well, don't spend it here. Save it. Take this and have a good time. And don't come back with any of it left. Understand?"

Before Bill could read the five on the banknote his chief had jammed into his hand, the man had pattered down the ladder and disappeared into the texas.

In his own cabin, Bill discovered a grinning, jubilant Jo Hartley whistling, "Oh, Dem Golden Slippers!"

"Ho-ho, Mr. Wingate. I trust you would not object to company on your first visit to the Crescent City. I will serve as guide and protector. Ah yes, and as a human fountain of enthusiasm. For the first time in my career as an engineer I have avoided the doubtful honor of being allowed to clean boilers most of the time the boat was in New Orleans!"

Bill pounced on him, rolled him onto the lower bunk.

“Guide! Escort! You’re hired. But I’ve got another job for you, too. You have to help me spend this five dollars the chief gave me. He issued orders that it had to be spent in New Orleans before I came back aboard for the next trip.”

Jo yanked himself free and stood up to gaze at his friend. “’Pon my soul. I don’t believe it.”

“Here’s the evidence,” Bill waved the note above his head.

Jo shook his head slowly in mock sorrow. “And I got my wages today. It’s going to be hard, but we’ll have to spend five dollars apiece. Come on, we might as well face our ordeal.”

They picked their way joyously through the heaps of freight and hordes of people toward Canal Street. Bill wanted to pause and look at the new Custom House, the largest building in the United States except the Capitol at Washington, but Jo had other ideas. He led the Quincy boy up the east side of Canal Street, listening to him exclaim about the horsecars and the wide island of grass that separated northbound from southbound traffic. Here stretched the widest street Bill had ever seen, a street full of fascinating possibilities, yet dignified with the solid appearance that comes with age.

“The first thing you want is a plate of oysters,”

Jo confided, "And I know just the place. Right in here. Cheap, but—m—mmm—how good!"

He led Bill into a small shop that consisted only of a long, scrubbed wooden counter, a line of battered stools and a shelf behind the counter where a pair of men with knives snapped open a steady stream of shells, slipped the oysters out onto a plate and to the counter in a continuous, smooth motion. With the oysters came little crackers and a bowl of sauce. Before Bill could restrain his friend, they had consumed two dozen.

Without a question they headed back toward the levee and the moorings of the ocean-going vessels. Cutting down St. Peter Street, past St. Louis Cathedral and the old Spanish Cabildo they struck the levee and headed downriver. On they walked, through warehouses fragrant with spices and coffee, onto wharf planks over which had pattered the bare feet of tropical sailors and the rough shoes of gulf fishermen. Jo explained the flags and markings on the different ships. Suddenly he was interrupted by a piercing scream.

"Jo! This way!" Bill hissed as he spun on his heel and dashed down the pier.

The screams continued. Bill caught sight of a swarthy sailor in a striped sweater bending over a

wriggling form. Then the seaman stood erect and fled.

Bill raced on, dodging sacks of coffee, trying to keep his footing. Jo, surprisingly fast for his generous weight, kept right at his heels.

For the moment the wharf seemed deserted. Few saw the chase, and those were only stevedores who paid no attention.

"We're gaining," Bill puffed. "Just—a—little—faster."

Now the sailor tripped over a low truck lying in his path and kept his feet only after a precarious moment of fighting for balance. In that moment, Bill and Jo pounced upon him.

It took only a second for the boys to find they had met their match. Panting, hearts hammering, they made little impression with their hardest blows.

"Look out! His right hand! He's got a knife," Jo suddenly puffed.

In an instant Bill and Jo's hands pressed with all their might on that thrashing, murderous right wrist. And, with each jerking movement of the knife, the boys could feel their strength ebbing. Bill knew the fight would soon be over, would soon bring—

"What's this here? Grab that knife!" an angry voice cried out as a great hairy hand snatched out,

and clamped the sailor's wrist tight to the boards.

Another moment, and a harbor policeman had handcuffed the sailor and dug a woman's handbag from his pocket. "Where did this all start?" the officer demanded.

"Back there by that American merchant ship," Bill reported, nursing a bleeding elbow. "We just heard a woman's scream and saw this fellow running. I suppose he stole that purse."

"Better get back there, then. Either of you youngsters hurt?"

"No, suh," Jo boomed. "Just shaken up a little. Lead on."

A little knot of people had gathered back by the American ship, but the officer forced his way through with the boys following. Bill stopped short when he recognized two girls, their backs propped against a bale of cotton, sitting listlessly on a cape some gentleman had thrown onto the wharf. One of the girls, chubby and blonde, had fainted and a captain from a deep sea ship was trying to bring her around. Yes, that girl was Lucy French. And beside her, eyes closed and dress torn, lay Constance Harrison!



Chapter VI

A DINNER PARTY

Panic swept through Bill Wingate as he stared at the two girls. Apparently Lucy French had only fainted, but Constance Harrison seemed in serious pain. Just as Lucy's eyes came open fitfully from the smelling salts held under her nose, the policeman broke in.

"I guess we've got the fellow who did all this," he announced. "These boys here caught him. He was ready to knife them when I jumped into the scrap."

A tall, impressive gentleman, digging nervously

into the pockets of his flowered waistcoat turned to Bill and Jo. "These boys here?" he asked, now tugging at his long mustaches and pointed beard that seemed to emphasize the stylish sweep of his broad-brimmed soft hat.

"These two," the officer replied. "And they got banged up a bit in the process."

"Permit me to introduce myself," the tall man bowed. "Pauncefoote L. Harrison of Oaknoll Plantation. I am very grateful to you for the rescue of my daughter."

Constance's father! Bill had difficulty in making his voice work, but he managed to answer, pointing to Jo, "This is Josiah Hartley, an engineer on the steamer *Magnolia*. I am William Wingate, cub pilot. But is Miss Harrison seriously hurt, sir?"

"I believe not, fortunately. We have sent for a doctor, but she seems to be more upset than injured."

Then Constance and Lucy, each resting on an arm of the captain stood beside them. Both seemed a little shaky but otherwise recovered.

"I certainly am ashamed of myself," Lucy protested. "Our dear Constance was being robbed, and all I could do was faint."

"Don't worry," Constance comforted her.

“They’ve caught the man now and got my money back. Will you introduce me to your friend who helped you, Mr. Wingate?”

Bill blushed at his carelessness and haltingly presented Jo to the two girls.

“Now the young ladies must go to the captain’s cabin and rest until the doctor comes,” Planter Harrison broke in.

“On one condition, Father,” Constance flashed her most winning smile. “If you’ll invite Mr. Wingate and Mr. Hartley to dine with us this evening and attend the theatre.”

“Of course, my child. Now run along with Capt. Bonet and rest.”

He turned to the boys. “It was all my fault. I was talking with the captain about a shipment from France and lost track of the girls. If it hadn’t been for you lads, things might have been much worse.” He eyed the two more carefully. “You must allow me,” he went on, “to have your clothing replaced.”

Before the boys could protest, he drew a pencil and a card from an inside pocket and scribbled hurriedly. “Take this to M. LeGrande on Canal Street. My personal tailor. Now where may I have my carriage pick you up this evening?”

Bill and Jo looked at one another, bewildered.



Bill haltingly presented Jo to the two girls

Where does a steamboatman await his host's carriage?

"Would the levee at the *Magnolia's* berth be satisfactory? At seven o'clock? We plan to go to Antoine's."

"Yes, sir. But we can come to the café just as—"

Mr. Harrison raised his hand:

"I insist. Perhaps, it might be well to have M. LeGrande provide you with evening things. At my expense, of course.

"That is, if you haven't yours aboard the boat," he added hastily.

Bill and Jo headed back for Canal Street in a haze of joyous excitement. Their bruises were forgotten as they talked breathlessly.

"We shouldn't take those clothes," Jo said suddenly. "But what else could we do? I haven't another stitch except my working outfit. We couldn't have dinner with them without evening clothes. And I had to see that Miss French again."

"I hated to agree to it, too, but Mr. Harrison seemed so insistent. As if his feelings would be hurt if we didn't accept."

"That's it. Well, here goes," Jo finished as they turned into a shop marked

M. LEGRANDE

Back in their cabin that night, the two, after shedding the new finery, stretched out to revel in their last few hours.

“Down Canal Street in a carriage,” Bill mused. “All the bright gas lights and fine horses and bright shops. And that theatre. I’ve never in my life seen a show like that. Beautiful curtains and colored lights. Quality folk dressed in their finest.”

“And that meal. Those Creole sauces. And the French waiters so quick you didn’t know they were there. The plates came and went like magic. This was the first time I’ve ever eaten in a place like that in New Orleans. And with people like the Harrisons and Lucy French,” Jo rhapsodized.

“Lucy French? How about Constance Harrison?” Bill retorted.

“Oh, so you’re interested, too?”

Abashed, Bill did not answer, though he knew Jo was right, had known it ever since he had discovered Constance lying injured on the dock that afternoon.

“I couldn’t blame you, if you like that type,” Jo went on. “She was certainly game tonight, covering up that ugly bump she had with a hat and having just as much fun as the rest of us.”

“She certainly was. I wonder if we’ll ever get a

chance to accept Mr. Harrison's invitation to visit them at Oaknoll."

"He likes you. And that surprises me," Jo changed the subject abruptly.

"Why?"

"Because you're a Northerner. Worse than that, your father was a down-East Yankee."

"But that didn't seem to make any difference to Mr. Harrison."

"That's why I say he must have liked you. Remember how he asked all about your parentage? And what you thought of the South? And whether you'd been to the slave market?"

"Yes, but—"

"Well, you were just lucky enough to tell him that your father had liked the South when he was on the river, that you fell in love with it on your first trip down on the *Magnolia* and that you couldn't see why those who wanted slaves shouldn't be allowed to have them."

"But that is the way I feel, Jo," Bill protested. It worried him to realize that Jo was also a Southerner, that they might quarrel over opinions they each had held since childhood.

"Remember what I told you the first night on the boat when you told me what you were going to

do for your dad? That the different ideas of Southerners and Yankees might bring trouble?"

Bill nodded.

"Well, tonight was a perfect example of it. Mr. Harrison didn't want to let himself like you until he was sure you had no anti-Southern opinions. Both Northerners and Southerners are that way. Plenty of Northerners distrust me, just as soon as they hear my Dixie way of talking, in the same way as Mr. Harrison distrusted you. I've learned that they're both partly right and partly wrong. I'm glad you feel the same way about it. Then, at least, we won't have any trouble between ourselves or with anybody else."

"No, we won't," Bill replied slowly. He had begun to realize what this hostile feeling on both sides could mean, what trouble it might eventually cause. Silently, he thanked his father for showing him unobtrusively the right on both sides of the North-and-South question.

"I think Mr. Harrison liked you too, Jo," he went on.

"Yes, but if he'd come from Boston, he'd have thought twice before he'd really feel safe in letting the girls see me again."

Bill managed to grin as he drove these unpleasant

thoughts from his mind. "All right, Mr. Senator," he laughed. "But let's get some sleep now. Remember we have a fitting at our exclusive French tailor's in the morning."

"Yes, my lord," Jo laughed and dug an elbow into Bill's ribs. "If you'll remove yourself from the senatorial couch, His Honor will retire."

Shortly after five o'clock next afternoon, rousters tugged at mooring lines, wound stage tackle around the capstan. Up in the pilothouse, Bill waited impatiently for his chief. He knew that Lemuel Birch and his steersman were already on board taking a nap, but Lexington would take the *Magnolia* out.

Capt. Merriman sounded the last beat on the big bell forward, then cocked his eyes up to the pilothouse, back to the levee. At that moment a landau, drawn by a pair of prancing chestnut horses, bumped down toward the water and stopped. The graceful figure of Andrew Lexington stepped out.

Scorning haste, he strolled to the plank, twirling a silver-topped malacca cane. Aware that all eyes were on him, he tipped his high hat gallantly and made his leisurely way topside. From behind the wheel he nodded to the captain, and the *Magnolia* slid slowly back out of the line.

Now Lexington set her wheels forward and began clipping the sterns of the thick ranks of steamboats. "Run 'em close," he spoke to Bill who stood beside him because the high bench was packed with passengers. "The easy water is close to the bank. Current is faster and harder to fight out in the middle."

Bill slipped from his pocket a small black notebook he had bought in New Orleans and entered his chief's instructions.

"Now you're learning," Lexington admitted. He seemed to be in a generous frame of mind. "Write down everything I tell you in that book."

"Yes, sir. And I had a fine time with that money."

"Forget it. It was—"

"Oh, there he is," Capt. Merriman thundered through the doorway. "Do you know you have a hero for a cub, Mr. Lexington?"

"I heard something along that line," the pilot remarked sourly. "Why?"

"I'd like to speak to him for a moment."

"Come in here and do it," Lexington's tone left the captain no choice.

"I—just wanted to give him this bank book. Mr. Harrison has deposited a hundred dollars in Bill's name in the bank and a hundred for Jo Hartley. For rescuing his daughter and her friend. He left the

books with me so that the boys couldn't refuse the money. He insisted they take it."

A hundred dollars! It was too much to believe! Then Bill's elation collapsed. He really ought not to take the money. Yet he remembered Mr. Harrison's face when he and Jo had tried to refuse his offers the previous day.

Too, a hundred dollars would make a grand start toward the savings for a boat. With that as a foundation, it wouldn't be so hard to save more.

"I'll write and thank him so that it catches the next mail connection," Bill announced. "Thank you, Capt. Merriman."

"Don't thank me. You and Jo did something to make us all proud of you. You deserve a reward."

Seeing Lexington's cold gaze that ignored him and Capt. Merriman altogether, he quickly slipped the book into an inner pocket and turned back to the pilot as the irritated captain went below.

"Now we'll get back to piloting," Lexington instructed acidly. "I hope this hasn't given you any fancy ideas."

Already Bill had learned the wisest response to such remarks from his chief. He merely said nothing.

Going below after his watch, he paused briefly on the hurricane to watch the last of the sunset

before dinner. Then as he passed the window of the captain's double cabin, he heard voices:

"Just a friendly game," one man coaxed softly. "It's a long, tiresome trip way up to St. Louis. We might as well enjoy ourselves."

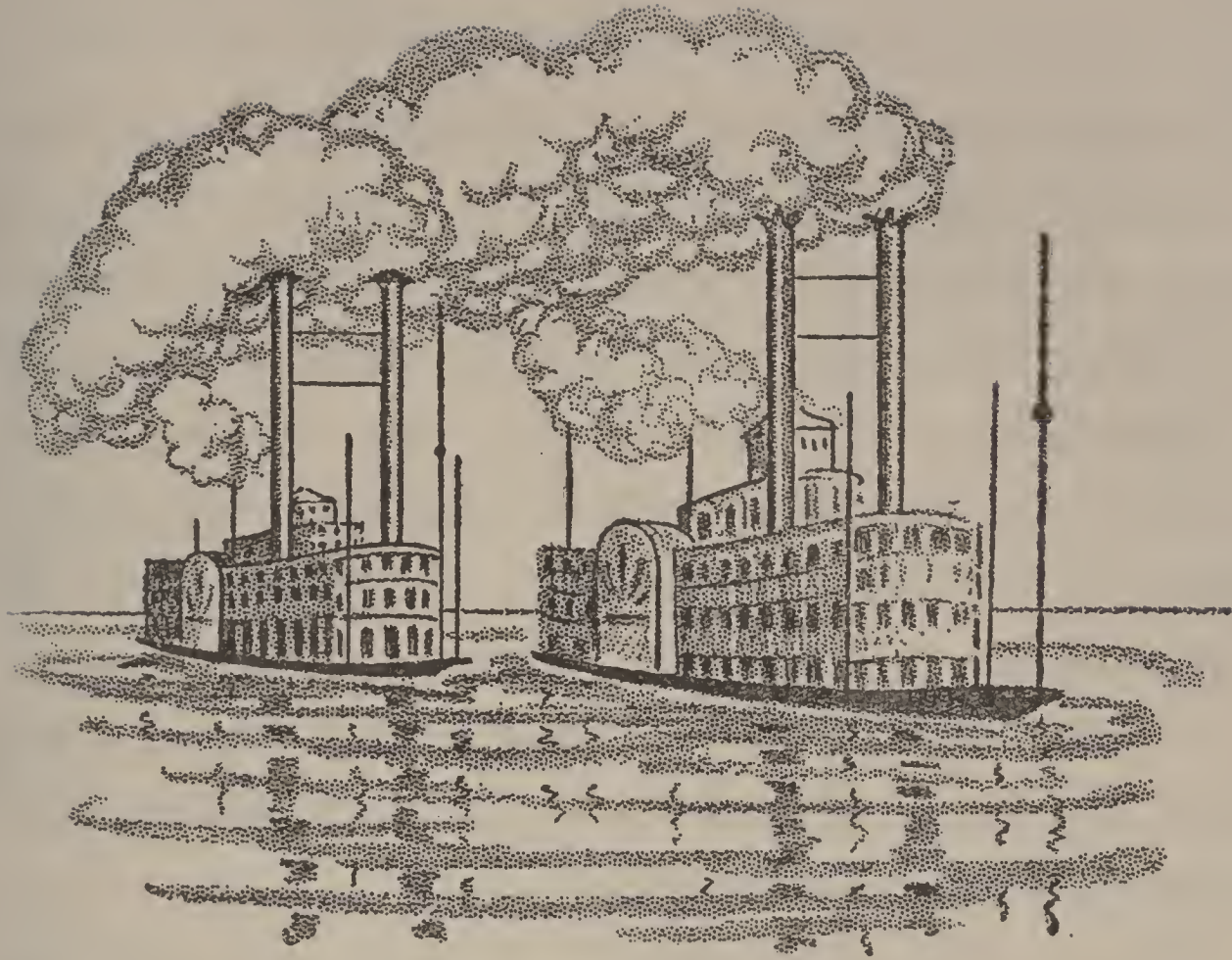
"I promised myself I wouldn't on this trip," said another, "but it's hard to resist gentlemen like yourselves."

"Ah, capital!" from a third. "Low stakes, of course."

Bill had had no intention of listening, or watching, but the lamps had just been lit and the cabin door had been opened. So it was difficult not to see the four inscrutable faces already watching new cards flash over a green table cover, greenbacks and gold coins being moved into neat stacks by practiced fingers.

"It's none of my business," Bill mumbled to himself, but that picture had struck him forcibly. He had heard of more than a few shootings resulting from just such a friendly game, though he hadn't ever really been able to believe the stories.

In a moment he was in the cabin with Jo, and their new bank books had driven everything else out of his mind.



Chapter VII

GAMBLERS ON BOARD

When Bill started above at eight the next morning, he passed the captain's cabin again. The "slip-slip" of shuffled cards and the low hum of men's voices still filtered out to the deck. He remembered the same sound came to his ears at four in the morning when he had climbed into his bunk. Yes, and these were the same men who had started playing just after the *Magnolia* had left New Orleans.

Then another sound distracted his attention. The steady drumming of the engines had risen to a roar. The deck under his feet trembled alarmingly as

the boat took on more speed, fought fiercely the battering high-river current. As he stood there trying to discover a reason for this feverish speed Andrew Lexington raced past him toward the pilot-house ladder. For the first time since Bill had been aboard the *Magnolia* Andrew Lexington was hurrying, coming onto watch five minutes early. Bill hastened to follow him.

“What’s going on?” he queried excitedly, noticing that Birch and his cub had not taken advantage of their five minutes of freedom.

“Look below to port,” Lexington shouted, his haughty calm completely absent. “The *Ingomar*. Memphis cotton boat out of New Orleans. Thinks she can pass us.”

Bill looked. He saw a glorious sight. The bow of the fleet cotton-carrier seemed to claw at the *Magnolia’s* paddle boxes. Her captain stood on the roof, now shouting to the boiler room for more steam, now to the pilot to urge the engines on faster. Black smoke belched from her stacks as her wheels churned white eddies, hurled them against the *Magnolia*. Passengers lined her guards even though the crew tried to get part of them to the other side to balance the boat. Now passengers jammed the *Magnolia’s* port rail, shouting encourage-

ment to her crew and taunts at those aboard the rival boat.

Lexington and Birch had miraculously become respectful of one another's abilities. "Would you cross here into the easier water behind that towhead, Mr. Lexington?" the shabby pilot inquired.

"Capital idea, sir," Lexington replied. "Then, if I may say so, we will be in perfect line to run the chute behind the island."

Then Lexington spun around to the speaking tubes. "What's the matter with you lazy alligators down there? Can't you give her any more speed?"

But still the *Ingomar* pressed ahead.

"They're putting lard on her fires!" a voice rang up from the *Magnolia's* furnace pit. "Got any lard on this tub?"

"Bill, quick," Lexington commanded. "Get below and see if you can get the captain to find some lard for our fires! Hurry!"

Young Wingate delivered his message to Capt. Merriman who panted, face drooping, by the pulsating engines.

"No use," he replied heavily. "We're using lard now. And the anvil is hung on the safety valve. We'll just have to let them go. We have a full cargo, and they're almost light."

Lexington grated his teeth at the report. "He's right. We'll have to give up. Those blasted cotton boats make so much running a load of cotton downstream that they can afford to take little but passengers upstream in order to get another cargo of cotton from the warehouses sooner. We'll get them yet. On a down trip. You wait and see!"

Soon the trim stern of the *Ingomar* passed the *Magnolia's* forecastle and, not long after, disappeared from sight around a bend.

The discouraged calm that hung over the texas abruptly melted in a fusillade of shots. Bill, steering, dared not take his eyes from the river, but his ears told him the gunfire came from the captain's cabin.

Lexington snatched the wheel, after a quick survey of the hurricane deck. "Shut that door and get below the windows until you're sure it's over," he ordered brusquely.

Two more explosions, and a bullet crashed through a side, then a forward window. Lexington hunched over the wheel, only his eyes and a high hat showing over the lower edge of the forward window frame.

Bill heard the unmistakable thump of a human body falling. He peeked over the edge of the door-glass. He could see a hand and wrist lying on the deck holding a revolver; then a foot kicking savagely

at the gun and a brief splash as the weapon disappeared into the Mississippi.

"All right," Lexington's voice had resumed its composure. "You can get up now. Guess they've finished him."

"May I go down and see who it is, sir?"

"If you don't stay down there all day. And get me a stogie while you're gone."

Capt. Merriman and Jim Barnes, the mud clerk, already were bending over the still body that now lay on its back.

"No pulse," Barnes whispered. "He's done for. Shot right through the heart."

"Walter Harlow from St. Louis, isn't it?" the captain asked in a matter-of-fact tone.

"Yes. Merchant up there. Thought he'd learned his lesson after that last trip."

"He came here to *teach* a lesson this time," offered a passenger who was wrapping a bleeding wrist in a silk handkerchief. "Those two cardsharppers, Carson and Villiers, took him for a thousand the last time he came back from New Orleans. This time he brought two thousand and a gun and got me to play in his game against them, to see that they played honestly. I was lucky to get nothing worse than a skinned wrist."

“What happened?” the captain’s voice continued impersonally.

“Well, we played from New Orleans until now. We won up until this morning and then started to lose. I stopped about an hour ago when I’d lost all I cared to let go. Harlow kept right on. He started to complain, and they tried to get him to take some drinks to calm his temper, but he wouldn’t drink. He lost larger and larger stakes, and I signalled to him that I had seen—I thought—that Carson was putting cards up his sleeve. Harlow lost a big pot and pulled a gun, yelling he wanted Carson to take his coat off and show those cards up his sleeve.”

“And, before Carson could shoot, Villiers had plugged Harlow?” Capt. Merriman finished.

“How did you know that?”

The captain did not answer, only questioned. “Did Harlow get Carson?”

“Carson’s dead,” the injured passenger shouted angrily, “but Villiers is free on this boat. Not even wounded. What are you going to do about it!” His voice raised shrilly.

“Come now,” Capt. Merriman patted him on the shoulder. “You’ve had a bad shock. Come below and sample some of my best brandy.”

He turned to the clerk and spoke softly. "See that the body's properly taken care of and ready for going ashore whenever his friend chooses to leave the boat. Villiers will tend to the other one."

His arm around the man's shoulder, Capt. Merri-man led him toward the bar. When Bill passed them after securing Lexington's stogie, they were chatting like old friends. "Probably Natchez would be the best place to stop ashore for embalming," he could hear the injured man saying.

After he had described the entire incident to his chief, Bill asked the question that had been bothering him ever since he had seen the captain dismiss the incident without asking to see Villiers, Harlow's murderer.

"Aren't they going to do anything about Villiers? Won't he be arrested?"

Lexington laughed sourly.

"That shows how new you are to the river. Villiers may leave the boat for a trip or two, but he'll be back."

"Doesn't Capt. Merriman—well, object?"

"He doesn't like it, but it's a pretty hard thing to avoid. It's usually healthier to let gamblers alone unless you want yourself ventilated with hot lead."

So that was the way of things, Bill thought. It

was true then that rivermen still took the law into their own hands. His spine prickled with uneasiness as he realized the dangers that he faced from men as well as from the river herself and from the frailties of steamboats.

“And see that you stay away from those fellows altogether. And from all gamblers,” Lexington ordered.

“You don’t have to tell me that,” Bill replied, trying to keep his eyes off the form that lay under a sheet on the deck.

Just as Andrew Lexington predicted, Villiers walked casually down the plank at St. Louis, followed by a Negro porter carrying his luggage. The gambler took his time about securing a carriage, then tipped his beaver contemptuously as the rig lurched up the levee.

Proud of his prominent escort, Bill Wingate hurried up with Andrew Lexington to one of the buildings above the waterfront.

“You see,” the pilot explained as they passed into a long, comfortable, smoke-filled room, “The Pilots’ Association allows each member to have one steersman who has to be endorsed by his chief and another pilot, when he gets his license, before he can be

admitted as a member. That's how we're keeping wages up to two fifty a month. We keep down the supply of pilots so that owners have to pay well to get one. And the insurance companies will let them have only member pilots."

By that time Lexington was being greeted from every side as he strolled up to the secretary's desk. "How was your trip, Andy?"

"I see the *Ingomar* left you astern."

"Come and have a drink with us, Lex."

But Bill's chief only raised a hand, smiled, and made arrangements to have Bill as his steersman.

Meanwhile young Wingate's eyes grew wide as he scanned the faces in the splendidly furnished room. There was Horace Bixby, famous for his running of Hat Island in low water. Here was Capt. E. W. Gould of the *Imperial*, a boat of the famous Railroad Line, enjoying himself as the guest of his crack pilot. Beside him sat Capt. Rogers of the *James E. Woodruff*, another Railroad Line packet, and the first boat to publish a daily newspaper on board.

Then Bill's eyes left these notables as a roar of laughter burst from one corner of the room. Business finished, Lexington had just turned to leave. Instead he took Bill's arm and led him toward the knot of pilots in the corner.

"That's Sam Clemens they're laughing at over there," he confided. "He's Horace Bixby's cub. Writes bits for the newspapers now and then."

Just as they heard a drawling voice start on a new anecdote, Lexington added:

"Come to think about it, Clemens comes from up your way. From Hannibal. Like to know him?"

"Yes, sir," Bill answered breathlessly. He had already, on his one round-trip to New Orleans, heard tales of Sam Clemens' lazy wit.

In the corner, legs over chair arm, fingers indolently holding a long stogie, Bill saw a rather short, careless-looking man. Almost his entire appearance seemed to fit perfectly that drawling voice and easy smile. But Bill noticed the penetration of the man's eyes, the vitality in bushy hair above a high, wide forehead.

"—and, you know," he was finishing, "that slave ain't been in that chicken yard since. He didn't mind when they peppered him with buckshot, but when they took to loadin' a shotgun with carpet tacks, he 'lowed he'd try some other chicken yard."

Lexington pushed through to stand before Clemens, and Bill could see now that Bixby's cub was not over twenty-five or twenty-six years old.

"This is Bill Wingate, Sam," Lexington broke into

the general laughter. "My cub. He comes from up in Quincy."

"Hello, Bill," Clemens shook hands warmly. "Ever been down to Hannibal?"

"Not often. But that cave surely was interesting."

"And then some. Some day I'll tell you how I nearly got lost inside. I didn't like it very much."

"Neither did I. But you can see the river better from that hill than you can from Quincy."

Before they could say more, a Negro waiter burst into the group, eyes goggling with excitement.

"Gotta hurry, Marse Clemens. *Penns'vania*, she done rang her last bell. Leavin' any minute. They's waitin' on you-all! Marse Bixby left already."

Clemens grinned slowly. "Well, gentlemen, perhaps I may be forced to leave this pleasant company to relieve my captain's blood pressure."

"We bettah hurry or get left," the waiter panted in exasperation at the deliberation with which Clemens relit his stogie and got to his feet.

"You're wrong there, Velvet," he told the Negro. "You better hurry and tell them I'm coming or I'll get left. Off with you now." Then he turned back to Bill. "Look me up when I'm not pressed with onerous duty," he patted Bill on the shoulder as he left.

“That fellow’ll never amount to much,” Lexington shook his head disgustedly.

“I wonder—” Bill mumbled, half to himself, as he thought of those all-seeing eyes and broad forehead.

“He might have seemed lazy, walking out of here,” remarked a member, peering out the window. “But now he’s running down that hill as fast as I’ve ever seen a human being run.”





Chapter VIII

A BAD FIRE

The steamer *Magnolia*, as she slipped downstream over moonlit water above Natchez, seemed as pleased with herself as Capt. Horace Merriman and Pilot Andrew Lexington who chatted elatedly on the high bench behind Bill Wingate.

They would look blissfully astern, smile over their shoulders as the lights of the *Ingomar* grew dimmer and dimmer and finally disappeared. Carrying about the same cargo as the *Ingomar* out of Memphis, the *Magnolia's* drumming engines that still shook the high bench had driven her under Lexington's skillful hand into the lead.

Now the drumming eased as the pilot took the wheel from Bill and brought the boat to an easy landing alongside Perkins' woodyard. The boat heeled as the larboard wheel touched bottom and stopped.

Lexington went back to gloating with Capt. Merriman, then reached for the bellpulls to the engine room as a hail of "All loaded, sir," floated up in the chief mate's coarse bass.

The bow of the *Magnolia* nosed into the current, as she started to slip placidly downstream and settle back onto an even keel.

What happened in the next moment could never be described calmly by anyone aboard the *Magnolia*. Bill Wingate, looking aft from the pilothouse window to watch the stern clear the bank, was hurtled against the door frame, shattering the glass as a deafening explosion thundered up forward.

Fighting to keep his feet, he whirled toward the bow, felt himself being slammed back behind the door, then dragged through it and down onto the hurricane in Capt. Merriman's fierce grip.

In self-preservation, Bill hid his head in his arms as great chunks of metal and wood crashed from the black sky onto the deck around him. Faintly remembering his father's tales of steamboat explosions, he

buried his mouth and nose in his coat lapels and crept around the edge of the pilothouse toward the bow.

On all sides men dived blindly into the water, bodies were thrown violently from the guards forward of the wheelhouses, deck passengers fought to escape from the deadly white cloud that burst from the shattered boilers.

Jo Hartley had been on watch in that inferno! Despair clutched at Bill's heart as he peered through the crack between his coat lapels and cap, saw flames whipping faster and faster from that cavernous emptiness that had been the bow section of the *Magnolia*.

The hull still floated downstream uninjured, but that very motion pressed flames back over the rest of the boat, hurled long, murderous red tongues and piles of black smoke through the open forward window of the pilothouse. Gasping, tortured with the scalding heat and smoke, Andrew Lexington crouched in the slight shelter of the wheel, fought to claw the *Magnolia's* bow toward the bank, fought in vain as she caught in swift water around a tow-head.

In the distance peacefully blinked the lights of Natchez, only about a mile away—but a mile in

which the *Magnolia* would certainly be consumed by flames.

With a crash, another set of cabin uprights collapsed, smashing down with it more of each deck. Shrieks of the wounded, panic-stricken men and women pinned under the heavy, flaming beams and red-hot ironwork pierced the suffocating air.

Now the forward edge of the pilothouse hung out over emptiness. Bill crept aft toward the sounding boat and yawl that lay lashed on the roof already surrounded by dazed passengers and deckhands fumbling clumsily at knots in the lines. Over his shoulder he saw Andrew Lexington frantically roping the wheel hard to larboard and dashing down the ladder to the roof.

From the starboard companionway, puffing, black with soot, rushed Capt. Merriman.

"She's lashed!" shouted Lexington. "Nothing else to do."

"Get those boats down," the captain ordered hoarsely. "You and Bill. Have those rousters help. All passengers stand by on the after guards on both sides, ready when the boats hit water. Quick now!"

As the captain hurried back down the companionway, Bill and Lexington forcibly drove passengers away from the boats to follow the captain. Then

they hooked falls onto the two craft and rapidly set them into the water.

“They have oarsmen down there,” the pilot bel-
lowed. “Clear the texas and the hurricane.”

Now the pilothouse rose as a silhouette of black, framed in hungry flames. Pilot and cub checked each cabin in the texas, then drove every remaining rouster and passenger down the companionway ahead of them. At the foot of the ladders, they stopped to keep back anyone who might madly run back above.

Slowly the *Magnolia* drifted nearer to shore. The wheels had stopped turning except for the pull of the current. Yawl and sounding boat, driven at heroic speed by panting deckhands, shot to and from the bank. But still the shore lay too far away to be reached by any but the most experienced swimmers. If only this clamoring, screaming mass of people could be rowed in before the flames reached the stern or entirely sank the hull!

Bill forgot his own fear as he watched these help-
less men, women and children, attacked on one side by roaring flames, hemmed in all around by water, seeing the shore so near, yet too far away to reach it by swimming.

The first mate, a great hulk of a man, clambered over the stern rail of the boiler deck. He could not

batter through to the narrow ladder leading up from the main deck, so had climbed the stern upright.

“Clear this deck,” he bellowed. “Everyone below before the fire gets here. If you’re not off when it gets too hot on the main deck, you’ll have to jump.”

Bill could feel the blistering heat pressing closer and closer. In a moment the stern would be aflame and all hope would be lost. For the *Magnolia* had drifted no closer to the bank.

Then he spied an axe hung on the wall of the ladies’ cabin. Wrenching it loose, he left Lexington and the other crew members to handle the passengers, swung fiercely with the narrow blade at the long sections of scrolled rail. As fast as he could hack a piece loose, he kicked it overside.

Quickly the passengers below realized what he was doing and dove, two or three at a time, into the water, seized the improvised rafts, started to paddle with their feet toward shore. Two sections still remained when the curving stern wall of the cabin puffed out in snapping tongues of fire, when the remainder of the superstructure seemed to teeter fore and aft with each puff of the rising wind.

Then Bill dove toward the fire, felt his hair flash hot as he ripped a scorched door from its sagging frame. With the last of his fading strength, he



He swung fiercely with the narrow blade

heaved it far out, arched his body over the side after it.

The cool, steady current served to rest him, to ease his jangling nerves. Grasping one end of the door, he propelled it toward the stampeding crowd at the stern—but he was too late. The two boats had just touched the steamer. All of the remaining passengers had leaped into them, some hanging on the almost-submerged gunwales, others piled into a hopeless tangle of arms and legs.

What boat hands had stayed on the steamer plunged in to swim beside the overburdened boats, to walk on the bottom, virtually carrying the craft, as soon as they could keep their heads above water. Only Capt. Merriman, a bitterly saddened yet defiant Capt. Merriman, stood on the afterguard of the *Magnolia*.

“Come along,” Bill shouted, more desperate than respectful. “You can’t do anything now. Get on this plank!”

The captain then slipped into the water from his wrecked steamer. The door sagged alarmingly under the captain’s weight, but Bill managed to start it off toward shore, heading downstream a little to keep out of the trough of the rising waves.

“Where’s Jo Hartley?” the captain suddenly called.

"I haven't seen him." Then his voice lowered. "But he couldn't have escaped from those controls. Not with boilers exploding twenty feet away."

Bill knew that the captain was right, but hearing the fact in words seemed to destroy the last wisp of hope. Nausea swept over him. His grip on the door slackened as the full meaning of the captain's words struck home.

"Bill! Bill! Bill Wingate!" a deep voice bored through the blackness of wind and water. "Help, Bill. It's Jo!"

Bill's eyes whipped over his shoulder, caught sight of a slender, moving object that might have been an arm, forward of the wrecked paddlebox, against the brightness of the fire. Before he could look again, the door dived crazily under him.

"Get out there and get him," Capt. Merriman gasped as he thrashed toward shore through water up to his chin. "He's got a leg pinned under the wreckage. But don't take any chances. Don't get on the boat. If you can't yank him out from the water, leave him there!"

"Yes, sir," Bill panted, without the least intention of obeying. If he had to dive into those flames to rescue Jo Hartley, he intended to do it.

As he at last neared the wreck, she caught in an

eddy and twisted to a right angle with the wind, fanning the flames onto the water, onto an exhausted Bill Wingate and his unsteady raft.

Bill ignored this new hazard. Recklessly he paddled into the scorching blast.

"I'm coming, Jo," he called through swollen lips as he saw his friend stretched flat along the guard, one arm dragging in the water. "Jo! Try again to get loose!" he shouted louder as the figure did not move.

With a vicious kick, he spun the door around so that he could seize Jo's shoulder, turn him over—and discover that he was barely alive.

Strangely the flames licked along inches from his body but did not touch him. Only at his left foot, pinned in a mass of broken chairs and railing, did the fire roar dangerously. With an agonizing effort, Bill jerked himself onto the guard, kneeled precariously near Jo's side, battled forward to where he could kick at the wreckage that held that pinioned left foot.

But it would not give. Hard as Bill flailed out with hands or feet, he gained nothing, and he finally sank down beside his friend in defeat.

"Jo! Jo!" he cried. "Can't you help me? Please, Jo!"

But his cry was enveloped in a new sound, a rap-

idly swelling, grinding, grating roar above them. As it rose louder and louder, the *Magnolia* slowly tilted to starboard.

In a flash Bill Wingate shot to his feet, seized Jo's waist in a death grip and threw his weight over the side. For an instant the two forms hung there—then plunged into the wreckage in the river channel.

As they fell, then sank into the merciful, cool river, Bill battled to keep his eyes open, to summon the strength that must bring him and Jo to shore. But he could not. Suddenly he was swallowed up in the blackness. And knew no more.





Chapter IX

CONVALESCENCE

Squirming uncomfortably, Bill felt a hard surface under his shoulder blades. A strange odor stung his nostrils as he inhaled deeply and shook himself awake.

Above his head stretched a low, raftered ceiling. He rolled over onto one side, winced at bruises on elbow and hip as he scanned the rows of still, blanketed figures stretched on the floor about him. Sunlight, filtering through shutters against square-paned windows, accented strangely a doctor and two women bending over one of the improvised beds, whispering almost inaudibly.

Obviously this was the main room of a tavern. Through an archway, Bill could see a bar on the far wall of another room. Stiffly he slid out of his blankets, got to his feet and peered through a nearby shutter. Far below lay Natchez-Under-The-Hill. The townspeople must have heard the explosion of the *Magnolia* and brought her refugees up to the city.

Quietly, Bill turned and made for the door leading out onto the porch. He got it open without disturbing the group in the far corner of the dim room.

Out on the porch, the brisk air of an early summer morning cleared his head at once. What a welcome change it was over the close, stuffy mixture of liquor and antiseptic that filled the long room indoors! He eased himself into one of the deep chairs and leaned back happily.

"You're a difficult patient, young man," a voice broke into his thoughts. "A lad that's gone through what you went through last night should still be resting in bed."

Bill looked up, then jumped to his feet as he recognized the speaker.

"Good morning, Mr. Harrison," he bowed. "But how do you happen to be here? It's nice to see you."

"I'm here on business," he went on, "And you're fortunate to be able to see me, William Wingate."

He smiled kindly. "You had hardly reached shore when you collapsed and they pulled you in last night. After saving Josiah Hartley's life. We were worried—"

"Is Jo all right?" Bill interrupted excitedly, forgetting manners in his concern.

Mr. Harrison again smiled graciously. "You like him a great deal, don't you, my boy?"

"Yes. Yes, of course. But how is he?"

"Nothing to worry about. His leg is badly sprained and bruised, and he's pretty thoroughly tuckered out. But there were no fractures and nothing crushed. Rest and quiet are about all he needs. You could use some of that yourself. Even heroes need it, you know."

Bill nodded, then asked: "How about Andrew Lexington and Capt. Merriman? And the *Magnolia*? Tell me about them."

Mr. Harrison raised a reproving hand, shook his head decisively. "I'll tell you about everything on one condition," he said firmly. "And I know that your father—and your mother, if she were here—would make the same stipulation."

"Yes, sir," Bill replied meekly.

"That condition is that you and Jo Hartley should come to Oaknoll until he is able to go back to work.

Mrs. Harrison and Constance would be most pleased to have you both."

"But I have to go back to work right away—that is, as soon as Mr. Lexington gets another berth."

"You needn't worry about that. I've talked with Mr. Lexington already, and he wants to talk to you. He's down under the hill at the levee with Capt. Merriman now. If you'll wait long enough to have a cup of coffee and some breakfast, you can go down and see them. And the store on the corner up the hill will give you fresh clothing. I've already talked with them."

Feeling new strength after the generous breakfast Mr. Harrison extracted with a miraculous combination of flattery and command from the coal-black chef, Bill hurried down to the store, then to the landing. The storekeeper had insisted that Mr. Harrison had instructed him to charge the clothes to him, but Bill finally forced the merchant to take part of Yankee Jack's farewell present.

Bill found Capt. Merriman and Andrew Lexington, bedraggled and still not entirely dry, sitting disconsolately on a cotton bale looking out at the charred hulk of the *Magnolia* that lay, half sunk, just above the levee. Obviously they had not yet been to bed, for their heavy-lidded eyes seemed to

see nothing as they stared wordlessly up the river.

"Hello, Son," Capt. Merriman greeted dully. The pilot did not look up.

Bill longed to say something that would make the master forget the loss of the *Magnolia* and the bodies that still lay at the bottom of the wide Mississippi. But he knew that no words could really help. Embarrassed, he waited for one of the others to continue.

"You'd better go up to Harrison's," the pilot finally spoke. "I'm going down to New Orleans on the next packet and get another boat. Had a Railroad Line offer last week. I'll send for you as soon as I can. Capt. Merriman wants you to stay with them until young Hartley is able to go back to work."

"Yes, sir. But you'll send for me in two or three weeks, won't you?"

"Don't worry about Andy, Bill," the captain put in. "No pilot could give up a cub that kept his head the way you did last night. And as soon as I get my next boat built, you're all coming back with me. You and Andy and Jo and all the rest of the *Magnolia's* crew—all the rest that were saved," he finished lamely.

"That's right," Lexington put in hastily. "Now you get back to the tavern and write letters to your

dad and Jo's uncle in Memphis so that they'll go up on the next upriver boat and get there before they have time to worry much about you. And take this dix note," he dug out a roll of rather damp paper money and peeled off a ten-dollar bill.

"I don't need it," Bill began to protest.

"You're still taking orders from me, even though you're not in a pilothouse," the pilot retorted angrily.

"Now take it and do as I tell you. Shove off now! I'll find a boat where they can take Hartley on with us."

Bill started away, but Capt. Merriman stopped him, laid a comforting hand on his shoulder. "We're all right, Son," he said kindly. "We're pretty worn out and grumpy now, but Andy's just as proud of you as I am. Now run along and have a good time at the plantation."

Rolling over the smooth, hard mud surface of the Natchez Trace that afternoon in the Harrison's shining carriage, Bill did not see the spirited pair of bays or the neat livery of the driver. Mr. Harrison lay back in one corner of the seat and Bill was left alone to think back over his harrowing experience. Jo would be brought out later on a stretcher after a last visit from the doctor.

The future seemed anything but bright. Of course, Lexington would probably find a berth in short order, a pilot like him always could. But this delay meant Bill would have to wait just that much longer before he could get his license and start earning money. Watching freight on the New Orleans and St. Louis levees brought a few dollars at the upper and lower ends of each trip, but this money had to go mostly for miscellaneous expenses. He took an oilskin bag from his pocket and pulled out his bankbook. One hundred and ten dollars. Only ten dollars added to the deposit Mr. Harrison had made for him. Now there would be nothing coming in for at least a month.

Then there was that rumor that a spy from the North had brought about the explosion of the *Magnolia* by anchoring down the safety valve because some of the kitchen crew were slaves owned by Capt. Merriman. Whether the rumor were true or not—and there would never be any way of proving it now that the valve was shattered and the boilers a mass of gnarled iron—Bill could see that this enmity between factory owners and workers in the North and planters and farmers of the agricultural, easy-living South might grow to fatal proportions. Actual proof had been discovered of at least two steamboats carry-

ing slaves being blown up by violent anti-slavery spies. Whatever the outcome of the nation being split into two sections that bitterly opposed one another might be, the struggle would certainly be a costly one that might cripple steamboating as well as every other business.

Bill thought back to his talks with Jo about this very question and to Jo's fears of how it would turn out. In the few short months since he had known the young engineer, the situation had grown worse and worse.

Suddenly Bill realized he should have refused to come to Oaknoll. Hospitable as Mr. Harrison might have been, Bill knew he should not have run the risk of letting slip some remark that would arouse one who felt so strongly the differences between the North and South. Also, Bill thought regretfully, the son of a down-East Yankee should be wise enough not to want to see the daughter of a Southern planter as badly as he wanted to see Constance again. Yet he could not suppress his happy anticipation.

Abruptly, the rig swerved to the right and upward into a private road. Mr. Harrison snapped erect.

"This is our property here, Bill," he explained. "Look up ahead."

Bill could not resist exclaiming over the scene that

met his eyes. The road seemed like a tunnel through immense graceful live oak trees draped with festoons of Spanish moss. Wide ribbons of close-clipped grass stretched out through rows of great trunks broken here and there by formal gardens of gorgeously brilliant roses. It all ended in a spacious turn-around at the foot of the sloping, magnolia-walled mall that led up to the house.

Even from the exterior of Oaknoll, Bill could understand why the Harrisons could take so calmly the grandeurs of the *Magnolia*. Tall and imposing, faced with refreshing white columns, their home seemed to breath luxury, refined elegance.

"I had Isaac stop at the foot of the walk here because I thought you might like to see the house through the mall," Mr. Harrison explained. "Do you like it?"

"It's grand," Bill breathed. "Isn't it terribly big?"

"Twenty-eight rooms, with slave houses for a hundred families in the rear."

Just then the gleaming white front door swung open, and Constance Harrison, heedless of her wide hoop skirt, hurried out to meet them.

"Are you all right, Mr. Wingate?" she asked, first of all.

"Perfectly," Bill laughed, happy at her interest.

“Jo Hartley is a little banged up, but he’ll be all right soon.”

“I’m sorry about him,” she was instantly contrite, then brightened. “But Lucy is coming soon to visit for a few weeks, so perhaps she’ll be able to make him happier.”

“I’m sure she will,” Bill knew he spoke the truth in that reply.

“Ever since I heard that the *Magnolia* had exploded I’ve been worrying.”

“Come, come, Daughter,” an older woman, obviously Mrs. Harrison, appeared. “Have Joel show your friend to his room so that he can wash the Natchez Trace off his hands and face. And you might also introduce him to me.”

After meeting Constance’s mother, Bill happily let the girl take his arm and lead him through the door to the wide curving stairway.

Leaving Joel and closing the door, Bill turned to look over his room.

“What can Ah do for yo-all?” a Negro voice called, as a grinning black face appeared in an inside doorway.

“Marcellus!” Bill rushed over to the darkey. “How did you get down here? When did you leave Quincy?”

“Marse Bill!” the Negro beamed. “Ah’s sure glad to see yo! Ah’s yo’ private boy down here.”

“Good. But what happened that you’re here? Did Judge Harkness sell you?”

The lanky black shook his curly head sadly.

“Sho’ done just that. Mary and all the chillun is still back at Harkness’. Ah’s been down here ever since you left home.”

“How do they treat you?”

The darkey put a finger over his lips, “Don’t say that so loud, Marse Bill. Summun might hear.

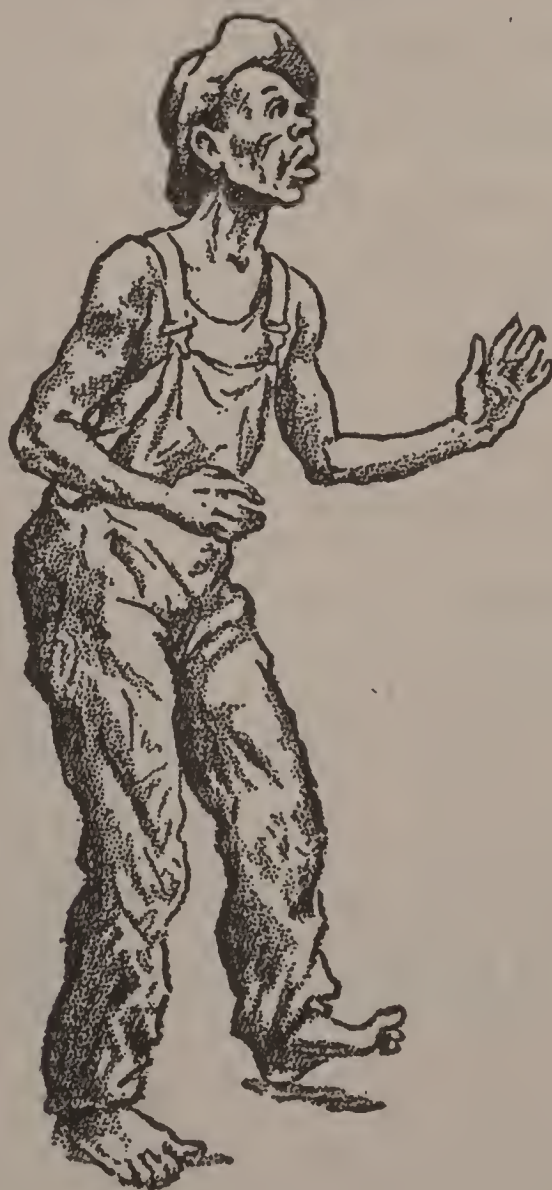
“Dey treats me fine. But dat boss of de field nig-gahs gits pow’ful brutal with that whip sometimes.”

“Well, you won’t have to work hard while you’re here with me, Marcellus. And maybe, some time, you can get back to Mary and the children.”

Bill wanted to do more to help this kind-hearted slave who had been so good to him in Quincy, but he knew he could not interfere with Mr. Harrison’s property. It seemed horribly unkind to separate a man, even a black man, from his family and sell him down the river. Yet, when Mr. Harrison spent hundreds of dollars to buy the lifetime labor of a slave, he should not have that property taken away from him so that he had nothing to show for the money he had spent.

The problem whirled confusingly through Bill's mind as he lay down to rest for a while. It seemed now as if every situation he faced brought up a new and insurmountable obstacle. The time when he could become a pilot and earn enough money to buy a steamboat seemed hopelessly far away. If only there were somebody to whom he could talk and get this whole tangle straightened out!

Bill Wingate did not realize that the problems that were upsetting him were baffling the best men in America and would cost the nation agony and bloodshed before they could be settled.





Chapter X

A DISAGREEMENT

Carefully Bill climbed the great stairway and made for his room. Not for the world would he have abused the delicious feeling behind his happy smile. For he had just finished the grandest breakfast of his life.

It was sheer bliss to stretch out on his back, sink into the soft mattress and dream of those fluffy biscuits, toothsome side meat, fragrant coffee. The sound of Marcellus coming into the room could not disturb him.

“Massa, Bill,” Marcellus spoke up. “Massa Bill.”

"Yes—Oh, it's you, Marcellus." He sank back on the bed again.

"Massa Bill, Mis' Constance' mammy done told me you-all was to see the plantation this mornin'. Ah got some ridin' clothes from her."

"I'm to ride with Miss Constance?"

"Thass it, Mistuh Bill."

"Lead the way!"

The next two hours brought Bill Wingate into a new world. Astride a great black hunter, he trotted at Constance's side through unbelievable paths of delicately tinted roses, rich magnolia blooms, caverns of moss-draped live oak.

Then he discovered a new Constance, an entirely different yet equally as fascinating a girl as the one he had known on the *Magnolia* and in New Orleans. The quiet, kindly manner was still there, but from behind it shone a rare courage, a strength Bill had not known before. Never had he believed that a young girl could ride so well, so bravely, yet with such dignity.

When they left the barns and finally broke into open country, Constance called over her shoulder:

"Here's our hunting ground. Shall we make a run of it?"

Hardly had Bill nodded in reply when the girl



"Shall we make a run of it?"

touched her tall chestnut hunter on the flank. Away she flew with Bill riding hard to keep her in sight. Over rough fields, soaring across rail fence jumps, they galloped for half an hour until Bill was nearly ready to drop with exhaustion, even though he was a reasonably good horseman.

Luckily Constance slowed down as she headed for a clump of trees to her right. By the time Bill caught up she had dismounted and was tying the chestnut to an overhanging limb. Flushed, smiling with excitement and pleasure, she ran up to Bill, seized his hand as he tied his bridle.

“Over this way,” she urged, tugging at his arm. “I want to show you something, a private spot of mine.”

It was impossible not to catch her mood, not to be as gay as she. “I’m with you,” he chanted, hurrying along beside her through the trees, then suddenly stopping as they reached the top of a small hill.

“Right over there—look and see how you like it,” she pointed with her crop. “I always like to come here to rest during my morning ride.”

“It’s—it’s wonderful,” Bill stuttered, for he had been taken completely by surprise. He was sure the river lay far off to the left. Instead, it stretched out

into the distance, like a map of green and silver, hundreds of feet below him.

“Come, sit down. You can share my private log,” Constance went on, enjoying his amazement. “Tell me how you like Oaknoll Plantation.”

“It’s hard to believe my own eyes,” Bill returned slowly after a moment. “It’s another world from the river or the towns I’ve known.”

“Yes, I suppose it is. Sometimes I wish I weren’t so used to it so that I could see it as a stranger does. And still I wouldn’t give up an hour of the happy times I’ve had here.”

“I still can’t imagine,” Bill spoke half to himself, as he stretched out on the soft moss, “I still can’t see why your father would invite me up here. I’m just a cub pilot from a small river town.”

“But, Bill, can’t you see that is why Dad—and—and I—like you especially. Of course, you were brave at New Orleans, and in the explosion. We could never repay that. But what we like best is that it doesn’t make any difference that we’re plantation owners and you’re not. You’d be a gentleman no matter what your station in life.”

“It’s very kind of you to say that, Miss Constance. But it’s you—and your father—that make it so easy for me to feel at home and to act as if I knew what

was the right thing to do in a fine house like yours.”

Constance laughed quietly. “Don’t be a goose. You had Daddy fooled completely until that dinner in New Orleans when you told him your father was a storekeeper on the Quincy levee—which is no disgrace,” she finished gently.

“But Daddy is grand about everything,” she went on as Bill did not answer. “I wish he weren’t so worried all the time.”

“Worried about what? Anything I could do to help?”

“No, it’s just those horrid politics. Those Yankees in Congress talk so much against slavery, and our senator comes home and upsets Daddy with all their talk.”

“It’s a shame,” Bill agreed. “I’m from the North, and you and your father and Jo are from the South. We would be on the opposite side of the battle if a war came of all this talk. It makes me almost afraid to speak to your father.”

“Oh, Bill!” Constance’s gloved hand fell on his shoulder. “You wouldn’t say anything that would upset him, or turn him against you? Would you?”

“I hope not. The subject of the North and South is mighty dangerous. But why?”

“You should know without asking,” she smiled,

then stretched out her hand. "Pull me up. I think it's high time we finished our ride. I had to plead with Mother to let me take you in the first place."

A month passed at Oaknoll in a whirl of happy impressions. Lolling in the garden with Jo, Constance and Lucy chatting gaily as they picked great bouquets for the tables; consuming heaping portions of succulent dishes at the great dining table as a tiny Negro boy cooled them by moving to and fro the lyre-shaped fan hung from the ceiling above the table; laughing at Jo's plight when the fan moved too swiftly and blew candlewax on to his hotbread; dancing with Constance in the long ballroom under two magnificent crystal candelabras; thrilling to Mrs. Harrison's full, rich contralto singing Negro lullabies with Constance furnishing hushed accompaniment—every minute was crammed with good things.

Only one incident marred Bill's complete happiness. One evening after Mr. Harrison had finished a disappointing visit with his friend, the local senator, just returned from Washington, Bill's Marcellus had clumsily bumped into the planter in the second floor hallway, and Mr. Harrison had dressed him down soundly. Just then Bill came out of his room, and, not seeing his host down the hall, asked the Negro what had happened.

“Never mind, sir,” Mr. Harrison wheeled and returned with long, purposeful strides. “I’ll take care of this ungrateful wretch in my own way. I see that you Yankees don’t approve of the way we conduct our homes here in the South.”

Before Bill could speak, Mr. Harrison had turned his back and stalked off.

Next day, as he rode out with Constance, Lucy and Jo, Bill knew that the incident had reached Constance’s ears. On the surface, she was no different than always. Only Bill could realize the strain she felt, the fear that something might endanger the bond that had drawn them closer, day by day.

In that way, it was a relief when a letter came from Andrew Lexington instructing him to be ready with Jo to ship aboard the *Alex Scott* when she passed Natchez on the upriver trip.

Yet, it was hard to roll down the long avenue of live oaks, watching the two figures waving from Oaknoll’s balcony grow smaller and smaller, then to disappear behind a bend in the road. Jo slipped slowly back into the seat of the open carriage and turned to Bill.

“Do you feel as badly about leaving Constance as I do about leaving Lucy?” he asked.

Bill nodded slowly, despairingly. There had been

an unmistakable finality in Mr. Harrison's farewell, even though he had apologized for the incident in the hall. Bill knew without being told that his host would not approve of his seeing Constance again, that the damage was done.

"I know how you feel," Jo sympathized. "But you know, to be polite, you must write her and Mrs. Harrison, thanking them for their hospitality. Constance might reply to that."

"At least I can try," Bill answered far more optimistically than he felt.

Life aboard the *Alex Scott* kept Bill even busier than when he had been on the *Magnolia*. He wrote grateful letters to Mrs. Harrison and Constance on his first off-watch after he came aboard. But his chief gave him more and more steering to do on the uptrips in spite of the rapidly falling river. Running as part of the Railroad Line, the *Scott* had to make connections with the new steam cars, and Capt. Switzer was often forced to ask almost impossible speeds from his pilots. The boat would leave one landing as soon as a train arrived and, if the train was late—which it often was—would have to race to another landing to arrive before another connecting train would depart. Such strenuous running was bad

enough in high water when there was plenty of depth to the river. But in low water when the most skillful pilots ran a good chance of grounding, each trip became a nightmare.

Toward the end of a trip, four hours of sleep between watches was hardly enough, and chief pilots often depended on their cubs to run the boat while they rested on the high bench to prepare for the more intricate and dangerous crossings and shallows.

In quick succession Bill learned how to take the crew out in the sounding boat and mark a channel; how to squeeze inches off a treacherous rounding-about; how to read depths from the appearance of the water and how to steer by the chanting song of the starboard and larboard leadsmen. When Jo brought a letter carrying a Natchez postmark from the office one day, Bill was almost too tired to read it.

“Dear Bill: (It said) Mother and I were both happy to have your notes and to know how you enjoyed your visit with us.

“I wish I could say more about how I enjoyed it myself, but I don’t think I have to. You know that for yourself.

“That is why it hurts so to ask you not to write me again or ask to see me again. But we must try to wait until it will no longer displease Daddy that

you are from the North when we are from the South.

"You *must* understand, Bill. And what we have together must wait—I hope not too long."

That was all Bill wanted to read. He packed the letter into his bag and vowed not to look at it again until he could enter Mr. Harrison's home as a friend, not an enemy.





Chapter XI

GOOD-BYE TO MR. LEXINGTON

Discouragement, the moments when the future seemed hopeless, grew more and more frequent as Bill Wingate fought through one strenuous trip after another on the *Alex Scott*. He did almost all of the steering now, carried on whether Andrew Lexington was asleep or awake, in the pilothouse or out. But the prospect of soon becoming a licensed pilot seemed far less attractive than when he first came aboard the *Magnolia*. In the few months since he had stayed at Oaknoll, hatred between the North and South rose to violent proportions. South Carolina left the Union

after the election of Abraham Lincoln as President.

Even now the group of shippers and visiting pilots that shared the high bench with Andrew Lexington argued the subject heatedly.

“Now, gentlemen,” Bill heard his chief’s decisive tones break into the clamor, “you’re all talking about secession. But you know that’s only the immediate trouble. Those Yankees have got factories and lots of money. They’re cutting into things at Washington, putting tariffs on imported goods, making everything harder for us in the South which doesn’t do any manufacturing.”

“But cotton is more important than any manufactured article the North can produce,” one tall, bearded planter insisted.

“Cotton is important,” Lexington admitted. “And I’m loyal to the South. But I still say the South ought to be careful. We’re entitled to our rights, but we ought to listen to reason.”

“Reason!” another Southerner boomed. “That man Lincoln will ruin this country. South Carolina was right when she seceded from the Union! And the rest of the South will soon follow!”

“Even though he did turn a pilot’s wheel on the Mississippi, Lincoln is a rotten Abolitionist,” one of the pilots charged.

“I don’t like his ideas, either,” Lexington admitted. “But the South can’t afford to start trouble. Cotton isn’t enough.”

“You said you’re loyal to the South,” another shouted. “But you don’t sound that way. I demand you explain yourself.”

“I’m sorry, gentlemen,” the pilot bowed and took the wheel from Bill. “I meant only to be helpful. You must excuse me now. This is a difficult crossing.”

As Bill yielded the wheel, he remembered another of his chief’s statements: “The South is broke and doesn’t know it.”

Most of the South did secede and Mississippi, Florida, Alabama, Louisiana, Georgia and Texas formed the Confederate States of America with Jefferson Davis as President. Two months later, about a month after Lincoln’s inauguration, the South fired on Ft. Sumter and on April 5th, Lincoln called for 75,000 troops to oppose the secession of the Southern states and their newly formed Confederacy.

The *Alex Scott* was tied up in the half-Union, half-Confederate city of St. Louis when a discouraged, frightened Bill Wingate took a table in a riverfront café with Jo Hartley and Andrew Lexington. All were tight-lipped, worried. Many had said that se-

cession would be overcome in three months at the most, but Bill's chief had provided ample reasons why the struggle should run into years. Tennessee and Arkansas had joined the Confederacy. Battles in the East already showed tremendous Southern strength and tenacity, Northern blundering.

Though little had happened in organized fighting near the Mississippi, steamboats had been fired upon from the shore, pilots killed at the wheel by snipers. No longer was a northern boat safe in Southern waters or a Yankee boatman safe on a Southern craft.

Thus Bill's dream of bringing his father back onto the river on his own boat had been slaughtered as brutally as those men who lay dead and dying from their last upriver trip. Even if he could get a berth and earn a good salary, even if he could at last buy a boat, it would be futile to do so and let it be destroyed in guerilla warfare or by his friends who had enlisted.

Only one course seemed to be left open to him—to go back home defeated and wait, living on his father's poor income, until the war could be settled and the river again opened to commerce. His inside pockets hung heavy with one hundred and twenty dollars of savings in gold he had drawn from the New Orleans bank to deposit in St. Louis, but this

meant only sixty dollars saved for each of the two years he had been on the river. Wearily he confessed to Lexington and Jo that he planned to leave for Quincy the next day.

“Did the captain say we had to leave the boat?” Lexington asked.

“No, but the boat won’t make any more trips for awhile, and I imagine he’ll let us go any time now.”

“Better wait,” the pilot advised. “It’s your only chance. I just heard over at the Association that Capt. Merriman sold his new *Magnolia* for the Galena trade the day after she was launched. If you leave the *Alex Scott*, all you can do is go home. Jo and I are leaving tonight to enlist at Memphis.”

“Enlist? With the South?” Bill cried.

“I’m afraid so,” Jo said seriously. “It’s our duty. I know how you feel, Bill. But—come with us.”

Bill shook his head slowly. The bottom seemed to be dropping out of everything. He’d never thought of Jo and Lexington leaving him and enlisting, as they would naturally do, with the South.

“I’m sorry,” he finally replied. “But it doesn’t seem right for me to fight against my own part of the country. It’s—it’s—” he gestured angrily. “It’s all silly. I can’t feel strongly enough about either side to want to fight for it. I can see why Mr. Harrison

and other Southerners oppose the North. And I can see what the North hates about slavery and Southern statesmen. But I can't hate you two just because I was born a Yankee—any more than you hate me because you came from Memphis in the South.”

“We're probably not going to fight as soldiers, Son,” Lexington put in quietly. “The Confederacy will find plenty of use for pilots and other steamboatmen. We're going down to Memphis to enlist. Does it matter greatly to you what flag you're under when you're steering a steamboat?”

Miserably Bill realized it did make a difference. He felt no ill will toward the South, but something forced him to tell his chief that joining in a war against his home state was out of the question. He could see no reason for fighting on the side of the North, yet enlisting against the North was unthinkable.

“But what can I do?” he asked Lexington hopelessly. “How can I get work if you leave?”

“You can be a pilot pretty soon,” Lexington said slowly, waiting for the effect it would have on Bill.

“No. You're making fun of me!”

“Hardly. Your application with proper signatures has been filed and will be accepted. The license itself will come to the captain of the *Alex Scott*. He'll give it to you. I told him all about it.”



"But what can I do?"

Bill tried to speak but could manage only a hollow croak. Then the happy moment was eclipsed in gloom. What good would a license for the Mississippi River do, now that the South held most of it from St. Louis down? Now that the only commerce was transportation of troops and war supplies? Now that most of the packets lay idle at St. Louis and Cairo?

“Let me give you some good advice,” Lexington spoke up sharply, commandingly. “Then we’ll drop the subject of war and have a proper farewell dinner.”

Both Bill and Jo agreed heartily. There was no subject that they would be more willing to eliminate completely.

“Just this,” the pilot went on. “And it’s for Bill’s benefit.” He turned to his ex-cub. “You just keep close to the *Scott* and the Railroad Line boats. They’ll have plenty of use for steersmen and pilots and will pay wages for them. You won’t have to enlist in either the Army or the Navy. There’s still plenty of contracts yet to be let to steamboats for transportation of troops and supplies. Those contracts will pay good money to everybody, and the *Alex Scott* won’t be idle if there’s that kind of business to be had. That may be the kind of thing Jo and I will be doing down below on the lower river, in case we don’t enlist in the Navy. You might as well make those wages

as anybody else. Stay around and give it a trial, anyway.”

Bill would rather have had nothing to do with the war, but neither did he want to go back to Quincy defeated. Staying on the *Scott* seemed to be the only way out. “All right,” he told his chief. “I’ll give it a trial anyway.”

“Now we’re supposed to forget battles,” Jo laughed, “but I can’t help telling you what I heard about Sam Clemens. Or have you heard it already?”

Bill and Lexington shook their heads.

“Well, you know he skipped out right after the South started taking pot shots at pilots. Claimed he didn’t care for the atmosphere up in a pilothouse. I guess he was afraid of lead poisoning.”

“That was a poor excuse for a joke,” Bill carped.

“I know it isn’t up to Sam’s jokes,” Jo admitted. “But he won’t be around here to criticize it. Some of the boys up in Hannibal organized a company of infantry, and he was in it—until his brother got appointed as secretary to the governor of Nevada. Now Sam decided he’d prefer Nevada climate to the Mississippi Valley, and he left his company without the War Department’s permission.”

“Not much danger of the War Department going to Nevada after him,” Lexington smiled. “But I

reckon he'll give the natives there plenty to laugh about, even though he'll probably make a much better silver miner than he did a soldier."

"Don't fancy carrying a gun myself," Jo yawned.

"You don't fancy carrying much of anything except a good dinner," the pilot added. "And if we don't order it right now, we'll probably have you making some more poor jokes."

Sizzling fried chicken soon occupied the three, and finally, the trip back to the *Alex Scott* could be accomplished only by easy stages at a slow pace. The laughter and good fellowship of the dinner carried them out onto the levee again as Jo and Lexington climbed aboard a small downriver packet and waved good-bye. Bill sent them off with a broad grin, wished them good luck as the boat swung down into the channel. Yet, it took all the determination he could muster to get back to his cabin on the *Scott* and write to his father about his license and his decision to stay on in St. Louis. It was hard not to drop into his bunk and give way to the loneliness he already felt, not to write that he wanted to come back home where war was far away, where Confederate flags did not hang from half the business houses and homes.

Still, something within Bill Wingate warned him

that the trouble he faced now would become insignificant in the face of the problems to come and that he now had to face the world as a man, not as a boy.





Chapter XII

THE *ALEX SCOTT*, TRANSPORT

Autumn chill spiced the early evening air as Bill Wingate climbed the pilothouse ladder of the *Alex Scott* and poked up the fire in the potbellied stove. The last rays of clear November sunshine highlighted the vast flotilla of barges and steamers, gunboats and hospital ships that made up the Cairo base and served as barracks for most of the land forces stationed at the junction of the Mississippi and Ohio Rivers.

A different, an older, more confident Bill Wingate was this man from the boy who had watched Jo Hartley and Andrew Lexington leave for the South

only a few months ago. Carrying stolidly the responsibilities of a licensed pilot, this lad, who had watched his country being torn into two nations, now showed no sign that he had yet to escape from his 'teens. Knowing that he had to make good now, that hundreds of lives depended upon his skill at the wheel of the *Alex Scott*, Bill faced the world more determinedly than ever. The firmness with which he thrust a lean jaw forward into hard lines, with which he carried square, muscular shoulders proved that determination.

In one tanned hand he held a letter from his father. Before opening the envelope, he climbed onto the high bench to scan thoughtfully the scene below him. He was thinking of the changes in Cairo, and the river, during the past action-packed months; how the frightened Union Troops poured back into Washington from their disastrous rout at Bull Run in August; how Gen. McClellan pecked irritably at the Southern forces in the East with negligible results; how Capt. Eads from Mississippi was just completing the building of a fleet of shallow-draft river ironclads at Carondelet, Missouri and Mound City, Illinois; how Gen. Grant with wooden gunboats occupied Paducah, Kentucky, on the Ohio River; and how the Nationals planned to move down the river from

Cairo and up from New Orleans to cut the South off from their food supply west of the Mississippi River.

Bill could not bring himself to feel pride in this great armed strength growing before his eyes, as blacksmiths and boat builders slaved in the floating shops anchored to the marshy shore. He had yet to discover a reason why he should enlist and thus actively pledge himself to help in carrying out the ambitions of the North.

Slowly he pulled open the letter in his hand. Two weeks ago he had written to his father back in Quincy, trying to learn from him if it were his duty to join the Northern forces, if his father could straighten out his tangled loyalties. Bill read the letter:

I can understand your confusion about the war because I feel the same way myself. Some of my best friends on the river, even some of the men here in Quincy, have joined the Southern Army.

But there is one point you seem to have missed—you seem to have the impression that this is *purely* a war between North and South. This is not wholly true. You have forgotten that one of the aims of the North is to preserve the Union for which America fought in

1776 and 1812. We are fighting to keep the United States from breaking up. War is no real way to settle a controversy, but, now that we are in it, I feel winning it is our only way to hold the states together.

I don't want to tell you whether or not to enlist. That is entirely up to you. I ask only that you keep the above point in mind and act as your sense of duty dictates. I fear the time will come when you will be needed as a Mississippi pilot in the Navy, but the decision must be yours.

Congratulations on that growing bank account!

Your loving father,

Jack Wingate

Bill gazed up from the letter thoughtfully. Undoubtedly his father was right. The Union should be preserved at any cost. But he himself was valuable at his post on the *Alex Scott*.

"Wingate!" the mate's voice snapped Bill back to the present. "We go down river tomorrow with troops aboard. Grant is planning a move around Columbus, Kentucky. Gunboats *Tyler* and *Lexington* are going to convoy. The *Chancellor*, *Keystone*, and *Memphis* will be the other transports. We're taking

about three thousand men, including a couple of companies of cavalry. Be running a cattle boat before we're through with this confounded war."

The movement did not come as a surprise to Bill. For nearly a week, since the first of November, rumors had been filtering through Cairo that Gen. Grant would be sent against the river garrison at Columbus to dislodge the Confederates. Now, on November sixth, he was ordered to take the fort.

In the pilothouse of the *Alex Scott*, Bill stood by the man on watch as they followed the *Lexington* and *Tyler* to a point about six miles above Columbus. There they landed and put ashore pickets who were to establish contacts with a Union force moving west from Paducah.

Through the evening they lay well above the garrison and waited for daybreak. Bill knew the sensible thing would be to go below and get some sleep, but the harrowing air of suspense that kept the troops pacing up and down the decks made him restless.

For Bill had yet to see his first battle. Although, at Cairo, he had been unable to escape seeing mangled, torn men borne onto the hospital ships, their relatives searching each face in the long streams of stretchers, praying that their loved ones lay here injured rather than on the field of battle, dead.

From the *Scott* and the other transports, a mere three thousand men, lightly armed, would face a much stronger Confederate army at the break of day, join with a small Paducah force against the murderous cannon of the Columbus batteries.

The *Lexington* and *Tyler* were to protect the landing of troops and engage the shore batteries, but these sidewheel steamers barricaded with thick wood, slanted from above the boiler deck to the lower guards would provide little protection against iron cannon balls, or even persistent musket fire. A single cannon ball could sink a transport such as the *Scott*.

About two in the morning, the enemy was discovered moving troops from Columbus across the river to a camp at Belmont on the Missouri side. At once Grant drew in his pickets on the Kentucky side and ordered the fleet to land about five miles above Belmont at the head of a long bend.

Bill heaved a sigh of relief as he realized that they would be five miles away from the battle, when a messenger hurried into the pilothouse and addressed Bill's partner.

"The gunboat *Tyler* requires a pilot to stand by in case of emergency, sir. Will you volunteer?"

The pilot shook his head slowly. "I've got a wife

and three little ones," he replied. "But if it's absolutely necessary—"

"I'll go," Bill heard himself saying in a trembling voice. "When do we start?"

Young Wingate shuddered as he came aboard the built-over packet. He scanned the main deck, packed with cannon and gunners, and the woefully inadequate wooden armor that protected them.

It was eight o'clock by the time that the pilots had watched all the troops disembark and started down toward the batteries at Columbus. As soon as the soldiers disappeared over a hill, the guns aboard the *Tyler* and *Lexington* started hurling shells across the river at the fort to divert attention from the Union forces moving toward Belmont.

Each shot jarred the *Tyler* from keel to smokestack. Closer and closer to the Columbus fort fell their shells until the Confederate gunners began to find the range of the gunboats. Wisely Commander Walke withdrew them in favor of the superior force on the Kentucky shore.

On the Missouri side Bill could now see the Union men making costly progress through a maze of cornfields, forest and marsh. As the exhausted gunners below him fought for air through the small gunports, he watched the blue-coated cavalry and infan-

try of the Nationals batter the grey lines back into their camp, then over into the shelter of a steep bluff along the river.

Again the *Tyler* and *Lexington* hurled more shells into the fort, then withdrew in a mass of fire and returned when the Southern batteries had paused. Now the boats moved in circles to confuse the enemies' gunners, hurling broadsides as fast as the pieces could be reloaded.

Each shot seemed to come closer to the *Tyler*, maneuver as she might.

Bill was kept frantically busy helping the pilot snatch the wheel down hard again and again, but they only confused their own gunners without evading the fire of the enemy. When a cannon ball plunged through the side and deck of their boat and convinced the commander that they should withdraw, Bill was perfectly willing to leave. One man had been killed and several wounded when the vicious shot passed the cramped quarters on the main deck. Luckily the engines were not disabled and could still bring the boat upstream successfully.

Now word came that the Union troops were escaping to the boats as a superior Rebel detachment from across the river drove fiercely after them. The gunboats stood by to guard the embarking, ready to

open fire on the enemy as soon as he appeared.

Last of all, without protection, Gen. Grant galloped into sight on the bank just as the last stage was hauled aboard. Quickly a rouster threw out a plank. The general scuttled down the steep hill and clattered his horse onto the forecastle. Seconds later, the Southern troop appeared, but the transports had already started upstream. Quickly, the ready gunners on the *Tyler* and *Lexington* hauled on firing lanyards and crushed their enemy back from the banks to shelter. The transports escaped safely, but nearly lost their commander. Grant had thrown himself on a couch in the captain's room of the steamer as they pulled away, only to hurry out onto the deck to watch the departure. No sooner had he left the couch than a bullet pierced it from front to back.

The entire Union forces rejoiced as they steamed back to Cairo. Though over four hundred men had been lost, and National forces been surrounded, they had fought their way through the enemy to the boats. For these were volunteer troops after their first battle, and they felt the confidence of a brave fight. They seemed to forget the dead lying on the field at Belmont, the wounded whose groans even now formed an agonizing background for the revels of their rejoicing comrades.

Bill could not drive those hours from his mind as he talked dully with one of the gunboat pilots at Cairo that night.

"It's too much for me," he spoke as much to himself as to his companion. "Coming down on Columbus there. A bright sunrise. Fresh, sweet air. The river bright in the sun. The boats driving down just as they used to, and then having it all torn into pieces by guns. Buried in black smoke."

"That's war for you, Bill. We just have to take it and like it."

"I couldn't ever like it. Seeing beautiful boats like the *Scott*, boats that carried the finest people on the river. Seeing them ripped and battered with rifle bullets and cannon balls, turned into filthy pens of muck and blood, men dying, others so badly hurt they wish they could die—it—it makes me—oh, I can't go on another trip like that one today!"

The other made no attempt to answer, only looked at Bill sympathetically.

"What can I do?" the young pilot demanded. "Piloting is my only livelihood." Then he seemed to steady himself. "But I guess I'm not the only pilot that doesn't know what to do. And I suppose the only way to stop this war is to try to win it."

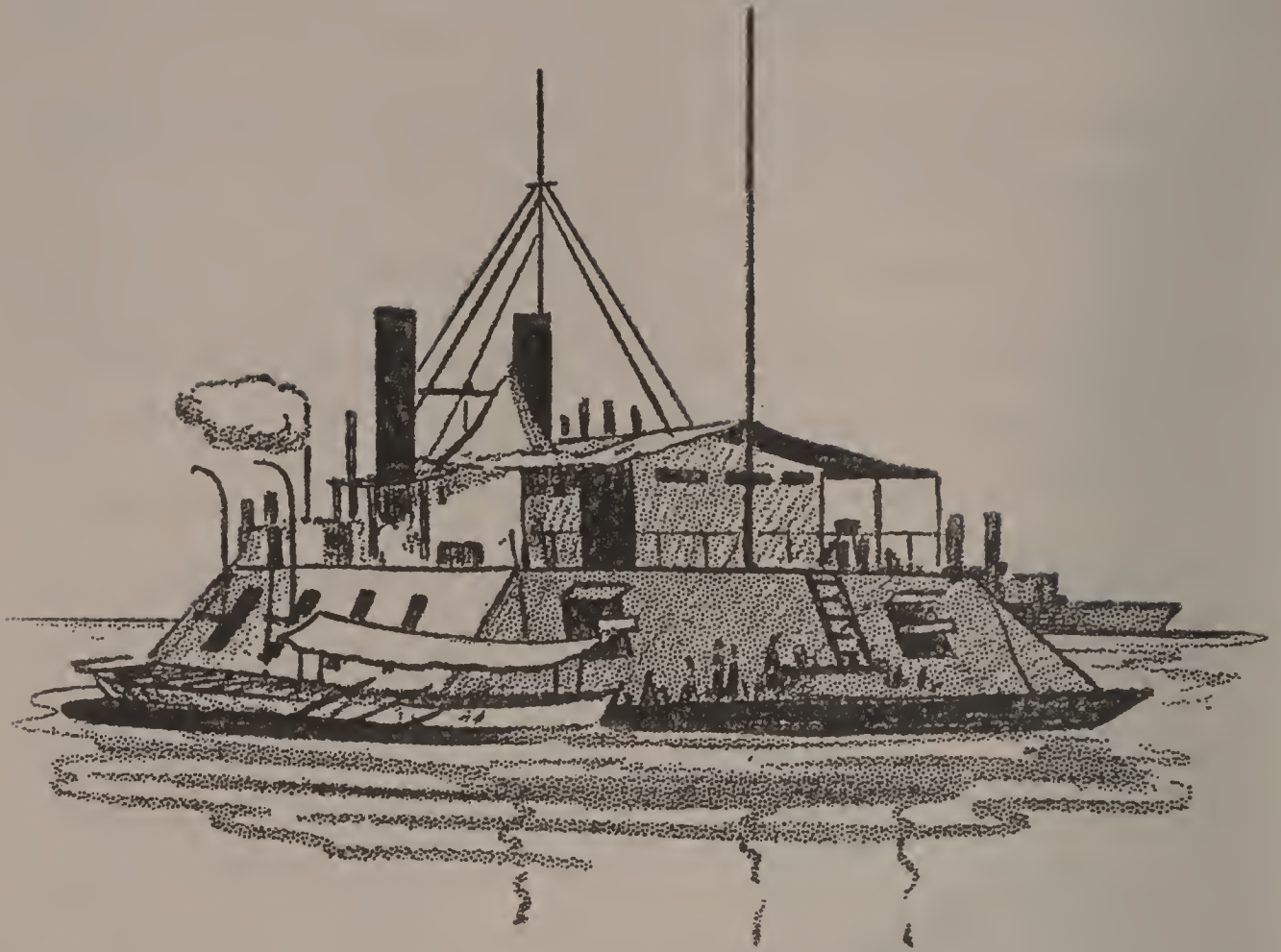
"Looks like it. We're into it now and can't get

back out. Best thing is to see how fast we can stop it by winning it.”

With an effort, Bill forced a smile onto his lips, snapped his right hand to forehead in a jaunty salute.

“Aye, aye, admiral. Just watch me!”





Chapter XIII

IRONCLADS IN BATTLE

The following winter that concluded the year 1861 and started the second spring of the War brought William Wingate an experience that he would never forget. During January, Grant, Flag Officer Foote and Gen. C. F. Smith made plans to cut the South's line that extended east from Columbus, Kentucky, by opening up the Tennessee and Cumberland Rivers. This would mean capturing Ft. Henry that lay up the Tennessee just below the Kentucky boundary, then moving troops east overland to Ft. Donelson on the Cumberland while the gunboats

looped back to that fort by way of the Ohio River.

At last some of the ironclad gunboats constructed by Capt. Eads were finished, and Bill, for want of other work, shipped as a pilot on the *Carondelet*.

The ironclads had the advantage of the *Lexington* and *Tyler* because they were sternwheelers covered on both sides and at bow and stern by plate iron 2½" inches thick. They would make nine miles an hour and stood less chance of being disabled since their wheels moved within the iron casemates. The *Carondelet* carried three guns in ports pierced through her bow, two in ports in the stern and four broad-side guns in ports on each side. The boilers and engines, on the main deck, as did the guns, had the protection of a barricade of heavy timbers. The pilothouse could be entered by a ladder from the main deck and was protected as much as possible without interfering with the pilot's vision.

The sight of the gun deck on the *Carondelet* sickened Bill even more than had his first glimpse of the *Tyler* back at Belmont, Missouri. Hardly headroom was left between the decks, and the only light was that which came through the gunports. What an inferno this place would be when smoke started to puff back from the guns! Or balls and shells came through the ports or casemates!

A clear, rather warm day greeted the flotilla on the sixth of February as they headed up the Tennessee to attack Ft. Henry. Troops had been landed on both sides of the river and were moving slowly through the rough country where all land not covered with snow was torn with high river water.

Under Flag Officer Foote, the fleet of seven gunboats proceeded upriver, forming into two lines, the flagship *Cincinnati* flanked on her right by the *Essex*, and on the left by the *Carondelet* and *St. Louis*. Carrying out the orders of Comm. Walke, Bill kept his partner advised of the spacing of their boat in relation to the rest of the line, sighting across the stacks, looking astern to check on the *Lexington*, *Tyler* and *Conestoga* in the second line which was to arch its fire over that of the first row. Catching the eye of Marshall Ford, with whom he had become most attached during his stay in Cairo, Bill waved as he stood at the wheel of the *Essex*. Ford waved back gaily, and his enthusiasm warmed away some of that chill that already clutched at Bill's heart.

Below decks, Bill knew, were stationed the gun crews commanded by captains brought from the Regular Navy ships on the coast. Now a hush settled over the entire boat as they waited anxiously for the first shot.

Abruptly they rounded a bend, left the wooded channel of black river and burst into full sight of the garrison and her mighty guns. A shot came from the flagship that meant "Commence Firing!" Orders were barked out by gun captains, and a dozen Federal guns discharged with violent detonation.

No National troops came into view, but the gunboats soon left telling effects with each shot. A light breeze kept the dense clouds of smoke moving so that the gunners could watch their balls tearing up the Rebel earthworks, ripping into the fort itself.

Yet the enemy's fire matched, often exceeded, the accuracy of the attacking force. Bill could see that the shots from the *Carondelet* often found their mark in the fort, but, more often, he felt under his feet the shock of a ball shattering the iron casemates, pounding about on the gun deck. He could see the balls surging viciously past the pilots, missing them by inches, stinging their ears with whining vibrations.

An hour of steady cannonade, and the Confederate fire seemed to lessen. Word had been brought up that all the gunners on the *Carondelet* had been able to escape the balls that had entered ports or smashed armor. Bill's pulse settled back to normal as they started to steam closer to the fort.

Then a different sort of noise, a screaming hiss

familiar to Bill's ears, snatched his gaze to the right and the *Essex*. Through a gaping hole in her port side rushed clouds of deadly-hot steam. Now it whipped through other ports, flew up into the pilot-house like gas into a balloon. Tortured sailors, screaming with pain and fear, dove into the river. Others seized the wounded Capt. Porter, held him on the narrow water-line guard, and helped him inside at the stern.

With only inches to spare, Bill forced his attention back to his wheel, just escaped running dangerously out of his course. The rest of the fleet kept on, but the *Essex* drifted back, helpless without power steam in her engines.

At last the officers from the fort rowed out in an open boat and offered to surrender. Only then was Bill able to get over to the *Essex*. He forgot that no one had been killed or wounded on his own boat as he mounted to the pilothouse of the disabled craft. Marshall Ford's body still lay propped up against a window frame. They had had to pull his hands from the wheel and bellrope, from the position in which he had been instantly scalded to death.

Bill returned to his boat immediately and was ordered to return with the disabled *Essex* since Ford's partner had also been scalded to death. So it was a



The officers rowed out and offered to surrender

discouraged, lonely Bill Wingate who arrived at Cairo and found a cabin on one of the idle steamers. He could find no one to talk to, no diversion that would take his mind off the sight of Marshall Ford's body at the wheel; and this war that had taken from him his friends Jo Hartley and Andrew Lexington, cut him off from Constance Harrison, even kept his father's letters from reaching him. Only sheer exhaustion freed his mind in sleep.

For the next few days discouraging reports came back from the ironclads' attack on Fort Donelson, especially of the *Carondelet* being hit fifty-four times by the enemy. But toward the end of the month after the fort fell, she was able to come up to Mound City above Cairo and be put on the ways for repairs.

During March the flotilla started down the Mississippi to attack the Confederate fort on Island Number Ten below the Kentucky state line, but Bill was not called for service. During the rest of the month the fleet hammered away at the batteries until Walke ran the *Carondelet* through them and at last helped isolate the Island Ten forces by taking New Madrid farther down the river. Now they were opposed by the Rebels' holding the Mississippi with Fort Pillow and, across the river, Osceola, Arkansas.

Farragut had cut through New Orleans with his

Union fleet from the Gulf of Mexico, and Grant had taken Pittsburg Landing on the Tennessee River on a line east of Memphis. Yet, the South's River Defense Fleet on the Mississippi, now strengthened by steam rams, threatened the Northern boats above Ft. Pillow. Rebel steam rams had attacked disastrously many Northern ships on the Atlantic coast, so that the Secretary of War late in March commissioned an engineer, Charles Ellet, Jr., to transform several Ohio River steamboats into rams to aid the Western Flotilla in fighting the South's River Defense Fleet and cutting down the river to join with Farragut's fleet on its way up at Memphis.

Even the greatest efforts on the part of Ellet to complete and man the rams consumed time. The Western Flotilla waited fearfully, hoping fervently that the new boats would relieve them before the South crashed through and took Cairo and St. Louis.

Bill heard of the new boats and was immediately interested. Soon afterward, he wrote to his father:

Dear Dad:

When the War started, you wrote me a letter about whether or not I should enlist. As you know, I never did enlist, even though I've piloted steamboats and gunboats in the battles of Columbus, Kentucky, and Fort

Henry. I merely was called by the Pilot's Association and then paid for each trip separately.

I don't think I would ever enlist in a service where I had to fire upon the South. Yet, I can't stay here at Cairo waiting for something to happen and making no money in the meantime. So I'm going down to New Albany, Indiana and see Col. Ellet, who is building a fleet of steam rams there. If his plans are what I've been told they are there, I'll enlist as a pilot.

I hope this letter reaches you all right and that you won't worry. I'll write every time there's a chance of getting a letter through to you, just as I have been doing. I hope everything's fine at Quincy.

Affectionately yours,

Bill

By the time Bill Wingate reached New Albany, near Louisville, two of the rams were being manned. A pilot's wages would be \$175 per month, lasting until the rams either were successful in opening the river or lost in battle.

Directly from the train, Bill visited Ellet, now bear-

ing the temporary rank of Colonel in the War Department.

At once young Wingate was impressed with the vital, dynamic energy of this slight, narrow-faced man who worked so incessantly, who ignored his lack of knowledge of military etiquette and concentrated on getting things done. He welcomed Bill with a firm handshake, instructed him briefly that this would be a hazardous enterprise so that he preferred to depend on brave rivermen rather than trained soldiers whose caution often ruined their effectiveness.

“These boats will have one purpose,” he explained to Bill. “They are to surprise the enemy boats and sink them by ramming. We will carry soldiers only as sharpshooters to protect the boats against boarding by the enemy and to cover our pilots. The safety of a vessel will be of secondary consideration if we are successful in sinking a Rebel with it!”

“Then the success of any attack depends on the skill of the pilot?”

“Almost entirely, Mr. Wingate. And I have arranged for all acts of bravery to receive due citation to the War Department. We ask only that you sign this oath that covers a period of six months. The Secretary of War agrees with me that the very na-

ture of this service demands that it not be hampered by unnecessary military or naval regulations." He pushed a sheet of paper across the table:

MILITARY OBLIGATION

I—DO SOLEMNLY SWEAR, That I will bear true allegiance to the United States of America and that I will serve them honestly and faithfully against all their enemies or opposers whatsoever, and observe and obey the orders of the President of the United States, and the orders of the officers appointed over me, according to the rules and articles for the government of the forces of the United States, and all Government business entrusted to me shall be strictly and sacredly confidential, and I will use my influence to have good discipline in the service to which I belong, and continue well and truly to serve until I am discharged, provided the term of service shall not exceed six months from the date hereof. SO HELP ME GOD.

After reading the text thoroughly, Bill signed his name, shook hands with the colonel, and went down to the shipyard to watch the work of changing over the boats. His blood tingled with excitement as he thought of the engagements to come. Here his skill at the wheel could be of some value instead of leading to slaughter like that he had seen on death-traps such as the *Tyler* and *Essex*. On the rams men would

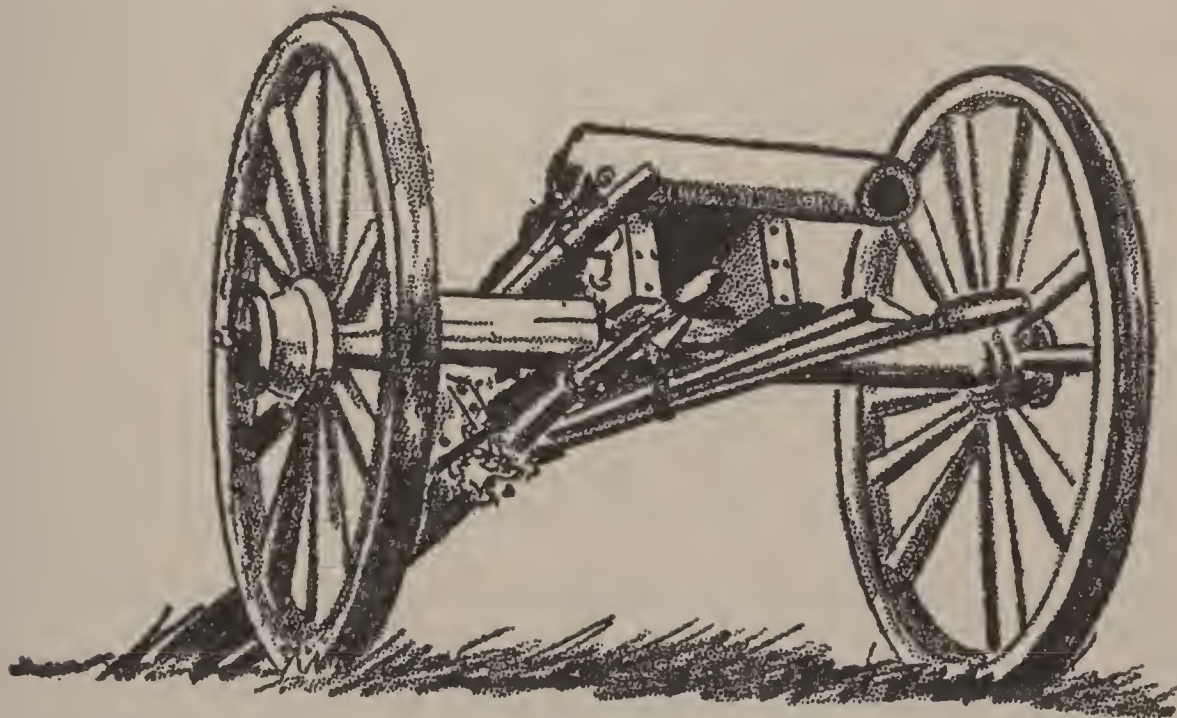
not be imprisoned behind the casemates to be scalded, as on the gunboats. Bill decided, too, as he looked over one of the boats at the shipyards, that there would be no boilers punctured by shot since oak barricades, two feet thick, guarded them.

Great timbers, twelve to sixteen inches thick were being run from stem to stern, trussed at right angles at regular intervals with iron tie-rods. Long bolts also braced engines and boilers in all directions. Bill could see that the object was to reinforce the boat in such a way that her entire weight as a solid mass would drive the sharpened bow so deeply into any vessel it met that the opponent would sink immediately.

As Bill finally reached Cairo in the ram *Monarch*, formerly of the Cincinnati and New Orleans Express Line, he came closer to being happy than he had in months. Already he was making friends among the many rivermen in the fleet who accepted him when they learned he belonged to the Association and had been a cub under Andrew Lexington. He was glad, too, to be free of military discipline. The only military men on the boats were in the small details obtained by Capt. Alfred Ellet, Col. Ellet's brother, formerly an officer in the Illinois Volunteer Infantry and now second-in-command in the fleet. Freedom

within reasonable limits was allowed to all the rivermen. Standing their watches properly was left more to their pride and loyalty than to commands, and all the steamboat men appreciated and justified the trust placed in them.

On the 25th of May the complete fleet of seven rams, two small sternwheel towboats and their coal barges anchored with the Union fleet above Ft. Pillow. Col. Ellet visited Flag Officer Charles H. Davis of the Western Flotilla while the crews of the ram fleet, Bill Wingate among them, waited eagerly for the command to advance on the threatening River Defense Fleet.





Chapter XIV

THE RAM FLEET

Indecision on the part of Flag Officer C. H. Davis of the gunboat flotilla held the assembled fleets idle. By the time Davis agreed to Ellet's running down to ram the Southern fleet without the help of the gunboats, it was the 6th of June.

That night Col. Ellet drifted down upon the fort in a yawl to prove his contention that the fort had been evacuated and the Southern fleet moved downriver. When the ram fleet followed him at daybreak, they found the Union flag planted on the deserted stronghold. The Rebels had departed during the National forces' debate.

In the pilothouse of the *Monarch* with Bill Wingate stood pilots Thomas F. Collins and Charles M. Jackson, as Col. Ellet from the *Queen of the West*, which he had made his flagship, signalled orders to proceed toward Memphis in regular succession. The *Queen* led in the official order followed by the *Monarch*, *Lancaster*, and *Switzerland*. Behind came the sternwheelers, *Lioness*, *Sampson* and *Mingo*, commanded to keep back a safe distance so they could land their heavy tows of coal safely in case of an engagement. Captain Alfred Ellet commanded the *Monarch*.

Going below later in the morning for a cup of coffee Bill was greeted by one of the sharpshooters from Alfred Ellet's company of volunteers.

"What are the plans?" Bill asked.

"I couldn't say for sure," the rifleman returned disgustedly. "Nobody knows anything aboard these tubs. No military discipline. Nothing arranged. I hear we're to stop at Ft. Randolph and plant the Union flag. But Davis didn't give any more orders than that."

"Then Col. Ellet is just to use his own judgment?"

"Guess that's what he plans to do. Davis went off without sending over a line. Unless he sends back some boat, we're on our own."

“And mark my words,” he went on decisively, “we’re going to catch it at Memphis. They won’t let that go without a battle.”

“Probably not,” Bill agreed. “Have they many boats?”

“Enough to do us harm if we’re not ready,” the soldier said briefly and went out.

“They won’t surprise me,” Bill murmured to the empty room. “Not if I can help it.”

No word came from the gunboats the rest of the day. By a signal from the *Queen*, Col. Ellet gave orders to land for the night. Bill took the *Monarch* in behind the *Queen* on the Arkansas shore and recognized the spot as being about eight to ten miles above Memphis.

Before sunrise next morning the ram fleet slid out into the channel and made for Memphis. About a mile or so above the city, near the islands Paddy’s Hen and Chickens, they discovered the Federal fleet at anchor, spaced out in usual formation.

From the *Queen* came the order to round to for landing, and Bill, with the help of Jackson, put the wheel hard over. Behind them the *Lancaster* and *Switzerland* repeated the maneuver. The *Mingo*, *Lioness* and *Sampson* had yet to round the bend. In the pilothouse of the *Queen*, Bill could see Col. Ellet

giving orders to the wheelmen. Now a line went twisting to the bank from the *Queen's* forecastle.

Clear and still, the early morning air echoed the splash of paddle wheels and the creak of winches, of short, quick commands.

Then, into the quiet crashed the resounding explosion of a heavy cannon. Shrieking with speed, a shell knifed the water just astern of the *Queen*.

Instantly the scene changed, woke to a feverish activity as the sun appeared above the horizon. Orders snapped from boat to boat. Five in the morning, and the grim Battle of Memphis began.

At once the gunboats opened fire, covering the river with solid walls of smoke. Col. Ellet rushed from the *Queen's* pilothouse, flashed to the fleet the order to attack. Speedily the *Queen* and *Monarch* spun around, wheels churning the river white, rushing toward the intervals between the anchored gunboats.

Cheers roared up from the gunners on the *Benton* as Bill put the *Monarch's* bow on the *Queen's* stern and passed the line of gunboats.

Now Col. Ellet shouted from the hurricane roof of the *Queen* as they found a rift in the wall of smoke and could see eight Confederate boats about a mile ahead. Ellet selected the Rebel *Gen. Lovell*, a great

steamer barricaded with cotton bales, as his opponent and waved to Alfred Ellet to take another of the enemy rams.

Bill had nothing to do but keep the *Monarch* on her new course and wait. But it was tense waiting. With every foot the *Queen* and *Monarch* rushed ahead, they gained more momentum, more speed by current and engines to be hurled bodily into the heavy craft driving as hard upstream toward them.

Closer and closer the *Queen* and *Lovell* plunged. Now it seemed they would collide head-on.

Then the *Lovell*, at the last moment, began to turn. Another second, a terrible crash, and she was slashed nearly through amidships by the charging *Queen*. Bill could hardly believe his eyes, so quickly had it all happened. Now, before the *Queen* could free herself from the wreckage, the Confederate *Gen. Beauregard* smashed into the *Queen's* larboard wheel, practically disabling her, forcing her to get to shore as best she could.

All this had occurred in the time it took the *Monarch* to cover about two hundred yards. But now Bill had to prepare for the crash that lay ahead of the *Monarch*. For the *Beauregard* had backed away from the *Queen* and was heading full at Bill's ship.

Tense, harrowing seconds dragged past as the boats

ate up the intervening water. Then they met. With violent smashing and rending, the *Monarch's* bow crashed into the *Beauregard's* forward quarter, sliced off a wheel, left her ready to sink.

With the impact Bill was hurled violently backward, but one of his partners managed to hang onto the wheel as Bill climbed to his feet. He noticed on the way up that Col. Ellet was being carried, obviously wounded, toward the texas on the *Queen*.

The *Monarch* lay idle for a brief moment as Bill's eyes flashed through the Southern fleet. Five rams and their smaller flagship *Little Rebel* against the *Monarch*. How could they overcome such odds?

But there was no time for musing now, only time for action. The *Gen. Bragg*, a frigate-rigged ram from the Rebel ocean fleet, charged toward their larboard stern. On her forecastle gunners loaded a 32-pound weapon. Desperately the sharpshooters below Bill on the *Monarch* peppered that gun crew.

Simultaneously the *Gen. Price* hurtled toward the *Monarch's* starboard bow. Hopelessly Bill awaited orders as the senior pilot jerked frantically at the engine-room bell pulls. How could they escape being crushed between these two great ships?

Skillfully the sharpshooters picked away at the *Price's* pilots. At the last moment, they forced the

ram slightly out of control so that she missed the *Monarch's* bow. At the stern, as the *Monarch* finally gained way, only a small piece of after guard was slashed off by the *Bragg*.

By skillful rounding to, the *Monarch* managed to get to the *Price* and sink her. From near shore next came the *Little Rebel*, which they slammed aground for half her length. A boarding party rushed on to take possession.

All through the ramming, the gunboats had hammered effective fire into the River Defense Fleet, raked the *Beauregard*, disabled the *Little Rebel* with a shot into her boiler room. Later the *Jeff Thompson*, *Bragg* and *Sumter* were captured by the pursuing gunboats that had slipped anchor during the battle.

The only escaping ram, the *Van Dorn*, was almost out of sight when Bill and his partners set out after her. Thirty-five miles down the river they carried the pursuit, but the *Van Dorn's* advantage was too great, and Lt. Col. Alfred Ellet, worried about his brother, gave the chase up as hopeless.

As soon as they returned to the fleet, they rounded the *Monarch* to, made her fast, and sent a yawl bearing Lt. Col. Ellet over to the *Queen of the West*. There the men from the *Monarch* discovered what had happened during the battle.

The *Lancaster* lay disabled with a broken rudder through some mistake in signals. The *Switzerland* had left the battle to rescue her and land her safely.

The *Lioness*, *Sampson* and *Mingo* had arrived in due time, beaching their tows of coal as instructed, but the battle was finished just before the *Lioness* reported. Thus, two rams with the fire of the gunboats as aid had crippled practically the entire River Defense Fleet.

Bill noticed the *Lioness* at the landing before the city of Memphis and inquired the reason for the visit. He learned that Col. Ellet, disabled in his cabin, with one knee shattered by a rifle shot, had sent his son Charles Rivers Ellet along with a military officer and two soldiers, to demand the surrender of the city.

“Look over there now,” Bill’s partner Jackson called just then. “On top of the Post Office Building!”

Bill discovered two tiny figures atop the four-story structure high on the bluff. A crowd surged at the entrance of the building. But the Stars and Stripes flew bravely from the roof!

As if expecting violence from the mob, a crew of sharpshooters from the *Lioness* started up to protect the party.

By three o'clock when a detachment of troops under Col. Fitch from the transport *Van Phul* took over, the Union forces had military possession of Memphis.

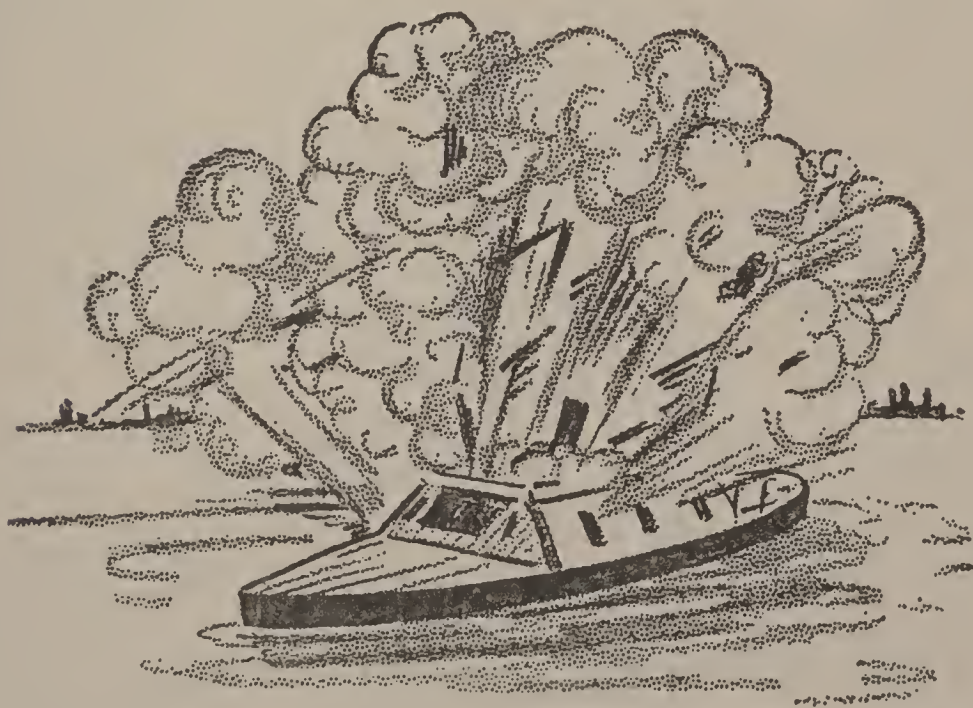
Pride in their victory filled Bill Wingate with joy as he heard the news of the official surrender, and later that Col. Ellet's wound, the only one of consequence in the entire Union fleet, would not be serious. The list of killed, wounded and missing in the Confederate forces had reached a hundred.

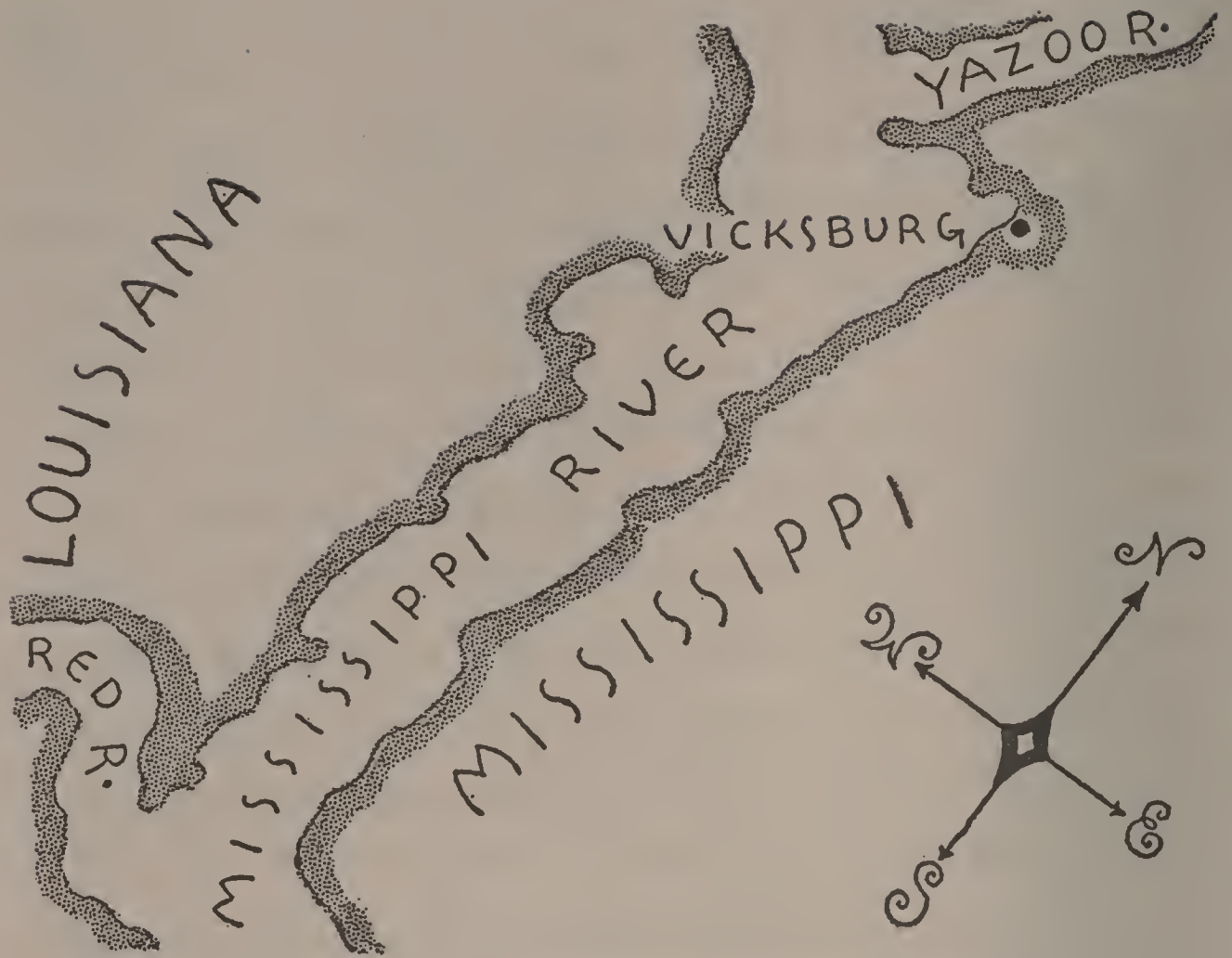
But as the excitement of the battle passed, the picture changed. Daily their gallant commander grew worse. Refusing to give way to his wound, meeting jealousies and needless obstacles at every turn, he failed rapidly. By June 16th he was forced to relinquish his command to his brother Alfred and leave for Cairo on the *Switzerland*.

Seeing on the river before him the wrecks of boats that had been the pride of their captains and passengers, hearing of the death of more and more of his friends in the Southern fleet, wondering whether Andrew Lexington and Jo Hartley could be among the missing on those boats, brought home to Bill more sickeningly than ever the bitterness, the brutality of the War. Those abandoned days in the forests and on the river at Quincy, those dreamy hours at

the Harrison plantation with Constance seemed part of a distant, past world. He could see nothing in the glory of being a hero even though he had been commended for his skill at the *Monarch's* wheel. It was hard to be enthusiastic about the honor in a letter home. Even though the generous monthly wage counted for much, he would have sacrificed it if he could have escaped from the fleet without breaking the oath he had signed. His spirits touched bottom when the death of Col. Charles Ellet was reported on the 21st of the month.

Even the news secured from a prisoner that Jo and Andrew Lexington had escaped aboard the *Van Dorn* helped little. For now the Union rams were on their way to attack Vicksburg.





Chapter XV

SCOUTING UP THE YAZOO

Cautiously Bill Wingate steered the ram flagship *Monarch* down the bright, hurrying river above Island Number Ninety-seven and Vicksburg. The tension that kept the riflemen on close watch at the bow set his pulses drumming as they moved deeper and deeper into enemy territory.

The *Queen* remained upriver for repairs. Near the *Monarch* churned the *Fulton* and *Lancaster* with the *Mingo* and *Lioness* a distance astern towing barges. Suddenly the *Fulton* shot up a distress flag, then signalled that she had burned a boiler and would have

to stop. A reply flashed back from the *Monarch*, and the flagship continued on her course, leaving the other three to guard the *Fulton*. As the rest of the fleet disappeared behind a bend, Lt. Col. Ellet, in command, came into Bill's pilothouse.

"We'll go down just far enough to protect the others against being caught by a surprise attack," he ordered. "We'll return as soon as it seems likely that the *Fulton* can continue."

"Yes, sir," Bill and his partner answered.

"May I ask whether the gunboats will follow us?"

"You may. And the answer will be in the negative. Commodore Davis seems to ignore the fact that we are practically unarmed and need protection. However, we cannot afford to let our duty wait on another man's plans. We learned that at Memphis."

Soon they came back up to the other boats, and Lt. Col. Ellet ordered the *Fulton*, the shallowest-draft boat of the five, to lead the way to Vicksburg.

As they rounded the bend and anchored above the city, Bill caught his first glimpse of the fort whose mighty batteries stood in the way of the Union's holding the entire Mississippi River. Yet Farragut, even now working upstream from New Orleans, planned to try to make a junction with the Western Flotilla above the city.

Bill could hardly recognize the Vicksburg that had grown so familiar on his trips at the wheel of the *Alex Scott* and *Magnolia*. Streets parallel to the river still rose in regular steps up the steep bluffs. Store buildings and warehouses still covered the first few levels, with the courthouse, churches and homes covering the final ledges. But now guns, protected by heavy earthworks, interrupted the peaceful beauty of the city. One set of twelve heavy cannon lined the shore. Other sets covered the wide arc of the bluffs' peaks—all silent, ominous threats of death or ruin to any man or boat who might try to assault their strength. He could hardly believe this was the city where, only two years before, he had met Constance Harrison.

A hail from below caught Bill's attention, but he stayed in the pilothouse as his partner followed the commander down to greet a lone man whose skiff bore a white flag of truce.

Within five minutes, the other pilot rushed back, eyes bright with excitement.

"That fellow is for the Union but from Vicksburg," he confided. "He says Farragut and his fleet lie on the other side of the point below the lower batteries. They demanded surrender of the city in May and were refused. Now they want to attack it.



His party waded through swamps waist deep

Ellet is sending his nephew—you know, Charley Ellet—with a party to cross the point to find and talk to Farragut right away!”

“But they can’t do anything against all those guns. At that elevation. Alfred Ellet told me Farragut hasn’t any rifled guns,” Bill protested.

“He’ll try mortars, probably. But they won’t do much good.

“And here’s something else,” the pilot went on. “This fellow told Ellet that the Rebels are just finishing a powerfully big gunboat up the Yazoo river, the *Arkansas*, and that they’ve got a lot of transports and a couple of rams there, too. Including the *Van Dorn* that got away at Memphis.”

Bill whistled thoughtfully. Were Jo and his old chief on the *Van Dorn*?

Charles Ellet and his party at last managed to get back, and waded through swamps waist deep, facing danger at every step. They reported that Farragut wanted the gunboats under Davis to come down to help him attack Vicksburg. In reply Alfred Ellet sent the *Fulton* up to the Davis fleet with the message.

Meantime he put his nephew in command of the *Lancaster*, and in the *Monarch* began scouting up the Yazoo to investigate the reports of Southern boats hiding there.

Bill could hardly contain himself as they picked their course through miles of narrowing river, between shores thick with canebrake and heavy trees. The sixty-five miles passed slowly as he peered anxiously around each bend for a sight of the *Van Dorn* or other Rebel craft. Bill tried not to think of what might happen if a battle did result.

Abruptly they came onto a raft that bridged the river. A few guns had been placed on the raft to protect the Confederate boat. Quickly Bill recognized the *Van Dorn*. Also the *Polk* and *Livingston*. But before the batteries could bark out an attack, before Ellet could give an order, all three of the Confederate ships seemed to burst into flame at once, to start drifting slowly down upon them.

“Bring her to! Retreat! Back down river!” Ellet shouted to his pilots, rushing a flagman to a spot where he could relay the command to the *Lancaster*.

And retreat was the only course. The three Southern boats might contain magazines of explosives that could blow the *Monarch* and *Lancaster* right out of the river. Dejectedly Bill helped bring the boat’s nose around. They would not reach the *Arkansas*, and worse, Bill would not hear nor see anything of his friends.

Two days later Farragut decided to try running

the batteries of the city in order to get around the point and join the rams to wait for Davis and the gunboats. He succeeded at five in the morning of the 28th of June, but four men were killed and thirteen wounded. His report sent into Washington contained the famous sentence: "The forts can be passed and we have done it, and can do it as often as may be required of us!"

Those words meant much in the newspapers, but the rest of his dispatch stated: "It will not, however, be any easy matter for us to do more than silence the batteries for a time, as long as the enemy has a large force behind the hills to prevent our landing and holding the place."

Even a boy as unskilled in military tactics as Bill could see the hopelessness of the situation. He sat through the blistering hot days dejectedly, disgusted with the constant volleys from Farragut's guns, with the humiliating escape of the *Arkansas* from the Yazoo and the Union's useless attempt to sink her before the Vicksburg batteries.

There were no reserve land forces available to concentrate on attacking the city, so Farragut's remaining longer seemed futile in the face of a falling river. Taking Vicksburg would cut the South off from her breadbasket along the Red River and disable another

railroad, but no men could be spared from other Union positions for even as vital a movement as this.

Besides, malaria which was rising murderously from the vile swamps and thriving in the humid summer heat, mowed down Army and Navy alike. An attempt to cut a canal through the point had to be abandoned. Finally, Ellet and Davis were forced to withdraw up the river to Helena, Arkansas, as the Confederates industriously set to strengthening their fortifications at Vicksburg for a long fight.

For Bill those months beat along with agonizing slowness. He could hardly bear to wake each day and report for mess on a boat filthy with disease, ringing with the delirium of new cases. He had seen his friends die from the shot of their countrymen; now he watched them struggling hopelessly against trembling chills and searing fever. He could hardly manage to be grateful when, during his first attack of the disease, he was assigned to pilot the *Queen* to Cairo for repairs. Not even the news that his pay would be advanced to \$250 per month could make him face calmly the prospect of eventually coming back to Vicksburg.

He was resolved to resign or even desert from the service when he plodded onto the Cairo wharfboat and to the post office to look for mail from his father.



Chapter XVI

A NEW POST

The first person Bill saw when he stepped off the wharfboat at Cairo was Jo Hartley.

“Ho! Bill Wingate!” roared his chum. “Welcome to our city!”

Joy rushed through Bill as he ran up to Jo, threw his arms over his shoulders, hammered him on the back. The war, the *Monarch*, even the broiling sun that had set his fever smoldering, were forgotten as he greeted the young engineer.

“And what are you doing up here, Mr. Hartley?” he demanded.

“What do you suppose?” the jolly roar abruptly lost its cheeriness. “You don’t think Abe Lincoln asks Southern Navy men to come to Cairo as his guests, do you?”

“I’m sorry, Jo,” Bill realized his mistake. “Seeing you again made me forget there ever was a war.”

“I know,” Jo cooled off. “I shouldn’t have been grumpy. It isn’t your fault—at least not directly—that I was taken prisoner.”

“Jo? What do you mean by not directly my fault?” Bill asked unable to understand this new, bitter Jo Hartley.

“I’m sorry again. It’s just this rotten position I’m in up here. But, you see, you were piloting the *Monarch*, one of the two rams that ruined our fleet at Memphis. And chased me off the *Little Rebel*.”

“But somebody told me you escaped on the *Van Dorn*.”

“Whoever told you that was wrong. I was on the *Rebel* all the time. I managed to get away out into Arkansas, but Lexington was too badly hurt. We had to leave him to die. The Memphis people buried him. I had a letter from Capt. Merriman about that.”

“But I didn’t see him in any of the pilothouses,” Bill protested.

“Who could see anybody in all that smoke?” Jo

countered gruffly. "But forget it. Lexington's gone. I'm a prisoner. And, from the way you look, you're in none too good condition yourself. War is awful, and the only thing to do is try to forget it. What have you been doing?"

"It's—terrible to—to—hear about Mr. Lexington. And I haven't seen anything but war either."

"Well, tell me about it. It can't be any worse than what I've been through."

"I can't, Jo. The last month or so were horrible. They were trying to dig a canal across the point at Vicksburg and had no luck. Then the *Tyler* and *Carondelet* and *Queen* went up the Yazoo after their—your—new gunboat, the *Arkansas*. The *Arkansas* came into the river and nearly wrecked our fleet. Even though Farragut did see the *Arkansas* go to pieces down below Vicksburg, it didn't make our bungling above the city and up the Yazoo any less disgraceful. It's—it's, well, creepy to have the lives of your friends, the men we knew on the river, wiped out because of mistakes of officers, mistakes that make battles and loss of life useless."

"I know," Jo returned thoughtfully. "I thought of you on one side of the lines and me on the other." He paused. "I can't make any sense out of it."

"Neither can I," Bill burst out. "And I'm going

to resign. I can get an honorable discharge because of this fever I got at Vicksburg."

"They might let you because of your sickness," Jo said, after a moment. "But I suspect you won't try." Some new, hidden meaning had crept into Jo's words.

"Why?"

"Just this, Bill."

"Just what?"

"All right. I might as well tell you and have it over with. Your father is in trouble, in debt. One of the St. Louis merchants is going to put him out of business because he hasn't paid for the merchandise he's sold at the store in Quincy. There was a fellow down from St. Louis looking for you last week."

"Tell me about it," Bill pleaded miserably.

"Nothing much to tell," Jo replied slowly. "Barton and Sons want about seven hundred dollars or else they will take over your dad's store."

Seven hundred dollars! Only a few dollars less than the pay he had just received at Vicksburg for those four tortured, punishing months with the Ram Fleet. Seven hundred dollars, that with his bank account might at least allow him to buy a share in a steamboat after the War. The heavy, moisture-

packed air now seemed almost impossible to breathe.

“Seven hundred?” he asked Jo feebly.

Young Hartley nodded sympathetically — then lunged forward to seize Bill as he toppled.

“Just fever,” Bill managed to explain. “Probably I’d better go to the hospital. But—”

“But what?” Jo asked as Bill failed to finish while they made their way slowly to the hospital boat.

“But you’d better see that this is paid for Dad.” He weakly tugged an envelope from an inside pocket. “I—I—guess we’ll have to wait a spell for a boat. And I guess—guess I can’t resign just—just yet.”

Only sheer determination—and the presence of Jo Hartley—kept Bill Wingate alive through that attack of fever. Weeks, then months passed, before he was able to sit upright in his bed and see the world in its normal proportions. Yankee Jack Wingate came down for a visit and went back without talking to his son, realizing that Bill wanted to fight his own fight. David D. Porter took command of the Ram Fleet and the Western Flotilla, (now under the supervision of the Navy Department) to succeed Davis with whom the Ellets had had so much dissension. Grant, in command of the operations in the West, moved down toward Vicksburg to make the

capture of the city his principal objective. And in February, 1863, Union Prisoner Josiah Hartley talked with Union Pilot William Wingate, temporarily disabled, about a new brigade being formed under the command of Brig. Gen. A. W. Ellet at St. Louis.

“You remember the trouble your Ram Fleet had when its boats carried communications and supplies from Vicksburg and the Yazoo up to Memphis.”

Bill turned over his left arm, peered at the elbow.

“Guess it’s gone now,” he mused. “I had a fine burn right there from some guerilla riflemen on the shore when I came up here last time on the *Monarch*. I think they were part of Col. Ferguson’s command. We dropped a few shells on them, but I heard they came right back afterwards just as they had done after firing on a lot of our other boats. It was the first surprise volley that did the damage.”

“That’s what Ellet said. Our—I mean the Confederate—men can do a lot of damage by surprising the boats from the shore when the channel runs near the bank. Now Ellet’s formed a brigade at St. Louis to be carried on a lot of new steamboats the North bought. It’ll be called the Mississippi Marine Brigade. They even got up a song for themselves when they organized this winter. This is it.

“ ‘I’m Captain Jinks of the Horse Marines,
I give my horse good corn and beans;
Of course, it’s quite beyond my means,
Though I’m Captain in the Army.’ ”

Bill laughed delightedly. “Just a floating livery stable,” he chuckled. “I suppose the cavalry will gallop after the guerillas when they attack.”

“That’s it,” Jo grinned. “They’re rigging gang-planks two horses wide. And they’re recruiting convalescents from the hospitals.”

“How about a convalescent pilot?” Bill asked, half in fun.

“That’s where you come in. They’ll need some when they get downriver.”

“But I’m not taking any easy duty out of self-pity,” Bill asserted. “Just that I’ve been sick is no reason why I should go after invalids’ assignments. Besides, I was going to tell you. Charles Ellet wants me back on the *Queen* early next month. Porter is going to try to cut off boat traffic from the Red River where Vicksburg gets its supplies.”

“But, Bill,” Jo protested, “are you strong enough yet?”

“Of course. I’m going to be discharged from the hospital at the end of the week. I’m going down to Vicksburg on the dispatch boat.”

Jo saw it was useless to argue. "All I can do is wish you luck, then. I'll miss you up here."

"Don't worry," Bill grinned. "We'll have this war all ironed out in a few months. Then we can go back to steamboating again. And some of that real steamboat cooking."

Bill was mightily pleased a week later when he found Jo had received permission to come down to the wharfboat to see him off on the dispatch boat for Vicksburg. It made it easier to forget, for a moment at least, that this duty would be doubly painful now that he was weak from sickness and unprepared to meet the hardships that had defeated him before, that had killed and made invalids of full-grown men.

"Try to be careful, will you, Bill?" Jo pleaded.

Young Wingate smiled, warmed by his friend's genuine anxiety. "Don't worry," he chided. "No more hospitals for me where I can't draw full pay."

"Miser. I'm ashamed of you."

"It's not as bad as all that, Mr. Engineer. You knew you were going to be chief engineer on my boat when I get it, didn't you?"

"I was going to apply for the berth, sir. At the proper time," Jo announced with mock dignity.

"Very good, Mr. Hartley. I'll keep you in mind."

The arrival of the captain interrupted their talk, and they sat silent for a moment as a uniformed messenger from headquarters delivered to him a batch of official orders and documents. They would leave at any minute now.

“Jo,” Bill spoke slowly. He hated to ask this question. “Have—have you heard anything of Constance Harrison and Lucy French?”

“I’m sorry. Not a thing since last June before the Battle of Memphis. I imagine they’re both still in Mississippi. At the plantations. Lucy said nothing would make them leave. They have all their slaves to provide for even though they’re *not* slaves any more since the Emancipation Proclamation.”

Bill nodded miserably.

“But I thought you didn’t want to hear of Constance again.”

“I oughtn’t to want to. I was determined not to. But somehow, I guess I just can’t help thinking about her. Oh, I wish this war could be over!”

“On that stage now!” barked the mate, and Bill had to hurry aboard as the rousters started to bring the plank in.

Jo stood up and shouted across the barricade of cotton bales on the boat’s forecastle. “Then get the war finished, Bill Wingate! Good luck, Captain! It’s

your chief engineer that will be cheering for you!”

Bill waved gaily as they worked out into the channel. For the first time he was going downriver to fight without fear, without dread of the horror before him. And Jo's banter was not the only cause of this new courage. He could feel within himself that something pleasant lay ahead, that this trip would be different from the others.





Chapter XVII

MISS CONSTANCE HARRISON

Bill's optimism held through the trip down to Young's Point above Vicksburg. Even though guerillas interrupted them by hurling a 32-pound shell into the boat's upper hull along with a rain of rifle balls, he managed to get in a double quota of sleep and arrive feeling much more rested than when he left the Cairo hospital ship.

Then brisk activity suddenly shattered his leisure. Col. Charles Rivers Ellet, commanding the Ram Fleet while Brig. Gen. Alfred Ellet was organizing the Marine Brigade at St. Louis, called his men together on the *Queen of the West*.

“You all know that the Rebel transport *City of Vicksburg* lies before the Vicksburg batteries,” he addressed them. “You know that the batteries have been strengthened since Farragut went downriver and that we have withheld any attack from above. You also know that the river from Port Hudson to our position is being used for the passage of Confederate supplies from the Red River. Cutting off that flow of supplies will eventually starve out the Vicksburg garrison, especially if our army can invest the city from the southern and eastern sides. We already hold the Yazoo on the north.”

Looking at the faces of those around him—drawn, tense, bitterly determined faces—Bill saw reflected the spirit of optimism, of desperate bravery that made him eager for the young colonel’s next words.

“I have accepted the responsibility of passing the batteries with the *Queen* and attempting to ram the *City of Vicksburg* at her moorings, thence moving down to patrol the river below the lower batteries. We will barricade the *Queen* with timbers and cotton bales. Every precaution will be made for the safety of the *Queen’s* crew. We will try moving the steering apparatus below, out of range. We will take as few men as possible and pick up the party for the patrol duty on the other side of the peninsula below

the batteries. This will be a vitally important duty, as dangerous as it is important. I will assign no men for this trip. I feel only volunteers should man the *Queen*. Will those willing to undertake this duty step forward?"

Not knowing why he did so, yet sure he would regret holding back, Bill stepped forward. Scott Long, whom he had known before as a pilot in the Ram Fleet, also volunteered.

Long was at the wheel when they cast off and started downstream through the early morning blackness on their hazardous expedition. Not a light showed from the *Queen* as Long eased her carefully into the channel, moving at slow speed so that their engines and escape pipes could hardly be heard.

"Bill," Long hissed, "come here. Try this wheel. It's too unhandy for me to do anything with it. I could hardly get it down in time when we backed out."

Young Wingate grasped the spokes. The boat answered properly to her helm, but with the wheel cramped into such a small space, it would be impossible to handle the *Queen* as fast as she would have to be handled in ramming the *Vicksburg*. It would be suicide to try to run the batteries with such a handicap.

“We’ll have to go back and fix this,” Bill replied. “Will you explain to Charley Ellet?”

Long nodded and was on his way as Bill rounded the *Queen* to. By the time they got under way again, it was nearly daylight.

Nevertheless, the *Queen* now drove down toward the ominous cannon-studded bluffs and the transport lying at the landing. It would be foolish to try to go slowly. The only chance was to run as fast as possible, try to escape before too much damage was done. Bill and Long kept her close to the right hand bank, as far from the guns as possible, planning to cross when they got down to the *City of Vicksburg*.

The batteries were ready for them. As soon as they rounded the bend, fire belched from guns on the bluffs and from the line at the water’s edge. Obviously the attack had been expected, for women and children stood in the city streets watching the bombardment. Sharpshooters had been placed at the water battery. Bill trembled as he thought of bringing their flimsy *Queen* directly into these guns to try to ram the *Vicksburg*. Already they had been struck three times above the waterline.

Now they were across the river from the transport and rounding up into the current. Below on the forecastle Bill could see the *Queen’s* crew loading the

bow gun with turpentine balls. Even though a 64-pound shot crashed through the barricade protecting them, they kept right on with their task.

That bravery was the only thing that kept Bill at the wheel. For, with the *Vicksburg's* bow lying part way into the stream, only hitting her from below would leave any effect. Bill and Long spun the wheel, trying to get the *Queen* around fast enough so that they would have a straight ram upriver. But the current defeated them, whipped their stern so far over that they lost headway and could strike only a glancing blow. All the while the whine of shells, the clatter of rifle fire bit into the *Queen*, nagged her men with searing insistence.

At the instant of impact, the gunners shot the flaming turpentine balls onto the *Vicksburg*, set her afire. But the crash of the *Queen's* pointed bow was not serious.

“*Back! Head her down and away!*” Col. Ellet shouted. “We’re afire ourselves. Cut loose those bales on the bow!”

For one of the Rebel shells had fired some of the cotton bale barricades. Now smoke swept back into the *Queen*, tailed by long red tongues of flame. Only quick action could save the boat.

Scornful of the constant cannonade from the bluffs,

men rushed forward with knives, tumbled overboard bale after bale. Long rang for full speed as Bill headed the *Queen* out into the swiftest part of the channel, slaved to take advantage of every ounce of steam to get them past the lower batteries.

At last the task was done. They were free of the murderous fire, and, although the boat had been struck twelve times and had her cabin reduced to kindling wood, not a man received a serious injury.

Spent but relieved, Bill dropped to a chair behind the wheel as they tied up. As he glanced idly about the pilothouse, he shuddered. Not one square foot of woodwork could he find that had not been pierced by at least two or three rifle slugs.

Long broke into Bill's depressing thoughts. "No time for that now, partner," he announced. "That was a narrow enough escape. We leave at one o'clock, right after what those army fellows call mess."

The *Queen* had hardly reached Warrenton, just below Vicksburg, when she was beset by a battery of four rifle guns on the shore. Luckily she was hit only twice, without important damage, so that she got to Natchez about midnight. Apparently there was no communication by telegraph in that direction, for, with the exception of Warrenton, none of the towns made any effort to resist her passage. In

fact, when they met a sidewheel packet at about three A. M. below the mouth of the Red River, they were greeted with regulation whistle signals.

At the commander's orders, Long kept the *Queen* on her course without replying to the signal. Abruptly the packet pulled to shore with the *Queen* after her. Rebel officers sprang to the bank as soon as she touched. As Ellet's men took prisoner five captains and two lieutenants, Bill studied the sidewheeler through the darkness, finally discovered she was the *H. W. Baker*. He hardly noticed several ladies coming aboard from her with the captives.

Just then another steamer was sighted and a shot fired over her bows. She turned out to be the *Moro* carrying pork, hogs and salt for the Confederate army. Placing one of his officers in charge of the prize, Ellet ordered the *Queen* pointed for the Red River, with the other boats following.

Bill went down into the cabin to consult Col. Ellet. On his way back along the rail toward the dark companionway, a cry whirled him around.

"Who's there?" he demanded.

"Quiet! Don't let them hear you," the voice commanded low, but intense. "I'm behind the ladder."

Bill grasped firmly the pistol he carried in case of emergencies. He would have drawn it, had not that

voice sounded so familiar. "No, it couldn't be," he told himself, advancing carefully. "That would be too much to ask."

Now he could make out a slender, erect form in what looked like a full riding skirt. "Who are you?" he whispered bitinglly. Then he dove quickly into the corner behind the ladder, seized the wrists of the shadowy figure, spun her around so that the faint coloring in the east fell on her face.

"Constance," he cried aloud. "What are you doing here?"

"Quiet! You shouldn't be seen here talking with me."

"I'll take the risk," he snapped back, then softened as he studied her more closely. Pain, fear, anxiety lined her smooth forehead. Hardship had left her thin. Yet those very hardships had made her more beautiful, strengthened the set of her square shoulders, shaped more nobly the determined line of neck and chin.

"Have you been all right, Constance?" he asked softly. "How are your father and mother and Lucy? Jo was asking after Lucy at Cairo. He was captured, but not injured."

"Everybody is all right. Father is with Jefferson Davis at the Capitol. Mother and Lucy are here with



"Constance," he cried aloud. "What are you doing here?"

me. And Marcellus, too. Col. Ellet will let us off at Jones' Plantation near the mouth of the Red River.

"But Bill, please," she interrupted herself, "we have only a minute. Tell me all about yourself. And your dad."

"Dad's fine, and you don't have to worry about me. But stay on the boat, all of you. You'll be safe at Vicksburg."

She shook her head decisively.

"You know we can't do that. Any more than you can leave your side of the War. Oh!" and she suddenly broke into tears. "This War is horrible, horrible. I've missed you so!"

It took all the courage Bill could muster to take her by the shoulders, shake her out of the despair he knew might break her down entirely. "Constance! Constance!" his voice was hard. "Stop that! And go back to your mother. Tell Marcellus you saw me and that I said for him to take good care of you for me."

Anxiously Bill waited for her sobbing to subside. At last she was master of herself, again able to raise that strong chin. "Will you be back to Mississippi after the War is over—if—if—"

With an effort Bill grinned, patted her warmly on the shoulder. "Miss Harrison, Mr. Hartley and I

will roll down the Mississippi in our new steamboat, the finest on the river, and tie up at Harrison's Landing. When we blow the whistle, you will know we are there to take you with us. Now I have to go back to the pilothouse to earn that steamboat."

With a firm handclasp he started her to the cabin and scaled the ladder away from her without looking back. A wave from the pilothouse when they pulled away from Jones' Plantation, and Bill Wingate went back to war, to bringing closer that day when he and Jo would tie up at Harrison's Landing. In his happiness he forgot Constance's father.





Chapter XVIII

BILL WINGATE, PRISONER

All hands aboard the *Queen* won high praise when they reached Vicksburg. Only a few days later the flagship again turned her nose downstream, bound again for the Red River. Bill Wingate was not aboard.

Without explanation he had been replaced in the pilothouse and ordered north to the new Marine Brigade. He suspected his conversation with Constance had something to do with the situation, since Col. Ellet had asked him informally who the young woman was whom he had talked with secretly on the

Queen. He had seemed perfectly satisfied with Bill's reply, but Constance could have been a spy, and Ellet obviously dared not risk Bill's seeing her again.

Still, Bill would not have given up that talk with Constance for anything in the world. In spite of Jo's heartening words, he had been again sinking into that numb, discouraged apathy that weighed down most of the veterans in the service. He had been about ready to resign, as had so many of the rivermen who began with the Ram Fleet. Now he was determined to do his best to bring closer the day when he and Jo would sail down to Harrison's Landing with a boat carrying JACK WINGATE—OWNER over the office door.

Too, it was thrilling to back away from the St. Louis levee at the wheel of the *Diana* and head for Cairo. From there, after coaling, they would go on to Vicksburg. Bill remembered vividly his father's description of the dramatic race between the *Diana* and the *Baltic* (also included in the Marine Brigade) which had made history in the New Orleans trade.

Now the *Diana*, commanded by General Alfred Ellet was sheathed from main deck to roof with double two-inch oak planking and cut up inside into stables, officers' and soldiers' quarters and separate messes for each. Hoses were rigged for hot boiler

water to be used to repel boarders. Yet she still answered to her helm, came ahead at the engine bells like the magnificent lady she was.

Strangely they were not molested during the trip down to the Confederate stronghold. Occasional stops were made for picking up coal or exercising the troops. But the first trouble was internal. Bad, inadequate food at Vicksburg culminated in wrecked mess halls on four of the boats and stoppage of pay for several of the wreckers. The recruiting posters had promised good food, but the cooks tried to call two biscuits per man per meal with tea or coffee "good food." On one boat the mutineers even crashed down a partition and burst into the officers' mess.

Meanwhile naval matters at Vicksburg grew worse. The canal across the point, started again, was given up in disgust. Expeditions sent up Yazoo Pass and Steele's Bayou in an attempt to get at the Vicksburg batteries from the rear failed miserably. The *Queen of the West* grounded before a Rebel battery up the Red River. Her crew escaped only by floating down the stream on cotton bales. And disease plowed disastrously through the camps and boats.

Bill was more than glad to receive orders with the Marine Brigade to scout in the neighborhood of Greenville, Mississippi, and suppress the guerillas.

Heartily sick of Vicksburg already, he fortunately could not know that Vicksburg would figure more painfully than ever in the days to come.

Across the river from Greenville, Gen. Ellet ordered his first landing near Lake Village for scouting. Bill brought the *Diana* up to the levee and watched the wide stage creak over from the forecastle as the cavalrymen held their mounts, waiting for the order to swing into the saddle and clatter onto the levee road.

Now they trooped down, two by two, a gay sight in neat blue uniforms, caps bright with a wide green band and gold lace trim. Bill could see the pride in Gen. Ellet's eyes as he cantered at the rear, flanked by Capt. Crandall and two orderlies. But Bill knew these bright costumes would soon be smirched with mud and blood.

No sign of the guerillas under Col. Ferguson could be seen from the bank. A lake, fed by many narrow streams, separated the river from Lake Village. As the men would not return for an hour or two and the boats had ample protective forces Bill saw nothing wrong in strolling up the road. The quiet of the place after the horses had disappeared behind the hills tempted him.

Lazily he wandered to a narrow creek bed cut

deeply into the river bank, and picked out a shady spot under a willow. Stretched on the springy ground, listening to the peaceful hurry of the water he could almost forget the war. His mind slipped back to Illinois and the woods around Quincy. He could almost imagine himself back there, watching a chance to toss a line invitingly to the great bullhead that so often sneaked up the still creeks to cool himself—

“On yo’ feet, there!” a harsh voice slashed into his calm. “Lively now. And don’t cry out.”

Bill knew at once from the battered grey uniforms that these were Confederate scouts. Strangely they had not drawn their pistols but only stood over him threateningly.

Slowly he crawled to his feet, trying to watch both holsters at once, but being careful to keep his own hand well away from his gun.

“You’re from the Marine Brigade?” one of the soldiers demanded as the other lashed his hands behind him.

Young Wingate nodded.

“Well, we’ll go and talk to Col. Ferguson.”

“Col. Ferguson?” Dismay shot through Bill’s heart as he heard the name of the powerful, relentless guerilla commander whom the Marine Brigade sought, on whose account the movement to Green-

ville had been planned. Ferguson would naturally want to know of the details of that movement and would perhaps try to force them from Bill.

"Come on now, this way," one of his captors instructed gruffly. "You bring up the rear, Jim. And no trying to escape or screaming, Mr. Horse Marine."

Bill nodded sullenly and followed the speaker as he struck up the creek bed toward the river. On the bank, out of sight of the Union fleet, he pulled a skiff out of hiding and wordlessly rowed across the stream. Bill's mind worked furiously as he tried to imagine what Ferguson's questions would be and how he would reply to them. He couldn't decide whether it was to his advantage or disadvantage that he knew nothing of Gen. Ellet's plans except that the Brigade was now headed for Lake Village. For one weak moment he even considered giving himself up entirely, telling all he knew and staying with the Southern forces. Then he remembered the oath which he had taken at New Albany when he joined the Ram Fleet. He could not go back on his word. His duty was to tell nothing, try to escape from Ferguson's camp at the first possible moment and warn the Marines. It would be foolhardy to break away now in this unfamiliar country with two men ready to shoot instantly.

His determination hardened when he was at last led to the guerilla tents. Here were camped enough mounted men to strike a fatal blow upon the Marine Brigade. In spite of the way his muscles dragged limply with fatigue, he straightened his back, pulled his lips tight as he was brought to Col. Ferguson in a small headquarters tent. The sun, low on the horizon, burned through the wall behind the commander so that Bill could distinguish none of his features against the bright light. There was only a steady, meaningful voice:

“Your name, sir?”

“William Wingate, pilot on the steamer *Diana* of the Mississippi Marine Brigade.”

“Thank you,” the Colonel went on in an even tone. “I wish to learn of their projected movements. What was their object in landing across the river?”

“They wished to look over the ground, sir,” he answered, hoping that would suffice.

“What did they expect to find?”

“I don’t know. Being only a pilot, I was not told of Gen. Ellet’s plans. I am merely given orders to bring the boat to a certain place. When we leave that place, I am given orders for the next trip.”

Bill could feel his heart pounding as the Colonel considered his reply.

“And you had received no orders for the next move of the fleet before you came ashore?”

“No, sir. I merely strolled into the creek bed to get away from the boat for a few minutes. I have no idea what will come next.”

“Would it be your opinion that the Brigade was seeking this camp here? Planning an attack to annihilate me?”

“Yes, sir.”

“But you know of no definite plans to that effect?”

“No, sir. As I told you, I am only a pilot.”

“Did it also ever occur to you that you might be subject to an unpleasant experience if I discovered you were lying to me?”

“Yes—yes, sir. That’s—that’s one of the reasons I’ve been telling you the truth.”

The colonel turned to one of Bill’s captors.

“Jim, I’m afraid you drew a blank. I can tell this boy is concealing nothing.”

“We only obeyed your orders to bring in anyone we could discover.”

“Of course, it’s just more ill luck. Now, young man,” Ferguson’s voice turned steel-edged as he spoke to Bill. “You have the freedom of this camp. You’ll find a cot and some blankets above the horse barn. But remember! Our sentries’ guns are *always loaded*.”

We dislike to shoot a man—least of all a boy—in the back, but that is the only way an escaping prisoner can be shot. Don't forget that!"

Trembling, beaten, Bill collapsed on the cot which the soldier had assigned to him. It stood in the loft of a great plantation barn, full of horses, tack and supply wagons. Weakly he refused food, but the soldier sympathetically reappeared a few minutes later with a tin plate of stew and a cup of water. Bill could only nod his thanks.

All life seemed to have left him. The future looked hopeless. If only he could get back to the Fleet! Warn them of this camp! Yet it would be futile to try to escape on foot through the sentries.

Dutifully he began to eat the stew. He could feel no appetite for it, knew only that he must do everything possible to overcome discouragement and get back his strength. For what seemed hours, he lay on the cot, defeated.





Chapter XIX

BILL ESCAPES

Before long the food seemed to warm Bill and set his mind to working again. Peering through the semi-darkness, he inspected every corner of the great loft.

His cot stood at one end, at the head of a ladder and trapdoor through the floor. A heap of farm implements filled the rest of the space, a great, half-empty hayloft that occupied the center one-third of the floor area.

Slipping off his shoes, trying carefully to avoid all creaking boards, Bill worked through to the opposite end of the barn. This corresponded exactly to his

own end. A pile of miscellaneous discarded tools, another trapdoor and ladder.

He could see nothing but darkness through the trap, two of whose edges were formed by the end and wall of the building. Bill lay flat on his stomach, craned his neck to try to scan the ground floor. In the faint light from a lantern at the far end of the barn he finally made out a flat bed wagon directly below him and another open door. Up by the lantern, two men rummaged around harness racks.

Quickly Bill hurried back to his cot, looked through the trap. That was wagon harness they were working with. Perhaps here was a chance. He lay quiet, listening.

“—the end one. There’s a canvas on it already.”

“Right,” his companion replied. “We’ll hitch that one.”

As fast as he could move quietly, Bill sped, shoes in hand, to the other end of the barn, down the corner ladder. Crouching behind the tailboard of the wagon, he put his shoes on. Should he risk the men’s not looking under the canvas or take the chance of their flashing the lantern under the tailboard? Either way involved a tremendous risk. And Bill could not forget those steely words of Col. Ferguson.

Making himself as small as possible, Bill lay on the

ground, wedged against the wall behind a gun carriage that lay next to the wagon. Luckily his fears were groundless. The men set the lantern in the middle of the floor and backed the team up to the whiffletree. They said nothing as they clambered, grunting, onto the seat and clucked at the horses.

As the wheels began to turn, Bill half dove, half climbed under the canvas. He lay still, breathless, waiting to see if they had heard him, then decided the creak of the turning wheels and the grating words of the drivers trying to get their team going out the door had muffled any sound he could have made. Relieved he took a deep breath and lay down to wait for Greenville.

He began to relax, to plan the next move when fear clamped at his heart. A human hand seized his wrist.

The suddenness of the move would have burst a shout from Bill's throat had not another strong hand clapped over his lips and nose. Panic swept through him. Col. Ferguson's words clattered in his ears.

Then a voice, barely audible, breathed at his ear.

"Don't call out. I don't know who you are, but if you try to expose me I'll cut your heart out with this knife." He released Bill's wrist and pressed a cold knife blade gently against his palm.

"Don't worry," Bill could hardly find the breath for his whispered reply, so violently had he been shocked. "I'm escaping, too."

"We get out just before we come into town. I'll lead the way down to the river."

"All right."

Bill did not in the least like the prospect of throwing in his lot with a stranger, but there was no other way now. Impatiently he waited, the minutes dragging by.

It was nearly an hour later that his unknown companion wriggled around to peek out over the end gate, then tumble noisily off into the road.

Instantly Bill ripped the canvas from over his head and plunged over the side of the wagon, streaked blindly away from the road.

"Hey! Stop. Quick, they're getting away," the men on the seat shouted together.

Bill drove ahead, pounding every ounce of power into his cramped legs. Ahead he could see a man, obviously the one that had been in the wagon with him. At his right were a few lights, probably those of Greenville. That meant the river lay straight ahead of him, past a wall of trees.

"Stop or I'll shoot!" a voice bellowed from behind Bill, but he kept on, praying a shot could not reach

him. Desperately, he took a pivoting, zig-zag course, hoping that would confuse the riflemen's aim.

Then shots bit into the night. If only those trees were not so far away!

Suddenly a scream rose over the clatter of shots, a long rising scream as the man ahead dove forward, rolled over himself, then lay still. Now Bill could feel footsteps pounding closer.

Gasping, and nearly exhausted, he rushed past the dead man into the clump of willows. Out of the corner of his eye he recognized the Confederate uniform—a deserter, probably—as he pounded into a diagonal path. Now the shots and the footsteps had stopped, but Bill kept going. Only after hurling himself into the shallow water at the levee did he dare pause and try to catch his breath.

For fifteen minutes he waited there, but no one appeared over the top of the levee. The next step he had already planned, and luck followed him again, for here was a skiff, complete with oars and even a fishing line. Swiftly he cast off and, with the skill he had learned at Quincy, sculled far out into the stream without making a sound with the oar, keeping as much out of sight as possible.

Then, after slipping off his jacket and cap and feeling his money belt securely in place, he climbed onto

the thwart and rowed upstream, keeping well away from the arc of faintly-illuminated river before the city.

One look was enough. There were no boats tied up at the landing and none in sight upriver. The Marine Brigade must either be well above Greenville and not contemplating an attack on Ferguson's force, or else still some place downstream. Without a second's hesitation, Bill turned the skiff around and began pulling hard with the current.

It took a long time for him to get down to the spot where he had left the fleet, and, as he expected, they had gone. Now he shipped his oars, eased himself onto the bottom of the boat and watched for a spot where he could hide for the day that would soon be breaking.

Already the blackness in the east had begun to fade when he ran past a long island near the Arkansas shore. Heavy screens of willows hung over the smoothly moving channel with the ground rising slightly farther inland. Bill remembered it from his trip down on the *Diana*. If he could get around the foot and work up into the willows, he would be safe for the day.

Day after day passed as Bill lay in hiding or drifted slowly toward Vicksburg, living mostly on berries.

On only one night did he find a spot where he dared build a fire and cook a string of catfish.

Always, except when asleep, he kept a sharp lookout for the Brigade, not knowing that they had been sent to the Tennessee River direct from Lake Village. He waited, too, for some opportunity to stop a Union boat with a flag of truce, but none passed at a time when he could risk exposing himself.

On the last evening, his hunger had grown too painful to bear. About twenty miles still lay between his camp and Young's Point, but he gritted his teeth and determined to get to the fleet no matter what the danger. Bravely he thrust all of his ebbing strength against the oars and made the skiff fairly fly over the water.

Three hours later, Bill could locate himself only when the channel ran close to shore. As the boat headed in again toward the Louisiana side, his nose caught the sharp, acrid odor of wood smoke. Shipping the oars, he let the skiff drift through the darkness. Around the next bend he should be able to see the Union gunboat fleet. Yes, he could hear the rumble of cannon.

The scene that flashed before his eyes as he turned that bend would never leave his memory. For the entire river from the Vicksburg shore to the settle-

ment of DeSoto across the channel was lit up by fires, burning buildings, and brush piles.

As if for his benefit, the guns thundered out in a new broadside. The flash of exploding shells splashed with now colors the flames on the banks. Silhouetted against the brightness, adding to the din, drove the Federal gunboats, the *Carondelet* and *Louisville*, the ram *General Price*, captured at Memphis, and five other gunboats. To the rear rode transports, hulls protected with coal barges lashed to their sides, upper works barricaded with cotton bales. For the first time, mere transports dared to run the murderous Vicksburg batteries.

This action could only mean one thing, that Grant was moving troops downriver to land somewhere below Vicksburg for a flanking movement against the batteries.

The fleet drew closer and closer to the batteries. Grant must mean to cut himself off from his base entirely and risk everything on trying to snatch a foothold below the city.

Now the fleet charged on more rapidly, straight into the thick of the inferno of shot and shell. Bill could hardly draw his fascinated eyes from that picture of horror to think of his own position.

He knew he could not stay where he was with the

fleet gone. His only salvation would be to join them. But what man—or boy—would dare to dash in an open boat into that downpour of death?

Bill strove to quiet his drumming pulses as he threw himself into one last effort at the oars. Two hundred yards to go! A shell burst behind his stern, tearing the river into treacherous whirlpools, nearly spinning his small craft end for end. Drenched with perspiration and river water, head aching from the smoke that bit at his eyes and lungs, ears jangling with the clamor of explosions, he headed for the barge lashed to the *Tuscumbia*, the last of the gunboats. A hundred yards to go now!

But the skiff had dived from beneath his feet, smashed to bits as a brutal wall of water crashed upon it. Could he reach the barge, half-paralyzed with exhaustion, through that turmoil of water? Only instinct made Bill's arms thrash out, his legs beat in a desperate effort to swim. And it was strength beyond description that flexed his arms, pulled him onto the coal barge to lie panting, oblivious to the leaden death that burned down on all sides.

Then a new sound, an insistent whine, penetrated Bill's consciousness. A shell coming dangerously close! He tried to move, to shake into activity his spent muscles.



A hundred yards to go now!

Closer, more intense drove the deathly tone. Bill dragged his knees under him, fought upright, peered over his shoulder. He hurled himself into the river as the shell tore into the barge under the load of coal.

Then the shell exploded.

For a moment nothing seemed to happen, except a flash and a report, until the stern of the barge tore out with a rending, shrieking crash.

With all his might, Bill tried to hurl himself up and over the guard onto the *Tuscumbia*, but it was no use. Before he could escape, one of the heavy barge timbers thundered down across his feet and legs. One desperate effort to move, one searing flame of pain, and Bill knew they were useless.

Now the barge had burst into flames and men on the *Tuscumbia* had begun to slash with axes the lines holding it to the gunboat. Each movement a new agony, Bill seized the guard and inched along toward them, screaming at the top of his voice.

Only when he heard a blurred voice through the hammering in his ears did he relax.

"Pull him up here. Get him inside," said the voice. "He's in bad shape."

Then the voices faded, and Bill Wingate let the cool blackness wash him under.



Chapter XX

REUNION IN ST. LOUIS

Nearly two years passed with Bill Wingate lying helpless in the Vicksburg hospital. Grant had finally taken the city by seige. Union Armies in the East had conquered Gettysburg in that same July of 1863. Now, in 1865, Grant had forced General Lee's surrender at Appomattox, and finished the War.

Only in the last week or two had Bill been able to walk slowly across the room between two nurses. Each day he gained more strength. Having the war off his mind helped his recovery, but he would improve more rapidly if he could drive out those other

worries, those anxieties that nagged at him day and night.

Bright, encouraging letters from his father hindered rather than helped. With only a little over a thousand dollars due him, Bill knew there was no way now that he could buy a steamboat, achieve the task he had set for himself. It would be hard now even to get a berth as a pilot. With the South shattered by business failures as much as by cannon fire, trade would be slow in returning to normal.

He thought sadly of how he had happily announced to Constance that night, near the Red River, that he would come for her in his own boat. It had seemed difficult enough then, considering her father's views on Northerners. Now it would be impossible. Bill lay back against the pillows on his chair, shut his eyes against the sunshine that brightened the grass and flowers of the hospital grounds. Too discouraged to care about anything, he did not hear his name spoken by a voice behind him.

"Here he is, sir," a nurse announced respectfully.

"Thank you," came the reply in leisurely, masculine tones. "He seems to be asleep."

"No, I don't think so. Mr. Wingate," she touched Bill's shoulder gently. "You have a caller."

"All right," Bill returned disinterestedly, taking

it for granted that the visitor was, as usual, just a friend from some other part of the hospital or from the Union garrison.

"Good afternoon, William Wingate," the gracious voice surprised Bill. "I hope I'm not disturbing you."

"Of—of course not, sir," he struggled to his feet. The caller was Constance's father. "I—I didn't mean to be rude, Mr. Harrison. I guess I was just too miserable to be polite."

"Forget it, my boy. And sit down again. I'll bring that chair from over by the bushes for myself."

Bill watched Mr. Harrison as he crossed the lawn and started back. Even though his manner had not changed from the air of elegance and courtesy Bill had known at Oaknoll, Planter Harrison seemed older, less autocratic. Bill could see that collapse of the Confederate States of America had left its mark on the older man's pride.

"I imagine you wonder why I'm here," he seated himself carefully, then treated Bill to a friendly smile.

"A little," Bill confessed hesitantly.

"Well, it happened I met your friend Josiah Hartley at Cairo when I helped make arrangements for a number of our exchanged prisoners, their transportation home and so forth. He told me you were here, and I, in turn, told my daughter. We both thought

I should stop in to see you the next time I came to Vicksburg. That's all there is to it."

Bill was puzzled at the kindness, the cordiality of Mr. Harrison's words. It couldn't be that he had forgotten his hostile attitude, especially after the Union had brought about the Confederate surrender. But Bill could not suppress the hope that rose within him. If only Mr. Harrison could accept him as a man, as a fellow American, not an enemy!

"It was nice of you to come," Bill filled the silence. "Did Jo go back to Memphis?"

A twinkle lit Mr. Harrison's eyes, a mischievous smile Bill had never seen before.

"I can only tell you I understand he's to be in St. Louis. There's a reason for my secrecy." The smile grew into a happy grin.

Baffled, Bill studied this new side of Mr. Harrison.

"But why?" then added hurriedly, "if I may ask, sir."

"Of course, you may ask, but I'm convinced you'd rather I didn't tell you. You'll find out all about it after you leave here and get up to St. Louis next week."

"Well, all right," Bill managed a feeble grin.

"But there's something I really wanted to say. Seriously."

Young Wingate waited impatiently as Mr. Harrison paused.

"I want to clear up what I'm afraid was a misunderstanding. You felt I considered you my enemy when you were at our home just before the—just before the Spring of '61, didn't you?"

"I didn't know. I thought it best not to say anything about it," Bill prayed that the next sentence would bring the answer he wanted so much.

"I just wanted to say that I am sorry if I gave you such an impression. We Southerners feel our loyalties strongly, but we insist on being gentlemen as well. We hope not to cause any innocent party pain because of those loyalties.

"Ever since that day you and Jo Hartley rescued my daughter and Miss French at New Orleans I've admired you. And the fact that you were born in the North had no effect on that admiration. Your determination to make good on the river and your unselfish bravery under fire has made me admire you even more. If I had had a son I would have wished nothing more of him than to approach the world as you have. I'm only sorry that incident with Marcellus had to happen."

"That's—that's very kind of you, Mr. Harrison," Bill put in shyly, abashed by the flowery words of

praise. "I'm glad you feel that I've done my best—even though I've failed so far to—"

"None of that," the smile was back on Mr. Harrison's face. "A boy like you will come out right in the end. But I must be getting along. Mrs. Harrison and Constance both wanted me to tell you, though, that you'll be most welcome at Oaknoll—or what's left of it—as soon as you're moving about again. And I add my own invitation to that."

Bill got to his feet, met Mr. Harrison's outstretched hand with a sincere clasp. "I can't tell you how kind you've been, sir. Or how much I appreciate it."

"I'm glad," he returned simply and was gone.

So it was a happier Pilot William Wingate who stood at the boiler deck guard as his transport drew nearer and nearer to the line of steamboats at St. Louis. He waited anxiously for the solution to Mr. Harrison's secret, as gay hordes of returning soldiers pressed closer around him, straining their eyes for the first sight of the city. Excited groups of people rushed toward the wharfboats as the pilot blew long blasts on the whistle.

Just as the transport's prow reached the lower end of the line of boats, a brass band on the levee broke into the new song, *Marching Through Georgia*.

Cheers roared up as the pilot pulled her into a berth, as rousters rushed out with the lines, and swung out the stage to the mate's voluble commands.

Then Bill spied two figures, one slender and slightly stooped, one rotund and triumphant. Both waved violently, joining in the cheers.

Recklessly Bill dove into the mob of soldiers tramping down the forward companionway and the gangplank. In another moment, he jubilantly returned the pummeling of Jo Hartley and the warm greeting of his father.

"You two!" he cried. "How did you get together? Who could ask for a more royal homecoming than having you both here to meet me!"

"Jo—" Jack Wingate began, but Bill interrupted him.

"So that's it," he laughed, noticing the others' puzzled looks. "Mr. Harrison came to the hospital to see me and very slyly refused to tell me why Jo was coming to St. Louis from Cairo."

"I knew he wouldn't spoil our secret," Jo put in, his hearty laugh ringing out. "He's a sly fellow when he wants to be."

"Come on. Out with it," Bill insisted. "Did you have some plot, you two?"

Jo took father and son by their respective arms

and led them up the hill, announcing grandly, "We have great plans under foot—or afoot, I mean—for our various futures. We will discuss them up at the coffee house. Now, no explanations until then."

As they hurried along, Bill realized they were heading for the place where Jo and he had had their last talk with Andrew Lexington. Suddenly the full realization that they would never see Lexington struck home. Unconsciously Bill held back.

"What's the matter, partner?" Jo was instantly sympathetic.

"Shouldn't we go some place else? I mean—on account of Andrew Lexington?"

Jo shook his head decisively. "Not on your life! Andrew Lexington is why we're going there. He wanted us to tell—whoa there, I almost spoiled it."

Bewilderedly, Bill let Jo lead them to the same table they had occupied with the pilot who had lost his life in the Battle of Memphis. After they had given their orders, Jo winked at Jack Wingate.

"You tell him, Mr. Wingate. I want to do nothing but watch him smile."

"All right," Mr. Wingate agreed, as boyishly happy as the young engineer. "Jo, here, was with Andrew Lexington when he died. Lexington had saved a little money and had some pay coming, but

there were no relatives. He asked Jo to see that it came to you. He said you had a special use for it. It amounted to several thousand dollars."

"I didn't get it," Jo interrupted, "until I was released and got back to Memphis. I didn't dare tell you about it at Cairo because I wasn't sure."

Too moved to reply, Bill tried to smile to hide the queer catch in his throat.

"Tell him the rest. I can't wait," Jo urged.

"It isn't much," Mr. Wingate went on modestly. "But Jo told me you went onto the river to earn enough to buy a boat to be operated by Wingate and Son. And that you couldn't make ends meet after being wounded in the war. Is that right?"

Bill nodded.

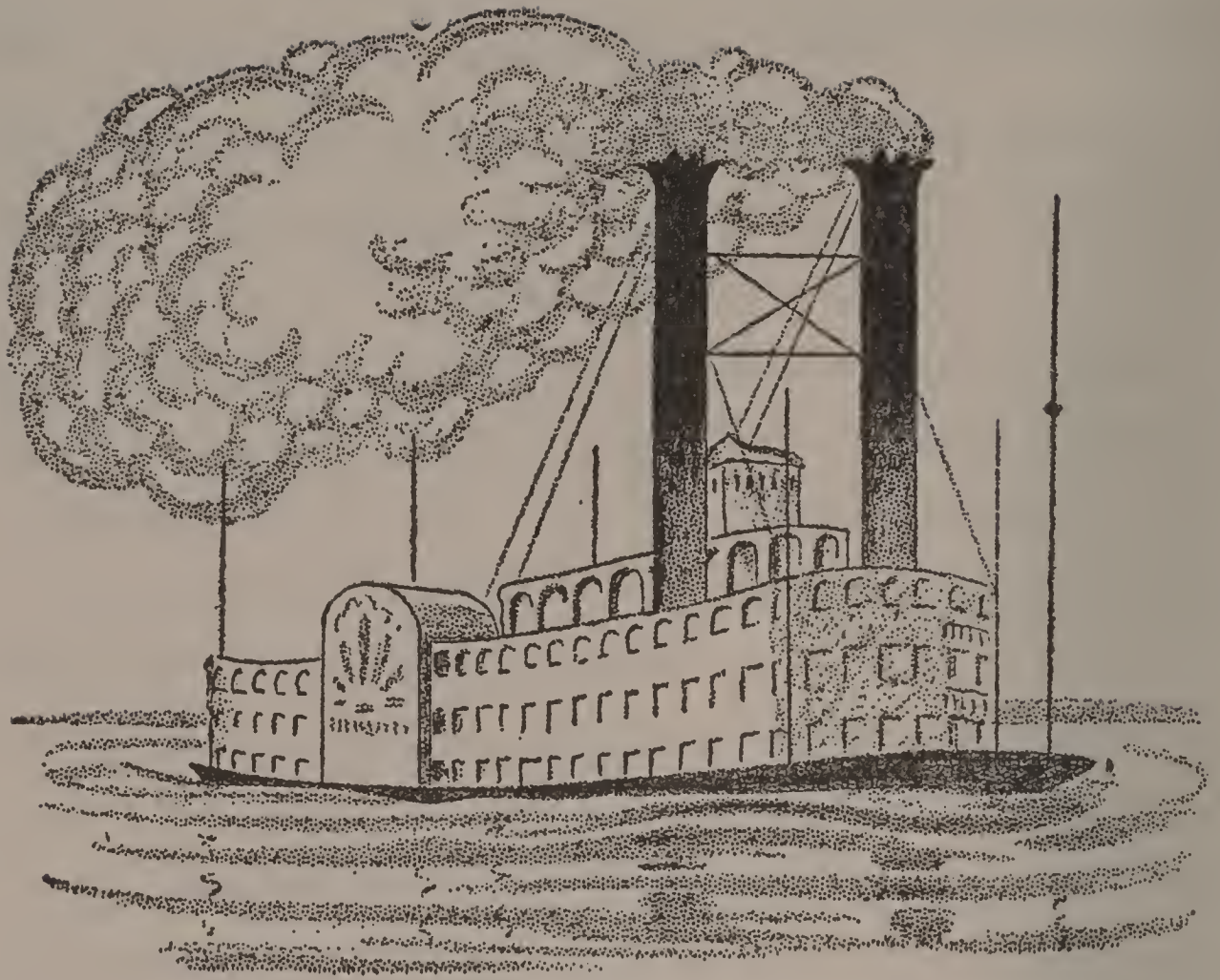
"Well, when you so unselfishly donated some of that money to help me and my store out of a tight situation, when you paid off that debt without even telling me about it, you naturally acquired a share in my store. And, since I thought you'd rather have the Wingates running a steamboat than a store, I found a generous buyer, and sold the store. Now I'm ready and waiting for you and Jo to take me out shopping for steamboats. How—"

"Dad! And Jo!" Bill cried gleefully. "We start right now. I hear we could get one at New Albany—"

“And there’s a big packet on the Upper River for sale,” Jo broke in. “Capt. Merriman told us about it.”

Jack Wingate only leaned back in his chair and smiled blissfully, waiting for them to decide what boat to look at first.





Chapter XXI

THE MODEL OF THE *CHALLENGER*

Bill Wingate took over the wheel of the rejuvenated sidewheel packet *Challenger* as she neared Harrison's Landing. In his pride of ownership, he forgot that his legs ached from standing his share of the watches, for, over the office forward on the boiler deck, was painted JACK WINGATE AND SON, OWNERS.

Mounting to the hurricane roof was Jack Wingate, at his side Capt. Merriman, who had insisted on coming on the *Challenger's* first trip as a paying passenger even though he had helped the Wingates to secure their new boat.

Yankee Jack Wingate tapped the landing bell, then smiled back over his shoulder to the pilothouse. Bill grinned gaily back and whistled into the speaking tube. "Half speed, Jo. We're almost there!"

Smartly the stage swung out as the bow touched the landing. One long pull at the whistle cord, and Bill was hurrying down to the forecastle.

For up the stage hurried Constance Harrison and Lucy French, behind them their parents. By the time Bill reached the forecastle, Jo was helping them onto the boat.

"A fine good mornin' to yo' all," rolled out his wide, deep baritone. "Certainly sorry the management can't be on the job to greet such important guests."

"No, Jo—" Lucy began to protest, but Bill broke in.

"The management, father and son, welcome you all," he bowed. "How do you like her?"

"She's grand, Bill," Constance smiled proudly. "I'm so—*so happy*—oh, for you all."

"Just a moment," Mr. Harrison shook hands with Bill. "We would like to take cabin passage aboard this packet if you have it available. We have a dinner engagement in New Orleans with a Mr. Wingate and his son and a Mr. Hartley. At Antoine's."

“Right this way, sir. Mr. Wingate Senior will be proud to take care of you.”

As introductions were made and the register signed, Mr. Wingate turned to Mr. Harrison. “Your luggage, Mr. Harrison?”

“Ha! I nearly forgot,” the planter roared with laughter. “I have a little surprise of my own.”

The party waited for him to go on. Bill was about to speak when Mr. Harrison suddenly called toward the landing: “Marcellus! What’s got into you, boy?”

No response, only a slight rustling behind an oak tree on the bank. Finally a sleepy Marcellus, rubbing his eyes, stumbling up the plank with the bags.

“Mistuh Bill! And Mistuh Wingate!” he cried happily. “I’se sho’ glad to see yo’.”

“Would you like to have Marcellus on your crew?” Mr. Harrison asked.

Bill’s anxious enthusiasm was his answer.

“Fine. He can start right now. I know you’ll help him arrange for his family up in Quincy.”

Bill nodded unbelievably, felt his eyes misting.

“Go ’long now,” Mr. Harrison waved him away. “Aren’t you going to show my daughter the boat?”

The tour ended in the pilothouse where Bill offered to take the wheel. The pilot went below quickly, but winked back over his shoulder.

Below the pilothouse the Mississippi spread majestically on all sides. For a moment neither Bill nor Constance spoke as the gleaming *Challenger* swept downstream.

“How would you like to keep her going straight down the channel?” Bill at last spoke. “For just a moment. I have something to show you.”

Though she had never held a steamboat wheel in her life, Constance smiled and quietly grasped the spokes. Bill drew a wooden case from beside the stove, and opened it on a small deal table by the starboard window.

“How do you like that?” when he took the wheel again. “It’s a model of this boat.”

Constance gasped with delight at the perfectly detailed miniature, complete with boats, even with tiny pilots leaning out of the windows. “It’s beautiful!” she cried, then abruptly laid her hand on Bill’s arm.

“But that name on the paddle box. It’s—it’s not *Challenger*.”

“That’s why I showed you the model. That’s the name we want to give this boat, the *Constance H. Wingate*. After my—my wife,” he stuttered shyly.

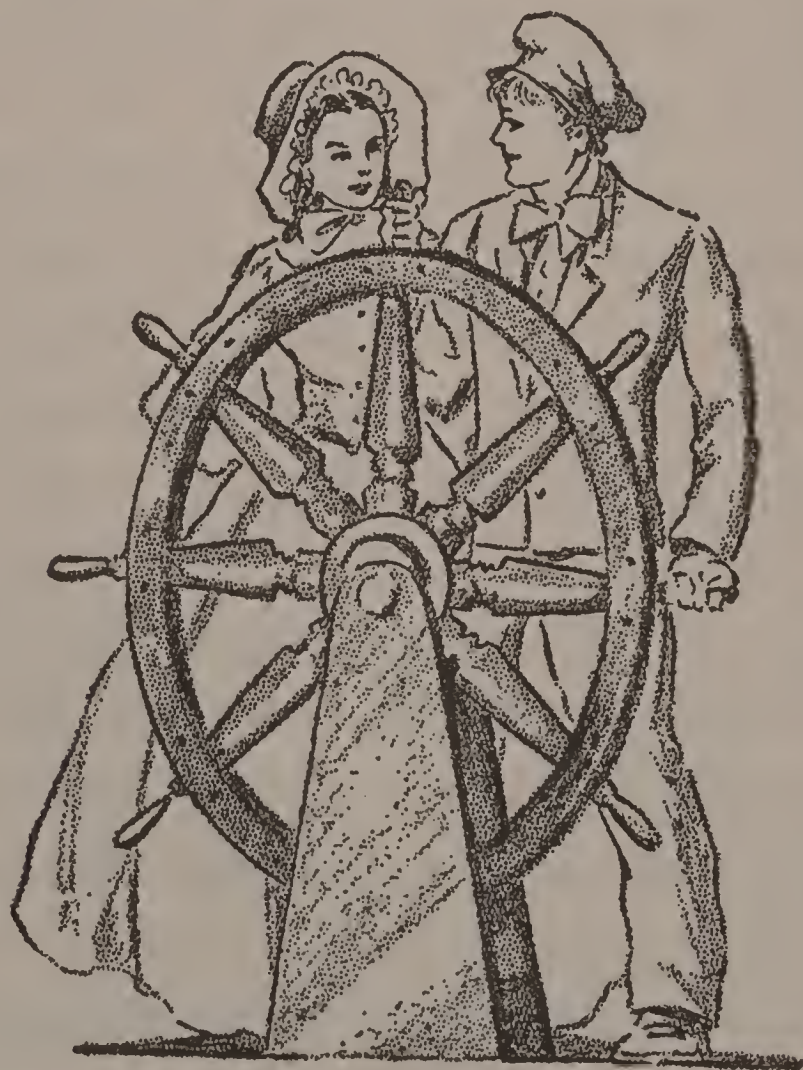
“I’m glad you want that name, Bill,” she said simply. “Because I do, too.”

“You won’t mind if your Chief Engineer also is

a married man, do you?" boomed from behind them.

"Congratulations," Bill shook Jo's hand warmly. "We'll have to have a double wedding. And if you'll send that pilot up here, Constance and I will follow you below and make plans."

As Jo disappeared, Bill found Constance standing quietly beside him at the wheel. They did not speak as he crossed the long, wide stretch of river before them shimmering in the late afternoon sun. And, within himself, Bill could feel the future opening ahead of him in the same way, sure, happy, bright and peaceful—like the river.



GLOSSARY

Abolitionist—A man or woman who believed slavery should be abolished.

Aft—Toward the stern.

Berth—A job or position. Also a bed on a ship.

Boiler Deck—The deck, second up from the water that usually carried the men's and women's social cabins, the staterooms, etc.

Breast Line—A mooring line at the bow exerting a pull in a direction at right angles to the keel of a boat.

Cabin Passage—The privilege of traveling from one landing to another with cabin and food provided. Contrasted with Deck Passage.

Capstan—An upright, revolving drum, usually on the fore-castle, worked by long bars, used for heaving on mooring lines or for any other pulling too heavy for men alone.

Casemate—Shielding, cut for guns, protecting gunners from enemy fire. River gunboats were usually enclosed on all four sides by four continuous casemates.

Channel—The course of a river, usually the deepest portion and that portion chosen by pilots.

Chief Mate—First mate.

Chute—A rapidly running portion of the river, usually narrow, between one bank of an island and the mainland.

Companionway—A flight of stairs leading from one deck to another, often enclosed. Sometimes called a Ladder.

Confederate—Of the Confederate States of America, enemy of the United States of America. See Rebel.

Crossing—Running a boat from one bank of a river to another to follow the channel.

Cub-Pilot—Apprentice to a pilot.

- Deck Passage**—Privilege of traveling from one landing to another at a lower rate because no food or cabin were provided. Often deck passengers helped pay for their trip by loading wood or freight.
- Dix Note**—A ten-dollar bill issued by the “Banque des Citizens” of New Orleans. “Dix,” meaning ten in French, was printed on one side of the note, explaining the term. These were as stable as any currency in the country in pre-War times. Many say Dixie Land was the land of the Dix Note.
- Draft**—The amount of water necessary to float a boat. Thus a shallow draft boat required less depth of river than a deep draft boat, and shallow draft boats were used on the smaller, shallower rivers.
- Falls**—Lines used for hoisting or lowering a skiff or yawl.
- Federal**—Of the United States of America. See Union.
- First Mate**—The officer of a boat second in command to the captain.
- Flag Officer**—Commanding officer of a fleet or flotilla.
- Flotilla**—A group or fleet of boats.
- Forecastle**—The forward portion of the main deck extending ahead of the superstructure.
- Frigate-rigged**—Rigged as a sailing vessel of the frigate type. Many of the Gulf Squadron in the War between the States used engines for power but carried sail rigging for emergencies.
- Galley**—The kitchen on a boat.
- Gangway**—A plank or stage extending from the forecastle of a boat to the shore or wharfboat. Often only a single piece of lumber.
- Guard**—Railing or projections around the outboard edge of a boat.

- Guerilla**—Detached soldier, or soldiers in a small band, used to harass the enemy separately from the regular movements.
- Headline**—A line used to moor the bow of a boat.
- Hurricane**—The deck on which the texas is laid, usually the third deck up from the water. Also known as the Roof or Hurricane Roof.
- Invest**—To surround or lay siege to.
- Jackstaff**—The staff at the very bow of the boat on which a flag was flown.
- Keel**—Timber running through the center of the bottom of a boat from bow to stern.
- Ladder**—See Companionway.
- Landau**—A carriage on which the top can be thrown back.
- Lanyard**—A piece of line pulled to discharge a cannon or mortar.
- Larboard**—To the left. Replaces on river boats the word port which is used in deep sea parlance.
- Lashing**—Tying or binding securely with line.
- Lead**—A device for sounding (See Sounding), consisting of a piece of lead at the end of a light line, marked at regular distances.
- Leadsman**—Member of the crew tossing lead and calling depths.
- Levee**—A dike built to prevent lowlands from being flooded at normal or high stages of the river. Also a paved area on the bank in front of a town used as a boat landing and a storage space for incoming and outgoing freight.
- Lines**—All ropes; mooring, hoisting, etc.
- Main Deck**—The deck, first up from the water, on which the engines were set and of which the forecastle was the forward portion.

- Mortar Boat**—Barges, towed by steamboats, enclosed on four sides but not roofed, carrying a gun to throw shells at a high elevation.
- Mortar Guns or Mortars**—Guns, not rifled, used to hurl shells or bombs at high elevations. A mortar would be used to send a cannon ball over a wall while a rifled gun would be used to send it through the wall.
- Mud Clerk**—Second clerk, usually an apprentice, learning the business end of steamboating. Called Mud Clerk because he had to climb over muddy levees to check freight in or out.
- Musket**—A rifle or firearm carried by infantrymen.
- Natchez Trace**—The old trail leading north from Natchez. Used by rafters and keelboatmen who had floated downriver, sold their craft and cargo at New Orleans, and traveled home on foot.
- National**—Of the United States of America. See Federal.
- Overhang**—The portion of deck and superstructure extending aft over the water past the end of the keel.
- Paddlebox**—The housing around a paddlewheel on a side-wheel boat.
- Partner**—Pilots spoke of the other pilots on their boat as their partners.
- Ports**—Openings in the side of a boat. Cut through casemates for guns in the gunboats.
- Purser**—Chief clerk, business head of the boat under the owner.
- Quill**—A clerk.
- Rebel**—Enemy of the United States of America. See Confederate.
- Rifled Guns**—Guns bored with a spiral grooving to give the projectile better direction.

- River Defense Fleet**—The Confederate river fleet.
- Round to**—Bring the bow of the boat around into the current.
- Rousters**—Roustabouts, deck hands, freight handlers.
- Runners**—Solicitors employed by steamboats or hotels to approach prospective guests or passengers as they stood on levees or boats.
- Scull**—Propel a boat with a single oar at the stern.
- Shippers**—Those sending goods via steamboat.
- Slate**—Many boats carried slates similar to school slates to be signed by passengers just as a guest signs the register in a hotel.
- Snipers**—Riflemen, usually hidden, used to concentrate on a single enemy as opposed to mass fire of troops.
- Sounding**—Measuring the depth of the river with a lead.
- Sounding Boat**—Rowboat, skiff, yawl used for soundings, usually kept fitted out with leadlines, buoys, etc., ready to be launched when sounding was necessary.
- Southern**—Pertaining to the states which seceded and formed the Confederate States of America.
- Stage**—See Gangway.
- Starboard**—To the right hand.
- Steersman**—An assistant to a pilot, usually a cub pilot, handling the wheel under the pilot's direction and responsibility.
- Sternline**—A line used to moor the stern of a boat.
- Texas**—The cabin house on the top "layer" of the boat, under the pilothouse, used as cabins for the more important members of the crew. Called texas because state-rooms on the boiler deck were usually named after states of the Union and Texas had been just brought into the Union when this top cabinhouse was named.

- Texas Tender**—A waiter or servant who took care of the wants of those in the texas or pilothouse.
- Throttle**—The lever controlling the speed of an engine. On most sidewheelers, each wheel and its engine had a separate throttle.
- Thwart**—Seat in a skiff or rowboat.
- Tintype**—An old form of photography in which the image was printed on a piece of tin instead of on paper.
- Topside**—The upper portions of a boat. To go topside is to go to a higher deck.
- Towhead**—A low point of landing extending into the river.
- Turpentine Balls**—Balls of rags or some absorbent material were soaked in turpentine, lit and thrown or shot from a gun in an attempt to ignite their target.
- Union**—Of the United States of America. See Federal.
- Ways**—Drydock or marine railway on which a boat is built or hauled out for repairs.
- Watch**—Time spent on duty. Steamboatmen usually worked four-hour shifts.
- Western Flotilla**—The Union river fleet.
- Wheelhouse**—Housing for the paddlewheels.
- Winch**—A device used for the same purpose as a capstan or windlass.
- Yawl**—Rowboat or skiff, often steered with a rudder, used for taking sounds or as a tender.

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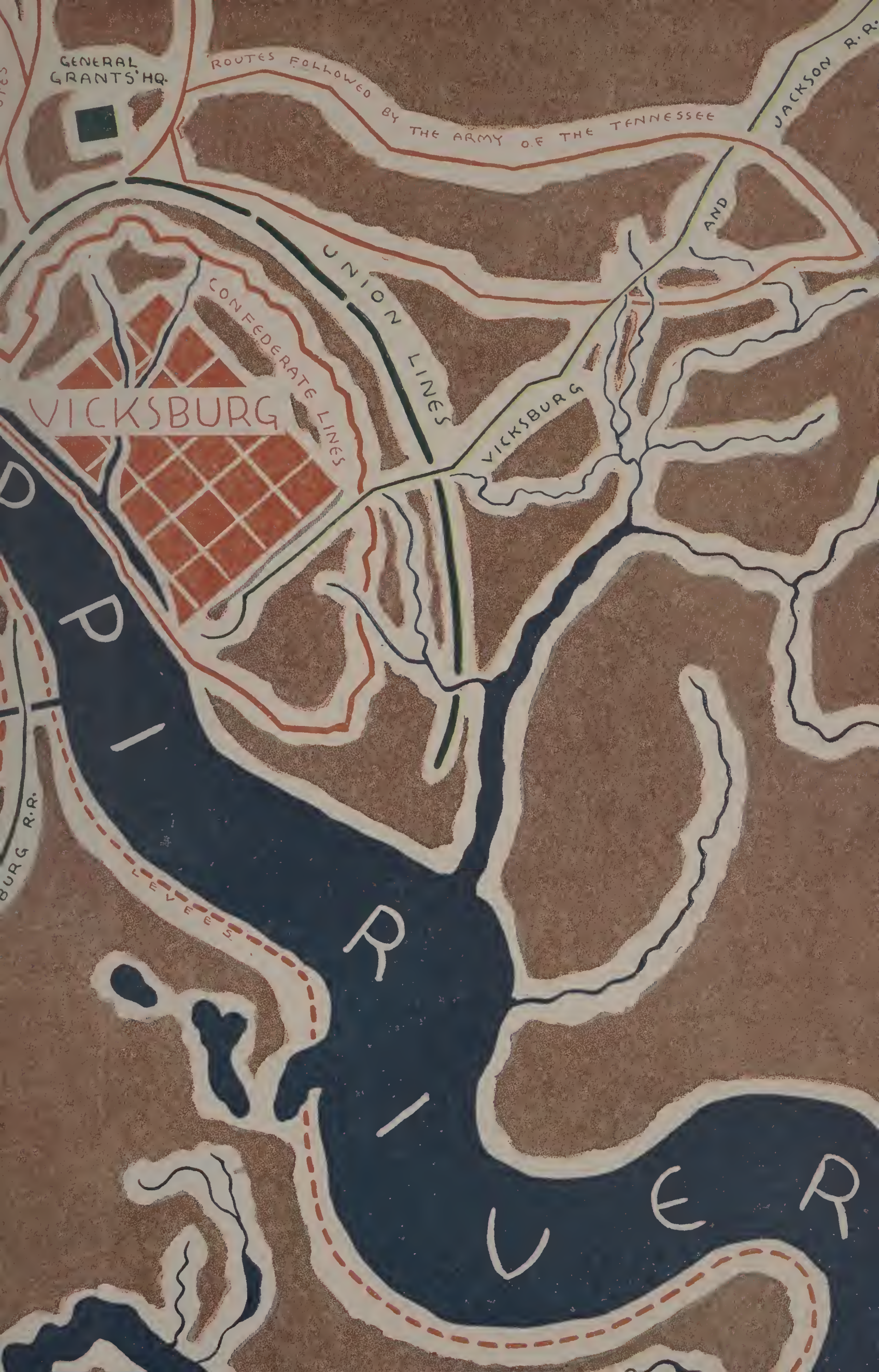


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