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Жек Лондон

# ҲИКОЯЛАР



artin Eden

**Kitob shu yerda ko'rsatilgan muddatdan  
kechiktirilmagan holda topshirilishi shart**

**ilgarigi berilmalar miqdori** \_\_\_\_\_

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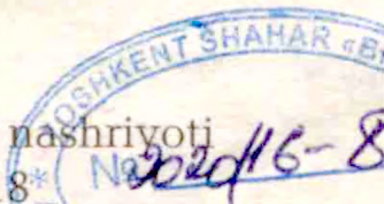
JEK LONDON

# HIKOYALAR



"Adabiyot uchqunlari" nashriyoti

Toshkent – 2018\*



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**BBK: 85-44 (L-31)**

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Ushbu kitobdan mashhur ingliz yozuvchisi Jek London ijodiga mansub hikoyalar tarjimasi o'rin olgan. Tarjimalar ingliz tilidagi matnlar bilan yonma-yon berilmoqda. Bu esa akademik litsey, kasb-hunar kollejlari va oliy o'quv yurtlari talabalari uchun ingliz tilini o'rganishda manba vazifasini ham o'taydi.

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*The function of man is to live, not to exist. I shall not waste my days in trying to prolong them. I shall use my time.*

***Jack London.***

*Hayotda insoniyatning asl vazifasi faqat mavjud bo'lib qolish emas, balki haqiqiy yashashdir. Men kunlarimni uzaytirish maqsadida emas, ulardan mazmunli foydalanish uchun yashayman!*

***Jek London***

## JEK LONDON – HIKOYANAVIS

XX asr boshida ijod qilgan amerikalik mashhur adib Jek London (Jack London. 1876-1916) ijodiga mansub hikoya, qissa va romanlar o'tgan asr Yevropa va Amerika adabiyotida muhim o'rin egallaydi. Jek London hikoya va romanlari jahon xalqlari tillariga, jumladan o'zbek tiliga ham tarjima qilingan.

Adib mashaqqatli hayot va ijod yo'lini bosib o'tdi. Shu bois, uning barcha asarlaridagi voqealar hayotiy bo'lib, o'zi yashagan davr kirdikorlarini fosh qilishga bag'ishlangan, zulm va raqobat ostida qiynalgan, azob-uqubatlarga chalingan jafokash inson obrazini real tasvirlashga qaratilgan. Biz adibning "Oq so'yloq" (White Fang. 1906), "Temir tovon" (The iron heel. 1907), "Martin Iden" (Martin Eden. 1909) romanlarini o'qirkanmiz, buning shohidi bo'lamiz. Ayniqsa, yozuvchining "Martin Iden" romanidagi voqealar muallif hayoti va turmushida kechirgan voqealarga vobasta tasvirlangani, Amerika jamiyatida yosh avlodning hayotda o'z o'rnini topishidagi qiyinchiliklari yuksak pafosda, romantik ideallar og'ushida yoritib berilgani o'quvchini o'ziga jalb qiladi.

Jek London hikoya va qissalari qahramonlari – oltin izlovchi yoshlar ham o'z yo'llarini topishda erkin harakat qiladilar, oldindagi to'siqlarga qarshi mardonavor turib, ularni yengib o'tish uchun



o'zlarida kuch-qudrat topadilar. Adib o'z ijodida "Bo'ri o'g'li" (1900), "Otalar xudosi" (1901), "Qish farzandlari" (1902), "Xudolar kulganda" (1911), "Janub dengizi hikoyalari" (1911) kabi bir qator hikoyalar to'plamlarini nashr ettirdi. Ulardagi eng qiziqarli hikoyalar o'zbek tiliga ham tarjima qilingan.

Mustaqillik yillarida mamlakatimizda tarjima asarlariga e'tibor yanada ortdi. Agar o'tgan asr davomida ingliz, nemis, fransuz va boshqa adabiyotlardan vositachi til – rus tili orqali tarjimalar qilingan bo'lsa, so'nggi o'n-o'n besh yil ichida xorijiy tillardan o'zbek tiliga bevosita tarjima amaliyoti rivojlandi. Ayniqsa, uyoki buchet tilini mukammal o'zlashtirayotgan yoshlarimiz bevosita tarjimaga qo'l urishmoqda. Natijada jahon klassik va zamonaviy adabiyotdan bevosita o'girilgan o'qishli tarjima asarlar yaratilmoqda.

O'zbekiston Davlat jahon tillari universiteti magistranti Shahlo Obloqulova ham ingliz va amerika adabiyotidan tarjimalarni amalga oshirmoqda. Ushbu kitobchada uning Jek London ijodida muhim o'rin tutuvchi hikoyalari tarjimasi o'rin olgan. Ushbu tarjimalar o'z o'quvchisini topadi, deb o'ylayman. Shahlo Obloqulovaga tarjimonlikning sermashaqqat yo'lida omad tilab qolaman.

**Muhammadjon XOLBEKOV,**  
*filologiya fanlari doktori, professor.*



## TRUST

ALL lines had been cast off, and the Seattle No. 4 was pulling slowly out from the shore. Her decks were piled high with freight and baggage, and swarmed with a heterogeneous company of Indians, dogs, and dog-mushers, prospectors, traders, and homeward-bound gold-seekers. A goodly portion of Dawson lined up on the bank, saying good-by. As the gang-plank came in and the steamer nosed into the stream, the clamor of farewell became deafening. Also, in that eleventh moment, everybody began to remember final farewell messages and to shout them back and forth across the widening stretch of water. Louis Bondell, curling his yellow mustache with one hand and languidly waving the other hand to his friends on shore, suddenly remembered something and sprang to the rail.

«Oh, Fred!» he bawled. «Oh, Fred!»

The «Fred» desired thrust a strapping pair of shoulders through the forefront of the crowd on the bank and tried to catch Louis Bondell's message, who grew red in the face with vain vociferation. Still the water widened between steamboat and shore.

«Hey, you, Captain Scott!» he yelled at the pilot-house. «Stop the boat!»

The gongs clanged, and the big stern wheel reversed, then stopped. All hands on the steamboat

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and on bank took advantage of this respite to exchange final, new, and imperative farewells. More futile than ever was Louis Bondell's effort to make himself heard. The Seattle No. 4 lost way and drifted down-stream, and Captain Scott had to go ahead with her and reverse a second time. His head disappeared inside the pilot-house, coming into view a moment later behind a big megaphone.

Now Captain Scott had a remarkable voice, and the «Shut up!» he launched at the crowd on deck and on shore could have been heard at the top of Moosehide Mountain and as far as Klondike City. This official remonstrance from the pilot-house spread a film of silence over the tumult.

«Now, what do you want to say?» Captain Scott demanded.

«Tell Fred Churchill - he's on the bank there - tell him to go to Macdonald. It's in his safe - a small gripsack of mine. Tell him to get it and bring it out when he comes.»

In the silence Captain Scott bellowed the message ashore through the megaphone:

«You, Fred Churchill, go to Macdonald - in his safe - small gripsack - belongs to Louis Bondell - important! Bring it out when you come! Got it?»

Churchill waved his hand in token that he had got it. In truth, had Macdonald, half a mile away, opened his window, he 'd have got it, too. The tumult of farewell rose again, the gongs clanged, and the Seattle No. 4 went ahead, swung out into



the stream, turned on her heel, and headed down the Yukon, Bondell and Churchill waving farewell and mutual affection to the last.

That was in mid-summer. In the fall of the year, the W. H. Willis started up the Yukon with two hundred homeward-bound pilgrims on board. Among them was Churchill. In his state-room, in the



middle of a clothes-bag, was Louis Bondell's grip. It was a small, stout leather affair, and its weight of forty pounds always made Churchill nervous when he wandered too far from it. The man in the adjoining state-room had a treasure of gold-dust hidden similarly in a clothes-bag, and the pair of them ultimately arranged to stand watch and watch. While one went down to eat, the other kept an eye on the two state-room doors. When Churchill wanted to take a hand at whist, the other man mounted guard, and when the other man wanted to relax his soul, Churchill read four-months'-old newspapers on a camp-stool between the two doors.



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There were signs of an early winter, and the question that was discussed from dawn till dark, and far into the dark, was whether they would get out before the freeze-up or be compelled to abandon the steamboat and tramp out over the ice. There were irritating delays. Twice the engines broke down and had to be tinkered up, and each time there were snow flurries to warn them of the imminence of winter. Nine times the W. H. Willis essayed to ascend the Five-Finger Rapids with here impaired machinery, and when she succeeded, she was four days behind her very liberal schedule. The question that then arose was whether or not the steamboat Flora would wait for her above the Box Cañon. The stretch of water between the head of the Box Cañon and the foot of the White Horse Rapids was unnavigable for steamboats, and passengers were trans-shipped at that point, walking around the rapids from one steamboat to the other. There were no telephones in the country, hence no way of informing the waiting Flora that the Willis was four days late, but coming.

When the W. H. Willis pulled into White Horse, it was learned that the Flora had waited three days over the limit, and had departed only a few hours before. Also, it was learned that she would tie up at Tagish Post till nine o'clock, Sunday morning. It was then four o'clock, Saturday afternoon. The pilgrims called a meeting. On board was a large Peterborough canoe, consigned to the police post

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 at the head of Lake Bennett. They agreed to be responsible for it and to deliver it. Next, they called for volunteers. Two men were needed to make a race for the Flora. A score of men volunteered on the instant. Among them was Churchill, such begin his nature that he volunteered before he thought of Bondell's gripsack. When this thought came to him, he began to hope that he would not be selected; but a man who had made a name as captain of a college foot-ball eleven, as a president of an athletic club, as a dog-musher and a stampeder in the Yukon, and, moreover, who possessed such shoulders as he, had no right to avoid the honor. It was thrust upon him and upon a gigantic German, Nick Antonsen.

While a crowd of the pilgrims, the canoe on their shoulders, started on a trot over the portage, Churchill ran to his state-room. He turned the contents of the clothes-bag on the floor and caught up the grip, with the intention of intrusting it to the man next door. Then the thought smote him that it was not his grip, and that he had no right to let it out of his own possession. So he dashed ashore with it and ran up the portage, changing it often from one hand to the other, and wondering if it really did not weight more than forty pounds.

It was half-past four in the afternoon when the two men started. The current of the Thirty Mile River was so strong that rarely could they use the paddles. It was out on one bank with a tow-line over the shoulders, stumbling over the rocks,



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forcing a way through the underbrush, slipping at times and falling into the water, wading often up to the knees and waist; and then, when an insurmountable bluff was encountered, it was into the canoe, out paddles, and a wild and losing dash across the current to the other bank, in paddles, over the side, and out tow-line again. It was exhausting work. Antonsen toiled like the giant he was, uncomplaining, persistent, but driven to his utmost by the powerful body and indomitable brain of Churchill. They never paused for rest. It was go, go, and keep on going. A crisp wind blew down the river, freezing their hands and making it imperative, from time to time, to beat the blood back, into the numb fingers.

As night came on they were compelled to trust to luck. They fell repeatedly on the untraveled banks and tore their clothing to shreds in the underbrush they could not see. Both men were badly scratched and bleeding. A dozen times, in their wild dashes from bank to bank, they struck snags and were capsized. The first time this happened, Churchill dived and groped in three feet of water for the gripsack. He lost half an hour in recovering it, and after that it was carried securely lashed to the canoe. As long as the canoe floated it was safe. Antonsen jeered at the grip, and toward morning began to curse it; but Churchill vouchsafed no explanations.

Their delays and mischances were endless. On one swift bend, around which poured a healthy



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young rapid, they lost two hours, making a score of attempts and capsizing twice. At this point, on both banks, were precipitous bluffs, rising out of deep water, and along which they could neither tow nor pole, while they could not gain with the paddles against the current. At each attempt they strained to the utmost with the paddles, and each time, with hearts nigh to bursting from the effort, they were played out and swept back. They succeeded finally by an accident. In the swiftest current, near the end of another failure, a freak of the current sheered the canoe out of Churchill's control and flung it against the bluff. Churchill made a blind leap at the bluff and landed in a crevice. Holding on with one hand, he held the swamped canoe with the other till Antonsen dragged himself out of the water. They pulled the canoe out and rested. A fresh start at this crucial point took them by. They landed on the bank above, and plunged immediately ashore and into the brush with the tow-line.

Daylight found them far below Tagish Post. At nine o'clock Sunday morning they could hear the Flora whistling her departure. And when, at ten o'clock, they dragged themselves in to the Post, they could just barely see the Flora's smoke far to the southward. It was a pair of worn-out tatterdemalions that Captain Jones of the Mounted Police welcomed and fed, and he afterward averred that they possessed two of the most tremendous appetites he had ever observed.

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They lay down and slept in their wet rags by the stove. At the end of two hours Churchill got up, carried Bondell's grip, which he had used for a pillow, down to the canoe, kicked Antonsen awake, and started in pursuit of the Flora.

«There's no telling what might happen - machinery break down, or something,» was his reply to Captain Jones's expostulations. «I'm going to catch that steamer and send her back for the boys.»

Tagish Lake was white with a fall gale that blew in their teeth. Big, swinging seas rushed upon the canoe, compelling one man to bail and leaving one man to paddle. Headway could not be made. They ran along the shallow shore and went overboard, one man ahead on the tow-line, the other shoving on the canoe. They fought the gale up to their waists in the icy water, often up to their necks, often over their heads, and buried by the big, crested waves. There was no rest, never a moment's pause from the cheerless, heart-breaking battle. That night, at the head of Tagish Lake, in the thick of a driving snow-squall, they overhauled the Flora. Antonsen fell on board, lay where he had fallen, and snored. Churchill looked like a wild man. His clothes barely clung to him. His face was iced up and swollen from the protracted effort of twenty-four hours, while his hands were so swollen that he could not close the fingers. As for his feet, it was an agony to stand upon them.



The captain of the Flora was loath to go back to White Horse. Churchill was persistent and imperative; the captain was stubborn. He pointed out finally that nothing was to be gained by going back, because the only ocean steamer at Dyea, the Athenian, was to sail on Tuesday morning, and that he could not make the back grip to White Horse and bring up the stranded pilgrims in time to make the connection.

«What time does the Athenian sail?» Churchill demanded.

«Seven o'clock, Tuesday morning.»

«All right,» Churchill said, at the same time kicking a tattoo on the ribs of the snoring Antonsen. «You go back to White Horse. We 'll go ahead and hold the Athenian.»

Antonsen, stupid with sleep, not yet clothed in his waking mind, was bundled into the canoe, and did not realize what had happened till he was drenched with the icy spray of a big sea, and heard Churchill snarling at him through the darkness:

«Paddle, can't you! Do you want to be swamped?»

Daylight found them at Caribou Crossing, the wind dying down, and Antonsen too far gone to dip a paddle. Churchill grounded the canoe on a quite beach, where they slept. He took the precaution of twisting his arm under the weight of his head. Every few minutes the pain of the pent circulation arouse him, whereupon he would look at his watch and twist the other arm under



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his head. At the end of two hours he fought with Antonsen to rouse him. Then they started. Lake Bennett, thirty miles in length, was like a mill-pond; but, half-way across, a gale from the south smote them and turned the water white. Hour after hour they repeated the struggle on Tagish, over the side, pulling and shoving on the canoe, up to their waists and necks, and over their heads in the icy water; toward the last the good-natured giant played completely out. Churchill drove him mercilessly; but when he pitched forward and bade fair to drown in three feet of water, the other dragged him into the canoe. After that, Churchill fought on alone, arriving at the police post at the head of Bennett in the early afternoon. He tried to help Antonsen out of the canoe, but failed. He listened to the exhausted man's heavy breathing, and envied him when he thought of what he himself had yet to undergo. Antonsen could lie there and sleep; but he, behind time, must go on over mighty Chilcat and down to the sea. The real struggle lay before him, and he almost regretted the strength that resided in his frame because of the torment it could inflict upon that frame.

Churchill pulled the canoe up on the beach, seized Bondell's grip, and started on a limping dog-trot for the police post.

«There's a canoe down there, consigned to you from Dawson,» he hurled at the officer who answered his knock. «And there's a man in it pretty near dead. Nothing serious; only played

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out. Take care of him. I've got to rush. Good-by. Want to catch the Athenian.»

A mile portage connected Lake Bennett and Lake Linderman, and his last word he flung back after him as he resumed the trot. It was a very painful trot, but he clenched his teeth and kept on, forgetting his pain most of the time in the fervent heat with which he regarded the gripsack. It was a severe handicap. He swung it from one hand to the other, and back again. He tucked it under his arm. He threw one hand over the opposite shoulder, and the bag bumped and pounded on his back as he ran along. He could scarcely hold it in his bruised and swollen fingers, and several times he dropped it. Once, in changing from one hand to the other, it escaped his clutch and fell in front of him, tripped him up, and threw him violently to the ground.

At the far end of the portage he bought an old set of pack-straps for a dollar, and in them he swung the grip. Also, he chartered a launch to run him the six miles to the upper end of Lake Linderman, where he arrived at four in the afternoon. The Athenian was to sail from Dyea next morning at seven. Dyea was twenty-eight miles away, and between towered Chilcat. He sat down to adjust his foot-gear for the long climb, and woke up. He had dozed the instant he sat down, though he had not slept thirty seconds. He was afraid his next doze might be longer, so he finished fixing his foot-gear standing up. Even then he was overpowered



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for a fleeting moment. He experienced the flash of unconsciousness; becoming aware of it, in mid-air, as his relaxed body was sinking to the ground, and as he caught himself together, stiffened his muscles with a spasmodic wrench, and escaped the fall. The sudden jerk back to consciousness left him sick and trembling. He beat his head with the heel of his hand, knocking wakefulness into the numb brain.

Jack Burn's pack-train was starting back light for Crater Lake, and Churchill was invited to a mule. Burns wanted to put the gripsack on another animal, but Churchill held on to it, carrying it on the saddle-pommel. But he dozed, and the grip persisted in dropping off the pommel, one side or the other, each time wakening him with a sickening start. Then, in the early darkness, Churchill's mule brushed him against a projecting branch that laid his cheek open. To cap it, the mule blundered off the trail and fell, throwing rider and gripsack out upon the rocks. After that, Churchill walked, or stumbled, rather, over the apology for a trail, leading the mule. Stray and awful odors, drifting from each side the trail, told of the horses that had died in the rush for gold. But he did not mind. He was too sleepy. By the time Long Lake was reached, however, he had recovered from his sleepiness; and at Deep Lake he resigned the gripsack to Burns. But thereafter, by the light of the dim stars, he kept his eyes on Burns. There were not going to be any accidents with that bag.

At Crater Lake the pack-train went into camp, and Churchill, slinging the grip on his back, started the steep climb for the summit. For the first time, on that precipitous wall, he realized how tired he was. He crept and crawled like a crab, burdened by the weight of his limbs. A distinct and painful effort of will was required each time he lifted a foot. A hallucination came to him that he was shod with lead, like a deep-sea diver, and it was all he could do to resist the desire to reach down and feel the lead. As for Bondell's gripsack, it was inconceivable that forty pounds could weigh so much. It pressed him down like a mountain, and he looked back with unbelief to the year before, when he had climbed that same pass with a hundred and fifty pounds on his back. If those loads had weighed a hundred and fifty pounds, then Bondesll's grip weighed five hundred.

The first rise of the divide from Crater Lake was across a small glacier. Here was a well-defined trail. But above the glacier, which was also above the timber-line, was naught but a chaos of naked rock and enormous boulders. There was no way of seeing the trail in the darkness, and he blundered on, paying thrice the ordinary exertion for all that he accomplished. He won the summit in the thick of howling wind and driving snow, providentially stumbling upon a small, deserted tent, into which he crawled. There he found and bolted some ancient fried potatoes and half a dozen raw eggs.

When the snow ceased and the wind eased



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down, he began the almost impossible descent. There was no trail, and he stumbled and blundered, often finding himself, at the last moment, on the edge of rocky walls and steep slopes the depth of which he had no way of judging. Part way down, the stars clouded over again, and in the consequent obscurity he slipped and rolled and slid for a hundred feet, landing bruised and bleeding on the bottom of a large, shallow hole. From all about him arose the stench of dead horses. The hole was handy to the trail, and the packers had made a practice of tumbling into it their broken and dying animals. The stench overpowered him, making him deathly sick, and as in a nightmare he scrambled out. Half-way up, he recollected Bondell's gripsack. It had fallen into the hole with him; the pack-strap had evidently broken, and he had forgotten it. Back he went into the pestilential charnel-pit, where he crawled around on hands and knees and vainly groped for half an hour. Altogether he encountered and counted seventeen dead horses (and one horse still alive that he shot with his revolver), before he found Bondell's grip. Looking back upon a life that had not been without valor and achievement, he unhesitatingly declared to himself that this return after the grip was the most heroic act he had ever performed. So heroic was it that he was twice on the verge of fainting before he crawled out of the hole.  
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By this time, he had descended to the Scales, the steep pitch of Chilcat was past, and the way became easier. Not that it was an easy way, however, in the best of places; but it became a really possible trail, along which he could have made good time if he had not been worn out, if he had had light with which to pick his steps, and if it had not been for Bondell's gripsack. To him, in his exhausted condition, it was the last straw. Having barely strength to carry himself along, the additional weight of the grip was sufficient to throw him nearly every time he tripped or stumbled. And when he escaped tripping, branches reached out in the darkness, hooked the grip between his shoulders, and held him back.

His mind was made up that if he missed the Athenian it would be the fault of the gripsack. In fact, only two things remained in his consciousness - Bondell's grip and the steamer. He knew only those two things, and they became identified, in a way, with some stern mission upon which he had journeyed and toiled for centuries. He walked and struggled on as in a dream. As part of the dream was his arrival at Sheep Camp. He stumbled into a saloon, slid his shoulders out of the straps, and started to deposit the grip at his feet. But it slipped from his fingers and struck the floor with a heavy thud that was not unnoticed by two men who were just leaving. Churchill drank a glass of whisky, told the barkeeper to call him in ten minutes, and sat down, his feet on the grip, his head on his knees.



So badly did his misused body stiffen, that when he was called it required another ten minutes and a second glass of whisky to unbend his joints and limber up the muscles.

«Hey! not that way!» the barkeeper shouted, and then went after him and started him through the darkness toward Canyon City. Some little husk of inner consciousness told Churchill that the direction was right, and, still as in a dream, he took the cañon trail. He did not know what warned him, but, after what seemed several centuries of traveling, he sensed danger and drew his revolver. Still in the dream, he saw two men step out and heard them halt him. His revolver went off four times, and he saw the flashes and heard the explosions of their revolvers. Also, he was aware that he had been hit in the thigh. He saw one man go down, and, as the other came for him, he smashed him a straight blow with the heavy revolver full in the face. Then he turned and ran. He came from the dream shortly afterward, to find himself plunging down the trail at a limping lope. His first thought was for the gripsack. It was still on his back. He was convinced that what had happened was a dream till he felt for his revolver and found it gone. Next he became aware of a sharp stinging of his thigh, and, after investigating, he found his hand warm with blood. It was a superficial wound, but it was incontestable. He became wider awake, and kept up the lumbering run to Canyon City.

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He found a man, with a team of horses and a wagon, who got out of bed and harnessed up for twenty dollars. Churchill crawled in on the wagon-bed and slept, the gripsack still on his back. It was a rough ride, over water-washed boulders down the Dyea Valley; but he roused only when the wagon hit the highest places. Any altitude of his body above the wagon-bed of less than a foot did not faze him. The last mile was smooth going, and he slept soundly.

He came to in the gray dawn, the driver shaking him savagely and howling into his ear that the Athenian was gone. Churchill looked blankly at the deserted harbor.

«There's a smoke over a Skauguay,» the man said.

Churchill's eyes were too swollen to see that far, but he said: «It's she. Get me a boat.»

The driver was obliging, and found a skiff and a man to row it for ten dollars, payment in advance. Churchill paid, and was helped into the skiff. It was beyond him to get in by himself. It was six miles to Skaguay, and he had a blissful thought of sleeping those six miles. But the man did not know how to row, and Churchill took the oars and toiled for a few more centuries. He never knew six longer and more excruciating miles. A snappy little breeze blew up the inlet and held him back. He had a gone feeling at the pit of the stomach, and suffered from faintness and numbness. At his command, the man took the bailer and threw salt water into his face.



The Athenian's anchor was up-and-down when they came alongside, and Churchill was at the end of his last remnant of strength.

«Stop her! Stop her!» he shouted hoarsely. «Important message! Stop her!»

Then he dropped his chin on his chest and slept. When half a dozen men started to carry him up the gang-plank, he awoke, reached for the grip, and clung to it like a drowning man.

On deck he became a center of horror and curiosity. The clothing in which he had left White Horse was represented by a few rags, and he was as frayed as his clothing. He had traveled for forty-five hours at the top notch of endurance. He had slept six hours in that time, and he was twenty pounds lighter than when he started. Face and hands and body were scratched and bruised, and he could scarcely see. He tried to stand up, but failed, sprawling out on the deck, hanging on to the gripsack, and delivering his message.

«Now, put me to bed,» he finished; «I 'll eat when I wake up.»

They did him honor, carrying him down in his rags and dirt and depositing him and Bondell's grip in the bridal chamber, which was the biggest and most luxurious state-room in the ship. Twice he slept the clock around, and he had bathed and shaved and eaten and was leaning over the rail smoking a cigar when two hundred pilgrims from White Horse came alongside.

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By the time the Athenian arrived in Seattle, Churchill had fully recuperated, and he went ashore with Bondell's grip in his hand. He felt proud of that grip. To him it stood for achievement and integrity and trust. «I 've delivered the goods,» was the way he expressed these various high terms to himself. It was early in the evening, and he went straight to Bondell's home. Louis Bondell was glad to see him, shaking hands with both hands at the same time and dragging him into the house.

«Oh, thanks, old man; it was good of you to bring it out,» Bondell said when he received the gripsack.

He tossed it carelessly upon a couch, and Churchill noted with an appreciative eye the rebound of its weight from the springs. Bondell was volleying him with questions.

«How did you make out? How 're the boys? What became of Bill Smithers? Is Del Bishop still with Pierce? Did he sell my dogs? How did Sulphur Bottom show up? You 're looking fine. What steamer did you come out on?»

To all of which Churchill gave answer, till half an hour had gone by and the first lull in the conversation had arrived.

«Hadn't you better take a look at it?» he suggested, nodding his head at the gripsack.

«Oh, it's all right,» Bondell answered. «Did Mitchell's dump turn out as much as he expected?»

«I think you 'd better look at it,» Churchill



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insisted. «When I deliver a thing, I want to be satisfied that it's all right. There's always the chance that somebody might have got into it when I was asleep, or something.»

«It's nothing important, old man,» Bondell answered, with a laugh.

«Nothing important,» Churchill echoed in a faint, small voice. Then he spoke with decision: «Louis, what 's in that bag? I want to know.»

Louis looked at him curiously, then left the room and returned with a bunch of keys. He inserted his hand and drew out a heavy 44 Colt's revolver. Next came out a few boxes of ammunition for the revolver and several boxes of Winchester cartridges.

«Churchill took the gripsack and looked into it. Then he turned it upside down and shook it gently.

«The gun's all rusted,» Bondell said. «Must have been out in the rain.»

«Yes,» Churchill answered. «Too bad it got wet. I guess I was a bit careless.»

He got up and went outside. Ten minutes later Louis Bondell went out and found him on the steps, sitting down, elbows on knees and chin on hands, gazing steadfastly out into the darkness.

## AN OLD SOLDIER'S STORY

*(A real incident which occurred in the life of the writer's father.)*

THE TIMES were strange then, and at the front was not the only place to have adventures. During the war, some of the most stirring scenes I took part in were right at home. You see that old Colt's revolver which hangs by my sword? I carried it through my five years in the army, and more than once it helped me out of a bad scrape.

In '63 I went home on 30 days' furlough to see my people, also to get recruits. I was quite successful, and by the time my furlough was up, had found between 25 and 30 men who were willing to enlist. There was one young man I had tried hard to get, and though he was willing, his father stubbornly refused to let him go. The only reason he had for refusing was that corn-husking was not yet over and his son Hiram was needed for the work. The only reason which finally caused him to give his consent was the bounty. They were offering a thousand dollars for every man who would join the army, and Hiram promised to turn every cent of it over to his father. So old Zack said he would agree if I would turn in and help with the husking.

My 30 days' furlough was up, but I was young and thoughtless in those days, and paid no heed to it. I knew the other recruits wished to stay till



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after corn-husking, and besides, felt that nothing would be done to me when I came back to my regiment with 30 stalwart lads. So I pitched in, and in two weeks all Old Zack's corn was husked and I was ready to start.

The tickets were bought, and the next morning we were ready to take the train at Rock Island for Quincy. There the men were to be sworn in and would receive their bounties, while our township would be credited with so many recruits. But in overstaying my furlough I had forgotten one thing—the provost marshal. These marshals were men who were looked down upon and despised worse than the dog-catchers. Their duty was to arrest deserters, and since their pay was \$25 for every deserter captured, you can see they never let a chance slip. If they had only arrested real deserters, the people would not have dislike them so, but they were always bringing trouble upon good, honest soldiers whose only fault lay in being a little careless and staying too long at home. The provost marshal in our county was shrewd, brave as a lion, and as mean a man as one could meet in a whole day's travel. Only a short time before, Tommy Jingles had come home from my regiment and thoughtlessly over-stayed his furlough. On the third day, just as he was boarding the train at Rock Island to go back to the army, Davy McGregor captured him and sent him back under arrest. The \$25 reward and the expenses were taken from poor Tommy's pay, and Tommy

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with never a thought of deserting. And this was not the only instance in which Davy McGregor had behaved so meanly.

But to return to my story. It was my last night at home, and I was dreaming of war and battles. I had been thrown forward with a cloud of skirmishers. The musketry was rattling about like hail, and we were storming the first outpost, when I heard a loud rap at the door and was awake on the instant. «Come out, Simon, I want you.»

It was Davy's voice, and I well know what he wanted me for. I made no answer, however, and began to silently dress. His knocking soon roused the house, and by the time I was dressed my sister came slipping into the room. I told her in whispers that to do. She went to the door and talked with Davy, but would not open it. He became suspicious, and I could hear him creeping around the house so as to have an eye on the kitchen door. You see, he was certain I was in the house, and thought I would most likely come out that way. Kissing father and mother and sister, I asked them to say good-bye to the boys, and carefully opened the front door. It was moonlight, and Davy was, as I suspected, keeping watch at the rear of the house. With my shoes in my hand, taking advantage of every shadow and scarcely daring to breathe, I crawled to the barn. I saddled father's big black stallion, and when all was ready, came out of the barn like a cannon shot.

Davy ran to the road and halted me as I came



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up on the dead lope, my cocked Colt's in my hand. He blocked my path, ordering me to halt and flourishing his pistols. On I came straight at him, and would surely have run him down, had he not sprung aside, blazing right and left at me as I went by. I knew he would do this, and ducked to the off-side of my horse, but not quickly enough, for a burning pain told me where his first bullet had plowed across my scalp.

On and away, with Rock Island 28 miles before me, I dashed like the wind. Davy, always well mounted, was hot after me. But our horses were evenly matched. At first he took flying shots at me as we rounded the bends, but he soon gave that up. Mile after mile flew by, and I was just beginning to feel sure of escape, when I met with an accident. Dawn was breaking as I plunged into a stretch of woods where it was yet as black as night. The road was heavy at that place, and the horse's hoofs made no sound. Suddenly, out of the darkness and from the opposite direction, leaped a horse and rider. Too late to avoid the shock, our horses struck breast on. The strange steed and rider were hurled to the ground, while I was not badly hurt. But father's stallion was strong. He shook himself, groaned, and sprang away on the gallop.

Still he had been badly hurt, and I saw that he was losing his speed. Davy slowly overhauled me. Soon he was alongside, trying to seize my rein. He had emptied his pistols, so could not shoot.

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Again and again I drew a bead on him with my loaded Colt's, but he was a brave man, refusing to be frightened. I did not wish to shoot him, but I think I would have done it rather than have the disgrace of deserter put upon me. You see, instead of running away, I was trying to run back to the army—a funny thing for a real deserter to do. But I did not shoot, not intending to use my revolver unless I had to.

Then we galloped, side by side, for at least 10 or 12 miles. Little by little my horse gave out and the last mile he made, Davy had to hold his horse in to keep him from running away from me. Every time he tried to catch my bridle I struck at his hand with my heavy revolver, and he soon gave that up. I felt that the stallion could not last much longer, and know I must do something to escape unearned disgrace. Now I am and always was a mild man, full of pity for dumb animals, but necessity forced me to do what I did. I played a trick I had learned out west. It is called «creasing,» and is often used on wild horses. They shoot them so the bullet just grazes the top of the neck. But it does not hurt the horse. It just stuns him and in a few minutes he is as good as ever.

Quick as a flash I leaned out of the saddle, placed the muzzle of my revolver on the nape of the neck of Davy's horse, and pulled the trigger. Down he went with a crash, throwing Davy over his head. Yet Davy was on his feet instantly, and my poor horse could barely keep away from him as he ran after me on foot.



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I looked at my watch. I could catch the first train, and Rock Island was only five miles away. My horse could not make those five miles and I did not know what to do. Davy gave me the idea, however. Coming around a turn in the road, I barely missed running into a farmer's wagon going to town. Not 20 feet away was another, going in the same direction. Davy stopped the first one and began to cut the traces—this was the idea. I halted the second one, which was driven by a woman, and explained as I did likewise. And she was willing for she knows all about the provost marshal. We finished and mounted at the same time, with myself 20 feet in the lead. Yet fortune seemed to favor him, for his horse was a little the better of the two. But he had neglected to cut the traces quite short though, and the horse, stepping upon them, was thrown.



This gave me several hundred feet, and I was still leading by several lengths when we entered Rock Island. How we startled the city! Down the

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main street we thundered, while the people, who all hated the provost marshal, cheered me on. We barely missed a dozen collisions, and galloped into the depot, where the train was just ready to start. I rode through the crowd as far as I dared; the dismounted and made a dash for the steps. You can guess how the people gave room for a wild hatless soldier, flourishing a huge revolver.

Persevering Davy was right behind, and I had to face about and keep him off with my pistol. It was not loaded, but he did not know that. I backed away from him, threatening to pull the trigger if he laid hand on me. The crowd began to take my part, and to hoot and jeer the provost marshal. «Hurrah for the soldier!» they cried. «Down with the provost marshal!» «Shoot him, soldier, shoot him!» «Who arrested poor Tommy Jingles?» «Davy McGregor, the black-hearted provost.» «Hurrah for the boy in blue!»

So they kept it up, getting in his way and pushing and shoving him about. Then they became rough, and as I backed up the steps to the platform, they were stepping on his toes, pulling his coat-tails and twisting him about like a football. The conductor gave the signal, and with a last cheer from the crowd, the train pulled out for Quincy. There I met my recruits later in the day. And when I brought my sturdy lads into the regiment and told all about it, the colonel said, «Well done, Simon, and at this rate I think you have well earned a second leave of absence.»



## A NORTHLAND MIRACLE

This is a story of things that happened, which goes to show that there is an eternal core of goodness in the hearts of all men. Bertram Cornell was a bad man, and a failure. In a little English home overseas there had been sorrow unavailing and tears shed in vain for his earthly and spiritual welfare. He was bad, utterly bad. There could be no doubt of it. Thoughtless, careless and uncaring were mild terms with which to brand his weaknesses.

Even in his boyhood he had been strong only for evil. Kind words and pleadings had no effect on him, and he had been callous to the wet eyes of his mother and sisters and the sterner though no less kindly admonitions of his father. So it could hardly have been otherwise, when yet a very young man, that he fled hurriedly out of his home in England, carrying with him something which should have burdened his conscience had he but possessed one, and leaving behind a disgrace on his name for his people to bear. And so it was that those who had known him spoke of him in bitterness and sadness, until the memory of him was dimmed with time. Of what further evils he wrought there was never a whisper, and of his end no one ever heard. In his last hour he made recompense and wiped clean his tarnished page of life. But he did this thing in a far country,

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 where news travels slowly and gets lost upon the way, and where men oftentimes die before they can tell how others died. But this was the way of it. Strong of body and uncaring, he had laughed at the great rough hand of the world and had always done, not what the world demanded, but whatever Bertram Cornell desired. And he had met harsh words with harsher, and stout blows with stouter. He had served as sailor on many seas, as shepherd on the Australian ranges, as cowboy among the Dakota cattlemen, and as an enrolled private with the Mounted Police of the Northwest Territory. From this last post he had deserted on the discovery of gold in the Klondike and worked his way to the Alaskan coast. Here, because of his frontier experience, he speedily found place to fit into in a party of three other men.

This party was bound for the Klondike, but it had planned to abandon the beaten track and to go into the country over a new and untraveled route. With a pack train of many horses (cayuses from the mountains of eastern Oregon), the four men struck east into the desolate wilderness which lies beyond Mount St. Elias, and then north through the upland region in which the headwaters of the White and Tanana rivers have their source. It was an unexplored domain, marked vaguely on the maps, which was yet to feel the foot of the first white man. So vast and dismal was it that even animal life was scarce, and the tiny Indian tribes few and far between. For days, sometimes,



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they rode through the silent forest of by the rims of lonely lakes and saw no living thing, heard no sound save the sighing of the wind and the sobbing of the waters. A great solemnity brooded over the land, and the quiet was so profound that they came to hush their voices and to waste few words in idle talk.

AS they journeyed on they prospected for the hidden gold, groping in the chill pools of the torrents and panning dirt in the shadows of the mighty glaciers. Once they came upon a body of virgin copper, like a mountain, but they could only shrug their shoulders and pass on. Food for their horses was scarce, and quite often poisonous, and the patient animals died one by one on the strange trail their masters had led them to. Crossing a high divide, the party was overwhelmed by a sleety storm common to such elevations, and, when finally, they struggled through to the warmer valley beneath, the last horse had been left behind.

But here, in the sheltered valley, John Thornton cleared back the moss and from the grassroots shook out glittering particles of yellow gold. Bertram Cornell was with him at the time, and that night the twain carried back to camp nuggets which weighed a thousand dollars in the scales. A stop was called, and at the end of a month the four men had mined a treasure far greater than they could carry. But their food supply had been steadily growing less and less, till one man could

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bend forward and bear it all on his back.

What with the bleak region and fall coming on, it was high time to be going along. Somewhere to the northeast they knew the Klondike lay and the country of the Yukon. How far they did not know, though they thought it could not be more than a hundred miles. So each took about five pounds of gold, or a thousand dollars, and the rest of the great treasure they cached safely against their return. And to return they intended just as soon as they could lay in more grub. Their ammunition having given out, they left their rifles with the gold, burdening themselves only with the camp equipage and the scant supply of food.

So sure were they that they would shortly reach the gold diggings, that they ate unsparingly of the provisions; so that on the tenth day they found but a few miserable pounds remaining. And still before them, in up-heaved earth-waves, range upon range, towered the great grim mountains. Then it was that doubt came, and fear settled upon the men, and Bill Hines began to ration out the food.

THEY no longer ate at midday, and morning and evening he divided the day's allowance into four meager portions. It was evenly shared, but it was very little – enough to keep soul and body together, but not enough to furnish the proper strength to healthy toiling men. Their faces grew wan and haggard, and day by day they covered less ground. Often the nausea of emptiness seized



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them, and their knees shook with weakness, and they reeled and fell. And always, when they had gasped and dragged themselves to the crest of a jagged mountain pass and eagerly looked beyond, another mountain confronted them. And always the brooding peace lay heavy over the land, and there was nothing but the loneliness and silence without end.

ONE by one, they threw away their blankets and spare clothes. They dropped their axes by the way, and the spare cooking utensils, and even the sacks of gold dust, until at last they staggered onward, half-naked, unburdened save for the pittance of grub that remained. This, Jan Jensen, the Dane, divided by weight into four parts so that the burden might be equally distributed. And each man, by the holy though unwritten and unspoken bonds of comradeship, held sacred that which he carried on his back. The small grub-packs were never opened except by the light of the campfire, where all could see and where just division was made.

Of bacon they possessed one three-pound chunk, which John Thornton carried in addition to a few cups of flour. This one piece they were saving for the very last, when the need would be greatest, and they resolutely refrained from touching it. But Bertram Cornell cast hungry eyes upon it and thought hungry thoughts. And in the night, while his comrades slept the sleep of exhaustion, he unstrapped John Thornton's pack

and robbed it of the bacon; and all through the hours till dawn, taking care lest the unaccustomed quantity turn his stomach, he munched and chewed and swallowed it, bit by bit, till nothing at all of it was left.

ON the day which followed he took good care to hide the new strength which had come to him of the night and, if anything, appeared weaker than the rest. It was a very hard day; John Thornton lagged behind and rested often; but by nightfall they had cleared another mountain and beheld the opening of a small river valley beneath, running to the eastward. To the eastward! There lay the Klondike and safety! A few more days, could they but manage to live through them, they would be among white men and grub-caches again.

But, huddled by the fire, the starving men looking greedily on, Bill Hines opened Thornton's pack to get some flour. In an instant each eye had noted the absence of the bacon. Thornton's eyes stared in horror, and Hines dropped the pack and sobbed aloud. But Jan Jensen drew his hunting knife and spoke. His voice was low and husky, almost a whisper, but each word fell slowly from his lips, and distinctly.

«My comrades, this is murder. This man has slept with us and shared with us in all fairness. When we divided all the grub by weight, each man carried on his back the lives of his comrades. And so did this man carry our lives on his back. It was a trust, a great trust, a sacred trust. He has not



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been true to it. Today, when he dropped behind, we thought he was weary. We were mistaken. Behold! He has eaten that which was ours, upon which our very lives were hanging. There is no other name for it than murder. For murder there is one punishment, and only one. Am I not right, my comrades?»

«Ay!» Bill Hines cried; but Bertram Cornell remained silent. He had not expected this.

Jan Jensen raised the long-bladed knife to strike, but Cornell gripped his wrist. «Let me speak,» he demanded.

Thornton staggered slowly to his feet and said, «It is not right that I should die. I did not eat the bacon; nor could I have lost it. I know nothing about it. But I swear solemnly by the most high God that I have neither touched nor tasted the bacon!»

«If you were sneak enough to eat it, certainly you are sneak enough to lie about it now,» Jensen charged, fingering the knife impatiently.

«Leave him alone, I tell you,» threatened Cornell. «We don't



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 know that he ate it. We know nothing about it. And I warn you, I won't stand by and see murder done. There is a chance that he is not guilty. Don't trifle with that chance. You dare not punish him on a chance.»

The angry Dane sheathed the blade, but an hour later, when Thornton happened to speak to him, he turned his back. Bill Hines also refused to hold conversation with the wretched man, while Cornell, already ashamed for the good which had fluttered in him (the first in years), would have nothing to do with him.



THE next morning Bill Hines lumped the little remaining food together and redivided it into four parts. From Thornton's portion he subtracted

the equivalent of the bacon, which same he shared among the other three piles. This he did without a word; the act was too significant to need speech.

«And let him carry his own grub,» Jensen growled. «If he wants to eat it all at once, he's welcome to.»



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What John Thornton suffered in the days which followed, only John Thornton knows. Not only did his comrades turn from him with abhorrent faces, but he was judged guilty of the blackest and most cowardly of crimes—that of treason. And further, eating less than they, he was forced to keep up with them or perish. Even then, when he had eaten his very last pinch, they had food left for two days. So he cut the leather tops from his moccasins and boiled them and ate them and during the day chewed the bark of willow-shoots till the pain of his swollen and inflamed mouth nearly drove him mad. And he dragged onward, staggering, falling, crawling, as often in delirium as not.

But the day came when the three other men fell back upon their moccasins and the green shoots of young trees. By this time, they had followed the torrent down until it had become a small river, and they were counseling desperately the gathering of the drift-logs into a rickety raft. Then it was that they came unexpectedly upon an Indian village of a dozen lodges. But the Indians had never seen white men before and greeted them with a shower of arrows. «See! The river! Canoes!» Jensen cried. «We're saved if we can make them! We must make them!»

They ran, drunkenly, toward the bank, the howling tribesmen on their heels and gaining. Suddenly, from behind a tree to one side, a skin-clad warrior stepped forth. He poised his great

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 ivory-pointed spear for a moment, then cast it with perfect aim. Singing and hurtling through the air, it drove full into John Thornton's hips. He wavered for a second, tripped and fell forward on his face. Hines and Jensen, running just behind him, swerved to the right and left and passed him on either side.

THEN the miracle came to pass. The spirit of Goodness fluttered mightily in Bertram Cornell's breast. Without thought, obeying the inward prompting, he sprang forward on the instant and seized the fleeing men by the arms.

«Come back!» he cried hoarsely. «Carry Thornton to the canoes! I'll hold the Indians back until you shove clear!»

«Leave go!» the Dane screamed, fumbling for his knife. «I wouldn't touch the dog to save my life!»

«I stole the bacon. I ate the bacon. Now will you come back?» Cornell saw the doubt in their eyes. «As I hope for mercy at the Judgment Seat, I stole it.» A flight of arrows fell about them like rain. «Hurry! I'll hold them back!»

In a trice they were staggering toward the canoes with the wounded man between them; but Bertram Cornell faced about and stood still. Surprised by this action, the Indians hesitated and halted, while Cornell, seeing that it was gaining time, made no motion. They discharged a shower of arrows at him. The bone-barbed missiles flew about him like hail.



Half a dozen arrows entered his chest and legs, and one pinned into his neck. But he yet stood upright and still as a carved statue. The warrior who flung the spear at Thornton approached him from the side, and they closed together in each other's arms. At this the rest of the tribesmen came down upon him in a flood of war.

AS they cut and hacked, he heard Jan Jensen shouting from the water, and he knew that his comrades were safe. Then he fought the good fight, the first for a good cause in all his life, and the last. But when all was still, the Indians drew back in superstitious awe. With him lay their chief and six of their fellows.

Though he had lived without honor, thus he died, like a man, brave and repentant, and rectifying evil. Nor was his body dishonored. For that he fought greatly, and slew their own chieftain, they respected him and gave him a warrior's burial. And because they were a simple people, who had never seen white men, they were wont to speak of him, as the seasons passed, as «the strange god who came down out of the sky to die.»

## HOUSEKEEPING IN THE KLONDIKE

Housekeeping in the Klondike - that's bad! And by men - worse. Reverse the propositions, if you will, yet you will fail to mitigate, even by a hair's-breadth, the woe of it. It is bad, for a man to keep house, and it is equally bad to keep house in the Klondike. That's the sum and substance of it. Of course men will be men, and especially is this true of the kind who wander off to the frozen rim of the world. The glitter of gold is in their eyes, they are borne along by uplifting ambition, and in their hearts is a great disdain for everything in the culinary department save «grub.» «Just so long as it's grub,» they say, coming in off trail, gaunt and ravenous, «grub, and piping hot.» Nor do they manifest the slightest regard for the genesis of the same; they prefer to begin at «revelations.»

Yes, it would seem a pleasant task to cook for such men; but just let them lie around cabin to rest up for a week, and see with what celerity they grow high-stomached and make sarcastic comments on the way you fry the bacon or boil the coffee. And behold how each will spring his own strange and marvelous theory as to how sour-dough bread should be mixed and baked. Each has his own recipe (formulated, mark you, from personal experience only), and to him it is an idol of brass, like unto no other man's, and he'll fight for it - ay, down to the last wee pinch of soda -



and if need be, die for it. If you should happen to catch him on trail, completely exhausted, you may blacken his character, his flag, and his ancestral tree with impunity; but breathe the slightest whisper against his sour-dough bread, and he will turn upon and rend you.

From this is may be gathered what an unstable thing sour dough is. Never was coquette so fickle. You cannot depend upon it. Still, it is the simplest thing in the world. Make a batter and place it near the stove (that it may not freeze) till it ferments or sours. Then mix the dough with it, and sweeten with soda to taste - of course replenishing the batter for next time. There it is. Was there ever anything simpler? But, oh, the tribulations of the cook! It is never twice the same. If the batter could only be placed away in an equable temperature, all well and good. If one's comrades did not interfere, much vexation of spirit might be avoided. But this cannot be; for Tom fires up the stove till the cabin

is become  
like the  
hot-room  
of a Turkish  
bath; Dick  
forgets all  
about the  
fire till the  
place is a  
refrigerator;  
then along







comes Harry and shoves the sour-dough bucket right against the stove to make way for the drying of this mittens. Now heat is a most potent factor in accelerating the fermentation of flour and water, and hence the unfortunate cook is constantly in disgrace with

Tom, Dick, and Harry. Last week his bread was yellow from a plethora of soda; this week it is sour from a prudent lack of the same; and next week - ah, who can tell save the god of the fire-box?

Some cooks aver that they have so cultivated their olfactory organs that they can tell to the fraction of a degree just how sour the batter is. Nevertheless, they have never been known to bake two batches of bread which were at all alike. But this fact casts not the slightest shadow upon the infallibility of their theory. One and all, they take advantage of circumstances, and meanly crawl



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out by laying the blame upon the soda, which was dampened «the time the canoe overturned,» or upon the flour, which they got in trade from «that half-breed fellow with the dogs.»

The pride of the Klondike cook in his bread is something which passes understanding. The highest commendatory degree which can be passed upon a man in that country, and the one which distinguishes him from the tenderfoot, is that of being a «sour-dough boy.» Never was a college graduate prouder of his «sheepskin» than the old-timer of this appellation. There is a certain distinction about it, from which the new-comer is invidiously excluded. A tenderfoot with his baking-powder is an inferior creature, a freshman; but a «sour-dough boy» is a man of stability, a post-graduate in that art of arts - bread-making.

Next to bread a Klondike cook strives to achieve distinction by his doughnuts. This may appear frivolous at first glance, and at second, considering the materials with which he works, an impossible feat. But doughnuts are all-important to the man who goes on a trail for a journey of any length. Bread freezes easily, and there is less grease and sugar, and hence less heat in it, than in doughnuts. The latter do not solidify except at extremely low temperatures, and they are very handy to carry in the pockets of a Mackinaw jacket and munch as one travels along. They are made much after the manner of their brethren in warmer climes, with

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the exception that they are cooked in bacon grease - the more grease, the better they are. Sugar is the cook's chief stumbling-block; if it is very scarce, why, add more grease. The men never mind - on trail. In the cabin? - well, that's another matter; besides, bread is good enough for them then.

The cold, the silence, and the darkness somehow seem to be considered the chief woes of the Klondiker. But this is all wrong. There is one woe which overshadows all others - the lack of sugar. Every party which goes north signifies a manly intention to do without sugar, and after it gets there bemoans itself upon its lack of foresight. Man can endure hardship and horror with equanimity, but take from him his sugar, and he raises his lamentations to the stars. And the worst of it is that it all falls back upon the long-suffering cook. Naturally, coffee, and mush, and dried fruit, and rice, eaten without sugar, do not taste exactly as they should. A certain appeal to the palate is missing. Then the cook is blamed for his vile concoctions. Yet, if he be a man of wisdom, he may judiciously escape the major part of this injustice. When he places a pot of mush upon the table, let him see to it that it is accompanied by a pot of stewed dried apples or peaches. This propinquity will suggest the combination to the men, and the flatness of the one will be neutralized by the sharpness of the other. In the distress of a sugar famine, if he be a cook of parts, he will boil rice and fruit together in one pot; and if he cooks





a dish of rice and prunes properly, of a verity he will cheer up the most melancholy member of the party, and extract from him great gratitude.

Such a cook must indeed be a man of resources. Should his comrades cry out that vinegar be placed upon the beans, and there is no vinegar, he must know how to make it out of water, dried apples, and brown paper. He obtains the last from the bacon-wrappings, and it is usually saturated with grease. But that does not matter. He will early learn that in the land of low temperatures it is impossible for bacon grease to spoil anything. It is to the white man what blubber and seal oil are to the Eskimo. Soul-winning gravies may be made from it by the addition of water and browned flour over the fire. Some cooks base far-reaching fame solely upon their gravy, and their names come to be on the lips of men wherever they forgather at the feast. When the candles give out, the cook fills a sardine-can with bacon grease, manufactures a wick out of the carpenter's sail-twine, and behold!



the slush-lamp stands complete. It goes by another and less complimentary name in the vernacular, and, next to sour-dough bread, is responsible for more men's souls than any other single cause of degeneracy in the Klondike.

The ideal cook should also possess a Semitic incline to his soul. Initiative in his art is not the only requisite; he must keep an eye upon the variety of his larder. He must «swap» grub with the gentile understandingly; and woe unto him should the balance of trade be against him. His comrades will thrust it into his teeth every time the bacon is done over the turn, and they will even rouse him from his sleep to remind him of it. For instance, previous to the men going out for a trip on trail, he cooks several gallons of beans in the company of numerous chunks of salt pork and much bacon grease. This mess he then moulds into blocks of convenient size and places on the roof, where it freezes into bricks in a couple of hours. Thus the men, after a weary day's travel, have but



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to chop off chunks with an axe and thaw out in the frying-pan. Now the chances preponderate against more than one party in ten having chilli-peppers in their outfits. But the cook, supposing him to be fitted for his position, will ferret out that one party, discover some particular shortage in its grub-supply of which he has plenty, and swop the same for chill-peppers. These in turn he will incorporate in the mess aforementioned, and behold a dish which even the hungry arctic gods may envy. Variety in the grub is a welcome to the men as nuggets. When, after eating dried peaches for months, the cook trades a few cupfuls of the same for apricots, the future at once takes on a more roseate hue. Even a change in the brand of bacon will revivify blasted faith in the country.

It is no sinecure, being cook in the Klondike. Often he must do his work in a cabin measuring ten by twelve on the inside, and occupied by three other men besides himself. When it is considered that these men eat, sleep, lounge, smoke, play cards, and entertain visitors there, and also in that small space house the bulk of their possessions, the size of the cook's orbit may be readily computed. In the morning he sits up in bed, reaches out and strikes the fire, then proceeds to dress. After that the centre of his orbit is the front of the stove, the diameter the length of his arms. Even then his comrades are continually encroaching upon his domain, and he is at constant warfare to prevent territorial grabs.

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If the men are working hard on the claim, the cook is also expected to find his own wood and water. The former he chops up and sleds into camp, the latter he brings home in a sack - unless he is unusually diligent, in which case he has a ton or so of water piled up before the door. Whenever he is not cooking, he is thawing out ice, and between-whiles running out and hoisting on the windlass for his comrades in the shaft. The care of dogs also devolves upon him, and he carries his life and a long club in his hand every time he feeds them.

But there is one thing the cook does not have to do, nor any man in the Klondike - and that is, make another man's bed. In fact, the beds are never made except when the blankets become unfolded, or when the pine needles have all fallen off the boughs which form the mattress. When the cabin has a dirt floor and the men do their carpenter-work inside, the cook never sweeps it. It is much warmer to let the chips and shavings remain. Whenever he kindles a fire he uses a couple of handfuls of the floor. However, when the deposit becomes so deep that his head is knocking against the roof, he seizes a shovel and removes a foot or so of it.

Nor does he have any windows to wash; but if the carpenter is busy he must make his own windows. This is simple. He saws a hole out of the side of the cabin, inserts a home-made sash, and for panes falls back upon the treasured writing-

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tablet. A sheet of this paper, rubbed thoroughly with bacon grease, becomes transparent, sheds water when it thaws, and keeps the cold out and the heat in. In cold weather the ice will form upon the inside of it to the thickness of sometimes two or three inches. When the bulb of the mercurial thermometer has frozen solid, the cook turns to his window, and by the thickness of the icy coating infallibly gauges the outer cold within a couple of degrees.

A certain knowledge of astronomy is required of the Klondike cook, for another task of his is to keep track of the time. Before going to bed he wanders outside and studies the heavens. Having located the Pole Star by means of the Great Bear, he inserts two slender wands in the snow, a couple of yards apart and in line with the North Star. The next day, when the sun on the southern horizon casts the shadows of the wands to the northward and in line, he knows it to be twelve o'clock, noon, and sets his watch and those of his partners accordingly. As stray dogs are constantly knocking his wands out of line with the North Star, it becomes his habit to verify them regularly every night, and thus another burden is laid upon him.

But, after all, while the woes of the man who keeps house and cooks food in the northland are innumerable, there is one redeeming feature in his lot which does not fall to the women housewives of other lands. When things come to a pass with his feminine prototype, she throws her

apron over her head and has a good cry. Not so with him, being a man and a Klondiker. He merely cooks a little more atrociously, raises a storm of grumbling, and resigns. After that he takes up his free out-door life again, and exerts himself mightily in making life miserable for the unlucky comrade who takes his place in the management of the household destinies.



## A PIECE OF STEAK

WITH the last morsel of bread Tom King wiped his plate clean of the last particle of flour gravy and chewed the resulting mouthful in a slow and meditative way. When he arose from the table he was oppressed by the feeling



that he was distinctly hungry. Yet he alone had eaten. The two children in the other room had been sent early to bed in order that in sleep they might forget they had gone supperless. His wife had touched nothing, and had sat silently and watched him with solicitous eyes. She was a thin, worn woman of the working class, though signs of an earlier prettiness were not wanting in her face. The flour for the gravy she had borrowed from the neighbor across the hall. The last two ha'pennies had gone to buy the bread.

He sat down by the window on a rickety chair that protested under his weight, and quite

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mechanically he put his pipe in his mouth and dipped into the side pocket of his coat. The absence of any tobacco made him aware of his action and, with a scowl for his forgetfulness, he put the pipe away. His movements were slow, almost hulking, as though he were burdened by the heavy weight of his muscles. He was a solid-bodied, stolid-looking man, and his appearance did not suffer from being overprepossessing. His rough clothes were old and slouchy. The uppers of his shoes were too weak to carry the heavy resoling that was itself of no recent date. And his cotton shirt, a cheap, two-shilling affair, showed a frayed collar and ineradicable paint stains.

But it was Tom King's face that advertised him unmistakably for what it was. It was the face of a typical prizefighter; of one who had put in long years of service in the squared ring, by that means, developed and emphasized all the marks of the fighting beast. It was distinctly a lowering countenance, and, that no feature of it might escape notice, it was clean-shaven. The lips were shapeless and constituted a mouth harsh to excess, that was like a gash in his face. The jaw was aggressive, brutal, heavy. The eyes, slow of movement and heavy-lidded, were almost expressionless under the shaggy, indrawn brows. Sheer animal that he was, the eyes were the most animal-like feature about him. They were sleepy, lion-like - the eyes of a fighting animal. The forehead slanted quickly back to the hair,



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which clipped close, showed every bump of the villainous-looking head. A nose, twice broken and moulded variously by countless blows, and a cauliflower ear, permanently swollen and distorted to twice its size, completed his adornment, while the beard, fresh-shaven as it was, sprouted in the skin and gave the face a blue-black stain.

Altogether, it was the face of a man to be afraid of in a dark alley or lonely place. And yet Tom King was not a criminal, nor had he ever done anything criminal. Outside of brawls, common to his walk in life, he had harmed no one. Nor had he ever been known to pick a quarrel. He was a professional, and all the fighting brutishness of him was reserved for his professional appearances. Outside the ring he was slow-going, easy-natured, and, in his younger days when money was flush, too open-handed for his own good. He bore no grudges and had few enemies. Fighting was a business with him. In the ring he struck to hurt, struck to maim, struck to destroy; but there was no animus in it. It was a plain business proposition. Audiences assembled and paid for the spectacle of men knocking each other out. The winner took the big end of the purse. When Tom King faced the Woolloomoolloo Gouger, twenty years before, he knew that Gouger's jaw was only four months healed after having been broken in a Newcastle bout. And he played for that jaw and broken it again in the ninth round, not because he bore the Gouger any ill will, but because that was the

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 surest way to put the Gouger out and win the big end of the purse. Nor had the Gouger borne him any ill will for it. It was the game, and both knew the game and played it.

Tom King had never been a talker, and he sat by the window, morosely silent, staring at his hands. The veins stood out on the backs of the hands, large and swollen; and the knuckles, smashed and battered and malformed, testified to the use to which they had been put. He had never heard that a man's life was the life of his arteries, but well he knew the meaning of those big, upstanding veins. His heart had pumped too much blood through them at top pressure. They no longer did the work. He had stretched the elasticity out of them, and with their distention had passed his endurance. He tired easily now. No longer could he do a fast twenty rounds, hammer and tongs, fight, fight, fight, from gong to gong, with fierce rally on top of fierce rally, beaten to the ropes and in turn beating his opponent to the ropes, and rallying fiercest and fastest of all in that last, twentieth round, with the house on its feet and yelling, himself rushing, striking, ducking, raining showers of blows upon showers of blows and receiving showers of blows in return, and all the time the heart faithfully pumping the surging blood through the adequate veins. The veins, swollen at the time, had always shrunk down again, though not quite – neach time, imperceptibly at first, remaining just a trifle larger than before. He stared at them and at his



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battered knuckles, and, for the moment, caught a vision of the youthful excellence of those hands before the first knuckle had been smashed on the head of Benny Jones, otherwise known as the Welsh Terror.

The impression of his hunger came back on him.

«Blimey, but couldn't I go a piece of steak!» he muttered aloud, clenching his huge fists and spitting out a smothered oath.

«I tried both Burke's an' Sawley's,» his wife said half apologetically.

«An' they wouldn't?» he demanded.

«Not a ha'penny. Burke said — —» She faltered.

«G`wan! Wot 'd he say?»

«As how 'e was thinkin' Sandel ud do ye tonight, an' as how yer score was comfortable big as it was.»

Tom King grunted, but did not reply. He was busy thinking of the bull terrier he had kept in his younger days to which he had fed steaks without end. Burke would have given him credit for a thousand steaks — then. But times had changed. Tom King was getting old; and old men, fighting before second-rate clubs, couldn't expect to run bills of any size with the tradesmen.

He got up in the morning with a longing for a piece of steak, and the longing had not abated. He had not had a fair training for this fight. It was a drought year in Australia, times were hard and even the most irregular work was difficult to find.



He had had no sparring partner and his food had not been of the best nor always sufficient. He had done a few days' navvy work when he could get it, and he had run around the Domain in the early mornings to get his legs in shape. But it was hard training without a partner and with a wife and two kiddies that must be fed. Credit with the tradesmen had undergone very slight expansion when he was matched with Sandel. The secretary of the Gayety Club had advanced him three pounds – the loser's end of the purse – and beyond that had refused to go. Now and again he had managed to borrow a few shillings from old pals, who would have leant more only that it was a drought year and they were hard put themselves. No – and there was no use in disguising the fact – his training had not



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been satisfactory. He should have had better food and no worries. Besides, when a man is forty it is harder to get into condition than when he is twenty.

«What time is it, Lizzie?» he asked.

His wife went across the hall to inquire and came back. «Quarter before eight.»

«They'll be startin' the first bout in a few minutes,» he said. «Only a try-out. Then there's a four-round spar 'tween Dealer Wells an' Gridley, an' a ten-round go 'tween Starlight an' some sailor bloke. I don't come on for over an hour.»

At the end of another silent ten minutes he rose to his feet.

«Truth is, Lizzie, I ain't had proper trainin'.»

He reached for his hat and started for the door. He did not offer to kiss her – he never did on going out – but on this night she dared to kiss him, throwing her arms around him and compelling him to bend down to her face. She looked quite small against the massive bulk of the man.

«Good luck, Tom,» she said. «You gotter do 'im.»

«Ay, I gotter do 'im,» he repeated. «That's all there is to it. I jus' gotter do 'im.»

He laughed with an attempt at heartiness, while she pressed more closely against him. Across her shoulders he looked around the bare room. It was all he had in the world, with the rent overdue, and her and the kiddies. And he was leaving it to go out into the night to get meat for his mate and cubs – not like a modern workingman doing to

his machine grind, but in the old, primitive, royal, animal way, by fighting for it.

«I gotter do 'im,» he repeated, this time a hint of desperation in his voice. «If it's a win it's thirty quid – an' I can pay all that's owin', with a lump o' money left over. If it's a lose I get naught – not even a penny for me to ride home on the tram. The secretary's give all that's comin' from a loser's end. Good-by, old woman. I'll come straight home if it's a win.»

«An' I'll be waitin' up,» she called to him along the hall.

It was a full two miles to the Gayety, and as he walked along he remembered how in his palmy days – he had once been the heavyweight champion of New South Wales – he would have ridden in a cab to the fight, and how, most likely, some heavy backer would have paid for the cab and ridden with him. There were Tommy Burns and that Yankee nigger, Jack Johnson – they rode about in motor cars. And he walked! And, as any man knew, a hard two miles was not the best preliminary to a fight. He was an old un, and the world did not wag well with old uns. He was good for nothing now except navvy work, and his broken nose and swollen ear were against him even in that. He found himself wishing that he had learned a trade. It would have been better in the long run. But no one had told him, and he knew, deep down in his heart, that he would not have listened if they had. It had been so easy. Big



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money – sharp, glorious fights – periods of rest and loafing in between – a following of eager flatterers, the slaps on the back, the shakes of the hand, the toffs glad to buy him a drink for the privilege of five minutes' talk – and the glory of it, the yelling houses, the whirlwind finish, the referee's «King wins!» and his name in the sporting columns next day.

Those had been times! But he realized now, in his slow, ruminating way, that it was the old uns he had been putting away. He was Youth, rising; and they were Age, sinking. No wonder it had been easy – they with their swollen veins and battered knuckles and weary in the bones of them from the long battles they had already fought. He remembered the time he put out old Stowsher Bill, at Rush-Cutters Bay, in the eighteenth round, and how old Bill had cried afterward in the dressing-room like a baby. Perhaps old Bill's rent had been overdue. Perhaps he'd had at home a missus an' a couple of kiddies. And perhaps Bill, that very day of the fight, had had a hungering for a piece of steak. Bill had fought game and taken incredible punishment. He could see now, after he had gone through the mill himself, that Stowsher Bill had fought for a bigger stake, that night twenty years ago, than had young Tom King, who had fought for glory and easy money. No wonder Stowsher Bill had cried afterward in the dressing-room.

Well, a man had only so many fights in him, to begin with. It was the iron law of the game. One

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 man might have a hundred hard fights in him, another man only twenty; each, according to the make of him and the quality of his fiber, had a definite number, and when he had fought them he was done. Yes, he had had more fights in him than most of them, and he had had far more than his share of the hard, grueling fights—the kind that worked the heart and lungs to bursting, that took the elastic out of the arteries and made hard knots of muscle out of youth's sleek suppleness, that wore out nerve and stamina and made brain and bones weary from excess of effort and endurance overwrought. Yes, he had done better than all of them. There was none of his old fighting partners left. He was the last of the old guard. He had seen them all finished, and he had had a hand in finishing some of them.

They had tried him out against the old uns, and one after another he had put them away – laughing when, like old Stowsher Bill, they cried in the dressing-room. And now he was an old un, and they tried out the youngsters on him. There was the bloke, Sandel. He had come over from New Zealand with a record behind him. But nobody in Australia knew anything about him, so they put him up against old Tom King. If Sandel made a showing he would be given better men to fight, with bigger purses to win; so it was to be depended upon that he would put up a fierce battle. He had everything to win by it – money and glory and career; and Tom King was the grizzled



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old chopping-block that guarded the highway to fame and fortune. And he had nothing to win except thirty quid, to pay to the landlord and the tradesmen. And, as Tom King thus ruminated, there came to his stolid vision the form of Youth, glorious Youth, rising exultant and invincible, supple of muscle and silken of skin, with heart and lungs that had never been tired and torn and that laughed at limitation of effort. Yes, Youth was the Nemesis. It destroyed the old uns and recked not that, in so doing, it destroyed itself. It enlarged its arteries and smashed its knuckles, and was in turn destroyed by Youth. For Youth was ever youthful. It was only Age that grew older.

At Castlereagh Street he turned to the left, and three blocks along came to the Gayety. A crowd of young larrikins hanging outside the door made respectful way for him, and he heard one say to another: «That's 'im! That's Tom King!»

«How are you feelin', Tom?» he asked.

«Fit as a fiddle,» King answered, although he knew that he lied, and that if he had a quid he would give it right there for a good piece of steak.

When he emerged from the dressing-room, his seconds behind him, and came down the aisle to the squared ring in the center of the hall, a burst of greeting and applause went up from the waiting crowd. He acknowledged salutations right and left, though few of the faces did he know. Most of them were the faces of kiddies unborn when he was winning his first laurels in the squared

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 ring. He leaped lightly to the raised platform and ducked through the ropes to his corner, where he sat down on a folding stool. Jack Ball, the referee, came over and shook his hand. Ball was a broken-down pugilist who for over ten years had not entered the ring as a principal. King was glad that he had him for referee. They were both old uns. If he should rough it with Sandel a bit beyond the rules he knew Ball could be depended upon to pass it by.

Aspiring young heavyweights, one after another, were climbing into the ring and being presented to the audience by the referee. Also, he issued their challenges for them.

«Young Pronto,» Ball announced, «from North Sydney, challenges the winner for fifty pounds' side bet.»

The audience applauded, and applauded again as Sandel himself sprang through the ropes and sat down in his corner. Tom King looked across the ring at him curiously, for in a few minutes they would be locked together in merciless combat, each trying with all the force of him to knock the other into unconsciousness. But little could he see, for Sandel, like himself, had trousers and sweater on over his ring costume. His face was strongly handsome, crowned with a curly mop of yellow hair, while his thick muscular neck hinted at bodily magnificence.

Young Pronto went to one corner and then the other, shaking hands with the principals and



dropping down out of the ring. The challenges went on. Ever Youth climbed through the ropes – Youth unknown, but insatiable – crying out to mankind that with strength and skill it would match issues with the winner. A few years before, in his own heyday of invincibleness, Tom King would have been amused



and bored by these preliminaries. But now he sat fascinated, unable to shake the vision of Youth from his eyes. Always were these youngsters rising up in the boxing game, springing through the ropes and shouting their defiance; and always were the old uns going down before them. They climbed to success over the bodies of the old uns. And ever they came, more and more youngsters – Youth unquenchable and irresistible – and ever they put the old uns away, themselves becoming old uns and traveling the same downward path, while behind them, ever pressing on them, was Youth eternal – the new babies, grown lusty and dragging their elders down, with behind them more babies to the end of

time – Youth that must have its will and that will never die. King glanced over to the press box and nodded to Morgan, of the Sportsman, and Corbett, of the Referee. Then he held out his hands, while Sid Sullivan and Charley Bates, his seconds slipped on his gloves and laced them tight, closely watched by one of Sandel's seconds, who first examined critically the tapes on King's knuckles.

A second of his own was in Sandel's corner, performing a like office. Sandel's trousers were pulled off and, as he stood up, his sweater was skinned over his head. And Tom King, looking, saw Youth incarnate, deep-chested, heavy-thewed, with muscles that slipped and slid like live things under the white satin skin. The whole body was acrawl with life, and Tom King knew that it was a life that had never oozed its freshness out though the aching pores during the long fights wherein Youth paid its toll and departed not quite so young as when it entered.

The two men advanced to meet each other and, as the gong sounded and the seconds clattered out of the ring with the folding stools, they shook hands with each other and instantly took their fighting attitudes. And instantly, like a mechanism of steel and springs balanced on a hair trigger, Sandel was in and out and in again, landing a left to the eyes, a right to the ribs, ducking a counter, dancing lightly away and dancing menacingly back again. He was swift and clever. It was a dazzling exhibition.



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The house yelled its approbation. But King was not dazzled. He had fought too many fights and too many youngsters. He knew the blows for what they were – too quick and too deft to be dangerous. Evidently Sandel was going to rush things from the start. It was to be expected. It was the way of Youth, expending its splendor and excellence in wild insurgence and furious onslaught, overwhelming opposition with its own unlimited glory of strength and desire.

Sandel was in and out, here, there and everywhere, light-footed and eager-hearted, a living wonder of white flesh and stinging muscle that wove itself into a dazzling fabric of attack, slipping and leaping like a flying shuttle from action to action through a thousand actions, all of them centered upon the destruction of Tom King, who stood between him and fortune. And Tom King patiently endured. He knew his business, and he knew Youth now that Youth was no longer his. There was nothing to do till the other lost some of his steam, was his thought, and he grinned to himself as he deliberately ducked so as to receive a heavy blow on the top of his head. It was a wicked thing to do, yet eminently fair according to the rules of the boxing game. A man was supposed to take care of his own knuckles, and if he insisted on hitting an opponent on the top of the head he did so at his own peril. King could have ducked lower and let the blow whiz harmlessly past, but he remembered his own early fights and how

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 he smashed his first knuckle on the head of the Welsh Terror. He was but playing the game. That duck had accounted for one of Sandel's knuckles. Not that Sandel would mind it now. He would go on, superbly regardless, hitting as hard as ever throughout the fight. But later on, when the long ring battles had begun to tell, he would regret that knuckle and look back and remember how he smashed it on Tom King's head.

The first round was all Sandel's, and he had the house yelling with the rapidity of his whirlwind rushes. He overwhelmed King with avalanches of punches, and Kind did nothing. He never struck once, contenting himself with covering up, blocking and ducking and clinching to avoid punishment. He occasionally feinted, shook his head when the weight of a punch landed, and moved stolidly about, never leaping or springing or wasting an ounce of strength. Sandel must foam the froth of Youth away before discreet Age could dare to retaliate. All King's movements were slow and methodical, and his heavy-lidded, slow-moving eyes gave him the appearance of being half asleep or dazed. Yet they were eyes that saw everything, that had been trained to see everything thought all his twenty years and odd in the ring. They did not blink or waver before an impending blow, but that coolly saw and measured distance.

Seated in his corner for the minute's rest at the end of the round, he lay back with outstretched



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legs, his arms resting on the right angle of the ropes, his chest and abdomen heaving frankly and deeply as he gulped down the air driven by the towels of his seconds. He listened with closed eyes to the voices of the house. «Why don't yeh fight, Tom?» many were crying. «Yeh ain't afraid of 'im, are yeh?»

«Muscle-bound,» he heard a man on a front seat comment. «He can't move quicker. Two to one on Sandel, in quids.»

The gong struck and the two men advanced from their corners. Sandel came forward fully three-quarters of the distance, eager to begin again; but King was content to advance the shorter distance. It was in line with his policy of economy. He had not been well trained and he had not had enough to eat, and every step counted. Besides, he had already walked two miles to the ringside. It was a repetition of the first round, with Sandel attacking like a whirlwind and with the audience indignantly demanding why King did not fight. Beyond feinting and several slowly-delivered and ineffectual blows he did nothing save block and stall and clinch. Sandel wanted to make the pace fast, while King, out of his wisdom, refused to accommodate him. He grinned with a certain wistful pathos in his ring-battered countenance, and went on cherishing his strength with the jealousy of which only Age is capable. Sandel was Youth, and he threw his strength away with the munificent abandon of Youth. To King belonged

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 the ring generalship, the wisdom bred of long, aching fights. He watched with cool eyes and head, moving slowly and waiting for Sandel's froth to foam away. To the majority of the onlookers it seemed as though King was hopelessly outclassed, and they voiced their opinion in offers of three to one on Sandel. But there were wise ones, a few, who knew King of old time and who covered what they considered easy money.

The third round began as usual, one-sided, with Sandel doing all the leading and delivering all the punishment. A half-minute has passed when Sandel, overconfident, left an opening. King's eyes and right arm flashed in the same instant. It was his first real blow – a hook, with the twisted arch of the arm to make it rigid, and with all the weight of the half-pivoted body behind it. It was like a sleepy-seeming lion suddenly thrusting out a lightning paw. Sandel, caught on the side of the jaw, was felled like a bullock. The audience gasped and murmured awe-stricken applause. The man was not muscle-bound, after all, and he could drive a blow like a triphammer.

Sandel was shaken. He rolled over and attempted to rise, but the sharp yells from his seconds to take the count restrained him. He knelt on one knee, ready to rise, and waited, while the referee stood over him, counting the seconds loudly in his ear. At the ninth he rose in fighting attitude, and Tom King, facing him, knew regret that the blow had not been an inch nearer the point of the jaw. That



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would have been a knockout, and he could have carried the thirty quid home to the missus and the kiddies.

The round continued to the end of its three minutes, Sandel for the first time respectful of his opponent and King slow of movement and sleepy-eyed as ever. As the round neared its close King, warned of the fact by sight of the seconds crouching outside ready of the spring in through the ropes, worked the fight around to his own corner. And when the gong struck he sat down immediately on the waiting stool, while Sandel had to walk all the way across the diagonal of the square to his own corner. It was a little thing, but it was the sum of little things that counted. Sandel was compelled to walk that many more steps, to give up that much energy and to lose a part of the precious minute of rest. At the beginning of every round King loafed slowly out from his corner, forcing his opponent to advance the greater distance. The end of every round the fight manœuvered by King into his own corner so that he could immediately sit down.

Two more rounds went by, in which King was parsimonious of effort and Sandel prodigal. The latter's attempt to force a fast pace made King uncomfortable, for a fair percentage of the multitudinous blows showered upon him went home. Yet King persisted in his dogged slowness, despite the crying of the younger hotheads for him to go in and fight. Again, in the sixth round,

Sandel was careless, again Tom King's fearful right flashed out to the jaw, and again Sandel took the nine seconds' count.

By the seventh round Sandel's pink of condition was gone and he settled down to what he knew was to be the hardest fight in his experience. Tom King was an old un, but a better old un than he had ever encountered – an old un who never lost his head, who was remarkably able at defense, whose blows had the impact of a knotted club and who had a knockout in either hand. Nevertheless, Tom King dared not hit often. He never forgot his battered knuckles, and knew that every hit must count if the knuckles were to last out the fight. As he sat in his corner, glancing across at his opponent, the thought came to him that the sum of his wisdom and Sandel's youth would constitute a world's champion heavyweight. But that was the trouble. Sandel would never become a world champion. He lacked the wisdom, and the only way for him to get it was to buy it with Youth; and when wisdom was his, Youth would have been spent in buying it.

King took every advantage he knew. He never missed an opportunity to clinch, and in effecting most of the clinches his shoulder drove stiffly into the other's ribs. In the philosophy of the ring a shoulder was as good as a punch so far as damage was concerned, and a great deal better so far as concerned expenditure of effort. Also, in the clinches King rested his weight on his



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opponent and was loth to let go. This compelled the interference of the referee, who tore them apart, always assisted by Sandel, who had not yet learned to rest. He could not refrain from using those glorious flying arms and writhing muscles of his, and when the other rushed into a clinch, striking shoulder against ribs and with head resting under Sandel's left arm, Sandel almost invariably swung his right behind his own back and into the projecting face. It was a clever stroke, much admired by the audience, but it was not dangerous, and was, therefore, just that much wasted strength. But Sandel was tireless and unaware of limitations, and King grinned and doggedly endured.

Sandel developed a fierce right to the body, which made it appear that King was taking an enormous amount of punishment, and it was only the old ringsters who appreciated the deft touch of King's left glove to the other's biceps just before the impact of the blow. It was true, the blow landed each time; but each time it was robbed of its power by that touch on the biceps. In the ninth round, three times inside a minute, King's right hooked its twisted arch to the jaw; and three times Sandel's body, heavy as it was, was leveled to the mat. Each time he took the nine seconds allowed him and rose to his feet, shaken and jarred, but still strong. He had lost much of his speed and he wasted less effort. He was fighting grimly; but he continued to draw upon his chief asset, which was

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Youth. King's chief asset was experience. As his vitality had dimmed and his vigor abated he had replaced them with cunning, with wisdom born of the long fights and with a careful shepherding of strength. Not alone had he learned never to make a superfluous movement, but he had learned how to seduce an opponent into throwing his strength away. Again and again, by feint of foot and hand and body he continued to inveigle Sandel into leaping back, ducking or countering. King rested, but he never permitted Sandel to rest. It was the strategy of Age.

Early in the tenth round King began stopping the other's rushes with straight left to the face, and Sandel, grown wary, responded by drawing the left, then by ducking it and delivering his right in a sweeping hook to the side of the head. It was too high up to be vitally effective; but when first it landed King knew the old, familiar descent of the black veil of unconsciousness across his mind. For the instant, or for the slightest fraction of an instant rather, he ceased. In the one moment he saw his opponent ducking out of his field of vision and the background of white, watching faces; in the next moment he again saw his opponent and the background of faces. It was if he had slept for a time and just opened his eyes again, and yet the interval of unconsciousness was so microscopically short that there had been no time for him to fall. The audience saw him totter and his knees give, and then saw him recover and



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tuck his chin deeper into the shelter of his left shoulder.

Several times Sandel repeated the blow, keeping King partially dazed, and then the latter worked out his defense, which was also a counter. Feinting with his left he took a half-step backward, at the same time uppercutting with the whole strength of his right. So accurate was it timed that it landed squarely on Sandel's face in the full, downward sweep of the duck, and Sandel lifted in the air and curled backward, striking the mat on his head and shoulders. Twice King achieved this, then turned loose and hammered his opponent to the ropes. He gave Sandel no chance to rest or to set himself, but smashed blow in upon blow till the house rose to its feet and the air was filled with an unbroken roar of applause. But Sandel's strength and endurance were superb, and he continued to stay on his feet. A knockout seemed certain, and a captain of police, appalled at the dreadful punishment, arose by the ringside to stop the fight. The gong struck for the end of the round and Sandel staggered to his corner, protesting to the captain that he was sound and strong. To prove it he threw two back air springs, and the police captain gave in.

Tom King, leaning back in his corner and breathing hard, was disappointed. If the fight had been stopped the referee, perforce, would have rendered him the decision and the purse would have been his. Unlike Sandel, he was not fighting

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for glory or career, but for thirty quid. And now Sandel would recuperate in the minute of rest.

Youth will be served – this saying flashed into King's mind, and he remembered the first time he had heard it, the night when he had put away Stowsher Bill. The toff who had bought him a drink after the fight and patted him on the shoulder had used those words. Youth will be served! The toff was right. And on that night in the long ago he had been Youth. Tonight Youth sat in the opposite corner. As for himself, he had been fighting for half an hour now, and he was an old man. Had he fought like Sandel he would not have lasted fifteen minutes. But the point was that he did not recuperate. Those upstanding arteries and that sorely-tried heart would not enable him to gather strength in the intervals between the rounds. And he had not sufficient strength in him to begin with. His legs were heavy under him and beginning to cramp. He should not have walked those two miles to the fight. And there was the steak which he had got up longing for that morning. A great and terrible hatred rose up in him for the butchers who had refused him credit. It was hard for an old man to go into a fight without enough to eat. And a piece of steak was such a little thing, a few pennies at best; yet it meant thirty quid to him.

With the gong that opened the eleventh round Sandel rushed, making a show of freshness which he did not really possess. King knew it for what it



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was – a bluff as old as the game itself. He clinched to save himself, when, going free, allowed Sandel to get set. This was what King desired. He feinted with his left, drew the answering duck and swinging upward hook, then made the half-step backward, delivered the uppercut full to the face and crumpled Sandel over to the mat. After that he never let him rest, receiving punishment himself, but inflicting far more, smashing Sandel to the ropes, hooking and driving all manner of blows into him, tearing away from his clinches or punching him out of attempted clinches, and ever, when Sandel would have fallen, catching him with one uplifting hand and with the other immediately smashing him into the ropes where he could not fall.

The house by this time had gone mad, and it was his house, nearly every voice yelling; «Go it, Tom!» «Get 'im! Get 'im!» «You've got 'im, tom! You've got 'im!» It was to be a whirlwind finish, and that was what a ringside audience paid to see.

And Tom King, who for half an hour had conserved his strength, now expended it prodigally in the one great effort he knew he had in him. It was his once chance – now or not at all. His strength was waning fast, and his hope was that before the last of it ebbed out of him he would have beaten his opponent down for the count. And as he continued to strike and force, cooling estimating the weight of his blows and the quality of the damage wrought, he realized

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 how hard a man Sandel was to knock out. Stamina and endurance were his to an extreme degree, and they were the virgin stamina and endurance of Youth. Sandel was certainly a coming man. He had it in him. Only out of such rugged fiber were successful fighters fashioned.

Sandel was reeling and staggering, but Tom King's legs were cramping and his knuckles going back on him. Yet he steeled himself to strike the fierce blows, every one of which brought anguish to his tortured hands. Though now he was receiving practically no punishment he was weakening as rapidly as the other. His blows went home, but there was no longer the weight behind them, and each blow was the result of a severe effort of will. His legs were like lead, and they dragged visibly under him; while Sandel's backers, cheered by this symptom, began calling encouragement to their man.

King was spurred to a burst of effort. He delivered two blows in succession – a left, a trifle too high, to the solar plexus, and a right cross to the jaw. They were not heavy blows, yet so weak and dazed was Sandel that he went down and lay quivering. The referee stood over him, shouting the count of the fatal seconds in his ear. If before the tenth second was called, he did not rise the fight was lost. The house stood in hushed silence. King rested on trembling legs. A mortal dizziness was upon him, and before his eyes the sea of faces sagged and swayed, while to his ears, as from a



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remote distance, came the count of the referee. Yet he looked upon the fight as his. It was impossible that a man so punished could rise.

Only Youth could rise, and Sandel rose. At the fourth second he rolled over on his face and groped blindly for the ropes. By the seventh second he had dragged himself to his knee, where he rested, his head rolling groggily on his shoulders. As the referee cried «Nine!» Sandel stood upright, in proper stalling position, his left arm wrapped about his face, his right wrapped about his stomach. Thus were his vital points guarded, while he lurched forward toward King in the hope of effecting a clinch and gaining more time.

At the instant Sandel arose King was at him, but the two blows he delivered were muffled on the stalled arms. The next moment Sandel was in the clinch and holding on desperately while the referee strove to drag the two men apart. King helped to force himself free. He knew the rapidity with which Youth recovered and he knew that Sandel was his if he could prevent that recovery. One stiff punch would do it. Sandel was his, indubitably his. He had outgeneraled him, outfought him, outpointed him. Sandel reeled out of the clinch, balanced on the hairline between defeat or survival. One good blow would topple him over and down and out. And Tom King, in a flash of bitterness, remembered the piece of steak and wished that he had it then behind that necessary punch he must deliver. He nerved

himself for the blow, but it was not heavy enough nor swift enough. Sandel swayed but did not fall, staggering back to the ropes and holding on. King staggered after him and, with a pang like that of dissolution, delivered another blow. But his body had deserted him. All that was left of him was a fighting intelligence that was dimmed and clouded from exhaustion. The blow that was aimed for the jaw struck no higher than the shoulder. He had willed the blow higher, but the tired muscles had not been able to obey. And from the impact of the blow Tom King himself reeled back and nearly fell. Once again he strove. This time his punch missed altogether, and, from absolute weakness, he fell against Sandel and clinched, holding on to him to save himself from sinking to the floor.

King did not attempt to free himself. He had shot his bolt. He was gone. And Youth had been served. Even in the clinch he could feel Sandel growing stronger against him. When the referee thrust them apart, there, before his eyes, he saw Youth recuperate. From instant to instant Sandel grew stronger. His punches, weak and futile at first, became stiff and accurate. Tom King's bleared eyes saw the gloved fist driving at his jaw and he willed to guard it by interposing his arm. He saw the danger, willed the act; but the arm was too heavy. It seemed burdened with a hundredweight of lead. It would not lift itself, and he strove to lift it with his soul. Then the gloved fist landed home. He experienced a sharp snap that was like



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an electric spark and, simultaneously, the veil of blackness enveloped him.

When he opened his eyes again he was in his corner, and he heard the yelling of the audience like the roar of the surf at Bondi Beach. A wet sponge was being pressed against the base of his brain and Sid Sullivan was blowing cold water in a refreshing spray over his face and chest. His gloves had already been removed and Sandel, bending over him, was shaking his hand. He bore no ill will toward the man who had put him out, and he returned the grip with a heartiness that made his battered knuckles protest. Then Sandel stepped to the center of the ring and the audience hushed its pandemonium to hear him accept young Pronto's challenge and offer to increase the side bet to one hundred pounds. King looked on apathetically while his seconds mopped the streaming water from him, dried his face and prepared him to leave the ring. He felt hungry. It was not the ordinary, gnawing kind, but a great faintness, a palpitation at the pit of the stomach that communicated itself to all his body. He remembered back into the fight to the moment when he had Sandel swaying and tottering on the hairline balance of defeat. Ah, that piece of steak would have done it! He had lacked just that for the decisive blow, and he had lost. It was all because of the piece of steak.

His seconds were half-supporting him as they helped him through the ropes. He tore free from

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 them, ducked through the roped unaided and leaped heavily to the floor, following on their heels as they forced a passage for him down the crowded center aisle. Leaving the dressing-room for the street, in the entrance to the hall, some young fellow spoke to him.

«W'y didn't yuh go in an' get 'im when yuh 'ad 'im?» the young fellow asked.

«Aw, go to hell!» said Tom King, and passed down the steps to the sidewalk.

The doors of the public house at the corner were swinging wide, and he saw the lights and the smiling barmaids, heard the many voices discussing the fight and the prosperous chink of money on the bar. Somebody called to him to have a drink. He hesitated perceptibly, then refused and went on his way.

He had not a copper in his pocket and the two-mile walk home seemed very long. He was certainly getting old. Crossing the Domain he sat down suddenly on a bench, unnerved by the thought of the missus sitting up for him, waiting to learn the outcome of the fight. That was harder than any knockout, and it seemed almost impossible to face.

He felt weak and sore, and the pain of his smashed knuckles warned him that, even if he could find a job at navy work, it would be a week before he could grip a pick handle or a shovel. The hunger palpitation at the pit of the stomach was sickening. His wretchedness overwhelmed him,



and into his eyes came an unwonted moisture. He covered his face with his hands and, as he cried, he remembered Stowsher Bill and how he had served him that night in the long ago. Poor old Stowsher Bill! He could understand now why Bill had cried in the dressing-room.

– Sen, Fred Cherchill, Makdonaldga bor, seyfdagi kichik yuk chamadon – Luis Bondelga tegishli, juda muhim! Uni qaytishingda olib kel! Tushundingmi?

Cherchill tushunganini bildirib, qo‘l silkidi. Aslida Makdonaldgacha yarim mil yo‘l bo‘lib, bu unga qiyinchilik tug‘dirmas edi. Yana xayrlashuv suroniko‘tarildi, bong chalindi va “Sietl-4” oqimda chayqalib, orqa chiroqlarini yoqqancha, Yukon tomon ketib borardi. Bondell va Cherchill bir-biriga mehr bilan qo‘l siltab, uzoq xayrlashib qolishdi.

Yozning o‘rtalari edi. O‘sha yili Vills bortida ikki yuzsayohatchi bilan Yukanga yo‘l oldi. Unda Cherchill ham bor edi. Uning kayutasida, kiyim-boshlar orasida Luis Bondelning ham

yuk chamadoni turardi. U kichik, pishiq charmdan bo‘lib, og‘irligi naq qirq funt kelar, Cherchill undan uzoqlasharkan, tamom xavotirga tushardi. Qo‘shni kayutadagi kishida ham xuddi shunday kiyim chamadonlarida oltin zarralaridan iborat xazina bor edi,





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natijada ikkisi vaqti-vaqti bilan ularni qo'riqlashga kelishib olishdi. Biri ovqatlangani tushib ketganida, boshqasi ikki kayutaning eshiklaridan ko'z uzmasdan turardi. Cherchill qartada bir qo'l o'ynashni xohlagan kezlarda sherigi qorovullik qilar, u hordiq olgisi kelganda esa Cherchill ikki eshik o'rtasidagi sayyohlik kursisiga o'tirib, to'rt oylik eski gazetani o'qishga tutinardi.

Ertaqishningalomatlariko'rinib turar, muammo shunda ediki, agar ular muzlashdan oldin jo'nab ketishmasa, kemani tark etishga majbur bo'lishar, keyin esa muzda harakatlanish og'ir kechishi tayin edi. Bu tongdan shomga qadar, ba'zanyarim tungacha muhokama qilinardi. Odamning jig'ibiyronini chiqaradigan ortga surilishlar bo'lardi. Ikki marta motor buzilib qolib, tuzatishga urinib ko'rishdi. Har zamon yaqin turgan qishdan ogoh etib, qor uchqunlab qo'yardi. Vills to'qqiz marta Besh Panja Girdobidan o'tishga urindi, buning uchun qancha jihozlarga zarar yetmadi deysiz?! Nihoyat, kema yetib kelganida, ularning taxmin qilgan vaqtidan to'rt kunga kechikkan edi. Shundan so'ng Boks Kenonning yuqorisida Flora kemasi uni kutib turgan bo'ladimi yoki yo'q, degan savol ko'tarildi. Boks Kenonning boshidan "Uayt Xors"ning oxirigacha bo'lgan oqim kemalar qatnovi uchun o'ta noqulay bo'lib, bu vaziyatda yo'lovchilarni bir qayiqdan boshqasiga o'tkazib, oqimni aylanib o'tishar edi. Shahar bilan hech qanday aloqa yo'q, shu sababdan Villsning to'rt kunga kechikib kelayotganini Floradagilarga



m a ' l u m  
qilishimkonsiz  
edi.

Vills “Uayt  
Xors”ga kirib  
borganida ayon  
bo’ldiki, Flora  
aytilganidan uch  
kunziyod kutgan.  
Eng achinarlisi  
shuki, bor-yo’g’i  
bir necha soat  
oldin jo’nab  
ketgan ekan.  
Bundan chiqdi  
u yakshanba  
kuni ertalab soat  
to’qqizgacha

Tagish postiga yetib borishi kerak bo’lgan. Bu  
payt esa shanba kuni soat kunduzgi to’rt edi.  
Sayyohlar majlis qurishdi. Bortda katta Peterburg  
baydarkasi bo’lib, Bennet ko’lining boshidagi  
militsiya boshqarmasiga qarashli edi. Ular  
qayiqqa javobgarlik qilishni va yetkazib berishni  
o’z zimmalariga oldilar. So’ngra ko’ngillilarni  
chorladilar. Floraga yetishib olish uchun ikki  
kishi kerak edi. Bir zumda yigirmatacha kishi  
o’z xohishini bildirdi. Ularning orasida Cherchill  
ham bor edi. Aslida birovlardan o’z yordamini  
ayamaslik uning tabiatiga xos bo’lib, Bondelning  
yuk chamadoni xayolida ham yo’q edi. Bu o’y



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miyasiga kelganda, uni tanlamasliklarini umid qila boshladi. Lekin kollej futbol jamoasining sardori, yengil atletika klubining prezidenti va chana qo'shilgan itlar boshqaruvchisi sifatida nom qozongan keng yelkali bu shaxsning ayni yuksak sharafdan bosh tortishga haqqi yo'q edi. Bu Cherchill va mahobatli nemis Nik Antonsenga bildirilgan ishonch edi.

Sayyohlar jamoasi baydarkani yelkalariga qo'ygancha bandargoh uzra yelib, kerakli nuqtaga joylashtirayotganidaga, Cherchill xonasiga yugurdi va poldagi yuk uyumini ag'dargan ko'yi o'sha kichik chamadonni qo'shni xonadagi kishiga ishonib topshirib ketish niyatida qo'liga oldi. Keyin esa miyasiga bu o'zchamadonim emas, shunday ekan, o'zimning shaxsiy buyumimdek tashlab ketishga haqqim yo'q, degan o'y keldi. Shunday qilib, yuk chamadoni bilan sohil tomon chopib ketdi. Uni bir qo'lidan ikkinchisiga o'tkazarkan, o'zi qirq funt chiqarmikan deya ajablandi.

Ikkalasi yo'lga tushgan chog' soat kunduzgi to'rt yarim edi. "O'ttiz mil daryo"sining oqimi shu qadar shiddatli ediki, kamdan-kam hollarda eshkak esha olardilar. Yelkalari osha baydarkaga bog'langan arqon yechilib ketar, qoyalarga urilishar, butazorlar ichidan yo'l ochishga zo'r berishar, goho sirpanishib, suvga qulashar, sayoz joylarda tizzalari va bellarigacha suv kechishar, quturgan, talofatli to'lqinlar ularni boshqa sohilga surib yuborardi.

Bu o'ta holdan toydiradigan holat edi. Antonsen bahodirlardek uzoq mashaqqat chekdi.

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Bu eshkakchi sabrli va matonatli edi, lekin Cherchilning o'tkir zehni va qudrati uni boshqarib turardi. Ular sira dam olishmas, faqat olg'a va yana olg'a intilishardi. Daryoda qattiq shamol turdi, ularning qo'llari muzlab, vaqti-vaqti bilan uvushar, shuning uchun kaft va barmoqlarini bir-biriga ishqalab, qon yugurtirishga harakat qilishardi.

Kech tusha boshlagach, taqdirga tan berishdi. Tag'in inson qadami yetgmagan nishablikka qulab tushishdi. Ular hech narsani ko'rolmas, chakalakzorlar kiyimlarini timdalab tashlagandi. Har ikkisining o'ta qattiq tirnalgan tanalaridan qon sizib turardi. Daydi to'lqinlar necha martalab ularni sohildan sohilga, to'siqlarga urib, ag'darib yubordi. Dastlab bu hol yuz berganida, Cherchill suvga sho'ng'idi va uch fut chuqurlikda paypaslagancha yuk chamadonini qidira ketdi. Uni topishga bir yarim soat vaqt yo'qotdi, shundan so'ng chamadonniqayiqqa mahkam bog'lab qo'ydi. Antonsen chamadonni tonggacha nafrat bilan la'natlab chiqdi, biroq Cherchill uni tinchlantirishni o'ziga ep ko'rmadi.

Ularga uchraganomadsizliklarning poyoni yo'q edigo'yo. Daryoning tezoqar, keskin muyulishida ikki soat vaqt yo'qotdilar. Hatto ikki marta ag'darilib ham tushishdi. Bu payt har ikki qirg'oq ham chuqur jarlik bo'lib, ularda na arqon, na ilgak bor edi. Oqimga qarshi faqat eshkaklar bilan hech narsa qilib bo'lmasligini ham yaxshi bilishardi. Har eshkak eshganlarida katta kuch sarflab,





jon-jahdlari bilan harakat qilishardi. U l a r g a tasodifan omad kulib b o q d i . Kutilmagan t o ' l q i n qayiqning yo'nalishini o'zgartirib y u b o r d i . Cherchill nazoratni yo'qotdi, to'lg'in uni

sohildagi daragaing'itib yubordi. Antonsen suvdan chiqib olguncha, u bir qo'li bilan botqoqdagi qayiqni ushlab turdi. Ular qayiqni tortib olgach, hordiq olishdi. Eng asosiy nuqtada o'zlariga kelib, yo'lga tushishdi. Yuqori sohilga chiqishgach, arqon bilan tezda chakalakzorga o'tishdi.

Kunduzi ular Tagish Porti ancha uzoq deb o'ylashgandi. Biroq yakshanba kuni ertalab soat to'qqizda Floraning jo'nash signalini eshitishga muyassar bo'ldilar. Soat o'nlarda, ular ming mashaqqat bilan portga yetib kelganlarida, uzoq janub yo'lida ketib borayotgan Floraning tutunini bazo'r ko'ra oldilar, xolos. Holdan toygan, juldur kiyimli bu ikki kishini Mounted politsiyasi Kapitan

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Jones samimiy kutib oldi va ovqatlantirdi. So'ngra ikkisinin ham juda-juda charchaganini sezib, holi qo'ydi. Ular pech yonida nam kiyimlarida yotib uxlashdi. Ikki soatdan so'ng Cherchill uyg'ondi, Bondelning yostiq o'rnida foydalangan chamadonini olib, qayiqqa qo'ydi. Antonsenni turtib uyg'otgach, Floraning ortidan yo'lga tushishdi.

– Ha, nima bo'lishini oldindan bilib bo'lmaydi, jihozlar ishdan chiqadimi yoki boshqa. – Bu uning Kapitan Jones e'tiroziga javobi edi. – Men bu kemaga yetib olib, albatta, bolalarga yubormoqchiman.

Tagish ko'li kuchli bo'rondan oppoq tusga kirib, sovuq ularning jon-jonidan o'tib ketdi. Shiddat bilan chayqalayotgan to'lqinlar baydarkani uchirib ketar, biri eshkak eshgani holda, ikkinchisi qayiqdagi suvni chiqarish bilan andarmon bo'lar, oldinga yurishning iloji yo'q edi. Imkon izlagan suzuvchilar sayoz sohil tomon intilishdi, qayiqdan tushib, biri oldinda arqonni tortsa, sherigi qayiqni itarib borardi. Kuchli bo'rondan himoyalanishga urinishar, biroq bellarigacha muzday suv qoplar, gohida bo'g'izlarigacha, hatto boshlari uzra chiqar va baland po'rtanalarda ko'milib ketardilar. Og'ir va behalovat, yurakni ezuvchi olishuvdan bir lahza bo'lsin tinim yo'q edi. O'sha tun Tagish ko'lining boshida, kuchli qor bo'roni zabtida Florani quvib yetishdi. Antonsen bortga behol yiqilgancha hansirab nafas olib yotardi. Cherchill yovvoyi odamga o'xshab qolgandi. Kiyimlari



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uning tanasiniarang yopib turardi. Yuzi muzlab qotib qolgan, yigirma to'rt soat davom etgan azoblardan holdan toygan, qo'llari shu qadar shishib ketgan ediki, hatto barmoqlarini buka olmasdi. Oyoqlarida esa kuchli og'riq turgandi.

Floraning kapitani "Uayt Xors"ga qaytishni xohlamadi. Cherchill gapida qat'iy turib oldi. Biroq kapitan ham qaysarlikda undan qolishmasdi. Oxiri u ortga qaytib, hech nimaga erishib bo'lmasligini, negaki, Deyadagi yagona dengiz paroxodi – "Afinalik" seshanba kuni erta bilan yo'lga chiqishini, biroq "Uayt Xors"ga kirolmasligini va qolib ketgan sayyohlar bilan mumkin qadar ertaroq aloqa o'rnatishini ma'lum qildi.

– "Afinalik" qaysi payt yo'lga chiqadi? – qat'iy so'radi Cherchill.

– Seshanba ertalab, soat yettida.

– Tushunarli, – deya Cherchill, xurрак otayotgan Antonsenning qovurg'asidagi tatiurovkasiga turtdi. – Sen "Uayt Xors"ga qaytib bor. Yo'lda davom etib, "Afinalik"ka yetib olamiz.

Antonsen qayiqda ahmoqlarday uxlab yotar, uning mudroq ongi hech nimani anglamas, ulkan dengizning muz zarralaridan jiqqa ho'l bo'lib ketgan edi. Qorong'uda Cherchilning baqirayotganini elas-elas anglay boshladi. Ungacha nima bo'lganini bilmasdi.

– Eshkak eshish qo'lingdan keladimi?! Yoki suv toshirmoqchimisan?!..

Kunduzi ular Karibou Chorrahasiga yetib kelishdi, shamol tingan edi. Antonsen jon-jahdi

..... bilan eshkak eshdi va ular ancha olislab ketishdi. Cherchill biroz uxlab olish uchun qayiqnisayoz qirg'oqqa to'xtatdi. U ehtiyot chorasini ko'rib, bir qo'lini boshining ostiga bukkancha uyquga ketdi. Har besh daqiqada bukilgan qo'lida qoni yurmay, og'riqdan uyg'onib ketar va darhol atrofga sinchiklab nazar tashlar, keyin esa ikkinchi qo'lini bukib, boshining ostiga qo'ygan ko'yi uyquga ketar edi. Ikki soatlardan so'ng Antonsen uni uyg'otdi. So'ng yana yo'lga tushishdi. Uch miluzunlikdagi Bennet Ko'li tegirmon havzasiga o'xshardi. Yarim yo'lda janubda kuchli bo'ron turdi. Tagishgacha uzoq, davomiy to'siqlarni yengishga to'g'ri keldi. Qayiq bir tomonga og'ib ketar, to'lqin ko'tarilib, ularning beli, bo'g'zi va boshigacha sovuq suv qoplar, natijada Antonsen tamomila holdan toygandi. Cherchill uni o'ziga kelishi uchun shafqatsizlarcha turtib, baqirardi, biroq u to'lqin zarbidan suvga tushib ketib, cho'ka boshlagan edi. Cherchill uni bir amallab suvdan tortib olib, qayiqqa chiqardi. Shundan so'ng Cherchill bu ayovsiz kurashni yolg'iz o'zi davom ettirishga majbur bo'ldi. Tushdan oldin Bennet Ko'lining boshidagi politsiya postiga yetib keldi. Antonsenni qayiqdan chiqarishga urindi, biroq urinishlari zoye ketdi. U tinkasi qurigan odamning og'ir nafas olishini eshitib turardi. Shu choqqacha boshidan kechirganlarini eslab, unga hatto hasadi kelib ketdi. Antonsen uxlab yotardi, Cherchill esa avvalgidek qudratli Chilkat bo'ylab davom etishi va dengizga chiqishi kerak edi. Haqiqiy kurash



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hali oldinda edi. U o'zini shu ko'yga solgan azob-  
uqubatlardan so'ng ham tanasida kuch mavjudligi  
uchunnegadir pushaymon bo'lib ketdi.

Cherchill qayiqni qirg'oqqa sudrab chiqdi,  
Bondelning yuk chamadonini qo'liga oldi va  
oqsagancha politsiya postiga qarab yo'rtib ketdi.

– U yerda Dosendan sizga yuborilgan qayiq bor,  
– baqirdi peshvoz chiqqan ofitserga. – Unda o'lim  
yoqasida turgan bir odam yotibdi. Xavfli hech  
narsa yo'q, faqat o'ta holdan toygan. O'shandan  
xabar oling. Men shoshilishim kerak. Xayr!  
“Afinalik”ka yetib olishim lozim.

Bir mil keladigan port Bennet va Linderman  
ko'lini bog'lab turardi. U oqsoqlanib yugurib  
borarkan, ortiga o'girilib, ofitserga so'nggi bor  
baqirdi. Yugurish unga azob bersa-da, tishini  
tishiga qo'yib davom etar, chamadonga qararkan,  
unga bo'lgan hurmatining ta'siridan ko'p  
hollarda hattoki og'riqni ham unutib yuborardi.  
Aslida chamadon jiddiy halal berardi. Bir qo'lidan  
boshqasiga o'tkazar, qo'ltiqlashga tutinar,  
gohida bir qo'llab yelkasi osha ortmoqlab olar,  
yugurganida esa orqasiga gursillab urilardi. Uni  
momataloq bo'lib, shishib ketgan barmoqlarida  
arang ko'tarib yurardi. Necha marta tushirib ham  
yubordi. Bir gal qo'ldan qo'lga o'tkazayotib, old  
tarafga nogoh tushirib yubordi, shiddatli qadamini  
to'xtatolmay, unga qoqildi va jon holatda yerga  
yiqildi. Portning olis chekkasidan eski bog'ichli  
yuk sumkasotib oldi va chamadonni unga  
joylashtirdi. Shuningdek, Linderman ko'lining

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 yuqori chegarasigacha bo'lgan olti milni bosib o'tish uchun kater yolladi. U yerga tushki soat to'rtida yetib keldi. Ertasiga ertalab soat yettida "Afinalik" Daidan yo'lga tushishi kerak edi. U yergacha yigirma sakkiz mil masofa bo'lib, o'rtada Chilkat yastanib yotardi. U oyoq kiyimlarini uzoq yo'lga moslab olish uchun o'tirdi – o'ttiz soniyadan so'ng uyg'ondi. Garchi uxlamagan bo'lsa-da, o'tirgan ko'yi mudray boshlagan edi. Endigi hordiq onlari uzoq davom etishi mumkinligidan qo'rqardi, shuning uchun ishini tezda yakunlab, o'rnidan qo'zg'aldi. Hatto shundan so'ng ham biroz muddat o'zini bilmay turdi, hech narsani his qilmas, havoda muallaq turganga o'xshardi. Bo'shashgan vujudi uni yerga tortardi, shu payt o'zini qo'lga olib, tortishib qolgan muskullarini siltab, tetiklashdi va yotib qolishdan saqlandi. Kutilmagan qo'zg'alish uni o'ziga keltirdi, titrog'i va dardini aritdi. Karaxt miyasini uyg'otish uchun kafti bilan boshiga urdi.

Jek Bernsning yuk karvoni Kretr Ko'liga qaytib ketayotgandi, Cherchilni ham o'zlariga qo'shib olishdi. Berns Cherchilning sumkasini boshqa yuk xachiriga qo'yishini aytgandi, biroq Cherchill uni o'zi bilan egar oldiga olib, yo'lga tushdi. Egari ustida mudrab, uni mahkam tutgancha uyquga ketdi va har zamon u yer-bu yerda ko'ngli aynib, uyg'onib ketardi. So'ng shom tushmasdan burun Cherchilning xachiri lunjini shishirib, rejadagi yo'lga teskari yurib ketdi. Buning ustiga xachir so'qmoqda qo'pol harakatlanib, yiqilib,



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yo'lovchisini uloqtirib yubordi, yuk sumka esa qoyatoshlar ustiga tushdi. Shundan so'ng Cherchill piyoda holda qoqilib, xachirni boshqarib borardi, so'qmoqda oltin izlashda yo'ldan adashib qolgan va halok bo'lgan otlarning qoldiqlaridan o'ta badbo'y hid anqib turardi. U qattiq uyqu bosganidan bunga e'tibor bermasdi. Ayni paytda "Uzun ko'l"ga kelib qolgan edi. Bazo'r uyqudan bosh ko'tardi. Keyin esa xira yulduzlar yog'dusida Bernsga ko'z tikib yotdi. Yuk sumkasi bilan bog'liq ortiq baxtsiz hodisa kutilmayotgandi.

Yuk karvoni Kretr ko'lidagi oromgohga borishi kerak edi. Cherchill esa yuk sumkani orqasiga osib, tik cho'qqiga chiqa boshladi. O'sha tik jarlikda, ilk qadamlaridayoq qay darajada charchaganini his qildi. Butun gavdasining og'irligi tushib, dengiz qisqichbaqasi kabi sudralib tirmashar, har bir yuqoriga ko'tarilish undan kuchli iroda va matonat talab qilardi. Shu payt unda gallyutsinatsiya boshlandi, Cherchill o'zini dengiz qa'riga sho'ng'uvchi g'avvoslardek his qilar, azbaroyi tubsizlikka sho'ng'ishga intilar va undan bahramand bo'lish istagidan o'zini tiya olmasdi. Bondelning yuk chamadoni haddan ortiq og'irlik qilar, go'yoki tog'day bosib turardi. U tirmashib borarkan, o'tgan bir yilni esladi, xuddi shu so'qmoqdan bir yuz ellik funt yukni olib o'tganiga aqli bovar qilmasdi. Agar o'sha yuklar bir yuz ellik funt og'irlikda bo'lsa, Bondelning yuki, uningcha, besh yuz funt kelishi kerak edi.

Kretr ko'lidan ajralib turuvchi nishablikning

narigi tomoni muz bilan qoplangani yaqqol ko'rinib turar, biroq muz qatlamlarining yuqorisi hech narsa o'smaydigan taqir yer bo'lib, yalang'och qoya va ulkan tog' xarsanglari qalashib yotardi. Zimistonda so'qmoqni ko'rishning iloji yo'qligi bois, ganderaklab, qoqilib, atrofdagi har bir narsaga diqqat qilib borardi. Shamolning uvullashi va kuchli qor bo'roni zabtida cho'qqiga yetib keldi. Ayni shu payt tasodifan kichkina, qarovsiz bir chodirni topib oldi va sudralib ichkariga kirdi. U yerda juda eskirib qolgan qovurilgan kartoshka va besh-oltita pishmagan chala-xom tuxumlarni topib, shosha-pisha yutoqib yeya boshladi.

Qor tinib, shamol pasaygach, umuman yurib bo'lmaydigan qiyalikdantushishga urindi. So'qmoq yo'q bo'lib ketgan, u esa qoqilib, ganderaklab borardi. Goho ilojsiz bir holat – uning hukmi o'tmaydigan tik qiyaliklar tubiga va qoyatoshlar qirrasiga kelib qolardi. Yo'lning bir qismi ortda qolib, yulduzlarni yana bulut qopladi. Qorong'uda sirpanib, dumalab ketdi va yuz qadamlarcha toyib borib, keng, lekin sayoz chuqurlikning etagiga qontalash va momataloq holda yiqildi. Uning butun atrofidan o'lgan otlarning badbo'y, qo'lansa hidi ko'tarilardi. Chuqurlik so'qmoqqa shu qadar qulay joylashgandiki, yuk tashuvchilar muntazam ravishda bu yerga kasalmand, chalajon otlarni keltirishga odatlanishgan, o'lik otlar ayqash-uyqash bo'lib ketgan edi. Qo'lansa hid uni tamoman yengib, o'lar holatda mazasini qochirar, u yomon tushdagi kabijon holatda yuqoriga



tirmashardi. Yarim yo'lga yetganda Bondelning chamadoni esiga tushdi. U ham o'zi bilan chuqurga qulagan edi, demakki, bog'ichi uzilgan, Cherchill esa buni esdan chiqargan. O'lat tarqagan o'sha chuqurga yana qaytib bordi. U yerda tizzalab va qo'llari bilan atrofni emaklab, bir yarim soatcha vaqt ichida chamadonni qidirdi. Chamadonni topguncha jami o'n sakkizta otga duch keldi. (Bitta ot esa hali tirik edi, uni revolveri bilan otib tashladi.) Hayotni jasorat va g'alabalarsiz tasavvur qilib bo'lmaydi. U yuk sumkasiga qaytib kelishini umri davomidagi qilgan eng mardonavor ish deb bemalol ayta olardi. Xullas, uning qahramonligi shunda ediki, chuqurlikdan chiqishidan oldin ikkinchi bor o'lishiga bir bahya qolgandi.

Bu payt u Skeylzga yetib kelgan, Chilkatning tik nishabliklari ortda qolgan edi. Yo'l esa birmuncha yengillashgan-u, baribir qulay emasdi, biroq chidasa bo'lardi. Agar u bunchalik holdan toymaganida edi, vaqtini chog'o'tkazishi mumkin edi. Agar qadami yengillashib, Bondelning chamadoni bo'lmaganida, uning bu darmonsiz holiga battar og'irlik tushmasdi. Shu bois zo'rg'a sudralib yurar, sumkaning ortiqcha yuki uni irg'itib yuborish uchun kifoya edi. Deyarli har zamon qoqinib, turtinib borardi. U yiqilmaslikka tirisharkan, butoqli zulmat g'oyat cho'zilib ketgan edi. Sumkani yelkalari osha ortqilab olgan va u yo'lchini orqaga tortar edi.

Cherchilning xayoli o'zida edi. Agar "Afinalik" o'tib ketsa, bu yuk sumkasining aybi bo'ladi. Aslida

uning ongida ikki narsa qolgandi: Bondelning sumkasi va kema. Faqat shu ikki tushunchanigina tan olardi. Chunki ular Cherchilni uzoq sayohatga va mashaqqat chekishga majbur qilgandi. U go'yoki tushida, qiynalib yo'lda davom etayotganga o'xshardi. Tushining davomi sifatida u Ship Kempga yetib keldi. Chayqalib pivoxonaga kirib bordi. Yelkalarini qayishlardan bo'shatdi. Yuk sumkasini oyoqlariga qo'yayotgan edi, nogahonda barmoqlaridan sirg'anib ketdi va og'ir taqillagan tovush chiqarib, polga quladi. Lekin bu ayni payt chiqib ketayotgan ikki kishiga sezilmadi. Cherchill bir stakan viski ichib, bar xizmatchisiga o'n daqiqadan keyin uni chaqirishini aytdi. Boshini tizzasiga, sumkasini esa oyog'iga qo'yib o'tirdi.

Noqulay joylashgan tanasi shu holicha qotib qolgan edi. O'n daqiqadan so'ng, o'zi aytganidek, uni uyg'otishdi. Ikkinchi stakandagi viskidan so'ng bo'g'imlari va mushaklarini yozib, yengil harakat bilan dam berdi.

– Hoy! Bas qil! – baqirdi bar xizmatchisi. So'ng unizimistonda Kan'on Sitiga tomonquvib yubordi. Oltinchi hissiyot unga to'g'ri ketayotganini aytar, hamon zabtiga olayotgan uyqu esa Kenon so'qmog'iga yetaklardi. Ancha yurib, oldinda qandaydir xavfni sezdi va revolverini chiqardi. Hamon tush holatida turarkan, ikki kishining qorasini ko'rdi va unga yaqin to'xtagani eshitildi. U revolveridan to'rt marta o'q uzdi. O'ziga qarata ularning ham qurollaridan uchqun sachraganini



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ko'rdi. Shuningdek, Cherchill kimningdir bo'ksasiga qattiq urdi va bir kishi qulaganini ko'rdi. Boshqasi yaqinlashayotganida og'ir revolveri bilan yuziga qaqshatqich zarba berdi. Keyin ortga yugurib ketdi. Birozdan so'ng u xayolini yig'ib oldi. So'qmoqda egilib, sudralib qadam tashlab borarkan, dastlabki xayoli yuk sumkasida edi. U hamon yelkasida osig'liq turardi. Revolveri yo'qolganini bilgunga qadar bo'lib o'tgan barcha ishlarning tushligiga ishonardi. Keyin sonining qattiq achishayotganini sezdi, ushlab ko'rgan edi, qo'lga issiq qon urildi. U yuzaki jarohat edi, biroq buni rad etib bo'lmasdi. Birdan hushyor tortdi va Kan'on Siti tomon oqsoqlanib keta boshladi.

Yo'lda bir to'da otlari va aravasi bor kishini uchratdi, yigirma dollar evaziga otni aravaga qo'shdi. Cherchill arava yotog'iga sudralib kirdi, sumkasi orqasiga osilgan ko'yi uyquga ketdi. Aravada suv yuvib kelgan shag'allar ustidaog'ir harakatlanib, Dai vodiysi tomon tushib borishar, Cherchillesa arava do'ngliklarga urilgandagina o'rnidan turar, ba'zi do'ngliklar uni yotoqdan ko'tarib yuborar edi. Lekin uni ochlik qiynog'ichalik bezovta qilmasdi. So'nggi milbir tekis, ravon bo'lib, u miriqib uxladi.

U g'ira-shira tong yorishayotganda o'rnidan turdi, haydovchi uni qattiq silkitar, "Afinalik" ketib bo'lganini aytib, qulog'iga baqirardi. Cherchill qarovsiz bandargohga talmovsirab qarab turardi.

– Skaugaydan tutuni ko'rinyapti, – dedi o'sha odam.

Cherchillko'zlarini kata-katta ochib, uzoqqa qaradi va dedi:

– Bu o'sha, meni qayiqda oborib qo'ying.

Haydovchi hech bir ishdan bo'yin tovlamas,



h a q q i n i  
t o ' l a s h s a  
bo'lgani edi.  
Kichik qayiq  
topildi, o'ndollar  
evaziga o'sha  
kishi eshkak  
e s h a d i g a n  
bo'ldi. Cherchill  
oldindan to'lov  
qildi, uning  
y o r d a m i d a  
qayiqqa o'tib,  
orqa tomoniga  
o ' t i r d i .  
Skaugaygacha  
olti mil edi,

bu unga uxlash imkonini berishidan xursand edi. Ammo o'sha kishi qanday eshkak eshishni bilmasdi. Cherchill eshkaklarni qo'liga oldi va yana uzoq ter to'kdi. U sira olti milning bunchalik uzoq va mashaqqatli bo'lishini bilmas ekan. Ko'rfazda huzurbaxsh shabada turib, uni uyqu elitdi, o'zini zo'rg'a tutib turardi. Uning barcha xayollari sarobga aylandi, holsizlik va karaxtlikdan azob chekardi. Uning xohishi bilan sherigi kurakchaga sho'r suv olib, yuziga sepdi.



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Ular “Afinalik”kayaqinlashishganida uning langari pastdan yuqoriga ko‘tarilar va Cherchill vujudidagi oxirgi kuchini sarflamoqda edi.

– To‘xtang! To‘xtang! – baqirdi u xirillagan bo‘g‘iq bir ovozda.

– Muhim xabar! To‘xtang!

Keyin u iyagini ko‘ksiga qo‘yganicha behol uyquga ketdi. Uni besh-olti kishi ko‘tarib, kema narvoniga olib o‘tishganida uyg‘ondi va sumkasiga talpindi. Go‘yoki cho‘kayotgan odam xasga intilganiday unga yopishib oldi.

U palubada qo‘rquv va qiziqish markazida edi. “Uayt Xors”dan chiqayotgandagi kiyimlari bir uyum juldurga aylangandi. Uning o‘zi ham,asablari ham charchagan edi. U katta sabr-bardosh bilan qirq besh soat sayohat qildi. Bu vaqtda bor-yo‘g‘i olti soat uxladi. Avvalgidan yigirma funtga yengillashgan edi. Yuz-qo‘llari va tanasi tiralib, ko‘karib ketgan va zo‘rg‘a ko‘rardi. O‘rnidan turishga urindi, biroq harakati bekor ketdi va palubaga uzala tushib o‘tirib qoldi. Yuk sumkasini mahkam quchib, xabarni yetkazdi.

– Hoziroq meni yotoqqa olib boring! – deya so‘zini tugatdi. –Uyg‘onganimdan so‘ng ovqatlanarman.

Uning izzatini joyiga qo‘yishdi. Kir, eski-tuski kiyimlaridan soqit qilib, kemadagi eng katta, serhasham, to‘y marosimlariga mo‘ljallangan xonaga chamadoni bilan joylashtirishdi. Deyarli ikki marta uxlab turdi, dush qabul qildi, soqolini qirtishladi va tamaddi qildi, so‘ng to‘siqqa

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suyanib sigareta chekdi. Bu paytda “Uayt Xors” dan kelayotgan ikki yuz sayohatchi yaqinlashib qolgan edi.

“Afinalik” Sietlga yetib kelganida, Cherchill butunlay sog‘ayib ketgan edi. U Bondelning yuk chamadonini ushlagancha qirg‘oqqa keldi. O‘sha chamadon bilan o‘zida faxr tuydi. Bu uning vijdoni va burchi g‘alaba qilganini aks ettirardi. “Men yukni olib keldim”, – dedi mag‘rur turib. Hali kech tushishiga bor edi va u to‘g‘ri Bondelning uyiga yo‘l oldi. Luis Bondell uni ko‘rib xursand bo‘ldi, ikki qo‘li bilan baravar salomlashish asnosida, uyiga sudradi.

– Eh, rahmat, qariya, buni olib kelganing juda ajoyib bo‘ldi, – dedi Bondell yukni qabul qilarkan.

Uni divanga e‘tiborsiz otib yubordi. Cherchill yukning urilib sapchiganini o‘tkir nigohlari bilan kuzatib turar, Bondell esa uni savol bilan ko‘mib tashlardi.

– Qanaqasiga uddalading?! Qolganlar qanday? Bill Smitersga nima bo‘ldi? Dell Bishob haliyam Piers bilanmi? U kuchuklarimni sotib yubordimi? Salfer Bottom qanday kelib qoldi? Ko‘rinishing ajoyib. Qaysi kemada kelding?

Cherchill hamma savollarga javob berdi. Bir yarim soatlar o‘tib, suhbatlaridagi ilk sukunat paydo bo‘ldi.

– Uni yaxshiroq ko‘rib olmaysanmi?! – dedi u yuk chamadoniga imo qilib.

– E-e, hojati yo‘q,-javob berdi Bondell. – Mitchelning qurollari kutganidan ham a‘lo holda.



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– Yaxshilab ko‘rib olishing kerak! – undadi Cherchill, – Men biror narsani egasiga yetkazganimda, albatta, hammasi yaxshiligiga ishonch hosil qilishim kerak. Uyqudaligimda qulay fursat tug‘ilib, kimdir tegingan yoki boshqa bir nima yuz bergan bo‘lishi mumkin, axir.

– Muhim narsaning o‘zi yo‘q, qariya, – Bondell kulib javob berdi.

– Muhim emas, – Cherchill zaif, past ovozda takrorladi.

Keyin u hukm ohangida gapirdi:

– Luis, bu chamadondagi nima?! Bilishni xohlayman.

Luis unga sinchkovlik bilan qaradi, xonadan chiqib ketdi va bir shoda kalitlar bilan kirib keldi. Uni ochdi va og‘ir “44-Kold” revolverini oldi. Keyin bir necha qutida revolver uchun o‘q-dori va yana bir necha qutida vinchester patronlari chiqdi.

Cherchillchamadonni olib, ichiga qaradi, keyin ag‘darib, ehtiyotlab qoqdi.

– Qurollarning hammasi zanglagan – dedi Bondell, – yomg‘irda qolib ketgan bo‘lsa kerak-da.

– Ha, – javob berdi Cherchill. – Ancha ivib qoldi. Biroz ehtiyotsizlik qilibman.

U o‘rnidan turib, tashqariga chiqib ketdi. Bir necha daqiqadan so‘ng Luis Bondell ham chiqdi va uning zinapoyada, tirsaklarini tizzalariga, qo‘llarini iyagiga qo‘yib, zulmatga qattiq tikilib o‘tirganini ko‘rdi.

## KEKSA ASKAR HIKOYASI

*(Muallifning otasi boshidan kechirgan  
hayotiy hikoya)*

U vaqtlar zamon juda qaltis, front esa sarguzashtlar o'tkazadigan joy emasdi. Urush paytida boshimdan kechgan eng tahlikali voqealarning ba'zilari shundoq uyimizda sodir

bo'lgan edi.

Qilichim yonida osilib turadigan eski "Kolt" revolvorni ko'rgandirsiz-a?!

Uni armiyada besh yillik xizmat davrimda olib yurganman, necha bor eng og'ir vaziyatlardan chiqib ketishimda asqotgan.

'63-yil o'ttiz kunlik mehnat ta'tilida, yaqinlarimni ko'rish, shuningdek yangi ko'ngilli askarlar yig'ish uchun uyga keldim.





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Ta'tilim tugagunga qadar nihoyatda omadim kelib, yigirma besh – o'ttiz nafar xizmatga yozilmoqchi bo'lgan ko'ngillilarni topdim. Ular orasida men olib ketishga zo'r berib uringan bir yosh yigitcha ham bor edi. Uning o'zi xohlashiga qaramasdan otasi o'jarlik qilib, ketishiga yo'l qo'ymasdi. Bosh tortishining bor-yo'q sababi shu ediki, jo'xori archish mavsumi hali tugamagan, o'g'li Hiram esa bu ishga kerak edi. Pirovardida, Hiramning borishiga rozilik berishga undagan birdan bir sabab – mukofot puli edi. Armiyaga qo'shilgan har bir kishi uchun yuz dollardan taklif qilinayotgan edi. Hiram esa uning har bir sentigacha otasiga berishga va'da bergandi. Shunda qariya Zek, agar men o'rniga qolib, jo'xori archishga yordam bersam, rozilik berishini aytdi.

30 kunlik ta'tilim poyoniga yetdi, biroq o'sha paytlar yosh va beg'amligim sabab, bunga e'tibor qilmadim. Boshqa ko'ngillilar ham jo'xori archish tugagunga qadar qolish istagida ekanligini bilardim, bundan tashqari, o'ttizta azamat yigitlar bilan polkimga borganimda, menga jin ham urmaydi, degan xayolda edim. Shunday qilib, men ham o'z hissamni qo'shdim. Ikki hafta deganda qariya Zekning barcha jo'xorilari archib bo'lindi va men jo'nashga shay edim.

Biletlar olingan va tongda Rok Aylendda Qvins shaharchasiga boradigan poyezdga chiqishga hozir edik.

U yerda shaharchamizdan bunchalik ko'p ko'ngillilar yozilgani e'tirof etilishi, shuningdek

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 qasamyod qilishlari hamda va'da qilingan mukofotni olishlari kerak edi. Biroq men ta'tilimda uzoq qolib ketishdan tashqari, bir narsani unutgandim, ya'ni bosh zobitni. Bu zobitlar har yerda uchraydigan, ko'chada hayvon tutib yuruvchilardan ham jirkanchroq kimsalar edi. Ularning vazifasi qochoqlarni tutish. Maoshiga har bir tutilgan qochoq uchun yigirma besh dollardan qo'shilgani uchun ham, anglaganingizday, qulay fursatni sira qo'ldan boy bermaslikka urinishardi. Qaniydi, ular faqat asl qochoqlarni qo'lga olishganida edi?! Xalq ularni shuning uchun ham yomon ko'rardiki, bu zobitlar, bor-yo'q aybi – uzoq uyida qolib ketgan yoki arzimasi xatoga yo'l qo'ygan yaxshi, halol askarlarga zahmat keltirardilar. Bosh zobit ziyrak, sherday kuchli, okrugimizda bitta pastkash bo'lsa, u ham o'sha edi. Biroz oldin Tommi Jingles polkimdan uyiga kelgan va beparvolik qilib, ta'tilda uzoq qolib ketgan edi. Uchinchi kuni armiyaga qaytish uchun, Rok stansiyasida shundoq poezdga chiqayotganida, Devi Mak Gregor uni qo'lga oladi va qamoqqa jo'natib yuboradi. Yigirma besh dollar mukofot va xarajatlar bechora Tommining maoshidan undirib olinadi. Tommi esa qochishni xayoliga ham keltirmagan edi. Bu esa Devi Mak Gregorning nechog'lik shafqatsiz ish tutishining birgina misoli edi.

Hikoyamga qaytadigan bo'lsam, o'shanda uydagi so'nggi tunim edi, tushimda urush manzaralarini ko'rardim. Jang bulutlarida olg'a



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intilib borardim. Mushket do'l yog'ishiga o'xshab taraqalar va biz – birinchi avanpos g'azab bilan baqirib, yugurib borayotgan ekanmiz, shu payt eshikning qattiq taqillashidan uyg'onib ketdim.

– Chiq, Simon, senga keldim.

Bu Devining ovozi edi, nega kelganini yaxshi bilardim. Unga javob bermadim, qanday bo'lmasin sekin kiyina boshladim. Uning taqillatishi bir zumda uyni larzaga solib yubordi. Kiyinayotganimda singlim xonaga sekin kirib keldi. Men unga pichirlab, nima qilish kerakligini tushuntirdim. U eshikka tomon bordi, uni ochmasdan turib Devi bilan gaplashdi. Devi shubhalandi va oshxona eshigidan qarash uchun uning uy atrofida o'ralashib yurgan tovushi eshitilib turardi. Uyda ekanligimga ishonchi komil edi va eng yaxshisi jo'nashim kerak, degan to'xtamga keldim. Otam, onam va singlimni o'pib, bolalarga xayr deb qo'yishini va oldingi eshikni ehtiyot bo'lib ochishini tayinladim. Oy yog'dusi tushib turar, shubha qilganimday Devi uyimiz orqasida poylamoqda edi. Oyog'imni qo'lga olib, har bir ko'lanka imkoniyatidan foydalanib va nafas olish uchun o'zimda zo'rg'a kuch topib, emaklagancha omborxonaga bordim. Dadamning katta qora ayg'irini egarlashga tushdim, hammasi tayyor bo'lgach, zambarakning o'qiday ombordan otilib chiqdim.

Devi yo'lga qarab yugurdi, qo'limda "kolt"ni ko'targancha katta-katta qadamlar bilan yaqinlashayotganimda, u to'pponchalarini

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 silkitgancha to'xtashga buyruq berib, yo'limni to'sib chiqdi. To'g'ri uning ustiga ot choptirganimda, u o'zini chetga olmasdan ikki qo'lidan o'q uzardi. Uni bosib ketishim muqarrar edi, biroq o'zini chetga olishga ulgurdi. Maqsadiga erishgandi, chunki birinchi o'qi boshimni tilib o'tgan joydan kuchli og'riqni his qilayotgandim.

To'xtovsiz, oldinda yigirma sakkiz mil masofada joylashgan Rok stansiyasi tomon yelday uchib borardim. Doim yaxshi otda yuradigan Devi mendan ko'ra mohirroq edi. Lekin otlarimiz birday yelardi. Muyulishdan aylanib o'tayotganimizda, dastlab u meni havodan o'qqa tutdi, lekin tezda to'xtatdi. Mil ketidan mil yurib, kutilmagan falokatga ro'baro bo'lganimdagina, qochib ketishga ishonch hosil qila boshladim. O'zimni qator cho'zilgan o'rmonlar ichiga urganimda, tong ortda qolgan edi. Chunki u yer hali tundagidek qorong'u edi. Yo'l esa mashaqqatli bo'lib, otning tuyoqlari tovush chiqarmasdi. Kutilmaganda zimiston qo'ynida, qarama-qarshi tarafdin otliq chavandoz paydo bo'ldi. Qochishga juda kech edi, otlarimiz ko'ksilarini bir-biriga urishtira boshlagandi. Notanish ot va chavandoz kuchli zarbdan yerga ag'anadi, lekin menga og'ir ziyon yetmadi. Negaki, dadamning ayg'iri juda kuchli edi. U silkindi, ingrab yubordi va birdan sakrab turdi.

Otim ham og'ir yaralangan, shu sabab tezligini yo'qotayotgan edi. Devi meni sekin, diqqat bilan kuzata boshladi. Birozdan so'ng jilovimni



ushlashga urinib yaqinlashdi. U to'pponchalarini bo'shatib bo'lgandi, shuning uchun ham ota olmasdi. Qayta-qayta uni o'qlangan qurolim bilan nishonga oldim, lekin u jasur odam edi, sira qo'rqmasdi.



Aslida otish niyatim yo'q edi, lekin uni o'ldirish

– qochoq degan isnodni ko'tarib yurishdan yaxshiroq edi. Ko'rganingizday, qochish o'rniga, haqiqiy qochoqlarga kulguli bo'lgan holat – armiyaga qaytib borishga harakat qilayotgan edim. Lekin men otmadim, basharti otishim kerak bo'lsa-da, revolverimdan foydalanishni xohlamasdim.

Keyin biz yonma-yon o'n-o'n ikki milcha ot chopdik. Otim tobora holdan toya boshladi. Devi otini himoya qilish uchun mendan uzoqda chopishi kerak edi. Har gal u yuganimdan tortishga uringanda, qo'liga og'ir revolverim bilan tushirardim, u esa darhol ortga tisarilardi. Bildimki, ayg'ir ortiq davom etolmasdi. Bo'ynimga

qo'yilgan asossiz isnoddan xalos bo'lish uchun nimadir qilishim kerak edi. Tabiatan mehribon va yuvosh odamman, tilsiz hayvonlarga nisbatan juda beozorman, lekin nima qilgan bo'lsam, zarurat majbur qildi. Men G'arbda o'rgangan hiylani qo'lladim. U "gangitish" deb ataladi va ko'pincha yovvoyi otlarda qo'llaniladi. Ularni shunday otishadiki, o'q bo'ynini tilib o'tadi, lekin bu otga jiddiy jarohat yetkazmaydi. Uni biroz gangitib qo'yadi, biroq besh daqiqadan so'ng avvalgi holiga qaytadi.

Yashin tezligida egardan engashib, revolverimning uchini Devi otining ensasiga qo'ydim va tepkini bosib yubordim. Devi darhol pastga tushib, yugurishda davom etdi. U meni piyoda quvlab o'tayotganida, bechora otim zo'rg'a o'zini chetga olishga ulgurdi.

Soatimga qaradim. Birinchi poezdga ilina olardim. Rok stansiyasiga bor-yo'g'i besh mil qolgandi. Otim bu masofani bosib o'tolmasdi, men esa nima qilishni bilmasdim. Biroq Devi menga g'oya berdi. Yo'lning muyulishini aylanib o'tishda, shaharga borayotgan fermerning aravasiga yetib olishning uddasidan chiqolmadim. Yigirma qadam narida bir xil yo'nalishdagi boshqa bir arava kelayotgan edi. Devi birinchisini to'xtatdi va qamchi bosib, olg'a yurdi. Bu bir g'oya edi. Men bir ayol boshqarib kelayotgan ikkinchi aravani to'xtatdim va nima bo'lganini tushuntirdim. U bosh zobit haqida hammasini bilgani uchun ham rozi bo'ldi. Biz bir paytda to'xtab, otga mingan



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edik, men yigirma qadamcha oldinda edim. Omad ko'proq u tomonda, sababi uning oti yaxshiroq edi, lekin u beparvolik bilan ularni olg'a yurishga undar, ot esa bundan asabiy irg'ishlardi.

Natijada men bir necha yuz qadam ilgarilab ketdim. Rok Aylendga yetib kelganimizda hamon ancha masofa oldinda edim. Shaharni qanday hayratga solgan edik-a?! Biz asosiy ko'chaga ot choptirib borardik, bosh zobitdan nafratlanuvchi xalq meni olqishlardi. Biz ko'plab to'siqlardan zo'rg'a o'tib, poyezd jo'namoqchi bo'lib turgan temir yo'l stansiyasi tomon ot choptirib ketdik. Men olomon orasida ot chopishga botina olmadim, otdan tushib, shiddat bilan yugurib ketdim. Ulkan revolverini silkitgancha, g'azabga mingan, qalpoqsiz askarga olomonning qanday yo'l bo'shatib berganini taxmin qilayotgan bo'lsangiz kerak.

Tirishib oldinga intilayotgan Devi shundoqqina orqamda edi. Unga yuzlanib, to'pponcham bilan tahdid solgancha to'xtatmoqchi bo'ldim. O'qталgan qurolimning o'qi qolmagan edi, lekin u buni bilmasdi. Agar menga qo'l tekkizadigan bo'lsa, tepkini bosishim haqida qo'rqitib, orqaga chekindim. Olomon bosh zobitni tahqirlab, hushtak chalgan ko'yi mening tarafimni ola ketdi. "Yashasin askar!" – deb baqirishdi. "Bosh zobitga la'nat!", "Ot uni, askar, ot!", "Bechora Tommi Jinglesni kim qamoqqa olgan edi?!", "Devi Mak Gregor, yaramas zobit!", "Ura, askarni olqishlang!" – kabi xitoblar yangradi.

Shu tarzda ular raqibimni turtib, itarib orqasidan borishardi. Keyin ular qo‘pollashdi, men perronga yetib olganimda, olomon uning oyoqlariga tepishar, kamzulidan tortishar va uni futbol koptogi kabi ermak qilgan holda, qaddini bukib qo‘yishgandi. Konduktor signal berdi, olomonning so‘nggi olqishi bilan poezd Qvins shaharchasiga jo‘nab ketdi. O‘sha kuni u yerda men o‘zim yig‘gan askarlarni uchratdim. Navqiron yigitlarni polkimga olib borib, hammasini aytib berganimda, polkovnigimiz shunday dedi:

– Barakalla, Simon, bu ketishda, o‘ylaymanki, tez orada ikkinchi ta‘tilni ham qo‘lga kiritasan!



## SHIMOLIY O'LKA MO'JIZASI



Bu bo'lgan voqea – butun bashariyat qalbida ezgulikning abadiy mavjudligini ko'rsatuvchi hikoyadir. Bertram Kornel yomon va omadsiz odam edi. Okean ortidagi kichik ingliz kulbasida yashab, moddiy va ma'naviy farovonligi yo'lidagi qayg'ulari foydasiz, ko'z-yoshlari esa behuda ketdi. U yaramas va butkul rasvo kishi edi. Bunga shubha bo'lishi aslo mumkin emasdi. E'tiborsizlik, beparvolik va g'ayriinsoniylik uning zaif tomonlarini ko'rsatib turuvchi “yumshoq” so'zlar edi.

Hatto bolaligida ham u faqat yovuzlikka qodir edi. Yaxshi gaplar va yolvorishlar unga ta'sir

qilmas, onasi va opa-singillarining nam ko'zlariga bag'ritoshlik, otasining kamtarona nasihatlariga shafqatsiz munosabatda bo'lardi. Nima bo'lganda ham, yoshligidayoq Angliyadagi uyini tezda tark etdi, o'zi bilan birga vijdonini ham orqalab oldi, agar bu tuyg'u unda bor bo'lsa! O'zidan qoldirgan isnod sabab yurtdoshlari undan nafratlanib yurdi. Uni bilganlar esa vaqt xotirasini yuvib ketguniga qadar g'am-anduh bilan gapirib yurishdi. Yana qanday qabihliklar qilgani haqida hech bir shivir-shivirlar quloqqa chalinmadi. Keyingi taqdiri haqida esa hech kim hech narsa eshitmadi. Hayotining so'nggi daqiqalarida u tovon to'ladi va dog' tushgan hayot sahifasini tozaladi. Ammo u buni yangilik sekin tarqaladigan, odamlar so'qmoqlar aro adashib qolib, ana shunday sabablar tufayli halok bo'lgan kishilar haqida aytmasdan burun o'zlari ham hayot bilan vidolashishga mahkum olis va sirli bir mamlakatda amalga oshirdi.





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Bu uning tanlagan yo'li edi. Kuchli va beg'amligi bilan birga,

hayotning buyuk va dag'al qo'llarida kulib dunyoga kelgan edi. Hayot talab qilmagan bo'lsa-da, nimaiki qilgan bo'lsa, Bertram Sornelning o'zi xohladi. Qo'pol so'zlardan-da qo'polroq, kuchli zarbalardan-da kuchliroqlari bilan to'qnash keldi. Ummonlarda dengizchi, Avstraliya yerlarida podachi, Dakota cho'ponlari orasida kovboy va Shimoli-G'arbiy hudud otliq militsiyasidan ro'yxatdan o'tgan oddiy askarlar safida xizmat qildi. Bu so'nggi lavozimdan so'ng u Klondaykka oltin topish ilinjida ketdi va o'z yo'lini Alyaska qirg'og'iga burdi. Bu yerda oldingi tajribasi qo'l kelib, uch kishidan iborat jamoadan tezda o'rin egalladi.

Bu jamoa Klondaykka yo'l olgan, biroq bunda so'qmoq yo'ldan voz kechib, yangi aniqlanmagan yo'nalish bo'ylab mamlakatga kirish rejalashtirilgan edi. Yuk ortilgan ko'plab otlar (Shimoliy Oregon tog'laridan bo'lgan aravakash poni otlar) safi bilan to'rt kishi sharqqa, Muqaddas Elias tog'ining ortidagi tashlandiq va kimsasiz hududlarga, so'ngra Oq va Tanana daryolari manbalarining yuqori suv tog'li hududlari orqali shimolga yetishdilar. Bu o'rganilmagan, xaritalarda noaniq ko'rsatilgan, hali dastlabki oq tanli odam oyog'ini his qilmagan hudud edi. Bu yer shu qadar ulkan va mudhish ediki, hatto hayvonot hayoti va ba'zi kichik hindu qabilalarining orasi ancha olis edi. Necha kunlardan buyon, ba'zan

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yolg'iz ko'llarning yoqasi bo'ylab sokin o'rmon  
oralab, otda yurib o'tishar va hech bir tirik jonni  
ko'rishmas, shamolning guvullashi va suvning  
xo'rsinishidan boshqa hech bir sas eshitishmasdi.  
Hudud bo'ylab ulkan horg'inlik yoyilgan, shu  
qadar chuqur sukunat cho'kkan ediki, hatto  
o'zlarining ovozlari ham so'nib borar, suhbat  
asnosida aytilgan gaplar jimlik qa'riga singib  
ketardi.

Yashirin oltinlarni izlab, yo'lda borisharkan,  
kuchli oqimlar, izg'irin sovug'i jonni achitadigan  
havzalarning ostini paypaslab qadam bosishar,  
qudratli muzliklarning ko'lankalarida yerlab,  
sekin harakatlanishardi. Bir gal sof misning  
tog'dek keladigan katta bo'lagiga duch kelishdi,  
biroq ensalari qotib, o'tib ketishdi. Otlarining  
oziqasi taqchillashgan, o't-o'landan tez-tez  
zaharlanishar, kasal hayvonlar esa notanish  
yo'llarda birin-ketin halok bo'lar, xo'jayinlari ham  
bunga imkon berishardi. Suv omborining narigi  
tomoni – baland tepaliklar sari o'tisharkan, jamoa  
bulduriqli bo'ronni yengib o'tishdi va nihoyat,  
zo'r qiyinchiliklar bilan iliq vodiya etaklariga yetib  
olishdi, so'nggi ot ham ortda qoldirildi.

Bu yerda, pana vodiya Jon Tornton  
po'panaklarni tozalagan edi, o't ildizlaridan sariq  
oltinning yarqiroq zarralari sochilib chiqdi. Ayni  
payt Bertram Kornel u bilan birga edi. O'sha tun  
ikkalasi ming dollar qiymatida tosh bosuvchi sof  
oltin bo'laklarini qarorgohga keltirishdi. Manzilga  
yetib kelingandi. Oy oxirida to'rt kishining ham





ko'tara olish imkonidan og'irroq va ko'proq bo'lgan boylikni qazib oldilar. Ammo oziqa ta'minoti muttasil kamayib borar, barchasini bir kishi ortmoqlab, bukchayib yurib borardi.

Sovuq hudud va boshlangan yog'ingarchilik sabab ortiq yurish jonga tekkandi. Shimoli sharqning allaqayeridadir Yukan mamlakati va Klondayk yastanib yotganini bilishardi. Ming mildan ortiq chiqmaydi, deb o'ylashsa-da, qanchalik uzoqligini bilishmasdi. Shunday qilib, har biri taxminan ming dollar qiymatidagi besh funtcha oltin olishib, katta boylikning qolganini qaytib kelishlari uchun hech kim bilmaydigan joyga ehtiyotkorlik bilan yashirib qo'yishdi. Yana qaytib kelish niyatida ko'proq yegulik ham g'amlab qo'yishdi. O'q-dorilarning oxiri ko'ringan, shu

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 sababli miltiqlarini oltin bilan birga qoldirishdi, o'zlari bilan chodir jihozlari va ozgina yegulik zaxirasini olishdi.

Ko'p o'tmay oltin qazishmalariga yetishib, mo'l-ko'l oziq-ovqat yeyishlariga shu qadar ishonishardi. Biroq o'ninchi kuni ozgina pul qoldiqlaridan boshqa hech narsa topisholmadi. Hali ularning oldida qator ko'kka cho'zilgan baland tog' tizmalari-yu ulkan tog'lar yastanib yotardi. Shundan so'ng ularda shubha tug'ilib, borliqlarini qo'rquv qamrab oldi. Bil Hayns yegulikni ulushlarga bo'lib bera boshladi.

Ular peshin vaqti ortiq ovqatlanishmas, ertalab va kechqurunlari esa kunlik ta'minot to'rtta kichik bo'laklarga bo'linardi. Bu teng taqsimot, biroq juda oz ediki, jon va tanani hamohang ushlab turish uchungina yetardi, sermashaqqat ish sohiblarini kerakli kuch bilan ta'minlash uchun esa urpoq ham bo'lmas edi. Yuzlari holdan toyganliklari, kasallikdan oqarib ketganligi bois horg'in ko'rinardi. Kundan kunga kamroq yo'l bosishardi. Ochlikdan tez-tez ko'ngil aynishi xuruj qilardi, tizzalari ojizona silkinib ketar va boshlari gangib, yiqilib ketay deyishardi. Hansirab, sudralgancha qirrali tog' dovonining cho'qqisiga chiqishar va zo'r ishtiyoq bilan narigi taraf – qarshilaridagi tog'ga boqishardi. Biroq yoqimsiz va og'ir sukunatli hudud, nihoyasiz yolg'izlik va jimjitlikdan boshqa narsa ko'rinmasdi.

Birin-ketin jun adyollar va ortiqcha kiyimlarini uloqtirishdi. Yo'l-yo'lakay boltalar va qozon-



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tovoqlar, hatto oltin zarrali xaltalarini ham tashlab yuborishdi. Nihoyat, qolgan oz miqdordagi yeguliklarini ortmoqlab, yarim yalang'och holda chayqalgancha ilgarilab borishardi. Og'ir yuk teng taqsimlandi, uni Jen Jesen, Deni vazniga ko'ra to'rt qismga bo'lishdi. Har biri yozilmagan va aytilmagan, muqaddas safdoshlik rishtalari bilan yukni orqalab olishdi. Mitti yegulik xaltalari chodir yorug'ida, barchaning ishtirokida odilona taqsimlanadigan, boshqa payt xalta hech qachon ochilmaydigan bo'ldi.

Bekonning uch funtcha keladigan yirik bo'lagini bir necha taqsimcha un bilan Jon Tornton olib yurdi. Bu bir bo'lakni ular so'nggi ehtiyojlarini qondirish uchun saqlab qo'yishdi va qat'iyon tegmaslikka kelishib olishdi. Biroq Bertram Kornell unga och ko'zlarini tikdi va suqlanib qarab qo'ydi. Tunda sheriklari holsiz uyquga ketishganida, Jon Tornton xaltasining bog'ichlarini yechdi va bekonni o'g'irladi; soatlab sahargacha barchasini avaylab olib qursog'iga burdama-burda, umuman hech vaqo qolmaguncha joyladi, g'archillatib tishladi, chaynadi va yutindi.

Kelasi kuni tunda bo'lgan voqeani yashirish uchun ehtiyotkorona ish tutdi, agar biror hodisa yuz bersa, uning zaifligi qolganlarga oshkor bo'lardi. Bu juda og'ir kun edi; Jon Tornton orqada qolar va tez-tez dam olardi. Tun kirganda ular yana bir tog'ni bosib o'tishdi va vodiyni pastida kichik daryoning boshini ko'rishdi. Keyin esa sharq tomonga yugurib

ketishdi. Sharq tomonga! U yerda Klondayk va najot turibdi! Bir necha kun chidashsa, ular yana oziqa zaxirasi va oq tanli odamlar orasida bo'lishadi.

Olov yonida junjikib, ochlikdan sillasi qurigan odamlar ochko'zlik bilan atrofga alanglashardi. Bill Hayns biroz un olish uchun Torntonning xaltasini ochdi. Ko'z ochib yumguncha bekonning yo'qolganini payqadi. Torntonning ko'zlari dahshatdan baqrayib qoldi. Hayns xaltani tashlab yuborib, baland ovozda xo'rsindi, keyin esa yig'lab yubordi. Jen Jensen ov pichog'ini sug'urib olib, asabiy holda gapira ketdi. Uning ovozi kuchsiz va xirillagan, qariyb pichirlash bilan barobar edi. Ammo har bir so'zi lablaridan asta sirg'alar, biroq aniq eshitilib turardi.

– Do'stlarim, bu – qotillik. Bu odam biz bilan uxladi, biz bilan adolatli ulushini oldi. Zaxirani bo'lishib olganimizda, har bir kishi o'z yelkasida safdoshlarining hayotini ko'tarib borayotgan edi. Bu ishonch edi, yuksak ishonch, muqaddas ishonch. U bunga sadoqat qilmadi. Bugun u atayin orqada qolib ketgandi. Biz uni holdan toygan, deb o'yladik. Biz yanglishgan ekanmiz. Qarang! U biznikini ham yeb qo'ydi, aynan bizning hayotimizni yelkasida olib yurgan edi. Uning bu ishi qotillikdan boshqa narsa emas. Qotil uchun bitta jazo bor, faqat bitta. To'g'rimasmi, do'stlarim?!

– Ey, Bill Hayns! - deya baqirdi, ammo Bertram Kornell jim bo'lib qoldi. U buni kutmagandi.



Jen Jensen uzun tig'li pichog'ini muqarrar jazo uchun baland ko'tardi, ammo Kornell uning bilagidan mahkam ushlab oldi.

– Gapirishimga izn bering, – so'radi Tornton. U sekin gandraklarkan, oyoqlariga o'tirib qoldi. – Mening o'lishim adolatdan emas, men na bekonni yedim, na yo'qotdim. Hech narsani bilmayman. Ammo oliy xudo nomidan chindan ont ichamanki, bekonni na ushladim va na tatib ko'rdim.

– Toki sen uni yeyishgacha borgan ablah ekansan, shubhasiz, endi yolg'on gapirishga ham qodirsan, – Jensen betoqatlik bilan pichoqni o'qtalib, hamla qildi.

– Uni tinch qo'y, dedim, – do'q qildi Kornell. – Biz uning yeganini bilmaymiz. Buni hech birimiz ko'rmadik, bilmadik. Sizlarni ogohlantiryapman. Men undan uzoqlashmagan edim, qotillik qilganini ham ko'rmadim. Aybsizligini bilishning imkoni bor. Bunga e'tiborsiz bo'lmang. Uni tavakkal jazolamang.

G'azablangan Deni tig'ni qiniga soldi, bir soatdan keyin Tornton o'ziga kelib, unga so'z qotgan edi, Deni orqa o'girib ketdi. Bill Hayns ham bu la'nati odam bilan suhbatlashishdan bosh tortdi. Ayni paytda Kornell unga yuragi achishib, vijdoni oldida qiynalayotgan edi (umrida birinchi bor), lekin hech narsa qilolmasdi.

Ertasi kuni ertalab Bill Hayns ozgina qolgan ovqatni birlashtirib, to'rt bo'lakka qaytadan bo'ldi. Torntonning ulushidan bekonning teng qiymatini ayirib oldi va qolgan uch kishining

g'aramiga teng qo'shib berdi. Buni so'zsiz bajardi, xatti-harakatlari izohga muhtoj emas edi.

– Unga o'zining yeguligini olib yurishiga ruxsat, – bo'kirdi Jensen.

– Agar u hammasini birdan yeb qo'yishni xohlar ekan, marhamat.

Keyingi kunlar Jon Torntonning qanchalik azob chekkanini faqat uning o'zi bilardi. Nafaqat sheriklari undan nafratli nigoh bilan voz kechishdi, balki u eng qora va qo'rqqoq jinoyat, ya'ni xiyonat qilganlikda ayblanardi. Bundan tashqari, boshqalardan kamroq yeyishga, ortda qolib, ularga ergashishga yoki o'limga mahkum edi. Hatto keyin ham, u eng so'nggi chimdimni yeb tugatganida, sheriklarida ikki kunga yetarli yegulik qolgandi. Shunday qilib, u mokasinlarining yuqori terisini kesib qaynatdi va yedi. Kun davomida esa tol navdalarining po'stloqlarini shishgan va qizargan og'ziga solib, azob bergancha, aqldan ozar darajada chaynab yuraverdi. U sudralib, gandiraklab, goh yiqilib, ba'zan emaklab, alahlagan ko'yi oldinga intilardi.

Qolgan uch kishi uchun ham mokasinlari va nihollarning yashil navdalarini chaynash vaqti keldi. Bu paytda ular kuchli oqim bo'ylab yurishardi. Kichik daryo boshlangach, shoshilinch kengash qilishib, uyum xodalardan omonat sol yasashdi. So'ngra kutilmaganda o'nlab ovchilar makoni bo'lgan Hindu qishlog'iga duch kelishdi. Biroq Hindular avvallari hech ham oq tanli



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odamlarni ko'rmaganliklari sabab ularni o'q yomg'iri bilan qarshi oldilar.

– Qarang! Daryo! Baydarkalar! – Jensen baqirdi. – Agar ularga yetib olsak, omon qolamiz! Ularga yetib olishimiz kerak!

Ular gandraklab qirg'oqqa yugurib ketishdi. Qabila erkaklari uvullagancha jazavaga tushgan ko'yi bir joyga yig'ilishdi. Kutilmaganda bir tarafdagi daraxt orqasidan teridan kiyingan jangchi chiqib keldi. Katta muguz nishli nayza bilan bir muddat mo'ljal oldi va bekamu ko'st nishonga urdi. O'q havoda vizillab, yeldek uchib keldi va Jon Torntonning soniga qadaldi. U bir lahza chayqaldi va qoqinib, yuztuban yerga yiqildi. Hayns va Jensen uning orqasidan yugurib kelayotgan edi, o'ng va chap tomonlariga bir o'girilishdi-yu o'lib ket, deganday Torntonning ikki tomonidan o'tib ketishdi.

Shundan so'ng mo'jiza yuz berdi. Ezgulik ruhi Bertram Kornelning qalbiga kuchli ta'sir qilib, uni hapriqtirdi. O'ylab o'tirmasdan, darhol ichki ovozga quloq soldi va shu zahoti oldinga yugurib chiqib, qochayotgan sheriklarini qo'li bilan ushlab qoldi.

– Qaytib bor! – baqirdi u ovozi xirillab.  
– Torntonni baydarkaga olib chiq! Uni olib ketguningizcha hindularni ushlab turaman!

– Yuringlar! – qichqirdi Deni pichog'ini paypaslab. – Hayotimni asrashim uchun itga yordam berishni istamayman!

– Bekonni men o'g'irladim. Bekonni men yedim. Endi qaytib kelasanmi?! – Kornell uning

ko'zlarida hayratni ko'rdi. – Oliy sud qarshisida muruvvat istayman, uni men o'g'irladim! – Uchib kelayotgan nayzalar yomg'ir kabi ustiga yog'ilardi. – Shoshilinglar! Ularni qaytarib turaman!

Qolganlar zumda yaradorni o'rtalariga olib, baydarka tomon chayqalib borishardi. Bertram Kornell esa mardonavor holda dushmanga qarshi chiqdi va joyidan jilmadi. Bundan hayron qolgan hindular bir zum ikkilanib to'xtab qolishdi. Ayni vaqtda Kornell vaqtdan yutmoqda edi, hech bir harakat qilmadi. Hindular unga nayzalar yomg'irini yog'dirishdi. Zaharli suyak o'qlar uning borlig'i uzra do'lddek yopirilib kelardi.

Besh-oltita nayza uning ko'krak va oyoqlariga kirdi, bittasi bo'yniga sanchilib qoldi. Ammo u hali ham qotgan haykaldek tik turardi. Torntonga nayza otgan jangchi yon tomondan unga yaqinlashdi va ular bir-birlariga tashlanishdi. Ayni payt qolgan hindular ham urush jazavasi bilan bostirib kelardi.

Ular bir-birini chopishib, yanchishayotganlarida, Jen Jensenning suvdan baqirgani eshitildi va Kornell sheriklarining xavfdan holiekanliklarini angladi. O'shanda u yaxshi jang qildi va bu hayoti mobaynida ezgu maqsad yo'lida amalga oshirilgan birinchi va oxirgi xayrli ish edi. Hatto uni hindular ham o'zgacha hurmat bilan tilga olishadi. Chunki unga qarshi kechgan jangda hindular boshlig'i va oltita jangchi ham halok bo'lgandi.

Kornell hurmat-e'tiborsiz yashagan bo'lsa-da, tavba qilib, xatolarini tuzatib, haqiqiy inson kabi



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jasurlik va yuksak matonat bilan vafot etdi. Uning jasadi ham haqoratlanmadi. Uzoq jang qildi va hindular boshlig'ini o'ldirdi. Unga ehtirom ko'rsatishib, munosib jangchilardek dafn etishdi. Oq tanli odamlarni ko'rmagan sodda hindular mavsum tugagach, uni "Osmondan halok bo'lish uchun tushgan ilohiy xudo" – deya nomlashdi.

## KLONDAYKDA RO‘ZG‘OR TUTUMI

Klondaykda ro‘zg‘or ishi – bu yomon. Ayniqsa, erkaklar uchun undan-da yomonroq. Agar aksincha o‘ylasangiz, uning muammolarini qilcha ham yengillata olmaysiz. Erkaklar uchun uyni tutib turish og‘ir, ayniqsa, Klondaykda undan-da og‘irroq. Bu ayni haqiqat va qat‘iy xulosa. Albatta, erkaklar – bu erkaklar, ular dunyoning muzlagan narigi chetiga boradiganlar xilidan desak ham, to‘g‘riroq bo‘ladi. Ko‘zlari porlagan oltinlar, orziqqan umidlar ilinjida ochiqqan, yuraklarida oshpazlik bobida “ovqat”dan boshqa har qanday narsaga o‘ta nopisandlik bor. “Avval ovqat”, – deyishadi ular, so‘qmoqdan oriqlab, ochiqib kelishib, shu so‘zni aytishadi: “Ovqat va qizdiruvchi ichimlik”. Bu turdagilar zarracha mulozamat ko‘rsatishmaydi, ular “ochiqchasiga” bo‘lishni afzal ko‘rishadi.



Ha, bunday odamlar uchun taom tayyorlash y o q i m l i mashg‘ulotdek tuyulsa-da, biroq shundoq bir hafta xonada dam olib yotishlari, qo‘yingchi, qandayin tez dimog‘lanib



.....ketishi, bekon qovurayotganingizda yoki qahva qaynatayotganingizda kinoyali vaysashlarini ko'ravering. Qarangki, har birida xamirturushli nonni qanday aralashtirish va pishirish borasida o'ziga xos g'alati va hayron qolarlik "nazariya"lar bor. Har birining o'z shaxsiy retsepti bo'lib, faqat tajribaga tayanilgan, o'ziga qolsa, bu boshqalarnikiga o'xshamasligiga chin dildan ishonishar va hatto buning uchun urushishgacha ham borishardi – oxirgi chimdim sodani solish uchun kerak bo'lsa, o'lishga ham tayyor. Agar uni so'qmoqda tamomila holdan toygan holda uchratib qolguday bo'lsangiz, uning xulq-atvorini, nasl-nasabini qoralashingiz mumkin, biroq pichirlab bo'lsa-da, xamirturushli noniga qarshi biror nima deb ko'ring-chi, to'nini teskari kiyib, teringizni shilib oladi.

Namuncha tuturiqsiz bo'lsa-ya bu xamirturush. Tannoz ayol ham bunchalik noz-karashmali emas. Xamirturushga ham ishonib bo'lmaydi. Shunday bo'lsa-da, xamirturush degani bu dunyodagi eng oddiy narsa. Yaxshilab qoring-da, muzlab qolmaslik uchun achiguncha pechka yoniga joylang. So'ngra xamir bilan aralashtiring-da, xushta'm bo'lishi uchun soda ham qo'shing – albatta, yana bir karra qayta ishlov bering. Mana, bundan-da osoni bormikan?! Evoh! Hali pishirish mashmashasi ham bor. Biroq ikki marta pishirib bo'lmaydi-ku. Agar nonlar teng haroratda pishsa, hozircha hammasi yaxshi degani. Qaniydi sheriklari burun tiqishmasa edi, ko'p dilxiraliklarning oldi



olangan bo'larmidi?! Ammo buning iloji yo'q; Tom nonxona turk hammomiday qiziguncha pechkani baland yoqib qo'yadi. Dik esa xona muzlab qolguncha o't yoqishni butunlay unutadi; keyin Garri keladi-da, qo'lqoplarini quritishga joy hozirlarkan, xamirli paqirni to'g'ri pechka tomonga surib qo'yadi. Endi issiqlik xamirning achishini

tezlashtiradigan asosiy sharoit hisoblanadi, shundan omadsiz oshpaz Tom Dik va Harrining kasofati tufayli doim sharmanda bo'lib yuradi. O'tgan hafta uning noni ko'p miqdordagi soda qo'shilganidan sariq bo'lib qolgan edi, bu hafta xuddi shunday ehtiyotsizlik oqibatida nordon bo'lib qoldi, kelasi hafta nima bo'larkin, oh, buni pechka xudosidan boshqa hech kim bilmaydi.

Ba'zi oshpazlar o'zlarining hid bilish qobiliyati qanchalar baland ekanini maqtanishar, zuvalaning qay darajada achiganini uning kichik bo'lagini hidlab, ayta bilishlarini o'zlaricha ta'kidlashardi. Biroq shunga qaramay, bir pechda ikkita bir xil non yopganlari hali ma'lum emas. Ammo bu haqiqat ulardagi samarasiz tajribani zarracha



bo'lsa-da, yuzaga chiqarmaydi, chunki har biri vaziyatdan foydalanib qolib, istamaygina aybni baydarka ag'darilganda namlanib qolgan sodaga yoki yonida itlari bo'lguvchi mulat kishidan savdolashib olingan arzon unga ag'darishadi.

Klondaykoshpazining faxri uning nonida, degan tushuncha yuradi. Bu tushuncha – mamlakatda insonga beriladigan va uni tanitadigan, bir so'z bilan aytganda, “xamirturushli bola” nomini beradigan eng yuqori maqto'v pillapoyasi sanalardi.

Nondan tashqari, Klondayk oshpazi o'zining ponchiklari bilan ham martabaga erishishga intiladi. Bu bir qarashda yengil ko'rinsa-da, boshqa tarafdin, ishlatiladigan masalliqlar hisobga olinsa, mushkul san'at. Biroq ponchiklar so'qmoq orqali istalgan muddatga sayohatga ketadiganlar uchun juda muhim. Non tezda qotib qoladi, qancha kam yog' va shakar bo'lsa, shuncha kam issiq saqlanadi. Ponchiklar o'ta past darajadan boshqa holatlarda qotib qolmaydi. Ularni Makintosh kamzuli cho'ntaklarida olib yurish, yo'l-yo'lakay huzur qilib yeb ketish mumkin. Ponchiklar ko'pincha an'anaviy usulda, tuzlangan cho'chqa yog'ida pishiriladi – qancha ko'p yog' bo'lsa, shuncha shirin va yumshoq bo'ladi. Shakar oshpaz uchun asosiy va mushkul masala; agar u taqchil bo'lsa, kamroq yog' qo'shiladi. Odamlar so'qmoqda tashvish qilishmaydi. Kulbada-chi?! – Xo'sh, bu – boshqa masala. Bundan tashqari, ular uchun non ponchikdan-da yaxshiroq.



Sovuq sukunat va qorong'ulik negadir Klondaykdagilarning bosh g'am-t a s h v i s h i d e k ko'rinardi. Ammo bularning bari bo'lmagan gap. Qolgan hammasiga soya solib turadigan bir muammo bor, u ham bo'lsa shakar

taqchilligi. Shimolga boradigan har bir jamoa shakarsiz ham eplasa bo'ladi, degan erkakcha o'yni ilgari suradi, keyin esa bunday tadbirsizlik oqibatida shikoyatlar vujudga keladi. Odamlar muhtojlik va qo'rquvga sovuqqonlik bilan chiday olishadi, ammo shakarini olib qo'ying-chi, fig'oni yulduzlarga qadar ko'tariladi. Buning eng yomoni shundaki, barchasi borib zahmatkash oshpazga taqaladi va u azob chekadi. Tabiiyki, qahva, bo'tqa, quritilgan meva va guruchni shakarsiz yeyishlari mumkin, biroq ularning asl ta'mini aniq sezishmaydi. Muayyan ta'm bilish sifati yo'qoladi. So'ngra oshpazning ishi qoralanadi. Shunga qaramay, agar oshpaz dono bo'lsa, mulohaza bilan bu nohaqlikdan qutulib qolishi mumkin. U stolga bir kosacha bo'tqa tortganda, qo'yingki, yoniga quritilgan olma va shaftolilarning bir qozon qaynatmasini ham qo'shib bersin. Bu qorishma odamlarga ajoyib bir mazani tuhfa etadiki,



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birining betamligi boshqasining o'tkir ta'mi bilan uyg'unlashadi. Shakar yetishmayotgan mushkul holatda, agar u jamoa oshpazi bo'lsa, guruch va mevani birga – bir qozonda qaynatadi; agar guruch va olxo'ri qoqisidan maromiga yetqazib ovqat tayyorlasa, chindan jamoaning g'amgin a'zolarini sevintiradi va oshpazga katta minnatdorchiliklar bildiriladi.

Oshpaz, haqiqatan ham, shunday bir ijodkor odam bo'lishi lozim. Sheriklari fasolga sirka aralashtirish kerak deb baqirishsa-yu, sirka bo'lmasa, u suv, qurigan olma va kartondan qanday tayyorlashni bilishi kerak. Oshpaz tuzlangan cho'chqa go'shtining oxirini jamlaydi, odatda yog' bilan to'yintiradi. Biroq masala bunda emas. Past haroratli o'lkalarda yog'li cho'chqa go'shti hech qachon aynimasligini biladi. U vorvan va tulen yog'i bo'lib Eskimoslarga juda zarur. Ko'ngilga xush yoqadigan qaylalar, unga suv va olovda qizdirilgan undan qo'shib tayyorlanadi. Ba'zi oshpazlar o'z qaylalari bilan katta obro' qozonishadi, ularning nomlari bazmlarda, umuman qayerda bo'lmasin, odamlarning og'zidan tushmaydi. Shamlar o'chirilganda, oshpaz sardine konserva bankasini cho'chqa yog'i bilan to'ldiradi, duradgorning yelkan chilviridan pilik yasaydi, ana shunaqa! Moychiroq to'la turadi. Xamirturushli non Klondaykda nasl-nasab sabablaridan-da muhimroq, odamlarning joniga javobgar.

Yetuk oshpazning qalbida Som tillariga moyillik bo'lishi lozim. Mulohazakorlik faqat zaruriyat emas; omborxonaning xilma-xilligidan ko'z-

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quloq bo'lib turish lozim. U majusiylarni tushunib, yegulikni "ayirboshlash"ni bilishi kerak. Unga qarshi bo'lgan savdoni pishita olishi lozim. Sheriklari har gal tishlagan bekon bir necha bosqichlarda tayyorlanadi, hatto ular buni eslatib qo'yish uchun oshpazni uyqudan uyg'otishadi. Masalan, so'qmoqqa sayohatga chiqayotganlar uchun oldindan bir necha gallon dukkaklilar, yirik bo'lakli tuzlangan cho'chqa go'shtlari va bir talay bekon yog'i ko'pchilik bo'lib tayyorlangan. Buni keyinchalik oshpaz qulay o'lchamli qoliplarga solib, tomga joylaydigan bo'ldi, bir necha soat ichida g'isht bo'lib muzlab qoladi. Shunday qilib, odamlar holdan toydiradigan sayohatda uning yirik bo'lagini bolta bilan chopib olishadi va tovada eritib yeyishadi.

Oshpaz o'z o'rniga munosib bo'lish uchun ham ta'minotda ba'zi bir yetishmovchiliklar hisobini oladi va ortiqchalarini qizil qalampirlarga ayirboshlaydi.

Yuqoridagi muammolarni hal etishda kelishib hamkorlik qilinadi, bunday ovqatga hatto ochlik va sovuqning o'zi ham hasad qilishi mumkin. Yeguliklardagi xilma-xillik odamlarga oltin donalaridek xush yoqadi. Oylab quritilgan shaftolilar yeyilgach, oshpaz bir necha stakanni xuddi shunday o'riklarga ayirboshlaydi, kelajak birdan yana-da gullab-yashnaydi. Bekon mahsulotidagi o'zgarish hatto mamlakatda vayron bo'lgan ishonchni jonlantiradi.

Klondaykda oshpaz bo'lish serdaromad kasb emas. Ko'p hollarda ichkarida o'zi bilan yana uchta



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odamni band qilib, o'n-o'n ikkigacha zarur hisob-kitoblarni bajaradi. Bu odamlar ayni joyda yebichadi, uxlaydi, vaqtini bekor o'tkazadi, chekadi, qarta o'ynaydi va mehmonlar bilan ko'ngilxushlik qiladi, bundan tashqari, mulklarining asosiy qismi shu kichkina uyda turadi, oshpazlarning uy o'lchamini shuning o'zidan osongina aniqlash mumkin. Ertalab oshpaz uyqudan tura solib, olov yoqishga yuguradi, keyin esa kiyinadi. Shundan so'ng diametri qo'lining uzunligicha keladigan pechkaning og'zi uning ish markaziga aylanadi.

Agar odamlar yer ostida qattiq ishlayotgan bo'lsa, oshpaz o'tin va suvini o'zi ta'minlaydi. Oldin chopib chiqadi va chanaga ortadi, nihoyat, uyga qoplab olib keladi – agar u tirishib ishlamasa, eshik oldida qariyb tonna suv yig'ilib ketadi. Ovqat pishirmayotgan paytlari muz eritayotgan bo'ladi va goh-gohida quduqdagi sheriklariga chig'ir bilan shamchiroq tutib turadi. Itlarga g'amxo'rlik qilish ham uning zimmasida, u o'zini himoya qilish va itlarni ovqatlantirish uchun qo'lida doim tayoq ko'tarib yuradi.

Biroq nafaqat oshpaz, balki Klondaykda hech bir kishi qilishi zarur bo'lmagan yumush bor – bu o'zgalar o'rnini yig'ishtirish. Aslida, jun adyollar yoyilmagan bo'lsa yoki qarag'ay ignalari shoxlardan to'kilib gilam kabi to'shalgan kezlardan istisno holatlarda, yotoqlar hech qachon to'g'irlanmaydi. Xona poli ifloslangan, ichkarida duradgorlik ishlari qilishganida, oshpaz hech qachon supurib chiqmaydi. Bu yer

ana shunday ishlar uchun anchayin iliq. Olov yoqqanda hovuchlab bir juft pol qipiqalaridan soladi. Holbuki, qoldiqlar ko'payib, bosh tomga tekkgudek bo'lsa, belkurakni olib, oyoq tagini yig'ishtiradi.

Oshpaz oynalarni yuvmaydi, ammo duradgor band bo'lsa, o'zining oynalarini yuvishi kerak. Bu oddiy. Xona tashqarisidagi teshikni arralaydi, xonaki oyna o'rnatadi, qimmat yozuv qog'ozini deraza oynasiga o'rnatadi. Bu qog'oz yuzasi cho'chqa yog'i bilan yaxshilab ishqalanadi, qog'oz shaffoflashadi, u erigan qor suvlarini o'tkazmaydi va sovuqni tashqarida ushlab, ichkarini issiq tutadi. Sovuq havoda muz uning ichki tarafida ba'zan ikki yoki uch dyumgacha qalinlashadi. Simobli termometr lampochkasi qattiq muzlab qolganda, oshpaz derazaga qarab, muz qoplamasining qalinligidan tashqaridagi sovuqni bir necha daraja farqi bilan bexato aniqlaydi.

Klondayk oshpaziga astronomiyaga oid muayyan bilimlar ham talab qilinadi. Chunki uning yana bir vazifasi vaqtni kuzatib borish.





Uxlashidan oldin tashqarida aylanib yuradi va osmonni o'rganadi. Qutb yulduzi joylashgan Katta Ayiq orqali bir necha yardni ajratib oladi va Shimoliy Yulduz yo'liga qaratib ikkita ingichka tayoqchani qorga o'rnatadi. Ertasi kuni janubiy ufqdagi quyosh nuri shimol tomondagi tayoqchalar soyasiga tushganida, soat o'n ikki – tush vaqti bo'lganini biladi, so'ng sheriklari va o'zining soatini unga to'g'rilab oladi. Daydi itlar muttasil tayoqlarni chiziqdan olib tashlashi sabab, har tun ularni muntazam tekshirish odat tusiga aylangan, shu zayl unga yana bir vazifa yuklanadi.

Shunday bo'lsa-da, hududning shimolida uy ishlari, pishir-kuydir bilan band bo'lgan insonning sanoqsiz g'am-tashvishlari borligiga qaramay, uning xonadonida boshqa uy bekalari xonadonida uchramaydigan o'ziga xoslik bor edi. U ayol obraziga kirishi kerak bo'lgan holatlarda, fartugini boshiga taqqancha, ko'zlariga yosh olardi. Bu shunchaki erkak yoki Klondiker bo'lish emas edi. Kamdan kam holatlarda ovqat tayyorlashga to'g'ri kelishi uning hislarini g'alayonga solib, ishdan voz kechishiga olib kelardi. Shunday paytlarda ko'cha ishlari bilan mashg'ul bo'lardi, bundan uning xo'jalik vajlari hisobiga tushkunlik aks etgan qiyofasida biroz nur jilva qilardi.

## BIR PARCHA GO'SHT

Tom King  
so'nggi bir  
tishlam non bilan  
likopchasidagi  
unli qaylaning  
oxirgi qoldiqlarini  
tozalab artdi,  
keyin esa og'iz  
to'ldirib, sekin va  
o'ychan chaynadi.  
Stoldan turarkan,  
ochlikni yaqqol  
his qilib og'rindi.  
Hali uning bir  
o'zi ovqatlangan



edi. Narigi xonada esa ikki bolasi kechki ovqatni unutishlari uchun erta yotqizilgan edi. Xotini hech nimaga teginmas, jimgina o'tirar va erini kuyunchak nigohi bilan kuzatardi. U ishchi sinfining oriq va juda toliqqan ayollaridan edi, shunga qaramay yuzlari yoshlik chiroyiga ehtiyoj sezmasdi. Qaylaga unni to'g'ridagi qo'shnisidan qarzga olgan edi. Oxirgi ikki chaqaga ham non sotib olingan edi.

Tom deraza yonidagi vazniga norozi g'ichirlagan, omonatgina bir stulga o'tirdi, beixtiyor og'ziga trubkani qo'ydi va paltosining yon cho'ntagini titkilay ketdi. Bu harakati unda hech



qancha tamaki qolmaganidan dalolat edi. Keyin esa yodidan chiqarganidan xo'mrayib, trubkani olib qo'ydi. Harakatlari juda sekin, imillar, go'yoki og'ir mushaklari o'ziga yuk bo'layotgandek tuyulardi. U pishiq jussali, sovuqqon ko'rinishdagi odam bo'lib, tashqi qiyofasiga iliqlik yetishmasdi. Dag'al eski kiyimlari beso'naqay ko'rinar edi. Oyoq kiyimining ustki qismi shu qadar mo'rtlashib qolgandiki, so'nggi paytlarda og'ir tagcharmi yolg'iz ko'tarishga ojizlik qilayotgan edi. Paxtalik ko'ylagi esa arzon, ikki shillingli mato bo'lib, to'zib ketgan yoqasi va o'chmas bo'yoq dog'lari bilinib turardi.

Tomning yuzi u haqdagi bor haqiqatni bexato aks ettirib turardi. Bu mohir boks ustasining yuzi edi; ring maydonida uzoq yillar ter to'kkan, shu taxlit shafqatsiz jangchining barcha belgilari yaqqol ko'rinish turardi.

Ubadqovoq yuz, e'tiborni tortadigan jihatlardan holi, ammo soqoli yangi olingan edi. Shaklsiz lablari va ortiqcha qo'pol bichilgan og'zi go'yo yuzidagi yaraga o'xshab ko'rinish berardi. Jag'i tajovuzkor, yovuz va qalin ko'rinar edi. Ko'zlari sust harakatli, og'ir qovoqli, paxmoq sochlari esa botiq peshona tagida qariyb ifodasiz turardi. Shunchalar shafqatsiz odamga o'xshardiki, go'yoki ko'zlarida hayvoniylik aksetgandi. Ular uyqusiragan, sherniki kabi vahshiy tus olgandi. Manglayiga qiya tushib turgan sochlari qalin kesilgan bo'lib, boshidagi har bir xunuk g'urralarini ko'rsatib turardi. Burni ikki marta singan, sanoqsiz zarbalardan qayta

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 tiklangan, gulkaram qulog'i doim shishgan va hajmi ikki barobar katta ko'rinib, uning shaklini buzib ko'rsatardi. Unga bezak bo'lib turgan soqoli tozalab olingan bo'lsa-da, terini yorib chiqqanlari yuzida ko'kish-qora dog' kabi ko'rinib turardi.

Xullas, qorong'u yo'lakda yoki xilvat joyda ko'rib qo'rqib ketadigan odamning yuz ifodasi edi. Shu vaqtgacha Tom King jinoyatchi bo'lmagan, jinoiy ishga qo'l urgan emasdi. Janglardan tashqarida oddiy hayot tarziga ega, hech kimga ozor bermagan. Biror marta janjal ko'targani ham ma'lum emas. U kasbining ustasi edi, shu sababli janglardagi shafqatsizligi uning professional qiyofasini shakllantirgan edi. Ringdan tashqarida u sust, beparvo odam edi, puli ko'p bo'lgan yoshlik damlarida esa o'z manfaati yo'lida juda ochiqqo'l bo'lgan. Hech qachon adovat saqlamas va shu bois ham dushmanlari bo'lmagan, bizningcha. Jang uning ishi edi. Ha, ringda u jarohat berish uchun urardi, mayib qilish uchun urardi, o'ldirish uchun urardi, biroq bunda hech bir xusumat yo'q edi. Bu uning odatdagi kasbiy vazifasi edi. Raqiblar bir-birlarini o'ldirishlarini tomosha qilish uchun odamlar pul to'lab kirishardi. G'olib katta pul mukofotini olardi. Tom bundan yigirma yil oldin Vudomolo Gauger bilan to'qnash kelganda, raqibining jag'i Nyu Kesldagi jangda singani va tuzalib bitganiga bor-yo'g'i to'rt oy bo'lganini yaxshi bilardi. Tom aynan shu jag' uchun jangga tushdi va to'qqizinchi raundda uni yana bir bor sinishga mahkum etdi. Bu ishni Gaugerni



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yana kasal qilish va azoblash uchun emas, balki mukofot pulini qo'lga kiritishning yagona yo'li bo'lganligi uchun qilgandi. Gaugerning ham unga hech qanday yomon niyati yo'q edi. Bu o'yin edi va ikkisi ham buni bilishardi, shu bois zimmalaridagi vazifani og'ishmay ijro etishardi.

Tom King ko'p gapirmas, deraza yonida odamovilar kabi jimgina, qo'llariga tikilganча o'tirardi. Vena tomirlari qo'lining ustida bo'rtib chiqqan bo'lib, katta va shishib ko'rinardi; bilak bo'g'imlari ham shikastlangan, hatto yegan zarblaridan noto'g'ri shakllangan bo'lib, o'zlarining kechmishidan guvohlik berib turardi. Tom inson umri uning arteriyalari hayotiga bog'liqligini eshitmagan edi, ammo bu katta, bo'rtib turgan venalarning ma'nosini yaxshi bilardi. Yuragi yuqori bosim ostida ularga ko'p miqdorda qon haydardi. Ular endi bundan ortiq ishlamaydi. U tomirlarining uvushishini va shishlarini chidam bilan yoydi. Tom hozir tezda charchab qoladi. Oldingiday yigirma raundlab tezkor jang qilolmaydi, bolg'a va qisqichlar, jang, jang, jang, ketma-ket gong zarbi, shiddatli olishuv, arqonlarga zarb bilan urilish va qaytib, raqibini ham shu ahvolga solish, so'nggi hal qiluvchi va tezkor jang, yigirmanchi raund, baqirib, chopib borib, zarba berish, o'zni chetga olib, boshni egish, ustma-ust zarbalar yomg'irini yog'dirish, javob zarbalariga qarshi turish; bu kabi shiddatli harakatlar uchun uning yuragi doimo sadoqat bilan venalarga yetarli qonni yetkazib

berardi. Venalar shishganda, yana torayar va doim joyiga tushib ketardi – hozir esa oldinlari sezilmagan bo'lsa-da, tugunlari ilgarigidan biroz kattalashib qolgandi. Tom ularga va shikastlangan bilak bo'g'imlariga termularkan, bir lahza bu qo'llarining navqiron davrlarini, Benni Jonesning boshiga birinchi bo'g'im zarbasini bergani va Uels Terrori nomi bilan mashhur bo'lib ketgan damlarini eslab, xayolga toldi.

Ochlik azobi uni yana qiynay boshladi.

– Nahotki bir bo'lak go'sht yeyolmasam?! – qattiq to'ng'illadi u katta mushtlarini siqib, ichida so'kingancha yoniga yengil tuflarkan.

– Men ikkalovlari – Burke va Savleylardan so'rab ko'rdim, – yarim xijolatomuz ohangda dedi xotini.

– Ular xohlashmadimi? – so'radi u.

– Bir chaqam ham yo'q, dedi Burke – chaynaldi u.

– Davom et! Yana nima dedi?

– Nima ham derdi, o'zi shundoq ham, undan ko'p oziq-ovqatni qarzga oldik, hali Sendl adabimizni beradi.

Tom King to'ng'illadi, biroq javob bermadi. Yoshligida mo'l-ko'l go'sht bilan boqqan terer kuchugini o'ylash bilan band edi. O'shanda Burke ming bo'lak lahm go'shtiga yetadigan qarz bergan bo'lardi. Ammo zamon o'zgardi. Tom King qariyapti; qariyalar oldingiday o'rtamiyona klublarda jang qilishib, tijoratchilar bilan katta miqdordagi banknotalarni topishga endi umid qilisholmaydi.



U ertalab bir bo'lak go'sht istab uyg'ondi, ayni istak hech kamaymadi. Bu jangga yaxshi tayyorgarlik ko'rmadi. Avstraliyada qurg'oqchilik yili kelib, zamon o'g'irlashib ketdi, hatto uchiga chiqqan bezoriliklar ham kamdan-kam ko'zga tashlanardi. Uning mashg'ulot uchun sherigi yo'q, ovqati esa mazasiz va qoniqarsiz edi. Bir necha kun o'zicha ishladi, erta tongdan belgilangan hududda oyoqlarini tayyorlash uchun yugurib chiqdi. Biroq sheriksiz mashg'ulot og'ir kechar, xotini va ikki bolasini esa ovqatlantirishi kerak edi. Sendl bilan kelishgach, tijoratchilar qarzni arzimas miqdorda tushirib berishdi. Gayeti klubining kotibi unga uch funt avans berdi. Ba'zida u eski qadrdonlaridan qarz olib turardi. Uni suyay oladiganlarning o'zlari ham qurg'oqchil mavsum sabab og'ir holda qolgan edilar. Haqiqatni yashirishdan foyda yo'q – uning tayyorgarligi qoniqarli bo'lmadi. U yaxshi ovqatlanib, xavotirlardan holi bo'lishi kerak edi. Bundan tashqari, odam uchun qirq yoshida yigirma yoshdagi davriga nisbatan shart-sharoitga moslashish og'ir kechadi.

— Soat necha bo'ldi, Lizi? – so'radi u.

Xotini zaldan o'tib vaqtni bilib keldi:

– Chorak takam sakkiz!

— Bir necha daqiqadan so'ng birinchi jangni boshlashadi, – dedi u.

— Faqat sinab ko'rish kerak. Ungacha Deler Vels va Gridley o'rtasida to'rt raund, Starlayt va qandaydir dengizchi yigit bilan o'n raund jang bor. Men hali bir soatsiz jangga chiqmayman.

Oxirgi o'n daqiqalik jimlikdan so'ng u o'rnidan turdi:

— To'g'risi, Lizi, men yaxshi tayyorgarlik ko'rolmadim.

U shlyapasini oldi va eshikka yo'naldi. Xotiniga o'pich hadya qilmadi — chiqib ketayotganida hech ham bunday qilmasdi — ammo o'sha tun xotinining o'zi uni o'pishga jur'at qildi, quchoqlab oldi va Tom itoat qilib unga egildi. Ayol erining ulkan gavdasi oldida juda kichik ko'rinardi.

— Omad, Tom! — dedi xotini. — Uni yengishing kerak!

— Ha, uni yengishim kerak, — takrorladi Tom. — Hammasi shunga bog'liq. Men uni aniq yengishim kerak!

Jangga shaylangan er yurakdan kulishga urindi, xotini unga yanada yaqin kelib quchoqladi. U xotinining yelkalari osha bo'sh xonaga ko'z yugurtirdi. Bu uning borlig'i edi, muddati o'tib ketgan ijara haqi, xotini va bolalari. Tom esa ketyapti, jufti va polaponlariga go'sht olib kelish uchun zulmatga sho'ng'ib ketmoqda — zamonaviy ishchi kabi texnikasini charxlab emas, balki eskicha, ibtidoiy, hayvonsifat yo'l bilan olishib, topyapti.

— Men uni yengaman, — takrorladi u.

Bu galgi ovozi umidsizlikka ishora bo'ldi:

— Agar yutsam, o'ttiz funt sterling bilan hamma qarzlarimni to'layman, mo'maygina pul yonimga qoladi. Mabodo yutqazadigan bo'lsam,





hech vaqosiz  
qolaman – hatto  
uyga tramvayda  
yetib olish uchun  
chaqa ham  
tegmaydi. Kotiba  
h a m m a s i n i  
beradi. Xayr. Agar  
zafar quchsam,  
to'g'ri uyga

qaytaman.

– Seni kutaman, – zal tomondan xotinining ovozi keldi.

Gayetiga roppa-rosa ikki chaqirim chiqar, yo'l-yo'lakay baxtiyor damlarini eslardi – bir gal Yangi Janubiy Uelsda og'ir vaznlilar toifasi g'olibi bo'lgan edi – jangga taksida kelardi, ha shunday, ko'pincha ba'zi kuchli homiylar taksi yollab, uni olib kelardi. Tommi Burns va o'sha Yanke habash, Jek Jonsonlar bo'lardi – ular ulovda yurishardi. U esa piyoda! Hamma biladiki, ikki millik og'ir yo'lni bosib o'tish, jang uchun yaxshi tayyorgarlik emas. U qari, hayot qariyalarga rahm qilmaydi. Qora ishdan boshqasiga esa yaramasdi, jangga hatto singan burni va shishgan qulog'i ham qarshi edi. Afsuski, u hech bir hunar o'rganmadi, agar o'rganganda yaxshi bo'lardi. Hech kim unga aytmadi va yuragining tub-tubidan bilardiki, aytganda ham quloq solmagan bo'lardi. Boks unga oson kechgan. Mo'maygina pul; keskin, shonli janglar; sabrsiz, xushomadgo'y muxlislar; yelkaga

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 qoqib qo'yishlar, qo'l silkishlar, zodagonlar besh daqiqalik suhbatlari sharafiga ichimlik olishdan mamnun bo'lardilar – va g'alaba – tomoshabinlar qichqirig'i, shiddatli yakun, hakam e'lon qiladi: "King – g'olib!". Nomi esa ertasi kuni sport ustunlarida yulduzday porlaydi.

Hammasi o'tib ketdi! Biroq hozir uzoq o'ylanib, shuni angladiki, u endi keraksiz bo'lib qoldi. Yoshligida yuksalib bordi; keksalikda esa g'arq bo'lmoqda. Taajjub yo'qki, bu oson bo'lmadi, bular – uning shishgan venalari, charchagan bo'g'imlari, uzoq janglarda holdan toygan suyaklari. Rash Katters Bey ko'rfazida keksa Bilni o'n sakkizinchi raundda mag'lub qilgani, keyin esa kiyinish xonasida keksa Bill yosh boladay o'ksinib yig'lagan damni xotirladi. Ehtimol o'shanda Bilning ijara haqi muddati o'tib ketgandir, ehtimol, uyida xotini va bir juft bolalari bo'lgandir. Bill o'sha jang kuni bir bo'lak go'sht yeyishni balki juda xohlagandir. Bill jang qilib, favqulodda jazo olgan edi. Tom buni endi, tegirmon toshi aylanib o'ziga kelgandan so'ng tushunib yetdi. O'sha tun, yigirma yil oldin, Stovsher Bill bir parcha go'sht uchun, navqiron Tom King esa shon-shuhrat va yengil pul uchun jang qilishdi. Keyin Billning kiyinish xonasidagi yig'isi hech bir hayron qolarli emasdi.

Albatta, inson ko'plab janglarni boshidan o'tkazadi. Bu o'yinning temir qonuni. Biri yuzta jang qilishi mumkin, boshqasi bor-yo'g'i yigirmata; har biri o'z zuvalasi, iroda sifatiga ko'ra



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muayyan miqdorga erishadi va jangga yaxshilab tayyorgarlik ko'radi. Darhaqiqat, u hammadan ko'p jang qildi, og'ir janglarda o'z ulushidan-da ko'prog'ini oldi. Natijada yurak va o'pkalariga zarar yetdi, bu zo'riqishlar arteriyalarning elastikligini, yoshlik go'zalligini oldi, muskullarda yechilmas tugunlar hosil qildi, asablar tamom bo'ldi, ortiqcha zo'r berish, chidam va asabiylikdan miya toliqdi, suyaklar mo'rtlashdi. Ha, u hammadan zo'ri edi. Eski jangchi do'stlaridan hech biri qolmagandi. Sobiq jangchilarning so'nggisi edi. Ularning vafotiga shohid bo'lgan, ba'zilarida o'zining ham qo'li bor edi.

Navqironligida uni kekxa jangchilarga qarshi sinab ko'rishdi, birin-ketin barchasini uloqtirib tashladi. Kekxa Bill kabi kiyinish xonasida yig'laganlar ustidan kuldi. Endi esa o'zi ham qariyalardan biri va unga qarshi yoshlarni sinovga qo'yishmoqda. Sendl degan bir yigit bo'lardi. U Yangi Zelandiyadan bo'lib, rekordi bo'yicha Tomdan keyingi o'rinda turardi. Biroq Avstraliyada u haqda hech kim hech narsa bilmasdi. Shuning uchun ham uni kekxa Tomga qarshi qo'yishmoqda. Agar Sendlning qo'li baland kelsa, kattaroq pul yutib olish uchun boshqa kuchlirog'i bilan olishadi; shuning uchun bu yaxshi, shiddatkor jang qilishiga bog'liq. Unda zafar quchish uchun hamma narsa bor – pul, shon-shuhrat, martaba; Tom King esa shuhrat va taqdirini himoya qilish uchun katta yo'lga chiqqan, soch-soqoliga oq tushgan qariya edi.

Tomning yer egasi va savdogarga qarzini to'lash uchun o'ttiz funtni yutishdan boshqa ilinji yo'q edi. Tom shu taxlit o'ylanardi, nogoh sovuqqon xayoliga unib kelayotgan navqiron, yengilmas, qayishqoq mushak va mayin terili, sog'lom yurak hamda o'pkasiga shikast yetmagan yosh yigit timsoli kelardi. Ha, yoshlar yengilmas Nemizada kabidir. Ular qariyalarni xarob qiladi, pisand ham qilmaydi, alal-oqibat o'zlarini ham halokatga boshlaydi. Yoshlar doim yosh bo'lib qolamiz deb o'ylashadi. Bu bor-yo'g'i keksayish davri xolos.

Kesri ko'chasidan chapga qayrildi va uchta bino bo'ylab Gaeti klubiga keldi. Bir to'da eshikka osilib turgan yalangbosh bezorilar hurmat ko'rsatishdi, birining ikkinchisiga aytgan gapini eshitib qoldi:

— Bu – o'sha! Bu – Tom King!

— O'zingni qanday his qilyapsan, Tom? – so'radi u.

— A'lo darajada! – javob berdi King garchi yolg'on gapirayotgan bo'lsa ham.

Qaniydi bir funti bo'lganida edi, yaxshigina bir bo'lak go'sht yeb olgan bo'lardi. U kiyinish xonasidan chiqib, ortida sekundantlari bilan yo'lakdan tushdi. Zal markazidagi kvadrat ringga borganida, kutib turgan olomonning qisqa salomlashuvi va olqishlari yangradi. Garchi ozchilik qiyofalar tanish bo'lsa-da, chap va o'ng tomoniga salom berib, minnatdorchilik bildirdi. Ularning ko'pchiligi yosh, ringda dastlabgi g'alabalarga erishganida hali tug'ilmagan bolalar edi. Platformaga arqonlar orasidan yengilgina



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egilib sakrab o'tdi. Keyin o'z burchagiga yo'naldi va taxlama kursiga o'tirdi. Hakam, Jek Bell kelib, qo'lini siqdi. Bell qariyb o'n yildan buyon ringga chiqmagan, jarohatlangan mohir jangchi edi. King uning hakamlilik qilishidan xursand bo'ldi. Ularning ikkisi ham keksa edi. Agar Tom Sendlga qo'pollik qiladigan bo'lsa, bilardiki, Bell qoidalarini biroz chetlab o'tardi.

Shuhratparast, og'ir vaznli o'spirinlar birin-ketin ringga chiqib kelishdi va hakam tomonidan tomoshabinlarga havola etildi. Shuningdek, garov puli e'lon qilindi.

– Yosh Pronto! – e'lon qildi Bell. – Shimoliy Sidneydan, g'alabaga ellik funt garov puli tikiladi!

Sendl arqonlardan sakrab o'tgach, tomoshabinlar qayta-qayta qarsak chalishib, uni olqishlashdi, so'ng o'ziga tegishli burchakka borib o'tirdi. Tom unga sinchikovlik bilan qaradi. Bir necha daqiqadan so'ng shafqatsiz olishuvda ular bir-biriga yopishib olishadi, har ikkisi bor kuchini ishga solib, boshqasini hushsiz qilish uchun zarba berishadi. Sendl ham o'zi kabi ring libosi ustidan shim va kamzul kiyib olganini payqab qoldi. Uning yuzi juda istarali, sarg'ish sochlarining jingalak tutami tushib turardi. Qalin mushakdor bo'yni jismoniy savlatiga ishora qilardi.

Yosh Pronto burchakka bordi, keyin boshqalari kattalar bilan qo'l siqishib, ringdan tushdilar. Tanishtiruv marosimi davom etardi. Yoshlar arqonlar orasidan chiqib kelishar – noma'lum va shijoatli yoshlar – g'olibona

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 kuch-g'ayratini ko'z-ko'z qilib, go'yo butun dunyoga jar solardilar. Bir necha yil oldin, gullagan yengilmas davrlarida, Tom Kingning bundayin tanishtiruvlardan ensasi qotar va zerikardi. Hozir esa mahliyo bo'lib o'tirar, ko'z oldidan yoshlik xayollari ketmasdi. Har gal bu yosh bokschilar arqonlardan sakrab, ringga chiqisharkan, chorlovga javoban baqirishar; keksalar har doim ularning oldilarida shumshayib qolardilar. Yoshlar keksalar ustidan g'alaba qozonib, shuhrat cho'qqisiga ko'tarilib borar edilar. Hamma davrlarda ham yangidan yangi, ko'pdan ko'p yosh bokschilar kelaveradi, qoniqmas va yengilmas yoshlar doim keksalarni uloqtirib tashlaydilar, kun kelib, o'zlari ham keksaygach, xuddi shunday tanazzul so'qmoqlarida ojiz tentiraydilar, ularning ham ortidan yangi avlod bosib, yanchib kelaveradi, sog'lom unib, kattalarni qulatib, yiqitib ketaveradi, ularning ham ortidan ko'plab chaqaloqlar qo'llarini musht qilgancha dunyoga kelaveradilar. Bir so'z bilan aytganda, Yoshlik o'z yo'lidan ketaveradi va hech qachon mag'lub bo'lmaydi.

King matbuot xodimlariga ko'z yugurtirdi va sportchilardan Morganga, hakamlardan Korbetlarga bosh irg'adi. Keyin sekundantlari Sid Sellivan va Charli Beytsilarga qo'llarini uzatdi, ular qo'lqoplarni kiydirib, mahkam tortib bog'lashdi. Tom Sendlning vakillaridan birini, avvalboshda Kingning bo'g'imlaridagi tugunlarini diqqat



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bilan kuzatgan sinchkov yordamchisini kuzatdi. Sendlning shimplari yechildi, o'rnidan turgach boshi osha kamzuli yechildi. Tom qarshisida turgan keng ko'krakli, baquvvat muskulli, atlasdek silliq oq teri ostidagi muskullarini go'yo tirik bir narsadek o'ynatayotgan Yoshlik timsolini ko'rib, undan ko'z uzolmay qoldi. Butun vujudi qaynoq hayot bilan to'la, Tom bu jon uzoq janglarda teri teshiklaridan og'riq bilan chiqib ketmasligini, vaqti kelib, yoshlik buning badalini to'lashini bilardi.

Raqiblar bir-birlari bilan tanishish uchun o'zaro yaqinlashdilar va gong urilgani hamon yordamchilar taq-tuq qilib buklama stollarni yig'ishtirdilar. Bokschilar qo'l berib ko'rishib, bir zumda jang ruhiga kirishishdi. Po'lat va prujina mexanizmini uyg'unlashtirgancha murosasiz jang qilishardi. Sendl galma-gal hamla qilib, tisarilar va yana hujum qilardi. Tomning ko'ziga chapdan, qovurg'alari ostiga o'ngdan zarba berar, yengil sakrab, ortga tisarilar va yana tahdid solib sakrardi. U ildam va mohir edi. Bu zavqli manzara edi.

Zaldagilar jo'shib baqirishardi. Biroq bundan King zavqlanmasdi. Tom ko'p zarbalarga chap berdi va o'zi ham yosh bokschiga zo'rlarini yo'lladi. U xavfli zarbalarning juda tez va shaxdamligini bilardi. Sendl birdaniga tezlashib ketdi. Shunday bo'lishi taxmin qilingandi. Bu yoshlarga xos uslub edi, butun savlati, ustunligi, quturgan va darg'azab shiddatli hujumlarini o'zining cheksiz shon-shuhrati va istaklari yo'lida raqibini mag'lub etishga sarflardi.

Sendl qaltis hujum qilar va chekinar, zarba berayotgan uchqur, qaynoq muskullari, yaraqlagan oq tanasi tirik mo'jizaning o'zginasi edi, qayiq misol lip-lip etib, goh u yoqqa, goh bu yoqqa sirg'alib, sho'ng'ib ketar, bari sa'y-harakatlari bir narsaga – o'zi va shon-shuhrat o'rtasida turgan Tom Kingni yo'q qilishga yo'naltirilgan edi. Tom King bardosh berdi. U kasbining ustasi edi va endi yoshlik nima ekanini tushunib yetgandi. Ular ham endi Tom yosh emasligini bilishardi. Tom raqib holdan toygunicha kutishni o'ylardi va miyig'ida kulib, boshini egdi va tepa qismini jo'rttaga og'ir zarbaga tutib berdi. Bu makkorona yo'l bo'lib, boks qoidalariga ko'ra ruxsat berilmasdi. Tom bo'g'imlarini avaylashni o'ylardi, basharti raqibi boshining ustiga zo'r berib musht tushirsa, mayli u bundan o'pkalamaydi. King boshini quyiroqqa egar va zarba g'izillab zahmatsiz o'tib ketardi, biroq u dastlabki jangini va Uels Maxluqining boshiga ilk daf'a zarba berib, bilak barmoqlarini pachoqlab olganini esladi. Endi esa qilmishiga javob bermoqda. Bu taktika Sendlning qo'l bo'g'im suyaklari e'tiboridan chetda qolmadi. Sendl hozir bunga e'tibor berib o'tirmadi. U beparvolik bilan davom etar, jang yukunigacha ketma-ket og'ir zarbalarni yo'lladi. Ammo keyinroq, uzoq davom etgan jang sharhlab berilgach, Sendl qo'l bo'g'imlariga achindi, ortga nazar soldi va Tom Kingning boshiga qanday tushirganini esladi.

Birinchi raund mutlaqo Sendlning hisobiga hal bo'ldi va tomosha zali guvillar, uning yashindek



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kuchli zarbalariga tasanno aytishardi. U Tomni zarbalar ko'chkisi bilan ko'mib tashladi, King esa hech narsa qilolmadi, bir marta ham zarba bermadi, panalab, berkinib, boshini egib olgancha jazodan qochishga, himoyalalanishga harakat qildi. Har zamonda hiyla-nayrang ishlatar, musht zarbi tekkanda boshini tebratar, sovuqqonlik bilan harakatlanar, o'zicha sakramas, zarracha bo'lsa-da kuch isrof qilmasdi. Mayli, Sendl yoshlik safsatalariga qonib olsin, kun kelib qarigach, javobini oladi. Kingning barcha harakatlari sust, batartib, og'ir qovoq, sust harakatli ko'zlari unga yarim uyqu va esankiragan kabi ko'rinish berib turardi. Hali ko'zlari hamma narsani ko'rar, yigirma yildan ortiq ringdagi faoliyatiga qaramasdan, hech narsani nazardan qoldirmaslikka o'rgangandi. Muqarrar zarba oldidan hovliqmas, pirpiramas, balki vazmin harakat qilar, oraliqni hisobga olardi.

Raund so'ngida biroz hordiq olish uchun burchakka o'tirdi va uzala tushgan oyoqlarini yig'ishtirdi, qo'llari arqonning burchagida hordiq olar, ko'ksi va qorni sekundantlarining sochiqlaridan urilgan havodan yutinib ko'tarilib tushardi. Zalning munosabatini yumuq ko'zlari bilan tinglardi: "Nimaga jang qilmaysan, Tom?". Tomoshabinlarning ba'zilari chinqirib yubordilar: "Sen undan qo'rqmaysan, shundaymi?".

— Mushak uvushishi... — birinchi qatorda o'tirgan kishining fikrini eshitdi. — U chaqqon o'ynolmaydi. Sendl foydasiga ikki funt.

Gong urildi, raqiblar burchaklardan jildilar. Sendl oradagi masofaning uch choragini bosib o'tdi, jangni boshlashga sabri yetmay turardi; King esa qisqaroq oraliq qolganidan mamnun edi. Bu uning kuchini tejash taktikasiga o'xshardi. U yaxshi mashq qilmagan, yetarli ovqatlanmagan va shuning uchunmi, har qadamini sanardi. Ustiga-ustak ringga qadar ikki mil piyoda yurgan edi. Bu raund oldingisining takrori bo'ldi; Sendl raqibiga bo'ron kabi tashlanar, tomoshabinlar esa Kingning sustkashligidan g'azablanib, baqirishardi. Sust, natijasiz zarbalar va hamlalardan bo'lak King hech bir harakatlanmas, faqat o'zini olib qochar, blokkanar va klinchga kirardi. Sendl jangga shiddatli tus berishga intilar, biroq Kingning tajribasi bunga yo'l qo'ymasdi. King kuchini qizg'anib tejar, qarilikka xos, jangovar yuzida horg'inlik alomatlari bilan kulimsirardi. Sendl esa yoshlikning o'zi edi, yoshlikka xos beparvolik bilan kuchini isrof qilardi. Kingga kelsak, u ring ustasi, mislsiz, og'ir janglarning hadisini olgan edi. Uning harakatlari bamaylixotir edi. Boshi og'ishmay, sovuq nigoh bilan Sendlni kuzatar, uning jangovar shijoati sovushini kutardi. Ko'pchilik tomoshabinlarga King umidsizlangan, ustunlikni qo'lga olishni istamayotgandek tuyular, tomoshabinlar baland ovoz bilan Sendlga uch barobar ko'p pul tikishga undashardi. Ammo ba'zi bir oldingi Kingni biladigan tajribalilar uning yutishiga ishonishib, garov o'ynashardi.



Uchinchi raund oldingilariday boshlandi. Sendl ustunlikni qo'lga olib, hujumga o'tdi. Mana, ishonch bilan jangni boshlaganiga ham yarim daqiqa bo'ldi. Kingning ko'zlari yondi, ko'z ochib yumguncha o'ng qo'li bilan shiddatli yon zarba berdi. Bu uning birinchi haqiqiy zarbasi – yarim tanasining butun og'irligi tushib, bukilgan qo'l bilan yo'llangan xuk edi. Go'yo o'zini uyquga solgansheryashintezligidapanjasiniko'targandek bo'ldi. Zarba Sendlning jag'iga yon tomondan keldi va uni ho'kizdek polga yiqitdi. Tomoshabinlar oh urdilar, hayratdan qarsak chalib g'o'ng'irlashdilar. Bu qariyaning mushaklari umuman harakatsiz emas, balki temirchi bolg'asidek zarba yo'llay olishining isboti edi.

Sendl hayratda edi. U turmoqchi bo'lib o'girildi, ammo sekundantlar kutish kerakligini aytib, to'xtatishdi. Hakam uning tepasida turib, qulog'ining tagida baland ovozda soniyalarni sanarkan, Sendl bir tizzalab, turishga tayyor bo'lib kutardi. To'qqizinchi soniyada u jangovar holatga keldi. Tom King unga nazar tashlarkan, zarbaning bir dyum pastroq – aniq iyagiga tegmaganiga afsuslandi. O'shanda u nokaut bo'lardi, Tom esa uyiga, xotini va bola-chaqalarining oldiga o'ttiz funt bilan qaytardi.

Raund to'liq uch daqiqa davom etdi. Sendl ilk bor raqibiga nisbatan hurmat hissini tuydi. Kingning ko'zlari yana oldingidek sust, uyquli ifodaga qaytgan edi. Sekundantlarning ring tashqarisida cho'kkalab, arqonlar tagidan sakrab

kirishga tayyor bo'lib turgan nigohidan King raund oxirlayotganini payqadi va jangni o'z burchagi tomon yo'naltirdi. Gong chalinishi bilan u darhol stolga o'tirdi, Sendl esa o'z burchagiga yetib olish uchun maydonda butun yo'lni diagonal bo'ylab bosib o'tishi kerak edi. Bu arzimasdek edi go'yo, biroq shu arzimas narsalar yig'ilib, katta ahamiyat kasb etardi. Sendl ko'proq qadam tashlashga, quvvati va dam olish vaqtini sarflashga majbur bo'ldi. Har raund boshida King burchagidan sekin siljir va bu bilan raqibini oradagi katta masofani bosib o'tishga majbur qilardi. Raund so'ngida esa u shunday yo'l tutardiki, jang uning burchagiga yaqin borar va darhol stuliga o'tirib olardi.

Keyingi ikki raundda King o'z kuchini oldingidek tejadi, Sendl esa yana avvalgidek behuda urinishlar qilardi. Sendl ustunlikni qo'lga olib, jon-jahdi bilan jang qildi, bu Kingga qiyinchilik tug'dirdi, negaki Sendlning sanoqsiz zarbalarining ancha-munchasi mo'ljalga tekkan edi. Garchi zaldagi qiziqqon yoshlar baqirishib, uni jangga kirishishga undasa-da, King hamon o'jarlik bilan sustkashlik qilaverardi. Oltinchi raundda Sendl yana bir bor xatoga yo'l qo'ydi, Tom Kingning navbatdagi o'ng qo'ldan bergan qaqshatqich zarbasi Sendlning jag'iga tushdi va natijada unga yana to'qqiz soniya sanaldi.

Yettinchi raundda Sendl endi o'ziga oldingidek ortiqcha baho bermasdi; u mislsiz og'ir bir jangga kirib qolganini tushungandi. Tom King qariya edi,



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biroq Sendl hali bunaqasiga duch kelmagandi – sira nazoratni yo‘qotmas, himoyalanişhda o‘ta ustasi farang, zarbasining zalvori esa og‘ir to‘qmoqqa teng, har bir mushtida go‘yo nokaut yashiringandek edi. Biroq Tom King tez-tez zarba berishdan cho‘chir edi. U bir lahza ham mayib bo‘g‘imlarini unutmas, zarbalari sanoqli bo‘lishi shart, barmoqlarining bo‘g‘im suyaklari jang yakuniga qadar bardosh berishi kerak edi. King burchakda o‘tirib, raqibini kuzatarkan, xayoliga bir o‘y keldi: agar Sendlning yoshligi va o‘zining tajribasi umumlashsa, og‘ir vaznli jahon chempioni yuzaga keladi. Biroq masala shundaki, Sendl hech qachon jahon chempioni bo‘la olmaydi. Negaki, hozir unga tajriba yetishmaydi, bu tajribaga esa u yoshligi evaziga erisha oladi; afsuski, tajribaga erishganda yoshlik uni tark etgan bo‘ladi.

King o‘z tajribasini ustamonlik bilan qo‘llardi. Biror marta ham klinchga o‘tish imkoniyatini boy bermas va ko‘p hollarda yelkasi bilan raqibining qovurg‘alarini ezardi. Ring falsafasiga ko‘ra, yelka jarohat yetkazishda va kuch sarflashda musht bilan barobar qo‘llanadi. Shundan klinchlarda butun og‘irligi bilan raqibiga yotib olib, dam olar va undan ajralgisi kelmasdi. Doim sudyaning aralashuviga to‘g‘ri kelar, shunda ham Sendlning yordami bilan ularni ajratardi. Sendl esa shiddatli qanotdayin ko‘tarilgan qo‘llarini va o‘ynoqi mushaklarini ishga solmasdan tura olmasdi. King klinchga kirganida, yelkasi bilan Sendlning qovurg‘alariga tushirar va boshini uning chap

qo'lining tagiga yashirardi. Sendl doim o'ng qo'li bilan Kingning orqasiga va qo'ltiq tagidan chiqqan yuziga tushirardi. Bu mashhur usul bo'lib, tomoshabinlarni juda zavqlantirar, biroq xavfsiz edi. Shu sabab ko'p kuch bekorga ketardi. Biroq Sendl charchamas, o'z imkoniyatlarini hisobga olmas, King esa buni mumkin qadar cho'zishga intilar va tirjayardi.

Sendl o'ng qo'li bilan Kingning tanasiga shiddatli zarba yo'lladi, chetdan Tomga bu safar qattiq tekkandek tuyulardi, ammo bu zarbadan

birmuncha oldin u ham chapdan raqibining biqiniga yaxshigina tushirgan edi. To'g'ri, Sendlning har bir zarbasi mo'ljalga tegar, lekin biqinga yo'llagan zarbalar o'z kuchini yo'qotardi. To'qqizinchi raundda Kingning bukilgan o'ng qo'li bir daqiqa ichida uch marta Sendlning jag'iga qaqshatqich zarbalar berdi va uch marotaba Sendl bor og'irligi bilan yerga gursillab yiqildi. Har safar to'qqiz soniyadan foydalanib, oyoqqa turar, karaxt, ammo hali ham kuchda edi. Biroq u o'z shiddatini ancha yo'qotgan, endi ancha ehtiyotkorroq harakatlanmoqda edi. Sendl horg'in jang qilar, uning bor-yo'q ishongan narsasi yoshlik, Kingniki esa tajriba edi. Kuchi va jangovar shijoati uni tark eta boshlagandan buyon King ularni donolik, ayyorlik va kuchni tejashga almashtirdi. U faqatgina ortiqcha harakatlardan qochishni emas, balki raqibining kuchini sovurishni ham o'zlashtirdi. Oyoqlari, qo'llari va tanasining qayta-qayta yolg'onchi harakatlari bilan Sendlni orqaga otilishga, sapchib qochishga, zarbalar



berishga majburlardi. Kingning o'zi dam olar, biroq raqibini dam olishga qo'ymasdi. Bu keksalik strategiyasi edi.

O'ninchi raund boshida King raqibining sakrashlariga barham berib, chap qo'lida Sendlning yuziga to'g'ridan to'g'ri zarba berdi. Sendl esa ehtiyotkorroq bo'lib, chapi bilan himoyalandi. Keyin esa bunga javoban yon tarafdin Kingning boshiga zarba yo'lladi. Zarba juda balanddan keldi va King eski, tanish tuyg'uni his qildi – unung ko'z oldini qandaydir qora parda qamrab oldi. Bir zum o'zini bilmay qoldi, qarshisidagi raqib va atrofdagi odamlar ko'z oldidan g'oyib bo'ldi. Keyin yana asta-sekin raqib, tomosha zali va odamlar namoyon bo'la boshladi. U go'yo bir lahza uxlab qolib, qayta uyg'onganga o'xshardi. Lahza shu qadar qisqa ediki, King yiqilishga ham ulgurmagandi. Tomoshabinlar uning birdan yiqilgudek tebranganini va so'ng darhol o'zini qo'lga olganini ko'rib turishardi. So'ng iyagini chuqurroq taqab oldi-da, chap yelkasi bilan himoyalandi.

Bir necha marta Sendl o'rnidan sakrab turgan tomoshabinlar baqirig'i ostida qayta-qayta zarbalar yo'lladi va qariyb Kingni esankiratib qo'ydi. Natijada King himoyalalanishga o'tdi. Chapi bilan aldab, yarim qadam ortga tisarildi va xuddi shu vaqt bor kuchi bilan to'g'ridan apperkot zarba yo'lladi. Zarba shunchalik aniq hamda o'z vaqtida pastdan yo'llandiki, Sendlning yuziga tushdi. Yosh bokschi havoda sapchib ketdi va ortga buralib,

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yerga boshi hamda yelkalari bilan urildi. King buni ikki bor amalga oshirishga muvaffaq bo'ldi va raqibini arqonlarga taqab qo'ydi. U Sendlga dam olib, o'ziga kelib olishga imkon bermas, biroq ustma-ust yo'llangan zarbalar tomosha zalini birdek oyoqqa turg'izgan, atrof davomiy qichqiriqlar va qarsaklarga to'lgan edi. Ammo Sendlning kuchi va chidami a'lo darajada bo'lib, hamon tik oyoqda turardi. Nokaut bo'lishi tayin edi, go'yo mirshab yomon oqibatni sezganday, jangni to'xtatish niyatida ring yonida paydo bo'ldi. Raund tugab, gong chalindi va Sendl chayqalib, o'z burchagiga yetib oldi. Mirshabga hammasi joyida deganday, isboti uchun ikki marta sakrab ham qo'ydi. Mirshab ishondi.

King burchakda og'ir nafas olib hansirab o'tirar va umidsizlikka tushgan edi. Qaniydi jangni to'xtatishsa, hakam uning foydasiga qaror chiqarishga majbur bo'lar va mukofot unga tegardi. U Sendlga o'xshab mansab va shon-shuhrat uchunmas, bor-yo'g'i o'ttiz funt uchungina jang qilayotgan edi. Biroq Sendl shu bir daqiqa hordiqdayoq o'ziga kelib olardi.

“Yoshlik zo'r keladi” – Kingning miyasidan shu fikr o'tdi va bu so'zlarni Stovsher Bilni yo'ldan olib tashlagan o'sha kechada birinchi bor eshitganini esladi. Buni qandaydir bir olifta o'shanda jangdan keyin viski bilan mehmon qilib, uning yelkasiga qoqib qo'yib aytgan edi. “Yoshlik zo'r keladi”. Olifta haq ekan. Olis o'sha tunda u yosh edi. Bugungi tunda esa yoshlik unga qarama-qarshi



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narigi burchakda o'tiribdi. Garchi qariya bo'lsa-  
da, bir yarim soatdan buyon u bilan olishayapti.  
Agar u Sendlday olishganida bormi, o'n besh  
daqiqaga ham chiday olmasdi. Hamma gap  
shundaki, uning kuchi tiklanmayapti. Bo'rtgan  
arteriyalari va charchagan yuragi raundlar  
orasidagi tanaffuslarda kuch to'plashga imkon  
bermayapti. To'g'risini aytganda, musobaqadan  
oldin uning kuchi kam edi.

U og'irlashgan oyoqlarining tomir  
tortishayotganini sezdi. Ha, jang oldi ikki  
mil piyoda yurmaslik kerak edi. Ustiga-ustak  
ertalabdan beri bir bo'lak go'shtni qo'msayotgan  
edi. Unda qarz bermagan qassoblarga nisbatan  
cheksiz g'azab uyg'ondi. To'yib yemasdan ringga  
chiqish og'ir. Nima u bir bo'lak go'sht?! Arzimas  
narsa, narxi ham bir necha penni; biroq bu o'ttiz  
funt bo'lib qaytib keladi degani edi.

Gong o'n birinchi raund boshlanganini e'lon  
qilishi bilan Sendl o'zida yo'q bir tetiklikni  
nomoyon etib, hujumga otildi. King esa boksdagi  
bu eski odat – blefni yaxshi tushunardi. Boshida  
raqibidan himoyalaniib, klinchga kirdi, keyin  
Sendlga qaddini rostlagan holda himoyaga turish  
uchun imkoniyat berdi. Bu Kingga qo'l keldi.  
U chapi bilan raqibga yolg'ondan do'q qilib,  
sho'ng'ishga majbur qildi. O'ziga esa pastdan  
yuqoriga yo'llangan zarbani oldi va o'zini yarim  
qadam orqaga tashlab, Sendlni qaqshatqich  
apperkot zarbasi bilan yerga qulatdi. Shu  
daqiqadan King Sendlni tin olgani qo'ymas, o'zi

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ham zarba yer, biroq Sendlni arqonlarga otib yuborib, undan-da ko'p zarba berardi. Sendlga to'g'ri, yon, qisqa va uzun zarbalarni yog'dirar, uning klinchlaridan chiqib ketib yoki vaqtida klinchga kirishiga yo'l qo'ymas edi. Klinchga kirishga bo'lgan urinishlarini yo'q qilib, endi yiqilmoqchi bo'lgan paytda bir qo'li bilan ushlab, ikkinchisi bilan arqonga qisib qo'yardi.

Tomoshabinlar naq jinni bo'layozdi. Endi ularning barchasi Tom tarafida bo'lib, deyarli har biri baqirardi: "Qani, Tom!", "Tushir, Tom!", "Tushir unga!", "Sen olding!". Final juda qizg'in bo'lishi kutilar va kelganlar shuni ko'rish uchun pul to'lashardi.

Tom King esa bir yarim soatdan buyon tejayotgan kuchini bir shiddatli urinish bilan yo'qqa chiqarmoqda edi. Bu uning yagona imkoniyati edi – hozir yoki hech qachon. U tez holdan toyar, o'ta zaiflashib qolmasdan burun raqibini yiqitishga umid qilardi. Ketma-ket hujum qilib, zarba berar, sovuqqonlik bilan o'z zarbalarining zalvorini, raqibining shikastlanish darajasini hisobga olardi. O'z navbatida, u Sendldek navqiron kimsani nokaut qilish qanchalik mushkulligini tushunib yeta boshlagan edi. Hayotiy kuchi, chidami va sabr-matonati tuganmasdek edi go'yo. Ha, Sendl uzoqqa boradi. U tug'ma bokschi. Faqatgina shunday kuchli iroda sohiblari chempion bo'ladilar.

Sendlning boshi gangigan ko'yi gandiraklar, biroq Tom King oyoqlarining tomirlari tortishar,



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barmoq bo'g'implari unga bo'ysunmas edi. King hamon o'zini kuchli zarbalar berishga majburlar, har bir urganda, shikastlangan qo'llariga dahshatli og'riq azob berardi. Garchi hozir Tomga amalda zarba tushmayotgan bo'lsa-da, raqibidek tez zaiflashib borayotgandi. Zarbalari mo'ljalga tegar, garchi ularda kuch yo'q bo'lsa-da, har biri kata iroda evaziga paydo bo'lardi. Oyoqlarini go'yo qo'rg'oshinga bog'langandek bazo'r sudrashni yaqqol ayon bo'lib turardi; bu alomatdan quvongan Sendlning tarafdorlari o'z nomzodlarini qichqiriqlar bilan qo'llab-quvvatlashni boshlashgandi.

Bu Kingni jadallatdi va kuchini jamlashga majbur qildi. U Sendlga birin-ketin ikkita zarba – chapi bilan sal balandroqqa, o'ngi bilan esa jag'iga yo'lladi. Zarbalar u qadar og'ir emas edi, biroq Sendl shu qadar zaiflashgan va esankirab qolgandiki, yerga gursullab yiqildi va badanini kuchli qaltiroq tutdi. Hakam uning tepasida turib, muqarrar soniyalarni sanar edi. O'n soniya sanalguncha turmasa, Sendl jangni yutqazgan bo'ladi. Tomoshabinlar nafas olmay qoldilar. King oyoqlarida zo'rg'a turardi. U o'lar holatda turar, boshi tinmay aylanardi; ko'z oldida odamlar go'yo ummon kabi chayqalardi. Qulog'iga o'tib borayotgan lahzalarni sanayotgan hakamning ovozi allaqayer – uzoqlardan eshitilardi. Tom jangni yutdim deb o'ylar, uningcha, bu qadar zarba yegan odamning qayta oyoqqa turishi mumkin emas edi.

Bunday og'ir damda faqat yoshlikkina qaddini rostlay olardi va Sendl o'rnidan turdi. To'rtinchi soniyada u yuztuban ag'anadi va shapko'rga o'xshab, arqonni paypaslay boshladi. Yettinchi soniyada bir tizzada turib, nafas rostladi, zarbalardan sarxush boshi har yonga chayqalardi. Hakam "To'qqiz!"-deb baqirganida, Sendl oyog'ida turib, himoya holatida edi.

U chapi bilan yuzini, o'ngi bilan qornini yopib turardi. Shu usul bilan eng nozik nuqtalarini himoya qilib, vaqtdan yutish uchun klinch umidida King tomon chayqalib borardi.

Sendl turgani hamon King unga tashlandi. Biroq yo'llagan ikki zarbasi Sendlning qo'llariga tegib, zaiflashdi. Keyingi on Sendl klinchda edi, raqibiga yopishib olib, hakamning ajratishga bo'lgan urinishlariga qarshilik qilardi. King esa chiqib ketishga urinar, yoshlik tezda kuchini tiklashini, Sendlning faqatgina kuchi tiklanibgina qolmay, raqibini yutishi ham mumkinligini bilardi. Bitta yaxshi zarba bahsga yakun yasardi. Sendl mag'lub bo'ladi, shubhasiz, mag'lub bo'ladi. King uni urdi, jangovar bilimi bilan undan ustun keldi va ko'p ochko yig'di. Sendl klinchdan chiqib chayqaldi, bu onda uning taqdiri qil ustida turardi. "Bitta yaxshi zarba bilan uni qulatsam va barchasiga yakun yasasam..."-deya xayolidan o'tkazarkan, Tom King parcha go'shtni yana bir bor achchiq alam bilan esladi.

Hal qiluvchi hujumni yo'llashda madad bo'lardi, deya o'yladi afsus bilan. Keyin esa kuchini to'plab,



.....  
zarba berdi, biroq u unchalik ham kuchli va tezkor bo'lmadi. Sendl chayqaldi, lekin yiqilmadi, arqonlarga suyangancha qoldi. King tebrangan ko'yi raqibga tashlandi va chidab bo'lmas og'riqni yengib, unga yana bir zarba berdi, biroq uning kuchi qolmagan edi. Tinkasi quriganidan kurashuvchan ongi xiralashib, so'na borardi; hammasi uni tark etardi. Uning raqib jag'ga yo'llagan zarbasi yelkasigacha bordi. Asli teparoqni mo'ljalga olgan edi, lekin charchagan mushaklari unga bo'ysunmasdi, o'zi ham bazo'r oyoqda turardi. King ham zarbani qaytardi. Butunlay madorsizlikdan yiqilmaslik uchun Sendlni qo'llari bilan quchoqlab, unga suyanib oldi.

King raqibiga yopishib oldi. U qo'lidan kelgan barchasini qilgandi, boshqa hech narsa qolmagandi. Yoshlikning esa qo'li baland keldi. King Sendlning klinch holatida raqibiga suyanib, kuchga kirayotganini sezib turardi. Hakam ularni ajratganida King yoshlikning ko'z oldida kuchga to'layotganini ko'rdi. Sendl har soniyada tiklanib borar; zarbalari boshida zaif va mo'ljalga tegmas, keyinroq esa shiddatli va aniq tus olib borardi. Tom Kingning ko'z oldini go'yo tuman qoplagandek bo'ldi; jag'ini mo'ljalga olgan qo'lqopli mushtning yaqinlashib kelayotganini ko'rib, qo'li bilan o'zini himoya qilmoqchi bo'ldi. U xavfni ko'rib turar, harakat qilishni istar, biroq qo'llari juda ham og'ir, go'yoki tonnalab qo'rg'oshin osilgandek edi. King bor irodasini jamlab, qo'llarini zarba berish uchun

ko'tarmoqqa tirishdi, ammo kech qolgandi. Qo'lqopdagi musht mo'ljalga tegdi. King elektr toki urganday qattiq og'riqni his qildi va ozini yo'qotdi, butun borlig'i zulmat qa'riga cho'mdi.

Ko'zlarini ochganda, o'zini burchagidagi stolda o'tirganini ko'rdi. Quloqlariga Bondiy qirg'og'iga urilgandengizto'lqinlariningshovqinikabiuzoqdan tomoshabinlarning qichqiriqlari eshitilardi. Kimdir uning ensasiga nam sochiq qo'yar, Sid Sullivan esa yuzi va ko'kragiga hayotbaxsh sovuq suv quyardi. Qo'lqoplari allaqachon yechilgan va Sendl enkayib, uning qo'lini qisar edi. Mag'lub etilgan bu odamga uning hech bir xusumati yo'q edi. King ham shunday samimiy qo'l qisdiki, shikastlangan bo'g'implari og'riqdan zirqiradi. Keyin Sendl ring markaziga chiqdi va bir lahzaga shovqin tindi, so'ng yosh Prontoni jangga chorladi hamda o'z tomoniga tikilgan pulni yuz funtgacha ko'tarishni taklif qildi. Kingning sekundantlari uning badanini artar, yuziga sochiq qo'yar, ringdan chiqishga tayyorlashardi: King esa bunga befarq qarardi. U ochiqqanini sezdi. Bu oddiy ochlik emas, katta zaiflik edi, butun badaniga tarqalayotgan ko'krak osti chuqurchasidagi ojiz titroqni his qilayotgandi. Xayollari yana jangga qaytdi; Sendlning oyoqda bazo'r turgani va mag'lubiyatga bir qadam qolgan damni esladi. Ha, bir bo'lak go'sht ishni tugatardi! Hal qiluvchi zarbani berayotganida aynan shu yetishmadi. Mana shuning uchun u jangni boy berdi! Hammasi o'sha bir bo'lak go'shtni deb bo'ldi.



Sekundantlar unga arqon tagidan o'tishga yordam berishmoqchi bo'lib, suyak turishardi. Biroq ularni ozidan chetlatdi va engkayib, hech qanday yordamsiz o'tib ketdi, pastga qarab og'ir sakradi. Olomonga to'la markaziy yo'lak bo'ylab borarkan, unga yo'l ochayotgan sekundantlar ortidan ketardi. King kiyinish xonasidan ko'chaga chiqayotganida, zalning kirish yo'lida bir yosh yigitcha unga gap qotdi:

— Nega qo'lingda bo'la turib, Sendlni yiqitmading?!

— Jin ursin! – dedi Tom King va zinapoyadan tushib kata yo'lga o'tdi.

Burchakdagi pivoxonaning eshiklari lang ochilgan edi. U yerda chiroqlar va jilmaygan ofitsiantlarni ko'rar, jang haqidagi g'ala-g'ovurlar, peshtaxtaga urilayotgan tangalarning jarang-jurungi eshitilib turardi. Kimdir birga ichishga taklif



.....  
qildi. U bundan biroz ikkilanib turdi, keyin qat`iy  
rad qildi-da, yo`lida davom etdi.

Tomning cho`ntagida bir chaqa ham yo`q edi  
va uygacha bo`lgan ikki mil masofa nihoyasizdek  
tuyulardi. Shubhasiz, u qariyapti. Domen parkini  
kesib o`tayotganida, birdan o`rindiqqa o`tirib  
qoldi. Uxlamasdan, jang yakunini bilmoqchi  
bo`lib, uni kutayotgan xotinini o`ylab, ruhi tushib  
ketdi. Bu har qanday nokautdan ham og`irroq edi.  
Uning yuziga qarash ilojisizdek tuyulardi.

Mag`lub qariya aql bovar qilmas darajada  
majolsiz edi. Shikastlangan bo`g`imlari, qo`yingki,  
unga biror ish topilgan taqdirda ham, qo`liga  
belkurak va cho`kichni olish uchun kamida bir  
hafta o`tishi zarurligini anglatib turardi. Ko`kragi  
ostidagi chuqurchaning ochlikdan tortishishi esa  
ko`nglini aynitardi. Omadsizlik uni sindirdi va  
ko`zlari beixtiyor yoshlandi. Yuzini qo`llari bilan  
yopib olganicha yig`ladi va shu on Stovsher Bill  
yodiga tushdi. Uzoq o`sha tundagi o`z qilmishini  
esladi. Bechora keksa Stovsher Bill! Ha, Bilning  
nega yig`laganini u endi tushunib yetgandi.



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**JEK LONDON**

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The function of man is to live, not to exist.  
I shall not waste my days In trying to prolong them.  
I shall use my time.

Jack London



White F

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