

Suspiria De Profundis

By F. C. Owlett

At midnight Smithers crawled panting into the dug-out which he shared with me, lugging an oil-drum under his arm. Setting the drum in a corner, he removed his helmet and mopped his brow.

"In the name of all that's wonderful —" I began.

"I've purloined it from the Hindenburg Line," said he, "and it's full!

"Smithers, you're stark mad," said I, "madder than I like a fellow lodger of mine to be. I begin to think of moving to another trench. Tell me, what's your game with that drum?"

"Taint the drum my boy, it's what's *inside* the drum—oil sonny the best lubricating, all the way from the Hindenburg Line, and what am I going to do with it? I'm going to oil my boots with it, and anything else that wants oiling. There's quite a lot of things that wants oiling hereabouts when you reckon 'em up, and never a drop of oil can a fellow get this side of the Line without repeating the Catechism, the Apostles Creed, the Arabian Nights, and anything else you may be called on to recite. So I went to Hindenburg."

"I give you up Smithers and tomorrow morning I quit."

After a while we slept.

I was awakened by a dull buzzing in my ear. I opened my eyes and sat up. The atmosphere was oppressive—strangely, uncannily oppressive. The bussing hung about my ear until it seemed to resolve itself into words whispered or hummed. Good heavens; I thought, I must be going out of my mind! In a sweat I arose and gave Smithers a kick. Smithers sat up.

"Who's talking in ear?" he exclaimed, "And what are you doing the rounds for Jones?"

"Ho, ho! talking in *your* ear is it? Well Smithers, it's ghosts or demons, or we're a pair of raving lunatics, or —"

"Look at yon oil-drum!"

I looked at the oil-drum, and saw a thin spiral of vapour rising from the screw cap.

"A bomb!" I cried.

"Nonsense," said Smithers, "It's oil I tell you—I know that by the way it swished about when I was lugging it home. Anyway we'll soon settle the question."

Smithers went to the drum and unscrewed the cap.

Instantly a filmy column of vapour curled upward from the opening, and at the same time the buzzing in our ears swelled to a flow of words distinctly whispered,

"Kadaver, Kamerado! Kadaver!.....Vare iss mein Gretcher?
Stairr me gently Gretchen.....Wilheim nefair waste anytings.....
Gott strafe Wilhelm!.....For Wilhelm der pottomless pit iss!.....