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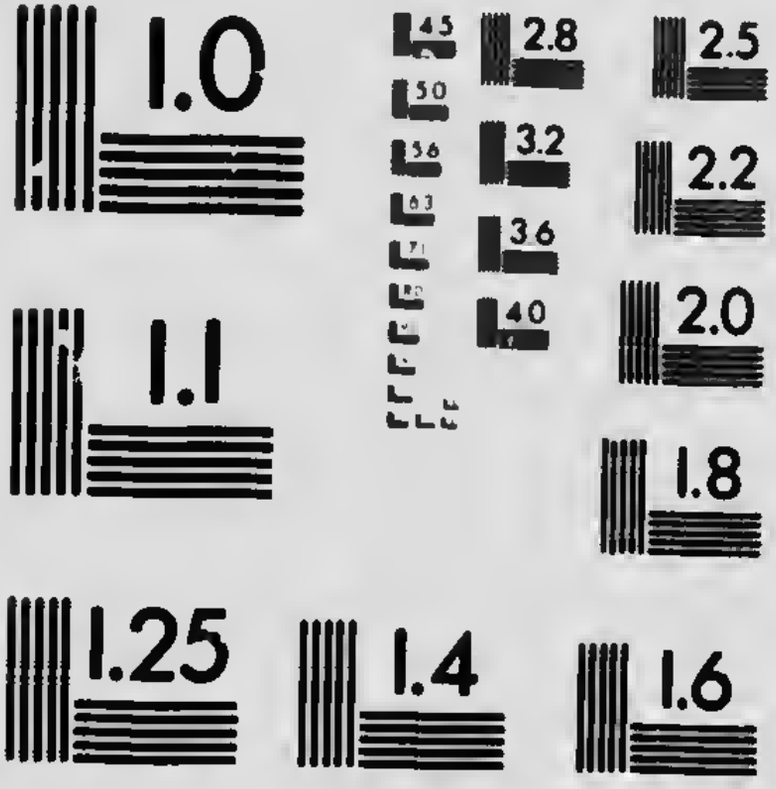

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(716) 482 - 0300 - Phone
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THE STRANGER

BY

ARTHUR STRINGER

"It puzzled
John Hardy"

"I died for it!"

THE STRANGER

By Arthur Stringer

THERE was a shout of alarm, a scream of brakes hard down, and a cloud of dust as the heavy motor-car slithered to a stop.

"I hit 'em!" gasped John Hardy, with a shake in his knees as he sat gripping the wheel and staring back over his shoulder. Then, with a sinking of the midriff, he leaned over the car-side and looked at his running-board. He looked at it as though he expected to see shreds of flesh hanging from its metalled edges.

But he could see nothing, nothing on the running-board and nothing on the road itself. Yet something was wrong with his eyes, or with his nerves that morning, for he had misjudged both his speed and his distances as that strange looking vehicle had come with ghost-like quietness about the turn in the road. The whole thing, indeed, had struck him as a bit fantastic, as a bit incredible, like a spectacle carpentered together for a motion-picture camera: the sombre grey team with their sombre trappings, the ancient-looking barouche with the two cockaded figures on the driving-seat, the solitary passenger in his solemn-looking military cape and the three-cornered black hat that shadowed a grey face with a far-away look in the eyes. It puzzled John Hardy. His Klaxon-horn had, apparently, been unheard, just as his shout had been ignored. And the fools had turned out to the left, instead of to the right. So as he ducked for his emergency-brake and stiffened in his seat he knew that the collision was inevitable. He had not actually seen it, misted as his vision must have been with road-dust and sudden panic. But as he sat there, grey-jowled and shaken, waiting for the Unknown to disclose itself, his eye fell on a brown pocketbook within ten feet of his car.

He clambered down from his seat and picked it up. Instead of being a pocketbook, however, it was a much-thumbed volume of faded calf-skin. But he looked up from the faded pages, which he was able to make out as a copy of Grey's "Elegy," to see a figure emerging through the dust-cloud which still hung over the road. It was the same figure that he had seen in the barouche, only now

the grey-faced stranger was without cape or hat. His brow, in fact, wore a slight frown of perplexity as he continued to brush a sprinkling of dust from his clothing of faded broadcloth.

John Hardy gulped with gratitude. He hadn't killed the man, at any rate, whatever might have happened to the crazy old chariot and the tombstone-tinted horses. But he muttered, under his breath: "Confound those movie idiots, anyway!"

Then he stared at the stranger who, he knew, had no ghost of a claim against him. "Hurt?" he demanded, deliberately curt, yet disquieted a little by the wistful face with the far-away look in its eyes.

"Not so much hurt, sir, as startled," was the stranger's quietly spoken reply.

"How about your horses?" inquired Hardy, squinting back along the empty road.

"They seem to have disappeared," acknowledged the man with the disturbingly mournful eyes.

"Then I can at least give you a lift," suggested the other with a glance at his wrist-watch. He had intended to be justly indignant at this disregard of road-rules and this loss of time on the brink of an altogether too busy day. But his earlier vague uneasiness had deepened into something almost intimidating before the sustained, unruffled dignity of the stranger who had obviously suffered more than he from the encounter.

"I should be grateful for that kindness," acknowledged the grey-faced man with the mournful eyes. And Hardy's sense of disquiet persisted, even when they were both back in the car and once more under way. He even covertly studied the strangely impassive figure at his side.

"Then you're not an actor, after all?" he finally ventured, more humble than he had intended to be.

"An actor?" echoed the other, slightly perplexed. "No, I am not an actor. I am an observer now, and nothing more."

"You're lucky to have time for that, in days like these," announced the man of action, not unconscious of the other's mild bewilderment as they gathered speed and went careening along a

road that ribboned cityward between orchard and woodland and hillside already flaming with the tints of autumn.

"It's a great country, this Canada of ours," proclaimed Hardy, easily, from a hill-top that unfolded before them a still wider prospect of sun-bathed farmlands and hamlets and clustered homes. "And she's going to hum, now we've got the war over and we're getting back into our stride again. Yes, sir, it's a great country!"

"Is it?" somewhat wistfully asked the stranger with the far-away look in his eyes.

Hardy's laugh was a confident one.

"Look what it did over there in the Big Fight! A quarter of a million of the Lion's whelps, at the first growl from the Old Mother! And when it came to spear-heads Canucks every time, when they knew the push would be a hard one! And sticking to the job until it was finished, and finished right!"

"Then you regard it as finished?"

"Well, we're not studying German verbs and goose-stepping up to a Bismarck-herring *burgomeister* with taxes for Clown Prince Willie's women and racing-stables. And that's finish enough for me!"

"Then everything has been done?" asked the wistful-eyed stranger, "everything that Canada and the Empire needs?"

"There are the loose ends, of course," conceded the man of business with a shrug. "Somebody's got to get after *them*. But the fire's out, and the Kaiser's playing beaver round the tree butts over at Huis-Doorn, and that Armistice-Day hub-bub, naturally, isn't the sort of thing that can last over-night."

"I infer, then, that you served and suffered in this war?" queried the sombre figure at Hardy's side.

A cloud settled on the rubicund face with the grizzled temples.

"No, I stayed right here and stuck to business," he acknowledged. "But I rather think I did my share. I held jobs open for every boy from The Works who went over. I dug down for every drive that came along. And I took up a good big chunk of each of our war loans, even when—"

"That was a sacrifice," murmured the man at his side. And Hardy was quick to detect and resent a note of irony in that interruption.

"Well, it was *meant* for a sacrifice," he averred. "Things were at a cherry-heat, then, and I felt the call for doing something for this Canada of ours. I dug down until it hurt, and thought I was being a hero. I tried to give my country something, but instead of getting sacrifice out of the deal I got a bunch of bonds that are carrying a five per cent. premium. It was like taking a dollar out of your right-hand pocket and putting it in your left—and then getting over-paid for the move. But God knows I was willing enough to give, when I saw what our boys were going through over there!"

"And now?" prompted the stranger.

"Now the nightmare's over I want to knuckle down and double the output of The Works while Europe's still calling for the goods I make." He slowed up his car at the crest of the hill as he spoke and pointed to the city that lay beneath them, the city overhung with its hazy crown of commerce, touched into pearl and pale gold by the pallid autumn sun. "That's The Works down there, strung along that bit of waterway. And I'm some proud of that place. And my men are too, for you don't see so many factories, in this land, with ivy on the walls, and flower-beds, and green lawns, and a sports-park like that to the west there. But I don't believe in doing things by halves. Do it right, and finish it up right when you're at it—that's my motto. Why, between Building Three and Four there I've got what the men call their Chin Quad—give 'em a band-concert now and then during the noon-hour and have a platform-talker or a college-man over to pow-wow on the things they've got to let off steam about. And it's good business, in the long——"

"Would you mind stopping a moment or two, where we can see wider than usual?" requested the stranger, in a somewhat abstracted tone of voice.

"You can see pretty far, from this point," ventured the slightly perplexed Hardy, as the car came to a stop.

"I wonder if you can?" murmured the wistful-eyed stranger at his side. "I wonder if you are seeing far enough to see this Canada of yours as I see it now, this land of beauty that was born for glory, if only you and the men of your time could fathom its promise? I ask this because you have spoken of the need of

sacrifice, when your only need is a need of vision. For I see something more than a land of stately rivers and statelier plains. I see something more than crowded harbors and countless leagues of wheatland threaded with steel and fat farms and proud and stately cities where little more than a generation ago the wilderness lay. I see the lonely figures of Cabot and Cartier and Champlain threading its waterways, and La Verendrye and Radisson and Mackenzie, with wonder in their eyes, pushing deeper and deeper into the solitude and mystery of its prairies. I see a country that stretches half a world away, linking the Atlantic with the Pacific, a country in which the Roman Empire at its loftiest might easily be lost, numbing the mind with its magnitude, thrilling the very soul with its vistas of material splendor. But I see more than this. I see a nation purified by suffering and left nobler by loss, the loss of her happy dead who gave up their lives for an Idea, and an Idea which others must transmute into an Ideal. I see a people who have endured the test of disaster without flinching now facing the keener test of success, a nation that stood shoulder to shoulder before peril now called on to stand shoulder to shoulder before obligation. For I see its heroes to be rewarded, its wounded to be succoured, its homes to be builded, its ships to go voyaging forth into hungrier lands with the bread of life, its valleys of virgin loam to be opened up to its sons of adventure. I see it striving to weave its children up into the fabric of nationhood. I see it begging to make them partners in a prosperity which is their own if they will only accept it. I see it with its great tasks still uncompleted, asking, as I have said, not for sacrifice but for vision, proclaiming not its poverty but its right to reap the fruits of victory!"

The eyes of the two men met, and still again that vague sense of uneasiness touched with humility took possession of the hard-headed man of business as he stared at the stranger with the light of exaltation on his colorless face. Hardy even sat speechless for a moment or two, with his hand on the wheel of his car.

"And what's all this to me?" he demanded, out of that prolonging silence, perplexed by the difficulty with which his ghostly resentments were finding their voice. "It sounds like very fine talk. But talk, after all, is talk, and I'm a man of action. I believe in doing things, instead of saying them. And I rather

imagine, when you get down to hard-pan and actual performance, that I've done about as much for this country as you have."

"Have you?" inquired the man at his side, quietly and quite without rancour.

Hardy sat for a moment in thought, sniffing a phantasmal rebuff in the ironic calmness of that inquiry. Then his face lost a little of its color.

"Well, there's one thing I want to tell you. I'm not in the habit of parading my personal troubles before strangers I pick up on the road. But it may set things a little straighter,"—he paused for a moment or two, and his voice unconsciously deepened,—"when I say that I lost my boy, over there in Flanders."

Hardy could feel the wistful eyes of the other man searching his face.

"But you can at least glory in that death?" the stranger finally suggested.

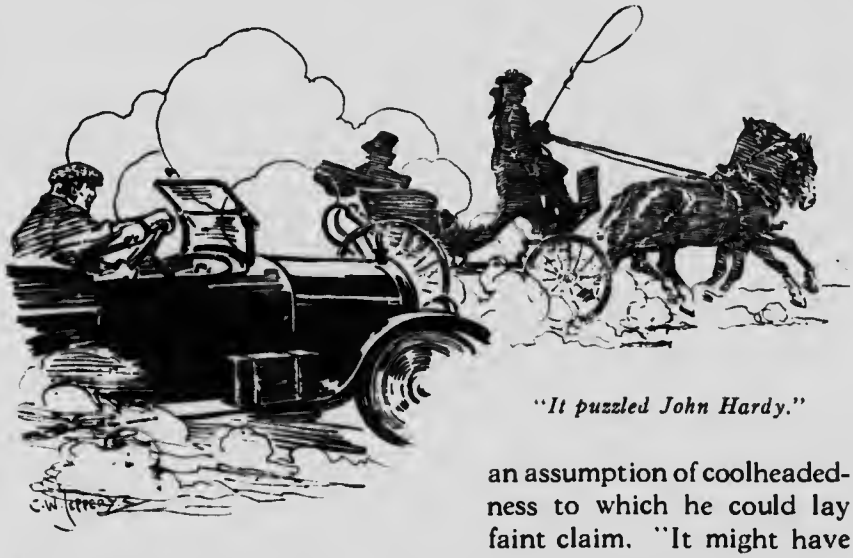
"I'm not so sure that I do," Hardy found himself compelled to admit. "He was very close to me, that boy. And he was all I had. I'd always thought of him as carrying on The Works when I was through. But it fired him, that first call from overseas, and he went without a thought of anything else. He went the way they all went, for there was a Beast loose in the world, and it had to be throttled. In a way, I had nothing whatever to do with his going. And when I talk about having given my son for the cause, I know I'm only trying to cover up the old wound and salve the old ache. *I* had nothing to do with the giving. He gave himself!"

Hardy sat gazing down into the valley plumed with smoke and crowned with the dust of traffic. He was a reticent man, and it was not often he was prompted to speak of these things.

"But to die, victorious, on the field of honor, to go gloriously, in the hour of triumph," the man beside him was saying, in a slightly tremulous voice.

Hardy, without looking up, felt the rapt eyes searching his face.

"That's just the point," he finally said, as though afraid of an emotion which he dare not explore too deeply. So he spoke with



"It puzzled John Hardy."

an assumption of coolheadedness to which he could lay faint claim. "It might have been different, if my boy had given up his life at white heat, in one of those big pushes. It wouldn't have seemed so hard, if he'd gone out giving those Huns what they deserved. But the way he did die seems so meaningless, so accidental, so damnably unnecessary, that I can't help getting bitter, now and then, when I fall to thinking about it."

"Then how did he die?"

"Do you happen to know anything about warfare?"

"I have known warfare, in my time," admitted the other, as though speaking to himself, and only to himself.

"Well, this modern kind of campaigning is a good deal different to the brand of fighting of even twenty years ago. You see, when you win a battle nowadays you can't call it actually won until the moppers-up have gone over the territory and cleaned it up, rooted out the hidden snipers and taken care of the mud-crawlers who cut loose and stab in the dark. It means consolidating your position. It's really getting your triumph organized so it can't turn turtle into a defeat. And it's something that it doesn't pay to overlook."

"I think I understand," acknowledged his grave-eyed companion.

"I haven't been able to find out a great deal about that particular movement," Hardy went on, "but they'd carried a salient and had been too busy to send in a mopping-up party. They thought the thing was finished, and that boy of mine was helping with the wounded, when he ran across a Prussian officer. That hulk of hate was lying there, like a dog with rabies, with an automatic under his belly. When my boy stooped down, to give him first aid, that overlooked mass of hate turned and shot him through the stomach, shot him abominably, uselessly!"

His voice trailed off, and for only a second or two he sat inert. Then he pulled himself together, grasped his gear-shift, and let in his clutch. Some inner commotion of his mind seemed to expend itself in the fury with which he raced his car-engine as they got under way again and went rocking and slewing down into the wide valley before them.

"And all this that you have been telling me," the wistful-eyed man at his side finally observed, "it means nothing to you, now of all times? It means nothing to you to-day, when you can so confidently tell me that this Canada of yours is a great country?"

Hardy, slowing up at the outskirts of the city, frowned a little.

"I can't say that I see any particular connection between saying I'm proud of my country and a mopping-up operation that failed to put in an appearance two years ago over in Flanders," protested the man of business as he crossed a canal-bridge and tooled his car in through the trim gateway of The Works where his day's duties awaited him.

"But have we not dreamed," began the man at his side, with a singular note of earnestness in his quiet-toned voice, "That our work is done, our work for this wide Dominion, before what you have spoken of as the mopping-up has taken place? The enemies of our Empire have gone down in defeat, and the big fire is out, as you have said. But how about the salvage-corps and the cleaning up after the tumult and the fever and the smoke? This country, I am told, is calling on you. It is calling on you, not for help, but for sagacity. It is calling on you to organize a victory so that the fruits of it may be your own. It is calling on you to consolidate a position which has been paid for in blood, and dearly paid for, so that peril may not reappear in your path and disaster may not slink up on you in the dark. It is calling on you, not for a renewal

of those earlier hot-blooded sacrifices, but for cool-headed pride in this brotherhood of men and races that is known as Canada. It is the time for the last move, the time for the mopping-up, as you have called it, the time to show the world that you have won what you have won, not by brute passion and blind luck, but by strength of will and cleanness of mind. And Oh, sir, if you can but see these things as I see them, who am an older and wiser man than you are, I can devoutly and gratefully say to you that the son you have loved and lost has not died in vain!"

Hardy turned and regarded the stranger with the faded air, so suggestive of old daguerreotypes. The earnestness of the man, the sheer persistence of the man, as he followed him like a shadow from his car even into his private office, both nettled and amazed the owner of The Works who remembered that he had a busy day ahead of him. But he remembered other things as well, as he dropped into his swivel-chair before the rosewood desk that stood so grimly bald and plain, like the deck of a battleship cleared for action. It was a place of encounter, that desk, as definite a point of combat as the squared ring of pugilists. And when the owner of it looked up at the wistful figure beyond the square of rosewood, it was almost with a challenge in his eyes. He was moved and a little bewildered, stirred by powers which he could not quite decipher. But he was a practical man, and mystery was not admitted into his scheme of things.

"There's just one thing I'd like to know," he began with a laboriously achieved bruskness of tone, "and that's why you're coming to me with this love-of-country talk. I thought I'd been getting enough of that from the people I know around here, this last few days. But I don't comprehend what brought *you* into the chorus!"

"It was the need, the need that could not be denied, which brought me," was the deliberate and unruffled reply.

"And what persuaded you of that?" demanded the man of business. But he let his eyes fall before the oddly luminous stare of the faded figure on the far side of the room.

"I can only remind you that an enemy of mine, who is now my comrade, once said: *Debout les morts!*"

"You'll have to pardon me for not quite understanding."

"Where the need is great," murmured the other, "even *they* come back."

A gesture, more of frustration than of impatience, came from the man at the desk.

"Let's get down to earth. What I want to know is, just who you are and where you're from. What's your name?"

There was a moment's silence.

"My name, sir, is Wolfe," answered the other, oddly humble, "James Wolfe."

John Hardy leaned forward, with his thick elbows on the polished rosewood desk-top.

"Well, Mister Wolfe, I'm glad to have met you. And I'll admit that you've stirred me up a bit this morning, and that I've talked to you as I don't talk to most men. There's been a good deal said about this country of ours, and about coming to her help when she's calling for it. But since you seem to know a good deal about what I've done and what I haven't done, I'm a little curious to know, since you've ventured to bring the matter up, what you've ever done for this Canada of ours?"

"*I died for it on the Plains of Abraham one hundred and sixty years ago,*" answered the voice of the stranger, out of a stillness that seemed disturbingly like the stillness of the house of God.

* * * * *

John Hardy started up with a cry of understanding. He had heard no movement, no sound of a door being opened and closed. But he found that he was alone. And he was oppressed by a dull feeling of shame, not unlike a consciousness of trivially uncouth movements in a place of worship. He saw it all now, where before it had seemed so meaningless.

He sat before his desk, deep in thought. He sat there without moving even after a young man in spectacles, with a sheaf of papers in his hand, stepped with a secretarial sort of soft briskness into the room.

"You're a trifle late this morning, Mr. Hardy," ventured the young man in spectacles, with his quick yet controlled smile. For

it was something in the nature of a cataclysm, the Chief getting down to The Works behind time.

"Yes," acknowledged Hardy, ignoring the sheaf of papers which his secretary had placed on the desk before him, "Yes, I ran into something!"

"Ran into something, sir?"

"I ran into the Truth, on my way down here this morning, and it threw me out of the rut where I'd been travelling."

A smile of tempered forbearance hovered for a moment about the mouth of the young man in spectacles. Then his features became serious, like a company at attention.

"Major Brown, of the Victory Loan Committee, has been waiting for some time, sir. He says you had promised him a decision about subscribing this morning."

Hardy moved his head, in assent, his thoughts still apparently elsewhere. "Show him in," he finally said.

The two men who had played marbles and then Rugby and then golf and had grown grey together shook hands with a touch of heartiness.

"I guess you know why I'm here, John," began the slimmer and straighter man of the two. "I'm here because I want your 'yes' or 'no' on this Victory Loan business. I call it a business, you'll notice, because it *is* a business and not a charity, a business that makes you a working partner with the biggest country in the New World. But I'm not going over that old ground again. You know what Ottawa has to face in the next year or two just as well as I do: our boys to be taken care of, the broken lads to get their patching-up and the sturdy ones to get their land settlements. Then we've got a big slice of Europe to feed and furnish, and to unload the stuff from your factory here and your farm out yonder we've got to give her credit. And we've got to do it before the other fellow beats us to it and takes that trade from under our nose. You know that better than I do. We've got to have ships, and we've got to have grain-cars and houses and hospitals. We've——"

Hardy stopped him with a quick gesture which only his smile kept from being peremptory.

"You certainly don't need to go over that again, Major," he said as he leaned back in his chair. "I understand those things. And I also understand that I promised to give you a decision this morning. Well, I'm not going to give it to you right now. I've made you do a considerable amount of waiting, and now I'm going to make you wait just a little bit longer. For I want you to step out into what they call our Chin Quad and get what I've got to say about this Loan business there!"

John Hardy watched his visitor pass out through the door, smiling at the other's slight frown of perplexity. He sat for several minutes, deep in thought. Then he leaned forward and touched a buzzer-button on the end of his desk.

"Wilson," he said, as his secretary stepped into the room; "I want you to tell the department-heads to have the boys come out into the Chin Quad, the whole bunch of them. I want them there right away."

In an incredibly short space of time a soft-pedal seemed to fall on that noisy key-board of industry. Machinery droned off into silence, pulleys grew still, carriers came to rest. There was a scattering tidal-wave of bare-armed workmen out into the clear October sunlight between the ivy-draped walls. They met and merged in the green-swarded quadrangle with the bare little wooden platform at one end. About this platform they sat and squatted on the grass in semicircular rows, easily, without constraint, not unlike Tommies at a rest-camp sing-sing, some of them even smoking. It was, plainly, an old story with them. The only novelty lay in the untowardness of the hour they were foregathering there.

There was not even a stir, much less a cheer, as the Chief, bareheaded and squinting a little from the strong sunlight, mounted the platform. He stood looking at them for a moment or two, apparently collecting his thoughts. And then he began to speak.

"Men," he said in a clear and vibrant voice that was new to them and even to himself, "men, I'm not much of a talker, and you know it. But this morning I've got something to say, and I want to say it straight and simple. We've had our troubles, this last year or two, both inside these gates and outside of them. But those troubles are over, and we understand each other a little better. But there's one thing I don't think I've quite understood, until

something gave me a jolt this morning. Just what that was wouldn't mean much to you. But we're all glad to think that the war is won, that the agony's over, and we're glad to get the home fires burning again, and once more back into harness to make up for lost time. And I guess you want to be a success, to make good, just about as much as I do. But there have been times when I was thinking so much about being a success that I almost forgot about being a Canadian. When I think what the boys from the land of the Maple Leaf did over there, I get a thrill out of it. When I remember what they made the very name of 'Canada' mean, I'm proud that I belong to the land of the Beaver. But to-day we've got to bring our patriotism home from Flanders and plant it right in our own front-yards. We talk about the war being over. It *is* over. But if your doctor took your appendix out and you heard him hollering as you came out of the ether: 'Your operation's over—get off the table—get out,' you wouldn't thank him for either what he did or what he didn't do. And that's about what we're up against here in Canada to-day. The big fire is out; the Kaiser's canned; we've paid the price and saved the world. But that's not all. We've got to get that old sword-blade pounded back into a plow-share. And that means a different kind of work, a kind where clear thinking takes the place of high feeling. You know what I'm driving at. You've already heard enough about how your country's calling on you, not to come to her help, but to come to your own help, with thrift. She's calling on you to get into partnership with Johnny Canuck, the lad who's crowding in next to the rail in this twentieth century race for prosperity. We're not a light-tongued brood, we sons of the Big North. We don't wear our hearts on our jumper-sleeves. But if it's true that men have to be crazy about something, you've got a country that you're always safe in being crazy about, for you can't beat her, boys, from the tip of the North Pole to the bed-plates of the South. Stay crazy about her, for she'll justify you in the end. But when she's doing this for you, you've got to do something for her. You've got to get together. You've got to ***stand*** together. You've got to get that feeling of one family, to sink or swim. And when you wake up to that you'll wake up to the fact that this isn't a Loan they're talking about, but a collaboration in profit-taking. So when I stand here and say that I'm going to dig down for this Loan, on my own hook, that I'm going to dig down until I've a

cramp in my pocket-book, I'm not posing as a hero. It's only good, hard-headed Canadianism. And it's something I want to see you all in on. Grab your chance, and invest in your own bigness. Show 'em what the Whelp of the Lion can do. We belong to the land of the Beaver, which is the wisest and the hardest worker on four legs. So show 'em what the sons of the Beaver can do, when they get down to real digging. We're all one family, remember, pulling together. So let's make it half a billion, boys, before we're through—let's make it so big the Maple Leaves will flush with pride!"

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