

# **Down Among Men**

BY  
**WILL LEVINGTON COMFORT**

## **Table of Contents**

BOOK I. AFIELD

BOOK II. THE HILL-CABIN

BOOK III. THE BARE-HEADED MAN

## TO THE MEN OF THE UPPER ROOM

... AND THIS IS THE STORY I TOLD YOU THROUGH THE SEVERAL NIGHTS: OF THE MAN WHO CAME UP THROUGH THE DARK AND THE FIGHTING (OFTEN IN SUCH A RUCK OF FIGHTING THAT HE COULDN'T HEAR VOICES); HOW HE WAS PUNISHED BY MEN, BROKEN BY SELF, AND HEALED BY A WOMAN; INDEED, BUT FOR HER, HE MIGHT HAVE CHOSEN THE LONG WAY OF THE BRUTE TO PUT ON HIS POWERS AND ATTAIN THE CERTAIN ROYALTY OF THE HUMAN ADULT IN THIS YEAR OF OUR LORD. SHE PAID THE PRICE; SHE WAS THE MAN-MAKER; SHE SAW THE WORLD-MAN SHINING AHEAD.... IT IS A STORY OF THE PATH AT OUR FEET, OF THE COMPASSIONATES WHO DRAW NEAR TO SPEAK, WHEN WE ARE BRAVE ENOUGH TO LISTEN, OF THE WOMEN WHO WALK BESIDE US. A TALE OF THE ROAD AS WE GO—MANY ARE AHEAD, MANY BEHIND—BUT WE DO NOT TRAVEL THIS STRETCH AGAIN.

—*W. L. C.*

## KAO LIANG

*No one thought of kao liang.*

*Morning did not mention it in his great story; even Duke Fallows did not think of it.*

*Kao liang, the millet of China. Inland seas of it are there, green in the beginning of its flow, dull gold in its high tide.*

*A ruffianly scouring grain. Rice is its little white sister. Millet is the strength of the beast, the mash of the world's poor. A hundred millions of acres of Asia are in yield or waiting for kao liang to-day. Remember the poor.*

*In Manchuria kao liang grows strong and high. Its fox-tails brush the brows of the tall Chinese of the north country. It brushed the caps of the Russian soldiers one certain Fall.*

*The Censurer came with the planting in that year. Kao liang was like a soft green mould upon the hills and valleys when he came to his battle-fields. He was watching for a browner harvest and a ruddier planting. Fall plowing and red planting—for that, he came to Liaoyang.*

*His soldiers trampled it, devastated the young grain with their formations, foraged their beasts upon it. Yet the millet grew, hardened and covered the earth—for the poor must be served. Out of flood and gale and burning, it waxed great, filling the hills and the hollows, closing in on the city, climbing thinly to the Passes.*

*Its protest to the invasion was mute as China's, but it did not run. Before the Japanese, it closed in. It was ripe when the brown flanker crossed the Taitse. It was ripe when two Slav chiefs took their thousands forth to form the anvil upon which the flanker was to be broken. The Cossacks had been feeding their beasts upon it for many days, and they drank in the deep hollows where the roots of kao liang held the rain. It was ripe for the world's poor, when the Sentimentalist strode forth at last—the hammer that was to break the spine of the flanker.*

BOOK I.  
**AFIELD**

**1**

THE town of Rosario was ahead. The cavalry expected to sup and sleep there. Chance of firing presently from the natives was pure routine. John Morning, back in the second troop, on the horse of a missing soldier, wondered if years of service and exploration would make him ever as great a correspondent as Mr. Reeve Kennard looked. The wide, sloping shoulders of the Personage were to be seen occasionally when the trail crooked, far forward and near the General.

The bit of fighting was over before the rear troopers got rightly into the skirmish-line (every fourth trooper holding four horses); and now the men breathed and smoked cigarettes in one more Luzon town; and another *Alcalde's* house was turned into headquarters.... This was a brigade expedition of December, 1899. Two weeks before the General had ridden out of Manila. Various pieces of infantry had been left to garrison the many towns which would not stay held without pins. Two or three days more, then Batangas, and the big ride was over, the lower Luzon incision complete, and drainage established.

Morning, with the troopers, had to look to his mount in regulation fashion, and did not reach Headquarters until after the others. The *Alcalde's* house in Rosario as usual stood large among the straw-thatched bamboo huts. The little upper room which Morning had

come to expect through the courtesy of the staff, was easily found. The saddle-bags and blanket-rolls of Mr. Kennard and his companion, a civilian, named Calvert were already there, each in a corner. Morning's thought was that he would hear these men talk after supper. In a third corner he placed his canteen, and shyly tucked away in the shadow, the limp haversack.

There was a small table in the room, of black wood worn shiny by the hands of the house, as the black wood of the floors was worn shiny by the bare feet of servants. Upon the table was a small sheath-knife, the brass handle of which was inscribed *Mio Amigo*.

It becomes necessary to explain that the human male is discriminating about his loot, by the time he has been afield two weeks in a tropical island, especially if he has camped in a fresh town every night. The day's march makes him value every pound that he can throw away, for he has already been chafed by each essential button and buckle. A tin pail of silver pesos unearthed in a church had passed from hand to hand among the soldiers. As the stress of the days increased (and the artificial sense of values narrowed to the fundamentals such as food and tobacco and sleep), Morning had observed with curious approval that the silver hoard leaked out of the command entirely—to return to the natives for further offerings to the priests.

So the knife on the table aroused no desire. It was not even a good knife, but *Mio Amigo* took his eye, as if affording a bit of insight to the native mind. It could not have been wanted by Mr. Kennard or Mr. Calvert, since it lay upon the table. Morning put it in his coat, knowing he would toss it away before to-morrow's sun was high. In his hot moist hand the brass-handle sent up a smell of verdigris. A little later in the village road, he encountered Mr. Reever

Kennard in the act of purchasing ancient canned stuff from a native-woman, too lame to run before the cavalry. Morning was not natural in the Presence.

The great man was broad and round and thick. He criticised generals afield, and in Washington when times were dry. He had dined with the President and signed the interview. His head dropped forward slightly, his chin sunk in its own cushions. He bought the native wares with the air of a man who is keeping a city in suspense, and the city deserves it. Morning stood by and did not speak. There was no reason for him to stay; he did not expect companionship; he had nothing to say; no money with which to buy food—and yet, having established himself there, he could not withdraw without remark of some kind. At least he felt this; also he felt cruelly the cub. He was at home in this service with packers and enlisted men, but always as now, officers, and others of his own work, made him feel the upstart.

Mr. Kennard now turned to perceive him, his eyes opening in the “Bless me—what sort is this?” manner of the straying Englishman; and John Morning, quite in a funk, fell to enforcing an absurd interest in the native sheath-knife. Kennard was not drawn to such a slight affair, but perceiving the menial in Morning, allowed him to carry some of his purchases back to Headquarters.

Supper was a serious matter to the boy. He had no money nor provisions. In the usual case, money would have been no good—but there were a few things left in the shop of the lame woman. The field ration was light; and while he would not go hungry if the staff-officers knew, it was a delicate matter to make known his grubless state. Morning rambled over the town, after helping Mr. Kennard to quarters, and returned empty to the upper room. Mr.



Calvert was there and appeared to see Morning for the first time. Calvert was a slender quiet chap, and believed in what he had to say.

“Where did you get that little sheath-knife you showed Mr. Kennard?” he asked abruptly.

Morning sickened before the man’s eyes. His life had been fought out in dark, rough places. He was as near twenty as twenty-five. He had the way of the under-dog, who does not expect to be believed, looking for the worst of it, whether guilty or not. He told Calvert he had found the knife on this table.

“I thought I put it in my saddle-bags,” Calvert said.

“You are very welcome to it. The *Mio Amigo* made me look at it twice——”

“That’s why I wanted it. Take this for your trouble.”

Calvert placed a bit of paper money on the table between them.

“It was no trouble. I don’t want the money.”

“Take it along. Don’t think of it again.”

Morning didn’t want to appear stubborn. This was the peculiarity of the episode. The thought of taking the money repelled him. The connection of the money with supper occurred, but not with the strength of his dislike to appear perverse or bad-tempered.... He saw all clearly after he had accepted the paper, but the matter was then closed. He was very miserable. He had proved his inferiority. The little brush with big men had been too much for him. He belonged among the enlisted....

He went to the lame woman and bought a bottle of pimientos and a live chicken. The latter he traded for a can of bacon with a soldier.

## 2

IMPERIAL HOTEL, Tokyo, early in March, 1904.... The Japanese war office had finally decided to permit six American correspondents to accompany each army. The Americans heard the news with gravity. There were two men for every place. Only three Japanese armies were in conception at this time. The first six Americans were easily chosen—names of men that allowed no doubt; and this initial group, beside being the first to take the field, was elected to act as a committee to appoint the second and third sets of six—twelve places and thirty waiting. The work at hand was delicate.

The committee was in session in the room of Mr. Reeve Kennard. Five of the second list had been settled upon when the name of John Morning (of the Open Market) was brought up. It was Duke Fallows of San Francisco, who spoke:

“I don’t know John Morning, but I know his stuff. It’s big stuff; he’s the big man. We’ve gone too far without him already. He has more right to be on the committee than I. He was here before I was. He has minded his own business and taken quarters apart. I had no intention of breaking into the picture this way, but the fact is, I expected John Morning to go in first on the second list. Now that there is only one place left, there really can’t be any doubt about the name.”

Mr. Reeve Kennard of the *World-News* now arose and waited for silence. He got it. The weight of Mr. Reeve Kennard was felt in this room. Everything in it had weight—saddle and leggings of

pigskin, gauntlets, typewriters, cameras, the broadside of riding-breeches, and a little arsenal of modern inventions which only stop firing upon formal request. Without his hat, Mr. Reeve Kennard was different, however. Much weight that you granted under the big hat, had left that arid country for the crowded arteries of neck and jowl and jaw, or, indeed, for the belted cosmic center itself. He said:

“Mr. Fallows talks wide. This Morning is out on a shoe-string; and while he may have a bit of force to handle certain kinds of action, it isn’t altogether luck—his not getting a good berth. The young man hasn’t made good at home. He hasn’t the money backing to stand his share of the expense. The War Office suggests that each party of correspondents employ a sutler——”

Fallows was still standing and broke in:

“I’m interested in that matter of making good at home. I’ve seen the work of most Americans here, and I believe John Morning to be the best war-writer sent out from the States. As for the shoe-string, I’ll furnish his tooth-brush and dinnercoat—if the sutler insists——”

“We understand very clearly the enthusiasm of Mr. Fallows who wants a second column-man for his paper. Doubtless this Morning is open——”

“I hadn’t thought of it, but certainly the *Western States* would profit, if John Morning turned part of his product there. How about your *World-News* on that?”

“I favor Mr. Borden for the sixth place in second column,” Kennard said simply.

“Borden reached Tokyo three weeks after Morning—and never campaigned before.”

“He’s one of the best of the younger men in New York—a Washington correspondent of big influence——”

“I have no objection to him, except as one to take the place that belongs to John Morning. I can’t see him there.”

Kennard looked about him. Morning was not well known, having been little seen at the *Imperial* in the last six weeks. Fallows had not helped him by saying he was the best war-writer sent out from the States; still in a general way he could not be put aside. Kennard saw this.

“I wasn’t going to hurt Morning badly, if I could help it,” he said, “but Mr. Fallows has rather forced it. This Morning isn’t straight. We caught him stealing a sheath-knife from the saddle-bags of Archibald Calvert down in Luzon four or five years ago. Morning said he found it on a table in the room assigned to us. He took money from Calvert for restoring the knife.”

Fallows laughed at this.

“I can’t believe the story,” he said. “The man who did the stuff I’ve read, isn’t stealing sheath-knives from another’s saddle-bags.... Oh, I don’t mean that it didn’t seem true to you, Kennard——”

Kennard had waited for the last, and was not good to look at until it came. He turned quickly to the others. Borden was chosen.

“You’ve still got a place to fill in the first list,” said Fallows.

The committee was now excited. The five faces turned to the Westerner.

“I repeat, Kennard, that your remarks may be within the letter of truth, but I wouldn’t campaign in the same army with a man who’d bring up a thing like that against a boy—and five years afterward. Understand, I have never spoken a word to John Morning——”

“You’re not giving up your place?” said the committee.

“Exactly.”

“Then you’ll take Borden’s with the second——?”

“I have nothing against Borden. I wouldn’t spoil the chance of a man already chosen.”

“Then first with the third army,” urged the committee.

“I can do better than that,” said Fallows. “Gentlemen, I thank you, and beg to withdraw.”

### 3

JOHN MORNING waved back the rickshaw coolie at the door of the little Japanese Inn, where he had been having his own way for several weeks, and walked down the Shiba road toward the *Imperial* hotel. He had half-expected to get on the committee, which meant work with the first army and a quick start; failing in that, he looked for his name to be called early in the second list, and was on the way now to find out. Morning shared the passion of the entire company to get afield at any cost.

Reasoning, however, did not lift his restlessness and apprehension. He had not been on the spot. He had been unable to afford life at the *Imperial*; and yet, the costliness of it was not altogether vain, since the old hotel had become a center of the world in the matter

of war-correspondence. Japan reckoned with it as the point of foreign civilian force. While his brain could not organize a condition that would spoil his chance, Morning's more unerring inner sense warned him that he was not established, as he walked in the rain.

His name was not posted in any of the three groups. The card blurred after his first devouring glance, so that he had to read again and a third time. For a moment he was out of hand—seething, eruptive. Yet there was nothing to fight....

Corydon Tait, a young Englishman with whom he had often talked and laughed, was standing by. Tait's name was not down. Morning controlled himself to speak courteously.

The Englishman looked beyond him at the card. A chill settled upon Morning's self-destructive heat. This was new in his world. In the momentary misunderstanding, he grasped Tait's arm.

"Really, old chap, I'd prefer you not to do that," the other said, drawing his arm away. "It must be plain that I don't know you."

"I thought you were joking," said Morning.

## 4

BACK on Shiba Road in the beginning of dusk, he turned to the native inn. The door slid open before his hand touched the latch; his figure having been seen through the papered lattice. The proprietor bowed to the matting and hissed with prolonged seriousness, hissed in fact until the American had removed and exchanged his shoes for sandals. The hand-maidens appeared and bowed laughingly. The old kitchen drudge emerged from her

chimney and ogled. The mother of the house took the place beside her lord on the rostrum-of-the-pencils.[Pg 9] She did not hiss, but it was very clear that the matting under the white man's feet was far above her in worthiness.

There was something of this formality with his every entrance. Morning had felt silly during the first days as he passed through the hedge of bent backs; the empty cringing and favor-groveling had seemed indecent. But now (in the dusk of the house before the candles) a faint touch of healing came from it. They had all served him. He had been fearfully over-served. They had bothered his work through excessive service—so many were the hands and so little to do. The women were really happy to work for him. To-night, a queer gladness clung to their welcome. He had fallen indeed to sense it. He was starving for reality, for some holy thing. They had stripped him at the *Imperial*. In his heart he was trying to make a reality now of this mockery of Japanese self-extinction.

The bath-boy, wet from steam, with only a loin-cloth about him, followed Morning to his room. The American was not allowed to bathe alone; would not have been allowed to undress himself, had he not insisted upon the privilege. He sat in a tub, three walls of which were wood and the fourth of iron. Against the outside of the latter, burned a furious fire of charcoal. For the benefits of this bath, he was begged to make no haste and to occupy his mind with matters of the higher life. A moment or two before the water reached a boiling-point, Morning was allowed to escape. Exceeding pressure of business was occasionally accepted as precluding the chance of a bath for one day, but to miss two days in succession, without proving that he had bathed elsewhere, meant a loss of respect, and a start of household whispering.

He was sick to get back to work, turned to it for restoration and forgetfulness, as a man to a drug. Moreover, there was need, for he was on space. Two or three papers in the Mid-west used what he could write, though he had no holding contracts, and had left Chicago with such haste to catch a steamer, that there had been no chance to make an arrangement, whereby these papers might have used the same story simultaneously. And then, there had been a delay of nearly a day in Vancouver. This time in Chicago would have been enough for the establishment of a central office and an agent on percentage, who could have enlarged his market without limit, and cut down his work to one letter a day. Instead, he did the same story now, from three different angles. It had been this way before. With war in the air, Morning was unable to breathe at home. Off he went, without a return ticket—tourist cars and dingy second-class steamer passage—but with a strange confidence in his power to write irresistibly. It was like a mark—this faith of his in the ability to appeal.

All his life he had lived second-class. To-night he wondered if it would always be so; if there was not something in the face of John Morning, something that others saw at once, which placed him instantly among culls and seconds in the mysterious adjustments of the world. They had made him feel so at the *Imperial*, before this episode. Men who didn't write ten lines a day were there on big incomes; and others, little older than he, with only two or three fingers of his ability, on a safe salary and flexible expense account.

The day was brought back to him again and again. The cut of Corydon Tait had crippled him. He felt it now crawling swiftly along the nerves of his limbs until it reached his brain, and remaining there coldly like undigested matter in a sick body. He felt his face queerly. There was neither fat nor flabbiness upon it.



He could feel the bone. His fingers brushed his mouth, and a sort of burn came to him. It was the finest thing about John Morning. There was a bit of poetry about it, a touch of tenderness, finer than strength. Passion was in the mouth, intensity without intentness, not a trace of the boarish, nor bovine. It is true you often see the ruin of such a mouth in quiet places where those of drugs and drinks are served; but you see as well the finished picture upon the faces of those men lit with world's service, who have heard the voice of the human spirit, and are loved by the race, because they have forgotten how to love themselves.

Morning knew it only as his weakness. It was the symbol to-night of his failure.... Those at the *Imperial* had seen it; they had dared to deny him because of it. The greatest among the war-men were thin-lipped and sinewy-jawed—the soldier face.... He knew much about war; none had campaigned more joyously than he. In the midst of peril, courage seemed altogether obvious and easy; his fearlessness was too natural for him to be surprised at it, though it surprised others....

The typewriter buzzed on. Wearily he caught up the trend, but the drive was gone, although there was hardly a lull in the registering of the keys for two-thirds of a page. Always before, this sort of hackwork had been done with a dream of the field ahead. His forces fused. He had been denied a column. His hand brushed across his face and John Morning was ashamed—ashamed of his poverty, of his work, of his own nature, which made a tragedy of the cut of Corydon Tait; ashamed of the heat in his veins from the stimulants he had drunk; ashamed because he had not instantly demanded his rights at the *Imperial*; ashamed of the mess of a man he was, a fool of his volition and vitality, commonness stamped on his every feature.

## Thank You for previewing this eBook

You can read the full version of this eBook in different formats:

- HTML (Free /Available to everyone)
- PDF / TXT (Available to V.I.P. members. Free Standard members can access up to 5 PDF/TXT eBooks per month each month)
- Epub & Mobipocket (Exclusive to V.I.P. members)

To download this full book, simply select the format you desire below

