

# **OFF DUTY**

A Dozen Yarns for Soldiers and Sailors

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TO MY BROTHER  
LIEUTENANT FRANCIS HARPER

## FOREWORD

In my work here at Pelham Bay Camp with our wounded from abroad, with our sick boys who did not get “over there,” and with the well but often lonely men, who frequent our library, I have discovered a distinct need for some collection of the best stories, especially adapted to the “genus homo.” To meet this want, I have prepared this compilation for our soldiers and sailors, and incidentally for all to read who will.

Work with our American youth is most inspiring because of his open mind, his courage, and his great appreciation of any service rendered him. This fact I have learned through becoming acquainted with the brave lads on the hospital cots at Pelham, who have needed help in whiling away the long hours of waiting.

In all camps there are many men not acquainted with books. My aim has been to introduce them to some of our best writers, knowing that friendship and liking would soon follow. The work has been a pleasant one, made doubly so because of the willing co-operation given me by the distinguished authors whose stories are contained herein; and by the equally generous response which the various publishers have made to my requests. It was not done for me, but for the purpose of the compilation. To authors and publishers I hereby express my gratitude.

W. H.  
April, 1919.

# I KEEPING UP WITH LIZZIE

BY IRVING BACHELLER

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(In part)

"Sam Henshaw's girl had graduated an' gone abroad with her mother. One Sunday 'bout a year later, Sam flew up to the door o' my house in his automobile. He lit on the sidewalk an' struggled up the steps with two hundred an' forty-seven pounds o' meat on him. He walked like a man carryin' a barrel o' pork. He acted as if he was glad to see me an' the big arm-chair on the piaz'.

"What's the news?' I asked.

"Lizzie an' her mother got back this mornin',' he gasped. 'They've been six months in Europe. Lizzie is in love with it. She's hobnobbed with kings an' queens. She talks art beautiful. I wish you'd come over an' hear her hold a conversation. It's wonderful. She's goin' to be a great addition to this community. She's got me faded an' on the run. I ran down to the store for a few minutes this mornin', an' when I got back she says to me:

"'Father, you always smell o' ham an' mustard. Have you been in that disgusting store? Go an' take a bahth at once.'" That's what she called it—a "bahth." Talks just like the English people—she's been among 'em so long. Get into my car an' I'll take ye over an' fetch ye back.'

“Sam regarded his humiliation with pride an’ joy. At last Lizzie had convinced him that her education had paid. My curiosity was excited. I got in an’ we flew over to his house. Sam yelled up the stairway kind o’ joyful as we come in, an’ his wife answered at the top o’ the stairs an’ says:

“‘Mr. Henshaw, I wish you wouldn’t shout in this house like a boy calling the cows.’

“I guess she didn’t know I was there. Sam ran up-stairs an’ back, an’ then we turned into that splendid parlor o’ his an’ set down. Purty soon Liz an’ her mother swung in an’ smiled very pleasant an’ shook hands an’ asked how was my family, etc., an’ went right on talkin’. I saw they didn’t ask for the purpose of gettin’ information. Liz was dressed to kill an’ purty as a picture—cheeks red as a rooster’s comb an’ waist like a hornet’s. The cover was off her show-case, an’ there was a diamond sunburst in the middle of it, an’ the jewels were surrounded by charms to which I am not wholly insensible even now.

“‘I wanted ye to tell Mr. Potter about yer travels,’ says Sam.

“Lizzie smiled an’ looked out o’ the window a minute an’ fetched a sigh an’ struck out, lookin’ like Deacon Bristow the day he give ten dollars to the church. She told about the cities an’ the folks an’ the weather in that queer, English way she had o’ talkin’.

“‘Tell how ye hobnobbed with the Queen o’ Italy,’ Sam says.

“‘Oh, father! Hobnobbed!’ says she. ‘Anybody would think that she and I had manicured each other’s hands. She only spoke a few words of Italian and looked very gracious an’ beautiful an’ complimented my color.’

“Then she lay back in her chair, kind o’ weary, an’ Sam asked me how was business—just to fill in the gap, I guess. Liz woke up an’ showed how far she’d got ahead in the race.

“‘Business!’ says she, with animation. ‘That’s why I haven’t any patience with American men. They never sit down for ten minutes without talking business. Their souls are steeped in commercialism. Don’t you see how absurd it is, father? There are plenty of lovely things to talk about.’

“Sam looked guilty, an’ I felt sorry for him. It had cost heavy to educate his girl up to a p’int where she could give him so much advice an’ information. The result was natural. She was irritated by the large cubic capacity—the length, breadth and thickness of his ignorance and unrefinement; he was dazed by the length, breadth, an’ thickness of her learning an’ her charm. He didn’t say a word. He bowed his head before this pretty, perfumed casket of erudition.

“‘You like Europe,’ I says.

“‘I love it,’ says she. ‘It’s the only place to live. There one finds so much of the beautiful in art and music and so many cultivated people.’

“Lizzie was a handsome girl, an’ had more sense than any o’ the others that tried to keep up with her. After all, she was Sam’s fault, an’ Sam was a sin conceived an’ committed by his wife, as ye might say. She had made him what he was.

“‘Have you seen Dan Pettigrew lately?’ Lizzie asked.

“‘Yes,’ I says. ‘Dan is goin’ to be a farmer.’

“‘A farmer!’ says she, an’ covered her face with her handkerchief an’ shook with merriment.

“‘Yes,’ I says. ‘Dan has come down out o’ the air. He’s abandoned folly. He wants to do something to help along.’

“‘Yes, of course,’ says Lizzie, in a lofty manner. ‘Dan is really an excellent boy—isn’t he?’

“‘Yes, an’ he’s livin’ within his means—that’s the first mile-stone in the road to success,’ I says. ‘I’m goin’ buy him a thousand acres o’ land, an’ one o’ these days he’ll own it an’ as much more. You wait. He’ll have a hundred men in his employ an’ flocks an’ herds an’ a market of his own in New York. He’ll control prices in this county, an’ they’re goin’ down. He’ll be a force in the State.’

“‘They were all sitting up. The faces o’ the Lady Henshaw an’ her daughter turned red.

“‘I’m very glad to hear it, I’m sure,’ said her Ladyship.

“‘I wasn’t so sure o’ that as she was, an’ there, for me, was the milk in the cocoanut. I was joyful.

“‘Why, it’s perfectly lovely!’ says Lizzie, as she fetched her pretty hands together in her lap.

“‘Yes, you want to cultivate Dan,’ I says. ‘He’s a man to be reckoned with.’

“‘Oh, indeed!’ says her Ladyship.

“‘Yes, indeed!’ I says, ‘an’ the girls are all after him.’



“I just guessed that. I knew it was unscrupulous, but livin’ here in this atmosphere does affect the morals even of a lawyer. Lizzie grew red in the face.

“‘He could marry one o’ the Four Hundred if he wanted to,’ I says. ‘The other evening he was seen in the big red tourin’-car o’ the Van Alstynes. What do you think o’ that?’

“Now that was true, but the chauffeur had been a college friend of Dan’s, an’ I didn’t mention that.

“Lizzie had a dreamy smile on her face.

“‘Why, it’s wonderful!’ says she. ‘I didn’t know he’d improved so.’

“‘I hear that his mother is doing her own work,’ says the Lady Henshaw, with a forced smile.

“‘Yes, think of it,’ I says. ‘The woman is earning her daily bread—actually helpin’ her husband. Did you ever hear o’ such a thing! I’ll have to scratch ’em off my list. It’s too uncommon. It ain’t respectable.’

“Her ladyship began to suspect me an’ retreated with her chin in the air. She’d had enough.

“I thought that would do an’ drew out o’ the game. Lizzie looked confident. She seemed to have something up her sleeve besides that lovely arm o’ hers.

“I went home, an’ two days later Sam looked me up again. Then the secret came out o’ the bag. He’d heard that I had some money in the savings-bank over at Bridgeport payin’ me only three and a

half per cent, an' he wanted to borrow it an' pay me six per cent. His generosity surprised me. It was not like Sam.

“‘What’s the matter with you?’ I asked. ‘Is it possible that your profits have all gone into gasoline an’ rubber an’ silk an’ education an’ hardwood finish an’ human fat?’

“‘Well, it costs so much to live,’ he says, ‘an’ the wholesalers have kept liftin’ the prices on me. Now there’s the meat trust—their prices are up thirty-five per cent.’

“‘Of course,’ I says, ‘the directors have to have their luxuries. You taxed us for yer new house an’ yer automobile an’ yer daughter’s education, an’ they’re taxin’ you for their steam-yachts an’ private cars an’ racin’ stables. You can’t expect to do all the taxin’. The wholesalers learnt about the profits that you an’ others like ye was makin’, an’ they concluded that they needed a part of ’em. Of course they had to have their luxuries, an’ they’re taxin’ you—they couldn’t afford to have ’em if they didn’t. Don’t complain.’

“‘I’ll come out all right,’ he says. ‘I’m goin’ to raise my whole schedule fifteen per cent.’

“‘The people won’t stand it—they can’t,’ says I. ‘You’ll be drownin’ the miller. They’ll leave you.’

“‘It won’t do ’em any good,’ says he. ‘Bill an’ Eph will make their prices agree with mine.’

“‘Folks will go back to the land, as I have,’ says I.

“‘They don’t know enough,’ says Sam. ‘Farmin’ is a lost art here in the East. You take my word for it—they’ll pay our prices—they’ll have to—an’ the rich folks, they don’t worry about prices. I

pay a commission to every steward an' butler in this neighborhood.'

"‘I won't help you,' says I. ‘It's wicked. You ought to have saved your money.'

"‘In a year from now I'll have money to burn,' he says. ‘For one thing, my daughter's education is finished, an' that has cost heavy.'

"‘How much would it cost to unlearn it?' I asked. ‘That's goin' to cost more than it did to get it, I'm 'fraid. In my opinion the first thing to do with her is to uneducate her.'

"That was like a red-hot iron to Sam. It kind o' het him up.

"‘Why, sir, you don't appreciate her,' says he. ‘That girl is far above us all here in Pointview. She's a queen.'

"‘Well, Sam,' I says, ‘if there's anything you don't need just now it's a queen. If I were you I wouldn't graft that kind o' fruit on the grocery-tree. Hams an' coronets don't flourish on the same bush. They have a different kind of a bouquet. They don't harmonize. Then, Sam, what do you want of a girl that's far above ye? Is it any comfort to you to be despised in your own home?'

"‘Mr. Potter, I haven't educated her for my own home or for this community, but for higher things,' says Sam.

"‘You hairy old ass! The first you know,' I says, ‘they'll have your skin off an' layin' on the front piaz' for a door-mat.'

"Sam started for the open air. I hated to be ha'sh with him, but he needed some education himself, an' it took a beetle an' wedge to open his mind for it. He lifted his chin so high that the fat swelled

out on the back of his neck an' unbuttoned his collar. Then he turned an' said: 'My daughter is too good for this town, an' I don't intend that she shall stay here. She has been asked to marry a man o' fortune in the old country.'

“‘So I surmise, an' I suppose you find that the price o' husbands has gone up,’ I says.

“‘Sam didn't answer me.

“‘They want you to settle some money on the girl—don't they?’ I asked.

“‘My wife says it's the custom in the old country,’ says Sam.

“‘Suppose he ain't worth the price?’

“‘They say he's a splendid fellow,’ says Sam.

“‘You let me investigate him,’ I says, ‘an' if he's really worth the price I'll help ye to pay it.’

“‘Sam said that was fair, an' thanked me for the offer, an' gave me the young man's address. He was a Russian by the name of Alexander Rolanoff, an' Sam insisted that he belonged to a very old family of large means an' noble blood, an' said that the young man would be in Pointview that summer. I wrote to the mayor of the city in which he was said to live, but got no answer.

“‘Alexander came. He was a costly an' beautiful young man, about thirty years old, with red cheeks an' curly hair an' polished fingernails, an' wrote poetry. Sometimes ye meet a man that excites yer worst suspicions. Your right hand no sooner lets go o' his than it slides down into your pocket to see if anything has happened; or maybe you take the arm o' yer wife or yer daughter an' walk away.

Aleck leaned a little in both directions. But, sir, Sam didn't care to know my opinion of him. Never said another word to me on the subject, but came again to ask about the money.

“Look here, Sam,” I says. “You tell Lizzie that I want to have a talk with her at four o'clock in this office. If she really wants to buy this man, I'll see what can be done about it.”

“All right, you talk with her,” says he, and went out.

“In a few minutes Dan showed up.

“Have you seen Lizzie?” says I.

“Not to speak to her,” says Dan. “Looks fine, doesn't she?”

“Beautiful,” I says. “How is Marie Benson?”

“Oh, the second time I went to see her she was trying to keep up with Lizzie,” says he. “She's changed her gait. Was going to New York after a lot o' new frills. I suppose she thought that I wanted a grand lady. That's the trouble with all the girls here. A man might as well marry the real thing as an imitation. I wish Lizzie would get down off her high horse.”

“She's goin' to swap him for one with still longer legs,” I says. “Lizzie is engaged to a gentleman o' fortune in the old country.”

“Dan's face began to stretch out long as if it was made of injy-rubber.

“It's too bad,” says he. “Lizzie is a good-hearted girl, if she is spoilt.”

“‘Fine girl!’ I says. ‘An’, Dan, I was in hopes that she would discover her own folly before it was too late. But she saw that others had begun to push her in the race an’ that she had to let out another link or fall behind.’

“‘Well, I wish her happiness,’ says Dan, with a sigh.

“‘Go an’ tell her so,’ I says. ‘Show her that you have some care as to whether she lives or dies.’

“‘I could see that his feelin’s had been honed ’til they were sharp as a razor.

“‘I’ve seen that fellow,’ he says, ‘an’ he’ll never marry Lizzie if I can prevent it. I hate the looks of him. I shall improve the first opportunity I have to insult him.’

“‘That might be impossible,’ I suggested.

“‘But I’ll make the effort,’ says Dan.

“‘As an insulter I wouldn’t wonder if Dan had large capacity when properly stirred up.

“‘Better let him alone. I have lines out that will bring information. Be patient.’

“‘Dan rose and said he would see me soon, an’ left with a rather stern look on his face.’”

“‘Lizzie was on hand at the hour appointed. We sat down here all by ourselves.

“‘Lizzie,’ I says, ‘why in the world did you go to Europe for a husband? It’s a slight to Pointview—a discouragement of home industry.’

“‘There was nobody here that seemed to want me,’ she says, blushin’ very sweet.

“‘She had dropped her princess manner an’ seemed to be ready for straight talk.

“‘If that’s so, Lizzie, it’s your fault,’ I says.

“‘I don’t understand you,’ says she.

“‘Why, my dear child, it’s this way,’ I says. ‘Your mother an’ father have meant well, but they’ve been foolish. They’ve educated you for a millionairess, an’ all that’s lackin’ is the millions. You over-awed the boys here in Pointview. They thought that you felt above ’em, whether you did or not; an’ the boys on Fifth Avenue were glad to play with you, but they didn’t care to marry you. I say it kindly, Lizzie, an’ I’m a friend o’ yer father’s, an’ you can afford to let me say what I mean. Those young fellows wanted the millions as well as the millionairess. One of our boys fell in love with ye an’ tried to keep up, but your pace was too hot for him. His father got in trouble, an’ the boy had to drop out. Every well-born girl in the village entered the race with ye. An era of extravagance set in that threatened the solvency, the honor, o’ this sober old community. Their fathers had to borrow money to keep agoin’. They worked overtime, they importuned their creditors, they wallowed in low finance while their daughters revelled in the higher walks o’ life an’ sang in different languages. Even your father—I tell you in confidence, for I suppose he wouldn’t have the courage to do it—is in financial difficulties. Now, Lizzie, I want to

be kind to you, for I believe you're a good girl at heart, but you ought to know that all this is what your accomplishments have accomplished.'

"She rose an' walked across the room, with trembling lips. She had seized her parachute an' jumped from her balloon and was slowly approachin' the earth. I kept her comin'. 'These clothes an' jewels that you wear, Lizzie—these silks an' laces, these sunbursts an' solitaires—don't seem to harmonize with your father's desire to borrow money. Pardon me, but I can't make 'em look honest. They are not paid for—or if they are they are paid for with other men's money. They seem to accuse you. They'd accuse me if I didn't speak out plain to ye.'

"All of a sudden Lizzie dropped into a chair an' began to cry. She had lit safely on the ground.

"It made me feel like a murderer, but it had to be. Poor girl! I wanted to pick her up like a baby an' kiss her. It wasn't that I loved Lizzie less but Rome more. She wasn't to blame. Every spoilt woman stands for a fool-man. Most o' them need—not a *master*—but a frank counsellor. I locked the door. She grew calm an' leaned on my table, her face covered with her hands. My clock shouted the seconds in the silence. Not a word was said for two or three minutes.

"'I have been brutal,' I says, by-an'-by. 'Forgive me.'

"'Mr. Potter,' she says, 'you've done me a great kindness. I'll never forget it. What shall I do?'

"'Well, for one thing,' says I, 'go back to your old simplicity an' live within your means.'



“‘I’ll do it,’ she says; ‘but—I—I supposed my father was rich. Oh, I wish we could have had this talk before!’

“‘Did you know that Dan Pettigrew was in love with you?’ I put it straight from the shoulder. ‘He wouldn’t dare to tell ye, but you ought to know it. You are regarded as a kind of a queen here, an’ it’s customary for queens to be approached by ambassadors.’

“Her face lighted up.

“‘In love with me?’ she whispered. ‘Why, Mr. Potter, I never dreamed of such a thing. Are you sure? How do you know? I thought he felt above me.’

“‘An’ he thought you felt above him,’ I says.

“‘How absurd! how unfortunate!’ she whispered. ‘I couldn’t marry him now if he asked me. This thing has gone too far. I wouldn’t treat any man that way.’

“‘You are engaged to Alexander, are you?’ I says.

“‘Well, there is a sort of understanding, and I think we are to be married if—if—’

“She paused, and tears came to her eyes again.

“‘You are thinking o’ the money,’ says I.

“‘I am thinking o’ the money,’ says she. ‘It has been promised to him. He will expect it.’

“‘Do you think he is an honest man? Will he treat you well?’

“‘I suppose so.’

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