

Childhood of Miss Churt

By F. R. Buckley

ILLUSTRATED BY HARDIE GRAMATKY

What if she has only eight lives left to give for her country? The one she has lost was dearly bought



MISS CHURT—British, like every one else aboard the *Malvern*—sat on the storm sill of the galley and with glazed eyes surveyed the North Atlantic.

Miss Churt was meditating somberly on the rump steak the cook had given her. "Eat it up, Kitty; good!" the cook had said, and Miss Churt had followed the suggestion.

Now—although the steak had been delicious—Miss Churt was experiencing certain qualms; a sensation, as of cannon balls in the midriff, had assailed her. . . .

Miss Churt decided that she would get a little fresh air and drop in on her friend Mr. Wharton.

She dropped from her perch and, with tail at its meridian height, walked unsteadily toward the cuddy stairway.

THE *Malvern* was moving unsteadily also, and likewise because of a heavy feeling in the midriff; caused not by cannon balls but by much more modern munitions of war. Never on very cordial terms with her rudder, she had now been be-shelled and be-packing-cased and be-airplane-parted until she would just as soon go anywhere as anywhere else, and was constantly trying to do so.

In a room on the boat deck, the first officer and the chief engineer were discussing this phenomenon and others related to the comfort and well-being of the ship's company. Mr. McIvor, who was naturally the engineer, had joined in New York and was absorbing pessimism from Mr. Wharton.

"He's a kind of mixed product of the flu and the board room," said the first mate, alluding to his captain. "He's—well, you saw him."

"I saw *something*," said Mr. McIvor cautiously.

"That'd be him. Chairman's nephew; on the beach for years; war comes along—old Stokes gets flu—hand o' Providence—an' here I am sayin' 'Aye, aye, sir!' to *that*. If he'd got eyelashes I wouldn't mind it so much, but—"

Mr. McIvor nodded, and his unclean pipe said, "Cluck, cluck."

"Have any trouble comin' over?"

"Subs, you mean? Naw. Hello, sweetheart! Hello! Come to see Poppa?"

Mr. McIvor, thunderstruck, made an instinctive motion to smooth his hair; but it was only Miss Churt. Mr. Wharton went over, picked her up out of the aperture of the hooked door and before sitting down again on his berth spread a month-old newspaper carefully on the carpet. The page uppermost bore a picture of Lady Somebody's wedding to Captain Gossakes-Whosis of the guards; Mr. Wharton, bending with Miss Churt sprawled over his palm, surveyed orange blossoms, smiles, teeth, tonsils and the arch of swords with a nitric eye.

"There, sweetheart," he said, putting Miss Churt down on them.

"You a morried mon?" asked Mr. McIvor.

"Nah. But I *will* be. That's her."

The engineer rolled an eye at the picture on the bureau.

"Nice gurrul."

"You said it. Canon Hobson an' all. Speakin' of cannon, have you seen our 4.7 on the poop deck?"

"To my grief. But what's this," said Mr. McIvor, whose intake of personal news was disproportionate to his output, "about a canon? The young leddy's no got a smash on um?"

"On old Hobson? Not *that* kind," said Mr. Wharton; and his look made Mr. McIvor wonder whether he should

Miss Churt ran away now, her ears cocked for the sound of beloved footsteps pursuing. And they came

have asked "Fact is—that's a good little sweetheart! Come to Poppa! 'At's a girlie!"

"Ye seem fond o' yon kitten."

"I'm mad about her. And she's just wild about Harry, aren't you, pet?"

Miss Churt licked a gnarled and knotted hand. It tasted something like the rump steak, flavored with tar, salt, tobacco and Mallinson's Wonder Ointment for superficial cuts and bruises. . . .

"Then whaur does this canon come in?"

"All the girls round our way in Liverpool are mad about him. See—he had us all in Sunday school; children's choral guild, he called it; us boys got away after we'd been confirmed, of course, but you can believe it or not, I've never been the swearer I ought to have."

"I noticed that when we was warpin' into the stream," said Mr. McIvor. "I thocht maybe ye was a nance."

A sudden squeezing of Miss Churt's ribs evoked a mew.

"Did I hurt ums bellah?" asked Mr. Wharton. "Dere. Snuzzle down, a good girlie; such a full ickle tummy . . . Ho, you did, hah?"

"Until we met," said Mr. McIvor in haste. "But—he canna be a young mon, this parson?"

"CANON," said Mr. Wharton. "Naw, an' he's no beauty neither. But he's the bee's knees so far's Annie's concerned, an' she's goin' to be married by him or nobody, so so far it's been nobody—an' now they go an' put this pink-whiskered nincompoop in over my head—"

"What's it matter who morries ye? It takes no longer than havin' a tooth out."

"Ho, doesn't it? That's where *you* drop your tow. Old Hobson's strong for the ritual and all that; and that means veils an' orange flowers for Annie an' a top hat an' tails for me."

"But not in wartime!"

"How do *you* know?"

"I'd go," said Mr. McIvor after reflection, "an' see the old mon an' say 'Fush!' to um."

"You would *not*," said Mr. Wharton darkly, "not if you saw him. He's only about five foot six, but I've seen him sober a stevedore with one look—*cold* sober, an' askin' for coffee. He's got one o' those kissers you carve out o' granite with a road drill. Looks something like you."

The chief engineer considered this judicially, and put his glass down.

"Aweel," he said, rising. "It's the wull o' Allah, I suppwase, that some of us should be morried an' hae bairns, while ithers lovish their possions on toby cots. Guid nicht, Mr. Wharton."

In the doorway he turned to see the burst of this Glaswegian bomb. Miss Churt, who had been awakened by something that felt like an earth tremor, blinked at him and went to sleep again.

"We've naval ratings aboard to work yon gun?" McIvor asked, to cover his more morbid curiosity.

"We have," said Mr. Wharton, "an' if anybody asks you who's in command o' that gun crew, it's me. Naval reserve."

"You bein' in turn commanded by Captain Timbs. Weel—guid nicht."

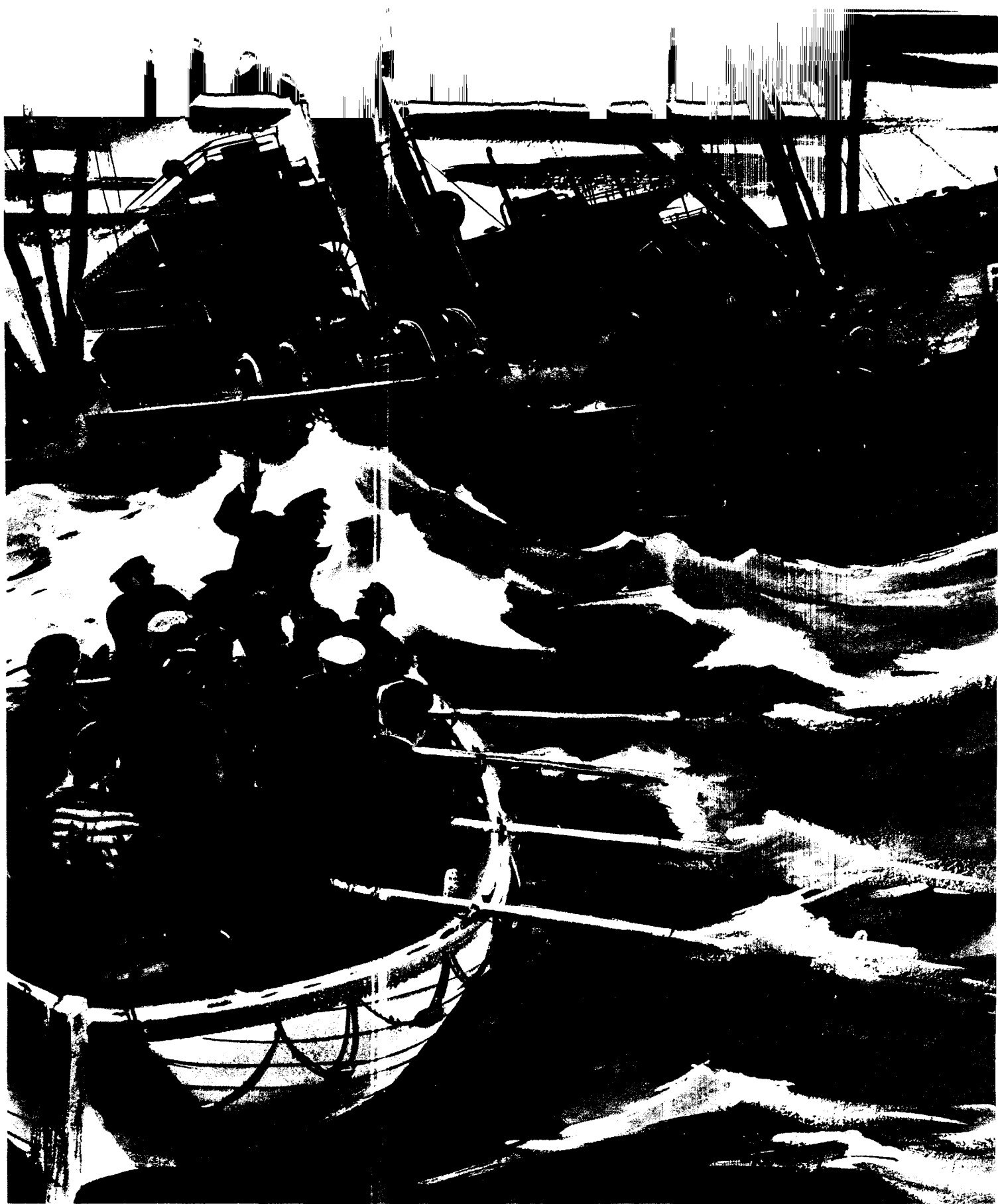
"You heard about that timber ship gettin' torpedoed?" Wharton asked.

"No. What was that?"

"Oh, just that they thought she mightn't have sunk properly, an' be derelict hereabouts. Timbs has been radioin' everybody bar Churchill an' President Roosevelt, but nobody's seen her. Dark night, too. Well—pleasant dreams."

A certain pensiveness marked Mr. McIvor's departure but the first mate seemed to feel better.

He extracted Miss Churt gently from the land of nod, held her up with fore-



"Forgotten something?" said Mr. Wharton. "I've left my cat behind." From the bow came a chuckle

legs dangling, treated her to a gigantic smile and kissed her unhygienically on the nose.

"Azza booful girlie!" said Mr. Wharton. "You like Poppa go home to his other girl an' get married, please, an' zen you have lovely house an' garden to scratch in?"

Miss Churt was exceedingly drowsy; moreover that rump steak seemed still to be clogging her articulation. She opened her pink mouth, but no sound issued.

"I'll bet you," said Mr. Wharton. "And that reminds me—"

He had just risen to pick up the newspaper with the wedding on it when from for'ard, out in the starry dark, there came a thunderous crash.

The Malvern stopped in her tracks like a dowager smitten in the bread-basket.

Simultaneously, the lights went out.

It was, of course, that derelict, floating bottom up at what the French so prettily call the flower of the water, or, in Anglo-Saxon sea talk, awash!

Having accomplished the destiny given her by those heavenly lights overhead—Neptune afflicted by Mars, perhaps; who knows?—and buckled the Malvern's blunt bows backward like the bellows of a concertina, the timber ship rolled, spewed a few hundred thousand board feet from a new gash and sank; while down behind the forepeak of the Malvern, Mr. Wharton and a number of nearly naked shipmates strove to save their tub from doing likewise.

IT WAS a question of strengthening a bulkhead, and strengthening bulkheads is uneasy work in the pitch dark.

It was an hour before Mr. McIvor and his horde got the uprooted dynamo go-

ing again; and then what was revealed by hand lights led into the hold was the reverse of encouraging.

Not only was the bulkhead spouting water through the holes of deracinated rivets; it was bulging bodily and visibly inward, so that it was obvious that no time remained for carpenter work and fancy shoring.

Mr. Wharton's eyes, under a mop of embattled hair, shuttled desperately about the hold. The port and starboard sides were solid-packed with minor munitions, forming admirable buttresses for the wings of the forward wall. But in the midst stood two cases that had taxed the stevedores; they were large and heavy enough to have contained whippet tanks, and the Malvern's notorious instability had caused them to be stowed well aft of the bulkhead.

The space between was filled with
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Leave the Lady Be

By Frank Condon

Jean Arthur detests press agents and interviewers. So Gate-Crasher Condon decided to interview her to find out why

MISS JEAN ARTHUR has a very nice voice and I am a pushover for a beautiful young woman with a nice voice, especially if it is clear, low and sort of lilting. I have recently returned from Tucson, Arizona, where I had a good chance to hear this voice in the rear of a tin garage, with a cooler machine blowing, and I will state the voice comes spang up to all descriptions, hints and rumors. The noise Miss Arthur makes when talking is such that you don't care a hang what she is talking about and are content to lean back and be lulled.

Regarding the trip to Arizona, there were a few ominous preliminaries. It was explained, with some hesitance, that Jean Arthur avoided newspapermen, press agents, lady interviewers and any person carrying sheets of yellow paper in a side pocket. It was said she had a poor opinion of all interviewers, who are apparently people who listen carefully to what a person has to say and then write something else.

There was a slight chill of formality in the Tucson air, which could stand a little chilling, as it was otherwise 130 degrees in the sun, 100 in the shade. Even her own press department, the scholarly lads from Columbia Pictures, spoke of her remotely as Miss Arthur and she was said to address Otis Wiles as Mister Wiles, causing him some uneasiness. I suggested to Lou Smith, who had bounced all the way over on the midnight plane: "Maybe we better turn around and go on home."

Well, I'll never understand any part of it, because, as I say, I sat in this dim garage and Jean sat opposite me on a wet hospital cot, for which she personally paid \$1.39, and we got along fine. . . . The garage was part of the set and the trailer was backed into it and the cooler shot a blast of air over the whole. She talked for two hours about the war, pictures, actors, people, the war, herself, pictures, actresses, people, the heat, the supreme efficiency of the workmen about her, the war and why she doesn't like to pose in the studio for still pictures, holding a bottle of catsup. She hates to sit anywhere for still pictures and studios must have still pictures.

I said: "What do you do about it?"

She said: "I don't go."

Meanwhile, the air machine murmured steadily, and after a long time the publicity staff figured they'd better investigate and see if anything untoward had happened to me in the garage. Miss Arthur was clad in an all-lace bridal costume of ivory white, with five petticoats of satin, formal pantalettes with lace, two scuffed-looking shoes and a bride's veil, which she presently hung on a horseshoe.

Tucson's Ready for War

Tucson in June is one of the world's hottest hot spots, although the residents appear not to notice the heat. Hotels and homes are equipped with air-conditioning machines that work all right, but make alarming noises, and you can buy a cooler-box starting as low as eight dollars, so even the Indians have air-cooled tepees. Tucson lies a few miles north of the border of (one word censored) and enemy bombers could leave foreign soil and drop their eggs on Tucson within twenty minutes. It's that close. Tucson gave this some serious thought, and with the help of Columbia Pictures it is now the only camouflaged city in America and ready for war. What it did, along with Columbia, was to build another Tucson, a phony Tucson, about seventeen miles due south of itself, and in case of military activity the bombers are expected to leave (same word censored), fly north and mistakenly drop their bombs on the imitation Tucson.

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PHOTOGRAPH FOR COLLIER'S BY CHARLES KERLEE

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