


the wind and the waiter

By Dvr. C. F. MILNE



Tents, buckets, oil-drum stoves, make-shift tables, and, rushing madly round them, me. I'm waiter in an officers' mess on a lonely wind-blown atoll in the Pacific. "Suit you," they said, "plenty of spare time." But my cot never sees me; always I am working. If only it didn't blow.

It blows—Lord how it blows! Morning, noon, and night!

To-day, yesterday, the day before, the day before that; always has it blown. And always from the sea—Smack, right in my face!

I wash dishes, they're dirty before I dry them; I wash tablecloth and tea-towels and the wind flings them through the air to the nearest mud pool; so I keep on washing dishes, tablecloths, tablecloths and dishes. Always washing: always dirty. I pray. I pray again, but still it blows. I shout hysterically: "Curse you, wind, go blow some other place!" It just blows harder, faster, fiercer. I give up. I throw slops over the cliff and they spray back all over me. Wild heavy waves bash against the cliff and boom and roar and make white foam—no beauty but anger, destruction, hate. Oh, cruel wind!

No sooner finish breakfast than morning tea upon me. I'm running late. I fly here, dart there, dodge myself going another way, trip, get up again; then lunch, afternoon tea—"Stop! Let me catch up," shouts my shadow. I can't wait. Everywhere I run—to the cook-

house, to the mess, to the sink, to the table; serve the colonel, serve the major, serve the captains, serve all of them. "No, salt!" I look for the salt. Then they leave the table. Then they're back again; mouths open, watching and waiting like hungry young birds in the nest and me the bustling father-bird in a snowstorm. They're waiting, I'm supposed to be, I'm worried.

They eat; I run. They eat faster; I run faster. Inch by inch, always closer in race without finish. Pity poor fox hearing panting hounds closing in on him as he scurries blindly over rolling countryside, through ditches, brambles, ploughed fields, backyards; under fences, over banks; running, running, running: no time to breathe; no time to think—I know. And was the cursed wind gave hounds the scent!

Oh, wind, to think I once admired you, revelled in you, even loved you: waving through long grass, tearing over hilltops, tossing spray over the shoulder of tumbling breaker, swaying tops of tall pines, gliding white sails down the harbour, chasing clouds over the sky, tugging at children's kites, playing with laughing maid's pretty skirt and ruffled hair—and now this!

Curse you, wind. Blow—go on, blow! Blow dirt everywhere and my washing in the dirt; blow the tent down; blow the trees down; blow the black clouds down upon us; blow the sea all over the island to swallow us—

Well!—Blow me down—it's stopped!

