Chambers Robert William

The Crimson Tide: A Novel

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Содержание

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To

MARGARET ILLINGTON BOWES

AND

EDWARD J. BOWES

I

I'd rather walk with Margaret,
I'd rather talk with Margaret,
And anchor in some sylvan nook
And fish Dream Lake with magic hook
Than sit indoors and write this book.

II

An author's such an ass, alas!
To watch the world through window glass
When out of doors the skies are fair
And pretty girls beyond compare–
Like Margaret–are strolling there.

III

I'd rather walk with E. J. Bowes,
I'd rather talk with E. J. Bowes,
In woodlands where the sunlight gleams
Across the golden Lake of Dreams
Than drive a quill across these reams.

IV

If I could have my proper wish
With these two friends I'd sit and fish

Where sheer cliffs wear their mossy hoods
And Dream Lake widens in the woods,
But Fate says “No! Produce your goods!”

ENVOI

Inspect my goods and choose a few
Dear Margaret, and Edward, too;
Then sink them in the Lake of Dreams
In dim, gold depths where sunshine streams
Down from the sky’s unclouded blue,
And I’ll be much obliged to you.

R. W. C.

FOREWORD

An American ambulance going south stopped on the snowy road; the driver, an American named Estridge, got out; his companion, a young woman in furs, remained in her seat.

Estridge, with the din of the barrage in his ears, went forward to show his papers to the soldiers who had stopped him on the snowy forest road.

His papers identified him and the young woman; and further they revealed the fact that the ambulance contained only a trunk and some hand luggage; and called upon all in authority to permit John Henry Estridge and Miss Palla Dumont to continue without hindrance the journey therein described.

The soldiers–Siberian riflemen–were satisfied and seemed friendly enough and rather curious to obtain a better look at this American girl, Miss Dumont, described in the papers submitted to them as "American companion to Marie, third daughter of Nicholas Romanoff, ex-Tzar."

An officer came up, examined the papers, shrugged.

"Very well," he said, "if authority is to be given this American lady to join the Romanoff family, now under detention, it is not my affair."

But he, also, appeared to be perfectly good natured about the matter, accepting a cigarette from Estridge and glancing at the young woman in the ambulance as he lighted it.

"You know," he remarked, "if it would interest you and the young lady, the Battalion of Death is over yonder in the birch woods."

"The woman's battalion?" asked Estridge.

"Yes. They make their début to-day. Would you like to see them? They're going forward in a few minutes, I believe."

Estridge nodded and walked back to the ambulance.

"The woman's battalion is over in those birch woods, Miss Dumont. Would you care to walk over and see them before they leave for the front trenches?"

The girl in furs said very gravely:

"Yes, I wish to see women who are about to go into battle."

She rose from the seat, laid a fur-gloved hand on his offered arm, and stepped down onto the snow.

"To serve," she said, as they started together through the silver birches, following a trodden way, "is not alone the only happiness in life: it is the only reason for living."

"I know you think so, Miss Dumont."

"You also must believe so, who are here as a volunteer in Russia."

"It's a little more selfish with me. I'm a medical student; it's a liberal education for me even to drive an ambulance."

"There is only one profession nobler than that practised by the physician, who serves his fellow men," she said in a low, dreamy voice.

"Which profession do you place first?"

"The profession of those who serve God alone."

"The priesthood?"

"Yes. And the religious orders."

"Nuns, too?" he demanded with the slightest hint of impatience in his pleasant voice.

The girl noticed it, looked up at him and smiled slightly.

"Had my dear Grand Duchess not asked for me, I should now he entering upon my novitiate among the Russian nuns… And she, too, I think, had there been no revolution. She was quite ready a year ago. We talked it over. But the Empress would not permit it. And then came the trouble about the Deaconesses. That was a grave mistake–"

She checked herself, then:

"I do not mean to criticise the Empress, you understand."

"Poor lady," he said, "such gentle criticism would seem praise to her now."

They were walking through a pine belt, and in the shadows of that splendid growth the snow remained icy, so that they both slipped continually and she took his arm for security.

"I somehow had not thought of you, Miss Dumont, as so austerely inclined," he said.

She smiled: "Because I've been a cheerful companion–even gay? Well, my gaiety made my heart sing with the prospect of seeing again my dearest friend–my closest spiritual companion–my darling little Grand Duchess… So I have been, naturally enough, good company on our three days' journey."

He smiled: “I never suspected you of such extreme religious inclinations,” he insisted.

“Extreme?”

“Well, a novice–” he hesitated. Then, “And you mean, ultimately, to take the black veil?”

“Of course. I shall take it some day yet.”

He turned and looked at her, and the man in him felt the pity of it as do all men when such fresh, virginal youth as was Miss Dumont’s turns an enraptured face toward that cloister door which never again opens on those who enter.

Her arm rested warmly and confidently within his; the cold had made her cheeks very pink and had crisped the tendrils of her brown hair under the fur toque.

“If,” she said happily, “you have found in me a friend, it is because my heart is much too small for all the love I bear my fellow beings.”

“That’s a quaint thing to say,” he said.

“It’s really true. I care so deeply, so keenly, for my fellow beings whom God made, that there seemed only one way to express it–to give myself to God and pass my life in His service who made these fellow creatures all around me that I love.”

“I suppose,” he said, “that is one way of looking at it.”

“It seemed to be the only way for me. I came to it by stages… And first, as a child, I was impressed by the loveliness of the world and I used to sit for hours thinking of the goodness of God. And then other phases came–socialistic cravings and settlement

work–but you know that was not enough. My heart was too full to be satisfied. There was not enough outlet."

"What did you do then?"

"I studied: I didn't know what I wanted, what I needed. I seemed lost; I was obsessed with a desire to aid–to be of service. I thought that perhaps if I travelled and studied methods–"

She looked straight ahead of her with a sad little reflective smile:

"I have passed by many strange places in the world… And then I saw the little Grand Duchess at the Charity Bazaar… We seemed to love each other at first glance… She asked to have me for her companion… They investigated… And so I went to her."

The girl's face became sombre and she bent her dark eyes on the snow as they walked.

All the world was humming and throbbing with the thunder of the Russian guns. Flakes continually dropped from vibrating pine trees. A pale yellow haze veiled the sun.

Suddenly Miss Dumont lifted her head:

"If anything ever happens to part me from my friend," she said, "I hope I shall die quickly."

"Are you and she so devoted?" he asked gravely.

"Utterly. And if we can not some day take the vows together and enter the same order and the same convent, then the one who is free to do so is so pledged… I do not think that the Empress will consent to the Grand Duchess Marie taking the veil… And so, when she has no further need of me, I shall make

my novitiate… There are soldiers ahead, Mr. Estridge. Is it the woman's battalion?"

He, also, had caught sight of them. He nodded.

"It is the Battalion of Death," he said in a low voice. "Let's see what they look like."

The girl-soldiers stood about carelessly, there in the snow among the silver birches and pines. They looked like boys in overcoats and boots and tall wool caps, leaning at ease there on their heavy rifles. Some were only fifteen years of age. Some had been servants, some saleswomen, stenographers, telephone operators, dressmakers, workers in the fields, students at the university, dancers, laundresses. And a few had been born into the aristocracy.

They came, too, from all parts of the huge, sprawling Empire, these girl-soldiers of the Battalion of Death–and there were Cossack girls and gypsies among them–girls from Finland, Courland, from the Urals, from Moscow, from Siberia–from North, South, East, West.

There were Jewesses from the Pale and one Jewess from America in the ranks; there were Chinese girls, Poles, a child of fifteen from Trebizond, a Japanese girl, a French peasant lass; and there were Finns, too, and Scandinavians–all with clipped hair under the astrakhan caps–sturdy, well shaped, soldierly girls who handled their heavy rifles without effort and carried a regulation equipment as though it were a sheaf of flowers.

Their commanding officer was a woman of forty. She lounged

in front of the battalion in the snow, consulting with half a dozen officers of a man's regiment.

The colour guard stood grouped around the battalion colours, where its white and gold folds swayed languidly in the breeze, and clots of virgin snow fell upon it, shaken down from the pines by the cannonade.

Estridge gazed at them in silence. In his man's mind one thought dominated–the immense pity of it all. And there was a dreadful fascination in looking at these girl soldiers, whose soft, warm flesh was so soon to be mangled by shrapnel and slashed by bayonets.

"Good heavens," he muttered at last under his breath. "Was this necessary?"

"The men ran," said Miss Dumont.

"It was the filthy boche propaganda that demoralised them," rejoined Estridge. "I wonder–*are* women more level headed? Is propaganda wasted on these girl soldiers? Are they really superior to the male of the species?"

"I think," said Miss Dumont softly, "that their spiritual intelligence is deeper."

"They see more clearly, morally?"

"I don't know… I think so sometimes… We women, who are born capable of motherhood, seem to be fashioned also to realise Christ more clearly–and the holy mother who bore him… I don't know if that's the reason–or if, truly, in us a little flame burns more constantly–the passion which instinctively flames

more brightly toward things of the spirit than of the flesh… I think it is true, Mr. Estridge, that, unless taught otherwise by men, women's inclination is toward the spiritual, and the ardour of her passion aspires instinctively to a greater love until the lesser confuses and perplexes her with its clamorous importunity."

"Woman's love for man you call the lesser love?" he asked.

"Yes, it is, compared to love for God," she said dreamily.

Some of the girl-soldiers in the Battalion of Death turned their heads to look at this young girl in furs, who had come among them on the arm of a Red Cross driver.

Estridge was aware of many bib brown eyes, many grey eyes, some blue ones fixed on him and on his companion in friendly or curious inquiry. They made him think of the large, innocent eyes of deer or channel cattle, for there was something both sweet and wild as well as honest in the gaze of these girl-soldiers.

One, a magnificent blond six-foot creature with the peaches-and-cream skin of Scandinavia and the clipped gold hair of the northland, smiled at Miss Dumont, displaying a set of superb teeth.

"You have come to see us make our first charge?" she asked in Russian, her sea-blue eyes all a-sparkle.

Miss Dumont said "Yes," very seriously, looking at the girl's equipment, her blanket roll, gas-mask, boots and overcoat.

Estridge turned to another girl-soldier:

"And if you are made a prisoner?" he enquired in a low voice. "Have you women considered that?"

"Nechevo," smiled the girl, who had been a Red Cross nurse, and who wore two decorations. She touched the red and black dashes of colour on her sleeve significantly, then loosened her tunic and drew out a tiny bag of chamois. "We all carry poison," she said smilingly. "We know the boche well enough to take that precaution."

Another girl nodded confirmation. They were perfectly cheerful about it. Several others drew near and showed their little bags of poison slung around their necks inside their blouses. Many of them wore holy relics and medals also.

Miss Dumont took Estridge's arm again and looked over at the big blond girl-soldier, who also had been smilingly regarding her, and who now stepped forward to meet them halfway.

"When do you march to the first trenches?" asked Miss Dumont gravely.

"Oh," said the blond goddess, "so you are English?" And she added in English: "I am Swedish. You have arrived just in time. I t'ink we go forward immediately."

"God go with you, for Russia," said Miss Dumont in a clear, controlled voice.

But Estridge saw that her dark eyes were suddenly brilliant with tears. The big blond girl-soldier saw it, too, and her splendid blue eyes widened. Then, somehow, she had stepped forward and taken Miss Dumont in her strong arms; and, holding her, smiled and gazed intently at her.

"You must not grieve for us," she said. "We are not afraid. We

are happy to go."

"I know," said Palla Dumont; and took the girl-soldier's hands in hers. "What is your name?" she asked.

"Ilse Westgard. And yours?"

"Palla Dumont."

"English? No?"

"American."

"Ah! One of our dear Americans! Well, then, you shall tell your countrymen that you have seen many women of many lands fighting rifle in hand, so that the boche shall not strangle freedom in Russia. Will you tell them, Palla?"

"If I ever return."

"You shall return. I, also, shall go to America. I shall seek for you there, pretty comrade. We shall become friends. Already I love you very dearly."

She kissed Palla Dumont on both cheeks, holding her hands tightly.

"Tell me," she said, "why you are in Russia, and where you are now journeying?"

Palla looked at her steadily: "I am the American companion to the Grand Duchess Marie; and I am journeying to the village where the Imperial family is detained, because she has obtained permission for me to rejoin her."

There was a short silence; the blue eyes of the Swedish girl had become frosty as two midwinter stars. Suddenly they glimmered warm again as twin violets:

"Kharasho!" she said smiling. "And do you love your little comrade duchess?"

"Next only to God."

"That is very beautiful, Palla. She is a child to be enlightened. Teach her the greater truth."

"She has learned it, Ilse."

"*She*?"

"Yes. And, if God wills it, she, and I also, take the vows some day."

"The veil!"

"Yes."

"You! A nun!"

"If God accepts me."

The Swedish girl-soldier stood gazing upon her as though fascinated, crushing Palla's slim hands between her own.

Presently she shook her head with a wearied smile:

"That," she said, "is one thing I can not understand–the veil. No. I can understand *this*–" turning her head and glancing proudly around her at her girl comrades. "I can comprehend this thing that I am doing. But not what you wish to do, Palla. Not such service as you offer."

"I wish to serve the source of all good. My heart is too full to be satisfied by serving mankind alone."

The girl-soldier shook her head: "I try to understand. I can not. I am sorry, because I love you."

"I love you, Ilse. I love my fellows."

After another silence:

"You go to the imperial family?" demanded Ilse abruptly.

"Yes."

"I wish to see you again. I shall try."

The battalion marched a few moments later.

It was rather a bad business. They went over the top with a cheer. Fifty answered roll call that night.

However, the hun had learned one thing–that women soldiers were inferior to none.

Russia learned it, too. Everywhere battalions were raised, uniformed, armed, equipped, drilled. In the streets of cities the girl-soldiers became familiar sights: nobody any longer turned to stare at them. There were several dozen girls in the officers' school, trying for commissions. In all the larger cities there were infantry battalions of girls, Cossack troops, machine gun units, signallers; they had a medical corps and transport service.

But never but once again did they go into action. And their last stand was made facing their own people, the brain-crazed Reds.

And after that the Battalion of Death became only a name; and the girl-soldiers bewildered fugitives, hunted down by the traitors who had sold out to the Germans at Brest-Litovsk.

PREFACE

A door opened; the rush of foggy air set the flames of the altar candles blowing wildly. There came the clank of armed men.

Then, in the dim light of the chapel, a novice sprang to her feet, brushing the white veil from her pallid young face.

At that the ex-Empress, still kneeling, lifted her head from her devotions and calmly turned it, looking around over her right shoulder.

The file of Red infantry advanced, shuffling slowly forward as though feeling their way through the candle-lit dusk across the stone floor. Their accoutrements clattered and clinked in the intense stillness. A slovenly officer, switching a thin, naked sword in his ungloved fist, led them. Another officer, carrying a sabre and marching in the rear, halted to slam and lock the heavy chapel door; then he ran forward to rejoin his men, while the chapel still reverberated with the echoes of the clanging door.

A chair or two fell, pushed aside by the leading soldiers and hastily kicked out of the way as the others advanced more swiftly now. For there seemed to be some haste. These men were plainly in a hurry, whatever their business there might be.

The Tzesarevitch, kneeling beside his mother, got up from his knees with visible difficulty. The Empress also rose, leisurely, supporting herself by one hand resting on the prie-dieu.

Then several young girls, who had been kneeling behind her

at their devotions, stood up and turned to stare at the oncoming armed men, now surrounding them.

The officer carrying the naked sword, and reeking with fumes of brandy, counted these women in a loud, thick voice.

"That's right," he said. "You're all present–one! two! three! four! five! six!–the whole accursed brood!" pointing waveringly with his sword from one to another.

Then he laughed stupidly, leering out of his inflamed eyes at the five women who all wore the garbs of the Sisters of Mercy, their white coiffes and tabliers contrasting sharply with the sombre habits of the Russian nuns who had gathered in the candle-lit dusk behind them.

"What do you wish?" demanded the ex-Empress in a fairly steady voice.

"Answer to your names!" retorted the officer brutally. The other officer came up and began to fumble for a note book in the breast of his dirty tunic. When he found it he licked the lead of his pencil and squinted at the ex-Empress out of drunken eyes.

"Alexandra Feodorovna!" he barked in her face. "If you're here, say so!"

She remained calm, mute, cold as ice.

A soldier behind her suddenly began to shout:

"That's the German woman. That's the friend of the Staretz Novykh! That's Sascha! Now we've got her, the thing to do is to shoot her–"

"Mark her present," interrupted the officer in command. "No

ceremony, now. Mark the cub Romanoff present. Mark 'em all–Olga, Tatyana, Marie, Anastasia!–no matter which is which–they're all Romanoffs–"

But the same soldier who had interrupted before bawled out again: "They're not Romanoffs! There are no German Romanoffs. There are no Romanoffs in Russia since a hundred and fifty years–"

The little Tzesarevitch, Alexis, red with anger, stepped forward to confront the man, his frail hands fiercely clenched. The officer in command struck him brutally across the breast with the flat of his sword, shoved him aside, strode toward the low door of the chapel crypt and jerked it open.

"Line them up!" he bawled. "We'll settle this Romanoff dispute once for all! Shove them into line! Hurry up, there!"

But there seemed to be some confusion between the nuns and the soldiers, as the latter attempted to separate the ex-Empress and the young Grand Duchesses from the sisters.

"What's all that trouble about!" cried the officer commanding. "Drive back those nuns, I tell you! They're Germans, too! They're Sascha's new Deaconesses! Kick 'em out of the way!"

Then the novice, who had cried out in fear when the Red infantry first entered the chapel, forced her way out into the file formed by the Empress and her daughters.

"There's a frightful mistake!" she cried, laying one hand on the arm of a young girl dressed, like the others, as a Sister of Mercy. "This woman is Miss Dumont, my American companion!

Release her! **I** am the Grand Duchess Marie!"

The girl, whose arm had been seized, looked at the young novice over her shoulder in a dazed way; then, suddenly her lovely face flushed scarlet; tears sprang to her eyes; and she said to the infuriated officer:

"It is not true, Captain! I am the Grand Duchess Marie. She is trying to save me!"

"What the devil is all this row!" roared the officer, who now came tramping and storming among the prisoners, switching his sword to and fro with ferocious impatience.

The little Sister of Mercy, frightened but resolute, pointed at the novice, who still clutched her by the arm: "It is not true what she tells you," she repeated. "I am the Grand Duchess Marie, and this novice is my American companion, Miss Dumont, who loves me devotedly and who now attempts to sacrifice herself in my place–"

"I *am* the Grand Duchess Marie!" interrupted the novice excitedly. "This young girl dressed like a Sister of Mercy is only my American companion–"

"Damnation!" yelled the officer. "I'll take you both, then!" But the girl in the Sister of Mercy's garb turned and violently pushed the novice from her so that she stumbled and fell on her knees among the nuns.

Then, confronting the officer: "You Bolshevik dog," she said contemptuously, "don't you even know the daughter of your dead Emperor when you see her!" And she struck him across the face

with her prayer book.

As he recoiled from the blow a soldier shouted: "There's your proof! There's your insolent Romanoff for you! To hell with the whole litter! Shoot them!" Instantly a savage roar from the Reds filled that dim place; a soldier violently pushed the young Tzesarevitch into the file behind the Empress and held him there; the Grand Duchess Olga was flung bodily after him; the other children, in their hospital dresses, were shoved brutally toward their places, menaced by butt and bayonet.

"March!" bawled the officer in command.

But now, among the dark-garbed nuns, a slender white figure was struggling frantically to free herself:

"You red dogs!" she cried in an agonised voice. "Let that English woman go! It is I you want! Do you hear! I mock at you! I mock at your resolution! Boje Tzaria Khrani! Down with the Bolsheviki!"

A soldier turned and fired at her; the bullet smashed an ikon above her head.

"I am the Grand Duchess Marie!" she sobbed. "I demand my place! I demand my fate! Let that American girl go! Do you hear what I say? Red beasts! Red beasts! I am the Grand Duchess!–"

The officer who closed the file turned savagely and shook his heavy cavalry sabre at her: "I'll come back in a moment and cut your throat for you!" he yelled.

Then, in the file, and just as the last bayonets were vanishing through the crypt door, one of the young girls turned and kissed

her hand to the sobbing novice–a pretty gesture, tender, gay, not tragic, even almost mischievously triumphant.

It was the adieu of the Grand Duchess Tatyana to the living world–her last glimpse of it through the flames of the altar candles gilding the dead Christ on his jewelled cross–the image of that Christ she was so soon to gaze upon when those lovely, mischievous young eyes of hers unclosed in Paradise…

The door of the crypt slammed. A terrible silence reigned in the chapel.

Then the novice uttered a cry, caught the foot of the cross with desperate hands, hung there convulsively.

To her the Mother Superior turned, weeping. But at her touch the girl, crazed with grief, lifted both hands and tore from her own face the veil of her novitiate just begun;–tore her white garments from her shoulders, crying out in a strangled voice that if a Christian God let such things happen then He was no God of hers–that she would never enter His service–that the Lord Christ was no bridegroom for her; and, her novitiate was ended–ended together with every vow of chastity, of humility, of poverty, of even common humanity which she had ever hoped to take.

The girl was now utterly beside herself; at one moment flaming and storming with fury among the terrified, huddling nuns; the next instant weeping, stamping her felt-shod foot in ungovernable revolt at this horror which any God in any heaven could permit.

And again and again she called out on Christ to stop this thing

and prove Himself a real God to a pagan world that mocked Him.

Dishevelled, her rent veil in tatters on her naked shoulders, she sprang across the chapel to the crypt door, shook it, tore at it, seized chair after chair and shattered them to splinters against the solid panels of oak and iron.

Then, suddenly motionless, she crouched and listened.

"Oh, Mother of God!" she panted, "intervene now–*now*!–or never!"

The muffled rattle of a rather ragged volley answered her prayer.

Outside the convent a sentry–a Kronstadt sailor–stood. He also heard the underground racket. He nodded contentedly to himself. Other shots followed–pistol shots–singly.

After a few moments a wisp of smoke from the crypt crept lazily out of the low oubliettes. The day was grey and misty; rain threatened; and the rifle smoke clung low to the withered grass, scarcely lifting.

The sentry lighted a third cigarette, one eye on the barred oubliettes, from which the smoke crawled and spread out over the grass.

After a while a sweating face appeared behind the bars and a half-stifled voice demanded why there was any delay about fetching quick-lime. And, still clinging to the bars with bloody fingers, he added:

"There's a damned novice in the chapel. I promised to cut her throat for her. Go in and get her and bring her down here."

The novice was nowhere to be found.

They searched the convent thoroughly; they went out into the garden and beat the shrubbery, kicking through bushes and saplings, their cocked rifles poised for a snap shot.

Peasants, gathering there more thickly now, watched them stupidly; the throng increased in the convent grounds. Some Bolshevik soldiers pushed through the rapidly growing crowd and ran toward a birch wood east of the convent. Beyond the silvery fringe of birches, larger trees of a heavy, hard-wood forest loomed. Among these splendid trees a number of beeches were being felled on both sides of the road.

"Did you see a White Nun run this way?" demanded the soldiers of the wood-cutters. The latter shook their heads:

"Nothing has passed," they said seriously, "except some Ural Cossacks riding north like lost souls in a hurricane."

An officer of the Red battalion, who had now hastened up with pistol swinging, flew into a frightful rage:

"Cossacks!" he bellowed. "You cowardly dogs, what do you mean by letting Kaledines' horsemen gallop over you like that–you with your saws and axes–twenty lusty comrades to block the road and pull the Imperialists off their horses! Shame! For all I know you've let a Romanoff escape alive into the world! That's probably what you've done, you greasy louts!"

The wood-cutters gaped stupidly; the Bolshevik officer cursed them again and gesticulated with his pistol. Other soldiers of the Red battalion ran up. One nudged the officer's elbow without

saluting:

"That other prisoner can't be found–"

"What! That Swedish girl!" yelled the officer.

Several soldiers began speaking excitedly:

"While we were in the cellar, they say she ran away–"

"Yes, Captain, while we were about that business in the crypt, Kaledines' horsemen rode up outside–"

"Who saw them?" demanded the officer hoarsely. "God curse you, who saw them?"

Some peasants had now come up. One of them began:

"Your *honour*, I saw Prince Kaledines' riders–"

"*Whose!*"

"The Hetman's–"

"Your *honour*! *Prince* Kaledines! The Hetman! Damnation! Who do you think you are! Who do you think I am!" burst out the Red officer in a fury. "Get out of my way!–" He pushed the peasants right and left and strode away toward the convent. His soldiers began to straggle after him. One of them winked at the wood-cutters with his tongue in his cheek, and slung the rifle he carried over his right shoulder *en bandoulière*, muzzle downward.

"The Tavarish is in a temper," he said with a jerk of his thumb toward the officer. "We arrested that Swedish girl in the uniform of the woman's battalion. One shoots that breed on sight, you know. But we were in such a hurry to finish with the Romanoffs–" He shrugged: "You see, comrades, we should have taken her into the crypt and shot her along with the Romanoffs.

That's how one loses these birds–they're off if you turn your back to light a cigarette in the wind."

One of the wood-cutters said: "Among Kaledines' horsemen were two women. One was crop-headed like a boy, and half naked."

"A White Nun?"

"God knows. She had some white rags hanging to her body, and dark hair clipped like a boy's."

"That–was–she!" said the soldier with slow conviction. He turned and looked down the long perspective of the forest road. Only a raven stalked there all alone over the fallen leaves.

"Certainly," he said, "that was our White Nun. The Cossacks took her with them. They must have ridden fast, the horsemen of Kaledines."

"Like a swift storm. Like the souls of the damned," replied a peasant.

The soldier shrugged: "If there's still a Romanoff loose in the world, God save the world!.. And that big heifer of a Swedish wench!–she was a bad one, I tell you!–Took six of us to catch her and ten to hold her by her ten fingers and toes! Hey! God bless me, but she stands six feet and is made of steel cased in silk–all white, smooth and iron-hard–the blond young snow-tiger that she is!–the yellow-haired, six-foot, slippery beastess! God bless me–God bless me!" he muttered, staring down the wood-road to its vanishing point against the grey horizon.

Then he hitched his slung rifle to a more comfortable position,

turned, gazed at the convent across the fields, which his distant comrades were now approaching.

"A German nest," he said aloud to himself, "full of their damned Deaconesses! Hey! I'll be going along to see what's to be done with them, also!"

He nodded to the wood-cutters:

"Vermin-killing time," he remarked cheerily. "After the dirty work is done, peace, land enough for everybody, ease and plenty and a full glass always at one's elbows–eh, comrades?"

He strode away across the fields.

It had begun to snow.

ARGUMENT

The Cossacks sang as they rode:

I

"Life is against us
We are born crying:
Life that commenced us
Leaves us all dying.

We were born crying;

We shall die sighing.

"Shall we sit idle?
Follow Death's dance!
Pick up your bridle,
Saddle and lance!
Cossacks, advance!"

They were from the Urals: they sat their shaggy little grey horses, lance in hand, stirrup deep in saddle paraphernalia–kit-bags, tents, blankets, trusses of straw, a dead fowl or two or a quarter of beef. And from every saddle dangled a balalaika and

the terrible Cossack whip.

The steel of their lances flashed red in the setting sun; snow whirled before the wind in blinding pinkish clouds, powdering horse and rider from head to heel.

Again one rider unslung his balalaika, struck it, looking skyward as he rode:

"Stars in your courses,
This is our answer;
Women and horses,
Singer and dancer

Fall to the lancer!

That is your answer!

"Though the Dark Raider
Rob us of joy–
Death, the Invader,
Come to destroy–
Nichevo! Stoi!"

They rode into a forest, slowly, filing among the silver birches, then trotting out amid the pines.

The Swedish girl towered in her saddle, dwarfing the shaggy pony. She wore her grey wool cap, overcoat, and boots. Pistols bulged in the saddle holsters; sacks of grain and a bag of camp tins lay across pommel and cantle.

Beside her rode the novice, swathed to the eyes in a sheepskin greatcoat, and a fur cap sheltering her shorn head.

Her lethargy–a week's reaction from the horrors of the convent–had vanished; and a feverish, restless alertness had taken its place.

Nothing of the still, white novice was visible now in her brilliant eyes and flushed cheeks.

Her tragic silence had given place to an unnatural loquacity; her grief to easily aroused mirth; and the dark sorrow in her haunted eyes was gone, and they grew brown and sunny and vivacious.

She talked freely with her comrade, Ilse Westgard; she exchanged gossip and banter with the Cossacks, argued with them, laughed with them, sang with them.

At night she slept in her sheepskin in Ilse Westgard's vigorous arms; morning, noon and evening she filled the samovar with snow beside Cossack fires, or in the rare cantonments afforded in wretched villages, where whiskered and filthy mujiks cringed to the Cossacks, whispering to one another: "There is no end to death; there is no end to the fighting and the dying, God bless us all. There is no end."

In the glare of great fires in muddy streets she stood, swathed in her greatcoat, her cap pushed back, looking like some beautiful, impudent boy, while the Cossacks sang "Lada oy Lada!"–and let their slanting eyes wander sideways toward her, till her frank laughter set the singers grinning and the *gusli* was

laid aside.

And once, after a swift gallop to cross a railroad and an exchange of shots with the Red guards at long range, the sotnia of the Wild Division rode at evening into a little hamlet of one short, miserable street, and shouted for a fire that could be seen as far as Moscow.

That night they discovered vodka–not much–enough to set them singing first, then dancing. The troopers danced together in the fire-glare–clumsily, in their boots, with interims of the *pas seul* savouring of the capers of those ancient Mongol horsemen in the *Hezars* of Genghis Khan.

But no dancing, no singing, no clumsy capers were enough to satisfy these riders of the Wild Division, now made boisterous by vodka and horse-meat. Gossip crackled in every group; jests flew; they shouted at the peasants; they roared at their own jokes.

"Comrade novice!–Pretty boy with a shorn head!" they bawled. "Harangue us once more on law and love."

She stood with legs apart and thumbs hooked in her belt, laughing at them across the fire. And all around crowded the wretched *mujiks*, peering at her through shaggy hair, out of little wolfish eyes.

A Cossack shouted: "My law first! Land for all! That is what we have, we Cossacks! Land for the people, one and all–land for the *mujik*; land for the bourgeois; land for the aristocrat! That law solves all, clears all questions, satisfies all. It is the Law of Peace!"

A Cossack shoved a soldier-deserter forward into the firelight. He wore a patch of red on his sleeve.

"Answer, comrade! Is that the true law? Or have you and your comrades made a better one in Petrograd?"

The deserter, a little frightened, tried to grin: "A good law is, kill all generals," he said huskily. "Afterward we shall have peace."

A roar of laughter greeted him; these dark, thickset Cossacks with slanting eyes were from the Urals. What did they care how many generals were killed? Besides, their hetman had already killed himself.

Their officer moved out into the firelight–a reckless rider but a dull brain–and stood lashing at his snow-crusted boots with the silver-mounted quirt.

"Like gendarmes," he said, "we Cossacks are forever doing the dirty work of other people. Why? It begins to sicken me. Why are we forever executing the law! What law? Who made it? The Tzar. And he is dead, and what is the good of the law he made?

"Why should free Cossacks be policemen any more when there is no law?

"We played gendarme for the Monarchists. We answered the distress call of the Cadets and the bourgeoisie! Where are they? Where is the law they made?"

He stood switching his dirty boots and swinging his heavy head right and left with the stupid, lowering menace of a bull.

"Then came the Mensheviki with their law," he bellowed

suddenly. "Again we became policemen, galloping to their whistle. Where are they? Where is their law?"

He spat on the snow, twirled his quirt.

"There is only one law to govern the land," he roared. "It is the law of hands off and mind your business! It's a good law."

"A good law for those who already have something," cried a high, thin voice from the throng of peasants.

The Cossacks, who all possessed their portion of land, yelled with laughter. One of them called out to the Swedish girl for her opinion, and the fair young giantess strode gracefully out into the fire-ring, her cap in her hand and the thick blond ringlets shining like gold on her beautiful head.

"Listen! Listen to this soldier of the Death Battalion!" shouted the Cossacks in great glee. "She will tell us what the law should be!"

She laughed: "We fought for it–we women soldiers," she said. "And the law we fought for was made when the first tyrant fell.

"This is the law: Freedom of mind; liberty of choice; an equal chance for all; no violence; only orderly debate to determine the will of the land."

A Cossack said loudly: "*Da volna!* Those who have nothing would take, then, from those who have!"

"I think not!" cried another,"–not in the Urals!"

Thunderous laughter from their comrades and cries of, "Palla! Let us hear our pretty boy, who has made for the whole world a law."

Palla Dumont, her slender hands thrust deep in her great coat sleeves, and standing like a nun lost in mystic revery, looked up with gay audacity–not like a nun at all, now, save for the virginal allure that seemed a part of the girl.

"There is only one law, Tavarishi," she said, turning slightly from her hips as she spoke, to include those behind her in the circle: "and that law was not made by man. That law was born, already made, when the first man was born. It has never changed. It comprehends everything; includes everything and everybody; it solves all perplexity, clears all doubts, decides all questions.

"It is a living law; it exists; it is the key to every problem; and it is all ready for you."

The girl's face had altered; the half mischievous audacity in defiance of her situation–the gay, impudent confidence in herself and in these wild comrades of hers, had given place to something more serious, more ardent–the youthful intensity that smiles through the flaming enchantment of suddenly discovered knowledge.

"It is the oldest of all laws," she said. "It was born perfect. It is yours if you accept it. And this law is the Law of Love."

A peasant muttered: "One gives where one loves."

The girl turned swiftly: "That is the soul of the Law!" she cried, "to give! Is there any other happiness, Tavarishi? Is there any other peace? Is there need of any other law?

"I tell you that the Law of Love slays greed! And when greed dies, war dies. And hunger, and misery die, too!

"Of what use is any government and its lesser laws and customs, unless it is itself governed by that paramount Law?

"Of what avail are your religions, your churches, your priests, your saints, relics, ikons–all your candles and observances–unless dominated by that Law?

"Of what use is your God unless that Law of Love also governs Him?"

She stood gazing at the firelit faces, the virginal half-smile on her lips.

A peasant broke the silence: "Is she a new saint, then?" he said distinctly.

A Cossack nodded to her, grinning respectfully:

"We always like your sermons, little novice," he said. And, to the others: "Nobody wishes to deny what she says is quite true"–he scratched his head, still grinning–"only–while there are Kurds in the world–"

"And Bolsheviki!" shouted another.

"True! And Turks! God bless us, Tavarishi," he added with a wry face, "it takes a stronger stomach to love these beasts than is mine–"

In the sudden shout of laughter the girl, Palla, looked around at her comrade, Ilse.

"Until each accepts the Law of Love," said the Swedish girl-soldier, laughing, "it can not be a law."

"I have accepted it," said Palla gaily; but her childishly lovely mouth was working, and she clenched her hands in her sleeves

to control the tremor.

Silent, the smile still stamped on her tremulous lips, she stood for a few moments, fighting back the deep emotions enveloping her in surging fire–the same ardent and mystic emotions which once had consumed her at the altar's foot, where she had knelt, a novice, dreaming of beatitudes ineffable.

If that vision, for her, was ended–its substance but the shadow of a dream–the passion that created it, the fire that purified it, the ardent heart that needed love–love sacred, love unalloyed–needed love still, burned for it, yearning to give.

As she lifted her head and looked around her with dark eyes still a little dazed, there was a sudden commotion among the *mujiks*; a Cossack called out something in a sharp voice; their officer walked hastily out into the darkness; a shadowy rider spurred ahead of him.

Suddenly a far voice shouted: "Who goes there! *Stoi!*"

Then red flashes came out of the night; Cossacks ran for their horses; Ilse appeared with Palla's pony as well as her own, and halted to listen, the fearless smile playing over her face.

"Mount!" cried many voices at once. "The Reds!"

Palla flung herself astride her saddle; Ilse galloped beside her, freeing her pistols; everywhere in the starlight the riders of the Wild Division came galloping, loosening their long lances as they checked their horses in close formation.

Then, with scarcely a sound in the unbroken snow, they filed away eastward at a gentle trot, under the pale lustre of the stars.

THE CRIMSON TIDE

CHAPTER I

On the 7th of November, 1917, the Premier of the Russian Revolutionary Government was a hunted fugitive, his ministers in prison, his troops scattered or dead. Three weeks later, the irresponsible Reds had begun their shameful career of treachery, counselled by a pallid, black-eyed man with a muzzle like a mouse–one L. D. Bronstein, called Trotzky; and by two others–one a bald, smooth-shaven, rotund little man with an expression that made men hesitate, and features not trusted by animals and children.

The Red Parliament called him Vladimir Ulianov, and that's what he called himself. He had proved to be reticent, secretive, deceitful, diligent, and utterly unhuman. His lower lip was shaped as though something dripped from it. Blood, perhaps. His eyes were brown and not entirely unattractive. But God makes the eyes; the mouth is fashioned by one's self.

The world knew him as Lenine.

The third man squinted. He wore a patch of sparse cat-hairs on his chin and upper lip.

His head was too big; his legs too short, but they were always in a hurry, always in motion. He had a persuasive and ardent tongue,

and practically no mind. The few ideas he possessed inclined him to violence–always the substitute for reason in this sort of agitator. It was this ever latent violence that proved persuasive. His name was Krylenko. His smile was a grin.

These three men betrayed Christ on March 3d, 1918.

On the Finland Road, outside of Petrograd, the Red ragamuffins held a perpetual carmagnole, and all fugitives danced to their piping, and many paid for the music.

But though White Guards and Red now operated in respectively hostile gangs everywhere throughout the land, and the treacherous hun armies were now in full tide of their Baltic invasion, there still remained ways and means of escape–inconspicuous highways and unguarded roads still open that led out of that white hell to the icy but friendly seas clashing against the northward coasts.

Diplomats were inelegantly "beating it." A kindly but futile Ambassador shook the snow of Petrograd from his galoshes and solemnly and laboriously vanished. Mixed bands of attachés, consular personnel, casuals, emissaries, newspaper men, and mission specialists scattered into unfeigned flight toward those several and distant sections of "God's Country," divided among civilised nations and lying far away somewhere in the outer sunshine.

Sometimes White Guards caught these fugitives; sometimes Red Guards; and sometimes the hun nabbed them on the general hunnish principle that whatever is running away is fair game for

a pot shot.

Even the American Red Cross was "suspect"–treachery being alleged in its relations with Roumania; and hun and Bolshevik became very troublesome–so troublesome, in fact, that Estridge, for example, was having an impossible time of it, arrested every few days, wriggling out of it, only to be collared again and detained.

Sometimes they questioned him concerning gun-running into Roumania; sometimes in regard to his part in conducting the American girl, Miss Dumont, to the convent where the imperial family had been detained.

That the de facto government had requested him to undertake this mission and to employ an American Red Cross ambulance in the affair seemed to make no difference.

He continued to be dogged, spied on, arrested, detained, badgered, until one evening, leaving the Smolny, he encountered an American–a slim, short man who smiled amiably upon him through his glasses, removed a cigar from his lips, and asked Estridge what was the nature of his evident and visible trouble.

So they walked back to the hotel together and settled on a course of action during the long walk. What this friend in need did and how he did it, Estridge never learned; but that same evening he was instructed to pack up, take a train, and descend at a certain station a few hours later.

Estridge followed instructions, encountered no interference, got off at the station designated, and waited there all day,

drinking boiling tea.

Toward evening a train from Petrograd stopped at the station, and from the open door of a compartment Estridge saw his chance acquaintance of the previous day making signs to him to get aboard.

Nobody interfered. They had a long, cold, unpleasant night journey, wedged in between two soldiers wearing arm-bands, who glowered at a Russian general officer opposite, and continued to mutter to each other about imperialists, bourgeoisie, and cadets.

At every stop they were inspected by lantern light, their papers examined, and sometimes their luggage opened. But these examinations seemed to be perfunctory, and nobody was detained.

In the grey of morning the train stopped and some soldiers with red arm-bands looked in and insulted the general officer, but offered no violence. The officer gave them a stony glance and closed his cold, puffy eyes in disdain. He was blond and looked like a German.

At the next stop Estridge received a careless nod from his chance acquaintance, gathered up his luggage and descended to the frosty platform.

Nobody bothered to open their bags; their papers were merely glanced at. They had some steaming tea and some sour bread together.

A little later a large sleigh drove up behind the station; their

light baggage was stowed aboard, they climbed in under the furs.

"Now," remarked his calm companion to Estridge, "we're all right if the Reds, the Whites and the boches don't shoot us up."

"What are the chances?" inquired Estridge.

"Excellent, excellent," said his companion cheerily, "I should say we have about one chance in ten to get out of this alive. I'll take either end–ten to one we don't get out–ten to two we're shot up and not killed–ten to three we are arrested but not killed–one to ten we pull through with whole skins."

Estridge smiled. They remained silent, probably preoccupied with the hazards of their respective fortunes. It grew colder toward noon.

The young man seated beside Estridge in the sleigh smoked continually.

He was attached to one of the American missions sent into Russia by an optimistic administration–a mission, as a whole, foredoomed to political failure.

In every detail, too, it had already failed, excepting only in that particular part played by this young man, whose name was Brisson.

He, however, had gone about his occult business in a most amazing manner–the manner of a Yankee who knows what he wants and what his country ought to want if it knew enough to know it wanted it.

He was the last American to leave Petrograd: he had taken his time; he left only when he was quite ready to leave.

And this was the man, now seated beside Estridge, who had coolly and cleverly taken his sporting chance in remaining till the eleventh hour and the fifty-ninth minute in the service of his country. Then, as the twelfth hour began to strike, he bluffed his way through.

During the first two or three days of sleigh travel, Brisson learned all he desired to know about Estridge, and Estridge learned almost nothing about Brisson except that he possessed a most unholy genius for wriggling out of trouble.

Nothing, nobody, seemed able to block this young man's progress. He bluffed his way through White Guards and Red; he squirmed affably out of the clutches of wandering Cossacks; he jollied officials of all shades of political opinion; but he always continued his journey from one étape to the next. Also, he was continually lighting one large cigar after another. Buttoned snugly into his New York-made arctic clothing, and far more comfortable at thirty below zero than was Estridge in Russian costume, he smoked comfortably in the teeth of the icy gale or conversed soundly on any topic chosen. And the range was wide.

But about himself and his mission in Russia he never conversed except to remark, once, that he could buy better Russian clothing in New York than in Petrograd.

Indeed, his only concession to the customs of the country was in the fur cap he wore. But it was the galoshes of Manhattan that saved his feet from freezing. He had two pair and gave one to Estridge.

During several hundreds of miles in sleighs, Brisson's constant regret was the absence of ferocious wolves. He desired to enjoy the whole show as depicted by the geographies. He complained to Estridge quite seriously concerning the lack of enterprise among the wolves.

But there seemed to be no wolves in Russia sufficiently polite to oblige him; so he comforted himself by patting his stomach where, sewed inside his outer underclothing, reposed documents destined to electrify the civilised world with proof infernal of the treachery of those three men who belong in history and in hell to the fraternity which includes Benedict Arnold and Judas.

One late afternoon, while smoking his large cigar and hopefully inspecting the neighbouring forest for wolves, this able young man beheld a sotnia of Ural Cossacks galloping across the snow toward the flying sleigh, where he and Estridge sat so snugly ensconced.

There was, of course, only one thing to do, and that was to halt. Kaledines had blown his brains out, but his riders rode as swiftly as ever. So the sleigh stopped.

And now these matchless horsemen of the Wild Division came galloping up around the sleigh. Brilliant little slanting eyes glittered under shaggy head-gear; broad, thick-lipped mouths split into grins at sight of the two little American flags fluttering so gaily on the sleigh.

Then two booted and furred riders climbed out of their saddles, and, under their sheepskin caps, Brisson saw the delicate

features of two young women, one a big, superb, blue-eyed girl; the other slim, dark-eyed, and ivory-pale.

The latter said in English: "Could you help us? We saw the flags on your sleigh. We are trying to leave the country. I am American. My name is Palla Dumont. My friend is Swedish and her name is Ilse Westgard."

"Get in, any way," said Brisson briskly. "We can't be in a worse mess than we are. I imagine it's the same case with you. So if we're all going to smash, it's pleasanter, I think, to go together."

At that the Swedish girl laughed and aided her companion to enter the sleigh.

"Good-bye!" she called in her clear, gay voice to the Cossacks. "When we come back again we shall ride with you from Vladivostok to Moscow and never see an enemy!"

When the young women were comfortably ensconced in the sleigh, the riders of the Wild Division crowded their horses around them and shook hands with them English fashion.

"When you come back," they cried, "you shall find us riding through Petrograd behind Korniloff!" And to Brisson and Estridge, in a friendly manner: "Come also, comrades. We will show you a monument made out of heads and higher than the Kremlin. That would be a funny joke and worth coming back to see."

Brisson said pleasantly that such an exquisite jest would be well worth their return to Russia.

Everybody seemed pleased; the Cossacks wheeled their

shaggy mounts and trotted away into the woods, singing. The sleigh drove on.

"This is very jolly," said Brisson cheerfully. "Wherever we're bound for, now, we'll all go together."

"Is not America the destination of your long journey?" inquired the big, blue-eyed girl.

Brisson chuckled: "Yes," he said, "but bullets sometimes shorten routes and alter destinations. I think you ought to know the worst."

"If that's the worst, it's nothing to frighten one," said the Swedish girl. And her crystalline laughter filled the icy air.

She put one persuasive arm around her slender, dark-eyed comrade:

"To meet God unexpectedly is nothing to scare one, is it, Palla?" she urged coaxingly.

The other reddened and her eyes flashed: "What God do you mean?" she retorted. "If I have anything to say about my destination after death I shall go wherever love is. And it does not dwell with the God or in the Heaven that we have been taught to desire and hope for."

The Swedish girl patted her shoulder and smiled in good humoured deprecation at Brisson and Estridge.

"God let her dearest friend die under the rifles of the Reds," she explained cheerfully, "and my little comrade can not reconcile this sad affair with her faith in Divine justice. So she concludes there isn't any such thing. And no Divinity." She

shrugged: “That is what shakes the faith in youth–the seeming indifference of the Most High.”

Palla Dumont sat silent. The colour had died out in her cheeks, her dark, indifferent eyes became fixed.

Estridge opened the fur collar of his coat and pulled back his fur cap.

“Do you remember me?” he said to Ilse Westgard.

The girl laughed: “Yes, I remember you, now!”

To Palla Dumont he said: “And do *you* remember?”

At that she looked up incuriously; leaned forward slowly; gazed intently at him; then she caught both his hands in hers with a swift, sobbing intake of breath.

“You are John Estridge,” she said. “You took me to her in your ambulance!” She pressed his hands almost convulsively, and he felt her trembling under the fur robe.

“Is it true,” he said, “–that ghastly tragedy?”

“Yes.”

“All died?”

“All.”

Estridge turned to Brisson: “Miss Dumont was companion to the Grand Duchess Marie,” he said in brief explanation.

Brisson nodded, biting his cigar.

The Swedish girl-soldier said: “They were devoted–the little Grand Duchess and Palla… It was horrible, there in the convent cellar–those young girls–” She gazed out across the snow; then,

“The Reds who did it had already made me prisoner… They

arrested me in uniform after the decree disbanding us… I was on my way to join Kaledines' Cossacks–a rendezvous… Well, the Reds left me outside the convent and went in to do their bloody work. And I gnawed the rope and ran into the chapel to hide among the nuns. And there I saw a White Nun–quite crazed with grief–"

"I had heard the volley that killed her," said Palla, in explanation, to nobody in particular. She sat staring out across the snow with dry, bright eyes.

Brisson looked askance at her, looked significantly at the Swedish girl, Ilse Westgard: "And what happened then?" he inquired, with the pleasant, impersonal manner of a physician.

Ilse said: "Palla had already begun her novitiate. But what happened in those terrible moments changed her utterly… I think she went mad at the moment… Then the Superior came to me and begged me to hide Palla because the Bolsheviki had promised to return and cut her throat when they had finished their bloody business in the crypt… So I caught her up in my arms and I ran out into the convent grounds. And at that very moment, God be thanked, a sotnia of the Wild Division rode up looking for me. And they had led horses with them. And we were in the saddle and riding like maniacs before I could think. That is all, except, an hour ago we saw your sleigh."

"You have been hiding with the Cossacks ever since!" exclaimed Estridge to Palla.

"That is her history," replied Ilse, "and mine. And," she added

cheerfully but tenderly, "my little comrade, here, is very, very homesick, very weary, very deeply and profoundly unhappy in the loss of her closest friend… and perhaps in the loss of her faith in God."

"I am tranquil and I am not unhappy,"–said Palla. "And if I ever win free of this murderous country I shall, for the first time in my life, understand what the meaning of life really is. And shall know how to live."

"You thought you knew how to live when you took the white veil," said Ilse cheerfully. "Perhaps, after all, you may make other errors before you learn the truth about it all. Who knows? You might even care to take the veil again–"

"Never!" cried Palla in a clear, hard little voice, tinged with the scorn and anger of that hot revolt which sometimes shakes youth to the very source of its vitality.

Ilse said very calmly to Estridge: "With me it is my reason and not mere hope that convinces me of God's existence. I try to reason with Palla because one is indeed to be pitied who has lost belief in God–"

"You are mistaken," said Palla drily; "–one merely becomes one's self when once the belief in that sort of God is ended."

Ilse turned to Brisson: "That," she said, "is what seems so impossible for some to accept–so terrible–the apparent indifference, the lack of explanation–God's dreadful reticence in this thunderous whirlwind of prayer that storms skyward day and night from our martyred world."

Palla, listening, sat forward and said to Brisson: "There is only one religion and it has only two precepts–love and give! The rest–the forms, observances, creeds, ceremonies, threats, promises, are man-made trash!

"If man's man-made God pleases him, let him worship him. That kind of deity does not please me. I no longer care whether He pleases me or not. He no longer exists as far as I am concerned."

Brisson, much interested, asked Palla whether the void left by discredited Divinity did not bewilder her.

"There is no void," said the girl. "It is already filled with my own kind of God, with millions of Gods–my own fellow creatures."

"Your fellow beings?"

"Yes."

"You think your fellow creatures can fill that void?"

"They have filled it."

Brisson nodded reflectively: "I see," he said politely, "you intend to devote your life to the cult of your fellow creatures."

"No, I do not," said the girl tranquilly, "but I intend to love them and live my life that way unhampered." She added almost fiercely: "And I shall love them the more because of their ignorant faith in an all-seeing and tender and just Providence which does not exist! I shall love them because of their tragic deception and their helplessness and their heart-breaking unconsciousness of it all."

Ilse Westgard smiled and patted Palla's cheeks: "All roads lead ultimately to God," she said, "and yours is a direct route though you do not know it."

"I tell you I have nothing in common with the God you mean," flashed out the girl.

Brisson, though interested, kept one grey eye on duty, ever hopeful of wolves. It was snowing hard now–a perfect geography scene, lacking only the wolves; but the étape was only half finished. There might be hope.

The rather amazing conversation in the sleigh also appealed to him, arousing all his instincts of a veteran newspaper man, as well as his deathless curiosity–that perpetual flame which alone makes any intelligence vital.

Also, his passion for all documents–those sewed under his underclothes, as well as these two specimens of human documents–were now keeping his lively interest in life unimpaired.

"Loss of faith," he said to Palla, and inclined toward further debate, "must be a very serious thing for any woman, I imagine."

"I haven't lost faith in love," she said, smilingly aware that he was encouraging discussion.

"But you say you have lost faith in spiritual love–"

"I did not say so. I did not mean the other kind of love when I said that love is sufficient religion for me."

"But spiritual love means Deity–"

"It does *not*! Can you imagine the all-powerful father watching

his child die, horribly–and never lifting a finger! Is that love? Is that power? *Is* that Deity?"

"To penetrate the Divine mind and its motives for not intervening is impossible for us–"

"That is priest's prattle! Also, I care nothing now about Divine motives. Motives are human, not divine. So is policy. That is why the present Pope is unworthy of respect. He let his flock die. He deserted his Cardinal. He let the hun go unrebuked. He betrayed Christ. I care nothing about any mind weak enough, politic enough, powerless enough, to ignore love for motives!

"One loves, or one does not love. Loving is giving–" The girl sat up in the sleigh and the thickening snowflakes drove into her flushed face. "Loving is giving," she repeated, "–giving life to love; giving *up* life for love–giving! *giving!* always giving!–always forgiving! That is love! That is the only God!–the indestructible, divine God within each one of us!"

Brisson appraised her with keen and scholarly eyes. "Yet," he said pleasantly, "you do not forgive God for the death of your friend. Don't you practise your faith?"

The girl seemed nonplussed; then a brighter tint stained her cheeks under the ragged sheepskin cap.

"Forgive God!" she cried. "If there really existed that sort of God, what would be the use of forgiving what He does? He'd only do it again. That is His record!" she added fiercely, "–indifference to human agony, utter silence amid lamentations, stone deaf, stone dumb, motionless. It is not in me to fawn and

lick the feet of such an image. No! It is not in me to believe it alive, either. And I do not! But I know that love lives: and if there be any gods at all, it must be that they are without number, and that their substance is of that immortality born inside us, and which we call love! Otherwise, to me, now, symbols, signs, saints, rituals, vows–these things, in my mind, are all scrapped together as junk. Only, in me, the warm faith remains–that within me there lives a god of sorts–perhaps that immortal essence called a soul–and that its only name is love. And it has given us only one law to live by–the Law of Love!"

Brisson's cigar had gone out. He examined it attentively and found it would be worth relighting when opportunity offered.

Then he smiled amiably at Palla Dumont:

"What you say is very interesting," he remarked. But he was too polite to add that it had been equally interesting to numberless generations through the many, many centuries during which it all had been said before, in various ways and by many, many people.

Lying back in his furs reflectively, and deriving a rather cold satisfaction from his cigar butt, he let his mind wander back through the history of theocracy and of mundane philosophy, mildly amused to recognize an ancient theory resurrected and made passionately original once more on the red lips of this young girl.

But the Law of Love is not destined to be solved so easily; nor had it ever been solved in centuries dead by Egyptian, Mongol, or Greek–by priest or princess, prophet or singer, or by any vestal

or acolyte of love, sacred or profane.

No philosophy had solved the problem of human woe; no theory convinced. And Brisson, searching leisurely the forgotten corridors of treasured lore, became interested to realise that in all the history of time only the deeds and example of one man had invested the human theory of divinity with any real vitality–and that, oddly enough, what this girl preached–what she demanded of divinity–had been both preached and practised by that one man alone–Jesus Christ.

Turning involuntarily toward Palla, he said: "Can't you believe in Him, either?"

She said: "He was one of the Gods. But He was no more divine than any in whom love lives. Had He been more so, then He would still intervene to-day! He is powerless. He lets things happen. And we ourselves must make it up to the world by love. There is no other divinity to intervene except only our own hearts."

But that was not, as the young girl supposed, her fixed faith, definite, ripened, unshakable. It was a phase already in process of fading into other phases, each less stable, less definite, and more dangerous than the other, leaving her and her ardent mind and heart always unconsciously drifting toward the simple, primitive and natural goal for which all healthy bodies are created and destined–the instinct of the human being to protect and perpetuate the race by the great Law of Love.

Brisson's not unkindly cynicism had left his lips edged with

a slight smile. Presently he leaned back beside Estridge and said in a low voice:

"Purely pathological. Ardent religious instinct astray and running wild in consequence of nervous dislocations due to shock. Merely over-storage of superb physical energy. Intellectual and spiritual wires overcrowded. Too many volts… That girl ought to have been married early. Only a lot of children can keep her properly occupied. Only outlet for her kind. Interesting case. Contrast to the Swedish girl. Fine, handsome, normal animal that. She could pick me up between thumb and finger. Great girl, Estridge."

"She is really beautiful," whispered Estridge, glancing at Ilse.

"Yes. So is Mont Blanc. That sort of beauty–the super-sort. But it's the other who is pathologically interesting because her wires are crossed and there's a short circuit somewhere. Who comes in contact with her had better look out."

"She's wonderfully attractive."

"She is. But if she doesn't disentangle her wires and straighten out she'll burn out… What's that ahead? A wolf!"

It was the rest house at the end of the étape–a tiny, distant speck on the snowy plain.

Brisson leaned over and caught Palla's eye. Both smiled.

"Well," he said, "for a girl who doesn't believe in anything, you seem cheerful enough."

"I am cheerful because I *do* believe in everything and in everybody."

Brisson laughed: “You shouldn’t,” he said. “Great mistake. Trust in God and believe nobody–that’s the idea. Then get married and close your eyes and see what God will send you!”

The girl threw back her pretty head and laughed.

“Marriage and priests are of no consequence,” she said, “but I adore little children!”

CHAPTER II

They were a weary, half-starved and travel-stained quartette when the Red Guards stopped them for the last time in Russia and passed them through, warning them that the White Guards would surely do murder if they caught them.

The next day the White Guards halted them, but finally passed them through, counselling them to keep out of the way of the Red Guards if they wished to escape being shot at sight.

In the neat, shiny, carefully scrubbed little city of Helsingfors they avoided the huns by some miracle–one of Brisson's customary miracles–but another little company of Americans and English was halted and detained, and one harmless Yankee among them was arrested and packed off to a hun prison.

Also, a large and nervous party of fugitives of mixed nationalities and professions–consuls, chargés, attachés, and innocent, agitated citizens–was summarily grabbed and ordered into indefinite limbo.

But Brisson's daily miracles continued to materialise, even in the land of the Finn. By train, by sleigh, by boat, his quartette floundered along toward safety, and finally emerged from the white hell of the Red people into the sub-arctic sun–Estridge with painfully scanty luggage, Palla Dumont with none at all, Ilse Westgard carrying only her Cossack saddle-bags, and Brisson with his damning papers still sewed inside his clothes, and owing

Estridge ten dollars for not getting murdered.

They all had become excellent comrades during those anxious days of hunger, fatigue and common peril, but they were also a little tired of one another, as becomes all friends when subjected to compulsory companionship for an unreasonable period.

And even when one is beginning to fall in love, one can become surfeited with the beloved under such circumstances.

Besides, Estridge's budding sentiment for Ilse Westgard, and her wholesome and girlish inclination for him, suffered an early chill. For the poor child had acquired trench pets from the Cossacks, and had passed on a few to Estridge, with whom she had been constantly seated on the front seat.

Being the frankest thing in Russia, she told him with tears in her blue eyes; and they had a most horrid time of it before they came finally to a sanitary plant erected to attend to such matters.

Episodes of that sort discourage sentiment; so does cold, hunger and discomfort incident on sardine-like promiscuousness.

Nobody in the party desired to know more than they already knew concerning anybody else. In fact, there was little more to know, privacy being impossible. And the ever instinctive hostility of the two sexes, always and irrevocably latent, became vaguely apparent at moments.

Common danger swept it away at times; but reaction gradually revealed again what is born under the human skin–the paradox called sex-antipathy. And yet the men in the party would not have hesitated to sacrifice their lives in defence of these women, nor

would the women have faltered under the same test.

Brisson was the philosophical stoic of the quartette. Estridge groused sometimes. Palla, when she thought herself unnoticed, camouflaged her face in her furs and cried now and then. And occasionally Ilse Westgard tried the patience of the others by her healthy capacity for unfeigned laughter–sometimes during danger-laden and inopportune moments, and once in the shocking imminence of death itself.

As, for example, in a vile little village, full of vermin and typhus, some hunger-crazed peasants, armed with stolen rifles and ammunition, awoke them where they lay on the straw of a stable, cursed them for aristocrats, and marched them outside to a convenient wall, at the foot of which sprawled half a dozen blood-soaked, bayoneted and bullet-riddled landlords and land owners of the district.

And things had assumed a terribly serious aspect when, to their foolish consternation, the peasants discovered that their purloined cartridges did not fit their guns.

Then, in the very teeth of death, Ilse threw back her blond head and laughed. And there was no mistaking the genuineness of the girl's laughter.

Some of their would-be executioners laughed too;–the hilarity spread. It was all over; they couldn't shoot a girl who laughed that way. So somebody brought a samovar; tea was boiled; and they all went back to the barn and sat there drinking tea and swapping gossip and singing until nearly morning.

That was a sample of their narrow escapes. But Brisson's only comment before he went to sleep was that Estridge would probably owe him a dollar within the next twenty-four hours.

They had a hair-raising time in Helsingfors. On one occasion, German officers forced Palla's door at night, and the girl became ill with fear while soldiers searched the room, ordering her out of bed and pushing her into a corner while they ripped up carpets and tore the place to pieces in a swinishly ferocious search for "information."

But they did nothing worse to her, and, for some reason, left the hotel without disturbing Brisson, whose room adjoined and who sat on the edge of his bed with an automatic in each hand–a dangerous opportunist awaiting events and calmly determined to do some recruiting for hell if the huns harmed Palla.

She never knew that. And the worst was over now, and the Scandinavian border not far away. And in twenty-four hours they were over–Brisson impatient to get his papers to Washington and planning to start for England on a wretched little packet-boat, in utter contempt of mines, U-boats, and the icy menace of the North Sea.

As for the others, Estridge decided to cable and await orders in Copenhagen; Palla, to sail for home on the first available Danish steamer; Ilse, to go to Stockholm and eventually decide whether to volunteer once more as a soldier of the proletariat or to turn propagandist and carry the true gospel to America, where, she had heard, the ancient liberties of the great Democracy were

becoming imperilled.

The day before they parted company, these four people, so oddly thrown together out of the boiling cauldron of the Russian Terror, arranged to dine together for the last time.

Theirs were the appetites of healthy wolves; theirs was the thirst of the marooned on waterless islands; and theirs, too, was the feverish gaiety of those who had escaped great peril by land and sea; and who were still physically and morally demoralized by the glare and the roar of the hellish conflagration which was still burning up the world around them.

So they met in a private dining room of the hotel for dinner on the eve of separation.

Brisson and Estridge had resurrected from their luggage the remains of their evening attire; Ilse and Palla had shopped; and they now included in a limited wardrobe two simple dinner gowns, among more vital purchases.

There were flowers on the table, no great variety of food but plenty of champagne to make up–a singular innovation in apology for short rations conceived by the hotel proprietor.

There was a victrola in the corner, too, and this they kept going to stimulate their nerves, which already were sufficiently on edge without the added fillip of music and champagne.

"As for me," said Brisson, "I'm in sight of nervous dissolution already;–I'm going back to my wife and children, thank God–" he smiled at Palla. "I'm grateful to the God you don't believe in, dear little lady. And if He is willing, I'll report for duty in two

weeks." He turned to Estridge:

"What about you?"

"I've cabled for orders but I have none yet. If they're through with me I shall go back to New York and back to the medical school I came from. I hate the idea, too. Lord, how I detest it!"

"Why?" asked Palla nervously.

"I've had too much excitement. You have too–and so have Ilse and Brisson. I'm not keen for the usual again. It bores me to contemplate it. The thought of Fifth Avenue–the very idea of going back to all that familiar routine, social and business, makes me positively ill. What a dull place this world will be when we're all at peace again!"

"We won't be at peace for a long, long while," said Ilse, smiling. She lifted a goblet in her big, beautifully shaped hand and drained it with the vigorous grace of a Viking's daughter.

"You think the war is going to last for years?" asked Estridge.

"Oh, no; not this war. But the other," she explained cheerfully.

"What other?"

"Why, the greatest conflict in the world; the social war. It's going to take many years and many battles. I shall enlist."

"Nonsense," said Brisson, "you're not a Red!"

The girl laughed and showed her snowy teeth: "I'm one kind of Red–not the kind that sold Russia to the boche–but I'm very, very red."

"Everybody with a brain and a heart is more or less red in these days," nodded Palla. "Everybody knows that the old

order is ended–done for. Without liberty and equal opportunity civilisation is a farce. Everybody knows it except the stupid. And they'll have to be instructed."

"Very well," said Brisson briskly, "here's to the universal but bloodless revolution! An acre for everybody and a mule to plough it! Back to the soil and to hell with the counting house!"

They all laughed, but their brimming glasses went up; then Estridge rose to re-wind the victrola. Palla's slim foot tapped the parquet in time with the American fox-trot; she glanced across the table at Estridge, lifted her head interrogatively, then sprang up and slid into his arms, delighted.

While they danced he said: "Better go light on that champagne, Miss Dumont."

"Don't you think I can keep my head?" she demanded derisively.

"Not if you keep up with Ilse. You're not built that way."

"I wish I were. I wish I were nearly six feet tall and beautiful in every limb and feature as she is. What wonderful children she could have! What magnificent hair she must have had before she sheared it for the Woman's Battalion! Now it's all a dense, short mass of gold–she looks like a lovely boy who requires a barber."

"Your hair is not unbecoming, either," he remarked, "–short as it is, it's a mop of curls and very fetching."

"Isn't it funny?" she said. "I sheared mine for the sake of Mother Church; Ilse cut off hers for the honour of the Army! Now we're both out of a job–with only our cropped heads

to show for the experience!–and no more army and no more church–at least, as far as I am concerned!"

And she threw back hers with its thick, glossy curls and laughed, looking up at him out of her virginal brown eyes of a child.

"I'm sorry I cut my hair," she added presently. "I look like a Bolshevik."

"It's growing very fast," he said encouragingly.

"Oh, yes, it grows fast," she nodded indifferently. "Shall we return to the table? I am rather thirsty."

Ilse and Brisson were engaged in an animated conversation when they reseated themselves. The waiter arrived about that time with another course of poor food.

Palla, disregarding Estridge's advice, permitted the waiter to refill her glass.

"I can't eat that unappetising entrée," she insisted, "and champagne, they say, is nourishing and I'm still hungry."

"As you please," said Brisson; "but you've had two glasses already."

"I don't care," she retorted childishly; "I mean to live to the utmost in future. For the first time in my silly existence I intend to be natural. I wonder what it feels like to become a little intoxicated?"

"It feels rotten," remarked Estridge.

"Really? *How* rotten?" She laughed again, laid her hand on the goblet's stem and glanced across at him defiantly, mischievously.

However, she seemed to reconsider the matter, for she picked up a cigarette and lighted it at a candle.

"Bah!" she exclaimed with a wry face. "It stings!"

But she ventured another puff or two before placing it upon a saucer among its defunct fellows.

"Ugh!" she complained again with a gay little shiver, and bit into a pear as though to wash out the contamination of unaccustomed nicotine.

"Where are you going when we all say good-bye?" inquired Estridge.

"I? Oh, I'm certainly going home on the first Danish boat–home to Shadow Hill, where I told you I lived."

"And you have nobody but your aunt?"

"Only that one old lady."

"You won't remain long at Shadow Hill," he predicted.

"It's very pretty there. Why don't you think I am likely to remain?"

"You won't remain," he repeated. "You've slipped your cable. You're hoisting sail. And it worries me a little."

The girl laughed. "It's a pretty place, Shadow Hill, but it's dull. Everybody in the town is dull, stupid, and perfectly satisfied: everybody owns at least that acre which Ilse demands; there's no discontent at Shadow Hill, and no reason for it. I really couldn't bear it," she added gaily; "I want to go where there's healthy discontent, wholesome competition, natural aspiration–where things must be bettered, set right, helped. You understand?

That is where I wish to be."

Brisson heard her. "Can't you practise your loving but godless creed at Shadow Hill?" he inquired, amused. "Can't you lavish love on the contented and well-to-do?"

"Yes, Mr. Brisson," she replied with sweet irony, "but where the poor and loveless fight an ever losing battle is still a better place for me to practise my godless creed and my Law of Love."

"Aha!" he retorted, "–a brand new excuse for living in New York because all young girls love it!"

"Indeed," she said with some little heat, "I certainly do intend to live and not to stagnate! I intend to live as hard as I can–live and enjoy life with all my might! Can one serve the world better than by loving it enough to live one's own life through to the last happy rags? Can one give one's fellow creatures a better example than to live every moment happily and proclaim the world good to live in, and mankind good to live with?"

Ilse whispered, leaning near: "Don't take any more champagne, Palla."

The girl frowned, then looked serious: "No, I won't," she said naïvely. "But it is wonderful how eloquent it makes one feel, isn't it?"

And to Estridge: "You know that this is quite the first wine I have ever tasted–except at Communion. I was brought up to think it meant destruction. And afterward, wherever I travelled to study, the old prejudice continued to guide me. And after that, even when I began to think of taking the veil, I made abstinence

one of my first preliminary vows… And *look* what I've been doing to-night!"

She held up her glass, tasted it, emptied it.

"There," she said, "I desired to shock you. I don't really want any more. Shall we dance? Ilse! Why don't you seize Mr. Brisson and make him two-step?"

"Please seize me," added Brisson gravely.

Ilse rose, big, fresh, smilingly inviting; Brisson inspected her seriously–he was only half as tall–then he politely encircled her waist and led her out.

They danced as though they could not get enough of it–exhilaration due to reaction from the long strain during dangerous days.

It was already morning, but they danced on. Palla's delicate intoxication passed–returned–passed–hovered like a rosy light in her brain, but faded always as she danced.

There were snapping-crackers and paper caps; and they put them on and pelted each other with the drooping table flowers.

Then Estridge went to the piano and sang an ancient song, called "The Cork Leg"–not very well–but well intended and in a gay and inoffensive voice.

But Ilse sang some wonderful songs which she had learned in the Battalion of Death.

And that is what was being done when a waiter knocked and asked whether they might desire to order breakfast.

That ended it. The hour of parting had arrived.

No longer bored with one another, they shook hands cordially, regretfully.

It was not a very long time, as time is computed, before these four met again.

CHAPTER III

The dingy little Danish steamer *Elsinore* passed in at dawn, her camouflage obscured by sea-salt, her few passengers still prostrated from the long battering administered by the giant seas of the northern route.

A lone Yankee soldier was aboard–an indignant lieutenant of infantry named Shotwell–sent home from a fighting regiment to instruct the ambitious rookie at Camp Upton.

He had hailed his assignment with delight, thankfully rid himself of his cooties, reported in Paris, reported in London; received orders to depart via Denmark; and, his mission there fullfilled, he had sailed on the *Elsinore*, already disenchanted with his job and longing to be back with his regiment.

And now, surly from sea-sickness, worried by peace rumours, but still believing that the war would last another year and hopeful of getting back before it ended, he emerged from his stuffy quarters aboard the *Elsinore* and gazed without enthusiasm at the minarets of Coney Island, now visible off the starboard bow.

Near him, in pasty-faced and shaky groups, huddled his fellow passengers, whom he had not seen during the voyage except when lined up for life-drill.

He had not wished to see them, either, nor, probably, had they desired to lavish social attentions on him or upon one another.

These pallid, discouraged voyagers were few–not two dozen

cabin passengers in all.

Who they might be he had no curiosity to know; he had not exchanged ten words with any of them during the entire and nauseating voyage; he certainly did not intend to do so now.

He favoured them with a savage glance and walked over to the port side–the Jersey side–where there seemed to be nobody except a tired Scandinavian sailor or two.

In the grey of morning the Hook loomed up above the sea, gloomy as a thunder-head charged with lightning.

After a while the batteries along the Narrows slipped into view. Farther on, camouflaged ships rode sullenly at anchor, as though ashamed of their frivolous and undignified appearance. A battleship was just leaving the Lower Bay, smoke pouring from every funnel. Destroyers and chasers rushed by them, headed seaward.

Then, high over the shore mists and dimly visible through rising vapours, came speeding a colossal phantom.

Vague as a shark's long shadow sheering translucent depths, the huge dirigible swept eastward and slid into the Long Island fog.

And at that moment somebody walked plump into young Shotwell; and the soft, fragrant shock knocked the breath out of both.

She recovered hers first:

"I'm sorry!" she faltered. "It was stupid. I was watching the balloon and not looking where I was going. I'm afraid I hurt you."

He recovered his breath, saluted ceremoniously, readjusted his overseas cap to the proper angle.

Then he said, civilly enough: "It was my fault entirely. It was I who walked into you. I hope I didn't hurt you."

They smiled, unembarrassed.

"That was certainly a big dirigible," he ventured. "There are bigger Zeps, of course."

"Are there really?"

"Oh, yes. But they're not much good in war, I believe."

She turned her trim, small head and looked out across the bay; and Shotwell, who once had had a gaily receptive eye for pulchritude, thought her unusually pretty.

Also, the steady keel of the *Elsinore* was making him feel more human now; and he ventured a further polite observation concerning the pleasures of homecoming after extended exile.

She turned with a frank shake of her head: "It seems heartless to say so, but I'm rather sorry I'm back," she said.

He smiled: "I must admit," he confessed, "that I feel the same way. Of course I want to see my people. But I'd give anything to be in France at this moment, and that's the truth!"

The girl nodded her comprehension: "It's quite natural," she remarked. "One does not wish to come home until this thing is settled."

"That's it exactly. It's like leaving an interesting play half finished. It's worse–it's like leaving an absorbing drama in which you yourself are playing an exciting rôle."

She glanced at him–a quick glance of intelligent appraisal.

"Yes, it must have seemed that way to you. But I've been merely one among a breathless audience… And yet I can't bear to leave in the very middle–not knowing how it is to end. Besides," she added carelessly, "I have nobody to come back to except a rather remote relative, so my regrets are unmixed."

There ensued a silence. He was afraid she was about to go, but couldn't seem to think of anything to say to detain her.

For the girl was very attractive to a careless and amiably casual man of his sort–the sort who start their little journey through life with every intention of having the best kind of a time on the way.

She was so distractingly pretty, so confidently negligent of convention–or perhaps disdainful of it–that he already was regretting that he had not met her at the beginning of the voyage instead of at the end.

She had now begun to button up her ulster, as though preliminary to resuming her deck promenade. And he wanted to walk with her. But because she had chosen to be informal with him did not deceive him into thinking that she was likely to tolerate further informality on his part. And yet he had a vague notion that her inclinations were friendly.

"I'm sorry," he said rather stupidly, "that I didn't meet you in the beginning."

The slightest inclination of her head indicated that although possibly she might be sorry too, regrets were now useless. Then she turned up the collar of her ulster. The face it framed was

disturbingly lovely. And he took a last chance.

"And so," he ventured politely, "you have really been on board the *Elsinore* all this time!"

She turned her charming head toward him, considered him a moment; then she smiled.

"Yes," she said; "I've been on board all the time. I didn't crawl aboard in mid-ocean, you know."

The girl was frankly amused by the streak of boyishness in him–the perfectly transparent desire of this young man to detain her in conversation. And, still amused, she leaned back against the rail. If he wanted to talk to her she would let him–even help him. Why not?

"Is that a wound chevron?" she inquired, looking at the sleeve of his tunic.

"No," he replied gratefully, "it's a service stripe."

"And what does the little cord around your shoulder signify?"

"That my regiment was cited."

"For bravery?"

"Well–that was the idea, I believe."

"Then you've been in action."

"Yes."

"Over the top?"

"Yes."

"How many times?"

"Several. Recently it's been more open work, you know."

"And you were not hit?"

"No."

She regarded him smilingly: "You are like all soldiers have faced death," she said. "You are not communicative."

At that he reddened. "Well, everybody else was facing it, too, you know. We all had the same experience."

"Not all," she said, watching him. "Some died."

"Oh, of course."

The girl's face flushed and she nodded emphatically: "Of course! And *that* is our Yankee secret;–embodied in those two words–'of course.' That is exactly why the boche runs away from our men. The boche doesn't know why he runs, but it is because you all say, 'of course!–of course we're here to kill and get killed. What of it? It's in the rules of the game, isn't it? Very well; we're playing the game!'

"But the rules of the hun game are different. According to their rules, machine guns are not charged on. That is not according to plan. Oh, no! But it is in your rules of the game. So after the boche has killed a number of you, and you say, 'of course,' and you keep coming on, it first bewilders the boche, then terrifies him. And the next time he sees you coming he takes to his heels."

Shotwell, amused, fascinated, and entirely surprised, began to laugh.

"You seem to know the game pretty well yourself," he said. "You are quite right. That is the idea."

"It's a wonderful game," she mused. "I can understand why

you are not pleased at being ordered home."

"It's rather rotten luck when the outfit had just been cited," he explained.

"Oh. I should think you *would* hate to come back!" exclaimed the girl, with frank sympathy.

"Well, I was glad at first, but I'm sorry now. I'm missing a lot, you see."

"Why did they send you back?"

"To instruct rookies!" he said with a grimace. "Rather inglorious, isn't it? But I'm hoping I'll have time to weather this detail and get back again before we reach the Rhine."

"I want to get back again, too," she reflected aloud, biting her lip and letting her dark eyes rest on the foggy statue of Liberty, towering up ahead.

"What was your branch?" he inquired.

"Oh, I didn't do anything," she exclaimed, flushing. "I've been in Russia. And now I must find out at once what I can do to be sent to France."

"The war caught you over there, I suppose," he hazarded.

"Yes… I've been there since I was twenty. I'm twenty-four. I had a year's travel and study and then I became the American companion of the little Russian Grand Duchess Marie."

"They all were murdered, weren't they?" he asked, much interested.

"Yes… I'm trying to forget–"

"I beg your pardon–"

"It's quite all right. I, myself, mentioned it first; but I can't talk about it yet. It's too personal–" She turned and looked at the monstrous city.

After a silence: "It's been a rotten voyage, hasn't it?" he remarked.

"Perfectly rotten. I was so ill I could scarcely keep my place during life-drill… I didn't see you there," she added with a faint smile, "but I'm sure you were aboard, even if you seem to doubt that I was."

And then, perhaps considering that she had been sufficiently amiable to him, she gave him his congé with a pleasant little nod.

"Could I help you–do anything–" he began. But she thanked him with friendly finality.

They sauntered in opposite directions; and he did not see her again to speak to her.

Later, jolting toward home in a taxi, it occurred to him that it might have been agreeable to see such an attractively informal girl again. Any man likes informality in women, except among the women of his own household, where he would promptly brand it as indiscretion.

He thought of her for a while, recollecting details of the episode and realising that he didn't even know her name. Which piqued him.

"Serves me right," he said aloud with a shrug of finality. "I had more enterprise once."

Then he looked out into the sunlit streets of Manhattan, all

brilliant with flags and posters and swarming with prosperous looking people–his own people. But to his war-enlightened and disillusioned eyes his own people seemed almost like aliens; he vaguely resented their too evident prosperity, their irresponsible immunity, their heedless preoccupation with the petty things of life. The acres of bright flags fluttering above them, the posters that made a gay back-ground for the scene, the sheltered, undisturbed routine of peace seemed to annoy him.

An odd irritation invaded him; he had a sudden impulse to stop his taxi and shout, "Fat-heads! Get into the game! Don't you know the world's on fire? Don't you know what a hun really is? You'd better look out and get busy!"

Fifth Avenue irritated him–shops, hotels, clubs, motors, the well-dressed throngs began to exasperate him.

On a side street he caught a glimpse of his own place of business; and it almost nauseated him to remember old man Sharrow, and the walls hung with plans of streets and sewers and surveys and photographs; and his own yellow oak desk–

"Good Lord!" he thought. "If the war ends, have I got to go back to that!–"

The family were at breakfast when he walked in on them–only two–his father and mother.

In his mother's arms he suddenly felt very young and subdued, and very glad to be there.

"Where the devil did you come from, Jim?" repeated his father, with twitching features and a grip on his son's strong hand

that he could not bring himself to loosen.

Yes, it was pretty good to get home, after all– … And he might not have come back at all. He realised it, now, in his mother's arms, feeling very humble and secure.

His mother had realised it, too, in every waking hour since the day her only son had sailed at night–that had been the hardest!–at night–and at an unnamed hour of an unnamed day!–her only son–gone in the darkness–

On his way upstairs, he noticed a red service flag bearing a single star hanging in his mother's window.

He went into his own room, looked soberly around, sat down on the lounge, suddenly tired.

He had three days' leave before reporting for duty. It seemed a miserly allowance. Instinctively he glanced at his wrist-watch. An hour had fled already.

"The dickens!" he muttered. But he still sat there. After a while he smiled to himself and rose leisurely to make his toilet.

"Such an attractively informal girl," he thought regretfully.

"I'm sorry I didn't learn her name. Why didn't I?"

Philosophy might have answered: "But to what purpose? No young man expects to pick up a girl of his own kind. And he has no business with other kinds."

But Shotwell was no philosopher.

The "attractively informal girl," on whom young Shotwell was condescending to bestow a passing regret while changing his linen, had, however, quite forgotten him by this time. There is

more philosophy in women.

Her train was now nearing Shadow Hill; she already could see the village in its early winter nakedness–the stone bridge, the old-time houses of the well-to-do, Main Street full of automobiles and farmers' wagons, a crowded trolley-car starting for Deepdale, the county seat.

After four years the crudity of it all astonished her–the stark vulgarity of Main Street in the sunshine, every mean, flimsy architectural detail revealed–the dingy trolley poles, the telegraph poles loaded with unlovely wires and battered little electric light fixtures–the uncompromising, unrelieved ugliness of street and people, of shop and vehicle, of treeless sidewalks, brick pavement, car rails, hydrants, and rusty gasoline pumps.

Here was a people ignorant of civic pride, knowing no necessity for beauty, having no standards, no aspirations, conscious of nothing but the grosser material needs.

The hopelessness of this American town–and there were thousands like it–its architectural squalor, its animal unconsciousness, shocked her after four years in lands where colour, symmetry and good taste are indigenous and beauty as necessary as bread.

And the girl had been born here, too; had known no other home except when at boarding school or on shopping trips to New York.

Painfully depressed, she descended at the station, where she climbed into one of the familiar omnibuses and gave her luggage

check to the lively young driver.

Several drummers also got in, and finally a farmer whom she recognised but who had evidently forgotten her.

The driver, a talkative young man whom she remembered as an obnoxious boy who delivered newspapers, came from the express office with her trunk, flung it on top of the bus, gossiped with several station idlers, then leisurely mounted his seat and gathered up the reins.

Rattling along the main street she became aware of changes–a brand new yellow brick clothing store–a dreadful Quick Lunch–a moving picture theatre–other monstrosities. And she saw familiar faces on the street.

The drummers got out with their sample cases at the Bolton House–Charles H. Bolton, proprietor. The farmer descended at the "Par Excellence Market," where, as he informed the driver, he expected to dispose of a bull calf which he had finally decided "to veal."

"Which way, ma'am?" inquired the driver, looking in at her through the door and chewing gum very fast.

"To Miss Dumont's on Shadow Street."

"Oh!.." Then, suddenly he knew her. "Say, wasn't you her niece?" he demanded.

"I *am* Miss Dumont's niece," replied Palla, smiling.

"Sure! I didn't reckonise you. Used to leave the *Star* on your doorstep! Been away, ain't you? Home looks kinda good to you, even if it's kinda lonesome–" He checked himself as though

recollecting something else. “Sure! You been over in Rooshia livin’ with the Queen! There was a piece in the *Star* about it. Gee!” he added affably. “That was pretty soft! Some life, I bet!”

And he grinned a genial grin and climbed into his seat, chewing rapidly.

“He means to be friendly,” thought the heart-sick girl, with a shudder.

When Palla got out she spoke pleasantly to him as she paid him, and inquired about his father–a shiftless old gaffer who used, sometimes, to do garden work for her aunt.

But the driver, obsessed by the fact that she had lived with the “Queen of Rooshia,” merely grinned and repeated, “Pretty soft,” and, shouldering her trunk, walked to the front door, chewing furiously.

Martha opened the door, stared through her spectacles.

“Land o’ mercy!” she gasped. “It’s Palla!” Which, in Shadow Hill, is the manner and speech of the “hired girl,” whose “folks” are “neighbours” and not inferiors.

“How do you do, Martha,” said the girl smilingly; and offered her gloved hand.

“Well, I’m so’s to be ’round–” She wheeled on the man with the trunk: “Here, *you*! Don’t go-a-trackin’ mud all over my carpet like that! Wipe your feet like as if you was brought up respectful!”

“Ain’t I wipin’ em?” retorted the driver, in an injured voice. “Now then, Marthy, where does this here trunk go to?”

"Big room front–wait, young fellow; you just follow me and be careful don't bang the banisters–"

Half way up she called back over her shoulder: "Your room's all ready, Palla–" and suddenly remembered something else and stood aside on the landing until the young man with the trunk had passed her; then waited for him to return and get himself out of the house. Then, when he had gone out, banging the door, she came slowly back down the stairs and met Palla ascending.

"Where is my aunt?" asked Palla.

And, as Martha remained silent, gazing oddly down at her through her glasses:

"My aunt isn't ill, is she?"

"No, she ain't ill. H'ain't you heard?"

"Heard what?"

"Didn't you get my letter?"

"*Your* letter? Why did *you* write? What is the matter? Where is my aunt?" asked the disturbed girl.

"I wrote you last month."

"*What* did you write?"

"You never got it?"

"No, I didn't! What has happened to my aunt?"

"She had a stroke, Palla."

"What! Is–is she dead!"

"Six weeks ago come Sunday."

The girl's knees weakened and she sat down suddenly on the stairs.

"Dead? My Aunt Emeline?"

"She had a stroke a year ago. It made her a little stiff in one leg. But she wouldn't tell you–wouldn't bother you. She was that proud of you living as you did with all those kings and queens. 'No,' sez she to me, 'no, Martha, I ain't a-goin' to worry Palla. She and the Queen have got their hands full, what with the wicked way those Rooshian people are behaving. No,' sez she, 'I'll git well by the time she comes home for a visit after the war–'"

Martha's spectacles became dim. She seated herself on the stairs and wiped them on her apron.

"It came in the night," she said, peering blindly at Palla… "I wondered why she was late to breakfast. When I went up she was lying there with her eyes open–just as natural–"

Palla's head dropped and she covered her face with both hands.

CHAPTER IV

There remained, now, nothing to keep Palla in Shadow Hill.

She had never intended to stay there, anyway; she had meant to go to France.

But already there appeared to be no chance for that in the scheme of things. For the boche had begun to squeal for mercy; the frightened swine was squirting life-blood as he rushed headlong for the home sty across the Rhine; his death-stench sickened the world.

Thicker, ranker, reeked the bloody abomination in the nostrils of civilisation, where Justice strode ahead through hell's own devastation, kicking the boche to death, kicking him through Belgium, through France, out of Light back into Darkness, back, back to his stinking sty.

The rushing sequence of events in Europe since Palla's arrival in America bewildered the girl and held in abeyance any plan she had hoped to make.

The whole world waited, too, astounded, incredulous as yet of the cataclysmic debacle, slowly realising that the super-swine were but swine–maddened swine, devil driven. And that the Sea was very near.

No romance ever written approached in wild extravagance the story of doom now unfolding in the daily papers.

Palla read and strove to comprehend–read, laid aside her

paper, and went about her own business, which alone seemed dully real.

And these new personal responsibilities–now that her aunt was dead–must have postponed any hope of an immediate departure for France.

Her inheritance under her aunt's will, the legal details, the inventory of scattered acreage and real estate, plans for their proper administration, consultations with an attorney, conferences with Mr. Pawling, president of the local bank–such things had occupied and involved her almost from the moment of her arrival home.

At first the endless petty details exasperated her–a girl fresh from the tremendous tragedy of things where, one after another, empires were crashing amid the conflagration of a continent. And she could not now keep her mind on such wretched little personal matters while her heart battered passionately at her breast, sounding the exciting summons to active service.

To concentrate her thoughts on mortgages and deeds when she was burning to be on her way to France–to confer power of attorney, audit bills for taxes, for up-keep of line fences, when she was mad to go to New York and find out how quickly she could be sent to France–such things seemed more than a girl could endure.

In Shadow Hill there was scarcely anything to remind her that the fate of the world was being settled for all time.

Only for red service flags here and there, here and there a

burly figure in olive-drab swaggering along Main Street, nothing except war-bread, the shortage of coal and sugar, and outrageous prices reminded her that the terrific drama was still being played beyond the ocean to the diapason of an orchestra thundering from England to Asia and from Africa to the Arctic.

But already the eternal signs were pointing to the end. She read the *Republican* in the morning, the *Star* at night. Gradually it became apparent to the girl that the great conflagration was slowly dying down beyond the seas; that there was to be no chance of her returning; that there was to be no need of her services even if she were already equipped to render any, and now, certainly, no time for her to learn anything which might once have admitted her to comradeship in the gigantic conflict between man and Satan. She was too late. The world's tragedy was almost over.

With the signing of the armistice, all dreams of service ended definitely for her.

False news of the suspension of hostilities should have, in a measure, prepared her. Yet, the ultimately truthful news that the war was over made her almost physically ill. For the girl's ardent religious fervour had consumed her emotional energy during the incessant excitement of the past three years. But now, for this natural ardour, there was no further employment. There was no outlet for mind or heart so lately on fire with spiritual fervour. God was no more; her friend was dead. And now the war had ended. And nobody in the world had any need of her–any need

of this woman who needed the world–and love–spiritual perhaps, perhaps profane.

The false peace demonstration, which set the bells of Shadow Hill clanging in the wintry air and the mill whistles blowing from distant villages, left her tired, dazed, indifferent. The later celebration, based on official news, stirred her spiritually even less. And she felt ill.

There was a noisy night celebration on Main Street, but she had no desire to see it. She remained indoors reading the *Star* in the sitting room with Max, the cat. She ate no dinner. She cried herself to sleep.

However, now that the worst had come–as she naïvely informed the shocked Martha next morning–she began to feel relieved in a restless, feverish way.

A healthful girl accumulates much bodily energy over night; Palla's passionate little heart and her active mind completed a storage battery very quickly charged–and very soon over-charged–and an outlet was imperative.

Always, so far in her brief career, she had had adequate outlets. As a child she found satisfaction in violent exercises; in flinging herself headlong into every outdoor game, every diversion among the urchins of her circle. As a school girl her school sports and her studies, and whatever social pleasures were offered, had left the safety valve open.

Later, mistress of her mother's modest fortune, and grown to restless, intelligent womanhood, Palla had gone abroad with

a married school-friend, Leila Vance. Under her auspices she had met nice people and had seen charming homes in England–Colonel Vance being somebody in the county and even somebody in London–a diffident, reticent, agriculturally inclined land owner and colonel of yeomanry. And long ago dead in Flanders. And his wife a nurse somewhere in France.

But before the war a year's travel and study had furnished the necessary outlet to Palla Dumont. And then–at a charity bazaar–a passionate friendship had flashed into sacred flame–a friendship born at sight between her and the little Grand Duchess Marie.

War was beginning; Colonel Vance was dead; but imperial inquiry located Leila. And imperial inquiry was satisfied. And Palla became the American companion and friend of the youthful Grand Duchess Marie. For three years that blind devotion had been her outlet–that and their mutual inclination for a life to be dedicated to God.

What was to be her outlet now?–now that the little Grand Duchess was dead–now that God, as she had conceived him, had ceased to exist for her–now that the war was ended, and nobody needed that warm young heart of hers–that ardent little heart so easily set throbbing with the passionate desire to give.

The wintry sunlight flooded the familiar sitting room, setting potted geraniums ablaze, gilding the leather backs of old books, staining prisms on the crystal chandelier with rainbow tints, and causing Max, the family cat, to blink until the vertical pupils of

his amber eyes seemed to disappear entirely.

There was some snow outside–not very much–a wild bird or two among the naked apple trees; green edges, still, where snowy lawn and flower border met.

And there was colour in the leafless shrubbery, too–wine-red stems of dogwood, ash-blue berry-canes, and the tangled green and gold of willows. And over all a pale cobalt sky, and a snow-covered hill, where, in the woods, crows sat cawing on the taller trees, and a slow goshawk sailed.

A rich land, this, even under ice and snow–a rich, rolling land hinting of fat furrows and heavy grain; and of spicy, old-time gardens where the evenings were heavy with the scent of phlox and lilies.

Palla, her hands behind her back, seeming very childish and slim in her black gown, stood searching absently among the books for something to distract her–something in harmony with the restless glow of hidden fires hot in her restless heart.

But war is too completely the great destroyer, killing even the serener pleasures of the mind, corrupting normal appetite, dulling all interest except in what pertains to war.

War is the great vandal, too, obliterating even that interest in the classic past which is born of respect for tradition. War slays all yesterdays, so that human interest lives only in the fierce and present moment, or blazes anew at thought of what may be to-morrow.

Only the chronicles of the burning hour can hold human

attention where war is. For last week is already a decade ago; and last year a dead century; but to-day is vital and to-morrow is immortal.

It was so with Palla. Her listless eyes swept the ranks of handsome, old-time books–old favourites bound in gold and leather, masters of English prose and poetry gathered and garnered by her grand-parents when books were rare in Shadow Hill.

Not even the modern masters appealed to her–masters of fiction acclaimed but yesterday; virile thinkers in philosophy, in science; enfranchised poets who had stridden out upon Olympus only yesterday to defy the old god's lightning with unshackled strophes–and sometimes unbuttoned themes.

But it was with Palla as with others; she drifted back to the morning paper, wherein lay the interest of the hour. And nothing else interested her or the world.

Martha announced lunch. Max accompanied her on her retreat to the kitchen. Palla loitered, not hungry, nervous and unquiet under the increasing need of occupation for that hot heart of hers.

After a while she went out to the dining room, ate enough, endured Martha to the verge, and retreated to await the evening paper.

Her attorney, Mr. Tiddley, came at three. They discussed quit-claims, mortgages, deeds, surveys, and reported encroachments incident to the decay of ancient landmarks. And the conversation

maddened her.

At four she put on a smart mourning hat and her black furs, and walked down to see the bank president, Mr. Pawling. The subject of their conversation was investments; and it bored her. At five she returned to the house to receive a certain Mr. Skidder–known in her childhood as Blinky Skidder, in frank recognition of an ocular peculiarity–a dingy but jaunty young man with a sheep's nose, a shrewd upper lip, and snapping red-brown eyes, who came breezily in and said: "Hello, Palla! How's the girl?" And took off his faded mackinaw uninvited.

Mr. Skidder's business had once been the exploitation of farmers and acreage; his specialty the persuasion of Slovak emigrants into the acquisition of doubtful land. But since the war, emigrants were few; and, as honest men must live, Mr. Skidder had branched out into improved real estate and city lots. But the pickings, even here, were scanty, and loans hard to obtain.

"I've changed my mind," said Palla. "I'm not going to sell this house, Blinky."

"Well, for heaven's sake–ain't you going to New York?" he insisted, taken aback.

"Yes, I am. But I've decided to keep my house."

"That," said Mr. Skidder, snapping his eyes, "is silly sentiment, not business. But please yourself Palla. I ain't saying a word. I ain't trying to tell you I can get a lot more for you than your house is worth–what with values falling and houses empty and the mills letting men go because there ain't going to be any

more war orders!–but please yourself, Palla. I ain't saying a word to urge you."

"You've said several," she remarked, smilingly. "But I think I'll keep the house for the present, and I'm sorry that I wasted your time."

"Please yourself, Palla," he repeated. "I guess you can afford to from all I hear. I guess you can do as you've a mind to, now… So you're fixing to locate in New York, eh?"

"I think so."

"Live in a flat?"

"I don't know."

"What are you going to do in New York?" he asked curiously.

"I'm sure I don't know. There'll be plenty to do, I suppose."

"You bet," he said, blinking rapidly, "there's always something doing in that little old town." He slapped his knee: "Palla," he said, "I'm thinking of going into the movie business."

"Really?"

"Yes, I'm considering it. Slovaks and bum farms are played out. There's no money in Shadow Hill–or if there is, it's locked up–or the income tax has paralysed it. No, I'm through. There's nothing doing in land; no commissions. And I'm considering a quick getaway."

"Where do you expect to go?"

"Say, Palla, when you kiss your old home good-bye, there's only one place to go. Get me?"

"New York?" she inquired, amused.

"That's me! There's a guy down there I used to correspond with–a feller named Puma–Angelo Puma–not a regular wop, as you might say, but there's some wop in him, judging by his map–or Mex–or kike, maybe–or something. Anyway, he's in the moving picture business–The Ultra-Fillum Company. I guess there's a mint o' money in fillums."

She nodded, a trifle bored.

"I got a chance to go in with Angelo Puma," he said, snapping his eyes.

"Really?"

"You know, Palla, I've made a little money, too, since you been over there living with the Queen of Russia."

"I'm very glad, Blinky."

"Oh, it ain't much. And," he added shrewdly, "it ain't so paltry, neither. Thank the Lord, I made hay while the Slovaks lasted… So," he added, getting up from his chair, "maybe I'll see you down there in New York, some day–"

He hesitated, his blinking eyes redly intent on her as she rose to her slim height.

"Say, Palla."

She looked at him inquiringly.

"Ever thought of the movies?"

"As an investment?"

"Well–that, too. There's big money in it. But I meant–I mean–it strikes me you'd make a bird of a movie queen."

The suggestion mildly amused her.

"I mean it," he insisted. "Grab it from me, Palla, you've got the shape, and you got the looks and you got the walk and the ways and the education. You got something peculiar–like you had been born a rich swell–I mean you kinda naturally act that way–kinda cocksure of yourself. Maybe you got it living with that Queen–"

Palla laughed outright.

"So you think because I've seen a queen I ought to know how to act like a movie queen?"

"Well," he said, picking up his hat, "maybe if I go in with Angelo Puma some day I'll see you again and we'll talk it over."

She shook hands with him.

"Be good," he called back as she closed the front door behind him.

The early winter night had fallen over Shadow Hill. Palla turned on the electric light, stood for a while looking sombrely at the framed photographs of her father and mother, then, feeling lonely, went into the kitchen where Martha was busy with preparations for dinner.

"Martha," she said, "I'm going to New York."

"Well, for the land's sake–"

"Yes, and I'm going day after to-morrow."

"What on earth makes you act like a gypsy, Palla?" she demanded querulously, seasoning the soup and tasting it. "Your pa and ma wasn't like that. They was satisfied to set and rest a mite after being away. But you've been gone four years 'n more, and now you're up and off again, hippity-skip! clippity-clip!–"

"I'm just going to run down to New York and look about. I want to look around and see what–"

"That's *you*, Palla! That's what you allus was doing as a child– allus looking about you with your wide brown eyes, to see what you could see in the world!.. You know what curiosity did to the cat?"

"What?"

"Pinched her paw in the mouse-trap."

"I'll be careful," said the girl, laughing.

CHAPTER V

In touch with his unexciting business again, after many months of glorious absence, and seated once more at his abhorred yellow-oak desk, young Shotwell discovered it was anything except agreeable for him to gather up the ravelled thrums of civilian life after the thrilling taste of service over seas.

For him, so long accustomed to excitement, the zest of living seemed to die with the signing of the armistice.

In fact, since the Argonne drive, all luck seemed to have deserted him; for in the very middle of operations he had been sent back to the United States as instructor; and there the armistice had now caught him. Furthermore, then, before he realised what dreadful thing was happening to him, he had been politely assigned to that vague limbo supposedly inhabited by a mythical organisation known as The Officers' Reserve Corps, and had been given indefinite leave of absence preliminary to being mustered out of the service of the United States.

To part from his uniform was agonising, and he berated the fate that pried him loose from tunic and puttees. So disgusted was he that, although the Government allowed three months longer before discarding uniforms, he shed his in disgust for "cits."

But James Shotwell, Jr., was not the only man bewildered and annoyed by the rapidity of events which followed the first days of demobilisation. Half a dozen other young fellows

in the big real estate offices of Clarence Sharrow & Co. found themselves yanked out of uniform and seated once more at their familiar, uninviting desks of yellow oak–very young men, mostly, assigned to various camps of special three-month instruction; and now cruelly interrupted while scrambling frantically after commissions in machine-gun companies, field artillery, flying units, and tank corps.

And there they were, back again at the old grind before they could realise their horrid predicament–the majority already glum and restless under the reaction, and hating Shotwell, who, among them all, had been the only man to cross the sea.

This war-worn and envied veteran of a few months, perfectly aware that his military career had ended, was now trying to accept the situation and habituate himself to the loathly technique of commerce.

Out of uniform, out of humour, out of touch with the arts of peace; still, at times, all a-quiver with the nervous shock of his experience, it was very hard for him to speak respectfully to Mr. Sharrow.

As instructor to rookie aspirants he would have been somebody: he had already been somebody as a lieutenant of infantry in the thunderous scheme of things in the Argonne.

But in the offices of Clarence Sharrow & Co. he was merely a rather nice-looking civilian subordinate, whose duties were to aid clients in the selection and purchase of residences, advise them, consult with them, make appointments to show them dwelling

houses, vacant or still tenanted, and in every stage of repair or decrepitude.

On the wall beside his desk hung a tinted map of the metropolis. Upon a table at his elbow were piled ponderous tomes depicting the Bronx in all its beauty, and giving details of suburban sewers. Other volumes contained maps of the fashionable residential district, showing every consecrated block and the exact location as well as the linear dimensions of every awesome residence and back yard from Washington Square to Yorkville.

By referring to a note-book which he carried in his breast pocket, young Shotwell could inform any grand lady or any pompous or fussy gentleman what was the "asking price" of any particular residence marked for sale upon the diagrams of the ponderous tomes.

Also–which is why Sharrow selected him for that particular job–clients liked his good manners and his engaging ways.

The average client buys a freshly painted house in preference to a well-built one, but otherwise clamours always for a bargain. The richer the client the louder the clamour. And to such demands Shotwell was always sympathetic–always willing to inquire whether or not the outrageous price asked for a dwelling might possibly be "shaded" a little.

It always could be shaded; but few clients knew that; and the majority, much flattered at their own business acumen, entertained kind feelings toward Sharrow & Co. and sentiments

almost cordial toward young Shotwell when the "shading" process had proved to be successful.

But the black-eye dealt the residential district long ago had not yet cleared up. Real property of that sort was still dull and inactive except for a flare-up now and then along Park Avenue and Fifth.

War, naturally, had not improved matters; and, as far as the residential part of their business was concerned, Sharrow & Co. transacted the bulk of it in leasing apartments and, now and then, a private house, usually on the West Side.

That morning, in the offices of Sharrow & Co., a few clients sat beside the desks of the various men who specialised in the particular brand of real estate desired: several neat young girls performed diligently upon typewriters; old man Sharrow stood at the door of his private office twirling his eyeglasses by the gold chain and urbanely getting rid of an undesirable visitor–one Angelo Puma, who wanted some land for a moving picture studio, but was persuasively unwilling to pay for it.

He was a big man, too heavy, youngish, with plump olive skin, black hair, lips too full and too red under a silky moustache, and eyes that would have been magnificent in a woman–a Spanish dancer, for example–rich, dark eyes, softly brilliant under curling lashes.

He seemed to covet the land and the ramshackle stables on it, but he wanted somebody to take back a staggering mortgage on the property. And Mr. Sharrow shook his head gently, and

twirled his eyeglasses.

"For me," insisted Puma, "I do not care. It is good property. I would pay cash if I had it. But I have not. No. My capital at the moment is tied up in production; my daily expenses, at present, require what cash I have. If your client is at all reasonable–"

"He isn't," said Sharrow. "He's a Connecticut Yankee."

For a moment Angelo Puma seemed crestfallen, then his brilliant smile flashed from every perfect tooth:

"That is very bad for me," he said, buttoning-his showy overcoat. "Pardon me; I waste your time–" pulling on his gloves. "However, if your client should ever care to change his mind–"

"One moment," said Sharrow, whose time Mr. Puma had indeed wasted at intervals during the past year, and who heartily desired to be rid of property and client: "Suppose you deal directly with the owner. We are not particularly anxious to carry the property; it's a little out of our sphere. Suppose I put you in direct communication with the owner."

"Delighted," said Puma, flashing his smile and bowing from the waist; and perfectly aware that his badgering had bored this gentleman to the limit.

"I'll write out his address for you," said Sharrow, "–one moment, please–"

Angelo Puma waited, his glossy hat in one hand, his silver-headed stick and folded suede gloves in the other.

Like darkly brilliant searchlights his magnificent eyes swept the offices of Sharrow & Co.; at a glance he appraised the self-

conscious typists, surmised possibilities in a blond one; then, as a woman entered from the street, he rested his gaze upon her. And he kept it there.

Even when Sharrow came out of his private office with the slip of paper, Angelo Puma's eyes still remained fastened upon the young girl who had spoken to a clerk and then seated herself in a chair beside the desk of James Shotwell, Jr.

"The man's name," repeated Sharrow patiently, "is Elmer Skidder. His address is Shadow Hill, Connecticut."

Puma turned to him as though confused, thanked him effusively, took the slip of paper, pulled on his gloves in a preoccupied way, and very slowly walked toward the street door, his eyes fixed on the girl who was now in animated conversation with young Shotwell.

As he passed her she was laughing at something the young man had just said, and Puma deliberately turned and looked at her again–looked her full in the face.

She was aware of him and of his bold scrutiny, of course–noticed his brilliant eyes, no doubt–but paid no heed to him–was otherwise preoccupied with this young man beside her, whom she had neither seen nor thought about since the day she had landed in New York from the rusty little Danish steamer *Elsinore*.

And now, although he had meant nothing at all to her except an episode already forgotten, to meet him again had instantly meant something to her.

For this man now represented to her a link with the exciting

past–this young soldier who had been fresh from the furnace when she had met him on deck as the *Elsinore* passed in between the forts in the grey of early morning.

The encounter was exciting her a little, too, over-emphasising its importance.

"Fancy!" she repeated, "my encountering you here and in civilian dress! Were you dreadfully disappointed by the armistice?"

"I'm ashamed to say I took it hard," he admitted.

"So did I. I had hoped so to go to France. And you–oh, I *am* sorry for you. You were so disgusted at being detailed from the fighting line to Camp Upton! And now the war is over. What a void!"

"You're very frank," he said. "We're supposed to rejoice, you know."

"Oh, of course. I really do rejoice–"

They both laughed.

"I mean it," she insisted. "In my sober senses I am glad the war is over. I'd be a monster if I were not glad. But–*what* is going to take its place? Because we must have something, you know. One can't endure a perfect void, can one?"

Again they laughed.

"It was such a tremendous thing," she explained. "I did want to be part of it before it ended. But of course peace is a tremendous thing, too–"

And they both laughed once more.

"Anybody overhearing us," she confided to him, "would think us mere beasts. Of course you are glad the war is ended: that's why you fought. And I'm glad, too. And I'm going to rent a house in New York and find something to occupy this void I speak of. But isn't it nice that I should come to you about it?"

"Jolly," he said. "And now at last I'm going to learn your name."

"Oh. Don't you know it?"

"I wanted to ask you, but there seemed to be no proper opportunity–"

"Of course. I remember. There seemed to be no reason."

"I was sorry afterward," he ventured.

That amused her. "You weren't really sorry, were you?"

"I really was. I thought of you–"

"Do you mean to say you remembered me after the ship docked?"

"Yes. But I'm very sure you instantly forgot me."

"I certainly did!" she admitted, still much amused at the idea. "One doesn't remember everybody one sees, you know," she went on frankly,"–particularly after a horrid voyage and when one's head is full of exciting plans. Alas! those wonderful plans of mine!–the stuff that dreams are made of. And here I am asking you kindly to find me a modest house with a modest rental… And by the way," she added demurely, "my name is Palla Dumont."

"Thank you," he said smilingly. "Do you care to know mine?"

"I know it. When I came in and told the clerk what I wanted,

he said I should see Mr. Shotwell."

"James Shotwell, Jr.," he said gravely.

"That *is* amiable. You don't treasure malice, do you? I might merely have known you as *Mr.* Shotwell. And you generously reveal all from James to Junior."

They were laughing again. Mr. Sharrow noticed them from his private office and congratulated himself on having Shotwell in his employment.

"When may I see a house?" inquired Palla, settling her black-gloved hands in her black fox muff.

"Immediately, if you like."

"How wonderful!"

He took out his note-book, glanced through several pages, asked her carelessly what rent she cared to pay, made a note of it, and resumed his study of the note-book.

"The East Side?" he inquired, glancing at her with curiosity not entirely professional.

"I prefer it."

From his note-book he read to her the descriptions and situations of several twenty-foot houses in the zone between Fifth and Third Avenues.

"Shall we go to see some of them, Mr. Shotwell? Have you, perhaps, time this morning?"

"I'm delighted," he said. Which, far from straining truth, perhaps restrained it.

So he got his hat and overcoat, and they went out together into

the winter sunshine.

Angelo Puma, seated in a taxi across the street, observed them. He wore a gardenia in his lapel. He might have followed Palla had she emerged alone from the offices of Sharrow & Co.

Shotwell Junior had a jolly morning of it. And, if the routine proved a trifle monotonous, Palla, too, appeared to amuse herself.

She inspected various types of houses, expensive and inexpensive, modern and out of date, well built and well kept and "jerry-built" and dirty.

Prices and rents painfully surprised her, and she gave up any idea of renting a furnished house, and so informed Shotwell.

So they restricted their inspection to three-story unfurnished and untenanted houses, where the neighbourhood was less pretentious and there was a better light in the rear.

But they all were dirty, neglected, out of repair, destitute of decent plumbing and electricity.

On the second floor of one of these Palla stood, discouraged, perplexed, gazing absently out, across a filthy back yard full of seedling ailanthus trees and rubbish, at the rear fire escapes on the tenements beyond.

Shotwell, exploring the closely written pages of his note-book, could discover nothing desirable within the terms she was willing to make.

"There's one house on our books," he said at last, "which came in only yesterday. I haven't had time to look at it. I don't even

know where the keys are. But if you're not too tired–"

Palla gave him one of her characteristic direct looks:

"I'm not too tired, but I'm starved. I could go after lunch."

"Fine!" he said. "I'm hungry, too! Shall we go to Delmonico's?"

The girl seemed a trifle nonplussed. She had not supposed that luncheon with clients was included in a real estate transaction.

She was not embarrassed, nor did the suggestion seem impertinent. But she said:

"I had expected to lunch at the hotel."

He reddened a little. Guilt shows its colors.

"Had you rather?" he asked.

"Why, no. I'd rather lunch with you at Delmonico's and talk houses." And, a little amused at this young man's transparent guile, she added: "I think it would be very agreeable for us to lunch together."

She came from the dressing-room fresh and flushed as a slightly chilled rose, rejoining him in the lobby, and presently they were seated in the palm room with a discreet and hidden orchestra playing, "Oh! How I Hate To Get Up in the Morning," and rather busy with a golden Casaba melon between them.

"Isn't this jolly!" he said, expanding easily, as do all young men in the warmth of the informal.

"Very. What an agreeable business yours seems to be, Mr. Shotwell."

"In what way?" he asked innocently.

"Why, part of it is lunching with feminine clients, isn't it?"

His close-set ears burned. She glanced up with mischief brilliant in her brown eyes. But he was busy with his melon. And, not looking at her:

"Don't you want to know me?" he asked so clumsily that she hesitated to snub so defenceless a male.

"I don't know whether I wish to," she replied, smiling slightly. "I hadn't aspired to it; I hadn't really considered it. I was thinking about renting a house."

He said nothing, but, as the painful colour remained in his face, the girl decided to be a little kinder.

"Anyway," she said, "I'm enjoying myself. And I hope you are."

He said he was. But his voice and manner were so subdued that she laughed.

"Fancy asking a girl such a question," she said. "You shouldn't ask a woman whether she doesn't want to know you. It would be irregular enough, under the circumstances, to say that you wanted to know her."

"That's what I meant," he replied, wincing. "Would you consider it?"

She could not disguise her amusement.

"Yes; I'll consider it, Mr. Shotwell. I'll give it my careful attention. I owe you something, anyway."

"What?" he asked uncertainly, prepared for further squelching.

"I don't know exactly what. But when a man remembers a woman, and the woman forgets the man, isn't something due him?"

"I think there is," he said so naïvely that Palla was unable to restrain her gaiety.

"This is a silly conversation," she said, "–as silly as though I had accepted the cocktail you so thoughtfully suggested. We're both enjoying each other and we know it."

"Really!" he exclaimed, brightening.

His boyish relief–everything that this young man said to her–seemed to excite the girl to mirth. Perhaps she had been starved for laughter longer than is good for anybody. Besides, her heart was naturally responsive–opened easily–was easily engaged.

"Of course I'm inclined to like you," she said, "or I wouldn't be here lunching with you and talking nonsense instead of houses–"

"We'll talk houses!"

"No; we'll *look* at them–later… Do you know it's a long, long time since I have laughed with a really untroubled heart?"

"I'm sorry."

"Yes, it isn't good for a girl. Sadness is a sickness–a physical disorganisation that infects the mind. It makes a strange emotion of love, too, perverting it to that mysticism we call religion–and wasting it… I suppose you're rather shocked," she said smilingly.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.