

"MINE OWN AMERICA"

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that this country wasn't justified in going into this war. And—perhaps you share the view of some of your German friends."

"You—you young fool!" father exploded. "You get out of here!" With the air of a martyr who had been down-faced after proving his point, the young lawyer departed. Two or three old friends loitered after the rest had gone, as if they would like to have a confidential talk with father, but he waved them away.

You may judge how the talk got abroad that father had pro-German leanings. He was aware of it, and I'm sure it hurt him, yet he went on quietly about his business. Not even at home did he discuss the fact that certain old friends were fighting shy of him. Yet no one dared lift a finger against Stoltz. For he dwelt under the protection of father's standing in the community.

Nevertheless, father was troubled. He took to walking the floor at night, long after mother and I had retired. He took neither of us into his confidence, and when he answered our inquiries with silence, there was nothing more to be said.

Yet I realized what was passing in his mind. His friendship for Stoltz was rooted in his heart. When father came west after the civil war and homesteaded, it was Stoltz who taught him how to hold the plow, lent him money when he needed it, stood up with him when he married mother, and brought the doctor when I was born. It was Stoltz who suggested father for the first of his county offices, drove out to campaign for him, was caught in a driving rain and all but died of pneumonia. Then barely recovered, he drove down to the county seat the evening of election day with the returns from his township. When he arrived at midnight, all the other precincts had reported, and father's rival was fifty votes ahead.

"Hooray!" cried Stoltz, when he heard how the figures stood. "Why?" asked the officers of election. "We give White sixty votes," was the answer. "And how many for the other fellow?" they demanded. "None," was his triumphant bellow. In season and out of season, he had been father's friend—in fact, he fairly worshipped him.

Keenly sensitive to the obligations of such a friendship, it may be judged that he found his position most harrowing. For, suppose Mason was right. What if old Stoltz did do something desperate in a moment of frenzy? Also, was it consistent with loyalty to his country, even to seem to shield him? Father was painfully conscientious and just. He was fighting a terrible battle. And mother and I wondered with growing dread: "What would be the result?"

Through the strategy of Mason and his kindred spirits a big patriotic meeting was arranged, and father was asked to be the speaker. "Whoop her up, Judge!" chirped a committeeman. "We

know you can do it." But father failed to enthuse. For he knew that the whole town would expect a statement of his attitude regarding Stoltz, and would be satisfied with nothing less than an outright repudiation of the old German. Anything less, in the minds of townspeople, would have convicted him of disloyalty.

For Mason, it was a master-stroke. This I bitterly realized; and I made up my mind that if father was heckled into saying something contrary to his calmer judgment, I would give Mason the drubbing of his life. As the day approached, a shadow of doom seemed to be settling down, especially when I noted that father was making slow progress in writing out his speech, to be carefully committed to memory, as was his practice.

The night before the meeting, the committee met at Doc Fraser's office to complete some details. I was there to keep tab on things and to see that Mason didn't get too presuming. Doc came in late, and bustled right out again, satchel in hand, at the same time explaining: "Sorry, can't stay. But I got a stork case and it won't wait."

Nothing exciting happened at the meeting. But next morning, as I was getting the paper ready for the press, Doc called up: "Got an item for you. Minnie Stoltz has got a boy—ten pounder. Minnie had a close call, but she'll make it." Making room for this item, I rushed the paper out, that I might have time to compose myself for the evening's ordeal.

The community hall was packed to the door, when the meeting opened. The chairman, the minister and father stepped onto the platform and were greeted with a flurry of applause. Father took his seat by the flag-draped table in the center of the platform. He never looked so old and ill at ease. My heart chilled, and I knew that everyone about me was asking the same question as myself. "What will he say?" As a part of the general movement I came to my feet and the singing of "America" was a confusion in my ears. Then the minister prayed that "each of us might be given strength to do his duty, no matter how hard that duty seemed to be."

We sat down, and father rose to speak. Everyone leaned forward, and he was the center of their tense, united gaze. "Sir, and fellow citizens," he began, his voice unnatural and high-pitched—a bad sign. "I—"

Then it happened! There was a commotion in the rear of the hall and up the aisle thumped old Stoltz. Men sprang to their feet as he proceeded straight to the platform and stepped up onto it. There he stood—wild, dishevelled, and with what we took to be a gleam of madness in his eyes. Father stepped back, dumfounded.

"What's he going to do?" buzzed through the hall.

In answer, Stoltz jerked the flag loose from the table and waved it aloft.

"Grab him!" came the angry chorus.

"Wait!" father checked a fierce movement by the chairman. Stoltz turned and bowed to him, then to the audience. Waving the flag again frantically and joyfully, he let it flutter out to its full length and thundered:

"Mine own America!"

When we grasped the meaning, we shouted and yelled until we were hoarse. Then led by Mason—how changed he now seemed—we rose to our feet and gave him the greatest tribute of American hearts—three magnificent cheers.

"Listen mine friends," said Stoltz when he was able to make himself heard. "Old Stoltz has been through hell, and all the wrong ideas have been burned out of him—thank Gott!" Here we roared. Stoltz looked puzzled, then smiled broadly.

"All right, mine friends—laugh. Mebbe the old language stick in mine speech some yet. But old Stoltz's heart is all right. It's Uncle Sam's and Gott's."

"Now look here," he bristled, being flustered by our interrupting applause, "you keep still and let me talk. I say I got something to tell you."

Silence reigned, and he began a tremendously earnest, solemn recital. "Last night," he said, "I sit in mine room and listen at a woman's agony coming through the wall. Poor little Minna was going through hell and old Stoltz went with her all the whole way. Herr Doctor come in 'bout midnight and say: 'Stoltz, its terrible serious and I want to prepare you for the worst.'" Choking, he grasped the table to steady himself and went on:

"I said: 'Gott, why is all this pain and sorrow in the world? Why is little Minna got to suffer so?' Then a voice say plain to me: 'It's so Fred can live on and your name, Stoltz, go down the generations.' Mine name, friends! Think of that—mine name! Something squeezed my heart, so I almost died."

"'Mine name is clear,' I cries. 'I never did no man wrong.' 'Stoltz, are you sure?' come the answer. 'What is that big blotch doing on your name?' Ach, mine friends! It come to me. Ungratitude! Ungratitude to Germany? No! I was borned there, but I come 'way when I was young man. Why? Because America say: 'Come on over, Stoltz. I give you goot opportunity.' And she done so. She give Stoltz land and pigs and chickens 'cause he work hard and was honest. She give Stoltz his whole life—mine home, mine Dorothea, mine boy Fred and mine dear Minna. And here I got naturalized. What? An American citizen!"

"Then I say: 'Stoltz, you are a bum! There is a man in next room fighting to save Minna's life and 'nother one. Is he your enemy? And what 'bout these people you lived among so long time? Ain't they been goot to you? Didn't you go and come just as you like? Is they your enemy? Ain't Judge White been brother to you? Is he your enemy? Ain't this country been mother to you, Stoltz? Ain't you breathed her air, got rich off her soil? Is her your enemy?' 'Mine Gott!' I cries, 'America is always