

The Fatherland

By May C. Ringwalt.

"I AM not a Ger-man, Mees Bla-ke. I am an A-mer-i-can—the whole, everything, all the way through to the heart."

A cubit added to his stature from pride in his carefully enunciated English, Karl Wagner, stamped with an unmistakable light-haired-blue-eyed-Gretchen birthmark, solemnly regarded the young woman seated opposite him at the table, Alma Blake, a new arrival at Miss Minerva King's select second-class boarding house.

"Ger-many, Mees Bla-ke, it is a great country," he went on with an impressive roll of his "r's," as he held a teaspoon poised in mid-air over his saucer of bread pudding,—"a magnificent country in the learn-ing, the sci-en-ces, the inven-tions, but not in the govern-ment. That is—how do you say it?—a be-hind number."

There was a rhetorical pause while the spoon gloatingly swooped up with the one raisin in the saucer.

"And the army, Mees Bla-ake, it is a curse."

The roll of the final "r" rumbled like threatening thunder.

"Who supports its emp-ty glit-ter? The Kaiser? The govern-ment? No, the people that pay the tax-es. Gott in Himmel, Mees Bla-ake, there haf been times when I haf had the feel to throw the bomb!"

Almost convulsed with hidden laughter Alma Blake listened as one hypnotized.

This made-in-Germany American interested, fascinated her—was quite the most charming of all the delightful people she had met during the twenty-four hours she had been at Miss Minerva King's.

For after twenty years of looking at the world through a dusky glass larkly, shut away in a forlorn, colorless little town, she suddenly stood face to face with all the wonder and beauty and excitement of city life, everything, everybody, about her under a spell of enchantment.

The fact that she was a hard-working, underpaid stenographer, that her room was a cold storage two by four, hall chamber up on the third floor, under a mansard roof, did not brush off a single golden speck from the glamour's bloom.

She was free. Free from the domestic drudgery she hated. From the daily irritation of living with an irritable, tyrannical father with whom she had not an idea in common. Free in making her way—and all the adorable new clothes that strict economy and bargain counter buys were going to arrange between them.

And because she was filled brimming over with freedom, she did not hesitate an instant in regard to the new friendship that so quickly grew up between her and Karl Wagner. She liked being in his company. That was enough. As eagerly, as straightforwardly as a child stretching out its arms toward a desired object she followed wherever he led.

Sometimes the lead was to an ice cream parlor, sometimes a motion picture show—on rare, dazzling occasions, an evening at the Orpheum.

But no matter where the goal, always on the way her companion rode his pet hobby—a—t a trot; on a gallop, with a wild leap at all obstructing fences.

"Ger-many, Mees Bla-ake," he would say, "is a land of the brave, but not a land of the free. It is a law-ridden country. The whole everything tied up with—how do you say it?—the scar-let tape. Not only the actions, but the thoughts, the e-motions. The Kaiser, he is not the Uncle Sam, Mees Bla-ake. He is—how do you say it?—the man with the large club."

"How long have you been naturalized?" Alma once asked.

"Oh, Mees Bla-ake," he answered mournfully, "there you handle a sore spot. I am an Ame-er-i-can, but I am not yet the citizen. Five years haf passed since I entered the States, but I haf been—what is the word I hunt for? You say it of a population that fid-gets about—I catch him at last—I haf been a float-er. Here a lee-tle while, there a lee-tle while,

but I haf not adhered. Now I stick, I settle. Soon I shall establish the residence."

His joy in his present freedom, his intolerance toward injustice and tyranny, were appeals that went straight to Alma's heart. He could understand, sympathize, with her spirit of bitterness, of revolt. He too, had been in captivity—he too had broken his chain forever.

"My obligations of birth, Mees Bla-ake," he exclaimed vehemently, "they no long-er exist. I haf wiped them out by my service in the army. That debt of honor is al-ready paid. I am not a Ger-man, Mees Bla-ake, I am a A-mer-i-can, the whole every-thing, all the way through to the heart."

Alma felt her last doubts of conscience slip from her. Had she not wiped out her debt of obligations of birth in service? Paid her debt of honor to the last cent? She was as free as he—to live the life of peace and happiness that lay before them.

Then with the suddenness of a bursting bomb war broke upon the nations of the earth.

Karl Wagner was out of town on a business trip and Alma's impatience could scarcely await his return.

If he had been rabid against German oppressiveness and tyranny before, what tirades of invectives he would hurl against the Kaiser, the government, the army now.

An expectant little smile lighted

up Alma's face as she hurried home from the office the evening of the day he was to return.

His hat upon the hatrack was the first thing she saw as she entered the hall—his excited voice in the living room the first sound that fell on her ear.

"Ah, Mees Bla-ake," he cried, hurrying out to meet her, "it is with great sad-ness that I take your hand in mine for the last time. I leave on the night's overland. My country it is in per-il. I go to Germany on the first ves-sel I can overtake."

"I don't understand," faltered Alma, bewildered, aghast. "You have always said that you were an American, that—"

"But there is a difference now," he interrupted. "Ger-many is in danger. My Kaiser needs me. I go!"

A wave of dizziness swept over her and she turned to the little table under the hatrack, a hand outstretched to steady herself.

The yellow envelope of a telegram addressed in her name caught her surprised eye.

With shaking fingers she tore it open and read.

"I hope nothing is the trouble, Mees Bla-ake," said Karl Wagner solicitously.

"It's my father," answered Alma, tears springing to her eyes. "He is very sick. I must go to him at once."

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