

SERIAL STORY THE EDGE OF DARKNESS

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BY WILLIAM WOODS

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THIS STORY: All Norway is preparing for revolt against the German conquerors. Enemies will furnish guns. That is the news brought by Iverre Hansen, who escaped a heroic, though disastrous, battle against the Nazis at Stockholm. Hansen traveled 15 miles on foot, evading a dozen patrols, to reach Knut Osterholm at the sleeping Norwegian fishing village of Trollness. When Dr. Martin Stensgard, mayor of Trollness, hears the news he calls Gunnar Brongre to his surgery. "We've met," the doctor bursts out. "It will be dangerous, but at last we fight."

TROLLNESS SHALL JUDGE

CHAPTER II

"By God, Gunnar, can you see what it means? Slowly the whole coast armed. Rifles, machine guns, grenades. Every man's garden his own fortress. And then, when the danger comes... holla... loco at them in every town in Norway, and down the whole ruffianly gang of them in the fjords."

"Does anybody else know this?" asked Gunnar.

"Not yet." After a moment the doctor added, "Be very careful, but pass the word around. I want some people we can trust to slip through if they can and meet at Osterholm's tonight. He's a real man, that farmer, a real man."

"There will be many details," said Gunnar slowly, thinking. "Jo, Osterholm is a brave man. We need men like him."

"Yes, yes, of course. The matter of contacts with the ships, the organization of a defense committee to take charge. Above all, we must keep an eye out for those who talk too much. And keep the men quiet now. We don't want trouble. Not until we're ready."

The fisherman had picked up his hat to go when there was a soft tap at the door behind the examining table. The doctor wheeled.

"No. I'm busy with a patient."

The tap was repeated. Stensgard closed his eyes a moment, then went over into the alcove, thrust a bookful of white coats aside, and flung open the door. A pale woman stood there with a scrap of paper in her hand. When she saw Gunnar she started back in embarrassment, but then changed her mind, leaned forward, and whispered something to the doctor.

"Three ore for the postman, my dear? Well, so that's it." Stensgard smiled, reached into his pocket, and handed her some coins. "There's all of half a kroner there, so look to it I get the change. Now don't bother us. We have a matter of great importance."

"So have I," she whispered, and looked a little proud. "We have a letter from Johann."

He glared at her as if to remind her of Gunnar's presence. "So!"

"He has left Stockholm. He is coming home." She was watching him carefully to see how he would take it.

For a moment he stared at her, mouth agape. He had grown as pale as she. Then, "Very well," he snapped. "I'll see you later," and slowly shut the door.

WHEN the fisherman left, Dr. Stensgard abruptly stopped smiling. He seated himself at his polished walnut desk across from the door, pursed his lips, and touched the tips of his stubby fingers together in front of him. His brow furrowed. Some minutes passed.

When the pale woman entered, closing the door quietly behind her, a breath of starch and fresh linen came with her into the room. "Oh, Martin," she said immediately. "I was so worried about you." She leaned back against the wall and brushed a frail hand through her hair that was done up in a wisp bun on the top of her head.

He smiled, a trace of condescension in the downward curve of his lips. "So they paid us a visit. Very well, my dear. But now, you see I have returned, so there is no cause to worry any longer."

"Oh, I see you wore your bear-skin." The woman's hands fluttered and picked up the cap. "Was it cold? We were terribly cold on the stairs."

He made no answer. She fussed with her hands, and kept talking so as not to give him time.

"Martin, the soldiers said they were looking for guns, and if they found any, they were going to arrest hostages... all over the village. Something terrible must have happened..." she bit her lip, but he remained unmoved. "I added in a small voice. 'Oh, Martin,' she went on, 'I was so frightened. At least, if Karen were here, it would not be so lonely when you go away nights.'"

"Karen will be home on Tuesday."

Quickly she came forward. "Really? Did you speak to Osterholm?"

"Yes. He says the weeks up at the sater have done the girls good. But now that the season is so advanced, he is sending a man up to close the house and drive the cattle home."

"Tuesday?"

"However," he said, and touched the tips of his fingers together again, "you are well aware that that was not why I sent for you. Have you the letter with you?"

SHE reached into the bosom of her dress and drew it out, but with such a look of entreaty on her face that he assumed a kinder tone. "Sit down, my dear."

"Before you say anything, Martin, hear me out."

He bent a questioning eye on her and remained silent. She came up to the desk, the letter clasped in her hand. The starched white cuffs on her sleeves were a trifle short, exposing the fragile wrists.

"Johann addressed it to me. He says he is in Oslo, and coming home. We both knew he would never make a doctor, and if that is the reason you sent him to

Stockholm..."

"That is not the reason."

"He is simply not fitted for it. And if it's that other thing you are thinking..."

"Yes, it is," he snapped pompously. "Anna, you have borne two children. Your daughter is an honest, upright girl. Your son is, in plain words, a scoundrel. When I think of him now actually coming to Trollness I grow red with shame. And mind you, I have been just. I gave him every opportunity. In spite of everything that happened, I sent him to medical school in Stockholm because I thought that, divorced from his associates in Oslo, he might become a man. Instead, he took advantage of his freedom to cast aside every remaining shred of self-respect, and..."

"Martin, don't."

"I will not have that boy in my house," he thundered.

"Martin," she sobbed. "Oh, Martin," she clasped the letter to her breast and gazed at his flushed, angry face. He looked up at her. "Let me see the letter."

She handed it to him. He flipped it open, and read it quickly. When he had finished, he laid it on the desk and closed his eyes. He was remembering when he had first taught the boy to write. But even in those days they had never understood each other. Fathers and children! Was it always that way? And now, this last and greatest rip that had opened out between them. "My own son," he said wearily.

At once she took hope. "Then you will talk to him? Oh, Martin, it cannot be true, what they say. And even so, all he has ever needed was your love."

For quite some time he had not answer, only stared down bitterly at the scrap of paper lying in front of him. "No," he said. "No," and raised his head. She saw how

drawn his face looked. "No," he repeated again. "If he comes... the fishermen of Trollness... they are his countrymen. They... they shall judge."

HOLD EVERYTHING!

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"Milkman!"

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