

SERIAL STORY THE EDGE OF DARKNESS

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BY WILLIAM WOODS

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CHAPTER XV

RUCK heard the shouts of the soldiers down below. He saw one of them run around the corner of the hotel and come back after a moment with a rope, which he tied around the old man's waist. An almost irresistible urge came over him to fling up the sash and shout at them to stop. But caution prevented him. It would never do to risk the fate of a whole village for the sake of one old man.

They tied the rope around the old man's waist and dragged him through town behind them. When they got to his cottage they broke down the door, which he had locked, and dragged out the furniture piece by piece.

He sat on the ground, staring into the distance, and listened to them indoors. Townspeople gathered, muttering, across the road, but two troopers stood outside with rifles and held them back. He heard the bookcases that covered the four walls of his study come down crashing. Soldiers began striding out, their arms loaded with torn books and papers. They commandeered a farmer's cart driving by, tilted the potatoes out onto the road (with a big heave, four of them on one side), and then started loading it up with books and furniture.

More people gathered. Gunnar Broge and the doctor were standing side by side in the crowd. The pastor, Arne Aalesen, came forward and started expostulating with the soldiers. They pushed him back with laughter and jeers. The crowd started singing the national anthem, slow and stately. More soldiers came down the road from the hotel, carrying ugly-looking rifles slung across their backs. They finished loading the cart, tied the old man to its tailboard, and started toward the center of town.

The people followed, led by Gunnar and Knut Osterholm, the limping farmer. "Never mind, old Sixtus," they cried. "Our day is coming." The wind blew scattered papers off the cart and onto the road. Here and there, people stooped to pick them up.

THOUGH he was very tired, the old man walked with his head high behind the cart. Except for the blood on his beard, his face was drawn and pale.

A long, deep whistle blast sounded down in the harbor. It was the mailboat pulling into the pier. Most of them did not even hear it. The soldiers paid no attention at all. But Dr. Stensgard, back in the press, felt his heart beat faster. That would be Johann coming home. He started praying inwardly that all this would be over before the boy landed so that no one in the crowd would see him. Two orderlies carrying Major Ruck's baggage came down the hotel path and cut across the line of march.

They dumped the cart near the fountain in the middle of the square. People were streaming in from all the side streets. Two soldiers appeared from the direction of the wharf, carrying a large metal container between them. They were greeted with cheers by the troopers standing around the old man, and went about splashing gasoline over the pile of furniture and books. Sixtus was still tied to the overturned cart, shouting something, but over the noise of the crowd, no one could hear what it was.

Someone put a match to the pyre, and spires of thick, black smoke gathered and rose in the air, sweeping in broad eddies westward over toward the docks. The crowd surged forward, shaking their fists and shouting imprecations, but the troops unslinging rifles and formed a square facing outward to hold them back.

And suddenly the gray mass of people grew very still. The shouts and snatches of song stopped as if broken off. The soldiers became nervous, as if afraid that at any moment those hundreds would rush in one solid packed mass and crush them with kicks and blows before they could fire a shot.

Stensgard could stand it no longer. He looked around, and all he could see was the great throng of men and women with dark hatred in their faces, staring inward at the fire near the fountain.

All at once the old man cried out in a loud voice, "For God's sake, let me go!" The people stirred, and young Pastor Aalesen ran out from among them and straight across the square. Stensgard pushed his way back. He was panting heavily. His face was wet. His collar was too tight. He went quickly back up the road, feeling the cool wind, hearing the muffled and heavy crowd behind him.

When he got to his own door his face was white as chalk. He could not catch his breath. "Anna, Anna," he cried, and wondered confusedly where his wife could be. A tall, fair-haired man with a carpet bag slung over his shoulder stood waiting for him in the doorway.

The days grew raw and bitter cold. The sea thundered up its roaring green water against the mole in the outer harbor. Smoke poured out of chimneys at night and settled over the streets like a gray mist in the morning. It began to rain, a dreary, interminable downpour, sweeping in wind-driven sheets from the hills.

About the village, hope had given way to a dull apathy. More than half the boats in harbor had been taken down the coast several weeks before. There was no fishing done, and the cannery factory had stopped working as well, not only because of the dearth of supplies, but also, as the commandant

said, because the men could no longer be trusted. There was no coal to be had at any price, and in the damp houses, where blankets and heavy coats had been taken for the German armies weeks before, it was an eternal struggle to chop enough wood to keep the fires going.

Every night at midnight, up on the dark plateau where the wind whined and cut, some lonely man would sit crouched in the snow, with a strong light in the pocket of his great coat, and binoculars in his hand, watching out to sea. And at four in the morning he would rise, stiff and cramped with cold, sweep the bare horizon for one last time, then start his long and hopeless trek back into town. Sometimes it was little Kjerlor, the nervous, questioning farmer who had led Sverre Hammer over to Sweden two months before. More often it was Mortensen from the farm up near the saeter. "If my son, Trygve, can lie in prison," he said, "I can do this work to help him get free."

Mortensen was not a strong man. They wondered if he could stand the cold nights. But they let him go. At least three nights a week it was Osterholm, Margit's father, or Gunnar Broge, or one of the other fishermen, who stood guard. The plans had all been perfected long ago. Each man who could be trusted knew what his post would be on the last day. Old Malken was in it. He and three others were to capture the guard down on the point. Men had been sent up into the hills to talk to people in outlying villages and the smaller farms. Here and there they came across others who had also had news from the English. But week followed week; the days grew dark; the sun set, a dull red fire on the sea at three in the afternoon,

and still there was no word. With narrow eyes and dark, silent faces, the men tried to keep heart in their wives, the strong in the weak . . . and they waited. There was too much for them ever to forget. (To Be Continued)

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THIS CURIOUS WORLD

By William Ferguson



A RED NOSE DOES NOT MEAN A DRINKER'S NOSE . . . AND MANY TOTAL ABSTAINERS HAVE THEM.

JUSH LIKE HICCUPS, FRINSTANCE

ERECTED IN THE YEAR MCMXXII



How old is the above building?

ANSWER: It was built this year, 1942.

NEXT: Chlorine, the World War Jekyll and Hyde.

LATE COMEDIAN

HORIZONTAL

1,4 Pictured

late comedian.

9 He answered

a curtain

10 Russian

stockades for

prisoners in

transit.

12 Impartial.

13 Beast.

15 He was

of the team of

Weber and

Fields.

16 Particle.

18 Symbol for

aluminum.

19 Employ.

21 Size of shot.

22 Indian army

(abbr.).

23 Attempt.

25 Bone.

26 Belongs to it.

27 Fatigue.

28 Internal decay

in fruit.

29 Dawn goddess.

Answer to Previous Puzzle

FAUCET

LEO

STALE

PAID

ALL

AD

BIS

HART

INKER

OGRE

PIST

YIN

UP

DEAR

TEE

ON

FUN

ARE

AC

APPE

ANCE

ATONES

TOASTS

30 We.

33 Sooner than.

34 Right line

(abbr.).

35 Assaulters.

41 Symbol for

erbium.

42 Bird's home.

44 Flower.

45 Part (Latin).

47 Adds.

49 Capers.

51 Italian city.

53 Ireland.

6 Edit.

7 Roof finial.

8 Mat anew.

9 Sedan.

11 Perched.

12 Cab.

14 Those who lag

behind.

15 Archetype.

17 Subdues.

20 Therefore.

21 Toward.

24 Years (abbr.).

26 Island (Fr.).

30 Note in

Guido's scale.

31 Mire.

32 Chaldean city.

35 Perfume.

36 Resource.

37 Court (abbr.).

38 Parrot.

39 Sea eagles.

40 Steeple.

43 Male child.

46 Playing card.

48 Mimic.

50 Cravat.

52 Steamship

(abbr.).

5 Greek letter.

HEROES ARE MADE-NOT BORN

By J. R. Williams

Red Ryder

FOKVILLE--USED TO COME HERE OFTEN--HAD SOME CALLS HERE--WONDER WHO THEIR DOCTOR IS HERE NOW--DAYS--

OH! OH! SOMETHINGS HAPPENED--PEOPLE RUNNING--ACCIDENT OF SOME SORT--WELL, I'M ONLY A BYSTANDER NOW--NOT A PRACTISING PHYSICIAN ANY MORE--

STILL, ANY BYSTANDER IS ENTITLED TO HIS CURIOSITY--SOMEONE HAS BEEN HIT BY A CAR--WHY, IT'S A LITTLE KID--THEY'RE CARRYING IT INTO THAT DRUG STORE--

YEAH! ITS TH JENKINS KID--

DOC CLOVER IS GOIN TO OPERATE IN TH BACK ROOM--NO TIME TO LOSE--

DOCTOR CLOVER? HAMM--WELL, LOTS OF NEW NAMES THESE DAYS--

FELL OFF HIS BIKE RIGHT IN FRONT OF THE BUS--

AND WHEN SHE FINDS OUT HOW MUCH SHE'S GONNA GET, I'M AFRAID I'LL BE THE PARTY!

By Harold Gray

By Blosser

By Crane

By Martin

By V. T. Hamlin

By J. R. Williams

By Fred Harman

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