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IF WINTER COMES

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BY A. S. M. HUTCHINSON

He suddenly recollected Nona's letter. He took it from his pocket and opened it; and the second event was discharged upon him.
She wrote from their town house: "Marko, take me away—Nona."
His emotions leapt to her with most terrible violence. He felt his heart leap against his breast as though, engine of his tumult, it would burst its bonds and to her. He struck his hand upon the desk. He said aloud, "Yes! Yes!" He remembered his words, "If ever you feel you can't bear it, tell me.—Tell me."

VI
He began to write plans to her. He would come to London to-morrow. She should come to the station if she could; if not, he would be at the Great Western Hotel. She would telephone to him there and they could arrange to meet and discuss what they should do. He would like to go away with her directly they met, but there were certain things to see to. He wrote, "But I can only take you—"

His pen stopped. Familiar words! He repeated them to himself, and their conclusion and their circumstance appeared and stood, as with a sword, across the passage of his thoughts. "But I can only lead you downwards. I cannot lead you upwards."
As with a sword—
He sat back in his chair and gazed upon this armed intruder to give it battle.

VII
The morning passed and the afternoon while still he sat, no more moving than to sink lower in his seat as the battle joined and as he most dreadfully suffered in its most dreadful onsets. Towards five o'clock he put out his hand without moving his position and drew towards him the letter he had begun. The action was as that of one utterly undone. He very slowly tore it across, and then across again, and so into tiniest fragments till his fingers could no more fasten upon them. He dropped his arms away and opened his hand, and the white pieces fluttered in a little cloud to the floor.
Presently he drew himself up to the table and began to write, writing very slowly because his hand trembled so. In half an hour he blotted the few lines on the last sheet:

"... So, simply what I want to do is to let our step—if we take it—be mine, not yours. We shall forget absolutely that you ever wrote. It's as though it had never been written. On Tuesday I will write and ask you, 'Shall I come up to you?' So if you say 'Yes' the action will have been entirely mine. It will start from there. This hasn't happened. And during these days in between, just think like anything over what I've said. Honour can't have any degree, Nona, any more than truth can have any degree: whatever else the world can quibble to bits it can't partition those: truth is just truth and honour is just honour. And a marriage vow is a pledge of honour like any other pledge of honour, and if one breaks it one breaks one's honour, never mind what the excuse is. There's no conceivable way of arguing out of that. That's what I shall ask you to do on Tuesday and I'm just warning you so you shall have time to think beforehand."

He took his pen, and steadied his hand, and wrote:
"And your reply, when I ask you, whichever it is, shall bring me light into darkness, unutterable darkness.—M."

He could hear the homeward movements about the office. It was time to go. He wheeled his bicycle to the letter box at the corner of The Precincts. As he dropped in his letter, the evening edition of Pike's paper came bawling around the corner.

AUSTRIA DECLARES WAR ON SERBIA.
He shook his head at the paper the boy held out to him and rode away. What had that kind of thing to do with him?

VIII
Unutterable darkness! He lived within it during the days that followed while he awaited the day appointed to write to Nona again. He had put away that for which, with a longing that was almost physical in its pain, his spirit craved; and craved the more terribly for his denial of it. Whatever she said when he asked, whichever way she answered him, he would be

ALL THE FAMILY HAD BAD COLDS

"Did you ever notice that if one of the family contracts a cold it generally runs to all the other members?"
Many people when they contract a cold do not pay any attention to it, thinking perhaps it will pass away of itself in a day or two. This is a great mistake for before they know it, it has become settled on the lungs.
Never neglect the first symptoms; get a bottle of

Dr. Wood's Norway Pine Syrup

and see how quickly your cold will disappear.
Mrs. A. Coghlan, Magnolia, Alta., writes:—"Last Winter we all had bad colds in our family, and I didn't know what to do. Some folks told me to try Dr. Wood's Norway Pine Syrup, so I went and got a couple of bottles, and in a short while our colds were all gone. Now we always keep a bottle on hand in case one of us might catch a cold."

"Dr. Wood's" is 25¢ and 50¢ a bottle; put up only by The T. Millburn Co., Limited, Toronto, Ont.

brought relief from his intolerable stress. If she maintained honour above love, his weakness, he knew, would be welded into strength, as the presence of another brings enormous support to timidity; if she declared for love—his mind surged within him at the imagination of bursting away once and for ever the squeamish principles which for years, hedging about his conduct on this side and on that, had profited nothing those on whose behalf they had been erected and his own life had desolated into barrenness.
He was little disposed, in these days and in this darkness, to divert attention to the international disturbances which now were rumbling across the newspapers in portentous and enormous headlines. Ireland was pressed away. It was all Europe now—thrones, chancelleries, councils, armies. He tried to say, "What of it?" Many in Great Britain tried to say, "What of it?" Crises and deadlocks again! Meaningless and empty words, for months and years past worked to death and rendered hollow as empty vessels. Some one would climb down. Some one always climbed down.
Nobody climbed down.

The cauldron whose seething and bubbling had entertained some, fidgeted some, some nothing at all concerned, suddenly boiled over, and poured in boiling fat upon the flames, and poured in flames upon the hearts of every man's concerns.

On Friday the Stock Exchange closed. On Saturday Germany declared war on Russia. In Sunday's papers Sabre read of the panic run on the banks, people fighting to convert their notes into gold. One London bank had suspended payment. Many had shut out failure only by minutes when midday permitted them to close their doors. People were besieging the provision shops to lay in stores of food. And poured in flames upon the hearts of every man's concerns.
All his concerns, the crisis with Nona, with his honour and his love, that awaited determination, were disputed their place in his mind by the incredible and enormous events that each new hour discharged upon the world. He watched them as one might be watching a burning building and feeling at every moment that the roof will crash in, yet somehow feeling that it cannot and will not fall in. The thing was gone beyond possibility of recovery, there terribly arose now the urgency for Great Britain to declare for honour, yet somehow he felt that it could not and would not fall to be averted. It could not happen.

IX
The news of Tuesday morning caused him at six o'clock in the evening to have been standing two hours in the great throng that filled Market Square gazing towards the offices of the County Times. Our mobilisation, our resolve to stand by France it the German Fleet came into the Channel, lastly, most awfully pregnant of all, our obligations to Belgium,—that had been the morning's news, conveyed in the report of Sir Edward Grey's statement in the House of Commons. That afternoon the Prime Minister was to make a statement.

A great murmur swelled up from the waiting crowd, a great movement pressed it forward towards the County Times offices. On the first-floor balcony men appeared dragging a great board faced with paper, on the paper enormous lettering. The board was pulled out endways. The man last through the window took a step forward and swung the letters into view.

PREMIER'S STATEMENT

ULTIMATUM TO GERMANY EXPIRES MIDNIGHT
Sabre pressed his way out of the Square. He kept saying to himself, "War... War..." He found himself running to the office; no one was in the office; then getting out his bicycle with frantic haste, then riding home—hard.

And he kept saying, "War!"
He thought, "Otway" and before his eyes appeared a vision of Otway with those little beads of perspiration in his nose.
War—he couldn't get any further than that. Like the systole and diastole of a slowly beating pulse, the word kept on forming in his mind and welling away in a tide of confused and amorphous scenes; and forming again; and again oozing in presentments of speculations, scenes, surmises, and in profound disturbances of strange emotions. War... And there kept appearing the face of Otway with the little points of perspiration about his nose. Otway had predicted this months ago. —And he was right. It had come. War...

CHAPTER IV.

I
He approached Penny Green and realized for the first time the hard

pace at which he had been riding. And realised also the emotions which subconsciously had been driving him along. All the way he had been saying "War!" What he wanted, most terribly, was to say it aloud to some one. He wanted to say it to Mabel. He had a sudden great desire to see Mabel and tell her about it and talk to her about it. He felt a curiously protective feeling towards her. For the first time in his life he pedalled instead of free-wheeling the conclusion of the ride. He ran into the house and into the morning room. Mabel was not there. It was almost dinner time. She would be in her room. He ran upstairs. She was standing before her dressing table and turned to him in surprise.
"Whatever—"
"I say, it's war!"
She echoed the word. "War?"
"Yes, war. We've declared war!"
"Declared war?"
"Yes, declared war. We've sent Germany an ultimatum. It ends to-night. It's the same thing. It means war."
He was breathless, panting. She said, "Good gracious! Whatever will happen? Have you brought an evening paper? Do you know the papers didn't come this morning till—"
He could not hear her out. "No, I didn't wait. I simply rushed away."
He was close to her. He took her hands. "I say, Mabel, it's war." His emotions were tumultuous and extraordinary. He wanted to draw her to him and kiss her. They had not kissed for longer than he could have remembered; but now he held her hands hard and desired to kiss her. "I say, it's war."
She gave her sudden burst of laughter. "You are excited. I've never seen you so excited. Your collar's undone."
He dropped her hands. He said rather stupidly, "Well, it's war, you know," and stood there.

She turned to her dressing table. "Well, I do wish you'd stayed for a paper. Now we've got to wait till to-morrow and goodness only knows—"
She was fastening something about her throat and held her breath in the operation. She released it and said, "Just fancy, war! I never thought it would be. What will happen first? Will they—?" She held her breath again. She said, "It's too annoying about those papers coming so late. If they haven't arrived when you go off to-morrow you can tell Jones he needn't send them any more. He's one of those independent sort of tradesmen who think they can do just what they like. Just fancy actually having war with Germany. I can't believe it. She turned towards him and gave her sudden laugh again. "I say, aren't you ever going to move?"

He went out of the room and along the passage. As he reached his own room he realised it again. "War—"
He went quickly back to Mabel. "I say—" He stopped. His feelings most fruitfully desired some vent. None here. "Look here. Don't wait dinner for me. You start. I'm going round to Fargus to tell him."

(To be Continued.)

We can be thankful to a friend for a few acres or a little money, and yet for the freedom of the whole earth and for the great benefit of our being, our life, health and reason, we look upon ourselves as under no obligation.
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