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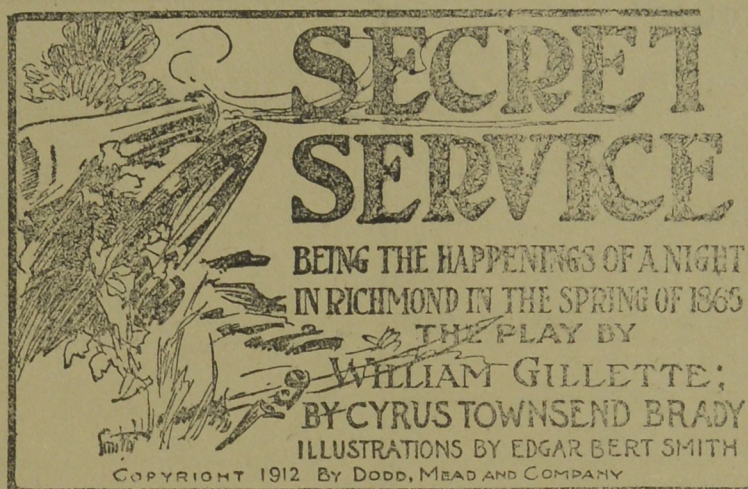
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SYNOPSIS.

CHAPTER I—Mrs. Varney, wife of a Confederate general, has lost one son and has another dying from wounds. She reluctantly gives her consent for Wilfred, the youngest, to join the army if his father consents. The federals are making their last assault in an effort to capture Richmond.

CHAPTER II—Edith Varney secures from President Davis a commission for Capt. Thorne, who is just recovering from wounds, as chief of the telegraph at Richmond.

CHAPTER III—Capt. Thorne tells Edith he has been ordered away. She declares he must not go and tells him of the commission from the president. He is strangely agitated and declares he cannot accept.

CHAPTER IV—Thorne decides to escape while Edith leaves the room to call the commission, but is prevented by the arrival of Caroline Milford, Wilfred's sweetheart.

CHAPTER V—Mr. Arrelsford of the Confederate secret service, a rejected suitor of Edith's, detects Jonas, Mrs. Varney's butler, carrying a note from a prisoner in Libby prison. Arrelsford suspects it is intended for Thorne. The note reads: "Attack tonight. Plan 3. Use Telegraph."

CHAPTER VI—Edith is indignant when Arrelsford tells her of his suspicions regarding Thorne. He declares the latter is Lewis Burdett, chief of the Federal secret service and that his brother Henry is a prisoner in Libby. Edith refuses to believe and suggests that Thorne be confronted with the prisoner as a test.

CHAPTER VII—Edith detains Thorne while the prisoner is sent for. An order comes from General Varney for Wilfred to report to the front at once.

CHAPTER VIII—Edith is forced to carry out her part in the test of Thorne. She gives him the message taken from Jonas, which he reads without betraying himself. He suspects that he is being watched.

CHAPTER IX—The prisoner is thrust into the room alone with Thorne, who recognizes him as his older brother, Henry Dumont. They put up a fake fight. Henry implores his brother to shoot him in the leg. Thorne refuses and Henry accidentally kills himself. Arrelsford rushes into the room with the guard. Thorne nonchalantly says: "Corporal, here is your prisoner, we had a fight and I shot him."

CHAPTER X—Caroline goes to the war department telegraph office to send a message.

CHAPTER XI—Arrelsford refuses to let Caroline's message go through. It is a telegram to Wilfred simply asking forgiveness, but Arrelsford suspects a double meaning. He and Edith secrete themselves to watch Thorne, whose arrival Arrelsford expects.

CHAPTER XII—Thorne takes charge of the telegraph office—and after satisfying himself that he is alone—begins sending a message, but is interrupted by the arrival of a messenger from the secretary of war with a dispatch.

CHAPTER XIII—Arrelsford and Edith see Thorne after the secretary's dispatch. Thorne is shot in the wrist by Arrelsford when he attempts to send it. Arrelsford calls the guard, and when they appear Thorne turns the tables by ordering the arrest of Arrelsford.

CHAPTER XIV—The removal of Arrelsford is stopped by the arrival of General Randolph. Thorne again begins sending the dispatch. Arrelsford protests, declaring Thorne is sending a forged order to weaken the lines of defense. Randolph demands upon what authority Thorne has assumed command of the telegraph office. Miss Varney appears.

CHAPTER XV—She produces Thorne's commission as major in command of the government telegraph. She, having seen enough to convince her, he is a Federal, him not to send the forced order. After she leaves he tears it up.

CHAPTER XVI—Thorne plans to escape from Richmond.

CHAPTER XVII—Arrelsford calls at the Varney home and demands to see Edith. Mrs. Varney refuses. A sergeant appears with an order to search the house for Thorne. Wilfred Varney returns from the front wounded.

(Continued.)

door; they would bring him back that way, and she could see him again.

"Wilfred, dear," asked Caroline, "what are they going to do?"

"Shoot him."

"When?"

"Now."

"Where?"

"Out in the street."

Caroline's low exclamation of pity struck a responsive chord in Wilfred's heart. He nodded gravely, and bit his lips. He did not feel particularly happy over the situation, evidently, but the conversation was interrupted by the entrance of the men. They came into the room in double line, Thorne walking easily between them. They entered the room by the door, marched down it, came back, and ranged themselves opposite the stacks of arms.

"Halt!" cried the sergeant. "Right face! Take arms! Carry arms! Left face! Forward—march!"

Edith had not taken her eyes off Thorne since he entered the room. She had watched him as if fascinated. He had shot at her one quick, searching glance, and then had kept his eyes averted, not because he would not like to look at her, but because he could not bear himself like a man in these last swift terrible seconds, if he did.

As the men moved to carry out their last order, the girl awoke to her surroundings.

"Wait," she said. "Who is in command?"

"I am, miss," answered the sergeant.

"I'd like to speak to the—the prisoner," continued Edith.

"I'm sorry, miss," answered the sergeant respectfully, but abruptly; "but we haven't the time."

"Only a word, sergeant," pleaded the girl, stepping close to him, and laying her hand on his arm.

The sergeant looked at her a moment. What he saw in her eyes touched his very soul.

"Very well," he said. "Right face! Fall out the prisoner!"

Thorne stepped out in front of the ranks.

"Now, miss," said the sergeant, "be quick about it."

"No!" said Wilfred sternly.

"Oh, Wilfred!" cried Caroline, laying her hand on his arm. "Let her speak to him, let her say goodbye."

There was an instant's pause. Wilfred looked from Caroline's flushed, eager face, to Edith's pale one. After all, what was the harm? He nodded his head, but no one moved. It was the sergeant who broke the silence.

"The lady," he said, looking at Thorne, and pointing at Edith. As he spoke, he added another order.

"Matson, take your squad and guard the windows. Prisoner, you can go over to the side of the room."

The sergeant's purpose was plain. It would give Edith Varney an opportunity to say what she had to say to Thorne in a low voice if she chose, without the possibility of being overheard. The initiative must come from the woman, the man realized. It was Edith who turned and walked slowly across the room. Thorne followed her more rapidly, and the two stood side by side. They were thus so placed by the kindness of the veteran that she could speak her words, and no one could hear what they were.

"One of the servants," began the girl in a low, utterly passionless and expressionless voice, "Jonas, has taken the bullets from the guns. If you will drop when they fire, you can escape with your life."

In exactly the same level, almost monotonous voice, Thorne whispered a pertinent question:

"Shall I do this for you?"

"It is nothing to me," said the woman quietly, and might God forgive her, she prayed, for that falsehood.

Thorne looked at her, his soul in his eyes. If her face had been carved from marble, it could not have been more expressionless and indifferent. He could not know how wildly her heart was beating beneath that stony exterior. Well, she had turned against him. He was nothing to her. There was no one living any longer. She did not care.

"Were you responsible in any way for this?" he asked.

The girl shook her head and turned away without looking at him. She had not the least idea of what he was about to do. Not one man in a thousand would have done it. Perhaps if he went to his death in some exotic way, he might redeem himself in her eyes, had flashed into Thorne's mind, as he turned to the guard.

"Sergeant," he said, saluting. He spoke in a clear, cool, most indifferent way. "You had better take a look at the rifles of your command. I understand that they have been tampered with."

"What the hell!" cried the sergeant, seizing a piece from the nearest man. He snapped open the breech-plug, and drew out the cartridge and examined it. Someone had bitten off the bullet! He saw everything clearly. "Squad ready!" he cried. "Draw cartridges!"

There was a rattling of breech-plugs and a low murmur of astonishment, as every man found that his cartridge was without a bullet.

"With ball cartridges, load!" cried the sergeant. "Carry arms!"

When this little maneuver, which was completed with swiftness and precision because the men were all veterans, was finished, the sergeant turned to the prisoner, who had stood composedly watching the performance, which took away his last opportunity for escape, and saluted him with distinct admiration.

"I am much obliged to you, sir," he said.

How Edith Varney kept her feet why she did not scream or faint was she could not tell. Thorne's words had petrified her. Her pride kept her from acknowledging that she felt she had never dreamed of any such action on his part, and it seemed to her that she had sent him to his death in vain. How could she retract her words, repair her blunder? There was nothing to do. But her countenance changed. A look of such desperate anxiety came into her face as fully betrayed her feelings. Of the people in the room, only Arrelsford observed her, and even his jealousy and resentment were slightly softened by her visible anguish. Everybody was staring at Thorne, for they all knew the result of his remarkable action, although no one could in the least divine the reason.

(To Be Continued.)

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