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406 Holliday Building

Indianapolis, Ind.

The Last Man

by Douglas
Oliver



THIS story is Seldom Swift's own. In reproducing it I have adhered faithfully to the narrative as it fell from his lips. As he hesitatingly unfolded the uncanny events in this weird drama I would have questioned his sanity but for my long and intimate friendship with him.

What is the answer? Perhaps some reader of this magazine may be able to supply it. Swift, himself, is still puzzling.—D. O.

IT HAD stopped raining. The skies were beginning to clear. Swift prayed for the early appearance of some landmark which might direct him, unfalteringly, to Jean Stacquet's estaminet at the crossroads.

Swift was angry. Two hours of floundering through the ruin of the old, fallen trench systems of the ridge were enough to take the heart out of any man, he avowed, even a man as imperturbable as he. As he took stock of his clothing, filthy from rain and

constant contact with spongy shell craters into which he slopped at every step, it seemed, he inwardly cursed the turn of mind that had prompted him to quit the Arras road, rough and winding as it was, for the cross-country track on which he stood. For that track, instead of bringing him to Stacquet's place with its glowing windows, ahead of schedule, had transported him to a veritable wilderness country.

"Fine place to spend the night," Swift mused, his eyes alert for the first sign of a star.

He was lost—hopelessly lost—and he knew it. Presently his foot slipped and he was thrown heavily against a coil of wire, many of whose rusted barbs fastened in his garments. Briefly he struggled, then kicked himself loose, one leg of his breeches going with the final effort.

Swift was about to give audible expression to his feelings when the words froze on his lips. Out of the darkness ahead—how close he could not say—had come a voice. Swift paused as if transfixed, head in the air like a thirsty setter pup winding water, eyes endeavoring to penetrate the wall of black about him.

Somewhere in front a man was singing softly. It was a pleasing

baritone Swift heard. Now and then he made out the sway of the lyric.

Just a song at twilight, when the lights
are low,
And the flickering shadows softly come
and go.

The last echo died away. Swift could feel cold sweat standing out upon his neck, trickling down beneath his flannel collar. He attempted to rid himself of the catch in his throat; tried to do it quietly, but the bleat he produced evoked even stranger action on the part of the unknown.

"Another step there—and I'll jam this bayonet through you," was the ultimatum hurled at Swift, who brought himself up with a jerk. crouched lower, shaking, trying to reassemble his scattered senses.

Again from out of the gloom came the voice of the challenger, as unmistakably threatening as it was British.

"Who are you?" it rasped. "Hurry up, and let me get a look at you."

"Friend," Swift stammered. Then he added, his voice quavering, "Tourist from St. Pol—who are you?"

"Advance, friend," came the steely command, accompanied by a sudden jangle of equipment that threw Swift's nerves into a similar jangle.

There was little hurry about Swift's advance. In fact it seemed most deliberate. It was not his much boasted imperturbability that restrained him, but rather, grave concern that had gripped his knees as well as his throat with the first mysterious cry from the Stygian darkness. Nevertheless he did go forward, for he retained sufficient clearness of mind to realize that strange individuals who held up inoffensive travelers at the point of the bayonet were not to be trifled with under any circumstances.

And Swift thought it reasonable to expect, if highway robbery was the man's intent, such a trap as that into

which he (Swift) had seemingly blundered would have called for a setting on some trafficked highway, and not the middle of a devastated battle area, traveled but rarely throughout the year and then never by night for obvious reasons. Moreover, no present-day, died-in-the-wool bandit, Swift concluded, was apt to give warning of his presence as this man, by singing, had done.

Slowly, step by step, Swift edged on, one hand buried in the side pocket of his coat where reposed a stumpy but businesslike automatic. And ere he took the final stride that carried him within striking distance of his challenger, a steadied finger was caressing the delicate trigger of the Colt.

Swift could feel the man's breath fanning his cheek. He deemed it wise to grant the fellow the first move. That move was slow in forthcoming. Meanwhile Swift bent his gaze in scrutiny of the blurred figure before him. Gradually the blur resolved itself into the awkward lines of a fighting man, a soldier, a Tommy, a typical representative of the British Expeditionary Force in complete battle order from the short rifle he gripped to the steel hat that topped off a good six feet of brawn and muscle.

Swift's mind strayed momentarily in reflection. He knew the last units of the British Expeditionary Force had crossed the channel two years before; that now no man of that monster organization was doing duty in France. Yet here—here before him . . .

"You've come at last," interrupted the unknown. "You are my relief—I expect?"

Swift's eyes almost popped from his head.

"I have been waiting a long time for you," the stranger went on. He

sighed heavily as if rid, at last, of some great burden.

Swift leaned forward, trying to examine the face of the speaker, little of which could be seen for the ill-fitting helmet tilted down upon it.

"Surprized, sir?" inquired the unknown.

"Just the least," Swift managed to get out. "I have been in France but three days—comparative stranger, so to speak."

"But your mission concerns me—surely?" The man's voice registered concern.

"Certainly," returned Swift, who figured one answer as good as the next, and thought it was wise to humor this fellow, whoever he was.

"You will take over at once?"

"If everything is satisfactory," assented Swift, realizing he was plunging into still deeper water.

"Splendid," said the man. He thrust his rifle against the wall of the sagged trench in which he stood and told Swift to follow. They traveled a scant thirty yards through ankle-deep mire. Swift's knees wobbled considerably and he hoped his guide would not hear them knocking together. What mysterious business, he asked himself, was this on which he was engaged? How long was it to keep up? What would it mean to him? He groped deeper in his side pocket where the serrated grip of the automatic felt reassuring to the touch.

Ahead gleamed the eye of a small pocket lamp. "Here, sir," called the unknown, whose thumb was playing with the button of the flash. A narrow shaft of light thrown upward to the crumbled parapets came to rest on one of the familiar white crosses of the battlefields. This cross was aged and weather-beaten. A few fragments only of its original markings remained. To Swift's gaze, these, in the pale illumination from the tiny

torch, seemed to stand out doubly prominent.

R P
GORD
Bn. Canadian Inf y
KILL ACT N
23. 7

Silence enveloped the pair, broken only by the occasional spit of a rain-drop.

"Well?" said Swift.

"My cross," was the terse reply.

Swift staggered.

"You don't mean to tell me"—he whispered, brokenly,—"you can't be dead—it's impossible . . ."

"But true, nevertheless," came the unruffled response. "You should know that, though."

"Quite so—quite so," murmured Swift, a sudden numbness creeping over him. "Instructions a bit confusing, you know—sorry . . ."

His tongue failed him. His head swam. As from afar he heard the other speaking.

"I'm the man you want, all right. That's my piece of wood—my cross I was killed just before the Vimy show. Officially killed, I mean. But mistakes will be made."

"Mistakes?" asked Swift feebly.

"A great mistake, sir. Damn them for their mistakes. It's Whitey—not I—that lies under that cross—*there*.

"You see when the shell got both of us it took me in the head." (The man jerked impatiently at the strap of his helmet. The steel headgear fell away. It was a scarred, heart-sickening face on which Swift looked.) "For a long time my mind went back on me. It seemed eternity, in fact. Before I learned of the blunder. Poor old Whitey, there, buried for me.

"Often Whitey, in his loneliness, calls out to me, and I come and sit through the night with him. Time and time again Whitey tells me: 'They won't be much longer coming now, old boy. Your relief will soon

be here, old boy. It can't be much longer now.'

"A whole year I've waited, sir—and now you're here. My vigil is over. I have kept my promise—I've stuck by Whitey—I've kept faith—thank God!"

Bony fingers cut deep into Swift's shoulders. "You'll take over immediately, sir?" pleaded the unknown.

The shiver that ran through Swift's frame must have betrayed itself to the man, for his demeanor altered with astonishing suddenness.

"Are you playing with me?" he demanded hoarsely.

"No—no—I'm not," declared Swift, but his words of denial sounded empty and flat. He sensed instant hostility on the part of the other.

"You are tricking me—you scoundrel." The words came like so many scissor snips. The unknown leaped at Swift, who sprang aside instinctively.

"I meant no harm," Swift expostulated. "How could you expect me to understand?" He tried to get the gun out of his pocket, but the hammer caught in the lining.

"I'll teach you to understand, then," bellowed the stranger as he again came at Swift. The latter knew now he was facing a madman; realized that his antagonist had caught up some cudgel from the trench bottom; saw him swing it on high.

"Now you die—you!" he heard the man pant.

Swift took a desperate chance. He fired through his coat, point-blank. Twice he pulled the trigger. He heard the heavy slugs zoom through space. He knew he had missed. He threw himself backward.

A great weight fell across his head. A thousand stars danced before his eyes. He experienced the sensation of slowly sinking—sinking. Would he never stop sinking? Would he—

...

"UGH-UGH," grunted Swift, picking himself up from the bare flooring.

What a nightmare!

Swift took one glance at the rickety bed from which he had tumbled, then dived beneath the coverlets as the "clump-clump" of *Madame's* sabots sounded on the stairs without.

For the first time Swift noticed how sore he was. He ached in every limb. His head throbbed abominably. What had got into him? His head had seemed as clear as a bell when he had retired. Touch of fever, likely. Through the open window wafted an unmistakable barnyard odor. Lord! No wonder, thought Swift. Enough to cause an epidemic.

A light knock at the door. Swift heard the old dame cackling: "*M'sieu—M'sieu.*"

"Come in," Swift called listlessly. A polite "*bon jour*" he added, however, when he saw the bowl of steaming coffee she had brought with her.

"For the head, *m'sieu*," she explained, a knowing look in her beady eyes.

How the dickens did she guess his trouble? Swift asked himself. These Frenchies were too much of a puzzle to suit him. He'd be pulling stakes shortly.

"*M'sieu—plentee 'zig-zag'* last night." *Madame* remarked indifferently.

"'Zig-zag'?" asked Swift, who was disposing of the coffee in huge gulps. Already his head felt better.

"*Oui—plentee whisky*," returned the woman. She shook a denouncing finger at him. Her face lit up with mirth.

"You're wrong there, old top," said Swift. "I never touched a drop of anything last night. You know that. Wasn't out of your place either. And you know that, too."

Swift glanced up from his last swallow to see the old woman fairly shaking with laughter.

"So funny!" she repeated over and over, one stubby finger wagging.

Then she proceeded to tell a now curious M'sieu Swift a few things that left his brain only the more muddled.

Had not this same M'sieu Swift kept them waiting up all hours of the night for him? Had not Jean, her husband, threatened many times to close the estaminet doors on him? Had he not come at last like a man from the grave—so white he was? Had he not refused to speak to Jean or Philippe or to *Madame* herself but had gone stamping upstairs, grunting like a pack of pigs, as Jean had said? Where had M'sieu got his whisky? Jean would like to know. Jean would put in a barrel, perhaps.

"Wait a minute." Swift threw out an arresting hand. Slowly he straightened up in bed.

With a little shriek of terror *Madame* lifted from her chair as though possessed of wings and fluttered from the room, not stopping until she had placed the door between her and her lodger.

"Well, I'll be damned!" exclaimed Swift. "What's got into her, anyway? Now let's get this business straight. Read for an hour—crawled in about 10. That's the sum total of last night's happenings. Read for an hour—crawled in about 10. Yes, sir, that's all. What's the matter with the old dame, anyway?"

He ran his fingers through his hair. They came away sticky. He inspected them hurriedly.

Blood!

What the devil! He gingerly explored his scalp. There was a gash there—a small one, all clotted over—it might require some attention. Blood on his face? Likely. Some sight, he'd bet. No wonder the old woman scooted for the door. But where on

earth had he bumped his head in that fashion?

For one brief moment his dream incident flashed into vision.

"Tommyrot," he snarled. "I'm growing childish—I am." But was it all rot? his conscience questioned. He would see. One bound carried him half-way across the room. Where were his clothes? He had piled them neatly, he remembered, on the solitary table the room claimed. There they were, strewn everywhere about the floor. What? Those rags his?—dirty, mucky things like that? There must be some mistake. He held up his trousers for examination. One leg, from the knee down, hung in tatters.

Swift clapped his hands to his head. "Crazy—crazy!" he mumbled. He found his revolver—heavy with recent rust. He had the clip extracted in a jiffy. "Click-click-click," whispered the cartridges as he thumbed them in his palm.

"Two shells missing? Two vanished overnight?" Why, he had looked over that gun not later than the previous afternoon. Everything had been shipshape then.

Swift sank down upon his bed. The automatic slipped from his fingers to the floor, unheeded. For a long time he sat there, staring straight before him, unbelieving. And many times had Jean to call him before he would appear below at breakfast.

3

CONFLICTING emotions possessed Swift that same afternoon as, accompanied by Jean, he drove away from the estaminet.

He had hesitated to acquaint the innkeeper with the nature of his mission until he had got him away from the influence of his frumpy wife, who, from breakfast on, had everlastingly poked fun at Swift because of his bedraggled clothing and soured expression. Swift felt sure that once

he had Stacquet alone he could convince him there was more behind his last night's adventure, if there had been any adventure (and he doubted it), than a bottle or so of bad liquor and a jealous lover, as *Madame* openly charged.

Just beyond the granite monument at Les Tilleuls corner, Swift drew rein on the pretext of filling his pipe. A hundred yards distant some youngsters were kite-flying. Barring them, the road was deserted.

Swift hopped from the cart. "Come on, Jean," he called. "I'm looking for a soldier, *un soldat Anglais*," he added as he noted Stacquet's bewildered look. "Yes—a soldier who is every bit as alive as you or I. Very much alive," he laughed, fingering the scalp wound that had been administered but recently.

Stacquet held up his hands in derision. "English soldiers gone—*tout fini*—a long time," he said, grinning.

"That's what I thought," declared Swift, "but there's one of them here yet and he's somewhere round these diggings." Wherewith he proceeded to pour his story into the receptive ears of the Frenchman, who several times during the narrative gazed heavenward and crossed himself most solemnly.

Then they tethered the mule to a second-growth poplar out of the path of Lens-bound motors and struck off across the waste. Past debris of war, defying description, they made their way, till with an exultant cry Swift waved the Frenchman to his side.

Stacquet, hurrying up, found his traveler-guest on his knees. "Here it is—the identical cross—see the wording!" cried Swift. "GORD—that was the inscription—I'm positive. Now let's have a look around."

But the look around brought no further results. After the most careful search Swift was ready to admit that the spot looked as if it had not

been visited for ages. Not a single footprint could be found. Swift wondered if it had rained any more during the early morning—if a heavy downpour could have obliterated all such prints. The more he looked the more exasperated he grew until finally with a snarl of "I'm a doggone fool—let's get out," he turned away. "But that's the same cross," he flung back at Jean, whose eyes were fixed in incredulity and who was suggestively tapping his shaven pate with a dirty finger.

The ride back to the estaminet was uneventful. Swift, hunched up in the narrow seat of the cart, rubbing elbows with Jean, rapidly reviewed the situation. Regardless of what might or might not have occurred, the cross-roads would soon consider him fit for the madhouse. He wondered just how short of the mark they were, for he had actually begun to doubt his own powers of reasoning.

All of a sudden there was communicated to his brain a possible explanation of the rôle he had played—if he had played a rôle—in the whole uncanny mess.

"Jean," he asked eagerly, "is there an English doctor in Arras, by any chance? If there is—I think I'd better look him up at once."

But Jean had turned a deaf ear to the inquiry and was hammering his mule with a rawhide, apparently wanting to get home with the least possible delay. He acted like one spiritually afraid.

"Whack-whack" went the rawhide, and "clatter-clatter" went the cart wheels over the cobbled road.

4

THAT night Swift met the Ancart woman.

He was unaware of her approach till she had whispered directly behind him.

"You are interested in me, *M'sieu!*"

Swift was not thrown off his guard. Calmly he pushed his chair back and turned to meet a pair of attractive eyes from whose depth seemed to flash many tiny darts of animosity.

"Why—interested?" he demanded bluntly.

"You have been watching me for the last half hour. *M'sieu*—in fact since I entered the place—that is why, *M'sieu*."

"Can I not watch whom I wish?" said Swift, quietly studying the face that looked into his. He was not to be outscored in any duel of badinage—not he. "But to be frank, *Madame*—I presume you are the lovely *Madame Ancart*—I was more interested in your husband than you."

The girl—for she was little more than a girl—flushed warmly, curtsied, replied with a gay little toss of her head.

"You can be complimentary, *M'sieu*. I apologize—but I regret, nevertheless, your interest was not for me."

"But I am interested," protested Swift, catching at the lace scarf trailing from her trim shoulders. The girl had been about to move away. Now she hesitated, then as the babble of the *estaminet* rose to a still higher pitch, seated herself on the arm of his chair.

"But why interested in my husband?" she persisted.

"Passing fancy—nothing more," said Swift. "Reminded me of someone I'd met before. I guess."

Ever since the couple had crossed the *Stacquet* threshold Swift had endeavored to smother curiosity that had filled his thoughts with his first glimpse of the woman's husband.

Of her, during his two weeks' stay at the crossroads, he had learned considerable; of him, virtually nothing. Apparently he figured but little in the life of the community. She had

come up from Boulogne early the past spring, bringing her invalid husband with her. The sea air, at Boulogne, she had been told, was not suited to his run-down state of health. A drier climate was preferred. The Vimy Ridge country was quite attractive. She would stay for the summer, perhaps. And they had stayed on.

"No pretty women here, you say," *Stacquet* had once derided an assertion from Swift. "Just wait, *M'sieu*, till you see *Denise Ancart*."

And now on seeing this *Ancart* woman for the first time Swift was willing to acknowledge that *Jean* had been right. He would even go farther. The Frenchman had not half done her justice. She was beautiful—beautiful beyond words.

Swift's eyes, roaming about the room, fell upon the huddled figure by the door. The long gray coat and soiled *képi* but added to the man's air of absolute dejection. Nodding his way, Swift said:

"Tell me about your husband, *Madame*."

"It was Verdun. *M'sieu*," she answered wearily.

"Bad?"

"His hearing. *M'sieu*—and his speech—"

The woman shivered. Swift's big hand crept to hers, tenderly.

"Poor fellow," he said, huskily. "You do need sympathy, little woman."

"*C'est la guerre*," she said, rising to her feet, and offering a slim, cool hand. "We must be leaving, *M'sieu*."

"So soon? The night is still early—and you live but across the way." Swift was actually sorry to see her go.

"*Oui, M'sieu*, *Émile* is growing restless I fear—it is a late hour for *Émile*."

What Swift had intended to say was cut short by sounds of a commo-

tion. He came to life in time to see Madame Ancart dart from him and thread her way among the roisterers. Swift hoped he might be of some assistance. Struggling, shoving, he elbowed a passage to her side. He found her tugging vainly at her husband's coat. Her husband, backed against the wall, was facing two angry countrymen. Every vestige of depression had fled his appearance. He stood erect, alert, in a position of defense, a good six feet of brawn and muscle. God! what a shame, thought Swift. Such perfect physique to have been blasted by war!

As rapidly as the alteration had flared up it died out. It had occupied no more than a minute, perhaps, but in that brief time Swift's keen gaze had focused on the maimed chap's attitude of defense.

"Regular professional crouch," he remarked to himself. "No French *savate* artist ever taught Ancart that—not by a long shot. You'd have thought he was just whetting for a scrap, crippled as he was. Believe me, there's something mighty peculiar about that fellow, after all. Funny no one knows a thing about him."

Later, Jean Stacquet laughed Swift's deductions to scorn.

"*M'sieu*," he chided, "has not quite recovered from the little 'zip' he get on the head the first night he come to the crossroads. You think Ancart fooling, eh? *Non, non—Philippe*, there" (he indicated a swarthy fellow whom Swift already knew to be a liar of the first magnitude) "served with Ancart in the *chasseurs*. He know him well. But, *M'sieu*, you play with fire when you play with Denise Ancart. The people see you tonight with her—they do not like anyone to take advantage of an unfortunate *poilu* like *Émile*. I would warn you, *M'sieu*."

SWIFT had removed his boots.

His feet made little noise as he climbed the steps, one by one, to their sleeping quarters. The door at the foot of the stairs, whose bulky but ineffective lock he had jimmied, remained open as an aid to retreat should such be necessary.

Off in the distance a dog yapped mournfully, one, twice, was silent. A creepy feeling ran the length of Swift's spine and for a long while he halted there on the stairs where the cur's ominous baying had reached his ears. Then he resumed his climb, blessing his lucky stars when his feet encountered heavy, woolly matting on the landing. The matting would facilitate his approach, but even then his night's job was cut out for him, for by no means was it a delectable mission—that on which he was engaged.

His breathing suppressed, Swift crawled his way, bit by bit, to their door. Ear lowered to the keyhole, he listened attentively. Gradually the drone of conversation within assumed definite and intelligent proportions. Madame Ancart was saying:

"I have had enough of this nonsense." Her words dripped sting. "You must be more cautious henceforth. Or do you wish me to inform? You realize, I suppose, it would be hard for you at this late date to satisfy any investigator? To prove that you did not leave your countrymen intentionally?"

"And the penalty for desertion—at least I have been given to understand—is extremely severe, even with your stupid English authorities."

"But, Denise!" The plaintive whimper, Swift fancied, must have issued from the lips of the deaf and dumb *Émile*. "I should go tonight—I should—"

"*Oui*—you will go—go to your bed," was the reply. Swift heard the man shuffle along the floor within

a few feet of where he crouched. He heard her say:

"And remove that ridiculous uniform. Have I not many times forbidden you to wear it? Have I not ever been patient with you? Did I not bring you here to satisfy your whims? Have you played fair with me? Hardly. Twice this month you have strayed away at night. The ridge is no place for one in your condition, alone. Fortunately I overtook you in time this evening."

"But he is calling—calling for me out there—don't you hear him calling?"

"That's enough, I say. Take off those garments—you will burn them tomorrow. How I hate those English rags anyway!"

"Hate them?"

"*Oui*. Despise them. See—I spit on them. Have you never guessed? Do you think for one minute I took you in to live with me—you, a crazy man—for such love as you could give me? Eda Reinhardt has been too long accustomed to the costliest and finest to care for one of your country. *Gott strafe England!*"

Swift heard the woman laugh contemptuously.

"Imbecile," she continued, "you have kept me very much amused—very! Did you not know that all the time I made love to you, I picked from you the information so valued by our intelligence? You never dreamed your little Denise so clever? *Non!* You never knew Berlin could pay big money to clever little French girls like Eda Reinhardt? *Non!* Do not look so surprized—so hurt—*mon mari*. There is no need for worry concerning me. Next week I return to Berlin. Once the French government would have paid big rewards for Eda's head, but she slipped them by. The war is long passed now, and they have forgotten. Three years I have waited to make sure—that they

might not trip me up. Next week I go back to my own people."

"Oh, my God!" rang Emile's cry.

Suddenly it all came back to Swift, listening by the door. Could this man within be his challenger chap? His would-be murderer of a fortnight back? Was it possible?

The ring of some delicate metal against glass.

"No threats, Emile,—roll up your sleeve," Swift heard the woman command. "You are upset again tonight. Forget that dead man of yours. This will help you to forget. This will take the pain from your head—it is good for you."

"I will not have it," came the refusal.

"Do as I say. Bare your arm."

Swift altered his position slightly; squirmed down, cautiously, until his eye at the keyhole commanded partial observation of the scene being enacted within. What he glimpsed stirred his indignation to the full. His muscles tightened, it seemed, to a point nigh breaking.

He watched the wreck of a man—Ancart, dressed fully in once-familiar khaki—his midnight man of the battle wastes—the identical person (he was certain of it)—extend his arms in a helpless manner. He saw Madame Ancart, pale and hard-eyed with suppressed anger, bend over the fellow where he reclined on a small couch, and work deftly with a tiny syringe. He saw, almost felt, the hypodermic needle plunged into naked flesh. He heard the heavy breathing of the unwilling patient; saw the man's chin drop lower and lower as his chest heaved less and less; saw the gaunt frame writhe slightly, then relax.

"The last tablet—I must be careful from now on," he heard the woman say pitilessly.

"You're damned right you must!" Swift heard himself shout. His voice rang through and through the build-

ing and echoed from the house-walls on the street without.

"Oh you she-devil—I'll make you settle for this!" he roared, grabbing the knob and throwing all his weight against the door. "I'm coming in!" he shouted at the top of his lungs. "I'm—coming—"

6

SOME terrific pressure was holding him down; was crushing the life from him. Could he throw it off? Fight—fight—there he was slipping from the coils—one last lunge—he was free—free—*smash!*

Swift's head came in violent contact with a solid bit of masonry. Something snapped within him, leaving him as weak as a kitten. He found himself staring at a rude doorknob about which his hands were clenched in a grip unbreakable.

Why—where was he?

Into whose abode had his somnambulism carried him this time? Why had he trusted that Arras doctor who had assured him that return to him at middle age of the unfortunate ailment of his youth was out of the question, that the idea was absurd?

But it was too late now.

"I'll have to see the blamed business through," he said to himself. "Let me in there—let me in there! I demand it!" he blustered, pummeling the door with his fists.

A catlike step in his rear. Swift swung round quickly to confront a gleaming bull's eye lantern and behind it the sturdy figure of a gendarme.

"I thought I heard a cry—then I found the house open," explained the latter. "and suspected something might be out of place."

"And just in time," a cool voice interpolated. The door had opened slightly, unobserved. The face of the Ancart woman peered from the aperture. "It isn't often," she said,

"that the privacy of my dwelling is disturbed by such noisy wretches."

"You're not putting anything over on me," Swift interposed. "She's killing a man in there," he declared, turning to the officer.

"I have no idea why he should select this place to rob," calmly returned the woman. "We are poor, as you know."

"Rubbish," snorted Swift. He thrust one arm between the door and the jamb and catapulted himself past the woman into the room. In a far corner stood a bed, and to all appearances sleeping peacefully on it, stretched Emile, her husband. He was undressed. Then for the first time Swift noticed that *Madame* was clad but lightly too.

Had his devilish sleep-walking played hob with him again? If so what a ridiculous situation in which to be discovered! What would he do? What could he do?

Up the stairs stamped a clump of excited villagers. They, too, they said, had heard cries. As Swift debated his plans, his brain seeking here and there for some loophole of inspiration, he suddenly spotted one of Ancart's arms protruding from beneath the bed clothing. He was over it in an instant. From the near-by table he caught up the lamp. He examined the flesh closely. Those little punctures—could they be—?

Glancing around, he noted the tremor at the woman's throat, the slight curling back of her lips.

A sweep of the gendarme's arm hurled him speechless against the wall.

"Well, officer," Madame Ancart diffidently remarked, again mistress of herself, "I detest notoriety but I can not remain here in the cold any longer. I see I have to explain and I shall do so. M'sieu Swift, I regret to say, entered this house tonight, for no other reason, I can gather, than to

molest me. Since we first met he has ever troubled me. At the estaminet, but recently, he made passionate love to me—threatened me, unless—”

“*Madame* speaks the truth,” enjoined one of the audience. “I happened to be at Stacquet’s that evening.” Swift recognized the impossible Philippe as the damaging witness.

“You liar!” he breathed intensely.

“See that,” declared the woman. “How long, officer, need we put up with such insults?”

A murmur of strong disapproval welled up from the spectators. Various suggestions were advanced. “Get him off quickly,” appeared to be the consensus. Swift wondered if he could make a break for it, but the gendarme’s burly figure completely blocked the stairway.

“How long will it take you to pack up?” asked the limb of the law, finally. Swift did not reply. “Well—there’s a train leaves Aubigny at 9 in the morning. I’ll have Stacquet drive you over—if he will. You had better take that train.”

Swift shot a last glance at the recumbent form of Ancart and went wearily down the stairs.

7

THE first gray streaks of dawn were faintly showing. Swift moved uneasily in the cart. Some thought was stirring deep within him, pleading for utterance.

Far-away strains of music reached his ears. Soft and mellow was the voice. That voice again—or was it? They were just opposite the Ancart home.

. when the lights are low,
And the flickering shadows

Swift stared hard at the top-story window of the place where something wily moved behind the stained

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glass; seemed to be signaling him. By heavens! Someone *was* singing there. That was where the voice came from. It was the crazy chap.

“They’re not going to pull the wool over my eyes any longer,” raged Swift. “Stop this blasted wagon—”

Shuddering, Swift opened his eyes and found Stacquet clutching his arm in a viselike grip. The Frenchman gave him a bad look.

“Next time,” he admonished, “I won’t catch you. Twice since we start I stop you from falling out on to the road. Be patient till you reach the station. You may sleep there as you will.”

NOTE. — The following excerpt from *The Warrior* was clipped since the receipt of Mr. Oliver’s manuscript:

In the spring of 1917, somewhere in France, Private James White, Canadian Infantry, was reported wounded. Immediately thereafter his name vanished from the records, and in spite of a strenuous search instituted by his father, Mr. William White, of Montreal, which was ably seconded by British and French authorities, his disappearance remained an absolute mystery until recently.

A cable from White’s parents, now in France, announces the discovery of their son’s remains.

Official records always had it that Private John Gordie, an intimate friend of White, was killed at the same time White received his wounds. Acting on the theory that some mistake had been made, the latter’s father, with the consent of the Graves and Burial Commission, had the supposed Gordie body exhumed. There was no difficulty in identifying the body as that of Private James White.

It will be recalled that White and Gordie attended the same school, enlisted together, went to France with the same unit and fell in the same engagement.

But the recent identification of White’s body merely shifts the mystery to young Gordie, who, it now appears, was the man to go down the line a casualty, and who figured in the derailment of the hospital train on the outskirts of the city of Boulogne. From that moment on, all his movements are lost.