

Without the Blue



by Johnston McCulley

I.

DOWN on the street again, Jimmie Brooks stood for a few minutes at the curb and strove to control his emotions. Being a secret service operative, and a good one, he knew that anger netted a man nothing in the way of success; and just now Jimmie Brooks was angry.

He couldn't blame the chief, he told himself. Washington was burning up the wires telling the chief just what it thought of him and the men who looked to him for orders. This branch of the secret service that had its headquarters in an unpretentious little office in an old office building in "a Pacific port" was failing to make the good record it should. More than that, it was fast gaining with the department heads a reputation that was far from enviable.

A short distance from the city was a huge cantonment where the young men of America learned to be soldiers; and as their training was finished they were moved toward the Atlantic—and France. It was necessary, of course, to keep all troop movements secret. There lurked, here and there, alien fiends who resorted to dynamite and torn and twisted bridges and demolished tracks to prevent regiments being transported safely and with

speed. That strong men died among twisted steel and splintered wood instead of dying from bullet wounds with their faces toward the enemy made small difference to the plotters.

Three times within as many weeks troop trains had been wrecked within a few hours after leaving the cantonment. Information regarding the movements of the trains was being conveyed to the enemy. In the offices of the great railroad company that had charge of troop transportation every man was being watched. Men suspected of being enemy spies—and women, too—were shadowed constantly. Yet the knowledge got out with disastrous results.

Jimmie Brooks had just come from the dingy office where the division chief had his desk. He had been the recipient of a tirade. It was not the usual tirade of a disgusted man. The chief had a way of speaking in a low, even voice that could be scathingly sarcastic. His words seemed to burn into a man's brain. And Jimmie Brooks, for once had lost control of himself, had become angry.

Now he stood at the curb and fought for self-control. The chief had been no more than just, he knew. A dozen good men worked out of that office, specializing on the case, in addition to ordinary operatives who shadowed those under suspicion. And yet they had not

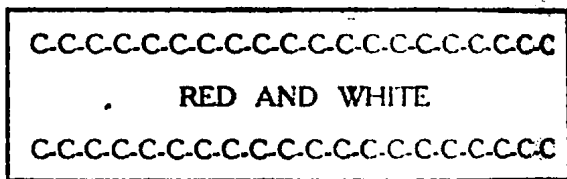
found the slightest clue to the guilty persons.

"You've got to stop it!" the chief had said to Jimmie Brooks and some of the others. "Each of you work independently for a time. It's up to you men. Your failure is causing good boys to go down to death in railroad wrecks, and it is delaying the government's plans. Get out of here—and get results!"

Jimmie Brooks shrugged his shoulders and turned up the street. The factory whistles were screeching out the midday hour. Brooks turned into a side street and walked rapidly in the direction of a small café where he took his meals.

"Get results! Get results!" rang in his brain. He admitted to himself that he didn't know which way to turn to get results. Every man who could know the orders for troop movements was being watched. The railroad men, even officers at the army post, were under suspicion. And there was not the slightest clue.

At the curb before the little café Brooks paused a moment to let the throng pass before he cut across the walk and entered. A small piece of cardboard fluttered lazily from a window above struck the brim of Brooks's hat and dropped to his shoulder. Brooks caught it and favored it with a glance. It was a peculiar sort of thing—some advertising dodge, he supposed.



Brooks tossed the bit of cardboard aside and went on into the little café. He nodded to the cashier, a young woman he admired in a way, and sat down at a table near the window. Having given his order he glanced out at the walk and the passing throng.

From the main entrance of the building adjoining the café there darted a hatless, breathless man, who looked to be about forty-five. He was short, heavily built, and gave a suggestion of great strength. He stood just in front of the café window and glanced about the walk; then suddenly darted forward, disregarding the rights of pedestrians, stooped and picked up the bit of cardboard Brooks had read and dropped. There was a look of keen satisfaction on the man's face as he turned and hurried into the entrance again.

"Who is the excited gent?" Brooks asked the cashier carelessly, turning his head and looking up at her.

"Freak!" she explained, reaching for a fresh stick of chewing gum. "Name's Professor Kenderdine. Eats here now and then. And he's fussy about his grub. What he's professor of I don't know. Lives in a suite of rooms up-stairs. Looks like a clairvoyant, or some sort of crook. Professor of gettin' the dough without workin', I suppose. Funny what grafts get by in this burg!"

"It is at that," Brooks assented, and gave his attention to his meal.

But he couldn't forget the bit of cardboard and the fact that the "professor" had hurried out bareheaded to regain it.

"Red and white; eh?" he mused. "Tain't right. Red and white without the blue isn't exactly proper in this day and age. Like a man showing only half his colors! Huh!"

He didn't enjoy that luncheon. The sarcastic words of the chief had disturbed him greatly, and he still was a bit angry. He paid his check, joked a moment with the pretty cashier, and went out upon the street.

He walked rapidly, his head bent slightly, intending to go to the offices of the railroad company and search for the elusive clue. At the first corner he collided with a young woman.

Brooks generally was a cool and calm man, but now he was the victim of confusion.

Going carelessly around the city streets and bumping into young women—especially pretty young women—wasn't exactly the proper thing. He felt sure it wasn't being done this season.

He stammered his embarrassed apologies, and saw that the young woman was smiling.

"I—er—I was thinking," he mentioned.

"I'm glad some men take time to think," she replied, dimpling. "It is all right, I assure you."

"But you must think me—confound it!—you must think I'm a sort of—er—"

"Roughneck?" she suggested.

"Er—yes!"

Brooks had regained his composure, only to have it shaken again. On the left lapel of her coat the young woman wore two carnations—one red and one white. Red and white again—without the blue!

"Er—you've lost one of your colors," Brooks said, trying to be pleasant.

"I beg pardon?"

"Ought to have a blue carnation too—" he said.

"Oh! That isn't possible, I'm afraid. But it is a good suggestion. After this I'll put a tiny bow of blue ribbon with them."

She smiled at Jimmie Brooks again and walked on down the street. Jimmie Brooks knew that young women usually did not wear flowers in just that manner. Why only two carnations, and why were they pinned to the lapel of her coat? Was there any connection between the red and white carnations and the card that had dropped on his hat and bore the words "Red and white"?

"I'll be looking for a clue in the gutter next!" Brooks muttered to himself in huge disgust. "If we don't solve this little mystery pretty soon I'll be a candidate for a sanatorium!"

A hand fell upon his shoulder. He whirled around to face a city detective he knew.

"What's the idea, Jimmie," the detective

asked, "going around assaulting young women these days? I saw you. Why didn't you knock her down and walk over her—and be done with it? Or is it just a way you have of making an acquaintance?"

"Accident! Was thinking!" Jimmie explained.

"Don't try to flirt with that young beauty, Jimmie. That girl hasn't any time to waste. Some beauty, eh? And she's a mighty good girl. Supports a mother and kid brother."

"Works, eh?"

"You bet she does! Gets about a hundred and twenty-five a month at that. She is private secretary to Hamlin, traffic manager for the X. Z. and Y."

"She—what?" Brooks asked.

"Private secretary to Hamlin. Got more brains than he has, I guess. Plucky little girl! Sends her brother to school and keeps her mother in a dandy little flat."

"Must be a good girl," Brooks admitted. "See you again, Joe. I'm in a hurry now."

"On your way?" the detective said, laughing; and they separated.

Jimmie Brooks was thinking in earnest now. Private secretary to Hamlin, traffic director of the railroad that moved the troops! And she wore red and white carnations!

II

IT was about seven o'clock that evening when Jimmie Brooks entered the little café again—this time for dinner.

He had spent an afternoon of futile endeavor. He had made a nuisance of himself around the railroad offices, and had discovered nothing worthy of notice. He had met the young woman again, had learned that her name was Betty Burns, and had apologized for about the tenth time for the collision of the noon hour.

Across the street from the little café was a drug store, and in its window an electric

display sign alternately flashed a red and white light. Jimmie Brooks started when he saw it; and then told himself that he was all sorts of a fool. That sign had been there for a year, at least, and probably for longer than that. He had watched it scores of times while sitting in the little café and waiting for food to be carried to him. There was nothing particularly attractive about the sign, except perhaps to a stranger.

It appeared that the waiter was unusually slow to-night, and Brooks spent the time watching the street. He was sitting in his usual place, near the cashier's cage, but she was busy checking up accounts and Brooks did not bother her with conversation.

And then he saw the professor again. Kenderdine passed before the window and turned in at the entrance of the building. And almost at the same moment Brooks saw Hamlin, traffic manager.

Brooks suddenly was alert. Hamlin was across the street. At this hour the man should have been in his pretentious home eating his dinner. The traffic manager stopped before the drug-store and inspected some Kodak supplies in the window. Presently he entered the store.

Brooks saw him engage the proprietor, Baker, in conversation. It appeared that the two men were well acquainted. Two or three customers who were in the store completed their purchases and left. Baker and Hamlin walked toward the rear end of the establishment, where the store owner took down something from a shelf, wrapped it up, handed it to the traffic manager and rang up the sale on the cash-register.

Nothing particularly suspicious in that, Brooks thought. Yet he continued to watch even after his dinner had been placed before him. And suddenly he saw Hamlin walk around behind the prescription-case.

Brooks ate dinner leisurely, yet watching the drug-store continually meanwhile. Half an hour passed and Hamlin did not emerge.

Something seemed to attract Brooks's attention to the electric display light again. And then he forgot his dessert and bent forward in his chair, watching intently.

For the electric sign was not working in the usual manner. There came no longer alternate flashes of red and white. At times there would be several red flashes in succession, then several white ones, and now and then a pause when the sign flashed neither red nor white.

"Ah! A little more red and white—without the blue!" Brooks muttered. "I'll just make little note of this!"

Pencil and note-book came from his pocket. The sign across the street was dark for a time, and then the flashes began again. If it was a message, Jimmie Brooks had lost a considerable part of it, but perhaps he could catch enough yet to give him an inkling of its import.

He wrote rapidly in the note-book, making a check for a red flash and a cross for a white one, in indicating the pauses. This is what he got:

Red, red, red. Red. Red, red, red, white. Red. White, red, white, white. Red, red. Red, white, red, red. Red. Red, red, red, red, red. Red, white, red, red. Red, white. White, red. White, red, red. White. Red, white, white. Red. Red, white, red. red. Red, red, red, white. Red. White. White, white, white. White, red. Red, red. White, white, red. Red, red, red. White.

Jimmie Brooks scarcely spoke to the cashier when he paid his check, which surprised that young woman considerably. He hurried up the street to his rooms, dashed to the desk, sat down before it, and contemplated the note-book.

After a quarter of an hour of thought, Brooks reached for a United States Army signal-book. He turned to the Morse code. An attempt to make sense of the red and white syllables he had written failed. Here and there would be a letter that ruined what otherwise

might have been a perfectly good word.

Then he turned to the Continental code. There is a small difference between the two codes, but Brooks found enough to make a message where there had been nonsense before. Three minutes later Brooks closed the signal-book and got up from the desk.

At last he had it. From those peculiar flashes of red and white in the window of the drug-store he had deciphered in the Continental code a message of five words. The red represented a dot and the white a dash. It read:

Seven Mile Island twelve to-night.

Jimmie Brooks felt a thrill as he read the message, and he fumed because of the part of it that he had lost. He knew Seven Mile Island well. It was down the river from the sea about the distance that gave it its name. There were only two ways of reaching it, by water direct and by taking a trolley-car to a way station and crossing from there in a rowboat.

The island itself was very small. Near the south end of it, about a hundred yards from the river and practically hidden from view by a thick growth of large trees, stood an old cabin. Formerly it had been occupied by an old fisherman. But it had been vacant now for several years, the doors and the windows had been removed, and the floor was rotten with age.

Brooks thought for a time of the island as he knew it, and then read the message again. A clock near by struck the hour of nine. On the street below newsboys were crying extras. He could hear the words:

“Another troop-train wrecked! Extra!”

Brooks set his lips in a thin, straight line, put the note-book and message in his pocket, and went out. Seven Mile Island at midnight, eh? Well, he'd be there! Possibly there was nothing to it, since he had not got the first part of the message, but he would have to find out.

Before a newspaper office he glanced at the bulletin-board. The troop-train had plunged through a bridge that had had a span blown out a few minutes before, a message stated. Young men in the khaki of their country had met death there, and others had suffered injuries.

“Like to get my hands on the throat of the fiend that did that!” an aged man near Jimmie was muttering. “They don't give the boys a chance! It's worse than shootin' them from the dark! Why don't the government do something?”

That was the key-note—the government should do something about it. The public trusted the government. No matter how difficult the task, the public expected the government to protect its soldiers from such fiendish work as this. And Jimmie Brooks was a part of the government!

He glanced over the other bulletins, and then went on down the street. He boarded a trolley-car and set on the rear end in the semidarkness and smoked. The car carried him through the retail district, through the residence section, and out along the broad river.

He could see lights twinkling on moored ships. He saw river packets going toward the city. Now and then, as the car stopped at way stations, he could hear the wash of the water upon the shore. And always he heard the old man's question: “Why don't the government do something?”

He left the car at the proper station and walked down toward the river. Heavy clouds obscured the moon and stars; and a drizzle of rain was falling. It was a perfect night, Brooks thought, for plots and plotters.

He used his electric torch when he reached the edge of the water, and presently discovered an old skiff pulled up on the ground. Two splintered oars were near it, wedged between two rocks. That suited Jimmie Brooks perfectly; he didn't want to

attract attention by communicating with some fisherman and renting a boat. Jimmie Brooks seized the craft.

Slowly and carefully he rowed across the turbulent river, flinching now and then because the rusty oar-locks squeaked, stopping now and then to listen. He reached the island, and landed a couple of hundred yards above the old cabin, pulled the boat out of the water, and hid it among the tall weeds that lined the shore. Then he crept through the weeds and thick brush, and made his way toward the distant shack.

III.

IN former days a path had run from the cabin to a tiny dock, but now the path was almost overgrown with weeds and brush. The dock was still there, but half the boards in its flooring had rotted away.

Brooks investigated the path carefully, and decided that it had been used recently. He listened for a time in the vicinity of the cabin, and, convinced that no one was there, entered and flashed the torch. The cabin had been swept and the walls partially cleaned. In one corner of it was an old table, and a couple of boxes that were used as chairs. The cabin, it was evident, had been used within the last few days.

Brooks was not certain that those who visited Seven Mile Island this night would go to the cabin. So he made his way down to the river again and prepared to hide in the brush near the dock in case any one came. It was only eleven o'clock; he had an hour to wait.

To his ears came the faint squeaking of oar-locks. Nearer came the sound, until Brooks was assured that a boat was approaching the island. Crouching in the brush, he waited, wishing that the moon would come from behind the clouds to shed some light on the river. He had only the sound of the squeaking oar-locks by which to tell in what

direction the boat was being moved.

Across the river a trolley car rounded a curve. For an instant its headlight was reflected on the surface of the water, making a path of brilliance toward the island, cresting the tiny waves with golden light. In this glow, for just a moment, Brooks saw a rowboat. A girl was at the oars.

Then the light was whirled away, and the surface of the stream was in darkness again. The squeaking of the oar-locks had stopped. Brooks imagined that the girl at the oars had been frightened when the streak of light revealed her.

Presently he heard the squeaking again and he could make out that the boat was being rowed slowly toward the island. It did not approach the little dock. Thirty yards to one side it was landed and drawn up on the beach. Brooks was within twenty feet of the girl when she left the edge of the water and started through the weeds toward the cabin.

He had guessed that the girl was Betty Burns, Hamlin's secretary. He wondered at her being mixed up in such a business, and told himself that promised reward supplied the answer. The girl had worked hard; she had a mother and brother to support. Perhaps Hamlin, or somebody else, had whispered that money could be obtained easily, and that it would purchase many things that had been denied her.

Brooks liked to think that the girl did not realize just what she was doing, or that she was an innocent girl in the hands of scoundrels. But she was there, at almost midnight, and alone. Brooks decided to watch, her for a time before making his presence known.

She made little noise as she walked slowly toward the cabin, and Jimmie Brooks made less. She found the path in time, and followed that, stopping now and then as though to listen. Once she flashed a pocket-torch, and Brooks was almost discovered.

He expected her to enter the cabin, and wait for the person who was to come at midnight, and he was somewhat surprised when she went to one side of it and crouched down in the brush. Her attitude told Jimmie Brooks that, like himself, she was there to watch and overhear—for what purpose, he could not guess.

She made not a particle of noise now, and Brooks was afraid to leave her then and return to the dock, afraid that his departure would not be silent, and that she would become aware of his presence. For almost half an hour they remained within thirty feet of each other, neither moving.

Then there came from the river the soft purring of a motor-boat. The purring stopped; and a little later a man slipped up the pathway. He went directly to the cabin, flashed a torch, and then lighted a candle.

“He’s got his nerve with him!” Brooks growled to himself. “I wish that girl would make a move. I want to get nearer and take a look at the latest arrival.”

His wish was granted immediately. The girl stole out to the path and hurried along it. Jimmie Brooks could not see her, but he could bear her light footsteps. He did not know just what to expect. Perhaps, after all, Miss Betty Burns had a rendezvous with the man in the cabin, and had been awaiting his arrival in the brush as a matter of precaution.

But the girl did not enter the cabin. Brooks saw her walk through the faint streak of light the candle made and approach one of the open windows. She peered inside, and Brooks got a fleeting view of her face. It was Betty Burns. And after she had glanced through the window, she stepped back to the brush and crouched at the edge of it again.

Brooks crept forward silently and attained a position where he could look through the doorway and into the cabin. The man sitting on one of the boxes beside the table was Hamlin, the traffic manager. One glance

Brooks gave him and then slipped away again. Experience told him there would be no satisfactory result if he invaded that cabin now and demanded what Hamlin was doing there. He had no conclusive evidence, merely a mass of conjectures. And such an action would probably mean that the man for whom the flashing light message had been intended would scent trouble and fail to appear. It was Brooks’s part to wait and observe.

In the brush again he made his way silently, and foot by foot, toward Betty Burns. There was some wind now, and the brush and trees rattled considerably, enough to cover the sounds of his approach. When he was so close that he could hear her breathing, he stopped. He could see nothing, but he sensed that he could touch her by extending an arm at its full length.

He listened for the sound of another boat’s approach, but heard nothing. Over across the river, some clock struck the hour of twelve, and Jimmie Brooks counted the soft strokes. Then he heard a man’s steps on the twigs which covered the path.

The latest arrival went directly to the cabin and stopped at the door. Brooks saw him plainly; he was Professor Kenderdine, who had a suite of rooms above the little café.

“Fool!” he heard Kenderdine hiss, “Why the light?”

“Oh, I say, Kenderdine—”

“And no names! Must you always be a fool?”

“I’m new at this business,” Hamlin said.

“A baby could tell that, my friend.”

“And I don’t like it!”

“But you like the money, eh? You play at buying stock and being a lamb, and your wife goes into society, and your railroad salary will not stretch, eh? And so, when a certain old professor comes along and offers some easy money—”

“No need to go into details!” Hamlin snapped. “Let’s get down to business.”

"You must be careful how you flash word for me to meet you here," Kenderdine said. "I was half-minded not to come tonight. We cannot risk a meeting every few minutes. It is money, I suppose?"

"Yes."

"You have it coming to you, of course, and I stand ready to pay it. But we must be careful, my friend. There is not a breath of suspicion now blowing upon either of us. If that breath comes—puff! Jail—or worse!"

"Well, don't talk about it!"

"It is not a pleasant prospect, eh? Remember that—and use some precautions. Have you some more information for me this evening—some that you did not flash from the little drug-store window-lamp?"

"Yes. Three sections start Tuesday, the first at noon, one at one and one at two o'clock."

"Um! Noon, eh? That will mean that we must do our work some miles from here."

"I'll let you know if the trains are to be held up during the afternoon. There may be some change in plans. The government men are frantic."

"Do you dislike this work, my friend?" Kenderdine asked.

"Do you?" Hamlin countered.

"Ah! I am working for my country; you are working against yours! There is a world of difference."

"In other words, you may buy me, but you do not respect me."

"Can one respect a traitor?"

"You are but a spy!"

"Which is much better than being a traitor, though death is the lot of both—if caught. But such talk gets us nowhere, sir. Each of us has his aims and must deal with his own conscience. You want money? Very good! I have another five thousand with me to-night."

"Can't you make it ten?"

"I fancy not, my friend."

"I have expenses, you know. A part of

mine goes to—er—our friend who makes the flash-lamp possible."

"That is your business," Kenderdine said. "It was a part of our bargain that you find a safe way to convey the information to me."

"And how do you pass it on?" Hamlin asked. "That is what surprises me. One of those trains started early in the morning and was wrecked at night five hundred miles away. And you don't dare use the telegraph!"

"I have little ways of my own, and clever men to help me. It pays to be clever, my friend. And before we go further, I must be assured of your own cleverness. I cannot afford to have suspicion attach to me through some careless act of yours. This little matter is but one of many I have in hand for my country. I am too valuable to be—er—put out of the way by your government."

"I guess I am clever enough." Hamlin snarled. "I'm not liable to make a mistake, when it would mean disaster to me as well as to you. Give me the five thousand and let me get back to the city."

"Very well!"

Kenderdine took a packet from his pocket and placed it in Hamlin's hands.

"Try to think of some better way of getting the money," Kenderdine said. "This is too risky. We might meet here two times with safety, and the third time might be disastrous."

Brooks watched Hamlin put the packet of money into an inside pocket and button his coat. He knew that Betty Burns was still within a few feet of him, and wondered what her share in this was to be. And then he heard the brush crack and knew that she had moved.

Had he known the truth then he would have made an effort to stop her, but he did not know. The girl sprang to her feet before him and darted to the door of the cabin. Brooks, from the middle of the path, saw her stop in the doorway, and heard the exclamations of the men she faced.

"So this is the way of it!" Brooks heard

her say.

IV.

KENDERDINE was the first of the men to speak.

"Who is this girl?" he demanded of Hamlin.

"She—she is Miss Burns."

"The one to whom the cards have been sent?"

"Yes."

"And what does her presence here mean?"

"I—I do not know," Hamlin gasped.

Kenderdine faced the girl.

"What are you doing here, young lady?" he demanded. "It is rather peculiar, is it not, for you to be in such a place after midnight?"

"Perhaps," she assented. "And is not what you are doing peculiar?"

"I fail to understand this situation," Kenderdine said, looking at Hamlin once more.

"The girl does not know," the traffic manager said in a low tone.

"Ah! Is that so, or is it possible you two are attempting what you Americans call the double-cross? I presume the young lady is after money, too? You Americans appear to have an abnormal appetite for money."

"But I do know!" Betty Burns cried. "I know that I have been made a tool by scoundrels. I know the horrible things you have been doing."

"Quiet, I beg of you!" Kenderdine commanded.

But his command fell upon deaf ears. Standing in the doorway, Betty Burns made a picture of defiance, with the candlelight playing over her pretty face, which now expressed anger and determination.

"I know you for spy and traitor!" she said. "I know that Mr. Hamlin has done the worst thing a man can do—he has been a foe to his own country, and has helped send brave men

to death. Oh, I know it all now!"

"Do you, then, know so much?" Kenderdine sneered.

"It seemed very simple when Mr. Hamlin spoke to me about it first. I would be working for my country, he said. Because of enemy spies, the news regarding the movement of troop-trains had to be carried in unusual ways. Only a few persons knew the truth, he said. And because I was his trusted private secretary. I was to help."

"And you did!" insinuated Kenderdine.

"I was merely to wear red and white carnations," she went on. "On certain days I would receive a card through the mail. It would have the words 'Red and White' printed on it, and below and above them a row of letters. On some days the letters would be 'C,' and on others 'M.' If the letter was 'C' I was to wear the carnations on my left lapel, if 'M,' on the right. And I had merely to go into a certain drug-store just after the noon hour and make a purchase, being sure to remain in the store for five or ten minutes. That was all. In some mysterious way a certain message would be forwarded."

"Very pretty!" Kenderdine commented.

"And I did it!" the girl went on. "I thought I was serving my country, helping protect our troops—and I was helping slay them! And my own big brother is in the army! He has been in the army for years—dear black sheep of the family that he is! He never sent us money, though I suppose he had little enough to spare. And we used to think he didn't amount to much. But since the war came we have been proud of him. He is in the army, a regular."

"Interesting!" Kenderdine sneered.

"How can you talk like that? Do you realize what you have been doing? A hundred men to-day, the papers say! And I have been helping!"

"I began to grow suspicious. It seemed that every troop-train the road handled was wrecked. And Mr. Hamlin began acting

peculiarly. I—I watched him. To-night I followed him. I saw him go to that drug-store. I waited for him to come out. And while I was waiting I noticed the red and white light in the window. I suppose I'd never have noticed it except for the red and white cards and carnations. I saw that it was flashing peculiarly. The rest was easy!"

"Easy?" Hamlin cried.

"My brother is in the signal corps— where my younger brother will be when he is old enough. I know both the Continental and Morse codes. I learned them from my brother once when he had a furlough and came home. And I kept brushed up on them after I began working for the railroad, Mr. Hamlin is responsible for that. When he engaged me he told me that I should interest myself in everything pertaining to railroading, if I wished to be advanced. So it didn't take me long to guess that the 'C' on the card meant Continental, and 'M' meant Morse, and that sometimes one code would be used and sometimes the other, as a matter of precaution."

"Ah!" said Kenderdine, and glanced at Hamlin.

"And I read the red and white dashes, and found that there was to be a meeting here to-night I read, too, while information was sent, that a train would be moved early in the morning. I knew what that meant—another wreck, more soldiers maimed and killed. And so I came here—"

"To get money?" Kenderdine insinuated.

"Money? You think I would take money?" she cried. "I came to learn the truth. And I have heard some, and guessed some. You mailed cards to me, and I wore carnations accordingly. I went into that drug-store, and somebody watching for me there knew whether to use Continental or Morse that night. I knew Mr. Hamlin could use the code, of course—he was a telegrapher once. And there must be somebody else, for some of

those messages were sent from the store window when Mr. Hamlin was not at the store. I can guess that he telephoned the information to somebody there. He didn't dare go too often himself. You all were so very careful to protect yourselves. And you made me your tool!"

"Well, what is to be the outcome?" Kenderdine asked "Let us have done with heroics and get down to business."

"She knows—she'll tell!" Hamlin gasped. His face was ashen, his hands trembling. "We'll go to jail!"

"To a firing squad, more than likely," Kenderdine admitted. "That is—if the knowledge is allowed to get out."

"You—what do you mean?" Hamlin asked

"Dangerous persons should be removed. Who is this girl? Is she so important that we must go to death rather than send her there?"

"You would commit murder?" Hamlin cried.

"I am working for my country. Even if I escaped, my flight would ruin many well-laid plans and put government officials on guard. I am afraid that the young woman must not be allowed to tell her story."

He got up from the box as he finished speaking, and Betty Burns recoiled a step. But Kenderdine caught her by an arm and whirled her inside the cabin.

"If you rebel at such a thing, Hamlin, you had better start for the city now," he said. "I will not need any help."

"I'll not be a party to murder!"

"I fear that it is necessary. The young lady says she did not come here for money, and she appears sincere."

"I'll not have anything to do with it!"

"Do you wish to allow her to return to the city and tell what she knows? Do you want to be known as a traitor, to face a firing squad?"

"A traitor!" Betty Burns cried, her eyes flaming into Hamlin's. "Traitor to your country, and to the railroad you serve! And

you have preached to me of loyalty to the road. A traitor—you a railroad man! The first railroad man in the world, in my life, to play such a part!”

“Enough of this!” Kenderdine cried; and Brooks sensed the change in his mood. “Make up your mind, Hamlin! Either help me, or go back to the city and leave me to do this thing alone! We’ll be safe, man! A grave on this forsaken island never will be found, and, if it should be by accident, nobody ever will know the guilty man. It’ll be just another mysterious disappearance of a girl. You can sympathy with the family, help them financially—”

Hamlin got up from the box. Jimmie Brooks grasped an automatic pistol and crept nearer the door.

V.

LISTENING to the girl’s recital, Jimmie Brooks had seen the plot instantly. These precious scoundrels, fearful of discovery, had been careful to remain away from each other. By means of the little cards Kenderdine had sent word from time to time to change from one code to another. Betty Burns, not realizing what she was doing, had received those cards and had worn red and white carnations accordingly.

She had walked into Baker’s drug-store. Some person there had noticed the carnations and had known what code to use. In some manner information about the troop-trains was conveyed to this person. At night he flashed the light in the store window—and Kenderdine, in his suite across the street, read the information conveyed.

Through prepared channels, Kenderdine passed the word on—and soldiers died in wreckage. Perhaps Hamlin had worked that flashlight at times, perhaps some other man. Baker, the druggist, must be an accomplice, Brooks thought. There was a gang, of course: such a big thing could not be handled by a

couple of men. Brooks was eager to know certain things—how Baker was implicated, and how the information regarding the trains was sent from the railroad offices to the drug-store. The latter may have been done over the telephone, of course. A few words would suffice.

Brooks admired the pluck and loyalty of Betty Burns, but he found himself wishing he could have stopped her before she confronted the men in the cabin. Not knowing they had been discovered, they might have led him to where the remainder of the gang was.

But now that she was in danger, Jimmie Brooks did not hesitate. He knew that Kenderdine was the sort of man who would not stop short of murder when not to slay meant the ruination of his plans and threatened his freedom.

Crouching just outside the doorway in the darkness, Brooks waited. He did not have long to wait. Hamlin walked to the door, and there stopped and turned.

“I—I wish there was some other way,” he stammered.

“Don’t be a fool!” Kenderdine exclaimed. “Either help me, or get away from here!”

Betty Burns jerked away, but Kenderdine had her in his grasp again instantly, and now he clapped a hand over her mouth to stifle the cries she was about to voice. Jimmie Brooks grasped his automatic firmly, thumb on the safety catch, and stepped nearer the doorway.

“There must be some other way,” Hamlin said.

“Go, you fool! And forget the entire business!” Kenderdine commanded. “Keep your wits about you, and you’ll never come under suspicion.”

“You sha’n’t do it!” Hamlin cried.

He turned upon Kenderdine like an angry beast. Kenderdine hurled the girl to a corner of the cabin and sprang at Hamlin’s throat. Jimmie Brooks knew that Hamlin was no match for the other man, and he feared that

Kenderdine might decide to do a couple of murders this night. He didn't want Hamlin killed. He wanted him a prisoner, a frightened prisoner who might break down under the third degree and name his accomplices.

Jimmie Brooks stepped inside the door calmly and leveled his automatic.

"Hands up, gentlemen!" he requested, in a hard voice. "It isn't necessary for you to murder each other. I'll do all the violence that's to be done here to-night!"

They whirled to face him, falling away from each other. In Hamlin's face was a look of wonder, in Kenderdine's an expression of cold rage. A squeal of thankfulness came from Betty Burns in the corner.

Ordinarily, an armed man can control two others upon whom he has the "drop," but not always when the others face ignoble death for their crimes. Hamlin fell back a step, his hands high above his head, and made no other move.

"Who is this?" Kenderdine snarled.

"I happen to be connected with the United States government," Jimmie explained. "I am here because you dropped a little card out of your window at noon. It struck my hat, and I read it. Afterward I saw your pleasure when you recovered it. That set me to thinking of 'red and white' with this result."

"So! A Secret Service man?"

"Call me whatever you like," Jimmie said. "I fancy you gentlemen are at the end of your ropes."

"Not yet!" Kenderdine screamed, and sprang!

Jimmie Brooks was watching for that spring, and was ready to put a bullet where it would disable but not kill. And in the instant when his finger was ready to press the trigger, he saw that Betty Burns was in the line of fire. In that same instant Kenderdine was upon him.

Kenderdine was a powerful man. Jimmie Brooks knew that he would have no time to

strike his antagonist a telling blow on the head with the butt of the automatic, and he feared that he might be overcome and Kenderdine get possession of the weapon. He tossed it quickly at the feet of Betty Burns as he clashed with the spy.

"Take it—watch Hamlin!" he cried.

The girl was quick to comply. She snatched the gun up from the floor and turned to cover the traffic manager with it. And Hamlin remained standing against the wall, his hands high above his head, taking no part in the fray. The girl's flashing eyes warned him that a move would mean a shower of bullets.

Years before Jimmie Brooks had learned that, when it became necessary to fight, it behooved a man to fight with his whole will and power. He lashed into Kenderdine like a maniac, yet did not forget what science he knew in his display of brute force. He fought Kenderdine back to the wall of the cabin as a whirlwind tosses a tumbleweed. But, the first surprise of his vigorous onslaught over, he found that Kenderdine was something of a fighter himself. He, too, coupled brute strength with science. Foot by foot he fought Jimmie Brooks back to the center of the cabin again, trying to come into a clinch—the thing that Brooks was eager to avoid.

Neither made a sound; it was a battle of determined men. From the corners of his eyes, Brooks saw that Betty Burns was still holding Hamlin at bay, and Kenderdine, noticing the same thing, gave up all hope that the traffic manager would aid him.

Now he had Brooks at bay in a corner, but Jimmie eluded the strong arms that sought to clasp him, and whirled into the middle of the cabin again. Kenderdine charged—and slipped. Brooks planted two blows in the approved place, and Kenderdine measured his unconscious length on the floor.

Brooks reeled away from him, gasped for breath, and then stumbled forward again. He

snapped handcuffs on the wrists of the prostrate man and glanced around for something with which to secure him better. There was an old fish-net in a corner; he used a part of that. It made clumsy bonds, but served. And then he whirled toward the traffic manager.

"I'll just take that automatic, now. Miss Burns," he said. "Thanks for holding him off while I attended to the other man. He's a precious scoundrel, isn't he? We'll just tie his hands behind him and trot him down to the motor-boat he came here in. We'll put Kenderdine in with him and run back to town, and hand them over. And I'll see that you have your pretty picture in the newspapers, young lady."

"Oh, it is so dreadful!" she said. "And I—I played a part in it, you know!"

"An innocent part! I heard your little recital. I'm quite sure your name need not be mentioned in connection with this case. The gentleman standing against the wall with his hands in the air probably will have the good sense to make a simple confession that will not involve you. If he does not, and we have to present evidence his sentence will be greater, naturally."

Hamlin was wetting his lips with his tongue, and there was a peculiar expression on his face. Jimmie Brooks believed it as expression of bewilderment because he had been caught.

"Think of it! A railroad man a traitor to his country!" Betty Burns cried, "And think what he has done!"

"I fancy we'd better take our prisoners back to the city. It is rather late to be out," Brooks said. "By the way, you must pardon me, Miss Burns. I suspected you for a time. I'll explain all that later. Now we'll—"

"Great Scott!" exclaimed a voice at the door.

JIMMIE BROOKS had been in many a narrow place during his career. He had trained himself to think and act quickly. And he had been taught that one of the greatest crimes is to lose a prisoner after taking one.

So now he whirled around so that his back was against the wall, and he continued to cover Hamlin while he took in the scene in the doorway, ready to battle new foe if it proved necessary, wondering if accomplices had arrived at an inopportune time.

Just inside the door stood a railroad detective he knew. Framed in the doorway behind him were half a dozen faces—more railroad operatives. Jimmie Brooks gave a sigh of relief and allowed a slight smile to play about his lips.

"Just in time, boys," he observed, "There is one scoundrel groaning on the floor, and another with his hands in the air. But you are a little late. This young lady and myself are entitled to all the honors."

The man in the doorway threw back his head and laughed long and loudly, and Jimmie Brooks stared at him in astonishment.

"My hands are tired!" came the voice of Hamlin.

"Well, you'll keep them up in the air, just the same!" Brooks told him. "A man who has done the things you have done—"

"It's all right, Jimmie! Let him put his hands down," said the detective at the door. "He's as innocent as a new-born babe."

"Oh, is he? I know it's a facer to find a railroad man engaged in treason, but here is one."

The men outside crowded into the room. Hamlin dropped his hands and sank on a box.

"Innocent as a lamb," the detective went on. "It is all finished, Mr. Hamlin. Jimmie, I'm sorry, but you're not wise to the whole thing. You certainly worked well, and swiftly, but you were off the track. And Miss Burns—"

"Miss Burns almost—er—spilled the beans," Hamlin said.

"What's the proper meaning of all this?" Brooks demanded.

"Let me explain," said Hamlin. "Kenderdine approached me some time ago and tried to get me to play traitor. I took the railroad's operatives into my confidence. They suggested that I 'play' him in order to discover his accomplices.

"So I pretended to fall in with Kenderdine's plans. I arranged for the cards to be sent to Miss Burns, and I arranged for Baker's lamp to flash the messages. Baker already was in Kenderdine's pay. I was to telephone him information regarding the movement of troop-trains, and he was to flash the messages across to Kenderdine.

"The information I furnished was fake, of course—but the information flashed across the street was genuine! I would say that a train was to start Monday morning, but the lamp would flash Tuesday morning, the correct time of departure. That mystified us. We knew there was a real traitor somewhere. Kenderdine was getting genuine information. So we kept at work, trying to capture the guilty man. I got money from Kenderdine, acted the part well, met him here a couple of times. You see, we wanted to know the whole plot before we made a move. We wanted to get the entire gang."

"And we've landed them," said the chief of the railroad's operatives. "The guilty man is the alien janitor in the railroad building. He had a dictaphone arrangement stretched from your private office to the boiler-room. He knew of your deal with Kenderdine, and he was in it with Baker, the druggist. We nabbed him to-night, and he confessed. He knew you were giving false information. He gave Baker the correct information to be flashed across the street, and Baker split with him. They were afraid to notify Kenderdine that you were fooling him, afraid he would grow

alarmed and call off the whole plot—and then the money would stop. So Baker disregarded your information and sent what the janitor telephoned.

"We nabbed Baker, too, and got a confession out of him. Then we hurried here to catch Kenderdine—and found that Jimmie Brooks had been mussing around. We've found a small wireless outfit here on the island that Kenderdine used to convey his information to his confederates in other parts of the country, and there'll be a lot of men in jail before another night. Sorry to spoil your triumph, Brooks."

"How can you ever forgive me for doubting you?" Betty Burns asked her employer.

"It was natural for you to suspect me," Hamlin replied. "I experienced several bad minutes when you made your appearance here. I feared Kenderdine would— And when Mr. Brooks appeared, I was about ready to collapse. I knew I would be cleared at once, of course, but we would lose our chances to take Kenderdine's confederates and discover the real traitor."

"Anyway, Brooks, you get credit for nabbing Kenderdine," the railroad's chief said. "That ought to help some. Let's take him to the launch and go back to town."

"Oh, I fancy I haven't lost out entirely," Jimmie Brooks answered.

He was looking at Betty Burns as he spoke. And later, when they sat in the stern of the launch, he said:

"Stupid of me not to have noticed it at noon when I bumped into you. I was thinking that red and white without the blue wasn't proper at all. And you were showing your whole colors all the time. Blue? Huh!"

"What do you mean?" she asked.

"Your eyes," he replied. "Blue as you can find 'em! I always did like blue eyes!"