

one man servant shared the great house which had been unchanged—and in which nothing appeared to have been worn out or have heeded replacing—since his wife left him, suddenly and unaccountably, about twenty years before. At that time he had looked much the same as now; since then, the white slash upon his temple had grown a bit broader perhaps; his nose had become a trifle aquiline, his chin more sensitive, his well formed hands a little more slender. People said he looked more French, referring to his father, who was known to have been a skin-hunter north of Lake Superior in the 50's, but who later married an English girl at Mackinac and settled down to become a trader in the woods of the North Peninsula, where Benjamin Corvet was born.

During his boyhood, men came to the peninsula to cut timber; young Corvet worked with them and began building ships. Thirty-five years ago, he had been only one of the hundreds with his fortune in the fate of a single bottom; but to-day in Cleveland, in Duluth, in Chicago, more than a score of great steamers under the names of various interdependent companies were owned or controlled by him and his two partners, Sherrill and young Spearman.

He was a quiet, gentle-mannered man. At times, however, he suffered from fits of intense irritability, and these of late had increased in frequency and violence. It had been noticed that these outbursts occurred generally at times of storm upon the lake, but the mere threat of financial loss through the destruction of one or even more of his ships was not now enough to cause them; it was believed that they were the result of some obscure physical reaction to the storm, and that this had grown upon him as he grew older.

To-day his irritability was so marked, his uneasiness so much greater than any one had seen it before, that the attendant whom Corvet had sent, a half hour earlier, to reserve his usual table for him in the grill—"the table by the second window"—had started away without daring to ask whether the table was to be set for one or more. Corvet himself had corrected the omission: "For two," he had shot after the man. Now, as his uneven footsteps carried him to the door of the grill, and he went in, the steward, who had started forward at sight of him, suddenly stopped, and the waiter assigned to his table stood nervously uncertain, not knowing whether to give his customary greeting or to efface himself as much as possible.

The tables, at this hour, were all unoccupied. Corvet crossed to the one he had reserved and sat down; he turned immediately to the window at his side and scraped on it a little clear opening through which he could see the storm outside. Ten minutes later he looked up sharply but did not rise, as the man he had been awaiting—Spearman, the younger of his two partners—came in.

Spearman's first words, audible through the big room, made plain that he was late to an appointment asked by Corvet; his acknowledgment of this took the form of an apology, but one which, in tone different from Spearman's usual bluff, hearty manner, seemed almost contemptuous. He seated himself, his big, powerful hands clasped on the table, his gray eyes studying Corvet closely. As Corvet, without acknowledging the apology, took the pad and began to write an order for both, Spearman interfered; he had already lunched; he would take only a cigar. The waiter took the order and went away.

WHEN he returned, the two men were obviously in bitter quarrel. Corvet's tone, low pitched but violent, sounded steadily in the room, though his words were inaudible. The waiter, as he set the food upon the table, felt relief that Corvet's outburst had fallen on other shoulders than his.

It had fallen, in fact, upon the shoulders best able to bear it. Spearman—still called, though he was slightly over forty now, "young" Spearman—was the power in the great ship-owning company of Corvet, Sherrill, and Spearman. Corvet had withdrawn, during recent years, almost entirely from active life; some said the sorrow and mortification of his wife's leaving him had made him choose more and more the seclusion of his library in the big lonely house on the North Shore, and had given Spearman the chance to rise; but those most intimately acquainted with the affairs of the great ship-owning firm maintained

that Spearman's rise had not been granted him, but had been forced by Spearman himself. In any case, Spearman was not the one to accept Corvet's irritation meekly.

For nearly an hour, the quarrel continued with intermitted truces of silence. The waiter, listening, as waiters always do, caught at times single sentences.

"You have had the idea for some time?" he heard from Corvet.

"We have had an understanding for more than a month."

"How definite?"

Spearman's answer was not audible, but it more intensely agitated Corvet; his lips set; a hand which held his fork clasped and unclasped nervously; he dropped his fork and, after that, made no pretense of eating.

THE waiter, following this, caught only single words. "Sherrill"—that, of course, was the other partner. "Constance"—that was Sherrill's daughter. The other names he heard were names of ships. But, as the quarrel went on, the manners of the two men changed; Spearman, who at first had been assailed by Corvet, now was assailing him. Corvet sat back in his seat, while Spearman pulled at his cigar and now and then took it from his lips and gestured with it between his fingers, as he jerked some ejaculation across the table.

Corvet leaned over to the frosted window, as he had done when alone, and looked out. Spearman shot a comment which made Corvet wince and draw back



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from the window; then Spearman rose. He delayed, standing, to light another cigar deliberately and with studied slowness. Corvet looked up at him once and asked a question, to which Spearman replied with a snap of the burnt match down on the table; he turned abruptly and strode from the room. Corvet sat motionless.

The revulsion to self-control, sometimes even to apology, which ordinarily followed Corvet's bursts of irritation had not come to him; his agitation plainly had increased. He pushed from him his uneaten luncheon and got up slowly. He went out to the coat room, where the attendant handed him his coat and hat. He hung the coat upon his arm. The doorman, acquainted with him for many years, ventured to suggest a cab. Corvet, staring strangely at him, shook his head.

"At least, sir," the man urged, "put on your coat." Corvet ignored him.

He winced as he stepped out into the smarting, blinding swirl of sleet, but his shrinking was not physical; it was mental, the unconscious reaction to some thought the storm called up. The hour was barely four o'clock, but so dark was it with the storm that the shop windows were lit; motorcars, slipping and skidding up the broad boulevard, with headlights burning, kept their signals clattering constantly to warn other drivers blinded by the snow. The sleet-swept sidewalks were almost deserted; here or there, before a hotel or one of the shops, a limousine came to the curb, and the passengers dashed swiftly across the walk to shelter.

Corvet, still carrying his coat upon his arm, turned northward along Michigan Avenue, facing into the gale. The sleet beat upon his face and lodged in the folds of his clothing without his heeding it.

Suddenly he aroused. "One—two—three—four!" he counted the long, booming blasts of a steam whistle. A steamer out on that snow-shrouded lake was in distress. The sound ceased, and the gale bore in only the ordinary storm and fog signals. Corvet recognized the foghorn at the lighthouse at the end of the government pier; the light, he knew, was turning white, red, white, red, white behind the curtain of sleet; other steam vessels, not in distress, blew their blasts; the long four of the steamer calling for help cut in again.

Corvet stopped, drew up his shoulders, and stood staring out toward the lake, as the signal blasts of distress boomed and boomed again. Color came now into his pale cheeks for an instant. A siren swelled and shrieked, died away wailing, shrieked louder and stopped; the four blasts blew again, and the siren wailed in answer.

A door opened behind Corvet; warm air rushed out, laden with sweet, heavy odors—chocolate and candy; girls' laughter, exaggerated exclamations, laughter again came with it; and two girls holding their muffs before their faces passed by.

"See you to-night, dear."

"Yes; I'll be there—if he comes."

"Oh, he'll come!"

They ran to different limousines, scurried in, and the cars swept off.

CORVET turned about to the tearoom from which they had come; he could see, as the door opened again, a dozen tables with their white cloths, shining silver, and steaming little porcelain pots; twenty or thirty girls and young women were refreshing themselves, pleasantly, after shopping or fittings or a concert; a few young men were sipping chocolate with them. The blast of the distress signal, the scream of the siren, must have come to them when the door was opened; but, if they heard it at all, they gave it no attention; the clatter and laughter and sipping of chocolate and tea was interrupted only by those who reached quickly for a shopping list or some filmy possession threatened by the draft. They were as oblivious to the lake in front of their windows, to the ship struggling for life in the storm, as though the snow were a screen which shut them into a distant world.

To Corvet, a lake man for forty years, there was nothing strange in this. Twenty miles, from north to south, the city—its business blocks, its hotels and restaurants, its homes—faced the water and, except where the piers formed the harbor, all unprotected water, an open sea where in times of storm ships sank and grounded, men fought for their lives against the elements and, losing, drowned and died; and Corvet was well aware that likely enough none of those in that tearoom or in that whole building knew what four long blasts meant when they were blown as they were now, or what the siren meant that answered. But now, as he listened to the blasts