

## A Man, a Woman, and a Bayonet

THE Corporal in charge, who had been drinking steadily, bludgeoned his anecdotes. "Yellow imps! That's what they are, with teeth as long as your finger. First they shoot and then they eat you. Ugh!

Stepanovitch shivered. He was reviving from the stupor in which the events of the past few hours had plunged him. He had never expected to be called upon—he, a man just married. It was unfair—horrible. Why should he be sent out to this far and perilous country, called Manchuria, to be eaten by those yellow goblins? If what the Corporal said was true they would never come back alive. Why had he been such a fool when the yellow card was given him, to go to the depot and be enrolled? Why had he not done like others—crept out in the night and met the German agent who helped men to cross the frontier and go in a ship to a country where there was much gold. Was it too late?

The train rolled on through the frosty flats. It was a bitter cold night, but the carriage was stifling. The other recruits were asleep or stupid with fright. They lay back against the wooden walls of the carriage with closed eyes, heedless of the jolting. The Corporal, who had taken yet another drink from his bottle, seemed to be sleeping too. He was a fierce looking man in his sleep, fiercer even than when he was awake; but it was a thing to be thankful for that there was a breathing space from those monstrous stories of his. They hurt a man's inside, those stories.

To get rid of the feel of them, Stepanovitch tried to fix his thoughts on Katinka. She was a good girl and laborious, and it

was a shame that she should be left—as good as widowed—so soon. How she had wept when the yellow card came! She had wept so much indeed that when the hour for his departing arrived, her eyes had been quite dry. He hoped that she would not forget the instructions he had given her, in case he came back; especially in regard to any money she might save. It was not likely that she would save any. Very few did in the village, and Katinka was a hungry one always. That was perhaps why she was so plump. She was the plumpest girl for miles round, and it was for this reason that Stepanovitch had loved her. Well, it was not to be supposed that she could stay plump forever, especially with her man away. She would not have the food. That was natural enough—not to have much food when one's man was away—and Stepanovitch did not regret that he had kept secret from her the place under the floor in which his savings were stored. She might have been tempted to spend them, if she had known where they lay; and then when he came back and needed them, there would be nothing left.

But would he never come back? It seemed the question would recur whatever one fixed one's mind on. The railway carriage was altogether asleep now. There was nothing else but snores through the whole of it—snores that kept time with the monotonous vibration of the train. Stepanovitch, who was in the corner by the door, put his hand on the handle and turned it. He had not meant to open the door, but suddenly it was open. The train went very slow; he could see that by looking through the veriet c nk that caused no draught and disturbed no sleeper. A man could leap