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THE DANCING GIRLS

When, on opening a magazine, you see a picture of a young man in uniform with a background of assorted star-shells in full flower; a young man in uniform gazing into the eyes of a young lady (in uniform); a young man in uniform crouching in a trench, dugout, or shell-hole, this happens:

You skip lightly past the story of the young man in uniform; you jump hurriedly over the picture; and you plunge into the next story, noting that it is called "The Crimson Emerald" and that, judging from the pictures, all the characters in it wear evening clothes all the time.

Chug Scaritt took his dose of war with the best of them, but this is of Chug before and after taking. If, inadvertently, there should sound a faintly martial note it shall be stifled at once with a series of those stylish dots ... indicative of what the early Victorian writers conveniently called a drawn veil.

Nothing could be fairer than that.

Chug Scaritt was (and is) the proprietor and sole owner of the Elite Garage, and he pronounced it with a long i. Automobile parties, touring Wisconsin, used to mistake him for a handy man about the place and would call to him, "Heh, boy! Come here and take a look at this engine. She ain't hitting." When Chug finished with her she was hitting, all right. A medium-sized young fellow in the early twenties with a serious mouth, laughing eyes, and a muscular grace pretty well concealed by the grease-grimed grotesquerie of overalls. Out of the overalls and in his tight-fitting, belted green suit and long-visored green cap and flat russet shoes he looked too young and insouciant to be the sole owner—much less the proprietor—of anything so successful and established as the Elite Garage.

In a town like Chippewa, Wisconsin—or in any other sort of town, for that matter—a prosperous garage knows more about the scandals of the community than does a barber-shop, a dressmaker-by-the-day, or a pool-room habitue. It conceals more skeletons than the catacombs. Chug Scaritt,

had he cared to open his lips and speak, might have poured forth such chronicles as to make Spoon River sound a pæan of sweetness and light. He knew how much Old Man Hatton's chauffeur knocked down on gas and repairs; he knew just how much the Tillotsons had gone into debt for their twin-six, and why Emil Sauter drove to Oshkosh so often on business, and who supplied the flowers for Mrs. Gurnee's electric. Chug didn't encourage gossip in his garage. Whenever possible he put his foot down on its ugly head in a vain attempt to crush it. But there was something about the very atmosphere of the place that caused it to thrive and flourish. It was like a combination newspaper office and Pullman car smoker. Chug tried to keep the thing down but there might generally be seen lounging about the doorway or perched on the running board of an idle car a little group of slim, flat-heeled, low-voiced young men in form-fitting, high-waisted suits of that peculiarly virulent shade of green which makes its wearer look as if he had been picked before he was ripe.

They were a lean, slim-flanked crew with a feline sort of grace about them; terse of speech, quick of eye, engine-wise, and, generally, nursing a boil just above the collar of their soft shirt. Not vicious. Not even tough. Rather bored, though they didn't know it. In their boredom resorting to the only sort of solace afforded boys of their class in a town of Chippewa's size: cheap amusements, cheap girls, cheap talk. This last unless the topic chanced to be of games or of things mechanical. Baseball, or a sweet-running engine brought out the best that was in them. At their worst, perhaps, they stood well back in the dim, cool shade of the garage doorway to watch how, when the girls went by in their thin summer dresses, the strong sunlight made a transparency of their skirts. At supper time they would growl to their surprised sisters:

"Put on some petticoats, you. Way you girls run around it's enough to make a person sick."

Chug Scaritt escaped being one of these by a double margin. There was his business responsibility on one side; his very early history on the other. Once you learn the derivation of Chug's nickname you have that history from the age of five to twenty-five, inclusive.

Chug had been christened Floyd (she had got it out of a book) but it was an appendix rather than an appellation. No one ever dreamed of addressing him by that misnomer, unless you except his school teachers. Once or twice the boys had tried to use his name as a weapon, shrieking in a shrill falsetto and making two syllables of it. He put a stop to that soon enough with fists and feet. His virility could have triumphed over a name twice as puerile. For that matter, I once knew a young husky named Fayette who—but that's another story.

The Scaritts lived the other side of the tracks. If you know Chippewa, or its equivalent, you get the significance of that. Nobodys. Not only did they live the other side of the tracks; they lived so close to them that the rush and rumble of the passing trains shook the two-story frame cottage and rattled the crockery on the pantry shelves. The first intelligible sound the boy made was a chesty chug-chug-chug in imitation of a panting engine tugging its freight load up the incline toward the Junction. When Chug ran away—which was on an average of twice daily—he was invariably to be found at the switchman's shanty or roaming about the freight yards. It got so that Stumpy Gans, the one-legged switchman, would hoist a signal to let Mrs. Scaritt know that Chug was safe.

He took his first mechanical toy apart, piece by piece. "Wait till your pa comes home!" his mother had said, with terrible significance. Chug, deep in the toy's wreckage, seemed undismayed, so Mrs. Scaritt gave him a light promissory slap and went on about her housework. That night, before supper, Len Scaritt addressed his son with a sternness quite at variance with his easy-going nature.

"Come here to me! Now, then, what's this about your smashing up good toys? Huh? Whatdya mean! Christmas not two days back and here you go smashing—"

The culprit trotted over to a corner and returned with the red-painted tin thing in his hand. It was as good as new. There may even have been some barely noticeable improvement in its locomotive powers. Chug had merely taken it apart in order to put it together again, and he had been too absorbed to pause long enough to tell his mother so. After that, nothing that bore wheels, internally or externally, was safe from his investigating fingers.

It was his first velocipede that really gave him his name. As he rode up and down, his short legs working like piston-rods gone mad, pedestrians would scatter in terror. His onrush was as relentless as that of an engine on a track, and his hoarse, "Chug-chug! Da-r-r-n-ng! Da-r-r-n-ng!" as he bore down upon a passerby caused that one to sidestep precipitously into the gutter (and none too soon).

Chug earned his first real bicycle carrying a paper route for the *Chippewa Eagle*. It took him two years. By the time he had acquired it he knew so much about bicycles, from ball-bearings to handle-bars, that its possession roused very little thrill in him. It was as when a lover has had to wait over-long for his bride. As Chug whizzed about Chippewa's streets, ringing an unnecessarily insistent bell, you sensed that a motorcycle was already looming large in his mechanism-loving mind. By the time he was seventeen Chug's motorcycle was spitting its way venomously down Elm Street. And the sequence of the seasons was not more inevitable than that an automobile should follow the motorcycle. True, he practically built it himself, out of what appeared to be an old wash-boiler, some wire, and an engine made up of parts that embraced every known car from Ford to Fiat. He painted it an undeniable red, hooded it like a demon racer, and shifted to first. The thing went.

He was a natural mechanic. He couldn't spend a day with a piece of mechanism without having speeded it up, or in some way done something to its belt, gears, wheels, motor. He was almost never separated from a monkey-wrench or pliers, and he was always turning a nut or bolt or screw in his grease-grimed fingers.

Right here it should be understood that Chug never became a Steinmetz or a Wright. He remained just average-plus to the end, with something more than a knack at things mechanical; a good deal of grease beneath his nails; and, generally, a smudge under one eye or a swipe of black across a cheek that gave him a misleadingly sinister and piratical look. There's nothing very magnificent, surely, in being the proprietor of a garage, even if it is the best-paying garage in Chippewa, where six out of ten families own a car, and summer tourists are as locusts turned beneficent.

Some time between Chug's motorcycle and the home-made automobile Len Scaritt died. The loss to the household was social more than economic. Len had been one of those good-natured, voluble, walrus-moustached men who make such poor providers. A carpenter by trade, he had always been a spasmodic worker and a steady talker. His high, hollow voice went on endlessly above the fusillade of hammers at work and the clatter of dishes at home. Politics, unions, world events, local happenings, neighbourhood gossip, all fed the endless stream of his loquacity.

"Well, now, looka here. Take, frins'ance, one these here big concerns—"

After he was gone Mrs. Scaritt used to find herself listening to the silence. His ceaseless talk had often rasped her nerves to the point of hysteria, but now she missed it as we miss a dull ache to which we have grown accustomed.

Chug was in his second year at the Chippewa high school. He had always earned some money, afternoons and Saturdays. Now he quit to go to work in earnest. His mother took it hard.

"I wanted you to have an education," she said. "Not just schooling. An education." Mittie Scaritt had always had ambition and a fierce sort of pride. She had needed them to combat Len's shiftlessness and slack good nature. They had kept the two-story frame cottage painted and tidy, had her pride and ambition; they had managed a Sunday suit, always, for Chug; money for the contribution box; pork roast on Sundays; and a sitting room, chill but elegant, with its plump pyramids of pillows, embroidered with impossible daisies and carnations and violets, filling every corner.

Mrs. Scaritt had had to fight for Chug's two years of high school. "He don't need no high school," Len Scaritt had argued, in one of the rare quarrels between the two. "I never had none."

The retort to this was so obvious that his wife refrained from uttering it. Len continued: "He don't go with none of my money. His age I was working 'n' had been for three years and more. You'll be fixing to send him to college, next."

"Well, if I do? Then what?"

"Then you're crazy," said Len, without heat, as one would state a self-evident fact.

That afternoon Mrs. Scaritt went down to the office of the *Eagle* and inserted a neat ad.

LACE CURTAINS DONE UP LIKE NEW. 25
CENTS A PR. MRS. SCARITT, 639 OUTAGAMIE ST.

For years afterward you never passed the Scaritt place without seeing the long skeleton frames of wooden curtain stretchers propped up against the back porch in the sun. Mrs. Scaritt became famous for her curtains as an artist is known for his middle distances, his woodland green, or his flesh tones. In time even the Hattons, who had always heretofore sent their fine curtains to Milwaukee to be cleaned, trusted their lacy treasures to Mrs. Scaritt's expert hands.

Chug went to high school on those lace curtains. He used to call for and deliver them. He rigged up a shelf-like device on his bicycle handlebars. On this the freshly laundered curtains reposed in their neat paper wrappings as unwrinkled as when they had come from the stretching frame.

At seventeen he went to work in the Elite Garage. He hadn't been there a month before the owner was saying, "Say, Chug, take a look at this here bus, will you? She don't run right but I can't find out what's got into her."

Chug would put his ear to the heart of the car, and tap its vitals, and count its pulse-beats as a doctor sounds you with his stethoscope. The look on his face was that of a violinist who tries his G-string.

For the rest, he filled gas tanks, changed and pumped up tires, tested batteries, oiled tappets. But the thing that fascinated him was the engine. An oily, blue-eyed boy in spattered overalls, he was always just emerging from beneath a car, or crawling under it. When a new car came in, en route—a proud, glittering affair—he always managed to get a chance at it somehow, though the owner or chauffeur guarded it ever so jealously. The only thing on wheels that he really despised was an electric brougham. Chippewa's well-paved streets made these vehicles possible. Your true garage man's feeling for electrics is unprintable. The least that they called them was juice-boxes.

At home Chug was forever rigging up labour-saving devices for his mother. The Scaritt's window-shades always rolled; their doorbell always rang with a satisfactory zing; their suction-pump never stuck. By the time he was twenty Chug was manager of the garage and his mother was saying, "You're around that garage sixteen hours a day. When you're home you're everlastingly reading those engineering papers and things. Your pa at your age had a girl for every night in the week and two on Sundays."

"Another year or so and I can buy out old Behnke and own the place. Soon's I do I'm going to come home in the speediest boat in the barn, and I'm going to bust up those curtain frames into kindling wood, over my knee, and pile 'em in the backyard and make a bonfire out of 'em."

"They've been pretty good friends to us, Chug—those curtain frames."

"Um." He glanced at her parboiled fingers. "Just the same, it'll be nix with the lace curtains for you."

Glancing back on what has been told of Chug he sounds, somehow, so much like a modern Rollo, with a dash of Alger, that unless something is told of his social side he may be misunderstood.

Chug was a natural born dancer. There are young men who, after the music has struck up, can start out incredibly enough by saying: "What is this, anyway—waltz or fox trot?" This was inconceivable to Chug. He had never had a dancing lesson in his life, but he had a sense of rhythm that was infallible. He could no more have danced out of time than he could have started a car on high, or confused a flivver with a Twelve. He didn't look particularly swanlike as he danced, having large, sensible feet, but they were expert at not being where someone else's feet happened to be, and he could time a beat to the fraction of a second.

When you have practically spent your entire day sprawled under a balky car, with a piece of dirty mat between you and the cement floor, your view limited to crank-case, transmission, universal, fly-wheel, differential, pan, and brake-rods you can do with a bit of colour in the evening. And just here was where Chippewa failed Chug.

He had a grave problem confronting him in his search for an evening's amusement. Chippewa, Wisconsin, was proud of its paved streets, its thirty

thousand population, its lighting system, and the Greek temple that was the new First National Bank. It boasted of its interurban lines, its neat houses set well back among old elms, its paper mills, its plough works, and its prosperity. If you had told Chippewa that it was criminally ignoring Chug's crying need it would have put you down as mad.

Boiled down, Chug Scaritt's crying need was girls. At twenty-two or three you must have girls in your life if you're normal. Chug was, but Chippewa wasn't. It had too many millionaires at one end and too many labourers at the other for a town of thirty thousand. Its millionaires had their golf club, their high-powered cars, their smart social functions. They were always running down to Chicago to hear Galli-Curci; and when it came to costume—diamond bracelet, daring décolletage, large feather fans, and brilliant-buckled slippers—you couldn't tell their women from the city dwellers. There is much money in paper mills and plough works.

The mill hands and their families were well-paid, thrifty, clannish Swedes, most of them, with a liberal sprinkling of Belgians and Slavs. They belonged to all sorts of societies and lodges to which they paid infinitesimal dues and swore lifelong allegiance.

Chug Scaritt and boys of his kind were left high and dry. So, then, when Chug went out with a girl it was likely to be by way of someone's kitchen; or with one of those who worked in the rag room at the paper and pulp mill. They were the very girls who switched up and down in front of the garage evenings and Saturday afternoons. Many of them had been farm girls in Michigan or northern Wisconsin or even Minnesota. In Chippewa they did housework. Big, robust girls they were, miraculously well dressed in good shoes and suits and hats. They had bad teeth, for the most part, with a scum over them; over-fond of coffee; and were rather dull company. But they were good-natured, and hearty, and generous.

The paper-mill girls were quite another type. Theirs was a grayish pallor due to lungs dust-choked from work in the rag room. That same pallor promised ill for future generations in Chippewa. But they had a rather appealing, wistful fragility. Their eyes generally looked too big for their faces. They possessed, though, a certain vivacity and diablerie that the big, slower-witted Swede girls lacked.

When Chug felt the need of a dash of red in the evening he had little choice. In the winter he often went up to Woodman's Hall. The dances at Woodman's Hall were of the kind advertised at fifty cents a couple. Extra lady, twenty-five cents. Ladies without gents, thirty-five cents. Bergstrom's two-piece orchestra. Chug usually went alone, but he escorted home one of the ladies-without-gents. It was not that he begrudged the fifty cents. Chug was free enough with his money. He went to these dances on a last-minute impulse, almost against his will, and out of sheer boredom. Once there he danced every dance and all the encores. The girls fought for him. Their manner of dancing was cheek to cheek, in wordless rhythm. His arm about the ample waist of one of the Swedish girls, or clasping close the frail form of one of the mill hands, Chug would dance on and on, indefatigably, until the music played "Home Sweet Home." The conversation, if any, varied little.

"The music's swell to-night," from the girl.

"Yeh."

"You're some little dancer, Chug, I'll say. Honest, I could dance with you forever." This with a pressure of the girl's arm, and spoken with a little accent, whether Swedish, Belgian, or Slavic.

"They all say that."

"Crazy about yourself, ain't you!"

"Not as crazy as I am about you," with tardy gallantry.

He was very little stirred, really.

"Yeh, you are. I wish you was. It makes no never minds to you who you're dancing with, s'long's you're dancing."

This last came one evening as a variant in the usual formula. It startled Chug a little, so that he held the girl off the better to look at her. She was Wanda something-or-other, and anybody but Chug would have been alive to the fact that she had been stalking him for weeks with a stolid persistence.

"Danced with you three times to-night, haven't I?" he demanded. He was rather surprised to find that this was so.

"Wisht it was thirty."

That was Wanda. Her very eagerness foiled her. She cheapened herself. When Chug said, "Can I see you home?" he knew the answer before he put the question. Too easy to get along with, Wanda. Always there ahead of time, waiting, when you made a date with her. Too ready to forgive you when you failed to show up. Telephoned you when you were busy. Didn't give a fellow a chance to come half way, but went seven eighths of it herself. An ignorant, kindly, dangerous girl, with the physical development of a woman and the mind of a child. There were dozens like her in Chippewa.

If the girls of his own class noticed him at all it was the more to ignore him as a rather grimy mechanic passing briefly before their vision down Outagamie Street on his way to and from dinner. He was shy of them. They had a middle-class primness which forbade their making advances even had they been so inclined. Chug would no more have scraped acquaintance with them than he would have tried to flirt with Angie Hatton, Old Man Hatton's daughter, and the richest girl in Chippewa—so rich that she drove her own car with the chauffeur stuck up behind.

You didn't have to worry about Wanda and her kind. There they were, take them or leave them. They expected you to squeeze their waist when you danced with them, and so you did. You didn't have to think about what you were going to say to them.

Mrs. Scaritt suspected in a vague sort of way that Chug was "running with the hired girls." The thought distressed her. She was too smart a woman to nag him about it. She tried diplomacy.

"Why don't you bring some young folks home to eat, Chug? I like to fuss around for company." She was a wonderful cook, Mrs. Scaritt, and liked to display her skill.

"Who is there to bring?"

"The boys and girls you go around with. Who is it you're always fixing up for, evenings?"

"Nobody."

Mrs. Scaritt tried another tack.

"I s'pose this house isn't good enough for 'em? Is that it?"

"Good enough!" Chug laughed rather grimly. "I'd like to know what's the matter with it!"

There was, as a matter of fact, nothing the matter with it. It was as spick and span as paint and polish could make it. The curtain-stretching days were long past. There had even been talk of moving out of the house by the tracks, but at the last moment Mrs. Scaritt had rebelled.

"I'll miss the sound of the trains. I'm used to 'em. It's got so I can tell just where my right hand'll be when the seven fifty-two goes by in the morning, and I've got used to putting on the potatoes when I hear the 'leven-forty. Let's stay, Chug."

So they had stayed. Gradually they had added an improvement here, a convenience there, as Chug's prosperity grew, until now the cottage by the tracks was newly painted, bathroomed, electric-lighted, with a cement walk front and back and a porch with a wicker swing and flower baskets. Chug gave his mother more housekeeping money than she needed, though she, in turn, served him meals that would have threatened the waist-line of an older and less active man. There was a banana pie, for instance (it sounds sickish, but wait!) which she baked in a deep pan, and over which she poured a golden-brown custard all flecked with crusty melted sugar. You took a bite and lo! it had vanished like a sweet dewdrop, leaving in your mouth a taste as of nectar, and clover-honey, and velvet cream.

Mrs. Scaritt learned to gauge Chug's plans for the evening by his ablutions. Elaborate enough at any time, on dance nights they amounted to a rite. In the old days Chug's father had always made a brief enough business of the process he called washing up. A hand-basin in the kitchen sink or on the back-porch bench sufficed. The noises he made were out of all proportion to the results obtained. His snufflings, and snortings, and splashings were like those of a grampus at play. When he emerged from them you were surprised to find that he had merely washed his face.

Chug had grease to fight. He had learned how in his first days at the garage. His teacher had been old Rudie, a mechanic who had tinkered around

automobiles since their kerosene days, and who knew more about them than their inventor. Soap and water alone were powerless against the grease and carbon and dust that ground themselves into Chug's skin. First, he lathered himself with warm, soapy water. Then, while arms, neck, and face were still wet, he covered them with oil—preferably lubricating oil, medium. Finally he rubbed sawdust over all; great handfuls of it. The grease rolled out then, magically, leaving his skin smooth and white. Old Rudie, while advocating this process, made little use of it. He dispatched the whole grimy business by the simple method of washing in gasoline guaranteed to take the varnish off a car fender. It seemed to leave Rudie's tough hide undevastated.

At twenty-four Chug Scaritt was an upstanding, level-headed, and successful young fellow who worked hard all day and found himself restless and almost irritable toward evening. He could stay home and read, or go back to the garage, though after eight things were very quiet. For amusement there were the pool shack, the cheap dances, the street corner, the Y.M.C.A. This last had proved a boon. The swimming pool, the gym, the reading room, had given Chug many happy, healthful hours. But, after all, there was something—

Chug didn't know it was girls—girls you could talk to, and be with, and take around. But it was. After an hour in the pool, or around the reading table, or talking and smoking, he usually drifted out into the quiet street. He could go home. Or there was Wanda. If he went home he found himself snapping rather irritably at his mother, for no reason at all. Ashamed of doing it. Powerless, somehow, to stop.

He took to driving in the evening: long drives along the country roads, his cap pulled low over his eyes, the wind blowing fresh in his face. He used to cover mile on mile, sitting slumped low on his spine, his eyes on the road; the engine running sweet and true. Sometimes he took Wanda along, or one of the mill girls. But not often. They were disappointed if you didn't drive with one arm around them. He liked being alone. It soothed him.

It was thus that he first met the Weld girl. The Weld girl was the plain daughter of the Widow Weld. The Widow Weld was a musical-comedy sort of widow in French-heeled, patent-leather slippers and girlish gowns. When you met her together with her daughter Elizabeth you were supposed to say,

"Not mother and daughter! Surely not! Sisters, of course." Elizabeth was twenty-four and not a success. At the golf-club dances on Saturday night she would sit, unsought, against the wall while her skittish mother tripped it with the doggish bachelors. Sometimes a man would cross the floor toward her and her heart would give a little leap, but he always asked the girl seated two chairs away. Elizabeth danced much better than her mother—much better than most girls, for that matter. But she was small, and dark, and rather shy, and wore thick glasses that disguised the fineness of her black-lashed gray eyes. Now and then her mother, flushed and laughing, would come up and say, "Is my little girl having a good time?" The Welds had no money, but they belonged to Chippewa's fashionable set. There were those who lifted significant eyebrows at mention of the Widow Weld's name, and it was common knowledge that no maid would stay with her for any length of time because of the scanty provender. The widow kowtowed shamelessly to the moneyed ones of Chippewa, flattering the women, flirting with the men. Elizabeth had no illusions about her mother, but she was stubbornly loyal to her. Her manner toward her kittenish parent was rather sternly maternal. But she was the honest sort that congenitally hates sham and pretence. She was often deliberately rude to the very people toward whom her mother was servile. Her strange friendship with Angie Hatton, the lovely and millioned, was the one thing in Elizabeth's life of which her Machiavellian mother approved.

"Betty, you practically stuck out your tongue at Mr. Oakley!" This after a dance at which Elizabeth had been paired off, as usual, with the puffy and red-eyed old widower of that name.

"I don't care. His hands are fat and he creaks when he breathes."

"Next to Hatton, he's the richest man in Chippewa. And he likes you."

"He'd better not!" She spat it out, and the gray eyes blazed behind the glasses. "I'd rather be plastered up against the wall all my life than dance with him. Fat!"

"Well, my dear, you're no beauty, you know," with cruel frankness.

"I'm not much to look at," replied Elizabeth, "but I'm beautiful inside."

"Rot!" retorted the Widow Weld, inelegantly.

Had you lived in Chippewa all this explanation would have been unnecessary. In that terrifying way small towns have, it was known that of all codfish aristocracy the Widow Weld was the piscatorial pinnacle.

When Chug Scaritt first met the Weld girl she was standing out in the middle of the country road at ten-thirty P.M., her arms outstretched and the blood running down one cheek. He had been purring along the road toward home, drowsy and lulled by the motion and the April air. His thoughts had been drowsy, too, and disconnected.

"If I can rent Bergstrom's place next door when their lease is up I'll knock down the partition and put in auto supplies. There's big money in 'em.... Guess if it keeps on warm like this we can plant the garden next week.... That was swell cake Ma had for supper.... What's that in the road! What's! —"

Jammed down the foot-brake. Jerked back the emergency. A girl standing in the road. A dark mass in the ditch by the road-side. He was out of his car. He recognized her as the Weld girl.

"S'matter?"

"In the ditch. She's hurt. Quick!"

"Whose car?" Chug was scrambling down the banks.

"Hatton's. Angie Hatton's."

"Gosh!"

Over by the fence, where she had been flung, Angie Hatton was found sitting up, dizzily, and saying, "Betty! Betty!" in what she supposed was a loud cry but which was really a whisper.

"I'm all right, dear. I'm all right. Oh, Angie, are you—"

She was cut and bruised, and her wrist had been broken. The two girls clung to each other, wordlessly. The thing was miraculous, in view of the car that lay perilously tipped on its fender.

"You're a lucky bunch," said Chug. "Who was driving?"

"I was," said Angie Hatton.

"It wasn't her fault," the Weld girl put in, quickly. "We were coming from Winnebago. She's a wonderful driver. We met a farm-wagon coming toward us. One of those big ones. The middle of the road. Perhaps he was asleep. He didn't turn out. We thought he would, of course. At the last minute we had to try for the ditch. It was too steep."

"Anyway, you're nervy kids, both of you. I'll have you both home in twenty minutes. We'll have to leave five thousand dollars' worth of car in the road till morning. It'll be all right."

He did get them home in twenty minutes and the five thousand dollars' worth of car was still lying repentantly in the ditch when morning came. Old Man Hatton himself came into the garage to thank Chug the following day. Chug met him in overalls, smudge-faced as he was. Old Man Hatton put out his hand. Chug grinned and looked at his own grease-grimed paw.

"That's all right," said Old Man Hatton, and grasped it firmly. "Want to thank you."

"That's all right," said Chug. "Didn't do a thing."

"No business driving alone that hour of the night. Girls nowadays—" He looked around the garage. "Work here, I suppose?"

"Yessir."

"If there's anything I can do for you? Over at the mill."

"Guess not," said Chug.

"Treat you right here, do they?"

"Fine."

"Let's see. Who owns this place?"

"I do."

Old Man Hatton's face broke into a sunburst of laugh-wrinkles. He threw back his head and went the scale from roar to chuckle. "One on me. Pretty

good. Have to tell Angie that one."

Chug walked to the street with him. "Your daughter, she's got a lot of nerve, all right. And that girl with her—Weld. Say, not a whimper out of her and the blood running down her face. She all right?"

"Cut her head a little. They're both all right. Angie wouldn't even stay in bed. Well, as I say, if there's anything—?"

Chug flushed a little. "Tell you what, Mr. Hatton. I'm working on a thing that'll take the whine out of the Daker."

Old Man Hatton owned the Daker Motor plant among other things. The Daker is the best car for the money in the world. Not much for looks but everything in the engine. And everyone who has ever owned one knows that its only fault is the way its engine moans. Daker owners hate that moan. When you're going right it sounds a pass between a peanut roaster and a banshee with bronchitis. Every engineer in the Daker plant had worked over it.

"Can't be done," said Old Man Hatton.

"Another three months and I'll show you."

"Hope you do, son. Hope you do."

But in another three months Chug Scaritt was one of a million boys destined to take off a pink-striped shirt, a nobby belted suit, and a long-visored cap to don a rather bob-tailed brown outfit. It was some eighteen months later before he resumed the chromatic clothes with an ardour out of all proportion to their style and cut. But in the interval between doffing pink-striped shirt and donning pink-striped shirt....

No need to describe Camp Sibley, two miles outside Chippewa, and the way it grew miraculously, overnight, into a khaki city. No going into detail concerning the effective combination formed by Chug and a machine gun. These things were important and interesting. But perhaps not more interesting than the seemingly unimportant fact that in July following that April Chug was dancing blithely and rhythmically with Elizabeth Weld, and

saying, "Angie Hatton's a smooth little dancer, all right; but she isn't in it with you."

For Chippewa, somehow, had fused. Chippewa had forgotten sets, sections, cliques, factions, and parties, and formed a community. It had, figuratively, wiped out the railroad tracks, together with all artificial social boundaries. Chug Scaritt, in uniform, must be kept happy. He must be furnished with wholesome recreation, fun, amusement, entertainment. There sprang up, seemingly overnight, a great wooden hall in Elm Street, on what had been a vacant lot. And there, by day or by night, were to be had music, and dancing, and hot cakes, and magazines, and hot coffee, and ice cream and girls. Girls! Girls who were straight, and slim, and young, and bright-eyed, and companionable. Girls like Angie Hatton. Girls like Betty Weld. Betty Weld, who no longer sat against the wall at the golf-club dances and prayed in her heart that fat old Oakley wasn't coming to ask her to dance.

Betty Weld was so popular now that the hostess used to have to say to her, in a tactful aside, "My dear, you've danced three times this evening with the Scaritt boy. You know that's against the rules."

Betty knew it. So did Chug. Betty danced so lightly that Chug could hardly feel her in his arms. He told her that she ran sweet and true like the engine of a high-powered car, and with as little apparent effort. She liked that, and understood.

It was wonderful how she understood. Chug had never known that girls could understand like that. She talked to you, straight. Looked at you, straight. Was interested in the things that interested you. No waist-squeezing here. No cheap banter. You even forgot she wore glasses.

"I'm going to try to get over."

"Say, you don't want to do that."

"I certainly do. Why not?"

"You're—why, you're too young. You're a girl. You're—"

"I'm as old as you, or almost. They're sending heaps of girls over to work in the canteens, and entertain the boys. If they'll take me. I'll have to lie six

months on my age."

Rudie was in charge of the garage now. "That part of it's all right," Chug confided to the Weld girl. "Only thing that worries me is Ma. She hasn't peeped, hardly, but I can see she's pretty glum, all right."

"I don't know your mother," said the Weld girl.

"Thasso," absent-mindedly, from Chug.

"I'd—like to."

Chug woke up. "Why, say, that'd be fine! Listen, why don't you come for Sunday dinner. I've got a hunch we'll shove off next week, and this'll be my last meal away from camp. They haven't said so, but I don't know—maybe you wouldn't want to, though. Maybe you—we live the other side of the tracks—"

"I'd love to," said the Weld girl. "If you think your mother would like to have me."

"Would she! And cook! Say!"

The Widow Weld made a frightful fuss. Said that patriotism was all right, but that there were limits. Betty put on her organdie and went.

It began with cream soup and ended with shortcake. Even Chug realized that his mother had outdone herself. After his second helping of shortcake he leaned back and said, "Death, where is thy sting?" But his mother refused to laugh at that. She couldn't resist telling Miss Weld that it was plain food but that she hoped she'd enjoyed it.

Elizabeth Weld leaned forward. "Mrs. Scaritt, it's the best dinner I've ever eaten."

Mrs. Scaritt flushed a little, but protested, politely: "Oh, now! You folks up in the East End—"

"Not the Welds. Mother and I are as poor as can be. Everybody knows that. We have lots of doylies and silver on the table, but very little to eat. We

never could afford a meal like this. We're sort of crackers-and-tea codfish, really."

"Oh, now, Miss Weld!" Chug's mother was aghast at such frankness. But Chug looked at the girl. She looked at him. They smiled understandingly at each other.

An hour or so later, after Elizabeth had admired the vegetable garden, the hanging flower-baskets, the new parlour curtains ("I used to do 'em up for folks in town," said Mrs. Scaritt, "so's Chug could go to high school." And "I know it. That's what I call splendid," from the girl), she went home, escorted by Chug.

Chug's hunch proved a good one. In a week he was gone. Thirteen months passed before he saw Elizabeth Weld again. When he did, Chippewa had swung back to normal. The railroad tracks were once more boundary lines.

Chug Scaritt went to France to fight. Three months later Elizabeth Weld went to France to dance. They worked hard at their jobs, these two. Perhaps Elizabeth's task was the more trying. She danced indefatigably, tirelessly, magnificently. Miles, and miles, and miles of dancing. She danced on rough plank floors with cracks an inch wide between the boards. She danced in hospitals, châteaux, canteens, huts; at Bordeaux, Verdun, Tours, Paris. Five girls, often, to five hundred boys. Every two weeks she danced out a pair of shoes. Her feet, when she went to bed at night, were throbbing, burning, aching, swollen. No hot water. You let them throb, and burn, and ache, and swell until you fell asleep. She danced with big blond bucks, and with little swarthy doughboys from New York's East Side. She danced with privates, lieutenants, captains; and once with a general. But never a dance with Chug.

Once or twice she remembered those far-away Chippewa golf-club dances. She was the girl who used to sit there against the wall! She used to look away with pretended indifference when a man crossed the floor toward her—her heart leaping a little. He would always go to the girl next to her. She would sit there with a set smile on her face, and the taste of ashes in her mouth. And those shoddy tulle evening dresses her mother had made her wear! Girlish, she had called them. A girl in thick-lensed glasses should not wear tulle evening frocks with a girlish note. Elizabeth had always felt

comic in them. Yet there she had sat, shrinking lest the odious Oakley, of the fat white fingers and the wheezy breath, should ask her to dance.

She reflected, humorously, that if the miles of dancing she had done in the past year were placed end to end, as they do it in the almanac's fascinating facts, they must surely reach to Mars and return.

Whenever the hut door opened to admit a tall, graceful, lean brown figure her heart would give a little leap and a skip. As the door did this on an average of a thousand times daily her cardiac processes might be said to have been alarmingly accelerated.

Sometimes—though they did not know it—she and Chug were within a half hour's ride of each other. In all those months they never once met.

Elizabeth Weld came back to Chippewa in June. The First National Bank Building seemed to have shrunk; and she thought her mother looked old in that youthful hat. But she was glad to be home and said so.

"It has been awful here," said the Widow Weld. "Nothing to do but sew at the Red Cross shop; and no sugar or white bread."

"It must have been," agreed Elizabeth.

"They're giving a dance for you—and dinner—a week from Saturday, at the golf club. In your honour."

"Dance!" Elizabeth closed her eyes, faintly. Then, "Who is?"

"Well, Mr. Oakley's really giving it—that is, it was his idea. But the club wanted to tender some fitting—"

"I won't go."

"Oh, yes, you will."

Elizabeth did not argue the point. She had two questions to ask.

"Have the boys come back?"

"What boys?"

"The—the boys."

"Some of them. You know about dear Harry Hatton, of course. Croix de—"

"What have they done with the Khaki Club, where they used to give the dances?"

"Closed. Long ago. There was some talk of keeping it open for a community centre, or something, but it fell through. Now, Betty, you'll have to have a dress for Saturday night, I wonder if that old chiffon, with a new —"

Chug Scaritt came home in September. The First National Bank Building seemed, somehow, to have shrunk. And his mother hadn't had all that gray hair when he left. He put eager questions about the garage. Rudie had made out, all right, hadn't he? Good old scout.

"The boys down at the garage are giving some kind of a party for you. Old Rudie was telling me about it. I've got a grand supper for you to-night, Chug."

"Where's this party? I don't want any party."

"Woodman's Hall, I think they said. There was some girl called up yesterday. Wanda, her name sounded like. I couldn't—"

"Don't they give dances any more at the Soldiers' Club down on Elm?"

"Oh, that's closed, long. There was some talk of using it for what they called a community club. The *Eagle* was boosting for a big new place. What they called a Community Memorial Centre. But I don't know. It kind of fell through, I guess."

"I won't go," said Chug, suddenly.

"Go where, Chug?"

But instead of answering, Chug put his second question.

"Have you seen—is that—I wonder if that Weld girl's back."

"My, yes. Papers were full of it. Old Oakley gave her a big dance, and all, at the Country Club. They say—"

A week later, his arm about Wanda's big, yielding waist, he was dancing at Woodman's Hall. There was about her a cheap, heavy scent. She had on a georgette blouse and high-heeled shoes. She clung to Chug and smiled up at him. Wanda had bad teeth—yellow, with a sort of scum over them.

"I sure was lonesome for you, Chug. You're some dancer, I'll say. Honest, I could dance with you all night." A little pressure of her arm.

Somewhere in the recesses of his brain a memory cell broke. Dimly he heard himself saying, "Oh, they all tell me that."

"Crazy about yourself, ain't you!"

"Not as crazy as I am about you," with tardy gallantry.

Then, suddenly, Chug stopped dancing. He stopped, and stepped back from Wanda's arms. Bergstrom's two-piece orchestra was in the throes of its jazziest fox-trot number. Chug stood there a moment, in the centre of the floor, staring at Wanda's face that was staring back at him in vacuous surprise. He turned, without a word, and crossed the crowded floor, bumping couples blindly as he went. And so down the rickety wooden stairs, into the street, and out into the decent darkness of Chippewa's night.