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The Sole Survivor

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stretched out weakly and shut his eyes. His teeth chattered till they ached.

Abbott put his weight to the edge of the door, and assured himself that it would not hold two. Then, he clung to the raft close beside the face of the man he had rescued, and gazed up at him with a ebbie's look of blind admiration in his eyes.

"My, Jimmy, but you're lookin' prosperous! How's things, any way?" he exclaimed.

The flamboyant cheeks of Burke's cheaply loud suit spelled affluence to his boyhood worship. The blout that puffed his cheeks was the rotundity of health, and proof that he had always had plenty to eat.

At the sound of Abbott's voice, the man on the door opened his eyes and stared into the face of his rescuer.

"You are Tommy Abbott, ain't you?" he said at last, as if he found the resemblance hard to trace. "Where you been all this time?" Even his fear of sudden death was forgotten in the strangeness of this meeting.

Shame-facedly, the stowaway told his story of his failure. An occasional wave broke over his head and strangled him. But his heart was warm with admiration, and he laughed. At times, he noticed that Jimmy seemed hardly to be hearing him; but he did not let that halt his narrative. Jimmy had always been smart enough so that he didn't have to listen to every word a fellow said, to know what he was talking about.

"So, you see I ain't done very well, Jimmy," he concluded.

Jimmy stared at him blankly.

"What's that?—Oh yes!"

"An' how've things been with you, Jimmy? You'n Ruth get hitched?"

"Sure! Two years ago."

"An' have you got a—got a—"

"Yep. A girl."

"Now, ain't that fine!"

The weak face in the water glowed with a kind of benign joy.

"An' are you still livin' in Bagley?"

"Sure!"

"What are you doin' there?"

"Runnin' dad's orchard."

"Have'n't made you mayor yet, have they?"

"I'm servin' my first term now."

"Well now, Jimmy, what d'you think o' that? I always thought they'd pick you for mayor!"

The minutes strung themselves on the endless chain of time. An hour passed—two hours; but still one man lay on the ear door, while the other clung to the edge; one man questioned eagerly, while the other answered. Sometimes Burke hesitated over his replies; but that was only natural, because he was lying. He had expanded from a domineering youth into that rare thing—a man with so little good in him that it is imperceptible. It was more natural to Burke to lie than to tell the truth. Perhaps that was why, when Abbott had startled him by asking if he had married Ruth Hawley, whom he had not seen in five years, he had lied about it. Perhaps it was, that behind the shifty eyes that peered out of his puffy face, there lurked a crafty wit that told him that Abbott would do a lot for his boyhood idol; more than he would for a Milwaukee saloon-keeper of bad reputation, with a wife that he had culled from his own wine room. After the first plunge, there had been no drawing back and he needs must flounder straight ahead.

Dawn began to cast a wan, gray light over the angry rollers. Abbott looked up at Burke apologetically.

"D'you think you could trade places with me a few minutes, Jimmy?" he asked weakly. "I'm purty chilled."

"I can't!" gasped Burke, his face pasty and purple-mottled in the garish light.

"All right, Jimmy. I'll hold on here. I guess I'm more used to this sort o' thing than a man like the mayor o' Bagley 'ld be."

The door plunged and climbed and bucked in silence. Burke had hidden his face in his sleeve. Abbott was busy fight-

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