

FISKE JAMES

UNDER FIRE

FOR SERVIA

James Fiske

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Under Fire For Serbia

CHAPTER I

DICK MAKES A FRIEND

The American consul in the small but highly important city of Semlin, in Hungary, was a busy man. He was probably one of the first men in the world who knew how great was the danger of war between Austria-Hungary and the little kingdom of Serbia after the assassination of the heir to the Austrian throne in the summer of 1914. Now, since the Austrian ultimatum to Serbia had aroused all Europe to the peril, refugees had doubled the consul's work. All the Americans in Serbia, and there had been quite a number there that summer, seemed to be pouring through Semlin. Indeed, all the Americans gathered there from all the Balkan states, and from Turkey as well, since the great trunk railway, the famous Orient line, crossed the Save river at Belgrade, and Semlin was therefore a border town, where in many cases passports had to be examined.

So it was a hard matter for any stranger to see the consul in person unless he could prove that his business was of the greatest importance. His office force did all it could to give him the time he needed to catch up with his duties, but on a sunny morning late in July there came a visitor who refused to be put off. The consul heard him as he sat at his desk, writing frantically.

"I tell you I've got to see him!" That was what the consul heard, in a voice that caused him to sit straight in his chair in astonishment. For the voice was that of an American boy. Clear, penetrating, self-reliant, it rang out like a call from home. The consul smiled and touched a bell on his desk. And a minute later Dick Warner faced him, bearing out what his voice had already told about him.

"You want to see me?" said the consul. "Well, sir, what can I do for you? Lost your folks? Want money to get home? Something like that, eh?" a note of condescension in his voice.

"No, sir. I just want to get permission to stay here in Semlin. The police say that I'm English, and that I'll have to go away. But that's because Mike Hallo has a pull."

"Michael Hallo, the great merchant?" the consul frowned.

"I don't know anything about his being a great merchant, sir, but I know that he's a great crook! I've chased him here from New York, and now that I've found him, I'm not going to let him frighten me into going away before he makes good!"

"Tell me about this, my boy," said the consul. "It sounds as if it should be interesting."

"That's what I want to do, sir. My name's Dick Warner, and my father's dead. He and Mike Hallo were partners in New York, and they had a good business. We always had lots of money until my father died. Then, right away after that, Mike Hallo said the business began to go wrong and lost money. And, after a while, it got so bad, he said, that it had to be closed down, and there wasn't any more money coming in. He sold out, and gave my mother a little money and said he was going home."

"That might have happened," said the consul.

"Sure – only it didn't, you see! My mother was soft, and she believed everything Mike Hallo told her. And I wasn't old enough to know anything about it. So he got away with it all right, and went home. But then we began to find things out. We found that the business hadn't been losing money at all, and that he hadn't really sold it. He had another crook running it, and sending him all the profits, only the law couldn't do anything about that, because there'd been a sort of fake sale, and they said this other man had bought it legally. Do you see how that could be, sir?"

"Yes, very easily. I'd have to know more about the facts to understand it properly, but I can understand that it's possible."

"I thought you would, sir. Well, that was how it was. We knew he'd cheated us. A lawyer that was a friend of my dad's said he thought Mike Hallo would still be away ahead of the game, even if he paid my mother a hundred thousand dollars, or perhaps a hundred and fifty thousand! And we – why, my mother's got about five hundred a year left to look after herself and my little sister, and we used to have ever so much when dad was alive! So I just came over here to find Mike and try to make him come through."

"Good for you!" exclaimed the consul, carried away for the moment. But then he frowned thoughtfully. "Look here, Dick, I believe your story, right through. You're not the sort of boy that would get things twisted. But if you couldn't make Hallo disgorge in New York, how can you hope to do it here, where he has all sorts of influence – pull, as you call it? And how did you get here, anyway? It costs money to travel from New York to Semlin."

"I had a good job, and saved up my money, sir. And then I worked my way across the ocean as a steward. I'd studied languages a good deal, too, and I got another job then, traveling with a rich family that wanted to have someone to buy tickets and tell how much things cost in the shops, so that they wouldn't get cheated. I came as far as Buda-Pesth with them, and then they paid my way to Belgrade so that I could reserve rooms for them there. You see, I can talk German and Magyar and Servian and Russian, as well as French and English and Italian."

"For heaven's sake!" said the consul, in amazement. "My boy, I'm not so sure that you won't be able to give Hallo a bad time, after all! You must have a gift of tongues. I don't know half the languages you do, and I'm supposed to, too, in my work."

"Oh, I've always been pretty good at languages, sir. And if you like to know how to talk other languages, you can find people that speak them all in New York. I know a little Turkish, too – not so very much, but enough to get along. And I forgot about the Greek."

The consul roared with laughter.

"By George!" he said. "I'll back you to make it hot for Hallo!" But then he grew more serious. "I don't know, though," he went on. "You're in hard luck, Dick. In ordinary times I think you'd have a good chance. But these aren't ordinary times. Come here!"

He led the way to the window. From it they could see the broad Danube, the great, sluggish river that was wending its slow way to the Black Sea, and the narrower, cleaner Save, directly before them, which flowed into the bigger stream here and lost its own identity. Across the Save was a steel bridge, over which a train was now running. And at the other end of the bridge was a city of white houses, with minarets and spires, and on top of a high, flat topped hill stood an old, white fortress.

"Look there, above the bridge," he said. "Do you see that monitor?"

"Yes, sir. And there are two more out in the Danube."

"Exactly! Well, at any moment those monitors may begin bombarding Belgrade, the capital of Servia. I don't know at what moment war will break out, but I know that it won't be delayed very long."

"It won't be much of a war, will it, sir?" asked Dick. "Servia's too small to have a chance with Austria-Hungary, I thought."

"Maybe. But you must remember that Servia has just been through two great wars. She smashed the Turks in her great battles with them, and then she smashed the Bulgarians, who had beaten the Turks too, and were supposed to have the most efficient army of its size in all Europe. You see, the Servian army has been doing a lot of fighting in these last few years. Every man in it is a veteran, and knows just what war is. A man like that is worth more than one who has to get used to the idea of a campaign, and has never been under fire. And – maybe Austria wouldn't have to fight Servia alone."

Dick stared at him.

"Maybe Russia will help Servia. I think she will. Then all of Europe will get into the war, sooner or later. If Austria has to fight Russia on the other side, she won't be able to spare her whole army or anything like it to fight Servia. And three hundred thousand Servians won't be beaten by that many Austrians, I can tell you!"

"Well, but I don't see what that's got to do with Hallo, after all, sir. He's not a soldier, is he?"

"No. He's past the age of military service. But this is what it will mean, Dick. In time of war ordinary affairs can't be attended to the way they are in times of peace. Even legal, admitted debts, that a man is perfectly willing to pay, can't be collected. Special laws and rules are made, just for war. It would make it much easier for Hallo to dodge you. And he has a pull, as you say."

"Yes, but so have you, haven't you, sir?"

"I hope so," said the consul, with a smile. "Of a different sort from his, too. But I'm afraid it isn't the sort that can help you very much just now, Dick. Still, we'd better do what we can. You want to stay here. Have you got a passport? It would simplify matters for you."

"No, sir. They told me at home I didn't need it."

"That's what they are always saying," said the consul, looking annoyed. "They never seem to understand, at home, that Europe isn't just like America. Here war is likely to break out at any moment, and then a passport is a necessity. It's been that way for years. Still, I suppose you've got some sort of proof that you're an American citizen? Your birth certificate or something of the sort?"

"No, sir, I'm afraid I haven't. I haven't got anything except my Boy Scout certificate."

"Let me see that."

Dick produced, rather proudly, the pocket card that showed him to be a first-class scout, a member of a star patrol of a good New York troop, and recorded his many honor badges.

"This is fine," said the consul, returning it. "But it doesn't prove that you're an American, my boy."

Dick looked at him in dismay.

"But you believe that I am, don't you, sir?"

"I certainly do! There isn't a boy of any other country in the world that could have come here as you have done! But what I believe doesn't count. If Hallo is trying to have you expelled, I'd have to be able to prove definitely that you were an American, instead of just saying that I believed it. In ordinary times – but, as I've told you already, these aren't ordinary times. And I know a little something about this Hallo. I've had trouble with him myself."

"You have, sir?"

"Yes. He exports things to America, and it's part of my duty to certify to values and so on, for the customs. I've thought once or twice that he was trying to cheat. I'm sure of this – that his pull is mighty strong. But I tell you what I'll do. I'll cable for proofs of your identity. Your scoutmaster should be able to get them. We'll hope Hallo won't hurry too much. Now be off, but come back at six, and we'll have dinner together."

CHAPTER II

A SURPRISING OFFER

Plucky and self-reliant as Dick Warner really was, he felt a good deal better when he emerged from Consul Denniston's office than when he had been trying to get by the barrier of clerks fifteen minutes earlier. Then he had been a good many thousand miles from home, and not only friendless in a strange and alien country, but possessed of a determined and unscrupulous enemy as well. He had told only the truth about Hallo, but he did not know everything, by any means, about the rich Hungarian who had cheated his widowed mother.

He had not been very long in Semlin, however, without making the discovery that here, in the old Hungarian town that faced the capital of Servia across the river Save, Mike Hallo was a far more important person than he had ever been in New York. The firm of Warner and Hallo had been a good, sound one in New York, and both partners had been comfortably well off. But in Semlin means that had not seemed very great in New York made a man the equivalent of a millionaire in America. Hallo lived in one of the finest houses of the city, and seemed to be looked up to and respected.

"Gee!" Dick had said to himself. "They seem to think as much of him here as people in New York do of J. P. Morgan or Andy Carnegie!"

Dick was boarding in Semlin. The extravagance of a hotel, he felt, was not for him. He had a considerable sum of money, which he always carried with him, in gold, wrapped in a belt, which never left him, but he knew this money might have to last him a long time, and if he could help it he was certainly not going to have to seek charity to get home. He wanted to paddle his own canoe; that was his favorite motto.

Dick hadn't seen Mike Hallo, to speak to him, since he had come to Semlin. He had seen him at a distance when Mike had been driving in an open carriage, and Mike had seen him, too. Dick had caught the flush on the sallow cheeks, and the look of hate that had sprung into his father's partner's narrow, beady eyes. Oh, yes, Mike knew he was in Semlin! And Dick did not underestimate the man's cleverness. It was just as sure as it could be that Hallo understood very well why he had come and what he hoped to do. Dick had tried to follow Mike's thoughts, too.

"He's a crook – he cheated my mother," Dick had said to himself. "And any man who would do a thing like that has got a yellow streak in him a mile wide. So it's a cinch he's afraid of me. He may think I can't do anything to hurt him, and all that, but he won't take any chances if he can help it, because he's a coward. He'll know he's in the wrong, even if he thinks he's got the law fixed, so that he couldn't be pinched, even if he went back to New York. But down at bottom, just because he himself knows that he's in the wrong, he'll be afraid. And he'll hate me, too, because he's done me an injury."

As a matter of fact, that was good reasoning, and showed that Dick had it in him to become a good judge of human nature. A man's worst enemy is always the one to whom he has done the greatest injury. It is much easier to forgive someone who has done one an injury than to retain a liking for the person one has hurt or cheated.

That morning, before he had gone to the consulate, the Semlin police had visited Dick. First they had asked for his passport and when he couldn't produce one, had told him that, as an English subject, he must leave the town within twenty-four hours.

"You go tell Mike Hallo I'm not afraid of him, even if he gets the whole Hungarian army after me!" Dick had said.

The policemen had only professed utter ignorance concerning Hallo, but Dick had not been deceived. He had not lived in New York without coming to the conclusion that a man with a great deal of money can command a good many things not at the disposal of ordinary people, and he was perfectly sure that it was Mike Hallo who was behind this sudden activity of the police in Semlin.

"He's a dirty sneak," he said to himself. "But I've got to get busy and call on Uncle Sam to help, or I'm apt to be chased out of here before I get a good crack at Mike. Even if I'm not afraid of him and the whole Hungarian army, it's a cinch that it wouldn't take more than a couple of Hungarian cops to put me on a train and see that I stayed there."

So, if he had not been frightened, Dick had been a good deal worried when he went to the consulate. His travels about Europe had shown him that over here things were allowed that would have been impossible at home, and that there is something more than a pretty line or two of poetry about the verse that sings of the land of the free. There wasn't much freedom, he had long since decided for himself, in countries like Austria and Hungary. Those who had influence with officials, like the police, or with the army, could do very much as they pleased, and those who didn't had to toe the mark whenever anyone in uniform told them to do so whether they liked it or no.

That was why he was able to leave the consulate with a light heart and a song on his lips. He had found a friend, and it seemed to him that a friend was a pretty good thing to have found here on the banks of the Danube, four thousand miles and more from the apartment on Washington Heights where his mother and his little sister, for whose sakes he had made his adventurous journey, were waiting for him. About Consul Denniston, busy as he was, and rather stern though his aspect had been in the beginning, there was something that made Dick feel that he would go through a good deal for the sake of anyone he had decided to befriend. So in the street Dick snapped his fingers at Semlin and the whole Austrian empire.

"That for Mike Hallo!" he said. "Well, I think I'll go and try to see the old boy! Wonder if he'll see me? They can't hang me for trying!"

He knew where Hallo was to be found. His office was in the warehouse that he owned. His trade was largely one with Russia and Roumania. Barges laden with products of all sorts from the interior came consigned to him, and were transshipped here at Semlin to the river steamers and other vessels that went down the Danube toward the sea. And so his warehouse was down by the river, whence an excellent view of the old, mysterious looking city of Belgrade could be had. Dick knew something of history, and he remembered that for centuries the high tide of the Turkish invasion had come as far as this and stopped. Christian and Turk in turn had held Belgrade and Semlin, and great battles had been fought many and many a time on the ground that he now trod.

But he forgot about ancient history when finally he stood outside of Hallo's warehouse. He went in boldly, not asking anyone for directions, until he came to a boy of about his own age on guard outside his own door. This boy took one look at him, and then, to his surprise, spoke to him in English.

"What can I do for you?" he asked, very politely.

"I'd like to see Mr. Hallo," said Dick.

"Right in here," said the other boy. "He's not busy just now."

"He will be, when he sees me," said Dick, and walked in.

Hallo was sitting at a table, looking over some papers. At the sound of Dick's entrance he looked up, and for just a moment Dick saw the same look of mingled fear and hatred in his eyes that he had caught when he had seen him driving. But then that look vanished, and Hallo, with an obvious effort, greeted Dick with the bluff heartiness that Dick remembered so well as his customary manner in the days before his father's death.

"Well, well, Dick Warner! My old friend's son! I am glad to see you, Dick! What brings you here, so far from New York?"

"Business, Mr. Hallo."

"You are starting young, Dick! May I ask what sort of business? And can I help you, or is this just a friendly visit to a man who held you on his knee when you were a baby back in New York?"

"Oh, cut that out, Mr. Hallo!" said Dick, disgusted. "You know mighty well why I'm here. I want to know what you're going to do about the way you cheated my mother. You told her the business in New York had failed, and she believed you. Now are you going to do the right thing?"

"I don't understand, Dick," said Hallo. Plainly he was trying to be very patient, and his whole manner was that of a kindly, genial man assailed by a bad little boy, but determined not to lose his temper. "Your father's estate was settled in the regular way. No one regretted his death more than I. The way things went afterward proved how important he was to the business. I lost a great deal of money in the failure, you know."

"You didn't!" said Dick. "Oh, we've got the goods on you, Mike Hallo! And I'll tell you something, too. Maybe there's nothing I can do to you here. I don't know yet – not until I've hired a lawyer who knows all about the sort of law you have here. But I know this much. You'll be wanting to come back to America sometime – you'll have to, on account of your business. And we've found out enough to fix it so that you'll be arrested the minute you step off the steamer on to American soil!"

This was a pure bluff, but it might be true, at that. What Dick did know was that Hallo had stolen money, and he was sure that, whether the law would make it possible to cause his arrest or not, it ought to make that not only possible, but easy. Beyond question, too, the statement had its effect. Hallo's small eyes were getting smaller and narrower, and though the smile was still on his face, he kept it there with an obvious effort.

"You hurt me, Richard," he said. "I did all I could for your mother. I tried in every possible way to cover up the mistakes your father made before he died – "

"You said just now that if he had lived things would have been all right! You don't want to mix up your stories that way, Mike! It won't sound well when they get you into court and try you!" retorted Dick, his temper quickly rising.

"I see that there is no use in talking to you," said Hallo, looking as if he felt more sorry than angry. "I regret very much that your mother is not so well off as she was once, but it is not my fault, and I am afraid that I am too busy to talk any more to you about this matter until you are in a better frame of mind. How long shall you be in Semlin?"

"You ought to know," said Dick. "How long can I hold out against your pull? If that goes back on you, you've still got the answer. Because I'm going to stay here until you either have me run out of town or come through with a check for the money you stole – and a check that I can get certified at the bank, too, before I take the train."

Hallo tried to look bewildered, and as if he did not understand what Dick meant, but the attempt was a poor one. His anger was rapidly passing all bounds.

"So long!" said Dick. "I'll see you again, Mike. I'll give you a tip, too. You'd better not try any monkey business with me, because Uncle Sam's right on the job. I'm not very important, you know, back in New York, but I'm an American! And I guess they'd just as soon send a gun-boat or two up that big river after me if there wasn't any other way of fixing things."

And on that word Dick turned and left the office. He had accomplished as much and as little as he had expected. He had forced a show-down, so that now matters between him and Hallo had come to a crisis. He had never expected Hallo to yield, of course, until he was forced to do so. In fact, he had done even better than he had hoped. He had expected to have some difficulty in getting speech with the man at all.

The boy who had let him into Hallo's office was waiting for him outside.

"Quick!" he whispered. "I am a friend. Tell me where you live. Perhaps I shall be able to help you – and you will need help!"

CHAPTER III

THE POLICE RAID

The strange boy vanished before Dick could ask him what he meant, and he went on, wondering. His whole manner had been friendly, but it was also puzzling in the extreme. Instinctively Dick had told him where he was staying in Semlin, and then the other had disappeared at once. Dick could make nothing of it.

"Oh, well, it can't make any difference," he said to himself. "He didn't want to know for Mike Hallo, because Mike must know all about where I'm staying, and if he doesn't, he can find out – in a place where the police get the names of everyone who takes a room for a night."

So Dick resolved not to worry about the future, but to have a look around the town. He didn't think much of Semlin. It might be old, but it was not especially interesting. It seemed to him dirty, for one thing, and he didn't like dirt. Belgrade, across the river Save, however, fascinated him. There was something romantic about the great citadel. He knew that it had withstood siege after siege in the olden times, and the fact that it probably wouldn't be used as a fortress at all if war broke out that day didn't detract a bit from the interest of its history.

"Some fort, all right!" he said to himself. "I can just see those old Johnnies trying to rush that hill, in days when men fought hand to hand, instead of laying off a few miles and pounding away at a place with big guns. If they're going to have another scrap here, I hope I'm around to see some of it. I'd like to see a war."

He was to be gratified in that modest wish!

There was one noticeable thing. Semlin was a garrisoned town; a regiment of the Austrian army was always there. But now a great many extra troops were always more or less in evidence. Trains would come in, with soldiers looking out from every window. The men would detrain, march through the town, and disappear. After leaving Hallo's office, Dick saw a full regiment arrive like that, march through the streets, and disappear to the west. Now he stopped and began doing a sum in mental arithmetic.

"Gee!" he said, to himself. "I bet the consul's right! I bet the Austrians do mean to start something! That makes about fifteen thousand men I've seen brought in here just since I've been here. I wonder if the Servians know about it? I should think it would be a pretty good thing for them to have a few people here in Semlin just sort of keeping their eyes open."

Dick did not know to the full how serious the situation was. But then very few people in Semlin did. Here news was being suppressed. At this point, where the border brought masses of Servians and Hungarians into such close contact, it was not considered wise to allow the newspapers to print all they knew. It was understood that Austria had made certain demands, but it did not seem to occur to anyone in Semlin that it was possible for tiny Servia to defy the mighty Austrian empire. But as a matter of fact, the final steps that led to the great war were being taken, and war was already regarded as inevitable by those who, like Consul Denniston, were in a position to know the truth.

The consul had told him to come back for dinner at six o'clock, and so Dick had a good deal of time to kill. He determined, therefore, to go across to Belgrade and see if there was a message there yet from the Abercrombies, the family with which he had traveled as far as Buda-Pesth. He was to engage rooms for them when they wrote or telegraphed to him that they were ready for him to do so, and he decided that he might as well see if the message had come, though he was pretty sure that there had not been time yet.

To his surprise, he found some difficulty in passing the guards at the centre of the bridge. Luck favored him, however. One of the soldiers was a Hungarian who had been a waiter at a famous

Hungarian restaurant in New York, and had returned to serve his term with the army. When he heard Dick say that he was an American, he offered to question him, and began to ask Dick about New York.

"He's all right. He knows all the places I know!" said the soldier, after that.

And so Dick was able to proceed. In Belgrade, inquiring at the bank the Abercrombies had named, he found a message, but not the sort of message he had been looking for.

"We are going to London as fast as we can get there," ran the message. "Should advise you to do the same. Situation looks very serious."

There had been more in the original message, for the blank was plainly marked "Censored." Dick was indignant at the idea that anyone should interfere with a telegram sent by as distinguished an American as Judge Abercrombie, but, after all, he decided there was no one here to blame. The censoring had been done at Buda-Pesth in all probability. And the essential fact was there. He was a good deal disappointed, for he had rather hoped that Judge Abercrombie might be able to help him in his dealings with Mike Hallo. However, there was no help for it.

So, having nothing else to do now, he spent a part of the afternoon in wandering about Belgrade, and making himself familiar with the strange old town. The older part of the city he found to be much more romantic when viewed from Semlin. At close quarters it was incredibly dirty, and the houses were rabbit warrens, inhabited by a wretched mixture of Turks and mixed breeds. He managed to learn there were not so many Servians; for Servians are not fond of living in towns. They are farmers and herders, and by choice they live in the open country, which is why they are a hardy and long-lived race.

But the new palace seemed to him a fine building, and he was lucky enough to see old King Peter, with his white hair and his fine, sturdy face, drive out of the grounds. A crowd had assembled, knowing that he was going to drive out, and it cheered the old man to the echo. Dick remembered how, for many years, King Peter had lived in Paris alone, in poverty, longing always for the time when he might return to the land his ancestors had helped to free from Turkish tyranny. And now this old man was an idolized king, who had led his people in two victorious wars and to-day was being urged by them to defy a country many times the size of his own. Dick took off his own hat and cheered with the crowd when the carriage passed him.

"I'm not a Servian," he said, to himself, "but he's a real man, and it won't hurt me to take off my hat to him, I guess."

Here in Belgrade there was far more excitement over the prospect of war than there had been in Semlin. Dick decided that this was because here much more of the truth was known.

He liked the looks of the newer part of Belgrade, beyond the palace. Here there were pleasant white houses, in green gardens, and everything was clean and well kept. The people, too, seemed to him more like real folks, as he put it. There wasn't a servile respect for a uniform. One reason for that, had he known it, was that when Servia went to war it meant that every man, and every boy old enough to carry arms, was engaged. It was a nation that fought, not just an army.

So it was with a pleasanter impression of the Servian capital than he had expected to acquire that Dick returned to Semlin. When he got back the sun was already low over the hills in the west, and he had just about time to hurry to his lodgings and change his clothes.

There he found something that surprised and angered him. In his absence someone had been through all his few belongings; few because he had of necessity traveled with little baggage. He could see that everything had been ransacked, and he guessed that the police had paid his room another visit in his absence. It hadn't done them any good, for of course he carried no papers that would have been of the slightest interest to anyone else, and his money, the only valuable thing he had, was always in the belt that he wore next to his skin, under all his clothes.

But he was angry, none the less, and he carried his anger with him to the consulate, where, arriving promptly, he had to wait a little while for the consul to finish some business. When he told Mr. Denniston what had happened the consul frowned.

"I'm not surprised," he said. "I couldn't prove this, Dick, but I've learned enough to be perfectly certain that Hallo is behind the police interest in you. I don't believe that anyone really thinks you are English, or has the slightest idea that you may be a spy."

"A spy! What kind of a spy would I make? Is that their line?"

"In a time like this almost anyone may be accused of being a spy, Dick. You see, the argument is that it's just the one that's apparently least likely to be guilty, who can be the most dangerous spy. But, as I say, in your case it's just an excuse. I have sent a cable message to the State Department, asking them to satisfy themselves through your scoutmaster at home that you are an American citizen. When I hear from that message, you see, you'll have an official standing, and I can do something. What I am afraid of is that the answer will be delayed. But come in to dinner. I shall have to leave you right afterward."

At the dinner table Mr. Denniston explained the situation more in detail to Dick.

"Hallo's powerful enough to have his way. That's the size of it," he said. "I've decided to have you come here, as my guest. They wouldn't dare to take you from the consulate for that would mean trouble with the United States. And if I don't read the whole situation mistakenly, they are going to have enemies enough before long without embroiling themselves with us, even for the sake of pleasing Mr. Michael Hallo!"

"I hate to trouble you, sir," said Dick. "But it is most awfully good of you to invite me, and, of course, I'd be safe here."

"It's no trouble – I'll be glad to have you. As soon as we've finished dinner, go and get your things, and then come right back here. They gave you twenty-four hours, you said, didn't you? And that was this morning?" returned Mr. Denniston.

"Yes, sir."

"Then I think you have time enough. But there is no use in leaving yourself in their power when the time is up. When they move here, they move very quickly indeed."

"All right, sir. I'll go along, and get back at once."

Dick hurried through his dinner, and then went back to his lodgings. In his room he began packing, but he had not finished his task, light as it was, when he heard a heavy pounding on the street door, which was at the bottom of the stairs, directly in line with his own, his room being on the first floor. He was curious enough to open his door to listen, and he saw the woman of the house open the street door.

"In the name of the law," he heard a heavy voice say. "We have come to take one Richard Warner, calling himself an American, who is accused of being a spy, and is to be sent immediately to Buda-Pesth. Stand aside!"

"Yes, sir – yes – right up the stairs, there," stammered the frightened woman.

Dick was aghast for a moment. Then, by a sheer instinct of self-preservation, he flung the door shut, locked and bolted it. It was stout and would hold for a moment. He rushed to the window. It was an easy drop to the garden below. But of what use to drop? What chance was there for him to make his way through the streets to the consulate, where, could he but reach it, he might find asylum? It might be better to yield. Though he was not a coward, he knew that the police might shoot him.

And then, just as heavy footsteps came up the stairs, a voice spoke in his ear.

"Will you trust me?" it said.

He turned with a start, to see the boy of Hallo's office beside him!

"Follow me – through the window. I can save you," said this boy. "It is I they should seek – I *am* a spy!"

CHAPTER IV

THE REFUGE

There was no time to debate. Dick heard the policemen at the door and he knew that it would not delay them for more than a minute, at best. The mysterious boy was already half way out of the window. Dick rushed over, and saw him land in a flower bed below. A moment more, and he was beside him.

"Follow me," said the stranger. "Can you run fast?"

"Yes, I can," said Dick, speaking in Servian. He wanted to surprise this boy who had surprised him so thoroughly, and he succeeded. But there was no time for questions. He suited the action to the word now, and they ran, the stranger in the lead. But even as they ran, Dick's mind was active. He had answered in Servian because he had suddenly guessed part of the mystery. The other's cry, "I am a spy!" had given him a clue. He concluded that this boy must be a Servian.

And his start of surprise when he had heard the words in that language, which very few foreigners can speak, had convinced Dick that he had made the right guess. He felt better after that. Somehow hitherto he had not been able to divest himself of an uncomfortable suspicion that this strange boy might be in some fashion acting against him and in the interests of Mike Hallo. Yet his manner contradicted that idea; he was frank and open in his appearance. And, finally, there was no need for Dick to feel that he was making any serious mistake in following him now.

It was certain that the police *were* working for Hallo, whether they knew it or not, and it was equally certain that had he not dropped from the window he would now be in their hands, and perhaps on his way to Buda-Pesth. As it was, he was free for the moment at least.

Hot as was their pace, Dick's training as a scout enabled him to keep track of their direction, roughly at least, and he knew that they were going toward the river. Had he been a boy of the type too often seen nowadays, born and brought up in a city, he would have been hopelessly lost within a minute of the start, for his guide twisted and turned in a bewildering fashion, plainly with the idea of making pursuit more difficult for the police. At last the pace slackened, and the Servian turned into a narrow alley. Dick followed, and they dropped into a cellar. This was a damp, dark, filthy place, but they were not to stay there. The Servian pressed a certain spot on what seemed to be a perfectly blank wall, and it gave. Dick saw that there was a secret panel, which swung around now and gave them entrance to a second cellar of a very different aspect, as he saw when his companion struck a match.

This room, for a room it really was, was lined with match board, and there was some sort of ventilation, for the air was fresh and pure, and, moreover, in constant motion. The Servian lighted a lamp that hung from a bracket on the wall, and then, as the light spread, Dick could see what manner of refuge it was that they had reached.

Evidently it was intended for frequent use. There were two or three chairs, a table, and a big, comfortable looking couch, covered with rugs and cushions. Books were on the table, and on a shelf that ran around two sides of the room, and on the table, too, were pens, ink and paper in abundance.

"Now we are safe!" said the Servian. "This place has been used for two or three years, and the police seem never to have suspected its existence. I suppose you are curious?"

"I certainly am!" said Dick. "Who are you? And what are you doing here? And – but go ahead! You'll tell me what you like, I suppose."

"My name is Stepan Dushan," said the other, with a laugh. "That is a good Servian name, as I suppose you know. But you must have guessed before that I am Servian, or you would not have spoken to me in my own language. How is it that you, an American, over here for the first time, speak our language so well?"

"How is it that you know so much about me?" countered Dick, really amazed. "I never saw you until this morning, in Hallo's place."

"Nor I you," said Stepan. "But it was my business to know all about everything that Hallo was doing. He is a very important man just now, and especially for us Servians. He has a great deal to do with the government here. He will supply many of the things the Austrian soldiers will need in the war, and there was a chance that by working for him I might be able to gain a great deal of valuable information. There are so few of us Servians, you see, and especially after the wars, that boys have to do the work of men."

"I see," said Dick, vaguely, though he was a long way from a clear understanding yet.

"That was why I listened to what you had to say to Hallo," the Servian went on. "Anything might be important, you see. But I soon understood that this was a different matter. And then I remembered things I had heard, or had just happened to stumble on, since I had been in his office, and then I knew all about you, and how he had cheated your family – the scoundrel!"

"You do know a lot!" said Dick. He was beginning to be tremendously impressed by this Servian lad, no older than himself, who nevertheless was serving his country in such a dangerous and delicate capacity.

"Oh, I just jumped at the chance of putting a spoke in Hallo's wheel," said Dushan. "It hasn't been the easiest thing in the world working for him, obeying his orders, I can tell you. He treats those who work for him like a dog. You would think he was a noble, instead of a shrewd peasant who has made money."

He laughed.

"I ought not to talk like that," he said. "In Serbia we are all democrats, and a peasant is as good as the next man. But still it was hard with this Magyar swine! My father – you know my father is in our army, a general of brigade. I shall be in the army, too, when I am old enough, if there is to be more war after this. And in the meantime I do what I can. I am a Boy Scout."

"A scout? So am I!" exclaimed Dick.

They had found a common tie when Stepan Dushan said that, and for a little time they forgot everything in a discussion of scouting and of the differences between the Servian and American systems. They soon agreed that, though there had to be many differences, the fundamental idea was the same, and that the original impulse of the Boy Scout movement had spread because there must be, after all, a great deal in common between all boys everywhere.

"There are scouts here in Hungary. In Buda-Pesth there are several troops, you know," said the Servian.

"I saw them there," Dick nodded. "And in Germany, too, but the German scouts are rather different. I say, this is splendid, Steve! You don't mind my making it Steve, do you, instead of Stepan? That sounds so strange to me."

"I don't mind a bit," said the Servian. "Well, I got you away from the police, but I'm puzzled as to what to do for you next. We can't stay here very long, because some of the men who are doing the really dangerous work may want to use this place any minute, and I don't think they'd like it if we stayed. I suppose I could manage to get you out of Semlin, but you'd have to go to Buda-Pesth, and you want to stay within reach of Hallo, don't you?"

Dick's jaws snapped together.

"I certainly do," he said, doggedly. "I hate to give a thing up when I've once started to try to do it, don't you?"

"Ye-es. I'm trying to think, Dick. There is a way, of course. I can smuggle you over to Belgrade when it gets dark. But if you once get into Serbia just now, there's no knowing when you'll get out again. When the fighting starts – and it's going to start soon, perhaps to-night, perhaps to-morrow – things are going to move quickly. We haven't wanted war, we Servians. We've had enough to last us a lifetime since we attacked Turkey. But we're ready for it."

Dick said nothing. It seemed plain that his new found friend was still pondering an idea.

"You've no idea how I hate that man Hallo!" he burst out in a minute. "Sometime, if we are to be together, I'll tell you why. The rest of the reasons, that is. But I'd give anything to help you beat him, Dick, and I do think there's a way. Only it will be risky. You'd have to come with me to Belgrade. And you'd have to stay with me and probably help Servia, and I don't suppose an American, who's got nothing to do with our troubles, would want to do that?"

"I'd do pretty nearly anything rather than go home beaten," said Dick, grimly. "And there's another thing, too, Steve. Do you think there's a chance that this may mean a European war, with Germany and France and Russia mixed up in it? That's what Mr. Denniston, the American consul here, seems to think."

"Yes, I'm afraid it will mean just that," said Dushan, gravely. "Russia will help us if Austria attacks us. We know that already. Then Germany must help Austria and France must help Russia, and England must help them both. And there will be the great war – the war Austria threatened us with when she took away Albania, that thousands of our Servians had died to win for the fatherland! We gave way then, just as we gave way when she enslaved millions of Serbs in Bosnia, so that there might be peace in Europe. But this time Austria has gone too far, when she tries to take away the independence our fathers bought from the Turks with their blood! Servia cannot give way again. And Russia will not let her be wiped out by Austria."

"Then I'll stay here," said Dick, cheerfully. "Because there isn't a chance for me to get home. I haven't got money enough. I got here by working my way, and in time of war there'd be no chance for me to do that."

"There is something in that," said Stepan. But he seemed doubtful still. "I don't want you to come in without knowing what there is to be risked," he went on. "It is going to be dangerous, hard work. But I really think that at the end there will be a chance for you to get what you came for. I think that I can show you a way to beat Hallo and force him to make restitution. Don't ask me why I think so, because I'm not ready to tell you yet. And it might spoil everything if I told you too soon."

"You've done so much for me now that there's no reason why you should do more," said Dick. "And as for helping Servia, why shouldn't I? When my own country was little and poor, and fighting for its life against England, we got help from all sorts of people who believed in freedom and hated tyranny. So I don't see any reason why an American scout shouldn't do anything that's in his power for Servia."

They struck hands then.

"We must wait until dark," said Stepan. "Until it is really dark, full night. Then it will be very easy to get over the river, unless things have changed greatly since last night. I am glad you are going to stay, Dick. We are in the right, and we are going to win. There's no other way."

"I think so, too," said Dick. "Steve, there's just one thing. I know that Austria has treated Servia badly, and that she should not have annexed lands in which there were so many Serbs. But that murder in Serajevo was an awful thing – "

"It was frightful!" declared Stepan, passionately. "Every true Servian will tell you the same thing! But it is a wicked Austrian lie to say that Servia had anything to do with it! It was Austrian subjects who were, perhaps, Serbs in blood, who planned it. We Servians did all we could. Our government learned that trouble was brewing, and our minister in Vienna begged the Archduke Franz Ferdinand to stay away or at least to take especial precautions. The Serbs in Bosnia hated him because they thought he was the man who planned the annexation. But to say that the Servian government knew what was planned is to say what the Austrian government knows to be false."

"No, that is only an excuse. Austria is afraid of us, of our patriotism. She has determined to crush us before we are too strong. She is trembling because of her memory of how we crushed the Turks."

CHAPTER V

UNDER FIRE

It was after midnight when Steve finally decided that it was safe to venture from their retreat. And then they did not emerge by the way in which they had entered it.

"This place has saved the life of many a Servian patriot in these last few years," said Steve. "I think the Austrians have come near to finding it once or twice. They have pursued some of our people to the very entrance. But what has always puzzled them is that we never go out by the way in which we come in. And one entrance we have never used except for flight, and then only in a grave emergency. No Austrian pursuer has ever seen that, or come near it. It is the one by which we shall escape now. Keep still. That is all that is necessary. Keep still and follow me."

Dick had guessed already that there were other entrances. He was not prepared, however, for the elaborate system of rooms and passages that were revealed as he followed Steve, who had now possessed himself of an electric flashlight, and had given Dick one also.

"We could almost have stood a siege down here," explained Steve. "Here – we seem to be in a dead alley, don't we?"

They had passed from the room in which they had waited to another, where Dick had seen a plentiful supply of provisions and of drinking water in great bottles. From this they had gone into a narrow passage, dark and damp. Now Steve flashed his light on a blank wall. But a touch at the right place brought a handle into view. This, when it was pulled, showed that there was really a door, cunningly made so that it seemed to be a part of the wall, with no cracks to betray it. And behind this was another door of solid steel.

"It would not be easy to get through that door, you see, even if they penetrated the secret of the first one," said Steve. "That door is made of armor plate, of tempered steel. It is the same sort of steel that is used for the protection of a great battleship. Even a shell from a cannon would not go through it very easily, and bullets would only be hurled back if they struck it."

He touched a spring and the door revolved on its own axis, staying open just long enough for them to pass through, and then closing.

"The action is automatic," said Steve. "That would make it safe even if one were pursued, for the pursuer would be caught as the door closed; he would not be so close as to be able to get through."

"You people didn't overlook anything, it seems to me," said Dick. "You must have been getting ready for war for a long time."

"For years," said Steve, quietly. "Ever since King Peter came to the throne and refused any longer to betray the country to Austria, as his predecessor did always. We stand in Austria's way. Until we became powerful by beating Turkey and Bulgaria, which attacked us as the result of an Austrian trick, it mattered less. But ever since the end of the second war last year we have known that Austria was only looking for an excuse to attack us. And so we have tried to be ready. It was our only chance."

"But you say you won't have to fight Austria alone. The Russians will come to Serbia's aid, won't they?"

"In a way, yes. But they will not be able to send troops to fight with our armies. They may attack Austria, and so keep some of her soldiers busy elsewhere. But that is all. We do not touch Austria anywhere. She might send troops through Roumania, and Roumania, it is true, is friendly toward us. But that would bring her into the war, and she will not be ready for that for a time. At least Turkey would bar her from sending troops by sea to Antivari, for they would have to pass through the Dardanelles, and that is impossible since Turkey is the friend of Germany.

"And there is another point. Austria has been making ready. She can strike quickly. Russia is slow. It will be two months before she makes herself felt, even if she declares war at once. For two

months Austria can devote herself almost entirely to us. And the odds in her favor are so great that anything might happen in that time, if we had not prepared for her. As it is, there is almost nothing of Austria's plans and preparations that we do not know."

While Steve talked they were walking through what seemed almost like a tunnel. Now he flashed his light, looked about, and dropped his voice.

"Now we must begin to be careful," he said. "We are getting near the light. This is like a rabbit's warren, but soon we shall be in the open. Sure as we are that the Austrians know nothing of this place, we never take chances."

"We must be a long way from the cellar we first went into," said Dick. "Even if we've circled around, and here where there are no stars, I can't tell about that. We've walked a long distance, I should say."

"You're right," said Steve, with a low and discreet chuckle. "Oh, this is a fine tunnel! Do you know what we did a few minutes ago? We walked right under a police station!"

The tunnel seemed to dip now, and then to rise again. And in a few moments cold air was blowing on their faces; cold, that is, by comparison with the heat of the subterranean workings in which they had been buried. Then they came out, stooping, and passing through a well designed covering of shrubs and bushes, on the sandy beach of the river. Dick gasped a little at that, and at seeing that they had evidently got out of the town altogether. Before him now lay the lights of Belgrade, but he noticed one thing at once. The lights had shrunk; there were fewer than there had been the night before.

Steve had gone ahead now, scouting to see if the coast were clear, but he returned in a moment, jubilant.

"All safe!" he said. "I knew it would be, of course, but there is no need to take chances. Now we're all right so far. But we've got quite a walk before us yet. We'll still be very cautious."

"Which way?" asked Dick.

"West, along the bank of the Save here. Look, do you see that monitor there? If her searchlight swings this way, drop down. She might not pay any attention, but we don't want to be noticed at all, and it's better to be on the safe side."

"Why are there so few lights in Belgrade?" asked Dick. "I know it's late, but other nights, when I've looked over, it was much brighter."

"I'm not sure," said Steve, looking anxious. "You see, it's hours since I've had any news. The war may have come already, Dick. I hope not, because I should feel that we were more sure of getting across before the declaration. Still we have a good chance, even if it has begun."

Three times, as they walked along the river bank, Steve made a long detour inland.

"The Austrians have patrols along the river," he said. "But they don't take that sort of work very seriously. They are trusting the monitors and their searchlights. You see, their lights are swinging pretty steadily, and they cover the whole river and the Servian shore."

"And don't they think that there's likely to be danger on this side?"

"They're right, too, of course. Spies, yes. But we couldn't threaten them very seriously in any way that would make it necessary for them to be very careful here."

"I wish we knew what was going on, don't you? Doesn't it seem funny to be right in the middle of something that's going to make history and to think that people thousands of miles away really know more about it than we do?"

"Yes. But soon we'll know all there is to be known. When we're once over the river, then we can ask questions and get true answers, which is more than people in Semlin have been doing lately. Yes, I'm just as anxious for some news as you are. I rather wish now that I'd gone out while we were waiting for it to be late enough to start. But I suppose it was better that I didn't. You'd have been helpless there if anything had happened to keep me from coming back," remarked Stepan.

"If you'd been caught, you mean?"

"Ye – es, I suppose that's what I mean. Although really I don't think there was ever any great danger of that. When I got a job from Hallo, it was sure that no one suspected me, because he's so busy with government contracts that he had to be careful. I'm supposed to be a Hungarian, from Buda-Pesth. And it isn't as if I'd been trying to find out things in a general way. All I had to do was to pick up the information that it was so easy to get in Hallo's place. There were all sorts of things to be learned there, and a lot was made easy for me because Hallo and others didn't think, I suppose, that I would know what certain papers and estimates meant."

"How did you know enough to be able to do all that sort of thing, Steve?"

"Well, there were a lot of things I didn't understand, myself. But I didn't have to. I just copied down everything I saw that seemed to have anything to do with military matters in any way, and sent everything I got to the general staff at home. They knew the meaning of everything, you see. It wasn't any one thing, perhaps; it was what I and a lot of others who were at work over here were able to report that counted. They could put one thing with another, and, altogether, it was worth something. I don't know how much. But I do know, for instance, that Hallo has sent supplies of various sorts to particular places. There's a regular arsenal on the Austrian side, near Schabatz, and there are big depots of supplies at a lot of places along the Drina."

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