

AN OLYMPIC VICTOR

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VI



IN anticipation of the needs of Greek youth who might wish to take part in the coming Olympic Games, there had been installed at Athens this physical director, already met, as has been described, by Loues and Gouskous, a man acquainted by reason of long residence in other countries with the training methods of the world's greatest athletes; and it was this director who announced one morning that thereafter the candidates for the games were to be overlooked in their exercises by a Board of Judges, and that after another ten days the squad would be reduced to such as were considered of good merit; and therefore that it behooved all to prosecute their exercises with the rigor and skill and self-denial worthy the dignity and importance of the occasion; and that all would have need of every ounce of strength and every shade of skill, for there were coming from all parts of the world great athletes to contend for the unsurpassable glory of the celebration; and further, in a sonorous voice, the director read from the *Echo* of that morning the names and residences of the foreign athletes who had announced their intention of coming: Germany, France, Austria, Italy, Russia, Sweden, Denmark, Belgium, Holland, England, America, and even far-away Chile and Australia.

The reading of the list cast a chill over many; even Gouskous, the self-confident, was subdued. "Truly, Loues, here are mighty men coming to contend with us." And that day in the Stadium bore himself with solemnity.

Accordingly—thoughtlessly, joyously or seriously—each to his nature prepared for the trials which were to determine who would finally represent the nation.

On the tenth day there was great anxiety as the director, when the exercises of the

day were done, announced in the order of their event the names of those who had won approval of the judges. Gouskous was among the successful ones; indeed his was the first name read for the discus-throwing and weight-lifting; but the entries for the Marathon race were not to be announced until after a trial to be held within the week.

On the morning of that trial Loues could partake of no breakfast, but set out with his companions and arrived with something like a burning fever in his veins. He had been unable to sleep the night before, and felt weak in body as well as dispirited in soul. His mind was not at peace. Not since that discomposing day when he was discharged from the Army had he had sight of Marie. Euripides, who had since come twice to Athens to see him, could or would give him no word; and Loues chose to put a hopeless interpretation on his silence.

But even in his weakness Loues, reproaching himself as a man lacking courage, goaded himself to the test which was the last on earth he would have selected for that particular day; and yet, despite what his will would do for him, the dark feeling of despair was not to be driven away.

A hot morning, the road lay deep with dust. Everything seemed to conspire against Loues, who had hoped for a cool wind laden with dampness to keep the dust from his lungs, which seemed as if they were on fire within him; but it was not to be. The race was begun and completed, and Loues was almost nowhere. Only on the last kilometre was it, that torn apart with pain and dread, shame and fear, hope and despair, he gathered himself for a burst that carried him past those competitors who would have intervened to prevent him from securing a place on the judge's list; but immediately he crossed the finishing line he sank to the ground.

It was Gouskous who caught and bore his failing body from the track. "Courage, my Loues, courage." As the athletes said

of him, "A fine friendly nature, a great heart, Gouskous—you should know him." When Loues was somewhat recovered and was able, with the supporting arm of Gouskous, to make his way to the dressing-room, it was the great-souled Gouskous who all the while encouragingly talked to him. "Most marvellous indeed was it, Loues, to see you get the place. Such an effort! 'His heart will burst,' I exclaimed—did I not, Touferes? Only this morning, when I saw you, so pale and distressed, set forth for the tremendous exertion, I shook my head and it was Touferes again to whom I said—was it not, Touferes? 'Poor Loues, all last night he tossed in pain and now in extreme weakness he goes forth to run.' Think of it—nothing to eat since the evening before! Ps-st! but how a man can do anything on these empty stomachs is most amazing. For me, I cannot lift a little finger in the morning until after I have abundantly breakfasted. It is too painful altogether. But you, Loues, notwithstanding my calamitous predictions, went forth and you are named among the qualifying runners. 'Twas sublime—hah, was it not, Touferes? and so I say, courage, my Loues, courage. It is true you are yet behind Vanitekes, who has trouble to conceal his pride and joy; but to-day I even heard the director saying as you approached the goal—said he, and pointed you out to his associates, 'Observe that lad. He will be of the chosen ones. There is that in his features which tells me he needs but the occasion to do a great deed.' Yes, so he said, Loues. And so take heart, and be prepared, when the great trial comes."

An observing man altogether, that director. That afternoon, after the athletes had lunched and were resting, he said to Gouskous: "Your friend Loues is a promising lad, but he should be encouraged. He does not think enough of himself."

And a wise man also that, for later, when Loues, now partly rested, was reclining on a row of seats in the Stadium, to him came the director, and questioned him as to his previous practice in the way of running. He was a sympathetic man, to whom, seeing that he listened with interest, Loues related the habits of his earlier days, of the days which he had spent in pursuit of game, flying hot-foot from dawn to dark down the declivities, or surmounting laboriously the

steeps; and of the nights when he had found himself so far from any habitation that he would make his bed in the open, in the morning bathing himself in the nearest sheet of water, or, it might be, refreshing his body in the dew of the grass. Further, under the encouraging comment of the director, he told of his life in the Army; how when they were camping in the country, in Thessaly at one time, far from cities and regular lines of travel, he had been called upon by the commander to carry messages for long distances. "And they used to call me then Ergoteles."

"Why?"

"Euripides—he is my godfather—tells me that Ergoteles was four times crowned victor in the long race in the ancient games."

"Ha? Go on."

"And that for him the great Pindar composed a most moving ode, and that when he returned to Himera they breached the walls about the city that he might not have to enter through the gate used by the ordinary citizen, and that, further, they raised to him a statue in the market-place, as was also done in the groves of Olympia in honor of his unrivalled prowess, and a pension for life was his, and he died in great honor."

The director's eyes sparkled, and he drew the lad's arm within his own. "Stay by us, Loues, for surely you are possessed of the true spirit. They are to be many, the chance is slight among them all; but who knows, my Loues, that you shall not win?"

An astute man also the director. That evening, after all had dined together, in a building set apart for that purpose, midway between the ancient temple of Theseus and the Stadium, and from the windows of which the athletes might gaze their fill on the ruined but ever-glorious Acropolis, he turned to Loues and said, "Have a care for your friend Gouskous. A very Milo of Crete for strength, and in size equal to that Diagoras, after whom he is so often called, but he must be restrained. But for my watchful eye he would have awhile ago gone to the cask in the cellar and helped himself. He may have all the food he craves, but restrain him if you can in his absorption of wine."

A politic man likewise: To Vanitekes he said, "They did not name you The Goat without reason. On you I doubt not will

rest the honor of upholding the fame of Greece." And to all he said aloud, "From henceforth we must not fail to train faithfully."

At the table that evening there had been some mirth, largely because of Gouskous, who had become disgruntled. "There, now," he complained, "one measure of wine! A single measure of wine without a single measure of discrimination. Constantine there—estimate now on the bulk of his shrimp-like body. He weighs now—how much? Fifty kilograms? So it is. And I—one hundred and forty kilos. It is true. Yet we get the same ridiculous apportionment. He as much as will drown him if he be not careful, and I, Gouskous, the strong man of our fleet, who has posed for Hercules in the charades, I get no more than what will sprinkle the membrane of my parched stomach, not to speak of the palate and throat which must be assuaged on the way down."

VII

LOUES had now and again seen Euripides during these days of preparation for the festival, and from him had been getting all the neighborly gossip of Marousi; of all but her of whom he was most desirous to hear. And the suspense was affecting him to such an extent that one night he conceived that he could bear it no longer. He would go to Marousi; and because he feared that the director would attempt to hinder him and protest it was a violation of training rules, an imperilling of his chances in the race, he informed no one at the training quarters of his intention.

Not even Gouskous did he tell; this that the gigantic one might be able to say truthfully in the morning that he knew not where his friend was; and if of his intended action he spoke no word to his friend, be sure he told him nothing of what was in his heart and mind.

But Gouskous was not to be overreached. As Loues was about to drop from the window the big man suddenly awakened from an apparently profound sleep and grasped his nether leg.

"Ps-st, be not alarmed! It is only Gouskous. I have been observing thee for several days past. To-night I said to myself, he will do it."

"Do what?"

"Ss-s-st! I know not—I care not, whatever it is. But I have a suspicion." He laid a finger to his beard and smiled roguishly. "And I would advise thee. Our ship lay three weeks in the roadstead at Bombay and there was one ashore, Loues, as would have— Ah, Loues, the purple days of youth! And overboard I stepped one night—and ruined such a magnificent uniform! Never again did it fit me. And such a tale of accident and adventure as I had to concoct on my return next day! Old Homer himself reeled his recitation out no more smoothly, I'll warrant. And it fitted in all its parts—my story—as—ah-h, if only my blue uniform fitted half so well! But not a word would any one believe, not a word. Ho, ho! Ho, ho! from the youngest apprentice to the Admiral himself. And now, great heart, shall I stand by the window for you? And at what hour? And if you're not returned in time, what shall I say, Loues? Let us agree on a story in case they question us apart. For these objectionable and mostly useless superiors—they do ask questions at times."

All this Gouskous was whispering, but with one detaining arm that would have held back a team of struggling horses. "What shall I tell them if you are not returned by morning, my Loues—and I doubt you will be, because one may drop from a window of this height more easily than he can climb into it—even if you are in a mind to return in time, which is much to be doubted. Ha, you will—good Loues, do think of it. What shall I say in the morning when they ask? It is always one of two reasons, and for you one does not exist. As sparing as any ascetic are you of the wine. And so what girl's name is to be shielded—for so it must be—what else?—they will believe so anyway and at once cast about to identify her. Hah, what—don't mistake—I mind not the hot blood of youth if sometimes it bursts bounds, but consider, great soul, consider the work before you—and it is on such as you, not on great-bodied boasters like myself on whom the final honor will fall."

Loues had paused, not to conjure a picture of himself enwrapped in that final honor, but to picture his comrades gathered about the table and of those careless or malicious ones who would only too freely and

eagerly pass that word of comment which no girl's name should be allowed to sustain.

Gouskous under the half-light of the night that came from outside, noted the hesitation, even though he misread the motive for it. "Ah, Loues, great soul, but a little sacrifice for now. Stay to-night and to-morrow matters will be clearer. To-morrow the foreign athletes come in large numbers, and by them we will pattern anew, and mayhap discover new devices for our training."

And Loues stayed. And next day the first of the foreign athletes arrived, and from them, as Gouskous had predicted, they learned many things of value. From the American, from one American particularly, Loues learned an important point in training.

The occasion was when Touferes, after noticing his American, French and Irish rivals leaping, began to comment to Loues on his own chances. Sighing, he observed, "They are stags, Loues. I fear that the glory of Greece is to remain unsung for all of me."

"And as for me, also, I think. But the race is yet to be run, and I shall not take their looks for it."

"No, nor will Vanitekes. Look. He watches them all like eagles. Only to-day he said: 'I have learned something,' even in the dressing-room awhile back, and through me he asked all manner of questions of the foreigners. He will profit by to-day's practice. The matter of foot covering was not lost on him, Loues. He will be hard to beat."

"Yes," answered Loues, slowly. "Very hard. And yet it will be a great satisfaction if he wins, for then also it will be Greece that wins."

The particular American who had taken a great fancy to Loues, now observing the expression on the young Greek face, inquired of Touferes what it was that Loues was concerned about, whereat Touferes, the linguist, translated; whereon the American carefully comparing Vanitekes and Loues as the two stood not far apart, said, "Why, that other is a horse. He is of a strong, course fibre, built for long, steady, unrelieved labor; but your friend is so much more delicately adjusted—strong also, but so much less gross. He probably does not allow in his training for the extra strain imposed by his more active brain and more ardent soul. That other, as I say, is the

work-horse and your friend the thoroughbred. Don't let the other wear him down. He is made, your friend Loues, for less frequent but more supreme efforts. Tell him to ease up in his work."

And it was as much because of this advice as of his example that Loues changed his mode of practice; so that instead of running as formerly every day, except Sunday, of course, and each day as far as his system would endure, he now ran only on alternate days and varied the distances. Thus on Tuesday he ran, say, sixteen kilometres, ten miles, on the road, eight kilometres out from the city and back; on Thursday perhaps thirteen kilometres, and on Saturdays, his hard task, twenty-four kilometres. On days between he might walk the seven kilos to the beach at Phaleron, and there lie almost naked in the sun; or if it were a particularly enticing day, take a quick dip in the sea, allowing himself to dry off in the warm sand. Having had always a passion for air, sun, and water, this mode of life seemed to answer perfectly the needs of his nature. He could not say that his speed was increasing, but he felt himself waxing strong as a young lion, which added much to his confidence, and yet he began to feel almost nervous lest the augmented power should pass from him ere the great day arrived.

Now, during all this time of trial and diversion, Loues had been to Marousi but once, and then went on an off-day, in lieu of a walk to Phaleron, and with the express permission of his director, ostensibly to see Euripides in the matter of new shoes for the race, but really more to see Marie. He did not see Marie, but he came away with a pair of shoes of the softest and most flexible kid, patterned after those of the American, and which fitted his feet as gloves fit a lady's hands. It was with these shoes in his hands that he had called at Marie's home, trusting that she would admire them; but he got only a gruff word from her father at the gate, and, despite the beautiful shoes, came away disconsolate.

VIII

THE great festival was drawing near; the athletes were becoming more careful in their training. At last the morning of the first day of the games was on Athens.

The city was alive with visitors. A hundred thousand strangers were within her gates. One may imagine what a commotion that created in the ancient city. At this time of the year, in the late spring, there were always great crowds of people from all the world over, but now the fame of the Olympic Games had perceptibly increased the usual number of tourists. People who otherwise might have stayed a few weeks longer in Turkey, Egypt, Italy or the Holy Land, had hurried to Athens for the Olympic festival.

English and Americans were particularly prominent, the English men and women in overheavy loose-fitting clothes, and the Americans eager, rushing everywhere, with seemingly inexhaustible supplies of energy—likewise of money. They had but to see a thing—a trinket, a relic, a bit of sculpture, to demand at once the price and immediately to buy. Of course many things were not to be bought, and they would ask, "Why not? why not?" impatiently. Many of them seemed not to understand that even an unlimited purse is not always potent. They were wearing now in their lapels little flags of their country, and whenever a group of them assembled they were challenging one another to wagers on the chances of this or that competitor in the games.

Sixty thousand people crowded the seats and walks of the Stadium this day; another sixty thousand, it was estimated, crowded the hills which rose above the walls of the enclosure. First there were the trial heats of the short race, a little more than one-half the length of the Stadium. One after the other, in the trial heats, the Americans, as was expected, came in victorious, except in the case of one German and one Australian. None of the Greeks secured a place for the final heat, to be run next day, and this largely because they were not sufficiently trained in the little details that count for so much in a race that is barely of ten seconds' duration.

After the running came the triple leap, the ancient contest at which in olden days the wonderful Phaylos excelled. In the trials it was the American, a Frenchman and the Greek, Touferes, who led. Hoping against hope for Touferes, the Greeks awaited painfully the further results; but all their prayers availed not; possibly—who knows—as one said, possibly for the Amer-

ican prayers even as fervent were offered. However it was, at the last trial the American won, and then ensued a scene for which, to have the honor to fall on one of themselves, hundreds of Greeks there felt that they would gladly offer up their lives.

The moment it was declared that the American had won, his name was elevated, the consolidated band broke into the first notes of the "Star-Spangled Banner," and at the same instant the flag of his country, beautiful with the alternate bright stripes of red and white and the little stars against the blue field, rolled and unrolled against the sky of Greece. The band continued to play, and everywhere the people cheered, while the countrymen of the victor, every one seemingly, mysteriously produced a small copy of that great ensign and waved it frantically aloft.

"How proud he should feel, that American," breathed thousands of throats fervently, and doubtless he did, the first winner, after fifteen hundred years, of an Olympic championship. But there was small chance to see how he took it, proud enough though he doubtless felt, for he no more than waved his hand to a group of his countrymen ere he disappeared into the tunnel which led to the dressing-room.

And now entered Gouskous to contend in the discus-throwing. The rules were such as the Grecian officials conceived governed the contest of old. A designated attitude was assumed, and from that pose, with one forward stride within the square, the disc was hurled. From the first the enormous force of Gouskous was apparent. Apparently without pause or premeditation he grasped the disc, assumed position, and, with no more than a quick glance around and before, cast the missile from him. His lack of skill was evident, but his superior strength was believed sufficient to offset that, especially when the American, his chief opponent, seemed to be casting the disc also unskilfully to one side. A great gain would have resulted could either have succeeded in throwing accurately down the centre line of measurement.

On the last try Gouskous heaved most valiantly, and a mark at least a metre beyond all others resulted. The audience was jubilant, and the name of Gouskous re-echoed resoundingly throughout the Stadi-

um. The American was yet to throw, but no one anticipated a greatly improved performance, and so the officials made no concealment of the plaque bearing the name of Gouskous which they were about to elevate, nor of their own blue-and-white flag which was about to be hoisted triumphant. But the American had not yet thrown. And now in his preparation was seen evidence of that which was making his nation so great. He was not to be shaken in his preparation by the cheers of the tens of thousands for the victorious Gouskous. Calmly he took position and coolly surveyed the prospect. His eye seemed to remain glued on a point far down the centre line. At the instant of execution a panic seized the Stadium. Suppose he should throw so accurately that the disc would sail straight down the centre line? Which was exactly what he did. No waste whatever in the cast—Gouskous was astoundingly beaten. The populace, in time, almost philosophically accepted their defeat. As one paper next morning put it: "Ah, well might the Americans say that their mixed blood was welding a nation that is to be invincible in time. Their vitality to-day in the games is but symbolical."

But at the moment the Greeks were inconsolable. Again the American flag aloft, again the cheers of the victor's countrymen, again their voices ringing as the superb band played the strains of their national hymn.

Gouskous mingled in the joy of the victors—he could not help it—they were generous foes; but gloom was creeping on the Greeks, a gloom which deepened when at the end of the second and third days they had still no victory to the credit of their nation. And the night of that third day of defeat brought to Loues a feeling that he could no longer combat.

Still no sight of Marie, whom he now felt was lost to him; especially as Vanitekes, with whom he had yet to exchange his first word of greeting—Vanitekes had become unbearably insolent in his manner. It was true—all Greece said that on Vanitekes rested the hopes of the nation. But there was more than that to Loues. There was something in his rival's expression, or so he imagined, which was not to be accounted for by the admiration of the populace alone.

That night, when Loues was with his compatriots at the training quarters, when

he should have been asleep, he suddenly left his cot, and silently dressed himself. There was now no zealous friend to restrain him. Gouskous, his period of abstemious training past, was in the hands of his friends that night, had been for three nights now, explaining to them how it came about that his great arm did not win the undying glory for his country.

The mind of Loues dwelt not now on what interpretation might be placed on his flight. One more day, another night and it would be the morning of Marathon—they would be too engrossed in that to reflect overmuch on his absence. After all who was he? But one of sixscore. And was not Vanitekes the favorite? Was it not to be Vanitekes, whose picture graced every shop-window, that stared full-length from every paper? Was it not the wonderful Vanitekes who was to lead all the world?

And yet—who knows—the vanity of the unpreferred champion was betrayed by his bitter smile—the race was not yet run. But he had to see Marie. Come what would of it, he would see her. He swung back the shutters and for a moment balanced himself at the ledge. He was not certain of the distance to be dropped, but what matter?

Even as he landed sprawling, ere yet he picked himself up, he was praying that of whatever bones might be broken they would not be those of his legs. He would have need of them.

All the way Loues ran to Marousi, above twelve kilometres, over the uneven road. He knew that he should not be doing it—his country demanded and deserved better of him; but that inward torment, even as he reasoned thus, would not leave him.

Euripides, as if he had been expecting him, answered quickly to the knock on the door, but could not forbear a little grandmotherly scolding. "H-m—and so you are come. I had begun to hope that Gouskous had dissuaded you. Yes, I have had more than one conversation with him about you. And you must have run all the way. And since you would come, why did you not ride, this night above all others?"

"Ride? Search for a carriage this hour of the night and have it all over Athens tomorrow. Besides I could come quicker afoot. The horses of our cabmen are overworked these days."

"H-m-m—There's a strange mixture of

wisdom and impulse for you! You're a lather of sweat. You did run all the way then?"

"I did. And would, had it been to Marathon itself."

"And been ready to turn about and run all the way back the day after to-morrow for the honor of Greece? Do you think you're doing well, Loues?"

"I think nothing, godfather—I care nothing. This I had to do or fret my soul away ere morning. May I sleep here to-night? Or will you argue till I fly to the hills and sleep there till dawn?"

Euripides then must have seen what he never saw before in the boy, for at once he ceased scolding, and laying a tender hand to his head, which was feverishly hot, patted him as if he were a child. "Yes, Loues, turn in now. But here, first this—" and made him drink a cup of warm goat's milk. "'Twill make you sleep," he said, and sat by his cot, kindly smiling till the lad fell to slumber.

IX

In the morning Loues was early awake. The feverish spirit was not yet wholly allayed, though the sleep had calmed him wonderfully. Waiting not for breakfast, he strolled forth. Toward Marie's house he went, but seeing no one awake he continued his way toward the hills.

Now hills and woods had ever an overpowering effect on Loues. He never beheld the uprising slopes of the one, nor gave himself to contemplation in the shades of the other, but at once whatever petty troubles beset fell from him like a cast garment. And so it was this morning. He lay on his back on a broad flat stone, minding not the moisture which everywhere dripped from the underbrush, and fell into soothing meditation. It was very quiet. Everything—even the heart which for days before had been throbbing painfully was now deliciously quiescent. And lying there he reviewed all the years, the years and years, the beautiful years of his boyhood.

It was almost as if he had fallen asleep; and it seemed as if from out a dream, as if from out his dream of the days back there when they were playmates in that village of Marousi, that she came and leaned over him. And, as though if it were no dream

he would know who it must be, he refrained from opening his eyes. "Loues," he thought she whispered, "Loues," and, doubtless thinking he was asleep, bent down and touched her lips to his forehead.

He forced lips and eyes to remain closed, but he felt that the warming blood must have rushed to his amazed face, for—if it were no dream—he felt her shrinking away, and he felt his temples, cheeks and very ears and neck burn.

"Loues," she called again, more loudly, and he opened his eyes.

Perhaps three paces away she stood, leaning against a tree, and regarding him with an expression new to him; but calmly enough she went on: "From behind my curtain I saw you pass, and came after you, and found you here, and waited the longest time for you to awake. What brought you back, Loues?"

"To see you, Marie."

She neither smiled nor frowned; only knitting her brows, said: "And the race so near?"

"I know, but I could not help it. I had to come."

For a minute or two she remained silent, regarding him the meanwhile however with intentness. And then, "Have you had breakfast?"

"Not yet."

"No? That is good."

"Why?"

"Because I am going to confess and receive the sacrament. Will you come?"

He leaped to his feet.

"And receive the sacrament, too, Loues?"

"With you, Marie? That I will——"

She clapped her hands. Her face flushed, her eyes shone luminously. "It is true what Euripides maintained. 'Soldier or no, city or barracks——'" she ended suddenly.

But Loues, in a puzzle, had heard clearly. "What is it Euripides maintained? and why?"

"It is nothing."

"Nothing—then why——"

"Hush—I will tell you later—some time——" and would answer no more, but to herself breathed, "It is true—his is the clean soul, as Euripides said——" and turning to him—"Let us go."

And so to the little centuries-old church he went with her, and confessed after her, and received communion beside her.

"And for what purpose do you think I offered my communion, Loues?" Mass was over, but they lingered in the church porch.

"To what, Marie?"

"To your success," she whispered.

"And I to your—but I will tell you later," he whispered.

She flushed vividly. "And now shall we go back and light a taper before the Blessed Virgin's shrine, also for your success?"

"For mine, yes—or for the success of a Greek—whoever he be."

"That is better and greater, for whoever it may be, so it be a Greek. But," she smiled timidly, "my prayers shall be for you, nevertheless. And now"—they had come to the road by now—"I must go home and you must go to your godfather's and have breakfast. And later I shall meet you and we will have a long talk over old days. And bring with you the new running clothes which Euripides has ready for you, those which you are to wear in the race."

And they met and went out into the sunlight and wandered far, and his heart was like a boy's again. And during all this time never a word of love, and yet every word making for love, and love alone. He was almost forgetting that ever a race was to be run next day; but the overthought of it was there and they both knew that soon he would have to leave for it; and began to talk of that.

The valley lay below them. No one was near.

"To-morrow you run, Loues?"

"To-morrow, Marie."

"You will run well, you think?"

"I think so, Marie."

"You will win, do you think?" She bent forward anxiously.

He did not answer.

"You doubt you will win, Loues?"

"Very much, Marie."

"Who then? Vanitekes?"

"Of all the Greeks I should name him. But when all the world is there; who could declare that this or that one will win—from among so many?"

"And you reflect on it calmly, you or no other Greek winning, Loues? Your coming into the Stadium to-morrow and—yet no Greek winning?"

He answered nothing to that until she spoke again. "What do you say, Loues? Doesn't that thought trouble you?"

"It troubles me so much, Marie, that I hesitate to say how much. I am going to try to win to-morrow—going to try so hard that I expect to win or—" He smiled so calmly that she had no suspicion.

"Go on, Loues. To win or—" No suspicion a moment ago; yet now as she looked on him she began to breathe painfully.

"No, no, it is a sin to say it, to think it even—after taking the sacrament, too."

"Never mind—to win or——?"

"Well, say—or drop on the road."

"Drop—insensible you mean, Loues?"

"Insensible? M-m——"

"You mean dead—drop dead, Loues?"

He said nothing.

"Loues!" she gasped.

For a long space they said nothing more, until again she spoke. "Loues, you've no token of me, have you?"

He drew out from his inner pocket a little leather envelope and showed her the faded rose-leaves and the blue-and-white rosette. "At least, Marie, I have been supposing they are from you."

She seemed pleased and took them from him and held them tenderly. "Let me keep them now, Loues—because you have carried them. And now, let me see the jersey which you will wear to-morrow."

Loues undid the little package. The beautiful suit of white silk, sleeveless jersey and trousers cut to fit above the knee, fell out on to the grass. Marie picked them up and held them up. "Are they not beautiful—the blue trimmings—Oh, oh—blue and white—our country's colors. And now, see, Loues—" She drew from her bosom a small silk Greek flag. "This I am going to sew on the breast of your jersey—So—" She spread it out to show him. "Will it not be beautiful? It *is* beautiful—our flag," and bending over, kissed it rapturously. The tears were in her eyes, and almost in Loues's. "And now, Loues, that flag for our country, but this—" she drew forth the knot of blue-and-white ribbon—"this for one who will pray that you will win. This we will place—where shall we place it?"

Loues reached over and took it from her and laid it on the jersey. "There, Marie—above the heart—" and that there would be no mistake, held a finger on the exact spot until, by a preliminary stitch, she fitted it exactly.

"And 'twill be a happy girl returning to



Three paces away she stood leaning against a tree.—Page 211.

Marousi if on the breast of the first runner entering the Stadium she sees that knot of blue and white, and beside it the flag of Greece."

Loues said nothing, because his tongue choked him; but in his mind flamed a picture of a victorious runner entering the Stadium. Vanitekes? Never! His heart jumped painfully at the thought, and yet, shame rose in him—Vanitekes was also a Greek.

"They say, Loues—" having put the last stitches to the ribbon, she was bending low to bite off the end of the thread—"it is reported that the rich widow, Madam—m-m—what *is* her name?"

"Madam Herikler?"

"Y-yes. It is—well, it is said that she has published her desire to wed the winner of the Marathon race—if he be a Greek—

that is bestow on him her wealth—and herself. Is it so?"

"So they say, Marie."

"And she is beautiful, they say."

"M-m——"

"You have seen her?"

Loues nodded gravely.

"H-m—she has been to the Stadium to see the runners practice?"

"Oh, yes—frequently."

"H-m—And she is rich, but—but—*is* she beautiful?"

"M-m—yes."

"Ah-h—" sighed Marie. "Could a man be blamed? Rich, beautiful—" and went off into a reverie.

It was all like a reverie to Loues, almost a dream; but it had to end. The afternoon was fading, and they must be returning.

"Marie, I may not see you again until

after the race to-morrow—win or lose—and yet if I lose——”

“If you lose, come to Marousi. I shall be waiting. Good-by.”

“And if I win—suppose it, Marie—if I win?”

“If you win, Loues, it will be enough. There will be plenty to crown you. You will have no further need of me if you win.”

She smiled as she said it. Loues smiled, too, but bitterly, to think she could say it so easily.

“But won’t you come, Marie, by way of my godfather’s? Early in the morning he is to take me to Marathon, and you may not see him until after the race again.”

“Oh, I shall see him—his seats for the Stadium are near to ours. Only father and I go together, of course. Your godfather obtained seats near ours of your friend Gouskous.”

“Ah, Gouskous! You should see Gouskous, Marie, since he has come from the Navy. A huge fellow, but a great soul, too.”

“I have met him, Loues.”

“Where?”

“One day in the Stadium. Euripides and I—we two went to see the athletes practice. It’s not your rich widows alone who take interest——”

“And where was I?”

“You had not returned from your practice on the road.”

“And you did not wait?”

“Oh, yes—and saw you, but you did not see me. Gouskous, now, he is one to waste a moment in chat with a friend—but you, Loues, no sooner in than off. No more than two or three circles around the track and away to the dressing-room.”

“Ah-h—I did not know, and covered with dust, I wished to get clean once more.”

“I did not mind the dust, Loues. A little dust does not blind us, Loues. But I see no sign of your godfather. And, oh, Loues——”

“Yes——” they were by then within the door of Euripides’s shop— “Yes, Marie.”

“Nothing. But don’t the men look so handsome in their athletic clothes! One who never saw could not conceive that men could look so beautiful. We women are stiff and clumsy beside you.”

“Ah-h—Did you mark Gouskous—the symmetry for so large a man.”

“The symmetry—Ah, Loues, in that——” She did not finish the sentence.

Euripides had not yet returned, and the two were standing alone. Marie sighed. Loues stepped closer.

“This rose, Loues——” She held it up, fragrant, exquisite, as she herself—“I have been carrying it—and why? To give you for the dead leaves of that rose I took from you to-day. A rose, like—like—love—should be ever blooming—and yet even if it dies! No, I shall not pin it, but do you carry it so——” She bent over—her head was beneath his chin—he rested his lips on her hair. She looked up. Said nothing, but looked at him. She was calm enough apparently, but he shook as with fever. She smiled and—it came over him—the hundred times this sweet day when, sitting beside her, walking beside her, his hand touched hers and he wished to clasp it, when her head bent toward his and his heart ached because he must not draw her to him—and the rush of passion overcame him—he drew her close and kissed her.

She did not lift her head, made no protest, and he in shame for himself drew away. To think of it! Only that morning he had received the holy sacrament with her—and already he had forgotten. He a man and she a girl—a weak girl. “Oh, Marie,” he whispered, and dropped his arms in despair.

The hand over his shoulder patted him gently. There were tears, too, in her eyes, “It is all right, dear.”

“But you——”

“Me? There has never been any other and never will be now. And what matter, so that you are happy? And now, good-by, and——” no further word, but raising her head, she kissed him, and ran off.

Ran off, but at the door turned, and oh, the look she gave!

Quivering, Loues sat down on his godfather’s bench.

And there his godfather found him.

“What is it, Loues?” The old man touched the damp forehead, lifted the hot head.

Loues arose and stretched his arms—as if he would embrace the world. “Oh-h—godfather!” His eyes were flaming—to Euripides they flamed like the sword of an archangel.

“Ah-h——” murmured the old man—



He and the Frenchman vied with each other in practical joking, "To the health of our respective countries."—Page 216

"whatever brought it on—the purple light of youth is coloring the world for you now. Take care, Loues, take care."

"Oh, godfather—" he stretched his arms again and laughed with a ripple like a girl's—like Marie's— "To-morrow, godfather—" and suddenly stopped.

Euripides waited, the boy said no more, but sat down with his head hidden again.

The old man patted him. "That's right. Do not say it, but think it all you please. It is the unuttered impulse which drives farthest and fastest."

X

Or all the candidates who assembled at Marathon on the morning of the race Loues was the last to arrive; and escaped not without some gibes as well as hearty greetings from his compatriots.

"Ola, it is Loues! So you tore yourself away? Who is it, Loues?"

"And does she live so far from Athens, Loues, that you had to leave a night in advance to see her?"

"Oh, Loues, you should have heard Gouskous trying to explain your absence. His imagination is as large as his body almost; but like the power of his great body he exercises it sometimes to no purpose. The director was not to be deceived. 'It is of no avail, Gouskous,' said he, 'he has been moping for days, and he is off at last.' Indeed, but he will be rejoiced to hear that you have turned up at last; for despite his criticism he was grieved at your deception."

Only Vanitekes, lowering and preoccupied, had no word either of censure or affection. He pretended, indeed, after the first unwilling nod of recognition, that he saw Loues no more; and yet Loues felt often

that his rival's glowering eyes were turned on him as if he would have liked well to know where it was he had spent the missing hours.

Loues had no mind to enlighten him, nor any other there. He took his light breakfast—he and Euripides had left Marousi before sunup—and after breakfast made his way to the shade of a tree, and there lay down. All thought he was asleep, but it was not to sleep he went. He was thinking of Marie. And lying there he felt but little concern about the race. Why should he—Marie's kiss still on his lips! When his mind did revert to the trial it gave him no worry. A new confidence was in him. No longer did he feel distrust that he was doomed to fail in the very trying. He might be beaten; indeed it was almost certain that he would be, among so many, the pick of all the world over, but at least they would know that he was in the race.

There were yet several hours before the start of the race, and most of the competitors were resting in houses near by. It was a hot, breathless morning, and some could not sleep, either because of the heat or from nervousness. Loues after an hour or two of sweetest musing fell lightly asleep. And this outdoor nap—it was like a page from his old life. After a time he slept profoundly. Indeed they had to wake him when it came time for the luncheon, which all partook of about two hours before the start of the race.

In this matter of luncheon there was much difference of opinion. Some were for eating most sparingly, raw eggs in light wine, with a husk of bread; others not quite so unsubstantially as that, but still a light repast. Loues was of the opinion of a man from Ireland, who had no divided mind in the matter. "Gentlemen," he announced—Christovopulous, a runner, translating it—"if from here to Athens is the same distance as from Athens to here, then 'tis a long road. And we'll be needing, I'm thinking, something more nourishing than fresh air in our stomachs before we see the Stadium again. Something good and substantial for me, and you can't cook it too soon to suit me, either."

A droll man the Irishman, a big man who declared that he should be throwing weights like his Greek friend Gouskous, with whom he had become a favorite—anything but

long-distance running. "It's only self-respect that's keeping me in it. 'Tis nothing but torture I've endured since I first set my two feet in this ancient country."

He and a Frenchman vied with each other in practical joking, and it was comical to see how they made out to converse, each but half comprehending the language of the other.

"And who will drink with me to the health of our respective countries?" With a bottle of cognac under his arm the Frenchman until now had been vainly trying to induce some one to exchange toasts with his.

The Irishman at last said that he would take a sup with him—"For—" he turned to Christovopulous—"as your own poet says:

"'Tis blood and spirits gives us all our strength,
To these we add brave wine and food at length:
What man, though hero he, and strong
Without them lasts the whole day long?"

And so not to make a liar of old Homer, I'll have to take one with you, Frenchie."

Said the Frenchman—"I drink to your success—after me."

"And you—here's to the long shanks of you running across the line first—that is, of course, if old Ireland has crossed before you."

The Frenchman was not content with that, but must seek to find others to drink healths with him, but thereat he was not oversuccessful. Here and there was a good-natured or a weak one who did. It was not that many would not like to, but they were not there this day to give appetite full play.

During all the parleying after luncheon Loues was busy in his own way. From a peasant near by he borrowed needle and thread and a small square of cloth. With these he improvised a tiny pouch, inside of which he placed the already withered rose of Marie's, and hung the whole, like a scapula, about his neck.

At two o'clock the contestants were assembled across the road in four crowded rows. In nearly all was apparent an intense nervousness. Some betrayed their dread of the ordeal by gripping and un-gripping their hands continuously; by lacing and relacing their shoes; by chewing on wisps of wood; others again rolling and unrolling their hats. One would be continu-

ously spitting out, another patting the ground with one foot; others again could not stay in one place but were running back and forth behind the aligned rows.

In the Frenchman the excitement showed in characteristic form. "Soon we go," he said, "but before we go one more health, one more. With you? You?" And so on with everybody refusing until he came to the Irishman, who pushed him along, but was at length persuaded. "For the glory of the sport then, Frenchie, one more hooker. And may the devil paralyze your legs if you bother me again."

All chafed under the dallying of the clerk of the course and his assistant, who seemed to spend an unconscionably long time in checking off the names. One after the other he read them, and as he called each answered. And such a list! More than a hundred in all, and from such far-away countries! Italy, Hungary, Austria, England, Switzerland, Germany, Holland, Sweden, Denmark, Belgium, Spain, Ireland, Australia, America.

And then the clerk of the course, turning to the starter, said, "All is ready," whereupon the starter, an officer of the Greek Army, gave out the conditions of the race, first in French, and then in Greek; and, having done that, paused, and baring his head, addressed his own countrymen anew:

"The Greeks had this run inserted in the Olympic list," he said, "to commemorate the historic feat of the messenger who carried the news of the great victory of Marathon to the anxious waiters at Athens.

"Which of us does not know it by heart? But it may be wise to rehearse it here.

Know then that when the valiant Greeks had swept the field of Marathon their first thought was to get the news home. They sought a fleet courier, and found him in the person of a warrior who had fought all day against the invading Persians and who was even then panting from his exertions. This one was only too proud to be the chosen messenger—indeed who would not be?—and at the word he was off, only disencumbering himself of his heavier armor. His great run was made with but one brief stop for refreshment on the way. He reached the market-place of Athens in an incredibly short time, turned to the multitude, spoke the one word, 'Victory!' and dropped dead."

Here the officer's voice choked, and for a moment he could not go on, and there were tears in the eyes of many others also. And when he went on, "And so may it be with us of Greece to-day—victory or——"

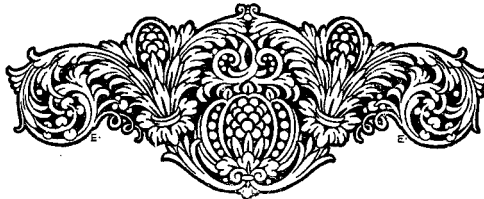
"Death!" shouted several—Vanitekes among them. Loues did not shout, did not even whisper to Christovopulous who was beside him, but his heart at the call leaped so convulsively that he was forced to press a hand to his breast to check its movement.

"Loues, Loues—you are pale," whispered Christovopulous.

Loues smiled. The hand that had been pressed to his heart now caressed the knot of blue and white. The other hand was tucking inside his jersey the amulet with the roses.

"Twice blessed," whispered Loues, smiling—"but oh, Christovopulous, this waiting is the most trying, don't you think?"

(To be concluded.)



FORTY MINUTES LATE

By F. Hopkinson Smith

ILLUSTRATIONS BY ROSE O'NEILL WILSON



It began to snow half an hour after the train started—a fine-grained, slanting, determined snow that forced its way between the bellows of the vestibules, and deposited itself in mounds of powdered salt all over the platforms and steps. Even the porter had caught some puffs on his depot coat with the red cape, and so had the conductor, from the way he thrashed his cap on the back of the seat in front of mine.

"Yes, gettin' worse," he said in answer to an inquiring lift of my eyebrows. "Everything will be balled up if this keeps on."

"Will we make the connection at Bondville?" I was to lecture fifty miles from Bondville Junction, and had but half an hour lee-way.

If the man with the punch heard, he made no answer. The least said the soonest mended in crises like this. If we arrived on time every passenger would grab his bag and bolt out without thanking him or the road, or the engineer who took the full blast of the storm on his chest and cheeks. If we missed the connection, any former hopeful word would only add another hot coal to everybody's anger.

I fell back on the porter:

"Yes, sir, she'll be layin' jes 'cross de platform. She knows we're comin'. Sometimes she waits ten minutes—sometimes she don't; more times I seen her pullin' out while we was pullin' in."

Not very reassuring this. Only one statement was of

value—the position of the connecting train when we rolled into Bondville.

I formulated a plan: The porter would take one bag, I the other—we would both stand on the lower step of the Pullman, then make a dash. If she was pulling out as we pulled in, a goat-like spring on my part might succeed; the bags being hurled after me to speed the animal's motion.

One hour later we took up our position.



"Yer ain't the fust one they've left down here to git up the best way they could."
—Page 222.