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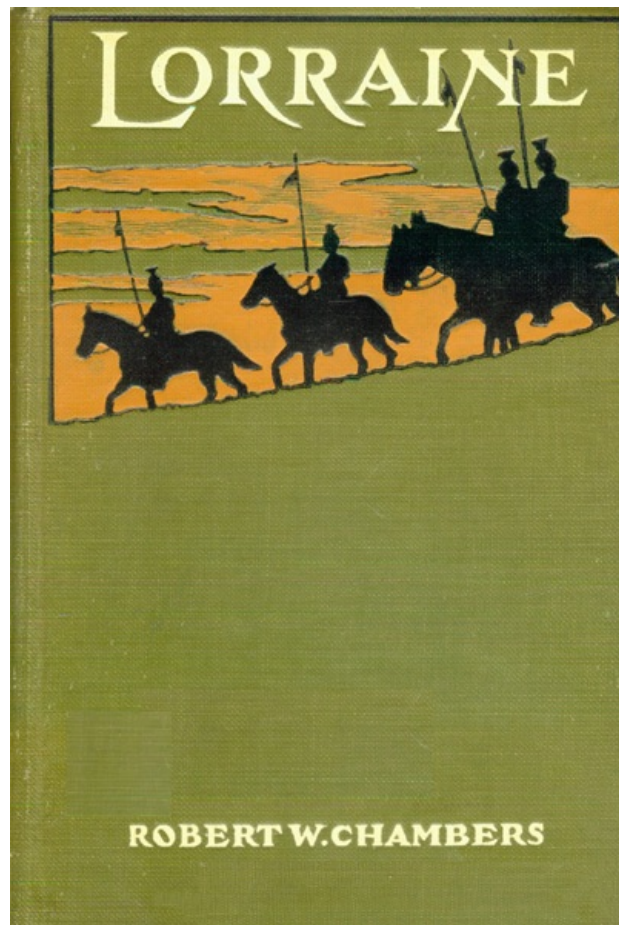
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LORRAINE

A ROMANCE

By ROBERT W. CHAMBERS

Author of "Cardigan,"

"The Maid at Arms,"

"The Maids of Paradise,"

"The Fighting Chance," etc.

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TO

MY FATHER

LORRAINE!

*When Yesterday shall dawn again,
And the long line athwart the hill
Shall quicken with the bugle's thrill,
Thine own shall come to thee, Lorraine!*

*Then in each vineyard, vale, and plain,
The quiet dead shall stir the earth
And rise, reborn, in thy new birth—
Thou holy martyr-maid, Lorraine!*

*Is it in vain thy sweet tears stain
Thy mother's breast? Her castled crest
Is lifted now! God guide her quest!
She seeks thine own for thee, Lorraine!*

*So Yesterday shall live again,
And the steel line along the Rhine
Shall cuirass thee and all that's thine.
France lives—thy France—divine Lorraine!*

R. W. C.

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Occasionally the author has deemed it best to change the names of villages, officers, and regiments or battalions.

The author believes that the romance separated from the facts should leave the historical basis virtually accurate.

R. W. C.

New York, September, 1897.

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LORRAINE

CHAPTER I

A MAKER OF MAPS

There was a rustle in the bushes, the sound of twigs snapping, a soft foot-fall on the dead leaves.

Marche stopped, took his pipe out of his mouth, and listened.

Patter! patter! patter! over the crackling underbrush, now near, now far away in the depths of the forest; then sudden silence, the silence that startles.

He turned his head warily, right, left; he knelt noiselessly, striving to pierce the thicket with his restless eyes. After a moment he arose on tiptoe, unslung his gun, cocked both barrels, and listened again, pipe tightly clutched between his white teeth.

All around lay the beautiful Lorraine forests, dim and sweet, dusky as velvet in their leafy depths. A single sunbeam, striking obliquely through the brush tangle, powdered the forest mould with gold.

He heard the little river Lisse, flowing, flowing, where green branches swept its placid surface with a thousand new-born leaves; he heard a throstle singing in the summer wind.

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Suddenly, far ahead, something gray shambled loosely across the path, leaped a brush heap, slunk under a fallen tree, and loped on again.

For a moment Marche refused to believe his own eyes. A wolf in Lorraine!—a big, gray timber-wolf, here, within a mile of the Château Morteyn! He could see it yet, passing like a shadow along the trees. Before he knew it he was following, running noiselessly over the soft, mossy path, holding his little shot-gun tightly. As he ran, his eyes fixed on the spot where the wolf had disappeared, he began to doubt his senses again, he began to believe that the thing he saw was some shaggy sheep-dog from the Moselle, astray in the Lorraine forests. But he held his pace, his pipe griped in his teeth, his gun swinging at his side. Presently, as he turned into a grass-grown carrefour, a mere waste of wild-flowers and tangled briars, he caught his ankle in a strand of ivy and fell headlong. Sprawling there on the moss and dead leaves, the sound of human voices struck his ear, and he sat up, scowling and rubbing his knees.

The voices came nearer; two people were approaching the carrefour. Jack Marche, angry and dirty, looked through the bushes, stanching a long scratch on his wrist with his pocket-handkerchief. The people were in sight now—a man, tall, square-shouldered, striding swiftly through the woods, followed by a young girl. Twice she sprang forward and seized him by the arm, but he shook her off roughly and hastened on. As they entered the carrefour, the girl ran in front of him and pushed him back with all her strength.

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"Come, now," said the man, recovering his balance, "you had better stop this before I lose

patience. Go back!"

The girl barred his way with slender arms out-stretched.

"What are you doing in my woods?" she demanded. "Answer me! I will know, this time!"

"Let me pass!" sneered the man. He held a roll of papers in one hand; in the other, steel compasses that glittered in the sun.

"I shall not let you pass!" she said, desperately; "you shall not pass! I wish to know what it means, why you and the others come into my woods and make maps of every path, of every brook, of every bridge—yes, of every wall and tree and rock! I have seen you before—you and the others. You are strangers in my country!"

"Get out of my path," said the man, sullenly.

"Then give me that map you have made! I know what you are! You come from across the Rhine!"

The man scowled and stepped towards her.

"You are a German spy!" she cried, passionately.

"You little fool!" he snarled, seizing her arm. He shook her brutally; the scarlet skirts fluttered, a little rent came in the velvet bodice, the heavy, shining hair tumbled down over her eyes.

In a moment Marche had the man by the throat. He held him there, striking him again and again in the face. Twice the man tried to stab him with the steel compasses, but Marche dragged them out of his fist and hammered him until he choked and spluttered and collapsed on the ground, only to stagger to his feet again and lurch into the thicket of second growth. There he tripped and fell as Marche had fallen on the ivy, but, unlike Marche, he wriggled under the bushes and ran on, stooping low, never glancing back.

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The impulse that comes to men to shoot when anything is running for safety came over Marche for an instant. Instinctively he raised his gun, hesitated, lowered it, still watching the running man with cold, bright eyes.

"Well," he said, turning to the girl behind him, "he's gone now. Ought I to have fired? Ma foi! I'm sorry I didn't! He has torn your bodice and your skirt!"

The girl stood breathless, cheeks aflame, burnished tangled hair shadowing her eyes.

"We have the map," she said, with a little gasp.

Marche picked up a crumpled roll of paper from the ground and opened it. It contained a rough topographical sketch of the surrounding country, a detail of a dozen small forest paths, a map of the whole course of the river Lisse from its source to its junction with the Moselle, and a beautiful plan of the Château de Nesville.

"That is my house!" said the girl; "he has a map of my house! How dare he!"

"The Château de Nesville?" asked Marche, astonished; "are you Lorraine?"

"Yes! I'm Lorraine. Didn't you know it?"

"Lorraine de Nesville?" he repeated, curiously.

"Yes! How dares that German to come into my woods and make maps and carry them back across the Rhine! I have seen him before—twice—drawing and measuring along the park wall. I told my father, but he thinks only of his balloons. I have seen others, too—other strange men in the chase—always measuring or staring about or drawing. Why? What do Germans want of maps of France? I thought of it all day—every day; I watched, I listened in the forest. And do you know what I think?"

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"What?" asked Marche.

She pushed back her splendid hair and faced him.

"War!" she said, in a low voice.

"War?" he repeated, stupidly. She stretched out an arm towards the east; then, with a passionate gesture, she stepped to his side.

"War! Yes! War! War! War! I cannot tell you how I know it—I ask myself how—and to myself I answer: 'It is coming! I, Lorraine, know it!'"

A fierce light flashed from her eyes, blue as corn-flowers in July.

"It is in dreams I see and hear now—in dreams; and I see the vineyards black with helmets, and the Moselle redder than the setting sun, and over all the land of France I see bayonets, moving, moving, like the Rhine in flood!"

The light in her eyes died out; she straightened up; her lithe young body trembled.

"I have never before told this to any one," she said, faintly; "my father does not listen when I speak. You are Jack Marche, are you not?"

He did not answer, but stood awkwardly, folding and unfolding the crumpled maps.

"You are the vicomte's nephew—a guest at the Château Morteyn?" she asked.

"Yes," said Marche.

"Then you are Monsieur Jack Marche?"

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He took off his shooting-cap and laughed frankly. "You find me carrying a gun on your grounds," he said; "I'm sure you take me for a poacher."

She glanced at his leggings.

"Now," he began, "I ask permission to explain; I am afraid that you will be inclined to doubt my explanation. I almost doubt it myself, but here it is. Do you know that there are wolves in these woods?"

"Wolves?" she repeated, horrified.

"I saw one; I followed it to this carrefour."

She leaned against a tree; her hands fell to her sides.

There was a silence; then she said, "You will not believe what I am going to say—you will call it superstition—perhaps stupidity. But do you know that wolves have never appeared along the Moselle except before a battle? Seventy years ago they were seen before the battle of Colmar. That was the last time. And now they appear again."

"I may have been mistaken," he said, hastily; "those shaggy sheep-dogs from the Moselle are very much like timber-wolves in colour. Tell me, Mademoiselle de Nesville, why should you believe that we are going to have a war? Two weeks ago the Emperor spoke of the perfect tranquillity of Europe." He smiled and added, "France seeks no quarrels. Because a brute of a German comes sneaking into these woods to satisfy his national thirst for prying, I don't see why war should result."

"War did result," she said, smiling also, and glancing at his torn shooting-coat; "I haven't even thanked you yet, Monsieur Marche—for your victory."

With a sudden gesture, proud, yet half shy, she held out one hand, and he took it in his own hands, bronzed and brier scratched.

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"I thought," she said, withdrawing her fingers, "that I ought to give you an American 'shake hands.' I suppose you are wondering why we haven't met before. There are reasons."

She looked down at her scarlet skirt, touched a triangular tear in it, and, partly turning her head, raised her arms and twisted the tangled hair into a heavy burnished knot at her neck.

"You wear the costume of Lorraine," he ventured.

"Is it not pretty? I love it. Alone in the house I always wear it, the scarlet skirts banded with black, the velvet bodice and silver chains—oh! he has broken my chain, too!"

He leaned on his gun, watching her, fascinated with the grace of her white fingers twisting her hair.

"To think that you should have first seen me so! What will they say at the Château Morteyn?"

"But I shall tell nobody," laughed Marche.

"Then you are very honourable, and I thank you. Mon Dieu, they talk enough about me—you have heard them—do not deny it, Monsieur Marche. It is always, 'Lorraine did this, Lorraine did that, Lorraine is shocking, Lorraine is silly, Lorraine—' O Dieu! que sais-je! Poor Lorraine!"

"Poor Lorraine!" he repeated, solemnly. They both laughed outright.

"I know all about the house-party at the Château Morteyn," she resumed, mending a tear in her velvet bodice with a hair-pin. "I was invited, as you probably know, Monsieur Marche; but I did not go, and doubtless the old vicomte is saying, 'I wonder why Lorraine does not come?' and Madame de Morteyn replies, 'Lorraine is a very uncertain quantity, my dear'—oh, I am sure that they are saying these things."

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"I think I heard some such dialogue yesterday," said Marche, much amused. Lorraine raised her head and looked at him.

"You think I am a crazy child in tatters, neglected and wild as a falcon from the Vosges. I know you do. Everybody says so, and everybody pities me and my father. Why? Parbleu! he makes experiments with air-ships that they don't understand. Voilà! As for me, I am more than happy. I have my forest and my fields; I have my horses and my books. I dress as I choose; I go where I choose. Am I not happy, Monsieur Marche?"

"I should say," he admitted, "that you are."

"You see," she continued, with a pretty, confidential nod, "I can talk to you because you are the vicomte's American nephew, and I have heard all about you and your lovely sister, and it is all right—isn't it?"

"It is," said Marche, fervently.

"Of course. Now I shall tell you why I did not go to the Château and meet your sister and the others. Perhaps you will not comprehend. Shall I tell you?"

"I'll try to comprehend," said Marche, laughing.

"Well, then, would you believe it? I—Lorraine de Nesville—have outgrown my clothes, monsieur, and my beautiful new gowns are coming from Paris this week, and then—"

"Then!" repeated Marche.

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"Then you shall see," said Lorraine, gravely.

Jack, bewildered, fascinated, stood leaning on his gun, watching every movement of the lithe figure before him.

"Until your gowns arrive, I shall not see you again?" he asked.

She looked up quickly.

"Do you wish to?"

"Very much!" he blurted out, and then, aware of the undue fervor he had shown, repeated: "Very much—if you don't mind," in a subdued but anxious voice.

Again she raised her eyes to his, doubtfully, perhaps a little wistfully.

"It wouldn't be right, would it—until you are presented?"

He was silent.

"Still," she said, looking up into the sky, "I often come to the river below, usually after luncheon."

"I wonder if there are any gudgeon there?" he said; "I could bring a rod—"

"Oh, but are you coming? Is that right? I think there are fish there," she added, innocently, "and I usually come after luncheon."

"And when your gowns arrive from Paris—"

"Then! Then you shall see! Oh! I shall be a very different person; I shall be timid and silent and stupid and awkward, and I shall answer, 'Oui, monsieur;' 'Non, monsieur,' and you will behold in me the jeune fille of the romances."

"Don't!" he protested.

"I shall!" she cried, shaking out her scarlet skirts full breadth. "Good-by!"

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In a second she had gone, straight away through the forest, leaving in his ears the music of her voice, on his finger-tips the touch of her warm hand.

He stood, leaning on his gun—a minute, an hour?—he did not know.

Presently earthly sounds began to come back to drown the delicious voice in his ears; he heard the little river Lisse, flowing, flowing under green branches; he heard a throstle singing in the summer wind; he heard, far in the deeper forest, something passing—patter, patter, patter—over the dead leaves.

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CHAPTER II

TELEGRAMS FOR TWO

Jack Marche tucked his gun under his arm and turned away along the overgrown wood-road that stretched from the De Nesville forests to the more open woods of Morteyn.

He walked slowly, puffing his pipe, pondering over his encounter with the châtelaine of the Château de Nesville. He thought, too, of the old Vicomte de Morteyn and his gentle wife, of the little house-party of which he and his sister Dorothy made two, of Sir Thorald and Lady Hesketh, their youthful and totally irresponsible chaperons on the journey from Paris to Morteyn.

"They're lunching on the Lisse," he thought. "I'll not get a bite if Ricky is there."

When Madame de Morteyn wrote to Sir Thorald and Lady Hesketh on the first of July, she asked them to chaperon her two nieces and some other pretty girls in the American colony whom they might wish to bring, for a month, to Morteyn.

"The devil!" said Sir Thorald when he read the letter; "am I to pick out the girls, Molly?"

"Betty and I will select the men," said Lady Hesketh, sweetly; "you may do as you please."

He did. He suggested a great many, and wrote a list for his wife. That prudent young woman carefully crossed out every name, saying, "Thorald! I am ashamed of you!" and substituted another list. She had chosen, besides Dorothy Marche and Betty Castlemaine, the two nieces in

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question, Barbara Lisle and her inseparable little German friend, Alixe von Elster; also the latter's brother, Rickerl, or Ricky, as he was called in diplomatic circles. She closed the list with Cecil Page, because she knew that Betty Castlemaine, Madame de Mortheyn's younger niece, looked kindly, at times, upon this blond giant.

And so it happened that the whole party invaded three first-class compartments of an east-bound train at the Gare de l'Est, and twenty-two hours later were trooping up the terrace steps of the Château Mortheyn, here in the forests and fragrant meadows of Lorraine.

Madame de Mortheyn kissed all the girls on both cheeks, and the old vicomte embraced his nieces, Betty Castlemaine and Dorothy Marche, and threatened to kiss the others, including Molly Hesketh. He desisted, he assured them, only because he feared Sir Thorald might feel bound to follow his example; to which Lady Hesketh replied that she didn't care and smiled at the vicomte.

The days had flown very swiftly for all: Jack Marche taught Barbara Lisle to fish for gudgeon; Betty Castlemaine tormented Cecil Page to his infinitely miserable delight; Ricky von Elster made tender eyes at Dorothy Marche and rowed her up and down the Lisse; and his sister Alixe read sentimental verses under the beech-trees and sighed for the sweet mysteries that young German girls sigh for—heart-friendships, lovers, *Ewigkeit*—God knows what!—something or other that turns the heart to tears until everything slops over and the very heavens sob.

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They were happy enough together in the Château and out-of-doors. Little incidents occurred that might as well not have occurred, but apparently no scars were left nor any incurable pang. True, Molly Hesketh made eyes at Ricky von Elster; but she reproved him bitterly when he kissed her hand in the orangery one evening; true also that Sir Thorald whispered airy nothings into the shell-like ear of Alixe von Elster until that German maiden could not have repeated her German alphabet. But, except for the chaperons, the unmarried people did well enough, as unmarried people usually do when let alone.

So, on that cloudless day of July, 1870, Rickerl von Elster sat in the green row-boat and tugged at the oars while Sir Thorald smoked a cigar placidly and Lady Hesketh trailed her pointed fingers over the surface of the water.

"Ricky, my son," said Sir Thorald, "you probably gallop better than you row. Who ever heard of an Uhlan in a boat? Molly, take his oars away."

"Ricky shall row me if he wishes," replied Molly Hesketh; "and you do, don't you, Ricky? Thorald will set you on shore if you want."

"I have no confidence in Uhlan officers," said her spouse, darkly.

Rickerl looked pleased; perspiration stood on his blond eyebrows and his broad face glowed.

"As an officer of cavalry in the Prussian army," he said, "and as an attaché of the German Embassy in Paris, I suggest that we return to first principles and rejoin our base of supplies."

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"He's thirsty," said Molly, gravely. "The base of supplies, so long cut loose from, is there under the willows, and I see six feet two of Cecil Page carrying a case of bottles."

"Row, Ricky!" urged Sir Thorald; "they will leave nothing for Uhlan foragers!"

The boat rubbed its nose against the mossy bank; Lady Hesketh placed her fair hands in Ricky's chubby ones and sprang to the shore.

"Cecil Page," she said, "I am thirsty. Where are the others?"

Betty and Dorothy looked out from their seat in the tall grass.

"Charles brought the hamper; there it is," said Cecil.

Barbara Lisle and sentimental little Alixe von Elster strolled up and looked lovingly upon the sandwiches.

Cecil Page stood and sulked, until Dorothy took pity and made room on the moss beside her.

"Can't you have a little mercy, Betty?" she whispered; "Cecil moons like a wounded elephant."

So Betty smiled at him and asked for more salad, and Cecil brought it and basked in her smiles.

"Where is Jack Marche?" asked Molly Hesketh. "Dorothy, your brother went into the chase with a gun, and where is he?"

"What does he want to shoot in July? It's too late for rooks," said Sir Thorald, pouring out champagne-cup for Barbara Lisle.

"I don't know where Jack went," said Dorothy. "He heard one of the keepers complain of the hawks, so, I suppose, he took a gun. I wonder why that strange Lorraine de Nesville doesn't come to call. I am simply dying to see her."

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"I saw her once," observed Sir Thorald.

"You generally do," added his wife.

"What?"

"See what others don't."

Sir Thorald, a trifle disconcerted, applied himself to caviare and, later, to a bottle of Moselle.

"She's a beauty, they say—" began Ricky, and might have continued had he not caught the danger-signal in Molly Hesketh's black eyes.

"Lorraine de Nesville," said Lady Hesketh, "is only a child of seventeen. Her father makes balloons."

"Not the little, red, squeaky kind," added Sir Thorald; "Molly, he is an amateur aeronaut."

"He'd much better take care of Lorraine. The poor child runs wild all over the country. They say she rides like a witch on a broom—"

"Astride?" cried Sir Thorald.

"For shame!" said his wife; "I—I—upon my word, I have heard that she has done that, too. Ricky! what do you mean by yawning?"

Ricky had been listening, mouth open. He shut it hurriedly and grew pink to the roots of his colourless hair.

Betty Castlemaine looked at Cecil, and Dorothy Marche laughed.

"What of it?" she said; "there is nobody here who would dare to!"

"Oh, shocking!" said little Alixe, and tried to look as though she meant it.

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At that moment Sir Thorald caught sight of Jack Marche, strolling up through the trees, gun tucked under his left arm.

"No luncheon, no salad, no champagne-cup, no cigarette!" he called; "all gone! all gone! Molly's smoked my last—"

"Jack Marche, where have you been?" demanded Molly Hesketh. "No, you needn't dodge my accusing finger! Barbara, look at him!"

"It's a pretty finger—if Sir Thorald will permit me to say so," said Jack, laughing and setting his gun up against a tree. "Dorrie, didn't you save any salad? Ricky, you devouring scourge, there's not a bit of caviare! I'm hungry—Oh, thanks, Betty, you did think of the prodigal, didn't you?"

"It was Cecil," she said, slyly; "I was saving it for him. What did you shoot, Jack?"

"Now you people listen and I'll tell you what I didn't shoot."

"A poor little hawk?" asked Betty.

"No—a poor little wolf!"

In the midst of cries of astonishment and exclamations Sir Thorald arose, waving a napkin.

"I knew it!" he said—"I knew I saw a wolf in the woods day before yesterday, but I didn't dare tell Molly; she never believes me."

"And you deliberately chose to expose us to the danger of being eaten alive?" said Lady Hesketh, in an awful voice. "Ricky, I'm going to get into that boat at once; Dorothy—Betty Castlemaine—bring Alixe and Barbara Lisle. We are going to embark at once."

"Ricky and his boat-load of beauty," laughed Sir Thorald. "Really, Molly, I hesitated to tell you because—I was afraid—"

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"What, you horrid thing?—afraid he'd bite me?"

"Afraid you'd bite the wolf, my dear," he whispered so that nobody but she heard it; "I say, Ricky, we ought to have a wolf drive! What do you think?"

The subject started, all chimed in with enthusiasm except Alixe von Elster, who sat with big, soulful eyes fixed on Sir Thorald and trembled for that bad young man's precious skin.

"We have two weeks to stay yet," said Cecil, glancing involuntarily at Betty Castlemaine; "we can get up a drive in a week."

"You are not going, Cecil," said Betty, in a low voice, partly to practise controlling him, partly to see him blush.

Lady Hesketh, however, took enough interest in the sport to insist, and Jack Marche promised to see the head-keeper at once.

"I think I see him now," said Sir Thorald—"no, it's Bosquet's boy from the post-office. Those are telegrams he's got."

The little postman's son came trotting across the meadow, waving two blue envelopes.

"Monsieur le Capitaine Rickerl von Elster and Monsieur Jack Marche—two telegrams this instant from Paris, messieurs! I salute you." And he took off his peaked cap, adding, as he saw the

others, "Messieurs, mesdames," and nodded his curly, blond head and smiled.

"Don't apologize—read your telegrams!" said Lady Hesketh; "dear me! dear me! if they take you two away and leave Thorald, I shall—I shall yawn!" [Pg 17]

Ricky's broad face changed as he read his despatch; and Molly Hesketh, shamelessly peeping over his shoulder, exclaimed, "It's cipher! How stupid! Can you understand it, Ricky?"

Yes, Rickerl von Elster understood it well enough. He paled a little, thrust the crumpled telegram into his pocket, and looked vaguely at the circle of faces. After a moment he said, standing very straight, "I must leave to-morrow morning."

"Recalled? Confound your ambassador, Ricky!" said Sir Thorald. "Recalled to Paris in midsummer! Well, I'm—"

"Not to Paris," said Rickerl, with a curious catch in his voice—"to Berlin. I join my regiment at once."

Jack Marche, who had been studying his telegram with puzzled eyes, held it out to Sir Thorald.

"Can't make head or tail of it; can you?" he demanded.

Sir Thorald took it and read aloud: "New York *Herald* offers you your own price and all expenses. Cable, if accepted."

"Cable, if accepted," repeated Betty Castlemaine; "accept what?"

"Exactly! What?" said Jack. "Do they want a story? What do 'expenses' mean? I'm not going to Africa again if I know it."

"It sounds as though the *Herald* wanted you for some expedition; it sounds as if everybody knew about the expedition, except you. Nobody ever hears any news at Morteyn," said Molly Hesketh, dejectedly. "Are you going, Jack?" [Pg 18]

"Going? Where?"

"Does your telegram throw any light on Jack's, Ricky?" asked Sir Thorald.

But Rickerl von Elster turned away without answering. [Pg 19]

CHAPTER III

SUMMER THUNDER

When the old vicomte was well enough to entertain anybody at all, which was not very often, he did it skilfully. So when he filled the Château with young people and told them to amuse themselves and not bother him, the house-party was necessarily a success.

He himself sat all day in the sunshine, studying the week's Paris newspapers with dim, kindly eyes, or played interminable chess games with his wife on the flower terrace.

She was sixty; he had passed threescore and ten. They never strayed far from each other. It had always been so from the first, and the first was when Helen Bruce, of New York City, married Georges Vicomte de Morteyn. That was long ago.

The chess-table stood on the terrace in the shadow of the flower-crowned parapets; the old vicomte sat opposite his wife, one hand touching the black knight, one foot propped up on a pile of cushions. He pushed the knight slowly from square to square and twisted his white imperial with stiff fingers.

"Helen," he asked, mildly, "are you bored?"

"No, dear."

Madame de Morteyn smiled at her husband and lifted a pawn in her thin, blue-veined hand; but the vicomte had not finished, and she replaced the pawn and leaned back in her chair, moving the two little coffee-cups aside so that she could see what her husband was doing with the knight. [Pg 20]

From the lawn below came the chatter and laughter of girls. On the edge of the lawn the little river Lisse glided noiselessly towards the beech woods, whose depths, saturated with sunshine, rang with the mellow notes of nesting thrushes.

The middle of July had found the leaves as fresh and tender as when they opened in May, the willow's silver green cooled the richer verdure of beach and sycamore; the round poplar leaves, pale yellow and orange in the sunlight, hung brilliant as lighted lanterns where the sun burned through.

"Helen?"

"Dear?"

"I am not at all certain what to do with my queen's knight. May I have another cup of coffee?"

Madame de Morteyn poured the coffee from the little silver coffee-pot.

"It is hot; be careful, dear."

The vicomte sipped his coffee, looking at her with faded eyes. She knew what he was going to say; it was always the same, and her answer was always the same. And always, as at that first breakfast—their wedding-breakfast—her pale cheeks bloomed again with a subtle colour, the ghost of roses long dead.

"Helen, are you thinking of that morning?"

"Yes, Georges."

"Of our wedding-breakfast—here—at this same table?"

[Pg 21]

"Yes, Georges."

The vicomte set his cup back in the saucer and, trembling, poured a pale, golden liquid from a decanter into two tiny glasses.

"A glass of wine?—I have the honour, my dear—"

The colour touched her cheeks as their glasses met; the still air tinkled with the melody of crystal touching crystal; a golden drop fell from the brimming glasses. The young people on the lawn below were very noisy.

She placed her empty glass on the table; the delicate glow in her cheeks faded as skies fade at twilight. He, with grave head leaning on his hand, looked vaguely at the chess-board, and saw, mirrored on every onyx square, the eyes of his wife.

"Will you have the journals, dear?" she asked presently. She handed him the *Gaulois*, and he thanked her and opened it, peering closely at the black print.

After a moment he read: "M. Ollivier declared, in the Corps Législatif, that 'at no time in the history of France has the maintenance of peace been more assured than to-day.' Oh, that journal is two weeks' old, Helen.

"The treaty of Paris in 1856 assured peace in the Orient, and the treaty of Prague in 1866 assures peace in Germany," continued the vicomte; "I don't see why it should be necessary for Monsieur Ollivier to insist."

He dropped the paper on the stones and touched his white mustache.

"You are thinking of General Chanzy," said his wife, laughing—"you always twist your mustache like that when you're thinking of Chanzy."

[Pg 22]

He smiled, for he was thinking of Chanzy, his sword-brother; and the hot plains of Oran and the dusty columns of cavalry passed before his eyes—moving, moving across a world of desert into the flaming disk of the setting sun.

"Is to-day the 16th of July, Helen?"

"Yes, dear."

"Then Chanzy is coming back from Oran. I know you dread it. We shall talk of nothing but Abd-el-Kader and Spahis and Turcos, and how we lost our Kabyle tobacco at Bou-Youb."

She had heard all about it, too; she knew every étape of the 48th of the Line—from the camp at Sathonay to Sidi-Bel-Abbès, and from Daya to Djebel-Mikaidon. Not that she cared for sabres and red trousers, but nothing that concerned her husband was indifferent to her.

"I hope General Chanzy will come," she said, "and tell you all about those poor Kabyles and the Legion and that horrid 2d Zouaves that you and he laugh over. Are you tired, dear?"

"No. Shall we play? I believe it was my move. How warm it is in the sun—no, don't stir, dear—I like it, and my gout is better for it. What do you suppose all those young people are doing? Hear Betty Castlemaine laugh! It is very fortunate for them, Helen, that I married an American with an American's disregard of French conventionalities."

"I am very strict," said his wife, smiling; "I can survey them en chaperone."

"If you turn around. But you don't."

[Pg 23]

"I do when it is necessary," said Madame de Morteyn, indignantly; "Molly Hesketh is there."

The vicomte laughed and picked up the knight again.

"You see," he said, waving it in the air, "that I also have become a very good American. I think no evil until it comes, and when it comes I say, 'Shocking!'"

"Georges!"

"That's what I say, my dear—"

"Georges!"

"There, dear, I won't tease. Hark! What is that?"

Madame de Morteyn leaned over the parapet.

"It is Jean Bosquet. Shall I speak to him?"

"Perhaps he has the Paris papers."

"Jean!" she called; and presently the little postman came trotting up the long stone steps from the drive. Had he anything? Nothing for Monsieur le Vicomte except a bundle of the week's journals from Paris. So Madame de Morteyn took the papers, and the little postman doffed his cap again and trotted away, blue blouse fluttering and sabots echoing along the terrace pavement.

"I am tired of chess," said the old vicomte; "would you mind reading the *Gaulois*?"

"The politics, dear?"

"Yes, the weekly summary—if it won't bore you."

"Tais toi! Écoute. This is dated July 3d. Shall I begin?"

"Yes, Helen."

She held the paper nearer and read: "A Paris journal publishes a despatch through l'agence Havas which declares that a deputation from the Spanish Government has left Madrid for Berlin to offer the crown of Spain to Leopold von Hohenzollern."

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"What!" cried the vicomte, angrily. Two chessmen tipped over and rolled among the others.

"It's what it says, mon ami; look—see—it is exactly as I read it."

"Are those Spaniards crazy?" muttered the vicomte, tugging at his imperial. "Look, Helen, read what the next day's journal says."

His wife unfolded the paper dated the 4th of July and found the column and read: "The press of Paris unanimously accuses the Imperial Government of allowing Prim and Bismarck to intrigue against the interests of France. The French ambassador, Count Benedetti, interviewed the King of Prussia at Ems and requested him to prevent Prince Leopold von Hohenzollern's acceptance. It is rumoured that the King of Prussia declined to interfere."

Madame de Morteyn tossed the journal on to the terrace and opened another.

"On the 12th of July the Spanish ambassador to Paris informed the Duc de Gramont, Minister of Foreign Affairs, that the Prince von Hohenzollern renounces his candidacy to the Spanish throne."

"À la bonheur!" said the vicomte, with a sigh of relief; "that settles the Hohenzollern matter. My dear, can you imagine France permitting a German prince to mount the throne of Spain? It was more than a menace—it was almost an insult. Do you remember Count Bismarck when he was ambassador to France? He is a man who fascinates me. How he used to watch the Emperor! I can see him yet—those puffy, pale eyes! You saw him also, dear—you remember, at Saint-Cloud?"

[Pg 25]

"Yes; I thought him brusque and malicious."

"I know he is at the bottom of this. I'm glad it is over. Did you finish the telegraphic news?"

"Almost all. It says—dear me, Georges!—it says that the Duc de Gramont refuses to accept any pledge from the Spanish ambassador unless that old Von Werther—the German ambassador, you know—guarantees that Prince Leopold von Hohenzollern will never again attempt to mount the Spanish throne!"

There was a silence. The old vicomte stirred restlessly and knocked over some more chessmen.

"Sufficient unto the day—" he said, at last; "the Duc de Gramont is making a mistake to press the matter. The word of the Spanish ambassador is enough—until he breaks it. General Lebœuf might occupy himself in the interim—profitably, I think."

"General Lebœuf is minister of war. What do you mean, Georges?"

"Yes, dear, Lebœuf is minister of war."

"And you think this German prince may some time again—"

"I think France should be ready if he does. Is she ready? Not if Chanzy and I know a Turco from a Kabyle. Perhaps Count Bismarck wants us to press his king for guarantees. I don't trust him. If he does, we should not oblige him. Gramont is making a grave mistake. Suppose the King of Prussia should refuse and say it is not his affair? Then we would be obliged to accept that answer, or—"

"Or what, Georges?"

"Or—well, my dear—or fight. But Gramont is not wicked enough, nor is France crazy enough, to wish to go to war over a contingency—a possibility that might never happen. I foresee a snub for our ambassador at Ems, but that is all. Do you care to play any more? I tipped over my king and his castles."

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"Perhaps it is an omen—the King of Prussia, you know, and his fortresses. I feel superstitious, Georges!"

The vicomte smiled and set the pieces up on their proper squares.

"It is settled; the Spanish ambassador pledges his word that Prince Hohenzollern will not be King of Spain. France should be satisfied. It is my move, I believe, and I move so—check to you, my dear!"

"I resign, dearest. Listen! Here come the children up the terrace steps."

"But—but—Helen, you must not resign so soon. Why should you?"

"Because you are already beaten," she laughed, gently—"your king and his castles and all his men! How headstrong you Chasseurs d'Afrique are!"

"I'm not beaten!" said the old man, stoutly, and leaned closer over the board. Then he also laughed, and said, "Tiens! tiens! tiens!" and his wife rose and gave him her arm. Two pretty girls came running up the terrace, and the old vicomte stood up, crying: "Children! Naughty ones! I see you coming! Madame de Morteyn has beaten me at chess. Laugh if you dare! Betty Castlemaine, I see you smiling!"

"I?" laughed that young lady, turning her flushed face from her aunt to her uncle.

"Yes, you did," repeated the vicomte, "and you are not the niece that I love any more. Where have you been? And you, Dorothy Marche?—your hair is very much tangled." [Pg 27]

"We have been lunching by the Lisse," said Dorothy, "and Jack caught a gudgeon; here it is."

"Pooh!" said the old vicomte; "I must show them how to fish. Helen, I shall go fishing—"

"Some time," said his wife, gently. "Betty, where are the men?"

"Jack and Barbara Lisle are fishing; Sir Thorald and Lady Hesketh are in the green boat, and Ricky is rowing them. The others are somewhere. Ricky got a telegram, and must go to Berlin."

"Tell Rickerl von Elster that his king is making mischief," laughed the vicomte, "and he may go back to Berlin when he chooses." Then, smiling at the young, flushed faces, he leaned on his wife's arm and passed slowly along the terrace towards the house.

"I wonder why Lorraine has not come?" he said to his wife. "Won't she come to-night for the dance?"

"Lorraine is a very sweet but a very uncertain girl," replied Madame de Morteyn. She led him through the great bay-window opening on the terrace, drew his easy-chair before his desk, placed the journals before him, and, stooping, kissed him.

"If you want me, send Charles. I really ought to be with the young people a moment. I wonder why Ricky must leave?"

"How far away are you going, Helen?"

"Only to the Lisse."

"Then I shall read about Monsieur Bismarck and his Spanish friends until you come. The day is long without you." [Pg 28]

They smiled at each other, and she sat down by the window.

"Read," she said; "I can see my children from here. I wonder why Ricky is leaving?"

Suddenly, in the silence of the summer noon, far in the east, a dull sound shook the stillness. Again they heard it—again, and again—a deep boom, muttering, reverberating like summer thunder.

"Why should they fire cannon to-day, Helen?" asked the old man, querulously. "Why should they fire cannon beyond the Rhine?"

"It is thunder," she said, gently; "it will storm before long."

"I am tired," said the vicomte. "Helen, I shall sleep. Sit by me—so—no—nearer yet! Are the children happy?"

"Yes, dear."

"When the cannon cease, I shall fall asleep. Listen! what is that?"

"A blackbird singing in the pear-tree."

"And what is that—that sound of galloping? Look out and see, Helen."

"It is a gendarme riding fast towards the Rhine." [Pg 29]

CHAPTER IV

THE FARANDOLE

That evening Dorothy Marche stood on the terrace in the moonlight waving her plumed fan and listening to the orchestra from the hamlet of Saint-Lys. The orchestra—two violins, a reed-pipe, a biniou, and a harp—were playing away with might and main. Through the bay-window she could see the crystal chandeliers glittering with prismatic light, the slender gilded chairs, the cabinets and canapés, golden, backed with tapestry; and everywhere massed banks of ferns and lilies. They were dancing in there; she saw Lady Hesketh floating in the determined grip of Cecil Page, she saw Sir Thorald proudly prancing to the air of the farandole; Betty Castlemaine, Jack, Alixe, Barbara Lisle passed the window only to re-pass and pass again in a whirl of gauze and filmy colour; and the swish! swish! swish! of silken petticoats, and the rub of little feet on the polished floor grew into a rhythmic, monotonous cadence, beating, beating the measure of the farandole.

Dorothy waved her fan and looked at Rickerl, standing in the moonlight beside her.

"Why won't you dance, Ricky?" she asked; "it is your last evening, if you are determined to leave to-morrow." He turned to her with an abrupt gesture; she thought he was going to speak, but he did not, and after a moment she said: "Do you know what that despatch from the New York *Herald* to my brother means?"

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"Yes," he said. His voice was dull, almost indifferent.

"Will you tell me?"

"Yes, to-morrow."

"Is—is it anything dangerous that they want him to do?"

"Yes."

"Ricky—tell me, then! You frighten me."

"To-morrow—perhaps to-night."

"Perhaps to-night?"

"If I receive another telegram. I expect to."

"Then, if you receive another despatch, we shall all know?"

Rickerl von Elster bent his head and laid a gloved hand lightly on her own.

"I am very unhappy," he said, simply. "May we not speak of other things?"

"Yes, Ricky," she said, faintly. He looked almost handsome there in the moonlight, but under his evening dress the square build of the Prussian trooper, the rigid back, and sturdy limbs were perhaps too apparent for ideal civilian elegance. Dorothy looked into his serious young face. He touched his blond mustache, felt unconsciously for the sabre that was not dangling from his left hip, remembered, coloured, and stood up even straighter.

"We are thinking of the same thing," said Dorothy; "I was trying to recall that last time we met—do you remember? In Paris?"

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He nodded; eyes fixed on hers.

"At the Diplomatic Ball?"

"Yes."

"And you were in uniform, and your sabre was very beautiful, but—do you remember how it clashed and banged on the marble stairway, and how the other attachés teased you until you tucked it under your left arm? Dear me! I was fascinated by your patent-leather sabre-tache, and your little spurs, that rang like tiny chimes when you walked. What sentimental creatures young girls are! Ne c'est pas, Ricky?"

"I have never forgotten that evening," he said, in a voice so low that she leaned involuntarily nearer.

"We were very young then," she said, waving her fan.

"It was not a year ago."

"We were young," she repeated, coldly.

"Yet I shall never forget, Dorothy."

She closed her fan and began to examine the fluffy plumes. Her cheeks were red, and she bit her lips continually.

"Do you particularly admire Molly Hesketh's hand?" she asked, indifferently.

He turned crimson. How could she know of the episode in the orangery? Know? There was no mystery in that; Molly Hesketh had told her. But Rickerl von Elster, loyal in little things, saw but one explanation—Dorothy must have seen him.

"Yes—I kissed her hand," he said. He did not add that Molly had dared him.

Dorothy raised her head with an icy smile.

"Is it honourable to confess such a thing?" she asked, in steady tones.

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"But—but you knew it, for you saw me—" he stammered.

"I did not!" she flashed out, and walked straight into the house.

"Dorrie!" cried her brother as she swept by him, "what do you think? Lorraine de Nesville is coming this evening!"

"Lorraine?" said his sister—"dear me, I am dying to see her."

"Then turn around," whispered Betty Castlemaine, leaning across from Cecil's arm. "Oh, Dorrie! what a beauty!"

At the same moment the old vicomte rose from his gilded chair and stepped forward to the threshold, saying, "Lorraine! Lorraine! Then you have come at last, little bad one?" And he kissed her white hands and led her to his wife, murmuring, "Helen, what shall we do with the little bad one who never comes to bid two old people good-day?"

"Ah, Lorraine!" said Madame de Morteyn; "kiss me, my child."

There she stood, her cheeks faintly touched with colour, her splendid eyes shining like azure stars, the candle-light setting her heavy hair aglow till it glistened and burned as molten ore flashes in a crucible. They pressed around her; she saw, through the flare of yellow light, a sea of rosy faces; a vague mist of lace set with jewels; and she smiled at them while the colour deepened in her cheeks. There was music in her ears and music in her heart, and she was dancing now—dancing with a tall, bronzed young fellow who held her strong and safe, and whose eyes continually sought her own.

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"You see," she said, demurely, "that my gowns came to-day from Paris."

"It is a dream—this one," he said, smiling back into her eyes, "but I shall never forget the scarlet skirt and little bodice of velvet, and the silver chains, and your hair—"

"My hair? It is still on my head."

"It was tangled across your face—then."

"Taisez-vous, Monsieur Marche!"

"And you seem to have grown taller—"

"It is my ball-gown."

"And you do not cast down your eyes and say, 'Oui, monsieur,' 'Non, monsieur'—"

"Non, monsieur."

Again they laughed, looking into each other's eyes, and there was music in the room and music in their hearts.

Presently the candle-light gave place to moonlight, and they found themselves on the terrace, seated, listening to the voice of the wind in the forest; and they heard the little river Lisse among the rushes and the murmur of leaves on the eaves.

When they became aware of their own silence they turned to each other with the gentle haste born of confusion, for each feared that the other might not understand. Then, smiling, half fearful, they reassured each other with their silence.

She was the first to break the stillness, hesitating as one who breaks the seal of a letter long expected, half dreaded: "I came late because my father was restless, and I thought he might need me. Did you hear cannon along the Rhine?"

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"Yes. Some German fête. I thought at first it might be thunder. Give me your fan."

"You do not hold it right—there—"

"Do you feel the breeze? Your fan is perfumed—or is it the lilies on the terrace? They are dancing again; must we go back?"

She looked out into the dazzling moonlight of Lorraine; a nightingale began singing far away in the distant swamp; a bat darted by, turned, rose, dipped, and vanished.

"They are dancing," she repeated.

"Must we go?"

"No."

In the stillness the nightingale grew bolder; the woods seemed saturated with song.

"My father is restless; I must return soon," she said, with a little sigh. "I shall go in presently and

make my adieux. I wish you might know my father. Will you? He would like you. He speaks to few people except me. I know all that he thinks, all that he dreams of. I know also all that he has done, all that he is doing, all that he will do—God willing. Why is it I tell you this? Ma foi, I do not know. And I am going to tell you more. Have you heard that my father has made a balloon?"

"Yes—everybody speaks of it," he answered, gravely.

"But—ah, this is the wonderful part!—he has made a balloon that can be inflated in five seconds! Think! All other balloons require a long, long while, and many tubes; and one must take them to a usine de gaz. My father's balloon needs no gas—that is, it needs no common illuminating gas."

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"A montgolfier?" asked Marche, curiously.

"Oh, pooh! The idea! No, it is like other balloons, except that—well—there is needed merely a handful of silvery dust—to which you touch a drop of water—piff! puff! c'est fini! The balloon is filled."

"And what is this silvery dust?" he asked, laughing.

"Voilà! Do you not wish you knew? I—Lorraine de Nesville—I know! It is a secret. If the time ever should come—in case of war, for instance—my father will give the secret to France—freely—without recompense—a secret that all the nations of Europe could not buy! Now, don't you wish you knew, monsieur?"

"And you know?"

"Yes," she said, with a tantalizing toss of her head.

"Then you'd better look out," he laughed; "if European nations get wind of this they might kidnap you."

"They know it already," she said, seriously. "Austria, Spain, Portugal, and Russia have sent agents to my father—as though he bought and sold the welfare of his country!"

"And that map-making fellow this morning—do you suppose he might have been hanging about after that sort of thing—trying to pry and pick up some scrap of information?"

"I don't know," she said, quietly; "I only saw him making maps. Listen! there are two secrets that my father possesses, and they are both in writing. I do not know where he keeps them, but I know what they are. Shall I tell you? Then listen—I shall whisper. One is the chemical formula for the silvery dust, the gas of which can fill a balloon in five seconds. The other is—you will be astonished—the plan for a navigable balloon!"

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"Has he tried it?"

"A dozen times. I went up twice. It steers like a ship."

"Do people know this, too?"

"Germany does. Once we sailed, papa and I, up over our forest and across the country to the German frontier. We were not very high; we could see the soldiers at the custom-house, and they saw us, and—would you believe it?—they fired their horrid guns at us—pop! pop! pop! But we were too quick; we simply sailed back again against the very air-currents that brought us. One bullet made a hole in the silk, but we didn't come down. Papa says a dozen bullets cannot bring a balloon down, even when they pierce the silk, because the air-pressure is great enough to keep the gas in. But he says that if they fire a shell, that is what is to be dreaded, for the gas, once aflame!—that ends all. Dear me! we talk a great deal of war—you and I. It is time for me to go."

They rose in the moonlight; he gave her back her fan. For a full minute they stood silent, facing each other. She broke a lily from its stem, and drew it out of the cluster at her breast. She did not offer it, but he knew it was his, and he took it.

"Symbol of France," she whispered.

"Symbol of Lorraine," he said, aloud.

A deep boom, sullen as summer thunder, shook the echoes awake among the shrouded hills, rolling, reverberating, resounding, until the echoes carried it on from valley to valley, off into the world of shadows.

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The utter silence that followed was broken by a call, a gallop of hoofs on the gravel drive, the clink of stirrups, the snorting of hard-run horses.

Somebody cried, "A telegram for you, Ricky!" There was a patter of feet on the terrace, a chorus of voices: "What is it, Ricky?" "Must you go at once?" "Whatever is the matter?"

The young German soldier, very pale, turned to the circle of lamp-lit faces.

"France and Germany—I—I—"

"What?" cried Sir Thorald, violently.

"War was declared at noon to-day!"

Lorraine gave a gasp and reached out one hand. Jack Marche took it in both of his.

CHAPTER V

COWARDS AND THEIR COURAGE

Rickerl took the old vicomte's withered hand; he could not speak; his sister Alixe was crying.

"War? War? Allons donc!" muttered the old man. "Helen! Ricky says we are to have war. Helen, do you hear? War!"

Then Rickerl hurried away to dress, for he was to ride to the Rhine, nor spare whip nor spur; and Barbara Lisle comforted little Alixe, who wept as she watched the maids throwing everything pell-mell into their trunks; for they, too, were to leave at daylight on the Moselle Express for Cologne.

Below, a boy appeared, leading Rickerl's horse from the stables; there were lanterns moving along the drive, and dark figures passing, clustering about the two steaming horses of the messengers, where a groom stood with a pail of water and a sponge. Everywhere the hum of voices rose and died away like the rumour of swarming bees. "War!" "War is declared!" "When?" "War was declared to-day!" "When?" "War was declared to-day at noon!" And always the burden of the busy voices was the same, menacing, incredulous, half-whispered, but always the same—"War! war! war!"

Booted and spurred, square-shouldered and muscular in his corded riding-suit, Rickerl passed the terrace again after the last adieux. The last? No, for as his heavy horse stamped out across the drive a voice murmured his name, a hand fell on his arm.

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"Dorothy," he whispered, bending from his saddle.

"I love you, Ricky," she gasped.

And they say women are cowards!

He lifted her to his breast, held her crushed and panting; she put both hands before her eyes.

"There has never been any one but you; do you believe it?" he stammered.

"Yes."

"Then you are mine!"

"Yes. May God spare you!"

And Rickerl, loyal in little things, swung her gently to the ground again, unknissed.

There was a flurry of gravel, a glimpse of a horse rearing, plunging, springing into the darkness—that was all. And she crept back to the terrace with hot, tearless lids, that burned till all her body quivered with the fever in her aching eyes. She passed the orchestra, trudging back to Saint-Lys along the gravel drive, the two fat violinists stolidly smoking their Alsatian pipes, the harp-player muttering to the aged piper, the little biniou man from the Côte-d'Or, excited, mercurial, gesticulating at every step. War! war! war! The burden of the ghastly monotone was in her brain, her tired heart kept beating out the cadence that her little slippered feet echoed along the gravel—War! war!

At the foot of the steps which skirted the terrace she met her brother and Lorraine watching the groom rubbing down the messengers' horses. A lantern, glimmering on the ground, shed a sickly light under their eyes.

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"Dorrie," said Jack, "Sir Thorald and Lady Hesketh think that we all should start for Paris by the early train. They have already sent some of our trunks to Saint-Lys; Mademoiselle de Nesville"—he turned with a gesture almost caressing to Lorraine—"Mademoiselle de Nesville has generously offered her carriage to help transport the luggage, and she is going to wait until it returns."

"And uncle—and our aunt De Morteyn?"

"I shall stay at Morteyn until they decide whether to close the house and go to Paris or to stay until October. Dorrie, dear, we are very near the frontier here."

"There will be no invasion," said Lorraine, faintly.

"The Rhine is very near," repeated Dorothy. She was thinking of Rickerl.

"So you and Betty and Cecil," continued Jack, "are to go with the Heskeths to Paris. Poor little Alixe is crying her eyes out up-stairs. She and Barbara Lisle are going to Cologne, where Ricky will either find them or have his father meet them."

After a moment he added, "It seems incredible, this news. They say, in the village, that the King of Prussia insulted the French ambassador, Count Benedetti, on the public promenade of Ems. It's all about that Hohenzollern business and the Spanish succession. Everybody thought it was

settled, of course, because the Spanish ambassador said so, and Prince Leopold von Hohenzollern withdrew his claim. I can't understand it; I can scarcely believe it."

Dorothy stood a moment, looking at the stars in the midnight sky. Then she turned with a sigh to Lorraine. [Pg 41]

"Good-night," she said, and they kissed each other, these two young girls who an hour before had been strangers.

"Shall I see you again? We leave by the early train," whispered Dorothy.

"No—I must return when my carriage comes back from the village. Good-by, dear—good-by, dear Dorothy."

A moment later, Dorothy, flinging her short ermine-edged cloak from her shoulders, entered the empty ballroom and threw herself upon the gilded canapé.

One by one the candles spluttered, glimmered, flashed up, and went out, leaving a trail of smoke in the still air. Up-stairs little Alixe was sobbing herself to sleep in Barbara's arms; in his own chamber the old vicomte paced to and fro, and to and fro, and his sweet-faced wife watched him in silence, her thin hand shading her eyes in the lamplight. In the next room Sir Thorald and Lady Hesketh sat close together, whispering. Only Betty Castlemaine and Cecil Page had lost little of their cheerfulness, perhaps because neither were French, and Cecil was not going to the war, and—after all, war promised to be an exciting thing, and well worth the absorbed attention of two very young lovers. Arm in arm, they promenaded the empty halls and galleries, meeting no one save here and there a pale-faced maid or scared flunky; and at length they entered the gilded ballroom where Dorothy lay, flung full length on the canapé. [Pg 42]

She submitted to Betty's caresses, and went away to bed with her, saying good-night to Cecil in a tear-choked voice; and a moment later Cecil sought his own chamber, lighted a pipe, and gave himself up to delightful visions of Betty, protected from several Prussian army-corps by the single might of his strong right arm.

At the foot of the terrace, Lorraine de Nesville stood with Jack, watching the dark drive for the lamps of the returning carriage. Her maid loitered near, exchanging whispered gossip with the groom, who now stood undecided, holding both horses and waiting for orders. Presently Jack asked him where the messengers were, and he said he didn't know, but that they had perhaps gone to the kitchens for refreshments.

"Go and find them, then; here, give me the bridles," said Jack; "if they are eating, let them finish; I'll hold their horses. Why doesn't Mademoiselle de Nesville's carriage come back from Saint-Lys? When you leave the kitchens, go down the road and look for it. Tell them to hurry."

The groom touched his cap and hastened away.

"I wish the carriage would come—I wish the carriage would hurry," repeated Lorraine, at intervals. "My father is alone; I am nervous, I don't know why. What are you reading?"

"My telegram from the New York *Herald*," he answered, thoughtfully.

"It is easy to understand now," she said.

"Yes, easy to understand. They want me for war correspondent."

"Are you going?" [Pg 43]

"I don't know—" He hesitated, trying to see her eyes in the darkness. "I don't know; shall you stay here in the Moselle Valley?"

"Yes—I suppose so."

"You are very near the Rhine."

"There will be—there shall be no invasion," she said, feverishly. "France also ends at the Rhine; let them look to their own!"

She moved impatiently, stepped from the stones to the damp gravel, and walked slowly across the misty lawn. He followed, leading the horses behind him and holding his telegram open in his right hand. Presently she looked back over her shoulder, saw him following, and waited.

"Why, will you go as war correspondent?" she asked when he came up, leading the saddled horses.

"I don't know; I was on the *Herald* staff in New York; they gave me a roving commission, which I enjoyed so much that I resigned and stayed in Paris. I had not dreamed that I should ever be needed—I did not think of anything like this."

"Have you never seen war?"

"Nothing to speak of. I was the *Herald's* representative at Sadowa, and before that I saw some Kabyles shot in Oran. Where are you going?"

"To the river. We can hear the carriage when it comes, and I want to see the lights of the Château de Nesville."

"From the river? Can you?"

"Yes—the trees are cut away north of the boat-house. Look! I told you so. My father is there alone."

Far away in the night the lights of the Château de Nesville glimmered between the trees, smaller, paler, yellower than the splendid stars that crowned the black vault above the forest. [Pg 44]

After a silence she reached out her hand abruptly and took the telegram from between his fingers. In the starlight she read it, once, twice; then raised her head and smiled at him.

"Are you going?"

"I don't know. Yes."

"No," she said, and tore the telegram into bits.

One by one she tossed the pieces on to the bosom of the placid Lisse, where they sailed away towards the Moselle like dim, blue blossoms floating idly with the current.

"Are you angry?" she whispered.

He saw that she was trembling, and that her face had grown very pale.

"What is the matter?" he asked, amazed.

"The matter—the matter is this: I—I—Lorraine de Nesville—am afraid! I am afraid! It is fear—it is fear!"

"Fear?" he asked, gently.

"Yes!" she cried. "Yes, it is fear! I cannot help it—I never before knew it—that I—I could be afraid. Don't—don't leave us—my father and me!" she cried, passionately. "We are so alone there in the house—I fear the forest—I fear—"

She trembled violently; a wolf howled on the distant hill.

"I shall gallop back to the Château de Nesville with you," he said; "I shall be close beside you, riding by your carriage-window. Don't tremble so—Mademoiselle de Nesville." [Pg 45]

"It is terrible," she stammered; "I never knew I was a coward."

"You are anxious for your father," he said, quietly; "you are no coward!"

"I am—I tremble—see! I shiver."

"It was the wolf—"

"Ah, yes—the wolf that warned us of war! and the men—that one who made maps; I never could do again what I did! Then I was afraid of nothing; now I fear everything—the howl of that beast on the hill, the wind in the trees, the ripple of the Lisse—C'est plus fort que moi—I am a coward. Listen! Can you hear the carriage?"

"No."

"Listen—ah, listen!"

"It is the noise of the river."

"The river? How black it is! Hark!"

"The wind."

"Hark!"

"The wind again—"

"Look!" She seized his arm frantically. "Look! Oh, what—what was that?"

The report of a gun, faint but clear, came to their ears. Something flashed from the lighted windows of the Château de Nesville—another flash broke out—another—then three dull reports sounded, and the night wind spread the echoes broadcast among the wooded hills.

For a second she stood beside him, white, rigid, speechless; then her little hand crushed his arm and she pushed him violently towards the horses.

"Mount!" she cried; "ride! ride!"

Scarcely conscious of what he did, he backed one of the horses, seized the gathered bridle and mane, and flung himself astride. The horse reared, backed again, and stood stamping. At the same instant he swung about in his saddle and cried, "Go back to the house!" [Pg 46]

But she was already in the saddle, guiding the other horse, her silken skirts crushed, her hair flying, sawing at the bridle-bit with gloved fingers. The wind lifted the cloak on her shoulders, her little satin slipper sought one stirrup.

"Ride!" she gasped, and lashed her horse.

He saw her pass him in a whirl of silken draperies streaming in the wind; the swan's-down cloak hid her body like a cloud. In a second he was galloping at her bridle-rein; and both horses, nose to nose and neck to neck, pounded across the gravel drive, wheeled, leaped forward, and plunged down the soft wood road, straight into the heart of the forest. The lace from her corsage fluttered in the air; the lilies at her breast fell one by one, strewing the road with white blossoms. The wind loosened her heavy hair to the neck, seized it, twisted it, and flung it out on the wind. Under the clusters of ribbon on her shoulders there was a gleam of ivory; her long gloves slipped to the wrists; her hair whipped the rounded arms, bare and white below the riotous ribbons, snapping and fluttering on her shoulders; her cloak unclasped at the throat and whirled to the ground, trampled into the forest mould.

They struck a man in the darkness; they heard him shriek; the horses staggered an instant, that was all, except a gasp from the girl, bending with whitened cheeks close to her horse's mane.

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"Look out! A lantern!—close ahead!" panted Marche.

The sharp crack of a revolver cut him short, his horse leaped forward, the blood spurting from its neck.

"Are you hit?" he cried.

"No! no! Ride!"

Again and again, but fainter and fainter, came the crack! crack! of the revolver, like a long whip snapped in the wind.

"Are you hit?" he asked again.

"Yes, it is nothing! Ride!"

In the darkness and confusion of the plunging horses he managed to lean over to her where she bent in her saddle; and, on one white, round shoulder, he saw the crimson welt of a bullet, from which the blood was welling up out of the satin skin.

And now, in the gloom, the park wall loomed up along the river, and he shouted for the lodge-keeper, rising in his stirrups; but the iron gate swung wide, and the broad, empty avenue stretched up to the Château.

They galloped up to the door; he slipped from his horse, swung Lorraine to the ground, and sprang up the low steps. The door was open, the long hall brilliantly lighted.

"It is I—Lorraine!" cried the girl. A tall, bearded man burst in from a room on the left, clutching a fowling-piece.

"Lorraine! They've got the box! The balloon secret was in it!" he groaned; "they are in the house yet—" He stared wildly at Marche, then at his daughter. His face was discoloured with bruises, his thick, blond hair fell in disorder across steel-blue eyes that gleamed with fury.

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Almost at the same moment there came a crash of glass, a heavy fall from the porch, and then a shot.

In an instant Marche was at the door; he saw a game-keeper raise his gun and aim at him, and he shrank back as the report roared in his ears.

"You fool!" he shouted; "don't shoot at me! drop your gun and follow!" He jumped to the ground and started across the garden where a dark figure was clutching the wall and trying to climb to the top. He was too late—the man was over; but he followed, jumped, caught the tiled top, and hurled himself headlong into the bushes below.

Close to him a man started from the thicket, and ran down the wet road—splash! splash! slop! slop! through the puddles; but Marche caught him and dragged him down into the mud, where they rolled and thrashed and splattered and struck each other. Twice the man tore away and struggled to his feet, and twice Marche fastened to his knees until the huge, lumbering body swayed and fell again. It might have gone hard with Jack, for the man suddenly dropped the steel box he was clutching to his breast and fell upon the young fellow with a sullen roar. His knotted, wiry fingers had already found Jack's throat; he lifted the young fellow's head and strove to break his neck. Then, in a flash, he leaped back and lifted a heavy stone from the wall; at the same instant somebody fired at him from the wall; he wheeled and sprang into the woods.

That was all Jack Marche knew until a lantern flared in his eyes, and he saw Lorraine's father, bright-eyed, feverish, dishevelled, beside him.

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"Raise him!" said a voice that he knew was Lorraine's.

They lifted Jack to his knees; he stumbled to his feet, torn, bloody, filthy with mud, but in his arms, clasped tight, was the steel box, intact.

"Lorraine!—my box!—look!" cried her father, and the lantern shook in his hands as he clutched the casket.

But Lorraine stepped forward and flung both arms around Jack Marche's neck.

Her face was deadly pale; the blood oozed from the wounded shoulder. For the first time her

father saw that she had been shot. He stared at her, clutching the steel box in his nervous hands.

With all the strength she had left she crushed Jack to her and kissed him. Then, weak with the loss of blood, she leaned on her father.

"I am going to faint," she whispered; "help me, father."

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CHAPTER VI

TRAINS EAST AND WEST

It was dawn when Jack Marche galloped into the court-yard of the Château Morteyn and wearily dismounted. People were already moving about the upper floors; servants stared at him as he climbed the steps to the terrace; his face was scratched, his clothes smeared with caked mud and blood.

He went straight to his chamber, tore off his clothes, took a hasty plunge in a cold tub, and rubbed his aching limbs until they glowed. Then he dressed rapidly, donned his riding breeches and boots, slipped a revolver into his pocket, and went down-stairs, where he could already hear the others at breakfast.

Very quietly and modestly he told his story between sips of café-au-lait.

"You see," he ended, "that the country is full of spies, who hesitate at nothing. There were three or four of them who tried to rob the Château; they seem perfectly possessed to get at the secrets of the Marquis de Nesville's balloons. There is no doubt but that for months past they have been making maps of the whole region in most minute detail; they have evidently been expecting this war for a long time. Incidentally, now that war is declared, they have opened hostilities on their own account."

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"You did for some of them?" asked Sir Thorald, who had been fidgeting and staring at Jack through a gold-edged monocle.

"No—I—we rode down and trampled a man in the dark; I should think it would have been enough to brain him, but when I galloped back just now he was gone, and I don't know how badly he was hit."

"But the fellow that started to smash you with a paving-stone—the Marquis de Nesville fired at him, didn't he?" insisted Sir Thorald.

"Yes, I think he hit him, but it was a long shot. Lorraine was superb—"

He stopped, colouring up a little.

"She did it all," he resumed—"she rode through the woods like a whirlwind! Good heavens! I never saw such a cyclone incarnate! And her pluck when she was hit!—and then very quietly she went to her father and fainted in his arms."

Jack had not told all that had happened. The part that he had not told was the part that he thought of most—Lorraine's white arms around his neck and the touch of her innocent lips on his forehead. In silent consternation the young people listened; Dorothy slipped out of her chair and came and rested her hands on her brother's shoulder; Betty Castlemaine looked at Cecil with large, questioning eyes that asked, "Would you do something heroic for me?" and Cecil's eyes replied, "Oh, for a chance to annihilate a couple of regiments!" This pleased Betty, and she ate a muffin with appreciation. The old vicomte leaned heavily on his elbow and looked at his wife, who sat opposite, pallid and eating nothing. He had decided to remain at Morteyn, but this episode disquieted him—not on his own account.

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"Helen," he said, "Jack and I will stay, but you must go with the children. There is no danger—there can be no invasion, for our troops will be passing here by night; I only wish to be sure that—that in case—in case things should go dreadfully wrong, you would not be compelled to witness anything unpleasant."

Madame de Morteyn shook her head gently.

"Why speak of it?" she said; "you know I will not go."

"I'll stay, too," said Sir Thorald, eagerly; "Cecil and Molly can take the children to Paris; Madame de Morteyn, you really should go also."

She leaned back and shook her head decisively.

"Then you will both come, you and Madame de Morteyn?" urged Lady Hesketh of the vicomte.

The old man hesitated. His wife smiled. She knew he could not leave in the face of the enemy; she had been the wife of this old African campaigner for thirty years, and she knew what she knew.

"Helen—" he began.

"Yes, dear, we will both stay; the city is too hot in July," she said; "Sir Thorald, some coffee? No

more? Betty, you want another muffin?—they are there by Cecil. Children, I think I hear the carriages coming; you must not make Lady Hesketh wait."

"I have half a mind to stay," said Molly Hesketh. Sir Thorald said she might if she wanted to enlist, and they all tried to smile, but the sickly gray of early morning, sombre, threatening, fell on faces haggard with foreboding—young faces, too, lighted by the pale flames of the candles.

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Alix von Elster and Barbara Lisle went first; there were tears and embraces, and *au revoirs* and *aufwiedersehens*.

Little Alixe blanched and trembled when Sir Thorald bent over her, not entirely unconscious of the havoc his drooping mustache and cynical eyes had made in her credulous German bosom. Molly Hesketh kissed her, wishing that she could pinch her; and so they left, tearful, anxious, to be driven to Courtenay, and whirled from there across the Rhine to Cologne.

Sir Thorald and Lady Hesketh lingered on the terrace after the others had returned to the breakfast-room.

"Thorald," she said, "you are a brute!"

"Eh?" cried Sir Thorald.

"You're a brute!"

"Molly, what the deuce is the matter?"

"Nothing—if you ever see her again, I'll tell Ricky."

"I might say the same thing in regard to Ricky, my dear," said Sir Thorald, mildly.

"It is not true," she said; "I did no damage to him; and you know—you know down in the depths of your fickle soul that—that—"

"What, my dear?"

"Never mind!" said Molly, sharply; but she crimsoned when he kissed her, and held tightly to his sleeve.

"Good ged!" thought Sir Thorald; "what a devil I am with women!"

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But now the carriages drove up—*coupés*, dog-carts, and a victoria.

"They say we ought not to miss this train," said Cecil, coming from the stables and flourishing a whip; "they say the line may be seized for government use exclusively in a few hours."

The old house-keeper, Madame Paillard, nodded and pointed to her son, the under-keeper.

"François says, Monsieur Page, that six trains loaded with troops passed through Saint-Lys between midnight and dawn; dis, François, c'est le Sieur Bosz qui t'a renseigné—pas?"

"Oui, mamam!"

"Then hurry," said Lady Hesketh. "Thorald, call the others."

"I," said Cecil, "am going to drive Betty in the dog-cart."

"She'll probably take the reins," said Sir Thorald, cynically.

Cecil brandished his whip and looked determined; but it was Betty who drove him to Saint-Lys station, after all.

The adieux were said, even more tearfully this time. Jack kissed his sister tenderly, and she wept a little on his shoulder—thinking of Rickerl.

One by one the vehicles rolled away down the gravel drive; and last of all came Molly Hesketh in the *coupé* with Jack Marche.

Molly was sad and a trifle distraite. Those periodical mental illuminations during which she discovered for the thousandth and odd time that she loved her husband usually left her fairly innocuous. But she was a born flirt; the virus was bred in the bone, and after the first half-mile she opened her batteries—her eyes—as a matter of course on Jack.

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What she got for her pains was a little sermon ending, "See here, Molly—three years ago you played the devil with me until I kissed you, and then you were furious and threatened to tell Sir Thorald. The truth is, you're in love with him, and there is no more harm in you than there is in a china kitten."

"Jack!" she gasped.

"And," he resumed, "you live in Paris, and you see lots of things and you hear lots of things that you don't hear and see in Lincolnshire. But you're British, Molly, and you are domestic, although you hate the idea, and there will never be a desolated hearth in the Hesketh household as long as you speak your mother-tongue and read Anthony Trollope."

The rest of the road was traversed in silence. They rattled over the stones in the single street of Saint-Lys, rolled into the gravel oval behind the Gare, and drew up amid a hubbub of restless

teams, market-wagons, and station-trucks.

"See the soldiers!" said Jack, lifting Lady Hesketh to the platform, where the others were already gathered in a circle. A train was just gliding out of the station, bound eastward, and from every window red caps projected and sunburned, boyish faces expanded into grins as they saw Lady Hesketh and her charges.

"Vive l'Angleterre!" they cried. "Vive Madame la Reine! Vive Johnbull et son rosbif!" the latter observation aimed at Sir Thorald.

Sir Thorald waved his eye-glass to them condescendingly; faster and faster moved the train; the red caps and fresh, tanned faces, the laughing eyes became a blur and then a streak; and far down the glistening track the faint cheers died away and were drowned in the roar of the wheels—little whirling wheels that were bearing them merrily to their graves at Wissembourg.

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"Here comes our train," said Cecil. "Jack, my boy, you'll probably see some fun; take care of your hide, old chap!" He didn't mean to be patronizing, but he had Betty demurely leaning on his arm, and—dear me!—how could he help patronizing the other poor devils in the world who had not Betty, and who never could have Betty?

"Montez, madame, s'il vous plait!—Montez, messieurs!" cried the Chef de Gare; "last train for Paris until Wednesday! All aboard!" and he slammed and locked the doors, while the engineer, leaning impatiently from his cab, looked back along the line of cars and blew his whistle warningly.

"Good-by, Dorrie!" cried Jack.

"Good-by, my darling Jack! Be careful; you will, won't you?" But she was still thinking of Rickerl, bless her little heart!

Lady Hesketh waved him a demure adieu from the open window, relented, and gave his hand a hasty squeeze with her gloved fingers.

"Take care of Lorraine," she said, solemnly; then laughed at his telltale eyes, and leaned back on her husband's shoulder, still laughing.

The cars were gliding more swiftly past the platform now; he caught a glimpse of Betty kissing her hand to him, of Cecil bestowing a gracious adieu, of Sir Thorald's eye-glass—then they were gone; and far up the tracks the diminishing end of the last car dwindled to a dark square, a spot, a dot, and was engulfed in a flurry of dust. As he turned away and passed along the platform to the dog-cart, there came a roar, a shriek of a locomotive, a rush, and a train swept by towards the east, leaving a blear of scarlet in his eyes, and his ears ringing with the soldiers' cheers: "Vive la France! Vive l'Empereur! À Berlin! À Berlin! À Berlin!" A furtive-eyed young peasant beside him shrugged his shoulders.

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"Bismarck has called for the menu; his cannon are hungry," he sneered; "there goes the bill of fare."

"That's very funny," said a fierce little man with a gray mustache, "but the bill of fare isn't complete—the class of '71 has just been called out!" and he pointed to a placard freshly pasted on the side of the station.

"The—the class of '71?" muttered the furtive-eyed peasant, turning livid.

"Exactly—the bill of fare needs the hors d'œuvres; you'll go as an olive, and probably come back a sardine—in a box."

And the fierce little man grinned, lighted a cigarette, and sauntered away, still grinning.

What did he care? He was a pompier and exempt.

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CHAPTER VII

THE ROAD TO PARADISE

The road between Saint-Lys and Morteyn was not a military road, but it was firm and smooth, and Jack drove back again towards the Château at a smart trot, flicking at leaves and twigs with Cecil's whip.

The sun had brushed the veil of rain from the horizon; the leaves, fresh and tender, stirred and sparkled with dew in the morning breeze, and all the air was sweet-scented. In the stillness of the fields, where wheat stretched along the road like a green river tinged with gold, there was something that troubled him. Silence is oppressive to sinners and prophets. He concluded he was the former, and sighed restlessly, looking out across the fields, where, deep in the stalks of the wheat, blood-red poppies opened like raw wounds. At other times he had compared them to little fairy camp-fires; but his mood was pessimistic, and he saw, in the furrows that the plough had raised, the scars on the breast of a tortured earth; and he read sermons in bundles of fresh-cut fagots; and death was written where a sickle lay beside a pile of grass, crisping to hay in the splendid sun of Lorraine.

What he did not see were the corn-flowers peeping at him with dewy blue eyes; the vineyards, where the fruit hung faintly touched with bloom; the field birds, the rosy-breasted finches, the thrush, as speckled as her own eggs—no, nor did he hear them; for the silence that weighed on his heart came from his heart. Yet all the summer wind was athrill with harmony. Thousands of feathered throats swelled and bubbled melody, from the clouds to the feathery heath, from the scintillating azure in the zenith to the roots of the glittering wheat where the corn-flowers lay like bits of blue sky fallen to the earth.

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As he drove he thought of Lorraine, of her love for her father and her goodness. He already recognized that dominant passion in her, her unselfish adoration of her father—a father who sat all day behind bolted doors trifling with metals and gases and little spinning, noiseless wheels. The selfish to the unselfish, the dead to the living, the dwarf to the giant, and the sinner to the saint—this is the world and they that dwell therein.

He thought of her as he had seen her last, smiling up into the handsome, bearded face that questioned her. No, the wound was nothing—a little blood lost—enough to make her faint at his feet—that was all. But his precious box was safe—and she had flung her loyal arms about the man who saved it and had kissed him before her father, because he had secured what was dearer to her than life—her father's happiness—a little metal box full of it.

Her father was very grateful and very solicitous about her wounded shoulder; but he opened his box before he thought about bandages. Everything was intact, except the conservatory window and his daughter's shoulder. Both could be mended—but his box! ah, that, if lost, could never be replaced.

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Jack's throat was hard and dry. A lump came into it, and he swallowed with a shrug, and flicked at a fly on the headstall. A vision of Sir Thorald, bending over little Alixe, came before his eyes. "Pah!" he muttered, in disgust. Sir Thorald was one of those men who cease to care for a woman when she begins to care for them. Jack knew it; that was why he had been so gentle with Molly Hesketh, who had turned his head when he was a boy and given him his first emotions—passion, hate—and then knowledge; for of all the deep emotions that a man shall know before he dies the first consciousness of knowledge is the most profound; it sounds the depths of heaven and hell in the space of time that the heart beats twice.

He was passing through the woods now, the lovely oak and beech woods of Lorraine. An ancient dame, bending her crooked back beneath a load of fagots, gave him "God bless you!" and he drew rein and returned the gift—but his was in silver, with the head of his imperial majesty stamped on one side.

As he drove, rabbits ran back into the woods, hoisting their white signals of conciliation. "Peace and good will" they seemed to read, "but a wise rabbit takes to the woods." Pheasants, too, stepped daintily from under the filbert bushes, twisting their gorgeous necks curiously as he passed. Once, in the hollow of a gorge where a little stream trickled under layers of wet leaves, he saw a wild-boar standing hock-deep in the ooze, rooting under mosses and rotten branches, absorbed in his rooting. Twice deer leaped from the young growth on the edge of the fields and bounded lazily into denser cover, only to stop when half concealed and stare back at him with gentle, curious eyes. The horse pricked up his ears at such times and introduced a few waltz steps into his steady if monotonous repertoire, but Jack let him have his fling, thinking that the deer were as tame as the horse, and both were tamer than man.

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Excepting the black panther, man has learned his lesson slowest of all, the lesson of acquiescence in the inevitable.

"I'll never learn it," said Jack, aloud. His voice startled him—it was trembling.

Lorraine! Lorraine! Life has begun for a very young man. Teach him to see and bring him to accept existence in the innocence of your knowledge; for, if he and the world collide, he fears the result to the world.

A few moments later he drove into Paradise, which is known to some as the Château de Nesville.

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CHAPTER VIII

UNDER THE YOKE

During the next two weeks Jack Marche drove into Paradise fourteen times, and fourteen times he drove out of Paradise, back to the Château Morteyn. Heaven is nearer than people suppose; it was three miles from the road shrine at Morteyn.

Our Lady of Morteyn, sculptured in the cold stone above the shrine, had looked with her wide stone eyes on many lovers, and had known they were lovers because their piety was as sudden as it was fervid.

Twice a day Jack's riding-cap was reverently doffed as he drew bridle before the shrine, going and coming from Paradise.

At evening, too, when the old vicomte slept on his pillow and the last light went out in the stables, Our Lady of Morteyn saw a very young man sitting, with his head in his hands, at her feet; and he took no harm from the cold stones, because Our Lady of Morteyn is gentle and gracious, and the

summer nights were hot in the province of Lorraine.

There had been little stir or excitement in Morteyn. Even in Saint-Lys, where all day and all night the troop-trains rushed by, the cheers of the war-bound soldiers leaning from the flying cars were becoming monotonous in the ears of the sober villagers. When the long, flat cars, piled with cannon, passed, the people stared at the slender guns, mute, canvas-covered, tilted skyward. They stared, too, at the barred cars, rolling past in interminable trains, loaded with horses and canvas-jacketed troopers who peered between the slats and shouted to the women in the street. Other trains came and went, trains weighted with bellowing cattle or huddled sheep, trains choked with small square boxes marked "Cartouches" or "Obus—7^{me}"; trains piled high with grain or clothing, or folded tents packed between varnished poles and piles of tin basins. Once a little excitement came to Saint-Lys when a battalion of red-legged infantry tramped into the village square and stacked rifles and jeered at the mayor and drank many bottles of red wine to the health of the shy-eyed girls peeping at them from every lattice. But they were only waiting for the next train, and when it came their bugles echoed from the bridge to the square, and they went away—went where the others had gone—laughing, singing, cheering from the car-windows, where the sun beat down on their red caps, and set their buttons glittering like a million swarming fire-flies.

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The village life, the daily duties, the dull routine from the vineyard to the grain-field, and from the étang to the forest had not changed in Saint-Lys.

There might be war somewhere; it would never come to Saint-Lys. There might be death, yonder towards the Rhine—probably beyond it, far beyond it. What of it? Death comes to all, but it comes slowly in Saint-Lys; and the days are long, and one must eat to live, and there is much to be done between the rising and the setting of a peasant's sun.

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There, below in Paris, were wise heads and many soldiers. They, in Paris, knew what to do, and the war might begin and end with nothing but a soiled newspaper in the Café Saint-Lys to show for it—as far as the people of Saint-Lys knew.

True, at the summons of the mayor, the National Guard of Saint-Lys mustered in the square, seven strong and a bugler. This was merely a display of force—it meant nothing—but let those across the Rhine beware!

The fierce little man with the gray mustache, who was named Tricasse, and who commanded the Saint-Lys Pompiers, spoke gravely of Francs-corps, and drank too much eau-de-vie every evening. But these warlike ebullitions simmered away peacefully in the sunshine, and the tranquil current of life flowed as smoothly through Saint-Lys as the river Lisse itself, limpid, noiseless, under the village bridge.

Only one man had left the village, and that was Brun, the furtive-eyed young peasant, the sole representative in Saint-Lys of the conscript class of 1871. And he would never have gone had not a gendarme pulled him from under his mother's bed and hustled him on to the first Paris-bound train, which happened to be a cattle train, where Brun mingled his lamentations with the bleating of sheep and the desolate bellow of thirsty cows.

Jack Marche heard of these things but saw little of them. The great war wave rolling through the provinces towards the Rhine skirted them at Saint-Lys, and scarcely disturbed them. They heard that Douay was marching through the country somewhere, some said towards Wissembourg, some said towards Saarbrück. But these towns were names to the peasants of Saint-Lys—tant pis for the two towns! And General Douay—who was he? Probably a fat man in red breeches and polished boots, wearing a cocked-hat and a cross on his breast. Anyway, they would chase the Prussians and kill a few, as they had chased the Russians in the Crimea, and the Italians in Rome, and the Kabyles in Oran. The result? Nothing but a few new colours for the ribbons in their sweethearts' hair—like that pretty Magenta and Solferino and Sebastopol gray. "Fichtre! Faut-il gaspiller tout de même! mais, à la guerre comme à la guerre!" which meant nothing in Saint-Lys.

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It meant more to Jack Marche, riding one sultry afternoon through the woods, idly drumming on his spurred boots with a battered riding-crop.

It was his daily afternoon ride to the Château de Nesville; the shy wood creatures were beginning to know him, even the younger rabbits of the most recent generation sat up and mumbled their prehensile lips, watching him with large, moist eyes. As for the red squirrels in the chestnut-trees, and the dappled deer in the carrefours, and the sulky boars that bristled at him from the overgrown sentiers, they accepted him on condition that he kept to the road. And he did, head bent, thoughtful eyes fixed on his saddle-bow, drumming absently with his riding-crop on his spurred boots, his bridle loose on his horse's neck.

There was little to break the monotony of the ride; a sudden gush of song from a spotted thrush, the rustle of a pheasant in the brake, perhaps the modest greeting of a rare keeper patrolling his beat—nothing more. He went armed; he carried a long Colt's six-shooter in his holster, not because he feared for his own skin, but he thought it just as well to be ready in case of trouble at the Château de Nesville. However, he did not fear trouble again; the French armies were moving everywhere on the frontier, and the spies, of course, had long ago betaken themselves and their projects to the other bank of the Rhine.

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The Marquis de Nesville himself felt perfectly secure, now that the attempt had been made and had failed.

He told Jack so on the few occasions when he descended from his room during the young fellow's visits. He made not the slightest objections to Jack's seeing Lorraine when and where he pleased, and this very un-Gallic behaviour puzzled Jack until he began to comprehend the depths of the man's selfish absorption in his balloons. It was more than absorption, it was mania pure and simple, an absolute inability to see or hear or think or understand anything except his own devices in the little bolted chamber above.

He did care for Lorraine to the extent of providing for her every want—he did remember her existence when he wanted something himself. Also it was true that he would not have permitted a Frenchman to visit Lorraine as Jack did. He hated two persons; one of these was Jack's uncle, the Vicomte de Morteyn. On the other hand, he admired him, too, because the vicomte, like himself, was a royalist and shunned the Tuileries as the devil shuns holy water. Therefore he was his equal, and he liked him because he could hate him without loss of self-respect. The reason he hated him was this—the Vicomte de Morteyn had pooh-poohed the balloons. That occurred years ago, but he never forgot it, and had never seen the old vicomte since. Whether or not Lorraine visited the old people at Morteyn, he had neither time nor inclination to inquire.

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This was the man, tall, gentle, clean-cut of limb and feature, and bearded like Jove—this was the man to whom Lorraine devoted her whole existence. Every heart-beat was for him, every thought, every prayer. And she was very devout.

This also was why she came to Jack so confidently and laid her white hands in his when he sprang from his saddle, his heart in flames of adoration.

He knew this, he knew that her undisguised pleasure in his company was, for her, only another link that welded her closer to her father. At night, often, when he had ridden back again, he thought of it, and paled with resentment. At times he almost hated her father. He could have borne it easier if the Marquis de Nesville had been a loving father, even a tyrannically solicitous father; but to see such love thrown before a marble-faced man, whose expression never changed except when speaking of his imbecile machines! "How can he! How can he!" muttered Jack, riding through the woods. His face was sombre, almost stern; and always he beat the devil's tattoo on his boot with the battered riding-crop.

But now he came to the park gate, and the keeper touched his cap and smiled, and dragged the heavy grille back till it creaked on its hinges.

Lorraine came down the path to meet him; she had never before done that, and he brightened and sprang to the ground, radiant with happiness.

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She had brought some sugar for the horse; the beautiful creature followed her, thrusting its soft, satin muzzle into her hand, ears pricked forward, wise eyes fixed on her.

"None for me?" asked Jack.

"Sugar?"

With a sudden gesture she held a lump out to him in the centre of her pink palm.

Before she could withdraw the hand he had touched it with his lips, and, a little gravely, she withdrew it and walked on in silence by his side.

Her shoulder had healed, and she no longer wore the silken support for her arm. She was dressed in black—the effect of her glistening hair and blond skin was dazzling. His eyes wandered from the white wrist, dainty and rounded, to the full curved neck—to the delicate throat and proud little head. Her body, supple as perfect Greek sculpture; her grace and gentle dignity; her innocence, sweet as the light in her blue eyes, set him dreaming again as he walked at her side, preoccupied, almost saddened, a little afraid that such happiness as was his should provoke the gods to end it.

He need not have taken thought for the gods, for the gods take thought for themselves; and they were already busy at Saarbrück. Their mills are not always slow in grinding; nor, on the other hand, are they always sure. They may have been ages ago, but now the gods are so out of date that saints and sinners have a chance about equally.

They traversed the lawn, skirted the tall wall of solid masonry that separated the chase from the park, and, passing a gate at the hedge, came to a little stone bridge, beneath which the Lisse ran dimpling. They watched the horse pursuing his own way tranquilly towards the stables, and, when they saw a groom come out and lead him in, they turned to each other, ready to begin another day of perfect contentment.

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First of all he asked about her shoulder, and she told him truthfully that it was well. Then she inquired about the old vicomte and Madame de Morteyn, and intrusted pretty little messages to him for them, which he, unlike most young men, usually remembered to deliver.

"My father," she said, "has not been to breakfast or dinner since the day before yesterday. I should have been alarmed, but I listened at the door and heard him moving about with his machinery. I sent him some very nice things to eat; I don't know if he liked them, for he sent no message back. Do you suppose he is hungry?"

"No," said Jack; "if he were he would say so." He was careful not to speak bitterly, and she noticed nothing.

"I believe," she said, "that he is about to make another ascension. He often stays a long time in his room, alone, before he is ready. Will it not be delightful? I shall perhaps be permitted to go up with him. Don't you wish you might go with us?"

"Yes," said Jack, with a little more earnestness than he intended.

"Oh! you do? If you are very good, perhaps—perhaps—but I dare not promise. If it were my balloon I would take you."

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"Would you—really?"

"Of course—you know it. But it isn't my balloon, you know." After a moment she went on: "I have been thinking all day how noble and good it is of my father to consecrate his life to a purpose that shall be of use to France. He has not said so, but I know that, if the next ascension proves that his discovery is beyond the chance of failure, he will notify the government and place his invention at their disposal. Monsieur Marche, when I think of his unselfish nobleness, the tears come—I cannot help it."

"You, too, are noble," said Jack, resentfully.

"I? Oh, if you knew! I—I am actually wicked! Would you believe it, I sometimes think and think and wish that my father could spend more time with me—with me!—a most silly and thoughtless girl who would sacrifice the welfare of France to her own caprice. Think of it! I pray—very often—that I may learn to be unselfish; but I must be very bad, for I often cry myself to sleep. Is it not wicked?"

"Very," said Jack, but his smile faded and there was a catch in his voice.

"You see," she said, with a gesture of despair, "even you feel it, too!"

"Do you really wish to know what I do think—of you?" he asked, in a low voice.

It was on the tip of her tongue to say "Yes." She checked herself, lips apart, and her eyes became troubled.

There was something about Jack Marche that she had not been able to understand. It occupied her—it took up a good share of her attention, but she did not know where to begin to philosophize, nor yet where to end. He was different from other men—that she understood. But where was that difference?—in his clear, brown eyes, sunny as brown streams in October?—in his serious young face?—in his mouth, clean cut and slightly smiling under his short, crisp mustache, burned blond by the sun? Where was the difference?—in his voice?—in his gestures?—in the turn of his head?

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Lorraine did not know, but as often as she gave the riddle up she recommenced it, idly sometimes, sometimes piqued that the solution seemed no nearer. Once, the evening she had met him after their first encounter in the forest carrefour—that evening on the terrace when she stood looking out into the dazzling Lorraine moonlight—she felt that the solution of the riddle had been very near. But now, two weeks later, it seemed further off than ever. And yet this problem, that occupied her so, must surely be worth the solving. What was it, then, in Jack Marche that made him what he was?—gentle, sweet-tempered, a delightful companion—yes, a companion that she would not now know how to do without.

And yet, at times, there came into his eyes and into his voice something that troubled her—she could not tell why—something that mystified and checked her, and set her thinking again on the old, old problem that had seemed so near solution that evening on the moonlit terrace.

That was why she started to say "Yes" to his question, and did not, but stood with lips half parted and blue eyes troubled.

He looked at her in silence for a moment, then, with a half-impatient gesture, turned to the river.

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"Shall we sit down on the moss?" she asked, vaguely conscious that his sympathies had, for a moment, lost touch with hers.

He followed her down the trodden foot-path to the bank of the stream, and, when she had seated herself at the foot of a linden-tree, he threw himself at her feet.

They were silent. He picked up a faded bunch of blue corn-flowers which they had left there, forgotten, the day before. One by one he broke the blossoms from the stalks and tossed them into the water.

She, watching them floating away under the bridge, thought of the blue bits of paper—the telegram—that she had torn up and tossed upon the water two weeks before. He was thinking of the same thing, for, when she said, abruptly: "I should not have done that!" he knew what she meant, and replied: "Such things are always your right—if you care to use it."

She laughed. "Then you believe still in the feudal system? I do not; I am a good republican."

"It is easy," he said, also laughing, "for a young lady with generations of counts and vicomtes behind her to be a republican. It is easier still for a man with generations of republicans behind him to turn royalist. It is the way of the world, mademoiselle."

"Then you shall say: 'Long live the king!'" she said; "say it this instant!"

"Long live—your king!"

"My king?"

"I'm his subject if you are; I'll shout for no other king."

"Now, whatever is he talking about?" thought Lorraine, and the suspicion of a cloud gathered in her clear eyes again, but was dissipated at once when he said: "I have answered the *Herald's* telegram." [Pg 73]

"What did you say?" she asked, quickly.

"I accepted—"

"What!"

There was resentment in her voice. She felt that he had done something which was tacitly understood to be against her wishes. True, what difference did it make to her? None; she would lose a delightful companion. Suddenly, something of the significance of such a loss came to her. It was not a revelation, scarcely an illumination, but she understood that if he went she should be lonely—yes, even unhappy. Then, too, unconsciously, she had assumed a mental attitude of interest in his movements—of partial proprietorship in his thoughts. She felt vaguely that she had been overlooked in the decision he had made; that even if she had not been consulted, at least he might have told her what he intended to do. Lorraine was at a loss to understand herself. But she was easily understood. For two weeks her attitude had been that of every innocent, lovable girl when in the presence of the man whom she frankly cares for; and that attitude was one of mental proprietorship. Now, suddenly finding that his sympathies and ideas moved independently of her sympathies—that her mental influence, which existed until now unconsciously, was in reality no influence at all, she awoke to the fact that she perhaps counted for nothing with him. Therefore resentment appeared in the faintest of straight lines between her eyes.

"Do you care?" he asked, carelessly.

"I? Why, no." [Pg 74]

If she had smiled at him and said "Yes," he would have despaired; but she frowned a trifle and said "No," and Jack's heart began to beat.

"I cabled them two words: 'Accept—provisionally,'" he said.

"Oh, what did you mean?"

"Provisionally meant—with your consent."

"My—my consent?"

"Yes—if it is your pleasure."

Pleasure! Her sweet eyes answered what her lips withheld. Her little heart beat high. So then she did influence this cool young man, with his brown eyes faintly smiling, and his indolent limbs crossed on the moss at her feet. At the same moment her instinct told her to tighten her hold. This was so perfectly feminine, so instinctively human, that she had done it before she herself was aware of it. "I shall think it over," she said, looking at him, gravely; "I may permit you to accept."

So was accomplished the admitted subjugation of Jack Marche—a stroke of diplomacy on his part; and he passed under the yoke in such a manner that even the blindest of maids could see that he was not vaulting over it instead.

Having openly and admittedly established her sovereignty, she was happy—so happy that she began to feel that perhaps the victory was not unshared by him.

"I shall think it over very seriously," she repeated, watching his laughing eyes; "I am not sure that I shall permit you to go."

"I only wish to go as a special, not a regular correspondent. I wish to be at liberty to roam about and sketch or write what I please. I think my material will always be found in your vicinity." [Pg 75]

Her heart fluttered a little; this surprised her so much that her cheeks grew suddenly warm and pink. A little confused, she said what she had not dreamed of saying: "You won't go very far away, will you?" And before she could modify her speech he had answered, impetuously: "Never, until you send me away!"

A mottled thrush on the top of the linden-tree surveyed the scene curiously. She had never beheld such a pitifully embarrassed young couple in all her life. It was so different in Thrushdom.

Lorraine's first impulse was to go away and close several doors and sit down, very still, and think. Her next impulse was to stay and see what Jack would do. He seemed to be embarrassed, too—he fidgeted and tossed twigs and pebbles into the river. She felt that she, who already admittedly was arbiter of his goings and comings, should do something to relieve this uneasy and strained situation. So she folded her hands on her black dress and said: "There is something I have been wishing to tell you for two weeks, but I did not because I was not sure that I was right, and I did not wish to trouble you unnecessarily. Now, perhaps, you would be willing to share the trouble

with me. Would you?"

Before the eager answer came to his lips she continued, hastily: "The man who made maps—the man whom you struck in the carrefour—is the same man who ran away with the box; I know it!"

"That spy?—that tall, square-shouldered fellow with the pink skin and little, pale, pinkish eyes?" [Pg 76]

"Yes. I know his name, too."

Jack sat up on the moss and listened anxiously.

"His name is Von Steyr—Siurd von Steyr. It was written in pencil on the back of one map. The morning after the assault on the house, when they thought I was ill in bed, I got up and dressed and went down to examine the road where you caught the man and saved my father's little steel box. There I found a strip of cloth torn from your evening coat, and—oh, Monsieur Marche!—I found the great, flat stone with which he tried to crush you, just as my father fired from the wall!"

The sudden memory, the thought of what might have happened, came to her in a flash for the first time. She looked at him—her hands were in his before she could understand why.

"Go on," he whispered.

Her eyes met his half fearfully—she withdrew her fingers with a nervous movement and sat silent.

"Tell me," he urged, and took one of her hands again. She did not withdraw it—she seemed confused; and presently he dropped her hand and sat waiting for her to speak, his heart beating furiously.

"There is not much more to tell," she said at last, in a voice that seemed not quite under control. "I followed the broken bushes and his footmarks along the river until I came to a stone where I think he sat down. He was bleeding, too—my father shot him—and he tore bits of paper and cloth to cover the wound—he even tore up another map. I found part of it, with his name on the back again—not all of it, though, but enough. Here it is."

She handed him a bit of paper. On one side were the fragments of a map in water-colour; on the other, written in German script, he read "Siurd von Steyr." [Pg 77]

"It's enough," said Jack; "what a plucky girl you are, anyway!"

"I? You don't think so!—do you?"

"You are the bravest, sweetest—"

"Dear me! You must not say that! You are sadly uneducated, and I see I must take you under my control at once. Man is born to obey! I have decided about your answer to the *Herald's* telegram."

"May I know the result?" he asked, laughingly.

"To-morrow. There is a brook-lily on the border of the sedge-grass. You may bring it to me."

So began the education of Jack Marche—under the yoke. And Lorraine's education began, too—but she was sublimely unconscious of that fact.

This also is a law in the world. [Pg 78]

CHAPTER IX

SAARBRÜCK

On the first day of August, late in the afternoon, a peasant driving an exhausted horse pulled up at the Château Morteyn, where Jack Marche stood on the terrace, smoking and cutting at leaves with his riding-crop.

"What's the matter, Passerat?" asked Jack, good-humouredly; "are the Prussians in the valley?"

"You are right, Monsieur Marche—the Prussians have crossed the Saar!" blurted out the man. His face was agitated, and he wiped the sweat from his cheeks with the sleeve of his blouse.

"Nonsense!" said Jack, sharply.

"Monsieur—I saw them! They chased me—the Uhlans with their spears and devilish yellow horses."

"Where?" demanded Jack, with an incredulous shrug.

"I had been to Forbach, where my cousin Passerat is a miner in the coal-mines. This morning I left to drive to Saint-Lys, having in my wagon these sacks of coal that my cousin Passerat procured for me, à prix réduit. It would take all day; I did not care—I had bread and red wine—you understand, my cousin Passerat and I, we had been gay in Saint-Avoid, too—dame! we see each other seldom. I may have had more eau-de-vie than another—it is permitted on fête-days! Monsieur, I was tired—I possibly slept—the road was hot. Then something awakes me; I rub my [Pg 79]

eyes—behold me awake!—staring dumfounded at what? Parbleu!—at two ugly Uhlans sitting on their yellow horses on a hill! 'No! no!' I cry to myself; 'it is impossible!' It is a bad dream! Dieu de Dieu! It is no dream! My Uhlans come galloping down the hill; I hear them bawling 'Halt! Wer da!' It is terrible! 'Passerat!' I shriek, 'it is the hour to vanish!'"

The man paused, overcome by emotions and eau-de-vie.

"Well," said Jack, "go on!"

"And I am here, monsieur," ended the peasant, hazily.

"Passerat, you said you had taken too much eau-de-vie?" suggested Jack, with a smile of encouragement.

"Much? Monsieur, you do not believe me?"

"I believe you had a dream."

"Bon," said the peasant, "I want no more such dreams."

"Are you going to inform the mayor of Saint-Lys?" asked Jack.

"Of course," muttered Passerat, gathering up his reins; "heu! da-da! heu! cocotte! en route!" and he rattled sulkily away, perhaps a little uncertain himself as to the concreteness of his recent vision.

Jack looked after him.

"There might be something in it," he mused, "but, dear me! his nose is unpleasantly—sunburned."

That same morning, Lorraine had announced her decision. It was that Jack might accept the position of special, or rather occasional, war correspondent for the New York *Herald* if he would promise not to remain absent for more than a day at a time. This, Jack thought, practically nullified the consent, for what in the world could a man see of the campaign under such circumstances? Still, he did not object; he was too happy.

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"However," he thought, "I might ride over to Saarbrück. Suppose I should be on hand at the first battle of the war?"

As a mere lad he had already seen service with the Austrians at Sadowa; he had risked his modest head more than once in the murderous province of Oran, where General Chanzy scoured the hot plains like a scourge of Allah.

He had lived, too, at headquarters, and shared the officers' mess where "cherba," "tadjines," "kous-kous," and "méchoin" formed the menu, and a "Kreima Kebira" served as his roof. He had done his duty as correspondent, merely because it was his duty; he would have preferred an easier assignment, for he took no pleasure in cruelty and death and the never-to-be-forgotten agony of proud, dark faces, where mud-stained turbans hung in ribbons and tinselled saddles reeked with Arab horses' blood.

War correspondent? It had happened to be his calling; but the accident of his profession had been none of his own seeking. Now that he needed nothing in the way of recompense, he hesitated to take it up again. Instinctive loyalty to his old newspaper was all that had induced him to entertain the idea. Loyalty and deference to Lorraine compelled him to modify his acceptance. Therefore it was not altogether idle curiosity, but partly a sense of obligation, that made him think of riding to Saarbrück to see what he could see for his journal within the twenty-four-hour limit that Lorraine had set.

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It was too late to ride over that evening and return in time to keep his word to Lorraine, so he decided to start at daybreak, realizing at the same time, with a pang, that it meant not seeing Lorraine all day.

He went up to his chamber and sat down to think. He would write a note to Lorraine; he had never done such a thing, and he hoped she might not find fault with him.

He tossed his riding-crop on to the desk, picked up a pen, and wrote carefully, ending the single page with, "It is reported that Uhlans have been encountered in the direction of Saarbrück, and, although I do not believe it, I shall go there to-morrow and see for myself. I will be back within the twelve hours. May I ride over to tell you about these mythical Uhlans when I return?"

He called a groom and bade him drive to the Château de Nesville with the note. Then he went down to sit with the old vicomte and Madame de Morteyn until it came dinner-time, and the oil-lamps in the gilded salon were lighted, and the candles blazed up on either side of the gilt French clock.

After dinner he played chess with his uncle until the old man fell asleep in his chair. There was an interval of silence.

"Jack," said his aunt, "you are a dear, good boy. Tell me, do you love our little Lorraine?"

The suddenness of the question struck him dumb. His aunt smiled; her faded eyes were very tender and kindly, and she laid both frail hands on his shoulders.

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"It is my wish," she said, in a low voice; "remember that, Jack. Now go and walk on the terrace, for she will surely answer your note."

"How—how did you know I wrote her?" he stammered.

"When a young man sends his aunt's servants on such very unorthodox errands, what can he expect, especially when those servants are faithful?"

"That groom told you, Aunt Helen?"

"Yes. Jack, these French servants don't understand such things. Be more careful, for Lorraine's sake."

"But—I will—but did the note reach her?"

His aunt smiled. "Yes. I took the responsibility upon myself, and there will be no gossip."

Jack leaned over and kissed the amused mouth, and the old lady gave him a little hug and told him to go and walk on the terrace.

The groom was already there, holding a note in one hand, gilt-banded cap in the other.

His first letter from Lorraine! He opened it feverishly. In the middle of a thin sheet of note-paper was written the motto of the De Nesvilles, "Tiens ta Foy."

Beneath, in a girlish hand, a single line:

"I shall wait for you at dusk. Lorraine."

All night long, as he lay half asleep on his pillow, the words repeated themselves in his drowsy brain: "Tiens ta Foy!" "Tiens ta Foy!" (Keep thy Faith!). Aye, he would keep it unto death—he knew it even in his slumber. But he did not know how near to death that faith might lead him.

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The wood-sparrows were chirping outside his window when he awoke. It was scarcely dawn, but he heard the maid knocking at his door, and the rattle of silver and china announced the morning coffee.

He stepped from his bed into the tub of cold water, yawning and shivering, but the pallor of his skin soon gave place to a healthy glow, and his clean-cut body and strong young limbs hardened and grew pink and firm again under the coarse towel.

Breakfast he ate hastily by candle-light, and presently he dressed, buckled his spurs over the insteps, caught up gloves, cap, and riding-crop, and, slinging a field-glass over his Norfolk jacket, lighted a pipe and went noiselessly down-stairs.

There was a chill in the gray dawn as he mounted and rode out through the shadowy portals of the wrought-iron grille; a vapour, floating like loose cobwebs, undulated above the placid river; the tree-tops were festooned with mist. Save for the distant chatter of wood-sparrows, stirring under the eaves of the Château, the stillness was profound.

As he left the park and cantered into the broad red highway, he turned in his saddle and looked towards the Château de Nesville. At first he could not see it, but as he rode over the bridge he caught a glimpse of the pointed roof and single turret, a dim silhouette through the mist. Then it vanished in the films of fog.

The road to Saarbrück was a military road, and easy travelling. The character of the country had changed as suddenly as a drop-scene falls in a theatre; for now all around stretched fields cut into squares by hedges—fields deep-laden with heavy-fruited strawberries, white and crimson. Currants, too, glowed like strung rubies frosted with the dew; plum-trees spread little pale shadows across the ruddy earth, and beyond them the disk of the sun appeared, pushing upward behind a half-ploughed hill. Everywhere slender fruit-trees spread their grafted branches; everywhere in the crumbling furrows of the soil, warm as ochre, the bunched strawberries hung like drops of red wine under the sun-bronzed leaves.

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The sun was an hour high when he walked his horse up the last hill that hides the valley of the Saar. Already, through the constant rushing melody of bird music, his ears had distinguished another sound—a low, incessant hum, monotonous, interminable as the noise of a stream in a gorge. It was not the river Saar moving over its bed of sand and yellow pebbles; it was not the breeze in the furze. He knew what it was; he had heard it before, in Oran—in the stillness of dawn, where, below, among the shadowy plains, an army was awaking under dim tents.

And now his horse's head rose up black against the sky; now the valley broke into view below, gray, indistinct in the shadows, crossed by ghostly lines of poplars that dwindled away to the horizon.

At the same instant something moved in the fields to the left, and a shrill voice called: "Qui-vive?" Before he could draw bridle blue-jacketed cavalymen were riding at either stirrup, carbine on thigh, peering curiously into his face, pushing their active light-bay horses close to his big black horse.

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Jack laughed good-humouredly and fumbled in the breast of his Norfolk jacket for his papers.

"I'm only a special," he said; "I think you'll find the papers in order—if not, you've only to gallop

back to the Château Morteyn to verify them."

An officer with a bewildering series of silver arabesques on either sleeve guided a nervous horse through the throng of troopers, returned Jack's pleasant salute, reached out a gloved hand for his papers, and read them, sitting silently in his saddle. When he finished, he removed the cigarette from his lips, looked eagerly at Jack, and said:

"You are from Morteyn?"

"Yes."

"A guest?"

"The Vicomte de Morteyn is my uncle."

The officer burst into a boyish laugh.

"Jack Marche!"

"Eh!" cried Jack, startled.

Then he looked more closely at the young officer before him, who was laughing in his face.

"Well, upon my word! No—it can't be little Georges Carrière?"

"Yes, it can!" cried the other, briskly; "none of your damned airs, Jack! Embrace me, my son!"

"My son, I won't!" said Jack, leaning forward joyously—"the idea! Little Georges calls me his son! And he's learning the paternal tricks of the old generals, and doubtless he calls his troopers 'mes enfants,' and—"

"Oh, shut up!" said Georges, giving him an impetuous hug; "what are you up to now—more war correspondence? For the same old *Herald*? Nom d'une pipe! It's cooler here than in Oran. It'll be hotter, too—in another way," with a gay gesture towards the valley below. "Jack Marche, tell me all about everything!"

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On either side the blue-jacketed troopers fell back, grinning with sympathy as Georges guided his horse into a field on the right, motioning Jack to follow.

"We can talk here a bit," he said; "you've lots of time to ride on. Now, fire ahead!"

Jack told him of the three years spent in idleness, of the vapid life in Paris, the long summers in Brittany, his desire to learn to paint, and his despair when he found he couldn't.

"I can sketch like the mischief, though," he said. "Now tell me about Oran, and our dear General Chanzy, and that devil's own 'Legion,' and the Hell's Selected 2d Zouaves! Do you remember that day at Damas when Chanzy visited the Emir Abd-el-Kader at Doummar, and the fifteen Spahis of the escort, and that little imp of the Legion who was caught roaming around the harem, and—"

Georges burst into a laugh.

"I can't answer all that in a second! Wait! Do you want to know about Chanzy? Well, he's still in Bel-Abbès, and he's been named commander of the Legion of Honour, and he's no end of a swell. He'll be coming back now that we've got to chase these sausage-eaters across the Rhine. Look at me! You used to say that I'd stopped growing and could never aspire to a mustache! Now look! Eh? Five feet eleven and—*what* do you think of my mustache? Oh, that African sun sets things growing! I'm lieutenant, too."

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"Does the African sun also influence your growth in the line of promotion?" asked Jack, grinning.

"Same old farceur, too!" mused Georges. "Now, what the mischief are you doing here? Oh, you are staying at Morteyn?"

"Yes."

"I—er—I used to visit another house—er—near by. You know the Marquis de Nesville?" asked Georges, innocently.

"I? Oh yes."

"You have—perhaps you have met Mademoiselle de Nesville?"

"Yes," said Jack, shortly.

"Oh."

There was a silence. Jack shuffled his booted toes in his stirrups; Georges looked out across the valley.

In the valley the vapours were rising; behind the curtain of shredded mist the landscape lay hilly, nearly treeless, cut by winding roads and rank on rank of spare poplars. Farther away clumps of woods appeared, and little hillocks, and now, as the air cleared, the spire of a church glimmered. Suddenly a thin line of silver cut the landscape beyond the retreating fog. The Saar!

"Where are the Prussians?" asked Jack, breaking the silence.

Georges laid his gloved hand on his companion's arm.

"Do you see that spire? That is Saarbrück. They are there."

"This side of the Rhine, too?"

"Yes," said Georges, reddening a little; "wait, my friend."

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"They must have crossed the Saar on the bridges from Saint-Johann, then. I heard that Uhlans had been signalled near the Saar, but I didn't believe it. Uhlans in France? Georges, when are you fellows going to chase them back?"

"This morning—you're just in time, as usual," said Georges, airily. "Do you want me to give you an idea of our positions? Listen, then: we're massed along the frontier from Sierk and Metz to Hagenau and Strasbourg. The Prussians lie at right angles to us, from Mainz to Lauterburg and from Trier to Saarbrück. Except near Saarbrück they are on their side of the boundary, let me tell you! Look! Now you can see Forbach through the trees. We're there and we're at Saint-Avold and Bitsch and Saargemünd, too. As for me, I'm with this damned rear-guard, and I count tents and tin pails, and I raise the devil with stragglers and generally ennui myself. I'm no gendarme! There's a regiment of gendarmes five miles north, and I don't see why they can't do depot duty and police this country."

"The same child—kicking, kicking, kicking!" observed Jack. "You ought to thank your luck that you are a spectator for once. Give me your glass."

He raised the binoculars and levelled them at the valley.

"Hello! I didn't see those troops before. Infantry, eh? And there goes a regiment—no, a brigade—no, a division, at least, of cavalry. I see cuirassiers, too. Good heavens! Their breastplates take the sun like heliographs! There are troops everywhere; there's an artillery train on that road beyond Saint-Avold. Here, take the glasses."

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"Keep them—I know where they are. What time is it, Jack? My repeater is running wild—as if it were chasing Prussians."

"It's half-past nine; I had no idea that it was so late! Ha! there goes a mass of infantry along the hill. See it? They're headed for Saarbrück! Georges, what's that big marquee in the wheat-field?"

"The Emperor is there," said Georges, proudly; "those troopers are the Cuirassiers of the Hundred-Guards. See their white mantles? The Prince Imperial is there, too. Poor little man—he looks so tired and bewildered."

Jack kept his glasses fixed on the white dot that marked the imperial headquarters, but the air was hazy and the distance too great to see anything except specks and points of white and black, slowly shifting, gathering, and collecting again in the grain-field, that looked like a tiny square of pale gilt on the hill-top.

Suddenly a spot of white vapour appeared over the spire of Saarbrück, then another, then three together, little round clouds that hung motionless, wavered, split, and disappeared in the sunshine, only to be followed by more round cloud clots. A moment later the dull mutter of cannon disturbed the morning air, distant rumblings and faint shocks that seemed to come from an infinite distance.

Jack handed back the binoculars and opened his own field-glasses in silence. Neither spoke, but they instinctively leaned forward, side by side, sweeping the panorama with slow, methodical movements, glasses firmly levelled. And now, in the valley below, the long roads grew black with moving columns of cavalry and artillery; the fields on either side were alive with infantry, dim red squares and oblongs, creeping across the landscape towards that line of silver, the Saar.

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"It's a flank movement on Wissembourg," said Jack, suddenly; "or are they swinging around to take Saint-Johann from the north?"

"Watch Saarbrück," muttered Georges between his teeth.

The slow seconds crept into minutes, the minutes into hours, as they waited there, fascinated. Already the sharper rattle of musketry broke out on the hills south of the Saar, and the projectiles fell fast in the little river, beyond which the single spire of Saarbrück rose, capped with the smoke of exploding shells.

Jack sat sketching in a canvas-covered book, raising his brown eyes from time to time, or writing on a pad laid flat on his saddle-pommel.

The two young fellows conversed in low tones, laughing quietly or smoking in absorbed silence, and even their subdued voices were louder than the roll of the distant cannonade.

Suddenly the wind changed and their ears were filled with the hollow boom of cannon. And now, nearer than they could have believed, the crash of volley firing mingled with the whirring crackle of gatlings and the spattering rattle of Montigny mitrailleuses from the Guard artillery.

"Fichtre!" said Georges, with a shrug, "not only dancing, but music! What are you sketching, Jack? Let me see. Hm! Pretty good—for you. You've got Forbach too near, though. I wonder what the Emperor is doing. It seems too bad to drag that sick child of his out to see a lot of men fall

over dead. Poor little Lulu!"

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"Kicking, kicking ever!" murmured Jack; "the same fierce Republican, eh? I've no sympathy with you—I'm too American."

"Cheap cynicism," observed Georges. "Hello!—here's an aide-de-camp with orders. Wait a second, will you?" and the young fellow gathered bridle and galloped out into the high-road, where his troopers stood around an officer wearing the black-and-scarlet of the artillery. A moment later a bugle began to sound the assembly; blue-clad cavalymen appeared as by magic from every thicket, every field, every hollow, while below, in the nearer valley, another bugle, shrill and fantastic, summoned the squadrons to the colours. Already the better part of a regiment had gathered, four abreast, along the red road. Jack could see their eagles now, gilt and circled with gilded wreaths.

He pocketed sketch-book and pad and turned his horse out through the fields to the road.

"We're off!" laughed Georges. "Thank God! and the devil take the rear-guard! Will you ride with us, Jack? We've driven the Prussians across the Saar."

He turned to his troopers and signalled the trumpeter. "Trot!" he cried; and the squadron of hussars moved off down the hill in a whirl of dust and flying pebbles.

Jack wheeled his horse and brought him alongside of Georges' wiry mount.

"It didn't last long—eh, old chap?" laughed the youthful hussar; "only from ten o'clock till noon—eh? It's not quite noon yet. We're to join the regiment, but where we're going after that I don't know. They say the Prussians have quit Saarbrück in a hurry. I suppose we'll be in Germany to-night, and then—vlan! vlan! eh, old fellow? We'll be out for a long campaign. I'd like to see Berlin—I wish I spoke German."

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"They say," said Jack, "that most of the German officers speak French."

"Bird of ill-omen, croaker, cease! What the devil do we want to learn German for? I can say, 'Wein, Weib, und Gesang,' and that's enough for any French hussar to know."

They had come up with the whole regiment now, which was moving slowly down the valley, and Georges reported to his captain, who in turn reported to the major, who presently had a confab with the colonel. Then far away at the head of the column the mounted band began the regimental march, a gay air with plenty of trombone and kettle-drum in it, and the horses ambled and danced in sympathy, with an accompaniment of rattling carbines and clinking, clashing sabre-scabbards.

"Quelle farandole!" laughed Georges. "Are you going all the way to Berlin with us? Pst! Look! There go the Hundred-Guards! The Emperor is coming back from the front. It's all over with the sausage-eaters, et puis—bon-soir, Bismarck!"

Far away, across the hills, the white mantles of the Hundred-Guards flashed in the sunshine, rising, falling, as the horses plunged up the hills. For a moment Jack caught a glimpse of a carriage in the distance, a carriage preceded by outriders in crimson and gold, and followed by a mass of glittering cuirassiers.

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"It's the Emperor. Listen, we are going to cheer," cried Georges. He rose in his saddle and drew his sabre, and at the same instant a deep roar shook the regiment to its centre—

"Vive l'Empereur!"

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CHAPTER X

AN UNEXPECTED ENCOUNTER

It was a little after noon when the regiment halted on the Saint-Avoid highway, blocked in front by a train of Guard artillery, and on either flank by columns of infantry—voltigeurs, red-legged fantassins loaded with camp equipment, engineers in crimson and bluish-black, and a whole battalion of Turcos, scarlet fez rakishly hauled down over one ear, canvas zouave trousers tucked into canvas leggings that fitted their finely moulded ankles like gloves.

Jack rested patiently on his horse, waiting for the road to be cleared, and beside him sat Georges, chatting paternally with the giant standard-bearer of the Turcos. The huge fellow laughed and showed his dazzling teeth under the crisp jet beard, for Georges was talking to him in his native tongue—and it was many miles from Saint-Avoid to Oran. His standard, ornamented with the "opened hand and spread fingers," fluttered and snapped, and stood out straight in the valley breeze.

"What's that advertisement—the hand of Providence?" cried an impudent line soldier, leaning on his musket.

"Is it the hand that spanked Bismarck?" yelled another. The Turcos grinned under their scarlet head-dresses.

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"Ohé, Mustapha!" shouted the line soldiers, "Ohé, le Croissant!" and their band-master, laughing,

raised his tasselled baton, and the band burst out in a roll of drums and cymbals, "Partons pour la Syrie."

"Petite riffa!" said the big standard-bearer, beaming—which was very good French for a Kabyle.

"See here, Georges," said Jack, suddenly, "I've promised to be back at Morteyn before dark, and if your regiment is going to stick here much longer I'm going on."

"You want to send your despatches?" asked Georges. "You could ride on to Saarbrück and telegraph from there. Will you? Then hunt up the regiment later. We are to see a little of each other, are we not, old fellow?"

"Not if you're going Prussian-hunting across the Rhine. When you come back crowned with bay and laurel and pretzels, you can stop at Morteyn."

They nodded and clasped hands.

"Au revoir!" laughed Georges. "What shall I bring you from Berlin?"

"I'm no Herod," replied Jack; "bring back your own feather-head safely—that's all I ask." And with a smile and a gay salute the young fellows parted, turning occasionally in their saddles to wave a last adieu, until Jack's big horse disappeared among the dense platoons ahead.

For a quarter of an hour he sidled and pushed and shoved, and picked a cautious path through section after section of field artillery, seeing here and there an officer whom he knew, saluting cheerily, making a thousand excuses for his haste to the good-natured artillerymen, who only grinned in reply. As he rode, he noted with misgivings that the cannon were not breech-loaders. He had recently heard a good deal about the Prussian new model for field artillery, and he had read, in the French journals, reports of their wonderful range and flat trajectory. The cannon that he passed, with the exception of the Montigny mitrailleuses and the American gatlings, were all beautiful pieces, bronzed and engraved with crown and LN and eagle, but for all their beauty they were only muzzle-loaders.

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In a little while he came to the head of the column. The road in front seemed to be clear enough, and he wondered why they had halted, blocking half a division of infantry and cavalry behind them. There really was no reason at all. He did not know it, but he had seen the first case of that indescribable disease that raged in France in 1870-71—that malady that cannot be termed paralysis or apathy or inertia. It was all three, and it was malignant, for it came from a befouled and degraded court, spread to the government, infected the provinces, sparing neither prince nor peasant, until over the whole fair land of France it crept and hung, a fetid, miasmatic effluvia, till the nation, hopeless, weary, despairing, bereft of nerve and sinew, sank under it into utter physical and moral prostration.

This was the terrible fever that burned the best blood out of the nation—a fever that had its inception in the corruption of the empire, its crisis at Sedan, its delirium in the Commune! The nation's convalescence is slow but sure.

Jack touched spurs to his horse and galloped out into the Saarbrück road. He passed a heavy, fat-necked general, sitting on his horse, his dull, apoplectic eyes following the gestures of a staff-officer who was tracing routes and railroads on a map nailed against a poplar-tree. He passed other generals, deep in consultation, absently rolling cigarettes between their kid-gloved fingers; and everywhere dragoon patrols, gallant troopers in blue and garance, wearing steel helmets bound with leopard-skin above the visors. He passed ambulances, too, blue vehicles covered with framed yellow canvas, flying the red cross. One of the field-surgeons gave him a brief outline of the casualties and general result of the battle, and he thanked him and hastened on towards Saarbrück, whence he expected to send his despatches to Paris. But now the road was again choked with marching infantry as far as the eye could see, dense masses, pushing along in an eddying cloud of red dust that blew to the east and hung across the fields like smoke from a locomotive. Men with stretchers were passing; he saw an officer, face white as chalk, sunburned hands clinched, lying in a canvas hand-stretcher, borne by four men of the hospital corps. Edging his way to the meadow, he put his horse to the ditch, cleared it, and galloped on towards a spire that rose close ahead, outlined dimly in the smoke and dust, and in ten minutes he was in Saarbrück.

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Up a stony street, desolate, deserted, lined with rows of closed machine-shops, he passed, and out into another street where a regiment of lancers was defiling amid a confusion of shouts and shrill commands, the racket of drums echoing from wall to pavement, and the ear-splitting flourish of trumpets mingled with the heavy rumble of artillery and the cracking of leather thongs. Already the pontoons were beginning to span the river Saar, already the engineers were swarming over the three ruined bridges, jackets cast aside, picks rising and falling—clink! clank! clink! clank!—and the scrape of mortar and trowel on the granite grew into an incessant sound, harsh and discordant. The market square was impassable; infantry gorged every foot of the stony pavement, ambulances creaked through the throng, rolling like white ships in a tempest, signals set.

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In the sea of faces around him he recognized the correspondent of the London *Times*.

"Hello, Williams!" he called; "where the devil is the telegraph?"

The Englishman, red in the face and dripping with perspiration, waved his hand spasmodically.

"The military are using it; you'll have to wait until four o'clock. Are you with us in this scrimmage? The fellows are down by the Hôtel Post trying to mend the wires there. Archibald Grahame is with the Germans!"

Jack turned in his saddle with a friendly gesture of thanks and adieu. If he were going to send his despatch, he had no time to waste in Saarbrück—he understood that at a glance. For a moment he thought of going to the Hôtel Post and taking his chances with his brother correspondents; then, abruptly wheeling his horse, he trotted out into the long shed that formed one of an interminable series of coal shelters, passed through it, gained the outer street, touched up his horse, and tore away, headed straight for Forbach. For he had decided that at Forbach was his chance to beat the other correspondents, and he took the chance, knowing that in case the telegraph there was also occupied he could still get back to Morteyn, and from there to Saint-Lys, before the others had wired to their respective journals.

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It was three o'clock when he clattered into the single street of Forbach amid the blowing of bugles from a cuirassier regiment that was just leaving at a trot. The streets were thronged with gendarmes and cavalry of all arms, lancers in baggy, scarlet trousers and clumsy schapskas weighted with gold cord, chasseurs à cheval in turquoise blue and silver, dragoons, Spahis, remount-troopers, and here and there a huge rider of the Hundred-Guards, glittering like a scaled dragon in his splendid armour.

He pushed his way past the Hôtel Post and into the garden, where, at a table, an old general sat reading letters.

With a hasty glance at him, Jack bowed, and asked permission to take the unoccupied chair and use the table. The officer inclined his head with a peculiarly graceful movement, and, without more ado, Jack sat down, placed his pad flat on the table, and wrote his despatch in pencil:

"FORBACH, 2d August, 1870.

"The first shot of the war was fired this morning at ten o'clock. At that hour the French opened on Saarbrück with twenty-three pieces of artillery. The bombardment continued until twelve. At two o'clock the Germans, having evacuated Saarbrück, retreated across the Saar to Saint-Johann. The latter village is also now being evacuated; the French are pushing across the Saar by means of pontoons; the three bridges are also being rapidly repaired.

"Reports vary, but it is probable that the losses on the German side will number four officers and seventy-nine men killed—wounded unknown. The French lost six officers and eighty men killed; wounded list not completed.

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"The Emperor was present with the Prince Imperial."

Leaving his pad on the table and his riding-crop and gloves over it, he gathered up the loose leaves of his telegram and hastened across the street to the telegraph office. For the moment the instrument was idle, and the operator took his despatch, read it aloud to the censor, an officer of artillery, who viséd it and nodded.

"A longer despatch is to follow—can I have the wires again in half an hour?" asked Jack.

Both operator and censor laughed and said, "No promises, monsieur; come and see." And Jack hastened back to the garden of the hôtel and sat down once more under the trees, scarcely glancing at the old officer beside him. Again he wrote:

"The truth is that the whole affair was scarcely more than a skirmish. A handful of the 2d Battalion of Fusilliers, a squadron or two of Uhlans, and a battery of Prussian artillery have for days faced and held in check a whole French division. When they were attacked they tranquilly turned a bold front to the French, made a devil of a racket with their cannon, and slipped across the frontier with trifling loss. If the French are going to celebrate this as a victory, Europe will laugh—"

He paused, frowning and biting his pencil. Presently he noticed that several troopers of the Hundred-Guards were watching him from the street; sentinels of the same corps were patrolling the garden, their long, bayoneted carbines over their steel-bound shoulders. At the same moment his eyes fell upon the old officer beside him. The officer raised his head.

It was the Emperor, Napoleon III.

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CHAPTER XI

"KEEP THY FAITH"

Jack was startled, and he instinctively stood up very straight, as he always did when surprised.

Under the Emperor's crimson képi, heavy with gold, the old, old eyes, half closed, peered at him, as a drowsy buzzard watches the sky, with filmy, changeless gaze. His face was the colour of clay, the loose folds of the cheeks hung pallid over a heavy chin; his lips were hidden beneath a mustache and imperial, unkempt but waxed at the ends. From the shadow of his crimson cap the hair straggled forward, half hiding two large, wrinkled, yellow ears.

With a smile and a slight gesture exquisitely courteous, the Emperor said: "Pray do not allow me to interrupt you, monsieur; old soldiers are of small account when a nation's newspapers wait."

"Sire!" protested Jack, flushing.

Napoleon III.'s eyes twinkled, and he picked up his letter again, still smiling.

"Such good news, monsieur, should not be kept waiting. You are English? No? Then American? Oh!"

The Emperor rolled a cigarette, gazing into vacancy with dreamy eyes, narrow as slits in a mask. Jack sat down again, pencil in hand, a little flustered and uncertain.

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The Emperor struck a wax-match on a gold matchbox, leaning his elbow on the table to steady his shaking hand. Presently he slowly crossed one baggy red-trouser knee over the other and, blowing a cloud of cigarette smoke into the sunshine, said: "I suppose your despatch will arrive considerably in advance of the telegrams of the other correspondents, who seem to be blocked in Saarbrück?"

He glanced obliquely at Jack, grave and impassible.

"I trust so, sire," said Jack, seriously.

The Emperor laughed outright, crumpled the letter in his gloved hand, tossed the cigarette away, and rose painfully, leaning for support on the table.

Jack rose, too.

"Monsieur," said Napoleon, playfully, as though attempting to conceal intense physical suffering, "I am in search of a motto—for reasons. I shall have a regiment or two carry 'Saarbrück' on their colours. What motto should they also carry?"

Jack spoke before he intended it—he never knew why: "Sire, the only motto I know is this: 'Tiens ta Foy!'"

The Man of December turned his narrow eyes on him. Then, bowing with the dignity and grace that he, of all living monarchs, possessed, the Emperor passed slowly through the garden and entered the little hôtel, the clash of presented carbines ringing in the still air behind him.

Jack sat down, considerably exercised in his mind, thinking of what he had said. The splendid old crusader's motto, "Keep thy Faith," was scarcely the motto to suggest to the man of the Coup d'État, the man of Rome, the man of Mexico. The very bones of Victor Noir would twist in their coffin at the words; and the lungs of that other Victor, the one named Hugo, would swell and expand until the bellowing voice rang like a Jersey fog-siren over the channel, over the ocean, till the seven seas vibrated and the four winds swept it to the four ends of the earth.

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Very soberly he finished his despatch, picked up his gloves and crop, and again walked over to the telegraph station.

The censor read the pencilled scrawl, smiled, drew a red pencil through some of it, smiled again, and said: "I trust it will not inconvenience monsieur too much."

"Not at all," said Jack, pleasantly.

He had not expected to get it all through, and he bowed and thanked the censor, and went out to where his horse stood, cropping the tender leaves of a spreading chestnut-tree.

It was five o'clock by his watch when he trotted out into the Morteyn road, now entirely deserted except by a peasant or two, staring, under their inverted hands, at the distant spire of Saarbrück.

Far away in the valley he caught glimpses of troops, glancing at times over his shoulder, but the distant squares and columns on hill-side and road seemed to be motionless. Already the thin, glimmering line of the Saar had faded from view; the afternoon haze hung blue on every hill-side; the woods were purple and vague as streaks of cloud at evening.

He passed Saint-Avold far to the south, too far to see anything of the division that lay encamped there; and presently he turned into the river road that follows the Saar until the great highway to Metz cuts it at an acute angle. From this cross-road he could see the railway, where a line of freight-cars, drawn by a puffing locomotive, was passing—cars of all colours, marked on one end "Elsass-Lothringen," on the other "Alsace-Lorraine."

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He had brought with him a slice of bread and a flask of Moselle, and, as he had had no time to eat since daybreak, he gravely began munching away, drinking now and then from his flask and absently eying the road ahead.

He thought of Lorraine and of his promise. If only all promises were as easily kept! He had plenty of time to reach Morteyn before dark, taking it at an easy canter, so he let his horse walk up the hills while he swallowed his bread and wine and mused on war and love and emperors.

He had been riding in this abstracted study for some time, and had lighted a pipe to aid his dreams, when, from the hill-side ahead, he caught a glimpse of something that sparkled in the afternoon sunshine, and he rose in his saddle and looked to see what it might be. After a moment he made out five mounted troopers, moving about on the crest of the hill, the sun slanting on

stirrup metal and lance-tip. As he was about to resume his meditations, something about these lancers caught his eye—something that did not seem quite right—he couldn't tell what. Of course they were French lancers, they could be nothing else, here in the rear of the army, but still they were rather odd-looking lancers, after all.

The eyes of a mariner and the eyes of a soldier, or of a man who foregathers with soldiers, are quick to detect strange rigging. Therefore Jack unslung his glasses and levelled them on the group of mounted men, who were now moving towards him at an easy lope, their tall lances, butts in stirrups, swinging free from the arm-loops, their horses' manes tossing in the hill breeze.

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The next moment he seized his bridle, drove both spurs into his horse, and plunged ahead, dropping pipe and flask in the road unheeded. At the same time a hoarse shout came quavering across the fields, a shout as harsh and sinister as the menacing cry of a hawk; but he dashed on, raising a whirlwind of red dust. Now he could see them plainly enough, their slim boots, their yellow facings and reverses, the shiny little helmets with the square tops like inverted goblets, the steel lances from which black and white pennons streamed.

They were Uhlans!

For a minute it was a question in his mind whether or not they would be able to cut him off. A ditch in the meadow halted them for a second or two, but they took it like chamois and came cantering up towards the high-road, shouting hoarsely and brandishing their lances.

It was true that, being a non-combatant and a foreigner with a passport, and, furthermore, an accredited newspaper correspondent, he had nothing to fear except, perhaps, a tedious detention and a long-winded explanation. But it was not that. He had promised to be at Morteyn by night, and now, if these Uhlans caught him and marched him off to their main post, he would certainly spend one night at least in the woods or fields. A sudden anger, almost a fury, seized him that these men should interfere with his promise; that they should in any way influence his own free going and coming, and he struck his horse with the riding-crop and clattered on along the highway.

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"Halt!" shouted a voice, in German—"halt! or we fire!" and again in French: "Halt! We shall fire!"

They were not far from the road now, but he saw that he could pass them easily.

"Halt! halt!" they shouted, breathless.

Instinctively he ducked, and at the same moment piff! piff! their revolvers began, and two bullets sang past near enough to make his ears tingle.

Then they settled down to outride him; he heard their scurry and jingle behind, and for a minute or two they held their own, but little by little he forged ahead, and they began to shoot at him from their saddles. One of them, however, had not wasted time in shooting; Jack heard him, always behind, and now he seemed to be drawing nearer, steadily but slowly closing up the gap between them.

Jack glanced back. There he was, a big, blond, bony Uhlan, lance couched, clattering up the hill; but the others had already halted far behind, watching the race from the bottom of the incline.

"Tiens ta Foy," he muttered to himself, digging both spurs into his horse; "I'll not prove faithless to her first request—not if I know it. Good Lord! how near that Uhlan is!"

Again he glanced behind, hesitated, and finally shouted: "Go back! I am no soldier! Go back!"

"I'll show you!" bellowed the Uhlan. "Stop your horse! or when I catch you—"

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"Go back!" cried Jack, angrily; "go back or I'll fire!" and he whipped out his long Colt's and shook it above his head.

With a derisive yell the Uhlan banged away—once, twice, three times—and the bullets buzzed around Jack's ears till they sang. He swung around, crimson with fury, and raised the heavy six-shooter.

"By God!" he shouted; "then take it yourself!" and he fired one shot, standing up in his stirrups to steady his aim.

He heard a cry, he saw a horse rear straight up through the dust; there was a gleam of yellow, a flash of a falling lance, a groan. Then, as he galloped on, pale and tight-lipped, a riderless horse thundered along behind him, mane tossing in the whirling dust.

With sudden instinct, Jack drew bridle and wheeled his trembling mount—the riderless horse tore past him—and he trotted soberly back to the dusty heap in the road. It may have merely been the impulse to see what he had done, it may have been a nobler impulse, for Jack dismounted and bent over the fallen man. Then he raised him in his arms by the shoulders and drew him towards the road-side. The Uhlan was heavy, his spurs dragged in the dust. Very gently Jack propped him up against a poplar-tree, looked for a moment at the wound in his head, and then ran for his horse. It was high time, too; the other Uhlans came racing and tearing uphill, hallooing like Cossacks, and he vaulted into his saddle and again set spurs to his horse.

Now it was a ride for life; he understood that thoroughly, and settled down to it, bending low in the saddle, bridle in one hand, revolver in the other. And as he rode his sobered thoughts dwelt

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now on Lorraine, now on the great lank Uhlan, lying stricken in the red dust of the highway. He seemed to see him yet, blond, dusty, the sweat in beads on his blanched cheeks, the crimson furrow in his colourless scalp. He had seen, too, the padded yellow shoulder-knots bearing the regimental number "11," and he knew that he had shot a trooper of the 11th Uhlans, and that the 11th Uhlan Regiment was Rickerl's regiment. He set his teeth and stared fearfully over his shoulder. The pursuit had ceased; the Uhlans, dismounted, were gathered about the tree under which their comrade lay gasping. Jack brought his horse to a gallop, to a canter, and finally to a trot. The horse was not winded, but it trembled and reeked with sweat and lather.

Beyond him lay the forest of La Bruine, red in the slanting rays of the setting sun. Beyond this the road swung into the Morteyn road, that lay cool and moist along the willows that bordered the river Lisse.

The sun glided behind the woods as he reached the bridge that crosses the Lisse, and the evening glow on feathery willow and dusty alder turned stem and leaf to shimmering rose.

It was seven o'clock, and he knew that he could keep his word to Lorraine. And now, too, he began to feel the fatigue of the day and the strain of the last two hours. In his excitement he had not noticed that two bullets had passed through his jacket, one close to the pocket, one ripping the gun-pads at the collar. The horse, too, was bleeding from the shoulder where a long raw streak traced the flight of a grazing ball.

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His face was pale and serious when, at evening, he rode into the porte-cochère of the Château de Nesville and dismounted, stiffly. He was sore, fatigued, and covered with dust from cap to spur; his eyes, heavily ringed but bright, roamed restlessly from window to porch.

"I've kept my faith," he muttered to himself—"I've kept my faith, anyway." But now he began to understand what might follow if he, a foreigner and a non-combatant, was ever caught by the 11th regiment of Uhlans. It sickened him when he thought of what he had done; he could find no excuse for himself—not even the shots that had come singing about his ears. Who was he, a foreigner, that he should shoot down a brave German cavalryman who was simply following instructions? His promise to Lorraine? Was that sufficient excuse for taking human life? Puzzled, weary, and profoundly sad, he stood thinking, undecided what to do. He knew that he had not killed the Uhlan outright, but, whether or not the soldier could recover, he was uncertain. He, who had seen the horrors of naked, gaping wounds at Sadowa—he who had seen the pitiable sights of Oran, where Chanzy and his troops had swept the land in a whirlwind of flame and sword—he, this same cool young fellow, could not contemplate that dusty figure in the red road without a shudder of self-accusation—yes, of self-disgust. He told himself that he had fired too quickly, that he had fired in anger, not in self-protection. He felt sure that he could have outridden the Uhlan in the end. Perhaps he was too severe on himself; he did not think of the fusillade at his back, his coat torn by two bullets, the raw furrow on his horse's shoulder. He only asked himself whether, to keep his promise, he was justified in what he had done, and he felt that he had acted hastily and in anger, and that he was a very poor specimen of young men. It was just as well, perhaps, that he thought so; the sentiment under the circumstances was not unhealthy. Moreover, he knew in his heart that, under any conditions, he would place his duty to Lorraine first of all. So he was puzzled and tired and unhappy when Lorraine, her arms full of brook-lilies, came down the gravel drive and said: "You have kept your faith, you shall wear a lily for me; will you?"

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He could not meet her eyes, he could scarcely reply to her shy questions.

When she saw the wounded horse she grieved over its smarting shoulder, and insisted on stabling it herself.

"Wait for me," she said; "I insist. You must find a glass of wine for yourself and go with old Pierre and dust your clothes. Then come back; I shall be in the arbour."

He looked after her until she entered the stables, leading the exhausted horse with a tenderness that touched him deeply. He felt so mean, so contemptible, so utterly beneath the notice of this child who stood grieving over his wounded horse.

A dusty and dirty and perspiring man is at a disadvantage with himself. His misdemeanours assume exaggerated proportions, especially when he is confronted with a girl in a cool gown that is perfumed by blossoms pure and spotless and fragrant as the young breast that crushes them.

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So when he had found old Pierre and had followed him to a bath-room, the water that washed the stains from brow and wrist seemed also to purify the stain that is popularly supposed to resist earthly ablutions. A clean body and a clean conscience is not a proverb, but there are, perhaps, worse maxims in the world.

When he dried his face and looked into a mirror, his sins had dwindled a bit; when Pierre dusted his clothes and polished his spurs and boots, life assumed a brighter aspect. Fatigue, too, came to dull that busybody—that tireless, gossiping gadabout—conscience. Fatigue and remorse are enemies; slumber and the white flag of sleep stand truce between them.

"Pierre," he said; "get a dog-cart; I am going to drive to Morteyn. You will find me in the arbour on the lawn. Is the marquis visible?"

"No, Monsieur Jack, he is still locked up in the turret."

"And the balloon?"

"Dame! Je n'en sais rien, monsieur."

So Jack walked down-stairs and out through the porch to the lawn, where he saw Lorraine already seated in the arbour, placing the long-stemmed lilies in gilded bowls.

"It will be dark soon," he said, stepping up beside her. "Thank you for being good to my horse. Is it more than a scratch?"

"No—it is nothing. The horse shall stand in our stable until to-morrow. Are you very tired? Sit beside me. Do you care to tell me anything of what you did?"

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"Do you care to know?"

"Of course," she said.

So he told her; not all, however—not of that ride and the chase and the shots from the saddle. But he spoke of the Emperor and the distant battle that had seemed like a scene in a painted landscape. He told her, too, of Georges Carrière.

"Why, I know him," she said, brightening with pleasure; "he is charming—isn't he?"

"Why, yes," said Jack; but for all he tried his voice sounded coldly.

"Don't you think so?" asked Lorraine, opening her blue eyes.

Again he tried to speak warmly of the friend he was really fond of, and again he felt that he had failed. Why? He would not ask himself—but he knew. This shamed him, and he began an elaborate eulogy on poor Georges, conscientious, self-effacing, but very, very unsatisfactory.

The maid beside him listened demurely. She also knew things that she had not known a week ago. That possibly is why, like a little bird stretching its new wings, she also tried her own resources, innocently, timidly. And the torment of Jack began.

"Monsieur Marche, do you think that Lieutenant Carrière may come to Morteyn?"

"He said he would; I—er—I hope he will. Don't you?"

"I? Oh yes. When will he come?"

"I don't know," said Jack, sulkily.

"Oh! I thought you were very fond of him and that, of course, you would know when—"

"Nobody knows; if he's gone with the army into Germany it is impossible to say when the war will end." Then he made a silly, boorish observation which was, "I hope for your sake he will come soon."

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Oh, but he was ashamed of it now! The groom in the stable yonder would have had better tact. Truly, it takes a man of gentle breeding to demonstrate what under-breeding really can be. If Lorraine was shocked she did not show it. A maid unloved, unloving, pardons nothing; a maid with a lover invests herself with all powers and prerogatives, and the greatest of these is the power to pardon. It is not only a power, it is a need, a desire, an imperative necessity to pardon much in him who loves much. This may be only because she also understands. Pardon and doubt repel each other. So Lorraine, having grown wise in a week, pardoned Jack mentally. Outwardly it was otherwise, and Jack became aware that the atmosphere was uncomfortably charged with lightning. It gleamed a moment in her eyes ere her lips opened.

"Take your dog-cart and go back to Morteyn," said Lorraine, quietly.

"Let me stay; I am ashamed," he said, turning red.

"No; I do not wish to see you again—for a long, long time—forever."

Her head was bent and her fingers were busy among the lilies in the gilded bowl.

"Do you send me away?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"Because you are more than rude."

"I am ashamed; forgive me."

"No."

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She glanced up at him from her drooping lashes. She had pardoned him long ago.

"No," she repeated, "I cannot forgive."

"Lorraine—"

"There is the dog-cart," she whispered, almost breathlessly. So he said good-night and went away.

She stood on the dim lawn, her arms full of blossoms, listening to the sound of the wheels until they died away beyond the park gate.

She had turned whiter than the lilies at her breast. This was because she was still very young and not quite as wise as some maidens.

For the same reason she left her warm bed that night to creep through the garden and slip into the stable and lay her tear-stained cheeks on the neck of Jack's horse.

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CHAPTER XII

FROM THE FRONTIER

During the next three days, for the first time since he had known her, he did not go to see Lorraine. How he stood it—how he ever dragged through those miserable hours—he himself never could understand.

The wide sculptured eyes of Our Lady of Morteyn above the shrine seemed to soften when he went there to sit at her feet and stare at nothing. It was not tears, but dew, that gathered under the stone lids, for the night had grown suddenly hot, and everything lay moist in the starlight. Night changed to midnight, and midnight to dawn, and dawn to another day, cloudless, pitiless; and Jack awoke again, and his waking thought was of Lorraine.

All day long he sat with the old vicomte, reading to him when he wished, playing interminable games of chess, sick at heart with a longing that almost amounted to anger. He could not tell his aunt. As far as that went, the wise old lady had divined that their first trouble had come to them in all the appalling and exaggerated proportions that such troubles assume, but she smiled gently to herself, for she, too, had been young, and the ways of lovers had been her ways, and the paths of love she had trodden, and she had drained love's cup at bitter springs.

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That night she came to his bedside and kissed him, saying: "To-morrow you shall carry my love and my thanks to Lorraine for her care of the horse."

"I can't," muttered Jack.

"Pooh!" said Madame de Morteyn, and closed the bedroom door; and Jack slept better that night.

It was ten o'clock the next morning before he appeared at breakfast, and it was plain, even to the thrush on the lawn outside, that he had bestowed an elaboration upon his toilet that suggested either a duel or a wedding.

Madame de Morteyn hid her face, for she could not repress the smile that tormented her sweet mouth. Even the vicomte said: "Oh! You're not off for Paris, Jack, are you?"

After breakfast he wandered moodily out to the terrace, where his aunt found him half an hour later, mooning and contemplating his spotless gloves.

"Then you are not going to ride over to the Château de Nesville?" she asked, trying not to laugh.

"Oh!" he said, with affected surprise, "did you wish me to go to the Château?"

"Yes, Jack dear, if you are not too much occupied." She could not repress the mischievous accent on the "too." "Are you going to drive?"

"No; I shall walk—unless you are in a hurry."

"No more than you are, dear," she said, gravely.

He looked at her with sudden suspicion, but she was not smiling.

"Very well," he said, gloomily.

About eleven o'clock he had sauntered half the distance down the forest road that leads to the Château de Nesville. His heart seemed to tug and tug and urge him forward; his legs refused obedience; he sulked. But there was the fresh smell of loam and moss and aromatic leaves, the music of the Lisse on the pebbles, the joyous chorus of feathered creatures from every thicket, and there were the antics of the giddy young rabbits that scuttled through the warrens, leaping, tumbling, sitting up, lop-eared and impudent, or diving head-first into their burrows.

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Under the stems of a thorn thicket two cock-pheasants were having a difference, and were enthusiastically settling that difference in the approved method of game-cocks. He lingered to see which might win, but a misstep and a sudden crack of a dry twig startled them, and they withdrew like two stately but indignant old gentlemen who had been subjected to uncalled-for importunities.

Presently he felt cheerful enough to smoke, and he searched in every pocket for his pipe. Then he remembered that he had dropped it when he dropped his silver flask, there in the road where he had first been startled by the Uhlans.

This train of thought depressed him again, but he resolutely put it from his mind, lighted a cigarette, and moved on.

Just ahead, around the bend in the path, lay the grass-grown carrefour where he had first seen Lorraine. He thought of her as he remembered her then, flushed, indignant, blocking the path while the map-making spy sneered in her face and crowded past her, still sneering. He thought, too, of her scarlet skirt, and the little velvet bodice and the silver chains. He thought of her heavy hair, dishevelled, glimmering in her eyes. At the same moment he turned the corner; the carrefour lay before him, overgrown, silent, deserted. A sudden tenderness filled his heart—ah, how we love those whom we have protected!—and he stood for a moment in the sunshine with bowed head, living over the episode that he could never forget. Every word, every gesture, the shape of the very folds in her skirt, he remembered; yes, and the little triangular tear, the broken silver chain, the ripped bodice!

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And she, in her innocence, had promised to see him there at the river-bank below. He had never gone, because that very night she had come to Morteyn, and since then he had seen her every day at her own home.

As he stood he could hear the river Lisse whispering, calling him. He would go—just to see the hidden rendezvous—for old love's sake; it was a step from the path, no more.

Then that strange instinct, that sudden certainty that comes at times to all, seized him, and he knew that Lorraine was there by the river; he knew it as surely as though he saw her before him.

And she was there, standing by the still water, silver chains drooping over the velvet bodice, scarlet skirt hanging brilliant and heavy as a drooping poppy in the sun.

"Dear me," she said, very calmly, "I thought you had quite forgotten me. Why have you not been to the Château, Monsieur Marche?"

And this, after she had told him to go away and not to return! Wise in the little busy ways of the world of men, he was uneducated in the ways of a maid.

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Therefore he was speechless.

"And now," she said, with the air of an early Christian tête-à-tête with Nero—"and now you do not speak to me? Why?"

"Because," he blurted out, "I thought you did not care to have me!"

Surprise, sorrow, grief gave place to pity in her eyes.

"What a silly man!" she observed. "I am going to sit down on the moss. Are you intending to call upon my father? He is still in the turret. If you can spare a moment I will tell you what he is doing."

Yes, he had a moment to spare—not many moments—he hoped she would understand that!—but he had one or two little ones at her disposal.

She read this in his affected hesitation. She would make him pay dearly for it. Vengeance should be hers!

He stood a moment, eying the water as though it had done him personal injury. Then he sat down.

"The balloon is almost ready, steering-gear and all," she said. "I saw papa yesterday for a moment; I tried to get him to stay with me, but he could not."

She looked wistfully across the river.

Jack watched her. His heart ached for her, and he bent nearer.

"Forgive me for causing you any unhappiness," he said. "Will you?"

"Yes."

Oh! where was her vengeance now? So far beneath her!

"These four days have been the most wretched days to me, the most unhappy I have ever lived," he said. The emotion in his voice brought the soft colour to her face. She did not answer; she would have if she had wished to check him.

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"I will never again, as long as I live, give you one moment's—displeasure." He was going to say "pain," but he dared not.

Still she was silent, her idle white fingers clasped in her lap, her eyes fixed on the river. Little by little the colour deepened in her cheeks. It was when she felt them burning that she spoke, nervously, scarcely comprehending her own words: "I—I also was unhappy—I was silly; we both are very silly—don't you think so? We are such good friends that it seems absurd to quarrel as we have. I have forgotten everything that was unpleasant—it was so little that I could not remember if I tried! Could you? I am very happy now; I am going to listen while you amuse me with stories." She curled up against a tree and smiled at him—at the love in his eyes which she dared not read, which she dared not acknowledge to herself. It was there, plain enough for a wilful maid to see; it burned under his sun-tanned cheeks, it softened the firm lips. A thrill of contentment passed through her. She was satisfied; the world was kind again.

He lay at her feet, pulling blades of grass from the bank and idly biting the whitened stems. The voice of the Lisse was in his ears, he breathed the sweet wood perfume and he saw the sunlight wrinkle and crinkle the surface ripples where the water washed through the sedges, and the long grasses quivered and bent with the glittering current.

"Tell you stories?" he asked again.

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"Yes—stories that never have really happened—but that should have happened."

"Then listen! There was once—many, many years ago—a maid and a man—"

Good gracious—but that story is as old as life itself! He did not realize it, nor did she. It seemed new to them.

The sun of noon was moving towards the west when they remembered that they were hungry.

"You shall come home and lunch with me; will you? Perhaps papa may be there, too," she said. This hope, always renewed with every dawn, always fading with the night, lived eternal in her breast—this hope, that one day she should have her father to herself.

"Will you come?" she asked, shyly.

"Yes. Do you know it will be our first luncheon together?"

"Oh, but you brought me an ice at the dance that evening; don't you remember?"

"Yes, but that was not a supper—I mean a luncheon together—with a table between us and—you know what I mean."

"I don't," she said, smiling dreamily; so he knew that she did.

They hurried a little on the way to the Château, and he laughed at her appetite, which made her laugh, too, only she pretended not to like it.

At the porch she left him to change her gown, and slipped away up-stairs, while he found old Pierre and was dusted and fussed over until he couldn't stand it another moment. Luckily he heard Lorraine calling her maid on the porch, and he went to her at once.

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"Papa says you may lunch here—I spoke to him through the key-hole. It is all ready; will you come?"

A serious-minded maid served them with salad and thin bread-and-butter.

"Tea!" exclaimed Jack.

"Isn't that very American?" asked Lorraine, timidly. "I thought you might like it; I understood that all Americans drank tea."

"They do," he said, gravely; "it is a terrible habit—a national vice—but they do."

"Now you are laughing at me!" she cried. "Marianne, please to remove that tea! No, no, I won't leave it—and you can suffer if you wish. And to think that I—"

They were both laughing so that the maid's face grew more serious, and she removed the teapot as though she were bearing some strange and poisonous creature to a deserved doom.

As they sat opposite each other, smiling, a little flurried at finding themselves alone at table together, but eating with the appetites of very young lovers, the warm summer wind, blowing through the open windows, bore to their ears the songs of forest birds. It bore another sound, too; Jack had heard it for the last two hours, or had imagined he heard it—a low, monotonous vibration, now almost distinct, now lost, now again discernible, but too vague, too indefinite to be anything but that faint summer harmony which comes from distant breezes, distant movements, mingling with the stir of drowsy field insects, half torpid in the heat of noon.

Still it was always there; and now, turning his ear to the window, he laid down knife and fork to listen.

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"I have also noticed it," said Lorraine, answering his unasked question.

"Do you hear it now?"

"Yes—more distinctly now."

A few moments later Jack leaned back in his chair and listened again.

"Yes," said Lorraine, "it seems to come nearer. What is it?"

"It comes from the southeast. I don't know," he answered.

They rose and walked to the window. She was so near that he breathed the subtle fragrance of her hair, the fresh sweetness of her white gown, that rustled beside him.

"Hark!" whispered Lorraine; "I can almost hear voices in the breezes—the murmur of voices, as if millions of tiny people were calling us from the ends and outer edges of the earth."

"There is a throbbing, too. Do you notice it?"

"Yes—like one's heart at night. Ah, now it comes nearer—oh, nearer! nearer! Oh, what can it be?"

He knew now; he knew that indefinable battle—rumour that steals into the senses long before it is really audible. It is not a sound—not even a vibration; it is an immense foreboding that weights the air with prophecy.

"From the south and east," he repeated; "from the Landesgrenze."

"The frontier?"

"Yes. Hark!"

"I hear."

"From the frontier," he said again. "From the river Lauter and from Wissembourg." [Pg 124]

"What is it?" she whispered, close beside him.

"Cannon!"

Yes, it was cannon—they knew it now—cannon throbbing, throbbing, throbbing along the horizon where the crags of the Geisberg echoed the dull thunder and shook it far out across the vineyards of Wissembourg, where the heights of Kapsweyer, resounding, hurled back the echoes to the mountains in the north.

"Why—why does it seem to come nearer?" asked Lorraine.

"Nearer?" He knew it had come nearer, but how could he tell her what that meant?

"It is a battle—is it not?" she asked again.

"Yes, a battle."

She said nothing more, but stood leaning along the wall, her white forehead pressed against the edge of the raised window-sash. Outside, the little birds had grown suddenly silent; there was a stillness that comes before a rain; the leaves on the shrubbery scarcely moved.

And now, nearer and nearer swelled the rumour of battle, undulating, quavering over forest and hill, and the muttering of the cannon grew to a rumble that jarred the air.

As currents in the upper atmosphere shift and settle north, south, east, west, so the tide of sound wavered and drifted, and set westward, flowing nearer and nearer and louder and louder, until the hoarse, crashing tumult, still vague and distant, was cut by the sharper notes of single cannon that spoke out, suddenly impetuous, in the dull din.

The whole Château was awake now; maids, grooms, valets, gardeners, and keepers were gathering outside the iron grille of the park, whispering together and looking out across the fields. [Pg 125]

There was nothing to see except pastures and woods, and low-rounded hills crowned with vineyards. Nothing more except a single strangely shaped cloud, sombre, slender at the base, but spreading at the top like a palm.

"I am going up to speak to your father," said Jack, carelessly; "may I?"

Interrupt her father! Lorraine fairly gasped.

"Stay here," he added, with the faintest touch of authority in his tone; and, before she could protest, he had sped away up the staircase and round and round the long circular stairs that led to the single turret.

A little out of breath, he knocked at the door which faced the top step. There was no answer. He rapped again, impatiently. A voice startled him: "Lorraine, I am busy!"

"Open," called Jack; "I must see you!"

"I am busy!" replied the marquis. Irritation and surprise were in his tones.

"Open!" called Jack again; "there is no time to lose!"

Suddenly the door was jerked back and the marquis appeared, pale, handsome, his eyes cold and blue as icebergs.

"Monsieur Marche—" he began, almost discourteously.

"Pardon," interrupted Jack; "I am going into your room. I wish to look out of that turret window. Come also—you must know what to expect." [Pg 126]

Astonished, almost angry, the Marquis de Nesville followed him to the turret window.

"Oh," said Jack, softly, staring out into the sunshine, "it is time, is it not, that we knew what was going on along the frontier? Look there!"

On the horizon vast shapeless clouds lay piled, gigantic coils and masses of vapour, dark, ominous, illuminated by faint, pallid lights that played under them incessantly; and over all towered one tall column of smoke, spreading above like an enormous palm-tree. But this was not

all. The vast panorama of hill and valley and plain, cut by roads that undulated like narrow satin ribbons on a brocaded surface, was covered with moving objects, swarming, inundating the landscape. To the south a green hill grew black with the human tide, to the north long lines and oblongs and squares moved across the land, slowly, almost imperceptibly—but they were moving, always moving east.

"It is an army coming," said the marquis.

"It is a rout," said Jack, quietly.

The marquis moved suddenly, as though to avoid a blow.

"What troops are those?" he asked, after a silence.

"It is the French army," replied Jack. "Have you not heard the cannonade?"

"No—my machines make some noise when I'm working. I hear it now. What is that cloud—a fire?"

"It is the battle cloud."

"And the smoke on the horizon?"

"The smoke from the guns. They are fighting beyond Saarbrück—yes, beyond Pfalzburg and Wörth; they are fighting beyond the Lauter." [Pg 127]

"Wissembourg?"

"I think so. They are nearer now. Monsieur de Nesville, the battle has gone against the French."

"How do you know?" demanded the marquis, harshly.

"I have seen battles. One need only listen and look at the army yonder. They will pass Morteyn; I think they will pass for miles through the country. It looks to me like a retreat towards Metz, but I am not sure. The throngs of troops below are fugitives, not the regular geometrical figures that you see to the north. Those are regiments and divisions moving towards the west in good order."

The two men stepped back into the room and faced each other.

"After the rain the flood, after the rout the invasion," said Jack, firmly. "You cannot know it too quickly. You know it now, and you can make your plans."

He was thinking of Lorraine's safety when he spoke, but the marquis turned instinctively to a mass of machinery and chemical paraphernalia behind him.

"You will have your hands full," said Jack, repressing an angry sneer; "if you wish, my aunt De Morteyn will charge herself with Mademoiselle de Nesville's safety."

"True, Lorraine might go to Morteyn," murmured the marquis, absently, examining a smoky retort half filled with a silvery heap of dust.

"Then, may I drive her over after dinner?"

"Yes," replied the other, indifferently.

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Jack started towards the stairs, hesitated, and turned around.

"Your inventions are not safe, of course, if the German army comes. Do you need my help?"

"My inventions are my own affair," said the marquis, angrily.

Jack flushed scarlet, swung on his heels, and marched out of the room and down the stairs. On the lower steps he met Lorraine's maid, and told her briefly to pack her mistress's trunks for a visit to Morteyn.

Lorraine was waiting for him at the window where he had left her, a scared, uncertain little maid in truth.

"The battle is very near, isn't it?" she asked.

"No, miles away yet."

"Did you speak to papa? Did he send word to me? Does he want me?"

He found it hard to tell her what message her father had sent, but he did.

"I am to go to Morteyn? Oh, I cannot! I cannot! Papa will be alone here!" she said, aghast.

"Perhaps you had better see him," he said, almost bitterly.

She hurried away up the stairs; he heard her little eager feet on the stone steps that led to the turret; climbing up, up, up, until the sound was lost in the upper stories of the house. He went out to the stables and ordered the dog-cart and a wagon for her trunks. He did not fear that this order might be premature, for he thought he had not misjudged the Marquis de Nesville. And he had not, for, before the cart was ready, Lorraine, silent, pale, tearless, came noiselessly down the stairs holding her little cloak over one arm.

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"I am to stay a week," she said; "he does not want me." She added, hastily, "He is so busy and

worried, and there is much to be done, and if the Prussians should come he must hide the balloon and the box of plans and formula—"

"I know," said Jack, tenderly; "it will lift a weight from his mind when he knows you are safe with my aunt."

"He is so good, he thinks only of my safety," faltered Lorraine.

"Come," said Jack, in a voice that sounded husky; "the horse is waiting; I am to drive you. Your maid will follow with the trunks this evening. Are you ready? Give me your cloak. There—now, are you ready?"

"Yes."

He aided her to mount the dog-cart—her light touch was on his arm. He turned to the groom at the horse's head, sprang to the seat, and nodded. Lorraine leaned back and looked up at the turret where her father was.

"Allons! En route!" cried Jack, cheerily, snapping his ribbon-decked whip.

At the same instant a horseless cavalryman, gray with dust and dripping with blood and sweat, staggered out on the road from among the trees. He turned a deathly face to theirs, stopped, tottered, and called out—"Jack!"

"Georges!" cried Jack, amazed.

"Give me a horse, for God's sake!" he gasped. "I've just killed mine. I—I must get to Metz by midnight—"

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CHAPTER XIII

AIDE-DE-CAMP

Lorraine and Jack sprang to the road from opposite sides of the vehicle; Georges' drawn face was stretched into an attempt at a smile which was ghastly, for the stiff, black blood that had caked in a dripping ridge from his forehead to his chin cracked and grew moist and scarlet, and his hollow cheeks whitened under the coat of dust. But he drew himself up by an effort and saluted Lorraine with a punctilious deference that still had a touch of jauntiness to it—the jauntiness of a youthful cavalry officer in the presence of a pretty woman.

Old Pierre, who had witnessed the episode from the butler's window, came limping down the path, holding a glass and a carafe of brandy.

"You are right, Pierre," said Jack. "Georges, drink it up, old fellow. There, now you can stand on those pins of yours. What's that—a sabre cut?"

"No, a scratch from an Uhlan's lance-tip. Cut like a razor, didn't it? I've just killed my horse, trying to get over a ditch. Can you give me a mount, Jack?"

"There isn't a horse in the stable that can carry you to Metz," said Lorraine, quietly; "Diable is lame and Porthos is not shod. I can give you my pony."

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"Can't you get a train?" asked Jack, astonished.

"No, the Uhlans are in our rear, everywhere. The railroad is torn up, the viaducts smashed, the wires cut, and general deuce to pay. I ran into an Uhlan or two—you notice it perhaps," he added, with a grim smile. "Could you drive me to Morteyn? Do you think the vicomte would lend me a horse?"

"Of course he would," said Jack; "come, then—there is room for three," with an anxious glance at Lorraine.

"Indeed, there is always room for a soldier of France!" cried Lorraine. At the same moment she instinctively laid one hand lightly on Jack's arm. Their eyes spoke for an instant—the generous appeal that shone in hers was met and answered by a response that brought the delicate colour into her cheeks.

"Let me hang on behind," pleaded Georges—"I'm so dirty, you know." But they bundled him into the seat between them, and Jack touched his beribboned whip to the horse's ears, and away they went speeding over the soft forest road in the cool of the fading day; old Pierre, bottle and glass in hand, gaping after them and shaking his gray head.

Jack began to fire volleys of questions at the young hussar as soon as they entered the forest, and poor Georges replied as best he could.

"I don't know very much about it; I was detached yesterday and taken on General Douay's staff. We were at Wissembourg—you know that little town on the Lauter where the vineyards cover everything and the mountains are pretty steep to the north and west. All I know is this: about six o'clock this morning our outposts on the hills to the south began banging away in a great panic. They had been attacked, it seems, by the 4th Bavarian Division, Count Bothmer's, I believe. Our posts fell back to the town, where the 1st Turcos reinforced them at the railroad station. The

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artillery were at it on our left, too, and there was a most infernal racket. The next thing I saw was those crazy Bavarians, with their little flat drums beating, and their fur-crested helmets all bobbing, marching calmly up the Geisberg. Jack, those fellows went through the vineyards like fiends astride a tempest. That was at two o'clock. The Prussian Crown-Prince rode into the town an hour before; we couldn't hold it—Heaven knows why. That's all I saw—except the death of our general."

"General Douay?" cried Lorraine, horrified.

"Yes, he was killed about ten o'clock in the morning. The town was stormed through the Hagenauer Thor by the Bavarians. After that we still held the Geisberg and the Château. You should have seen it when we left it. I'll say it was a butcher's shambles. I'd say more if Mademoiselle de Nesville were not here." He was trying hard to bear up—to speak lightly of the frightful calamity that had overwhelmed General Abel Douay and his entire division.

"The fight at the Château was worth seeing," said Georges, airily. "They went at it with drums beating and flags flying. Oh, but they fell like leaves in the gardens, there—the paths and shrubbery were littered with them, dead, dying, gasping, crawling about, like singed flies under a lamp. We had them beaten, too, if it hadn't been for their General von Kirchbach. He stood in the garden—he'd been hit, too—and bawled for the artillery. Then they came at us again in three divisions. Where they got all their regiments, I don't know, but their 7th Grenadier Guards were there, and their 47th, 58th, 59th, 80th, and 87th regiments of the line, not counting a Jäger battalion and no end of artillery. They carried the Three Poplars—a hill—and they began devastating everything. We couldn't face their fire—I don't know why, Jack; it breaks my heart when I say it, but we couldn't hold them. Then they began howling for cannon, and, of course, that settled the Château. The town was in flames when I left."

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After a silence, Jack asked him whether it was a rout or a retreat.

"We're falling back in very decent order," said Georges, eagerly—"really, we are. Of course, there were some troops that got into a sort of panic—the Uhlans are annoying us considerably. The Turcos fought well. We fairly riddled the 58th Prussians—their king's regiment, you know. It was the 2d Bavarian Corps that did for us. We will meet them later."

"Where are you going—to Metz?" inquired Jack, soberly.

"Yes; I've a packet for Bazaine—I don't know what. They're trying to reach him by wire, but those confounded Uhlans are destroying everything. My dear fellow, you need not worry; we have been checked, that's all. Our promenade to Berlin is postponed in deference to King Wilhelm's earnest wishes."

They all tried to laugh a little, and Jack chirped to his horse, but even that sober animal seemed to feel the depression, for he responded in fits and starts and jerks that were unpleasant and jarring to Georges' aching head.

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The sky had become covered with bands of wet-looking clouds, the leaves of the forest stirred noiselessly on their stems. Along the river willows quivered and aspens turned their leaves white side to the sky. In the querulous notes of the birds there was a prophecy of storms, the river muttered among its hollows of floods and tempests.

Suddenly a great sombre raven sailed to the road, alighted, sidled back, and sat fearlessly watching them.

Lorraine shivered and nestled closer to Jack.

"Oh," she murmured, "I never saw one before—except in pictures."

"They belong in the snow—they have no business here," said Jack; "they always make me think of those pictures of Russia—the retreat of the Grand Army, you know."

"Wolves and ravens," said Lorraine, in a low voice; "I know why they come to us here in France—Monsieur Marche, did I not tell you that day in the carrefour?"

"Yes," he answered; "do you really think you are a prophetess?"

"Did you see wolves here?" asked Georges.

"Yes; before war was declared. I told Monsieur Marche—it is a legend of our country. He, of course, laughed at it. I also do not believe everything I am told—but—I don't know—I have always believed that, ever since I was, oh, very, very small—like that." She held one small gloved hand about twelve inches from the floor of the cart.

"At such a height and such an age it is natural to believe anything," said Jack. "I, too, accepted many strange doctrines then."

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"You are laughing again," said Lorraine.

So they passed through the forest, trying to be cheerful, even succeeding at times. But Georges' face grew paler every minute, and his smile was so painful that Lorraine could not bear it and turned her head away, her hand tightening on the box-rail alongside.

As they were about to turn out into the Morteyn road, where the forest ended, Jack suddenly

checked the horse and rose to his feet.

"What is it?" asked Lorraine. "Oh, I see! Oh, look!"

The Morteyn road was filled with infantry, solid, plodding columns, pressing fast towards the west. The fields, too, were black with men, engineers, weighted down with their heavy equipments, resting in long double rows, eyes vacant, heads bent. Above the thickets of rifles sweeping past, mounted officers sat in their saddles, as though carried along on the surface of the serried tide. Standards fringed with gold slanted in the last rays of the sun, sabres glimmered, curving upward from the thronged rifles, and over all sounded the shuffle, shuffle of worn shoes in the dust, a mournful, monotonous cadence, a hopeless measure, whose burden was despair, whose beat was the rhythm of breaking hearts.

Oh, but it cut Lorraine to see their boyish faces, dusty, gaunt, hollow-eyed, turn to her and turn away without a change, without a shade of expression. The mask of blank apathy stamped on every visage almost terrified her. On they came, on, on, and still on, under a forest of shining rifles. A convoy of munitions crowded in the rear of the column, surrounded by troopers of the train-des-equipages; then followed more infantry, then cavalry, dragoons, who sat listlessly in their high saddles, carbines bobbing on their broad backs, whalebone plumes matted with dust.

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Georges rose painfully from his seat, stepped to the side, and climbed down into the road. He felt in the breast of his dolman for the packet, adjusted his sabre, and turned to Lorraine.

"There is a squadron of the Remount Cavalry over in that meadow—I can get a horse there," he said. "Thank you, Jack. Good-by, Mademoiselle de Nesville, you have been more than generous."

"You can have a horse from the Morteyn stables," said Jack; "my dear fellow, I can't bear to see you go—to think of your riding to Metz to-night."

"It's got to be done, you know," said Georges. He bowed; Lorraine stretched out her hand and he gravely touched it with his fingers. Then he exchanged a nervous gripe with Jack, and turned away hurriedly, crowding between the passing dragoons, traversing the meadows until they lost him in the throng.

"We cannot get to the house by the road," said Jack; "we must take the stable path;" and he lifted the reins and turned the horse's head.

The stable road was narrow, and crossed with sprays of tender leaves. The leaves touched Lorraine's eyes, they rubbed across her fair brow, robbing her of single threads of glittering hair, they brushed a single bright tear from her cheeks and held it, glimmering like a drop of dew.

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"Behold the end of the world," said Lorraine—"I am weeping."

He turned and looked into her eyes.

"Is that strange?" he asked, gently.

"Yes; I have often wished to cry. I never could—except once before—and that was four days ago."

The day of their quarrel! He thrilled from head to foot, but dared not speak.

"Four days ago," said Lorraine again. She thought of herself gliding from her bed to seek the stable where Jack's horse stood, she thought of her hot face pressed to the wounded creature's neck. Then, suddenly aware of what she had confessed, she leaned back and covered her face with her hands.

"Lorraine!" he whispered, brokenly.

But they were already at the Château.

"Lorraine, my child!" cried Madame de Morteyn, leaning from the terrace. Her voice was drowned in the crash of drums rolling, rolling, from the lawn below, and the trumpets broke out in harsh chorus, shrill, discordant, terrible.

The Emperor had arrived at Morteyn.

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CHAPTER XIV

THE MARQUIS MAKES HIMSELF AGREEABLE

The Emperor dined with the Vicomte and Madame de Morteyn that evening in the great dining-room. The Château, patrolled by doubled guards of the Cent Gardes, was surrounded by triple hedges of bayonets and a perfect pest of police spies, secret agents, and flunkys. In the breakfast-room General Frossard and his staff were also dining; and up-stairs, in a small gilded salon, Jack and Lorraine ate soberly, tenderly cared for by the old house-keeper.

Outside they could hear the steady tramp of passing infantry along the dark road, the clank of artillery, and the muffled trample of cavalry. Frossard's Corps was moving rapidly, its back to the Rhine.

"I saw the Prince Imperial," said Jack; "he was in the conservatory, writing to his mother, the

Empress. Have you ever seen him, Mademoiselle de Nesville? He is young, really a mere child, but he looks very manly in his uniform. He has that same charm, that same delicate, winning courtesy that the Emperor is famous for. But he looks so pale and tired—like a school-boy in the Lycée."

"It would have been unfortunate if the Emperor had stopped at the Château de Nesville," said Lorraine, sipping her small glass of Moselle; "papa hates him."

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"Many Royalists do."

"It is not that only; there is something else—something that I don't know about. It concerns my brother who died many years ago, before I was born. Have I never spoken of my brother? Has papa never said anything?"

"No," said Jack, gently.

"Well, when my brother was alive, our family lived in Paris. That is all I know, except that my brother died shortly before the empire was proclaimed, and papa and mamma came to our country-place here, where I was born. René's—my brother's—death had something to do with my father's hatred of the empire, I know that. But papa will never speak of it to me, except to tell me that I must always remember that the Emperor has been the curse of the De Nesvilles. Hark! Hear the troops passing. Why do they never cheer their Emperor?"

"They cheered him at Saarbrück—I heard them. You are not eating; are you tired?"

"A little. I shall go with Marianne, I think; I am sleepy. Are you going to sit up? Do you think we can sleep with the noise of the horses passing? I should like to see the Emperor at table."

"Wait," said Jack; "I'll go down and find out whether we can't slip into the ballroom."

"Then I'll go too," said Lorraine, rising. "Marianne, stay here; I will return in a moment;" and she slipped after Jack, down the broad staircase and out to the terrace, where a huge cuirassier officer stood in the moonlight, his straight sabre shimmering, his white mantle open over the silver breastplate.

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The ballroom was brilliantly lighted, the gilded canapés and chairs were covered with officers in every conceivable uniform, lounging, sprawling, chatting, and gesticulating, or pulling papers and maps over the floor. A general traced routes across the map at his feet with the point of a naked sword; an officer of dragoons, squatting on his haunches, followed the movement of the sword-point and chewed an unlighted cigarette. Officers were coming and going constantly, entering by the hallway and leaving through the door-like windows that swung open to the floor. The sinister face of a police-spy peered into the conservatory at intervals, where a slender, pale-faced boy sat, clothed in a colonel's uniform, writing on a carved table. It was the Prince Imperial, back from Saarbrück and his "baptism of fire," back also from the Spicheren and the disaster of Wörth. He was writing to his mother, that unhappy, anxious woman who looked every day from the Tuileries into the streets of a city already clamorous, already sullenly suspicious of its Emperor and Empress.

The boy's face was beautiful. He raised his head and sat silently biting his pen, eyes wandering. Perhaps he was listening to the retreat of Frossard's Corps through the fair province of Lorraine—a province that he should never live to see again. A few months more, a few battles, a few villages in flames, a few cities ravaged, a few thousand corpses piled from the frontier to the Loire—and then, what? Why, an emperor the less and an emperor the more, and a new name for a province—that is all.

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His delicate, high-bred face fell; he shaded his sad eyes with one thin hand and wrote again—all that a good son writes to a mother, all that a good soldier writes to a sovereign, all that a good prince writes to an empress.

"Oh, what sad eyes!" whispered Lorraine; "he is too young to see such things."

"He may see worse," said Jack. "Come, shall we walk around the lawn to the dining-room?"

They descended the dark steps, her arm resting lightly on his, and he guided her through a throng of gossiping cavalymen and hurrying but polite officers towards the western wing of the Château, the trample of the passing army always in their ears.

As he was about to cross the drive, a figure stepped from the shadow of the porte-cochère—a man in a rough tweed suit, who lifted his wide-awake politely and asked Jack if he was not English.

"American," said Jack, guardedly.

The man was apparently much relieved. He made a frank, manly apology for his intrusion, looked appealingly at Lorraine, and said, with a laugh: "The fact is, I'm astray in the wrong camp. I rode out from the Spicheren and got mixed in the roads, and first I knew I fell in with Frossard's Corps, and I can't get away. I thought you were an Englishman; you're American, it seems, and really I may venture to feel that there is hope for me—may I not?"

"Why, yes," said Jack; "whatever I can do, I'll do gladly."

"Then let me observe without hesitation," continued the man, smiling under his crisp mustache,

"that I'm in search of a modest dinner and a shelter of even more modest dimensions. I'm a war correspondent, unattached just at present, but following the German army. My name is Archibald Grahame."

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At the name of the great war correspondent Jack stared, then impulsively held out his hand.

"Aha!" said Grahame, "you must be a correspondent, too. Ha! I thought I was not wrong."

He bowed again to Lorraine, who returned his manly salute very sweetly. "If," she thought, "Jack is inclined to be nice to this sturdy young man in tweeds, I also will be as nice as I can."

"My name is Marche—Jack Marche," said Jack, in some trepidation. "I am not a correspondent—that is, not an active one."

"You were at Sadowa, and you've been in Oran with Chanzy," said Grahame, quickly.

Jack flushed with pleasure to find that the great Archibald Grahame had heard of him.

"We must take Mr. Grahame up-stairs at once—must we not?—if he is hungry," suggested Lorraine, whose tender heart was touched at the thought of a hungry human being.

They all laughed, and Grahame thanked her with that whimsical but charming courtesy that endeared him to all who knew him.

"It is awkward, now, isn't it, Mr. Marche? Here I am in France with the army I tried to keep away from, roofless, supperless, and rather expecting some of these sentinels or police agents may begin to inquire into my affairs. If they do they'll take me for a spy. I was threatened by the villagers in a little hamlet west of Saint-Avoid—and how I'm going to get back to my Hohenzollerns I haven't the faintest notion."

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"There'll surely be some way. My uncle will vouch for you and get you a safe-conduct," said Jack. "Perhaps, Mr. Grahame, you had better come and dine in our salon up-stairs. Will you? The Emperor occupies the large dining-room, and General Frossard and his staff have the breakfast-room."

Amused by the young fellow's doubt that a simple salon on the first floor might not be commensurate with the hospitality of Morteyn, Archibald Grahame stepped pleasantly to the other side of the road; and so, with Lorraine between them, they climbed the terrace and scaled the stairs to the little gilt salon where Lorraine's maid Marianne and the old house-keeper sat awaiting her return.

Lorraine was very wide-awake now—she was excited by the stir and the brilliant uniforms. She unconsciously took command, too, feeling that she should act the hostess in the absence of Madame de Morteyn. The old house-keeper, who adored her, supported her loyally; so, between Marianne and herself, a very delightful dinner was served to the hungry but patient Grahame when he returned with Jack from the latter's chamber, where he had left most of the dust and travel stains of a long tramp across country.

And how the great war correspondent did eat and drink! It made Jack hungry again to watch him, so with a laughing apology to Lorraine he joined in with a will, enthusiastically applauded and encouraged by Grahame.

"I could tell you were a correspondent by your appetite," said Grahame. "Dear me! it takes a campaign to make life worth living!"

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"Life is not worth living, then, without an appetite?" inquired Lorraine, mischievously.

"No," said Grahame, seriously; "and you also will be of that opinion some day, mademoiselle."

His kindly, humourous eyes turned inquiringly from Jack to Lorraine and from Lorraine to Jack. He was puzzled, perhaps, but did not betray it.

They were not married, because Lorraine was Mademoiselle de Nesville and Jack was Monsieur Marche. Cousins? Probably. Engaged? Probably. So Grahame smiled benignly and emptied another bottle of Moselle with a frank abandon that fascinated the old house-keeper.

"And you don't mean to say that you are going to put me up for the night, too?" he asked Jack. "You place me under eternal obligation, and I accept with that understanding. If you run into my Hohenzollerns, they'll receive you as a brother."

"I don't think he will visit the Hohenzollern Regiment," observed Lorraine, demurely.

"No—er—the fact is, I'm not doing much newspaper work now," said Jack.

Grahame was puzzled but bland.

"Tell us, Monsieur Grahame, of what you saw in the Spicheren," said Lorraine. "Is it a very bad defeat? I am sure it cannot be. Of course, France will win, sooner or later; nobody doubts that."

Before Grahame could manufacture a suitable reply—and his wit was as quick as his courtesy—a door opened and Madame de Morteyn entered, sad-eyed but smiling.

Jack jumped up and asked leave to present Mr. Grahame, and the old lady received him very sweetly, insisting that he should make the Château his home as long as he stayed in the vicinity.

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A few moments later she went away with Lorraine and her maid, and Jack and Archibald Grahame were left together to sip their Moselle and smoke some very excellent cigars that Jack found in the library.

"Mr. Grahame," said Jack, diffidently, "if it would not be an impertinent question, who is going to run away in this campaign?"

Grahame's face fell; his sombre glance swept the beautiful room and rested on a picture—the "Battle of Waterloo."

"It will be worse than that," he said, abruptly. "May I take one of these cigars? Oh, thank you."

Jack's heart sank, but he smiled and passed a lighted cigar-lamp to the other.

"My judgment has been otherwise," he said, "and what you say troubles me."

"It troubles me, too," said Grahame, looking out of the dark window at the watery clouds, ragged, uncanny, whirling one by one like tattered witches across the disk of a misshapen moon.

After a silence Jack relighted his half-burned cigar.

"Then it is invasion?" he asked.

"Yes—invasion."

"When?"

"Now."

"Good heavens! the very stones in the fields will rise up!"

"If the people did so too it might be to better purpose," observed Grahame, dryly. Then he emptied his glass, flicked the ashes from his cigar, and, sitting erect in his chair, said, "See here, Marche, you and I are accustomed to this sort of thing, we've seen campaigns and we have learned to judge dispassionately and, I think, fairly accurately; but, on my honour, I never before have seen the beginning of such a tempest—never! You say the very stones will rise up in the fields of France. You are right. For the fields will be ploughed with solid shot, and the shells will sow the earth with iron from the Rhine to the Loire. Good Lord, do these people know what is coming over the frontier?"

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"Prussians," said Jack.

"Yes, Prussians and a few others—Württembergers, Saxons, Bavarians, men from Baden, from Hesse, from the Schwarzwald—from Hamburg to the Tyrol they are coming in three armies. I saw the Spicheren, I saw Wissembourg—I have seen and I know."

Presently he opened a fresh bottle, and, with that whimsical smile and frank simplicity that won whom he chose to win, leaned towards Jack and began speaking as though the younger man were his peer in experience and age:

"Shall I tell you what I saw across the Rhine? I saw the machinery at work—the little wheels and cogs turning and grinding and setting in motion that stupendous machine that Gneisenau patented and Von Moltke improved—the great Mobilization Machine! How this machine does its work it is not easy to realize unless one has actually watched its operation. I saw it—and what I saw left me divided between admiration and—well, damn it all!—sadness.

"You know, Marche, that there are three strata of fighting men in Germany—the regular army, the 'reserve,' and the Landwehr. It is a mistake into which many fall to believe that the reserve is the rear of the regular army. The war strength of a regiment is just double its peace strength, and the increment is the reserve. The blending of the two in time of war is complete; the medalled men of 1866 and of the Holstein campaign, called up from the reserve, are welded into the same ranks with the young soldiers who are serving their first period of three years. It is an utter mistake to think of the Prussian army or the Prussian reserves as a militia like yours or ours. The Prussian reserve man has three years active service with his colours to point back to. Have ours? The mobilization machine grinds its grinding in this wise. The whole country is divided into districts, in the central city of each of which are the headquarters of the army corps recruited from that district. Thence is sent forth the edict for mobilization to the towns, the villages, and the quiet country parishes. From the forge, from the harvest, from the store, from the school-room, blacksmiths, farmers, clerks, school-masters drop everything at an hour's notice.

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"The contingent of a village is sent to headquarters. On the route it meets other contingents until the rendezvous is reached. And then—the transformation! A yokel enters—a soldier leaves. The slouch has gone from his shoulders, his chest is thrown forward, his legs straightened, his chin 'well off the stock,' his step brisk, his carriage military. They are tough as whip-cord, sober, docile, and terribly in earnest. They are orderly, decent, and reputable. They need no sentries, and none are placed; they never get drunk, they are not riotous, and the barrack gates are never infested by those hordes of soldiers' women."

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He paused and puffed at his cigar thoughtfully.

"They are such soldiers as the world has not yet seen. Marching? I saw them striding steadily

forward with the thermometer at eighty-five in the shade, with needle-gun, heavy knapsack, eighty rounds of ammunition, huge great-coat, camp-kettle, sword, spade, water-bottle, haversack, and lots of odds and ends dangling about them, with perhaps a loaf or two under one arm. Sunstroke? No. Why? Sobriety. No absinthe there, Mr. Marche."

"We beat those men at Saarbrück," said Jack.

Grahame laughed good-humouredly.

"At Saarbrück, when war was declared, the total German garrison consisted of a battalion of infantry and a regiment of Uhlans. Frossard and his whole corps were looking across at Saarbrück over the ridges of the Spicheren, and nobody had the means of knowing what everybody knows now, the reason, so discreditable to French organization, which prevented him from blowing out of his path the few pickets and patrols, and invading the territory which had its frontier only nominally guarded. I was in Saarbrück at the time, and I had the pleasure of dodging shells there, too. Why, we were all asking each other if it were possible that the Frenchmen did not know the weakness of the land. Our Uhlans and infantry were manipulated dexterously to make a battalion look like a brigade; but we had an army corps in front of us. We held the place by sheer impudence."

"I know it," said Jack; "it makes me ill to think of it."

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"It ought to make Frossard ill! Had a French army of invasion pushed on through Saint-Johann on the 2d of August and marched rapidly into the interior, the Germans could not possibly have concentrated their scattered regiments, and it is my firm conviction that Napoleon would have seen the Rhine without having had to fight a pitched battle. Well, Marche, I drink to neither one side nor the other, but—here's to the men with backbones. Prosit!"

They laughed and clinked glasses. Grahame finished his bottle, rose, politely stifled a yawn, and looked humourously at Jack.

"There are two beds in my room; will you take one?" said the young fellow.

"Thank you, I will," said Grahame, "and as soon as you please, my dear fellow."

So Jack led the way and ushered the other into a huge room with two beds, seemingly lost in distant diagonal corners. Grahame promptly kicked off his boots, and sat down on his bed.

"I saw a funny thing in Saarbrück," he said. "It was right in the midst of a cannonade—the shells were smashing the chimneys on the Hotel Hagen and raising hell generally. And right in the midst of the whole blessed mess, cool as a cucumber, came sauntering a real live British swell with a coat adorned with field-glasses and girdle and a dozen pockets, an eye-glass, a dog that seemed dearer to him than life, and a drawl that had not been perceptibly quickened by the French cannon. He-aw-had been going eastward somewhere to-aw-Constantinople, or Saint-Petersburg, or-aw-somewhere, when he-aw-heard that it might be amusing at Saarbrück. A shell knocked a cart-load of tiles around his head, and he looked at it through his eye-glass. Marche, I never laughed so in my life. He's a good fellow, though—he's trotting about with the Hohenzollern Regiment now, and, really, I miss him. His name is Hesketh—"

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"Not Sir Thorald?" cried Jack.

"Eh?—yes, that's the man. Know him?"

"A little," said Jack, laughing, and went out, bidding Graham good-night, and promising to have him roused at dawn.

"Aren't you going to turn in?" called Grahame, fearful of having inconvenienced Jack in his own quarters.

"Yes," said the young fellow. "I won't wake you—I'll be back in an hour." And he closed the door, and went down-stairs.

For a few moments he stood on the cool terrace, listening to the movement of the host below; and always the tramp of feet, the snort of horses, and the metallic jingle of passing cannon filled his ears.

The big cuirassier sentinel had been joined by two more, all of the Hundred-Guards. Jack noticed their carbines, wondering a little to see cuirassiers so armed, and marvelling at the long, slender, lance-like bayonets that were attached to the muzzles.

Presently he went into the house, and, entering the smoking-room, met his aunt coming out.

"Jack," she said, "I am a little nervous—the Emperor is still in the dining-room with a crowd of officers, and he has just sent an aide-de-camp to the Château de Nesville to summon the marquis. It will be most awkward; your uncle and he are not friendly, and the Marquis de Nesville hates the Emperor."

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"Why did the Emperor send for him?" asked Jack, wondering.

"I don't know—he wishes for a private interview with the marquis. He may refuse to come—he is a very strange man, you know."

"Then, if he is, he may come; that would be stranger still," said Jack.

"Your uncle is not well, Jack," continued Madame de Morteyn; "he is quite upset by being obliged to entertain the Emperor. You know how all the Royalists feel. But, Jack, dear, if you could have seen your uncle it would have been a lesson in chivalry to you which any young man could ill afford to miss—he was so perfectly simple, so proudly courteous—ah, Jack, your uncle is one in a nation!"

"He is—and so are you!" said Jack, kissing her faded cheek. "Are you going to retire now?"

"Yes; your uncle needs me. The lights are out everywhere. Lorraine, dear child, is asleep in the next room to mine. Is Mr. Grahame comfortable? I am glad. The Prince Imperial is sleeping too, poor child—sleeping like a worn-out baby."

Jack conducted his aunt to her chamber, and bade her good-night. Then he went softly back through the darkened house, and across the hall to the dining-room. The door was open, letting out a flood of lamp-light, and the generals and staff-officers were taking leave of the Emperor and filing out one by one, Frossard leading, his head bent on his breast. Some went away to rooms assigned them, guided by a flunky, some passed across the terrace with swords trailing and spurs ringing, and disappeared in the darkness. They had not all left the Emperor, when, suddenly, Jack heard behind him the voice of the Marquis de Nesville, cold, sneering, ironical.

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"Oh," he said, seeing Jack standing by the door, "can you tell me where I may find the Emperor of the French? I am sent for." Turning on the aide-de-camp at his side: "This gentleman courteously notified me that the Emperor desired my presence. I am here, but I do not choose to go alone, and I shall demand, Monsieur Marche, that you accompany me and remain during the interview."

The aide-de-camp looked at him darkly, but the marquis sneered in his face.

"I want a witness," he said, insolently; "you can tell that to your Emperor."

The aide-de-camp, helmet under his arm, from which streamed a horse-hair plume, entered the dining-room as the last officer left it.

Jack looked uneasily at the marquis, and was about to speak when the aid returned and requested the marquis to enter.

"Monsieur Marche, remain here, I beg you," said the marquis, coolly; "I shall call you presently. It is a service I ask of you. Will you oblige me?"

"Yes," said Jack.

The door opened for a second.

Napoleon III. sat at the long table, his head drooping on his breast; he was picking absently at threads in the texture of the table-cloth. That was all Jack saw—a glimpse of a table covered with half-empty glasses and fruit, an old man picking at the cloth in the lamplight; then the door shut, and he was alone in the dark hall. Out on the terrace he heard the tramp of the cuirassier sentinels, and beyond that the uproar of artillery, passing, always passing. He stared about in the darkness, he peered up the staircase into the gloom. A bat was flying somewhere near—he felt the wind from its mousy wings.

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Suddenly the door was flung open beside him, and the marquis called to him in a voice vibrating with passion. As he entered and bowed low to the Emperor, he saw the marquis, tall, white with anger, his blue eyes glittering, standing in the centre of the room. He paid no attention to Jack, but the Emperor raised his impassible face, haggard and gray, and acknowledged the young man's respectful salutation.

"You have asked me a question," said the marquis, harshly, "and I demanded to answer it in the presence of a witness. Is your majesty willing that this gentleman shall hear my reply?"

The Emperor looked at him with half-closed, inscrutable eyes, then, turning his heavy face to Jack's, smiled wearily and inclined his head.

"Good," said the marquis, apparently labouring under tremendous excitement. "You ask me to give you, or sell you, or loan you my secret for military balloons. My answer is, 'No!'"

The Emperor's face did not change as he said, "I ask it for your country, not for myself, monsieur."

"And I will give it to my country, not to you!" said the marquis, violently.

Jack looked at the Emperor. He noticed his unkempt hair brushed forward, his short thumbs pinching the table-cloth, his closed eyes.

The Marquis de Nesville took a step towards him.

"Does your majesty remember the night that Morny lay dying in the shadows? And that horrible croak from the darkness when he raised himself on one elbow and gasped, 'Sire, prenez garde à la Prusse!' Then he died. That was all—a warning, a groan, the death-rattle in the shadows by the bed. Then he died."

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The Emperor never moved.

"'Look out for Prussia!' That was Morny's last gasp. And now? Prussia is there, you are here! And

you need aid, and you send for me, and I tell you that my secrets are for my country, not for you! No, not for you—you who said, 'It is easy to govern the French, they only need a war every four years!' Now—here is your war! Govern!"

The Emperor's slow eyes rested a moment on the man before him. But the man, trembling, pallid with passion, clenched his hands and hurled an insult at the Emperor through his set teeth: "Napoleon the Little! Listen! When you have gone down in the crash of a rotten throne and a blood-bought palace, then, when the country has shaken this—this thing—from her bent back, then I will give to my country all I have! But never to you, to save your name and your race and your throne—never!"

He fairly frothed at the lips as he spoke; his eyes blazed.

"Your coup-d'état made me childless! I had a son, fairer than yours, who lies asleep in there—brave, gentle, loving—a son of mine, a De Nesville! Your bribed troops killed him—shot him to death on the boulevards—him among the others—so that you could sit safely in the Tuileries! I saw them—those piled corpses! I saw little children stabbed to death with bayonets, I saw the heaped slain lying before Tortoni's, where the whole street was flooded crimson and the gutters rippled blood! And you? I saw you ride with your lancers into the Rue Saint-Honoré, and when you met the barricade you turned pale and rode back again! I saw you; I was sitting with my dead boy on my knees—I saw you—"

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With a furious cry the marquis tore a revolver from his pocket and sprang on the Emperor, and at the same instant Jack seized the crazy man by the shoulders and hurled him violently to the floor.

Stunned, limp as a rag, the marquis lay at the Emperor's feet, his clenched hands slowly relaxing.

The Emperor had not moved.

Scarcely knowing what he did, Jack stooped, drew the revolver from the extended fingers, and laid it on the table. Then, with a fearful glance at the Emperor, he dragged the marquis to the door, opened it with a shove of his foot, and half closed it again.

The aide-de-camp stood there, staring at the prostrate man.

"Here, help me with him to his carriage; he is ill," panted Jack—"lift him!"

Together they carried him out to the terrace, and down the steps to a coupé that stood waiting.

"The marquis is ill," said Jack again; "put him to bed at once. Drive fast."

Before the sound of the wheels died away Jack hastened back to the dining-room. Through the half-opened door he peered, hesitated, turned away, and mounted the stairs slowly to his own chamber.

In the dining-room the lamp still burned dimly. Beside it sat the Emperor, head bent, picking absently at the table-cloth with short, shrunken thumbs.

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CHAPTER XV

THE INVASION OF LORRAINE

It was not yet dawn. Jack, sleeping with his head on his elbow, shivered in his sleep, gasped, woke, and sat up in bed. There was a quiet footfall by his bed, the scrape of a spur, then silence.

"Is that you, Mr. Grahame?" he asked.

"Yes; I didn't mean to wake you. I'm off. I was going to leave a letter to thank you and Madame de Morteyn—"

"Are you dressed? What time is it?"

"Four o'clock—twenty minutes after. It's a shame to rouse you, my dear fellow."

"Oh, that's all right," said Jack. "Will you strike a light—there are candles on my dresser. Ah, that's better."

He sat blinking at Grahame, who, booted and spurred and buttoned to the chin, looked at him quizzically.

"You were not going off without your coffee, were you?" asked Jack. "Nonsense!—wait." He pulled a bell-rope dangling over his head. "Now that means coffee and hot rolls in twenty minutes."

When Jack had bathed and shaved, operations he executed with great rapidity, the coffee was brought, and he and Grahame fell to by candle-light.

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"I thought you were afoot?" said Jack, glancing at the older man's spurs.

"I'm going to hunt up a horse; I'm tired of this eternal tramping," replied Grahame. "Hello, is this package for me?"

"Yes, there's a cold chicken and some things, and a flask to keep you until you find your

Hohenzollern Regiment again."

Grahame rose and held out his hand. "Good-by. You've been very kind, Marche. Will you say, for me, all that should be said to Madame de Morteyn? Good-by once more, my dear fellow. Don't forget me—I shall never forget you!"

"Wait," said Jack; "you are going off without a safe-conduct."

"Don't need it; there's not a French soldier in Morteyn."

"Gone?" stammered Jack—"the Emperor, General Frossard, the army—"

"Every mother's son of them, and I must hurry—"

Their hands met again in a cordial grasp, then Grahame slipped noiselessly into the hallway, and Jack turned to finish dressing by the light of his clustered candles.

As he stood before the quaintly wrought mirror, fussing with studs and buttons, he thought with a shudder of the scene of the night before, the marquis and his murderous frenzy, the impassive Emperor, the frantic man hurled to the polished floor, stunned, white-cheeked, with hands slowly relaxing and fingers uncurling from the glittering revolver.

Lorraine's father! And he had laid hands on him and had flung him senseless at the feet of the Man of December! He could scarcely button his collar, his fingers trembled so. Perhaps he had killed the Marquis de Nesville. Sick at heart, he finished dressing, buttoned his coat, flung a cap on his head, and stole out into the darkness. [Pg 158]

On the terrace below he saw a groom carrying a lantern, and he went out hastily.

"Saddle Faust at once," he said. "Have the troops all gone?"

"All, monsieur; the last of the cavalry passed three hours ago; the Emperor drove away half an hour later with Lulu—"

"Eh?"

"The prince—pardon, monsieur—they call him Lulu in Paris."

"Hurry," said Jack; "I want that horse at once."

Ten minutes later he was galloping furiously down the forest road towards the Château de Nesville. The darkness was impenetrable, so he let the horse find his own path, and gave himself up to a profound dejection that at times amounted to blind fear. Before his eyes he saw the pallid face of the Marquis de Nesville, he saw the man stretched on the floor, horribly still; that was the worst, the stillness of the body.

The sky was gray through the trees when he turned into the park and skirted the wall to the wicket. The wicket was locked. He rang repeatedly, he shook the grille and pounded on the iron escutcheon with the butt of his riding-crop; and at length a yawning servant appeared from the gate-lodge and sleepily dragged open the wicket. [Pg 159]

"The marquis was ill, have you heard anything?" asked Jack.

"The marquis is there on the porch," said the servant, with a gesture towards the house.

Jack's heart leaped up. "Thank God!" he muttered, and dismounted, throwing his bridle to the porter, who now appeared in the doorway.

He could see the marquis walking to and fro, hands clasped behind his strong, athletic back; his head was turned in Jack's direction. "The marquis is crazy," thought Jack, hesitating. He was convinced now that long brooding over ancient wrongs had unsettled the man's mind. There had always been something in his dazzling blue eyes that troubled Jack, and now he knew it was the pale light of suppressed frenzy. Still, he would have to face him sooner or later, and he did not recoil now that the hour and the place and the man had come.

"I'll settle it once for all," he thought, and walked straight up the path to the house. The marquis came down the steps to meet him.

"I expected you," he said, without a trace of anger. "I have much to say to you. Will you come in or shall we sit in the arbour there? You will enter? Then come to the turret, Monsieur Marche."

Jack would have refused, but he had not the courage. He was not at all pleased at the idea of mounting to a turret with a man whom he had laid violent hands on the night before, a man whom he had seen succumb to an access of insane fury in the presence of the Emperor of France. But he went, cursing the cowardice that prevented him from being cautious; and in a few moments he entered the chamber where retorts and bottles and steel machinery littered every corner, and the pale dawn broke through the window in ghastly streams of light, changing the candle-flames to sickly greenish blotches. [Pg 160]

They sat opposite each other, neither speaking. Jack glanced at a heavy steel rod on the floor beside him. It was just as well to know it was there, in case of need.

"Monsieur," said the marquis, abruptly, "I owe you a great deal more than my life, which is nothing; I owe you my family honour."

This was a new way of looking at the situation; Jack fidgeted in his chair and eyed the marquis.

"Thanks to you," he continued, quietly, "I am not an assassin, I am not a butcher of dogs. The De Nesvilles were never public executioners—they left that to the Bonapartes and Monsieur de Paris."

He rose hastily from his chair and held out a hand. Jack took it warily and returned the nervous pressure. Then they both resumed their seats.

"Let us clear matters up," said the marquis in a wonderfully gentle voice, that would have been fascinating to more phlegmatic men than Jack—"let us clear up everything and understand each other. You, monsieur, dislike me; pardon—you dislike me for reasons of your own. I, on the contrary, like you; I like you better this moment than I ever did. Had you not come as I expected, had you not entered, had you refused to mount to the turret, I still should have liked you. Now I also respect you."

Jack twisted and turned in his chair, not knowing what to think or say.

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"Why do you dislike me?" asked the marquis, quietly.

"Because you are not kind to your daughter," said Jack, bluntly.

To his horror the man's eyes filled with tears, big, glittering tears that rolled down his immovable face. Then a flush stained his forehead; the fever in his cheeks dried the tears.

"Jack," he said, calling the young fellow by his name with a peculiarly tender gesture, "I loved my son. My soul died within me when René died, there on the muddy pavement of the Paris boulevards. I sometimes think I am perhaps a little out of my mind; I brood on it too much. That is why I flung myself into this"—with a sweep of his arm towards the flasks and machinery piled around. "Lorraine is a girl, sweet, lovable, loyal. But she is not my daughter."

"Lorraine!" stammered Jack.

"Lorraine."

The young fellow sat up in his chair and studied the face of the pale man before him.

"Not—your child?"

"No."

"Whose?"

"I cannot tell."

After a silence the marquis stood up, and walked to the window. His face was haggard, his hair dishevelled.

"No," he said, "Lorraine is not my daughter. She is not even my heiress. She was—she was—found, eighteen years ago."

The room was becoming lighter; the sky grew faintly luminous and the mist from the stagnant fen curled up along the turret like smoke.

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Jack picked up his cap and riding-crop and rose; the marquis turned from the window to confront him. His face was no longer furrowed with pain, the cold light had crept back into his eyes.

"Monsieur," said Jack, "I ask your permission to address Lorraine. I love her."

The marquis stood silent, scarcely breathing.

"You know who and what I am; you probably know what I have. It is enough for me; it will be enough for us both. I shall work to make it enough. I do not expect or wish for anything from you for Lorraine; I do not give it a thought. Lorraine does not love me, but," and here he spoke with humility, "I believe that she might. If I win her, will you give her to me?"

"Win her?" repeated the marquis, with an ugly look. The man's face was changing now, darkening in the morning light.

"Monsieur," he said, violently, "you may say to her what you please!" and he opened the door and showed Jack the way out.

Dazed, completely mystified, Jack hurried away to find his horse at the gate where he had left him. The marquis was crazy, that was certain. These unaccountable moods and passions, following each other so abruptly, were nothing else but reactions from a life of silent suffering. All the way back to Morteyn he pondered on the strange scene in the turret, the repudiation of Lorraine, the sudden tenderness for himself, and then the apathy, the suppressed anger, the indifference coupled with unexplainable emotion.

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"No sane man could act like that," he murmured, as he rode into the Morteyn gate, and, with a smart slap of his hand on Faust's withers, he sent that intelligent animal at a trot towards the stables, where a groom awaited him with sponge and bucket.

The gardeners were cleaning up the litter in the roads and paths left by the retreating army. The road by the gate was marked with hoof and wheel, but the macadam had not suffered very much,

and already a roller was at work removing furrow and hoof-print.

He entered the dining-room. It was empty. So also was the breakfast-room, for breakfast had been served an hour before.

He sent for coffee and muffins and made a hasty breakfast, looking out of the window at times for signs of his aunt and Lorraine. The maid said that Madame de Mortheyn had driven to Saint-Lys with the marquis, and that Mademoiselle de Nesville had gone to her room. So he finished his coffee, went to his room, changed his clothes, and sent a maid to inquire whether Lorraine would receive him in the small library at the head of the stairs. The maid returned presently, saying that Mademoiselle de Nesville would be down in a moment or two, so Jack strolled into the library and leaned out of the window to smoke.

When she came in he did not hear her until she spoke.

"Don't throw your cigarette away, monsieur; I permit you to smoke—indeed, I command it. How do you do?" This in very timid English. "I mean—good-morning—oh, dear, this terrible English language! Now you may sit there, in that large leather arm-chair, and you may tell me why you did not appear at breakfast. Is Monsieur Grahame still sleeping? Gone? Oh, dear! And you have been to the Château de Nesville? Is my father well? And contented? There, I knew he would miss me. Did you give him my dearest love? Thank you for remembering. Now tell me—"

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"What?" laughed Jack.

"Everything, of course."

"Everything?"

She looked at him, but did not answer.

Then he deliberately sat down and made love to her, not actual, open, unblushing love—but he started in to win her, and what his tongue refused to tell, his eyes told until trepidation seized her, and she sat back speechless, watching him with shy blue eyes that always turned when they met his, but always returned when his were lowered.

It is a pretty game, this first preliminary of love—like the graceful sword-play and salute of two swordsmen before a duel. There was no one to cry "Garde à vous!" no one to strike up the weapons that were thrust at two unarmoured hearts, for the weapons were words and glances, and Love, the umpire, alas! was not impartial.

So the timid heart of Lorraine was threatened, and, before she knew it, the invasion had begun. She did not repel it with desperation; at times, even, she smiled at the invader, and that, if not utter treachery, was giving aid and encouragement to the enemy.

Besieged, threatened, she sat there in the arm-chair, half frightened, half smiling, fearful yet contented, alarmed yet secure, now resisting, now letting herself drift on, until the result of the combination made Jack's head spin; and he felt resentful in his heart, and he said to himself what all men under such circumstances say to themselves—"Coquetry!"

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One moment he was sure she loved him, the next he was certain she did not. This oscillation between heaven and hell made him unhappy, and, manlike, he thought the fault was hers. This is the foundation for man's belief in the coquetry of women.

As for Lorraine, she thrilled with a gentle fear that was the most delightful sensation she had ever known. She looked shyly at the strong-limbed, sunburned young fellow opposite, and she began to wonder why he was so fascinating. Every turn of his head, every gesture, every change in his face she knew now—knew so well that she blushed at her own knowledge.

But she would not permit him to come nearer; she could not, although she saw his disappointment, under a laugh, when she refused to let him read the lines of fate in her rosy palm. Then she wished she had laid her hand in his when he asked it, then she wondered whether he thought her stupid, then—But it is always the same, the gamut run of shy alarm, of tenderness, of fear, of sudden love looking unbidden from eyes that answer love. So the morning wore away.

The old vicomte came back with his wife and sat in the library with them, playing chess until luncheon was served; and after that Lorraine went away to embroider something or other that Madame de Mortheyn had for her up-stairs. A little later the vicomte also went to take a nap, and Jack was left alone lying on the lounge, too lonely to read, too unhappy to smoke, too lazy to sleep.

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He had been lying there for an hour thinking about Lorraine and wondering whether she would ever be told what her exact relation to the Marquis de Nesville was, when a maid brought him two letters, postmarked Paris. One he saw at a glance was from his sister, and, like a brother, he opened the other first.

"DEAR JACK,—I am very unhappy. Sir Thorald has gone off to St. Petersburg in a huff, and, if he stops at Mortheyn, tell him he's a fool and that I want him to come back. You're the only person on earth I can write this to.

"Faithfully yours, MOLLY HESKETH."

Jack laughed aloud, then sat silent, frowning at the dainty bit of letter-paper, crested and delicately fragrant. Yes, he could read between the lines—a man in love is less dense than when in his normal state—and he was sorry for Molly Hesketh. He thought of Sir Thorald as Archibald Grahame had described him, standing amid a shower of bricks and bursting shells, staring at war through a monocle.

"He's a beast," thought Jack, "but a plucky one. If he goes to Cologne he's worse than a beast." A vision of little Alixe came before him, blond, tearful, gazing trustingly at Sir Thorald's drooping mustache. It made him angry; he wished, for a moment, that he had Sir Thorald by the neck. This train of thought led him to think of Rickerl, and from Rickerl he naturally came to the 11th Uhlans.

"By jingo, it's unlucky I shot that fellow," he exclaimed, half aloud; "I don't want to meet any of that picket again while this war lasts."

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Unpleasant visions of himself, spitted neatly upon a Uhlan's lance, rose up and were hard to dispel. He wished Frossard's troops had not been in such a hurry to quit Morteyn; he wondered whether any other troops were between him and Saarbrück. The truth was, he should have left the country, and he knew it. But how could he leave until his aunt and uncle were ready to go? And there was Lorraine. Could he go and leave her? Suppose the Germans should pass that way; not at all likely—but suppose they should? Suppose, even, there should be fighting near Morteyn? No, he could never go away and leave Lorraine—that was out of the question.

He lighted a match and moodily burned Molly's letter to ashes in the fireplace. He also stirred the ashes up, for he was honourable in little things—like Ricky—and also, alas! apparently no novice.

Dorothy's letter lay on the table—her third since she had left for Paris. He opened his knife and split the envelope carefully, still thinking of Lorraine.

"MY OWN DEAR JACK,—There is something I have been trying to tell you in the other three letters, but I have not succeeded, and I am going to try again. I shall tuck it away in some quiet little corner of my page; so if you do not read carefully between every line, you may not find it, after all.

"I have just seen Lady Hesketh. She looks pale and ill—the excitement in the city and that horrid National Guard keep our nerves on edge every moment. Sir Thorald is away on business, she says—where, I forgot to ask her. I saw the Empress driving in the Bois yesterday. Some ragamuffins hissed her, and I felt sorry for her. Oh, if men only knew what women suffer! But don't think I am suffering. I am not, Jack; I am very well and very cheerful. Betty Castlemaine is going to be engaged to Cecil, and the announcement will be in all the English papers. Oh, dear! I don't know why that should make me sad, but it does. No, it doesn't, Jack, dear.

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"The city is very noisy; the National Guard parade every day; they seem to be all officers and drummers and no men. Everybody says we gained a great victory on the 2d of August. I wonder whether Rickerl was in it? Do you know? His regiment is the 11th Uhlans. Were they there? Were any hurt? Oh, Jack, I am so miserable! They speak of a battle at Wissembourg and one at the Spicheren. Were the 11th Uhlans there? Try to find out, dear, and write me *at once*. Don't forget—the *11th Uhlans*. Oh, Jack, darling! can't you understand?

Your loving sister, DOROTHY."

"Understand? What?" repeated Jack. He read the letter again carefully.

"I can't see what the mischief is extraordinary in that," he mused, "unless she's giving me a tip about Sir Thorald; but no—she can't know anything in that direction. Now what is it that she has hidden away? Oh, here's a postscript."

He turned the sheet and read:

"My love to aunt and uncle, Jack—don't forget. I am writing them by this mail. Is the 11th Uhlan Regiment in Prince Frederick Charles's Army? Be sure to find out. There is absolutely nothing in the Paris papers about the 11th Uhlans, and I am astonished. But what can one expect from Paris journals? I tried to subscribe to the *Berlin Post* and the *Hamburger Nachrichten* and the *Munich Neueste Nachrichten*, but the horrid creature at the kiosk said she wouldn't have a German sheet in her place. I hope the *Herald* will give particulars of losses in both armies. Do you think it will? Oh, why on earth do these two foolish nations fight each other?

"DORRIE.

"P. P. S.—Jack, for my sake, pay attention to what I ask you and answer every question. And don't forget to find out all about the 11th Uhlans. D."

"Now, what on earth interests Dorrie in all these battle statistics?" he wondered; "and what in the name of common-sense can she find to interest her in the 11th Uhlans? Ricky? Absurd!"

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He repeated "absurd" two or three times, but he became more thoughtful a moment later, and sat smoking and pondering. That would be a nice muddle if she, the niece of a Frenchman—an American, too—should fix her affections on a captain of Uhlans whose regiment he, Jack Marche, would avoid as he would hope to avoid the black small-pox.

"Absurd," he repeated for the fourth time, and tossed his cigarette into the open fireplace. And as he rose to go up-stairs something out on the road by the gate attracted his attention, and he went to the window.

Three horsemen sat in their saddles on the lawn, lance on thigh, eyes fixed on him.

They were Uhlans!

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CHAPTER XVI

"IN THE HOLLOW OF THY HAND"

For a moment he recoiled as though he had received a blow between the eyes.

There they sat, little glistening schapskas rakishly tilted over one ear, black-and-white pennons drooping from the lance-points, schabraques edged with yellow—aye, and tunics also, yellow and blue—those were the colours—the colours of the 11th Uhlans.

Then, for the first time, he fully realized his position and what it might mean. Death was the penalty for what he had done—death even though the man he had shot were not dead—death though he had not even hit him. That was not all; it meant death in its most awful form—hanging! For this was the penalty: any civilian, foreigner, franc-soldier, or other unrecognized combatant, firing upon German troops, giving aid to French troops while within the sphere of German influence, by aiding, abetting, signalling, informing, or otherwise, was hung—sometimes with a drum-head court-martial, sometimes without.

Every bit of blood and strength seemed to leave his limbs; he leaned back against the table, cold with fear.

This was the young man who had sat sketching at Sadowa where the needle-guns sent a shower of lead over his rocky observatory; the same who had risked death by fearful mutilation in Oran when he rode back and flung a half-dead Spahi over his own saddle, in the face of a charging, howling hurricane of Kabyle horsemen.

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Sabre and lance and bullets were things he understood, but he did not understand ropes.

He could not tell whether the Uhlans had seen him or not; there were lace curtains in the room, but the breeze blew them back from the open window. Had they seen him?

All at once the horses jerked their heads, reared, and wheeled like cattle shying at a passing train, and away went the Uhlans, plunging out into the road. There was a flutter of pennants, a fling or two of horses' heels, a glimmer of yellow, and they were gone.

Utterly unnerved, Jack sank into the arm-chair. What should he do? If he stayed at Morteyn he stood a good chance of hanging. He could not leave his aunt and uncle, nor could he tell them, for the two old people would fall sick with the anxiety. And yet, if he stayed at Morteyn, and the Germans came, it might compromise the whole household and bring destruction to Château and park. He had not thought of that before, but now he remembered also another German rule, inflexible, unvarying. It was this, that in a town or village where the inhabitants resisted by force or injured any German soldier, the village should be burned and the provisions and stock confiscated for the use of King Wilhelm's army.

Shocked at his own thoughtlessness, he sprang to his feet and walked hastily to the terrace. Nothing was to be seen on the road, nor yet in the meadows beyond. Up-stairs he heard Lorraine's voice, and his aunt's voice, too. Sometimes they laughed a little in low tones, and he even caught the rustle of stiff silken embroidery against the window-sill.

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His mind was made up in an instant; his coolness returned as the colour returns to a pale cheek. The Uhlans had probably not seen him; if they had, it made little difference, for even the picquet that had chased him could not have recognized him at that distance. Then, again, in a whole regiment it was not likely that the three horsemen who had peeped at Morteyn through the road-gate could have been part of that same cursed picquet. No, the thing to avoid was personal contact with any of the 11th Uhlans. This would be a matter of simple prudence; outside of that he had nothing to fear from the Prussian army. Whenever he saw the schapskas and lances he would be cautious; when these lances were pennoned with black and white, and when the schapskas and schabraques were edged with yellow, he would keep out of the way altogether. It shamed him terribly to think of his momentary panic; he cursed himself for a coward, and dug his clenched fists into both pockets. But even as he stood there, withering himself with self-scorn, he could not help hoping that his aunt and uncle would find it convenient to go to Paris soon. That would leave him free to take his own chances by remaining, to be near Lorraine. For it did not occur to him that he might leave Morteyn as long as Lorraine stayed.

It was late in the afternoon when he lighted a pipe and walked out to the road, where the smooth macadam no longer bore the slightest trace of wheel or hoof, and nobody could have imagined

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that part of an army corps had passed there the night before.

He felt lonely and a little despondent, and he walked along the road to the shrine of Our Lady of Morteyn and sat down at her naked stone feet. And as he sat there smoking, twirling his shooting-cap in his hands, without the least warning a horseman, advancing noiselessly across the turf, passed him, carbine on thigh, busby glittering with the silver skull and crossbones. Before he could straighten up another horseman passed, then another, then three, then six, then a dozen, all sitting with poised carbines, scarcely noticing him at all, the low, blazing sun glittering on the silver skulls and crossed thigh-bones, deep set in their sombre head-gear.

They were Black Hussars.

A distant movement came to his ear at the same time, the soft shock of thousands of footfalls on the highway. He sprang up and started forward, but a trooper warned him back with a stern gesture, and he stood at the foot of the shrine, excited but outwardly cool, listening to the approaching trample.

He knew what it meant now; these passing videttes were the dust before the tempest, the prophecy of the deluge. For the sound on the distant highway was the sound of infantry, and a host was on the march, a host helmeted with steel and shod with steel, a vast live bulk, gigantic, scaled in mail, whose limbs were human, whose claws were lances and bayonets, whose red tongues were flame-jets from a thousand cannon.

The German army had entered France and the province of Lorraine was a name.

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Like a hydra of three hideous heads the German army had pushed its course over the Saar, over the Rhine, over the Lauter; it sniffed at the frontier line; licked Wissembourg and the Spicheren with flaming tongues, shuddered, coiled, and glided over the boundary into the fair land of Lorraine. Then, like some dreadful ringed monster, it cast off two segments, north, south, and moved forward on its belly, while the two new segments, already turned to living bodies, with heads and eyes and contracted scales, struggled on alone, diverging to the north and south, creeping, squirming, undulating, penetrating villages and cities, stretching across hills and rivers, until all the land was shining with shed scales and the sky reeked with the smoke of flaming tongues. This was the invasion of France. Before it Frossard recoiled, leaving the Spicheren a smoking hell; before it Douay fell above the flames of Wissembourg; and yet Gravelotte had not been, and Vionville was a peaceful name, and Mars-la-Tour lay in the sunshine, mellow with harvests, gay with the scarlet of the Garde Impériale.

On the hill-sides of Lorraine were letters of fire, writing for all France to read, and every separate letter was a flaming village. The Emperor read it and bent his weary steps towards Châlons; Bazaine read it and said, "There is time;" MacMahon, Canrobert, Lebœuf, Ladmirault read it and wondered idly what it meant, till Vinoy turned a retreat into a triumph, and Gambetta, flabby, pompous, unbalanced, bawled platitudes from the Palais Bourbon.

In three splendid armies the tide of invasion set in; the Red Prince tearing a bloody path to Metz, the Crown Prince riding west by south, resting in Nancy, snubbing Toul, spreading out into the valley of the Marne to build three monuments of bloody bones—Saint-Marie, Amanvilliers, Saint-Privat.

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Metz, crouching behind Saint-Quentin and Les Bottes, turned her anxious eyes from Thionville to Saint-Julien and back to where MacMahon's three rockets should have starred the sky; and what she saw was the Red Prince riding like a fiery spectre from east to west; what she saw was the spiked helmets of the Feldwache and the sodded parapets of Longeau. Chained and naked, the beautiful city crouched in the tempest that was to free her forever and give her the life she scorned, the life more bitter than death.

Something of this ominous prophecy came to Jack, standing below the shrine of Our Lady of Morteyn, listening to the on-coming shock of German feet, as he watched the cavalry riding past in the glow of the setting sun.

And now the infantry burst into view, a gloomy, solid column tramp, tramp along the road—jägers, with their stiff fore-and-aft shakos, dull-green tunics, and snuffy, red-striped trousers tucked into dusty half-boots. On they came, on, on—would they never pass? At last they were gone, somewhere into the flaming west, and now the red sunbeams slanted on eagle crests and tipped the sea of polished spiked helmets with fire, for a line regiment was coming, shaking the earth with its rhythmical tramp—thud! thud! thud!

He looked across the fields to the hills beyond; more regiments, dark masses moving against the sky, covered the landscape far as the eye could reach; cavalry, too, were riding on the Saint-Avoid road through the woods; and beyond that, vague silhouettes of moving wagons and horsemen, crawling out into the world of valleys that stretched to Bar-le-Duc and Avricourt.

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Oppressed, almost choked, as though a rising tide had washed against his breast, ever mounting, seething, creeping, climbing, he moved forward, waiting for a chance to cross the road and gain the Château, where he could see the servants huddling over the lawn, and the old vicomte, erect, motionless, on the terrace beside his wife and Lorraine.

Already in the meadow behind him the first bivouac was pitched; on the left stood a park of field artillery, ammunition-wagons in the rear, and in front the long lines of picket-ropes to which the horses were fastened, their harness piled on the grass behind them.

The forge was alight, the farriers busy shoeing horses; the armourer also bent beside his blazing forge, and the tinkling of his hammer on small-arms rose musically above the dull shuffle of leather-shod feet on the road.

To the right of the artillery, bisected as is the German fashion, lay two halves of a battalion of infantry. In the foreground the officers sat on their camp-chairs, smoking long faïence pipes; in the rear, driven deep into the turf, the battalion flag stood furled in its water-proof case, with the drum-major's halberd beside it, and drums and band instruments around it on the grass. Behind this lay a straight row of knapsacks, surrounded by the rolled great-coats; ten paces to the rear another similar row; between these two rows stood stacks of needle-guns, then another row of knapsacks, another stack of needle-guns, stretching with mathematical exactness to the grove of poplars by the river. A cordon of sentinels surrounded the bivouac; there was a group of soldiers around a beer-cart, another throng near the wine-cart. All was quiet, orderly, and terribly sombre.

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Near the poplar-trees the pioneers had dug their trenches and lighted fires. Across the trenches, on poles of green wood, were slung simmering camp-kettles.

He turned again towards the Château; a regiment of Saxon riders was passing—had just passed—and he could get across now, for the long line had ended and the last Prussian cuirassiers were vanishing over the hill, straight into the blaze of the setting sun.

As he entered the gate, behind him, from the meadow, an infantry band crashed out into a splendid hymn—a hymn in praise of the Most High God, slow to anger and plenteous in mercy.

And the soldiers' hoarse voices chimed in—

"Thou, who in the hollow of Thy Hand—"

And the deep drums boomed His praise.

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CHAPTER XVII

THE KEEPERS OF THE HOUSE

The candles were lighted again in the ballroom, and again the delicate, gilded canapés were covered with officers, great stalwart fellows with blond hair and blue eyes, cuirassiers in white tunics faced with red, cuirassiers in green and white, black, yellow, and white, orange and white; dragoons in blue and salmon colour, bearing the number "7" on their shoulder-straps, dragoons of the Guard in blue and white, dragoons of the 2d Regiment in black and blue. There were hussars too, dandies of the 19th in their tasselled boots and crimson busby-crowns; Black Hussars, bearing, even on their soft fatigue-caps, the emblems of death, the skull and crossed thigh-bones. An Uhlan or two of the 2d Guard Regiment, trimmed with white and piped with scarlet, dawdled around the salon, staring at gilded clock and candelabra, or touching the grand-piano with hesitating but itching fingers. Here and there officers of the general staff stood in consultation, great, stiff, strapping men, faultlessly clothed in scarlet and black, holding their spiked helmets carefully under their arms. The pale blue of a Bavarian dotted the assembly at rare intervals, some officer from Von Werder's army, attentive, shy, saying little even when questioned. The huge Saxon officers, beaming with good-nature, mixed amiably with the sour-visaged Brunswick men and the stiff-necked Prussians.

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In the long dining-room dinner was nearly ended. Facing each other sat the old Vicomte and Madame de Morteyn, he pale, dignified, exquisitely courteous, she equally pale but more gentle in her sweet dignity. On the right sat the Red Prince, stiff as steel, jerky in every movement, stern, forbidding, unbending as much as his black Prussian blood would let him; on the left sat a thin old man, bald as an ivory ball, pallid, hairless of face, a frame of iron in a sombre, wrinkled tunic, without a single decoration. His short hawk's nose, keen and fine as a falcon's beak, quivered with every breath; his thin lips rested one upon the other in stern, delicate curves. It was Moltke, the master expert, come from Berlin to watch the wheels turning in that vast complicated network of machinery which he controlled with one fragile finger pressing the button.

There, too, was Von Zastrow, destined to make his error at Gravelotte, there was Steinmetz, and the handsome Saxon prince, and great, flabby August of Würtemberg, talking with Alvensleben, dainty, pious, aristocratic. Behind, in the shadow, stood Manstein and Goben, a grim, gray pair, with menacing eyes. Perhaps they were thinking of the Red Prince's parting words at the Spicheren: "Your duty is to march forward, always forward, find the enemy, prevent his escape, and fight him wherever you find him." To which the fastidious and devout Alvensleben muttered, "In the name of God," and poor, brave Kamecke, shuddering as he thought of his Westphalians and the cul-de-sac where he had sent them on the 6th day of August, sighed and looked out into deepening twilight.

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Outside a Saxon infantry band began to play a masterpiece of Beethoven. It seemed to be the signal for breaking up, and the Red Prince, with abrupt deference, turned to Madame de Morteyn, who gave the signal and rose. The Red Prince stepped back as the old vicomte gave his wife a trembling arm. Then he bowed where he stood, clothed in his tight, blood-red tunic, tall, powerful, square-jawed, cruel-mouthed, and eyed like a wolf. But his forehead was fine, broad,

and benevolent, and his beard softened the wicked curve of his lips.

Jack and Lorraine had again dined together in the little gilded salon above, served by Lorraine's maid and wept over by the old house-keeper.

The terrified servants scarcely dared to breathe as they crept through the halls where, "like a flight of devils from hell" the "Prussian ogres" had settled in the house. They came whimpering to their mistress, but took courage at the calm, dignified attitude of the old vicomte, and began to think that these "children-eating Prussians" might perhaps forego their craving for one evening. Therefore the chef did his best, encouraged by a group of hysterical maids who had suddenly become keenly alive to their own plumpness and possible desirability for ragoûts.

The old marquis himself received his unwelcome guests as though he were receiving travelling strangers, to whom, now that they were under his roof, faultless hospitality was due, nothing more, merely the courtesy of a French nobleman to an uninvited guest.

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Ah, but the steel was in his heart to the hilt. He, an old soldier of the Malakoff, of Algeria, the brother in arms of Changarnier, of Chanzy, he obliged to receive invaders—invaders belonging to the same nation which had lined the streets of Berlin so long ago, cringing, whining "Vive l'Empereur!" at the crack of the thongs of Murat's horsemen!

Yet now it was that he showed himself the chivalrous soldier, the old colonel of the old régime, the true beau-sabreur of an epoch dead. And the Red Prince Frederick Charles knew it, and bowed low as the vicomte left the dining-hall with his gentle, pale-faced wife on his arm.

Jack, sitting after dinner with Lorraine in the bay-window above, looked down upon the vast camp that covered the whole land, from the hills to the Lisse, from the forest to the pastures above Saint-Lys. There were no tents—the German army carried none. Here and there a canvas-covered wagon glistened white in the moonlight; the pale radiance fell on acres of stacked rifles, on the brass rims of drums, and the spikes of the sentries' helmets. Videttes, vaguely silhouetted on distant knolls, stood almost motionless, save for the tossing of their horses' heads. Along the river Lisse the infantry pickets lay, the sentinels, patrolling their beats with brisk, firm steps, only pausing to bring their heavy heels together, wheel squarely, and retrace their steps, always alert and sturdy. The wind shifted to the west and the faint chimes of Saint-Lys came quavering on the breeze.

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"The bells!" said Jack; "can you hear them?"

"Yes," said Lorraine, listlessly.

She had been very silent during their dinner. He wondered that she had not shown any emotion at the sight of the invading soldiers. She had not—she had scarcely even shown curiosity. He thought that perhaps she did not realize what it meant, this swarm of Prussians pouring into France between the Moselle and the Rhine. He, American that he was, felt heartsick, humiliated, at the sight of the spiked casques and armoured horsemen, trampling the meadows of the province that he loved—the province of Lorraine. For those strangers to France who know France know two mothers; and though the native land is first and dearest, the new mother, France, generous, tender, lies next in the hearts of those whom she has sheltered.

So Jack felt the shame and humiliation as though a blow had been struck at his own home and kin, and he suffered the more thinking what his uncle must suffer. And Lorraine! His heart had bled for her when the harsh treble of the little, flat Prussian drums first broke out among the hills. He looked for the deep sorrow, the patience, the proud endurance, the prouder faith that he expected in her; he met with silence, even a distraught indifference.

Surely she could comprehend what this crushing disaster prophesied for France? Surely she of all women, sensitive, tender, and loyal, must know what love of kin and country meant?

Far away in the southwest the great heart of Paris throbbed in silence, for the beautiful, sinful city, confused by the din of the ruffraff within her walls, blinded by lies and selfish counsels, crouched in mute agony, listening for the first ominous rumbling of a rotten, tottering Empire.

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God alone knows why he gave to France, in the supreme moment of her need, the beings who filled heaven with the wind of their lungs and brought her to her knees in shame—not for brave men dead in vain, not for a wasted land, scourged and flame-shrunken from the Rhine to the Loire, not for provinces lost nor cities gone forever—but for the strange creatures that her agony brought forth, shapes simian and weird, all mouth and convulsive movement, little pigmy abortions mouthing and playing antics before high Heaven while the land ran blood in every furrow and the world was a hell of flame.

Gambetta, that incubus of bombastic flabbiness, roaring prophecy and platitude through the dismayed city, kept his eye on the balcony of the particular edifice where, later, he should pose as an animated Jericho trumpet. So, biding his time, he bellowed, but it was the Comédie Française that was the loser, not the people, when he sailed away in his balloon, posed, squatting majestically as the god of war above the clouds of battle. And little Thiers, furtive, timid, delighting in senile efforts to stir the ferment of chaos till it boiled, he, too, was there, owl-like, squeaky-voiced, a true "Bombyx à Lunettes." There, too, was Hugo—often ridiculous in his terrible moods, egotistical, sloppy, roaring. The Empire pinched Hugo, and he roared; and let the rest of the world judge whether, under such circumstances, there was majesty in the roar. The spectacle of Hugo, prancing on the ramparts and hurling bad names at the German armies,

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recalls the persistent but painful manœuvres of a lion with a flea. Both are terribly in earnest—neither is sublime.

Jack sat leaning on the window-ledge, his chin on both hands, watching the moonlight rippling across the sea of steel below. Lorraine, also silent, buried in an arm-chair, lay huddled somewhere in the shadows, looking up at the stars, scarcely visible in the radiance of the moon.

After a while she spoke in a low voice: "Do you remember in chapel a week ago—what—"

"Yes, I know what you mean. Can you say it—any of it?"

"Yes, all."

Presently he heard her voice in the darkness repeating the splendid lines:

"In the days when the keepers of the house shall tremble, and the strong men shall bow themselves, and the grinders cease because they are few, and they that look out of the windows be darkened.

"And the doors shall be shut in the streets, when the sound of the grinding is low, and they shall rise up at the voice of a bird, and all the daughters of music shall be brought low.

"Also they shall be afraid of that which is high, and fear shall be in the way, and the almond-tree shall flourish, and the grasshopper shall be a burden, and desire shall fail.

"Because man goeth to his long home—"

Her voice broke a little.

"And the mourners go about the streets—"

He leaned forward, his hand stretched out in the shadows. After a moment her fingers touched his, moved a little, and were clasped close. Then it was that, in her silence, he read a despair too deep, too sudden, too stupefying for expression—a despair scarcely yet understood. A sensitive young mind, stunned by realities never dreamed of, recovers slowly; and the first outward evidence of returning comprehension is an out-stretched hand, a groping in the shadows for the hand of the best beloved. Her hand was there, out-stretched, their fingers had met and interlaced. A great lassitude weighed her down, mind and body. Yesterday was so far away, and to-morrow so close at hand, but not yet close enough to arouse her from an apathy unpierced as yet by the keen shaft of grief.

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He felt the lethargy in her yielding fingers; perhaps he began to understand the sensitive girl lying in the arm-chair beside him, perhaps he even saw ahead into the future that promised everything or nothing, for France, for her, for him.

Madame de Morteyn came to take her away, but before he dropped her hand in the shadows he felt a pressure that said, "Wait!"—so he waited, there alone in the darkness.

The bells of Saint-Lys sounded again, scarcely vibrating in the still air; a bank of sombre cloud buried the moon, and put out the little stars one by one until the blackness of the night crept in, blotting out river and tree and hill, hiding the silent camp in fathomless shadow. He slept.

When he awoke, slowly, confused and uncertain, he found her close to him, kneeling on the floor, her face on his knees. He touched her arm, fearfully, scarcely daring; he touched her hair, falling heavily over her face and shoulders and across his knees. Ah! but she was tired—her very soul was weary and sick; and she was too young to bear her trouble. Therefore she came back to him who had reached out his hand to her. She could not cry—she could only lie there and try to live through the bitterness of her solitude. For now she knew at last that she was alone on earth. The knowledge had come in a moment, it had come with the first trample of the Prussian horsemen; she knew that her love, given so wholly, so passionately, was nothing, had been nothing, to her father. He whom she lived for—was it possible that he could abandon her in such an hour? She had waited all day, all night; she said in her heart that he would come from his machines and his turret to be with her. Together they could have lived through the shame of the day—of the bitter days to come; together they could have suffered, knowing that they had each other to live for.

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But she could not face the Prussian scourge alone—she could not. These two truths had been revealed to her with the first tap of the Prussian drums: that every inch of soil, every grass-blade, every pebble of her land was dearer to her than life; and that her life was nothing to her father. He who alone in all the world could have stood between her and the shameful pageant of invasion, who could have taught her to face it, to front it nobly, who could have bidden her hope and pray and wait—he sat in his turret turning little wheels while the whole land shook with the throes of invasion—their native land, Lorraine.

The death-throes of a nation are felt by all the world. Bismarck placed a steel-clad hand upon the pulse of France, and knew Lorraine lay dying. Amputation would end all—Moltke had the apparatus ready; Bismarck, the great surgeon and greater executioner, sat with mailed hand on the pulse of France and waited.

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The girl, Lorraine, too, knew the crisis had come—sensitive prophetess in all that she held sacred! She had never prayed for the Emperor, but she always prayed for France when she asked forgiveness night and morning. At confession she had accused herself sometimes because she could not understand the deeper meaning of this daily prayer, but now she understood it; the

fierce love for native soil that blazes up when that soil is stamped upon and spurned.

All the devotion, all the tender adoration, that she had given her father turned now to bitter grief for this dear land of hers. It, at least, had been her mother, her comforter, her consolation; and there it lay before her—it called to her; she responded passionately, and gave it all her love. So she lay there in the dark, her hot face buried in her hands, close to one whom she needed and who needed her.

He was too wise to speak or move; he loved her too much to touch again the hair, flung heavily across her face—to touch her flushed brow, her clasped hands, her slender body, delicate and warm, firm yet yielding. He waited for the tears to come. And when they fell, one by one, great, hot drops, they brought no relief until she told him all—all—her last and inmost hope and fear.

Then when her white soul lay naked in all its innocence before him, and when the last word had been said, he raised her head and searched in her pure eyes for one message of love for himself.

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It was not there; and the last word had been said.

And, even as he looked, holding her there almost in his arms, the Prussian trumpets clanged from the dim meadows and the drums thundered on the hills, and the invading army roused itself at the dawn of another day.

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CHAPTER XVIII

THE STRETCHING OF NECKS

For two days and nights the German army passed through Morteyn and Saint-Lys, on the march towards Metz. All day long the hills struck back the echoes of their flat brass drums, and shook with the shock of armed squadrons, tramping on into the west. Interminable trains of wagons creaked along the sandy Saint-Avold road; the whistle of the locomotive was heard again at Saint-Lys, where the Bavarians had established a base of supplies and were sending their endless, multicoloured trains puffing away towards Saarbrück for provisions and munitions of war that had arrived there from Cologne. Generals with their staffs, serious, civil fellows, with anxious, near-sighted eyes, stopped at the Château and were courteously endured, only to be replaced by others equally polite and serious. And regularly, after each batch left with their marching regiments, there came back to the Château by courier, the same evening, a packet of visiting-cards and a polite letter signed by all the officers entertained, thanking the Vicomte and Madame de Morteyn for their hospitality.

At last, on the 10th of August, about five o'clock in the afternoon, the last squadron of the rear-guard cantered over the hills west of Morteyn, and the last straggling Uhlan followed after, twirling his long lance.

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Every day Lorraine had watched and waited for one word from her father; every day Jack had ridden over to the Château de Nesville, but the marquis refused to see him or to listen to any message, nor did he send any to Lorraine.

Old Pierre told Jack that no Germans had visited the Château; that the marquis was busy all day with his machinery, and never left his turret except to eat at daylight in the grand salon below. He also intimated that his master was about ready to make another ascension in the new balloon, which, old Pierre affirmed, had a revolving screw at either side of the wicker car, like a ship; and, like a ship, it could be steered with perfect ease. He even took Jack to a little stone structure that stood in a meadow, surrounded by trees. In there, according to Pierre, stood this marvellous balloon, not yet inflated, of course. That was only a matter of five seconds; a handful of the silver dust placed at the aperture of the silken bag, a drop of pure water touched to it, and, puff! the silver dust turns to vapour and the balloon swells out tight and full.

Jack had peeped into the barred window and had seen the wicker car of the balloon standing on the cement floor, filled with the folded silken covering for the globe of the balloon. He could just make out, on either side of the car, two twisted twin screws, wrought out of some dull oxidized metal. On returning to Morteyn that evening he had told Lorraine.

She explained that the screws were made of a metal called aluminum, rare then, because so difficult to extract from its combining substances, and almost useless on account of its being impossible to weld. Her father, however, had found a way to utilize it—how, she did not know. If this ascension proved a success the French government would receive the balloon and the secret of the steering and propelling gear, along with the formula for the silvery dust used to inflate it. Even she understood what a terrible engine of war such an aërial ship might be, from which two men could blow up fortress after fortress and city after city when and where they chose. Armies could be annihilated, granite and steel would be as tinder before a bomb or torpedo of picric acid dropped from the clouds.

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On the 10th of August, a little after five o'clock, Jack left Lorraine on the terrace at Morteyn to try once more to see the marquis—for Lorraine's sake.

He turned to the west, where the last Uhlan of the rear-guard was disappearing over the brow of the hill, brandishing his pennoned lance-tip in the late rays of the low-hanging sun.

"Good-by," he said, smiling up at her from the steps. "Don't worry, please don't. Remember your

father is well, and is working for France."

He spoke of the marquis as her father; he always should as long as she lived. He said, too, that the marquis was labouring for France. So he was; but France would never see the terrible war engine, nor know the secrets of its management, as long as Napoleon III. was struggling to keep his family in the high places of France.

"Good-by," he said again. "I shall be back by sundown."

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Lorraine leaned over the terrace, looking down at him with blue, fathomless eyes.

"By sundown?"

"Yes."

"Truly?"

"Yes."

"Tiens ta Foy."

"Always, Lorraine."

She did not chide him; she longed to call him Jack, but it stuck in her white throat when she tried.

"If you do not come back by sundown, then I shall know you cannot," she said.

"But I shall."

"Yes, I believe it."

"Come after me if I don't return," he laughed, as he descended the steps.

"I shall, if you break your faith," she smiled.

She watched him out of sight—he was going on foot this time—then the trees hid him, and she turned back into the house, where Madame de Morteyn was preparing to close the Château for the winter and return to Paris.

It was the old vicomte who had decided; he had stayed and faced the music as long as there was any to face—Prussian music, too. But now the Prussians had passed on towards Metz—towards Paris, also, perhaps, and he wished to be there; it was too sad in the autumn of Lorraine.

He had aged fearfully in the last four days; he was in truth an old man now. Even he knew it—he who had never before acknowledged age; but he felt it at night; for it is when day is ended that the old comprehend how old they are.

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This was to be Lorraine's last night at Morteyn; in the morning Jack was to drive her back to her father and then return to Morteyn to accompany his uncle and aunt to Paris. The old people once settled in Paris with Dorothy and Betty Castlemaine, and surrounded by friends again, Jack would take leave of them and return to Morteyn with one servant. This he had promised Lorraine, and she had not said no. His aunt also wished it, but she did not think it time yet to tell the vicomte.

The servants, with the exception of one maid and the coachman, had gone in the morning, by way of Vigny, with the luggage. The vicomte and his wife were to travel by carriage to Passy-le-Sel, and from there, via Belfort, if the line were open, to Paris by rail. Jack, it had been arranged, was to ride to Belfort on horseback, and join the old people there for the journey to Paris.

So Lorraine turned back into the silent house, where the furniture stood in its stiff, white dust-coverings, where cloths covered candelabra and mirror, and the piano was bare of embroidered scarfs.

She passed through darkened rooms, one after another, through the long hall, where no servants remained, through the ballroom and dining-room, and out into the conservatory, emptied of every palm. She passed on across the interior court, through the servants' wicket, and out to the stables. All the stalls save one were empty. Faust stood in that one stall switching his tail and peering around at her with wise, dark eyes. Then she kissed his soft nose, and went sadly back to the house, only to roam over it again from terrace to roof, never meeting a living soul, never hearing a sound except when she passed the vicomte's suite, where Madame de Morteyn and the maid were arranging last details and the old vicomte lay asleep in his worn arm-chair.

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There was one room she had not visited, one room in which she had never set foot, never even peeped into. That was Jack's room. And now, by an impulse she could not understand, her little feet led her up the stairway, across the broad landing, through the gun-room, and there to the door—his door. It was open. She glided in.

There was a faint odour of tobacco in the room, a smell of leather, too. That came from the curb-bit and bridle hanging on the wall, or perhaps from the plastron, foils, and gauntlets over the mantle. Pipes lay about in profusion, mixed with silver-backed brushes, cigar-boxes, neckties, riding-crops, and gloves.

She stole on tiptoe to the bed, looked at her wide, bright eyes in the mirror opposite, flushed, hesitated, bent swiftly, and touched the white pillow with her lips.

For a second she knelt there where he might have knelt, morning and evening, then slipped to her feet, turned, and was gone.

At sundown Jack returned, animated, face faintly touched with red from his three-mile walk. He had seen the marquis; more, too, he had seen the balloon—he had examined it, stood in the wicker car, tested the aluminum screws. He brought back a message for Lorraine, affectionate and kindly, asking for her return home early the next morning.

"If we do not find you at Belfort to-morrow," said Madame de Morteyn, seriously, "we shall not wait. We shall go straight on to Paris. The house is ready to be locked, everything is in perfect order, and really, Jack, there is no necessity for your coming. Perhaps Lorraine's father may ask you to stay there for a few days."

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"He has," said Jack, growing a trifle pink.

"Then you need not come to Belfort at all," insisted his aunt. Jack protested that he could not let them go to Paris alone.

"But I've sent Faust on already," said Madame de Morteyn, smiling.

"Then the Marquis de Nesville will lend me a horse; you can't keep me away like that," said Jack; "I will drive Mademoiselle de Nesville to her home and then come on horseback and meet you at Belfort, as I said I would."

"We won't count on you," said his aunt; "if you're not there when the train comes, your uncle and I will abandon you to the mercy of Lorraine."

"I shall send him on by freight," said Lorraine, trying to smile.

"I'm going back to the Château de Nesville to-night for an hour or two," observed Jack, finishing his Moselle; "the marquis wanted me to help him on the last touches. He makes an ascent to-morrow noon."

"Take a lantern, then," said Madame de Morteyn; "don't you want Jules, too—if you're going on foot through the forest?"

"Don't want Jules, and the squirrels won't eat me," laughed Jack, looking across at Lorraine. He was thinking of that first dash in the night together, she riding with the fury of a storm-witch, her ball-gown in ribbons, her splendid hair flashing, he galloping at her stirrup, putting his horse at a dark figure that rose in their path; and then the collision, the trample, the shots in the dark, and her round white shoulder seared with the bullet mark.

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She raised her beautiful eyes and asked him how soon he was going to start.

"Now," he said.

"You will perhaps wait until your old aunt rises," said Madame de Morteyn, and she kissed him on the cheek. He helped her from her chair and led her from the room, the vicomte following with Lorraine.

Ten minutes later he was ready to start, and again he promised Lorraine to return at eleven o'clock.

"Tiens ta Foy," she repeated.

"Always, Lorraine."

The night was starless. As he stood there on the terrace swinging his lantern, he looked back at her, up into her eyes. And as he looked she bent down, impulsively stretching out both arms and whispering, "At eleven—you have promised, Jack."

At last his name had fallen from her lips—had slipped from them easily—sweet as the lips that breathed it.

He tried to answer; he could not, for his heart beat in his throat. But he took her two hands and crushed them together and kissed the soft, warm palms, passive under his lips. That was all—a touch, a glimpse of his face half lit by the lantern swinging; and again she called, softly, "Jack, Tiens ta Foy!" And he was gone.

The distance to the Château de Nesville was three miles; it might have been three feet for all Jack knew, moving through the forest, swinging his lantern, his eyes on the dim trees towering into the blackness overhead, his mind on Lorraine. Where the lantern-light fell athwart rugged trunks, he saw her face; where the tall shadows wavered and shook, her eyes met his. Her voice was in the forest rumour, the low rustle of leafy undergrowth, the whisper of waters flowing under silent leaves.

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Already the gray wall of the park loomed up in the east, already the gables and single turret of the Château grew from the shadows and took form between the meshed branches of the trees.

The grille swung wide open, but the porter was not there. He walked on, hastening a little, crossed the lawn by the summer arbour, and approached the house. There was a light in the turret, but the rest of the house was dark. As he reached the porch and looked into the black hallway, a slight noise in the dining-room fell upon his ear, and he opened the door and went in.

The dining-room was dark; he set his extinguished lantern on the table and lighted a lamp by the window, saying: "Pierre, tell the marquis I am here—tell him I am to return to Morteyn by eleven—Pierre, do you hear me? Where are you, then?"

He raised his head instinctively, his hand on the lamp-globe. Pierre was not there, but something moved in the darkness outside the window, and he went to the door.

"Pierre!" he called again; and at the same instant an Uhlan struck him with his lance-butt across the temples.

How long it was before he opened his eyes he could not tell. He found himself lying on the ground in a meadow surrounded by trees. A camp-fire flickered near, lighting the gray side of the little stone house where the balloon was kept.

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There were sounds—deep, guttural voices raised in dispute or threats; he saw a group of shadowy men, swaying, pushing, crowding under the trees. The firelight glimmered on a gilt button here and there, on a sabre-hilt, on polished schapskas and gold-scaled chin-guards. The knot of struggling figures suddenly widened out into a half-circle, then came a quick command, a cry in French—"Ah! God!"—and something shot up into the air and hung from a tree, dangling, full in the firelight.

It was the writhing body of a man.

Jack turned his head away, then covered his eyes with his hands. Beside him a tall Uhlan, swathed to the eyes in his great-coat, leaned on a lance and smoked in silence.

Suddenly a voice broke out in the night: "Links! vorwärts!" There came a regular tramp of feet—one, two! one, two!—across the grass, past the fire, and straight to where Jack sat, his face in his arms.

The bright glare of lanterns dazzled him as he looked up, but he saw a line of men with bared sabres standing to his right—tall Uhlans, buttoned to the chin in their sombre overcoats, helmet-cords oscillating in the lantern glow.

Another Uhlan, standing erect before him, had been speaking for a second or two before he even heard him.

"Prisoner, do you understand German?" repeated the Uhlan, harshly.

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"Yes," muttered Jack. He began to shiver, perhaps from the chill of the wet earth.

"Stand up!"

Jack stumbled to his numbed feet. A drop of blood rolled into his eye and he mechanically wiped it away. He tried to look at the man before him; he could not, for his fascinated eyes returned to that thing that hung on a rope from the great sprawling oak-branch at the edge of the grove.

Like a vague voice in a dream he heard his own name pronounced; he heard a sonorous formula repeated in a heavy, dispassionate voice—"accused of having resisted a picquet of his Prussian Majesty's 11th Regiment of Uhlan cavalry, of having wilfully, maliciously, and with murderous design fired upon and wounded trooper Kohlmann of said picquet while in pursuit of his duty."

Again he heard the same voice: "The law of non-combatants operating in such cases leaves no doubt as to the just penalty due."

Jack straightened up and looked the officer in the eyes. Ah! now he knew him—the map-maker of the carrefour, the sneak-thief who had scaled the park wall with the box—that was the face he had struck with his clenched fist, the same pink, high-boned face, with the little, pale, pig-like eyes. In the same second the man's name came back to him as he had deciphered it written in pencil on the maps—Siurd von Steyr!

Von Steyr's eyes grew smaller and paler, and an ugly flush mounted to his scarred cheek-bone. But his voice was dispassionate and harsh as ever when he said: "The prisoner Marche is at liberty to confront witnesses. Trooper Kohlmann!"

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There he stood, the same blond, bony Uhlan whom Jack had tumbled into the dust, the same colourless giant whom he had dragged with trailing spurs across the road to the tree.

From his pouch the soldier produced Jack's silver flask, with his name engraved on the bottom, his pipe, still half full of tobacco, just as he had dropped it when the field-glasses told him that Uhlans, not French lancers, were coming down the hill-side.

One by one three other Uhlans advanced from the motionless ranks, saluted, briefly identified the prisoner, and stepped back again.

"Have you any statement to make?" demanded Von Steyr.

Jack's teeth were clenched, his throat contracted, he was choking. Everything around him swam in darkness—a darkness lit by little flames; his veins seemed bursting. He was in their midst now, shouldered and shoved across the grass; their hot breath fell on his face, their hands crushed his arms, bent back his elbows, pushed him forward, faster, faster, towards the tree where that thing

hung, turning slowly as a squid spins on a swivel.

It was the grating of the rope on his throat that crushed the first cry out of him: "Von Steyr, shoot me! For the love of God! Not—not this—"

He was struggling now—he set his teeth and struck furiously. The crowd seemed to increase about him; now there was a mounted man in their midst—more mounted men, shouting.

The rope suddenly tightened; the blood pounded in his cheeks, in his temples; his tongue seemed to split open. Then he got his fingers between the noose and his neck; now the thing loosened and he pitched forward, but kept his feet. [Pg 201]

"Gott verdammt!" roared a voice above him; "Von Steyr!—here! get back there!—get back!"

"Rickerl!" gasped Jack—"tell—tell them—they must shoot—not hang—"

He stood glaring at the soldiers before him, face bloody and distorted, the rope trailing from one clenched hand. Breathless, haggard, he planted his heels in the turf, and, dropping the noose, set one foot on it. All around him horsemen crowded up, lances slung from their elbows, helmets nodding as the restive horses wheeled.

And now for the first time he saw the Marquis de Nesville, face like a death-mask, one hand on the edge of the wicker balloon-car, which stood in the midst of a circle of cavalry.

"This is not the place nor is this the time to judge your prisoners," said Rickerl, pushing his horse up to Von Steyr and scowling down into his face. "Who called this drum-head court? Is that your province? Oh, in my absence? Well, then, I am here! Do you see me?"

The insult fell like the sting of a lash across Von Steyr's face. He saluted, and, looking straight into Rickerl's eyes, said, "Zum Befehl, Herr Hauptmann! I am at your convenience also."

"When you please!" shouted Rickerl, crimson with fury. "Retire!"

Scarcely were the words out of his mouth, scarcely had he backed his startled horse, when there came a sound of a crushing blow, a groan, and a soldier staggered back from the balloon-car, his hands to his head, where the shattered helmet hung by one torn gilt cord. In the same instant the marquis, dishevelled, white as a corpse, rose from the wicker car, shaking his steel box above his head. Then, through the ring of nervous, quivering horses the globe of the balloon appeared as by magic—an enormous, looming, yellow sphere, tense, glistening, gigantic. [Pg 202]

The horses reared, snorting with fright, the Uhlans clung to their saddles, shouting and cursing, and the huge balloon, swaying from its single rope, pounded and bounced from side to side, knocking beast and man into a chaotic mass of frantic horses and panic-stricken riders.

With a report like a pistol the rope parted, the great globe bounded and shot up into the air; a tumult of harsh shouts arose; the crazed horses backed, plunged, and scattered, some falling, some bolting into the undergrowth, some rearing and swaying in an ecstasy of terror.

The troopers, helpless, gnashing their teeth, shook their long lances towards the sky, where the moon was breaking from the banked clouds, and the looming balloon hung black above the forest, drifting slowly westward.

And now Von Steyr had a weapon in his hands—not a carbine, but a long chassepot-rifle, a relic of the despoiled franc-tireur, dangling from the oak-tree.

Some one shouted, "It's loaded with explosive bullets!"

"Then drop it!" roared Rickerl. "For shame!"

The crash of the rifle drowned his voice.

The balloon's shadowy bulk above the forest was belted by a blue line of light; the globe contracted, a yellow glare broke out in the sky. Then far away a light report startled the sudden stillness; a dark spot, suspended in mid-air, began to fall, swiftly, more swiftly, dropping through the night between sky and earth. [Pg 203]

"You damned coward!" stammered Rickerl, pointing a shaking hand at Von Steyr.

"God keep you when our sabres meet!" said Von Steyr, between his teeth.

Rickerl burst into an angry laugh.

"Where is your prisoner?" he cried.

Von Steyr stared around him, right and left—Jack was gone.

"Let others prefer charges," said Rickerl, contemptuously—"if you escape my sabre in the morning."

"Let them," said Von Steyr, quietly, but his face worked convulsively.

"Second platoon dismount to search for escaped prisoner!" he cried. "Open order! Forward!" [Pg 204]

CHAPTER XIX

RICKERL'S SABRE

Jack, lying full length in the depths of the forest, listened fearfully for the sounds of the human pack on his heels. The blackness was stupefying; the thud of his own heart seemed to fill the shrouded forest like the roll of a muffled drum. Presently he crept on again, noiselessly, painfully, closing his eyes when the invisible twigs brushed his face.

He did not know where he was going, he only thought of getting away, anywhere—away from that hangman's rope.

Again he rested, suffocated by the tumult in his breast, burning with thirst. For a long while he lay listening; there was not a sound in the night. Little by little his coolness returned; he thought of Lorraine and his promise, and he knew that now he could not keep it. He thought, too, of the marquis, never doubting the terrible fate of the half-crazed man. He had seen him stun the soldier with a blow of the steel box, he had seen the balloon shoot up into the midnight sky, he had heard the shot and caught a glimpse of the glare of the burning balloon. Somewhere in the forest the battered body of the marquis lay in the wreck of the shattered car. The steel box, too, lay there—the box that was so precious to the Germans.

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He rose to his knees, felt around among the underbrush, bent his head and crept on, parting leaves and branches with one hand, holding the other over his eyes. The thought that he might be moving in a circle filled him with fear. But that was exactly what he was doing, for now he found himself close to the park wall; and, listening, he heard the river murmuring among the alders. He halted, utterly at a loss. If he were caught again could Rickerl save him? What could a captain of Uhlans do? True, he had interfered with Von Steyr's hangman's work, but that was nothing but a reprieve at best.

The murmur of the river filled his ears; his hot throat was cracking. Drink he must, at any rate, and he started on in the darkness, moving stealthily over the moss. The water was closer than he had imagined; he bent above it, first touching it with groping hands, then noiselessly bathed his feverish face in the dark stream, drinking his fill.

He longed to follow the shallow stream, wading to Morteyn, but he dared not risk it; so he went along the bank as far as he could, trying to keep within sound of the waters, until again he found himself close to the park wall. The stream had vanished again.

Dawn began to gray the forest; little by little the nearest trees grew from the darkness, and bushes took vague shapes in the gloom. He strained his eyes, peering at every object near him, striving to recognize stones, saplings, but he could not. Even when dawn at last came up out of the east, and the thickets grew distinct, he did not know where he was. A line of vapour through the trees marked the course of the little river. Which way was it flowing? Even that he could not tell. He looked in vain for the park wall; that had vanished utterly with the dawn. Very cautiously he advanced over the deep forest mould to the willow-fringed bank of the stream. The current was flowing east. Where was he? He parted the willows and looked out, and at the same instant an Uhlan saw him and shouted.

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Running swiftly through the trees, head lowered, hands clenched, he heard the sound of galloping on a soft road that seemed to run through the forest, parallel to his own course. Then, as he bore hastily to the right and plunged into the deeper undergrowth, he caught a glimpse of the Château close by through the trees. Horrified to find himself back at the place from which he had started, he doubled in his tracks, ran on, stooping low, splashed into the stream and across, and plunged up to the shoulders through the tall weeds and bushes until again he felt the forest leaves beneath his feet.

The sudden silence around him was disconcerting. Where had the Uhlan gone? He ran on, making straight for the depths of the woods, for he knew now where he was, and in which direction safety lay.

After a while his breath and legs gave out together, and he leaned against a beech-tree, his hands pressed to his mouth, where the breath struggled for expulsion. And, as he leaned there, two Uhlans, mounted, lances advanced, came picking their way among the trees, turning their heads cautiously from side to side. Behind these two rode six others, apparently unarmed, two abreast. He saw at once that nothing could save him, for they were making straight for his beech-tree. In that second of suspense he made up his mind to die fighting, for he knew what capture meant. He fixed his eyes on the foremost Uhlan, and waited. When the Uhlan should pass his tree he would fly at him; the rest could stab him to death with their lances—that was the only way to end it now.

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He shrank back, teeth set, nerving himself for the spring—a hunted thing turned fierce, a desperate man knowing that death was close. How long they were in coming! Had they seen him? When would the horse's nose pass the great tree-trunk?

"Halt!" cried a voice very near. The soft trample of horses ceased.

"Dismount!"

It seemed an age; the sluggish seconds crawled on. There was the sound of feet among the dry forest leaves—the hum of deep voices. He waited, trembling, for now it would be a man on foot with naked sabre who should sink under his spring. Would he never come?

At last, unable to stand the suspense, he moved his eyes to the edge of the tree. There they were,

a group of Uhlans standing near two men who stood facing each other, jackets off, shirts open to the throat.

The two men were Rickerl and Von Steyr.

Rickerl rolled up his white shirt-sleeve and tucked the cuff into the folds, his naked sabre under his arm. Von Steyr, in shirt, riding-breeches, and boots, stood with one leg crossed before the other, leaning on his bared sabre. The surgeon and the two seconds walked apart, speaking in undertones, with now and then a quick gesture from the surgeon. The three troopers held the horses of the party, and watched silently. When at last one of the Uhlans spoke, they were so near that every word was perfectly distinct to Jack:

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"Gentlemen, an affair of honour in the face of the enemy is always deplorable."

Rickerl burst out violently. "There can be no compromise—no adjustment. Is it Lieutenant von Steyr who seeks it? Then I tell him he is a hangman and a coward! He hangs a franc-tireur who fires on us with explosive bullets, but he himself does not hesitate to disgrace his uniform and regiment by firing explosive bullets at an escaping wretch in a balloon!"

"You lie!" said Von Steyr, his face convulsed. At the same moment the surgeon stepped forward with a gesture, the two seconds placed themselves; somebody muttered a formula in a gross bass voice and the swordsmen raised their heavy sabres and saluted. The next moment they were at it like tigers; their sabres flashed above their heads, the sabres of the seconds hovering around the outer edge of the circle of glimmering steel like snakes coiling to spring.

To and fro swayed the little group under the blinding flashes of light, stroke rang on stroke, steel shivered and tinkled and clanged on steel.

Fascinated by the spectacle, Jack crouched close to the tree, seeing all he dared to see, but keeping a sharp eye on the three Uhlans who were holding the horses, and who should have been doing sentry duty also. But they were human, and their eyes could not be dragged away from the terrible combat before them.

Suddenly, from the woods to the right, a rifle-shot rang out, clear and sharp, and one of the Uhlans dropped the three bridles, straightened out to his full height, trembled, and lurched sideways. The horses, freed, backed into the other horses; the two remaining Uhlans tried to seize them, but another shot rang out—another, and then another. In the confusion and turmoil a voice cried: "Mount, for God's sake!" but one of the horses was already free, and was galloping away riderless through the woods.

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A terrible yell arose from the underbrush, where a belt of smoke hung above the bushes, and again the rifles cracked. Von Steyr turned and seized a horse, throwing himself heavily across the saddle; the surgeon and the two seconds scrambled into their saddles, and the remaining pair of Uhlans, already mounted, wheeled their horses and galloped headlong into the woods.

Jack saw Rickerl set his foot in the stirrup, but his horse was restive and started, dragging him.

"Hurry, Herr Hauptmann!" cried a Uhlan, passing him at a gallop. Rickerl cast a startled glance over his shoulder, where, from the thickets, a dozen franc-tireurs were springing towards him, shouting and shaking their chassepots. Something had given way—Jack saw that—for the horse started on at a trot, snorting with fright. He saw Rickerl run after him, seize the bridle, stumble, recover, and hang to the stirrup; but the horse tore away and left him running on behind, one hand grasping his naked sabre, one clutching a bit of the treacherous bridle.

"À mort les Uhlans!" shouted the franc-tireurs, their ferocious faces lighting up as Rickerl's horse eluded its rider and crashed away through the saplings.

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Rickerl cast one swift glance at the savage faces, turned his head like a trapped wolf in a pit, hesitated, and started to run. A chorus of howls greeted him: "À mort!" "À mort le voleur!" "À la lanterne les Uhlans!"

Scarcely conscious of what he was doing, Jack sprang from his tree and ran parallel to Rickerl.

"Ricky!" he called in English—"follow me! Hurry! hurry!"

The franc-tireurs could not see Jack, but they heard his voice, and answered it with a roar. Rickerl, too, heard it, and he also heard the sound of Jack's feet crashing through the willows along the river-bottom.

"Jack!" he cried.

"Quick! Take to the river-bank!" shouted Jack in English again. In a moment they were running side by side up the river-bottom, hidden from the view of the franc-tireurs.

"Do as I do," panted Jack. "Throw your sabre away and follow me. It's our last chance." But Rickerl clung to his sabre and ran on. And now the park wall rose right in their path, seeming to block all progress.

"We can't get over—it's ended," gasped Rickerl.

"Yes, we can—follow," whispered Jack, and dashed straight into the river where it washed the base of the wall.

"Do exactly as I do. Follow close," urged Jack; and, wading to the edge of the wall, he felt along under the water for a moment, then knelt down, ducked his head, gave a wriggle, and disappeared. Rickerl followed him, kneeling and ducking his head. At the same moment he felt a powerful current pulling him forward, and, groping around under the shallow water, his hands encountered the rim of a large iron conduit. He stuck his head into it, gave himself a push, and shot through the short pipe into a deep pool on the other side of the wall, from which Jack dragged him dripping and exhausted.

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"You are my prisoner!" said Jack, between his gasps. "Give me your sabre, Ricky—quick! Look yonder!" A loud explosion followed his words, and a column of smoke rose above the foliage of the vineyard before them.

"Artillery!" blurted out Rickerl, in amazement.

"French artillery—look out! Here come the franc-tireurs over the wall! Give me that sabre and run for the French lines—if you don't want to hang!" And, as Rickerl hesitated, with a scowl of hate at the franc-tireurs now swarming over the wall, Jack seized the sabre and jerked it violently from his hand.

"You're crazy!" he muttered. "Run for the batteries!—here, this way!"

A franc-tireur fired at them point-blank, and the bullet whistled between them. "Leave me. Give me my sabre," said Rickerl, in a low voice.

"Then we'll both stay."

"Leave me! I'll not hang, I tell you."

"No."

The franc-tireurs were running towards them.

"They'll kill us both. Here they come!"

"You stood by me—" said Jack, in a faint voice.

Rickerl looked him in the eyes, hesitated, and cried, "I surrender! Come on! Hurry, Jack—for your sister's sake!"

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CHAPTER XX

SIR THORALD IS SILENT

It was a long run to the foot of the vineyard hill, where, on the crest, deep hidden among the vines, three cannon clanged at regular intervals, stroke following stroke, like the thundering summons of a gigantic tocsin.

Behind them they saw the franc-tireurs for a moment, thrashing waist-deep through the rank marsh weeds; then, as they plunged into a wheat-field, the landscape disappeared, and all around the yellow grain rustled, waving above their heads, dense, sun-heated, suffocating.

Their shoes sank ankle-deep in the reddish-yellow soil; they panted, wet with perspiration as they ran. Jack still clutched Rickerl's sabre, and the tall corn, brushing the blade, fell under the edge, keen as a scythe.

"I can go no farther," breathed Jack, at last. "Wait a moment, Ricky."

The hot air in the depths of the wheat was stifling, and they stretched their heads above the sea of golden grain, gasping like fishes in a bowl.

"Perhaps I won't have to surrender you, after all," said Jack. "Do you see that old straw-stack on the slope? If we could reach the other slope—"

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He held out his hand to gauge the exact direction, then bent again and plodded towards it, Rickerl jogging in his footprints.

As they pressed on under the rustling canopy, the sound of the cannon receded, for they were skirting the vineyard at the base of the hill, bearing always towards the south. And now they came to the edge of the long field, beyond which stretched another patch of stubble. The straw-stack stood half-way up the slope.

"Here's your sabre," motioned Jack. He was exhausted and reeled about in the stubble, but Rickerl passed one arm about him, and, sabre clutched in the other hand, aided him to the straw-stack.

The fresh wind strengthened them both; the sweat cooled and dried on their throbbing faces. They leaned against the stack, breathing heavily, the breeze blowing their wet hair, the solemn cannon-din thrilling their ears, stroke on stroke.

"The thing is plain to me," gasped Rickerl, pointing to the smoke-cloud eddying above the vineyard—"a brigade or two of Frossard's corps have been cut off and hurled back towards Nancy. Their rear-guard is making a stand—that's all. Jack, what on earth did you get into such a

terrible scrape for?"

Jack, panting full length in the shadow of the straw-stack, told Rickerl the whole wretched story, from the time of his leaving Forbach, after having sent the despatches to the *Herald*, up to the moment he had called to Rickerl there in the meadow, surrounded by Uhlans, a rope already choking him senseless.

Rickerl listened impassively, playing with the sabre on his knees, glancing right and left across the country with his restless baby-blue eyes. When Jack finished he said nothing, but it was plain enough how seriously he viewed the matter. [Pg 214]

"As for your damned Uhlans," ended Jack, "I have tried to keep out of their way. It's a relief to me to know that I didn't kill that trooper; but—confound him!—he shot at me so enthusiastically that I thought it time to join the party myself. Ricky, would they have hanged me if they had given me a fair court-martial?"

"As a favour they might have shot you," replied Rickerl, gloomily.

"Then," said Jack, "there are two things left for me to do—go to Paris, which I can't unless Mademoiselle de Nesville goes, or join some franc-tireur corps and give the German army as good as they send. If you Uhlans think," he continued, violently, "that you're coming into France to hang and shoot and raise hell without getting hell in return, you're a pack of idiots!"

"The war is none of your affair," said Rickerl, flushing. "You brought it on yourself—this hanging business. Good heavens! the whole thing makes me sick! I can't believe that two weeks ago we were all there together at Morteyn—"

"A pretty return you're making for Morteyn hospitality!" blurted out Jack. Then, shocked at what he had said, he begged Rickerl's pardon and bitterly took himself to task.

"I *am* a fool, Ricky; I know you've got to follow your regiment, and I know it must cut you to the heart. Don't mind what I say; I'm so miserable and bewildered, and I haven't got the feeling of that rope off my neck yet." [Pg 215]

Rickerl raised his hand gently, but his face was hard set.

"Jack, you don't begin to know what a hell I am living in, I who care so much for France and the French people, to know that all, all is ended forever, that I can never again—"

His voice choked; he cleared it and went on: "The very name of Uhlan is held in horror in France now; the word Prussian is a curse when it falls from French lips. God knows why we are fighting! We Germans obey, that is all. I am a captain in a Prussian cavalry regiment; the call comes, that is all that I know. And here I am, riding through the land I love; I sit on my horse and see the torch touched to field and barn; I see railroads torn out of the ground, I see wretched peasants hung to the rafters of their own cottages." He lowered his voice; his face grew paler. "I see the friend I care most for in all the world, a rope around his neck, my own troopers dragging him to the vilest death a man can die! That is war! Why? I am a Prussian, it is not necessary for me to know; but the regiment moves, and I move! it halts, I halt! it charges, retreats, burns, tramples, rends, devastates! I am always with it, unless some bullet settles me. For this war is nearly ended, Jack, nearly ended—a battle or two, a siege or two, nothing more. What can stand against us? Not this bewildered France."

Jack was silent.

Rickerl's blue eyes sought his; he rested his square chin on one hand and spoke again: [Pg 216]

"Jack, do you know that—that I love your sister?"

"Her last letter said as much," replied Jack, coldly.

Rickerl watched his face.

"You are sorry?"

"I don't know; I had hoped she would marry an American. Have you spoken?"

"Yes." This was a chivalrous falsehood; it was Dorothy who had spoken first, there in the gravel drive as he rode away from Morteyn.

Jack glanced at him angrily.

"It was not honourable," he said; "my aunt's permission should have been asked, as you know; also, incidentally, my own. Does—does Dorothy care for you? Oh, you need not answer that; I think she does. Well, this war may change things."

"Yes," said Rickerl, sadly.

"I don't mean that," cried Jack; "Heaven knows I wouldn't have you hurt, Ricky; don't think I meant that—"

"I don't," said Rickerl, half smiling; "you risked your skin to save me half an hour ago."

"And you called off your bloody pack of hangmen for me," said Jack; "I'm devilish grateful, Ricky—indeed I am—and you know I'd be glad to have you in the family if—if it wasn't for this cursed

war. Never mind, Dorothy generally has what she wants, even if it's—"

"Even if it's an Uhlan?" suggested Rickerl, gravely.

Jack smiled and laid his hand on Rickerl's arm.

"She ought to see you now, bareheaded, dusty, in your shirt-sleeves! You're not much like the attaché at the Diplomatic ball—eh, Ricky? If you marry Dorothy I'll punch your head. Come on, we've got to find out where we are." [Pg 217]

"That's my road," observed Rickerl, quietly, pointing across the fields.

"Where? Why?"

"Don't you see?"

Jack searched the distant landscape in vain.

"No, are the Germans there? Oh, now I see. Why, it's a squadron of your cursed Uhlans!"

"Yes," said Rickerl, mildly.

"Then they've been chased out of the Château de Nesville!"

"Probably. They may come back. Jack, can't you get out of this country?"

"Perhaps," replied Jack, soberly. He thought of Lorraine, of the marquis lying mangled and dead in the forest beside the fragments of his balloon.

"Your Lieutenant von Steyr is a dirty butcher," he said. "I hope you'll finish him when you find him."

"He fired explosive bullets, which your franc-tireurs use on us," retorted Rickerl, growing red.

"Oh," cried Jack in disgust, "the whole business makes me sick! Ricky, give me your hand—there! Don't let this war end our friendship. Go to your Uhlans now. As for me, I must get back to Morteyn. What Lorraine will do, where she can go, how she will stand this ghastly news, I don't know; and I wish there was somebody else to tell her. My uncle and aunt have already gone to Paris, they said they would not wait for me. Lorraine is at Morteyn, alone except for her maid, and she is probably frightened at my not returning as I promised. Do you think you can get to your Uhlans safely? They passed into the grove beyond the hills. What the mischief are those cannon shelling, anyway? Well, good-by! Better not come up the hill with me, or you'll have to part with your sabre for good. We did lose our franc-tireur friends beautifully. I'll write Dorothy; I'll tell her that I captured you, sabre and all. Good-by! Good-by, old fellow! If you'll promise not to get a bullet in your blond hide I'll promise to be a brother-in-law to you!" [Pg 218]

Rickerl looked very manly as he stood there, booted, bareheaded, his thin shirt, soaked with sweat, outlining his muscular figure.

They lingered a moment, hands closely clasped, looking gravely into each other's faces. Then, with a gesture, half sad, half friendly, Rickerl started across the stubble towards the distant grove where his Uhlans had taken cover.

Jack watched him until his white shirt became a speck, a dot, and finally vanished among the trees on the blue hill. When he was gone, Jack turned sharply away and climbed the furze-covered slope from whence he hoped to see the cannon, now firing only at five-minute intervals. As he toiled up the incline he carefully kept himself under cover, for he had no desire to meet any lurking franc-tireurs. It is true that, even when the franc-tireurs had been closest, there in the swamp among the rank marsh grasses, the distance was too great for them to have identified him with certainty. But he thought it best to keep out of their way until within hail of the regular troops, so he took advantage of bushes and inequalities of the slope to reconnoitre the landscape before he reached the summit of the ridge. There was a tufted thicket of yellow broom in flower on the crest of the ridge; behind this he lay and looked out across the plain. [Pg 219]

A little valley separated this hill from the vineyard, terraced up to the north, ridge upon ridge. The cannon smoke shot up from the thickets of vines, rose, and drifted to the west, blotting out the greater portion of the vineyard. The cannon themselves were invisible. At times Jack fancied he saw a human silhouette when the white smoke rushed outward, but the spectral vines loomed up everywhere through the dense cannon-fog and he could not be sure.

However, there were plenty of troops below the hill now—infantry of the line trudging along the dusty road in fairly good order, and below the vineyard, among the uncut fields of flax, more infantry crouched, probably supporting the three-gun battery on the hill.

At that distance he could not tell a franc-tireur from any regular foot-soldier except line-infantry; their red caps and trousers were never to be mistaken. As he looked, he wondered at a nation that clothed its troops in a colour that furnished such a fearfully distinct mark to the enemy. A French army, moving, cannot conceal itself; the red of trousers and caps, the mirror-like reflections of cuirass and casque and lance-tip, advertise the presence of French troops so persistently that an enemy need never fear any open landscape by daylight.

Jack watched the cannonade, lying on his stomach, chin supported by both hands. He was perfectly cool now; he neither feared the Uhlans nor the franc-tireurs. For a while he vainly tried [Pg 220]

to comprehend the reason of the cannonade; the shells shot out across the valley in tall curves, dropping into a distant bit of hazy blue woodland, or exploded above the trees; the column of infantry below plodded doggedly southward; the infantry in the flax-field lay supine. Clearly something was interfering with the retreat of the troops—something that threatened them from those distant woods. And now he could see cavalry moving about the crest of the nearer hills, but, without his glass, it was not possible to tell what they were. Often he looked at the nearer forest that hid the Château de Nesville. Somewhere within those sombre woods lay the dead marquis.

With a sigh he rose to his knees, shivered in the sunshine, passed one hand over his forehead, and finally stood up. Hunger had made him faint; his head grew dizzy.

"It must be noon, at least," he muttered, and started down the hill and across the fields towards the woods of Morteyn. As he walked he pulled the bearded wheat from ripening stems and chewed it to dull his hunger. The raw place on his neck, where the rope had chafed, stung when the perspiration started. He moved quickly but warily, keeping a sharp lookout on every side. Once he passed a miniature vineyard, heavy with white-wine grapes; and, as he threaded a silent path among the vines, he ate his fill and slaked his thirst with the cool amber fruit. He had reached the edge of the little vineyard, and was about to cross a tangle of briars and stubble, when something caught his eye in the thicket; it was a man's face—and he stopped.

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For a minute they stared at each other, making no movement, no sound.

"Sir Thorald!"—faltered Jack.

But Sir Thorald Hesketh could not speak, for he had a bullet through his lungs.

As Jack sprang into the brier tangle towards him, a slim figure in the black garments of the Sisters of Mercy rose from Sir Thorald's side. He saw the white cross on her breast, he saw the white face above it and the whiter lips.

It was Alixe von Elster.

At the same instant the road in front was filled with French infantry, running.

Alixé caught his arm, her head turned towards the road where the infantry were crowding past at double-quick, enveloped in a whirling torrent of red dust.

"There is a cart there," she said. "Oh, Jack, find it quickly! The driver is on the seat—and I can't leave Sir Thorald."

In his amazement he stood hesitating, looking from the girl to Sir Thorald; but she drew him to the edge of the thicket and pointed to the road, crying, "Go! go!" and he stumbled down the pasture slope to the edge of the road.

Past him plodded the red-legged infantry; he saw, through the whirlwind of dust, the vague outlines of a tumbril and horse standing below in the ditch, and he ran along the grassy depression towards the vehicle. And now he saw the driver, kneeling in the cart, his blue blouse a mass of blood, his discoloured face staring out at the passing troops.

As he seized the horse's head and started up the slope again, firing broke out among the thickets close at hand; the infantry swung out to the west in a long sagging line; the chassepots began banging right and left. For an instant he caught a glimpse of cavalry riding hard across a bit of stubble—Uhlans he saw at a glance—then the smoke hid them. But in that brief instant he had seen, among the galloping cavalrymen, a mounted figure, bareheaded, wearing a white shirt, and he knew that Rickerl was riding for his life.

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Sick at heart he peered into the straight, low rampart of smoke; he watched the spirits of rifle-flame piercing it; he saw it turn blacker when a cannon bellowed in the increasing din. The infantry were lying down out there in the meadow; shadowy gray forms passed, repassed, reeled, ran, dropped, and rose again. Close at hand a long line of men lay flat on their bellies in the wheat stubble. When each rifle spoke the smoke rippled through the short wheat stalks or eddied and curled over the ground like the gray foam of an outrushing surf.

He backed the horse and heavy cart, turned both, half blinded by the rifle-smoke, and started up the incline. Two bullets, speeding over the clover like singing bees, rang loudly on the iron-bound cartwheels; the horse plunged and swerved, dragging Jack with him, and the dead figure, kneeling in the cart, tumbled over the tail-board with a grotesque wave of its stiffening limbs. There it lay, sprawling in an impossible posture in the ditch. A startled grasshopper alighted on its face, turned around, crawled to the ear, and sat there.

And now the volley firing grew to a sustained crackle, through which the single cannon boomed and boomed, hidden in the surging smoke that rolled in waves, sinking, rising, like the waves of a wind-whipped sea.

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"Where are you, Alixe?" he shouted.

"Here! Hurry!"

She stood on the edge of the brier tangle as he laboured up the slope with the horse and cart. Sir Thorald's breathing was horrible to hear when they stooped and lifted him; Alixe was crying. They laid him on the blood-soaked straw; Alixe crept in beside him and took his head on her

knees.

"To Morteyn?" whispered Jack. "Perhaps we can find a surgeon nearer—"

"Oh, hurry!" she sobbed; and he climbed heavily to the seat and started back towards the road.

The road was empty where he turned in out of the fields, but, just above, he heard cannon thundering in the mist. As he drew in the reins, undecided, the cannonade suddenly redoubled in fury; the infantry fire blazed out with a new violence; above the terrific blast he heard trumpets sounding, and beneath it he felt the vibration of the earth; horses were neighing out beyond the smoke; a thousand voices rose in a far, hoarse shout:

"Hurrah! Preussen!"

The Prussian cavalry were charging the cannon.

Suddenly he heard them close at hand; they loomed everywhere in the smoke, they were among the infantry, among the cannoneers; a tall rider in silver helmet and armour plunged out into the road behind them, his horse staggered, trembled, then man and beast collapsed in a shower of bullets. Others were coming, too, galloping in through the grain stubble and thickets, shaking their long, straight sabres, but the infantry chased them, and fell upon them, clubbing, shooting, stabbing, pulling horses and men to earth. The cannon, which had ceased, began again; the infantry were cheering; trumpets blew persistently, faintly and more faintly. In the road a big, bearded man was crawling on his hands and knees away from a dead horse. His helmet fell off in the dust.

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Jack gathered the reins and called to the horse. As the heavy cart moved off, the ground began to tremble again with the shock of on-coming horses, and again, through the swelling tumult, he caught the cry—

"Hurrah! Preussen!"

The Prussian cuirassiers were coming back.

"Is Sir Thorald dying?" he asked of Alixe; "can he live if I lash the horse?"

"Look at him, Jack," she muttered.

"I see; he cannot live. I shall drive slowly. You—you are wounded, are you? there—on the neck—"

"It is his blood on my breast."

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CHAPTER XXI

THE WHITE CROSS

At ten o'clock that night Jack stepped from the ballroom to the terrace of the Château Morteyn and listened to the distant murmur of the river Lisse, below the meadow. The day of horror had ended with a dozen dropping shots from the outposts, now lining the banks of the Lisse from the Château de Nesville to Morteyn. The French infantry had been pouring into Morteyn since late afternoon; they had entered the park when he entered, driving his tumbril with its blood-stained burden; they had turned the river into a moat, the meadow into an earthwork, the Château itself into a fortress.

On the concrete terrace beside him a gatling-gun glimmered in the starlight; sentinels leaned on their elbows, sprawling across the parapets; shadowy ranks of sleeping men lay among the shrubbery below, white-faced, exhausted, motionless.

There were low voices from the darkened ballroom, the stir and tinkle of spurred boots, the ring of sabres. Out in the hard macadamized road, cannon were passing into the park by the iron gate; beyond the road masses of men moved in the starlight.

After a moment Jack turned away and entered the house. For the hundredth time he mounted the stairs to Lorraine's bedroom door and listened, holding his breath. He heard nothing—not a cry—not a sob. It had been so from the first, when he had told her that her father lay dead somewhere in the forest of Morteyn.

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She had said nothing—she went to her room and sat down on the bed, white and still. Sir Thorald lay in the next room, breathing deeply. Alixe was kneeling beside him, crying silently.

Twice a surgeon from an infantry regiment had come and gone away after a glance at Sir Thorald. A captain came later and asked for a Sister of Mercy.

"She can't go," said Jack, in a low voice. But little Alixe rose, still crying, and followed the captain to the stables, where a dozen mangled soldiers lay in the straw and hay.

It was midnight when she returned to find Jack standing beside Sir Thorald in the dark. When he saw it was Alixe he led her gently into the hall.

"He is conscious now; I will call you when the time comes. Go into that room—Lorraine is there, alone. Ah, go, Alixe; it is charity!—and you wear the white cross—"

"It is dyed scarlet," she whispered through her tears.

He returned to Sir Thorald, who lay moving his restless hands over the sheets and turning his head constantly from side to side.

"Go on," said Jack; "finish what you were saying."

"Will she come?"

"Yes—in time."

Sir Thorald relapsed into a rambling, monotonous account of some military movement near Wissembourg until Jack spoke again:

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"Yes—I know; tell me about Alixe."

"Yes—Alixe," muttered Sir Thorald—"is she here? I was wrong; I saw her at Cologne; that was all, Jack—nothing more."

"There is more," said Jack; "tell me."

"Yes, there is more. I saw that—that she loved me. There was a scene—I am not always a beast—I tried not to be. Then—then I found that there was nothing left but to go away—somewhere—and live—without her. It was too late. She knew it—"

"Go on," said Jack.

Suddenly Sir Thorald's voice grew clear.

"Can't you understand?" he asked; "I damned both our souls. She is buying hers back with tears and blood—with the white cross on her heart and death in her eyes! And I am dying here—and she's to drag out the years afterwards—"

He choked; Jack watched him quietly.

Sir Thorald turned his head to him when the coughing ceased.

"She went with a field ambulance; I went, too. I was shot below that vineyard. They told her; that is all. Am I dying?"

Jack did not answer.

"Will you write to Molly?" asked Sir Thorald, drowsily.

"Yes. God help you, Sir Thorald."

"Who cares?" muttered Sir Thorald. "I'm a beast—a dying beast. May I see Alixe?"

"Yes."

"Then tell her to come—now. Soon I'll wish to be alone; that's the way beasts die—alone."

He rambled on again about a battle somewhere in the south, and Jack went to the door and called, "Alixe!"

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She came, pallid and weeping, carrying a lighted candle.

Jack took it from her hand and blew out the flame.

"They won't let us have a light; they fear bombardment. Go in now."

"Is he dying?"

"God knows."

"God?" repeated Alixe.

Jack bent and touched the child's forehead with his lips.

"Pray for him," he said; "I shall write his wife to-night."

Alixe went in to the bedside to kneel again and buy back two souls with the agony of her child's heart.

"Pray," she said to Sir Thorald.

"Pray," he repeated.

Jack closed the door.

Up and down the dark hall he wandered, pausing at times to listen to some far rifle-shot and the answering fusillade along the picket-line. Once he stopped an officer on the stairway and asked for a priest, but, remembering that Sir Thorald was Protestant, turned away with a vague apology and resumed his objectless wandering.

At times he fancied he heard cannon, so far away that nothing of sound remained, only a faint jar on the night air. Twice he looked from the window over the vast black forest, thinking of the dead man lying there alone. And then he longed to go to Lorraine; he felt that he must touch her, that

his hand on hers might help her somehow.

At last, deadly weary, he sat down on the stairs by her door to try to think out the problems that to-morrow would bring.

His aunt and uncle had gone on to Paris; Lorraine's father was dead and her home had been turned into a fort. Saint-Lys was heavily occupied by the Germans, and they held the railroad also in their possession. It seemed out of the question to stay in Morteyn with Lorraine, for an assault on the Château was imminent. How could he get her to Paris? That was the only place for her now.

He thought, too, of his own danger from the Uhlans. He had told Lorraine, partly because he wished her to understand their position, partly because the story of his capture, trial, and escape led up to the tragedy that he scarcely knew how to break to her. But he had done it, and she, pale as death, had gone silently to her room, motioning him away as he stood awkwardly at the door.

That last glimpse of the room remained in his mind, it obliterated everything else at moments—Lorraine sitting on her bedside, her blue eyes vacant, her face whiter than the pillows.

And so he sat there on the stairs, the dawn creeping into the hallway; and his eyes never left the panels of her door. There was not a sound from within. This for a while frightened him, and again and again he started impulsively towards the door, only to turn back again and watch there in the coming dawn. Presently he remembered that dawn might bring an attack on the Château, and he rose and hurried down-stairs to the terrace where a crowd of officers stood watching the woods through their night-glasses. The general impression among them was that there might be an attack. They yawned and smoked and studied the woods, but they were polite, and answered all his questions with a courteous light-heartedness that jarred on him. He glanced for a moment at the infantry, now moving across the meadow towards the river; he saw troops standing at ease along the park wall, troops sitting in long ranks in the vegetable garden, troops passing the stables, carrying pickaxes and wheeling wheelbarrows piled with empty canvas sacks.

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Sleepy-eyed boyish soldiers of the artillery were harnessing the battery horses, rubbing them down, bathing wounded limbs or braiding the tails. The farrier was shoeing a great black horse, who turned its gentle eyes towards the hay-bales piled in front of the stable. One or two slim officers, in pale-blue fur-edged pelisses, strolled among the trampled flower-beds, smoking cigars and watching a line of men shovelling earth into canvas sacks. The odour of soup was in the air; the kitchen echoed with the din of pots and pans. Outside, too, the camp-kettles were steaming and the rattle of gammels came across the lawn.

"Who is in command here?" asked Jack, turning to a handsome dragoon officer who stood leaning on his sabre, the horse-hair crinière blowing about his helmet.

"Why, General Farron!" said the officer in surprise.

"Farron!" repeated Jack; "is he back from Africa, here in France—here at Morteyn?"

"He is at the Château de Nesville," said the officer, smiling. "You seem to know him, monsieur."

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"Indeed I do," said Jack, warmly. "Do you think he will come here?"

"I suppose so. Shall I send you word when he arrives?"

Another officer came up, a general, white-haired and sombre.

"Is this the Vicomte de Morteyn?" he asked, looking at Jack.

"His nephew; the vicomte has gone to Paris. My name is Marche," said Jack.

The general saluted him; Jack bowed.

"I regret the military necessity of occupying the Château; the government will indemnify Monsieur le Vicomte—"

Jack held up his hand: "My uncle is an old soldier of France—the government is welcome; I bid you welcome in the name of the Vicomte de Morteyn."

The old general flushed and bowed deeply.

"I thank you in the name of the government. Blood will tell. It is easy, Monsieur Marche, to see that you are the nephew of the Vicomte de Morteyn."

"Monsieur Marche," said the young dragoon officer, respectfully, "is a friend of General Farron."

"I had the honour to be attached as correspondent to his staff—in Oran," said Jack.

The old general held out his hand with a gesture entirely charming.

"I envy General Farron your friendship," he said. "I had a son—perhaps your age. He died—yesterday." After a silence, he said: "There are ladies in the Château?"

"Yes," replied Jack, soberly.

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The general turned with a gesture towards the woods. "It is too late to move them; we are, it appears, fairly well walled in. The cellar, in case of bombardment, is the best you can do for

them. How many are there?"

"Two, general. One is a Sister of Mercy."

Other officers began to gather on the terrace, glasses persistently focussed on the nearer woods. Somebody called to an officer below the terrace to hurry the cannon.

Jack made his way through the throng of officers to the stairs, mounted them, and knocked at Lorraine's door.

"Is it you—Jack?"

"Yes."

"Come."

He went in.

Lorraine lay on the bed, quiet and pale; it startled him to see her so calm. For an instant he hesitated on the threshold, then went slowly to the bedside. She held out one hand; he took it.

"I cannot cry," she said; "I cannot. Sit beside me, Jack. Listen: I am wicked—I have not a single tear for my father. I have been here—so—all night long. I prayed to weep; I cannot. I understand he is dead—that I shall never again wait for him, watch at his door in the turret, dream he is calling me; I understand that he will never call me again—never again—never. And I cannot weep. Do you hate me? I am tired—so tired, like a child—very young."

She raised her other hand and laid it in his. "I need you," she said; "I am too tired, too young, to be so alone. It is myself I suffer for; think, Jack, myself, in such a moment. I am selfish, I know it. Oh, if I could weep now! Why can I not? I loved my father. And now I can only think of his little machines in the turret and his balloon, and—oh!—I only remember the long days of my life when I waited on the turret stairs hoping he would come out, dreaming he would come some day and take me in his arms and kiss me and hold me close, as I am to you. And now he never will. And I waited all my life!"

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"Hush!" he whispered, touching her hair; "you are feverish."

Her head was pressed close to him; his arms held her tightly; she sighed like a restless child.

"Never again—never—for he is dead. And yet I could have lived forever, waiting for him on the turret stairs. Do you understand?"

Holding her strained to his breast he trembled at the fierce hopelessness in her voice. In a moment he recognized that a crisis was coming; that she was utterly irresponsible, utterly beyond reasoning. Like a spectre her loveless childhood had risen and confronted her; and now that there was no longer even hope, she had turned desperately upon herself with the blank despair of a wounded animal. End it all!—that was her one impulse. He felt it already taking shape; she shivered in his arms.

"But there is a God—" he began, fearfully.

She looked up at him with vacant eyes, hot and burning.

He tried again: "I love you, Lorraine—"

Her straight brows knitted and she struggled to free herself.

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"Let me go!" she whispered. "I do not wish to live—I can't!—I can't!"

Then he played his last card, and, holding her close, looked straight into her eyes.

"France needs us all," he said.

She grew quiet. Suddenly the warm blood dyed her cheeks. Then, drop by drop, the tears came; her sweet face, wet and flushed, nestled quietly close to his own face.

"We will both live for that," he said; "we will do what we can."

For an hour she lay sobbing her heart out in his arms; and when she was quiet at last he told her how the land lay trembling under the invasion, how their armies had struggled and dwindled and lost ground, how France, humbled, drenched with blood and tears, still stood upright calling to her children. He spoke of the dead, the dying, the mutilated creatures gasping out their souls in the ditches.

"Life is worth living," he said. "If our place is not in the field with the wounded, not in the hospital, not in the prisons where these boys are herded like diseased cattle, then it is perhaps at the shrine's foot. Pray for France, Lorraine, pray and work, for there is work to do."

"There is work; we will go together," she whispered.

"Yes, together. Perhaps we can help a little. Your father, when he died, had the steel box with him. Lorraine, when he is found and is laid to rest, we will take that box to the French lines. The secret must belong to France!"

She was eager enough now; she sat up on the bed and listened with bright, wet eyes while he

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told her what they two might do for her land of France.

"Dear—dear Jack!" she cried, softly.

But he knew that it was not the love of a maid for a man that parted her lips; it was the love of the land, of her land of Lorraine, that fierce, passionate love of soil that had at last blazed up, purified in the long years of a loveless life. All that she had felt for her father turned to a burning thrill for her country. It is such moments that make children defenders of barricades, that make devils or saints of the innocent. The maid that rode in mail, crowned, holding aloft the banner of the fleur-de-lys, died at the stake; her ashes were the ashes of a saint. The maid who flung her bullets from the barricade, who carried a dagger to the Rue Haxo, who spat in the faces of the line when they shoved her to the wall in the Luxembourg, died too for France. Her soul is the soul of a martyr; but all martyrs are not saints.

For another hour they sat there, planning, devising, eager to begin their predestined work. They spoke of the dead, too, and Lorraine wept at last for her father.

"There was a Sister of Mercy here," she said; "I saw her. I could not speak to her. Later I knew it was Alixe. You called her?"

"Yes."

"Where is she?"

"Shall I speak to her?"

He went out into the hall and tapped at the door of the next room.

"Alixe?"

"Yes—Jack."

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He entered.

Sir Thorald lay very still under the sheets, the crucifix on his breast. At first Jack thought he was dead, but the slight motion of the chest under the sheets reassured him. He turned to Alixe:

"Go for a minute and comfort Lorraine," he whispered. "Go, my child."

"I—I cannot—"

"Go," said Sir Thorald, in a distinct voice.

When she had gone, Jack bent over Sir Thorald. A great pity filled him, and he touched the half-opened hand with his own.

Sir Thorald looked up at him wistfully.

"I am not worth it," he said.

"Yes, we all are worth it."

"I am not," gasped Sir Thorald. "Jack, you are good. Do you believe, at least, that I loved her?"

"Yes, if you say so."

"I do—in the shadow of death."

Jack was silent.

"I never loved—before," said Sir Thorald.

In the stillness that followed Jack tried to comprehend the good or evil in this stricken man. He could not; he only knew that a great love that a man might bear a woman made necessary a great sacrifice if that love were unlawful. The greater the love the more certain the sacrifice—self-sacrifice on the altar of unselfish love, for there is no other kind of love that man may bear for woman.

It wearied Jack to try to think it out. He could not; he only knew that it was not his to judge or to condemn.

"Will you give me your hand?" asked Sir Thorald.

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Jack laid his hand in the other's feverish one.

"Don't call her," he said, distinctly; "I am dying."

Presently he withdrew his hand and turned his face to the wall.

For a long time Jack sat there, waiting. At last he spoke: "Sir Thorald?"

But Sir Thorald had been dead for an hour.

When Alixe entered Jack took her slim, childish hands and looked into her eyes. She understood and went to her dead, laying down her tired little head on the sheeted breast.

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CHAPTER XXII

A DOOR IS LOCKED

Lorraine stood on the terrace beside the brass gatling-gun, both hands holding to Jack's arm, watching the soldiers stuffing the windows of the Château with mattresses, quilts, and bedding of all kinds.

A stream of engineers was issuing from the hallway, carrying tables, chairs, barrels, and chests to the garden below, where other soldiers picked them up and bore them across the lawn to the rear of the house.

"They are piling all the furniture they can get against the gate in the park wall," said Jack; "come out to the kitchen-garden."

She went with him, still holding to his arm. Across the vegetable garden a barricade of furniture—sofas, chairs, and wardrobes—lay piled against the wooden gate of the high stone wall. Engineers were piercing the wall with crowbars and pickaxes, loosening the cement, dragging out huge blocks of stone to make embrasures for three cannon that stood with their limbers among the broken bell-glasses and cucumber-frames in the garden.

A ladder lay against the wall, and on it was perched an officer, who rested his field-glasses across the tiled top and stood studying the woods. Below him a general and half a dozen officers watched the engineers hacking at the wall; a long, double line of infantry crouched behind them, the bugler kneeling, glancing anxiously at his captain, who stood talking to a fat sub-officer in capote and boots. [Pg 239]

Artillerymen were gathered about the ammunition-chests, opening the lids and carrying shell and shrapnel to the wall; the balconies of the Château were piled up with breastworks of rugs, boxes, and sacks of earth. Here and there a rifleman stood, his chassepot resting on the iron railing, his face turned towards the woods.

"They are coming," said a soldier, calling back to a comrade, who only laughed and passed on towards the kitchen, loaded down with sacks of flour.

A restless movement passed through the kneeling battalion of infantry.

"Fiche moi la paix, hein!" muttered a lieutenant, looking resentfully at a gossiping farrier. Another lieutenant drew his sword, and wiped it on the sleeve of his jacket.

"Are they coming?" asked Lorraine.

"I don't know. Watch that officer on the wall. He seems to see nothing yet. Don't you think you had better go to the rear of the house now?"

"No, not unless you do."

"I will, then."

"No, stay here. I am not afraid. Where is Alixe?"

"With the wounded men in the stable. They have hoisted the red cross over the barn; did you notice?"

Before she could answer, one of the soldiers on the balcony of the Château fired. Another rose from behind a mattress and fired also; then half a dozen shots rang out, and the smoke whirled up over the roof of the house. The officer on the ladder was motioning to the group of officers below; already the artillerymen were running the three cannon forward to the port-holes that had been pierced in the park wall. [Pg 240]

"Come," said Jack.

"Not yet—I am not frightened."

A loud explosion enveloped the wall in sulphurous clouds, and a cannon jumped back in recoil. The cannoneers swarmed around it, there was a quick movement of a sponger, an order, a falling into place of rigid artillerymen, then bang! and another up-rush of smoke. And now the other cannon joined in—crash! bang!—and the garden swam in the swirling fog. Infantry, too, were firing all along the wall, and on the other side of the house the rippling crash of the gatling-gun rolled with the rolling volleys. Jack led Lorraine to the rear of the Château, but she refused to stay, and he reluctantly followed her into the house.

From every mattress-stuffed window the red-legged soldiers were firing out across the lawn towards the woods; the smoke drifted back into the house in thin shreds that soon filled the rooms with a blue haze.

Suddenly something struck the chandelier and shattered it to the gilt candle-sockets. Lorraine looked at it, startled, but another bullet whizzed into the room, starring the long mirror, and another knocked the plaster from the fireplace. Jack had her out of the room in a second, and presently they found themselves in the cellar, the very cement beneath their feet shaking under the tremendous shocks of the cannon. [Pg 241]

"Wait for me. Do you promise, Lorraine?"

"Yes."

He hurried up to the terrace again, and out across the gravel drive to the stable.

"Alixé!" he called.

She came quietly to him, her arms full of linen bandages. There was nothing of fear or terror in her cheeks, nothing even of grief now, but her eyes transfigured her face, and he scarcely knew it.

"What can I do?" he asked.

"Nothing. The wounded are quiet. Is there water in the well?"

He brought her half a dozen buckets, one after another, and set them side by side in the harness-room, where three or four surgeons lounged around two kitchen-tables, on which sponges, basins, and cases of instruments lay. There was a sickly odour of ether in the air, mingled with the rank stench of carbolic acid.

"Lorraine is in the cellar. Do you need her? Surely not—when I am ready," he said.

"No; go and stay with her. If I need you I will send."

He could scarcely hear her in the tumult and din, but he understood and nodded, watching her busy with her lint and bandages. As he turned to go, the first of the wounded, a mere boy, was brought in on the shoulders of a comrade. Jack heard him scream as they laid him on the table; then he went soberly away to the cellar where Lorraine sat, her face in her hands.

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"We are holding the Château," he said. "Will you stay quietly for a little while longer, if I go out again?"

"If you wish," she said.

He longed to take her in his arms. He did not; he merely said, "Wait for me," and went away again out into the smoke.

From the upper-story windows, where he had climbed, he could see to the edge of the forest. Already three columns of men had started out from the trees across the meadow towards the park wall. They advanced slowly and steadily, firing as they came on. Somewhere, in the smoke, a Prussian band was playing gayly, and Jack thought of the Bavarians at the Geisberg, and their bands playing as the men fell like leaves in the Château gardens.

He had his field-glasses with him, and he fixed them on the advancing columns. They were Bavarians, after all—there was no mistaking the light-blue uniforms and fur-crested helmets. And now he made out their band, plodding stolidly along, trombones and bass-drums wheezing and banging away in the rifle-smoke; he could even see the band-master swinging his halberd forward.

Suddenly the nearest column broke into a heavy run, cheering hoarsely. The other columns came on with a rush; the band halted, playing them in at the death with a rollicking quickstep; then all was blotted out in the pouring cannon-smoke. Flash on flash the explosions followed each other, lighting the gloom with a wavering yellow glare, and on the terrace the gatling whirred and spluttered its slender streams of flame, while the treble crash of the chassepots roared accompaniment.

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Once or twice Jack thought he heard the rattle of their little harsh, flat drums, but he could see them no longer; they were in that smoke-pall somewhere, coming on towards the park wall.

Bugles began to sound—French bugles—clear and sonorous. Across the lawn by the river a battalion of French infantry were running, firing as they ran. He saw them settle at last like quail among the stubble, curling up and crouching in groups and bevvies, alert heads raised. Then the firing rippled along the front, and the lawn became gray with smoke.

As he went down the stairs and into the garden he heard the soldiers saying that the charge had been checked. The wounded were being borne towards the barn, long lines of them, heads and limbs hanging limp. A horse in the garden was ending a death-struggle among the cucumber-frames, and the battery-men were cutting the traces to give him free play. Upon the roof a thin column of smoke and sparks rose, where a Prussian shell—the first as yet—had fallen and exploded in the garret. Some soldiers were knocking the sparks from the roof with the butts of their rifles.

When he went into the cellar again Lorraine was pacing restlessly along the wine-bins.

"I cannot stay here," she said. "Jack, get some bottles of brandy and come to the barn. The wounded will need them."

"You cannot go out. I will take them."

"No, I shall go."

"I ask you not to."

"Let me, Jack," she said, coming up to him—"with you."

He could not make her listen; she went with him, her slender arms loaded with bottles. The shells were falling in the garden now; one burst and flung a shower of earth and glass over them.

"Hurry!" he said. "Are you crazy, Lorraine, to come out into this?"

"Don't scold, Jack," she whispered.

When she entered the stable he breathed more freely. He watched her face narrowly, but she did not blanch at the sickening spectacle of the surgeons' tables.

They placed their bottles of brandy along the side of a box-stall, and stood together watching the file of wounded passing in at the door.

"They do not need us here, yet," he said. "I wonder where Alixe is?"

"There is a Sister of Mercy out on the skirmish-line across the lawn," said a soldier of the hospital corps, pointing with bloody hands towards the smoke-veiled river.

Jack looked at Lorraine in utter despair.

"I must go; she can't stay there," he muttered.

"Yes, you must go," repeated Lorraine. "She will be shot."

"Will you wait here?" he asked.

"Yes."

So he went away, thinking bitterly that she did not care whether he lived or died—that she let him leave her without a word of fear, of kindness. Then, for the first time, he realized that she had never, after all, been touched by his devotion; that she had never understood, nor cared to understand, his love for her. He walked out across the smoky lawn, the din of the rifles in his ears, the bitterness of death in his heart. He knew he was going into danger—that he was already in peril. Bullets whistled through the smoke as he advanced towards the firing-line, where, in the fog, dim figures were outlined here and there. He passed an officer, standing with bared sword, watching his men digging up the sod and piling it into low breastworks. He went on, passing others, sometimes two soldiers bearing a wounded man, now and then a maimed creature writhing on the grass or hobbling away to the rear. The battle-line lay close to him now—long open ranks of men, flat on their stomachs, firing into the smoke across the river-bank. Their officers loomed up in the gloom, some leaning quietly back on their sword-hilts, some pacing to and fro, smoking, or watchfully steadying the wearied men.

Almost at once he saw Alixe. She was standing beside a tall wounded officer, giving him something to drink from a tin cup.

"Alixe," said Jack, "this is not your place."

She looked at him tranquilly as the wounded man was led away by a soldier of the hospital corps.

"It is my place."

"No," he said, violently, "you are trying to find death here!"

"I seek nothing," she said, in a gentle, tired voice; "let me go."

"Come back. Alixe—your brother is alive."

She looked at him impassively.

"My brother?"

"Yes."

"I have no brother."

He understood and chafed inwardly.

"Come, Alixe," he urged; "for Heaven's sake, try to live and forget—"

"I have nothing to forget—everything to remember. Let me pass." She touched the blood-stained cross on her breast. "Do you not see? That was white once. So was my soul."

"It is now," he said, gently. "Come back."

A wounded man somewhere in the smoke called, "Water! water! In the name of God!—my sister —"

"I am coming!" called Alixe, clearly.

"To me first! Hasten, my sister!" groaned another.

"Patience, children—I come!" called Alixe.

With a gesture she passed Jack; a flurry of smoke hid her. The pungent powder-fog made his eyes dim; his ears seemed to split with the terrific volley firing.

He turned away and went back across the lawn, only to stop at the well in the garden, fill two buckets, and plod back to the firing-line again. He found plenty to do there; he helped Alixe, following her with his buckets where she passed among the wounded, the stained cross on her breast. Once a bullet struck a pail full of water, and he held his finger in the hole until the water was all used up. Twice he heard cheering and the splash of cavalry in the shallow river, but they seemed to be beaten off again, and he went about his business, listless, sombre, a dead weight at his heart.

He had been kneeling beside a wounded man for some minutes when he became conscious that the firing had almost ceased. Bugles were sounding near the Château; long files of troops passed him in the lifting smoke; officers shouted along the river-bank.

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He rose to his feet and looked around for Alixe. She was not in sight. He walked towards the river-bank, watching for her, but he could not find her.

"Did you see a Sister of Mercy pass this way?" he asked an officer who sat on the grass, smoking and bandaging his foot.

A soldier passing, using his rifle as a crutch, said: "I saw a Sister of Mercy. She went towards the Château. I think she was hurt."

"Hurt!"

"I heard somebody say so." Jack turned and hastened towards the stables. He crossed the lawn, threaded his way among the low sod breastworks, where the infantry lay grimy and exhausted, and entered the garden. She was not there. He hurried to the stables; Lorraine met him, holding a basin and a sponge.

"Where is Alixe?" he asked.

"She is not here," said Lorraine. "Has she been hurt?"

"I don't know."

He looked at her a moment, then turned away, coldly. On the terrace the artillerymen were sponging the blood from the breech of their gatling where some wretch's brains had been splattered by a shell-fragment. They told him that a Sister of Mercy had passed into the house ten minutes before; that she walked as though very tired, but did not appear to have been hurt.

"She is up-stairs," he thought. "She must not stay there alone with Sir Thorald." And he climbed the stairs and knocked softly at the door of the death-chamber.

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"Alixe," he said, gently, opening the door, "you must not stay here."

She was kneeling at the bedside, her face buried on the breast of the dead man.

"Alixe," he said, but his voice broke in spite of him, and he went to her and touched her.

Very tenderly he raised her head, looked into her eyes, then quietly turned away.

Outside the door he met Lorraine.

"Don't go in," he murmured.

She looked fearfully up into his face.

"Yes," he said, "she was shot through the body."

Then he closed the door and turned the key on the outside, leaving the dead to the dead.

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CHAPTER XXIII

LORRAINE SLEEPS

The next day the rain fell in torrents; long, yellow streams of water gushed from pipe and culvert, turning the roads to lakes of amber and the trodden lawns to sargasso seas.

Not a shot had been fired since twilight of the day before, although on the distant hills Uhlans were seen racing about, gathering in groups, or sitting on their horses in solitary observation of the Château.

Out on the meadows, between the park wall and the fringe of nearer forest, the Bavarian dead lay, dotting the green pelouse with blots of pale blue; the wounded had been removed to the cover of the woods.

Around the Château the sallow-faced fantassins slopped through the mire, the artillery trains lay glistening under their waterproof coverings, the long, slim cannon in the breeches dripped with rain. Bright blotches of rust, like brilliant fungi, grew and spread from muzzle to vent. These were rubbed away at times by stiff-limbed soldiers, swathed to the eyes in blue overcoats.

The line of battle stretched from the Château Morteyn, parallel with the river and the park wall, to the Château de Nesville; and along this line the officers were riding all day, muffled to the chin in their great-coats, crimson caps soaked, rain-drops gathering in brilliant beads under the

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polished visors. That they expected a shelling was evident, for the engineers were at work excavating pits and burrows, and the infantry were filling sacks with earth, while in the Château itself preparations were in progress for the fighting of fire.

The white flag with the red-cross centre hung limp and drenched over the stables and barns. In the corn-field beyond, long trenches were being dug for the dead. Already two such trenches had been filled and covered over with dirt; and at the head of each soldier's grave a bayonet or sabre was driven into the ground for a head-stone.

Early that morning, while the rain drove into the ground in one sheeted downpour, they buried Sir Thorald and little Alixe, side by side, on the summit of a mound overlooking the river Lisse. Jack drove the tumbrel; four soldiers of the line followed. It was soon over; the mellow bugle sounded a brief "lights out," the linesmen presented arms. Then Jack mounted the cart and drove back, his head on his breast, the rain driving coldly in his face. Some officers came later with a rough wooden cross and a few field flowers. They hammered the cross deep into the mud between Sir Thorald and little Alixe. Later still Jack returned with a spade and worked for an hour, shaping the twin mounds. Before he finished he saw Lorraine climbing the hill. Two wreaths of yellow gorse hung from one arm, interlaced like thorn crowns; and when she came up, Jack, leaning silently on his spade, saw that her fair hands were cut and bleeding from plaiting the thorn-covered blossoms.

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They spoke briefly, almost coldly. Lorraine hung the two wreaths over the head-piece of the cross and, kneeling, signed herself.

When she rose Jack replaced his cap, but said nothing. They stood side by side, looking out across the woods, where, behind a curtain of mist and rain, the single turret of the Château de Nesville was hidden.

She seemed restless and preoccupied, and he, answering aloud her unasked question, said, "I am going to search the forest to-day. I cannot bear to leave you, but it must be done, for your sake and for the sake of France."

She answered: "Yes, it must be done. I shall go with you."

"You cannot," he said; "there is danger in the forest."

"You are going?"

"Yes."

They said nothing more for a moment or two. He was thinking of Alixe and her love for Sir Thorald. Who would have thought it could have turned out so? He looked down at the river Lisse, where, under the trees of the bank, they had all sat that day—a day that already seemed legendary, so far, so far in the mist-hung landscape of the past. He seemed to hear Molly Hesketh's voice, soft, ironical, upbraiding Sir Thorald; he seemed to see them all there in the sunshine—Dorothy, Rickerl, Cecil, Betty Castlemaine—he even saw himself strolling up to them, gun under arm, while Sir Thorald waved his wine-cup and bantered him.

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He looked at the river. The green row-boat lay on the bank, keel up, shattered by a shell; the trees were covered with yellow, seared foliage that dropped continually into the water; the river itself was a canal of mud. And, as he looked, a dead man, face under water, sped past, caught on something, drifted, spun giddily in an eddy, washed to and fro, then floated on under the trees.

"You will catch cold here in the rain," he said, abruptly.

"You also, Jack."

They walked a few steps towards the house, then stopped and looked at each other.

"You are drenched," he said; "you must go to your room and lie down."

"I will—if you wish," she answered.

He drew her rain-cloak around her, buttoned the cape and high collar, and settled the hood on her head. She looked up under her pointed hood.

"Do you care so much for me?" she asked, listlessly.

"Will you give me the right—always—forever?"

"Do you mean that—that you love me?"

"I have always loved you."

Still she looked up at him from the shadow of her hood.

"I love you, Lorraine."

One arm was around her now, and with the other hand he held both of hers.

She spoke, her eyes on his.

"I loved you once. I did not know it then. It was the first night there on the terrace—when they were dancing. I loved you again—after our quarrel, when you found me by the river. Again I loved

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you, when we were alone in the Château and you came to see me in the library."

He drew her to him, but she resisted.

"Now it is different," she said. "I do not love you—like that. I do not know what I feel; I do not care for that—for that love. I need something warmer, stronger, more kindly—something I never have had. My childhood is gone, Jack, and yet I am tortured with the craving for it; I want to be little again—I want to play with children—with young girls; I want to be tired with pleasure and go to bed with a mother bending over me. It is that—it is that that I need, Jack—a mother to hold me as you do. Oh, if you knew—if you knew! Beside my bed I feel about in the dark, half asleep, reaching out for the mother I never knew—the mother I need. I picture her; she is like my father, only she is always with me. I lie back and close my eyes and try to think that she is there in the dark—close—close. Her cheeks and hands are warm; I can never see her eyes, but I know they are like mine. I know, too, that she has always been with me—from the years that I have forgotten—always with me, watching me that I come to no harm—always for me, worrying because my head is hot or my hands cold. In my half-sleep I tell her things—little intimate things that she must know. We talk of everything—of papa, of the house, of my pony, of the woods and the Lisse. With her I have spoken of you often, Jack. And now all is said; I am glad you let me tell you, Jack. I can never love you like—like that, but I need you, and you will be near me, always, won't you? I need your love. Be gentle, be firm in little things. Let me come to you and fret. You are all I have."

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The intense grief in her face, the wide, childish eyes, the cold little hands tightening in his, all these touched the manhood in him, and he answered manfully, putting away from himself all that was weak or selfish, all that touched on love of man for woman:

"Let me be all you ask," he said. "My love is of that kind, also."

"My darling Jack," she murmured, putting both arms around his neck.

He kissed her peacefully.

"Come," he said. "Your shoes are soaking. I am going to take charge of you now."

When they entered the house he took her straight to her room, drew up an arm-chair, lighted the fire, filled a foot-bath with hot water, and, calmly opening the wardrobe, pulled out a warm bath-robe. Then, without the slightest hesitation, he knelt and unbuttoned her shoes.

"Now," he said, "I'll be back in five minutes. Let me find you sitting here, with your feet in that hot water."

Before she could answer, he went out. A thrill of comfort passed through her; she drew the wet stockings over her feet, shivered, slipped out of skirt and waist, put on the warm, soft bath-robe, and, sinking back in the chair, placed both little white feet in the foot-bath.

"I am ready, Jack," she called, softly.

He came in with a tray of tea and toast and a bit of cold chicken. She followed his movement with tired, shy eyes, wondering at his knowledge of little things. They ate their luncheon together by the fire. Twice he gravely refilled the foot-bath with hotter water, and she settled back in her soft, warm chair, sighing contentment.

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After a while he lighted a cigarette and read to her—fairy tales from Perrault—legends that all children know—all children who have known mothers. Lorraine did not know them. At first she frowned a little, watching him dubiously, but little by little the music of the words and the fragrance of the sweet, vague tales crept into her heart, and she listened breathless to the stories, older than Egypt—stories that will outlast the last pyramid.

Once he laid down his book and told her of the Prince of Argolis and Æthra; of the sandals and sword, of Medea, and of the wreathed wine-cup. He told her, too, of the Isantee, and the legends of the gray gull, of Harpan and Chaské, and the white lodge of hope.

She listened like a tired child, her wrist curved under her chin, the bath-robe close to her throat. While she listened she moved her feet gently in the hot water, nestling back with the thrill of the warmth that mounted to her cheeks.

Then they were silent, their eyes on each other.

Down-stairs some rain-soaked officer was playing on the piano old songs of Lorraine and Alsace. He tried to sing, too, but his voice broke, whether from emotion or hoarseness they could not tell. A moment or two later a dripping infantry band marched out to the conservatory and began to play. The dismal trombone vibrated like a fog-horn, the wet drums buzzed and clattered, the trumpets wailed with the rising wind in the chimneys. They played for an hour, then stopped abruptly in the middle of "Partons pour la Syrie," and Jack and Lorraine heard them trampling away—slop, slop—across the gravel drive.

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The fire in the room made the air heavy, and he raised one window a little way, but the wet wind was rank with the odour of disinfectants and ether from the stable hospital, and he closed the window after a moment.

"I spent all the morning with the wounded," said Lorraine, from the depths of her chair. The child-like light in her eyes had gone; nothing but woman's sorrow remained in their gray-blue

depths.

Jack rose, picked up a big soft towel, and, deliberately lifting one of her feet from the water, rubbed it until it turned rosy. Then he rubbed the other, wrapped the bath-robe tightly about her, lifted her in his arms, threw back the bed-covers, and laid her there snug and warm.

"Sleep," he said.

She held up both arms with a divine smile.

"Stay with me until I sleep," she murmured drowsily. Her eyes closed; one hand sought his.

After a while she fell asleep.

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CHAPTER XXIV

LORRAINE AWAKES

When Lorraine had been asleep for an hour, Jack stole from the room and sought the old general who was in command of the park. He found him on the terrace, smoking and watching the woods through his field-glasses.

"Monsieur," said Jack, "my ward, Mademoiselle de Nesville, is asleep in her chamber. I must go to the forest yonder and try to find her father's body. I dare not leave her alone unless I may confide her to you."

"My son," said the old man, "I accept the charge. Can you give me the next room?"

"The next room is where our little Sister of Mercy died."

"I have journeyed far with death—I am at home in death's chamber," said the old general. He followed Jack to the death-room, accompanied by his aide-de-camp.

"It will do," he said. Then, turning to an aid, "Place a sentry at the next door. When the lady awakes, call me."

"Thank you," said Jack. He lingered a moment and then continued: "If I am shot in the woods—if I don't return—General Chanzy will take charge of Mademoiselle de Nesville, for my uncle's sake. They are sword-brothers."

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"I accept the responsibility," said the old general, gravely.

They bowed to each other, and Jack went out and down the stairs to the lawn. For a moment he looked up into the sky, trying to remember where the balloon might have been when Von Steyr's explosive bullet set it on fire. Then he trudged on into the wood-road, buckling his revolver-case under his arm and adjusting the cross-strap of his field-glasses.

Once in the forest he breathed more freely. There was an odour of rotting leaves in the wet air; the branches quivered and dripped, and the tree-trunks, moist and black, exhaled a rank aroma of lichens and rain-soaked moss.

Along the park wall, across the Lisse, sentinels stood in the rain, peering out of their caped overcoats or rambling along the river-bank. A spiritless challenge or two halted him for a few moments, but he gave the word and passed on. Once or twice squads met him and passed with the relief, sick boyish soldiers, crusted with mud. Twice he met groups of roving, restless-eyed franc-tireurs in straight caps and sheepskin jackets, but they did not molest him nor even question him beyond asking the time of day.

And now he passed the carrefour where he and Lorraine had first met. Its only tenant was a sentinel, yellow with jaundice, who seized his chassépot with shaking hands and called a shrill "Qui Vive?"

From the carrefour Jack turned to the left straight into the heart of the forest. He risked losing his way; he risked more than that, too, for a shot from sentry or franc-tireur was not improbable, and, more-over, nobody knew whether Uhlans were in the woods or not.

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As he advanced the forest growth became thicker; underbrush, long uncut, rose higher than his head. Over logs and brush tangles he pressed, down into soft, boggy gullies deep with dead leaves, across rapid, dark brooks, threads of the river Lisse, over stony ledges, stumps, windfalls, and on towards the break in the trees from which, on clear days, one could see the turret-spire of the Château de Nesville. When he reached this point he looked in vain for the turret; the rain hid it. Still, he could judge fairly well in which direction it lay, and he knew that the distance was half a mile.

"The balloon dropped near here," he muttered, and started in a circle, taking a gigantic beech-tree as the centre mark. Gradually he widened his circuit, stumbling on over the slippery leaves, keeping a wary eye out for the thing on the ground that he sought.

He had seen no game in the forest, and wondered a little. Once or twice he fancied that he heard some animal moving near, but when he listened all was quiet, save for the hoarse calling of a raven in some near tree. Suddenly he saw the raven, and at the same moment it rose, croaking

the alarm. Up through a near thicket floundered a cloud of black birds, flapping their wings. They were ravens, too, all croaking and flapping through the rain-soaked branches, mounting higher, higher, only to wheel and sail and swoop in circles, round and round in the gray sky above his head. He shivered and hesitated, knowing that the dead lay there in the thicket. And he was right; but when he saw the thing he covered his eyes with both hands and his heart rose in his throat. At last he stepped forward and looked into the vacant eye-sockets of a skull from which shreds of a long beard still hung, wet and straggling.

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It lay under the washed-out roots of a fir-tree, the bare ribs staring through the torn clothing, the fleshless hands clasped about a steel box.

How he brought himself to get the box from that cage of bones he never knew. At last he had it, and stepped back, the sweat starting from every pore. But his work was not finished. What the ravens and wolves had left of the thing he pushed with sticks into a hollow, and painfully covered it with forest mould. Over this he pulled great lumps of muddy clay, trampling them down firmly, until at last the dead lay underground and a heap of stones marked the sepulchre.

The ravens had alighted in the tree-tops around the spot, watching him gravely, croaking and sidling away when he moved with abruptness. Looking up into the tree-tops he saw some shreds of stuff clinging to the branches, perhaps tatters from the balloon or the dead man's clothing. Near him on the ground lay a charred heap that was once the wicker car of the balloon. This he scattered with a stick, laid a covering of green moss on the mound, placed two sticks crosswise at the head, took off his cap, then went his way, the steel box buttoned securely in his breast. As he walked on through the forest, a wolf fled from the darkening undergrowth, hesitated, turned, cringing half boldly, half sullenly, watching him with changeless, incandescent eyes.

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Darkness was creeping into the forest when he came out on the wood-road. He had a mile and a half before him without lantern or starlight, and he hastened forward through the mire, which seemed to pull him back at every step. It astonished him that he received no challenge in the twilight; he peered across the river, but saw no sentinels moving. The stillness was profound, save for the drizzle of the rain and the drip from the wet branches. He had been walking for a minute or two, trying to keep his path in the thickening twilight, when, far in the depths of the mist, a cannon thundered. Almost at once he heard the whistling quaver of a shell, high in the sky. Nearer and nearer it came, the woods hummed with the shrill vibration; then it passed, screeching; there came a swift glare in the sky, a sharp report, and the steel fragments hurtled through the naked trees.

He was running now; he knew the Prussian guns had opened on the Château again, and the thought of Lorraine in the tempest of iron terrified him. And now the shells were streaming into the woods, falling like burning stars from the heavens, bursting over the tree-tops; the racket of tearing, splintering limbs was in his ears, the dull shock of a shell exploding in the mud, the splash of fragments in the river. Behind him a red flare, ever growing, wavering, bursting into crimson radiance, told him that the Château de Nesville was ablaze. The black, trembling shadows cast by the trees grew blacker and steadier in the fiery light; the muddy road sprang into view under his feet; the river ran vermilion. Another light grew in the southern sky, faint yet, but growing surely. He ran swiftly, spurred and lashed by fear, for this time it was the Château Morteyn that sent a column of sparks above the trees, higher, higher, under a pall of reddening smoke.

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At last he stumbled into the garden, where a mass of plunging horses tugged and strained at their harnessed guns and caissons. Muddy soldiers put their ragged shoulders to the gun-wheels and pushed; teamsters cursed and lashed their horses; officers rode through the throng, shouting. A squad of infantry began a fusillade from the wall; other squads fired from the lawn, where the rear of a long column in retreat stretched across the gardens and out into the road.

As Jack ran up the terrace steps the gatling began to whirl like a watchman's rattle; needle-pointed flames pricked the darkness from hedge and wall, where a dark line swayed to and fro under the smoke.

Up the stairs he sped, and flung open the door of the bedroom. Lorraine stood in the middle of the room, looking out into the darkness. She turned at the sound of the opening door:

"Jack!"

"Hurry!" he gasped; "this time they mean business. Where is your sentinel? Where is the general? Hurry, my child—dress quickly!"

He went out to the hall again, and looked up and down. On the floor below he heard somebody say that the general was dead, and he hurried down among a knot of officers who were clustered at the windows, night-glasses levelled on the forest. As he entered the room a lieutenant fell dead and a shower of bullets struck the coping outside.

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He hastened away up-stairs again. Lorraine, in cloak and hat, met him at the door.

"Keep away from all windows," he said. "Are you ready?"

She placed her arm in his, and he led her down the stairs to the rear of the Château.

"Have they gone—our soldiers?" faltered Lorraine. "Is it defeat? Jack, answer me!"

"They are holding the Château to protect the retreat, I think. Hark! The gatling is roaring like a furnace! What has happened?"

"I don't know. The old general came to speak to me when I awoke. He was very good and kind. Then suddenly the sentinel on the stairs fell down and we ran out. He was dead; a bullet had entered from the window at the end of the hall. After that I went into my room to dress, and the general hurried down-stairs, telling me to wait until he called for me. He did not come back; the firing began, and some shells hit the house. All the troops in the garden began to leave, and I did not know what to do, so I waited for you."

Jack glanced right and left. The artillery were leaving by the stable road; from every side the infantry streamed past across the lawn, running when they came to the garden, where a shower of bullets fell among the shrubbery. A captain hastening towards the terrace looked at them in surprise.

"What is it?" cried Jack. "Can't you hold the Château?"

"The other Château has been carried," said the captain. "They are taking us on the left flank. Madame," he added, "should go at once; this place will be untenable in a few moments."

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Lorraine spoke breathlessly: "Are you to hold the Château with the gatling until the army is safe?"

"Yes, madame," said the captain. "We are obliged to."

There came a sudden lull in the firing. Lorraine caught Jack's arm.

"Come," cried Jack, "we've got to go now!"

"I shall stay!" she said; "I know my work is here!"

The German rifle-flames began to sparkle and flicker along the river-bank; a bullet rang out against the granite façade behind them.

"Come!" he cried, sharply, but she slipped from him and ran towards the house.

Drums were beating somewhere in the distant forest—shrill, treble drums—and from every hill-side the hollow, harsh Prussian trumpets spoke. Then came a sound, deep, menacing—a far cry:

"Hourra! Preussen!"

"Why don't you cheer?" faltered Lorraine, mounting the terrace. The artillerymen looked at her in surprise. Jack caught her arm; she shook him off impatiently.

"Cheer!" she cried again. "Is France dumb?" She raised her hand.

"Vive la France!" shouted the artillerymen, catching her ardour. "Vive la Patrie! Vive Lorraine!"

Again the short, barking, Prussian cheer sounded, and again the artillerymen answered it, cheer on cheer, for France, for the Land, for the Province of Lorraine. Up in the windows of the Château the line soldiers were cheering, too; the engineers on the roof, stamping out the sparks and flames, swung their caps and echoed the shouts from terrace and window.

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In the sudden silence that followed they caught the vibration of hundreds of hoofs—there came a rush, a shout:

"Hourra! Preussen! Hourra! Hourra!" and into the lawn dashed the German cavalry, banging away with carbine and revolver. At the same moment, over the park walls swarmed the Bavarians in a forest of bayonets. The Château vomited flame from every window; the gatling, pulled back into the front door, roared out in a hundred streaks of fire. Jack dragged Lorraine to the first floor; she was terribly excited. Almost at once she knelt down and began to load rifles, passing them to Jack, who passed them to the soldiers at the windows. Once, when a whole window was torn in and the mattress on fire, she quenched the flames with water from her pitcher; and when the soldiers hesitated at the breach, she started herself, but Jack held her back and led the cheering, and piled more mattresses into the shattered window.

Below in the garden the Bavarians were running around the house, hammering with rifle-butts at the closed shutters, crouching, dodging from stable to garden, perfectly possessed to get into the house. Their officers bellowed orders and shook their sabres in the very teeth of the rifle blast; the cavalry capered and galloped, and flew from thicket to thicket.

Suddenly they all gave way; the garden and lawns were emptied save for the writhing wounded and motionless dead.

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"Cheer!" gasped Lorraine; and the battered Château rang again with frenzied cries of triumph.

The wounded were calling for water, and Jack and Lorraine brought it in bowls. Here and there the bedding and wood-work had caught fire, but the line soldiers knocked it out with their rifle-butts. Whenever Lorraine entered a room they cheered her—the young officers waved their caps, even a dying bugler raised himself and feebly sounded the salute to the colours.

By the light of the candles Jack noticed for the first time that Lorraine wore the dress of the Province—that costume that he had first seen her in—the scarlet skirt, the velvet bodice, the

chains of silver. And as she stood loading the rifles in the smoke-choked room, the soldiers saw more than that: they saw the Province itself in battle there—the Province of Lorraine. And they cheered and leaped to the windows, firing frenziedly, crying the old battle-cry of Lorraine: "Tiens ta Foy! Frappe! Pour le Roy!" while the child in the bodice and scarlet skirt stood up straight and snapped back the locks of the loaded chassespots, one by one.

"Once again! For France!" cried Lorraine, as the clamour of the Prussian drums broke out on the hill-side, and the hoarse trumpets signalled from wood to wood.

A thundering cry arose from the Château:

"France!"

The sullen boom of a Prussian cannon drowned it; the house shook with the impact of a shell, bursting in fury on the terrace.

White faces turned to faces whiter still.

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"Cannon!"

"Hold on! For France!" cried Lorraine, feverishly.

"Cannon!" echoed the voices, one to another.

Again the solid walls shook with the shock of a solid shot.

Jack stuffed the steel box into his breast and turned to Lorraine.

"It is ended, we cannot stay—" he began; but at that instant something struck him a violent blow on the chest, and he fell, striking the floor with his head.

In a second Lorraine was at his side, lifting him with all the strength of her arms, calling to him: "Jack! Jack! Jack!"

The soldiers were leaving the windows now; the house rocked and tottered under the blows of shell and solid shot. Down-stairs an officer cried: "Save yourselves!" There was a hurry of feet through the halls and on the stairs. A young soldier touched Lorraine timidly on the shoulder.

"Give him to me; I will carry him down," he said.

She clung to Jack and turned a blank gaze on the soldier.

"Give him to me," he repeated; "the house is burning." But she would not move nor relinquish her hold. Then the soldier seized Jack and threw him over his shoulder, running swiftly down the stairs, that rocked under his feet. Lorraine cried out and followed him into the darkness, where the crashing of tiles and thunder of the exploding shells dazed and stunned her; but the soldier ran on across the garden, calling to her, and she followed, stumbling to his side.

"To the trees—yonder—the forest—" he gasped.

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They were already among the trees. Then Lorraine seized the man by the arm, her eyes wide with despair.

"Give me my dead!" she panted. "He is mine! mine! mine!"

"He is not dead," faltered the soldier, laying Jack down against a tree. But she only crouched and took him in her arms, eyes closed, and lips for the first time crushed to his.

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CHAPTER XXV

PRINCESS IMPERIAL

The glare from the Château Morteyn, now wrapped in torrents of curling flame, threw long crimson shafts of light far into the forest. The sombre trees glimmered like live cinders; the wet moss crisped and bronzed as the red radiance played through the thickets. The bright, wavering fire-glow fell full on Jack's body; his face was hidden in the shadow of Lorraine's hair.

Twice the timid young soldier drew her away, but she crept back, murmuring Jack's name; and at last the soldier seized the body in both arms and stumbled on again, calling Lorraine to follow.

Little by little the illumination faded out among the trees; the black woods crowded in on every side; the noise of the crackling flames, the shouting, the brazen rattle of drums grew fainter and fainter, and finally died out in the soft, thick blackness of the forest.

When they halted the young soldier placed Jack on the moss, then held out his hands. Lorraine touched them. He guided her to the prostrate figure; she flung herself face down beside it.

After a moment the soldier touched her again timidly on the shoulder:

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"Have I done well?"

She sobbed her thanks, rising to her knees. The soldier, a boy of eighteen, straightened up; he noiselessly laid his knapsack and haversack on the ground, trembled, swayed, and sat down,

muttering vaguely of God and the honour of France. Presently he went away, lurching in the darkness like a drunken man—on, on, deep into the forest, where nothing of light or sound penetrated. And when he could no longer stand he sat down, his young head in his hands, and waited. His body had been shot through and through. About midnight he died.

When Jack came to his senses the gray mystery of dawn was passing through the silent forest aisles; the beeches, pallid, stark, loomed motionless on every side; the pale veil of sky-fog hung festooned from tree to tree. There was a sense of breathless waiting in the shadowy woods—no sound, no stir, nothing of life or palpitation—nothing but foreboding.

Jack crawled to his knees; his chest ached, his mouth cracked with a terrible throbbing thirst. Dazed as yet, he did not even look around; he did not try to think; but that weight on his chest grew to a burning agony, and he tore at his coat and threw it open. The flat steel box, pierced by a bullet, fell on the ground before his knees. Then he remembered. He ripped open waistcoat and shirt and stared at his bare breast. It was discoloured—a mass of bruises, but there was no blood there. He looked listlessly at the box on the leaves under him, and touched his bruised body. Suddenly his mind grew clearer; he stumbled up, steadying himself against a tree. His lips moved "Lorraine!" but no sound came. Again, in terror, he tried to cry out. He could not speak. Then he saw her. She lay among the dead leaves, face downward in the moss.

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When at last he understood that she was alive he lay down beside her, one arm across her body, and sank into a profound sleep.

She woke first. A burning thirst set her weeping in her sleep and then roused her. Tear-stained and ghastly pale, she leaned over the sleeping man beside her, listened to his breathing, touched his hair, then rose and looked fearfully about her. On the knapsack under the tree a tin cup was shining. She took it and crept down into a gulley, where, through the deep layers of dead leaves, water sparkled in a string of tiny iridescent puddles. The water, however, was sweet and cold, and, when she had satisfied her thirst and had dug into the black loam with the edge of the cup, more water, sparkling and pure, gushed up and spread out in the miniature basin. She waited for the mud and leaves to settle, and when the basin was clear she unbound her hair, loosened her bodice, and slipped it off. When she had rolled the wide, full sleeves of her chemise to the shoulder she bathed her face and breast and arms; they glistened like marble tinged with rose in the pale forest dawn. The little scrupulous ablutions finished, she dried her face on the fine cambric of the under-sleeve, she dried her little ears, her brightening eyes, the pink palms of her hand, and every polished finger separately from the delicate flushed tip to the wrist, blue-veined and slender. She shook out her heavy hair, heavy and gleaming with burnished threads, and bound it tighter. She mended the broken points of her bodice, then laced it firmly till it pressed and warmed her fragrant breast. Then she rose.

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There was nothing of fear or sorrow in her splendid eyes; her mouth was moist and scarlet, her curved cheeks pure as a child's.

For a moment she stood pensive, her face now grave, now sensitive, now touched with that mysterious exaltation that glows through the histories of the saints, that shines from tapestries, that hides in the dim faces carved on shrines.

For the world was trembling and the land cried out under the scourge, and she was ready now for what must be. The land would call her where she was awaited; the time, the hour, the place had been decreed. She was ready—and where was the bitterness of death, when she could face it with the man she loved.

Loved? At the thought her knees trembled under her with the weight of this love; faint with its mystery and sweetness, her soul turned in its innocence to God. And for the first time in her child's life she understood that God lived.

She understood now that the sadness of life was gone forever. There was no loneliness now for soul or heart; nothing to fear, nothing to regret. Her life was complete. Death seemed an incident. If it came to her or to the man she loved, they would wait for one another a little while—that was all.

A pale sunbeam stole across the tree-tops. She looked up. A little bird sang, head tilted towards the blue. She moved softly up the slope, her hair glistening in the early sun, her blue eyes dreaming; and when she came to the sleeping man she bent beside him and held a cup of sweet water to his lips.

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About noon they spoke of hunger, timidly, lest either might think the other complained. Her head close against his, her warm arms tight around his neck, she told him of the boy soldier, the dreadful journey in the night, the terror, and the awakening. She told him of the birth of her love for him—how death no longer was to be feared or sought. She told him there was nothing to alarm him, nothing to make them despair. Sin could not touch them; death was God's own gift.

He listened, too happy to even try to understand. Perhaps he could not, being only a young man in love. But he knew that all she said must be true, perhaps too true for him to comprehend. He was satisfied; his life was complete. Something of the contentment of a school-boy exhausted with play lingered in his eyes.

They had spoken of the box; she had taken it reverently in her hands and touched the broken key, snapped off short in the lock. Inside, the Prussian bullet rattled as she turned the box over and

over, her eyes dim with love for the man who had done all for her.

Jack found a loaf of bread in the knapsack. It was hard and dry, but they soaked it in the leaf-covered spring and ate it deliciously, cheek against cheek.

Little by little their plans took shape. They were to go—Heaven knows how!—to find the Emperor. Into his hands they would give the box with its secrets, then turn again, always together, ready for their work, wherever it might be.

Towards mid-afternoon Lorraine grew drowsy. There was a summer warmth in the air; the little forest birds came to the spring and preened their feathers in the pale sunshine. Two cicadas, high in the tree-tops, droned an endless harmony; hemlock cones dropped at intervals on the dead leaves. [Pg 274]

When Lorraine lay asleep, her curly head on Jack's folded coat, her hands clasped under her cheek, Jack leaned back against the tree and picked up the box. He turned it softly, so that the bullet within should not rattle. After a moment he opened his penknife and touched the broken fragment of the key in the lock. Idly turning the knife-blade this way and that, but noiselessly, for fear of troubling Lorraine, he thought of the past, the present, and the future. Sir Thorald lay dead on the hillock above the river Lisse; Alixe slept beside him; Rickerl was somewhere in the country, riding with his Uhlan scourges; Molly Hesketh waited in Paris for her dead husband; the Marquis de Nesville's bones were lying in the forest where he now sat, watching the sleeping child of the dead man. His child? Jack looked at her tenderly. No, not the child of the Marquis de Nesville, but a foundling, a lost waif in the Lorraine Hills, perhaps a child of chance. What of it? She would never know. The Château de Nesville was a smouldering mass of fire; the lands could revert to the country; she should never again need them, never again see them, for he would take her to his own land when trouble of war had passed, and there she should forget pain and sorrow and her desolate, loveless childhood; she should only remember that in the Province of Lorraine she had met the man she loved. All else should be a memory of green trees and vineyards and rivers, growing vaguer and dimmer as the healing years passed on. [Pg 275]

The knife-blade in the box bent, sprang back—the box flew open.

He did not realize it at first; he looked at the three folded papers lying within, curiously, indolently. Presently he took them and looked at the superscriptions written on the back, in the handwriting of the marquis. The three papers were inscribed as follows:

"1. For the French Government after the fall of the Empire.

"2. For the French Government on the death of Louis Bonaparte, falsely called Emperor."

"3. To whom it may concern!"

"To whom it may concern!" he repeated, looking at the third paper. Presently he opened it and read it, and as he read his heart seemed to cease its beating.

"TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN!

"Grief has unsettled my mind, yet, what I now write is true, and, if there is a God, I solemnly call His curses on me and mine if I lie.

"My only son, René Philip d'Harcourt de Nesville, was assassinated on the Grand Boulevard in Paris, on the 2d of December, 1851. His assassin was a monster named Louis Bonaparte, now known falsely as Napoleon III., Emperor of the French. His paid murderers shot my boy down, and stabbed him to death with their bayonets, in front of the Café Tortoni. I carried his body home; I sat at the window, with my dead boy on my knees, and I saw Louis Bonaparte ride into the Rue St. Honoré with his murderous Lancers, and I saw children spit at him and hurl curses at him from the barricade.

"Now I, Gilbert, Marquis de Nesville, swore to strike. And I struck, not at his life—that can wait. I struck at the root of all his pride and honour—I struck at that which he held dearer than these—at his dynasty! [Pg 276]

"Do the people of France remember when the Empress was first declared enciente? The cannon thundered from the orangerie at Saint-Cloud, the dome of the Invalides blazed rockets, the city glittered under a canopy of coloured fire. Oh, they were very careful of the Empress of the French! They went to Saint-Cloud, and later to Versailles, as they go to holy cities, praying. And the Emperor himself grew younger, they said.

"Then came the news that the expected heir, a son, had been born dead! Lies!

"I, Gilbert de Nesville, was in the forest when the Empress of the French fell ill. When separated from the others she called to Morny, and bade him drive for the love of Heaven! And they drove—they drove to the Trianon, and there was no one there. And there the child was born. Morny held it in his arms. He came out to the colonnade holding it in his arms, and calling for a messenger. I came, and when I was close to Morny I struck him in the face and he fell senseless. I took the child and wrapped it in my cloak. This is the truth!

"They dared not tell it; they dared not, for fear and for shame. They said that an heir had been born dead; and they mourned for their dead son. It was only a daughter. She is alive; she loves me, and, God forgive me, I hate her for defeating my just vengeance.

"And I call her Lorraine de Nesville."

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CHAPTER XXVI

THE SHADOW OF POMP

The long evening shadows were lengthening among the trees; sleepy birds twitted in dusky thickets; Lorraine slept.

Jack still stood staring at the paper in his hands, trying to understand the purport of what he read and reread, until the page became a blur and his hot eyes burned.

All the significance of the situation rose before him. This child, the daughter of the oath-breaker, the butcher of December, the sly, slow diplomate of Europe, the man of Rome, of Mexico, the man now reeling back to Châlons under the iron blows of an aroused people. In Paris, already, they cursed his name; they hurled insults at the poor Empress, that mother in despair. Thiers, putting his senile fingers in the porridge, stirred a ferment that had not even germinated since the guillotine towered in the Place de la Concorde and the tumbrils rattled through the streets. He did not know what he was stirring. The same impulse that possessed Gladstone to devastate trees animated Thiers. He stirred the dangerous mess because he liked to stir, nothing more. But from that hell's broth the crimson spectre of the Commune was to rise, when the smoke of Sedan had drifted clear of a mutilated nation.

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Through the heavy clouds of death which were already girdling Paris, that flabby Cyclops, Gambetta, was to mouth his monstrous platitudes, and brood over the battle-smoke, a nightmare of pomposity and fanfaronade—in a balloon. All France was bowed down in shame at the sight of the grotesque convoy, who were proclaiming her destiny among nations, and their destiny to lead her to victory and "la gloire." A scorched, blood-soaked land, a pall of smoke through which brave men bared their breasts to the blast from the Rhine, and died uncomplainingly, willingly, cheerfully, for the mother-land—was it not pitiful?

The sublime martyrdom of the men who marched, who shall write it? And who shall write of those others—Bazaine, Napoleon, Thiers, Gambetta, Favre, Ollivier?

If Bazaine died, cursed by a nation, his martyrdom, for martyrdom it was, was no greater than that of the humblest French peasant, who, dying, knew at last that he died, not for France, but because the men who sent him were worse than criminal—they were imbecile.

The men who marched were sublime; they were the incarnation of embattled France; the starving people of Metz, of Strassbourg, of Paris, were sublime. But there was nothing sublime about Monsieur Adolphe Thiers, nothing heroic about Hugo, nothing respectable about Gambetta. The marshal with the fat neck and Spanish affiliations, the poor confused, inert, overfed marshal caged in Metz by the Red Prince, harassed, bewildered, stunned by the clashing of politics and military strategy, which his meagre brain was unable to reconcile or separate—this unfortunate incapable was deserving of pity, perhaps of contempt. His cup was to be bitterer than that—it was to be drained, too, with the shouts of "Traitor" stunning his fleshy ears.

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He was no traitor. Cannot France understand that this single word "traitor" has brought her to contempt in the eyes of the world? There are two words that mar every glorious, sublime page of the terrible history of 1870-71, and these two words are "treason" and "revenge." Let the nation face the truth, let the people write "incapacity" for "treason," and "honour" for "revenge," and then the abused term "la gloire" will be justified in the eyes of men.

As for Thiers, let men judge him from his three revolutions, let the unknown dead in the ditches beyond the enceinte judge him, let the spectres of the murdered from Père Lachaise to the bullet-pitted terrace of the Luxembourg judge this meddler, this potterer in epoch-making cataclysms. Bismarck, gray, embittered, without honour in an unenlightened court, can still smile when he remembers Jules Favre and his prayer for the National Guard.

And these were the men who formed the convoy around the chariot of France militant, France in arms!—a cortège at once hideous, shameful, ridiculous, grotesque.

What was left of the Empire? Metz still held out; Strassbourg trembled under the shock of Prussian mortars; Paris strained its eyes for the first silhouette of the Uhlán on the heights of Versailles; and through the chill of the dying year the sombre Emperor, hunted, driven, threatened, tumbled into the snare of Sedan as a sick buzzard flutters exhausted to earth under a shower of clubs and stones.

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The end was to be brutal: a charge or two of devoted men, a crush at the narrow gates, a white flag, a brusque gesture from Bismarck, nothing more except a "guard of honour," an imperial special train, and Belgian newsboys shrieking along the station platform, "Extra! Fall of the Empire! Paris proclaims the Republic! Flight of the Empress! Extra!"

Jack, sitting with the paper in his hands, read between the lines, and knew that the prophecy of

evil days would be fulfilled. But as yet the writing on the wall of Alsatian hills had not spelled "Sedan," nor did he know of the shambles of Mars-la-Tour, the bloody work at Buzancy, the retreat from Châlons, and the evacuation of Vitry.

Buzancy marked the beginning of the end. It was nothing but a skirmish; the 3d Saxon Cavalry, a squadron or two of the 18th Uhlans, and Zwinker's Battery fought a half-dozen squadrons of chasseurs. But the red-letter mark on the result was unmistakable. Bazaine's correspondence was captured. On the same day the second sortie occurred from Strassbourg. It was time, for the trenches and parallels had been pushed within six hundred paces of the glacis. And so it was everywhere, the whole country was in a ferment of disorganized but desperate resistance of astonishment, indignation, dismay.

The nation could not realize that it was too late, that it was not conquest but invasion which the armies of France must prepare for. Blow after blow fell, disaster after disaster stunned the country, while the government studied new and effective forms of lying and evasion, and the hunted Emperor drifted on to his doom in the pitfall of Sedan.

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All Alsace except Belfort, Strassbourg, Schlettstadt, and Neuf Brisac was in German hands, under German power, governed by German law. The Uhlans scoured the country as clean as possible, but the franc-tireurs roamed from forest to forest, sometimes gallantly facing martyrdom, sometimes looting, burning, pillaging, and murdering. If Germans maintain that the only good franc-tireur is a dead franc-tireur, they are not always justified. Let them sit first in judgment on Andreas Hofer. England had Hereward; America, Harry Lee; and, when the South is ready to acknowledge Mosby and Quantrell of the same feather, it will be time for France to blush for her franc-tireurs. Noble and ignoble, patriots and cowards, the justified and the misguided wore the straight képi and the sheepskin jacket. All figs in Spain are not poisoned.

With the fall of the Château Morteyn, the war in Lorraine would degenerate into a combat between picquets of Uhlans and roving franc-tireurs. There would be executions of spies, vengeance on peasants, examples made of franc-tireurs, and all the horrors of irregular warfare. Jack knew this; he understood it perfectly when the muddy French infantry tramped out of the Château Morteyn and vanished among the dark hills in the rain.

For himself, had he been alone, there would have been nothing to keep him in the devastated province. Indeed, considering his peculiarly strained relations with the Uhlans of Rickerl's regiment, it behooved him to get across the Belgian frontier very promptly.

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Now he not only had Lorraine, he had the woman who loved him and who was ready to sacrifice herself and him too for the honour of France. She lived for one thing—the box, with its pitiful contents, its secrets of aerial navigation and destruction, must be placed at the service of France. The government was France now, and the Empress was the government. Lorraine knew nothing of the reasons her father had had for his hatred of the Emperor and the Empire. Personal grievances, even when those grievances were her father's, even though they might be justified, would never deter her from placing the secrets that might aid, might save, France with the man who, at that moment, in her eyes, represented the safety, security, the very existence of the land she loved.

Jack knew this. Whether she was right or not did not occur to him to ask. But the irony of it, the grim necessity of such a fate, staggered him—a daughter seeking her father at the verge of his ruin—a child, long lost, forgotten, unrecognized, unclaimed, finding the blind path to a father who, when she had been torn from him, dared not seek for her, dared not whisper of her existence except to Morny in the cloaked shadows of secret places.

For good or ill Jack made up his mind; he had decided for himself and for her. Her loveless, lonely childhood had been enough of sorrow for one young life; she should have no further storm, no more heartaches, nothing but peace and love and the strong arm of a man to shield her. Let her remember the only father she had ever known—let her remember him with faithful love and sorrow as she would. For the wrong he had done, let him account to another tribunal; her, the echo of that crime and hate and passion must never reach.

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Why should he, the man who loved her, bring to her this heritage of ruin? Why should he tear the veil from her trusting eyes and show her a land bought with blood and broken oaths, sold in blood and infamy? Why should he show her this, and say, "This is the work of your imperial family! There is your father!—some call him the Assassin of December! There is your mother!—read the pages of an Eastern diary! There, too, is your brother, a sick child of fifteen, baptized at Saarbrück, endowed at Sedan?"

It was enough that France lay prostrate, that the wounded screamed from the blood-wet fields, that the quiet dead lay under the pall of smoke from the nation's funeral pyre. It was enough that the parents suffer, that the son drag out an existence among indifferent or hostile people in an alien land. The daughter should never know, never weep when they wept, never pray when they prayed. This was retribution—not his, he only watched in silence the working of divine justice.

He tore the paper into fragments and ground them under his heel deep into the soft forest mould.

Lorraine slept.

He stood a long while in silence looking down at her. She was breathing quietly, regularly; her long, curling lashes rested on curved cheeks, delicate as an infant's.

CHAPTER XXVII

ÇA IRA!

"What do you want?" asked Jack, in a voice that vibrated unpleasantly. There was a dangerous light in his eyes; his lips grew thinner and whiter. One by one a dozen franc-tireurs stepped from behind the trees on every side, rifles shimmering in the subdued afternoon haze—wiry, gloomy-eyed men, their sleeveless sheepskin jackets belted in with leather, their sombre caps and trousers thinly banded with orange braid. They looked at him without speaking, almost without curiosity, fingering their gunlocks, bayoneted rifles unslung.

"Your name?" said the man who had touched him on the shoulder.

He did not reply at once. One of the men began to laugh.

"He's the vicomte's nephew," said another; and, pointing at Lorraine, who, now aroused, sat up on the moss beside Jack, he continued: "And that is the little châtelaine of the Château de Nesville." He took off his straight-visored cap.

The circle of gaunt, sallow faces grew friendly, and, as Lorraine stood up, looking questioningly from one to the other, caps were doffed, rifle-butts fell to the ground.

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"Why, it's Monsieur Tricasse of the Saint-Lys Pompiers!" she said. "Oh, and there is le Père Passerat, and little Émile Brun! Émile, my son, why are you not with your regiment?" The dark faces lighted up; somebody snickered; Brun, the conscript of the class of '71 who had been hauled by the heels from under his mother's bed, looked confused and twiddled his thumbs.

One by one the franc-tireurs came shambling up to pay their awkward respects to Lorraine and to Jack, while Tricasse pulled his bristling mustache and clattered his sabre in its sheath approvingly. When his men had acquitted themselves with all the awkward sincerity of Lorraine peasants, he advanced with a superb bow and flourish, lifting his cap from his gray head:

"In my quality of ex-pompier and commandant of the 'Terrors of Morteyn'—my battalion"—here he made a sweeping gesture as though briefly reviewing an army corps instead of a dozen wolfish-eyed peasants—"I extend to our honoured and beloved Châtelaine de Nesville, and to our honoured guest, Monsieur Marche, the protection and safe-conduct of the 'Terrors of Morteyn.'"

As he spoke his expression became exalted. He, Tricasse, ex-pompier and exempt, was posing as the saviour of his province, and he felt that, though German armies stretched in endless ranks from the Loire to the Meuse, he, Tricasse, was the man of destiny, the man of the place and the hour when beauty was in distress.

Lorraine, her eyes dim with gentle tears, held out both slender hands; Tricasse bent low and touched them with his grizzled mustache. Then he straightened up, frowned at his men, and said "Attention!" in a very fierce voice.

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The half-starved fellows shuffled into a single rank; their faces were wreathed in sheepish smiles. Jack noticed that a Bavarian helmet and side-arm hung from the knapsack of one, a mere freckled lad, downy and dimpled. Tricasse drew his sabre, turned, marched solemnly along the front, wheeled again, and saluted.

Jack lifted his cap; Lorraine, her arm in his, bowed and smiled tearfully.

"The dear, brave fellows!" she cried, impulsively, whereat every man reddened, and Tricasse grew giddy with emotion. He tried to speak; his emotion was great.

"In my capacity of ex-pompier," he gasped, then went to pieces, and hid his eyes in his hands. The "Terrors of Morteyn" wept with him to a man.

Presently, with a gesture to Tricasse, Jack led Lorraine down the slope, past the spring, and on through the forest, three "Terrors" leading, rifles poised, Tricasse and the others following, alert and balancing their cocked rifles.

"How far is your camp?" asked Jack. "We need food and the warmth of a fire. Tell me, Monsieur Tricasse, what is left of the two châteaux?"

Lorraine bent nearer as the old man said: "The Château de Nesville is a mass of cinders; Morteyn, a stone skeleton. Pierre is dead. There are many dead there—many, many dead. The Prussians burned Saint-Lys yesterday; they shot Bosquet, the letter-carrier; they hung his boy to the railroad trestle, then shot him to pieces. The Curé is a prisoner; the Mayor of Saint-Lys and the Notary have been sent to the camp at Strassbourg. We, my 'Terrors of Morteyn' and I, are still facing the vandals; except for us, the Province of Lorraine is empty of Frenchmen in armed resistance."

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The old man, in his grotesque uniform, touched his bristling mustache and muttered: "Nom d'une pipe!" several times to steady his voice.

Lorraine and Jack pressed on silently, sorrowfully, hand in hand, watching the scouts ahead, who were creeping on through the trees, heads turning from side to side, rifles raised. They passed along the back of a thickly wooded ridge for some distance, perhaps a mile, before the thin blue line of a smouldering camp-fire rose almost in their very faces. A low challenge from a clump of birch-trees was answered, there came the sound of rifles dropping, the noise of feet among the leaves, a whisper, and before they knew it they were standing at the mouth of a hole in the bank, from which came the odour of beef-broth simmering. Two or three franc-tireurs passed them, looking up curiously into their faces. Tricasse dragged a dilapidated cane-chair from the dirt-cave and placed it before Lorraine as though he were inviting her to an imperial throne.

"Thank you," she said, sweetly, and seated herself, not relinquishing Jack's hand.

Two tin basins of soup were brought to them; they ate it, soaking bits of crust in it.

The men pretended not to watch them. With all their instinctive delicacy these clumsy peasants busied themselves in guard-mounting, weapon cleaning, and their cuisine, as though there was no such thing as a pretty woman within miles. But it tried their gallantry as Frenchmen and their tact as Lorraine peasants. Furtive glances, deprecatory and timid, were met by the sweetest of smiles from Lorraine or a kindly nod from Jack. Tricasse, utterly unbalanced by his new rôle of protector of beauty, gave orders in fierce, agitated whispers, and made sudden aimless promenades around the birch thicket. In one of these prowls he discovered a toad staring at the camp-fire, and he drew his sword with a furious gesture, as though no living toad were good enough to intrude on the Châtelaine of the Château de Nesville; but the toad hopped away, and Tricasse unbent his brows and resumed his agitated prowl.

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When Lorraine had finished her soup, Jack took both plates into the cave and gave them to a man who, squatted on his haunches, was washing dishes. Lorraine followed him and sat down on a blanket, leaning back against the side of the cave.

"Wait for me," said Jack. She drew his head down to hers.

They lingered there in the darkness a moment, unconscious of the amazed but humourous glances of the cook; then Jack went out and found Tricasse, and walked with him to the top of the tree-clad ridge.

A road ran under the overhanging bank.

"I didn't know we were so near a road," said Jack, startled. Tricasse laid his finger on his lips.

"It is the high-road to Saint-Lys. We have settled more than one Uhlan dog on that curve there by the oak-tree. Look! Here comes one of our men. See! He's got something, too."

Sure enough, around the bend in the road slunk a franc-tireur, loaded down with what appeared to be mail-sacks. Cautiously he reconnoitred the bank, the road, the forest on the other side, whistled softly, and, at Tricasse's answering whistle, came puffing and blowing up the slope, and flung a mail-bag, a rifle, a Bavarian helmet, and a German knapsack to the ground.

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"The big police officer?" inquired Tricasse, eagerly.

"Yes, the big one with the red beard. He died hard. I used the bayonet only," said the franc-tireur, looking moodily at the dried blood on his hairy fists. "I got a Bavarian sentry, too; there's the proof."

Jack looked at the helmet. Tricasse ripped up the mail-sack with his long clasp-knife. "They stole our mail; they will not steal it again," observed Tricasse, sorting the letters and shuffling them like cards.

One by one he looked them over, sorted out two, stuffed the rest into the breast of his sheepskin coat, and stood up.

"There are two letters for you, Monsieur Marche, that were going to be read by the Prussian police officials," he said, holding the letters out. "What do you think of our new system of mail delivery? German delivery, franc-tireur facteur, eh, Monsieur Marche?"

"Give me the letters," said Jack, quietly.

He sat down and read them both, again and again. Tricasse turned his back, and stirred the Bavarian helmet with his boot-toe; the franc-tireur gathered up his spoils, and, at a gesture from Tricasse, carried them down the slope towards the hidden camp.

"Put out the fire, too," called Tricasse, softly. "I begin to smell it."

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When Jack had finished his reading, he looked up at Tricasse, folding the letters and placing them in his breast, where the flat steel box was.

"Letters from Paris," he said. "The Uhlans have appeared in the Eure-et-Seine and at Melun. They are arming the forts and enceinte, and the city is being provisioned for a siege."

"Paris!" blurted out Tricasse, aghast.

Jack nodded, silently.

After a moment he resumed: "The Emperor is said to be with the army near Mézières on the

south bank of the Meuse. We are going to find him, Mademoiselle de Nesville and I. Tell us what to do."

Tricasse stared at him, incapable of speech.

"Very well," said Jack, gently, "think it over. Tell me, at least, how we can avoid the German lines. We must start this evening."

He turned and descended the bank rapidly, letting himself down by the trunks of the birch saplings, treading softly and cautiously over stones and dead leaves, for the road was so near that a careless footstep might perhaps be heard by passing Uhlans. In a few minutes he crossed the ridge, and descended into the hollow, where the odour of the extinguished fire lingered in the air.

Lorraine was sitting quietly in the cave; Jack entered and sat down on the blankets beside her.

"The franc-tireurs captured a mail-sack just now," he said. "In it were two letters for me; one from my sister Dorothy, and the other from Lady Hesketh. Dorothy writes in alarm, because my uncle and aunt arrived without me. They also are frightened because they have heard that Morteyn was again threatened. The Uhlans have been seen in neighbouring departments, and the city is preparing for a siege. My uncle will not allow his wife or Dorothy or Betty Castlemaine to stay in Paris, so they are all going to Brussels, and expect me to join them there. They know nothing of what has happened at your home or at Morteyn; they need not know it until we meet them. Listen, Lorraine: it is my duty to find the Emperor and deliver this box to him; but you must not go—it is not necessary. So I am going to get you to Brussels somehow, and from there I can pass on about my duty with a free heart."

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She placed both hands and then her lips over his mouth.

"Hush," she said; "I am going with you; it is useless, Jack, to try to persuade me. Hush, my darling; there, be sensible; our path is very hard and cruel, but it does not separate us; we tread it together, always together, Jack." He struggled to speak; she held him close, and laid her head against his breast, contented, thoughtful, her eyes dreaming in the half-light of France reconquered, of noble deeds and sacrifices, of the great bells of churches thundering God's praise to a humble, thankful nation, proud in its faith, generous in its victory. As she lay dreaming close to the man she loved, a sudden tumult startled the sleeping echoes of the cave—the scuffling and thrashing of a shod horse among dead leaves and branches. There came a groan, a crash, the sound of a blow; then silence.

Outside, the franc-tireurs, rifles slanting, were moving swiftly out into the hollow, stooping low among the trees. As they hurried from the cave another franc-tireur came up, leading a riderless cavalry horse by one hand; in the other he held his rifle, the butt dripping with blood.

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"Silence," he motioned to them, pointing to the wooded ridge beyond. Jack looked intently at the cavalry horse. The schabraque was blue, edged with yellow; the saddle-cloth bore the number "11."

"Uhlan?" He formed the word with his lips.

The franc-tireur nodded with a ghastly smile and glanced down at his dripping gunstock.

Lorraine's hand closed on Jack's arm.

"Come to the hill," she said; "I cannot stand that."

On the crest of the wooded ridge crouched Tricasse, bared sabre stuck in the ground before him, a revolver in either fist. Around him lay his men, flat on the ground, eyes focussed on the turn in the road below. Their eyes glowed like the eyes of caged beasts, their sinewy fingers played continually with the rifle-hammers.

Jack hesitated, his arm around Lorraine's body, his eyes fixed nervously on the bend in the road.

Something was coming; there were cries, the trample of horses, the shuffle of footsteps. Suddenly an Uhlan rode cautiously around the bend, glanced right and left, looked back, signalled, and started on. Behind him crowded a dozen more Uhlans, lances glancing, pennants streaming in the wind.

"They've got a woman!" whispered Lorraine.

They had a man, too—a powerful, bearded peasant, with a great livid welt across his bloodless face. A rope hung around his neck, the end of which was attached to the saddle-bow of an Uhlan. But what made Jack's heart fairly leap into his mouth was to see Siurd von Steyr suddenly wheel in his saddle and lash the woman across the face with his doubled bridle.

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She cringed and fell to her knees, screaming and seizing his stirrup.

"Get out, damn you!" roared Von Steyr. "Here—I'll settle this now. Shoot that French dog!"

"My husband, O God!" screamed the woman, struggling in the dust. In a second she had fallen among the horses; a trooper spurred forward and raised his revolver, but the man with the rope around his neck sprang right at him, hanging to the saddle-bow, and tearing the rider with teeth and nails. Twice Von Steyr tried to pass his sabre through him; an Uhlan struck him with a lance-

butt, another buried a lance-point in his back, but he clung like a wild-cat to his man, burying his teeth in the Uhlan's face, deeper, deeper, till the Uhlan reeled back and fell crashing into the road.

"Fire!" shrieked Tricasse—"the woman's dead!"

Through the crash and smoke they could see the Uhlans staggering, sinking, floundering about. A mounted figure passed like a flash through the mist, another plunged after, a third wheeled and flew back around the bend. But the rest were doomed. Already the franc-tireurs were among them, whining with ferocity; the scene was sickening. One by one the battered bodies of the Uhlans were torn from their frantic horses until only one remained—Von Steyr—drenched with blood, his sabre flashing above his head. They pulled him from his horse, but he still raged, his bloodshot eyes flaring, his teeth gleaming under shrunken lips. They beat him with musket-stocks, they hurled stones at him, they struck him terrible blows with clubbed lances, and he yelped like a mad cur and snapped at them, even when they had him down, even when they shot into his twisting body. And at last they exterminated the rabid thing that ran among them.

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But the butchery was not ended; around the bend of the road galloped more Uhlans, halted, wheeled, and galloped back with harsh cries. The cries were echoed from above and below; the franc-tireurs were surrounded.

Then Tricasse raised his smeared sabre, and, bending, took the dead woman by the wrist, lifting her limp, trampled body from the dust. He began to mutter, holding his sabre above his head, and the men took up the savage chant, standing close together in the road:

"Ça ira! Ça ira!"

It was the horrible song of the Terror.

"Que faut-il au Républicain?
Du fer, du plomb, et puis du pain!

"Du fer pour travailler,
Du plomb pour nous venger,
Et du pain pour nos frères!"

And the fierce voices sang:

"Dansons la Carmagnole!
Dansons la Carmagnole!
Ça ira! Ça ira!
Tous les cochons à la lanterne!
Ça ira! Ça ira!
Tous les Prussiens, on les pendra!"

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The road trembled under the advancing cavalry; they surged around the bend, a chaos of rearing horses and levelled lances; a ring of fire around the little group of franc-tireurs, a cry from the whirl of flame and smoke:

"France!"

So they died.

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CHAPTER XXVIII

THE BRACONNIER

Lorraine had turned ghastly white; Jack's shocked face was colourless as he drew her away from the ridge with him into the forest. The appalling horror had stunned her; her knees gave way, she stumbled, but Jack held her up by main force, pushing the undergrowth aside and plunging straight on towards the thickest depths of the woods. He had not the faintest idea where he was; he only knew that for the moment it was absolutely necessary for them to get as far away as possible from the Uhlans and their butcher's work. Lorraine knew it, too; she tried to recover her coolness and her strength.

"Here is another road," she said, faintly; "Jack—I—I am not strong—I am—a—little—faint—" Tears were running over her cheeks.

Jack peered out through the trees into the narrow wood-road. Immediately a man hailed him from somewhere among the trees, and he shrank back, teeth set, eyes fixed in desperation.

"Who are you?" came the summons again in French. Jack did not answer. Presently a man in a blue blouse, carrying a whip, stepped out into the road from the bushes on the farther side of the slope.

"Hallo!" he called, softly.

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Jack looked at him. The man returned his glance with a friendly and puzzled smile.

"What do you want?" asked Jack, suspiciously.

"Parbleu! what do you want yourself?" asked the peasant, and showed his teeth in a frank laugh.

Jack was silent.

The peasant's eyes fell on Lorraine, leaning against a tree, her blanched face half hidden under the masses of her hair. "Oho!" he said—"a woman!"

Without the least hesitation he came quickly across the road and close up to Jack.

"Thought you might be one of those German spies," he said. "Is the lady ill? Cœur Dieu! but she is white! Monsieur, what has happened? I am Brocard—Jean Brocard; they know me here in the forest—"

"Eh!" broke in Jack—"you say you are Brocard the poacher?"

"Hey! That's it—Brocard, braconnier—at your service. And you are the young nephew of the Vicomte de Morteyn, and that is the little châtelaine De Nesville! [Cœur Dieu! Have the Prussians brutalized you, too? Answer me, Monsieur Marche—I know you and I know the little châtelaine—oh, I know!—I, who have watched you at your pretty love-making there in the De Nesville forest, while I was setting my snares for pheasants and hares! Dame! One must live! Yes, I am Brocard—I do not lie. I have taken enough game from your uncle in my time; can I be of service to his nephew?"

He took off his cap with a merry smile, entirely frank, almost impudent. Jack could have hugged him; he did not; he simply told him the exact truth, word by word, slowly and without bitterness, his arm around Lorraine, her head on his shoulder. [Pg 298]

"Cœur Dieu!" muttered Brocard, gazing pityingly at Lorraine; "I've half a mind to turn franc-tireur myself and drill holes in the hides of these Prussian swine!"

He stepped out into the road and beckoned Jack and Lorraine. When they came to his side he pointed to a stone cottage, low and badly thatched, hidden among the trunks of the young beech growth. A team of horses harnessed to a carriage was standing before the door; smoke rose from the dilapidated chimney.

"I have a guest," he said; "you need not fear him. Come!"

In a dozen steps they entered the low doorway, Brocard leading, Lorraine leaning heavily on Jack's shoulder.

"Pst! There is a thick-headed Englishman in the next room; let him sleep in peace," murmured Brocard.

He threw a blanket over the bed, shoved the logs in the fireplace with his hobnailed boots until the sparks whirled upward, and the little flames began to rustle and snap.

Lorraine sank down on the bed, covering her head with her arms; Jack dropped into a chair by the fire, looking miserably from Lorraine to Brocard.

The latter clasped his big rough hands between his knees and leaned forward, chewing a stem of a dead leaf, his bright eyes fixed on the reviving fire.

"Morteyn! Morteyn!" he repeated; "it exists no longer. There are many dead there—dead in the garden, in the court, on the lawn—dead floating in the pond, the river—dead rotting in the thickets, the groves, the forest. I saw them—I, Brocard the poacher." [Pg 299]

After a moment he resumed:

"There were more poachers than Jean Brocard in Morteyn. I saw the Prussian officers stand in the carrefours and shoot the deer as they ran in, a line of soldiers beating the woods behind them. I saw the Saxons laugh as they shot at the pheasants and partridges; I saw them firing their revolvers at rabbits and hares. They brought to their camp-fires a great camp-wagon piled high with game—boars, deer, pheasants, and hares. For that I hated them. Perhaps I touched one or two of them while I was firing at white blackbirds—I really cannot tell."

He turned an amused yellow eye on Jack, but his face sobered the next moment, and he continued: "I heard the fusillade on the Saint-Lys highway; I did not go to inquire if they were amusing themselves. Ma foi! I myself keep away from Uhlans when God permits. And so these Uhlans got old Tricasse at last. Zut! C'est embêtant! And poor old Passerat, too—and Brun, and all the rest! Tonnerre de Dieu! I—but, no—no! I am doing very well—I, Jean Brocard, poacher; I am doing quite well, in my little way."

An ugly curling of his lip, a glimpse of two white teeth—that was all Jack saw; but he understood that the poacher had probably already sent more than one Prussian to his account.

"That's all very well," he said, slowly—he had little sympathy with guerilla assassination—"but I'd rather hear how you are going to get us out of the country and through the Prussian lines." [Pg 300]

"You take much for granted," laughed the poacher. "Now, did I offer to do any such thing?"

"But you will," said Jack, "for the honour of the Province and the vicomte, whose game, it appears, has afforded you both pleasure and profit."

"Cœur Dieu!" cried Brocard, laughing until his bright eyes grew moist. "You have spoken the truth, Monsieur Marche. But you have not added what I place first of all; it is for the gracious châtelaine of the Château de Nesville that I, Jean Brocard, play at hazard with the Prussians, the stakes being my skin. I will bring you through the lines; leave it to me."

Before Jack could speak again the door of the next room opened, and a man appeared, dressed in tweeds, booted and spurred, and carrying a travelling-satchel. There was a moment's astonished silence.

"Marche!" cried Archibald Grahame; "what the deuce are you doing here?" They shook hands, looking questioningly at each other.

"Times have changed since we breakfasted by candle-light at Morteyn," said Jack, trying to regain his coolness.

"I know—I know," said Grahame, sympathetically. "It's devilish rough on you all—on Madame de Morteyn. I can never forget her charming welcome. Dear me, but this war is disgusting; isn't it now? And what the devil are you doing here? Heavens, man, you're a sight!"

Lorraine sat up on the bed at the sound of the voices. When Grahame saw her, saw her plight—the worn shoes, the torn, stained bodice and skirt, the pale face and sad eyes—he was too much affected to speak. Jack told him their situation in a dozen words; the sight of Lorraine's face told the rest.

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"Now we'll arrange that," cried Grahame. "Don't worry, Marche. Pray do not alarm yourself, Mademoiselle de Nesville, for I have a species of post-chaise at the door and a pair of alleged horses, and the whole outfit is at your disposal; indeed it is, and so am I. Come now!—and so am I." He hesitated, and then continued: "I have passes and papers, and enough to get you through a dozen lines. Now, where do you wish to go?"

"When are you to start?" replied Jack, gratefully.

"Say in half an hour. Can Mademoiselle de Nesville stand it?"

"Yes, thank you," said Lorraine, with a tired, quaint politeness that made them smile.

"Then we wish to get as near to the French Army as we can," said Jack. "I have a mission of importance. If you could drive us to the Luxembourg frontier we would be all right—if we had any money."

"You shall have everything," cried Grahame; "you shall be driven where you wish. I'm looking for a battle, but I can't seem to find one. I've been driving about this wreck of a country for the last three days; I missed Amonvillers on the 18th, and Rezonville two days before. I saw the battles of Reichshofen and Borny. The Germans lost three thousand five hundred men at Beaumont, and I was not there either. But there's a bigger thing on the carpet, somewhere near the Meuse, and I'm trying to find out where and when. I've wasted a lot of time loafing about Metz. I want to see something on a larger scale, not that the Metz business isn't large enough—two hundred thousand men, six hundred cannon—and the Red Prince—licking their chops and getting up an appetite for poor old Bazaine and his battered, diseased, starved, disheartened army, caged under the forts and citadel of a city scarcely provisioned for a regiment."

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Lorraine, sitting on the edge of the bed, looked at him silently, but her eyes were full of a horror and anguish that Grahame could not help seeing.

"The Emperor is with the army yet," he said, cheerfully. "Who knows what may happen in the next twenty-four hours? Mademoiselle de Nesville, there are many shots to be fired yet for the honour of France."

"Yes," said Lorraine.

Instinctively Brocard and Grahame moved towards the door and out into the road. It was perhaps respect for the grief of this young French girl that sobered their faces and sent them off to discuss plans and ways and means of getting across the Luxembourg frontier without further delay. Jack, left alone with Lorraine in the dim, smoky room, rose and drew her to the fire.

"Don't be unhappy," he said. "The tide of fortune must turn soon; this cannot go on. We will find the Emperor and do our part. Don't look that way, Lorraine, my darling!" He took her in his arms. She put both arms around his neck, and hid her face.

For a while he held her, watching the fire with troubled eyes. The room grew darker; a wind arose among the forest trees, stirring dried leaves on brittle stems; the ashes on the hearth drifted like gray snowflakes.

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Her stillness began to trouble him. He bent in the dusk to see her face. She was asleep. Terror, pity, anguish, the dreadful uncertainty, had strained her child's nerves to the utmost; after that came the deep fatigue that follows torture, and she lay in his arms, limp, pallid, exhausted. Her sleep was almost the unconsciousness of coma; she scarcely breathed.

The fire on the hearth went out; the smoking embers glimmered under feathery ashes. Grahame entered, carrying a lantern.

"Come," he whispered. "Poor little thing!—can't I help you, Marche? Wait; here's a rug. So—wrap

it around her feet. Can you carry her? Then follow; here, touch my coat—I'm going to put out the light in my lantern. Now—gently. Here we are."

Jack climbed into the post-chaise; Grahame, holding Lorraine in his arms, leaned in, and Jack took her again. She had not awakened.

"Brocard and I are going to sit in front," whispered Grahame. "Is all right within?"

"Yes," nodded Jack.

The chaise moved on for a moment, then suddenly stopped with a jerk.

Jack heard Grahame whisper, "Sit still, you fool! I've got passes; sit still!"

"Let go!" murmured Brocard.

"Sit still!" repeated Grahame, in an angry whisper; "it's all right, I tell you. Be silent!"

There was a noiseless struggle, a curse half breathed, then a figure slipped from the chaise into the road.

Grahame sank back. "Marche, that damned poacher will hang us all. What am I to do?"

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"What is it?" asked Jack, in a scarcely audible voice.

"Can't you hear? There's an Uhlan in the road in front. That fool means to kill him."

Jack strained his eyes in the darkness; the road ahead was black and silent.

"You can't see him," whispered Grahame. "Brocard caught the distant rattle of his lance in the stirrup. He's gone to kill him, the bloodthirsty imbecile!"

"To shoot him?" asked Jack, aghast.

"No; he's got his broad wood-knife—that's the way these brutes kill. Hark! Good God!"

A scream rang through the forest; something was coming towards them, too—a horse, galloping, galloping, pounding, thundering past—a frantic horse that tossed its head and tore on through the night, mane flying, bridle loose. And there, crouched on the saddle, two men swayed, locked in a death-clench—an Uhlan with ghostly face and bared teeth, and Brocard, the poacher, cramped and clinging like a panther to his prey, his broad knife flashing in the gloom.

In a second they were gone; far away in the forest the hoof strokes echoed farther and farther, duller, duller, then ceased.

"Drive on," muttered Jack, with lips that could barely form the words.

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CHAPTER XXIX

THE MESSAGE OF THE FLAG

It was dawn when Lorraine awoke, stifling a cry of dismay. At the same moment she saw Jack, asleep, huddled into a corner of the post-chaise, his bloodless, sunken face smeared with the fine red dust that drifted in from the creaking wheels. Grahame, driving on the front seat, heard her move.

"Are you better?" he asked, cheerfully.

"Yes, thank you; I am better. Where are we?"

Grahame's face sobered.

"I'll tell you the truth," he said; "I don't know, and I can't find out. One thing is certain—we've passed the last German post, that is all I know. We ought to be near the frontier."

He looked back at Jack, smiled again, and lowered his voice:

"It's fortunate we have passed the German lines, because that last cavalry outpost took all my papers and refused to return them. I haven't an idea what to do now, except to go on as far as we can. I wish we could find a village; the horses are not exhausted, but they need rest."

Lorraine listened, scarcely conscious of what he said. She leaned over Jack, looking down into his face, brushing the dust from his brow with her finger-tips, smoothing his hair, with a timid, hesitating glance at Grahame, who understood and gravely turned his back.

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Jack slept. She nestled down, pressing her soft, cool cheek close to his; her eyes drooped; her lips parted. So they slept together, cheek to cheek.

A mist drove across the meadows; from the plains, dotted with poplars, a damp wind blew in puffs, driving the fog before it until the blank vapour dulled the faint morning light and the dawn faded into a colourless twilight. Spectral poplars, rank on rank, loomed up in the mist, endless rows of them, fading from sight as the vapours crowded in, appearing again as the fog thinned in a current of cooler wind.

Grahame, driving slowly, began to nod in the thickening fog. At moments he roused himself; the horses walked on and the wheels creaked in the red dust. Hour after hour passed, but it grew no lighter. Drowsy and listless-eyed the horses toiled up and down the little hills, and moved stiffly on along the interminable road, shrouded in a gray fog that hid the very road-side shrubbery from sight, choked thicket and grove, and blotted the grimy carriage windows.

Jack was awakened with startling abruptness by Grahame, who shook his shoulders, leaning into the post-chaise from the driver's seat.

"There's something in front, Marche," he said. "We've fallen in with a baggage convoy, I fancy. Listen! Don't you hear the camp-wagons? Confound this fog! I can't see a rod ahead."

Lorraine, also now wide awake, leaned from the window. The blank vapour choked everything. Jack rubbed his eyes; his limbs ached; he could scarcely move. Somebody was running on the road in front—the sound of heavy boots in the dust came nearer and nearer. [Pg 307]

"Look out!" shouted Grahame, in French; "there's a team here in the road! Passez au large!"

At the sound of his voice phantoms surged up in the mist around them; from every side faces looked into the carriage windows, passing, repassing, disappearing, only to appear again—ghostly, shadowy, spectral.

"Soldiers!" muttered Jack.

At the same instant Grahame seized the lines and wheeled his horses just in time to avoid collision with a big wagon in front. As the post-chaise passed, more wagons loomed up in the fog, one behind another; soldiers took form around them, voices came to their ears, dulled by the mist.

Suddenly a pale shaft of light streamed through the fog above; the restless, shifting vapours glimmered; a dazzling blot grew from the mist. It was the sun. Little by little the landscape became more distinct; the pallid, watery sky lightened; a streak of blue cut the zenith. Everywhere in the road great, lumbering wagons stood, loaded with straw; the sickly morning light fell on silent files of infantry, lining the road on either hand.

"It's a convoy of wounded," said Grahame. "We're in the middle of it. Shall we go back?"

A wagon in front of them started on; at the first jolt a cry sounded from the straw, another, another—the deep sighs of the dying, the groans of the stricken, the muttered curses of teamsters—rose in one terrible plaint. Another wagon started—the wounded wailed; another started—another—another—and the long train creaked on, the air vibrating with the weak protestations of miserable, mangled creatures tossing their thin arms towards the sky. And now, too, the soldiers were moving out into the road-side bushes, unslinging rifles and fixing bayonets; a mounted officer galloped past, shouting something; other mounted officers followed; a bugle sounded persistently from the distant head of the column. [Pg 308]

Everywhere soldiers were running along the road now, grouping together under the poplar-trees, heads turned to the plain. Some teamsters pushed an empty wagon out beyond the line of trees and overturned it; others stood up in their wagons, reins gathered, long whips swinging. The wounded moaned incessantly; some sat up in the straw, heads turned also towards the dim, gray plain.

"It's an attack," said Grahame, coolly. "Marche, we're in for it now!"

After a moment, he added, "What did I tell you? Look there!"

Out on the plain, where the mist was clearing along the edge of a belt of trees, something was moving.

"What is it?" asked Lorraine, in a scarcely audible voice.

Before Grahame could speak a tumult of cries and groans burst out along the line of wagons; a bugle clanged furiously; the teamsters shouted and pointed with their whips.

Out of the shadow of the grove two glittering double lines of horsemen trotted, halted, formed, extended right and left, and trotted on again. To the right another darker and more compact square of horsemen broke into a gallop, swinging a thicket of lances above their heads, from which fluttered a mass of black and white pennons. [Pg 309]

"Cuirassiers and Uhlans!" muttered Grahame, under his breath. He stood up in his seat; Jack rose also, straining his eyes, but Lorraine hid her face in her hands and crouched in the chaise, her head buried in the cushions.

The silence was enervating; even the horses turned their gentle eyes wonderingly to that line of steel and lances; even the wounded, tremulous, haggard, held their breath between clenched teeth and stiff, swollen lips.

"Nom de Dieu! Serrez les rangs, tas de bleus!" yelled an officer, riding along the edge of the road, revolver in one hand, naked sabre flashing in the other.

A dozen artillerymen were pushing a mitrailleuse up behind the overturned wagon. It stuck in the ditch.

"À nous, la ligne!" they shouted, dragging at the wheels until a handful of fantassins ran out and pulled the little death machine into place.

"Du calme! Du calme! Ne tirez pas trop vite, ménagez vos cartouches! Tenez ferme, mes enfants!" said an old officer, dismounting and walking coolly out beyond the line of trees.

"Oui! oui! comptez sur nous! Vive le Colonel!" shouted the soldiers, shaking their chassepots in the air.

On came the long lines, distinct now—the blue and yellow of the Uhlans, the white and scarlet of the cuirassiers, plain against the gray trees and grayer pastures. Suddenly a level sheet of flame played around the stalled wagons; the smoke gushed out over the dark ground; the air split with the crash of rifles. In the uproar bugles blew furiously and the harsh German cavalry trumpets, peal on peal, nearer, nearer, nearer, answered their clangour.

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"Hourra! Preussen!"

The deep, thundering shout rose hoarsely through the rifles' roaring fusillade; horses reared; teamsters lashed and swore, and the rattle of harness and wheel broke out and was smothered in the sheeted crashing of the volleys and the shock of the coming charge.

And now it burst like an ocean roller, smashing into the wagon lines, a turmoil of smoke and flashes, a chaos of maddened, plunging horses and bayonets, and the flashing downward strokes of heavy sabres. Grahame seized the reins, and lashed his horses; a cuirassier drove his bloody, foam-covered charger into the road in front and fell, butchered by a dozen bayonets.

Three Uhlans followed, whirling their lances and crashing through the lines, their frantic horses crazed by blows and wounds. More cuirassiers galloped up; the crush became horrible. A horse and steel-clad rider were hurled bodily under the wagon-wheels—an Uhlan, transfixed by a bayonet, still clung to his shattered lance-butt, screaming, staggering in his stirrups. Suddenly the window of the post-chaise was smashed in and a horse and rider pitched under the wheels, almost overturning carriage and occupants.

"Easy, Marche!" shouted Grahame. "Don't try to get out!"

Jack heard him, but sprang into the road. For an instant he reeled about in the crush and smoke, then, stooping, he seized a prostrate man, lifted him, and with one tremendous effort pitched him into the chaise.

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Grahame, standing up in the driver's seat, watched him in amazement for a moment; but his horses demanded all his attention now, for they were backing under the pressure of the cart in front.

As for Jack, once in the chaise again he pulled the unconscious man to the seat, calling Lorraine to hold him up. Then he tore the Uhlan's helmet from the stunned man's head and flung it out into the road; after it he threw sabre and revolver.

"Give me that rug!" he cried to Lorraine, and he seized it and wrapped it around the Uhlan's legs.

Grahame had managed to get clear of the other wagon now and was driving out into the pasture, almost obscured by rifle smoke.

"Oh, Jack!" faltered Lorraine—"it is Rickerl!"

It was Rickerl, stunned by the fall from his horse, lying back between them.

"They'd kill him if they saw his uniform!" muttered Jack. "Hark! the French are cheering! They've repulsed the charge! Grahame, do you hear?—do you hear?"

"I hear!" shouted Grahame. "These horses are crazy; I can't hold them."

The troops around them, hidden in the smoke, began to cheer frantically; the mitrailleuse whirred and rolled out its hail of death.

"Vive la France! Mort aux Prussiens!" howled the soldiers. A mounted officer, his cap on the point of his sabre, his face laid open by a lance-thrust, stood shouting, "Vive la Nation! Vive la Nation!" while a boyish bugler shook his brass bugle in the air, speechless with joy.

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Grahame drove the terrified horses along the line of wagons for a few paces, then, wheeling, let them gallop straight out into the pasture on the left of the road, where a double line of trees in the distance marked the course of a parallel road.

The chaise lurched and jolted; Rickerl, unconscious still, fell in a limp heap, but Jack and Lorraine held him up and watched the horses, now galloping under slackened reins.

"There are houses there! Look!" cried Grahame. "By Jove, there's a Luxembourg gendarme, too. I—I believe we're in Luxembourg, Marche! Upon my soul, we are! See! There is a frontier post!"

He tried to stop the horses; two strange-looking soldiers, wearing glossy shakos and white-and-blue aiguillettes, began to bawl at him; a group of peasants before the cottages fled, screaming.

Grahame threw all his strength into his arms and dragged the horses to a stand-still.

"Are we in Luxembourg?" he called to the gendarmes, who ran up, gesticulating violently. "Are

we? Good! Hold those horses, if you please, gentlemen. There's a wounded man here. Carry him to one of those houses. Marche, lift him, if you can. Hello! his arm is broken at the wrist. Go easy—you, I mean—Now!"

Lorraine, aided by Jack, stepped from the post-chaise and stood shivering as two peasants came forward and lifted Rickerl. When they had taken him away to one of the stone houses she turned quietly to a gendarme and said: "Monsieur, can you tell me where the Emperor is?"

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"The Emperor?" repeated the gendarme. "The Emperor is with his army, below there along the Meuse. They are fighting—since four this morning—at Sedan."

He pointed to the southeast.

She looked out across the wide plain.

"That convoy is going to Sedan," said the gendarme. "The army is near Sedan; there is a battle there."

"Thank you," said Lorraine, quietly. "Jack, the Emperor is near Sedan."

"Yes," he nodded; "we will go when you can stand it."

"I am ready. Oh, we must not wait, Jack; did you not see how they even attacked the wounded?"

He turned and looked into her eyes.

"It is the first French cheer I have heard," she continued, feverishly. "They beat back those Prussians and cheered for France! Oh, Jack, there is time yet! France is rising now—France is resisting. We must do our part; we must not wait. Jack, I am ready!"

"We can't walk," he muttered.

"We will go with the convoy. They are on the way to Sedan, where the Emperor is. Jack, they are fighting at Sedan! Do you understand?"

She came closer, looking up into his troubled eyes.

"Show me the box," she whispered.

He drew the flat steel box from his coat.

After a moment she said, "Nothing must stop us now. I am ready!"

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"You are not ready," he replied, sullenly; "you need rest."

"'Tiens ta Foy,' Jack."

The colour dyed his pale cheeks and he straightened up. "Always, Lorraine."

Grahame called to them from the cottage: "You can get a horse and wagon here! Come and eat something at once!"

Slowly, with weary, drooping heads, they walked across the road, past a wretched custom-house, where two painted sentry-boxes leaned, past a squalid barnyard full of amber-coloured, unsavoury puddles and gaunt poultry, up to the thatched stone house where Grahame stood waiting. Over the door hung a withered branch of mistletoe, above this swung a sign:

ESTAMINET.

"Your Uhlan is in a bad way, I think," began Grahame; "he's got a broken arm and two broken ribs. This is a nasty little place to leave him in."

"Grahame," said Jack, earnestly, "I've got to leave him. I am forced to go to Sedan as soon as we can swallow a bit of bread and wine. The Uhlan is my comrade and friend; he may be more than that some day. What on earth am I to do?"

They followed Grahame into a room where a table stood covered by a moist, unpleasant cloth. The meal was simple—a half-bottle of sour red wine for each guest, a fragment of black bread, and a r agout made of something that had once been alive—possibly a chicken, possibly a sheep.

Grahame finished his wine, bolted a morsel or two of bread and r agout, and leaned back in his chair with a whimsical glance at Lorraine.

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"Now, I'll tell you what I'll do, Marche," he said. "My horses need rest, so do I, so does our wounded Uhlan. I'll stay in this garden of Eden until noon, if you like, then I'll drive our wounded man to Diekirch, where the H otel des Ardennes is as good an inn as you can find in Luxembourg, or in Belgium either. Then I'll follow you to Sedan."

They all rose from the table; Lorraine came and held out her hand, thanking Grahame for his kindness to them and to Rickerl.

"Good-by," said Grahame, going with them to the door. "There's your dog-cart; it's paid for, and here's a little bag of French money—no thanks, my dear fellow; we can settle all that later. But what the deuce you two children are going to Sedan for is more than my old brains can

comprehend."

He stood, with handsome head bared, and bent gravely over Lorraine's hands—impulsive little hands, now trembling, as the tears of gratitude trembled on her lashes.

And so they drove away in their dog-cart, down the flat, poplar-bordered road, silent, deeply moved, wondering what the end might be.

The repeated shocks, the dreadful experiences and encounters, the indelible impressions of desolation and grief and suffering had deadened in Lorraine all sense of personal suffering or grief. For her land and her people her heart had bled, drop by drop—her sensitive soul lay crushed within her. Nothing of selfish despair came over her, because France still stood. She had suffered too much to remember herself. Even her love for Jack had become merely a detail. She loved as she breathed—involuntarily. There was nothing new or strange or sweet in it—nothing was left of its freshness, its grace, its delicacy. The bloom was gone.

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In her tired breast her heart beat faintly; its burden was the weary repetition of a prayer—an old, old prayer—a supplication—for mercy, for France, and for the salvation of its people. Where she had learned it she did not know; how she remembered it, why she repeated it, minute by minute, hour by hour, she could not tell. But it was always beating in her heart, this prayer—old, so old!—and half forgotten—

"To Thee, Mary, exalted—
To Thee, Mary, exalted—"

Her tired heart took up the rhythm where her mind refused to follow, and she leaned on Jack's shoulder, looking out over the gray land with innocent, sorrowful eyes.

Vaguely she remembered her lonely childhood, but did not grieve; vaguely she thought of her youth, passing away from a tear-drenched land through the smoke of battles. She did not grieve—the last sad tear for self had fallen and quenched the last smouldering spark of selfishness. The wasted hills of her province seemed to rise from their ashes and sear her eyes; the flames of a devastated land dazzled and pained her; every drop of French blood that drenched the motherland seemed drawn from her own veins—every cry of terror, every groan, every gasp, seemed wrenched from her own slender body. The quiet, wide-eyed dead accused her, the stark skeletons of ravaged houses reproached her.

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She turned to the man she loved, but it was the voice of a dying land that answered, "Come!" and she responded with all a passion of surrender. What had she accomplished as yet? In the bitterness of her loneliness she answered, "Nothing." She had worked by the wayside as she passed—in the field, in the hospital, in the midst of beleaguered soldiers. But what was that? There was something else further on that called her—what she did not know, and yet she knew it was waiting somewhere for her. "Perhaps it is death," she mused, leaning on Jack's shoulder. "Perhaps it is *his* death." That did not frighten her; if it was to be, it would be; but, through it, through the hideous turmoil of fire and blood and pounding guns and shouting—through death itself—somewhere, on the other side of the dreadful valley of terror, lay salvation for the motherland. Thither they were bound—she and the man she loved.

All around them lay the flat, colourless plains of Luxembourg; to the east, the wagon-train of wounded crawled across the landscape under a pallid sky. The road now bore towards the frontier again; Jack shook the reins listlessly; the horse loped on. Slowly they approached the border, where, on the French side, the convoy crept forward enveloped in ragged clouds of dust. Now they could distinguish the drivers, blue-bloused and tattered, swinging their long whips; now they saw the infantry, plodding on behind the wagons, stringing along on either flank, their officers riding with bent heads, the red legs of the fantassins blurred through the red dust.

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At the junction of the two roads stood a boundary post. A slovenly Luxembourg gendarme sat on a stone under it, smoking and balancing his rifle over both knees.

"You can't pass," he said, looking up as Jack drew rein. A moment later he pocketed a gold piece that Jack offered, yawned, laughed, and yawned again.

"You can buy contraband cigars at two sous each in the village below," he observed.

"What news is there to tell?" demanded Jack.

"News? The same as usual. They are shelling Strassbourg with mortars; the city is on fire. Six hundred women and children left the city; the International Aid Society demanded it."

Presently he added: "A big battle was fought this morning along the Meuse. You can hear the guns yet."

"I have heard them for an hour," replied Jack.

They listened. Far to the south the steady intonation of the cannon vibrated, a vague sustained rumour, no louder, no lower, always the same monotonous measure, flowing like the harmony of flowing water, passionless, changeless, interminable.

"Along the Meuse?" asked Jack, at last.

"Yes."

"Sedan?"

"Yes, Sedan."

The slow convoy was passing now; the creak of wheel and the harsh scrape of axle and spring grated in their ears; the wind changed; the murmur of the cannonade was blotted out in the trample of hoofs, the thud of marching infantry.

Jack swung his horse's head and drove out across the boundary into the French road. On every side crowded the teams, where the low mutter of the wounded rose from the foul straw; on every side pressed the red-legged infantry, rifles *en bandoulière*, shrunken, faded caps pushed back from thin, sick faces. [Pg 319]

"My soldiers!" murmured Lorraine, sitting up straight. "Oh, the pity of it!—the pity!"

An officer passed, followed by a bugler. He glanced vacantly at Jack, then at Lorraine. Another officer came by, leading his patient, bleeding horse, over which was flung the dusty body of a brother soldier.

The long convoy was moving more swiftly now; the air trembled with the cries of the mangled or the hoarse groans of the dying. A Sister of Mercy—her frail arm in a sling—crept on her knees among the wounded lying in a straw-filled cart. Over all, louder, deeper, dominating the confusion of the horses and the tramp of men, rolled the cannonade. The pulsating air, deep-laden with the monstrous waves of sound, seemed to beat in Lorraine's face—the throbbing of her heart ceased for a moment. Louder, louder, nearer, more terrible sounded the thunder, breaking in long, majestic reverberations among the nearer hills; the earth began to shake, the sky struck back the iron-throated echoes—sounding, resounding, from horizon to horizon.

And now the troops around them were firing as they advanced; sheeted mist lashed with lightning enveloped the convoy, through which rang the tremendous clang of the cannon. Once there came a momentary break in the smoke—a gleam of hills, and a valley black with men—a glimpse of a distant town, a river—then the stinging smoke rushed outward, the little flames leaped and sank and played through the fog. Broad, level bands of mist, fringed with flame, cut the pasture to the right; the earth rocked with the stupendous cannon shock, the ripping rifle crashes chimed a dreadful treble. [Pg 320]

There was a bridge there in the mist; an iron gate, a heavy wall of masonry, a glimpse of a moat below. The crowded wagons, groaning under their load of death, the dusty infantry, the officers, the startled horses, jammed the bridge to the parapets. Wheels splintered and cracked, long-lashed whips snapped and rose, horses strained, recoiled, leaped up, and fell scrambling and kicking.

"Open the gates, for God's sake!" they were shouting.

A great shell, moaning in its flight above the smoke, shrieked and plunged headlong among the wagons. There came a glare of blinding light, a velvety white cloud, a roar, and through the gates, no longer choked, rolled the wagon-train, a frantic stampede of men and horses. It caught the dog-cart and its occupants with it; it crushed the horse, seized the vehicle, and flung it inside the gates as a flood flings driftwood on the rocks.

Jack clung to the reins; the wretched horse staggered out into the stony street, fell, and rolled over stone-dead.

Jack turned and caught Lorraine in both arms, and jumped to a sidewalk crowded with soldiers, and at the same time the crush of wagons ground the dog-cart to splinters on the cobble-stones. The crowd choked every inch of the pavement—women, children, soldiers, shouting out something that seemed to move the masses to delirium. Jack, his arm around Lorraine, beat his way forward through the throng, murmuring anxiously, "Are you hurt, Lorraine? Are you hurt?" And she replied, faintly, "No, Jack. Oh, what is it? What is it?" [Pg 321]

Soldiers blocked his way now, but he pushed between them towards a cleared space on a slope of grass. Up the slope he staggered and out on to a stone terrace above the crush of the street. An officer stood alone on the terrace, pulling at some ropes around a pole on the parapet.

"What—what is that?" stammered Lorraine, as a white flag shot up along the flag-staff and fluttered drearily over the wall.

"Lorraine!" cried Jack; but she sprang to the pole and tore the ropes free. The white flag fell to the ground.

The officer turned to her, his face whiter than the flag. The crowd in the street below roared.

"Monsieur," gasped Lorraine, "France is not conquered! That flag is the flag of dishonour!"

They stared at each other in silence, then the officer stepped to the flag-pole and picked up the ropes.

"Not that!—not that!" cried Lorraine, shuddering.

"It is the Emperor's orders."

The officer drew the rope tight—the white flag crawled slowly up the staff, fluttered, and

stopped.

Lorraine covered her eyes with her hands; the roar of the crowd below was in her ears.

"O God!—O God!" she whispered.

"Lorraine!" whispered Jack, both arms around her.

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Her head fell forward on her breast.

Overhead the white flag caught the breeze again, and floated out over the ramparts of Sedan.

"By the Emperor's orders," said the officer, coming close to Jack.

Then for the first time Jack saw that it was Georges Carrière who stood there, ghastly pale, his eyes fixed on Lorraine.

"She has fainted," muttered Jack, lifting her. "Georges, is it all over?"

"Yes," said Georges, and he walked over to the flag-pole, and stood there looking up at the white badge of dishonour.

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CHAPTER XXX

THE VALLEY OF THE SHADOW

Daylight was fading in the room where Lorraine lay in a stupor so deep that at moments the Sister of Mercy and the young military surgeon could scarcely believe her alive there on the pillows.

Jack, his head on his arms, stood by the window, staring out vacantly at the streak of light in the west, against which, on the straight, gray ramparts, the white flag flapped black against the dying sun.

Under the window, in the muddy, black streets, the packed throngs swayed and staggered and trampled through the filth, amid a crush of camp-wagons, artillery, ambulances, and crowding squadrons of cavalry. Riotous line soldiers cried out "Treason!" and hissed their generals or cursed their Emperor; the tall cuirassiers surged by in silence, sombre faces turned towards the west, where the white flag flew on the ramparts. Heavier, denser, more suffocating grew the crush; an ambulance broke down, a caisson smashed into a lamp-post, a cuirassier's horse slipped in the greasy depths of the filth, pitching its steel-clad rider to the pavement. Through the Place d'Alsace-Lorraine, through the Avenue du Collège and the Place d'Armes, passed the turbulent torrent of men and horses and cannon. The Grande Rue was choked from the church to the bronze statue in the Place Turenne; the Porte de Paris was piled with dead, the Porte de Balan tottered a mass of ruins.

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The cannonade still shook the hills to the south in spite of the white flag on the citadel. There were white flags, too, on the ramparts, on the Port des Capucins, and at the Gate of Paris. An officer, followed by a lancer, who carried a white pennon on his lance-point, entered the street from the north. A dozen soldiers and officers hacked it off with their sabres, crying, "No surrender! no surrender!" Shells continued to fall into the packed streets, blowing horrible gaps in the masses of struggling men. The sun set in a crimson blaze, reflecting on window and roof and the bloody waters of the river. When at last it sank behind the smoky hills, the blackness in the city was lighted by lurid flames from burning houses and the swift crimson glare of Prussian shells, still plunging into the town. Through the crash of crumbling walls, the hiss and explosion of falling shells, the awful clamour and din in the streets, the town clock struck solemnly six times. As if at a signal the firing died away; a desolate silence fell over the city—a silence full of rumours, of strange movements—a stillness pulsating with the death gasps of a nation.

Out on the heights of La Moncelle, of Daigny, and Givonne lanterns glimmered where the good Sisters of Mercy and the ambulance corps passed among the dead and dying—the thirty-five thousand dead and dying! The plateau of Illy, where the cavalry had charged again and again, was twinkling with thousands of lanterns; on the heights of Frénois Prussian torches swung, signalling victory.

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But the spectacle in the interior of the town—a town of nineteen thousand people, into which now were crushed seventy thousand frantic soldiers, was dreadful beyond description. Horror multiplied on horror. The two bridges and the streets were so jammed with horses and artillery trains that it seemed impossible for any human being to move another inch. In the glare of the flames from the houses on fire, in the middle of the smoke, horses, cannon, fourgons, charrettes, ambulances, piles of dead and dying, formed a sickening pell-mell. In this chaos starving soldiers, holding lighted lanterns, tore strips of flesh from dead horses lying in the mud, killed by the shells. Arms, broken and foul with blood and mud—rifles, pistols, sabres, lances, casques, mitrailleuses—covered the pavements.

The gates of the town were closed; the water in the fortification moats reflected the red light from the flames. The glacis of the ramparts was covered by black masses of soldiers, watching the placing of a cordon of German sentinels around the walls.

All public buildings, all the churches, were choked with wounded; their blood covered everything.

On the steps of the churches poor wretches sat bandaging their torn limbs with strips of bloody muslin.

Strange sounds came from the stone walls along the street, where zouaves, turcos, and line soldiers, cursing and weeping with rage, were smashing their rifles to pieces rather than surrender them. Artillerymen were spiking their guns, some ran them into the river, some hammered the mitrailleuses out of shape with pickaxes. The cavalry flung their sabres into the river, the cuirassiers threw away revolvers and helmets. Everywhere officers were breaking their swords and cursing the surrender. The officers of the 74th of the Line threw their sabres and even their decorations into the Meuse. Everywhere, too, regiments were burning their colours and destroying their eagles; the colonel of the 52d of the Line himself burned his colours in the presence of all the officers of the regiment, in the centre of the street. The 88th and 30th, the 68th, the 78th, and 74th regiments followed this example. "Mort aux Vaches!" howled a herd of half-crazed reservists, bursting into the crush. "Mort aux Prussiens! À la lanterne, Badinguet! Vive la République!"

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Jack turned away from the window. The tall Sister of Mercy stood beside the bed where Lorraine lay.

Jack made a sign.

"She is asleep," murmured the Sister; "you may come nearer now. Close the window."

Before he could reach the bed the door was opened violently from without, and an officer entered swinging a lantern. He did not see Lorraine at first, but held the door open, saying to Jack: "Pardon, monsieur; this house is reserved. I am very sorry to trouble you."

Another officer entered, an old man, covered to the eyes by his crimson gold-brocaded cap. Two more followed.

"There is a sick person here," said Jack. "You cannot have the intention of turning her out! It is inhuman—"

He stopped short, stupefied at the sight of the old officer, who now stood bareheaded in the lantern-light, looking at the bed where Lorraine lay. It was the Emperor!—her father.

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Slowly the Emperor advanced to the bed, his dreary eyes fixed on Lorraine's pale cheeks.

In the silence the cries from the street outside rose clear and distinct:

"Vive la République! À bas l'Empereur!"

The Emperor spoke, looking straight at Lorraine: "Gentlemen, we cannot disturb a woman. Pray find another house."

After a moment the officers began to back out, one by one, through the doorway. The Emperor still stood by the bed, his vague, inscrutable eyes fixed on Lorraine.

Jack moved towards the bed, trembling. The Emperor raised his colourless face.

"Monsieur—your sister? No—your wife?"

"My promised wife, sire," muttered Jack, cold with fear.

"A child," said the Emperor, softly.

With a vague gesture he stepped nearer, smoothed the coverlet, bent closer, and touched the sleeping girl's forehead with his lips. Then he stood up, gray-faced, impassive.

"I am an old man," he said, as though to himself. He looked at Jack, who now came close to him, holding out something in one hand. It was the steel box.

"For me, monsieur?" asked the Emperor.

Jack nodded. He could not speak.

The Emperor took the box, still looking at Jack.

There was a moment's silence, then Jack spoke: "It may be too late. It is a plan of a balloon—we brought it to you from Lorraine—"

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The uproar in the streets drowned his voice—"Mort à l'Empereur! À bas l'Empire!"

A staff-officer opened the door and peered in; the Emperor stepped to the threshold.

"I thank you—I thank you both, my children," he said. His eyes wandered again towards the bed; the cries in the street rang out furiously.

"Mort à l'Empereur!"

The Sister of Mercy was kneeling by the bed; Jack shivered, and dropped his head.

When he looked up the Emperor had gone.

All night long he watched at the bedside, leaning on his elbow, one hand shading his eyes from the candle-flame. The Sister of Mercy, white and worn with the duties of that terrible day, slept

upright in an arm-chair.

Dawn brought the sad notes of Prussian trumpets from the ramparts pealing through the devastated city; at sunrise the pavements rang and shook with the trample of the White Cuirassiers. A Saxon infantry band burst into the "Wacht am Rhine" at the Paris Gate; the Place Turenne vomited Uhlans. Jack sank down by the bed, burying his face in the sheets.

The Sister of Mercy rubbed her eyes and started up. She touched Jack on the shoulder.

"I am going to be very ill," he said, raising a face burning with fever. "Never mind me, but stay with her."

"I understand," said the Sister, gently. "You must lie in the room beyond."

The fever seized Jack with a swiftness incredible.

"Then—swear it—by the—by the Saviour there—there on your crucifix!" he muttered.

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"I swear," she answered, softly.

His mind wandered a little, but he set his teeth and rose, staggering to the table. He wrote something on a bit of paper with shaking fingers.

"Send for them," he said. "You can telegraph now. They are in Brussels—my sister—my family—"

Then, blinded by the raging fever, he made his way uncertainly to the bed, groped for Lorraine's hand, pressed it, and lay down at her feet.

"Call the surgeon!" he gasped.

And it was very many days before he said anything else with as much sense in it.

"God help them!" cried the Sister of Mercy, tearfully, her thin hands clasped to her lips. Alone she guided Jack into the room beyond.

Outside the Prussian bands were playing. The sun flung a long, golden beam through the window straight across Lorraine's breast.

She stirred, and murmured in her sleep, "Jack! Jack! 'Tiens ta Foy!'"

But Jack was past hearing now; and when, at sundown, the young surgeon came into his room he was nearly past all aid.

"Typhoid?" asked the Sister.

"The Pest!" said the surgeon, gravely.

The Sister started a little.

"I will stay," she murmured. "Send this despatch when you go out. Can he live?"

They whispered together a moment, stepping softly to the door of the room where Lorraine lay.

"It can't be helped now," said the surgeon, looking at Lorraine; "she'll be well enough by to-morrow; she must stay with you. The chances are that he will die."

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The trample of the White Cuirassiers in the street outside filled the room; the serried squadrons thundered past, steel ringing on steel, horses neighing, trumpets sounding the "Royal March." Lorraine's eyes unclosed.

"Jack!"

There was no answer.

The surgeon whispered to the Sister of Mercy: "Don't forget to hang out the pest flag."

"Jack! Jack!" wailed Lorraine, sitting up in bed. Through the tangled masses of her heavy hair, gilded by the morning sunshine, her eyes, bright with fever, roamed around the room, startled, despairing. Under the window the White Cuirassiers were singing as they rode:

"Flieg', Adler, flieg'! Wir stürmen nach,
Ein einig Volk in Waffen,
Wir stürmen nach ob tausendfach
Des Todes Pforten Klaffen!
Und fallen wir, flieg', Adler, flieg'!
Aus unserm Blute mächst der Sieg!
Vorwärts!
Flieg', Adler, flieg'!
Victoria!
Victoria!
Mit uns ist Gott!"

Terrified, turning her head from side to side, Lorraine stretched out her hands. She tried to speak, but her ears were filled with the deep voices shouting the splendid battle-hymn—

"Fly, Eagle! fly!"

With us is God!"

She crept out of bed, her bare feet white with cold, her bare arms flushed and burning. Blinded by the blaze of the rising sun, she felt her way around the room, calling, "Jack! Jack!" The window was open; she crept to it. The street was a surging, scintillating torrent of steel. [Pg 331]

"God with us!"

The White Cuirassiers shook their glittering sabres; the melancholy trumpet's blast swept skyward; the standards flapped. Suddenly the stony street trembled with the outcrash of drums; the cuirassiers halted, the steel-mailed squadrons parted right and left; a carriage drove at a gallop through the opened ranks. Lorraine leaned from the window; the officer in the carriage looked up.

As the fallen Emperor's eyes met Lorraine's, she stretched out both little bare arms and cried: "Vive la France!"—and he was gone to his captivity, the White Cuirassiers galloping on every side.

The Sister of Mercy opened the door behind, calling her.

"He is dying," she said. "He is in here. Come quickly!"

Lorraine turned her head. Her eyes were sweet and serene, her whole pale face transfigured.

"He will live," she said. "I am here."

"It is the pest!" muttered the Sister.

Lorraine glided into the hall and unclosed the door of the silent room.

He opened his eyes.

"There is no death!" she whispered, her face against his. "There is neither death nor sorrow nor dying." [Pg 332]

The clamour in the street died out; the wind was still; the pest flag under the window hung motionless.

He sighed; his eyes closed.

She stretched out beside him, her body against his, her bare arms around his neck.

His heart fluttered; stopped; fluttered; was silent; moved once again; ceased.

"Jack!"

Again his heart stirred—or was it her own?

When the morning sun broke over the ramparts of Sedan she fell asleep in his arms, lulled by the pulsations of his heart. [Pg 333]

CHAPTER XXXI

THE PROPHECY OF LORRAINE

When the Vicomte and Madame de Morteyn arrived in Sedan from Brussels the last of the French prisoners had been gone a week; the foul city was swept clean; the corpse-choked river no longer flung its dead across the shallows of the island of Glaires; the canal was untroubled by the ghastly freight of death that had collected like logs on a boom below the village of Iges.

All day the tramp of Prussian patrols echoed along the stony streets; all day the sinister outburst of the hoarse Bavarian bugles woke the echoes behind the ramparts. Red Cross flags drooped in the sunshine from churches, from banks, from every barrack, every depot, every public building. The pest flags waved gaily over the Asylum and the little Museum. A few appeared along the Avenue Philippoteaux, others still fluttered on the Gothic church and the convent across the Viaduc de Torcy. Three miles away the ruins of the village of Bazeilles lay in the bright September sunshine. Bavarian soldiers in greasy corvée lumbered among the charred chaos searching for their dead.

The plain of Illy, the heights of La Moncelle, Daigny, Givonne, and Frénois were vast cemeteries. Dredging was going on along the river, whither the curious small boys of Sedan betook themselves and stayed from morning till night watching the recovering of rusty sabres, bayonets, rifles, cannon, and often more grewsome flotsam. It was probably the latter that drew the small boys like flies; neither the one nor the other are easily glutted with horrors. [Pg 334]

The silver trumpets of the Saxon Riders were chorusing the noon call from the Porte de Paris when a long train crept into the Sedan station and pulled up in the sunshine, surrounded by a cordon of Hanover Riflemen. One by one the passengers passed into the station, where passports were shown and apathetic commissaires took charge of the baggage.

There were no hacks, no conveyances of any kind, so the tall, white-bearded gentleman in black,

who stood waiting anxiously for his passport, gave his arm to an old lady, heavily veiled, and bowed down with the sudden age that great grief brings. Beside her walked a young girl, also in deep mourning.

A man on crutches directed them to the Place Turenne, hobbling after them to murmur his thanks for the piece of silver the girl slipped into his hands.

"The number on the house is 31," he repeated; "the pest flag is no longer outside."

"The pest?" murmured the old man under his breath.

At that moment a young girl came out of the crowded station, looking around her anxiously.

"Lorraine!" cried the white-haired man.

She was in his arms before he could move. Madame de Morteyn clung to her, too, sobbing convulsively; Dorothy hid her face in her black-edged handkerchief.

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After a moment Lorraine stepped back, drying her sweet eyes. Dorothy kissed her again and again.

"I—I don't see why we should cry," said Lorraine, while the tears ran down her flushed cheeks. "If he had died it would have been different."

After a silence she said again:

"You will see. We are not unhappy—Jack and I. Monsieur Grahame came yesterday with Rickerl, who is doing very well."

"Rickerl here, too?" whispered Dorothy.

Lorraine slipped an arm through hers, looking back at the old people.

"Come," she said, serenely, "Jack is able to sit up." Then in Dorothy's ear she whispered, "I dare not tell them—you must."

"Dare not tell them—"

"That—that I married Jack—this morning."

The girls' arms pressed each other.

German officers passed and repassed, rigid, supercilious, staring at the young girls with that half-sneering, half-impudent, near-sighted gaze peculiar to the breed. Their insolent eyes, however, dropped before the clear, mild glance of the old vicomte.

His face was furrowed by care and grief, but he held his white head high and stepped with an elasticity that he had not known in years. Defeat, disaster, sorrow, could not weaken him; he was of the old stock, the real beau-sabreur, a relic of the old régime, that grew young in the face of defeat, that died of a broken heart at the breath of dishonour. There had been no dishonour, as he understood it—there had been defeat, bitter defeat. That was part of his trade, to face defeat nobly, courteously, chivalrously; to bow with a smile on his lips to the more skilful adversary who had disarmed him.

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Bitterness he knew, when the stiff Prussian officers clanked past along the sidewalk of this French city; despair he never dreamed of. As for dishonour—that is the cry of the pack, the refuge of the snarling mob yelping at the bombastic vociferations of some mean-souled demagogue; and in Paris there were many, and the pack howled in the Republic at the crack of the lash.

"Lady Hesketh is here, too," said Lorraine. "She appears to be a little reconciled to her loss. Dorothy, it breaks my heart to see Rickerl. He lies in his room all day, silent, ghastly white. He does not believe that Alixe—did what she did—and died there at Morteyn. Oh, I am glad you are here. Jack says you must tell Rickerl nothing about Sir Thorald; nobody is to know that—now all is ended."

"Yes," said Dorothy.

When they came to the house, Archibald Grahame and Lady Hesketh met them at the door. Molly Hesketh had wept a great deal at first. She wept still, but more moderately.

"My angel child!" she said, taking Dorothy to her bosom. Grahame took off his hat.

The old people hurried to Jack's room above; Dorothy, guided by Lorraine, hastened to Rickerl; Archibald Grahame looked genially at Molly and said:

"Now don't, Lady Hesketh—I beg you won't. Try to be cheerful. We must find something to divert you."

"I don't wish to," said Molly.

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"There is a band concert this afternoon in the Place Turenne," suggested Grahame.

"I'll never go," said Molly; "I haven't anything fit to wear."

In the room above, Madame de Morteyn sat with Jack's hand in hers, smiling through her tears. The old vicomte stood beside her, one arm clasping Lorraine's slender waist.

"Children! children! wicked ones!" he repeated, "how dare you marry each other like two little heathen?"

"It comes, my dear, from your having married an American wife," said Madame de Morteyn, brushing away the tears; "they do those things in America."

"America!" grumbled the vicomte, perfectly delighted—"a nice country for young savages. Lorraine, you at least should have known better."

"I did," said Lorraine; "I ought to have married Jack long ago."

The vicomte was speechless; Jack laughed and pressed his aunt's hands.

They spoke of Morteyn, of their hope that one day they might rebuild it. They spoke, too, of Paris, cuirassed with steel, flinging defiance to the German floods that rolled towards the walls from north, south, west, and east.

"There is no death," said Lorraine; "the years renew their life. We shall all live. France will be reborn."

"There is no death," repeated the old man, and kissed her on the brow.

So they stood there in the sunlight, tearless, serene, moved by the prophecy of their child Lorraine. And Lorraine sat beside her husband, her fathomless blue eyes dreaming in the sunlight—dreaming of her Province of Lorraine, of the Honour of France, of the Justice of God—dreaming of love and the sweetness of her youth, unfolding like a fresh rose at dawn, there on her husband's breast.

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THE END

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