The Last Shot eBook

The Last Shot

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BOOKRAGS

Contents

The Last Shot eBook....1

Contents....2

Table of Contents....14

Page 1....16

Page 2....17

Page 3....18

Page 4....20

Page 5....22

Page 6....24

Page 7....26

Page 8....28

Page 9....30

Page 10....32

Page 11....34

Page 12....36

Page 13....38

Page 14....40

Page 15....42

Page 16....44

Page 17....45

Page 18....47

Page 19....48

Page 20....50

Page 21....52

Page 22....54

Page 23.....56
Page 24.....58
Page 25.....60
Page 26.....62
Page 27.....64
Page 28.....66
Page 29.....68
Page 30.....70
Page 31.....72
Page 32.....74
Page 33.....76
Page 34.....78
Page 35.....80
Page 36.....82
Page 37.....84
Page 38.....86
Page 39.....88
Page 40.....90
Page 41.....92
Page 42.....94
Page 43.....95
Page 44.....97
Page 45.....99
Page 46.....101
Page 47.....103
Page 48.....105

Page 49.....107
Page 50.....109
Page 51.....111
Page 52.....113
Page 53.....115
Page 54.....116
Page 55.....118
Page 56.....120
Page 57.....122
Page 58.....124
Page 59.....126
Page 60.....128
Page 61.....130
Page 62.....132
Page 63.....134
Page 64.....136
Page 65.....138
Page 66.....140
Page 67.....142
Page 68.....144
Page 69.....146
Page 70.....148
Page 71.....149
Page 72.....151
Page 73.....153
Page 74.....155

Page 75.....157
Page 76.....159
Page 77.....161
Page 78.....163
Page 79.....165
Page 80.....167
Page 81.....169
Page 82.....171
Page 83.....173
Page 84.....175
Page 85.....177
Page 86.....179
Page 87.....181
Page 88.....183
Page 89.....185
Page 90.....187
Page 91.....189
Page 92.....191
Page 93.....193
Page 94.....195
Page 95.....197
Page 96.....199
Page 97.....201
Page 98.....202
Page 99.....204
Page 100.....206

Page 101.....207
Page 102.....208
Page 103.....210
Page 104.....212
Page 105.....214
Page 106.....216
Page 107.....218
Page 108.....220
Page 109.....222
Page 110.....224
Page 111.....226
Page 112.....228
Page 113.....230
Page 114.....232
Page 115.....234
Page 116.....236
Page 117.....238
Page 118.....240
Page 119.....242
Page 120.....244
Page 121.....246
Page 122.....248
Page 123.....250
Page 124.....252
Page 125.....254
Page 126.....256

Page 127.....258
Page 128.....260
Page 129.....262
Page 130.....264
Page 131.....266
Page 132.....268
Page 133.....270
Page 134.....271
Page 135.....273
Page 136.....274
Page 137.....275
Page 138.....277
Page 139.....279
Page 140.....281
Page 141.....283
Page 142.....285
Page 143.....287
Page 144.....289
Page 145.....291
Page 146.....293
Page 147.....295
Page 148.....297
Page 149.....299
Page 150.....301
Page 151.....303
Page 152.....305

Page 153.....307
Page 154.....309
Page 155.....311
Page 156.....312
Page 157.....314
Page 158.....316
Page 159.....318
Page 160.....320
Page 161.....322
Page 162.....324
Page 163.....325
Page 164.....327
Page 165.....329
Page 166.....330
Page 167.....332
Page 168.....334
Page 169.....336
Page 170.....338
Page 171.....340
Page 172.....342
Page 173.....344
Page 174.....346
Page 175.....348
Page 176.....350
Page 177.....352
Page 178.....354

Page 179.....356
Page 180.....358
Page 181.....360
Page 182.....362
Page 183.....364
Page 184.....366
Page 185.....368
Page 186.....370
Page 187.....372
Page 188.....374
Page 189.....376
Page 190.....378
Page 191.....379
Page 192.....381
Page 193.....383
Page 194.....385
Page 195.....387
Page 196.....389
Page 197.....391
Page 198.....393
Page 199.....395
Page 200.....397
Page 201.....399
Page 202.....401
Page 203.....403
Page 204.....405

Page 205.....407
Page 206.....409
Page 207.....411
Page 208.....413
Page 209.....415
Page 210.....417
Page 211.....419
Page 212.....421
Page 213.....423
Page 214.....425
Page 215.....426
Page 216.....428
Page 217.....430
Page 218.....432
Page 219.....434
Page 220.....436
Page 221.....438
Page 222.....440
Page 223.....442
Page 224.....444
Page 225.....446
Page 226.....448
Page 227.....450
Page 228.....451
Page 229.....453
Page 230.....455

Page 231.....457
Page 232.....459
Page 233.....461
Page 234.....463
Page 235.....465
Page 236.....467
Page 237.....469
Page 238.....471
Page 239.....473
Page 240.....475
Page 241.....477
Page 242.....479
Page 243.....481
Page 244.....483
Page 245.....485
Page 246.....487
Page 247.....488
Page 248.....490
Page 249.....491
Page 250.....493
Page 251.....494
Page 252.....496
Page 253.....498
Page 254.....500
Page 255.....501
Page 256.....503

Page 257.....505
Page 258.....507
Page 259.....509
Page 260.....511
Page 261.....513
Page 262.....515
Page 263.....516
Page 264.....518
Page 265.....520
Page 266.....521
Page 267.....523
Page 268.....525
Page 269.....527
Page 270.....529
Page 271.....530
Page 272.....532
Page 273.....534
Page 274.....536
Page 275.....538
Page 276.....540
Page 277.....542
Page 278.....544
Page 279.....546
Page 280.....548
Page 281.....549
Page 282.....551

Page 283.....553
Page 284.....555
Page 285.....557
Page 286.....559
Page 287.....561
Page 288.....563
Page 289.....565
Page 290.....567
Page 291.....569
Page 292.....571
Page 293.....572
Page 294.....574
Page 295.....576
Page 296.....578
Page 297.....580
Page 298.....582
Page 299.....584
Page 300.....585
Page 301.....587
Page 302.....589
Page 303.....590

Table of Contents

Table of Contents

Section	Page
Start of eBook	1
A SPECK IN THE SKY	1
II	8
III	13
IV	16
V	18
VI	24
VII	31
VIII	38
IX	40
X	48
XI	52
XII	58
XIII	67
XIV	73
XV	78
XVI	80
XVII	84
XVIII	88
XIX	94
XX	102
XXI	110
XXII	114
XXIII	116
XXIV	124
XXV	127
XXVI	134
XXVII	139
XXVIII	146
XXIX	150
XXX	161
XXXI	164
XXXII	167
XXXIII	188
XXXIV	196
XXXV	199
XXXVI	204
XXXVII	207
XXXVIII	211
XXXIX	217

XL	224
XLI	234
XLII	236
XLIII	243
XLIV	255
XLV	269
XLVI	289
XLVII	297

Page 1

A SPECK IN THE SKY

It was Marta who first saw the speck in the sky. Her outcry and her bound from her seat at the tea-table brought her mother and Colonel Westerling after her onto the lawn, where they became motionless figures, screening their eyes with their hands. The newest and most wonderful thing in the world at the time was this speck appearing above the irregular horizon of the Brown range, in view of a landscape that centuries of civilization had fertilized and cultivated and formed.

At the base of the range ran a line of white stone posts, placed by international commissions of surveyors to the nicety of an inch's variation. In the very direction of the speck's flight a spur of foot-hills extended into the plain that stretched away to the Gray range, distinct at the distance of thirty miles in the bright afternoon light. Faithful to their part in refusing to climb, the white posts circled around the spur, hugging the levels.

In the lap of the spur was La Tir, the old town, and on the other side of the boundary lay South La Tir, the new town. Through both ran the dusty ribbon of a road, drawn straight across the plain and over the glistening thread of a river. On its way to the pass of the Brown range it skirted the garden of the Gallands, which rose in terraces to a seventeenth-century house overlooking the old town from its outskirts. They were such a town, such a road, such a landscape as you may see on many European frontiers. The Christian people who lived in the region were like the Christian people you know if you look for the realities of human nature under the surface differences of language and habits.

Beyond the house rose the ruins of a castle, its tower still intact. Marta always referred to the castle as the baron; for in her girlhood she had a way of personifying all inanimate things. If the castle walls were covered with hoar frost, she said that the baron was shivering; if the wind tore around the tower, she said that the baron was groaning over the democratic tendencies of the time. On such a summer afternoon as this, the baron was growing old gracefully, at peace with his enemies.

Centuries older than the speck in the sky was the baron; but the pass road was many more, countless more, centuries older than he. It had been a trail for tribes long before Roman legions won a victory in the pass, which was acclaimed an imperial triumph. To hold the pass was to hold the range. All the blood shed there would make a red river, inundating the plain. Marta, a maker of pictures, saw how the legions, brown, sinewy, lean aliens, looked in their close ranks. They were no less real to her imagination than the infantry of the last war thirty years ago, or the Crusaders who came that way, or the baron in person and his shaggy-bearded, uncouth, ignorant ruffians who were their own moral law, leaving their stronghold to plunder the people of the fertile plain of the fruits of their toil.

Page 2

Stone axe, spear and bow, javelin and broadsword, blunderbuss and creaking cannon—all the weapons of all stages in the art of war—had gone trooping past. Now had come the speck in the sky, straight on, like some projectile born of the ether.

“Beside the old baron, we are parvenus,” Marta would say. “And what a parvenu the baron would have been to the Roman aristocrat!”

“Our family is old enough—none older in the province!” Mrs. Galland would reply. “Marta, how your mind does wander! I’d get a headache just contemplating the things you are able to think of in five minutes.”

The first Galland had built a house on the land that his king had given him for one of the most brilliant feats of arms in the history of the pass. He had the advantage of the baron in that he could read and write, though with difficulty. Marta had an idea that he was not presentable at a tea-table; however, he must have been more so than the baron, who, she guessed, would have grabbed all the cakes on the plate as a sheer matter of habit in taking what he wanted unless a stronger than he interfered.

Even the tower, raised to the glory of an older family whose descendants, if any survived, were unaware of their lineage, had become known as the Galland tower. The Gallands were rooted in the soil of the frontier; they were used to having war’s hot breath blow past their door; they were at home in the language and customs of two peoples; theirs was a peculiar tradition, which Marta had absorbed with her first breath. Every detail of her circumscribed existence reminded her that she was a Galland.

Town and plain and range were the first vista of landscape that she had seen; doubtless they would be the last. Meanwhile, there was the horizon. She was particularly fond of looking at it. If you are seventeen, with a fanciful mind, you can find much information not in histories or encyclopaedias or the curricula of schools in the horizon.

There she had learned that the Roman aristocrat had turned his thumb down to a lot of barbarian captives because he had a fit of indigestion, and the next day, when his digestion was better, he had scattered coins among barbarian children; that Napoleon, who had also gone over the pass road, was a pompous, fat little man, who did not always wipe his upper lip clean of snuff when he was on a campaign; that the baron’s youngest daughter had lost her eyesight from a bodkin thrust for telling her sister, who had her father’s temper, that she was developing a double chin.

For the people of Maria’s visions were humanly real to her, and as such she liked and understood them. If the first Galland were half a robber, to disguise the fact because he was her ancestor was not playing fair. It made him only a lay figure of romance.

Page 3

One or two afternoons a week Colonel Hedworth Westerling, commander of the regimental post of the Grays on the other side of the white posts, stretched his privilege of crossing the frontier and appeared for tea at the Gallands'. It meant a pleasant half-hour breaking a long walk, a relief from garrison surroundings. Favored in mind and person, favored in high places, he had become a colonel at thirty-two. People with fixed ideas as to the appearance of a soldier said that he looked every inch the commander. He was tall, strong-built, his deep, broad chest suggesting powerful energy. Conscious of his abilities, it was not without reason that he thought well of himself, in view of the order, received that morning, which was to make this a farewell call.

He had found Mrs. Galland an agreeable reflection of an aristocratic past. The daughter had what he defined vaguely as girlish piquancy. He found it amusing to try to answer her unusual questions; he liked the variety of her inventive mind, with its flashes of downright matter-of-factness.

Ascending the steps with his firm, regular tread, he suggested poise and confidence and, perhaps, vanity also in his fastidious dress. As Marta's slight, immature figure came to the edge of the veranda, he wondered what she would be like five years later, when she would be twenty-two and a woman. It was unlikely that he would ever know, or that in a month he would care to know. He would pass on; his rank would keep him from returning to South La Tir, which was a colonel's billet except in time of war.

Not until tea was served did he mention his new assignment; he was going to the general staff at the capital. Mrs. Galland murmured her congratulations in conventional fashion.

"Into the very holy of holies of the great war machine, isn't it?" Marta asked.

"Yes—yes, exactly!" he replied.

Her chair was drawn back from the table. She leaned forward in a favorite position of hers when she was intensely interested, with hands clasped over her knee, which her mother always found aggravatingly tomboyish. She had a mass of lustrous black hair and a mouth rather large in repose, but capable of changing curves of emotion. Her large, dark eyes, luminously deep under long lashes, if not the rest of her face, had beauty. Her head was bent, the lashes forming a line with her brow now, and her eyes had the still flame of wonder that they had when she was looking all around a thing and through it to find what it meant. Westerling knew by the signs that she was going to break out with one of her visions, rather than one of her whimsical ideas. She was seeing the Roman general, the baron, the first Galland, and the fat, pompous little man, no less in the life than Hedworth Westerling. She had fused them into one.

"Some day you will be chief of staff, the head of the Gray army!" she suddenly exclaimed.

Westerling started as if he had been surprised in a secret. Then he flushed slightly.

Page 4

“Why?” he asked with forced carelessness. “Your reasons? They’re more interesting than your prophecy.”

“Because you have the will to be,” she said without emphasis, in the impersonal revelations of thought. “You want power. You have ambition.”

He looked the picture of it, with his square jaw, his well-moulded head set close to the shoulders on a sturdy neck, his even teeth showing as his lips parted in an unconscious smile.

“Marta, Marta! She is—is so explosive,” Mrs. Galland remarked apologetically to the colonel.

“I asked for her reasons. I brought it on myself—and it is not a bad compliment,” he replied. Indeed, he had never received one so thrilling.

His smile, a smile well pleased with itself, remained as Mrs. Galland began to talk of other things, and its lingering satisfaction disappeared only with Marta’s cry at sight of the speck in the sky over the Brown range. She was out on the lawn before the others had risen from their seats.

“An aeroplane! Hurry!” she called.

This was a summons that aroused even Mrs. Galland’s serenity to haste. For the first time they were seeing the new wonder in all the fascination of novelty to us moderns, who soon make our new wonders commonplace and clamor impatiently for others.

“He flies! A man flies!” Marta exclaimed. “Look at that—coming straight for your tower, baron! You’d better pull up the drawbridge and go on your knees in the chapel, for devils are abroad!”

How fast the speck grew! How it spread to the entranced vision! It became a thing of still, soaring wings with a human atom in its centre, Captain Arthur Lanstron, already called a fool for his rashness by a group of Brown officers on the aviation grounds beyond the Brown range.

Naturally, the business of war, watching for every invention that might serve its ends, was the first patron of flight. Lanstron, pupil of a pioneer aviator, had been warned by him and by the chief of staff of the Browns, who was looking on, to keep in a circle close to the ground. But he was doing so well that he thought he would try rising a little higher. When the levers responded with the ease of a bird’s wings, temptation became inspiration and inspiration urged on temptation. He had gone mad with the ecstasy of his sensation, there between heaven and earth. Five seconds of this was worth five thousand years of any other form of life.

The summits of the range shot under him, unfolding a variegated rug of landscape. He dipped the planes slightly, intending to follow the range's descent and again they answered to his desire. He saw himself the eyes of an army, the scout of the empyrean. If a body of troops were to march along the pass road they would be as visible as a cloud in the sky. Yes, here was revolution in detecting the enemy's plans! He had become momentarily unconscious of the swiftness of his progress, thanks to its hypnotic facility. He was in the danger which too active a brain may bring to a critical and delicate mechanical task. The tower loomed before him as suddenly as if it had been shot up out of the earth. He must turn, and quickly, to avoid disaster; he must turn, or he would be across the white posts in the enemy's country.

Page 5

“Oh, glorious magic!” cried Marta.

“A dozen good shots could readily bring it down,” remarked Westerling critically. “It makes a steady target at that angle of approach. He’s going to turn—but take care, there!”

“Oh!” groaned Marta and Mrs. Galland together.

In an agony of suspense they saw the fragile creation of cloth and bamboo and metal, which had seemed as secure as an albatross riding on the lap of a steady wind, dip far over, careen back in the other direction, and then the whirring noise that had grown with its flight ceased. It was no longer a thing of winged life, defying the law of gravity, but a thing dead, falling under the burden of a living weight.

“The engine has stopped!” exclaimed Westerling, any trace of emotion in his observant imperturbability that of satisfaction that the machine was the enemy’s. He was thinking of the exhibition, not of the man in the machine.

Marta was thinking of the man who was about to die, a silhouette against the soft blue holding its own balance resolutely in the face of peril. She could not watch any longer; she could not wait on the catastrophe. She was living the part of the aviator more vividly than he, with his hand and mind occupied. She rushed down the terrace steps wildly, as if her going and her agonized prayer could avert the inevitable. The plane, descending, skimmed the garden wall and passed out of sight. She heard a thud, a crackling of braces, a ripping of cloth, but no cry.

Westerling had started after her, exclaiming, “This is a case for first aid!” while Mrs. Galland, taking the steps as fast as she could, brought up the rear. Through the gateway in the garden wall could be seen the shoulders of a young officer, a streak of red coursing down his cheek, rising from the wreck. An inarticulate sob of relief broke from Marta’s throat, followed by quick gasps of breath. Captain Arthur Lanstron was looking into the startled eyes of a young girl that seemed to reflect his own emotions of the moment after having shared those he had in the air.

“I flew! I flew clear over the range, at any rate!” he said. “And I’m alive. I managed to hold her so she missed the wall and made an easy bump.”

Marta smiled in the reaction from terror at his idea of an easy bump, while he was examining the damage to his person. He got one foot free of the wreck and that leg was all right. She shared his elation. Then he found that the other was uninjured, just as she cried in distress:

“But your hand—oh, your hand!”

His left hand hung limp from the wrist, cut, mashed, and bleeding. Its nerves numbed, he had not as yet felt any pain from the injury. Now he regarded it in a kind of awakening stare of realization of a deformity to come.

“Wool-gathering again!” he muttered to himself crossly.

Then, seeing that she had turned white, he thrust the disgusting thing behind his back and twinged with the movement. The pain was arriving.

Page 6

“It must be bandaged! I have a handkerchief!” she begged. “I’m not going to faint or anything like that!”

“Only bruised—and it’s the left. I am glad it was not the right,” he replied. Westerling arrived and joined Marta in offers of assistance just as they heard the prolonged honk of an automobile demanding the right of way at top speed in the direction of the pass.

“Thank you, but they’re coming for me,” said Lanstron to Westerling as he glanced up the road.

Westerling was looking at the wreck. Lanstron, who recognized him as an officer, though in mufti, kicked a bit of the torn cloth over some apparatus to hide it. At this Westerling smiled faintly. Then Lanstron saluted as officer to officer might salute across the white posts, giving his name and receiving in return Westeling’s.

They made a contrast, these two men, the colonel of the Grays, swart and sturdy, his physical vitality so evident, and the captain of the Browns, some seven or eight years the junior, bareheaded, in dishevelled fatigue uniform, his lips twitching, his slender body quivering with the pain that he could not control, while his rather bold forehead and delicate, sensitive features suggested a man of nerve and nerves who might have left experiments in a laboratory for an adventure in the air. There was a kind of challenge in their glances; the challenge of an ancient feud of their peoples; of the professional rivalry of polite duellists. Lanstron’s slight figure seemed to express the weaker number of the three million soldiers of the Browns; Westerling’s bulkier one, the four million five hundred thousand of the Grays.

“You had a narrow squeak and you made a very snappy recovery at the last second,” said Westerling, passing a compliment across the white posts. Marta could literally see a white post there between the two.

“That’s in the line of duty for you and me, isn’t it?” Lanstron replied, his voice thick with pain as he forced a smile.

There was no pose in his fortitude. He was evidently disgusted with himself over the whole business, and he turned to the group of three officers and a civilian who alighted from a big Brown army automobile as if he were prepared to have them say their worst. They seemed between the impulse of reprimanding and embracing him.

“I hope that you are not surprised at the result,” said the oldest of the officers, a man of late middle age, rather affectionately and teasingly. He wore a single order on his breast, a plain iron cross, and the insignia of his rank was that of a field-marshal.

“Not now. I should be again, sir,” said Lanstron, looking full at the field-marshal in the appeal of one asking for another chance. “I was wool-gathering. My mind was off duty

for a second and I got a lesson in self-control at the expense of the machine. I treated it worse than it deserved, and it treated me better than I deserved. But I shall not wool-gather next time. I've got a reminder more urgent than a string tied around my finger."

Page 7

“Yes, that hand needs immediate attention,” said the doctor. He and another officer began helping Lanstron into the automobile.

“The first flight ever made over a range—even a low one! Thirty miles straightaway!” remarked the civilian, making a cursory examination of the wreck of the machine which was a pattern known by his name.

“Very educational for our young man,” said the field-marshal, and at sight of Mrs. Galland paused while they exchanged the greetings of old friends.

“Your Excellency, may we send back for you, sir?” called the doctor. He was not one to let rank awe him when duty pressed. “This hand ought to be at the hospital at once.”

“I’m coming along. I’ve a train to catch,” replied His Excellency, springing into the car. “No more wool-gathering, eh?” he said, giving Lanstron a pat on the shoulder. To Lanstron this pat meant another chance.

“Good-by!” he called to the young girl, who was still watching him with big, sympathetic eyes. “I am coming back soon and land in the field, there, and when I do. I’ll claim a bunch of flowers.”

“Do! What fun!” she cried, as the car started.

“The field-marshal was Partow, their chief of staff?” Westerling asked.

“Yes,” said Mrs. Galland. “I remember when he was a young infantry officer before the last war, before he had won the iron cross and become so great. He was not of an army family—a doctor’s son, but very clever and skilful.”

“Getting a little old for his work!” remarked Westerling. “But apparently he is keen enough to take a personal interest in anything new.”

“Wasn’t it thrilling and—and terrible!” Marta exclaimed.

“Yes, like war at our own door again,” replied Mrs. Galland, who knew war. She had seen war raging on the pass road. “Lanstron, the young man said his name was,” she resumed after a pause. “No doubt the Lanstrons of Thorbourg. An old family and many of them in the army.”

“The way he refused to give in—that was fine!” said Marta.

Westerling, who had been engrossed in his own thoughts, looked up.

“Courage is the cheapest thing an army has! You can get hundreds of young officers who are glad to take a risk of that kind. The thing is,” and his fingers pressed in on the

palm of his hand in a pounding gesture of the forearm, “to direct and command—head work—organization!”

“If war should come again—” Marta began. Mrs. Galland nudged her. A Brown never mentioned war to an officer of the Grays; it was not at all in the accepted proprieties. But Marta rushed on: “So many would be engaged that it would be more horrible than ever.”

“You cannot make omelets without breaking eggs,” Westerling answered with suave finality.

“I wonder if the baron ever said that!” Marta recollected that it was a favorite expression of the fat, pompous little man. “It sounds like the baron, at all events.”

Page 8

Westerling did not mind being likened to the baron. It was a corroboration of her prophecy. The baron must have been a great leader of men in his time.

“The aeroplane will take its place as an auxiliary,” he went on, his mind still running on the theme of her prophecy, which the meeting with Lanstron had quickened. “But war will, as ever, be won by the bayonet that takes and holds a position. We shall have no miracle victories, no—”

There he broke off. He did not accompany Mrs. Galland and Marta back to the house, but made his adieus at the garden-gate.

“I’m sure that I shall never marry a soldier!” Marta burst out as she and her mother were ascending the steps.

“No?” exclaimed Mrs. Galland with the rising inflection of a placid scepticism that would not be drawn into an argument. Another of Marta’s explosions! It was not yet time to think of marriage for her. If it had been Mrs. Galland would not have been so hospitable to Colonel Westerling. She would hardly have been, even if the colonel had been younger, say, of Captain Lanstron’s age. Though an officer was an officer, whether of the Browns or the Grays, and, perforce, a gentleman to be received with the politeness of a common caste, every beat of her heart was loyal to her race. Her daughter’s hand was not for any Gray. Young Lanstron certainly must be of the Thorbourg Lanstrons, she mused. A most excellent family! Of course, Marta would marry an officer. It was the natural destiny of a Galland woman. Yet she was sometimes worried about Marta’s whimsies. She, too, could wonder what Marta would be like in five years.

II

TEN YEARS LATER

Does any man of power know whither the tendencies of his time are leading him, or the people whom he leads whither they are being led? Had any one of these four heroes of the Grays in their heavy gilt frames divined what kind of a to-morrow his day was preparing? All knew the pass of La Tir well, and if all had not won decisive battles they would have been hung in the outer office or even in the corridors, where a line of half-forgotten or forgotten generals crooked down the stairways into the oblivion of the basement. That unfortunate one whom the first Galland had driven through the pass was quite obscured in darkness. He would soon be crowded out to an antique shop for sale as an example of the portrait art of his period.

The privileged quartet on that Valhalla of victories, the walls of the chief of staff’s room, personified the military inheritance of a great nation; their names shone in luminous letters out of the thickening shadows of the past, where those of lesser men grew

dimmer as their generations receded into history. He in the steel corselet, with high cheek-bones, ferret, cold eyes, and high, thin nose, its nostrils drawn back in an aristocratic sniff—camps were evil-smelling in those days—his casquette resting on his arm, was the progenitor of him with the Louis XIV. curls; he of the early nineteenth century, with a face like Marshal Ney's, was the progenitor of him with the mustache and imperial of the sixties.

Page 9

It was whispered that the aristocratic sniff had taken to fierce, no-quarter campaigns in the bitterness of a broken heart. Did the Grays, then, really owe two of their fairest provinces to the lady who had jilted him? Had they to thank the clever wife of him of the Louis XIV. curls, whose intrigues won for her husband command of the army, for another province? It was whispered, too, that the military glory of him of the Marshal Ney physiognomy was due to the good fortune of a senile field-marshal for an opponent. But no matter. These gentlemen had seen the enemy fly. They had won. Therefore, they were the supermen of sagas who incarnate a people's valor.

The Browns gratified their own sense of superiority, in turn, by admiration of the supermen who had vanquished the Gray generals consigned to the oblivion of the basement. In their staff building, the first Galland occupied a prominent position in the main hall; while in the days of Marta's old baron heroes did not have their portraits painted for want of painters, and the present nations had consisted only of warring baronies and principalities.

They must have been rather lonely, these immortals in the Gray Valhalla, as His Excellency the chief of staff was seldom in his office. His Excellency had years, rank, prestige. The breast of his uniform sagged with the weight of his decorations. He appeared for the army at great functions, his picture was in the shop-windows. Hedworth Westerling, the new vice-chief of staff, was content with this arrangement. His years would not permit him the supreme honor. This was for a figurehead, while he had the power.

His appointment to the staff ten years ago had given him the fields he wanted, the capital itself, for the play of his abilities. His vital energy, his impressive personality, his gift for courting the influences that counted, whether man's or woman's, his astute readiness in stooping to some measures that were in keeping with the times but not with army precedent, had won for him the goal of his ambition. He had passed over the heads of older men, whom many thought his betters, rather ruthlessly. Those who would serve loyally he drew around him; those who were bitter he crowded out of his way.

The immortals would have been still more lonely, or at least confused, in the adjoining room occupied by Westerling. There the walls were hung with the silhouettes of infantrymen, such as you see at manoeuvres, in different positions of firing, crouching in shallow trenches, standing in deep trenches, or lying flat on the stomach on level earth. Another silhouette, that of an infantryman running, was peppered with white points in arms and legs and parts of the body that were not vital, to show in how many places a man may be hit with a small-calibre bullet and still survive.

The immortals had small armies. Even the mustache and imperial had only three hundred thousand in the great battle of the last war. In this day of universal European conscription, if Westerling were to win it would be with five millions—five hundred

thousand more than when he faced a young Brown officer over the wreck of an aeroplane—including the reserves; each man running, firing, crouching, as was the figure on the wall, and trying to give more of the white points that peppered the silhouette than he received.

Page 10

Now Turcas, the assistant vice-chief of staff, and Bouchard, chief of the division of intelligence, standing on either side of Westerling's desk, awaited his decisions on certain matters which they had brought to his attention. Both were older than Westerling, Turcas by ten and Bouchard by fifteen years.

Turcas had been strongly urged in inner army circles for the place that Westerling had won, but his manner and his inability to court influence were against him A lath of a man and stiff as a lath, pale, with thin, tightly-drawn lips, quiet, steel-gray eyes, a tracery of blue veins showing on his full temples, he suggested the ascetic no less than the soldier, while his incisive brevity of speech, flavored now and then with pungent humor, without any inflection in his dry voice, was in keeping with his appearance. He arrived with the clerks in the morning and frequently remained after they were gone. His life was an affair of calculated units of time; his habits of diet and exercise all regulated for the end of service. His subordinates, whose respect he held by the power of his intellect, said that his brain never tired and he had not enough body to tire. He was one of the wheels of the great army machine and loved the work for its own sake too well to be embittered at being overshadowed by a younger man. As a master of detail Westerling regarded him as an invaluable assistant, with certain limitations, which were those of the pigeonhole and the treadmill.

As for Bouchard, nature had meant him to be a wheel-horse. He had never had any hope of being chief of staff. Hawk-eyed, with a great beak nose and iron-gray hair, intensely and solemnly serious, lacking a sense of humor, he would have looked at home with his big, bony hands gripping a broadsword hilt and his lank body clothed in chain armor. He had a mastiff's devotion to its master for his chief.

"Since Lanstron became chief of intelligence of the Browns information seems to have stopped," said Westerling, but not complainingly. He appreciated Bouchard's loyalty.

"Yes, they say he even burns his laundry bills, he is so careful," Bouchard replied.

"But that we ought to know," Westerling proceeded, referring very insistently to a secret of the Browns which had baffled Bouchard. "Try a woman," he went on with that terse, hard directness which reflected one of his sides. "There is nobody like a woman for that sort of thing. Spend enough to get the right woman."

Turcas and Bouchard exchanged a glance, which rose suggestively from the top of the head of the seated vice-chief of staff. Turcas smiled slightly, while Bouchard was graven as usual.

"You could hardly reach Lanstron though you spent a queen's ransom," said Bouchard in his literal fashion.

“I should say not!” Westerling exclaimed. “No doubt about Lanstron’s being all there! I saw him ten years ago after his first aeroplane flight under conditions that proved it. However, he must have susceptible subordinates.”

Page 11

“We’ll set all the machinery we have to work to find one, sir,” Bouchard replied.

“Another thing, we may dismiss any idea that they are concealing either artillery or dirigibles or planes that we do not know of,” continued Westerling. “That is a figment of our apprehensions. The fact that we find no truth in the rumors proves that there is none. Such things are too important to be concealed by one army from another.”

“Lanstron certainly cannot carry them in his pockets,” remarked Turcas. “Still, we must be sure,” he added thoughtfully, more to himself than to Westerling, who had already turned his attention to a document which Turcas had laid on the desk.

“A recommendation by the surgeon-in-chief,” said Turcas, “for a new method of prompt segregation of ghastly cases among the wounded. I have put it in the form of an order. If reserves coming into action see men badly lacerated by shell fire it is bound to make them self-conscious and affect morale.”

“Yes,” Westerling agreed. “If moving pictures of the horrors of Port Arthur were to be shown in our barracks before a war, it would hardly encourage martial enthusiasm. I shall look this over and then have it issued. It will not be necessary to wait on action of the staff in council.”

Turcas and Bouchard exchanged another glance. They had fresh evidence of Westerling’s tendency to concentrate authority in himself.

“The 128th Regiment has been ordered to South La Tir, but no order yet given for the 132d, whose place it takes,” Turcas went on.

“Let it remain for the present!” Westerling replied.

After they had withdrawn, the look that passed between Turcas and Bouchard was a pointed question. The 132d to remain at South La Tir! Was there something more than “newspaper talk” in this latest diplomatic crisis between the Grays and the Browns? Westerling alone was in the confidence of the premier of late. Any exchange of ideas between the two subordinates would be fruitless surmise and against the very instinct of staff secrecy, where every man knew only his work and asked about no one else’s.

Westerling ran through the papers that Turcas had prepared for him. If Turcas had written the order for the wounded, Westerling knew that it was properly done. Having cleared his desk into the hands of his executive clerk, he looked at the clock. It had barely turned four. He picked up the final staff report of observations on the late Balkan campaign, just printed in book form, glanced at it and laid it aside. Already he knew the few lessons afforded by this war “done on the cheap,” with limited equipment and over bad roads. No dirigibles had been used and few planes. It was no criterion, except in the effect of the fire of the new pattern guns, for the conflict of vast masses of highly

trained men against vast masses of highly trained men, with rapid transportation over good roads, complete equipment, thorough organization, backed by generous resources, in the cataclysm of two great European powers.

Page 12

Rather idly, now, he drew a pad toward him and, taking up a pencil, made the figures seventeen and twenty-seven. Then he made the figures thirty-two and forty-two. He blackened them with repeated tracings as he mused. This done, he put seventeen under twenty-seven and thirty-two under forty-two. He made the subtraction and studied the two tens.

A swing door opened softly and his executive clerk reappeared with a soft tread, unheard by Westerling engaged in mechanically blackening the tens. The clerk, pausing as he waited for a signal of recognition, observed the process wonderingly. To be absently making figures on a pad was not characteristic of the vice-chief of staff. When he was absorbed his habit was to tap the desk edge with the blunt end of his pencil.

“Some papers for your signature, sir,” said the clerk as he slipped them on the blotter in front of Westerling. “And the 132d—no order about that, sir?” he asked.

“None. It remains!” Westerling replied.

The clerk went out impressed. His chief taking to sums of subtraction and totally preoccupied! The 132d to remain! He, too, had a question-mark in his secret mind.

Westerling proceeded with his mathematics. Having heavily shaded the tens, he essayed a sum in division. He found that ten went into seventy just seven times.

“One-seventh the allotted span of life!” he mused. “Take off fifteen years for youth and fifteen after fifty-five—nobody counts after that, though I mean to—and you have ten into forty, which is one fourth. That is a good deal. But it’s more to a woman than to a man—yes, a lot more to a woman than to a man!”

The clerk was right in thinking Westerling preoccupied; but it was not with the international crisis. He had dismissed that for the present from his thoughts by sending the 128th Regiment to South La Tir. He might move some other regiments in the morning if advices from the premier warranted. At all events, the army was ready, always ready for any emergency. He was used to international crises. Probably a dozen had occurred in the ten years since he had spoken his adieu to a young girl at a garden-gate. Over his coffee the name of Miss Marta Galland, in a list of arrivals at a hotel, had caught his eye in the morning paper. A note to her had brought an answer, saying that her time was limited, but she would be glad to have him call at five that afternoon.

Rather impatiently he watched the slow minute-hand on the clock. He had risen from his desk at four-thirty, when his personal aide, a handsome, boyish, rosy-cheeked young officer, who seemed to be moulded into his uniform, appeared.

“Your car is waiting, sir,” he said. His military correctness could not hide the admiration and devotion in his eyes. He thought himself the most fortunate lieutenant in the army. To him Westerling was, indeed, great. Westerling realized this.

Page 13

“This is a personal call,” Westerling explained; “so you are at liberty to make one yourself, if you like,” he added, with that magnetic smile of a genial power which he used to draw men to him and hold them.

III

OURS AND THEIRS

On the second terrace, Feller, the Gallands’ gardener, a patch of blue blouse and a patch of broad-brimmed straw hat over a fringe of white hair, was planting bulbs. Mrs. Galland came down the path from the veranda loiteringly, pausing to look at the flowers and again at the sweep of hills and plain. The air was singularly still, so still that she heard the cries of the children at play in the yards of the factory-workers’ houses which had been steadily creeping up the hill from the town. She breathed in the peace and beauty of the surroundings with that deliberate appreciation of age which holds to the happiness in hand. To-morrow it might rain; to-day it is pleasant. She was getting old. Serenely she made the most of to-day.

The gardener did not look up when she reached his side. She watched his fingers firmly pressing the moist earth around the bulbs that he had sunk in their new beds. There were only three more to set out, and her inclination, in keeping with her leisureliness, was to wait on the completion of his task before speaking. Again she let her glance wander away to the distances. It was arrested and held this time by two groups of far-away points in the sky along the frontier, in the same bright light of that other afternoon when Captain Arthur Lanstron had made his first night over the range.

“Look!” she cried. “Look, look!” she repeated, a girlish excitement rippling her placidity.

Aeroplanes and dirigibles had become a familiar sight. They were always going and coming and manoeuvring, the Browns over their territory and the Grays over theirs. But here was something new: two squadrons of dirigibles and planes in company, one on either side of the white posts. For the fraction of a second the dirigibles seemed prisms and the planes still-winged dragon-flies hung on a blue wall. With the next fraction the prisms were seen to be growing and the stretch of the plane wings broadening.

“They are racing—ours against theirs!” exclaimed Mrs. Galland. “Look, look!”

Still the gardener bent to his work, unconcerned.

“I forgot! I always forget that you are deaf!” she murmured.

She touched his shoulder. The effect was magical on the stoop-shouldered figure, which rose with the spring of muscles that are elastic and joints that are limber. His hat was removed with prompt and rather graceful deference, revealing eyebrows that were

still dark in contrast to the white hair. For only an instant did he remain erect, but long enough to suggest how supple and well-formed he must have been in youth. Then he made a grimace and dropped his hand demonstratively over his knee.

Page 14

“Pardon, Mrs. Galland, I have old bones. They always remind me if I try to play any youthful tricks on them. Pardon! I did not see that you were here. I,” he said, in the monotonous voice of the deaf, which, however, had a certain attractive wistfulness—“I —” and from the same throat as he saw the object of her gaze came a vibration of passionate interest. “Yes, neck and neck! Coming right for the baron’s tower, neck and neck!” he cried, in the zest of a contest understood and enjoyed.

His hand rose in a vigorous, pulsating gesture; his eyes were snapping; his lips parted in an ecstasy that made him seem twenty years younger; his shoulders broadened and his chest expanded with the indrawing of a deep breath. This let go, the stoop returned in a sudden reaction, the briefly kindled flame died out of his eyes, his lips took on the droop of age, and he thrust his hat back on his head, pulling the brim low over his brow.

“Wonderful, but terrible—terrible!” said Mrs. Galland. “Another horror is added to war, as if there were not already enough. Oh, I know what war is! I’ve seen this garden all spattered with blood and dead bodies in a row here at our feet, and heard the groans and the cheers—the groans of the wounded here in the garden and the cheers of the men who had taken the castle hill!”

Feller, with the lids of shaded eyes half closed, watched the oncoming squadrons in a staring mesmerism. His only movement was a tattoo of the fingers on his trousers’ legs.

“War!” he exclaimed with motionless lips. “War!” he repeated softly, coaxingly. One would easily have mistaken the thought of war as something delightful to him if he had not appeared so gentle and detached. It seemed doubtful if he realized what he was saying or even that he was speaking aloud.

As the Gray squadron started to turn in order to keep on their side of the white posts which circled around the spur of La Tir, one of the dirigibles failed to respond to its rudder and lost speed; that in the rear, responding too readily, had its leader on the thwart. An aeroplane, sheering too abruptly to make room, tipped at a dangerous angle and a tragedy seemed due within another wink of the eye.

“Huh-huh-huh!” came from Feller in quick breaths, like the panting of a dog on a hot day.

“Oh!” gasped Mrs. Galland in one long breath of suspense.

The envelope of the second dirigible grazed the envelope of its leader; the groggy plane righted itself and volplaned underneath a dirigible; and, though scattered, the Gray squadron drew away safely from the Brown, which, slowing down, came on as straight as an arrow in unchanged formation in a line over the castle tower. From the forward Brown aeroplane, as its shadow shot over the garden, pursued by the great, oblong shadows of the dirigibles, a white ball was dropped. It made a plummet streak until

about fifty feet above the earth, when it exploded into a fine shower of powder, leaving intact a pirouetting bit of white.

Page 15

“I think that was Colonel Lanstron leading when he ought to leave such work to his assistants,” said Mrs. Galland. “You remember him—why, it was the colonel who recommended you! There, now, I’ve forgotten again that you are deaf!”

The slip of paper glided back and forth on slight currents of air and finally fell among the rose-bushes a few yards from where the two were standing. Feller brought it to Mrs. Galland.

“Yes, it was Colonel Lanstron,” she said, after reading the message. “The message says: ‘Hello, Marta!’ Any other officer would have said: ‘How do you do, Miss Galland!’ He could not have known that she was away. I’ve just had a telegram from her that she will be home in the morning, and that takes me back to my idea that I came to speak about to you,” she babbled on, while Feller regarded her with a gentle, uncomprehending smile. “You know how she likes chrysanthemums and they are in full bloom. We’ll cut them and fill all the vases in the living-room and her room and—oh, how I do forget! You’re not hearing a word!” she exclaimed as she noted the helpless eagerness of his eyes.

“It is a great nuisance, deafness in a gardener. But I love my work. I try to do it well,” he said in his monotone.

“You do wonderfully, wonderfully!” she assented; “and you deserve great credit. Many deaf people are irritable—and you are so cheerful!”

He smiled as pleasantly as if he had heard the compliment and passed her a small pad from his blouse pocket. With the pencil attached to it by a string she wrote her instructions slowly, in an old-fashioned hand, dotting all the i’s and crossing all the t’s.

“Pardon me, madam, but Miss Galland”—he paused, dwelling with a slight inflection on his mention of the daughter as the talisman that warranted his presuming to disagree with the mother—“Miss Galland, when she took her last look around before going, said: ’Please don’t cut any yet. I want to see them all abloom in their beds first.’”

“She has taken such an interest in them, and my idea was to please her. Of course, leave them,” said Mrs. Galland. She made repeated vigorous nods of assent to save herself the trouble of writing. Starting back up the steps, she murmured: “I suppose cut flowers are out of fashion—I know I am—and deaf gardeners are in.” She sighed. “And you are twenty-seven, Marta, twenty-seven!” She drew another, a very long sigh, and then her serenity returned.

“Ours did not pass theirs,” observed the gardener, with a musing smile when he was alone; “but theirs nearly had a jolly spill there at the turn!”

As he bent once more to his work a bumblebee approached on its glad, piratical errand from flower to flower in the rapt stillness, and Feller looked around with a slight courtesy of his hat brim.

“You and your fussily thunderous wings!” he said, half aloud. “I wonder if you think you’re an aeroplane. Surely, they’d never train you to evolute in squadrons. You are an anarchist, you are, and an epicurean into the bargain!”

Page 16

He went with his barrow for more bulbs. Meanwhile, the sun sank behind the range. The plain lay bathed in soft, golden light; the ravines were tongues of black shadow. As the evening gun boomed out from a fortress on the Brown side of the frontier, Feller glanced around to see if any one were watching. Assured that he was alone, he removed his hat, and, though he wiped the brim and wiped his brow, in his attitude was the suggestion of the military stance of attention at colors. A minute later, when the evening gun of the Grays across the white posts reverberated over the plain, he jammed his hat back on his head rather abruptly and started to the tool house with his barrow.

“War! war!” he repeated softly. “Yes, war!” he added in eager desire.

IV

THE DIVIDENDS OF POWER

Westerling realized that the question of marriage as a social requirement might arise when he should become officially chief of staff with the retirement of His Excellency the field-marshal. For the present he enjoyed his position as a bachelor who was the most favored man in the army too much to think of marriage. This did not imply an absence of fondness for women; rather the contrary. He liked sitting next to a beautiful neck and shoulders and having a pair of feminine eyes sparkle into his at dinner; though, with rare exceptions, not the same neck and shoulders on succeeding nights. His natural sense of organization divided women into two classes: those of family and wealth, whom he met at great houses, and those purring kittens who live in small flats. Both afforded him diversion. A woman had been the most telling influence in making him vice-chief of staff; an affair to which gossip gave the breath of scandal had been an argument against him.

It was a little surprising that the bell that the girl of seventeen had rung in his secret mind when he was on one of the first rounds of the ladder, now lost in the mists of a lower stratum of existence, should ever tinkle again.... Yet he had heard its note in the tone of her prophecy with each step in his promotion; and while the other people whom he had known at La Tir were the vaguest shadows of personalities, her picture was as definite in detail as when she said: “You have the will! You have the ambition!” She had recognized in him the power that he felt; foreseen his ascent to the very apex of the pyramid. She was still unmarried, which was strange; for she had not been bad-looking and she was of a fine old family. What was she like now? Commonplace and provincial, most likely. Many of the people he had known in his early days appeared so when he met them again. But, at the worst, he looked for an interesting half-hour.

Page 17

The throbbing activity of the streets of the capital, as his car proceeded on the way to her hotel, formed an energetic accompaniment to his gratifying backward survey of how all his plans had worked out from the very day of the prophecy. Had he heard the remark of a great manufacturer to the banker at his side in a passing limousine, “There goes the greatest captain of industry of us all!” Westerling would only have thought: “Certainly. I am chief of staff. I am at the head of all your workmen at one time or another!” Had he heard the banker’s answer, “But pretty poor pay, pretty small dividends!” he would have thought: “Splendid dividends—the dividends of power!”

He had a caste contempt for the men of commerce, with their mercenary talk about credit and market prices; and also for the scientists, doctors, engineers, and men of other professions, who spoke of things in books which he did not understand. Reading books was one of the faults of Turcas, his assistant. No bookish soldier, he knew, had ever been a great general. He resented the growing power of these leaders of the civil world, taking distinction away from the military, even when, as a man of parts, he had to court their influence. His was the profession that was and ever should be the elect. A penniless subaltern was a gentleman, while he could never think of a man hi business as one.

All the faces in the street belonged to a strange, busy world outside his interest and thoughts. They formed what was known as the public, often making a clatter About things which they did not understand, when they Should obey the orders of their superiors. Of late, their clatter had been about the extra taxes for the recent increase of the standing forces by another corps. The public was bovine with a parrot’s head. Yet it did not admire the toiling ox, but the eagle and the lion.

As his car came to the park his eyes lighted at sight of one of the dividends—one feature of urban life that ever gave him a thrill. A battalion of the 128th, which he had ordered that afternoon to the very garrison at South La Tir that he had once commanded, was marching through the main avenue. Youths all, of twenty-one or two, they were in a muddy-grayish uniform which was the color of the plain as seen from the veranda of the Galland house.

Around them, in a mighty, pervasive monotone, was the roar of city traffic, broken by the nearer sounds of the cries of children playing in the sand piles, the bark of motor horns, the screech of small boys’ velocipedes on the paths of the park; while they themselves were silent, except for the rhythmic tramp of the military shoes of identical pattern, as was every article of their clothing and equipment from head to foot, whose character had been the subject of the weightiest deliberation of the staff.

How much can a soldier carry and how best carry it easily? What shoes are the most serviceable for marching and yet cheap? Nothing was so precise in all their surroundings, nothing seemed so resolutely dependable as this column of soldiers. They were the last word in filling human tissue into a mould for a set task. Where these

came from were other boys growing up to take their places. The mothers of the nation were doing their duty. All the land was a breeding-ground for the dividends of Hedworth Westerling.

Page 18

At the far side of the park he saw another kind of dividend—another group of marching men. These were not in uniform. They were the unemployed. Many were middle-aged, with worn, tired faces. Beside the flag of the country at the head of the procession was that of universal radicalism. And his car had to stop to let them pass. For an instant the indignation of military autocracy rose strong within him at sight of the national colors in such company. But he noted how naturally the men kept step; the solidarity of their movement. The stamp of their army service in youth could not be easily removed. He realized the advantage of heading an army in which defence was not dependent on a mixture of regulars and volunteers, but on universal conscription that brought every able-bodied man under discipline.

These reservists, in the event of war, would hear the call of race and they would fight for the one flag that then had any significance. Yes, the old human impulses would predominate and the only enemy would be on the other side of the frontier. They would be pawns of his will—the will that Marta Galland had said would make him chief of staff.

Wasn't war the real cure for the general unrest? Wasn't the nation growing stale from the long peace? He was ready for war now that he had become vice-chief, when the retirement of His Excellency, unable to bear the weight of his years and decorations in the field, would make him the supreme commander. One ambition gained, he heard the appeal of another: to live to see the guns and rifles that had fired only blank cartridges in practice pouring out shells and bullets, and all the battalions that had played at sham war in manoeuvres engaged in real war, under his direction. He saw his columns sweeping up the slopes of the Brown range. Victory was certain. He would be the first to lead a great modern army against a great modern army; his place as the master of modern tactics secure in the minds of all the soldiers of the world. The public would forget its unrest in the thrill of battles won and provinces conquered, and its clatter would be that of acclaim for a new idol of its old faith.

V

OFF TO THE FRONTIER

Ranks broken in the barracks yard, backs free of packs, shoulders free of rifles, the men of the first battalion of the 28th, which Westerling had seen marching through the park, had no thought except the prospect of the joyous lassitude of resting muscles and of loosening tongues that had been silent on the march. They were simply tired human beings in the democracy of a common life and service.

Page 19

The 128th had been recruited from a province in the high country distant from the capital. In the days of Maria's old baron, a baron of the same type had plundered their ancestors, and in the days of the first Galland they formed a principality frequently at war with their neighbors of the same blood and language. At length they had united with their neighbors who had in turn united with other neighbors, forming the present nation of the Grays, which vented its fighting spirit against other nations. Each generation must send forth its valorous and adventurous youth to the proof of its manhood in battle, while those who survived wounds and disease became the heroes of their reminiscences, inciting the younger generation to emulation. With each step in the evolution learning had spread and civilization developed.

Since the last war universal conscription had gone hand in hand with popular education and the telegraphic click of the news of the world to all breakfast tables and cheap travel and better living. Every private of the five millions was a scholar compared to the old baron; he had a broader horizon than the first Galland. In the name of defence, to hold their borders secure, the great powers were straining their resources to strengthen the forces that kept an armed peace. Evolution never ceases. What next?

In a group of the members of Company B, who dropped on a bench in the barrack room, were the sons of a farmer, a barber, a butcher, an army officer, a day-laborer, a judge, a blacksmith, a rich man's valet, a banker, a doctor, a manufacturer, and a small shopkeeper.

"Six months more and my tour is up!" cried the judge's son.

"Six months more for me!"

"Now you're counting!"

"And for me—one, two, three, four, five, six!"

"Oh, don't rub it in," the manufacturer's son shouted above the chorus, "you old fellows! I've a year and six months more."

"Here, too!" chimed in the banker's son. "A year and six months more of iron spoons and tin cups and army shoes and army fare and early rising. Hep-hep-hep, drill-drill-drill, and drudgery!"

"Oh, I don't know!" said the day-laborer's son. "I don't have to get up any earlier than I do at home, and I don't have to work as hard as I'll have to when I leave."

"Nor I!" agreed the blacksmith's son. "It's a kind of holiday for me."

“Holiday!” the banker’s son gasped. “That’s so,” he added thoughtfully, and smiled gratefully over a fate that had been indulgent to him in a matter of fathers and limousines.

“Look at the newspapers! Maybe we shall be going to war,” said the manufacturer’s son.

“Stuff! Nonsense!” said the judge’s son. “We are always having scares. They sell papers and give the fellows at the Foreign Office a chance to look unconcerned. But let’s have the opinion of an international expert, of the great and only philosopher, guide, companion, and friend. What do you think of the crisis, eh, Hugo? Soberly, now. The fate of nations may hang on your words. If not, at least the price of a ginger soda!”

Page 20

It was around Hugo Mallin that the group had formed. Groups were always forming around Hugo. He could spring the unexpected and incongruous and make people laugh. Slight but wiry of physique, he had light hair, a freckled and rather nondescript nose, large brown eyes, and a broad, sensitive mouth. Nature had not attempted any regularity of features in his case. She had been content with making each one a mobile servant of his mind. In repose his face was homely, and it was a mask.

“Come on, Hugo! Out with it!”

Hugo’s brow contracted; the lines of the mask were drawn in deliberate seriousness.

“I never hear war mentioned that I don’t have a shiver right down my spine, as I did when I was a little boy and went into the cellar without a light,” he replied.

“Fear?” exclaimed Eugene Aronson, the farmer’s son, whose big, plain face expressed dumb incomprehension. He alone was standing. Being the giant and the athlete of the company, the march had not tired him.

“Fear?” some of the others repeated. The sentiment was astounding, and Hugo was as manifestly in earnest as if he were a minister addressing a parliamentary chamber.

“Yes, don’t you?” asked Hugo, in bland surprise.

“I should say not!” declared Eugene.

“Do you want to be killed?” asked Hugo, with profound interest.

“The bullet isn’t made that will get me!” answered Eugene, throwing back his broad shoulders.

“I don’t know,” mused Hugo, eying the giant up and down. “You’re pretty big, Gene, and a bullet that only nicked one of us in the bark might get you in the wood. However, if you are sure that you are in no danger, why, you don’t count. But let’s take a census while we are about it and see who wants to be killed. First, you, Armand; do you?” he asked the doctor’s son, Armand Daution.

Armand grinned. The others grinned, not at him, but at the quizzical solemnity of Hugo’s manner.

“If so, state whether you prefer bullets or shrapnel, early in the campaign or late, a la carte or table d’hote, morning or—” Hugo went on.

But laughter drowned the sentence, though Hugo’s face was without a smile.

“You ought to go on the stage!” some one exclaimed.

“If it were as easy to amuse a pay audience as you fellows, I might,” Hugo replied. “But I’ve another question,” he pursued. “Do you think that the fellows on the other side of the frontier want to be killed?”

“No danger! They’ll give in. They always do,” said Eugene.

“I confess that it hardly seems reasonable to make war over the Bodlapoo affair!” This from the judge’s son.

“Over some hot weather, some swamp, and some black policemen in Africa,” said Hugo.

“But they hauled down our flag!” exclaimed the army officer’s son.

“On their territory, they say. We were the aggressors,” Hugo interposed.

Page 21

“It was *our* flag!” said Eugene.

“But we wouldn’t want them to put up their flag on our territory, would we?” Hugo asked.

“Let them try it!” thundered Eugene, with a full breath from the big bellows in his broad chest. “Hugo, I don’t like to hear you talk that way,” he added, shaking his head sadly. Such views from a friend really hurt him; indeed, he was almost lugubrious. This brought another laugh.

“Don’t you see he’s getting you, Gene?”

“He’s acting!”

“He always gets you, you old simpleton!” The judge’s son gave Eugene an affectionate dig in the ribs.

Eugene was well liked and in the way that a big Saint Bernard dog is liked. At the latest manoeuvres, on the night that their division had made a rapid flank movement, without any apparent sense that his own load was the heavier for it, he had carried the rifle and pack of Peter Kinderling, a valet’s pasty-faced little son “Peterkin,” as he was called, was the stupid of Company B. Being generally inoffensive, the butt of the drill sergeant, who thought that he would never learn even the manual of arms, and rounding out the variety of characters which makes for fellowship, he was regarded with a sympathetic kindliness by his comrades.

“But I don’t think you ought to joke about the flag That’s sacred!” declared Eugene.

“Now you’re talking!” said Jacob Pilzer, the butcher’s son, who sat on the other side of the bench from Eugene. He was heavily built, with an undershot jaw and a patch of liverish birthmark on his cheek.

“Yes,” piped Peterkin, who had an opinion when the two strong men of the company agreed on any subject. But he spoke tentatively, nevertheless. He was taking no risks.

“Oh, if we went to war the Bodlapoo affair would be only an excuse,” said the manufacturer’s son. “We shall go to war as a matter of broad national policy.”

“Right you are!” agreed the banker’s son. “No emotion about it. Emotion as an international quantity is dead. Everything is business now in this business age.”

“Killing people as a broad international policy!” mused Hugo *sotto voce*, as if this were a matter of his own thoughts.

The others scarcely heard him as the manufacturer’s son struck his fist in the palm of his hand resoundingly to demand attention.

“We need room in which to expand. We have eighty million people to their fifty, while our territory is only a little larger than theirs. Our population grows; the Browns’ does not!” he announced.

“But there is a remedy for that,” Hugo interjected loftly, so softly that everybody looked at him. “Why, all the conscripts of the army for two years could take a vow not to marry,” he said. “We could reduce the output, as your father’s factory does when the market is dull. We should not have so many babies. This would be cheaper than rearing them to be slaughtered in their young manhood.”

Page 22

“Hear ye! Hear ye!” shouted the doctor’s son, in the midst of the hilarity that ensued. “Hugo Mallin solves the whole problem of eugenics by destroying the field for eugenics!”

“The levity of a lot of mere unthinking privates who mistake themselves for sociological experts shall not deter me from finishing my speech,” pursued the manufacturer’s son.

“Speak on!”

“Listen to the fount of wisdom play!”

“A beer if you produce an idea!”

“War must come some day. It must come if for no other reason than to stop the strikes, arouse patriotism, and give an impetus to industry. An army of five millions on our side against the Browns’ three millions! Of course, they won’t start it! We shall have to take the aggressive; naturally, they’ll not.”

“And they’ll run, they’ll run, just as they always have” Eugene cried enthusiastically.

“You bet they will, or they’ll be mush for our bayonets!” said Pilzer, the butcher’s son.

“Will they? Do you really think they will?” asked Hugo, drawing down the corners of his mouth in profound contemplation that was actually mournful. “I wonder, now, I wonder if they can run any faster than I can?”

Everybody was laughing except him. If he had laughed too, he would not have been funny. His faint, look of surprise over their outburst only served to prolong it.

“Hugo, you’re immense!”

“You’re a scream!”

“But I am considering,” Hugo resumed, when there was silence. “If both sides ran as fast as they could when the war began, it would be interesting to see which army reached home first. Some of us might get out of breath, but nobody would be killed.” He had to wait on another laugh before he could continue. It takes little to amuse men in garrison if one knows how. “I don’t want to be killed, and why should I want to kill strangers on the other side of the frontier?” He paused on the rising inflection of his question, a calm, earnest challenge in his eyes. “I don’t know them. I haven’t the slightest grudge against them.”

No grudge against the Browns—against the ancient enemy! The faces around were frowning, as if in doubt how to take him.

“What did you come into the army for, then?” called Pilzer, the butcher’s son. “You didn’t have to, being an only son. Talk that stuff to your officers! They will let you out. They don’t want any cowards like you!”

“Cowards! Hold on, there!” said Eugene, who was very fond of Hugo. He spoke in the even voice of his vast good nature, but he looked meaningly at the butcher’s son.

“Coward? Is that the word, Jake?” Hugo inquired amiably. “Now, maybe I am. I don’t know. But it wouldn’t prove that I wasn’t if I fought you any more than if I fought the strangers on the other side of the frontier.”

“Well, if you don’t want to fight, what are you in the army for? That’s a fair question, isn’t it?” growled Pilzer, in an appeal to public opinion.

Page 23

“Yes, you can carry a joke too far,” said the army officer’s son. “Yes, why?”

The others nodded. An atmosphere of hostility was gathering around Hugo. In face of it a smile began playing about the corners of his lips. The smile spread. For the first time he was laughing, while all the others were serious. Suddenly he threw his arms around the necks of the men next to him.

“Why, to be with all you good fellows, of course!” he said, “and to complete my education. If I hadn’t taken my period in the army, you might have shaved me, Eduardo; you might have fixed a horseshoe for me, Henry; you might have sold me turnips, Eugene, but I shouldn’t have known you. Now we all know one another by eating the same food, wearing the same clothes, marching side by side, and submitting to another kind of discipline than that of our officers—the discipline of close association in a community of service. There’s hope for humanity in that—for humanity trying to free itself of its fetters. We have mixed with the people of the capital. They have found us and we have found them to be of the same human family.”

“That’s so! This business of moving regiments about from one garrison to another is a good cure for provincialism,” said the doctor’s son.

“Judge’s son or banker’s son or blacksmith’s son, whenever we meet in after-life there will be a thought of fellowship exchanged in our glances,” Hugo continued. “Haven’t we got something that we couldn’t get otherwise? Doesn’t it thrill you now when we’re all tired from the march except leviathan Gene—thrill you with a warm glow from the flow of good, rich, healthy red blood?”

“Yes, yes, yes!”

There was a chorus of assent. Banker’s son clapped valet’s son on the shoulder; laborer’s son and doctor’s son locked arms and teetered on the edge of the cot together.

“And I’ve another idea,” proceeded Hugo very seriously as the vows of eternal friendship subsided. “It is one to spread education and the spirit of comradeship still further. Instead of two sets of autumn manoeuvres, one on either side of the frontier, I’d have our army and the Browns hold a manoeuvre together—this year on their side and next year on ours.”

The biggest roar yet rose from throats that had been venting a tender tone. Only the slow Eugene Aronson was blank and puzzled. But directly he, too, broke into laughter, louder and more prolonged than the others.

“You can be so solemn that it takes a minute to see your joke,” he said.

“And humorous when we expect him to be solemn—and, presto, there he goes!” added the judge’s son.

Hugo’s lips were twitching peculiarly.

“Look at him!” exclaimed the manufacturer’s son. “Oh, you’ve had us all going this afternoon, you old farceur, you, Hugo!”

In the silence that waited on another extravagance from the entertainer the sergeant entered the room.

Page 24

“We shall entrain to-morrow morning!” he announced. “We are going to South La Tir on the frontier.”

Oh, joy! Oh, lucky 128th! It was to see still more of the world! The sergeant stood by listening to the uproar and cautioning the men not to overturn the tables and benches. Even the banker’s and the manufacturer’s sons, who had toured the country from frontier to frontier in paternal automobiles, were as happy as the laborer’s son.

“What fun it would be if we could visit back and forth with the fellows on the other side of the frontier!” said Hugo.

“What the—eh!” exclaimed the sergeant. “Will you never stop your joking, you, Hugo Mallin?”

“Never, sir,” replied Hugo dryly. “It comes natural to me!”

VI

THE SECOND PROPHECY

In the reception-room, where he awaited the despatch of his card, Hedworth Westerling caught a glimpse of his person in a panel glass so convenient as to suggest that an adroit hotel manager might have placed it there for the delectation of well-preserved men of forty-two. He saw a face of health that was little lined; brown hair that did not reveal its sprinkle of gray at that distance; shoulders, bearing the gracefully draped gold cords of the staff, squarely set on a rigid spine in his natural attitude. Yes, he had taken good care of himself, enjoying his pleasures with discreet, epicurean relish as he would this meeting with a woman whom he had not seen for ten years.

On her part, Marta, when she had received the note, had been in doubt as to her answer. Her curiosity to see him again was not of itself compelling. The actual making of the prophecy was rather dim to her mind until he recalled it. She had heard of his rise and she had heard, too, things about him which a girl of twenty-seven can better understand than a girl of seventeen. His reason for wanting to see her he had said was to “renew an old acquaintance.” He could have little interest in her, and her interest in him was that he was head of the Gray army. His work had intimate relation to that which the Marta of twenty-seven, a Marta with a mission, had set for herself.

A page came to tell Westerling that Miss Galland should be down directly. But before she came a waiter entered with a tea-tray.

“By the lady’s direction, sir,” he explained as he set the tray on a table opposite Westerling.

Across a tea-table the prophecy had been made and across a tea-table they had held most of their talks. Having a picture in memory for comparison, he was seeing the doorway as the frame for a second picture. When she appeared the picture seemed the same as of old. There was an undeniable delight in this first impression of externals. There had been no promise that she would be beautiful, and she was not. There had been promise of distinction, and she seemed to have fulfilled it. For a second she paused on the threshold rather diffidently. Then she smiled as she had when she greeted him from the veranda as he came up the terrace steps. She crossed the room with a flowing, spontaneous vitality that appealed to him as something familiar.

Page 25

“Ten years, isn’t it?” she exclaimed, putting a genuine quality of personal interest into the words as she gave his hand a quick, firm shake. Then, with the informality of old acquaintances who had parted only yesterday, she indicated a place on the sofa for him, while she seated herself on the other side of the tea-table. “The terrace there in the foreground,” she said with conforming gestures of location, “the church steeple over the town, the upward sweep of the mountains, and there the plain melting into the horizon. And, let me see, you took two lumps, if I remember?”

He would have known the hand that poised over the sugar bowl though he had not seen the face; a brownish hand, not long-fingered, not narrow for its length—a compact, deft, firm little hand.

“None now,” he said.

“Do you find it fattening?” she asked.

He recognized the mischievous sparkle of the eyes, the quizzical turn of the lips, which was her asset in keeping any question from being personal. Nevertheless, he flushed slightly.

“A change of taste,” he averred.

“Since you’ve become such a great man?” she hazarded. “Is that too strong?” This referred to the tea.

“No, just right!” he nodded.

He was studying her with the polite, veiled scrutiny of a man of the world. A materialist, he would look a woman over as he would a soldier when he had been a major-general making an inspection. She was slim, supple; he liked slim, supple women. Her eyes, though none the less luminous, and her lips, though none the less flexible, did not seem quite as out of proportion with the rest of her face as formerly, now that it had taken on the contour of maturity, which was noticeable also in the lines of her figure. Yes, she was twenty-seven, with the vivacity of seventeen retained, though she were on the edge of being an old maid according to the conventional notions. Necks and shoulders that happened to be at his side at dinner, he had found, when they were really beautiful, were not averse to his glance of appreciative and discriminating admiration of physical charm. But he saw her shrug slightly and caught a spark from her eyes that made him vaguely conscious of an offence to her sensibilities, and he was wholly conscious that the suggestion, bringing his faculties up sharply, had the pleasure of a novel sensation.

“How fast you have gone ahead!” she said. “That little prophecy of mine did come true. You are chief of Staff!”

After a smile of satisfaction he corrected her.

“Not quite; vice-chief—the right-hand man of His Excellency. I am a buffer between him and the heads of divisions. This has led to the erroneous assumption which I cannot too forcibly deny—”

He was proceeding with the phraseology habitual whenever men or women, to flatter him, had intimated that they realized that he was the actual head of the army. His Excellency, with the prestige of a career, must be kept soporifically enjoying the forms of authority. To arouse his jealousy might curtail Westerling’s actual power.

Page 26

“Yes, yes!” breathed Marta softly, arching her eyebrows a trifle as she would when looking all around and through a thing or when she found any one beating about the bush. The little frown disappeared and she smiled understandingly. “You know I’m not a perfect goose!” she added. “Had you been made chief of staff in name, too, all the old generals would have been in the sulks and the young generals jealous,” she continued. “The one way that you might have the power to exercise was by proxy.”

This downright frankness was another reflection of the old days before he was at the apex of the pyramid. Now it was so unusual in his experience as to be almost a shock. On the point of arguing, he caught a mischievous, delightful “Isn’t that so?” in her eyes, and replied:

“Yes, I shouldn’t wonder if it were!”

Why shouldn’t he admit the truth to the one who had rung the bell of his secret ambition long ago by recognizing in him the ability to reach his goal? He marvelled at her grasp of the situation.

“It wasn’t so very hard to say, was it?” she asked happily, in response to his smile. Then, her gift of putting herself in another’s place, while she strove to look at things with his purpose and vision, in full play, she went on in a different tone, as much to herself as to him: “You have labored to make yourself master of a mighty organization. You did not care for the non-essentials. You wanted the reality of shaping results.”

“Yes, the results, the power!” he exclaimed.

“Fifteen hundred regiments!” she continued thoughtfully, looking at a given point rather than at him. “Every regiment a blade which you would bring to an even sharpness! Every regiment a unit of a harmonious whole, knowing how to screen itself from fire and give fire as long as bidden, in answer to your will if war comes! That is what you live and plan for, isn’t it?”

“Yes, exactly! Yes, you have it!” he said. His shoulders stiffened as he thrilled at seeing a picture of himself, as he wanted to see himself, done in bold strokes. It assured him that not only had his own mind grown beyond what were to him the narrow associations of his old La Tir days, but that hers had grown, too. “And you—what have you been doing all these years?” he asked.

“Living the life of a woman on a country estate,” she replied. “Since you made a rule that no Gray officers Should cross the frontier we have been a little lonelier, having only the Brown officers to tea. Did you really find it so bad for discipline in your own case?” she concluded with playful solemnity.

“One cannot consider individual cases in a general order,” he explained. “And, remember, the Browns made the ruling first. You see, every year means a tightening—-yes, a tightening, as arms and armies grow more complicated and the maintaining of staff secrets more important. And you have been all the time at La Tir, truly?” he asked, changing the subject. He was convinced that she had acquired something that could not be gained on the outskirts of a provincial town.

Page 27

“No. I have travelled. I have been quite around the world.”

“You have!” This explained much. “How I envy you! That is a privilege I shall not know until I am superannuated.” While he should remain chief of staff he must be literally a prisoner in his own country.

“Yes, I should say it was splendid! Splendid—yes, indeed!” Snappy little nods of the head being unequal to expressing the joy of the memories that her exclamation evoked, she clasped her hands over her knees and swung back and forth in the ecstasy of seventeen.

“Splendid! I should say so!” She nestled the curling tip of her tongue against her teeth, as if the recollection must also be tasted. “Splendid, enchanting, enlightening, stupendous, and wickedly expensive! Another girl and I did it all on our own.”

“O-oh!” he exclaimed.

“Oh, oh, oh!” she repeated after him. “Oh, what, please?”

“Oh, nothing!” he said. It was quite comprehensible to him how well equipped she was to take care of herself on such an adventure.

“Precisely, when you come to think it over!” she concluded.

“What interested you most? What was the big lesson of all your journeying?” he asked, ready to play the listener.

“Being born and bred on a frontier, of an ancestry that was born and bred on a frontier, why, frontiers interested me most,” she said. “I collected impressions of frontiers as some people collect pictures. I found them all alike—stupid, just stupid! Oh, so stupid!” Her frown grew with the repetition of the word; her fingers closed in on her palm in vexation. He recollected that he had seen her like this two or three times at La Tir, when he had found the outbursts most entertaining. He imagined that the small fist pressed against the table edge could deliver a stinging blow. “As stupid as it is for neighbors to quarrel! It put me at war with all frontiers.”

“Apparently,” he said.

She withdrew her fist from the table, dropped the opened hand over the other on her knee, her body relaxing, her wrath passing into a kind of shamefacedness and then into a soft, prolonged laugh.

“I laugh at myself, at my own inconsistency,” she said. “I was warlike against war. At all events, if there is anything to make a teacher of peace lose her temper it is the folly of frontiers.”

“Yes?” he exclaimed. “Yes? Go on!” And he thought: “I’m really having a very good time.”

“You see, I came home from my tour with an idea—an idea for a life occupation just as engrossing as yours,” she went on, “and opposed to yours. I saw there was no use of working with the grown-up folks. They must be left to The Hague conferences and the peace societies. But children are quite alike the world over. You can plant thoughts in the young that will take root and grow as they grow.”

“Patriotism, for instance,” he observed narrowly.

“No, the follies of martial patriotism! The wickedness of war, which is the product of martial patriotism!”

Page 28

The follies of patriotism! This was the red flag of anarchy to him. He started to speak, flushing angrily, but held his tongue and only emitted a “whew!” in good-humored wonder.

“I see you are not very frightened by my opposition,” she rejoined in a flash of amusement not wholly untempered by exasperation.

“We got the appropriation for an additional army corps this year,” he explained contentedly, his repose completely regained.

“Thus increasing the odds against us. But perhaps not; for we are dealing with the children not with recruits, as I said. We call ourselves the teachers of peace. I organized the first class in La Tir. I have the children come together every Sunday morning and I tell them about the children that live in other countries. I tell them that a child a thousand miles away is just as much a neighbor as the one across the street. At first I feared that they would find it uninteresting. But if you know how to talk to them they don’t.”

“Naturally they don’t, when you talk to them,” he interrupted.

She was so intent that she passed over the compliment with a gesture like that of brushing away a cobweb. Her eyes were like deep, clear wells of faith and repose.

“I try to make the children of other countries so interesting that our children will like them too well ever to want to kill them when they grow up. We have a little peace prayer—-they have even come to like to recite it—a prayer and an oath. But I’ll not bother you with it. Other women have taken up the idea. I have found a girl who is going to start a class on your side in South La Tir, and I came here to meet some women who want to inaugurate the movement in your capital.”

“I’ll have to see about that!” he rejoined, half-banteringly, half-threateningly.

“There is something else to come, even more irritating,” she said, less intently and smiling. “So please be prepared to hold your temper.”

“I shall not beat my fist on the table defending war as you did defending peace!” he retaliated with significant enjoyment.

But she used his retort for an opening.

“Oh, I’d rather you would do that than jest! It’s human. It’s going to war because one is angry. You would go to war as a matter of cold reason.”

“If otherwise, I should lose,” he replied.

“Exactly. You make it easy for me to approach my point. I want to prevent you from losing!” she announced cheerfully yet very seriously.

“Yes? Proceed. I brace myself against an explosion of indignation!”

“It is the duty of a teacher of peace to use all her influence with the people she knows,” she went on. “So I am going to ask you not to let your country ever go to war against mine while you are chief of staff.”

“Mine against yours?” he equivocated. “Why, you live almost within gunshot of the line! Your people have as much Gray as Brown blood in their veins, *Your* country! *My* country! Isn’t that patriotism?”

Page 29

“Patriotism, but not martial patriotism,” she corrected him. “My thought is to stop war for both countries as war, regardless of sides. Promise me that you will not permit it!”

“I not permit it!” He smiled with the kindly patronage of a great man who sees a charming woman floundering in an attempt at logic. “It is for the premier to say. I merely make the machine ready. The government says the word that makes it move. I able to stop war! Come, come!”

“But you can—yes, you can with a word!” she declared positively.

“How?” he asked, amazed. “How?” he repeated blandly.

Was she teasing him? he wondered. What new resources of confusion had ten years and a tour around the world developed in her? Was it possible that the Whole idea of the teachers of peace was an invention to make conversation at his expense? If so, she carried it off with a sincerity that suggested other depths yet unsounded.

“Very easily,” she answered. “You can tell the premier that you cannot win. Tell him that you will break your army to pieces against the Browns’ fortifications!”

He gasped. Then an inner voice prompted him that the cue was comedy.

“Excellent fooling—excellent!” he said with a laugh. “Tell the premier that I should lose when I have five million men to their three million! What a harlequin chief of staff I should be! Excellent fooling! You almost had me!”

Again he laughed, though in the fashion of one who had hardly unbent his spine, while he was wishing for the old days when he might take tea with her one or two afternoons a week. It would be a fine tonic after his isolation at the apex of the pyramid surveying the deference of the lower levels. Then he saw that her eyes, shimmering with wonder, grew dull and her lips parted in a rigid, pale line as if she were hurt.

“You think I am joking?” she asked.

“Why, yes!”

“But I am not! No, no, not about such a ghastly subject as a war to-day!” She was leaning toward him, hands on knee and eyes burning like coals without a spark. “I”—-she paused as she had before she broke out with the first prophecy—“I will quote part of our children’s oath: ’I will not be a coward. It is a coward who strikes first. A brave man even after he receives a blow tries to reason with his assailant, and does not strike back until he receives a second blow. I shall not let a burglar drive me from my house. If an enemy tries to take my land I shall appeal to his sense of justice and reason with him, but if he then persists I shall fight for my home. If I am victorious I shall not try to take

his land but to make the most of my own. I shall never cross a frontier to kill my fellowmen.'"

Very impressive she made the oath. Her deliberate recital of it had the quality which justifies every word with an urgent faith.

"You see, with that teaching there can be no war," she proceeded, "and those who strike will be weak; those who defend will be strong."

Page 30

“Perhaps,” he said.

“You would not like to see thousands, hundreds of thousands, of men killed and maimed, would you?” she demanded, and her eyes held the horror of the sight in reality. “You can prevent it—you *can*!” Her heart was in the appeal.

“The old argument! No, I should not like to see that,” he replied. “I only do my duty as a soldier to my country.”

“The old answer! The more reason why you should tell the premier you can’t! But there is still another reason for telling him,” she urged gently.

Now he saw her not at twenty-seven but at seventeen, girlish, the subject of no processes of reason but in the spell of an intuition, and he knew that something out of the blue in a flash was coming.

“For you will not win!” she declared.

This struck fire. Square jaw and sturdy body, in masculine energy, resolute and trained, were set indomitably against feminine vitality.

“Yes, we shall win! We shall win!” he said without even the physical demonstration of a gesture and in a hard, even voice which was like that of the machinery of modern war itself, a voice which the aristocratic sniff, the Louis XVI. curls, or any of the old gallery-display heroes would have thought utterly lacking in histrionics suitable to the occasion. He remained rigid after he had spoken, handsome, self-possessed.

There was no use of beating feminine fists against such a stone wall. The force of the male was supreme. She smiled with a strange, quivering loosening of the lips. She spread out her hands with fingers apart, as if to let something run free from them into the air, and the flame of appeal that had been in her eyes broke into many lights that seemed to scatter into space, yet ready to return at her command. She glanced at the clock and rose, almost abruptly.

“I was very strenuous riding my hobby against yours, wasn’t I?” she exclaimed in a flutter of distraction that made it easy for him to descend from his own steed. “I stated a feeling. I made a guess, a threat about your winning—and all in the air. That’s a woman’s privilege; one men grant, isn’t it?”

“We enjoy doing so,” he replied, all urbanity.

“Thank you!” she said simply. “I must be at home in time for the children’s lesson on Sunday. My sleeper is engaged, and if I am not to miss the train I must go immediately.”

With an undeniable shock of regret he realized that the interview was over. Really, he had had a very good time; not only that, but—.

“Will it be ten years before we meet again?” he asked.

“Perhaps, unless you change the rules about officers dossing the frontier to take tea,” she replied.

“Even if I did, the vice-chief of staff might hardly go.”

“Then perhaps you must wait,” she warned him, “until the teachers of peace have done away with all frontiers.”

“Or, if there were war, I should come!” he answered in kind. He half wished that this might start another argument and she would miss her train. But she made no reply. “And you may come to the Gray capital again. You are not through travelling!” he added.

Page 31

This aroused her afresh; the flame was back in her eyes.

“Yes. I have all the memories of my journeys to enjoy, all their lessons to study,” she said. “There is the big world, and you want to have had the breath of all its climates in your lungs, the visions of all its peoples yours. Then the other thing is three acres and a cow. If you could only have the solidarity of the Japanese, their public spirit, with the old Chinese love of family and peace, and a cathedral near-by on a hill! Patriotism? Why, it is in the soil of your three acres. I love to feel the warm, rich earth of our own garden in my hands! Hereafter I shall be a stay-at-home; and if my children win,” she held out her hand in parting with the same frank, earnest grip of her greeting, “why, you will find that tea is, as usual, at four-thirty.”

He had found the women of his high official world—a narrower world than he realized—much alike. Striking certain keys, certain chords responded. He could probe the depths of their minds, he thought, in a single evening. Then he passed on, unless it was in the interest of pleasure or of his career to linger. This meeting had left his curiosity baffled. He understood how Marta’s vitality demanded action, which exerted itself in a feminine way for a feminine cause. The cure for such a fad was most clear to his masculine-perception. What if all the power she had shown in her appeal for peace could be made to serve another ambition? He knew that he was a great man. More than once he had wondered what would happen if he were to meet a great woman. And he should not see Marta Galland again unless war came.

VII

TIMES HAVE CHANGED

A prodigious brown worm, its body turning and rising and falling with the grade and throbbing with the march of its centipede feet, wound its way along a rising mountain road. In the strong, youthful figures set in the universal type of military mould it might have been a regiment of any one of many nations’ but the tint of its uniform was the brown of the nine hundred regiments that prepared for war against the gray of the fifteen hundred under Hedworth Westerling.

The 53d of the Browns had started for La Tir on the same day that the 128th of the Grays had started for South La Tir. While the 128th was going to new scenes, the 53d was returning to familiar ground. It had detrained in the capital of the province from which its ranks had been recruited. After a steep incline, there was a welcome bugle note and with shouts of delight the centipede’s legs broke apart! Bankers’, laborers’, doctors’, valets’, butchers’, manufacturers’, and judges’ sons threw themselves down on the greensward of the embankment to rest. With their talk of home, of relatives whom they had met at the station, and of the changes in the town was mingled talk of the crisis.

Meanwhile, an aged man was approaching. At times he would break into a kind of trot that ended, after a few steps, in shortness of breath. He was quite withered, his bright eyes twinkling out of an area of moth patches, and he wore a frayed uniform coat with a medal on the breast.

Page 32

“Is this the 53d?” he quavered to the nearest soldier

“It certainly is!” some one answered. “Come and join us, veteran!”

“Is Tom—Tom Fragini here?”

The answer came from a big soldier, who sprang to his feet and leaped toward the old man.

“It’s grandfather, as I live!” he called out, kissing the veteran on both cheeks. “I saw sister in town, and she said you’d be at the gate as we marched by.”

“Didn’t wait at no gate! Marched right up to you!” said grandfather. “Marched up with my uniform and medal on! Stand off there, Tom, so I can see you. My word! You’re bigger’n your father, but not bigger’n I was! No, sir, not bigger’n I was in my day before that wound sort o’ bent me over. They say it’s the lead in the blood. I’ve still got the bullet!”

The old man’s trousers were threadbare but well darned, and the holes in the uppers of his shoes were carefully patched. He had a merry air of optimism, which his grandson had inherited.

“Well, Tom, how much longer you got to serve?” asked grandfather.

“Six months,” answered Tom.

“One, two, three, four—” grandfather counted the numbers off on his fingers. “That’s good. You’ll be in time for the spring ploughing. My, how you have filled out! But, somehow, I can’t get used to this kind of uniform. Why, I don’t see how a girl’d be attracted to you fellows, at all!”

“They have to, for we’re the only kind of soldiers there are nowadays. Not as gay as in your day, that’s sure, when you were in the Hussars, eh?”

“Yes, I was in the Hussars—in the Hussars! I tell you, with our sabres a-gleaming, our horses’ bits a-jingling, our pennons a-flying, and all the color of our uniform—I tell you, the girls used to open their eyes at us. And we went into the charge like that—yes, sir, just that gay and grand, Colonel Galland leading!”

Military history said that it had been a rather foolish charge, a fine example of the vainglory of unreasoning bravery that accomplishes nothing, but no one would suggest such scepticism of an immortal event in popular imagination in hearing of the old man as he lived over that intoxicated rush of horses and men into a battery of the Grays.

“Well, didn’t you find what I said was true about the lowlanders?” asked grandfather after he had finished the charge, referring to the people of the southern frontier of the Browns, where the 53d had just been garrisoned.

“No, I kind of liked them. I made a lot of friends,” admitted Tom. “They’re very progressive.”

“Eh? eh? You’re joking!” To like the people of the southern frontier was only less conceivable than liking the people of the Grays. “That’s because you didn’t see deep under them. They’re all on the outside—a flighty lot! Why, if they’d done their part in that last war we’d have licked the Grays until they cried for mercy! If their army corps had stood its ground at Volmer—”

Page 33

“So you’ve always said,” interrupted Tom.

“And the way they cook tripe! I couldn’t stomach it, could you? And if there’s anything I am partial to it’s a good dish of tripe! And their light beer—like drinking froth! And their bread—why, it ain’t bread! It’s chips! ’Taint fit for civilized folks!”

“But I sort of got used to their ways,” said Tom.

“Eh? eh?” Grandfather looked at grandson quizzically, seeking the cause of such heterodoxy in a northern man. “Say, you ain’t been falling in love?” he hazarded. “You—you ain’t going to bring one of them southern girls home?”

“No!” said Tom laughing.

“Well, I’m glad you ain’t, for they’re naturally light-minded. I remember ’em well.” He wandered on with his questions and comments. “Is it a fact, Tom, or was you just joking when you wrote home that the soldiers took so many baths?”

“Yes, they do.”

“Well, that beats me! It’s a wonder you didn’t all die of pneumonia!” He paused to absorb the phenomenon. Then his half-childish mind, prompted by a random recollection, flitted to another subject which set him to giggling. “And the little crawlers—did they bother you much, the little crawlers?”

“The little crawlers?” repeated Tom, mystified.

“Yes. Everybody used to get ’em just from living close together. Had to comb ’em out and pick ’em out of your clothes. The chase we used to call it.”

“No, grandfather, crawlers have gone out of fashion. And no more epidemics of typhoid and dysentery either,” said Tom.

“Times have certainly changed!” grumbled Grandfather Fragini.

Interested in their own reunion, they had paid no attention to a group of Tom’s comrades near-by, sprawled around a newspaper containing the latest despatches from both capitals. It was a group as typical as that of the Grays around Hugo Mallin’s cot; only the common voice was that of defence.

“Five million soldiers to our three million!”

“Eighty million people to our fifty million!”

“Because of the odds, they think we are bound to yield, no matter if we are in the right!”

“Let them come!” said the butcher’s son. “If we have to go, it will be on a wave of blood.”

“And they will come some time,” said the judge’s son. “They want our land.”

“We gain nothing if we beat them back. War will be the ruin of business,"-said the banker’s son.

“Yes, we are prosperous now. Let well enough alone!” said the manufacturer’s son.

“Some say it makes wages higher,” said the laborer’s son, “but I am thinking it’s a poor way of raising your pay.”

“There won’t be any war,” said the banker’s son “There can’t be without credit. The banking interests will lot permit it.”

“There can always be war,” said the judge’s son, “always when one people determines to strike at another people—even if it brings bankruptcy.”

Page 34

“It would be a war that would make all others in history a mere exchange of skirmishes. Every able-bodied man in line—automatics a hundred shots a minute—guns a dozen shots a minute—and aeroplanes and dirigibles!” said the manufacturer’s son.

“To the death, too!”

“And not for glory! We of the 53d who live on the frontier will be fighting for our homes.”

“If we lose them we’ll never get them back. Better die than be beaten!”

There was no humorist Hugo Mallin in this group; no nimble fancy to send heresy skating over thin ice; but there was Herbert Stransky, with deep-set eyes, slightly squinting inward, and a heavy jaw, an enormous man who was the best shot in the company when he cared to be. He had listened in silence to the others, his rather thick but expressive lips curving with cynicism. His only speech all the morning had been in the midst of the reception in the public square of the town when he said:

“This home-coming doesn’t mean much to me. Home? Hell! The hedgerows of the world are my home!”

He appeared older than his years, and hard and bitter, except when his eyes would light with a feverish sort of fire which shone now as he broke into a lull in the talk.

“Comrades,” he began.

“Let us hear from the socialist!” a Tory exclaimed.

“No, the anarchist!” shouted a socialist.

“There won’t be any war!” said Stransky, his voice gradually rising to the pitch of an agitator relishing the sensation of his own words. “Patriotism is the played-out trick of the ruling classes to keep down the proletariat. There won’t be any war! Why? Because there are too many enlightened men on both sides who do the world’s work. We of the 53d are a provincial lot, but throughout our army there are thousands upon thousands like me. They march, they drill, but when battle comes they will refuse to fight—my comrades in heart, to whom the flag of this country means no more than that of any other country!”

“Hold on! The flag is sacred!” cried the banker’s son.

“Yes, that will do!”

“Shut up!”

Other voices formed a chorus of angry protest.

“I knew you thought it; now I’ve caught you!” This from the sergeant, who had seen hard fighting against a savage foe in Africa and therefore was particularly bitter about the Bodlapoo affair. The welt of a scar on his gaunt, fever-yellowed cheek turned a deeper red as he seized Stransky by the collar of the blouse.

Stransky raised his free hand as if to strike, but paused as he faced the company’s boyish captain, slender of figure, aristocratic of feature. His indignation was as evident as the sergeant’s, but he was biting his lips to keep it under control.

“You heard what he said, sir?”

“The latter part—enough!”

“It’s incitation to mutiny! An example!”

“Yes, put him under arrest.”

Page 35

The sergeant still held fast to the collar of Stransky's blouse. Stransky could have shaken himself free, as a mastiff frees himself from a puppy, but this was resistance to arrest and he had not yet made up his mind to go that far. His muscles were weaving under the sergeant's grip, his eyes glowing as with volcanic fire waiting on the madness of impulse for eruption.

"I wonder if it is really worth while to put him under arrest?" said some one at the edge of the group in amiable inquiry.

The voice came from an officer of about thirty-five, who apparently had strolled over from a near-by aeroplane station to look at the regiment. From his shoulder hung the gold cords of the staff. His left hand thrust in the pocket of his blouse heightened the ease of his carriage, which was free of conventional military stiffness, while his eyes had the peculiar eagerness of a man who seems to find everything that comes under his observation interesting and significant.

It was Colonel Arthur Lanstron, whose plane had skimmed the Gallands' garden wall for the "easy bump" ten years ago. There was something more than mere titular respect in the way the young captain saluted——admiration and the diffident, boyish glance of recognition which does not presume to take the lead in recalling a slight acquaintance with a man of distinction.

"Dellarme! It's all of two years since we met at Miss Galland's, isn't it?" Lanstron said, shaking hands with the captain.

"Yes, just before we were ordered south," said Dellarme, obviously pleased to be remembered.

"I overheard your speech," Lanstron continued, nodding toward Stransky. "It was very informing."

A crowd of soldiers was now pressing around Stransky, and in the front rank was Grandfather Fragini.

"Said our flag was no better'n any other flag, did he?" piped the old man. "Beat him to a pulp! That's what the Hussars would have done."

"If you don't mind telling it in public, Stransky, I should like to know your origin," said Lanstron, prepared to be as considerate of an anarchist's private feelings as of anybody's.

Stransky squinted his eyes down the bony bridge of his nose and grinned sardonically.

"That won't take long," he answered. "My father, so far as I could identify him, died in jail and my mother of drink."

“That was hardly to the purple!” observed Lanstron thoughtfully.

“No, to the red!” answered Stransky savagely.

“I mean that it was hardly inclined to make you take ft roseate view of life as a beautiful thing in a well-ordered world where favors of fortune are evenly distributed,” continued Lanstron.

“Rather to make me rejoice in the hope of a new order of things—the re-creation of society!” Stransky uttered the sentiment with the triumphant pride of a pupil who knows his text-book thoroughly.

Page 36

By this time the colonel commanding the regiment, who had noticed the excitement from a distance, appeared, forcing a gap for his passage through the crowd with sharp words. He, too, recognized Lanstron. After they had shaken hands, the colonel scowled as he heard the situation explained, with the old sergeant, still holding fast to Stransky's collar, a capable and insistent witness for the prosecution; while Stransky, the fire in his eyes dying to coals, stared straight ahead.

"It is only a suggestion, of course," said Lanstron, speaking quite as a spectator to avoid the least indication of interference with the colonel's authority, "but it seems possible that Stransky has clothed his wrongs in a garb that could never set well on his nature if he tried to wear it in practice. He is really an individualist. Enraged, he would fight well. I should like nothing better than a force of Stranskys if I had to defend a redoubt in a last stand."

"Yes, he might fight." The colonel looked hard at Stransky's rigid profile, with its tight lips and chin as firm as if cut out of stone. "You never know who will fight in the pinch, they say. But that's speculation. It's the example that I have to deal with."

"He is not of the insidious, plotting type. He spoke his mind openly," suggested Lanstron. "If you give him the limit of the law, why, he becomes a martyr to persecution. I should say that his remarks might pass for barrack-room gassing."

"Very well," said the colonel, taking the shortest way out of the difficulty. "We will excuse the first offence."

"Yes, sir!" said the sergeant mechanically as he released his grip of the offender. "We had two anarchists in my company in Africa," he observed in loyal agreement with orders. "They fought like devils. The only trouble was to keep them from shooting innocent natives for sport."

Stransky's collar was still crumpled on the nape of his neck. He remained stock-still, staring down the bridge of his nose. For a full minute he did not vouchsafe so much as a glance upward over the change in his fortunes. Then he looked around at Lanstron gloweringly.

"I know who you are!" he said. "You were born to the purple. You have had education, opportunity, position—everything that you and your kind want to keep for your kind. You are smarter than the others. You would hang a man with spider-webs instead of hemp. But I won't fight for you! No, I won't!"

He threw back his head with a determination in his defiance so intense that it had a certain kind of dignity that freed it of theatrical affectation.

“Yes, I was fortunate; but perhaps nature was not altogether unkind to you,” said Lanstron. “In Napoleonic times, Stransky, I think you might even have carried a marshal’s baton in your knapsack.”

“You—what rot!” A sort of triumph played around Stransky’s full lips and his jaw shot out challengingly. “No, never against my comrades on the other side of the border!” he concluded, his dogged stare returning.

Page 37

Now the colonel gave the order to fall in; the bugle sounded and the centipede's legs began to assemble on the road. But Stransky remained a statue, his rifle untouched on the sward. He seemed of a mind to let the regiment go on without him.

"Stransky, fall in!" called the sergeant.

Still Stransky did not move. A comrade picked up the rifle and fairly thrust it into his hands.

"Come on, Bert, and knead dough with the rest of us!" he whispered. "Come on! Cheer up!" Evidently his comrades liked Stransky.

"No!" roared Stransky, bringing the rifle down on the ground with a heavy blow.

Then impulse broke through the restraint that seemed to characterize the Lanstron of thirty-five. The Lanstron of twenty-five, who had met catastrophe because he was "wool-gathering," asserted himself. He put his hand on Stransky's shoulder. It was a strong though slim hand that looked as if it had been trained to do the work of two hands in the process of its owner's own transformation. Thus the old sergeant had seen a general remonstrate with a brave veteran who had been guilty of bad conduct in Africa. The old colonel gasped at such a subversion of the dignity of rank. He saw the army going to the devil. But young Dellarme, watching with eager curiosity, was sensible of no familiarity in the act. It all depended on how such a thing was done, he was thinking.

"We all have minutes when we are more or less anarchists," said Lanstron in the human appeal of one man to another. "But we don't want to be judged by one of those minutes. I got a hand mashed up for a mistake that took only a second. Think this over to-night before you act. Then, if you are of the same opinion, go to the colonel and tell him so. Come, why not?"

"All right, sir, you're so decent about it!" grumbled Stransky, taking his place in the ranks.

Hep-hep-hep! the regiment started on its way, with Grandfather Fragini keeping at his grandson's side.

"Makes me feel young again, but it's darned solemn beside the Hussars, with their horses' bits a-jingling. Times have certainly changed—officers' hands in their pockets, saying 'if you don't mind' to a man that's insulted the flag! Kicking ain't good enough for that traitor! Ought to hang him—yes, sir, hang and draw him!"

Lanstron watched the marching column for a time.

“Hep-hep-hep! It’s the brown of the infantry that counts in the end,” he mused. “I liked that wall-eyed giant. He’s all man!”

Then his livening glance swept the heavens inquiringly. A speck in the blue, far away in the realms of atmospheric infinity, kept growing in size until it took the form of the wings with which man flies. The plane volplaned down with steady swiftness, till its racing shadow lay large over the landscape for a few seconds before it rose again with beautiful ease and precision.

“Bully for you, Etzel!” Lanstron thought, as he started back to the aeroplane station. “You belong in the corps. We shall not let you return to your regiment for a while. You’ve a cool head and you’d charge a church tower if that were the orders.”

Page 38

VIII

THANKS TO A BUMBLEBEE

“Has he changed much?” Mrs. Galland asked, when she learned that Marta had seen Westerling.

“Jove has reached his own—the very top of Olympus, and he likes the prospect,” Marta replied.

The only home news of importance that her mother had to impart related to a tiny strip of paper with the greeting, “Hello, Marta!” that had been dropped from the pilot aeroplane as the Brown aerial squadron flew over the garden after its race with the Gray. She noted Marta’s customary quickening interest at mention of Lanstron’s name. It had become the talisman of a hope whose fulfilment was always being deferred.

“How different Lanny and Westerling are!” Marta exclaimed, the picture of the two men rising before her vision. “Lanny trying so hard under the pressure of his responsibility not to be human and unable to forget himself, and Westerling trying, really trying, to be human at times, but unable to forget that he is Jove! Did you wave your acknowledgments to Lanny,’?”

“Why, no! How could I?” asked Mrs. Galland. “He went over so fast I didn’t know it was he—a little figure so far overhead.”

“It’s odd, but I think I’d know Lanny a mile away by a sort of instinct,” said Marta. “You know I’d like a gun that would fire a bomb and drop a message of ‘Hello, yourself!’ right on his knee. Wouldn’t that give him a surprise?”

“You and he are so full of nonsense that you—” But Mrs. Galland desisted. What was the use?

Sometimes she wished that Colonel Lanstron would stay away altogether and leave a free field for a newcomer. Yet if two or three weeks passed without a call from him she was apprehensive. Besides being one of the Thorbourg Lanstrons, he was a most charming, capable man, who had risen very rapidly in his profession. It had been only six months after he had bolted up from the wreck of his plane by way of self-introduction to Marta before he alighted in the field across the road from the garden to report a promise kept.

Once she knew that he was a Lanstron of Thorbourg, a fact of hardly passing interest to Marta, Mrs. Galland made him intimately welcome. By the time he had paid his third call he was Lanny to Marta and she was Marta to him, quite as if they had known each other from childhood. She had a gift for unaffected comradeship. He was the kind of

man with whom she could be a comrade. There was always something to say the moment they met and they were never through talking when he had to go. They disagreed so often that Mrs. Galland thought they made a business of it. She wondered how real friendship could exist between two such controversialists. They could be seriously disputatious to the point of quarrelling; they could be light-heartedly disputatious to the bantering point, where either was uncertain which side of the argument he had originally espoused.

Page 39

“The gardener did not cut the chrysanthemums,” Mrs. Galland said. “That is why we had asters in the bowl at luncheon. His deafness is really a cross, I never realized before what a companion one naturally makes of a gardener.”

“No, there’s no purpose in having a deaf gardener,” said Marta. “Nature distributes her defects unintelligently. Now, if we had dumb demagogues, deaf gossips, and steel that when it was being formed into a sword-blade or a gun would turn to putty, we should be much better off. But we couldn’t let Feller go, could we? He’s already made himself a fixture. So few people would put up with his deafness! He’s so desirous of pleasing and he loves flowers.”

“And Colonel Lanstron recommended him. Except for his deafness he is a perfect gardener. Of course he had to have some drawback, for complete perfection is impossible,” Mrs. Galland agreed.

The old straw hat that shaded the fringe of white hair had been hovering within easy approaching distance of the chrysanthemum bed ever since the whistle of the train that brought Marta home had been heard from the station. Feller was watching Marta when she paused for a moment on the second terrace steps, enjoying the sweep of landscape anew with the freshness of a first glimpse and the intimacy of every familiar detail cut in the memory. It was her landscape, famed in history, where history might yet be made.

His greeting was picturesque and effective. With white head bared, he looked up from the chrysanthemums to her and back at them and up at her again, with a sort of covert comradeship in his eyes which were young, very young for such white hair, and held out his little pad and pencil. She smiled approval and slowly worked out a “perfect” in the deaf-and-dumb alphabet before she took the proffered pencil and wrote:

“I practised the deaf-and-dumb alphabet on the train. I’m learning fast. We’ve never had such chrysanthemums before. Next year we shall have some irises—just a few—-as fine as they have in Japan. How’s your rheumatism?”

He had replaced the broad-brimmed hat over his brow and his lips were visible in a lingering smile as he read the message.

“Thank you, Miss Galland,” he said in his even monotone. “You are very kind and I am very fortunate to find a place like this. I already knew something about irises and I’ve been reading up on the subject. We’ll try to hold our own with those little Japanese. As for the rheumatism, since you are good enough to inquire, Miss Galland, it’s about the same. My legs are getting old. There are bound to be some kinks in them.”

“You select those to cut—a great armful!” she slowly spelled out on her fingers, clapping her hands with a triumphant cry of “How’s that?” at the finish.

“Your time has come! To the sacrifice!” he exclaimed to the flowers.

Page 40

Very tenderly, as if he were an executioner considerate of the victims of an inexorable law, he was snipping the stems, his head bent close to the blooms, when a bumblebee appeared among the salvias a few feet away. Perhaps army staffs who neglect no detail have made a mistake in overlooking the whirring of bumblebees' wings in affecting the fate of nations. These plunderers are not dangerous from their size, but they have not yet been organized to the hep-hep-hep of partisanship. They would as soon live in a Gray as a Brown garden, as soon probe for an atom of honey on one side of the white posts as the other. This one as it drew nearer was well to one side over Feller's shoulders. With eyes and mind intent on his work, Feller turned his head absently, as one will at an interruption.

"There you are again, my dear!" he said. "You must think you're a battery of automatics."

He went on cutting chrysanthemums, apparently unconscious that he had spoken.

"Bring them up on the veranda, please," Marta wrote on the pad, her fingers moving with unusual nervous rapidity, the only sign of her inward excitement.

Coming to the head of the steps of the terrace above, she looked back. Feller's face was quite hidden under his hat and suddenly she seemed to stub her toe and fall, while she uttered a low cry of pain. The hat rose like a jack-in-the-box with the cover released. Feller bounded toward her, taking two of steps at a time. She scrambled to her feet hastily, laughed, and gestured to show that she was not hurt. He drew his shoulders together and bent over spasmodically, gripping his knee.

"I can run off if something starts me just as spry as if I were twenty," he said. "But after I've done it and the kinks come, I realize I've got old legs."

"Now I know he's not deaf!" Marta murmured, as he returned to his work. She frowned. She was angry. "Lanny, you have something to explain," she thought.

But when Feller brought his armful of chrysanthemums to her on the veranda, there was no trace in her expression of the discovery she had made, and she wrote a direction on his pad in the usual fashion.

IX

A SUNDAY MORNING CALL

As a boy, Arthur Lanstron had persisted in being an exception to the influences of both heredity and environment. Though his father and both grandfathers were officers who believed theirs to be the true gentleman's profession, he had preferred any kind of mechanical toy to arranging the most gayly painted tin soldiers in formation on the

nursery floor; and he would rather read about the wonders of natural history and electricity than the campaigns of Napoleon and Frederick the Great and my lord Nelson. Left to his own choice, he would miss the parade of the garrison for inspection by an excellency in order to ask questions of a man wiping the oil off his hands with cotton-waste, who was far more entertaining to him than the most spick-and-span ramrod of a sergeant.

Page 41

The first time he saw a dynamo in motion he was spellbound. This was even more fascinating than the drill that the family dentist worked with his foot. His tutor found him inclined to estimate a Caesar, self-characterized in his commentaries, as less humanly appealing than his first love, the engine-driver, with whom he kept up a correspondence after his father had been transferred to another post. He was given to magic lanterns, private telegraph and telephone lines, trying to walk a tight rope, and parachute acts and experiments in chemistry. When the family were not worried lest he should break his neck or blow his head off investigating, they were irritated by a certain plebeian strain in him which kept all kinds of company. His mother disapproved of his picking an acquaintance with a group of acrobats in order to improve his skill on the trapeze. His excuse for his supple friends was that they were all “experts” in something, just as his tutor was in Greek verbs.

Very light-hearted he was, busy, vital, reckless, with an earnest smile that could win the post telegrapher to teach him the code alphabet or persuade his father not to destroy his laboratory after he had singed off his eyebrows. This may explain why he had to cram hard in the dead languages at times, with a towel tied around his head. He complained that they were out of date; and he wanted to hear the Gauls’ story, too, before he fully made up his mind about Caesar. But for the living languages he had a natural gift which his father’s service abroad as military attache for a while enabled him to cultivate.

Upon being told one day that he was to go to the military school the following autumn, he broke out in open rebellion. He had just decided, after having passed through the stages of engine-driver, telegraph operator, railroad-signal watchman, automobile manufacturer, and superintendent of the city’s waterworks, to build bridges over tropical torrents that always rose in floods to try all his skill in saving his construction work.

“I don’t want to go into the army!” he said.

“Why?” asked his father, thinking that when the boy had to give his reasons he would soon be argued out of the heresy.

“It’s drilling a few hours a day, then nothing to do,” Arthur replied. “All your work waits on war and you don’t know that there will ever be any war. It waits on something nobody wants to happen. Now, if you manufacture something, why, you see wool come out cloth, steel come out an automobile. If you build a bridge you see it rising little by little. You’re getting your results every day; you see your mistakes and your successes. You’re making something, creating something; there’s something going on all the while that isn’t guesswork. I think that’s what I want to say. You won’t order me to be a soldier will you?”

The father, loath to do this, called in the assistance of an able pleader then, Eugene Partow, lately become chief of staff of the Browns, who was an old friend of the

Lanstron family. It was not in Partow's mind to lose such a recruit in a time when the heads of the army were trying, in answer to the demands of a new age, to counteract the old idea that made an officer's the conventional avocation of a gentleman of leisurely habits.

Page 42

“No army that ever worked as hard in peace as the average manufacturer or bridge-builder was ever beaten in battle if it fought anything like equal numbers,” he said. “The officer who works hard in the army deserves more credit than he would in any other profession because the incentive for results seems remote. But what a terrible test of results may be made in a single hour’s action. There is nothing you have learned or ever will learn that may not be of service to you. There is no invention, no form of industrial organization that must not be included in the greatest organization of all, whose plant and methods must be up to date in every particular. To be backward in a single particular may mean disaster—may mean that the loss of thousands of lives is due to you. You must have self-control, courage, dash, judgment If you have not kept up, if you are not equal to the test, your inefficiency will mean your shame and your country’s suffering; while efficiency means a clear conscience and your country’s security.”

Thus Partow turned the balance on the side of filial affection. He kept watch of the boy, but without favoring him with influence. Young Lanstron, who wanted to see results, had to earn them. He realized in practice the truth of Partow’s saying that there was nothing he had ever learned but what could be of service to him as an officer. What the acrobats had taught him probably saved his life on the occasion of his first flight across the range. The friendships with all sorts of people in his youth were the forerunner of his sympathy with the giant, wall-eyed Stransky who had mutinied on the march.

“Finding enough work to do?” Par tow would ask with a chuckle when they met in these days, for he had made Lanstron both chief of intelligence and chief aerostatic officer. Young Colonel Lanstron’s was the duty of gaining the secrets of the Gray staff and keeping those of the Brown and organizing up-to-the-moment efficiency in the new forces of the air.

He had remarked truly enough that the injury to his left hand served as a better reminder against the folly of wool-gathering than a string, even a large red string, tied around his finger. Thanks to skilful surgery working ingeniously with splintered bone and pulpy flesh, there was nothing unpleasant to the eye in a stiffened wrist and scarred knuckles slightly misshapen. The fingers, incapable of spreading much, were yet serviceable and had a firm grip of the wheel as he rose from the aeroplane station on the Sunday morning after Marta’s return home for a flight to La Tir.

He knew the pattern weaving under his feet as one knows that of his own garden from an overlooking window. Every detail of the staff map, ravines, roads, buildings, battery positions, was stitched together in the flowing reality of actual vision. No white posts were necessary to tell him where the boundary between the two nations lay. The line was drawn in his brain.

Page 43

Nature was in a gracious humor, the very tree tops motionless. The rich landscape in Sunday quiet appealed to his affections. He loved his country and he loved Marta. It had been on such a day as this when there would be no danger, that he had taken her for her first flight. The glimpses, as they flew, of her profile, so alive and tense, were fresh to his eye. How serious she had been! How vivid her impressions! How tempestuous her ideas! He recalled their talk upon their return; all his questions and her answers.

* * * * *

“Sublime and ridiculous!” she had begun in a summing up. “It is like seeing the life of a family through a glass roof—the big, universal family! Valleys seemed no larger than sauce-dishes on a table.”

“What was the sublime thing?”

“Man’s toil! The cumulative result of it, on every hand, in the common aim for food, comfort, happiness, and progress! Little details of difference disappeared. Towns, villages, houses were simply towns, villages, houses of any country.”

“And the supremely ridiculous thing?”

“A regiment of cavalry of the Grays and one of the Browns on the same road! They appeared so self-important, as if the sky would fall or the earth heave up to meet the sky if they got out of formation. I imagined each man a metal figure that fitted astride a metal horse of the kind that comes to children at Christmas time. They might better be engaged in brass-ring-snatching contests at the merry-go-rounds of public fairs. I wanted to brush them all over with a wave of the hand as you might the battalions of the nursery floor. Just drilling and drilling in order to slash at one another some day. Flight! flight! It makes one’s mind as big and broad as the world. Oh, what a wonderful talk I’ll have for my kids next Sunday!”

* * * * *

Now that Lanstron was the organizer of the aviation corps his own flights were rare. Mostly they were made to La Tir. His visits to Marta were his holidays? All the time that she was absent on her journey around the world they had corresponded. Her letters, so revealing of herself and her peculiar angles of observation, formed a bundle sacredly preserved. Her mother’s joking reference about her girlish resolution not to marry a soldier often recurred to him. There, he sometimes thought, was the real obstacle to his great desire.

He wished, this morning, that he were not Colonel Lanstron, but the bridge-builder returning from his triumph after he had at last spanned the chasm and controlled the

floods. Ah, there was something like romance and real accomplishment in that! What an easy time a bridge-builder had, comparatively, too! What an easy master capital must be compared to Eugene Partow! But no! If Marta loved it would not matter whether he were bridge builder or army builder. Yes, she was like that. And what right had he to think of marriage? He could not have any home. He was now in the capital; again, along the frontier—a vagabond of duty and Partow's orders.

Page 44

* * * * *

When he alighted from the plane he thrust his left hand into his blouse pocket. He always carried it there, as if it were literally sewn in place. In moments of emotion the scarred nerves would twitch as the telltale of his sensitiveness; and this was something he would conceal from others no matter how conscious he was of it himself. He found the Galland veranda deserted. In response to his ring a maid came to the open door. Her face was sad, with a beauty that had prematurely faded. But it lighted pleasurably in recognition. Her hair was thick and tawny, lying low over the brow; her eyes were a softly luminous brown and her full lips sensitive and yielding. Lanstron, an intimate of the Galland household, knew her story well and the part that Marta had played in it.

Some four years previously, when a baby was in prospect for Minna, who wore no wedding-ring, Mrs. Galland had been inclined to send the maid to an institution, “where they will take good care of her, my dear. That’s what such institutions are for. It is quite scandalous for her and for us—never happened in our family before!”

Marta arched her eyebrows.

“We don’t know!” she exclaimed softly.

“How can you think such a thing, let alone saying it—you, a Galland!” her mother gasped in indignation.

“That is, if we go far back,” said Marta. “At all events, we have no precedent, so let’s establish one by keeping her.”

“But for her own sake! She will have to live with her shame!” Mrs. Galland objected. “Let her begin afresh in the city. We shall give her a good recommendation, for she is really an excellent servant. Yes, she will readily find a place among strangers.”

“Still, she doesn’t want to go, and it would be cruel to send her away.”

“Cruel! Why, Marta, do you think I would be cruel? Oh, very well, then we will let her stay!”

* * * * *

“Both are away at church. Mrs. Galland ought to be here any minute, but Miss Galland will be later because of her children’s class,” said Minna. “Will you wait on the veranda?”

He was saying that he would stroll in the garden when childish footsteps were heard in the hall, and after a curly head had nestled against the mother’s skirts its owner, reminded of the importance of manners in the world where the stork had left her, made

a curtsey. Lanstron shook a small hand which must have lately been on intimate terms with sugar or jam.

“How do you do, flying soldier man?” chirruped Clarissa Eileen. It was evident that she held Lanstron in high favor.

“Let me hear you say your name,” said Lanstron.

Clarissa Eileen was triumphant. She had been waiting for days with the revelation when he should make that old request. Now she enunciated it with every vowel and consonant correctly and primly uttered; indeed, she repeated it four or five times in proof of complete mastery.

Page 45

“A pretty name. I’ve often wondered how you came to give it to her,” said Lanstron to Minna.

“You do like it!” exclaimed Minna with girlish eagerness. “I gave her the most beautiful name I could think of because”—she laid her hand caressingly on the child’s head and a madonna-like radiance stole into her face—“because she might at least have a beautiful name when”—the dull blaze of a recollection now burning in her eyes—“when there wasn’t much prospect of many beautiful things coming into her life; though I know, of course, that the world thinks she ought to be called Maggie.”

* * * * *

Proceeding leisurely along the main path of the first terrace, Lanstron followed it past the rear of the house to the old tower. Long ago the moat that surrounded the castle had been filled in. The green of rows of grape-vines lay against the background of a mat of ivy on the ancient stone walls, which had been cut away from the loopholes set with window-glass. The door was open, showing a room that had been closed in by a ceiling of boards from the walls to the circular stairway that ran aloft from the dungeons. On the floor of flags were cheap rugs. A number of seed and nursery catalogues were piled on a round table covered with a brown cloth.

“Hello!” Lanstron called softly. “Hello!” he called louder and yet louder.

Receiving no answer, he retraced his steps and seated himself on the second terrace in a secluded spot in the shadow of the first terrace wall, where he could see any one coming up the main flight of steps from the road. When Marta walked she usually came from town by that way. At length the sound of a slow step from another direction broke on his car. Some one was approaching along the path that ran at his feet. Around the corner of the wall, in his workman’s Sunday clothes of black, but still wearing his old straw hat, appeared Feller, the gardener. He paused to examine a rose-bush and Lanstron regarded him thoughtfully and sadly: his white hair, his stoop, his graceful hands, their narrow finger-tips turning over the leaves.

As he turned away he looked up, and a glance of definite and unfaltering recognition was exchanged between the two men. Feller’s hat was promptly lowered enough to form a barrier between their eyes. His face was singularly expressionless. It seemed withered, clayish, like the walls of a furnace in which the fire has died out. After a few steps he paused before another rose-bush. Meanwhile, both had swept the surroundings in a sharp, covert survey. They had the garden to themselves.

“Gustave!” Lanstron exclaimed under his breath.

“Lanny!” exclaimed the gardener, turning over a branch of the rose-bush. He seemed unwilling to risk talking openly with Lanstron.

“You look the good workman in his Sunday best to a T!” said Lanstron.

“Being stone-deaf,” returned Feller, with a trace of drollery in his voice, “I hear very well —at times. Tell me”—his whisper was quivering with eagerness—“shall we fight? Shall we fight?”

Page 46

“We are nearer to it than we have ever been in our time,” Lanstron replied.

The hat still shaded Feller’s face, his stoop was unchanged, but the branch in his hand shook.

“Honest?” he exclaimed. “Oh, the chance of it! the chance of it!”

“Gustave!” Lanstron’s voice, still low, came in a gust of sympathy, and the pocket which concealed his hand gave a nervous twitch as if it held something alive and distinct from his own being. “The trial wears on you! You feel you must break out?”

“No, I’m game—game, I tell you!” Still Feller spoke to the branch, which was steady now in a firm hand. “No, I don’t grow weary of the garden and the isolation as long as there is hope. But being deaf, always deaf, and yet hearing everything! Always stooped, even when the bugles are sounding to the artillery garrison—that is somewhat tiresome!”

“The idea of being deaf was yours, you know, Gustave,” said Lanstron.

“Yes, and the right plan. It was fun at first going through the streets and hearing people say, ‘He’s deaf as a stone!’ and having everybody work their lips at me while I pretended to study them in a dumb effort to understand. Actors have two hours of it an evening, and an occasional change of parts, but I act one part all the time. I get as taciturn as a clam. If war doesn’t come pretty soon I shall be ready for a monastery of perpetual silence.”

“Confound it, Gustave!” exclaimed Lanstron. “It’s inhuman, old boy! You shan’t stay another day!” Discretion to the winds, he sprang to his feet.

An impulse of the same sort overwhelmed Feller. His hand let go of the branch. The brim of the hat shot up, revealing a face that was not old, but in mercurial quickness of expressive, uncontrollable emotion was young, handsomely and attractively young in its frame of prematurely white hair. The stoop was wholly gone. He was tall now, his eyes sparkling with wild, happy lights and the soles of the heavy workman’s shoes unconsciously drawn together in a military stance. Lanstron’s twitching hand flew from his pocket and with the other found Feller’s hand in a strong, warm, double grip. For a second’s silence they remained thus. Feller was the first to recover himself and utter a warning.

“Miss Galland—Minna—some one might be looking.”

He drew away abruptly, his face becoming suddenly old, his stoop returning, and began to study the branch as before. Lanstron dropped back to his seat and gazed at the brown roofs of the town. Thus they might continue their conversation as guest and gardener.

“I didn’t think you’d stick it out, but you wanted to try—you chose,” said Lanstron. “Come—this afternoon—now!”

“This is best for me—this to the end of the chapter!” Feller replied doggedly. “Because you say you didn’t think I’d stick it out—ah, how well you know me. Lanny!—is the one reason that I should.”

Page 47

“True!” Lanstron agreed. “A victory over yourself!”

“How often I have heard in imagination the outbreak of rifle-fire down there by the white posts! How often I have longed for that day—for war! I live for war!”

“It may never come,” Lanstron said in frank protest. “And, for God’s sake, don’t pray for it in that way!”

“Then I shall be patient—patient under all irritations. The worst is,” and Feller raised his head heavily, in a way that seemed to emphasize both his stoop and his age, “the worst is Miss Galland.”

“Miss Galland! How?”

“She is learning the deaf-and-dumb alphabet in order the better to communicate with me. She likes to talk of the flowers—gardening is a passion with her, too—and all the while, in face of the honesty of those big eyes of hers and of her gentle old mother’s confidence, I am living a lie! Oh, the satire of it! And I have not been used to lying. That is my only virtue; at any rate, I was never a liar!”

“Then, why stay, Gustave? I will find something else for you.”

“No!” Feller shot back irritably. “No!” he repeated resolutely. “I don’t want to go! I mean to be game—I—” He shifted his gaze dismally from the bush which he still pretended to examine and suddenly broke off with: “Miss Galland is coming!”

He started to move away with a gardener’s shuffling steps, looking from right to left for weeds. Then pausing, he glanced back, his face in another transformation—that of a comedian.

“La, la, la!” he clucked, tossing his head gayly. “Depend on me, Lanny! They’ll never know I’m not deaf. I get my blue fits only on Sundays! And deafness has its compensations. Think if I had to listen to all the stories of my table companion, Peter, the coachman! La, la, la!” he clucked again, before disappearing around a bend in the path. “La, la, la! I’m the man for this part!”

Lanstron started toward the steps that Marta was ascending. She moved leisurely, yet with a certain springy energy that suggested that she might have come on the run without being out of breath or seeming to have made an effort. Without seeing him, she paused before one of the urns of hydrangeas in full bloom that flanked the third terrace wall, and, as if she would encompass and plunge her spirit into their abundant beauty, she spread out her arms and drew the blossoms together in a mass in which she half buried her face. The act was delightful in its grace and spontaneity. It was like having a page out of her secret self. It brought the glow of his great desire into Lanstron’s eyes.

“Hello, stranger!” she called as she saw him, and quickened her pace.

“Hello, pedagogue!” he responded.

As they shook hands they swung their arms back and forth like a pair of romping children for a moment.

“We had a grand session of the school this morning, the largest class ever!” she said. “And the points we scored off you soldiers! You’ll find disarmament already in progress when you return to headquarters. We’re irresistible, or at least,” she added, with a flash of intensity, “we’re going to be some day.”

Page 48

“So you put on your war-paint!”

“It must be the pollen from the hydrangeas!” She flicked her handkerchief from her belt and passed it to him. “Show that you know how to be useful!”

He performed the task with deliberate care.

“Heavens! You even have some on your ear and some on your hair; but I’ll leave it on your hair; it’s rather becoming. There you are!” he concluded.

“Off my hair, too!”

“Very well. I always obey orders.”

“I oughtn’t to have asked you to do it at all!” she exclaimed with a sudden change of manner as they started up to the house. “But a habit of friendship, a habit of liking to believe in one’s friends, was uppermost. I forgot. I oughtn’t even to have shaken hands with you!”

“Marta! What now, Marta?” he asked.

He had known her in reproach, in anger, in laughing mockery, in militant seriousness, but never before like this. The pain and indignation in her eyes came not from the sheer hurt of a wound but from the hurt of its source. It was as if he had learned by the signal of its loss that he had a deeper hold on her than he had realized.

“Yes, I have a bone to pick with you,” she said, recovering a grim sort of fellowship. “A big bone! If you’re half a friend you’ll give me the very marrow of it.”

“I am ready!” he answered more pathetically than philosophically.

“There’s not time now; after luncheon, when mother is taking her nap,” she concluded as they came to the last step and saw Mrs. Galland on the veranda.

X

A *luncheon at the Gallands*’

Seated at the head of the table at luncheon, Mrs. Galland, with her round cheeks, her rather becoming double chin, and her nicely dressed hair, almost snow-white now, suggested a girlhood in the Bulwer Lytton and Octave Feuillet age, when darkened rooms were favored for the complexion and it was the fashion for gentlewomen to faint on occasion. She lived in the past; the present interested her only when it aroused some memory. To-day all her memories were of the war of forty years ago.

“I remember how Mrs. Karly collapsed when they brought word of the death of her son, and never recovered her mind. And I remember Eunice Steiner when they brought Charles home looking so white—and it was the very day set for their wedding! And I remember all the wounded gathered at the foot of the terrace and being carried in here, while the guns were roaring out on the plain—and now it’s all coming again!”

“Why, mother, you’re very blue to-day!” said Marta.

“We have had these crises before. We—” Lanstron began, rallying her.

“Oh, yes, you have reason and argument,” she parried gently. “I have only my feelings. But it’s in the air—yes, war is in the air, as it was that other time. And I remember that young private, only a boy, who lay crumpled up on the steps where he fell. I bandaged him myself and helped to make his position easier. Yes, I almost lifted him in my arms” She was looking at the flowers on the table but not seeing them. She was seeing the face of the young private forty years ago.

Page 49

“He asked me to bring him a rose. He said the smell of roses was so sweet and he felt so faint. I brought him the rose—and he was dead!”

“Yes, yes!” Marta breathed. She, too, in her quick imagination, was seeing the young private and spatters of blood on the terrace. Lanstron feasted his eyes on her face, which mirrored her emotion.

“Oh, the groans of the dying in the night and the cheering when the news of victory came in!” Mrs. Galland continued. “I could not cheer. But that was, long, long ago—-long ago, and yet only yesterday! And now we are to have it all over again. The young men must have their turn. They will not be satisfied by the experience of their fathers. Yes, all over again; still more horrible—and it was horrible enough then! I used to get giddy easily. I do yet. But I didn’t faint—no, not once through the days of nursing, the weeks of suspense. I wondered afterward how I could have endured so much.”

“Are we of the septicized-serum age equal to it?” Marta exclaimed.

“Yes, we of the matter-of-fact, automatic gun-recoil age!” put in Lanstron.

“Oh, mother,” Marta went on, “I wish you would go with me to the class some morning, you who have seen and felt war, and tell it all as you saw it to the children!”

“But,” remonstrated Mrs. Galland, “I’m an old-fashioned woman; and, Marta, your father was an officer, as your grandfather was, too. I am sure he would not approve of your school, and I could do nothing against his wishes.”

She looked up with moistening eyes to a portrait on the opposite wall over the seat which her husband had occupied at table. Lanstron saw there a florid, jaunty gentleman in riding-habit, gloves on knee, crop in hand. The spirit of the first Galland or of the stern grandfather on the side wall—with Bluecher tufts in front of his ears sturdy defiance of that parvenu Bonaparte and of his own younger brother who had fallen fighting for Bonaparte—would have frowned on the descendant who had filled the house with many guests and paid the bills with mortgages in the ebbing tide of the family fortunes. But Mrs. Galland saw only a hero. She shared his prejudices against the manufacturers of the town; she saw the sale of land to be cut up into dwelling sites, which had saved the Gallands from bankruptcy, as the working of the adverse fate of modern tendencies. Even as she had left all details of business to her husband, so she had of late left them to Marta’s managing.

“Edward and I were just engaged before the outbreak of the war,” she proceeded. “How handsome he was in his Hussars’ uniform! How frightened I was and hew proud of his fine bravado when I heard him and a number of fellow officers drinking here in this room to quick death and speedy promotion! Do they still have that toast, Colonel?”

“Yes, in some regiments,” Lanstron answered. He would not say that what was good form in the days of the *beau sabreur* was considered a little theatrical in the days of the automatic gun-recoil.

Page 50

“And when he came—oh, when you came home,” breathed Mrs. Galland to the portrait, “with the scar on your cheek, how tanned and strong your hands were and how white mine as you held them so fast! And then”—she smiled in peaceful content—“then I did faint. I am not ashamed of it—I did!”

“Without any danger of falling far!” said Lanstron happily.

“Or with much of a jar!” added Marta.

“You prattling children!” gasped Mrs. Galland, her cheeks flushing. “Do you think that I fainted purposely? I would have been ashamed to my dying day if I had feigned it!”

“And you did not faint in the presence of the dead and dying!” said Marta thoughtfully, wonderingly, leaning nearer to her mother, her eyes athirst and drinking.

“But I believe it is only a wispy-waspy sort of girl that faints at all these days. They’re all so businesslike,” said Mrs. Galland—“so businesslike that they are ceasing to marry.”

How many girls she had known to wait a little too long! If anything could awaken Marta to action it ought to be war, which was a great match-maker forty years ago. The thought of a lover in danger had precipitated wavering hearts into engagements. Marta’s mood was such that she received the hint openly and playfully to-day.

“Oh, I don’t despair!” she exclaimed, straightening her shoulders and drawing in her chin with a mock display of bravery. “I believe it was in an English novel that I read that any woman without a hump can get any man she sets out for. It is a matter of determination and concentration and a wise choice of vulnerable objects.”

“Marta, Marta!” gasped Mrs. Galland. In her tone was a volume of lamentation.

“Now that I’m twenty-seven mother is ready to take any risk on my behalf, if it is masculine. By the time I’m thirty she will be ready to give me to a peddler with a harelip!” she said mischievously.

“A peddler with a harelip! Marta, will you never be serious?”

“Some day, mother,” Marta went on, “when we find the right man, you hold him while I propose, and together we’ll surely—”

Mrs. Galland could not resist laughing, which was one way to stop further absurdities—-absurdities concealing a nervous strain they happened to be this time—while Colonel Lanstron was a little flushed and ill at ease. She had a truly silvery laugh—the kind no longer in fashion among the gentry since golden laughs came in,—that went well with the dimples dipping into her pink cheeks.

Contrary to custom, she did not excuse herself immediately after luncheon for her afternoon nap, but kept battling with her nods until nature was victorious and the fell fast asleep. Marta, grown restless with impatience, suggested to Lanstron that they stroll in the garden, and they took the path past the house toward the castle tower, stopping in an arbor with high hedges on either side around a statue of Mercury.

Page 51

“Now!” exclaimed Marta narrowly. “It was you, Lanny, who recommended Feller to us as a gardener, competent though deaf!” With literal brevity she told how she had proved him to be a man of most sensitive hearing. “I didn’t let him know that he was discovered. I felt too much pity for him to do that. You brought him here—you, Lanny, you are the one to explain.”

“True, he is not deaf!” Lanstron replied.

“You knew he was not deaf, while we wrote our messages to him and I have been learning the deaf-and-dumb alphabet! It was pretty fun, wasn’t it?”

“Not fun—no, Marta!” he parried.

“He is a spy?” she asked.

“Yes, a spy. You can put things in a bright light, Marta!” He found words coming with difficulty in face of the pain and disillusion of her set look.

“Using some broken man as a pawn; setting him as a spy in the garden where you have been the welcome friend!” she exclaimed. “A spy on what—on my mother, on Minna, on me, on the flowers, as a part of this monstrous game of trickery and lies that you are playing?”

There was no trace of anger in her tone. It was that of one mortally hurt. Anger would have been easier to bear than the measuring, penetrating wonder that found him guilty of such a horrible part. Those eyes would have confused Partow himself with the steady, welling intensity of their gaze. She did not see how his left hand was twitching and how he stilled its movement by pressing it against the bench.

“You will take Feller with you when you go!” she said, rising.

Lanstron dropped his head in a kind of shaking throb of his whole body and raised a face white with appeal.

“Marta!” He was speaking to a profile, very sensitive and yet like ivory. “I’ve no excuse for such an abuse of hospitality except the obesssion of a loathsome work that some man must do and I was set to do. My God, Marta! I cease to be natural and human. I am a machine. I keep thinking, what if war comes and some error of mine let the enemy know where to strike the blow of victory; or if there were information I might have gained and failed to gain that would have given us the victory—if, because I had not done my part, thousands of lives of our soldiers were sacrificed needlessly!”

At that she turned on him quickly, her face softening.

“You do think of that—the lives?”

“Yes, why shouldn’t I?”

“Of those on your side!” she exclaimed, turning away.

“Yes, of those first,” he replied. “And, Marta, I did not tell you why Feller was here because he did not want me to, and I was curious to see if he had sustained power enough to keep you from discovering his simulation. I did not think he would remain. I thought that in a week he would tire of the part. But now you must have the whole story. You will listen?”

“I should not be fair if I did not, should I?” she replied, with a weary shadow of a smile.

Page 52

XI

MARTA HEARS FELLER'S STORY

To tell the story as Lanstron told it is to have it from the partisan lips of a man speaking for a man out of the depths of a friendship grown into the fibre of youth. It is better written by the detached narrator.

Gustave Feller's father had died when Gustave was twelve and his mother found it easy to spoil an only son who was handsome and popular. He suffered the misfortune of a mental brilliancy that learns too readily and of a personal charm that wins its way too easily. He danced well; he was facile at the piano; and he had so pronounced a gift as an amateur actor that a celebrated professional had advised him to go on the stage.

The two entering the cadet officers' school at the same time, chance made them roommates and choice soon made them chums. They had in common cleverness and the abundant energy that must continually express itself in action, and a mutual attraction in the very complexity of dissimilar traits that wove well in companionship.

While they were together Lanstron was a brake on his friend's impulses of frivolity which carried him to extremes; but they separated after receiving their commissions, Feller being assigned to the horse-artillery and Lanstron to the infantry and later to the staff. In charge of a field-battery at manoeuvres Feller was at his best. But in the comparative idleness of his profession he had much spare time for amusement, which led to gambling. Soon many debts hung over his head, awaiting liquidation at high rates of interest when he should come into the family property.

To the last his mother, having ever in mind a picture of him as a fine figure riding at the head of his guns, was kept in ignorance of this side of his life. With her death, when he had just turned thirty, a fortune was at his disposal. He made an oath of his resolution to pay his debts, marry and settle down and maintain his inheritance unimpaired. This endured for a year before it began to waver; and the wavering was soon followed by headlong obsession which fed on itself. As his passion for gambling grew it seemed to consume the better elements of his nature. Lanstron reasoned with him, then implored, then stormed; and Feller, regularly promising to reform, regularly fell each time into greater excesses. Twice Lanstron saved him from court-martial, but the third time no intercession or influence would induce his superiors to overlook the offence. Feller was permitted to resign to avoid a scandal, and at thirty-three, penniless, disgraced, he faced the world and sought the new land which has been the refuge for numbers of his kind. Only one friend bade him farewell as he boarded a steamer for New York, and this was Lanstron.

“Keep away from cities! Seek the open country! And write me, Gustave—don’t fail!” said Lanstron.

Page 53

Letters full of hope came from a Wyoming ranch; letters that told how Feller had learned to rope a steer and had won favor with his fellows and the ranch boss; of a one-time gourmet's healthy appetite for the fare of the chuck wagon. Lanstron, reading more between the lines than in them, understood that as muscles hardened with the new life the old passion was dying and in its place was coming something equally dangerous as a possible force in driving his ardent nature to some excess for the sake of oblivion. Finally, Feller broke out with the truth.

"My hair is white now, Lanny," he wrote. "I have aged ten years in these two. With every month of this new life the horror of my career has become clear to me. I lie awake thinking of it. I feel unworthy to associate with my simple, outspoken, free-riding companions. Remorse is literally burning up my brain. It is better to have my mind diseased, my moral faculties blurred, my body unsound; for to be normal, healthy, industrious is to remember the whole ghastly business of my dishonor.

"'Pay back! Pay back in some way!' a voice keeps saying. 'Pay back! Have an object in mind. Get to work on something that will help you to pay back or you will soon take a plunge to lower depths than you have yet sounded.'

"It is not the gambling, not the drinking—no! The thing that I cannot forget, that grows more horrible the more keenly awake clean living makes me to the past, is that I am inwardly foul—as foul as a priest who has broken his vows. I have disgraced the uniform—my country's uniform. I may never wear that uniform again; never look the meanest private in a battery in the face without feeling my cheeks hot with shame. While I cannot right myself before the service, I should like to do something to right myself with my conscience. I should like to see a battery march past and look at the flag and into the faces of the soldiers of my country feeling that I had atoned—feeling so for my own peace of mind—atoned by some real deed of service.

"I have been reading how Japanese volunteers made a bridge of their bodies for their comrades into a Russian trench, and when everybody else felt a horrible, uncanny admiration for such madness I have envied them the glorious exhilaration of the moment before the charge. That was a sufficient reward in life for death. So I come again to you for help. Now that you are chief of intelligence you must have many secret agents within the inner circle of the army's activities. In the midst of peace and the commonplaces of drill and manoeuvres there must be dangerous and trying work where the only distinction is service for the cause—our cause of three million against five. Find a task for me, no matter how mean, thankless, or dangerous, Lanny. The more exacting it is the more welcome, for the better will be my chance to get right with myself."

"Come!" was Lanstron's cable in answer.

Page 54

At the time he had not chosen any employment for Feller. He was thinking only that something must be found. When he heard of the death of the Gallands' gardener he recollected that before the passion for gambling overtook Feller he had still another passion besides his guns. The garden of the Feller estate had been famous in its neighborhood. Young Lanstron had not been more fond of the society of an engine-driver than young Feller of a gardener's. On a holiday in the capital with his fellow cadets he would separate from them to spend hours in the botanical gardens. Once, after his downfall began, at a riotous dinner party he had broken into a temper with a man who had torn a rose to pieces in order to toss the petals over the table.

"Flowers have souls!" he had cried in one of his tumultuous, abandoned reversions to his better self which his companions found eccentric and diverting. "That rose is the only thing in the room that is not foul —and I am the foulest of all!"

The next minute, perhaps after another glass of champagne, he would be winning a burst of laughter by his mimicry of a gouty old colonel reprimanding him for his erring career.

Naturally, in the instinct of friendship, Lanstron's own account left out the unpleasant and dwelt on the pleasant facts of Feller's career.

"His colonel did not understand him," he said. "But I knew the depths of his fine spirit and generous heart. I knew his talent. I knew that he was a victim of unsympathetic surroundings, of wealth, of love of excitement, and his own talent. Where he was, something must happen. He bubbled with energy. The routine of drill, the same old chaff of the mess, the garrison gossip, the long hours of idleness while the busy world throbs outside, which form a privileged life to most officers, were stifling to him. 'Let's set things going!' he would say in the old days, and we'd set them. Most of our demerits were for some kind of deviltry. And how he loved the guns! I can see the sparkle of his men's eyes at sight of him. Nobody could get out of them what he could. If he had not been put in the army as a matter of family custom, if he had been an actor, or if he and I had gone to build bridges, then he might have a line of capital letters and periods after his name, and he would not be a spy or I an employer of spies, doing the work of a detective agency in an officer's uniform because nobody but an officer may do it."

At first Marta listened rigidly, but as the narrative proceeded her interest grew. When Lanstron quoted Feller's appeal for any task, however mean and thankless, she nodded sympathetically and understandingly; when he related the incident of the rose, its appeal was irresistible. She gave a start of delight and broke silence.

"Yes. I recall just how he looked as he stood on the porch, his head bent, his shoulders stooped, twirling his hat in his hands, while mother and I examined him as to his qualifications," she said. "I remember his words. He said that he knew flowers and that, like him, flowers could not hear; but perhaps he would be all the better gardener

because he could not hear. He was so ingratiating; yet his deafness seemed such a drawback that I hesitated."

Page 55

Following the path to the tower leisurely, they had reached the tower. Feller's door was open. Marta looked into the room, finding in the neat arrangement of its furniture a new significance. He was absent, for it was the dinner hour.

"And on my recommendation you took him," Lanstron continued.

"Yes, on yours, Lanny, on a friend's! You"—she put a cold emphasis on the word—"you wanted him here for your plans! And why? You haven't answered that yet. What purpose of the war game does he serve in our garden?"

His look pleaded for patience, while he tried to smile, which was rather difficult in face of her attitude.

"Not altogether in the garden; partly in the tower," he replied. "You are to be in the whole secret and in such a way as to make my temptation clear, I hope. First, I think you ought to see the setting. Let us go in"

Impelled by the fascination of Feller's romantic story and by a curiosity that Lanstron's manner accentuated, she entered the room. Apparently Lanstron was familiar with the premises. Passing through the sitting-room into the room adjoining, where Feller stored his tools, he opened a door that gave onto the circular stone steps leading down into the dungeon tunnel.

"I think we had better have a light," he said, and when he had fetched one from the bedchamber he descended the steps, asking her to follow.

They were in a passage six feet in height and about three feet broad, which seemed to lead on indefinitely into clammy darkness. The dewy stone walls sparkled in fantastic and ghostly iridescence under the rays from the lantern. The dank air lay moist against their faces.

"It's a long time since I've been here," said Marta, glad to break the uncanny sound of their footsteps in the weird silence with her voice. "Not since I was a youngster. Then I came on a dare to see if there were goblins. There weren't any; at least, none that cared to manifest himself to me."

"We have a goblin here now that we are nursing for the Grays—an up-to-date one that is quite visible," said Lanstron. "This is far enough." He paused and raised the lantern. With its light full in her face, she blinked. "There, at the height of your chin!"

She noted a metal button painted gray, set at the side of one of the stones of the wall, which looked unreal. She struck the stone with her knuckles and it gave out the sound of hollow wood, which was followed, as an echo, by a little laugh from Lanstron. Pressing the button, a panel door flew open, revealing a telephone mouthpiece and receiver set in the recess. Without giving him time to refuse permission, her thought all

submissive to the prompting spirit of adventure, she took down the receiver and called: “Hello!”

“The wire isn’t connected,” explained Lanstron.

Marta hung up the receiver and closed the door abruptly in a spasm of reaction.

Page 56

“Like a detective play!” were the first words that sprang to her lips. “Well?” As she faced around her eyes glittered in the lantern’s rays. “Well, have you any other little tricks to show me? Are you a sleight-of-hand artist, too, Lanny? Are you going to take a machine gun out of your hat?”

“That is the whole bag,” he answered. “I thought you’d rather see it than have it described to you.”

“Having seen it, let us go!” she said, in a manner that implied further reckoning to come.

“If out of a thousand possible sources one source succeeds, then the cost and pains of the other nine hundred and ninety-nine are more than repaid,” he was saying urgently, the soldier uppermost in him. “Some of the best service we have had has been absurd in its simplicity and its audacity. In time of war more than one battle has been decided by a thing that was a trifle in itself. No matter what your preparation, you can never remove the element of chance. An hour gained in information about your enemy’s plans may turn the tide in your favor. A Chinese peasant spy, because he happened to be intoxicated, was able to give the Japanese warning in time for Kuroki to make full dispositions for receiving the Russian attack in force at the Sha-ho. There are many other incidents of like nature in history. So it is my duty to neglect no possible method, however absurd.”

By this time he was at the head of the steps. Standing to one side, he offered his hand to assist Marta. But she seemed not to see it. Her aspect was that of downright antagonism.

“However absurd! yes, it is absurd to think that you can make me a party to any of your plans, for—” She broke off abruptly with starting eyes, as if she had seen an apparition.

Lanstron turned and through the door of the tool-room saw Feller entering the sitting-room. He was not the bent, deferential old gardener, nor was he the Feller changed to youth as he thought of himself at the head of a battery. His features were hard-set, a fighting rage burning in his eyes, his sinews taut as if about to spring upon an adversary. When he recognized the intruders he turned limp, his head dropped, hiding his face with his hat brim, and he steadied himself by resting a hand on the table edge.

“Oh, it’s you, Lanny—Colonel Lanstron!” he exclaimed thickly. “I saw that some one had come in here and naturally I was alarmed, as nobody but myself ever enters. And Miss Galland!” He removed his hat deferentially and bowed; his stoop returned and the lines of his face drooped. “I was so stupid; it did not occur to me that you might be showing the tower to Colonel Lanstron.”

“We are sorry to have given you a fright!” said Marta very gently.

“Eh? eh?” queried Feller, again deaf. “Fright? Oh, no, no fright. It might have been some boys from the town marauding.”

He was about to withdraw, in keeping with his circumspect adherence to his part, which he played with a sincerity that half-convinced even himself at times that he was really deaf, when the fire flickered back suddenly to his eyes and he glanced from Lanstron to the stairway in desperate inquiry.

Page 57

“Wait, Feller! Three of us share the secret now. These are Miss Galland’s premises. I thought best that she should know everything,” said Lanstron.

“Everything!” exclaimed Feller. “Everything—” the word caught in his throat. “You mean my story, too?” He was neither young nor old now. He seemed nondescript and miserable. “She knows who I am?” he asked.

“Yes!” Lanstron answered.

“Lanny!” This almost reproachfully, as if the ethics of friendship had been abused.

“Yes. I’m sorry, Gustave. I—” Lanstron began miserably.

“But why not?” said Feller, with a wan attempt at a smile. “You see—I mean—it does not matter!” he concluded in a hopeless effort at philosophy.

“My thoughtlessness, my callousness, my obsession with my work! I should not have told your story,” said Lanstron.

“His story!” exclaimed Marta, with a puzzled look to Lanstron before she turned to Feller with a look of warm sympathy. “Why, there is no story! You came with excellent recommendations. You are our very efficient gardener. That is all we need to know. Isn’t that the way you wish it, Mr. Feller?”

“Yes, just that!” he said softly, raising his eyes to her in gratitude. “Thank you, Miss Galland!”

He was going after another “Thank you!” and a bow; going with the slow step and stoop of his part, when Lanstron, with a masculine roughness of impulse which may be a sublime gentleness, swung him around and seized his hands in a firm caress.

“Forgive me, Gustave!” he begged. “Forgive the most brutal of all injuries—that which wounds a friend’s sensibilities.”

“Why, there is nothing I could ever have to forgive you, Lanny,” he said, returning Lanstron’s pressure while for an instant his quickening muscles gave him a soldierly erectness. Then his attitude changed to one of doubt and inquiry. “And you found out that I was not deaf when you had that fall on the terrace?” he asked, turning to Marta. “That is how you happened to get the whole story? Tell me, honestly!”

“Yes”

“Had you suspected me before that?”

“Yes, if you must know. I observed you speak to a bumblebee you could not see,” she said frankly, though she knew that her answer hurt him. There was no parleying with the insistence of his pale, drawn face and his fingers playing in nervous tension on the table edge. Suddenly he smiled as he had at the bumblebee.

“There you are again, confound you!” he exclaimed, shaking his finger at the imaginary intruder on the silence of the garden. “Did anyone else suspect?” he asked in fierce intensity.

“No, I don’t think so.”

He drew back with a long breath of relief, while his fingers now beat a merry tattoo.

“You saw so much more of me than the others, Miss Galland,” he said with a charming bow, “and you are so quick to observe that you are hardly a fair test. That little thunderer will not get me again. I’ll fool the ones I want to fool. And I’m learning, Lanny, learning all the time—getting a little deafer all the time. Miss Galland,” he added, struck in visible contrition by a new thought, “I am sorry”—he paused with head down for an instant—“very sorry to have deceived you.”

Page 58

“But you are still a deaf gardener to me,” said Marta, finding consolation in pleasing him.

“Eh? eh?” He put his hand to his ear as he resumed his stoop. “Yes, yes,” he added, as a deaf man will when understanding of a remark which he failed at first to catch comes to him in an echo. “Yes, the gardener has no past,” he declared in the gentle old gardener’s voice, “when all the flowers die every year and he thinks only of next year’s blossoms—of the future!”

Now the air of the room seemed to be stifling him, that of the roofless world of the garden calling him. His face spoke pitifully a desire for escape as he withdrew. The bent figure disappeared around a turn in the path and they listened without moving until the sound of his slow, dragging footfalls had died away.

“When he is serving those of his own social station I can see how it would be easier for him not to have me know,” said Marta. “Sensitive, proud, and intense—” and a look of horror appeared in her eyes. “As he came across the room his face was transformed. I imagine it was like that of a man giving no quarter in a bayonet charge!”

“His secret was at stake!” Lanstron said in ready championship.

She put up her hand as if to shut out a picture.

“Don’t let us think of it!” she exclaimed with a shudder. “He did not know what he was doing. His is one of the natures that have moments when an impulse throws them off their balance and ruins the work of years. No, we must think only of his sacrifice, his enforced humiliation, in order to try to make amends for the past according to his light. No one could refuse him sympathy and respect.”

Feller had won the day for himself where a friend’s pleas might have failed. This was as it should be, Lanstron thought; and he smiled happily over the rare thing in Marta that felt the appeal which Feller had for him.

“The right view—the view that you were bound to take!” he said.

“And yet, I don’t know your plans for him, Lanny. Pity is one thing; there is another thing to consider,” she replied, with an abrupt change of tone. “But first let us leave Feller’s quarters. We are intruders here.”

XII

A CRISIS WITHIN A CRISIS

“A broken-hearted man playing deaf; a secret telephone installed on our premises without our consent—this is all I know so far,” said Marta, who was opposite Lanstron at

one end of the circular seat in the arbor of Mercury, leaning back, with her weight partly resting on her hand spread out on the edge of the bench, head down, lashes lowered so that they formed a curtain for her glance. “I listen!” she added.

“Of course, with our three millions against their five, the Grays will take the offensive,” he said. “For us, the defensive. La Tir is in an angle. It does not belong in the permanent tactical line of our defences. Nevertheless, there will be hard fighting here. The Browns will fall back step by step, and we mean, with relatively small cost to ourselves, to make the Grays pay a heavy price for each step—just as heavy as we can!”

Page 59

They had often argued before with all the weapons known to controversy; but now the realization that his soldierly precision was bringing the forces of war into their personal relations struck her cold, with a logic as cold as his own seemed to her.

“You need not use euphonious terms,” she said without lifting her lashes or any movement except a quick, nervous gesture of her free hand that fell back into place on her lap. “What you mean is that you will kill as many as possible of the Grays, isn’t it? And if you could kill five for every man you lost, that would be splendid, wouldn’t it?”

“I don’t think of it as splendid. There is nothing splendid about war,” he objected; “not to me, Marta.”

“Still you would like to kill five to one, even ten to one, wouldn’t you?” she persisted.

“Marta, you are merciless!”

“So is war. It should be treated mercilessly.”

“Yes, twenty to one if they try to take our land!” he declared. “If we could keep up that ratio the war would not last more than a week. It would mean a great saving of lives in the end. We should win.”

“Exactly. Thank you. Westerling could not have said it better as a reason for another army-corps. For the love of humanity—the humanity of our side—please give us more weapons for murder! And after you have made them pay five to one or ten to one in human lives for the tangent, what then? Go on! I want to look at war face to face, free of the will-o’-the-wisp glamour that draws on soldiers!”

“We fall back to our first line of defence, fighting all the time. The Grays occupy La Tir, which will be out of the reach of our guns. Your house will no longer be in danger, and we happen to know that Westerling means to make it his headquarters.”

“Our house Westerling’s headquarters!” she repeated. With a start that brought her up erect, alert, challenging, her lashes flickering, she recalled that Westerling had said at parting that he should see her if war came. This corroborated Lanstron’s information. One side wanted a spy in the garden; the other a general in the house. Was she expected to make a choice? He had ceased to be Lanny. He personified war. Westerling personified war. “I suppose you have spies under his very nose—in his very staff offices?” she asked.

“And probably he has in ours,” said Lanstron, “though we do our best to prevent it.”

“What a pretty example of trust among civilized nations!” she exclaimed. “And you say that Westerling, who commands the killing on his side, will be in no danger?”

“Naturally not. As you know, a chief of staff must be at the wire head where all information centres, free of interruption or confusion or any possibility of broken lines of communication with his corps and divisions.”

“Then Partow will not be in any danger?”

“For the same reasons, no.”

“How comfortable! In perfect safety themselves, they will order other men to death!”

Page 60

“Marta, you are unjust!” exclaimed Lanstron, for he revered Partow as disciple reveres master. “Partow has the iron cross!”—the prized iron cross given to both officers and men of the Browns for exceptional courage in action and for that alone. “He won it leading a second charge with a bullet in his arm, after he had lost thirty per cent, of his regiment. The second charge succeeded.”

“Yes, I understand,” she went on a little wildly. “And perhaps the colonel on the other side, who fought just as bravely and had even heavier losses, did not get the bronze cross of the Grays because he failed. Yes, I understand that bravery is a requisite of the military cult. You must take some risk or you will not cause enough slaughter to win either iron or bronze crosses. And, Lanny, are you a person of such distinction in the business of killing that you also will be out of danger?”

She had forgotten about the telephone; she had forgotten the picture of dare-devil nerve he made when he rose from the wreck of his plane. If his work were to make war, her work was against war—the mission of her life as she saw it in the intense, passionate moments when some new absurdity of its processes appeared to her. She was ready to seize any argument his talk offered to combat the things for which he stood. She did not see, as her eyes poured her hot indignation into his, that his maimed hand was twitching or how he bit his lips and flushed before he replied:

“Each one goes where he is sent, link by link, down from the chief of staff. Only in this way can you have that solidarity, that harmonious efficiency which means victory.”

“An autocracy, a tyranny over the lives of all the adult males in countries that boast of the ballot and self-governing institutions!” she put in.

“But I hope,” he went on, with the quickening pulse and eager smile that used to greet a call from Feller to “set things going” in their cadet days, “that I may take out a squadron of dirigibles. After all this spy business, that would be to my taste.”

“And if you caught a regiment in close formation with a shower of bombs, that would be positively heavenly, wouldn’t it?” She bent nearer to him, her eyes flaming demand and satire.

“No! War—necessary, horrible, hellish!” he replied. Something in her seemed to draw out the brutal truth she had asked for in place of euphonious terms.

“You apparently know where your profession ought to feel perfectly at home—but what is the use? What?” She put her hands over her face and shuddered. “I grow savage; but it is because I have known you so well and because everything you say brings up its answer irresistibly to my mind. I keep thinking of what mother said at luncheon—of her certainty that war is coming. I see the garden spattered with blood, the wounded and the dying—an eddy in the conflict! And I am in a controversial eddy whirling round and

round away from the main current of what you were to tell me." She let her hands drop, but her eyes still held their lights of hostility. "Go on. I listen!"

Page 61

“When I became chief of intelligence I found that an underground wire had been laid to the castle from the Eighth Division headquarters, which will be our general staff headquarters in time of war,” he said. “The purpose was the same as now, but abandoned as chimerical. All that was necessary was to install the instrument, which Feller did. I, too, saw the plan as chimerical, yet it was a chance—the one out of a thousand. If it should happen to succeed we should play with our cards concealed and theirs on the table.”

“The noble art of war, so sportsmanlike!” she exclaimed. “So like the rules and ideals of the Olympic games! But the games will not serve to keep nations virile. They must shed blood!”

“Sportsmanlike? Not in the least!” he said. “The sport and glamour of war are past. The army becomes a business, a trade that ought to be uniformed in blue jumpers rather than gold lace. We are in an era of enormous forces, untried tactics, and rapidly changing conditions. This is why the big nations hesitate to make war; why they prepare well; why the stake is so great that the smallest detail must not be overlooked.”

She could not hold back her arguments, reason was so unquestionably on her side.

“Yes, the cunning of the fox, the brutality of Cain, using modern science and invention! Feint and draw your enemy into a cul-de-sac; screen your flank attacks; mask your batteries and hold their fire till the infantry charge is ripe for decimation! Oh, I have been brought up among soldiers! I know!”

“The rest of Feller’s part you have guessed already,” he concluded. “You can see how a deaf, inoffensive old gardener would hardly seem to know a Gray soldier from a Brown; how it might no more occur to Westerling to send him away than the family dog or cat; how he might retain his quarters in the tower; how he could judge the atmosphere of the staff, whether elated or depressed, pick up scraps of conversation, and, as a trained officer, know the value of what he heard and report it over the ’phone to Partow’s headquarters.”

“But what about the aeroplanes?” she asked. “I thought you were to depend on them for scouting.”

“We shall use them, but they are the least tried of all the new resources,” he said. “A Gray aeroplane may cut a Brown aeroplane down before it returns with the news we want. At most, when the aviator may descend low enough for accurate observation he can see only what is actually being done. Feller would know Westerling’s plans before they were even in the first steps of execution. This”—playing the thought happily—“this would be the ideal arrangement, while our planes and dirigibles were kept over our lines to strike down theirs. And, Marta, that is all,” he concluded. “I’ve tried to make everything clear.”

“You have, quite!” Marta replied decisively. “Now it is my turn to talk.”

“You have been talking a little already!” he intimated good-naturedly.

Page 62

“Only interruptions. That’s not really talking,” she answered, and broke into a sharp little laugh. A laugh was helpful to both after such a taut colloquy, but it seemed only to renew her energies for conflict. “If there is war, the moment that Feller’s ruse is discovered he will be shot as a spy?” she asked.

“I warned him of that,” said Lanstron. “I made the situation plain. He refused the assignments I first suggested to him. He objected that they did not offer any real expiation; they were not difficult or hazardous enough. I saw that I could not trick his conscience—what a conscience old Gustave has!—by any nominal task. When I mentioned this one he was instantly keen. The deafness was his idea of a ruse for his purpose. He wanted his secret kept. Thinking that his weakness for change would not let him bear the monotony of a gardener’s life as he saw himself bearing it in imagination, I recommended him to you. And there was the chance—the thousandth chance, Marta! He is a soldier, with a soldier’s fatalism. He sees no more danger in this than in commanding a battery in a crisis.”

“Naturally, as he is all impulse and fire. But you are the tempered steel of self-control. You should save him from his impulses, not make use of them.”

“You put it bluntly, Marta. You—”

“My turn to talk!” she reminded him. “Did you of all her views of Feller from his entrance to his quarters till he had gone. Her lips, which had kept so firm in argument, were parted and trembling in sympathy.

“I can see how he would take it!” she exclaimed. “I see his white hair, his eyes, his fingers trembling on the edge of the table, his utter dejection—and then impulse, headlong, irresponsible, craving the devil’s company!”

“Yes, nothing could hold him,” Lanstron agreed. “What makes it worse is that with regular living, the pleasure of the garden, and a settled purpose I have noticed his improvement already!”

“There is something so fine about him, something that deserves to win out against his weaknesses,” she said reflectively.

“If there is no war, I hope—after a year or so, I hope and believe that I may have him rewarded in some way that would make him feel that he had atoned.”

“And we have been talking as if war were due to-morrow!” she exclaimed. The breaking light of a discovery, followed by a wave of happy relief, swept over her responsive features, from relaxing brows to chin, which gave a toss on its own account. “Why, of course, Lanny! Till war does come he is only a gardener with an illusion that is giving

mental strength. Why didn't you put it that way before?" she asked in surprise at so easy a solution having escaped them. "Let him stay, at least until war comes."

"And then?"

"Lanny, you yourself, with all your information, you don't think—"

"No; though we are nearer it than ever before, it seems to me," he said, choosing his words carefully. "But it is likely that diplomacy will find its way out of this crisis as it has out of many others."

Page 63

“Then we’ll leave that question till the evil day,” she replied. “We have had a terrific argument, Lanny, haven’t we? And you have won!”

Her fingers flew out to his arm and rested lightly there after an instant’s firm pressure, as was her wont after an argument and they sheathed their blades. Their comradeship seemed to be restored in all its old glory of freedom from petty restraint. He was sure of one thing: that she would let her fingers remain on no other man’s sleeve in this fashion; and he hoped that she would let them remain there a long time. Very foolish he was about her, very foolish for a piece of human machinery driven by the dynamo of a human will.

“I have an impression that your goodness of heart has won,” he suggested gently.

“Or rather let us say that Feller has won.”

“Better still, yes, Feller has won!” he agreed. “Oh, it is good, good, good to be here with you, Marta, away from the grind for a little while,” he was saying, in the fulness of his anticipation of the hours they should have together before he had to go, when they heard the sound of steps. He looked around to see an orderly from the nearest military wireless station.

“I was told it was urgent, sir,” said the orderly, in excuse for his intrusion, as he passed a telegram to Lanstron.

Immediately Lanstron felt the touch of the paper his features seemed to take on a mask that concealed his thought as he read:

“Take night express. Come direct from station to me. Partow.”

This meant that he would be expected at Partow’s office at eight the next morning. He wrote his answer; the orderly saluted and departed at a rapid pace; and then, as a matter of habit of the same kind that makes some men wipe their pens when laying them down, he struck a match and set fire to one corner of the paper, which burned to his fingers’ ends before he tossed the charred remains away. Marta imagined what he would be like with the havoc of war raging around him—all self-possession and mastery; but actually he was trying to reassure himself that he ought not to feel petulant over a holiday cut short.

“I shall have to go at once,” he said. “Marta, if there were to be war very soon—within a week or two weeks—what would be your attitude about Feller’s remaining?”

“To carry out his plan, you mean?”

“Yes.”

There was a perceptible pause on her part.

“Let him stay,” she answered. “I shall have time to decide even after war begins.”

“But instantly war begins you must go!” he declared urgently.

“You forget a precedent,” she reminded him. “The Galland women have never deserted the Galland house!”

“I know the precedent. But this time the house will be in the thick of the fighting.”

“It has been in the thick of the fighting before,” she said, with a gesture of impatience.

Page 64

“Not this kind of fighting, Marta,” he proceeded very soberly. “Other wars are no criterion for this. I know about the defences of the tangent because I helped to plan them. In order to keep the enemy in ignorance we have made no permanent fortifications. But the engineers and the material will be ready, instantly the frontier is closed to intelligence, to construct defences suited to a delaying and punishing action. Every human being will be subject to martial law; every resource at military command. Every hill, house, ditch, and tree will be used as cover or protection and will be subject to attack.”

Not argument this, but the marshalling of facts of the kind in which he dealt as unanswerable evidence, while she listened with a still face and dilating eyes that did not look at him until he had finished. Then a smile came, a faint, drawn smile of irony, and her eyes staring into his were chilling and greenish-black in their anger.

“And the house of a friend meant nothing! It was only fuel for the hell you devise!” she said, making each word count like shot singing over glare ice.

“It is only fair to myself to say that when I laid the sheets of my map before Partow I had excluded your house and grounds,” he pleaded in defence. “His thumb pounced on that telltale blank space. ’A key-point! So this is your tendon of Achilles, eh?’ he said in his blunt fashion.”

“The blunt fashion is admired by soldiers,” she replied without softening. “Yes, he could play chess with heaps of bodies! He is worse than Westerling!”

“No, he would use his own premises, his brother’s, his father’s if it would help. Well, then he took a pen and filled in the blank space with the detail which is to make your house and garden the centre of an inferno.”

“How Christian!” breathed Marta. “I suppose he loves his grandchildren and that they are taught the Lord’s prayer!”

“I believe his only pastime is playing with them,” admitted Lanstron, stumbling on, trying to be loyal to Partow, to duty, to country, no longer calm or dispassionate, but demoralized under the lash. “He tells them that when they are grown he hopes there will be an end of war.”

“Worse yet—a hypocrite!”

“But, Marta, I never knew a man more sincere. He is working to the same end as you —peace. If the Grays would play with fire he would give them such a burning that they will never try again. He would make war too horrible for practice; fix the frontier forever where by, right it belongs; make conquest by one civilized nation of another impossible hereafter. Yes, when it is stalemate, when it is proved that the science of modern

defence has made the weak so strong that superior numbers cannot play the bully, then shall we have peace in practice!”

“My children’s prayer and Partow in the same gallery!” she laughed stonily. “The peace of armament, not of man’s superiority to the tiger and the tarantula! And you say it all so calmly. You picture the hell of your manufacture as coolly as if it were some fairies’ dance!”

Page 65

“Should I be enthusiastic? Should I view the prospect with an old-fashioned Hussar’s hurrah?” he asked. “The right way is without illusions. Let us lose our heads, cry out for glory—and then chaos!”

“The heedless barbarism of ignorance intoxicated with primitive passion versus calculating, refined, intellectual, comprehending barbarism! I see no choice,” she concluded, rising slowly in the utter weariness of spirit that calls for the end of an interview.

“Marta, you will promise not to remain at the house?” he urged.

“Isn’t that my affair?” she asked. “Aren’t you willing to leave even that to me after all you have been telling how you are to make a redoubt of our lawn, inviting the shells of the enemy into our drawing-room?”

What could he say in face of a hostility so resolute and armed with the conviction of its logic? Only call up from the depths the two passions of his life in an outburst, with all the force of his nature in play.

“I love this soil, my country’s soil, ours by right—–and I love you! I would be true to both!”

“Love! What mockery to mention that now!” she cried chokingly. “It’s monstrous!”

“I—I—” He was making an effort to keep his nerves under control.

This time the stiffening elbow failed. With a lurching abruptness he swung his right hand around and seized the wrist of that trembling, injured hand that would not be still. She could not fail to notice the movement, and the sight was a magic that struck anger out of her.

“Lanny, I am hurting you!” she cried miserably.

“A little,” he said, will finally dominant over its servant, and he was smiling as when, half stunned and in agony—and ashamed of the fact—he had risen from the debris of cloth and twisted braces. “It’s all right,” he concluded.

She threw back her arms, her head raised, with a certain abandon as if she would bare her heart.

“Lanny, there have been moments when I would have liked to fly to your arms. There have been moments when I have had the call that comes to every woman in answer to a desire. Yet I was not ready. When I really go it must be in a flame, in answer to your flame!”

“You mean—I—.”

But if the flame were about to burst forth she smothered it in the spark.

“And all this has upset me,” she went on incoherently. “We’ve both been cruel without meaning to be, and we’re in the shadow of a nightmare; and next time you come perhaps all the war talk will be over and—oh, this is enough for to-day!”

She turned quickly in veritable flight and hurried toward the house. At the bend of the path she wheeled and stood facing him, a hand tossed up and opening and closing as if she had caught a shaft of sunshine and let it go again. Thus she would wave to him from the veranda as he came up the terrace steps. Indelible to him this picture, radiant of a versatile, impressionable vitality, of capacities yet unsounded, of a downright sincerity of impulses, faiths, and ideals which might buffet her this way and that over a strange course. A woman unafraid of destiny; a woman too objective yet to know herself!

Page 66

“If it ever comes,” she called, “I’ll let you know! I’ll fly to you in a chariot of fire bearing my flame—I am that bold, that brazen, that reckless! For I am not an old maid yet. They’ve moved the age limit up to thirty. But you can’t drill love into me as you drill discipline into armies—no, no more than I can argue peace into armies!”

For a while, motionless, Lanstron watched the point where she had disappeared.

“If I had only been a bridge-builder or an engine-driver,” he thought; “anything except this beastly—”

But he was wool-gathering again. He pulled himself together and started at a rapid pace for the tower, where he found Feller sitting by the table, one leg over the other easily, engaged in the prosaic business of sewing a button on his blouse. Lanstron rapped; no answer. He beat a tattoo on the casing; no answer.

“Gustave!” he called; no answer.

Now he entered and touched Feller’s shoulder.

“Hello, Lanny!” exclaimed Feller, rising and setting a chair and breaking into a stream of talk. “That’s the way they all have to do when they want to attract my attention. I heard your voice and Miss Galland’s—having an argument in the garden, I should say. Then I heard your step. Since I became deaf my sense of hearing has really grown keener, just as the blind develop a keener sense of feeling. Eh? eh?” He cupped his hand over his ear in the unctuous enjoyment of his gift of acting. “Yes, Colonel Lanstron, would you like to know what a perfect triumph we’re going to pull off in irises next season—-but, Lanny, you seem in a hurry!”

“Gustave, I am ordered to headquarters by the night express and I came to tell you that I think it means war.”

“War! war!” Feller shouted. “Ye gods and little fishes!” In riotous glee he seized a chair and flung it across the room. “Ye salty, whiskery gods and ye shiny-eyed little fishes! War, do you hear that, you plebeian trousers of the deaf gardener? War!” Flinging the trousers after the chair, he executed a few steps. When he had thus tempered his elation, he grasped Lanstron’s arm and, looking into his eyes with feverish resolution and hope, said: “Oh, don’t fear! I’ll pull it off. And then I shall have paid back—yes, paid back! I shall be a man who can look men in the face again. I need not slink to the other side of the street when I see an old friend coming for fear that he will recognize me. Yes, I could even dare to love a woman of my own world! And—and perhaps the uniform and the guns once more!”

“You may be sure of that. Partow cannot refuse,” said Lanstron, deeply affected. After a pause he added: “But I must tell you, Gustave, that Miss Galland, though she is

willing that you remain as a gardener, has not yet consented to our plan. She will make no decision until war comes. Perhaps she will refuse. It is only fair that you should know this."

For an instant Feller was downcast; then confidence returned at high pitch.

Page 67

“Trust me!” he said. “I shall persuade her!”

“I hope you can. It is a chance that might turn the scales of victory—a chance that hangs in my mind stubbornly, as if there were some fate in it. Luck, old boy!”

“Luck to you, Lanny! Luck and promotion!”

They threw their arms about each other in a vigorous embrace.

“And you will keep watch that Mrs. Galland and Marta are in no danger?”

“Trust me for that, too!”

“Then, good-by till I hear from you over the ’phone or I return to see you after the crisis is over!” concluded Lanstron as he hurried away.

XIII

BREAKING A PAPER-KNIFE

Hedworth Westerling would have said twenty to one if he had been asked the odds against war when he was parting from Marta Galland in the hotel reception-room. Before he reached home he would have changed them to ten to one. A scare bulletin about the Bodlapoo affair compelling attention as his car halted to let the traffic of a cross street pass, he bought a newspaper thrust in at the car window that contained the answer of the government of the Browns to a despatch of the Grays about the dispute that had arisen in the distant African jungle. This he had already read two days previously, by courtesy of the premier. It was moderate in tone, as became a power that had three million soldiers against its opponent’s five; nevertheless, it firmly pointed out that the territory of the Browns had been overtly invaded, on the pretext of securing a deserter who had escaped across the line, by Gray colonial troops who had raised the Gray flag in place of the Brown flag and remained defiantly in occupation of the outpost they had taken.

As yet, the Browns had not attempted to repel the aggressor by arms for fear of complications, but were relying on the Gray government to order a withdrawal of the Gray force and the repudiation of a commander who had been guilty of so grave an international affront. The surprising and illuminating thing to Westerling was the inspired statement to the press from the Gray Foreign Office, adroitly appealing to Gray chauvinism and justifying the “intrepidity” of the Gray commander in response to so-called “pin-pricking” exasperations.

At the door of his apartment, Francois, his valet and factotum, gave Westerling a letter.

“Important, sir,” said Francois.

Westerling knew by a glance that it was, for it was addressed and marked “Personal” in the premier’s own handwriting. A conference for ten that evening was requested in a manner that left no doubt of its urgency.

“Let me see, do I dine at the Countess Zalinski’s to-night?” asked Westerling. Both Francois and his personal aide kept a list of his appointments.

“Not to-night, sir. To-night you—” said Francois.

“Good!” thought Westerling. “No excuses will be necessary to Marie in order to be at the premier’s by ten.”

Page 68

Curiosity made him a little ahead of time, but he found the premier awaiting him in his study, free from interruption or eavesdropping.

In the shadow of the table lamp the old premier looked his years. His definite features were easy material for the caricaturist, who does not deal in halftones. A near view of them was not attractive. They had the largeness which impresses the gallery from the floor of a parliamentary chamber, where delicate lines of sensibility and character lack the quality which the actor supplies with his make-up. As is often the case with elderly statesmen, his face seemed like that of the crowd done boldly as a single face, while his shrewd eyes in a bed of crow's-feet, when they lighted to their purpose in confidence, expressed his understanding of the crowd and its thoughts and how it may be led.

From youth he had been in politics, ever a bold figure and a daring player, but now beginning to feel the pressure of younger men's elbows. Fonder even of power, which had become a habit, than in his twenties, he saw it slipping from his grasp at an age when the 'downfall of his government meant that he should never hold the reins again. He had been called an ambitious demagogue and a makeshift opportunist by his enemies, but the crowd liked him for his ready strategy, his genius for appealing phrases, and for the gambler's virtue which hitherto had made him a good loser.

"You saw our *communique* to-night that went with the publication of the Browns' despatch?" he remarked.

"Yes, and I was glad that I had been careful to send a spirited commander to that region," Westerling replied.

"So you guess my intention, I see." The premier smiled. He picked up a long, thin ivory paper-knife and softly patted the palm of his hand with it. "We have had many discussions, you and I, Westerling," he said. "But to-night I'm going to ask categorical questions. They may take us over old ground, but they are the questions of the nation to the army."

"Certainly!" Westerling replied in his ready, confident manner.

"We hear a great deal about the precision and power of modern arms as favoring the defensive," said the premier. "I have read somewhere that it will enable the Browns to hold us back, despite our advantage of numbers. Also, that they can completely man every part of their frontier and that their ability to move their reserves rapidly, thanks to modern facilities, makes a powerful flanking attack in surprise out of the question."

"Some half-truths in that," answered Westerling. "One axiom, that must hold good through all time, is that the aggressive which keeps at it always wins. We take the aggressive. In the space where Napoleon deployed a division, we deploy a battalion to-

day. The precision and power of modern arms require this. With such immense forces and present-day tactics, the line of battle will practically cover

Page 69

the length of the frontier. Along their range the Browns have a series of fortresses commanding natural openings for our attack. These are almost impregnable. But there are pregnable points between them. Here, our method will be the same that the Japanese followed and that they learned from European armies. We shall concentrate in masses and throw in wave after wave of attack until we have gained the positions we desire. Once we have a tenable foothold on the crest of the range the Brown army must fall back and the rest will be a matter of skilful pursuit."

The premier, as he listened, rolled the paper-knife over and over, regarding its polished sides, which were like Westerling's manner of facile statement of a programme certain of fulfilment.

"We can win, then? We can go to their capital, or far enough to force a great indemnity, the annexation of one of their provinces, perhaps, and the taking over of their African colonies, which we can develop so much better than they?"

Westerling took care to show none of the eagerness which had set his pulses humming.

"To their capital!" he declared decisively. "Nothing less. For that I have planned."

"And the cost in lives?"

"Five or six hundred thousand casualties, which means about a hundred thousand killed."

"Ghastly! The population of a good-sized city!" exclaimed the premier.

"A small percentage out of five million soldiers; a smaller out of eighty million population," Westerling returned.

"And how long do you think the war would last? How long the strain on our finances, the suspense to the markets?"

"About a month. We shall go swiftly. The completeness of modern preparation must make a war of to-day brief between two great powers. We must win with a rush, giving the defenders no breathing spell, pouring masses after masses upon the critical positions."

"How long will it take to mobilize?"

"Less than a week after the railroads are put entirely at our service, with three preceding days of scattered movements," answered Westerling. "Deliberate mobilizations are all right for a diplomatic threat that creates a furore in the newspapers and a depression in

the stock-market, but which is not to be carried out. When you mean war, all speed and the war fever at white heat."

"Therefore, there would be little time for the public to hoard money or to provoke a panic. The government, knowing precisely what was before it, could take severe preventive measures."

"But I may say that we should strike before mobilization is complete. A day will be required to take the La Tir tangent and other outlying positions. The 128th and other regiments who will do this work are already at the front. They were chosen because they came from distant provinces and we can count on their patriotic fervor for brilliant and speedy action, with resulting general enthusiasm for the whole army, which will be up in time for the assault on the Browns' permanent defences."

Page 70

“You would have made a good politician, Westerling,” the premier remarked, with a twitching uplift of the brows and a knowing gleam in his shrewd old eyes.

“Thank you,” replied Westerling, appearing flattered, though secretly annoyed that any one should think that a chief of staff could care to change places with any man in the world. Governments might come and go, but the army was the rock in the midst of the play of minor forces, the ultimate head of order and power. “A man who is able to lead in anything must be something of a politician,” he said suavely.

“Very true, indeed. Perhaps I had that partly in mind in making you vice-chief of staff,” responded the premier enjoyably. “You spoke of the war fever at white heat,” he went on, returning to his muttons, “and of the army’s enthusiasm for its work. There we come to the kernel in the nut, eh?” he asked, as he prodded the paper-knife into the palm of his hand.

“Drill, organization, discipline, and centralized authority and a high-spirited aristocracy of officers are most important,” said Westerling. “But after that come morale and the psychology of the soldier.” There he shrugged slightly, in indication of a resentment at the handicap of human nature in his work. “The business of a soldier is to risk death in the way he is told. The keener he is for his cause the better. An ideal soldier is he who does not think for himself, but observes every detail of training and will not stop until halted by orders or a bullet. Therefore we want the army hot with desire. The officers of a company cannot force their men forward. Without insubordination or mutiny the men may stop from lack of interest after only a very small percentage of loss.”

“Lack of interest!” mused the premier. But Westerling, preoccupied with the literal exposition of his subject, did not catch the flash of passing satire before the premier, his features growing hard and challenging, spoke in another strain: “Then it all goes back to the public—to that enormous body of humanity out there!” He swung the paper-knife around with outstretched arm toward the walls of the room. “To public opinion—as does everything else in this age—to the people! I have seen them pressing close, about to remove me from power, and I have started a diversion which made them forget the object of their displeasure. I have thought them won one day, and the next I realized that they were going against me. Thank Heaven for the brevity of their memory, or we leaders would be hung high by our own inconsistencies! He who leads sees which way they will go, rushes to the head of the procession, discovers them to themselves and turns a corner and they follow, thinking that they are going straight to the point. But always they are there, never older, never younger, never tiring—there, smiling or scowling or forgetting all about you, only to have a sudden fierce reminder overnight to surprise you—and our masters, yours and mine! For no man can stand against them when they say no or yes.”

Page 71

“You know the keys to play on, though,” remarked Westerling with a complimentary smile. “No one knows quite so well.”

“I ought to,” replied the premier. “That was the purpose of the semi-official *communique* about Bodlapoo, which, of course, we can repudiate later, if need be. I saw that the brilliant forced march of our commander had excited popular enthusiasm. It does not matter if he were in the wrong. Will race feeling rise to the pitch of war from this touchstone with the proper urging? Of course, the impulse must come from the people themselves. We must seem to resist it, the better to arouse it.” He bent the paper-knife into a bow with fingers that were rigid. “Times are hard, factions are bitter, our cabinet is in danger, with economic and political chaos from overpopulation in sight,” he continued. “We hunger for land, for fresh opportunities for development. An outburst of patriotism, concentrating every thought of the nation on war!—is that the way out?”

Westerling had only answered questions so far. Here was his cue for argument.

“We were never so ready,” he said. “War must come some time. We should choose the moment, not leave it to chance. The nation needs war as a stimulant, as a corrective, as a physician. We grow stale; we think of our domestic troubles. The old racial passions are weakening and with them our virility. Victory will make room for millions in the place of the thousands who fall. The indemnity will bring prosperity. Because we have had no war, because the long peace has been abnormal, is the reason you have all this agitation and all these strikes. They will be at an end. Those who are fit to rule will be in power.”

“And you are sure—sure we can win?” the premier asked with a long, tense look at Westerling, who was steady under the scrutiny.

“Absolutely!” he answered. “Five millions against three! It’s mathematics, or our courage and skill are not equal to theirs Absolutely! We have the power, why not use it? We do not live in a dream age!”

The premier sank deeper in his chair. He was silent, thinking. He who had carried off so many great coups with rare ease was on the threshold of one that made them all seem petty. He had heard random talk that some of the officers of the staff considered Westerling to be lath painted to look like steel. There was a reported remark by Turcas, his assistant, implying that the ability to achieve a position did not mean the ability to fill it. Jealousy, no doubt; the jealousy of rivals! The premier himself was used to having members of his own cabinet ever on the watch for the vulnerable spot in his back, which he had never allowed them to find. Yet, there was the case of Louis Napoleon. He had the ability to achieve a position; he had been the lath painted to look like steel. He had all the externals which the layman associates with victory until he went to the supreme test, which ripped him into slivers of rotten wood. The little Napoleon had been one of the premier’s favorite bugaboo examples of stage realism tried out in real life. But it

was ridiculous to compare him with the stalwart figure sitting across the table, who had spoken the language of materialism without illusion.

Page 72

Westerling's ambition on edge communicated itself to the premier, whose soft hands, long since divorced from any labor except official hand-shaking and the exercise of authority, were bending the paper-knife with unconscious vigor.

"All the achievements of power form only a dull background for victory in war to a people's imagination!" he exclaimed. "Your name and mine to symbolize an age! What power for us! What power for the nation!"

From a sudden, unwitting exertion of his strength the knife which had been the recipient of his emotions snapped in two. Rather carefully he laid the pieces on the table before he rose and turned to Westerling, his decision made.

"If the people respond with the war fever, then it is war!" he said. "I take you at your word that you will win!"

Westerling's chair creaked with the tense drawing of his muscles in the impulse of delight. He had gained the great purpose; but there was another and vital one on his programme.

"A condition!" he announced. "From the moment war begins the army is master of all intelligence, all communication, all resources. Everything we require goes into the crucible!"

"And the press—the mischievous, greedy, but very useful press?" asked the premier.

"It also shall serve; also obey. No lists of killed and wounded shall be given out until I am ready. The public must know nothing except what I choose to tell. I act for the people and the nation."

"That is agreed," said the premier. "For these terrible weeks every nerve and muscle of the nation is at your service to win for the nation. In three or four days I shall know if the public rises to the call. If not—" He shook his head.

"While all the information given out is provocative to our people, you will declare your hope that war may be averted," Westerling continued. "This will screen our purpose. Finally, on top of public enthusiasm will come the word that the Browns have fired the first shot—as they must when we cross the frontier—that they have been killing our soldiers. This will make the racial spirit of every man respond. Having decided for war, every plan is worthy that helps to victory."

"It seems fiendish!" exclaimed the premier in answer to a thought eddying in the powerful current of his brain. "Fiendish with calculation, but merciful, as you say."

“A fast, terrific campaign! A ready machine taking the road!” Westerling declared. “Less suffering than if we went to war carelessly for a long campaign—than if we allowed sentiment to interfere with intellect.”

“I like your energy, your will!” said the premier admiringly. “And about the declaration of war? We shall time that to your purpose.”

“Declarations of war before striking, by nations taking the aggressive, are a disadvantage,” Westerling explained. “They are going out of practice. Witness the examples of Japan against Russia and the Balkan allies against Turkey. In these days declarations are not necessary as a warning of what is going to happen. They belong to the etiquette of fencers.”

Page 73

“Yes, exactly. The declaration of war and the ambassador’s passports will be prepared and the wire that fighting has begun will release them,” agreed the premier. “Another thing,” he added, “there is the question of the opinion of the world as represented by The Hague and the peace societies. This government has always expressed sympathy with their ideas.”

“Naturally,” Westerling put in. “We shall use hand-grenades, explosives from dirigibles, every known power of destruction. So will the Browns, you may be sure. In such a cataclysm we shall have no time for niceties. The peace societies will have hardly formulated their protests to The Hague before the war is over. Our answer will be our victory—the power that goes with the prestige of unconquerable force. Victory, nothing but victory counts!”

Westerling was speaking by the book, expressing the ideas that he had again and again rehearsed as a part of the preparation, the eternal preparation for the sudden emergency of war, which is the duty of the staff. So letter-perfect was he in his lines that a layman might have scouted his realization of the enormousness of his responsibility.

“Yet if we did lose! If when I had given you all you ask your plans went wrong! If our army were broken to pieces on the frontier and then the nation, kept in ignorance of events, learned the truth”—the premier enunciated slowly and pointedly while he locked glances with Westerling—“that is the end for us both. You would hardly want to return to the capital to face public wrath!”

“We must win though we lose a million men!” he answered. “I stake my life!” he cried hoarsely, striking his fist on the table.

“You stake your life!” repeated the premier with slow emphasis.

“Bravado hardly becomes a chief of staff. His place is not under fire,” Westerling explained. “However, I mean to make my headquarters at La Tir, immediately we have taken it, for the effect of having the leader of the army promptly established on conquered territory.”

“I understand that,” replied the premier. “But still you stake your life? That is the greatest thing a man has to stake. You stake your life on victory?” he demanded fiercely.

“I do!” said Westerling. “Yes, my life. We cannot fail!”

“Then it will be war, if the people want it!” said the premier. “I shall not resist their desire!” he added in his official manner, at peace with his conscience.

XIV

IN PARTOW'S OFFICE

Partow was a great brain set on an enormous body. Partow's eyes had the fire of youth at sixty-five, but the pendulous flesh of his cheeks was pasty. Partow was picturesque; he was a personality with a dome forehead sweeping back nobly to scattered and contentious, short gray hairs. Jealousy and faction had endeavored for years to remove him from his position at the head of the army on account of age. New governments decided as they came in that he must go, and they went out with him still in the saddle. He worked fourteen hours a day, took no holidays and little exercise, violated the rules of health, and never appeared at gold-braid functions. The business of official display, as he said pungently, he delegated to that specialist, his handsome vice-chief of staff.

Page 74

He had set up no silhouette of a charging soldier peppered with bullet marks on the wall of his office, for this was a picture that he carried in his mind. Pertinent to his own taste, under the glance of the portraits of the old heroes, was a little statuette of a harvester called Toil on his desk.

“That’s the fellow we’re defending,” he would say, becoming almost rhapsodical. “I like to think back to him. He’s the infantry before you put him in uniform.”

Let officers apply themselves with conspicuous energy and they heard from a genial Partow; let officers only keep step and free of courts martial, and they heard from a merciless taskmaster. Resign, please, if you like a leisurely life, he told the idlers; and he had a way of making them so uncomfortable that they would take the advice. Among the sons of rest who had retired to mourn over the world going to the devil he was referred to as not being a gentleman, which amused him; some said that he was crazy, which amused him even more.

Peculiarly human, peculiarly dictatorial, dynamic, and inscrutable was Partow, who never asked any one under him to work harder than himself.

Lanstron appeared in the presence of Jove shortly after eight o’clock the next morning after he left La Tir. Jove rolled his big head on his short neck in a nod and said:

“Late!”

“The train was late, sir!”

“And you have disobeyed orders!” grumbled Partow.

“Disobeyed orders? How, sir?”

“And you look me in the eye as you always do! You think that excuses you, perhaps?”

“No, sir. But I am bound to ask what orders?”

“Well, not orders, but my instructions; at least, my desire. Flying yourself—directing a manoeuvre—racing the Grays!”

“You heard about it?”

“I hear about everything! I have told you not to risk your life. Lives are assets of various kinds in an army. It is my business to determine the relative value of those of my subordinates. You are not to sacrifice yours.”

“I haven’t yet, sir. I have it with me this morning,” Lanstron replied, “and I have some news about our thousandth chance.”

“Hm-m! What is it?” asked Partow. When Lanstron had told the story, Partow worked his lips in a way he had if he were struck by a passing reflection which might or might not have a connection with the subject in hand. “Strange about her when you consider who her parents were!” he said. “But you never know. His son,” nodding to Toil, “might be a great painter or a snob. Miss Galland has an idea—that’s something—and character and a brain making arrows so fast that she shoots them into the blue just for mental relief. She’s quite a woman. If I were thirty, and single, I believe I’d fall in love with her. But don’t you dare tell Mrs. Partow. I want the fun of telling her myself. Hm-m! Why don’t you sit down, young man?”

Partow turned his thick, white palm toward a chair, and his smile, now clearly showing that he was not deeply offended with Lanstron’s insubordination, had a singular charm. The smile vanished as Lanstron seated himself and in its place came such a look as friend Toil had seen on very rare occasions.

Page 75

“The way that the Grays gave out our despatch convinces me of their intentions,” Partow said. “Their people are rising to it and ours are rising in answer. The Grays have been transferring regiments from distant provinces to their frontier because they will fight better in an invasion. We are transferring home regiments to our frontier because they will fight for their own property. By Thursday you will find that open mobilization on both sides has begun.”

“My department is ready,” said Lanstron, “all except your decision about press censorship.”

“A troublesome point,” responded Partow. “I have procrastinated because two definite plans were fully worked out. It is a matter of choice between them: either publicity or complete secrecy. You know I am no believer in riding two horses at once. My mind is about made up; but let me hear your side again. Sometimes I get conviction by probing another mans.”

Lanstron was at his best, for his own conviction was intense.

“Of course they will go in for secrecy; but our case is different,” he began.

Partow settled himself to listen with the gift of the organizer who draws from his informant the brevity of essentials.

“I should take the people into our confidence,” Lanstron proceeded. “I should make them feel that we were one family fighting for all we hold dear against the invader. If our losses are heavy, if we have a setback, then the inspiration of the heroism of those who have fallen and the danger of their own homes feeling the foot of the invader next will impel the living to greater sacrifices. For the Grays are in the wrong. The moral and the legal right is with us.”

“And the duty of men like you and me, chosen for the purpose,” said Partow, “is worthily to direct the courage that goes with moral right. The overt act of war must come from them by violating our frontier, not in the African jungle but here. Even when the burglar fingers the window-sash we shall not fire—no, not until he enters our house. When he does, you would have a message go out to our people that will set them quivering with indignation?”

“Yes, and I would let the names of our soldiers who fall first be known and how they fell, their backs to their frontier homes and their faces to the foe.”

“Our very liberality in giving news will help us to cover the military secrets which we desire to preserve,” Partow said, with slow emphasis. “We shall hold back what we please, confident of the people’s trust. Good policy that, yes! But enough! Your orders are ready, in detail, I believe. You have nothing to add?”

“No, sir, nothing; at least, not until war begins.”

“Very well. We shall have the orders issued at the proper moment,” concluded Partow. “And Westerling is going to find,” he proceeded after a thoughtful pause, “that a man is readier to die fighting to hold his own threshold than fighting to take another man’s. War is not yet solely an affair of machinery and numbers. The human element is still uppermost. I know something, perhaps, that Westerling does not know. I have had an experience that he has not had and that few active officers of either army have had—I have been under fire.”

Page 76

His eyes flashed with the memory of his charge, and visions of the day when Grandfather Fragini was a *beau sabreur* and Marta Galland's father toasted quick death and speedy promotion seemed to cluster around him.

"Experience plus an old man's honest effort for a mind open to all suggestion and improvements!" he exclaimed. "An open mind that let you have your way in equipping more dirigibles and planes than Westerling guesses we have, eh? And, perhaps, a few more guns! And you, too, have been under fire," he added. "Give me your hand—no, not that one, not the one you shake hands with—the one wounded in action!"

Partow enclosed the stiffened fingers in his own with something of the caress which an old bear that is in very good humor might give to a promising cub.

"I have planned, planned, planned for this time," he said. "I have played politics with statesmen to hold my place in the belief that I was the man for the work which I have done. The world shall soon know, as the elements of it go into the crucible test, whether it is well done or not. I want to live to see the day when the last charge made against our trenches is beaten back. Then they may throw this old body onto the rubbish heap as soon as they please—it is a fat, unwieldy behemoth of an old body!"

"No, no, it isn't!" Lanstron objected hotly. He was seeing only what most people saw after talking with Partow for a few minutes, his fine, intelligent eyes and beautiful forehead.

"All that I wanted of the body was to feed my brain," Partow continued, heedless of the interruption. "I have watched my mind as a navigator watches a barometer. I have been ready at the first sign that it was losing its grip to give up. Yet I have felt that my body would go on feeding my brain and that to the last moment of consciousness, when suddenly the body collapses, I should have self-possession and energy of mind. Under the coming strain the shock may come, as a cord snaps. At that instant my successor will take up my work where I leave it off."

"Goerwitz, you mean." Lanstron referred in unmistakable apprehension to the vice-chief of staff, whom all the army knew had no real ability or decision underneath his pleasing, confident exterior.

"No, not Goerwitz," said Partow, with a shrug. "Some one who will go on with the weaving, not by knotting threads but with the same threads in a smooth fabric." Lanstron felt an increased pressure of the hand, a communicated tingling to his nerves. "I have chosen him. The old fogy who has aimed to join experience to youth chooses youth. You took your medicine without grumbling in the disagreeable but vitally important position of chief of intelligence. Now you—there, don't tremble with stage fright!" For Lanstron's hand was quivering in Partow's grasp, while his face was that of a man stunned.

“But Goerwitz—what will he say?” he gasped.

Page 77

“Goerwitz goes to a division in reserve.”

“And the army! The government! What will they say at such—such a jump for a colonel?”

“The government leaves all to me from the day war begins. I shall transfer others than Goerwitz—others who have had influence with the premier which it was not wise to deny in time of peace.”

“Very well, sir,” answered Lanstron, with a subordinate’s automatic consent to a superior’s orders. His words sounded ridiculous in view of his feelings, yet they were more expressive than any florid speech.

“You are to be at the right hand of this old body,” continued Partow. “You are to go with me to the front; to sleep in the room next to mine; to be always at my side, and, finally, you are to promise that if ever the old body fails in its duty to the mind, if ever you see that I am not standing up to the strain, you are to say so to me and I give you my word that I shall let you take charge.”

Lanstron was too stunned to speak for a moment. The arrangement seemed a hideous joke: a refinement of cruelty inconceivable. It was expecting him to tell Atlas that he was old and to take the weight of the world off the giant’s shoulders.

“Have you lost your patriotism?” demanded Partow. “Are you afraid? Afraid to tell me the truth? Afraid of duty? Afraid in your youth of the burden that I bear in age?”

His fingers closed in on Lanstron’s with such force that the grip was painful.

“Promise!” he commanded.

“I promise!” Lanstron said with a throb.

“That’s it’ That’s the way! That’s the kind of soldier I like,” Partow declared with change of tone, and he rose from his chair with a spring that was a delight to Lanstron in its proof of the physical vigor so stoutly denied. “We have a lot to say to each other to-day,” he added; “but first I am going to show you the whole bag of tricks.”

His arm crooked in Lanstron’s, they went along the main corridor of the staff office hung with portraits of generals who had beaten or held their own with the Grays. Passing through a door for which Partow held the key, they were in a dim, narrow passage with bare walls, lighted by two small gas flames. At the end was another, a heavy steel door, of the sort associated with the protection of bonds and securities, but in this case for the security of a nation’s defence. Partow turned the knob of the combination back and forth and with the smooth swing of a great weight on noiseless hinges the door opened and they entered a vault having a single chair and a small table in the centre and lined

by sections of numbered pigeonholes, each with a combination lock At the base of one section was a small safe. It was not the first time that Lanstron had been in this vault. He had the combination of two of the sections of pigeonholes, aerostatics and intelligence. The rest belonged to other divisions.

“The safe is my own, as you know. No one opens it; no one knows what is in it but me,” said Partow, taking from it an envelope and a manuscript, which he laid on the table. “There you have all that, is in my brain—the whole plan. The envelope contains the combinations of all the pigeonholes, if you wish to look up any details.”

Page 78

“Thank you!” Lanstron half whispered. It was all he could think of to say.

“And you will find that there is more than you thought, perhaps: the reason why I have fought hard to remain chief of staff; why—” Partow continued in a voice that had the sepulchral uncanniness of a threat long nursed now breaking free of the bondage of years within the sound-proof walls. “But—” he broke off suddenly as if he distrusted even the security of the vault. “Yes, it is all there—my life’s work, my dream, my ambition, my plan!”

Lanstron heard the lock slide in the door as Partow went out and he was alone with the army’s secrets. As he read Partow’s firm handwriting, many parts fell together, many moves on a chess-board grew clear. His breath came faster, he bent closer over the table, he turned back pages to go over them again. Every sentence dropped home in his mind like a bolt in a socket.

When he had finished the manuscript the trance of his thoughts held him in the same attitude. “Five millions to our three!” a voice kept repeating to him. “In face of that this dream!” another voice was saying. Had it been right to intrust such responsibility to one man of Partow’s age and right to transfer that responsibility to himself in an emergency? Yet how clear the plan in the confidence of its wisdom! Unconscious of the passage of time, he did not hear the door open or realize Partow’s presence until he felt Partow’s hand on his shoulder.

“I see that you didn’t look into any of the pigeonholes,” the chief of staff observed.

Lanstron pressed his finger-tips on the manuscript significantly.

“No. It is all there!”

“The thing being to carry it out!” said Partow. “God with us!” he added devoutly.

XV

CLOSE TO THE WHITE POSTS

Have you forgotten Hugo Mallin, humorist of Company B of the 128th Regiment of the Grays, whom we left in their barracks under orders for South La Tir on the afternoon that Westerling called on Marta Galland? Have you forgotten Eugene Aronson, the farmer’s son, and Jacob Pilzer, the butcher’s son, and pasty-faced little Peterkin, the valet’s son, and the judge’s son, and the other privates of the group that surrounded Hugo Mallin as he aired heresies that set them laughing?

Through the press, an unconscious instrument of his purpose, the astute premier has inoculated them with the virus of militant patriotism. Day by day the crisis has become

more acute; day by day the war fever has risen in their veins. Big Eugene Aronson believes everything he reads; his country can do no wrong. Jacob Pilzer is most bellicose; he chafes at inaction, while they all suffer the discomforts of an empty factory building in the rear of South La Tir which has become a temporary barracks.

On Tuesday they hear of crowds around the Foreign Office demanding war, on Wednesday of panics on the stock exchanges, on Thursday of mobilization actually begun and a rigid press censorship established, and on Friday other regiments and guns and horses are detraining and departing right and left. Hurrying officers know nothing except what they have been told to do.

Page 79

“When do we start? What are we waiting for?” demanded Pilzer. “I want to be in the thick of the fighting and not trailing along with the reserves!” If any one in the 128th wins the bronze cross he means that it shall be he and not Eugene Aronson.

“Never mind, you’ll have a chance. There’ll be war enough to go around, I am sure!” said Hugo Mallin.

“More than you’ll want!” Pilzer shot back, thrusting out his jaw.

“I’m sure of that!” answered Hugo, the mask of his face drawn in quizzical solemnity. “I don’t want any at all.”

This brought a tremendous laugh. All the laughs had been tremendous since mobilization had begun in earnest, and the atmosphere was like the suspense before a thunder-storm breaks.

On Saturday evening the 128th was mustered in field accoutrements and a full supply of cartridges. In the darkness the first battalion marched out at right angles to the main road that ran through La Tir and South La Tir. At length Company B, deployed in line of skirmishers, lay down to sleep on its arms.

“We wait here for the word,” Fracasse, the captain, whispered to his senior lieutenant. “If it comes, our objective is the house and the old castle on the hill above the town.”

The tower of the church showed dimly when a pale moon broke through a cloud. By its light Hugo saw on his right Eugene’s big features and massive shoulders and on his left the pinched and characterless features of Peterkin. A few yards ahead was a white stone post.

“That’s their side over there!” whispered the banker’s son, who was next to Peterkin.

“When we cross war begins,” said the manufacturer’s son.

“I wonder if they are expecting us!” said the judge’s son a trifle huskily, in an attempt at humor, though he was not given to humor.

“Just waiting to throw bouquets!” whispered the laborer’s son. He, too, was not given to humor and he, too, spoke a trifle huskily.

“And we’ll fix bayonets when we start and they will run at the sight of our steel!” said Eugene Aronson. He and Hugo alone, not excepting Pilzer, the butcher’s son, spoke in their natural voices. The others were trying to make their voices sound natural, while Pilzer’s voice had developed a certain ferocity, and the liver patch on his cheek twitched more frequently. “Why, Company B is in front! We have the post of honor, and maybe

our company will win the most glory of any in the regiment!" Eugene added. "Oh, we'll beat them! The bullet is not made that will get me!"

"Your service will be over in time for you to help with the spring planting, Eugene," whispered Hugo, who was apparently preoccupied with many detached thoughts.

"And you to be at home sucking lollipops!" Pilzer growled to Hugo.

"That would be better than murdering my fellowman to get his property," Hugo answered, so soberly that it did not seem to his comrades that he was joking this time. Pilzer's snarling exclamation of "White feather!" came in the midst of a chorus of indignation.

Page 80

Captain Fracasse, who had heard only the disturbance without knowing the cause, interfered in a low, sharp tone:

“Silence! As I have told you before, silence! We don’t want them to know that we are here. Go to sleep! You may get no rest to-morrow night!”

But little Peterkin, the question in his mind breaking free of his lips, unwittingly asked:

“Shall—shall we fight in the morning?”

“I don’t know. Nobody knows!” answered Fracasse. “We wait on orders, ready to do our duty. There may be no war. Don’t let me hear another peep from you!”

Now all closed their eyes. In front of them was vast silence which seemed to stretch from end to end of the frontier, while to the rear was the rumble of switching railway trains and the rumble of provision trains and artillery on the roads, and in the distance on the plain the headlight of a locomotive cut a swath in the black night. But the breathing of most of the men was not that of slumber, though Eugene and Pilzer slept soundly. Hours passed. Occasional restless movements told of efforts to force sleep by changing position.

“It’s the waiting that’s sickening!” exploded the manufacturer’s son under his breath, desperately.

“So I say. I’d like to be at it and done with the suspense!” said the doctor’s son.

“They say if you are shot through the head you don’t know what killed you, it’s so quick. Think of that!” exclaimed Peterkin, huddling closer to Hugo and shivering.

“Yes, very merciful,” Hugo whispered, patting Peterkin’s arm.

“Sh-h-h! Silence, I tell you!” commanded Fracasse crossly. He was falling into a half doze at last.

XVI

DELLARME’S MEN GET A MASCOT

And have you forgotten gigantic Private Stransky, born to the red, with the hedgerows of the world his home? Have you forgotten Tom Fragini and the sergeant and the others of Captain Dellarme’s men of the 53d of the Browns, whom we left marching along the road to La Tir, with old Grandfather Fragini, veteran of the Hussars, in his faded uniform coat with his medal on his breast, keeping step, hep-hep-hep?

Grandfather Fragini has attached himself to the regiment while it rests in barracks a few hours' march from the frontier. He is accepted as the mascot of the company in which both his grandson and Stransky are serving. But he never speaks to Stransky and refers to him in the third person as "that traitor," which makes Stransky grin sardonically. Each day's developments bring more color to his cheeks; his rheumatic old legs are limbering with the elixir of rising patriotism, though Tom and his comrades are singularly without enthusiasm, according to grandfather's idea. They lead the newspapers gluttonously and they welcome each item that promises a peaceful solution of the crisis.

Inwardly, Grandfather Fragini is worried about the state of the army. Is his race becoming decadent? Or, as he puts it, are the younger generation without sand in their craws? When he came into the barracks yard swinging his cap aloft and shouting the news that mobilization had begun there was not even a cheer.

Page 81

“I suppose it means war,” said Tom Fragini with a soberness that was in keeping with the grave faces of his fellows. Stransky sitting at one side by himself smiled.

“Well, you’d think it was a funeral!” grandfather exclaimed in disgust.

“There will be lots of funerals!” said Tom.

“I s’pose there will be; but if you get that in your mind how can you fight?” grandfather demanded. “Why, if any Hussar had spoken of funerals we’d called him white-livered, that’s what we would! We cheered till we was hoarse; we danced and hugged one another; we rattled our sabres in our scabbards; we sang rip-roaring death-or-glory songs. When you’re going to war you want to sing and shout. That’s the way to keep your spirits up.”

“Let’s sing ‘Ring-around-the-rosy’ to please the old gentleman. Come on!” suggested Stransky.

“I don’t see that we are after either death or glory,” said Tom. “We are going to do our duty.”

The impulse of enthusiasm seemed equally lacking in the others. Stransky grinned and his deep-set eyes turned inward with a squint of knowing satisfaction at the bony bridge of his nose.

“I’m not wanting any traitor to start any songs for me!” declared grandfather.

“Never mind. The fellows on the other side aren’t any more enthusiastic than we are, grandfather,” Stransky said soothingly, in his mocking way. “The fact is, we don’t want to kill our brothers across the frontier and they don’t want to kill us or be killed. It’s only the ruling classes that want the proletariat to—”

“Fire away, Stransky! It’s hours since you made a speech!” chirruped a voice.

“Look out, Bert, the sergeant’s coming!” another voice warned the orator.

The state of mind of the 53d was that of all the regiments of the Browns with their faces toward the white posts, quiet, thoughtful, and grave; for they had not to arouse ardor for the aggressive. As they were to receive rather than give blows they might be more honest with themselves than the men of the Grays.

In marching order, with cartridge-boxes full, on Saturday night the 53d marched out to the main pass road. When Grandfather Fragini found that he had been ordered to remain behind he sought the colonel.

“I’ve got reasons! Let me come!” he pleaded.

“No. It is no place for you.”

“I can keep up! I can keep up! I feel like a boy!”

“But it is different these days, and this is the infantry. The bullets carry far. You will not know how to take cover,” the colonel explained.

“Well, if I am killed I won’t be losing much time on this earth,” grandfather observed with cool logic. “But that ain’t it. I’m worried about Tom. I’m afraid he ain’t going to fight! I —I want to stiffen him up!”

“He will fight, all right. Sorry, but it is out of the question,” said the colonel, turning away.

Grandfather buried his face in his hands and shook with the sobs of second childhood until an idea occurred to him. Wasn’t he a free man? Hadn’t he as much right as anybody to use the public highway? Drying his eyes, he set out along the road in the wake of the regiment.

Page 82

One company after another left the road at a given point, bound for the position mapped in its instructions Dellarme's, however, went on until it was opposite the Galland house.

"We are depending on you," the colonel said to Dellarme, giving his hand a grip. "You are not to draw off till you get the flag."

"No, sir," Dellarme replied.

"Mind the signal to the batteries—keep the men screened—warn them not to let their first baptism of shell fire shake their nerves!" the colonel added in a final repetition of instructions already indelibly impressed on the captain's mind.

Moving cautiously through a cut, Dellarme's company came, about midnight, to a halt among the stubble of a wheat-field behind a knoll. After he had bidden the men to break ranks, he crept up the incline.

"Yes, it's there!" he whispered when he returned. "On the crest of the knoll a cord is stretched from stake to stake," he said, explaining the reason for what was to be done, as was his custom. "The engineers placed it there after dusk and the frontier was closed, so that you would know just where to use your spades in the dark. Quietly as possible! No talking!" he kept cautioning as the men turned the soft earth, "and not higher than the cord, and lay the stubble side of the sods on the reverse so as to cover the fresh earth on the sky-line."

When the work was done all returned behind the knoll except the sentries posted at intervals on the crest to watch. With the aid of a small electric flash, screened by his hands, Dellarme again examined a section of the staff map that outlined the contour of the knoll in relation to the other positions. After this he wrote in his diary the simple facts of the day's events, concluding with a sentiment of gratitude for the honor shown to his company and a prayer that he might keep a clear head and do his duty if war came on the morrow.

"Now, every one get all the sleep he can!" he advised the men.

Stransky slept, with his head on his arm, as soundly as Eugene Aronson, his antithesis in character; the others slept no better than the men of the 128th. The night passed without any alarm except that of their own thoughts, and they welcomed dawn as a relief from suspense. There was no hot coffee this morning, and they washed down their rations with water from their canteens. The old sergeant was lying beside Captain Dellarme on the crest, the sunrise in their faces. As the mist cleared from the plain it revealed the white dots of the frontier posts in the meadow and behind them many gray figures in skirmish order, scarcely visible except through the glasses.

"It looks like business!" declared the old sergeant.

“Yes, it begins the minute they cross the line!” said Dellarme.

Page 83

His glance sweeping to the rear to scan the landscape under the light of day, he recognized, with a sense of pride and awe, the tactical importance of his company's position in relation to that of the other companies. Easily he made out the regimental line by streaks of concealed trenches and groups of brown uniforms; and here and there were the oblong, cloth stretches of waiting hospital litters. On the reverse slope of another knoll was the farmhouse, marked X on his map as the regimental headquarters, where he was to watch for the signal to fall back from his first stand in delaying the enemy's advance. Directly to the rear was the cut through which the company had come from the main pass road, and beyond that the Galland house, which was to be the second stand.

"Can you see them from up here?" chirped a voice in a jubilant, cackling laugh that drew Dellarme's attention to his immediate surroundings, and he saw Grandfather Fragini coming up to join him on the crest. He slid back on his stomach below the sky-line and held up an arresting hand.

"Kept along after you," piped the old man; "and it's just as I thought—the glummest lot of funeral faces I ever seen!"

"You must not remain! Follow that cut there and it will take you out to the road!" Dellarme told grandfather sharply.

"Just got to stay. Too tired to take another step," and grandfather dropped in utter exhaustion. "Have to carry me if you want me to go."

"That means two men out of the line," thought Dellarme.

"You're an archaic old fire-eater!" Stransky remarked in cynical amusement to grandfather Fragini.

"And you're a traitor!" answered grandfather with all the energy he could command.

Now Dellarme disposed his men in line back of the ridge of fresh earth that they had dug in the night, ready to rush to their places when he blew the whistle that hung from his neck, but he did not allow them a glimpse over the crest.

"I know you are curious, but powerful glasses are watching for you to show yourselves; and if a battery turned loose on us you'd understand," he explained.

The men wanted to talk but did not know what to talk about, so they examined their rifles critically as if they were unfamiliar gifts which they had found in their stockings on Christmas morning. Some began to empty their magazines of cartridges for the pleasure or occupation of refilling them; but one of the lieutenants stopped this. It might mean delay when the whistle blew. Thus the hours wore on, and the church clock struck nine and ten.

“Never a movement down there!” called the sergeant from the crest to Dellarme. “Maybe this is just their final bluff before they come to terms about Bodlapoo”—that stretch of African jungle that seemed very far away to them all.

“Let us hope so!” said Dellarme seriously.

“Hope there won’t be any war! Just listen to that from an army officer, with the enemy right in front of him!” gasped grandfather.

Page 84

XVII

A SUNDAY MORNING IN TOWN

“You ought not to leave the house—not this morning,” protested Mrs. Galland when Marta was putting on her hat to start for the regular Sunday service of her school.

“The children expect me,” Marta explained.

“Hardly, hardly this morning. They will take it for granted that you will not come.”

But Marta thrust her hatpin home decisively.

“Jacky Werther will certainly be there. Though he were the only one to come, I would not disappoint him!” she said. “Heaven knows, mother, if there were ever a time for teaching peace it is to-day! And I can’t remain inactive. Just to sit still and wait in a time like this—that is too terrible!”

“As you will!” Mrs. Galland responded with gentle resignation.

Garden and veranda were as peaceful as on any other Sunday morning, but it was a different kind of peace—a peace mocked by sounds beyond its boundaries which were to her like the rattling of the steel scales of a demon licking its jaws with its red tongue in voracious anticipation of a gorge and stretching out great steel claws in readiness to sink them into the flesh of its victims when Partow and Westerling gave the word. As Lanstron had said, this demon would feed on every resource and energy of the nation. It had no voice and no thought except kill, kill, kill! And man called this demon patriotism and love of country. Those who risked death in the demon’s honor got iron crosses and bronze crosses, but any one who dared to call it by its true name, if a man, received the decoration of the white feather; if a woman, was regarded as a sentimentalist and merely a woman, and told that she did not understand practical human nature.

Choosing to go to town by the castle road rather than down the terrace to the main pass road, Marta, as she emerged from the grounds, saw Feller, garden-shears in hand and in his workman’s clothes instead of his Sunday black, a figure of stone watching the approach of some field-batteries. In the week of distracting and cumulative suspense that had elapsed since his secret had been revealed to her, their relations had continued as before. She studiously kept up the fiction of his deafness by writing her orders. The question of allowing him to undertake his part as a spy had drifted into the background of her mind under the distressing and ever-present pressure of the crisis. He was to remain until there was war, and thought about anything that implied that war was coming was the more hideous to her the nearer war approached.

“It will be averted! It cannot be!” she was thinking. Her glimpse of him had no more interest for her at this moment of preoccupation than any other familiar object of the landscape.

“The guns! The guns! How I love the guns!” he was thinking.

Page 85

She was almost past him before he realized her presence, which he acknowledged by a startled movement and a step forward as he took off his hat. She paused. His eyes were glowing like coals under a blower as he looked at her and again at the batteries, seeming to include her with the guns in the spell of his fervid abstraction. He was unconscious that he had ever been anything but a soldier. His throat was athirst for words and his words craved a listening ear for all the pictures of the machinery of war in motion that crowded his imagination. To him the demon was a fair, beckoning god in cloth of gold—a god of hope and fortune.

“Frontier closed last night to prevent intelligence about our preparations leaking out—-Lanny’s plan all alive—the guns coming,” he went on, his shoulders stiffening, his chin drawing in, his features resolute and beaming with the ardor of youth in action—“troops moving here and there to their places—engineers preparing the defences—automatics at critical points with the infantry—field-wires laid—field-telephones set up—the wireless spitting—the caissons full—planes and dirigibles ready—search-lights in position”

There the torrent of his broken sentences was checked A shadow passed in front of him. He came out of his trance of imageries of activities, so vividly clear to his military mind, to realize that Marta was abruptly leaving.

“Miss Galland!” he called urgently. “Firing may commence at any minute. You must not go into town!”

“But I must!” she declared, speaking over her shoulder while she paused. It was clear that no warning would prevail against her determined mood.

“Then I shall go with you!” he said, starting toward her with a light step, in keeping with the gallantry of a man even younger than his years. He spoke in a tone of protective masculine authority, as an officer might to a woman of whom he was fond when he saw her exposing herself to danger. He would escort her; he would see that no harm befell her. The impulse was spontaneous in an illusion free of the gardener’s part. But he saw her lips tighten and a frown gather.

“It is not necessary, thank you!” she answered, more coldly than she had ever spoken to him. This had a magically quick effect on his attitude.

“I beg pardon! I forgot!” he explained in his old man’s voice, his head sinking, his shoulders drooping in the humility of a servant who recognizes that he has been properly rebuked for presumption. “Not a gunner any more—I’m a spy!” he thought, as he shuffled off without looking toward the batteries again, though the music of wheels and hoofs was now close by. “I must turn my back on the guns, for they tempt me. And I must win her consent before I shall have even the dignity of a spy—and I will win it!” he added, brightening. “La, la, la! Trust me!”

Marta had a glimpse, as she turned away, of an appealingly pathetic figure bent as under a wound to his spirits, which gave her a sense of personal cruelty in the midst of a wave of pity and regret.

Page 86

“He is what he is because of the army; a victim of a cult, a habit,” she was thinking. “Had he been in any other calling his fine qualities might have been of service to the world and he would have been happy.”

Then her sympathy was drawn to another object of war’s injustice—a man approaching under the guard of two soldiers. Suddenly the man planted his feet and refused to budge.

“I tell you, it isn’t fair!” he cried in rage and appeal. “I tell you, I was only visiting on this side and got caught! I’m a reservist of the first line. If I don’t answer the call I’ll be branded a shirker in my village, and I’ve got to live in that village all my life. You better kill me and have done with it!”

“Sorry,” said one of the soldiers, “but you were caught trying to sneak. We’re acting under orders. No use of balking.”

“Who wouldn’t sneak?” demanded the prisoner desperately. “Oh, say, be a little human! The worst of it is that I came over here to see my girl to say good-by to her. I’m going to marry her,” he pleaded, “though my folks are against it because she’s a Brown. It makes me so cheap—it—”

“We were told to take you to the general. He’ll let you off if there isn’t any war, and he may, anyway. But he sure won’t if you resist arrest.” The soldiers seized his arms firmly. “Come along!” they said, and he went. Any one must go when a steel claw of the demon enforces the order.

A company of infantry resting among their stacked rifles changed the color of the square in the distance from the gray of pavement to the brown of a mass of uniforms. In the middle of the main street a major of the brigade staff, with a number of junior officers and orderlies, was evidently waiting on some signal. Sentries were posted at regular intervals along the curb. The people in the houses and shops from time to time stopped packing up their effects long enough to go to the doors and look up and down apprehensively, asking bootless, nervous questions.

“Are they coming yet?”

“Do you think they will come?”

“Are you sure it’s going to be war?”

“Will they shell the town?”

“There’ll be time enough for you to get away!” shouted the major. “All we know is what is written in our instructions, and we shall act on them when the thing starts. Then we are in command. Meanwhile, get ready!”

A lieutenant of a detachment of engineers coming at the double from a cross street stopped to inquire:

“This way to the knitting mills?”

“Straight ahead! Can’t go wrong!” the major answered.

“We are going to loophole their walls for the infantry,” explained the lieutenant as he hurried on.

“Then they’re going to fight in the town!”

“Blow our homes to pieces!”

“Destroy our property!”

After this fusillade from the people the major glared at the retreating back of the lieutenant as much as to say that some men would never learn to hold their tongues. Naturally, the duty of looking after refugees was not to his soldierly taste.

Page 87

“We are doing it all for you, for the country,” he explained. “We are going to make them pay for every foot they take—the invaders!”

“Yes, make them pay!” called a voice from the houses.

“Make them pay!” other voices joined in.

“It isn’t the fellows just across the border that want to take our property,” said an elderly man. “They’re good friends enough. It’s the Grays’ politicians and the fire-eaters in the other provinces.”

“The robbers!” piped a woman’s high-pitched note. “I’ve got a son in the army, and if ever he leaves that mountain range and goes down the other side with the Grays chasing him, he’ll get worse from me than the Grays could give him!”

“That’s right! That’s the way to talk!” came a chorus.

Then the major became aware of a young woman who was going in the wrong direction. Her cheeks were flushed from her rapid walk, her lips were parted, showing firm, white teeth, and her black eyes were regarding him in a blaze of satire or amusement; an emotion, whatever it was, that thoroughly centred his attention.

“Yes,” she said, anger getting the better of her, “make them pay—and they make you pay—and you make them pay—and so on!”

The major smiled. It seemed the safe thing to do. He did not know but the young woman might charge.

“Mademoiselle, I am sorry, but unless you live in this direction,” he said very politely, “you may not go any farther. Until we have other orders or they attack, every one is supposed to remain in his house or his place of business.”

“This is my place of business!” Marta answered, for she was already opposite a small, disused chapel which was her schoolroom, where a half dozen of the faithful children were gathered around the masculine importance of Jacky Werther, one of the older boys.

“Then you are Miss Galland!” said the major, enlightened. His smile had an appreciation of the irony of her occupation at that moment. “Your children are very loyal. They would not tell me where they lived, so we had to let them stay there.”

“Those who have homes,” she said, identifying each one of the faithful with a glance, “have so many brothers and sisters that they will hardly be missed from the flock. Others have no homes—at least, not much of a one”—here her temper rose again—-

“taxes being so high in order that you may organize murder and the destruction of property.”

“I—” gasped the major under the fire of those black eyes.

But their flashes suddenly splintered into less threatening lights as she realized the fatuity of this personal allusion.

“Oh, I’m not the town scold!” she explained with a nervous little laugh that helped her to recover poise.

With the black eyes in this mood, the major was conscious only of a desire to please which conflicted with duty.

“Now, really, Miss Galland,” he began solicitously, “I have been assigned to move the civil population in case of attack. Your children ought—”

Page 88

“After school! You have your duty this morning and I have mine!” Marta interrupted pleasantly, and turned toward the chapel.

“They are putting sharpshooters in the church tower to get the aeroplanes, and there are lots of the little guns that fire bullets so fast you can’t count ’em—and little spring wagons with dynamite to blow things up—and—” Jacky Werther ran on in a series of vocal explosions as Marta opened the door to let the children go in.

“Yet you came!” said Marta with a hand caressingly on his shoulder.

“It looks pretty bad for peace, but we came,” answered Jacky, round-eyed, in loyalty. “We’d come right through the bullets ’cause we said we would if we wasn’t sick, and we wasn’t sick.”

“My seven disciples—seven!” exclaimed Marta as she counted them. “And you need not sit on the regular seats, but around me on the platform. It will be more intimate.”

“That’s grand!” came in chorus. They did not bother, about chairs, but seated themselves on the floor around Marta’s skirts.

“My, Miss Galland, but your eyes are bright!”

“And your cheeks are all red!”

“With little spots in the centre!”

“You’re very wonderful, Miss Galland!”

The church clock boomed out its deliberate strokes through ten, the hour set for the lesson, and all counted them—one—two—three. Marta was thinking what a dismal little effort theirs was, and yet she was very happy, tremblingly happy in her distraction and excitement, that they had not waited for her at the door of the chapel in vain.

She announced that there would be no talk this morning; they would only say their oath. Repeating in concert the pledge to the boys and girls of other lands, the childish voices peculiarly sweet and harmonious in contrast to the raucous and uneven sounds of foreboding from the street, they came in due course to the words of the concession that the oath made to militancy.

“If an enemy tries to take my land—”

“Children—I—” Marta interrupted with a sense of wonder and shock. They paused and looked at her questioningly. “I had almost forgotten that part!” she breathed confusedly.

“That’s the part that makes all we’re doing against the Grays right!” put in Jacky Werther promptly.

“As I wrote it for you! ’I shall appeal to his sense of justice and reason with him—’”

Jaws dropped and eyes bulged, for above the sounds of the street rose from the distance the unmistakable crackling of rifle-fire which, as they listened, spread and increased in volume.

“Go on—on to the end of the oath! It will take only a moment,” said Marta resolutely. “It isn’t much, but it’s the best we can do!”

XVIII

THE BAPTISM OF FIRE

After the morning sun commenced to tickle the back of his neck, Eugene Aronson, the giant of the 128th of the Grays, stretched his limbs as healthily as a cub bear.

Page 89

“No war yet!” he exclaimed, rubbing his eyes.

“Oh, we’d have called you if there were!” said the manufacturer’s son, trying to make a joke, which was hard work with his clothes dew-soaked after a sleepless night in the open.

“Wouldn’t want you to miss it after coming so far,” added the laborer’s son, aiming to show that he, too, was in a light-hearted mood.

“And how did you sleep?” asked Eugene, cheerily, of his neighbors.

“Fine!”

“First rate!”

“Like a stone!”

Every man was too intent in forcing his own spontaneity to notice that that of the others was also forced.

“Like a top!” chimed in pasty-faced Peterkin, the valet’s son, to be in fashion.

“I didn’t sleep much myself; in fact, not at all,” said Hugo Mallin.

“Oh, ho!” groaned Pilzer, the butcher’s son, with a broad grin that made a crease in the liver patch on his cheek.

“You see, it’s a new experience for me,” Hugo explained in a drawl, his face drawn as a mask. “I’m not so used to war as you other fellows are. I’m not so brave!”

There was a forced laugh because Hugo appeared droll, and when he appeared droll it was the proper thing to laugh. Besides, in the best humor there is a grain of truth, whether you see it or not. This time a number saw it quite clearly.

“I was thinking how ridiculous we all are,” Hugo went on without change of tone or expression, “grovelling here on our stomachs and pretending that we slept when we didn’t and that we want to be killed when we don’t!”

“White feather again!” Pilzer exclaimed.

“Oh, shut up!” snapped the doctor’s son irritably. “Let Hugo talk. He’s only gassing. It’s so monotonous lying here that any kind of nonsense is better than growling.”

“Yes, yes!” the others agreed.

Hugo's outburst of the previous evening was forgotten. They welcomed anything that broke the suspense. Let the regimental wag make a little fun any way that he could. As the officers had withdrawn somewhat to the rear for breakfast, there was no constraint.

"I was thinking how I'd like to go out and shake hands with the Browns," said Hugo. "That's the way fencers and pugilists do before they set to. It seems polite and sportsmanlike, indicating that there's no prejudice."

There was a ripple of half-hearted merriment punctuated by exclamations.

"What a fool idea!"

"How do all your notions get into your head, Hugo?"

"Sometimes by squinting at the moonlight and counting odd numbers; sometimes by knowing that anything that's different is ridiculous; and sometimes by looking for tangent truths out of professorial ruts," Hugo observed with a sort of erudite discursiveness which was the rank dissimulation of a hypocrite to Pilzer and wholly confusing to Peterkin, not to say a draught on mental effort for many of the others.

Page 90

“For instance, I got a good one from two fellows of the Browns whom I met on the road the first day we arrived. They were reservists. We were soon talking together and so peaceably that I was sceptical if they were Browns at all. So I determined on a test. I told them I was from a distant province and hadn’t travelled much and wouldn’t they please take off their hats. They consented very good-naturedly.”

“Oh, good old Hugo! He got one on the Browns!”

“I’d like to have been there to see it!”

“And when they took off their hats, what then?”

“Why, I said: ‘This isn’t convincing at all.’” Hugo’s drawl paused for a second while interest developed. “’You haven’t any horns! Haven’t you any forked tails, either? Or are they curled up nicely inside your trousers’ legs?’”

“Whew! But they must have felt cheap to have been got in that way!”

“And old Hugo looking so solemn!”

“Just like he does now!”

But the judge’s son said under his breath, “Very pretty!” and the doctor’s son, who was next him in the ranks, nodded understandingly.

“It seems they had checked their horns and tails at the frontier,” Hugo continued, “and, as I had left mine hanging in the rifle racks at the barracks, we got on together like real human beings. I found they could speak my language better than my lesson-book try at theirs—yes, as well as I can speak it myself—and that made it all the easier. After a while I mentioned the war. They were very amiable and they didn’t begin to call me a swill-eating land-shark or any other of the pretty names I’ve heard they are so fond of using. ‘We want to keep what is ours,’ they said. ’Your side will have to start the fight by crossing the line. We shall not!"’

“Because they know they’ll be licked!” put in Pilzer hotly.

“No, we may beat them in fighting,” agreed Hugo, “but these two fellows had me beaten on the argument!”

“They hauled down our flag! They insulted us in their despatches! They quibble! They’re the perfidious Browns!” cried big Eugene Aronson, speaking the lesson taught him by the newspapers, which had it from the premier.

“There, he’s got you again, Gene!”

“Yes, you funny old simpleton! You are almost too easy!”

There was something of the vivacity of the barrack-room banter in the exclamations at Eugene’s expense. Yet they were not the same. The look on no man’s face was the same. The humorist was silent.

“What next, Hugo?”

He half stared at them, and his mask was not solemn but tragic.

“I was thinking how men work their courage up, as if patriotism were a Moloch of which they were afraid,” he said. “How in order to get killed we go out to kill others, when right is on their side! How you, Armand, or you, Eugene, might be dead before to-morrow! How—.”

“The bullet is not made that will get me!” exclaimed Eugene, with a swelling breath from his bellows-like lungs.

Page 91

“Take him home to mother!” groaned Pilzer.

“That will do for you, Hugo Mallin!” came another interruption, a sharp one from Captain Fracasse, who had returned unobserved from the rear in time to overhear Hugo’s remarks. “And that’s the way to talk, Aronson and Pilzer. As for you, Mallin, I’ve a mind to put you under arrest and send you back for a coward! A coward—do you hear?”

“Ah-h!” breathed Pilzer in a guttural of satisfaction.

Hugo crimsoned at first in confusion, then he looked frankly and unflinchingly at the captain.

“Very well, sir!” he said with a certain dignity which Fracasse, who was a good deal of a martinet, found very irritating.

“No, that would suit you too well!” Fracasse declared. “You shall stay! You shall do the duty for which your country trained you and take your share of the chances.”

“Yes, sir!” answered Hugo. “But won’t you,” he asked persuasively and with the wondering inquiry of the suggestion that had sprung into his heretic brain, “won’t you ask the men if there are not some here who really, in their hearts, the logic of their hearts—which is often better than brain logic—do not believe just as I do?”

“Have you gone insane? There are none!” In the impulse of anger that swept his cheeks with a red wave Fracasse half drew his sword as if he would strike Hugo. “And, Mallin, you are a marked man. I shall watch you! I’ll have the lieutenants and sergeants watch you. At the first sign of flunking I’ll make an example of you!”

“Yes, sir,” answered Hugo, with the automatic deference of private to officer but with a reserved and studious inquiry that made the captain bite his lip.

“I’ll have Aronson and Pilzer watch you, too!” Fracasse added.

“Yes, sir!” said Pilzer promptly.

Then, under the restraint of the captain’s presence, there was a silence that endured. The men were left to the sole resource of their thoughts and observation of their surroundings. They were lying in a pasture facing the line of white posts whose tops ran in an even row over level ground. On the other side of the boundary was a wheat-field. Here a farmer had commenced his fall ploughing. His plough was in the furrow where he had left it when he unhitched his team for the day, before an orderly had come to tell him that he must move out of his house overnight. The wheat stubble swept on up to a knoll in the distance.

All the landscape in front of Fracasse's company seemed to have been deserted; no moving figures were anywhere in sight; no sign of the enemy's infantry. No trains came or went along the lines of steel into the mountain tunnel, which had been mined at a dozen points by the Browns. No vehicles and no foot-passengers dotted the highway into the town. Over the mountains and over the plain, planes and dirigibles moved in wide circles restively, watching for a signal as hawks watch for prey. Suspense this—-suspense of such a swift vibration that it was like a taut G string of a violin under the bow!

Page 92

Faintly the town clock was heard striking the hour. From eight to nine and nine to ten Fracasse's men waited; waited until the machine was ready and Westerling should throw in the clutch; waited until the troops were in place for the first move before he hurled his battalions forward. Every pawn of flesh facing the white posts had a thousand thoughts whirling in such a medley that he could be said to have no thought at all, only an impression juggled by destiny. No one would have confessed what he felt, while physical inactivity gave free rein to mental activity. That thing of a nation's nightmare; that thing for which generations had drilled without its materializing; that thing of speculation, of hazard, of horror; that thing of quick action and long-enduring consequences was coming.

They did not know how the captain at their back received his orders; they only heard the note of the whistle, with a command familiar to a trained instinct on the edge of anticipation. It released a spring in their nerve-centres. They responded as the wheels respond when the throttle is opened. Jumping to their feet they broke into a run, bodies bent, heads down, like the peppered silhouette that faced Westerling's desk. What they had done repeatedly in drills and manoeuvres they were now doing in war, mechanically as marionettes.

"Come on! The bullet is not made that can get me! Come on!" cried the giant Eugene Aronson.

He leaped over a white post and then over the plough, which was also in his path. Little Peterkin felt his legs trembling. They seemed to be detached from his will, and the company's and the captain's will, and churning in pantomime or not moving at all. If Hugo Mallin had been called a coward, what of himself? What of the stupid of the company, who would never learn even the manual of arms correctly, as the drill-sergeant often said? A new fear made him glance around. He would not have been surprised to find that he was already in the rear. But instead he found that he was keeping up, which was all that was necessary, as more than one other man assured his legs. After thirty or forty yards most of the legs, if not Peterkin's, had worked out their shiver and nearly all felt the exhilaration of movement in company. Then came the sound that generations had drilled for without hearing; the sound that summons the imagination of man in the thought of how he will feel and act when he hears it; the sound that is everywhere like the song snatches of bees driven whizzing through the air.

"That's it! We're under fire! We're under fire!" flashed as crooked lightning recognition of the sound through every brain.

There was no sign of any enemy; no telling where the bullets came from.

"Such a lot of them, one must surely get me!" Peterkin thought.

Whish-whish! Th-ipp-whing! The refrain gripped his imagination with an unseen hand. He seemed to be suffocating. He wanted to throw himself down and hold his hands in front of his head. While Pilzer and Aronson were not thinking, only running, Peterkin was thinking with the rapidity of a man falling from a high building. Worse! He did not know how far he had to go. He was certain only that he was bound to strike ground.

Page 93

“An inch is as good as a mile!” He recollected the captain’s teaching. “Only one of a thousand bullets fired in war ever kills a man”—but he was certain that he had heard a million already. Then one passed very close, its swift breath brushing his cheek with a whistle like a s-s-st through the teeth. He dodged so hard that he might have dislocated his neck; he gasped and half stumbled, but realized that he had not been hit. And he must keep right on going, driven by one fear against another, in face of those ghastly whispers which the others, for the most part, in the excitement of a charge, had ceased to hear.

Again he would be sure that his legs, which he was urging so frantically to their duty, were not playing pantomime. He looked around to find that he was still keeping up with Eugene and felt the thrill of the bravery of fellowship at sight of the giant’s flushed, confident face revelling in the spirit of a charge. And then, just then, Eugene convulsively threw up his arms, dropped his rifle, and whirled on his heel. As he went down his hand clutched at his left breast and came away red and dripping. After one wild, backward glance, Peterkin plunged ahead.

“Eugene!” Hugo Mallin had stopped and bent over Eugene in the supreme instinct of that terrible second, supporting his comrade’s head.

“The bullet is not—made—.” Eugene whispered, the ruling passion strong to the last. A flicker of the eyelids, a gurgle in the throat, and he was dead.

Fracasse had been right behind them. The sight of a man falling was something for which he was prepared; something inevitably a part of the game. A man down was a man out of the fight, service finished. A man up with a rifle in his hand was a man who ought to be in action.

“Here, you are not going to get out this way!” he said in the irritation of haste, slapping Hugo with his sword. “Go on! That’s hospital-corps work.”

Hugo had a glimpse of the captain’s rigid features and a last one of Eugene’s, white and still and yet as if he were about to speak his favorite boast; then he hurried on, his side glance showing other prostrate forms. One form a few yards away half rose to call “Hospital!” and fell back, struck mortally by a second bullet.

“That’s what you get if you forget instructions,” said Fracasse with no sense of brutality, only professional exasperation, “Keep down, you wounded men!” he shouted at the top of his voice.

The colonel of the 128th had not looked for immediate resistance. He had told Fracasse’s men to occupy the knoll expeditiously. But by the common impulse of military training, no less than in answer to the whistle’s call, in face of the withering fire

they dropped to earth at the base of the knoll, where Hugo threw himself down at full length in his place in line next to Peterkin.

“Fire pointblank at the crest in front of you! I saw a couple of men standing up there!” called Fracasse. “Fire fast! That’s the way to keep down their fire—pointblank, I tell you! You’re firing into the sky! I want to see more dust kicked up. Fire fast! We’ll have them out of there soon! They’re only an outpost.”

Page 94

Hugo was firing vaguely, like a man in a dream, and thinking that maybe up there on the knoll were the two Browns he had met on the road and perhaps their comrades were as fond of them as he was of Eugene. It is a mistake for a soldier to think much, as Westerling had repeatedly said.

Pilzer was shooting to kill. His eye had the steely gleam of his rifle sight and the liver patch on his cheek was a deeper hue as he sought to avenge Eugene's death. Drowned by the racket of their own fire, not even Peterkin was hearing the whish-whish of the bullets from Dellarme's company now. He did not know that the blacksmith's son, who was the fourth man from him, lay with his chin on his rifle stock and a tiny trickle of blood from a hole in his forehead running down the bridge of his nose.

Fracasse, glancing along from rifle to rifle, as a weaver watches the threads of a machine loom, saw that Hugo was firing at too high an angle.

"Mallin!" he called. Hugo did not hear because of the noise, and Fracasse had to creep nearer, which was anything but cooling to his temper. "You fool! You are shooting fifty feet above the top of the knoll! Look along your sight!" he yelled.

Fracasse observed, with some surprise, that Hugo's hand was steady as he carefully drew a bead. Hugo saw a spurt of dust at the point slightly below the crest where he aimed; for he was the best shot in the company at target practice.

"I'm not killing anybody!" he thought happily.

XIX

RECEIVING THE CHARGE

What about Stransky of the Reds, who would not fight to please the ruling classes? What about Grandfather Fragini, who would fight on principle whenever a Gray was in sight? Now we leave the story of Fracasse's men at the foot of the knoll for that of the Browns on the crest.

Young Dellarme, new to his captain's rank, with lips pressed tightly together, his delicately moulded, boyish features reflecting the confidence which it was his duty to inspire in his company, watching the plain through his glasses, saw the movement of mounted officers to the rear of the 128th as a reason for summoning his men.

"Creep up! Don't show yourselves! Creep up—carefully—carefully!" he kept repeating as they crawled forward on their stomachs. "And no one is to fire until the command comes."

Hugging the cover of the ridge of fresh earth which they had thrown up the previous night, they watched the white posts. Stransky, who had been ruminatively silent all the morning, was in his place, but he was not looking at the enemy. Cautiously, to avoid a reprimand, he raised his head to enable him to glance along the line. All the faces seemed drawn and clayish.

“They don’t want to fight! They’re just here because they’re ordered here and haven’t the character to defy authority,” he thought. “The leaven is working! My time is coming!”

Page 95

But Grandfather Fragini's cheeks had a hectic flush; his heart was beating with the exhilaration of an old war-horse. Looking over Tom's shoulder, he squinted into the distance, his underlip quivering against his toothless gums.

"My eyesight's kind of uncertain," he said. "Can you see 'em?"

"There by the white posts—those lying figures!" said Tom. "They're almost the color of the stubble."

"So I do, the land-sharks! Down on their bellies, too! No flag, either! But that ain't no reason why we shouldn't have a flag. It ought to be waving at 'em in defiance right over our heads!"

"Flags draw fire. They let the enemy know where you are,' Tom explained.

"The Hussars didn't bother about that. We let out a yell and went after 'em!" growled grandfather. "Appears to me the fighting these days is grovelling in the dirt and taking care nobody don't get hurt!"

"Oh, there'll be enough hurt—don't you worry about that!" said a voice from the line.

"Good thing an old fellow who's been under fire is along to stiffen you rookies!" replied grandfather tartly. "You'll be all right once you get going. You'll settle down to be real soldiers yet. And I'd like to hear a little more cussing. How the Hussars used to cuss! Too much reading and writing nowadays. It makes men too ladylike."

By this time he had once more attracted the captain's attention.

"Grandfather Fragini, you must drop back—you must! If you don't, I'll have you carried back!" called Dellarme, sparing the old man only a glance from his concentrated observation on the front.

When he looked again at the enemy any thought of carrying out his threat vanished, for the minute had come when all his training was to be put to a test. The figures on the other side of the white posts were rising. He was to prove by the way he directed a company of infantry in action whether or not he was worthy of his captain's rank. He breathed one of those unspoken prayers that are made to the god of one's own efficient, conscientious responsibility to duty. The words of it were: "May I keep my head as if I were at drill!" Then he smiled cheerily. In order that he might watch how each man used his rifle, he drew back of the line, his slim body erect as he rested on one knee, his head level with the other heads while he fingered his whistle. His lieutenants followed his example even to the detail of his cheery smile. There was a slight stirring of heads and arms as eyes drew beads on human targets. The instant that Eugene Aronson sprang over the white post a blast from Dellarme's whistle began the war.

It was a signal, too, for Stransky to play the part he had planned; to make the speech of his life. His six feet of stature shot to its feet with a Jack-in-the-box abruptness, under the impulse of a mighty and reckless passion.

“Men, stop firing!” he cried thunderously. “Stop firing on your brothers! Like you, they are only the pawns of the ruling class, who keep us all pawns in order that they may have champagne and caviare. Comrades, I’ll lead you! Comrades, we’ll take a white flag and go down to meet our comrades and we’ll find that they think as we do! I’ll lead you!”

Page 96

Grandfather Fragini, impelled by the hysterical call of the Hussar spirit, also sprang up, waving his hat and trembling and swaying with the emotion that racked his old body.

“Give it to ’em! Aim low! Give it to ’em—give it to ’em, horns and hoofs, sabre and carbine!” he shouted in a high, jumpy voice. “Give it to ’em! Make ’em weep! Make ’em whine! Make ’em bellow!”

Both appeals were drowned in the cracking of the rifles working as regularly as punching-machines in a factory. Every soldier was seeing only his sight and the running figures under it. Mechanically and automatically, training had been projected into action, anticipation into realization. A spectator might as well have called to a man in a hundred-yard dash to stop running, to an oarsman in a race to jump out of his shell.

So centred was Dellarme in watching his men and the effect of their fire that he did not notice the two silhouettes on the sky-line, making ridicule of all his care about keeping his company under cover, until the doctor, who alone had nothing to do as yet, touched him on the arm. At the moment he looked around, and before he could speak a command, a hospital-corps man who was near Grandfather Fragini threw himself in a low tackle and brought the old man to earth, while the company sergeant sprang for Stransky with an oath. But Stransky was in no mood to submit. He felled the sergeant with a blow and, recklessly defiant, stared at Dellarme, while the men, steadily firing, were still oblivious of the scene. The sergeant, stunned, rose to his knees and reached for his revolver. Dellarme, bent over to keep his head below the crest, had already drawn his as he hastened toward them.

“Stransky,” said Dellarme, “you have struck an officer under fire! You have refused to fight! Within the law I am warranted in shooting you dead!”

“Well!” answered Stransky, throwing back his head, his face seeming all big, bony nose and heavy jaw and burning eyes.

“Will you get down? Will you take your place with your rifle?” demanded Dellarme.

Stransky laughed thunderously in scorn. He was handsome, titanic, and barbaric, with his huge shoulders stretching his blouse, which fell loosely around his narrow hips, while the fist that had felled the sergeant was still clenched.

“No!” said Stransky. “You won’t kill much if you kill me and you’d kill less if you shot yourself! God Almighty! Do you think I’m afraid? Me—afraid?”

His eyes in a bloodshot glare, as uncompromising as those of a bull in an arena watching the next move of the red cape of the matador, regarded Dellarme, who hesitated in the revulsion of the horror of killing and in admiration of the picture of human force before him. But the old sergeant, smarting under the insult of the blow, his

sandstone features mottled with red patches, had no compunctions of this order. He was ready to act as executioner.

Page 97

“If you don’t want to shoot, I can! An example—the law! There’s no other way of dealing with him! Give the word!” he said to Dellarme.

Stransky laughed, now in strident cynicism. It was the laugh of the red, of bastardy, of blanketless nights in the hedgerows, and boot soles worn through to the macadam, with the dust of speeding automobiles blown in the gaunt face of hunger. Dellarme still hesitated, recollecting Lanstron’s remark. He pictured Stransky in a last stand in a redoubt, and every soldier was as precious to him as a piece of gold to a miser.

“One ought to be enough to kill me if you’re going to do it to slow music,” said Stransky. “You might as well kill me as the poor fools that your poor fools are trying to—”

Another breath finished the speech; a breath released from a ball that seemed to have come straight from hell. The fire-control officer of a regiment of Gray artillery on the plain, scanning the landscape for the origin of the rifle-fire which was leaving many fallen in the wake of the charge of the Gray infantry, had seen two figures on the knoll. “How kind! Thank you!” his thought spoke faster than words. No need of range-finding! The range to every possible battery or infantry position around La Tir was already marked on his map. He passed the word to his guns.

The burst of their first shrapnel-shell blinded all three actors in the scene on the crest of the knoll with its ear-splitting crack and the force of its concussion threw Stransky down beside the sergeant. Dellarme, as his vision cleared, had just time to see Stransky jerk his hand up to his temple, where there was a red spot, before another shell burst, a little to the rear. This was harmless, as a shrapnel’s shower of fragments and bullets carry forward from the point of explosion. But the next burst in front of the line. The doctor’s period of idleness was over. One man’s rifle shot up as his spine was broken by a jagged piece of shrapnel jacket. Now there were too many shells to watch them individually.

“It’s all right—all right, men!” Dellarme called again, assuming his cheery smile. “It takes a lot of shrapnel to kill anybody. Our batteries will soon answer!”

His voice was unheard, yet its spirit was felt. The men knew through their training that there was no use of dodging and that their best protection was an accurate fire of their own.

“Shelling us, the —— ——!” gasped Grandfather Fragini, who had experience, if he were weak in reading and writing. “All noise and smoke!”—as it was to a larger degree in his day.

Page 98

Stransky had half risen, a new kind of savagery dawning on his features as he regained his wits. With inverted eyes he regarded the red ends of his fingers, held in line with the bridge of his nose. He felt of the wound again, now that he was less dizzy. It was only a scratch and he had been knocked down like a beef in an abattoir by an unseen enemy, on whom he could not lay hands! He glared around as if in search of the hidden antagonist. The sergeant had crept forward to be a steadying influence to the men in their first trial, if need be, and the doctor and a hospital-corps man were dragging a wounded man out of fine without exposing their own shoulders above the crest. Stransky rolled his eyes in and out; the tendons of his neck swelled; his jaw worked as if crunching pebbles. Deafeningly, the shrapnel jackets continued to crack with “ukung-s-sh—ukung-s-sh” as the swift breath of the shrapnel missiles spread.

“Give it to ’em! Give it to ’em!” Grandfather Fragini cried, his old voice a quavering bird note in the pandemonium. “My, but they do come fast!” he gasped.

Yes, a trifle faster than in your day, grandfather, when a gun of the horse-artillery had to be relaid after the recoil, which is now taken up by an oil chamber, while the gunner on his seat behind the breech keeps the sight steady on the target. The guns of one battery of that Gray regiment of artillery, each firing six fourteen-pound shells a minute methodically, every shell loaded with nearly two hundred projectiles, were giving their undivided attention to the knoll.

How long could his company endure this? Dellarme might well ask. He knew that he would not be expected to withdraw yet. With a sense of relief he saw Fracasse’s men drop for cover at the base of the knoll and then, expectation fulfilled, he realized that rifle-fire now reinforced the enemy’s shell fire. His duty was to remain while he could hold his men, and a feeling toward them such as he had never felt before, which was love, sprang full-fledged into his heart as he saw how steadily they kept up their fusillade.

The sergeant, who now had time to think of Stransky, was seized with a spasm of retributive rage. He drew his revolver determinedly.

“You brought this on! I’ll do for you!” he cried, turning toward the spot where he had left Stransky, only to lower his revolver in amazement as he saw Stransky, eager in response to a new passion, spring forward into place and pick up his rifle.

“If you will not have it my way, take it yours!” said the best shot in the company, as he began firing with resolute coolness.

“They have a lot of men down,” said Dellarme, his glasses showing the many prostrate figures on the wheat stubble. “Steady! steady! We have plenty of batteries back in the hills. One will be in action soon.”

But would one? He understood that with their smokeless powder the Gray guns could be located only by their flashes, which would not be visible unless the refraction of light were favorable. Then “thur-eesh—thur-eesh” above every other sound in a long wail! No man ever forgets the first crack of a shrapnel at close quarters, the first bullet breath on his cheek, or the first supporting shell from his side in flight that passes above him.

Page 99

“That is ours!” called Dellarme.

“Ours!” shouted the sergeant.

“Ours!” sang the thought of every one of the men.

Over the Gray batteries on the plain an explosive ball of smoke hung in the still air; then another beside it.

“Thur-eesh—thur-eesh—thur-eesh,” the screaming overhead became a gale that built a cloud of blue smoke over the offending Gray batteries—beautiful, soft blue smoke from which a spray of steel descended. There was no spotting the flashes of the Browns’ guns in order to reply to them, for they were under the cover of a hill, using indirect aim as nicely and accurately as In firing pointblank. The gunners of the Gray batteries could not go on with their work under such a hail-storm, they were checkmated. They stopped firing and began moving to a new position, where their commander hoped to remain undiscovered long enough to support the 128th by loosing his lightnings against the defenders at the critical moment of the next charge, which would be made as soon as Fracasse’s men had been reinforced.

There was an end to the concussions and the thrashing of the air around Dellarme’s men, and they had the relief of a breaking abscess in the ear. But they became more conscious of the spits of dust in front of their faces and the passing whistles of bullets. In return, they made the sections of Gray infantry in reserve rushing across the levels, leave many gray lumps behind. But Fracasse’s men at the foot of the slope poured in a heavier and still heavier fire.

“Down there’s where we need the shells now!” spoke the thought of Dellarme’s men, which he had anticipated by a word to the signal corporal, who waved his flag one—two—three—four—five times. Come on, now, with more of your special brand of death, fire-control officer! Your own head is above the sky-line, though your guns are hidden. Five hundred yards beyond the knoll is the range! Come on!

He came with a burst of screams so low in flight that they seemed to brush the back of the men’s necks with a hair broom at the rate of a thousand feet a second. Having watched the result, Dellarme turned with a confirmatory gesture, which the corporal translated into the wigwag of “Correct!” The shrapnel smoke hanging over Fracasse’s men appeared a heavenly blue to Dellarme’s men.

“They are going to start for us soon! Oh, but we’ll get a lot of them!” whispered Stransky gleefully to his rifle.

Dellarme glanced again toward the colonel’s station. No sign of the retiring flag. He was glad of that. He did not want to fall back in face of a charge; to have his men

silhouetted in the valley as they retreated. And the Grays would not endure this shower-bath long without going one way or the other. He gave the order to fix bayonets, and hardly was it obeyed when he saw flashes of steel through the shrapnel smoke as the Grays fixed theirs. The Grays had five hundred yards to go; the Browns had the time that it takes running men to cover the distance in which to stop the Grays.

Page 100

“We’ll spear any of them who has the luck to get this far!” whispered Stransky to his rifle. The sentence was spoken in the midst of a salvo of shrapnel cracks, which he did not hear. He heard nothing, thought nothing, except to kill.

The Gray batteries on the plain, having taken up a new position and being reinforced, played on the crest at top speed instantly the Gray line rose and started up the slope at the run. With the purpose of confusing no less than killing, they used percussion, which burst on striking the ground, as well as shrapnel, which burst by a time-fuse in the air. Fountains of sod and dirt shot upward to meet descending sprays of bullets. The concussions of the earth shook the aim of Dellarme’s men, blinded by smoke and dust, as they fired through a fog at bent figures whose legs were pumping fast in dim pantomime.

But the guns of the Browns, also, have word that the charge has begun. The signal corporal is waiting for the gesture from Dellarme agreed upon as an announcement. The Brown artillery commander cuts his fuses two hundred and fifty yards shorter. He, too, uses percussion for moral effect.

Half of the distance from the foot to the crest of the knoll Fracasse’s men have gone in face of the hot, sizzling tornado of bullets, when there is a blast of explosions in their faces with all the chaotic and irresistible force of a volcanic eruption. Not only are they in the midst of the first lot of the Browns’ shells at the shorter range, but one Gray battery has either made a mistake in cutting its fuses or struck a streak of powder below standard, and its shells burst among those whom it is aiming to assist.

The ground seems rising under the feet of Fracasse’s company; the air is split and racked and wrenched and torn with hideous screams of invisible demons. The men stop; they act on the uncontrollable instinct of self-preservation against an overwhelming force of nature. A few without the power of locomotion drop, faces pressed to the ground. The rest flee toward a shoulder of the slope through the instinct that leads a hunted man in a street into an alley. In a confusion of arms and legs, pressing one on the other, no longer soldiers, only a mob, they throw themselves behind the first protection that offers itself. Fracasse also runs. He runs from the flame of a furnace door suddenly thrown open.

The Gray batteries have ceased firing; certain gunners’ ears burn under the words of inquiry as to the cause of the mistake from an artillery commander. Dellarme’s men are hugging the earth too close to cheer. A desire to spring up and yell may be in their hearts, but they know the danger of showing a single unnecessary inch of their craniums above the sky-line. The sounds that escape their throats are those of a winning team at a tug of war as diaphragms relax.

Page 101

With the smoke clearing, they see twenty or thirty Grays plastered on the slope at the point where the charge was checked. Every one of those prostrate forms is within fatal range. Not one moves a finger; even the living are feigning death in the hope of surviving. Among them is little Peterkin, so faithful in forcing his refractory legs to keep pace with his comrades. If he is always up with them they will never know what is in his heart and call him a coward. As he has been knocked unconscious, he has not been in the pell-mell retreat.

His first stabbing thought on coming to was that he must be dead; but, no; he was opening his eyes sticky with dust. At least, he must be wounded! He had not power yet to move his hands in order to feel where, and when they grew alive enough to move, what he saw in front of him held them frigidly still. His nerves went searching from his head to his feet and—miracle of Heaven!—found no point of pain or spot soppy with blood. If he were really hit there was bound to be one or the other, he knew from reading.

Between him and the faces of the Browns—yes, the actual, living, terrible Browns—-above the glint of their rifle barrels, was no obstacle that could stop a bullet, though not more than three feet away was a crater made by a shell burst. The black circle of every muzzle on the crest seemed to be pointing at him. When were they going to shoot? When was he to be executed? Would he be shot in many places and die thus? Or would the very first bullet go through his head? Why didn't they fire? What were they waiting for? The suspense was unbearable. The desperation of overwhelming fear driving him in irresponsible impulse, he doubled up his legs and with a cat's leap sprang for the crater.

A blood-curdling burst of whistles passed over his head as a dozen rifles cracked. This time he was surely killed! He was in some other world! Which was it, the good or the bad? The good, for he had a glimpse of blue sky. No, that could not be, for he had been alive when he leaped for the crater, and there he was pressed against the soft earth of its bottom. He burrowed deeper blissfully. He was the nearest to the enemy of any man of the 128th, and he certainly had passed through a gamut of emotions in the half-hour since Eugene Aronson had leaped over a white post.

* * * * *

"Confound it! If we'd kept on we'd have got them! Now we have to do it all over again!" growled Fracasse distractedly as he looked around at the faces hugging the cover of the shoulder—faces asking, What next? each in its own way; faces blank and white; faces with lips working and eyes blinking; faces with the blood rushing back to cheeks in baffled anger. One, however, was half smiling—Hugo Mallin's.

"You did your share of the running, I'll warrant, Mallin!" said Fracasse excitedly, venting his disgust on a particular object.

Page 102

“Yes, sir,” answered Hugo. “It was very hard to maintain a semblance of dignity. Yes, sir, I kept near you all the time so you could watch me. Wasn’t that what you wanted me to do, sir?”

“Good old Hugo! The same old Hugo!” breathed the spirit of the company. Three or four men burst into a hysterical laugh as if something had broken in their throats. Everybody felt better for this touch of drollery except the captain. Yet, possibly, it may have helped him in recovering his poise. Sometimes even a pin-prick will have this effect.

“Silence!” he said in his old manner. “I will give you something to joke about other than a little setback like this! Get up there with your rifles!”

He formed the nucleus of a firing-line under cover of the shoulder, and then set the remainder of his company to work with their spades making a trench. The second battalion of the 128th, which faced the knoll, was also digging at the base of the slope, and another regiment in reserve was deploying on the plain. After the failure to rush the knoll the Gray commander had settled down to the business of a systematic approach.

And what of those of Fracasse’s men who had not run but had dropped in their tracks when the charge halted? They were between two lines of fire. There was no escape. Some of the wounded had a mercifully quick end, others suffered the consciousness of being hit again and again; the dead were bored through with bullet holes. In torture, the survivors prayed for death; for all had to die except Peterkin, the pasty-faced little valet’s son.

Peterkin was quite safe, hugging the bottom of the shell crater under a swarm of hornets. In a surprisingly short time he became accustomed to the situation and found himself ravenously hungry, for the strain of the last twelve hours had burned up tissue. He took a biscuit out of his knapsack and began nibbling it, as became a true rodent.

XX

MARTA’S FIRST GLIMPSE OF WAR

As Marta and the children came to the door of the chapel after the recitation of the oath, she saw the civil population moving along the street in the direction of the range. Suddenly they paused in a common impulse and their heads turned as one head on the fulcrum of their necks, and their faces as one face in a set stare looked skyward.

“Keep on moving! No danger!” called the major of the brigade staff. “Pass the word—-no danger! It’s not going to drop any bombs; it’s only a scout plane trying to locate the positions of the defences we’ve thrown up overnight. No danger—keep moving!”

He might as well have tried to distract the attention of the grand stand from the finish of a horse-race. More than the wizard's spell, years before, at the first sight of man in flight held them in suspense as they watched a plane approaching with the speed of an albatross down the wind straight on a line with the church tower where the sharpshooters were posted. The spread of the wings grew broader; the motor was making a circle of light as large as a man's hat-box, and the aviator was the size of some enormous insect when three or four sharp reports were audible from the church tower.

Page 103

Still the plane came on intact over the spire. The sharpshooters had only rimmed the target, without injury to braces or engine. But they had another chance from the windows on the nearer side of the tower; and the crowd saw there the glint of rifle barrels. This time they got the bull's-eye. The aviator reeled and dropped sidewise, a dead weight caught by the braces, with his arm dangling. A teetering dip of the plane and his body was shaken free. His face, as he neared the earth in his descent, bore the surprised look of a man thumped on the back unexpectedly.

Marta pressed her fingers to her ears, but not soon enough to keep out the sound of a thud on the roof of the building across the street from the chapel.

"I was a coward to do that! I shall see worse things!" she thought, and went to the major, who had turned to the affairs of the living directly he saw that neither the corpse of the aviator nor the wreck of the plane was to strike in the street. "I will look after these children," she said, "and we will care for as many of the old and sick as we can in our house."

"The children will find their relatives or guardians in the procession there," he answered methodically. "If they do not, the government will look after them. It will not do for you to take them to your house. That would only complicate the matter of their safety." Here he was interrupted by a precipitate question from one of his lieutenants, who had come running up. "No! No matter what the excuse, no one can remain!" he answered. "The nation is not going to take the risk of letting spies get information to the enemy for the sake of gratifying individual interests. Every one must go!" Then he called to an able-bodied citizen of thirty years or so in the procession: "Here, you, if you're not in the reserve I have work for you!"

"But I was excused from army service on account of heart trouble!" explained the able-bodied citizen.

"We all have heart trouble to-day," remarked the major pithily. "Men are giving up their lives in defence of you and your property. Every man of your age must do his share when required. Go with this orderly!" was the final and tart conclusion of the argument. "And see that he is made useful," he added to the orderly.

An explosion in the factory district made windows rattle and brought an hysterical outcry from some of the women.

"It's nothing!" the major called, in the assurance of a shepherd to his sheep. "Blowing up some building that furnish cover for the enemy's approach in front of our infantry positions! You will hear more of it. Don't worry! Do as you're told! Keep moving! Keep moving!"

Now he had time to conclude what he had to say to Marta.

“As your house will soon be under fire, it will be not refuge for the children; and, in any event, we should net want to leave them to the care of the Grays with the parents on our side,” he explained in a manner none the less final because of its politeness. “Every detail has been systematically arranged under government supervision. Private efforts will only bring confusion and hardship where we would have order and all possible mercy. As for the old, the sick, and the infirm—those who cannot bear being carried far are being moved to the hospital and barracks outside the town.”

Page 104

In proof of his words, ambulances and requisitioned carriages filled with the sick and infirm were already proceeding up one of the side streets.

“It’s not human, though!” Marta exclaimed in the desperation of helplessness.

“No, it is war, which has a habit of being inhuman,” replied the major, turning to call to a woman: “Now, madame, if you leave that pillow behind you will not be dropping your other things and having to stop all the time to pick them up!”

“But it’s the finest goose feathers and last year’s crop!” said the woman; and then gasped: “Oh, Lord! I left my silver jug on the mantel!”

“As I’ve told you before—as the printed slips we distributed when we woke you at dawn told you,” said the major with some asperity, “you were to take only light things easily portable, and after you had gone, wagons would get what you had packed and left ready at the door of your houses, with your names clearly marked, up to two hundred pounds. The rest we trust to the mercy of the Grays.”

There was nothing for Marta to do but start homeward. The thought that her mother was alone made her hasten at a pace much more rapid than the procession of people, whose talk and exclamations formed a monotone audible in its nearness, despite the continuous rifle-fire, now broken by the pounding of the guns.

“I wish I had brought the clock—it was my great-grandfather’s.”

“Johnny, you keep close to me!”

“And they’ve taken my wife off to the hospital—separated us!”

Some were excruciatingly alive to the situation; others were in a daze. But one cry always roused them from their complaints; always brought a flash to the dullest eye: Retribution! retribution! Taken from their peaceful pursuits arbitrarily by the final authority of physical force, which they could not dispute, their minds turned in primitive passion to revenge through physical force.

“I hope our army makes them pay!”

“Yes, make them pay! Make them pay!”

“It’s all done to beat the Grays, isn’t it, Miss Galland? They are trying to take our land,” said Jacky Werther as Marta parted from him.

“Yes, it is done to beat the Grays,” she answered. “Good luck, Jacky!”

Yes, yes, to beat the Grays! The same, idea—the fighting nature, the brute nature of man—animated both sides. Had the Browns really tried for peace? Had they, in the spirit of her oath, appealed to justice and reason? Why hadn't their premier before all the world said to the premier of the Grays, as one honest, friendly neighbor to another over a matter of dispute:

"We do not want war. We know you outnumber us, but we know you would not take advantage of that. If we are wrong we will make amends; if you are wrong we know that you will. Let us not play tricks in secret to gain points, we civilized nations, but be frank with each other. Let us not try to irritate each other or to influence our people, but to realize how much we have in common and that our only purpose is common progress and happiness."

Page 105

But no. This was against the precedent of Cain, who probably got Abel into a cul-de-sac, handed down to the keeping of the Roman aristocrat, the baron, the first Galland, and the fat, pompous little man. It would deprive armies of an occupation. It would make statesmanship too simple and naive to have the distinction of craft, which gave one man the right to lead another. Both sides had to act in the old fashion of mutual suspicion and chicanery.

She was overwrought in the fervor of her principles; she was in an anguish of protest. Her spirit, in arms against an overwhelming fact that was wrong, sinful, ridiculous, demanded some expression in action. Now she was half running, both running away from horror and toward horror; in a shuttle of resolutions and emotions: a being at war with war. Passing the head of the procession, she soon had the castle road to herself, except for orderlies on motor-cycles and horseback, until a train of automobile wagons loaded with household goods roared by. The full orchestra of war was playing right and left: crashing, high-pitched gun-booms near at hand; low-pitched, reverberating gun-booms in the distance. At the turn of the road in front of the castle she saw the gunners of the batteries that Feller had watched approaching making an emplacement for their guns in a field of carrots that had not yet been harvested. The roots of golden yellow were mixed with the tossing spadefuls of earth.

A shadow like a great cloud in mad flight shot over the earth, and with the gunners she looked up to see a Gray dirigible. Already it was turning homeward; already it had gained its object as a scout. On the fragile platform of the gondola was a man, seemingly a human mite aiming a tiny toy gun. His target was one of the Brown aeroplanes.

“They’re in danger of cutting their own envelope! They can’t get the angle! The plane is too high!” exclaimed the artillery commander. Both he and his men forgot their work in watching the spectacle of aerial David against aerial Goliath. “If our man lands with his little bomb, oh, my!” he grinned. “That’s why he is so high. He’s been waiting up there.”

“Pray God he will!” exclaimed one of the gunners.

“Look at him volplane—motor at full speed, too!”

The pilot was young Etzel, who, as Lanstron had observed, would charge a church tower if he were bidden. He was taking no risks in missing. His ego had no cosmos except that huge, oblong gas-bag. He drove for it as a hawk goes for its prey. One life for a number of lives—the sacrifice of a single aeroplane for a costly dirigible—that was an exchange in favor of the Browns. And Etzel had taken an oath in his heart—not standing on a cafe table—that he would never let any dirigible that he attacked escape.

“Into it! Making sure! Oh, splen—O!” cried the artillery commander.

A ball of lightning shot forth sheets of flame. Dirigible and plane were hidden in an ugly swirl of yellowish smoke, rolling out into a purple cloud that spread into prismatic mist over the descent of cavorting human bodies and broken machinery and twisted braces, flying pieces of tattered or burning cloth. David has taken Goliath down with him in a death grip.

Page 106

An aeroplane following the dirigible as a screen, hoping to get home with information if the dirigible were lost, had escaped the sharpshooters in the church tower by flying around the town. However, it ran within range of the automatic and the sharpshooters on top of the castle tower. They failed of the bull's-eye, but their bullets, rimming the target, crippling the motor, and cutting braces, brought the crumpling wings about the helpless pilot. The watching gunners uttered "Ahs!" of horror and triumph as they saw him fall, gliding this way and that, in the agony of slow descent.

"Come, now!" called the artillery commander. "We are wasting precious time."

Entering the grounds of the Galland house, Marta had to pass to one side of the path, now blocked by army wagons and engineers' materials and tools. Soldiers carrying sand-bags were taking the shortest cut, trampling the flowers on their way.

"Do you know whose property this is?" she demanded in a burst of anger.

"Ours—the nation's!" answered one, perspiring freely at his work. "Sorry!" he added on second thought.

Already parts of the first terrace were shoulder-high with sand-bags and one automatic had been set in place, Marta observed as she turned to the veranda. There her mother sat in her favorite chair, hands relaxed as they rested on its arms, while she looked out over the valley in the supertranquillity that comes to some women under a strain—as soldiers who have been on sieges can tell you—that some psychologists interpret one way and some another, none knowing even their own wives.

"Marta, did any of the children come?" Mrs. Galland asked in her usual pleasant tone. So far as she was concerned, the activity on the terrace did not exist. She seemed oblivious of the fact of war.

"Yes, seven."

"And did you hold your session?"

"Yes."

Marta's monosyllables absently answering the questions were expressive of her wonder at her mother. Most girls do not know their mothers much better than psychologists know their wives.

"I am glad of that, Marta. I am glad you went and sorry that I opposed your going, because, Marta, whatever happens one should go regularly about what he considers his duty," said Mrs. Galland. "They have been as considerate as they could, evidently by Colonel Lanstron's orders," she proceeded, nodding toward the industrious engineers.

“And they’ve packed all the paintings and works of art and put them in the cellar, where they will be safe.”

The captain of engineers in command, seeing Marta, hurried toward her.

“Miss Galland, isn’t it?” he asked. “I have been waiting for you. I—I—well, I found that I could not make the situation clear to your mother.”

“He thinks me in my second childhood or out of my head,” Mrs. Galland explained with a shade of tartness. “And he has been so polite in trying to conceal his opinion, too,” she added with a comprehending smile.

Page 107

The captain flushed in embarrassment.

“I—I can’t speak too strongly,” he declared when he had regained his composure. “Though everything seems safe here now, it may not be in an hour. You must go, all of you. This house will be in an inferno as soon as the 53d falls back, and I can’t possibly get your mother to appreciate the fact, Miss Galland.”

“But I said that I did appreciate it and that the Gallands have been in infernos before—-perhaps not as bad as the one that is coming—but, then, the Gallands must keep abreast of the times,” replied Mrs. Galland. “I have asked Minna and she prefers to remain. I am glad of that. I am glad now that we kept her, Marta. She is as loyal as my old maid and the butler and the cook were to your grandmother in the last war. Ah, the Gallands had many servants then!”

“This isn’t like the old war. This place will be shelled, enfiladed! And you two—” the captain protested desperately.

“I became a Galland when I married,” said Mrs. Galland, “and the Galland women have always remained with their property in time of war. Naturally, I shall remain!”

“Miss Galland, it was you—your influence I was counting on to—” The captain turned to Marta in a final appeal.

Mrs. Galland was watching her daughter’s face intently.

“We stay!” replied Marta, and the captain saw in the depths of her eyes, a cold blue-black, that further argument was useless.

With a shrug of his shoulders he was turning to go when his lieutenant, hurrying up and pointing to the row of lindens at the edge of the estate, exclaimed:

“If we only had those trees out of the way! They cut the line of our fire! They form cover and protection for the enemy.”

“The orders are against it,” replied the captain.

“Lanstron may be a great soldier, but—” declared the lieutenant petulantly.

“Cut the lindens if it will help the Browns!” called Mrs. Galland.

“Cut the lindens, mother! Is everything to be destroyed—everything to satisfy the appetite of savagery?” exclaimed Marta. Then, in an abrupt change of mood, inexplicable to the captain and even to herself, she added: “My mother says to cut the lindens. And you will tell us when to go into the house?” Marta asked the captain.

“Yes. There is no danger yet—none until we see the 53d falling back.”

What mockery, what uncanny staginess for either her mother or herself to be so calm! Yet, what else were they to do? Were they to scream? Or fall into each other’s arms and sob? Marta found a strange pleasure in looking at her garden before it was spattered with blood, as it had been in the last war. It had never seemed more beautiful. There was a sublimity in nature’s obliviousness to the thrashing of the air with shells in a gentle breeze that fluttered the petals of the hydrangeas.

Page 108

The sight of Feller coming along the path of the second terrace brought in sudden vividness to her mind that question which must soon be decided: whether or not she would allow him to remain to carry out his plan. He still had the garden-shears in hand. He was walking with the slow and soft step which was in keeping with the serenity of his occupation. Pausing before the chrysanthemum bed, he touched his hat, and as he awaited her approach he lifted one of the largest blooms that was drooping from its weight on the slender stem.

“They look well, don’t you think?” he asked cautiously; and he was very cool, while his eyes had a singular limpidity, speaking better than any words the sadness of his story and the dependence of his hope of regeneration upon her.

“Yes, quite the best they ever have,” she replied, inclined to look away from him, conscious of her sensitiveness to his appeal, and yet still looking at him, while she marvelled at him, at herself, at everything.

“Thank you,” he said. “You don’t know how much that means, how pleased I am.”

Now came the sweep of a rising roar from the sky with the command to attention of the rush of a fast express-train past a country railway station. Two Gray dirigibles with their escort of aeroplanes—in formation like that which Mrs. Galland and Feller had seen race along the frontier—were bearing toward the pass over the pass road. One glimpse of the squadron was as a match to Feller’s military passion. He swept off his old straw hat and with it all of the gardener’s chrysalis. Feller the artillerist gazed aloft in feverish excitement.

“Lanny has them guessing! They’re bound to know his plans if it takes all the air craft in the shop!” he exclaimed. “And what are we doing? Yes, what are we doing?” he cried in alarm as his glance swept the sky in front of the squadron, already even with the terrace in its terrific speed.

The automatic and the riflemen in the tower banged away to no purpose, for the aerostatic officers of the Grays had been apprised of the danger in that direction.

“Minutes, seconds count! Where are our high-angle guns?” Feller went on. He was unconsciously gesticulating with all the fervor of hurrying a battery into place to cover an infantry retreat in a crisis. “And they’re turning! What’s the matter? What are high-angle guns for, anyway, with such targets naked over our lines? Ah-h! Beautiful!”

The central sections of the envelope of the rear dirigible had been torn in shreds; it was buckling. Clouds of blue shrapnel smoke broke around its gondola. A number of field-guns joined forces with a battery of high-angle guns in a havoc that left a drifting derelict that had ceased to exist to Feller’s mind immediately it was out of action; for he saw that

the remainder of the squadron had completed its loop and was pointing toward the plain.

Page 109

“And they were low enough to see all they want to know and rising now—evidently already out of reach of our guns—and nothing against them!” he groaned as he saw a clear sky ahead of the big disk and its attending wings, while clenched fists pumping up and down with the movement of his forearms shook his whole body in a palpitation of angry disgust. “Lanny, what’s the matter! Lanny, they’ve beaten you! Eh? What? What—” A long whistle broke from his lips. His body still, transfixed, he cupped his hands over his eyes. “So, that is it! That is your plan, Lanny, old boy!” he shouted. “But if one of their confounded little aviators gets back, he has the story!”

From a great altitude, literally out of the blue of heaven, high over the Gray lines, Marta made out a Brown squadron of dirigibles and planes descending across the track of the Grays.

“Catch them as they come back! Between them and home—between the badger and his hole!” Feller went on explosively; and then, while the two squadrons were approaching at countering angles, he breathed the thoughts that the spectacle aroused in his quick brain: “This is war—war! Talk about your old-fashioned, take-snuff-my-card-sir courage, pray-and-swear courage—what about this? What about old Lanny’s chosen men of the air, without boasts or oaths, offering their lives in no wild charge, but coolly, hand on lever, concentratedly, scientifically, in sane, twentieth-century fashion, just to keep our positions secret! Now—now for it!”

The Gray dirigibles, stern on, were little larger than umbrellas and the planes than swallows; the Brown dirigibles, side on, were big sausages and their planes specks. To the eye, this meeting was like that of two small flocks of soaring birds apparently unable to change their course. But imagination could picture the fearful crash of forces, whose wounded would find the succor of no hospital except impact on the earth below.

Marta put her hands over her eyes for only a second, she thought, before she withdrew them in vexation—hadn’t she promised herself not to be cowardly?—to see one Brown dirigible and two Brown aeroplanes ascending at a sharp angle above a cloud of smoke to escape the high-angle guns of the Grays.

“We’ve got them all! No lips survive to tell what the eye saw!” exclaimed Feller, his words bubbling with the joy of water in the sunlight. “As I thought,” he continued in professional enthusiasm and discrimination. “We are getting the theory of one feature of the new warfare in practice. It isn’t like the popular dream of wiping out armies by dropping bombs as you sail overhead. The force of gravity is against the fliers. You have only to bring them to earth to put them out of action. Plane driven into plane dirigible into dirigible, and an end of bomb-dropping and scouting! War will still be won by the infantry and the guns. Yes, the guns—the new guns! They—”

Feller recalled with a nervous shock flashing through his system that he was a gardener, a gentle old gardener. He put his hat back on a head already bent, while the

shoulders, after a pathetic shrug, drew together in the accustomed stoop. His slim fingers slipped under the largest chrysanthemum blossom, his attitude the same as when he had held it up for Marta's inspection before they heard the roar of the Gray squadron's motors.

Page 110

“I think that we might cut them all now and fill the vases,” he suggested, a musical, ingratiating note in his voice. “To-morrow we may not have a chance.”

“Yes,” she agreed mechanically, her thoughts still dwelling on the collision of the squadrons.

“And some of the finest ones for you to take now,” he added, plying the shears as he made his selections. “I’ll bring the rest,” he concluded when he had gathered a dozen choice blossoms.

His fingers touched hers as the stems changed hands. In his eyes, showing just below the rim of his hat, was the light which she had seen first during the dramatic scene in his sitting-room and the appeal of deference, of suffering, and of the boyish hope of a cadet.

XXI

SHE CHANGES HER MIND

The indefatigable captain of engineers had turned spectator. With high-power binoculars glued to his eyes, he was watching to see if the faint brown line of Dellarme’s men were going to hold or break. If it held, he might have hours in which to complete his task; if it broke, he had only minutes.

Marta came up the terrace path from the chrysanthemum bed in time to watch the shroud of shrapnel smoke billowing over the knoll, to visualise another scene in place of the collision of the squadrons, and to note the captain’s exultation over Fracasse’s repulse.

“How we must have punished them!” he exclaimed to his lieutenant. “How we must have mowed them down! Lanstron certainly knew what he was doing.”

“You mean that he knew how we should mow them down?” asked Marta.

Not until she spoke did he realize that she was standing near him.

“Why, naturally! If we hadn’t mowed them down his plan would have failed. Mowing them down was the only way to hold them back,” he said; and seeing her horror made haste to add: “Miss Galland, now you know what a ghastly business war is. It will be worse here than there.”

“Yes,” she said blankly. Her colorless cheeks, her drooping underlip convinced him that now, with a little show of masculine authority, he would gain his point.

“You and your mother must go!” he said firmly.

This was the very thing to whip her thoughts back from the knoll. He was thunderstruck at the transformation: hot color in her cheeks, eyes aflame, lips curving around a whirlwind of words.

“You name the very reason why I wish to stay. Why do you want to save the women? Why shouldn’t they bear their share? Why don’t you want them to see men mowed down? Is it because you are ashamed of your profession? Why, I ask?”

The problem of dealing with an angry woman breaking a shell fire of questions over his head had not been ready-solved in the captain’s curriculum like other professional problems, nor was it mentioned in the official instructions about the defences of the Galland house. He aimed to smile soothingly in the helplessness of man in presence of feminine fury.

Page 111

“It is an old custom,” he was saying, but she had turned away.

“Picking flowers! What mockery! Lanny’s plan—mow them down! mow them down! mow them down!” she went on, more to herself than to him, as she dropped the chrysanthemums on the veranda table.

In a fire of resolution she hastened back down the terrace steps. The Grays and the Browns were fighting in their way for their causes; she must fight in her way for hers. Stopping before Feller, she seemed taller than her usual self and quivering with impatience.

“Have you connected the wire to the telephone yet?” she asked abruptly.

“No, not yet,” he answered.

“Then please come with me to the tower!”

Whatever his fears, he held them within the serene bounds of the gardener’s personality, while his covert glimpse of her warned him against the mistake of trying to dam the current of a passion running so strong.

“Certainly, Miss Galland,” he said agreeably, quite as if there were nothing unusual in her attitude. No word passed between them as he kept pace with her rapid gait along the path, but out of the corner of his eye he surveyed in measuring admiration and curiosity the straight line of nose and forehead under its heavy crown of hair, with a few detached and riotous tendrils.

“Bring a lantern!” she said, as they entered his sitting-room, in a way that left no excuse for refusal.

When he had brought the lantern she took it from his hand and led the way into the tunnel.

“Please make the connection so that I can speak to Lanny!” she instructed him after she had pressed the button and the panel door of the telephone recess flew open.

For an instant he hesitated; then curiosity and the unremitting authority of her tone had their way. He dropped to his knees, ran his fingers into an aperture between two stones and made a jointure of two wire ends.

“All ready!” he said, and eagerly. What a delightfully spirited rage she was in! And what the devil was she going to do, anyway?

As she took the receiver from the hook she heard an electric bell at the other end of the line, but no “Hello!”

“The bell means that Lanny will be called if he is there. No one except him is to talk over this telephone,” Feller explained softly.

Marta waited for some time before she heard a familiar, calm voice, with a faint echo of irritation over being interrupted in the midst of pressing duties.

“Well, Gustave, old boy, it can’t be that you are in touch with Westerling yet?”

“It is I—Marta!” and she came abruptly to the flaming interrogation that had brought her there. “I want to ask a question. I want a clear answer—I want everything clear! If Feller’s plan succeeds it means that you will know where the Grays are going to attack?”

“Yes; why, yes, Marta!”

“So that you can mow them down?”

Page 112

“That is one way of putting it—yes.”

“If I keep your secret—if I let the telephone remain, I am an accomplice! I shall not be that—not to any kind of murder! I shall not let the telephone remain!”

“As you will, Marta,” he replied. “But anything that leads to victory means less slaughter in the end. For we have tested our army well enough to know that only when it is decimated will it ever retreat from its main line of defence.”

“The old argument!” she answered bitterly.

“As you will, Marta! Only, Marta—I plead with you—please, please leave the house!” he begged passionately.

Again that request, which was acid to the raw spot of her anger! Again that assumption that she must desert her own home because uninvited guests would make it the theatre of their quarrel! How clear and unassailable her reply in the purview of her distraught logic!

“Why particularly care for one life when you deal in lives by the wholesale?” she demanded. “Why think of my life when you are taking other lives every minute?”

“Because I am human, not just a machine! Because yours is the one life of all to me—-because I love you!” Feller, getting only one side of the talk, cautiously watching her as he held up the lantern to throw her face more clearly in relief, saw her start and caught the sound of a quick indrawing of breath between her lips, while something electric quivered through her frame. Then, as one who has twinged from a pin-prick of distraction which she will not permit to waive her from a white-heat purpose, she exclaimed, in rapid, stabbing, desperate sentences:

“That! That now! After what I said to you a week ago! That in the midst of your mowing! No, no, no!” She drove the receiver down on the hook and blazed out to Feller: “Now you will tear out the ‘phone’”

He steadied himself against the wall, covering his face with his hands, and for the first time in her life she heard a man sob.

“My one chance—my last chance—gone!” he said brokenly. “The chance for me to redeem myself, so that I might again look at the flag without shame, taken from me in the name of mercy, when, by helping to bring victory and shorten the war, I might have saved thousands of lives!” he proceeded dismally.

“The old argument! Lanny has just used it!” said Marta. But coming from a man sobbing it sounded differently. His hands fell away from his face as if they were a dead

weight. She saw him a wreck of a human being with only his eyes alive, regarding her in harrowing wonder and reproach.

“When I was a gardener eating at the kitchen table, playing the part of a spy—I who was honor man at the military school—I who had a conscience that sent me back from the free life on the plains to try to atone—when I hoped to do this thing in order to prove that I was fit to die if not to live——”

He was as a man pitting his last grain of strength against overwhelming odds. There were long, poignant pauses between his sentences as he seemed to strive for coherence.

Page 113

“—in order to prove it for my country, for Lanny, and for you who have been so kind to me!” he concluded, another dry sob shaking him.

His chin dropped to his breast. Even the spark in his eyes flickered out. In the feeble lantern light that deepened the shadows of his face he was indescribably pitiful. She could not look away from him. There was something infectious about his misery that compelled her to feel with his nerves.

“Please,” he pleaded faintly—“please leave me to myself. I will tear out the telephone—trust me—only I wish to be alone. I am uncertain—I see only dark!”

He sank lower against the wall, his head fell forward, though not so far but he could see her from under his eyebrows. She started as she had at the telephone, her breath came in the same sweep between her lips, and he looked for a passionate refusal; but it did not come. She seemed in some spell of recollection or projection of thought. A lustrous veil was over her eyes. She was not looking at him or at anything in the range of her vision. She shuddered and abruptly seized her left wrist with her right hand, as Lanstron had in the arbor, which had brought her cry of “I’m hurting you!” In this inscrutable attitude she was silent for a time.

“Let it remain—it means so much to you!” she said wildly, and hurried past him still clasping her wrist.

He stared into the darkness that closed around her. With the last sound of her footsteps he became another Gustave Feller, who, all mercurial vivacity, clucked his tongue against the roof of his mouth with a “La, la, la!” as his hand shot out for the receiver. There it paused, and still another idea animated still another Gustave Feller.

“Why not tear out the telephone—why not?” he mused. “Why didn’t I agree to her plan? Why can’t I ever carry more than one thing in mind at once? I forgot that we were at war. I forget that I am already at the front. I have skill! God knows, I ought to have courage! Volunteers who have both are always welcome in war. Any number of gunners will be killed! When an artillery colonel saw what I could do he would take me on without further questioning. Then I should not be a spy, shuffling and whining, but bang-bang-bang on the target!”

In imagination he now had a gun. His hand made a movement of manipulation, head bent, eye sighting.

“How do you like that? You will like this one less! And here’s another—but, no, no!” He dropped against the wall again; he drove his nails into his palms in a sort of castigation. “I am the same as a soldier now—a soldier assigned to a definite duty for my flag. I should break my word of honor—a soldier’s word of honor! No, not that again!”

He snatched down the receiver to make sure that temptation did not reappear in too luring a guise, and still another Gustave Feller was in the ascendant.

“Didn’t I say to trust it to me, Lanny?” he called merrily. “Miss Galland consents!”

Page 114

“She does? Good! Good for you, Gustave!”

“Her second thought,” Feller rejoined. “And, Lanny,” he proceeded in boyish enthusiasm, using a slang word of military school days, “it was bulludgeous the way we brought down their planes and dirigibles! How I ache to be in it when the guns are so busy! With batteries back of the house and an automatic in the yard, things seem very homelike. I—”

“Gustave,” interrupted Lanstron, “we all have our weaknesses, and perhaps yours is to play a part. So keep away from the fight and don’t think of the guns!”

“I will, I swear!” Feller answered fervently. “One thought, one duty! I’ll ’phone you when the house is taken, and if you don’t hear from me again, why, you’ll know the plan has failed and I’m a prisoner. But, trust me, Lanny! Trust me—for my flag and my country against the invader!”

“Against the invader—that justifies all! And get Miss Galland out of it. You seem to have influence with her. Get her out of it!”

“Trust me!”

“Bless you, and God with you!”

“One thought, one duty!” repeated Feller with the devoutness of a monk trying to forget everything except his aves as he started toward the stairway. “I wonder if we still hold the knoll!” he mused, extinguishing the lantern. “We do! we do!” he cried when he was in the doorway. “Oh, this is life!” he added after a deep-drawn breath, watching the little clouds of shrapnel smoke here and there along the base of the range.

XXII

FLOWERS FOR THE WOUNDED

Was there nothing for Marta to do? Could she only look on in a fever of restlessness while action roared around her? On the way from the tower to the house the sight of several automobile ambulances in the road at the foot of the garden stilled the throbs of distraction in her temples with an answer. The wounded! They were already coming in from the field. She hurried down the terrace steps. The major surgeon in charge, surprised to find any woman in the vicinity, was about to tell her so automatically; then, in view of her intensity, he waited for her to speak.

“You will let us do something for them?” Marta asked. “We will make them some hot soup.”

He was immediately businesslike. No less than Dellarme or Fracasse or Lanstron or Westerling, he had been preparing throughout his professional career for this hour. The detail of caring for the men who were down had been worked out no less systematically than that of wounding them.

“Thank you, no! We don’t want to waste time,” he replied. “We must get them away with all speed so that the ambulances may return promptly. It’s only a fifteen-minute run to the hospital, where every comfort and appliance are ready and where they will be given the right things to eat.”

“Then we will give them some wine!” Marta persisted.

Page 115

“Not if we can prevent it! Not to start hemorrhages! The field doctors have brandy for use when advisable, and there is brandy with all the ambulances.”

Clearly, volunteer service was not wanted. There was no room at the immediate front for Florence Nightingales in the modern machine of war.

“Then water?”

The major surgeon aimed to be patient to an earnest, attractive young woman.

“We have sterilized water—we have everything,” he explained. “If we hadn’t at this early stage I ought to be serving an apprenticeship in a village apothecary shop. Anything that means confusion, delay, unnecessary excitement is bad and unmerciful.”

Marta was not yet at the end of her resources. The recollection of the dying private who had asked her mother for a rose in the last war flashed into mind.

“You haven’t flowers! They won’t do any harm, even if they aren’t sterilized. The wounded like flowers, don’t they? Don’t you like flowers? Look! We’ve millions!”

“Yes, I do. They do. A good idea. Bring all the flowers you want to.”

The major surgeon’s smile to Marta was not altogether on account of her suggestion. “It ought to help anybody who was ever wounded anywhere in the world to have you give him a flower!” he was thinking.

She ran for an armful of blossoms and was back before the arrival of the first wounded man who preceded the stretchers on foot. He was holding up a hand bound in a white first-aid bandage which had a red spot in the centre. Those hit in hand or arm, if the surgeon’s glance justified it, were sent on up the road to a point a mile distant, where transportation in requisitioned vehicles was provided. These men were triumphant in their cheerfulness. They were alive; they had done their duty, and they had the proof of it in the coming souvenirs of scars.

Some of the forms on stretchers had peaceful faces in unconsciousness of their condition. Others had a look of wonder, of pain, of apprehension in their consciousness that death might be near. The single word “Shrapnel!” by a hospital-corps corporal told the story of crushed or lacerated features, in explanation of a white cloth covering a head with body uninjured.

Feller, strolling out into the garden under the spell of watching shell bursts, saw what Marta was doing. With the same feeling of relief at opportunity for action that she had felt, he hastened to assist her, bringing flowers by the basketful and pausing to watch her distribute them—watching her rather than the wounded and enjoying incidental thrills at examples of the efficiency of artillery fire.

“The guns—the guns are going to play a great part!” he thought. “These rapid-firers will recover all the artillery’s prestige of Napoleon’s time!”

Many of the wounded themselves looked at Marta even more than at the flowers. It was good to see the face of a woman, her eyes limpid with sympathy, and it was not what she said but the way she spoke that brought smiles in response to hers. For she was no solemn ministering angel, but high-spirited, cheery, of the sort that the major surgeon would have chosen to distribute flowers to the men. Every remark of the victims of war made its distinct and indelible impression on the gelatine of her mind.

Page 116

“I like my blue aster better than that yellow weed of yours, Tom!”

“You didn’t know Ed Schmidt got it? Yes, he was right next me in the line.”

“Say, did you notice Dellarme’s smile? It was wonderful.”

“And old Bert Stransky! I heard him whistling the wedding march as he fired.”

“Miss, I’ll keep this flower forever!”

“They say Billy Lister will live—his cheek was shot away!”

“Once we got going I didn’t mind. It seemed as if I’d been fighting for years!”

“Hole no bigger than a lead-pencil. I’ll be back in a week!”

“Yes; don’t these little bullets make neat little holes?”

“We certainly gave them a surprise when they came up the hill! I wonder if we missed the fellow that jumped into the shell crater!”

“Our company got it worst!”

“Not any worse than ours, I’ll wager!”

“Oh—oh—can’t you go easier? Oh-h-h—” the groan ending in a clenching of the teeth.

“Hello, Jake! You here, too, and going in my automobile? And we’ve both got lower berths!”

“Sh-h! That poor chap’s dying!”

Worst of all to Marta was the case of a shrapnel fracture of the cranium, with the resulting delirium, in which the sufferer’s incoherence included memories of childhood scenes, moments on the firing-line, calls for his mother, and prayers to be put out of misery. A prod of the hypodermic from the major surgeon, and “On the operating-table in fifteen minutes” was the answer to Marta’s question if the poor fellow would live.

Until dark, in groups, at intervals, and again singly, the wounded were coming in from a brigade front in the region where the rifles were crackling and the shrapnel clouds were hanging prettily over the hills; and stretchers were being slipped into place in the ambulances, while Marta kept at her post.

“We shan’t have much more to do at this station,” said the major surgeon when a plodding section of infantry in retreat arrived.

XXIII

STRANSKY FIGHTS ALONE

Every unit engrossed in his own work! Every man taught how a weak link may break a chain and realizing himself as a link and only a link! The captain of engineers forgot Marta's existence as an error of his subordinates caught his eye, and he went to caution the axemen to cut closer to the ground, as stumps gave cover for riflemen. For the time being he had no more interest in the knoll than in the wreckage of dirigibles which were down and out of the fight.

After all, the knoll was only a single point on the vast staff map—only one of many points of a struggle whose progress was bulletined through the siftings of regimental, brigade, division, and corps headquarters in net results to the staff. Partow and Lanstron overlooked all. Their knowledge made the vast map live under their eyes. But our concern is with the story of two regiments, and particularly of two companies, and that is story enough. If you would grasp the whole, multiply the conflict on the knoll by ten thousand.

Page 117

There had been the engrossment of transcendent emotion in repelling the charge. What followed was like some grim and passionless trance with triggers ticking off the slow-passing minutes. Dellarme aimed to keep down the fusillade from Fracasse's trench and yet not to neglect the fair targets of the reserves advancing by rushes to the support of the 128th. Reinforced, the gray streak at the bottom of the slope poured in a heavier fire. Above the steady crackle of bullets sent and the whistle of bullets received rose the cry of "Doctor! Doctor!" which meant each time that another Brown rifle had been silenced. The litter bearers, hard pressed to remove the wounded, left the dead. Already death was a familiar sight—an article of exchange in which Dellarme's men dealt freely. The man at Stransky's side had been killed outright. He lay face down on his rifle stock. His cap had fallen off. Stransky put it back on the man's head, and the example was followed in other cases. It was a good idea to keep up a show of a full line of caps to the enemy.

Suddenly, as by command, the fire from the base of the knoll ceased altogether. Dellarme understood at once what this meant—the next step in the course of a systematic, irresistible approach by superior numbers. It was to allow the ground scouts to advance. Individual gray spots detaching themselves from the gray streak began to crawl upward in search of dead spaces where the contour of the ground would furnish some protection from the blaze of bullets from the crest.

"Over their heads! Don't try to hit them!" Dellarme passed the word.

"That's it! Spare one to get a dozen!" said Stransky, grinning in ready comprehension. He seemed to be grinning every time that Dellarme looked in that direction. He was plainly enjoying himself. His restless nature had found sport to its taste.

The creeping scouts must have signalled back good news, for groups began crawling slowly after them.

"Over their heads! Encourage them!" Dellarme commanded.

After they had advanced two or three hundred yards they stopped, shoulders and hands exposed in silhouette, and began to work feverishly with their spades.

"Now let them have it!"

"Oh, beautiful!" cried Stransky. "That baby captain of ours has some brains, after all! We'll get them now and we'll get them when they run!"

But they did not run. Unfalteringly they took their punishment while they turned over the protecting sod in the midst of their own dead and wounded. In a few minutes they had dropped spades for rifles, and other sections either crawled or ran forward precipitately and fell to the task of joining the isolated beginnings into a single trench.

Again Dellarme looked toward regimental headquarters, his fixed, cheery smile not wholly masking the appeal in his eyes. The Grays had only two or three hundred yards to go when they should make their next charge in order to reach the crest. But his men had fifteen hundred to go in the valley before they were out of range. After their brave resistance facing the enemy they would receive a hail of bullets in their backs. This was the time to withdraw if there were to be assurance of a safe retreat. But there was no signal. Until there was, he must remain.

Page 118

The trench grew; the day wore on. Two rifles to one were now playing against his devoted company, which had had neither food nor drink since early morning. As he scanned his thinning line he saw a look of bloodlessness and hopelessness gathering on the set faces of which he had grown so fond during this ordeal. Some of the men were crouching too much for effective aim.

“See that you fire low! Keep your heads up!” he called. “For your homes, your country, and your God! Pass the word along!”

Parched throat after parched throat repeated the message hoarsely and leaden shoulders raised a trifle and dust-matted eyelashes narrowed sharply on the sights.

“For the man in us!” growled Stransky. “For the favor of nature at birth that gave us the right to wear trousers instead of skirts! For the joy of hell, give them hell!”

“For our homes! For the man in us!” they repeated, swallowing the words as if they had the taste of a stimulant. But Dellarme knew that it would not take much to precipitate a break. He himself felt that he had been on that knoll half a lifetime. He looked at his watch and it was five o’clock. For seven hours they had held on. The Grays’ trench was complete the breadth of the slope; more reserves were coming up. The brigade commander of the Grays was going to make sure that the next charge succeeded.

At last Dellarme’s glance toward regimental headquarters showed the flag that was the signal for withdrawal. Could he accomplish it? The first lieutenant, with a shattered arm, had gone on a litter. The old sergeant was dead, a victim of the colonial wars. Used to fighting savage enemies, he had been too eager in exposing himself to a civilized foe. He had been shot through the throat.

“Men of the first section,” Dellarme called, “you will slip out of line with the greatest care not to let the enemy know that you are going!”

“Going—going! Careful! Men of the first section going!” the parched throats repeated in a thrilling whisper.

“Those who remain keep increasing their fire!” called Dellarme again. “Cover the whole breadth of the trench!”

Every fourth man wormed himself backward on his stomach until he was below the sky-line, when his stiffened limbs brought him to his feet and he started on a dead run down into the valley and toward a cut behind another knoll across the road from the Galland house.

“Tom Fragini, with your corporal dead I put you in charge of the first section! What are you waiting for, Corporal Fragini?”

Tom was bending over Grandfather Fragini, who had been forgotten by everybody in the ordeal. The old man was lying where he had fallen after the first burst of shrapnel.

“Can’t go! Got a game leg!” said grandfather, pointing to a swollen ankle that had been bruised by a piece of shrapnel jacket that had lost most of its velocity before striking him. “You do your duty and leave me alone. I ain’t a fighting man any more. I done my work when I steadied you young fellows.”

Page 119

“Yes, go on, Fragini,” said Dellarme. “Attend to your men. Everybody in his place. We’ll get the old man away on a litter.”

“Yes, you go or you ain’t any grandson of mine!” shouted the old man in a high-pitched voice. “Just been promoted, too! You’ll be up for insubordination in a minute, you young whelp!”

Dellarme meant to look after grandfather, but his attention was engrossed in seeing that his men withdrew cautiously, for every minute that he was able to delay the enemy’s charge was vital. He himself picked up a rifle in order to increase the volume of fire when the third section was starting. As the fourth and last section drew off he uttered his first cry of triumph of the day as his final look revealed the Grays still in place. But they would not wait long once all fire from the knoll had ceased. Stransky, who was in the fourth section, remained to give a parting shot.

“Good-by, d—— you!” he called to the Grays. “You’ll hear more from me later!”

Then Dellarme saw that grandfather had not yet been carried away and no litters remained. What was to be done? Grandfather was prompt with his own view.

“Just leave me behind. I’ve done my work, I tell you!” he declared.

“Can’t lose you, grandpop!” said Stransky.

Quickly shifting his pack to the ground, he squatted with his back to the old man.

“I ain’t going to—and you’re a traitor, anyway; that’s what you are!”

“No back talk! No politics in this!” Stransky replied. “Get up! You carry your skin and I’ll carry your bones. Get up quick!”

With Dellarme’s authoritative assistance grandfather mounted. Then Dellarme put Stransky’s pack on his own back.

“Let me carry your rifle, too,” he said to Stransky as they started.

“Not much!” answered Stransky. “I was just married to that rifle this morning. We’re on our honeymoon trip and getting fairly well acquainted, and expect shortly to settle down to a busy domestic life.”

He set off at a lope and gained the rear of the section in his first burst of speed. As the other men got their second wind, however, Stransky began to puff and they soon drew away from him.

“Put me down! I ain’t going to depend on any traitor that insulted the flag!” protested grandfather.

“That’s the way! Call out to me now and then so I’ll know you’re there,” said Stransky. “You’re so light I mightn’t know it if you fell off.”

Dellarme did not think it right to expose the last section by asking it to delay. Shepherd of his flock and miser of his pieces of gold, now that their work was done the one thing he wanted in the world was that they should escape without further punishment. Already the van of the first section was disappearing into the cut in safety. But the fourth section, which had held to the last, had yet a thousand yards to go over a path bare of cover except a single small bush. At any moment he expected to hear a cheer from the knoll, and what would follow the cheer he knew only too well. Yet he tarried with Stransky out of one man’s impulse not to desert another in danger. At the same time he was wroth with the old man for having made such a nuisance of himself.

Page 120

“What are you waiting for?” Stransky demanded of Dellarme.

“I like good company,” answered Dellarme cheerfully.

“Compliment for you, grandfather!” said Stransky.

“Put me down!” screamed grandfather.

“Still there, eh? Thanks, grandpop!” said Stransky, turning on Dellarme. “Can’t you run any faster than that, captain? Your place is with your men, sir. If you got wounded I’d have to carry you, too. Your company’s gaining on you every minute. Hurry up!”

From the peremptory way that he spoke, Dellarme might have been the private and Stransky the officer.

“Right!” said Dellarme in face of such unanswerable military logic, and broke into a run.

Stransky adapted himself to a pace which he thought he could maintain, and plodded on, eyes on the bush as a half-way point. After a while he heard a mighty hurrah, which was cut short abruptly; then spits of dust about their feet hastened the steps of the last section, which was near the cut. He saw men drop out of line to make a cradle of their arms for comrades who had been hit; and these finally passed out of danger with their burdens.

“No flock in sight! It’s the turn of the individual birds!” thought Stransky, and heard a familiar sound about his ears.

“Bullets!” exclaimed grandfather. “Don’t whistle like they used to. They kind of crack and sizzle now. Maybe if they hit me I’ll stop ’em, and that’ll save you.”

“That’s so,” replied Stransky glumly, realizing that he was running with a human shield on his back. “But they’ll go right through him he’s so thin,” he thought in relief. The worst of it was that he had to receive without sending, which made him boil with rage. He wished that the bush had legs so it could run toward him; he half believed that it had and was retreating. “They’re shooting right at us, and that’s in our favor. It’s hard to get the bull’s-eye at that range,” he assured grandfather.

Whish-whish-whish! Enough pellets were singing by to have torn away the rim of the target, yet none got the centre before Stransky dropped behind the bush. Blessed bush! Back of it was a bowlder. Thrice-blessed bowlder! It protected grandfather as securely as the armor of a battleship.

“We are having a noisy time,” remarked Stransky as two or three of the leaves fell. “Intelligent thieves! How did you guess we were here?” and he put his big thumb to his big nose.

“But they didn’t know about the bowlder!” said the old man with a senile giggle. “Say, I didn’t mean it when I called you a traitor—not after the fight! I just said that to make you mad so you’d put me down and we shouldn’t lose a good fighting man trying to save an old bag of bones like me. You ain’t no traitor! You’re a patriot!”

“More politics, when I’m simply full of cussedness!” grumbled Stransky. “Not having any home, I’m fighting to save the other fellows’ homes, principally because I was married this morning by a shrapnel-shell to a lady that understands me perfectly. Say, shall we give them a few?” he asked with a squint down the bridge of his nose as he took up his rifle.

Page 121

“Yes, give ’em a few!” grandfather urged when they ought to have remained quiet, as the firing was dying down. It was not worth while to shoot at a bush, and after all the torrent of lead that they had poured into the bush the Grays had concluded that nothing behind it could remain alive.

Stransky aimed at a head and shoulder on the sky-line, which he took for those of an officer, and was accurate enough to make the head and shoulders duck and to get a swarm of bullets in return.

“Children, why will you waste your country’s ammunition?” said Stransky, firing again.

“That’s the way to talk!” said grandfather approvingly. “Nothing like a little gayety and ginger in war.”

Now a Brown battery whose fire could be spared from other work dropped a few shells on the knoll and so occupied the attention of the 128th that it had no time to attend to occasional bullets from snipers.

“Think we’re no account! Shall we charge them now we’ve got the support of the guns?” chuckled Stransky.

“You Hussar, you!” Grandfather gave Stransky a slap on the back. “With a thousand like you we could charge me whole army, if the general would let us!”

“But he wouldn’t let us,” replied Stransky. “I could even tell you why.”

With the shadows gathering he slipped back to grandfather’s side, and after it was quite dark he said that it was time for the old Hussar to mount his fiery steed. Grandfather’s hands slipped from around Stransky’s neck at the first trial; with the next, Stransky took the bony fingers in his grip and held them clasped on his chest with one hand, proceeding as quietly as he could, for he had an idea that the Grays were already moving down from the knoll under cover of night.

“Yes, sir, I’m glad I came!” said grandfather faintly and meanderingly. “I wasn’t sure about Tom—all this new-fangled education and these uniforms without any color in ’em. But I saw him firing away steady as a rock; yes, sir! I was in it, too, under fire! It made my heart thump-thump like the old days. And we’re going to hold ’em—we’re going to teach the land-sharks—I’m very happy—made my heart thump so—kind of tired me—”

The old man’s voice died away into silence. His knees weakened their grip and his legs swung pendulum-like with Stransky’s steps.

“What about me for a sleeping-car!” thought Stransky. “But he’s certainly harder to carry.”

Yet it pleased Stransky not to waken his passenger until they reached the station his ticket called for. Entering the cut, he was halted by the challenging cry of “Who goes there?” in his own tongue.

“Stransky of the Reds!” he roared back. “Stransky, private of the 53d—Stransky and his bride and grandfather!”

“All right, Bert!” was the answer. “Hurrah for you! I’d know your old bull voice out of a thousand.”

Page 122

Even this did not arouse grandfather. Stransky trudged on past the sentry, across a road and up three series of steps of a garden terrace, through a breach in a breastwork of sand-bags, and was again at home—the only home he knew—among the comrades of his company. Most of them had fallen asleep on the ground after finishing their rations, logs of men in animal exhaustion. Some of those awake were too weary to give more than a nod and smile and an exclamation of delight. They had witnessed too much horror that day to be excited over a soldier with an old man on his back. A few of the others, including Tom Fragini, gathered around the pair.

“We’ve arrived, grandfather!” said Stransky, squatting. There was no answer. “He certainly sleeps sound. I wonder if—.”

“Yes,” said Dellarme, who with Tom eased the fall of the limp body.

The thumping of an old man’s heart with the youth of a Hussar had been too much for it.

“He was game!” said Stransky. “There isn’t much in this world except to be game, I’ve concluded; and you can’t be so old or so poor or so big-nosed and wall-eyed that you can’t be game.”

Marta, coming out on the veranda, had not heard his remark, but she had seen a leonine sort of private bearing an old man on his back and had guessed that he had remained behind to save a life when every man in uniform had been engaged in taking life.

“You are tired! You are hungry!” she said with urgent gentleness. “Come in!”

He followed her into the house and dropped on a leather chair before a shining table in a room panelled with oak, wondering at her and at himself. No woman of Marta’s world had ever spoken in that way to him. But it was good to sit down. Then a maid with a sad, winsome face and tender eyes brought him wine and bread and cold meat and jam. He gulped down a glassful of the wine; he ate with great mouthfuls in the ravenous call of healthy, exhausted tissues, while the maid stood by to cut more bread.

“When it comes to eating after fighting—”

He looked up when the first pangs of hunger were assuaged. Enormous, broad-shouldered, physical, his cheeks flushed with the wine, his eyes opened wide and brilliant with the fire that was in his nature—eyes that spoke the red business of anarchy and war.

“Say, but you’re pretty!”

Springing up, he caught her hand and made to kiss her in the brashness of impulse. Minna struck him a stinging blow in the face. He received it as a mastiff would receive a bite from a pup, and she stood her ground, her eyes challenging his fearlessly.

“So you are like that!” he said thoughtfully. “It was a good one, and you meant it, too.”

“Decidedly!” she answered. “There’s more where that came from!”

“As I was telling the Grays this afternoon! Good for you!” He sat down again composedly, while she glared at him. “I’m still hungry. I’ve had wine enough; but would you cut me another slice of bread?”

Page 123

She cut another slice and he covered it generously with jam. Then little Clarissa Eileen entered and pressed against her mother's skirts, subjecting Stransky to childhood's scrutiny. He waved a finger at her and grinned and drew his eyes together in a squint at the bridge of his nose, making a funny face that brought a laugh.

"Your child?" Stransky asked Minna.

"Yes."

"Where's her father? Away fighting?"

"I don't know where he is!"

"Oh!" he mused. "Was that blow for him at the same time as for me?" he pursued thoughtfully.

"Yes, for all of your kind."

"M-m-m!" came from between his lips as he rose. "Would you mind holding out your hand?" he asked with a gentleness singularly out of keeping with his rough aspect.

"Why?" she demanded.

"I've never studied any books of etiquette of polite society, and I am a poor sort at making speeches, anyhow. But I want to kiss a good woman's hand by way of apology. I never kissed one in my life, but I'm getting a lot of new experiences to-day. Will you?"

She held out her hand at arm's length and flushed slightly as he pressed his lips to it.

"You certainly do cut thick slices of bread," he said, smiling. "And you certainly are pretty," he added, passing out of the door as jauntily as if he were ready for another fight and just in time to see the colonel of the regiment come around the house. He stood at the salute, half proudly, half defiantly, but in nowise humbly.

"Well, Major Dellarme!" was the colonel's greeting of the company commander.

"Major?" exclaimed Dellarme.

"Yes. Partow has the power. Four of the aviators have iron crosses already and promotion, too; and you are a major. Company G got into a mess and the whole regiment would have been in one unless you held on. So I let you stay. It all came out right, as Lanstron planned—right so far. But your losses have been heavy and here you are in the thick of it again. Your company may change places with Company E, which has had a relatively easy time."

“No, sir; we would prefer to stay,” Dellarme answered quietly.

“Good! Then you will take this battalion and I’ll transfer Groller to Alvery’s Bad loss, Alvery—shrapnel. The artillery has been doing ugly work, but that is all in favor of the defensive. If we can hold them on this line till to-morrow noon, it’s all we want for the present,” he concluded.

“We’ll hold them! Don’t worry!” put in Stransky.

If a private had spoken to a colonel in this fashion at drill, without being spoken to, it would have been a glaring breach of military etiquette. Now that they were at war it was different. Real comradeship between officer and man begins with war.

“We shall, eh?” chuckled the colonel. “You look big enough to hold anything, young man! Here! Isn’t this the fellow that Lanstron got off?”

Page 124

“Yes, sir,” answered Dellarme.

“Well, was Lanstron right?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Wonderful man, Lanstron!”

“He knows just’ a little too much!” Stransky half growled.

XXIV

THE MAKING OF A HERO

A digression, this, about pale, little Peterkin, the valet’s son, whom we left nibbling a biscuit in perfect security after his leap in mortal terror. When Fracasse’s men rose from their trench for the final charge and found that the enemy had gone, Peterkin, hearing their cheer and the thunderous tread of their feet, dared to look above the edge of the shell crater. Here was his company coming and he not in the ranks where he belonged. Of course he ought to have gone back with them when they went; whatever they did he ought to do. This was the only safe way for one of his incurable stupidity, as the drill sergeant had told him repeatedly.

He recognized the stocky butcher’s son and other familiar figures among his comrades. Their legs, unlike his, had not been paralyzed with fright; they had been able to run. He was in an absolute minority of one, which he knew, from the experience of his twenty years of life and his inheritance as a valet’s son, meant that he was utterly in the wrong. In a minute they would be sweeping down on him. They would be jeering him and calling him a rabbit or something worse for hiding in the ground.

Fright prompted him to a fresh impulse. Picking up his rifle, which he had not touched since his leap, he faced toward the now unoccupied crest of the knoll and commenced firing. Meanwhile, Fracasse’s men had reached the point where their first charge had broken, marked by a line of bodies, including that of the manufacturer’s son, who had thought that war would be beneficial as a deterrent to strikes and an impetus to industry, lying with his head on his arm, his neck twisted, and the whites of his eyes idled skyward. In a spasm of sickening realization of how impossible it was for those who had not run back to survive between two lines of fire, they heard a shot from the ground at their feet and beheld the runt of the company in the act of making war single-handed. It was a miracle! It was like the dead coming to life!

“Peterkin?”

“Yes, Peterkin!”

“With a whole skin!”

Probably it was a great mistake for him to have a whole skin, thought Peterkin. He scrambled to his feet and kept pace with the others, hoping that he would be overlooked in the ranks.

“I’m so glad! Dear little Peterkin!” said Hugo Mallin, who was at Peterkin’s side.

His knowledge of Hugo’s gentle nature convinced Peterkin that Hugo was trying to soften the forthcoming reprimand.

Page 125

When their feet at last actually stood on the knoll which had dealt death to their ranks and they saw the brown figures of the enemy that had driven them back in full flight, the men of the 128th felt the thrill of triumph won in the face of bullets. This is a thrill by itself, primitive and masculine, that calls the imagination of men to war for war's sake. Pilzer, the butcher's son, wanted to kill for the sheer joy and revenge of killing. He rejoiced in the dead and the blood spots that, as clearly as the trench itself, marked the line that Dellarme's men had occupied along the crest of the knoll. It pleased him to use one of the bodies as a rest for his rifle, while he laid his sight in ecstasy on the large target of two men of the last section who were bringing off one of the wounded, and he swore when they got away.

"But there's another out there all alone!" he cried. "Better say your prayers, for I'm going to get you," he whispered; though, as we know, Stransky was not hit.

Peterkin had been doing his best to make amends for past errors by present enthusiasm of application. He fired no less earnestly than the butcher's son. Now that Eugene Aronson was dead, Pilzer had become Peterkin's chief patron and guide. He would be doing right if he did what that brave Pilzer did, he was thinking, while he was conscious of Fracasse's eyes boring into his back. With the others, but no more expeditiously, however frightened, he fell back to cover from the burst of shell fire; and then, with the word to break ranks, he found himself the centre of a group including not only his captain but the colonel of the regiment. He could not quite make out the expressions on their faces, but he surmised that they were wondering how any man born under the flag of the Grays could be such a coward as he was. Probably he would be shot at sunrise.

"How did it happen?" Fracasse asked.

His tone was very pleasant, but Peterkin felt that this was only the calmness of a judge hearing the evidence of a culprit. Punishment would be, accordingly, the more drastic. He was too scared to tell the truth. He spoke softly, with the mealy tongue of a valet father who never explained why the wine was low in the decanter by any reference to a weakness of his own palate.

"I didn't hear the whistle to fall back," he said, "so I stayed."

"Didn't hear the whistle!" exclaimed the captain. He looked at the colonel and the colonel looked at him. The colonel stroked his mustache as if it were a nice mustache. "There wasn't any whistle," said Fracasse with a wry grin.

"Yes, my boy; and then?" asked the colonel, who had never before called any private in his regiment "my boy."

A bright light broke on Peterkin. Inherited instinct did not permit him to show much emotion on his face, and he had, too, an inherited gift of invention. He rubbed his rifle stock with his palm and bowed much in the fashion of the parent washing his hands in gratitude for a compliment.

Page 126

“And I didn’t want to run,” he continued. “I wanted to take that hill. That was what we were told to do, wasn’t it, sir?”

“Yes, yes!” said the colonel. “Go on!”

The light grew brighter, showing Peterkin’s imagination the way to higher flights.

“I jumped quick into the crater, knowing that if I jumped quick I would not be hit,” he proceeded, his thin voice accentuating his deferential modesty. “My! but the bullets were thick, going both ways! But I remembered the lectures to recruits said that it took a thousand to kill a man. I found that I had cover from the bullets from our side and some cover from their side. I could not lie there doing nothing, I decided, after I had munched biscuits for a while—”

“Coolly munching biscuits!” exclaimed the colonel.

“Yes, sir; so I began firing every time I had a chance and I picked off a number, I think, sir.”

“My boy,” said the colonel, putting his hand on Peterkin’s shoulder, “I am going to recommend you for the bronze cross.”

The bronze cross—desired of generals and privates—for Peterkin, when Pilzer had been so confident that he should win the first that came to the 128th now that Eugene Aronson was dead!

“I—I—” stammered Peterkin.

“And so modest about it!” added the colonel. “Remembered the lectures to recruits and acted on them faithfully!”

The old spirit of the nation was not dead. Here it was reappearing in a valet’s son, as it was bound to reappear in all classes! Yes, Peterkin had supplied the one shining incident of the costly day to the colonel, who found himself without his headquarters for the night at the Galland house as planned, waiting for orders on this confounded little knoll. He was wondering if his regiment would be out in reserve and given a rest on the morrow, when an officer of the brigade staff brought instructions:

“The batteries are going to emplace here for your support in the morning. You will move as soon as your men have eaten and occupy positions B-31 to B-35. That gives you a narrow front for one battalion, with two battalions in reserve to drive home your attack. The chief of staff himself desires that we take the Galland house before noon. The enemy must not have the encouragement of any successes.”

“So easy for Westerling to say,” thought the colonel; while aloud he acknowledged the message with proper spirit.

Before the order to move was given the news of it passed from lip to lip among the men in tired whispers. Since dawn they had lived through the impressions of a whole war, and they had won. With victory they had not thought of the future, only of their hunger. After the nightmare of the charge, after hearing death whispering for hours intimately in their ears, they were too weary and too far thrown out of the adjustments of any natural habits of thought and feeling to realize the horror of eating their dinners in the company of the dead. Now they were to go through another hell, but many of them in their exhaustion were chiefly concerned as to whether or not they should get any sleep that night.

Page 127

Peterkin could hear his heart thumping and feel chills running down his spine. How should he ever live up to a bronze cross—the precious cross given for valor alone, which marked him as heroic for life—when all he wanted to do was to crawl away to some quiet, safe place and munch more biscuits? He had once been a buttons who looked down on scullery boys, but how gladly would he be a scullery boy forever if he could escape to the rear where he would hear no more bullets!

His conscience smote him; he wanted a confessor. He had an impulse to tell the whole truth to Hugo Mallin, for Hugo was the one man in the company who would sympathetically understand the situation. Yet he did not find the words, because he was rather pleased with the reclame of being a hero, which was an entirely new experience in a family that had been for generations in service.

Hugo Mallin had fired when the others fired; advanced when the others advanced. He had done his mechanical part in a way that had not excited Fracasse's further acute displeasure, and he had no sense of physical fatigue, only of mental depression, of the elemental things that he had seen and felt this day in a whirling pressure on his brain.

It seemed to him that all his comrades had changed. They could never be the same as before they had set out to kill another lot of men on the crest of the knoll. He could not keep a comparison out of mind: One of the dead Browns, lying in almost the same position, looked enough like the manufacturer's son to be his brother. He pictured Eugene Aronson's parents receiving the news of his death—the mother weeping, the father staring stonily. And he saw many mothers weeping and many fathers staring stonily.

XXV

THE TERRIBLE NIGHT

The satire of war makes the valet's son a hero; the chance of war kills the manufacturer's son and lets the day-laborer's son live; the sport of war gives the latent forces of a Stransky full play; the mercy of war grants Grandfather Fragini a happy death; the glory of war brings Dellarme quick promotion; the glamour and the spectacular folly of war turn the bolts of the lightnings which man has mastered against man. Perhaps the savage who learned that he could start a flame by rubbing two dry sticks together may have set fire to the virgin forest and wild grass in order to destroy an enemy—and naturally with disastrous results to himself if he mistook the direction of the wind.

Marta Galland's thoughts at dusk when she returned up the steps to the house were much the same as Hugo Mallin's after Fracasse had taken the knoll. While he had felt the hot whirlwind of war in his face, she had witnessed the wreckage that it left. She

also was seeing fathers staring and mothers weeping. Her experience with the wounded drawing deep on the wells of sympathy, heightened her loathing of war and of all who planned and ordered it and led its legions. A Stransky righting would have been repulsive to her, but a Stransky trying to save a life was noble.

Page 128

Except for the few minutes when she had gone out on the veranda and had seen Stransky bringing in the lifeless body of Grandfather Fragini, she had been engaged since dark in completing the work of moving valuable articles from the front to the rear rooms of the house, which had been begun early in the day by Minna and the coachman.

Shortly after Stransky had finished his meal Minna came to say that Major Dellarme wished to speak to Miss Galland. Dellarme a major! This was his reward for his part in filling the ambulances with groans! In the days when he was at the La Tir garrison he had been a frequent caller. Now, in the perversity of her reasoning, out of the chaos of the tangent odds of her impressions since she had gone to hold the session of her school that morning, she thought of him as peculiarly one who gave to the profession of arms the attraction that had made it the vocation of the aristocrat. Waiting for her in the dismantled dining-room, despite all that he had passed through, his greeting had the diffident, boyish manner of her recollection; and despite a night on the ground his brown uniform was without creases, giving him a well-groomed, even debonair, appearance.

“I scarcely thought that we should ever meet under these conditions,” he said slightly constrained, a touch of color in his cheeks.

She had no excuse for her reply unless, in truth, she were in training for the town scold. But he typified an idea. He gave to war the aspect of refinement.

“If you did not expect it, why did you enter the army?” she asked.

He saw that she was not quite herself. The strain of the day had unnerved her. Yet he answered her bootless question with simple directness.

“I liked the idea of being a soldier. I was reared in the atmosphere of the army, and I hoped that I might do my duty if war came.”

Perhaps this was point one for him. Marta shrugged her shoulders.

“I might have guessed beforehand what you would say,” she replied. “You sent for me?”

“Hardly that, please. I asked if I might see you. The captain of engineers tells me that you insist on staying and I came to beg you to keep in the back of the house. You will be safe there. Any shell that may enter will explode in the front rooms and the fragments will not go through the second wall.”

“Yes, we understand that. We have already removed our heirlooms,” she replied indifferently.

The fatalism of her attitude and his alarm lest she had gone a little out of her head aroused all the innate horror of a man at the thought of a woman under fire. He broke out desperately:

“Miss Galland, this is no place for you! You do not realize—”

He had made the same mistake as the captain of engineers—touched a spot of irritation as raw as it had been in the morning.

“Why shouldn’t I stay here? Why shouldn’t every wife and mother be here in the fire zone? You soldiers die—it is very easy to die—and leave us to suffer. You destroy and leave us to build up. You go on a debauch of killing and come home to the women to nurse you. Why make us suffer the consequences without sharing the glory of the deed?”

Page 129

Such reasoning was not in the province of his training. He feared that she was about to become hysterical.

“Really, Miss Galland, I—women and children—I—” he was stammering.

“Better kill the children young than go to the expense of bringing them up before they are killed!” she went on, not hysterically, unless frozen intensity is hysteria. “Children clinging to your knees might stop you, but I suppose you would have a police force to tear the children away rather than miss the masculine privilege of murder.”

“Miss Galland, you are overwrought. I—”

She interrupted him with half-breathed laughter.

“Don’t I look it—hysterical?” she exclaimed. “How awkward for you if I should fall on the floor and kick and scream!”

With a peculiar uplifting of the brows which spoke a brittle humor, she looked at the floor as if selecting a place for the performance.

“That is not your way,” he managed to say. He was quite adrift in confusion at the recollection of quotations he had heard about woman’s subtleties and inconsistencies and her charm. Resorting to the last weapon in his armory—which the captain of engineers had already used—his attitude changed to a soldierly sternness. “Miss Galland, I feel that it is my duty, as long as you are going to stay, to make sure that—”

She killed the sentence on his lips with a gleam of mockery from her eyes. He understood that she had again anticipated what he was going to say.

“There are times when you must be firm with a woman, aren’t there? And the time has come for you to be firm!” The color in his cheeks deepened. He knew what to do with his men on the knoll, but not what to do in the present situation. “This is our home; our home is our country. Here we remain; but, naturally, we don’t propose to stick our heads out of the windows in a shower of shrapnel bullets,” she continued. “Even your soldiers are not so zealous for death but they fight behind sand-bags. They are not like Mohammedan fatalists who so love to die for their illusions that they bare their breasts to bullets. We have already arranged sleeping-quarters in the rear. Good night!”

She held out her hand with a smile of conventional pleasantry. Had it not been for the sound of firing, which still continued, and for the walls denuded of pictures, they might have been parting at the head of the stairs at a house-party. She stopped half-way up in an impulse to call back happily:

“You see, masculine firmness did calm feminine hysteria!”

“Oh, Miss Galland!” he exclaimed. “Miss Galland, you are beyond me!”

“What a pose! How foolish to break out in that way!” she thought angrily, as she hastened up the rest of the flight and along the corridor. “To him of all men! A pattern-plate of an officer, who never has had anything but a military thought! But everything is pose! Everything is abnormal! And sleep? Sleep is a pose, too. I feel as if my eyes would remain open forever. Oh, I wish they would begin the fighting and tear the house to pieces if they are going to! I wish—”

Page 130

She was at the door of her mother's room, which was like an antique shop. Old plates lay on top of old tables, with vases on the floor under the tables. Surrounded by her treasures, Mrs. Galland awaited the attack; not as a soldier awaits it, but as that venerable Roman senator of the story faced the barbarous Gauls—neither disputing the power of their spears nor yielding the self-respect of his own mind and soul. She had lain down in her wrapper for the night, and the light from a single candle—she still favored candles—revealed her features calm and philosophical among the pillows. Yet the magic of war, reaching deep into hidden emotions, had her also under its spell. Her voice was at once more tender and vital.

"Marta, I see that you are all on wires!"

"Yes; jangling wires, every one, jangling every second out of tune," Marta acquiesced.

"Marta, my father"—her father had been a premier of the Browns—"always said that you may enjoy the luxury of fussing over little things, for they don't count much one way or another; but about big things you must never fuss or you will not be worthy of big things. Marta, you cannot stop a railroad train with your hands. This is not the first war on earth and we are not the first women who ever thought that war was wrong. Each of us has his work to do and you will have yours. It does no good to tire yourself out and fly to pieces, even if you do know so much and have been around the world."

She smiled as a woman of sixty, who has a secret heart-break that she had never given her husband a son, may smile at a daughter who is both son and daughter to her, and her plump hand, all curves like her plump face and her plump body, spread open in appeal.

Marta, who, in the breeding of her generation, felt sentiment as more or less of a lure from logic, dropped beside the bed in a sudden burst of sentiment and gathered the plump hand in hers and kissed it.

"Mother, you are wonderful!" she said. "Mother, you are great!"

"Tush, Marta!" said Mrs, Galland. "You shouldn't say that. Your grandfather was great—a very great man. He never quite got his deserts; no good man does in politics."

"You are better than great," said Marta. "You soothe; you help; you have—what shall I call it?—the wisdom of mothers! Minna has it, too." She ran a tattoo of kisses along the velvety skin of Mrs. Galland's arm.

Mrs. Galland was blushing, and out of the depths of her eyes bubbled a little fountain of stars.

"Marta, you have kissed me often before," she said, "but you have been a little patronizing from your hilltop of youth and knowledge. Sometimes you have looked to

me lonely up there on your hilltop and I know that I have been lonely sometimes in my valley of the years where knees are not good at climbing hills."

"It was not my intention," Marta said rather miserably.

"No, it is a businesslike age," answered Mrs. Galland.

Page 131

“I—you mean I was too detached? I was not human?”

“You are now. You make me very happy,” her mother replied. “But you must sleep,” she insisted.

After a time, her ear becoming as accustomed to the firing as a city dweller’s to the distant roar of city traffic Mrs. Galland slept. But Marta could not follow her advice. If, transiently at least, she had found something of the peace of the confessional, the vigor of youth was in her arteries; and youth cannot help remaining awake under some conditions. She tiptoed across the hall into her own room and seated herself by the window, which had often spread the broadening vista of landscape with its lessening detail before her eyes.

On other nights she had looked out into opaqueness with the drum-beat of rain on the roof; into the faint starlight when there was only the vagueness of heights and levels; into the harvest moonlight with its spectral unreality. Now the symbol of what the ear had heard the eye saw: war, working in tones of the landscape by day with smokeless powder; war, revealed by its tongues of flame at night. Ugly bursts of fire from the higher hills spread to the heavens like an aurora borealis and broke their messengers in sheets of flame over the lower hills—the batteries of the Browns sprinkling death about the heads of the gunners of the Grays emplacing their batteries. Staccato flashes from a single point counted so many bullets from an automatic, which, directed by the beams of the search-lights, found their targets in sections of advancing infantry. Hill crests, set off with flashes running back and forth, demarked infantry lines of the Browns assisting the automatics.

There were lulls between the crashes of the small arms and the heavy, throaty speech of the guns; lulls that seemed to say that both sides had paused for a breathing spell; lulls that allowed the battle in the distance to be heard in its pervasive undertone. In one Of them, when even the undertone had ceased for a few seconds, Marta caught faintly the groans of a wounded man—one of the crew of a Gray dirigible burned by an explosion and brought in his agony softly to earth by a billowing piece of envelope which acted as a parachute.

Fighting proceeded in La Tir in stages of ferocity and blank silence. The upper part of the town, which the Browns still held, was in darkness; the lower part, where the Grays were, was illuminated.

“Another one of Lanny’s plans!” thought Marta. “He would have them work in the light, while we fire out of obscurity!”

Soon all the town was in darkness, for the Grays had cut the wire in the main conduit shortly after she had heard the groans of the wounded man. There the automatics broke out in a mad storm, voicing their feelings at getting a company in close order in a

street for the space of a minute, before those who escaped could plaster themselves against doorways or find cover in alleys. Then silence from the automatics and a cheer from the Browns that rasped out its triumph like the rubbing together of steel files.

Page 132

From the line of defence, that included the first terrace of the Galland grounds as the angle of a redoubt, not a shot, not a sound; silence on the part of officers and men as profound as Mrs. Galland's slumber, while one of the Browns' search-lights, like some great witch's slow-turning eye in a narrow radius, covered the lower terraces and the road.

Marta gave intermittent glances at the garden; the glances of a guardian. She happened to be looking in that direction when figures sprang across the road, crouching, running with the short, quick steps of no body movement accompanying that of the legs. The search-light caught them in merciless silhouette and the automatic and the rifles from behind the sand-bags on the first terrace let go. Some of the figures dropped and lay in the road and she knew that she had seen men hit for the first time. Others, she thought, got safely to the cover of the gutter on the garden side. Of those on the road, some were still and some she saw were moving slowly back on their stomachs to safety. Now the search-light laid its beam steadily on the road. Again silence. From the upper terrace came a great voice, like that of the guns, from a human throat:

"Why didn't we level those terraces? They'll creep up from one to the other!" It was Stransky.

In answer was another voice—Dellarme's.

"Perhaps there wasn't time to do everything. And if this position is taken before we are ready to go, it will not be from that side, but from the side of the town."

"We're making them pay for seeing our garden, but, anyhow, we won't let them pick any flowers," Stransky remarked pungently.

"If they get as far as the first terrace—well, in case of a crisis, we have hand-grenades," Dellarme added in explanation. "But, God knows, I hope we shall not have to use them."

After an interval, more figures made a rush across the road. They, too, in Stransky's words, paid a price for seeing the garden. But the flashes from the rifles and the automatic provided a target for a Gray battery. The blue spark that flies from an overhead trolley or a third rail, multiplied a hundredfold, broke in Marta's face. It was dazzling, blinding as a bolt of lightning a few feet distant, with the thunder crash at the same second, followed by the thrashing hum of bullets and fragments against the side of the house.

"I knew that this must come!" something within her said. If she had not been prepared for it by the events of the last twelve hours she would have jumped to her feet with an exclamation of natural shock and horror. As it was, she felt a convulsive, nervous thrill

without rising from her seat. A pause. The next shell burst in line with the first, out by the linden-trees; a third above the veranda.

“We’ve got that range, all right!” thought the Gray battery commander, who had judged the distance by the staff map. This was all he wanted to know for the present. He would let loose at the proper time to support the infantry attack, when there were enough driblets across the road to make a charge. The driblets kept on coming, and, one by one, the number of dead on the road was augmented.

Page 133

Marta was diverted from this process of killing by piecemeal by a more theatric spectacle. A brigade commander of the Grays had ticked an order over the wires and it had gone from battery to battery. Not only many field-guns, which are the terriers of the artillery, but some guns of siege calibre, the mastiffs, in a sudden outburst started a havoc of tumbling walls and cornices in the upper part of the town.

Then an explosion greater than any from the shells shot a hemisphere of light heavenward, revealing a shadowy body flying overhead, and an instant later the heavens were illuminated by a vast circle of flame as the dirigible that had dropped the dynamite received its death-blow. But already the Brown infantry was withdrawing from the town, destroying buildings that would give cover for the attack in the morning as they went. Two or three hours after midnight fell a silence which was to last until dawn. The combatants rested on their arms, Browns saying to Grays, “We shall be ready for the morrow!” and Grays replying: “So shall we!”

Marta, at her window, her eyes following the movements of the display, now here, now there, found herself thinking of many things, as in the intermissions between the acts of a drama. She wondered if the groaning, wounded man were crying for water or if he were wishing that some one at home were near him. She thought of her talk with Lanstron over the telephone and how mad and feminine and feeble it must have sounded to a mind working in the inexorable processes of the clash of millions of men. She saw his left hand twitching in his pocket, his right hand gripping it to hold it still, on that afternoon when, for the first time, she had understood his injury in the aeroplane accident as the talisman of his feelings—his controlled feelings! Always his controlled feelings!

She saw Feller leaning against the moist wall of the dank tunnel, suffering as it had never seemed to her that man could suffer, his agony an irresistible plea. She saw Westerling, so conscious of his strength, directing his chessmen in a death struggle against Partow. And he was coming to this house as his headquarters when the final test of the strength of the Titans was made.

She hoped that her mother was still sleeping; and she had seconds when she was startled by her own calmness. Again, the faces of the children in her school were as clear as in life. She breathed her gratitude that the procession in which they moved to the rear was hours ago out of the theatre of danger. In the simplicity of big things, her duty was to teach them, a future generation, no less than Feller’s duty was to the pursuing shadow of his conscience. She should see war, alive, naked, bloody, and she would tell her children what she had seen as a warning.

Page 134

Silence, except an occasional rifle-shot—silence and the darkness before dawn which would, she knew, concentrate the lightnings around the house. She glanced into her mother's room and marvelled as at a miracle to find her sleeping. Then she stole down-stairs and opened the outer door of the dining-room. A step or two brought her to the edge of the veranda. There she paused and leaned against one of the stone pillars. Dellarme himself was in a half-reclining position, his back to a tree. He seemed to be nodding. Except for a few on watch over the sand-bags, his men were stretched on the earth, moving restlessly at intervals, either in an effort to sleep or waking suddenly after a spell of harassed unconsciousness.

XXVI

FELLER IS TEMPTED

With the first sign of dawn there was a movement of shadowy forms taking position in answer to low-spoken commands. The search-light yielded its vigil to the wide-spread beam out of the east, and the detail of the setting where Marta was to watch the play of one of man's passions, which he dares not permit the tender flesh of woman to share, grew distinct. Bayonets were fixed on the rifles that lay along the parapet of sand-bags in front of the row of brown shoulders. Back of them in the yard was a section of infantry in reserve, also with bayonets fixed, ready to fill the place of any who fell out of line, a doctor and stretchers to care for the wounded, and a detachment of engineers to mend any breaches made in the breastwork by shell fire.

The gunner of the automatic sighted his barrel, slightly adjusted its elevation, and swung it back and forth to make sure that it worked smoothly, while his assistant saw that the fresh belts of cartridges which were to feed it were within easy reach. Dellarme, walking behind his men, cautioning them not to expose their heads and at the same time to fire low, had his cheery smile in excellent working order.

"We expect great things of you!" this smile said as he bent over the gunner with a pat on the shoulder.

"I understand!" said the upward glance in reply.

Marta could not deny that there was something fine about Dellarme's smile no less than in his bearing and his delicately, chiselled features. It had the assurance and self-possession of a surgeon about to perform a critical operation, the difference being that, unlike the surgeon, he shared in the risk, which was for the purpose of taking vigorous young lives rather than saving lives enfeebled by disease. Was it this that gave to war its halo—this offering of the most valuable thing man possesses to sudden destruction that made war heroic?

But where was the romance of the last war forty years ago? Where the glad songs going into battle? The glitter of buttons and the pomp of showy uniforms? The general's staff watching the course of the action by the billows of black smoke? Gone where the railroad sent the stage-coach, electricity sent the candle and horse-drawn street-cars, serum sent diphtheria, the knife sent the appendix, and rifled cannon and explosive shells sent the wooden walls of old ships of the line.

Page 135

It occurred to none of the actors, and to Marta alone, in the tight, foreboding silence, to look aloft. There was a serene blue sky. The birds were tuning up for their morning songs when she heard the dull echo of distant guns, soon to be submerged in other thunders at nearer points along the frontier. With every faculty an alert wire strung in suspense, she was instantly aware of the appearance of a figure whose lack of uniform made it conspicuous on that stage.

In straw hat and blue blouse, shuffling with his old man's walk, Feller came along the path from the gate. He was in retreat from the enticing picture of the regiment of field-guns in front of the castle that was ready for action. As the infantry had never interested him, he would be safe from temptation in the yard. He stopped back of the engineers, his glance roving down the line of brown shoulders until it rested on the automatic. This also was a gun, though it fired only bullets. His fingers began beating a tattoo on his trousers' seam; a hungry brilliance shone in his eyes. He took four or five steps forward as if drawn by an overpowering fascination.

"This is no place for you!" said one of the engineers.

"No, and don't waste any time, either, old man!" said another. "Back to your bulbs!"

Feller did not even hear them. For the moment he was actually deaf.

"Fire!" said Dellarme's whistle. "Thur-r-r!" went the automatic in soulless, mechanical repetition, its tape spinning through the cylinder, while the rifles spoke with the human irregularity of steel-tipped fingers pounding at random on a drumhead. All along the line facing La Tir the volume of fire spread until it was like the concert of a mighty loom.

Marta could see nothing of the enemy, but she guessed that he was making a rush from the second to the third terrace and from the outskirts of the town. The engineer's repeated warning unheard above the din, he touched Feller on the leg. Feller looked around with a frown of querulous abstraction just as the breaking of a storm of shell fire obscured Marta's vision with dust and smoke. She felt her head jerk as if it would go free of her neck with each explosion, until she reinforced her nerves with the memory of an old soldier's warning about the folly of dodging missiles that were already past before you heard them. She knew that she was perfectly safe behind the pillar.

The Gray batteries having tried out their range by the flashes of the automatic the previous evening were making the most of the occasion. "Uk-ung-n-ng!" the breaking jackets whipped out their grists. A crash on the roof brought a small avalanche of slate tumbling down. A concussion in the dining-room was followed by the tinkling of falling window-glass. The engineers had work immediately when two of the infantrymen and their rifles and the sand-bags on which they leaned were hurled together in a heap of sand and torn flesh. Other bags were placed in

Page 136

the breach; other men sprang forward and began firing. The reserves, the hospital-corps men and the engineers hugged the breastwork for cover. The leaves clipped from the trees by bullets were blown aside with the hurricane breaths of shrapnel bursts; bullets whistled so near Marta that she heard their shrillness above every other sound. She was amazed that the house still remained standing—that any one was alive. But she had a glimpse of Dellarme maintaining his set smile and another of Feller, who had crept up behind the automatic, making impatient “come-on! come-on! what-is-the-matter-with-you?” gestures in the direction of the batteries in front of the castle.

“Thur-eesh—thur-eesh!” As the welcome note swept overhead he waved his hands up and down in mad rapture and then peeped over the breastwork to ascertain if the practice were good. The Brown batteries had been a little slow in coming into action, but they had the range from the Gray batteries’ flashes the previous night and, undisturbed in the security of their own flashes screened by the trees, soon broke the precision of the opposing fire.

Now shells coming infrequently fell short or went wide. The air cleared. Marta could again see distinctly, and she marvelled that the brown figures were proceeding with their knitting as if nothing had happened. She could not resist a thrill of grim admiration for their steadiness or an appreciative thrill as she saw Feller eagerly peering over the automatic gunner’s shoulder to watch the effect of his fire. Suddenly, both the rifles and the automatic, which had been firing deliberately, began to fire with desperate rapidity. It was as if a boxer, sparring slowly, let out all his power in a rain of blows. She could see nothing of the Grays, but she understood that they were making a rush.

Then a chance shell, striking at the one point which the man who fired it six thousand yards away would have chosen as his bull’s-eye, obscured Feller and the automatic and its gunners in the havoc of explosion. Feller must have been killed. The dust settled; she saw Dellarme making frantic gestures as he looked at his men. They were keeping up their fusillade with unflinching rapidity. Through the breach left in the breastwork she had glimpses, as the dust was finally dissipated, of gray figures, bayonets fixed, pressing together as they came on fiercely toward the opening. The Browns let go the full blast of their magazines. Had that chance shell turned the scales? Would the Grays get into the breastwork?

All Marta’s faculties and emotions were frozen in her stare of suspense at the breach. Her heart seemed straining with the effort of the living, who heard nothing, thought nothing, in the crux of their effort. War’s own mesmerism had made her forget Feller and everything except the gamble, the turn of the card, while the gray figures kept stumbling on over their fallen. Then her heart leaped, a cry in a gust of short breaths broke from her lips as the Browns let go a rasping, explosive, demoniacal cheer. The first attack had been checked!

Page 137

After triumph, terror, faintness, and a closing of her eyes, she opened them to see Feller, with his old straw hat—brim torn and crownless now—still on his head, rise from the debris and shake himself like a dog coming ashore from a swim. While the engineers hastened to repair the breach he assisted Stransky, who had also been knocked down by the concussion, to lift the overturned automatic off the gunner. The doctor, putting a hand on the gunner's heart, shook his head, and two hospital-corps men removed the body to make room for the engineers.

Dellarme could now spare attention from the charge of the Gray infantry to observe the results of the shell fire. With the gunner dead, he looked for the gunner's assistant, who lay several feet distant. As Dellarme and the doctor hastened to him he raised himself to a sitting posture and looked around in dazed inquiry. The doctor poured a cup of brandy from his flask and held it to the assistant's lips, whereon he blinked and nodded his head in personal confirmation of the fact that he was still alive. But when he tried to raise his right arm the hand would not join in the movement. His wrist was broken.

For once Dellarme's cheery smile deserted him. There was no one left to man the automatic, so vital in the defence, and even if somebody could be found the gun was probably out of commission. As he started toward it his smile, already summoned back, was shot with surprise at sight of the gun in place and a stranger in blue blouse, white hair showing through a crownless straw hat, trying out the mechanism with knowing fingers. Dellarme stared. Feller, unconscious of everything but the gun, righted the cartridge band, swung the barrel back and forth, and then fired a shot.

"You—you seem to know rapid-firers!" Dellarme exclaimed in blank incomprehension.

"Yes, sir!" Feller raised his finger, whether in salute as a soldier or as a gardener touching his hat it was hard to say.

"But how—where?" gasped Dellarme.

This time the movement of the finger was undoubtedly in salute, in perfect, swift, military salute, with head thrown back and shoulders stiff. Feller the gardener was dead and buried without ceremony.

"Lanstron's class, school for officers, sir. Stood one in ballistics, prize medallist control of gun-fire. Yes, sir, I know something about rapid-firers," Feller replied, and fired a few more shots. "A little high, a little low—right, my lady, right!"

Stransky was back in his place next to the automatic and firing whenever a head appeared. He rolled his eyes in a characteristic squint of scrutiny toward the new recruit.

"Beats spraying rose-bushes for bugs, eh, old man?" he asked.

“Yes, a lead solution is best for gray bugs!” Feller remarked pungently, and their glances meeting, they saw in each other’s eyes the joy of hell.

“A pair of anarchists!” exclaimed Stransky grinning, and tried a shot for another head.

Page 138

As if in answer to prayer, a gunner had come out of the earth. Sufficient to the need was the fact. It was not for Dellarme to ask questions of a prize-medallist graduate of the school for officers in a blue blouse and crownless straw hat. His expert survey assured him that before another rush the enemy had certain preparations to make. He might give his fighting smile a recess and permit himself a few minutes' relaxation. Looking around to ascertain what damage had been done to the house and grounds, he became aware of Marta's presence for the first time.

"Miss Galland, you—you weren't there during the fighting?" he cried as he ran toward her.

"Yes," she said rather faintly.

"If I had known that I should have been scared to death!"

"But I was safe behind the pillar," she explained. "Your company did its work splendidly," she added, looking at him with eyes dull and wondering.

"Do you think so? They *are* splendid, my men! They make one try to be worthy of them. Thank you!" he said, blushing with pleasure. "But, Miss Galland, please—there's no firing now, but any minute——."

"Yes?"

He did not attempt masculine firmness this time, only boyish pleading and a sort of younger-brother camaraderie.

"Miss Galland, you're such a good soldier—please—and I'm sure you have not had your breakfast, and all good soldiers never neglect their rations, not at the beginning of a war! Miss Galland, please—." Yes, as he meant it, please be a good fellow.

She could not resist smiling at the charming manner of his plea. She felt weak and strange—a little dizzy. Besides, her mother's voice now came from the doorway and then her mother's hand was pressing her arm.

"Marta, if you remain out here, I shall!" announced Mrs. Galland.

"I was just coming in," said Marta.

Dellarme, his cap held before him in the jaunty fashion of officers, bowed, his face beaming his happiness at her decision.

As they entered the dining-room Marta saw that the shell which had entered the window had burst just over the heavy mahogany table and a fragment of the jacket had cut a long scar in the rich fibre. She paused, her breath coming and going hotly. She felt the

smarting pain of a file drawn over the skin. The table was very old; for generations it had been a family treasure. As a child she had loved its polished surface and revered its massive solidity.

“Oh! Oh! Somebody ought to be made to pay for such wickedness!” she exclaimed wrathfully.

“It will plane down and it is nothing we could help, Marta,” said Mrs. Galland. “Fortunately, all the portraits were out of the room.”

“Mother, you—you are just a little too philosophical!” complained Marta.

“Come!” Mrs. Galland slipped her hand into Marta’s. “Two women can’t fight both armies. Come! I prescribe hot coffee It is waiting; and, do you know, I find a meal in the kitchen very cosey.”

Page 139

Being human and not a heroine fed on lotos blossoms, and being exhausted and also hungry, when she was seated at table, with Minna adroitly urging her, Marta ate with the relish of little Peterkin in the shell crater munching biscuits from his haversack.

XXVII

HAND TO HAND

With Mrs. Galland on guard, insistent that wherever her daughter went she should go, Marta might not so easily expose herself again. For the time being she seemed hardly of a mind to. She sat staring at the kitchen clock on the wall in front of her, the only sign of any break in the funereal march of her thoughts being an occasional deep-drawn breath, or a shudder, or a clenching of the hands, or a bitter smile of irony.

An hour or more of intermittent firing passed in the suspense of listening to a trickle of water undermining a dam. Then, with the roar of waters carrying away the dam, a cataract of shell fire broke and continued in far heavier volume than that of the first attack.

“The last war was nothing like this!” murmured Mrs. Galland.

At every concussion against the walls of the house, at every crash within the house, Marta pressed her nails tighter into her palms. Abruptly as the inferno of the guns had commenced, it ceased, and the steady, passionate, desperate blasts of the rifles, now uninterrupted, were more deadly and venomous if less shocking to the ear.

The movement of the minute-hand on the clock-face became uncanny and merciless to her eye in its deliberate regularity. Dellarme had been told to hold on until noon, she knew. Was he still smiling? Was Feller still happy in playing a stream of lead from the automatic? Was the second charge of the Grays, which must have come to close quarters when the guns went silent, going to succeed?

The rifle-fire died down suddenly and she heard a cheer like that of the morning, only wilder and fiercer and even less human. Could it be from the Browns celebrating a repulse? Or from the Grays after taking the position? What did it matter? If the Grays had won there was an end to the agony so far as her mother and herself were concerned—an end to murder on the lawn and devastation of their property. But, at length, the rifle-fire beginning again in a slow, irregular pulse told her that the Browns had held.

Now another long intermission. The demon was wiping his brow and recovering his breath, Marta thought; he was repairing damaged joints in his armor and removing the flesh of victims from his claws. But he would not rest long, for the war was young—-exactly one day old—and many battalions of victims remained unslain.

How slowly the big hand of the clock kept hitching on from minute-mark to minute-mark! Yet no more slowly than the hands of clocks in distant provinces of the Browns or of the Grays, where this day was as quiet and peaceful as any other day.

Page 140

Mrs. Galland had settled down conscientiously to play solitaire, a favorite pastime of hers; but she failed to win, as she complained to Marta, because of her stupid way this morning of missing the combination cards.

“I really believe I need new glasses,” she declared.

“Let me help you,” said Marta. Welcome idea! Why hadn’t she thought of it before? It was something to do.

“But, Marta—there you are, covering up the jack of spades, the very card I need—-though it will not help now. I’ve lost again!” exclaimed Mrs. Galland at length. “Why, Marta, you miss worse than I do!”

“Do I? Do I?” asked Marta in blank surprise and irritation. “Please let me try once alone. I’ll not miss this time. Correct me if I do.”

She played with the deliberation and accuracy of Feller should he have to make a little ammunition for his automatic go a long way, and Mrs. Galland did not observe a single error.

“Hurrah! I won!” Marta cried triumphantly, with some of her old vivacity.

Then she drew away from the table wearily. The strain of concentrating her mind had been worse than that of the battle; or, rather, it had merely added another strain to a tortured brain after a sleepless night. For her ears had been constantly alert. The demon had moved one of his claws to fresh ground; the inferno on the La Tir side of the frontier had shifted to a valley beyond the Galland estate, where the firing appeared to come from the Brown side. Breaking from the leash of silence, guns, automatics, rifles —each one straining for a speed record—roared and crashed and rattled in greedy chorus, while the clock ticked perhaps a hundred times. Thus famished savages might boll their food in a time limit. Thereafter, for a while, the battle was desultory.

Then came another outburst from Dellarme’s men, which she interpreted as the response to another rush by the Grays; and this yelping of the demon was not that of the hound after the hare, as in the valley, but of the hare with his back to the wall. When it was over there was no cheer. What did this mean? Oh, that slow minute-hand, resting so calmly between hitches of destiny, now pointing to a quarter after eleven! For half a century, it seemed to her, Marta had endured watching its snail pace. Now inaction was no longer bearable. Without warning to her mother she bolted out of the kitchen. Mrs. Galland sprang up to follow, but Minna barred the way.

“One is enough!” she said firmly, and Mrs. Galland dropped back into her chair.

In the front rooms Marta found havoc beyond her imagination. A portion of the ceiling had been blown out by a shell entering at an up-stairs window; the hardwood floors were littered with plaster and window-glass and ripped into splinters in places.

“How can we ever afford repairs!” she thought.

Page 141

But she hurried on, impelled by she knew not what, through the dining-room, and, coming to the veranda, stopped short, with dilating eyes and a cry of grievous shock. Two of his men were carrying Dellarme back from the breastwork where they had caught him in their arms as he fell. They laid him gently on the sward with a knapsack under his head. His face grew whiter with the flow of blood from the red hole in the right breast of his blouse. Then he opened his lips and whispered to the doctor: "How is it?" Something in his eyes, in the tone of that faint question, required the grace of a soldier's truth in answer.

"Bad!" said the doctor.

"Then, good-by!" And his head fell to one side, his lips set in his cheery smile.

Had ever any martyr shown a finer spirit dying for any cause? Marta wondered. She felt the sublimity of a great moment, an inexorable sadness. She knew that she should never forget that cheery smile or that white face. What was danger to anybody? What was death if you had seen how he had died?

His company was a company with his smile out of its heart and in its place blank despair. Many of the men had stopped firing. Some had even run back to look at him and stood, caps off, backs to the enemy, miserable in their grief. Others leaned against the parapet, rifles out of hand, staring and dazed.

"They have killed our captain!"

"They've killed our captain!"—still a captain to them. A general's stars could not have raised him a cubit in their estimation.

"And once we called him 'Baby Dellarme,' he was so young and bashful! Him a baby? He was a king!"

"Men, get to your places!" cried the surviving lieutenant rather hopelessly, with no Dellarme to show him what to do; and Marta saw that few paid any attention to him.

In that minute of demoralization the Grays had their chance, but only for a minute. A voice that seemed to speak some uncontrollable thought of her own broke in, and it rang with the authority and leadership of a mature officer's command, even though coming from a gardener in blue blouse and crownless straw hat.

"Your rifles, your rifles, quick!" called Feller. "We're only beginning to fight!"

And then another voice in a bull roar, Stransky's:

"Avenge his death! They've got to kill the last man of us for killing him! Revenge! revenge!"

That cry brought back to the company all the fighting spirit of the cheery smile and with it another spirit—for Dellarme's sake!—which he had never taught them.

"Make them pay!"

"He was told to stay till noon!"

"They'll find us here at noon, alive or dead!"

Stransky picked up one of several cylindrical objects that were lying at his feet.

"He wouldn't use this—he was too soft-hearted—but I will!" he cried, and flung a hand-grenade, and then a second, over the breastwork. The explosions were followed by agonized groans from the Grays hugging the lower side of the terrace. For this they had crawled across the road in the night—to find themselves unable to move either way and directly under the flashes of the Browns' rifles.

Page 142

Feller's and Stransky's shouts rose together in a peculiar unity of direction and full of the fellowship they had found in their first exchange of glances.

"You engineers, make ready!"

"Hand-grenades to the men under the tree! That's where they're going to try for it—no wall to climb over there!"

"You engineers, take your rifles—and bayonet into anything that wears gray!"

"Get back, you men by the tree, to avoid their hand-grenades! Form up behind them, everybody!"

"No matter if they do get in at first! Back, you men, from under the tree!"

There was not a single rifle-shot. In a silence like that before the word to fire in a duel, all orders were heard and the more readily obeyed because Dellarme's foresight had impressed their sense upon the men in his quiet way.

The sand-bags by the tree were blown up by the Grays. Then, before the dust had hardly settled, came a half score of hand-grenades thrown by the first men of a Gray wedge, scrambling as they were pushed through the breach by the pressure of the mass behind. In that final struggle of one set of men to gain and another to hold a position, guns or automatics or long-range bullets played no part. It was the grapple of cold steel with cold steel and muscle with muscle, in a billowing, twisting mob of wrestlers, with no sound from throats but straining breaths; with no quarter, no distinction of person, and bloodshot eyes and faces hot with the effort of brute strength striving, in primitive desperation, to kill in order not to be killed. The cloud of rocking, writhing arms and shoulders was neither going forward nor backward. Its movement was that of a vortex, while the gray stream kept on pouring through the breach as if it were only the first flood from some gray lake on the other side of the breastwork.

Marta had come to the edge of the veranda, at once drawn and repelled, feeling the fearful suspense of the combat, the savage horror of it, and herself uttering sounds like the straining breaths of the men. What a place for her to be! But she did not think of that. She was there. The dreadful alchemy of war had made her a stranger to herself. She was mad; they were mad; all the world was mad!

One minute—two, perhaps—not three—and the thing was over. She saw the Grays being crushed back and realized that the Browns had won, when a last detail of the lessening tumult fixed her attention with its gladiatorial simplicity. Here, indeed, it was a case of man to man with the weapons nature gave them.

Standing higher than the others on the edge of the breach was that giant who had brought Grandfather Fragini in pickaback, looking a young god on an escarpment of

rock on Olympus. His great nose showed in silhouette at intervals of wrestling lurches back and forth as he tugged at the rifle of a thick-set soldier of the Grays with a liver patch on the cheek that made his face hideous enough for an incarnation of war's savagery. At last Jacob Pilzer tumbled backward over the breastwork. Unlucky Pilzer! That bronze cross was further away than ever for him, while Stransky shook the trophy of a captured rifle aloft, a torn sleeve revealing the weaving muscles of his powerful arm.

Page 143

“I thought so!” cried Feller. “Attacks on frontal positions by daylight are going out of fashion!”

It was he who mercifully arrested the shower of hand-grenades that followed the exit of the enemy. Two of the guns of the castle batteries, having changed their position, were making havoc enough at pointblank range, with a choice of targets between the Grays huddled on the other side of the breastwork and those in retreat.

“We’ll have peace for a few hours now,” said Stransky, squinting down his nose. “And we’ll have something to eat. I ought to have got that fellow with the beauty-spot on his physiognomy, but, confound him, he was an eel!”

By this time the men had recovered their breath. It occurred to them by common impulse that a cheer was due, and for the first time they broke into a hurrah with wide-open throats.

“Another—for Dellarme!” called Stransky, who seemed to think that he and not the callow lieutenant was in command.

This they gave, standing instinctively at attention, with heads bared, for the leader whose spirit survived in them; a cheer with triumph in its roar, but a different sort of triumph from the first cheer.

Listening to it were the wounded among the Grays who had fallen within the breastwork to be trampled by the Browns as they had pressed forward. The doctor, but a moment ago a fiend himself with features of rage, now, in the second nature of his calling, with a look of tender sympathy, was ministering without distinction of friend or foe. One of the Grays, his cheek bearing the mark of a boot heel, raised himself, and, in defiance and the satisfaction of the thought to his bruises and humiliation, pointing his finger at Feller, Marta heard him say:

“You there, in your straw hat and blue blouse, they’ve seen you—a man fighting and not in uniform! If they catch you it will be a drumhead and a firing squad at dawn!”

“That’s so!” replied Feller gravely. “But they’ll have to make a better job of it than you fellows did if they’re going to——”

He turned away abruptly but did not move far. His shoulders relaxed into the gardener’s stoop, and he pulled his hat down over his eyes and lowered his head as if to hide his face. He was thus standing, inert, when a division staff-officer galloped into the grounds.

“Splendid! Splendid! There’s some iron crosses in this for you!” he was shouting before he brought his horse to a standstill. “The way you held on gained the day for Lanstron’s plan. They tried to flank in the valley after their second attack on your position failed We

drew them on and had them—a battalion in close order—under the guns for a couple of minutes. It was ghastly! Our losses have been heavy enough, but nothing to theirs—-and how they are driving their men in! But where is Major Dellarme?”

When he saw Dellarme’s still body he dismounted and in a tide of feeling which, for the moment, submerged all thought of the machine, stood, head bowed and cap off, looking down at Dellarme’s face.

Page 144

“I was very fond of him! He was at the school when I was teaching there. But a good death—a soldier’s death!” he said. “I’ll write to his mother myself.” Then the voice of the machine spoke. “Who is in command?”

“I am, sir!” said the callow lieutenant, coming up.

Feller’s fingers moved in a restless beat on his trousers’ seam, his lips half parted as if he must speak, but the men of the company spoke for him.

“Bert Stransky!” they roared.

It was not according to military etiquette, but military etiquette meant nothing to them now. They were above it in veteran superiority.

“And—” Stransky had started to point to Feller, whose name he did not know, when a forbidding gleam under the hat brim arrested him.

“Where’s Stransky?” demanded the staff-officer.

“You’re looking at him!” replied Stransky with a benign grin.

Seeing that Stransky was only a private, the officer frowned at the anomaly when a lieutenant was present, then smiled in a way that accorded the company parliamentary rights, which he thought that they had fully earned.

“Yes, and he gets one of those iron crosses!” put in Tom Fragini.

“What for?” demanded Stransky in surprise. They were making a lot of fuss about him when he had not done anything except to work out his individual destiny.

“Yes—the first cross for Bert of the Reds!”

“And we’ll let him make a dozen anarchist speeches a day!”

“Yes, yes!” roared the company.

“By all means—but not for this; for trying to save an old man’s life!” put in Marta.

After his survey of that amazing company the officer was the more amazed to hear a woman’s voice in such surroundings.

“The ays have it!” he announced cheerfully. He lifted his cap to Marta. With tender regard and grave reverence for that company, he took extreme care with his next remark lest a set of men of such dynamic spirit might repulse him as an invader. “The lieutenant is in command for the present, according to regulations,” he proceeded. “You

will retire immediately to positions 48 to 49 A-J by the castle road. You have done your part. To-night you sleep and to-morrow you rest."

Sleep! Rest! Where had they heard those words before? Oh, yes, in a distant day before they went to war! Sleep and rest! Better far than an iron cross for every man in the company! They could go now with something warmer in their hearts than consciousness of duty well done; but this time they need not go until their dead as well as their wounded were removed.

"You're not coming with us?" Stransky whispered to Feller.

"Eh? eh?" Feller put his hand to his ear. "Quite deaf!" he quavered. "But I judge you ask if I am coming with you. No. I have to stay to look after my garden. It has been sadly damaged, I fear."

"That's right—of course you're deaf!" agreed Stransky, well knowing the contrary. "I'll be lonely without you, pal. It was love at first sight with me!"

Page 145

“And with me!” Feller whispered. “You and I, with a brigade of infantry and guns—” he began, but remembering his part, as he often would in the middle of a sentence since the distraction of war was in his mind, he turned to go.

“A cheer for the old gardener! We don’t know who he is or was, and it’s none of our business. He saved the day!” called Stransky.

Feller started; he paused and looked back as he heard that stentorian chorus in his honor; and, irresistibly, he made a snappy officer’s salute before starting on.

“That was very sweet to me,” he was thinking, and then: “A mistake! a mistake! One thought! One duty!”

Making to pass around the corner of the house, he was confronted by Marta, who had come to the end of the veranda. There, within hearing of the soldiers, the dialogue that followed was low-toned, and it was swift and palpitant with repressed emotion.

“Mr. Feller, I saw you at the automatic. I heard what the wounded private of the Grays said to you and realized how true it was.”

“He is a prisoner. He cannot tell.”

“Does he need to? You have been seen—the conspicuous figure of a man in gardener’s garb fighting on the very terrace of his own garden! The Gray staff is bound to hear of such an extraordinary occurrence. It is one of those stories that travel of themselves. And Westerling will find that same gardener here when he comes! What hope have you for your ruse, then?”

“I—I—no matter! I forgot myself, when Lanny had warned me not to go near the guns. My promise to him! My duty! I accept what I have prepared for myself—that is a soldier’s code.”

“But I shall not let you risk your life in this fashion.”

“You—” A searching look—a look of fire—from his eyes into hers, which were bright with appeal.

“I feel that I have no right to let you go to your death by a firing squad,” she interrupted hurriedly, “and I shall not! For I decide now not to allow the telephone to remain!”

“But my chance—my one chance to—”

“You have it there—happiness in the work you like, the work for which you seem to have been born—at least, a better work than spying and deceit—the right that you have won this morning there with the gun!”

“I”—he looked around at the automatic ravenously and fearsomely—“I—”

“It is all simply arranged. There is time for me to use the telephone before the Grays arrive. I shall tell Lanny why you took charge of the gun and how you handled it, and I know he will want you to keep it.”

“And the uniform—the uniform again! Yes, the uniform—if only a gunner private’s uniform!” he exclaimed in short, pulsating breaths of ecstasy.

“Yes, count on that, too! And good-by!”

“Good-by! I—” But she had already turned away. “I’ve changed my mind! Exit gardener! Enter gunner! I’m going with you! I’m going with you!” he cried in a jubilant voice that arrested the attention of every one on the grounds. They saw him throw his arms around Stransky and then rush to the automatic. “One thought! One duty! Oh, that is easy now!” he breathed, caressing the breech with a flutter of pats from both hands.

Page 146

XXVIII

AN APPEAL TO PARTOW

“You, Marta—you are still there!” Lanstron exclaimed in alarm when he heard her voice over the tunnel telephone. “But safe!” he added in relief. “Thank God for that! It’s a mighty load off my mind. And your mother?”

“Safe, too.”

“And Minna and little Clarissa Eileen?”

“All safe.”

“Well, you’re through the worst of it. There won’t be any more fighting around the house, and certainly Westerling will be courteous. But where is Gustave?”

“Gone!”

“Gone!” he repeated dismally.

In a flash he had guessed another tragedy for poor Gustave, who must have once more failed to stick to his purpose, thus shattering the last hope that the thousandth chance would ever come to anything.

“Wait until you hear how he went,” Marta said. With all the vividness of her impressions, a partisan for the moment of him and Dellarme, she sketched Feller’s part with the automatic.

As he listened, Lanstron’s spirit was twenty again, with the fever that Feller’s “let’s set things going!” could start rollicking in his veins. What did the thousandth chance matter? Only a wool-gatherer would ever have had any faith in it. Victory for Gustave! Victory for the friend in whom he believed when others had disbelieved! Victory for those gifts that had broken a career against army routine in peace, once they had full play in war!

“I can see him,” he said. “It was a full breath of fresh air to the lungs of a suffocating man. I—”

Marta was off in interruption in the full tide of an appeal.

“You must—I promised—you must let him have the uniform again!” she begged. “You must let him keep his automatic. To take it away would be like separating mother and child; like separating Minna from Clarissa Eileen.”

“Better than an automatic—a battery of guns!” replied Lanstron. “This is where I will use any influence I have with Partow for all it is worth. Now, let the red-tapists dare to point to his past when I ask anything for him and I’ll overwhelm them with the living present! Yes, and he shall have the iron cross. It is for such deeds as his that the iron cross was meant.”

“Thank you,” she said. “It’s worth something to make a man as happy as you will make him. Yes, you are real flesh and blood to do this, Lanny.”

Her point won with surprising ease, when she had feared that military form and law could not be circumvented, she leaned against the wall in reaction. For twenty-four hours she had been without sleep. The interest of her appeal for Feller had kept up her strength after the excitement of the fight for the redoubt was over. Now there seemed nothing left to do.

“No doctor who ever examined me for promotion has yet found that I wasn’t flesh and blood,” Lanstron remarked a little plaintively.

Page 147

“Then the doctor must have kept the truth from Partow,” she told him with a faint return of the teasing spirit that he knew well. “He wants only men of steel, with nerves of copper wire run by an electric battery, on his staff, I’m sure.”

Lanstron laughed very humanly for an automaton.

“I’ll suggest the battery to him. It might prove a labor saver,” he said. “Being a little old-fashioned, he has depended on clockwork, which requires a special orderly to wind us when we fun down and nod at our desks.” Then he turned solicitous. “The Gray staff will certainly give you an escort beyond the Gray lines, where you will find a place to establish yourselves comfortably.”

The suggestion brought her energy back with the snap of a whip.

“No!” she declared. “We stay in our home. It’s ours! No one else has any right there while our taxes are paid. Doesn’t my children’s oath say: ’I’ll not let a burglar drive me out of my house’?”

“Isn’t that coming around to my view, Marta?” he asked. “Aren’t we refusing to leave the nation’s house because a burglar is trying to enter?”

“Lanny, you, with all your intellect—when you know the oath as well as I—you pettifog like that! The oath says to appeal to justice and reason even after the first blow is struck. Why doesn’t our premier appeal to the people of the Grays?”

“They garbled his last despatch, as it was, to suit their purpose.”

“Their government garbled it. I meant to appeal not to their premier but to the people, as human beings to human beings. Over there they’re human beings just as much as we are. Why didn’t Partow speak, too, as chief of staff, if he is so fond of peace? He is the one—not the Fellers and the Dellarmes and the Stranskys, who merely act up to their faith and training as pawns—he in the security of his cabinet making war. Why didn’t he say: ’We do not want war. We will not mobilize our army. We will do nothing to arouse the war passion?’”

“Their government would only have been convinced of an easier conquest, and by this time they would have been up to the main line of defence. Marta, when the diplomatic history of the war is known it will be found that the Gray government struck as a matter of cold, deliberate intention. Bodlapoo was only an excuse to carry out a plan of conquest.”

“So Partow has taught the Browns,” she answered stubbornly. “That is one partisan view. What is theirs? What is Westerling teaching the Grays?”

“Marta—really, I—”

“What a smashing argument *really* is! You see that you really are not for peace, but for war. But won’t you ask Partow to do one thing, if he still insists that he is for peace? I wonder if he will chuckle or laugh at my suggestion, or will he grin or roar? Though you know that he will do them all, ask him to send out a flag of truce to the Grays and beg them to stay their operations

Page 148

while his appeal—an appeal with a little of the Christ spirit in it, from one Christian nation to another to stop the murder—is read to the Gray soldiers and ours; to those who have to suffer and die! Oh, I'd like to help write that appeal, telling the women what I have seen! Do you think if it were given to the world that the Grays would still come on? Ask him, Lanny, ask him to make that simple human appeal, as brother to brother, to the court of all humanity! Ask him, please, Lanny!"

"I shall, Marta!" he replied seriously, in respect for her seriousness throbbing with the abandoned play of her vitality, though he knew how fruitless the request would be. He loved her the more for this outburst. He loved her for her quick sympathies with any one in trouble, whether Feller or Minna; for all of her inconsistencies which were so real to her; for her dreams, her visions, her impulses, because she tried to put them in action, and he envied Feller for having fought in defence of her house. How could he expect her to interest herself exclusively in him as one human being when all human beings interested her so profoundly? If the world were peopled with Martas and their disciples then her proposal would be practicable.

"That's fine of you, Lanny!" she said. "You've taken it like a good stoic, this loss of your thousandth chance. You really believed in it, didn't you?"

"Forgotten already, like the many other thousandth chances that have failed," he replied cheerfully. "One of the virtues of Partow's steel automatons is that, being tearless as well as passionless, they never cry over spilt milk. And now," he went on soberly, "we must be saying good-by."

"Good-by, Lanny? Why, what do you mean?" She was startled.

"Till the war is over," he said, "and longer than that, perhaps, if La Tir remains in Gray territory."

"You speak as if you thought you were going to lose!"

"Not while many of our soldiers are alive, if they continue to show the spirit that they have shown so far; not unless two men can crush one man in the automatic-gun-recoil age. But La Tir is in a tangent and already in the Grays' possession, while we act on the defensive. So I should hardly be flying over your garden again."

"But there's the telephone, Lanny, and here we are talking over it this very minute!" she expostulated.

"You must remove it," he said. "If the Grays should discover it they might form a suspicion that would put you in an unpleasant position."

The telephone had become almost a familiar institution in her thoughts. Its secret had something of the fascination for her of magic.

“Nonsense!” she exclaimed. “I am going to be very lonely. I want to learn how Feller is doing—I want to chat with you. So I decide not to let it be taken out. And, you see, I have the tactical situation, as you soldiers call it, all in my favor. The work of removal must be done at my end of the line. You’re quite helpless to enforce your wishes. And, Lanny, if I ring the bell you’ll answer, won’t you?”

Page 149

“I couldn’t help it!” he replied.

“Until then! You’ve been fine about everything to-day!”

“Until then!”

When Marta left the tower she knew only that she was weary with the mind-weariness, the body-weariness, the nerve-weariness of a spectator who has shared the emotion of every actor in a drama of death and finds the excitement that has kept her tense no longer a sustaining force.

As she went along the path, steps uncertain from sheer fatigue, her sensibilities livened again at the sight of a picture. War, personal war, in the form of the giant Stransky, was knocking at the kitchen door. His two-days-old beard was matted with dust and there were dried red spatters on his cheek. War’s furnace flames seemed to have tanned him; war seemed to be breathing from his deep chest; his big nose was war’s promontory. But the unexposed space of his forehead seemed singularly white when he took off his cap as Minna came in answer to his knock. Her yielding lips were parted, her eyes were bright with inquiry and suspicion, her chin was firmly set.

“I came to see if you would let me kiss your hand again,” said Stransky, squinting through his brows wistfully.

“Would that do you any good?” Minna asked.

“A lot—a big lot!” said Stransky. “But if it is easier for you, why, you can give me another blow in the face. I deserve it. It would show that you weren’t quite indifferent; that you took some interest in me.”

“I see your nose has been broken once. You don’t want it broken a second time. I’m stronger than you think!” Minna retorted, and held out her hand carelessly as if it pleased her to humor him.

He was rather graceful, despite his size, as he touched his lips to her fingers. Just as he raised his head a burst of cheering rose from the yard.

“So you’ve found that we have gone, you brilliant intellects!” he shouted, and glared at the wall of the house in the direction of the cheers.

“Quick! You have no time to lose!” Minna warned him.

“Quick! quick!” cried Marta.

Stransky paid no attention to the urgings. He had something more to say to Minna.

“I’m going to keep thinking of you and seeing your face—the face of a good woman—-while I fight. And when the war is over, may I come to call?” he asked.

His feet were so resolutely planted on the flags that apparently the only way to move them was to consent.

“Yes, yes!” said Minna. “Now, hurry!”

“Say, but you make me happy! Watch me poke it into the Grays for you!” he cried and bolted.

“It seems to me that he is the biggest, most ridiculous man I ever saw!” said Minna, as she watched him out of sight. “I’m tired, just tired to death, aren’t you?” she added to Marta.

“Exactly!” agreed Marta. “I feel as if I had worked my way through hell to heaven and heaven was the chance to sleep.”

Page 150

Within the kitchen Mrs. Galland was already slumbering soundly in her chair. Overhead Marta heard the exclamations of male voices and the tread of what was literally the heel of the conqueror—guests that had come without asking! Intruders that had entered without any process of law! Would they overrun the house, her mother's room, her own room?

Indignation brought fresh strength as she started up the stairs. The head of the flight gave on to a dark part of the hall. There she paused, held by the scene that a score or more of Gray soldiers, who had riotously crowded into the dining-room, were enacting.

XXIX

THROUGH THE VENEER

These men in the dining-room were members of Fracasse's company of the Grays whom Marta had seen from her window the night before rushing across the road into the garden. It is time for their story—the story of their attack on the redoubt. One of those who remained motionless on the road was the doctor's son. If he had sprained his ankle at manoeuvres, the whole company would have gossiped about the accident. If he had died in the garrison hospital from pneumonia, the barracks would have been blue for a week. If he had fallen in the charge across the white posts, the day-laborer's son on his right and the judge's son on his left would have felt a spasm of horror.

This is death, they would have thought; death that barely missed us; death that lays a man in the full tide of youth, as we are, silent and still forever.

Twelve hours after the war had begun, when the judge's son missed the doctor's son from the ranks, he remarked:

"Then they must have got him!"

"Yes, I Saw him roll over on his side," said the laborer's son.

There was no further comment. The lottery had drawn the doctor's son this time; it would get some one else with the next rush. Existence had resolved itself into a hazard; all perspective was merged into a brimstone-gray background. The men did not think of home and parents, as they had on the previous night while they waited for the war to begin, or of patriotism. Relatives were still dear and country was still dear, but the threads of these affections were no longer taut. They hung loose. Fatalism had taken the place of suspense. There is no occurrence that frequency will not make familiar, and they were already familiar with death.

A man might even get used to falling from a great height. At first, in lightning rapidity of thought, all his life would pass in review before him and all his hopes for the future

would crowd thick. But what if he were to go on descending for hours; yes, for days? Would not his sensations finally wear themselves down to a raw, quivering brain and the brain at length grow callous? Suppose, further, that a number of men had been thrown over a precipice at the same time as he and that the bottom of the

Page 151

abyss was the distance from star to star! Suppose that they fell at the same rate of speed! The first to be dashed against a shelf of rock would be a ghastly reminder to each man of his own approaching end. But, proceeding on horror's journey, he would become accustomed to such pictures. He would feel hunger and cold. Physical discomfort would overwhelm mental agony. If a biscuit shot out from the pocket of a corpse, wouldn't the living hand grab for it in brute greediness?

The thinner the veneer of civilized habit, the more easily the animal, always waiting and craving war, breaks through. And the animal was strong in Jacob Pilzer, the butcher's son. He had a bull's heart and lacked the little tendrils of sensibility whose writhing would tire him. Hugo Mallin had these tendrils by the thousand. He had so many that they gave him a reserve physical endurance like a kind of intoxication. He felt as if he had been drinking some noxious, foamy wine which made his mind singularly keen to every impression. Therefore he and Pilzer alone of Fracasse's company were not utterly fatigued.

The savagery of Pilzer's bitterness at seeing another get the bronze cross before he received one turned not on little Peterkin, the valet's son, but on Hugo. As he and Hugo moved, elbow to elbow, picking their way forward from the knoll, he eased his mind with rough sarcasm at Hugo's expense. He christened Hugo "White Liver." When Hugo stumbled over a stone he whispered:

"White Liver, that comes from the shaking knees of a coward!"

Hugo did not answer, nor did he after they had crossed the road and were under the cover of the fourth terrace wall, and Pilzer whispered:

"Still with us, little White Liver? Cowards are lucky. But your time will come. You will die of fright."

They worked their way ahead in the darkness to the third terrace and then to the second, without drawing fire. There they were told to unslip their packs "and sleep—-sleep!"

Fracasse passed the word, as if this were also an order which perforce must be obeyed. They dropped down in a row, their heads against the cold stone wall. So closely packed were their bodies that they could feel one another's breaths and heart-beats. Where last night they had thought of a multitude of things in vivid flashes, to-night nothing was vivid after the last explosion in the town and there was an end of firing. Spaces of consciousness and unconsciousness were woven together in a kind of patchwork chaos of mind. For the raw brains were not yet quite calloused; they quivered from the successive benumbing shocks of the day.

Hugo would not even cheat himself by trying to close his eyes. He lay quite still looking at the quietly twinkling, kindly stars. Unlike his comrades, he had not to go to hell in order to know what hell was like. He had foreseen the nature of war's reality, so it had not come as a surprise. Sufficient universal projection of this kind of imagination might afford sufficient martial excitement without war.

Page 152

His mind was busy in the gestation of his impressions and observations since he had crossed the frontier. Definitely he knew that he was not afraid of bullets or shell fire, and in this fact he found no credit whatever. The lion and the tiger and the little wild pigs of South America who will charge a railroad train are brave. But it took some courage to bear Pilzer's abuse in silence, he was thinking, while he was conscious that out of all that he had seen and felt in the conflict of multitudinous angles of view was coming something definite, which would result in personal action, fearless of any consequences.

The thing that held him back from a declaration of self was the pale faces around him; his comrades of the barracks and manoeuvres. He loved them; he thought, student fashion, that he understood them. He liked being their humorist; he liked to win their glances of affection. The fortitude to endure their contempt, their enmity, their ostracism would not save those dear to him in his distant provincial home from humiliation and heart-break. There was the rub: his father and mother and his sweetheart. He was an only son. His sweetheart was a goddess to his eyes. What purpose is there in the rebellion of a grain of sand on the seashore, in the insubordination of one of five million soldiers? Hadn't Westerling answered all doubts with the aphorism, "It is a mistake for a soldier to think too much"?

Thus pondering, in the company of the stars, Hugo, who had so many thoughts of his own that he led a double life, awaited the dawn. When the church spire became outlined in the rosy, breaking light of the east, he thought how much it was like the church spire of his own town. He saw that he was in what had been a beautiful, tenderly cared-for old garden before soldiery had ruthlessly trampled its flowers.

Raising his head to a level with the terrace wall—the second terrace was low—he could see the piles of sand-bags on the first terrace only twenty feet away and an old house that belonged to the garden. The location appealed to him as his glance swept over plain and mountains glistening with dew. It must be glorious to come down from the veranda at daybreak or day's end to look at the flowers at your feet and the horizon in the distance.

"Could little White Liver sleep away from home and mamma? Did he long for mamma to tuck him among the goose feathers, with a sweet biscuit in his paddy?" inquired Pilzer awakening.

Hugo looked around at Pilzer in his quizzical fashion.

"Jake, you are unnecessarily uprooting an aster with the toe of your boot," he said.

Pilzer had a torrent of abuse ready to his tongue's end when Fracasse interrupted with a hoarse, whispered warning:

“Silence, Pilzer! You talk too much.”

Now the irascible Pilzer had a further grudge against Hugo for having made him the object of a reprimand.

“You!” he whispered, when the captain’s back was turned, calling Hugo a foul name.

Page 153

This cut through even Hugo's philosophy and the blood went in a hot rush to his cheeks; but he slipped on his pack, as the others were doing, and readjusted his cartridge-box. Word was passed to make ready for another rush, and soon the men knew that yesterday was not part of the hideous nightmare which had kept their legs quivering mechanically, as in the charge, while they slept, but that the nightmare was a continuing reality and the peace of morning a dream.

Under cover of the rain of shell fire on Dellarme's position, already described, they mounted the wall of the second terrace and ran to the wall of the first terrace. They had expected to suffer terribly, but passed safely underneath a sheet of bullets that caught other sections of their regiment on the lower terraces. Over their heads were the muzzles of the Browns' rifles, blazing toward the road, while in the direction of the tower they saw the first charge of another regiment melting like snow under sprays of flame. They could not fire at Dellarme's men and Dellarme's men could not fire at them without leaning over the parapet. They could not go ahead. There was no room to their rear, for the reserves behind the third terrace had rushed up to the second terrace; those behind the fourth to the third; and still others across the road to the fourth, in successive waves.

With a welter of slaughter around them, Fracasse's men were in something of the position that little Peterkin had enjoyed in the shell crater. They ate a breakfast of biscuits, washed down by water from their canteens. Trickles of sand from bullet holes sprinkled their shoulders and they had enough resiliency of spirit to grin when a stream of sand from a bag torn by a shell burst ran down the back of Pilzer's neck. It was rather amusing to hear Jake growling as he twisted in his blouse.

Hugo caught the humor of it in another sense, for the same shell burst threw a piece of brown sleeve matted in a piece of flesh among the flowers. The next instant he saw a squad of Grays who sprang up to rush toward the linden stumps go down under the hose stream from the automatic with the precision of having been struck by an electric current. Not occupied, as he had been yesterday, with the business of keeping to his part as a physical cog in the machine, he was seeing war as a spectator—as Marta saw it, as only a privileged few ever see it. Society, he was thinking, took the trouble to bring boys through the whooping-cough and measles, pay for clothing and doctors' bills, and, while it complained about business losses and safe-guarded trees and harvests and buildings, destroyed the most valuable product of all with a spatter of bullets from a rapid-firer.

The position of him and his comrades struck him as tragically ludicrous. Were they grown men? Had they reasoning minds? Were they of the great races that had given the world steam-power, electric power, anaesthesia, and antiseptics? Had they the religion of Christ? Had they an inheritance of great ages of art, literature, music, and philosophy? Did they guard the treasures of their libraries and galleries? Would they shudder in indignation if some one sent a bullet through the Sistine Madonna, or throw a

bomb at the Venus de Milo, or struck a rare Chinese porcelain into fragments with an axe?

Page 154

Yes; oh, yes!

Here were beings created in the likeness of their Maker, whose criterion of superiority over other animals was in these symbols and not in that of tooth, claw, or talon, disembowelling their fellow creatures. Here were beings huddled together like a lot of puppies or cubs on an island in the midst of carnage which was not a visitation of the Almighty, but of their own making. And suicide and homicide were against the law in the lands of both the Browns and the Grays!

The whole business was monstrous, lunatic, inconceivable. Yet he himself was one of the actors, without the character or the courage to break free of the machine which was taking lives with the irresponsibility of a baby hammering at the jewels of a watch. The fact that he knew better made him far more culpable, he thought, than little Peterkin or any of his comrades. Yes, he was despicable; he was a coward!

All were lulled into a sense of security except Captain Fracasse, who had a set frown of apprehension which came of a professional knowledge not theirs. Little Peterkin, warmed by the autumn sunlight, began to believe in his star. If there were to be a special dispensation providing shell craters and the reverse walls of redoubts for him, he might retain his reputation for heroism.

The sand still working its way downward between Pilzer's bare skin and his undershirt irritated him to unusual restlessness of ambition for glory and bronze crosses. He was the strong man of his company, now that Eugene Aronson was dead. He must prove his importance. An inspiration made him leap to his feet. This brought his head within a foot of the top of the parapet, with an enemy's rifle barrel in easy reach. Fortunately, or unfortunately, he was the type who must precede action with a boast; a bite with a growl. Let all see that he was about to do a gallant, clever thing.

"Watch me snatch that rifle!" he announced.

"No, you don't! Get down!" snapped Fracasse. "We aren't inviting hand-grenades. It's a wonder that we have escaped so far."

"Hand-grenades!" gasped Peterkin, going white.

But nobody observed his pallor. Every one else was gasping, "Hand-grenades!" under his breath; or, if not, his thoughts were shrieking, "Hand-grenades!" There was a restless movement, a wistful look to the rear.

"Keep quiet!" whispered Fracasse. "Let us hope it isn't known that we're here."

They became as still as men of stone.

“Well, if they are going to throw grenades then they will throw them!” exclaimed Peterkin with the bravery of fear. He must do or say something worthy of a hero, he thought, in order to prove that he was not as scared as he knew he had looked and still felt.

“You have the right sort of *sang-froid*, Peter Kinderling!” whispered Fracasse. “And you, Pilzer, showed a proper spirit, too, if wrongly directed.”

Page 155

Under cover of this favor, Peterkin drew a little out of line, making a great pretence of stretching his legs and yawning—yawning with a sincerely dropped jaw and a quivering lip. He pressed his chin against the ground and this stopped the quivering. Also, he was in a position to watch the parapet closely and to make a quick spring.

Fatalism had become suspense—suspense without action to take their minds off the prospect, the suspense of death lurking in a cloud which might break in a lightning flash! They thought that they knew the full gamut of horrors; but nothing that they had yet gone through was any criterion for what they now had to endure. All understood the nature of a hand-grenade, which bursts like a Nihilist's bomb. It was as easy, they knew, to toss hand-grenades over the sand-bags into human flesh as apples into a basket. They felt themselves bound and gagged, waiting for an assassin to macerate them at his own sweet will.

The second hour was worse than the first, the third worse than the second. In lulls they heard the voices of Dellarme and his men, which seemed more ominous than the crash of rifles or the scream and crack of shells. Finally there was a lull which they knew meant the supreme attempt to storm the position from the town side. They heard the commotion that followed Dellarme's death; the sharp, rallying commands of Feller and Stransky; and then, as Peterkin saw a black object fly free of a hand over the parapet he made a catlike spring, followed by another and another, and plunged face downward at the angle where the face of the redoubt bent toward the town.

He thought that he was dead, and found, as he had in the shell crater, that he was not. After the two explosions he heard groans that chilled his blood, and looked around to see living faces like chalk, with glassy, beady, protruding eyes, and a dozen men killed and eviscerated and mangled in bleeding confusion.

But Hugo and Pilzer and those of Peterkin's immediate group were alive. They were in their places, while he was alone and out of his place. He had bolted, while they held their ground; now he would be revealed in his true light. The bronze cross would be lost before it was pinned to his breast. From where he lay, however, he could see the other face of the redoubt and a wedge of men about to mount the sand-bags. His next act was born of the inspired cunning of his fear of being exposed, which was almost as compelling as his fear of death. He waved his hand excitedly to the others to come on.

"Charge! Charge! This is the way!" shrieked Peterkin.

His voice had the terror of a man floating toward a falls and calling for a rope, but not so to Fracasse, to whom it was the voice of a great chance. Why hadn't he thought of this before? Of course, he should move around under cover of the reverse wall of the redoubt to join in the attack on the weak point! The valet's son had shown him the way.

Page 156

“Come, men, come! Follow me and Peterkin!” cried Fracasse.

Did they follow? Westerling or any expert in the psychology of war could understand how ripe was their mood. “It is the wait under right conditions that will make men fiends unleashed when the word to storm is given,” an older authority had written. Under sentence of death for six hours, they welcomed any opportunity to get at grips with those who had held death suspended over their heads.

You will use hand-grenades, will you? Snug behind sand-bags you will tear the flesh of our comrades to pieces, will you? They saw red, the red of raw fragments of flesh; the red of the gush from torn artery walls—all except Hugo and Peterkin, who might well begin to believe that there was a measure of art in heroism. Peterkin seemed to share leadership at the captain’s side, but he slipped and fell—he had weak ankles, anyway—as Fracasse’s men pressed the rear of the wedge forward with the strength of mass, only to be borne back by men, riddled with bullets, tumbling fairly into their faces.

As we have seen, there was no getting through a breach under the concentrated blasts of a hundred rifles, and Pilzer, who, by using human shoulders for steps, had reached the parapet, turned a back somersault with out his rifle. However, he seized one from a dead man’s hand before the captain had noticed the loss. Some of the company joined in the flight of the attackers from the town into the open, but Hugo and Pilzer and their friends remained under cover of the wall. They still saw red, the red of a darker anger—that of repulse.

When, finally, they burst into the redoubt after it was found that the Browns had gone, all, even the judge’s son, were the war demon’s, own. The veneer had been warped and twisted and burned off down to the raw animal flesh. Their brains had the fever itch of callouses forming. Not a sign of brown there in the yard; not a sign of any tribute after all they had endured! They had not been able to lay hands on the murderous throwers of hand-grenades. Far away now was the barrack-room geniality of the forum around Hugo; in oblivion were the ethics of an inherited civilization taught by mothers, teachers, and church.

But here was a house—a house of the Browns; a big, fine house! They would see what they had won—this was the privilege of baffled victory. What they had won was theirs! To the victor the spoils! Pell-mell they crowded into the dining-room, Hugo with the rest, feeling himself a straw on the crest of a wave, and Pilzer, most bitter, most ugly of all, his short, strong teeth and gums showing and his liver patch red, lumpy, and trembling. In crossing the threshold of privacy they committed the act that leaves the deepest wound of war’s inheritance, to go on from generation to generation in the history of families.

“A swell dining-room! I like the chandeliers!” roared Pilzer.

With his bayonet he smashed the only globe left intact by the shell fire. There was a laugh as a shower of glass fell on the floor. Even the judge's son, the son of the tribune of law, joined in. Pilzer then ripped up the leather seat of a chair. This introductory havoc whetted his appetite for other worlds of conquest, as the self-chosen leader of the increasing crowd that poured through the doorway.

Page 157

“Maybe there’s food!” he shouted. “Maybe there’s wine!”

“Food and wine!”

“Yes, wine! We’re thirsty!”

“And maybe women! I’d like to kiss a pretty maid servant!” Pilzer added, starting toward the hall.

“Stop!” cried Hugo, forcing his way in front of Pilzer.

He was like no one of the Hugos of the many parts that his comrades had seen him play. His blue eyes had become an inflexible gray. He was standing half on tiptoe, his quivering muscles in tune with the quivering pitch of his voice: a Hugo in anger! This was a tremendous joke. He was about to regain his reputation as a humorist by a brilliant display in keeping with the new order of their existence.

“We have no right in here! This is a private house!”

But the fever of their savagery—the infectious savagery of the mob—wanted no humor of this kind.

“Out of the way, you white-livered little rat!” cried Pilzer, “or I’ll prick the tummy of mamma’s darling!”

What happened then was so sudden and unexpected in Hugo that all were vague about details. They saw him in a catapultic lunge, mesmeric in its swiftness, and they saw Pilzer go down, his leg twisted under him and his head banging the floor. Hugo stood, half ashamed, half frightened, yet ready for another encounter.

Fracasse, entering at this moment, was too intent on his mission to consider the rights of a personal difference between two of his company, though he heard and noted Pilzer’s growling complaint that he had been struck an unfair blow.

“There’s work to do! Out of here, quick! We are losing valuable time!” he announced, rounding his men toward the door with commanding gestures. “We are going in pursuit!”

Marta, who had observed the latter part of the scene from the shadows of the hall, knew that she should never forget Hugo’s face as he turned on Pilzer, while his voice of protest struck a singing chord in her jangling nerves. It was the voice of civilization, of one who could think out of the orbit of a whirlpool of passionate barbarism. She could see that he was about to spring and her prayer went with his leap. She gloried in the impact that felled the great brute with the liver patch on his cheek, which was like a birthmark of war.

After the men were gone she regretted that she had not gone to Hugo and expressed her gratitude. She vaguely wondered if she should see him again and hoped that she might. The two faces, Hugo's and Pilzer's, in the instant of Hugo's protest and Pilzer's contempt, were as clear as in life before her eyes.

Then a staff-officer appeared in the doorway. When he saw a woman enter the room he frowned. He had ridden from the town, which was empty of women, a fact that he regarded as a blessing. If she had been a maid servant he would have kept on his cap. Seeing that she was not, he removed it and found himself in want of words as their eyes met after she had made a gesture to the broken glass on the floor and the lacerated table top, which said too plainly:

Page 158

“Do you admire your work?”

The fact that he was well groomed and freshly shaven did not in any wise dissipate in her feminine mind his connection with this destruction. He had never seen anything like the smile which went with the gesture. Her eyes were two continuing and challenging flames. Her chin was held high and steady, and the pallor of exhaustion, with the blackness of her hair-and eyes, made her strangely commanding. He understood that she was not waiting for him to speak, but to go.

“I did not know that there was a woman here!” he said.

“And I did not know that officers of the Grays were accustomed to enter private houses without invitations!” she replied.

“This is a little different,” he began.

She interrupted him.

“But the law of the Grays is that homes should be left undisturbed, isn’t it? At least, it is the law of civilization. I believe you profess, too, to protect property, do you not?”

“Why, yes!” he agreed. He wished that he could get a little respite from the steady fire of her eyes. It was embarrassing and as confusing as the white light of an impracticable logic.

“In that case, please place a guard around our house lest some more of your soldiers get out of control,” she went on.

“I can do that, yes,” he said. “But we are to make this a staff headquarters and must start at once to put the house in readiness.”

“General Westerling’s headquarters?” she inquired.

He parried the question with a frown. Staff-officers never give information. They receive information and transmit orders.

“I know General Westerling. You will tell him that my mother, Mrs. Galland, and our maid and myself are very tired from the entertainment he has given us, unasked, and we need sleep to-night. So you will leave us until morning and that door, sir, is the one out into the grounds.”

The staff-officer bowed and went out by that door, glad to get away from Marta’s eyes. His inspection of the premises with a view to plans for staff accommodation could wait. Westerling would not be here for two days at least.

“Whew! What energy she has!” he thought. “I never had anybody make me feel so contemptibly unlike a gentleman in my life.”

Yet Marta, returning to the hall, had to steady herself in a dizzy moment against the wall. Complete reaction had come. She craved sleep as if it were the one true, real thing in the world. She craved sleep for the clarity of mind that comes with the morning light. In the haziness of fleecy thought, as slumber drew its soft clouds around her, her last conscious visions were the pleasant ones rising free of a background of horror: of Feller’s smile when he went back to his automatic for good; of Dellarme’s smile as he was dying; of Stransky’s smile as Minna gave him hope; and of Hugo’s face as he uttered his flute-like cry of protest.

Page 159

In her ears were the haunting calmness and contained force of Lanstron's voice over the telephone. She was pleased to think that she had not lost her temper in her talk with the staff-officer. No, she had not flared once in indignation. It was as if she had absorbed some of Lanny's own self-control. Lanny would approve of her in that scene with an officer of the Grays. And she realized that a change had come over her—a change inexplicable and telling—and she was tired—oh, so tired! It had been exhausting work, indeed, for one woman, though she had been around the world, making war on two armies.

* * * * *

Meanwhile, all too flushed with energy, the energy of movement, to think of the feud between Hugo and Pilzer, Fracasse's men had sped along the castle road. Little Peterkin easily kept pace. There was no danger in pursuit. In him was the same zest of the chase which Animated his comrades. They dropped down on a ledge without much regard to order. Before them, at close range, was a company breaking out of close order in a *sauve-qui-peut* rout up a reverse slope. It was not Dellarme's company, but some other that had mistaken its direction and retired too late and by the wrong road.

You will throw hand-grenades, will you? thought Fracasse's men. You will mangle our fellows when they Can't strike back, will you? Now you'll pay! Now it is our turn! We have seen our blood flow and now yours will flow!

The lust of the red slipped the cartridge clips into the magazines and held a true aim in the mad delight of slaughter. No one minded, for no one heard—not even little Peterkin—the scattering bullets in return. They had reached the stage where the objective thought of revenge wholly submerged the subjective thought of personal danger, which is the mood of the hungry tiger in the hunt. They were the veritable finished products of veteran experience in purpose and marksmanship. Hugo, too, was firing, but far over the head of every target; firing like a man in a trance who needs some deciding incident to bring him out of it into the part he was to play.

Only occasional figures who had not escaped over the ridge were to be seen. The fewer the targets the greater the concentration. A whole company was firing on a dozen straggling figures. But one—that one in the pasture—seemed to have a charmed life. The ground around him was peppered with dust spots. He had only a few yards more to go to safety; yes his head—the exasperation of him!—was in line with the crest before he fell.

Where was there any more prey? With ferret quickness eyes swept the range of vision. Out of an orchard into the stubble of a wheat-field broke a panicky mass; a score or

more of men who had lost their officer and their heads presumably. They were the nail under the hammer, a brown blot, a target.

Page 160

“Ah!” a chorus of excited exclamations in greeting of the game flushed from cover ran along the line. Just the way you got our fellows with the hand-grenades, we will get you! This was the thought, this the prayer which they saw being fulfilled by the glad medley of their fire when Hugo Mallin sprang up and threw down his rifle as if it were something whose touch had become venomous. He threw it down with features transformed in the uplifting thought and the relief of a final resolution taken.

“I am through!” he cried. “I will not murder my fellowman who has done me no wrong! I cannot, I will not kill!”

Fracasse, who was near by, heard enough to understand the purport of the declaration, and his recollection of Hugo’s heresy and all the prejudice that he had formed against Hugo and the abhorrence of Hugo’s offence to the strict militarist brought a rush of anger to his brain as he leaped up and drawing his sword, struck at Hugo with the flat of it. He aimed for Hugo’s back, but a bullet had hit Hugo in the calf of his leg and, his knees giving under him, he received the blow on the head and fell unconscious.

When he came to it was with a twitch of pain in his ribs. He saw the glowering faces of his comrades above him and realized that Pilzer had given him a kick which expressed the general opinion.

“Once ought to be enough of that,” said the doctor, who was bandaging the leg, speaking to Pilzer.

Yet in the doctor’s eyes Hugo saw no favor, only the humanity of his occupation of mercy to criminal and king alike. But Hugo expected no favor and he was glad of what he had done as he swooned again. When he came to a second time, his head aching with throbs, it was with a sense of falling. He found that he was on a litter that had just been set down. Evidently this was by order of the colonel, who was standing over Hugo in the company of some officers. All were regarding him as if he were a species of reptile.

“World anarchist ideas, which is another word for treason or white liver,” observed the colonel. “To think that it happened in my regiment! But I’ll not try to cover it for the regiment’s good name. He will get the full measure of the law!”

“The placard is a good idea,” suggested an officer.

“Yes, put on by one of his comrades!”

“The punishment of public opinion. It shows how sound the army is at heart.”

Hugo, lowering his glance, was able to see a sheet of note-paper pinned to his blouse. It was lettered, but he could not make out the words. Then he heard the approach of a galloping horse, whose hoofs seemed to strike his head, and heard the horse stop and

an orderly saying something about Company I having got too far forward into a mess and the need of litters.

“We can spare this one,” said the colonel.

Hugo was rolled roughly onto the ground by the roadside and left alone. He managed to raise himself on his elbow and saw that the lettering of the placard was “Coward!” Officers and soldiers and hospital-corps men called attention to it as they passed. The sun was very hot and he was growing feverish. Painfully he dragged himself to the shelter of a tree, and then, looking around, saw that he was near the big house of the terraced garden.

Page 161

XXX

MARTA MEETS HUGO

The general staff-officer of the Grays, who had tasted Marta's temper on his first call, when he returned the next morning did not enter unannounced. He rang the door-bell.

"I have a message for you from General Westerling," he said to her. "The general expresses his deep regret at the unavoidable damage to your house and grounds and has directed that everything possible be done immediately in the way of repairs."

In proof of this the officer called attention to a group of service-corps men who were removing the sand-bags from the first terrace. Others were at work in the garden setting uprooted plants back into the earth.

"His Excellency says," continued the officer, "that, although the house is so admirably suited for staff purposes, we will find another if you desire."

He was too polite and too considerate in his attitude for Marta not to meet him in the same spirit.

"That is what we should naturally prefer," and Marta bowed her head in indecision.

"We should have to begin installing the telegraph and telephone service on the lower floor at once," he remarked. "In fact, all arrangements must be made before the general's arrival."

"He has been a guest here before," she said reminiscently and detachedly.

Her head dropped lower, in apparent disregard of his presence, as she took counsel with herself. She was perfectly still, without even the movement of an eyelash. Other considerations than any he might suggest, he subtly understood, held her attention. They were the criterion by which she would at length assent or dissent, and nothing could hurry the Marta of to-day, who yesterday had been a creature of feverish impulse.

It seemed a long time that he was watching that wonderful profile under the very black hair, soft with the softness of flesh, yet firmly carved. She lifted her head gradually, her eyes sweeping past the spot where Dellarme had lain dying, where Feller had manned the automatic, where Stransky had thrown Pilzer over the parapet. He saw the glance arrested and focussed on the flag of the Grays, which was floating from a staff on the outskirts of the town, and slowly, glowingly, the light rippling on its folds was reflected in her face.

“She is for us! She is a Gray!” he thought triumphantly. The woman and the flag! The matter-of-fact staff-officer felt the thrill of sentiment.

“I think we can arrange it,” Marta announced with a rare smile of assent.

“Then I’ll go back to town and set the signal-corps men to work,” he said.

“And when you come you will find the house at your disposal,” she assured him.

Except that he was raising his cap instead of saluting, he was conscious of withdrawing with the deference due to a superior.

In place of the smile, after he had gone, came a frown and a look in her eyes as if at something revolting; then the smile returned, to be succeeded by the frown, which was followed by an indeterminate shaking of the head.

Page 162

The roar of battle kept up its steady refrain in the direction of the range. Marta had heard it when she fell asleep and heard it when she awakened. A battery of heavy guns of the Grays broke their flashes from a knoll this side of the one where Dellarme's men had made their first stand. At the foot of the garden, where yesterday she had distributed flowers to the wounded Browns, a regiment of Gray infantry was marching past a train of siege-guns. All the figures moving on the landscape, which yesterday had been brown, had changed to gray. The Grays were masters of the town and all the neighborhood.

Marta stepped down from the veranda in response to the call of the open air to physical vigor renewed after sweet sleep. Rather than return directly to the kitchen, where breakfast was waiting, she would go around the house. She stopped before a Japanese maple which had been split by a shell striking in a crotch. Was there any hope of saving it? No. She turned white about the lips, with red spots on her cheeks, and at length nodded her head as if in answer to some inward question.

Over the sward, cut by shell fragments, lay torn limbs and bits of bark, and in the shade of a tree near the road she had a glimpse of the shoulder of the gray uniform of a prostrate man. The rest of him was hidden by the low-hanging branches of one of the Norway spruces which bordered the estate at this point. Another step and she saw a circular red spot on a white leg bandage; another, and a white square of paper pinned to a blouse; another, and she identified the wounded man as her hero of the scene in the dining-room.

Hugo's eyes were closed, his breaths slow, in restless sleep. His face, flushed with fever, was winningly boyish and frank. He who had had the courage to speak alone against the opinion of his fellows, to voice a belief that made every sympathetic chord in her own mind sing with praise and understanding, the courage to say that invasion was wrong even when made by his own people, had been labelled coward and left to die!

The exaltation of his features when he had been the champion of her beliefs and her impulse against the barbarism of his comrades and the charm of their resignation now, the pitifulness of his condition—all had an appeal as she bent over him that called for an expression having the touch of the sublimely feminine. She took his hand in hers and pressed it gently. He awoke and brought himself jerkily to a sitting posture. The effort made a crash in his head that sent his senses swimming. She thought that he was going to swoon and slipped her arm behind him in support and, the Marta of impulse, pressed her lips to his brow. After the first racking throb of his temples he was able to steady himself, and as she drew away she saw his blue eyes starting in wonder at her act.

"I—I had to do it to thank you for what you did in the dining-room!" she stammered.

Page 163

“Oh! Oh! It was very beautiful of you, but I couldn’t help being surprised, for it was rather unusual—from a stranger.” He smiled, and Hugo had a gift in smiles, as we know: smiles for laughter, smiles for reassurance, and smiles to cure embarrassment. “It was almost as refreshing as a drink of water,” he concluded impersonally.

“You are thirsty?”

“This—this is morning, isn’t it?” Hugo went on quizzically.

“Yes, yes!”

“Then it must be the next day,” he pursued, still quizzically. “You see, I said I would not kill any more—and I will not—and I was shot and got tagged without even being shipped as freight. I was thirsty last night, very thirsty, and some one—I think it was Jake Pilzer—some one said to go to the fountain of hell for a drink, but I—I don’t think that a very good place to get a drink, do you?”

Weak and faint as he was, he put a touch of drollery into the question which made her laugh, her eyes sparkling through a moist haze.

“You’re real, aren’t you?” he inquired in sudden perplexity. “I’m not dreaming?”

“As real as the water I shall bring you.”

Soon Marta was back, holding a glass to his lips.

“There’s no doubt about it; you are real!” said Hugo.

“I feel as if the chimney were still hot but that you had drenched the fire in the grate.”

“Who put this on you?” she asked as she unpinned the placard.

“I’ve a vague idea, from a vague overhearing of the colonel’s remarks, that it is public opinion,” he replied, and seeing, that she was about to tear it up, he arrested her action. “No, I think I’d like to save it as a souvenir—the odds are so greatly against me—as a sort of souvenir to keep up my courage.”

His tone, the way he drew the muscles of his face, ironed out her frown of disgust at public opinion with a smile. For he made his kind of courage no less light-hearted and free of pose than Dellarme had made his.

Directly the coachman, whom Marta had summoned when she went for the water, appeared with an improvised litter, and the two bore in at the kitchen door a guest for breakfast whose arrival gave Mrs. Galland a distinctly visible surprise. His uniform was gray, and in her heart of hearts she hated gray as the symbol of an enemy whom her

husband had fought. But when Marta told the story of the part he had played in defence of the chandelier, personal partisanship abetted the motherly impulse that was already breaking down prejudice. She was busy with a dozen suggestions for his comfort, quite taking matters out of Marta's hands.

"I know more about the care of the sick than you do!" she insisted. "One lump or two in your coffee, sir? There, there, you had better let me hold the cup for you. You are sure you can sit up? Then we must have a pillow."

"I'll fetch one from the other room," put in Minna.

"Two will be better!" Marta called after her.

Page 164

“It is delightful to have breakfast in your kitchen, madame,” said Hugo to Mrs. Galland in a way that ought to have justified her in thinking herself the most charming and useful person in the world.

XXXI

UNTO CAESAR

It was more irritating than ever for Mrs. Galland to keep pace with her daughter’s inconsistencies. There was a Marta listening in partisan sympathy to Hugo’s story of why he had refused to fight and telling the story of her school in return. There was a Marta seizing Hugo’s hand in a quick, impulsive grasp as she exclaimed: “Your act personified what I taught my children!” There was a Marta planning how he should be secreted in the coachman’s quarters over the stable, where he would be reasonably free from discovery until his strength was regained. Then here was another Marta, after Hugo had been carried away on the litter, saying coolly to her mother:

“‘Unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s!’ We have our property, our home to protect. Perhaps the Grays have come to stay for good, so graciousness is our only weapon. We cannot fight a whole army single-handed.”

“You have found that out, Marta?” said Mrs. Galland.

“We have four rooms in the baron’s tower and a kitchen stove,” Marta proceeded. “With Minna we can make ourselves very comfortable and leave the house to the staff.”

“The Gallands in their gardener’s quarters! The staff of the Grays in ours! Your father will turn in his grave!” Mrs. Galland exclaimed.

“But, mother, it is not quite agreeable to think of three women living in the same house with a score of strange men!” Marta persisted.

“I had not thought of that, Marta. Of course, it would be abominable!” agreed Mrs. Galland, promptly capitulating where a point of propriety was involved.

When Marta informed the officer—the same one who had rung the door-bell on his second visit—of the family’s decision he appeared shocked at the idea of eviction that was implied. But, secretly pleased at the turn of events, he hastened to apologize for war’s brutal necessities, and Marta’s complaisance led him to consider himself something of a diplomatist. Yes, more than ever he was convinced of the wisdom of an invader ringing door-bells.

Meanwhile, the service-corps men had continued their work until now there was no vestige of war in the grounds that labor could obliterate; and masons had come to repair the walls of the house itself and plasterers to renew the broken ceilings.

All this Marta regarded in a kind of charmed wonder that an invader could be so considerate. Her manner with the officers in charge of preparations had the simplicity and ease which a woman of twenty-seven, who is not old-maidish because she is not afraid of a single future, may employ as a serene hostess. She frequently asked if there were good news.

Page 165

“Yes,” was the uniform reply. An unexpected setback here or resistance there, but progress, nevertheless. But she learned, too, that the first two days’ fighting along the frontier had cost the Grays fifty thousand casualties.

“In order to make an omelet you must break eggs!” she remarked.

“Spoken like a true soldier—like a member of the staff!” was the reply.

In her constraint and detachment they realized her conscious appreciation of the fact that in earlier times her people had been for the Browns; but in her flashes of interest in the progress of the war, flashes from a woman’s unmilitary mind, they judged that her heart was with the Grays. And why not? Was it not natural that a woman with more than her share of intellectual perception should be on the right side? From her associations it was not to be expected that she would make an outright declaration of apostasy. This would destroy the value and the attractiveness of her conversion Reverence for the past, for a father who had fought for the Browns, against her own convictions, made her attitude appear singularly and delicately correct.

Though everything was ready for them, the staff delayed coming owing to the stubbornness of some heavy guns of the Browns, which, while they had directed no shells against the house, had shown that they had the range by unexpectedly playing havoc with infantry in close order on the pass road at the foot of the garden and with transportation on the castle road. But at last the battery was silenced and the mind of the army might establish itself in its offices on the ground floor and its quarters on the second floor without being in danger.

The war was a week old—a week which had developed other tangents and traps than La Tir—on the morning that the first instalment of junior officers came to occupy the tables and desks. Where the family portraits had hung in the dining-room were now big maps dotted with brown and gray flags. Portable field cabinets with sectional maps on a large scale were arranged around the walls of the drawing-room. In what had been the lounging room of the old days of Galland prosperity, the refrain of half a dozen telegraph instruments made medley with the clicking of typewriters. Cooks and helpers were busy in the kitchen; for the staff were to live like gentlemen; they were to have their morning baths, their comfortable beds, and regular meals. No twinge of indigestion or of rheumatism from exposure was to interfere with the working of their precious intellectual processes. No detail of assistance would be lacking to save any bureaucratic head time and labor The bedrooms were apportioned according to rank—-that of the master awaited the master; the best servant’s bedroom awaited Francois, his valet.

Page 166

When Bouchard, the chief of intelligence, who fought the battle of wits and spies against Lanstron, came, two hours before Westerling was due, the last of the staff except Westerling and his personal aide had arrived Bouchard, with his iron-gray hair, bushy eyebrows, strong, aquiline nose, and hawk-like eyes, his mouth hidden by a bristly mustache, was lean and saturnine, and he was loyal. No jealous thought entered his mind at having to serve a man younger than himself. He did not serve a personality; he served a chief of staff and a profession. The score of words which escaped him as he looked over the arrangements were all of directing criticism and bitten off sharply, as if he regretted that he had to waste breath in communicating even a thought.

“I tell nothing, but you tell me everything!” said Bouchard’s hawk eyes. He was old-fashioned; he looked his part, which was one of the many points of difference between him and Lanstron as a chief of intelligence.

After he had gone through the house he went for a flyspecking tour of the grounds, where he came upon a private of the Grays on crutches. With rest and good food the tiny hole in Hugo’s leg from the merciful small-calibre bullet had healed rapidly. Confinement was irksome on a sunny day. He had grown strong enough in spirit to face his fate, whatever it might be, and in the absence of the watchful coachman he had risked the delight of a convalescent’s adventure in the open, clad in his uniform, the only clothes he had. Bouchard saw instantly that this private did not wear the insignia of staff service.

“What are you doing here?” he asked.

“Getting well of a wound,” answered Hugo, looking frankly into the hawk eyes.

“Evidently!” said Bouchard, who was always irritated when told what he could see for himself. “Why aren’t you at a hospital?”

“I was not wanted there!” said Hugo.

“What! what!” But Bouchard had wasted two words. “Your name and regiment?” he asked.

“Hugo Mallin, of the 128th,” replied Hugo.

“Uh-h!” Bouchard’s pigeonhole memory had retained the name. “Charge—mutiny under fire; anarchism!” he went on, chopping out the words as if they were chips from a piece of granite. “Well, you have not escaped trial by hiding.”

“I did not flatter myself that with one leg against a whole army I had much chance, sir!” Hugo replied respectfully.

“Uh-h!” The hawk eyes flashed their disapproval of such controversial freedom of language from a private. Had he had his way he would have hanged Hugo to the nearest tree; for Bouchard had truly a mediaeval soul.

But Hugo’s case was so extraordinary that it had reached Westerling’s ears, and Bouchard knew that Westerling wished to see Hugo when he was apprehended. It was not for Bouchard to consider this desire of a chief of staff to deal with the case of a private in person as singular. No request of the chief of staff was singular to him. It became a matter of natural law. He called to one of the staff guards who was pacing back and forth near by.

Page 167

“Take this man in charge and watch him sharply until General Westerling sends for him!”

“And you will get justice from General Westerling!” It was Marta’s voice. In approaching she had unavoidably overheard part of the conversation. “Justice is his first characteristic!” she added as the hawk eyes turned their scrutiny into hers, which were calm and smiling.

Hugo had not seen Marta since he had been carried to the coachman’s quarters. Minna had visited him frequently, bearing inquiries from her mistress as well as custards. He had looked forward to a talk with Marta as a kindred spirit, yet it was difficult for him to reconcile the woman speaking now with the woman who had kissed him on the forehead. But he said nothing as he was marched away.

“Miss Galland!” exclaimed Bouchard in a way that said he knew her story. “Yes, that little monkey can depend on more justice than he deserves. The unanswerable evidence is on the chief of staff’s desk awaiting his arrival.”

Bouchard’s hawk eyes probed hers for an instant longer and seemed to find nothing to call further curiosity; then he lifted his cap and proceeded with his tour of inspection.

Marta smiled thoughtfully as she watched his receding figure, while her eyelashes narrowed and she inclined her head with a nod before she moved away in the direction of the tower. There was almost complete silence along the front. Since yesterday’s action, which had checked the guns commanding the range of the house, there had been little firing. She guessed that the lull was only a recess of preparation for the grand attack on the first line of permanent defence, and that probably this would follow Westerling’s arrival. He was due at four o’clock and he would be characteristically prompt to the minute.

“It must not be! Hugo Mallin is too fine a spirit to be sacrificed. I’ll go on my knees, if need be, to Westerling,” Marta was thinking as she paced back and forth in her room. On her knees to him! She stopped short, struck in revolt with a memory of the way he had looked at her once as she sat across the tea-table from him in the hotel reception-room. “No, I could not endure that except as a last resort. If ever there were a time to use all my wits it is now—to save Hugo Mallin, the one soldier who acted out the principles which I taught my children!”

XXXII

TEA ON THE VERANDA AGAIN

As it lacked one minute to four when Hedworth Westerling, chief of staff in name as well as power now, alighted from the gray automobile that turned in at the Galland drive, the chauffeur thought well enough of himself to forget the crush of supplies and ambulances

that had delayed His Excellency's car for at least ninety seconds in the main street of the town. Though His Excellency had not occupied his new headquarters as soon as he expected, this could have no influence on results. If he had lost fifty thousand men on the first two days and two hundred thousand since the war had begun, should he allow this to disturb his well-being of body or mind? His well-being of body and mind meant the ultimate saving of lives.

Page 168

The Grays were winning; this alone counted in the present. They would continue to win; this alone counted in the future. They had won by crowding in reserves till the positions attacked yielded to superior strength. Thus they would continue to win until the last positions had yielded.

Five million mothers' sons against three million mothers' sons! Five to three pounds of flesh! Five to three ounces of blood! With equal skill, superior strength must always tell. Westerling and his staff were responsible for the skill. If their minds would work better for it, the nation could well afford to feed them on nightingales' tongues.

Confidence is the handmaiden of skill. Confidence is the edge on the sword; confidence brings the final charge that wins the redoubt. Confidence was reflected in Westerling's bearing and in his smile of command as he passed through the staff rooms, Turcas and Bouchard in his train, with tacit approval of the arrangements. Finally, Turcas, now vice-chief of staff, and the other chiefs awaited his pleasure in the library, which was to be his sanctum. On the massive seventeenth-century desk lay a number of reports and suggestions. Westerling ran through them with accustomed swiftness of sifting and then turned to his personal aide.

"Tell Francois that I will have tea on the veranda."

From the fact that he took with him the papers that he had laid aside, subordinate generals, with the gift of unspoken directions which is a part of their profession, understood that he meant to go over the subjects requiring special attention while he had tea.

"Everything is going well—well!" he added in a way that said that everything must be if he said so and that he knew how to make everything go well. "And we shall be up pretty late to-night. Any one who feels the need had better take a nap"—the implication being that he did not.

"Well!" ran the unspoken communication of confidence through the staff. So well that His Excellency was calmly taking tea on the veranda! For the indefatigable Turcas the detail; for Westerling the front of Jove.

"Well!" The thrill of the word was with him in a flight of sentiment as he stood on that veranda where a certain prophecy had been made to a young colonel. Sight of the rippling folds of the flag of his country on the outskirts of the town prolonged the thrill. His eyes swept the pale horizon of the distances of plain and Mountain and lowered to the garden. Above the second terrace he saw a crown of woman's hair—hair of a jet abundance, radiant in the sunlight and shading a face that brought familiar completeness to the scene.

He had told Marta only two weeks ago that he should see her again if war came; and war had come. With the inviting prospect of a few holiday moments in which to continue the interview that had been abruptly concluded in a hotel reception-room, he started down the terrace steps. Their glances met where the second terrace path ended at the second terrace flight; hers shot with a beam of restrained and questioning good humor that spoke at least a truce to the invader.

Page 169

“You called sooner than I expected,” she said in a note of equivocal pleasantry.

“Or I,” he rejoined with a shade of triumph, the politest of triumph. He was a step above her, her head on a level with the pocket of his blouse. His square shoulders, commanding height, and military erectness were thus emphasized, as was her own feminine slightness.

“I want to thank you,” she said. “As becomes a soldier, your forethought was expressed in action. It was the promptness of the men you sent to look after the garden which saved the uprooted plants before they were past recovery.”

“I wished it for your sake and somewhat for my own sake to be the same that it was in the days when I used to call,” he said graciously. “Tea was from four to five, do you remember? Will you join me? I have just ordered it.”

A generous, pleasant conqueror, this! No one knew better than Westerling how to be one when he chose. He was something of an actor. Leaders of men of his type usually are.

“Why, yes. Very gladly!” she assented with no undue cordiality and no undue constraint, quite as if there were no war.

“It was the Browns who cut the lindens?” he suggested significantly.

“They said that it was necessary as part of the defence,” she replied. “We shall plant new ones and have the pleasure of watching them grow.”

Neutrality could not be better impersonated he thought, than in the even cleaving of her lips over the words. They seemed to say that a storm had come and gone and a new set of masters had taken the place of the old. As they approached the veranda Francois was placing the tea things.

“Quite the same! That was your chair, as I remember,” said Westerling after indicating to Francois that he might go, “and this was mine.”

But the teapot was not Mrs. Galland’s—it belonged to the staff.

“This is different,” observed Marta, touching her finger-tip to the coat of arms of the Grays on the side of a cup.

“Yes, my own field kit,” he answered, thinking that the novelty of tea from a soldier’s service had appealed to her; for she was smiling.

“So, you being the host and I the guest now, why, you pour!” she said. There was a touch of brittleness in her tone—of half-teasing, half-serious brittleness.

“Oh, no, no!” he protested laughingly, and found her glance flashing through her brows holding him fast in an indefinable challenge.

“I shall pour when you do us the honor to come to tea at the gardener’s quarters in the tower,” she said.

“No, no!” he objected. “The tea conditions are the same as before.”

He was earnest for his point. It would please his masculine fancy to watch those firm, small fingers pausing over the cup before the plunge of a lump of sugar stirred the miniature ocean in waves; to watch the firm little hand in its grip of the handle of the pot.

Page 170

“Conditions the same as before?” She laughed softly. “How can they be in my thoughts or yours?” she asked with a sudden show of seriousness.

“We did turn you out of house and home—I understand!” he exclaimed apologetically. “And that is the symbol of it to you!” He indicated the coat of arms.

“The symbol of the conqueror, isn’t it?” he asked playfully, for in the company of women it pleased him to be playful.

“Conqueror? It’s a big word!” she mused. “I hadn’t thought of it in connection with pouring tea”—which might be another way of saying that she had just been thinking of it very hard and might be trying to find whether it had a pleasant or an unpleasant side. Clearly, here was a Marta different from any yet precipitated by the alchemy of war.

The resourceful variety of her! Oh, it was like the old days! It made him feel young, as young as when he had been a colonel commanding the garrison on the other side of the white posts. She had intelligence, yet was at the same time distinctly feminine, with the gift of as much talk about who should pour tea as about how to storm a redoubt. She did not carry her mental wares on her sleeve. She flashed them in a way that prompted curiosity as to the next exhibit. He had sought primarily, selfishly, to be entertained at tea, and he was being entertained. To want to win was his nature. He understood, too, that she wanted to win. He liked that quality in her the more because it heightened the valve of victory for him.

“Then, if you don’t think of it in connection with pouring tea, let me tell you what I think of when I sit on this veranda. I think of you as hostess. You refuse to play the part!” he exclaimed with that persistence, softened a little, perhaps, yet suggestive of the quality characterized by the firm jaw and still eyes, which won his point at staff councils. Again he was conscious of one of her sweeping glances of appraisal, with just a glint of admiration and even approval tucked away in the recesses of her smile.

“Suppose we compromise,” she suggested thoughtfully, with the gravity of one making a great concession. “Suppose you do the heavy work, and pour, and I drop the sugar in the cups.”

But Westerling always used a half concession as a lever to gain a full concession.

“I’d really better do it all—act out the host and the conqueror!” he declared. “One can’t compromise principles.”

“Oh! Why?” She was distinctly interested, leaning nearer to him and playing a tattoo with one set of fingers on the back of the other hand.

“Anything except your doing all the honors leaves me in the same invidious position,” he answered. “It compounds my felony. It shows that you do think that we failed by our

conduct to show respect for your property. It leaves me feeling that you think that I do not regard this as your veranda, your garden, your home, sacred by more than the laws of war—by an old friendship!”

Page 171

He made his appeal finely, as he well knew how to do. A certain magnetic eloquence that went well with his handsome face and sturdy bearing had been his most successful asset in making him chief of staff.

The tattoo of her fingers died down while she listened to his final, serious reasons about a subject that became peculiarly significant; and her brows lifted, her eyes opened in the surprise of one who gets a sudden new angle of light.

“You put it very well. In that case—” she said, and his glance and hers dropped, his to the capable hand on the handle of the teapot, hers into the cup. “With the honors of war and officers permitted to retain their side-arms?” she asked.

“Yes; oh, yes!” he answered happily.

She smiled her acknowledgment with just that self-respect of capitulation which flatters the victor with the thought that he has overcome no mean opponent—the highest form of compliment known to the guild of courtiers.

He was susceptible to it and, in turn, to the curiosity about her that had remained unsatisfied at the end of their talk in the hotel. Her own veranda was the natural, familiar place to judge the work of time in those character-forming years from seventeen to twenty-seven. She was not like what she had been in the artificial surroundings of a fortnight ago. She filled the eye and the mind now in the well-knit suppleness of figure and the finished maturity of features which bore the mark of inner growth of knowledge of life. She was not a species of intellectual exotic, as he had feared, too baffling to allow the male intellect to feel comfortable, but very much, as he noted discriminatingly, a woman in all the physical freshness of a woman in her prime.

“Just like the old days, isn’t it?” he exclaimed with his first sip, convinced that the officers’ commissary supplied excellent tea in the field.

“Yes, for the moment—if we forget the war!” she replied, and looked away, preoccupied, toward the landscape.

If we forget the war! She bore on the words rather grimly. The change that he had noted between the Marta of the hotel reception-room and the Marta of the moment was not altogether the work of ten years. It had developed since she was in the capital. In these three weeks war had been brought to her door. She had been under heavy fire. Yet this subject of the war was the one which he, as an invader, considered himself bound to avoid.

“We do forget it at tea, don’t we?” he asked.

“At least we need not speak of it!” she replied.

Safely, then, at first, their conversation ran not on the present but on an intimate past, free of any possible bumpers. The train of memories once started, she herself gave it speed if it stopped at a way station; cargo if it went empty. Prone to avoid recollections that made him feel old—to feel old was to be out of date in his profession—–he found these livening with the youth of thirty-two

Page 172

and gratifying as youth's dreams become reality. Feeling as young as a colonel, he had the consciousness of being chief of staff. This was enough to make any soldier enjoy the place and the company and to drink his tea slowly so as to prolong the recess from duty. His second cup growing cold, he was reminded of the value of time, and with a playfully reproachful look at Marta he put a warning finger of conscience on the papers that lay beside the bread plate.

"There's work—always work for a chief!" he declared. "I—"

Marta was quick to act on the hint. Her hands flew to the arms of her chair as she spoke.

"There's always the garden for me! But first—" Yes, first there was poor Hugo.

Westerling flushed guiltily that she should have taken his words as a hint, which was only half of his emotion. The other half shot out his hand in a restraining, companionable touch on her forearm, while his eyes—his calculating gray eyes—glinted a youthful entreaty.

"Please! I didn't finish my sentence!" he begged. "You remember that often I used to wait after tea until the sunset—"

"And reached your quarters late for dinner, I also remember!" she put in. But she remained in the same position, his finger-tips on her arm, her hands holding her body free of the chair. "That is, when you did not stay to dinner!" she added.

"I am staying to-night. I was going to ask if you wouldn't remain on the veranda while I go over these papers. It—it would be very cosey and pleasant."

One of these papers, she knew, must be the evidence against Hugo Mallin. She preferred not to make a direct appeal but to have Westerling bring up the subject himself. His smile and the look with which he regarded her spoke his appreciation of the picture she made and his fear of losing it. Very cosey and pleasant, yes, the company of a prophetess, with a ray of sunlight making her hair an aurora of flashing bronze overtopping a brown face, the eyes holding answers to an increasing number of unasked questions about the new forces that he had found in her.

"Why, yes," she agreed with evident pleasure, for she was thinking of Hugo.

Turcas now came, in answer to Westerling's ring. The orders and suggestions on the table seemed to be the product of this lath of a man, the vice-chief, but a lath of steel, not wood, who appeared a runner trained for a race of intellects in the scratch class. One by one, almost perfunctorily, Westerling gave his assent as he passed the papers

to Turcas; while Turcas's dry voice, coming from between a narrow opening of the thin lips, gave his reasons with a rapid-firer's precision in answer to his chief's inquiries.

Page 173

With each order somewhere along that frontier some unit of a great organism would respond. The reserves from this position would be transferred to that; such a position would be felt out before dark by a reconnaissance in force, however costly; the rapid-firers of the 19th Division would be transferred to the 20th; despite the 37th Brigade's losses, it would still form the advance; General So-and-So would be superseded after his failure of yesterday; Colonel So-and-So would take his place as acting major-general; more care must be exercised in recommendations for bronze crosses, lest their value so depreciate that officers and men would lack incentive to win them.

Marta was having a look behind the scenes at the fountainhead of great events. Power! power! The absolute power of the soldier in the saddle, with premier and government and all the institutions of peace only a dim background for the processes of war! Opposite her was a man who could make and unmake not only generals but even the destinies of peoples. By every sign he enjoyed his power for its own sake. There must be a chief of the five millions, which were as a moving forest of destruction, and here was the chief, his strength reflected in the strong muscles of his short neck as he turned his head to listen to Turcas. Marta recalled the contrast between Westerling and Lanstron as they faced each other after the wreck of the aeroplane ten years ago: the iron invincibility of the elder's sturdy, mature figure and the alert, high-strung invincibility of the slighter figure of the younger man.

"The evidence you asked for in that Mallin mutiny case," said Turcas, indicating the only remaining paper.

"Yes, I want to go into that—it's a question of policy," said Westerling.

He had taken up the paper thoughtfully after Turcas withdrew, when he looked up to Marta in answer to a movement in her chair. She had bent forward in a pose that freed her figure from the chair-back in an outline of suppleness and firmness; her lips were parted, showing a faint line of the white of her teeth, and he caught her gazing at him in a kind of wondering admiration. But she dropped her eyelids instantly and said deliberately, less to him than to herself:

"You have the gift!"

No tea-table flattery that, he knew; only the reflection of a fact whose existence had been borne in on her by observation.

"The gift? How?" he inquired, speaking to the fringe of hair that half hid her lowered face.

She looked up, smiling brightly.

“You don’t know what gift! Not the pianist’s! Not the poet’s!” (Oh, to save Hugo! The method she had chosen to save him, alien to all her impulses, born of the war’s stress on her mind, seemed the wise one in view of her knowledge of the man before her) “Why, of course, the supreme gift of command! The thing that made you chief of staff! And the war goes well for you, doesn’t it?”

Page 174

Delicious morsel, this, to a connoisseur in compliments! He tasted it with the same self-satisfied smile that he had her first prophecy. To her who had then voiced a secret he had shared with no one, as his chest swelled with a full breath, he bared another in the delight of the impression he had made on her.

“Yes, as you foresaw—as I planned!” he said. “Yes, I planned all, step by step, till I was chief of staff and ready. I convinced the premier that it was time to strike and I chose the hour to strike; for Bodlapoo was only a convenient excuse for the last of all the steps”

The subjective enjoyment of the declaration kept him from any keen notice of the effect of his words. Lanny was right. It had been a war of deliberate conquest; a war to gratify personal ambition. All her life Marta would be able to live over again the feelings of this moment. It was as if she were frozen, all except brain and nerves, which were on fire, while the rigidity of ice kept her from springing from her chair in contempt and horror. She would always wonder how the bonds of her purpose to save Hugo held her tongue But still another purpose came on the wings of diabolical temptation which would pit the art of woman against the power of a man who set millions against millions in slaughter to gratify personal ambition. She was thankful that she was looking down as she spoke, for she could not bring herself to another compliment. Her throat was too chilled for that yet.

“The one way to end the feud between the two nations was a war that would mean permanent peace,” he explained, seeing how quiet she was and realizing, with a recollection of her children’s oath, that he had gone a little too far. He wanted to retain her admiration. It had become as precious to him as a new delicacy to Lucullus.

“Yes, I understand,” she managed to murmur; then she was able to look up. “It’s all so immense!” she added. “And you have yet another paper there?” she said with a little gesture that might have been taken as the expression of a hope that she was not overstaying her welcome.

“This is very interesting,” he said, watching her narrowly now, “the case of a private, one Hugo Mallin, who refused to fight because he was against war on principle. Four charges: assault on a fellow soldier, cowardice, treason, and insubordination under fire.”

“Enough, I should say!” said Marta in a low tone.

“A question of which one to press—of an example,” continued Westerling, reading the full official statement for the first time.

“What is the punishment?” she asked.

“Why, of course, death!” he replied, somewhat absently, in preoccupation. “Extraordinary! And they have located him, it seems He is here at headquarters!”

“Yes; certainly,” Marta said. “We found him under a tree, deserted and wounded, labelled coward, and we cared for him.”

“Indeed!” exclaimed Westerling. “He must have appealed strongly to your sympathies.”

Page 175

There was no sharpness in the words, but he had lapsed from the personal to the official manner.

“To my sense of humanity!” Her reply was made in much the same tone as his remark, where he had expected emotion, even passion. More than ever was he certain that she had undergone some revealing experience since he had seen her in the capital. “Yes, to any one’s sense of humanity—a wounded, thirsty man in a fever!” There came, with a swift and mellowing charm, the look of a fervent and exalted tenderness and the pulse-arresting quiver of intensity that had swept over her at her first sight of Hugo under the tree. “I know that he was not a coward in one sense,” she added, “for I saw him make the assault named in the first charge.”

She proceeded with the story of what she had witnessed in the dining-room. There was no appeal on Hugo’s account. Appraising the qualities of the Marta of the moment in contrast with the Marta of seventeen and the Marta of three weeks ago, Westerling was significantly conscious of her attitude of impartiality, free of any attempt at feminine influence, and of her evident desire to help him with the facts that she knew.

“The charge of assault is only incidental,” said Westerling. “But Mallin was in the right about his comrades entering the house; right about the destruction of property. It is our business to protect property, not only as a principle but as a matter of policy. We do not desire to make the population of the country we occupy unnecessarily hostile.”

“I judged that from your kindness in repairing the damage done to ours,” she assured him, and added happily: “Though I don’t suppose that you go so far in most cases as to set uprooted plants back in their beds.”

“No; that is a refinement, perhaps,” he answered, laughing. She was not only more agreeable but also more sane than at the hotel. He liked the idea of continuing to despatch his work while retaining her company. “I must have a talk with Mallin,” he said. “I must settle his case so that if similar cases arise subordinates will know what to do without consulting me. Would you mind if I sent for him?” He reached for the bell to call an orderly.

“Yes, I should like to hear what he says to you and what you say to him,” she confessed with unfeigned interest, which brought a suggestion that he was to be put on trial before her at the same time as Mallin was on trial before Westerling. His fingers paused on the bell head without pressure. “I told him that you were a just man,” she remarked, “that any one would be certain of justice from you.”

He rang the bell; and after he had sent for Mallin, warming under the compliment of her last remark, he dared a reconnaissance along the line of inquiry which he had wanted to undertake from the first.

“Mallin’s ideas about war seem to be a great deal like your own,” he hinted casually.

“As I expressed them at the hotel, you mean!” she exclaimed. “That seems ages ago —ages!” The perplexity and indecision that, in a space of silence, brooded in the depths of her eyes came to the surface in wavering lights. “Yes, ages! ages!” The wavering lights grew dim with a kind of horror and she looked away fixedly at a given point.

Page 176

He was conscious of a thrill; the thrill that always presaged victory for him. He realized her evident distress; he guessed that terrible pictures were moving before her vision, and he changed the subject.

“I know how revolting it must have been to have seen those soldiers wantonly smashing your chandelier and gloating over their mischief,” he said. “Really, the Captain was to blame for letting his men get out of hand. He seems not to have been a competent man. We can train and train an officer, but when war comes—well, no amount of training will supply a certain quality that must be inborn—the quality of command.”

“Such as Dellarme had!” she exclaimed absently, under her breath.

She had forgotten her part and Westerling’s presence. The given point of her gaze was exactly where Dellarme lay when he died. She was unconsciously smiling in the way that he had smiled. But to Westerling it seemed that she was smiling at space. He was puzzled; his perception piqued.

“Who was Dellarme?” he was bound to ask.

“The officer in command of the company of infantry posted behind the sand-bags in the yard—he was killed!” she answered, turning her face toward Westerling without the smile, singularly expressionless.

“Yes, he must have had the quality from the defence he made,” agreed Westerling, in the hearty tribute of a taxable soldier to a capable soldier. So very well had that one small position been held that every detail was graven on the mind of a chief of staff who was supposed to leave details to his brigade commanders. It was he himself who had ordered the final charge after the brigade commander had advised delaying another attack until the redoubt could be hammered to pieces by heavy guns brought up from the rear. “But he had to go!” Westerling exclaimed doggedly; for he could not resist this tribute, in turn, to his own success in making an example for timid brigade commanders in the future by driving in more reserves until the enemy yielded.

“Yes!” she agreed without any change in the set face and moody eyes.

“You saw something of the defence?”

“Yes!” Marta replied in a way that aroused his imagination.

This, he recalled, had always been her gift. The slow-drawn monosyllable was pregnant with revelations which his knowing mind could readily supply. She had been in the midst of the fury of the most tenacious fighting within a small space that the war had yet to chronicle. She had been an intimate of the splendid desperation of the Browns; known their thoughts and feelings. What a multitude of impressions were stored in her sensitive mind, impressions which, for the moment, seemed to benumb

her! How she could make them speak from her eyes and quiver from her very finger-tips when she chose! He would yet hear her vivid account of all that she had seen. It would be informatory—a reflection of the spirit of the Browns. Her quietness itself was compelling in its latent strength, and strength was the thing he most admired. More and more questions winged themselves into his thoughts, while his next one served the purpose of passing the time until Hugo came.

Page 177

“There was a man out of uniform, in a gardener’s garb, in charge of the automatic,” he remarked. “It was so puzzling that I heard of it. You see, there is no limit to what a chief of staff may know.”

“Yes, our gardener,” she replied.

“Your gardener! Why, how was that? Wasn’t he in the reserves if he were a Brown? Wasn’t he called to the colors at the outbreak of the war?”

In spite of himself the questions were somewhat sharp. They seemed to take Marta by surprise, which, however, was evanescent.

“I wonder!” she said, as interested as Westerling in the suggestion. “Something a soldier would think of immediately and a woman wouldn’t. I know that we lost our gardener.”

That was all. She did not attempt any further explanation or enlarge on the subject, but let it go as an inquiry unexplained in the course of conversation.

Had Westerling been inclined to pursue it further he would have been interrupted by the arrival of a figure with a bandaged leg and head which came hobbling cheerfully around the corner of the house on crutches, escorted by an infantryman. The guard saluted and withdrew into the background. Hugo saluted and removed his cap and looked at Westerling with the faintest turn of a smile on his lips, which plainly spoke his quizzical appreciation of the fact that he was in the presence of dazzling heights for a private.

Marta had a single glance from him—a glance of peculiar inquiry and astonishment, sweeping over the tea things fairly into her eyes. Then it was gone. He might have been the most dutiful and respectful soldier of the five millions as he waited on the head of the five millions to speak.

Westerling read the four charges. Then he asked the stereotyped question:

“What have you to say to them?”

When he looked up from the paper he saw a face that was a mask, a gentle, pleasant mask, and blue eyes looking quite steadily into his own with a sort of well-established and dreamy fatalism.

“Nothing, sir,” said Hugo respectfully.

Westerling frowned. Though a confession of guilt simplified everything, perhaps he frowned to find no embarrassment in his presence in the private; perhaps he apprehended impertinence in the soft blue eyes.

“You know what that means—the charges sustained?”

“Yes, sir!”

“And you have nothing to say?” Westerling’s frown deepened. There was an undercurrent of urgency in his tone. This mild culprit, waiting for the wheels of justice to roll over him without a protest, gave him no light as to a policy that should apply to other cases. He resented, too, any suggestion of readiness for martyrdom No man of power who is anything of a politician and not a fool likes to make martyrs. “Nothing?” he repeated. “Nothing at all in your own behalf?”

A faint expression appeared on the mask. So insistently could Hugo’s mask hold attention that Westerling noted even a slight, thoughtful drawing down of the brow and one corner of the mouth. He could not conceive that the laws of gravity could be upset or that a private would undertake to have fun at the expense of a chief of staff.

Page 178

“Nothing, sir, unless I should make a long speech,” he said. “Do you want me to do that, sir?”

Westerling held his irritation in control and looked around at Marta. He saw only wonder in her eyes as she intently regarded Hugo, which was his own feeling, he suddenly realized.

“I have hardly time to listen to long speeches,” he remarked.

“I thought not, sir,” replied Hugo, unmoved. “That is why I said I had nothing to say. And in want of a long speech the best that I could do to explain would be to ask you to read certain books.”

An explosion of his breath in astonishment saved Westerling from harsh expletives. For one thing, he was piqued. Though he would not admit it even to himself, he had, perhaps, fancied the idea of playing the gentle and patient dispenser of justice before Marta A private on trial for the greatest of military crimes seraphically advising a chief of staff to read books! There were not enough words in the dictionary to rebuke the insubordination of such conceit! The only way to look at the thing was as a kind of grim jest. He retrieved his vexation with a laugh as he turned to Marta.

She was smiling irresistibly, in concert with his own mood, as she continued to regard Hugo. Hugo’s mask was entirely for Westerling. He did not seem to see Marta now, and through his mask radiated the considerate understanding of one who can put himself in another’s place—which was Hugo’s besetting fault or virtue, as you choose. In short, the chief of staff had a feeling that this private knew exactly what he, the chief of staff, was thinking.

“Yes, I was certain, sir,” said Hugo, “that you were too busy either to listen to speeches or to read books. You have months of hard work before you, sir.”

His respectful “sirs” had the deference of youth to an elder; otherwise, he was an equal in conversation with an equal. Westerling still kept his temper, but the way that his under jaw closed indicated that he had made up his mind.

“One charge is enough,” he said in a businesslike fashion. “On the firing-line you threw down your rifle. You refused to fight any more. You said: ‘Damn patriotism! I’m through!’ Is that so?”

A slight flush shot into Hugo’s cheeks; he twisted his shoulder on his crutch as if he had a twinge of pain, but his face did not change its expression.

“No, sir. I did not say: ‘Damn patriotism!’ I’m afraid Captain Fracasse was out of temper when he reported that. I didn’t say, ’Damn patriotism!’ because I did not think that then and do not now. Would you care to have my recollection of what I said?”

“Yes!” breathed Marta with so intent an emphasis that Westerling turned sharply, only to find her smiling at him. Her smile said that she thought that Hugo’s story would be interesting.

“Yes; go ahead!” said Westerling.

“I think that I can recall my words very accurately, sir,” Hugo proceeded. “They were important to me. I was the individual most affected in the matter. I said: ’I am through. I will not murder my fellowmen who have done me no wrong. I cannot, I will not kill!’”

Page 179

“That is all?” queried Westerling, again looking at Marta, this time covertly, while he played with a teaspoon.

Brooding uncertainty had flooded the sparkle out of her eyes. She was statue-like in her stillness, her breaths impalpable in their softness. But the points of her knuckles were ghostly, sharp spots on her tightly clenched hands. All that Westerling could tell was that she was thinking, and thinking hard. There was a space of silence broken only by the movement of the teaspoon. Hugo was the first to speak.

“I believe in patriotism, sir. That means love of country. I love my country,” he said slowly.

A preachment of patriotism from this nonchalant private was a straw too much for Westerling’s patience. He made a nervous gesture—a distinctly nervous one as he dropped the teaspoon. He would have an end of nonsense.

“You will answer questions!” he said. “First, you dropped your rifle?”

“Yes, sir.”

“You refused to fight?”

“Yes, sir.”

“You know the penalty for this?”

Hugo inclined his head. He was silent.

“Shot for treason—and immediately!” Westerling went on, irritated at the man’s complaisance. Then he bit his lip. This was harsh talk before Marta. He expected to hear her utter some sort of protest against such cruelty, and instead saw that her face remained calm and that there was nothing but wonder in her eyes. She knew how to wait.

“Then, sir,” said Hugo, speaking, evidently, because he was expected to say something, “I suppose, of course, that I shall be shot. But”—he was smiling in the way that he would when he brought a “good one” to the head in the barracks—“but it will not be necessary to do it more than once, will it? To tell you the truth, I had not counted on being shot more than once.”

Westerling was like a man who had lunged a blow at an object and struck only air.

“I said that he was not a coward,” Marta remarked quietly. There was nothing in her manner to imply that she was defending Hugo. She seemed to be incidentally justifying a previous observation of her own.

A smile in face of death! Westerling's prayer was for countless masses of infantry who would smile in face of death and do his bidding. He could not resist a soldier's admiration, which, however, he would not permit to take the form of words. The form which it took was a sharp thrust of his fist into the hollow of his hand. He had, too, a sense of defeat which was uppermost as he spoke—a defeat that he was bound to retrieve.

"You have a home, a father, and a mother?" he asked.

"Yes, sir."

"And perhaps a sweetheart?" Westerling proceeded.

Hugo unmistakably flushed.

"I don't think sir, that official statistics require an answer to that question. I"—and again that confounded smile, as Westerling was beginning to regard it—"I trust, sir, that I shall not have to be shot more than once if we do not bring any one not yet officially of my family into the affair."

Page 180

“You do not seem to like life,” Westerling observed.

“I love life!” answered Hugo earnestly. “I try to get something out of every minute of it; if nothing particular, at least the miracle of living and breathing and thinking and seeing—-seeing such beautiful scenes as this.” He looked away toward the glorious landscape. It was the first time that he had lifted the steady gaze of those studious blue eyes from Westerling, but directly they were back on duty. “It is because I love life,” he continued, “and think that everybody else must love life, that I do not want to kill. Because I love my country I know that others love their country, and I want them to keep their country.”

Marta’s glance had followed Hugo’s into the distance. It still rested there intently. To Westerling she showed only a profile, with the shadow of the porch between them and the golden light of receding day in the background: a golden light on a silhouette of ivory, a silhouette that you might find without meaning or so full of meaning as to hold an observer in a quandary as to what she was thinking or whether or not she was thinking at all.

Westerling had the baffled consciousness of fencing with a culprit at the bar who had turned adversary. It was the visionary’s white logic of the blue dome against the soldier’s material logic of *x* equals initial velocity. Here was an incomprehensible mortal who loved life and yet was ready to die for love of life. Here was love of country that refused to serve country.

All a pose, a clever bit of acting to play on his feelings through the presence of a woman, Westerling concluded. And Marta was still looking at the landscape. Her mind seemed withdrawn from the veranda. Only her body remained. All the impulse of Westerling’s military instinct and training, rebelling at an abstract ethical controversy with a private about book heresies that belonged under the censor’s ban, called for the word of authority from the apex of the pyramid to put an end to talk with an atom at the base. But that profile—that serene ivory in the golden light, so unlike the Marta of the hotel reception-room—was compellingly present though her mind were absent. It suggested loss of temper as the supreme weakness. He had permitted a controversy. He must argue his man down; he must find his adversary’s weak point.

“Your province is one of the most patriotic,” he said. “Its people are of the purest blood of our race. They have always been loyal. They have always fought determinedly. To no people would a traitor be so abhorrent. Do you want the distinction of being a traitor—one lone traitor in your loyal province?”

Hugo was visibly affected. The twisted corner of his mouth quivered.

“I had thought of that, too, sir,” he said.

“Suppose your father and mother knew that your comrades had labelled you a coward before the whole army; that they had thought you worthy only of kicks and to be left to die by the roadside. Suppose that your father and mother knew that the story of Hugo Mallin, coward and traitor, who threw down his rifle under fire is being told throughout the land—as I shall have it told—until your name is a symbol for cowardice and treason. How would your father and mother feel?”

Page 181

There was an unsteady movement of Hugo's body on his crutches. He swallowed hard, moistening dry lips; and the mobility of feature that could change the mask into the illumination of varied emotions spoke horror and asked for pity.

"I—I—as a matter of mercy, when I have admitted the charge, I ask you not to bear on that, sir!" he stammered. Then the crutches creaked with a stronger grip of his hands and a stiffening of his body as he mastered his feelings. The mask recovered its own, even to the drawing down of the corner of the mouth. "I have reasoned that all out, sir," he went on. "It was the thing which kept me from throwing down my rifle before we made our first charge. I have written a letter to my father and mother."

Marta had been so engrossed in the landscape that she seemed not to have been listening. It was her voice, come out of the distance, that asked, without any inflection except that of tense curiosity:

"May we see the letter?"

As she turned her eyes looked directly into Hugo's, their gaze locked, as it were: hers that of a simple request, his that of puzzled, unsatisfied scrutiny.

"May we?" she repeated to Westerling, looking now frankly at him, "though I don't know as it is in keeping with the situation or with your wishes to grant the whim of a woman. But you see," she added smiling, "that is what comes of having a woman present."

If she had any double meaning Westerling could not find it in her eyes.

"I am willing," said Hugo. "Indeed, I shall be very glad to have my side heard."

"Yes, let us see the letter," assented Westerling; for he, too, was curious.

When Hugo had given it to Westerling and he saw that it was not very long, he began reading aloud:

"'I've kept very well and cheerful and I'm cheerful now,'" the letter began. "'Please always think of me as cheerful. Everybody in our company has fought well; just as bravely as our forefathers did in the wars of their day.'"

"Which hardly agrees with your ideas," observed Westerling.

"Exactly, sir. Men should be brave for their convictions," answered Hugo. "And, as you said, the men of our province are loyal to the old ideas. They believe they ought to fight the Browns."

Then followed a brief, intimate, appealing story of how each of his dead comrades had fallen.

“’You can read these to their folks at home, if you want to. They might like to know.’”

Irresistibly there crept into Westerling’s face at these recitals of soldierly courage the satisfaction of the commander with the spirit of his men. Here was proof of the valor of the units of his army.

“‘Now I have something to tell you which will hurt you very much,’” Westerling read on, “’but you must recollect that I was always regarded as a little queer. And I don’t think people will hold you to blame on my account. I hope they will sympathize with you for having such a son. You will have heard the story from the men of the company, but I also want to tell it to you....’”

Page 182

After it was told the letter proceeded:

"'I feel that I was a coward up to the moment that everybody else was calling me a coward. Then I felt free and happy, as if I had been true to myself. I felt that I had been just as much in the wrong as if we should break into our neighbor's house and take his property because we were stronger than he. How would you feel if a neighbor entered your house and made it his own? You would call in the police. But what if there were no police? Would that make it right?'"

Marta's own opinions! The spirit of her children's prayer! Head bent, hands clasped, she was simply listening.

"'Would it be cowardice if one of the neighbor's family said, "I will not take any further part in this robbery!" when he saw you, mother, weeping over you, father, as you lay dead after trying to defend your house? When I was asked to fire at those running men it was like standing on a neighbor's door-step and firing down the street at my neighbors in flight. I could not do it. I could not do it though twenty million men were doing the same thing. No, I could not do it any more than you could commit murder, father. That is all. Perhaps when those who survive from my company come home, after they have been beaten as they will be—'"

"What!" Westerling exploded.

All the force of his being had to take umbrage at this. Beaten! Marta saw the rigid, unyielding Westerling who had cried, "We shall win!" when she made her second prophecy. But the comparison did not occur to him. Nothing occurred to him but red anger, until the first dart of reason warned him, a chief of staff, that a private had made him completely lose his temper. He recovered his poise with a laugh and without even glancing at Marta.

"Well, we might as well hear the reasons for your expert opinion," he said, his satire a trifle hoarse after the strain of his emotion.

"Because the Browns fight for their homes!" answered Hugo "When the great crisis comes they have a reserve strength that we have not: conscience, the intelligent conscience of this age that cannot fool itself with false enthusiasm continually. They are fighting as I should pray that I might fight if the Browns invaded our country; as I might fight against a murderous burglar. For I will fight, sir, I will fight with my face to the white posts, but not with my back to them! The Browns have no more right to cross our frontier than we have to cross theirs!"

There was a perceptible shudder on Marta's part, an abrupt, tossing elevation of her head. She stared at the spot where Dellarme had lain in the garden. Dellarme's smile

was back on her lips; it seemed graven there. Her eyes, which Westerling could not see, were leaping flames.

“I’m afraid you will not have the chance,” Westerling observed, as he returned the letter to Hugo, its reading unfinished. “What if every man held your views? What would become of the army and the nation?” he demanded.

Page 183

“Why, I think I have made that plain,” replied Hugo. He appeared no less weary than Westerling over continual beating of the air to no purpose. “We should retreat to our own soil, where we belong.”

“And you are ready to be shot for that principle?”

The question was sharp and final.

“Yes, if being shot for what I did is dying for it—though I prefer to live for it!” said Hugo, still without any pose. He refused to play for a chapter in the future book of martyrs to peace. This was the irritating thing about him to a soldier, who deprecated all kinds of personal bravado and show as against the efficiency of the modern military machine, when men were supposed to respond to duty in the face of death as automatically as in any business requiring team-work, with an every-day smile like Hugo’s on their lips.

“Then,” Westerling began, and broke off abruptly. His eyes sought Marta.

The affair seemed to have worn on her nerves also. There was a distinctly appreciable effort at self-control in the slow way that she turned her head. The flame in her eyes was suddenly suffused in a liquid glance which slowly brightened with a suggestion.

“It is extraordinary!” she breathed. “Don’t you think that the blow on his head and the fever afterward has something to do with it?”

Hugo answered for himself.

“My views are the same as they were before the blow and the act that brought the blow!” he said, with a slight cast of the eye toward Marta which intimated that he wanted no help from the deserter of the principles which she had professed to him previously.

She shuddered as if hurt, but only momentarily.

“Psychological, I suppose—psychological and irresponsible abnormality!” she murmured, avoiding Hugo’s look and bending her own on Westerling persistently.

“Long words!” said Hugo. “Insanity is shorter.”

But Westerling did not seem to hear. His thought was shaped by the superb misery and sensitiveness in Marta’s face. He had done wrong to ask her to remain. Of course the scene had been painful to her. She would not be herself if she wanted to see a man tried for his life. He knew that views not unlike Hugo’s were latent in many minds lacking Hugo’s initiative that would respond to the right impulse. A way out occurred to him as inspiration, which pleased his sense of craft. The press, which the premier reported was irritated by his censorship—the press which must have sensation, the traffic of its trade—should have a detailed account of how one of our indomitable

regiments placarded a private as coward, proving thereby that the army was a unit of aggressive zeal.

“You are alone—one man in a million in your ideas!” he declared, with judicial gravity. “We shall postpone your trial and leave public opinion to punish you. Your story will be given to the press in full; your name will be a byword throughout the land, an example, and while you are convalescing you will remain a prisoner. When you are well we shall have another talk I may give you a chance, for the sake of your father and mother and your sweetheart and the good opinion of your neighbors, to redeem yourself.”

Page 184

“I had to tell you what I felt, sir,” said Hugo. “Thank you for letting me live, after you knew.”

He saluted and turned away. Marta and Westerling watched him as he hobbled around the corner of the house and in a heavy silence listened to the crunch of his crutch tips on the gravel growing fainter. Her lashes, those convenient curtains for hiding thought, dropped as Westerling looked around; but he saw that her lips had reddened and that she was drawing a long, deep, energizing breath. When the lashes lifted, there was still wonder in her eyes—wonder which had become definite tribute to him. The assurance he wanted was that he had borne himself well, and he had it.

“You kept your patience beautifully,” she told him. “It seems to me that you were both kind and wise.”

“How I was to be merciful against the facts puzzled me,” he replied, “until you saved the day with your suggestion of psychological irresponsibility.”

“Then I helped? I really helped?”

“You did, decidedly! You—” There he broke off, for he found himself speaking to her profile.

She had looked away in a sudden flight of abstraction, very far away, where the lowering sun was stretching the shadows of the foot-hills toward the white posts. Capes and pillars and promontories of shadow there in the distance! Swinging, furry finger-points of shadow from the tall hollyhocks in the garden swaying with the breeze! The dark shade of the house’s mass over the yard!

It was time for him to be at his desk. But she seemed far from any suggestion of going. She seemed to expect him to wait; otherwise he might have concluded that she had forgotten his presence. Yet were he to rustle a paper he knew that she would hear it. Though she did not change her position in the chair, she appeared subtly active in every fibre.

He found waiting easy, free as he was to watch the beauty of her profile in the glory of the sunset. The superb thing about her was that she always called for study. Her lips moved in sensitive turns; her breast rose in soft billows with her breaths; the long, flickering eyelashes ran outward from black to bronze and to feather tips of gold. In time measured by the regular standard of clock ticks, which in the brain may either race madly or drag mercilessly, she was not long silent. When she spoke she’ did not look entirely around at first; he had no glimpse into her eyes.

“It was another experience of war,” she said moodily, returning to the subject of Hugo. “Yes, something like the final chapter of experience, the trial of this dreamer.” Then a

wave of restless impatience with her abstraction swept over her. Speaking of dreamers, she herself would stop dreaming. “For experience does make a great difference, doesn’t it?” she exclaimed with a sad, knowing smile. After a perceptible pause her eyes suddenly glowed into his. All the commotion of her thought was galvanized into purpose in the look. “I have had a heart full and a mind full of experiences!” she said. “I have been close to war—closer than you! I have looked on while others fought!”

Page 185

The thing was coming! He should hear the story of the change that war had wrought in her. She appeared to regard him as the one listener whom she had sought; as a confidant who alone could understand her. His gift for listening was in full play as he relaxed and settled back in his chair, shading his eyes with his hand lest he should seem to stare. For in his eagerness he would not miss any one of her varied signals of emotion.

She was as vivid as he knew that she would be, her narration flashes of impression in clear detail. Her being seemed transparent to its depths and her moods through the last week to run past him in review. He marvelled at times at her military knowledge; again at her impartiality. She was neither for the Browns nor the Grays; she was simply telling what she had seen. She passed by some horrors; on others she dwelt with fearless emphasis.

“Then the hand-grenades were thrown!” She put her hands over her eyes. “As they fell”—she put her hands over her ears—“oh, the groans!”

“It was the Browns who started it!” he interjected in defence. “I had hoped that we should escape that kind of warfare.” He was too intent to recall what he had said to the premier about using every known method of destruction.

“And this is only the beginning, isn’t it?” she asked piteously, exhausted with her story.

“Only the beginning!” he agreed.

Again brooding wonder appeared in her eyes, while there was wonder in his eyes—-wonder at her.

“And you remain with your property!” he exclaimed in a burst of admiration.

Once more she was looking away into the distance; once more he was studying her profile. He knew that she had gone through her experience without tears and without a scream. She had been subjected to his final test of all merit—war. Courage she had, feminine courage. And he had often asked himself what would happen if he, a great man, should ever meet a great woman. He was baffled by the resources of a mind that was held in detachment under her charm; baffled as to what she was thinking at that moment, only to find her smiling at him, the wonder in her eyes resolving itself into purpose.

“You see, I have been very much stirred up,” she said half apologetically. “There are some questions I want to ask—quite practical, selfish questions. You might call them questions of property and mercy. The longer the war lasts the greater will be the loss of life and the misery?”

“Yes, for both sides; and the heavier the expense and the taxes.”

“If you win, then we shall be under your flag and pay taxes to you?”

“Yes, naturally.”

“The Browns do not increase in population; the Grays do rapidly. They are a great, powerful, civilized race. They stand for civilization!”

“Yes, facts and the world’s opinion agree,” he replied. Puzzled he might well be by this peculiar catechism. He could only continue to reply until he should see where she was leading.

Page 186

“And your victory will mean a new frontier, a new order of international relations and a long peace, you think? Peace—a long peace!”

Was there ever a soldier who did not fight for peace? Was there ever a call for more army-corps or guns that was not made in the name of peace? He had his ready argument, spoken with the forcible conviction of an expert.

“This war was made for peace—the only kind of peace that there can be,” he said. “My ambition, if any glory comes to me out of this war, is to have later generations say: ‘He brought peace!’”

Though the premier, could he have heard this, might have smiled, even grinned, he would have understood Westerling’s unconsciousness of inconsistency. The chief of staff had set himself a task in victory which had no military connection. Without knowing why, he wanted to win ascendancy over her mind.

“The man of action!” exclaimed Marta, her eyes opening very wide, as they would to let in the light when she heard something new that pleased her or gave food for thought. “The man of action, who thinks of an ideal as a thing not of words but as the end of action!”

“Exactly!” said Westerling, sensible of another of her gifts. She could get the essence of a thing in a few words. “When we have won and set another frontier, the power of our nation will be such in the world that the Browns can never afford to attack us,” he went on. “Indeed, no two of the big nations of Europe can afford to make war without our consent. We shall be the arbiters of international dissensions. We shall command peace—yes, the peace of force, of fact! If it could be won in any other way I should not be here on this veranda in command of an army of invasion. That was my idea—for that I planned.” He was making up for having overshot himself in his confession that he had brought on the war as a final step for his ambition.

“You mean that you can gain peace by propaganda and education only when human nature has so changed that we can have law and order and houses are safe from burglary and pedestrians from pickpockets without policemen? Is that it?” she asked.

“Yes, yes! You have it! You have found the wheat in the chaff.”

“Perhaps because I have been seeing something of human nature—the human nature of both the Browns and the Grays at war. I have seen the Browns throwing hand-grenades and the Grays in wanton disorder in our dining-room directly they were out of touch with their officers!” she said sadly, as one who hates to accept disillusionment but must in the face of logic.

Westerling made no reply except to nod, for a movement on her part preoccupied him. She leaned forward, as she had when she had told him he would become chief of staff, her hands clasped over her knee, her eyes burning with a question. It was the attitude of the prophecy. But with the prophecy she had been a little mystical; the fire in her eyes had precipitated an idea. Now it forged another question.

Page 187

“And you think that you will win?” she asked. “You think that you will win?” she repeated with the slow emphasis which demands a careful answer.

The deliberateness of his reply was in keeping with her mood. He was detached; he was a referee.

“Yes, I know that we shall. Numbers make it so, though there be no choice of skill between the two sides.”

His tone had the confidence of the flow of a mighty river in its destination on its way to the sea. There was nothing in it of prayer, of hope, of desperation, as there had been in Lanstron’s “We shall win!” spoken to her in the arbor at their last interview. She drew forward slightly in her chair. Her eyes seemed much larger and nearer to him. They were sweeping him up and down as if she were seeing the slim figure of Lanstron in contrast to Westerling’s sturdiness; as if she were measuring the might of the five millions behind him and the three millions behind Lanstron. She let go a half-whispered “Yes!” which seemed to reflect the conclusion gained from the power of his presence.

“Then my mother’s and my own interests are with you—the interests of peace are with you!” she declared.

She did not appear to see the sudden, uncontrolled gleam of victory in his eyes; for now she was looking fixedly at the point where Hugo had stood. By this time it had become a habit for Westerling to wait silently for her to come out of her abstractions. To disturb one might make it unproductive.

“Then if I want to help the cause of peace I should help the Grays!”

The exclamation was more to herself than to him. He was silent. This girl in a veranda chair desiring to aid him and his five million bayonets and four thousand guns! Quixote and the windmills—but it was amazing; it was fine! The golden glow of the sunset was running in his veins in a paean of personal triumph. The profile turned ever so little. Now it was looking at the point where Dellarme had lain dying. Westerling noted the smile playing on the lips. It had the quality of a smile over a task completed—-Dellarme’s smile. She started; she was trembling all over in the resistance of some impulse—some impulse that gradually gained headway and at last broke its bonds.

“For I can help—I can help!” she cried out, turning to him in wild indecision which seemed to plead for guidance. “It’s so terrible—yet if it would hasten peace—I—I know much of the Browns’ plan of defence! I know where they are strong in the first line and—and one place where they are weak there—and a place where they are weak in the main line!”

“You do!” Westerling exploded. The plans of the enemy! The plans that neither Bouchard’s saturnine cunning, nor bribes, nor spies could ascertain! It was like the bugle-call to the hunter. But he controlled himself. “Yes, yes!” He was thoughtful and guarded.

“Do you think it is right to tell?” Marta gasped half inarticulately.

Page 188

“Right? Yes, to hasten the inevitable—to save lives!” declared Westerling with deliberate assurance.

“I—I want to see an end of the killing! I—” She sprang to her feet as if about to break away tumultuously, but paused, swaying unsteadily, and passed her hand across her eyes.

“We intend a general attack on the first line of defence to-night!” he exclaimed, his supreme thought leaping into words.

“And you would want the information about the first line to-night if—if it is to be of service?”

“Yes, to-night!”

Marta brought her hands together in a tight clasp. Her gaze fluttered for a minute over the tea-table. When she looked up her eyes were calm.

“It is a big thing, isn’t it?” she said. “A thing not to be done in an impulse. I try never to do big things in an impulse. When I see that I am in danger of it I always say: ’Go by yourself and think for half an hour!’ So I must now. In a little while I will let you know my decision.”

Without further formality she started across the lawn to the terrace steps. Westerling watched her sharply, passing along the path of the second terrace, pacing slowly, head bent, until she was out of sight. Then he stood for a time getting a grip on his own emotions before he went into the house.

XXXIII

IN FELLER’S PLACE

What am I? What have I done? What am I about to do? shot as forked shadows over the hot lava-flow of Malta’s impulse. The vitality that Westerling had felt by suggestion from a still profile rejoiced in a quickening of pace directly she was out of sight of the veranda. All the thinking she had done that afternoon had been in pictures; some saying, some cry, some groan, or some smile went with every picture.

Coming to the arbor she slowed down for a step or two, arrested by the recollection of her last meeting with Lanstron. There it was that she had scored him for making her an accomplice of trickery. She saw his twitching hand, and the misery in his eyes and the cadence of his words came as clearly as notes from a violin in a silent chamber to her ears. She nodded in affirmation; she shook her head in negation; she frowned; she laughed strangely, and hurried on.

The sitting-room of the tower was empty to other eyes but not to hers. In imagination she saw Feller standing by the table in the dejection of his heart-break when he faced her and Lanstron, his secret disclosed; and the appeal was more potent in memory than it had been at the time. She went on into the bedroom, which had been formerly the tool-room. On the threshold of the steps into the darkness she glanced back, to see Feller's face transfixed as it had been when he discovered the presence of interlopers —transfixed in fighting rage.

Page 189

The lantern was in the corner at hand. Only yesterday, in want of occupation, as she thought, she had cleaned the chimney and trimmed the wick. It seemed as if Lanny's fingers were lighting it now; as if he were leading the way as he had on her first visit to the telephone. After her hastening steps had carried her along the tunnel to the telephone, she set down the lantern and pressed the spring that opened the panel door. Another moment and she would be embarked on her great adventure in the finality of action. That little ear-piece became a spectre of conscience. She drew back convulsively and her hands flew to her face; she was a rocking shadow in the thin, reddish light of the lantern.

Conscious mind had torn off the mask from subconscious mind, revealing the true nature of the change that war had wrought in her. She who had resented Feller's part —what a part she had been playing! Every word, every shade of expression, every telling pause of abstraction after Westerling confessed that he had made war for his own ends had been subtly prompted by a purpose whose actuality terrified her.

Her hypocrisy, she realized, was as black as the wall of darkness beyond the lantern's gleam. All her pictures became a whirling involution of extravaganza and all the speeches of the characters of the scenes a kind of wail. Then this demoralization passed, as a nightmare passes, with Westerling's boast again in her ears. She was seeing Hugo Mallin; hearing him announce his principles in sight of the spot where Dellarme had died:

"I love my country.... But I know that other men love theirs.... Men should be brave for their convictions.... The Browns are fighting for their homes.... They are fighting, as I should want to fight, against murder and burglary.... I will fight with my face to the white posts, but not with my back to them."

She was seeing the faces of her children; she was hearing them repeat:

"But I shall not let a burglar drive me from my house. If an enemy tries to take my land I shall appeal to his sense of justice and reason with him; but if he then persists I shall fight for my home."

When war's principles, enacted by men, were based on sinister trickery called strategy and tactics, should not women, using such weapons as they had, also fight for their homes? Marta's hands swept down from her eyes; she was on fire with resolution.

Forty miles away a bell in Lanstron's bedroom and at his desk rang simultaneously. At the time he and Partow were seated facing each other across a map on the table of the room where they worked together. No persuasion of the young vice-chief, no edict of the doctors, could make the old chief take exercise or shorten his hours.

“I know. I know myself!” he said. “I know my duty. And you are learning, my boy, learning!”

Every day the flabby cheeks grew pastier and the pouches under the eyebrows heavier. But there was no dimming of the eagle flashes of the eyes, no weakening of the will. Last night Lanstron had turned as white as chalk when Partow staggered on rising from the table, the veins on his temples knotted blue whip-cords. Yet after a few hours’ sleep he reappeared with firm step, fresh for the fray.

Page 190

The paraphernalia around these two was the same as that around Westerling. Only the atmosphere of the staff was different. It had a quality of sober and buoyant alertness and fatality of determination rather than rigid confidence. Otherwise, there was the same medley of typewriters and telegraph instruments, the same types of busy officers and clerks that occupied the Galland house. To them, at least, war had brought no surprises. Its routine was as they had anticipated it there in the big division headquarters building, dissociated from the actual experience of the intimate emotions of the front. Each man was performing the part set for him. No man knew much of any other man's part. Partow alone knew all, and Lanstron was trying to grasp all and praying that Partow's old body should still feed his mind with energy. Lanstron was thinner and paler, a new and glittering intensity in his eyes.

A messenger had just brought in two despatches from the telegraph room. One was from the taciturn press bureau of the Grays which flashed into the Browns' headquarters from a neutral country at the same time that it flashed around the world to illumine bulletin-boards in every language of civilization. Day after day the Grays had announced the occupation of fresh positions. This was the only news that they had permitted egress—the news which read like the march of victory to the eager world of the press, hastening to quick conclusions. To-day came the official word that Westerling had established his headquarters on conquered territory. Proof, this, that five could drive back three; that the weak could not resist the strong!

"Hm-m—indeed!" exclaimed Partow, lifting his brow into massive, corrugated wrinkles. "It may affect the stock market, but not the result."

The other despatch was also out of the land of the Grays, but not by Westerling's consent or knowledge. By devious ways it had broken through the censorship of the frontier in cunning cipher. It told of artillery concentrations three days old; it told only what the aeroplanes had already seen; it told what the Grays had done but nothing of what they intended to do.

When word of Feller's defection came, Lanstron realized for the first time by Partow's manner that the old chief of staff, with all his deprecation of the telephone scheme as chimerical, had grounded a hope on it.

"There was the chance that we might know—so vital to the defence—what they were going to do before and not after the attack," he said.

Yet the story of how Feller yielded to the temptation of the automatic had made the nostrils of the old war-horse quiver with a dramatic breath, and instead of the command of a battery of guns, which Lanstron had promised, the chief made it a battalion. He had drawn down his brows when he heard that Marta had asked that the wire be left intact; he had shot a shrewd, questioning glance at Lanstron and then beat a tattoo on the table and half grinned as he grumbled under his breath:

Page 191

“She is afraid of being lonesome! No harm done!” A week had passed since the Grays had taken the Galland house, and still no word from Marta. The ring of the bell brought Lanstron to his feet with a startled, boyish bound.

“Very springy, that tendon of Achilles!” muttered Partow. “And, my boy, take care, take care!” he called suddenly in his sonorous voice, as vast and billowy as his body. “Take care! She might unwittingly repeat something you said—and hold on!” He was amazingly light and vigorous on his feet as he rose and hurried after Lanstron with the quick, short steps of active adiposity. “She may have seen or heard something. Ask—-ask what is the spirit of the staff, of the soldiers who have fought? What is the truth about their losses? What—” He broke off at the door of Lanstron’s bedroom. Lanstron had flung aside a bathrobe that covered a panel door in the closet and already had the receiver in his hand. “But you know what to ask!” concluded Partow. A flush of embarrassment crept into the pasty cheeks and a sparkle into his fine old eyes as he withdrew to acquit himself of being an eavesdropper.

It was Marta’s voice and yet not Marta’s, this voice that beat in nervous waves over the wire.

“Lanny—yes, I, Lanny! You were right. Westerling planned to make war deliberately to satisfy his ambition. He told me so. The first general attack on the first line of defence is to-night. Westerling says so!” She had to pause for breath. “And, Lanny, I want to know some position of the Browns which is weak—not actually weak, maybe, but some position where the Grays expect terrible resistance and will not find it—where you will let them in!”

“In the name of—Marta! Marta, what—”

“I am going to fight for the Browns—for my home!”

In the sheer satisfaction of explaining herself to herself, of voicing her sentiments, she sent the pictures which had wrought the change moving across the screen before Lanstron’s amazed vision. There was no room for interruption on his part, no question or need of one. The wire seemed to quiver with the militant tension of her spirit. It was Marta aflame who was talking at the other end; not aflame for him, but with a purpose that revealed all the latent strength of her personality and daring.

“Yes, the only way is to fight for your home,” she concluded. “Otherwise, the world would be to the bully and the heads of saints and philosophers and teachers would be egg-shells under his bludgeon.”

“It seems,” said Lanstron, “that this is almost like my own view.”

He was sorry before the words were fairly out of his mouth that he had taken that tack. It was asking her to back down abruptly from her old principles, which only the weak proselyte will do readily; and she was not a proselyte at all, to her conception.

Page 192

“No, no!” She etched her reply into his mind with acid, “My profession is peace; it is not war. I am caught with my back to the wall. If the Browns lose, the Gray flag floats over my home. As Westerling says, everybody must take orders from the Grays then. Oh, the mockery of his repairing the damage done to our house and grounds! Let him repair the damage done to fathers and mothers by bringing their sons sacrificed to the ambition for conquest back to life! Oh, I got the whole of him reflected in the mirror of himself this afternoon when he was comfortably taking tea, and in no danger, and sending men to death!”

There Lanstron winced over a characterization that might apply to him. He could think of only one thing that would ever heal the wound. Perhaps the chance for it would come some day.

“Yes,” she went on, “sitting there so comfortably and serenely and deciding that a man who was ready to die for his convictions must be shot for cowardice! My views are like Hugo Mallin’s and my back is against the wall. But to the work, Lanny! I have a half-hour in which to make up my mind”—she laughed curiously as she repeated the phrase—“in which to make up my mind.” Briefly she recounted what about: “I want to give him positive information of a weak point that can be taken easily.”

“But, Marta—Marta—have you considered what a terrible risk—what—” he protested, the chief of intelligence now submerged in the man.

“No more than for Feller. I sent Feller away and I am taking his place. How is he? Did he get his guns?”

“Yes, not a battery, but a battalion—a major’s command—and the iron cross, too!”

“Splendid! Oh, I’d like to see him in uniform directing their fire! How happy he must be! But, are you going to do your part? Are you going to give me the information?”

“I shall have to ask Partow. It’s a pretty big thing.”

“Yes—only that is not all my plan, my little plan. After they have taken the first line of defence—and they will get it, won’t they?”

“Yes, we shall yield in the end, yield rather than suffer too great losses there that will weaken the defence on the main line.”

“Then I want to know where it is that you want Westerling to attack on the main line, so that we can get him to attack there. That—that will help, won’t it?”

“Yes.”

“Of course, all the while I shall be getting news from him—when I have proven my loyalty and have his complete confidence—and I’ll telephone it to you. I am sure I can get something worth while with you to direct me; don’t you think so, Lanny?”

She put the question as simply as if she were asking if she might sew on a button for him. It had the charm of an intimate fellowship of purpose. It appeared free of the least realization of the magnitude of her undertaking. Didn’t Mrs. Galland believe that blood would tell? And hadn’t the old premier, her grandfather, said: “You can afford to be fussed about little things but never about big things”?

Page 193

“I’ll hold the wire, Lanny. Ask Partow!” she concluded. Of the two she was the steadier.

“Well?” said Partow, looking up at the sound of Lanstron’s step. Then he half raised himself from his chair at sight of a Lanstron with eyes in a daze of brilliancy; a Lanstron with his maimed hand twitching in an outstretched gesture; a Lanstron in the dilemma of being at the same time lover and chief of intelligence. Should he let her make the sacrifice of everything that he held to be sacred to a woman’s delicacy? Should he not return to the telephone and tell her that he would not permit her to play such a part? Partow’s voice cut in on his demoralization with the sharpness of a blade.

“Well, what, man, what?” he demanded. He feared that the girl might be dead. Anything that could upset Lanstron in this fashion struck a chord of sympathy and apprehension.

Lanstron advanced to the table, pressed his hands on the edge, and, now master of himself, began an account of Marta’s offer. Partow’s formless arms lay inert on the table, his soft, pudgy fingers outspread on the map and his bulk settled deep in the chair, while his eagle eyes were seeing through Lanstron, through a mountain range, into the eyes of a woman and a general on the veranda of an enemy’s headquarters. The plan meant giving, giving in the hope of receiving much in return. Would he get the return?

“A woman was the ideal one for the task we intrusted to Feller,” he mused, “a gentlewoman, big enough, adroit enough, with her soul in the work as no paid woman’s could be! There seemed no such one in the world!”

“But to let her do it!” gasped Lanstron.

“It is her suggestion, not yours? She offers herself? She wants no persuasion?” Partow asked sharply.

“Entirely her suggestion,” said Lanstron. “She offers herself for her country—for the cause for which our soldiers will give their lives by the thousands. It is a time of sacrifice.”

Partow raised his arms. They were not formless as he brought them down with sledge-hammer force to the table.

“Your tendon of Achilles? My boy, she is your sword-arm!” His sturdy forefinger ran along the line of frontier under his eye with little staccato leaps. “Eh?” he chuckled significantly, finger poised.

“Let them up the Bordir road and on to redoubts 36 and 37, you mean?” asked Lanstron.

“You have it! The position looks important, but so well do we command it that it is not really vital. Yes, the Bordir road is her bait for Westerling!” Partow waved his hand as if the affair were settled.

“But,” interjected Lanstron, “we have also to decide on the point of the main defence which she is to make Westerling think is weak.”

“Hm-m!” grumbled Partow. “That is not necessary to start with. We can give that to her later over the telephone, can’t we, eh?”

“She asked for it now.”

Page 194

“Why?” demanded Partow with one of his shrewd, piercing looks.

“She did not say, but I can guess,” explained Lanstron. “She must put all her cards on the table; she must tell Westerling all she knows at once. If she tells him piecemeal it might lead to the supposition that she still had some means of communication with the Browns.”

“Of course, of course!” Partow spatted the flat of his hand resoundingly on the map. “As I decided the first time I met her, she has a head, and when a woman has a head for that sort of thing there is no beating her. Well—” he was looking straight into Lanstron’s eyes, “well, I think we know the point where we could draw them in on the main line, eh?”

“Up the apron of the approach from the Engadir valley. We yield the advance redoubts on either side.”

“Meanwhile, we have massed heavily behind the redoubt. We retake the advance redoubts in a counter-attack and—” Partow brought his fist into his palm with a smack.

“Yes, if we could do that! If we could get them to expend their attack there!” put in Lanstron very excitedly for him.

“We must! She shall help!” Partow was on his feet. He had reached across the table and seized Lanstron’s shoulders in a powerful if flesh-padded grip. Then he turned Lanstron around toward the door of his bedroom and gave him a mighty slap of affection. “My boy, the brightest hope of victory we have is holding the wire for you. Tell her that a bearded old behemoth, who can kneel as gracefully as a rheumatic rhinoceros, is on both knees at her feet, kissing her hands and trying his best, in the name of mercy, to keep from breaking into verse of his own composition.”

Back at the telephone, Lanstron, in the fervor of the cheer and the enthusiasm that had transported his chief, gave Marta Partow’s message.

“You, Marta, are our brightest hope of victory!”

“Yes?” The monosyllable was detached, dismal, labored. “A woman can be that!” she exclaimed in an uncertain tone, which grew into the distraction of clipped words and broken sentences. “A woman play-acting—a woman acting the most revolting hypocrisy—influences the issue between two nations! Her deceit deals in the lives of sons precious to fathers and mothers, the fate of frontiers, of institutions! Think of it! Think of machines costing countless millions—machines of flesh and blood, with their destinies shaped by one little bit of lying information! Think of the folly of any civilization that stakes its triumphs on such a gamble! Am I not right? Isn’t it true? Isn’t it?”

“Yes, yes, Marta! But—I—” If she were weakening it was not his place to try to strengthen her purpose.

“I was thinking, only thinking!” she murmured reflectively. “That’s not the thing now!” she added with sudden force. “Partow gave you the positions?”

He described the Bordir position. She repeated the description after him with a stoical matter-of-factness to make sure that she had it correctly.

Page 195

“I must actually know in order to be convincing,” she said. “Now that of the main line.”

He did not include in the description of Engadir any reference to the Browns’ plan of a crushing counter-attack. But as she was repeating this, her calm tone broke into an outcry of horror, as the nature of what he was inadvertently concealing flashed into her mind. She was seeing another picture of imagination, with all the hideous detail of realism drawn from her week’s experiences.

“That column of Grays will go forward cheering with victory, led on, tricked on—and then they will find themselves in a shambles. No going forward, no going back through the cross-fire! Is that it?”

“Yes, something like that, though not exactly a cross-fire—not unless the enemy has poorer generals than we think.”

“But that will be the object and the effect—wholesale slaughter?”

“Yes!” assented Lanstron honestly.

“And a woman whose greatest happiness and pride was in teaching the righteousness and the beauty of peace to children—her lie will send them to death!” she moaned. “I shall be a party to murder!”

“No more than Westerling! No more than any general! No—” But he paused in his argument. Conviction must come to her from within, not from without. He stood graven and wordless, while she was tortured in the hell of her mind’s creation.

She was hearing the cry in the night of the Gray soldier who had fallen from the dirigible in the first day’s fighting; the agonized groans of the men under the wall of the terrace when the hand-grenades spattered human flesh as if it were jelly. But there was Dellarme smiling; there was Hugo Mallin saying that he would fight for his own home; there was Stransky, who had thrown the hand-grenade, bringing in an exhausted old man on his back from under fire; there was Feller as he rallied Dellarme’s men; and—-and there was Lanny waiting at the other end of the wire—and a burglar should not take her home.

“Men must have the courage of their convictions!” Hugo had said. Hers were all for peace. But there was not peace. There could not be peace until the war demon had had his fill of killing and one side had to cry for mercy. Which side should that be? That was the only question.

“It will the sooner end fighting, won’t it, Lanny?” she asked in a small, tense voice.

“Yes.”

“And the only real end that means real peace is to prove that the weak can hold back the strong from their threshold?”

“Yes.”

Even now Westerling might be on the veranda, perhaps waiting for news that would enable him to crush the weak; to prove that the law of five pounds of human flesh against three, and five bayonets against three, is the law of civilization.

“Yes, yes, yes!” The constriction was gone from her throat; there was a drum-beat in her soul. “Depend on me, Lanny!” It was Feller’s favorite phrase spoken by the one who was to take his place. “Yes, I’m ready to make any sacrifice now. For what am I? What is one woman compared to such a purpose? I don’t care what is said of me or what becomes of me if we can win! Good-by, Lanny, till I call you up again! And God with us!”

Page 196

"God with us!" as Partow had said, over and over The saying had come to be repeated by hard-headed, agnostic staff-officers, who believed that the deity had no relation to the efficiency of gun-fire. The Brown infantrymen even were beginning to mutter it in the midst of action.

XXXIV

THREE VOICES

Waiting on the path of the second terrace for Westerling to come, Marta realized the full meaning of her task. Day in and day out she was to have suspense at her elbow and the horror of hypocrisy on her conscience, the while keeping her wits nicely balanced. She must feel her part and at the same time she must be sufficiently conscious that she was placing a part not to let any impulse of aversion betray her. The tea-table scene had been a rehearsal; coming was a *premiere* before the ghostly, still faces across the bent glare of the footlights. No ready-made lines, hers She must create them. Every word must be the right word and spoken in the right way, all for the deception of one man.

When she saw Westerling appear on the veranda and start over the lawn she felt dizzy and uncertain of her capabilities. In the gathering dusk he seemed of giant stature, too masterful to be outwitted by any trickery she might devise. She wondered if she would be able to articulate a word; if she would not turn and flee.

"I have considered all that you said for my guidance and I have decided," she began.

Marta heard her own voice with the relief of a singer in a debut who, with knees shaking, finds that her notes are true. She was looking directly at Westerling in profound seriousness. Though knees shook, lips and chin could aid eyes in revealing the painful fatigue of a battle that had raged in the mind of a woman who went away for half an hour to think for herself.

"I have concluded," she went on, "that it is an occasion for the sacrifice of private ethics to a great purpose, the sooner to end the slaughter."

"All true!" whispered an inner voice. Its tone was Lanny's, in the old days of their comradeship. It gave her strength. All true!

"Yes, an end—a speedy end!" said Westerling with a fine, inflexible emphasis. "That is your prayer and mine and the prayer of all lovers of humanity."

"He is not thinking of humanity, but of individual victory!" whispered another voice, which had the mellow tone of Hugo Mallin's deliberate wisdom.

“It is little that I know, but such as it is you shall have it,” she began, conscious of his guarded scrutiny. When she told him of Bordir, the weak point in the first line of the Browns’ defence, she noted no change in his steady look; but with the mention of Engadir in the main line she detected a gleam in his eyes that had the merciless delight of a cutting edge of steel. “I have made my sacrifice to some purpose? The information is worth something to you?” she asked wistfully.

Page 197

“Yes, yes! Yes, it promises that way,” he replied thoughtfully.

Quietly he began a considerate catechism. Soon she was subtly understanding that her answers lacked the convincing details that he sought. She longed to avert her eyes from his for an instant, but she knew that this would be fatal. She felt the force of him directed in professional channels, free of all personal relations, beating as a strong light on her bare statements. How could a woman ever have learned two such vital secrets? How could it happen that two such critical points as Bordir and Engadir should go undefended? No tactician, no engineer but would have realized their strategic importance. Did she know what she was saying? How did she get her knowledge? These, she understood, were the real questions that underlay Westerling’s polite indirection.

“Invention! Quick, quick! How did you find out? Quick and naturally and obviously—-pure invention; no half-way business!” whispered still another voice, the voice of that most facile of story-builders, Feller, this time.

“But I have not told you the sources of my information! Isn’t that like a woman!” she exclaimed. “You see, it did not concern me at all at the time I heard it. I didn’t even realize its importance and I didn’t hear much,” she proceeded, her introduction giving time for improvisation. “You see, Partow was inspecting the premises with Colonel Lanstron. My mother had known Partow in her younger days when my grandfather was premier. We had them both to luncheon.”

“Yes?” put in Westerling, betraying his eagerness. Partow and Lanstron! Then her source was one of authority, not the gossip of subalterns!

“And it occurs to me now that, even while he was our guest,” she interjected in sudden indignation—“that even while he was our guest Partow was planning to make our grounds a redoubt!”

“Bully! Very feminine and convincing!” whispered the voice of Feller.

“After luncheon I remember Partow saying, ’We are going to have a look at the crops,’ and they went for a walk out to the knoll where the fighting began.”

“Yes! When was this?” Westerling asked keenly.

“Only about six weeks ago,” answered Marta.

“That’s it! That’s splendid! If you’d said a year ago there would have been time enough in the meanwhile to fortify!” whispered the voice of Feller encouragingly. “You’re going fine! Keep it up!”

“Later, I came upon them unexpectedly after they had returned,” Marta went on. “They were sitting there on that seat concealed by the shrubbery. I was on the terrace steps unobserved and I couldn’t help overhearing them. Their voices grew louder with the interest of their discussion. I caught something about appropriations and aeroplanes and Bordir and Engadir, and saw that Lanstron was pleading with his chief. He wanted a sum appropriated for fortifications to be applied to building planes and dirigibles. Finally, Partow consented, and I recall his exact words: ’They’re shockingly archaically defended, especially Engadir,’ he said, ’but they can wait until we get further appropriations in the fall.’” She was so far under the spell of her own invention that she believed the reality of her words, reflected in her wide-open eyes which seemed to have nothing to hide.

Page 198

“That is all,” she exclaimed with a shudder—“all my eavesdropping, all my breach of confidence! If—if it—” and her voice trembled with the intensity of the one purpose that was shining with the light of truth through the murk of her deception—“it will only help to end the slaughter!” She held out her hand convulsively in parting as if she would leave the rest with him.

“I think it will,” he said soberly. “I think it will prove that you have done a great service,” he repeated as he caught both her hands, which were cold from her ordeal. His own were warm with the strong beating of his heart stirred by the promise of what he had just heard. But he did not prolong the grasp. He was as eager to be away to his work as she to be alone. “I think it will. You will know in the morning,” he added.

His steps were sturdier than ever in the power of five against three as he started back to the house. When he reached the veranda, Bouchard, the saturnine chief of intelligence, appeared in the doorway of the dining-room: or, rather, reappeared, for he had been standing there throughout the interview of Westerling and Marta, whose heads were just visible, above the terrace wall, to his hawk eyes.

“A little promenade in the open and my mind made up,” said Westerling, clapping Bouchard on the shoulder.

“Something about an attack to-night?” asked Bouchard.

“You guess right. Call the others.”

Five minutes later he was seated at the head of the dining-room table with his chiefs around him waiting for their chairman to speak. He asked some categorical questions almost perfunctorily, and the answer to each was, “Ready!” with, in some instances, a qualification—the qualification made by regimental and brigade commanders that, though they could take the position in front of them, the cost would be heavy. Yes, all were willing and ready for the first general assault of the war, but they wanted to state the costs as a matter of professional self-defence.

Westerling could pose when it served his purpose. Now he rose and, going to one of the wall maps, indicated a point with his forefinger.

“If we get that we have the most vital position, haven’t we?”

Some uttered a word of assent; some only nodded. A glance or two of curiosity was exchanged. Why should the chief of staff ask so elementary a question? Westerling was not unconscious of the glances or of their meaning. They gave dramatic value to his next remark.

“We are going to mass for our main attack in front at Bordir!”

“But,” exclaimed four or five officers at once, “that is the heart of the position! That is—”

“I believe it is weak—that it will fall, and to-night!”

“You have information, then, information that I have not?” asked Bouchard.

“No more than you,” replied Westerling. “Not as much if you have anything new.”

“Nothing!” admitted Bouchard wryly. He lowered his head under Westerling’s penetrating look in the consciousness of failure.

Page 199

“I am going on a conviction—on putting two and two together!” Westerling announced. “I am going on my experience as a soldier, as a chief of staff. If I am wrong, I take the responsibility. If I am right, Bordir will be ours before morning. It is settled!”

“If you are right, then,” exclaimed Turcas—“well, then it’s genius or—” He did not finish the sentence. He had been about to say coincidence; while Westerling knew that if he were right all the rising scepticism in certain quarters, owing to the delay in his programme, would be silenced. His prestige would be unassailable.

XXXV

MRS. GALLAND INSISTS

“You have been in the tunnel again!” said Mrs. Galland with an emphasis on “again,” when Marta came up the stairs, lantern in hand, after telling Lanstron of her interview with Westerling.

“Again—yes!” Marta replied mechanically. Her mind was empty, burned out. She had thought herself through with deceit for the day.

“What interests you so much down there?” Mrs. Galland pursued softly.

Marta realized that she had to deal with a fresh dilemma. She could not be making frequent visits to the telephone without her mother’s knowledge; and, as yet, Mrs. Galland knew nothing of the part originally planned for Feller, let alone any inkling of her daughter’s part.

“I didn’t know but it would be a good place to hide our plate and other treasures,” said Marta, offering rather methodically the first invention that came to mind as she threw open-the reflector of the lantern and turned down the wick. She was ashamed of the excuse. It warned her how easy it was becoming for her to lie—yes, lie was the word.

“Don’t blow out the light, please,” said Mrs. Galland. “I should like to see for myself if the tunnel is a good hiding-place for the plate.”

“It’s too damp for you down there—it’s—” Marta blew out the flame with a sudden gust of breath and bolted across the room and into her chamber, closing the door and taking the lantern with her. In utter fatigue she dropped on the bed. Then came a gentle, prolonged knocking on the door.

“You forgot to leave the lantern,” called Mrs. Galland. “I have come to get it, if you please.”

Marta did not answer. Her head had sunk forward; her hands, bearing the weight of her body, were resting on her knees. All she could think was that one more lie would break the camel's back.

"Marta, please mayn't I come in?" rose the gentle voice on the other side of the door. "Marta, don't you hear me? I asked if I might come in."

"It's too childish and silly to remain silent any longer," thought Marta. Tired nerves revived spasmodically under another call to action. "Yes, certainly, mother—yes, do!" she said in a forced, metallic tone.

Page 200

Mrs. Galland entered to find her daughter before the mirror brushing her hair with hectic vigor. She did not take up the lantern, which Marta had left in the middle of the floor, but seated herself. Her nice deliberation in smoothing out a wrinkle of her skirt over her knees indicated that she meant to stay a while. She folded her plump, white hands; a faint touch of color came into her round, pink cheeks; a trace of a smile knitted itself into the corners of her mouth. She was as she had been—*J'y suis! J'y reste*!—when the captain of engineers had pleaded with her at the outset of the war to leave the house. In the reflection of the mirror Marta's glance caught hers, which was without reproach or complaint, but very resolute.

"Do you like best to keep it all to yourself, Marta?" Mrs. Galland inquired solicitously.

"What? Keep what?" asked Marta crossly.

"Even if you have been all the way around the world, it might be easier if you allowed me to help you a little," pursued Mrs. Galland.

"Help! Help about what?" said Marta.

That reply, as Marta knew now as an expert in deceit, was a mistake. She was hedging and petulant when she ought to have whirled around gayly and kissed her mother on the cheek, while laughing at such solemnity over a trip of exploration through the tunnel. Mrs. Galland had caught her prevaricating. Not since Marta was a little girl of seven had she "fibbed" to her mother; and on that memorable and ethically instructive occasion her mother had regarded her in this same calm fashion.

"At all events," said Mrs. Galland, "I could help you a little if you would let me comb your hair. You are combing in a most unsystematic way, I must say. Systematic, gentle combing is very good for headaches and—"

There was a twinkle in Mrs. Galland's eye that was not exactly humor; a persistent twinkle that seemed to shine out of every part of the mirror. Her curiosity had come to stay; there was no escaping it. Marta brought her brush down with a bang on the bureau, only to be disgusted with this show of temper which the persistent twinkle had not missed. Her next impulse, unanalyzed because it was one of the oldest and simplest of impulses, made her spin round and drop on her knees at her mother's feet, which was just what had happened when she had started to brave out the last lie—the childhood lie.

Her head buried in her mother's lap, she was sobbing. It was many years since Mrs. Galland had known Marta to sob and she was glad that Marta had not forgotten how. She believed in the value of the law of overflow. When Marta looked up with eyes still moist, it was with the joyous satisfaction that begins a confession. Not once during the

recital did the smile fade from Mrs. Galland's lips. She was too well fortified for any kind of a shock to exhibit surprise.

"You see, I could not tell you—I—" Marta concluded, still uncertain what conclusion lay behind her mother's attitude.

Page 201

“Of course you could not,” said Mrs. Galland. “As grandfather—my father, the premier—said; a man action cannot stop to explain everything he does. He must strike while the iron is hot. If you had stopped to discuss every step you would not have gone far—-Yes, I should have argued and protested. It was best that I, being as I am—that I should not have been told—not until now.”

“And I must go on!” added Marta.

“Of course you must!” replied Mrs. Galland. “You must for the sake of the Browns—the flag your father and grandfather served. They would not have approved of petty deceit, but anything for the cause, any sacrifices, any immolation of self and personal sensibilities. Yes, your father would have been happy, though he had no son, to know that his daughter might do such a service. And we must tell Minna,” she added.

“Minna! You think so? Every added link may mean weakness.”

“But Minna will see you going and coming from the tunnel, too. She is for the Browns with all her heart. They are her people and, besides,” Mrs. Galland smiled rather broadly, “that giant Stransky is with the Browns!” So Minna was told.

“I’d like to kiss your skirt, Miss Galland!” exclaimed Minna in admiration.

“Better kiss me!” said Marta, throwing her arms around the girl. “We must stand together and think together in any emergency.”

Soon after dark the attack began. Flashes of bursting shells and flashes from gun mouths and glowing sheets of flame from rifles made ugly revelry, while the beams of search-lights swept hither and thither. This kept up till shortly after midnight, when it died down and, where hell’s concert had raged, silent darkness shrouded the hills. Marta knew that Bordir was taken without having to ask Lanstron or wait for confirmation from Westerling.

She was seated in the recess of the arbor the next morning, when she heard the approach of those regular, powerful steps whose character had become as distinct to her as those of a member of her own family. Five Against three! five against three! they were saying to her; while down the pass road and the castle road ran the stream of wounded from last night’s slaughter.

Posted in the drawing-room of the Galland house were the congratulations of the premier to Westerling, who had come from the atmosphere of a staff that accorded to him a military insight far above the analysis of ordinary standards. But he was too clever a man to vaunt his triumph. He knew how to carry his honors. He accepted success as his due, in a matter-of-course manner that must inspire confidence in further success.

“You were right,” he said to Marta easily, pleasantly. “We did it—we did it—we took Bordir with a loss of only twenty thousand men!”

Only twenty thousand! Her revulsion at the bald statement was relieved by the memory of Lanny’s word over the telephone after breakfast that the Browns had lost only five thousand. Four to one was a wide ratio, she was thinking.

Page 202

“Then the end—then peace is so much the nearer?” she asked.

“Very much nearer!” he answered earnestly, as he dropped on the bench beside her.

He stretched his arms out on the back of the seat and the relaxed attitude, unusual with him, brought into relief a new trait of which she had been hitherto oblivious. The conqueror had become simply a companionable man. Though he was not sitting close to her, yet, as his eyes met hers, she had a desire to move away which she knew would be unwise to gratify. She was conscious of a certain softening charm, a magnetism that she had sometimes felt in the days when she first knew him. She realized, too, that then the charm had not been mixed with the indescribable, intimate quality that it held now.

“In the midst of congratulations after the position was taken last night,” he declared, “I confess that I was thinking less of success than of its source.” He bent on her a look that was warm with gratitude.

She lowered her lashes before it; before gratitude that made her part appear in a fresh angle of misery.

“There seems to be a kind of fatality about our relations,” he went on. “I lay awake pondering it last night.” His tone held more than gratitude. It had the elation of discovery.

“Look out! Look out, now!” Not only the voices of Lanny and Feller and Hugo warned her, but also those of her mother and Minna.

“He is going to make it harder than I ever guessed!” echoed her own thought, in a flutter of confusion.

“Yes, it was strange our meeting on the frontier in peace and then in war!” she exclaimed at random. The sound of the remark struck her as too subdued; as expectant, when her purpose was one of careless deprecation.

“I have met a great many women, as you may have imagined,” he proceeded. “They passed in review. They were simply women, witty and frail or dull and beautiful, and one meant no more to me than another. Nothing meant anything to me except my profession. But I never forgot you. You planted something in mind: a memory of real companionship.”

“Yes, I made the prophecy that came true!” she put in. This ought to bring him back to himself and his ambitions, she thought.

“Yes!” he exclaimed, his body stiffening free of the back of the seat. “You realized what was in me. You foresaw the power which was to be mine. The fate that first brought us

together made me look you up in the capital. Now it brings us together here on this bench after all that has passed in the last twenty-four hours."

She realized that he had drawn perceptibly nearer. She wanted to rise and cry out: "Don't do this! Be the chief of staff, the conqueror, crushing the earth with the tread of five against three!" It was the conqueror whom she wanted to trick, not a man whose earnestness was painting her deceit blacker. Far from rising, she made no movement at all; only looked at her hands and allowed him to go on, conscious of the force of a personality that mastered men and armies now warm and appealing in the full tide of another purpose.

Page 203

“The victory that I was thinking of last night was not the taking of Bordir. It was finer than any victory in war. It was selfish—not for army and country, but born of a human weakness triumphant; a human weakness of which my career had robbed me,” he continued. “It gave me a joy that even the occupation of the Browns’ capital could not give. I had come as an invader and I had won your confidence.”

“In a cause!” she interrupted hurriedly, wildly, to stop him from going further, only to find that her intonation was such that it was drawing him on.

“That fatality seemed to be working itself out to the soldier so much older than yourself in renewed youth, in another form of ambition. I hoped that there was more than the cause that led you to trust me. I hoped—”

Was he testing her? Was he playing a part of his own to make certain that she was not playing one? She looked up swiftly for answer. There was no gainsaying what she saw in his eyes. It was beating into hers with the power of an overwhelming masculine passion and a maturity of intellect as his egoism admitted a comrade to its throne. Such is ever the way of the man in the forties when the clock strikes for him. But who could know better the craft of courtship than one of Westerling’s experience? He was fighting for victory; to gratify a desire.

“I did not expect this—I—” The words escaped tumultuously and chokingly.

She heard all the voices in chorus: “Look out! Look out!” And then the voice of Feller alone, insinuating, with a sinister mischievousness: “What more could you ask? Now that you have him, hold him! For God and country—for our dear Brown land!”

Hold a man who was making love to her by the tricks of the courtesan! But what kind of love? He was bending so close to her that she felt his breath on her cheek burning hot, and she was sickeningly conscious that he was looking her over in that point-by-point manner which she had felt across the tea-table at the hotel. This horrible thing in his glance she had sometimes seen in strangers on her travels, and it had made her think that she was wise to carry a little revolver. She wanted to strike him.

“Confess! Confess!” called all her own self-respect. “Make an end to your abasement!”

“Confession, after the Browns have given up Bordir! Confession that makes Lanny, not Westerling, your dupe!” came the reply, which might have been telegraphed into her mind from the high, white forehead of Partow bending over his maps. “Confession, betraying the cause of the right against the wrong; the three to the conquering five! No! You are in the things. You may not retreat now.”

For a few seconds only the duel of argument thundered in her temples—seconds in which her lips were parted and quivering and her eyes dilated with an agitation which

the man at her side could interpret as he pleased. A prompting devil—a devil roused by that thing in his eyes—urging a finesse in double-dealing which only devils understand, made her lips hypnotically turn in a smile, her eyes soften, and sent her hand out to Westerling in a trance-like gesture. For an instant it rested on his arm with telling pressure, though she felt it burn with shame at the point of contact.

Page 204

“We must not think of that now,” she said. “We must think of nothing personal; of nothing but your work until your work is done!”

The prompting devil had not permitted a false note in her voice. Her very pallor, in fixity of idea, served her purpose. Westerling drew a deep breath that seemed to expand his whole being with greater appreciation of her. Yet that harried hunger, the hunger of a beast, was still in his glance.

“This is like you—like what I want you to be!” he said. “You are right.” He caught her hand, enclosing it entirely in his grip, and she was sensible, in a kind of dazed horror, of the thrill of his strength. “Nothing can stop us! Numbers will win! Hard fighting in the mercy of a quick end!” he declared with his old rigidity of five against three which was welcome to her. “Then,” he added—“and then—”

“Then!” she repeated, averting her glance. “Then—” There the devil ended the sentence and she withdrew her hand and felt the relief of one escaping suffocation, to find that he had realized that anything further during that interview would be banality and was rising to go.

“I don’t feel decent!” she thought. “Society turned on Minna for a human weakness—-but I—I’m not a human being! I am one of the pawns of the machine of war!”

Walking slowly with lowered head as she left the arbor, she almost ran into Bouchard, who apologized with the single word “Pardon!” as he lifted his cap in overdone courtesy, which his stolid brevity made the more conspicuous.

“Miss Galland, you seem lost in abstraction,” he said in sudden loquacity. “I am almost on the point of accusing you of being a poet.”

“Accusing!” she replied. “Then you must think that I would write bad poetry.”

“On the contrary, I should say excellent—using the sonnet form,” he returned.

“I might make a counter accusation, only that yours would be the epic form,” answered Marta. “For you, too, seem fond of rambling.”

There was a veiled challenge in the hawk eyes, which she met with commonplace politeness in hers, before he again lifted his cap and proceeded on his way.

XXXVI

MARKING TIME

For the next two weeks Marta's role resolved itself into a kind of routine. Their cramped quarters became spacious to the three women in the intimacy of the common secret shared by them under the very nose of the staff. With little Clarissa Eileen, they formed the only feminine society in the neighborhood. On sunshiny days Mrs. Galland was usually to be found in her favorite chair outside the tower door; and here Minna set the urn on a table at four-thirty as in the old days.

Page 205

No member of the staff was more frequently present at Marta's teas than Bouchard, who was developing his social instinct late in life by sitting in the background and allowing others to do the talking while he watched and listened. In his hearing, Marta's attitude toward the progress of the war was sympathetic but never interrogatory, while she shared attention with Clarissa Eileen, who was in danger of becoming spoiled by officers who had children of their own at home. After the reports of killed and wounded, which came with such appalling regularity, it was a relief to hear of the day's casualties among Clarissa's dolls. The chief of transportation and supply rode her on his shoulder; the chief of tactics played hide-and-seek with her; the chief engineer built her a doll house of stones with his own hands; and the chief medical officer was as concerned when she caught a cold as if the health of the army were at stake.

"We mustn't get too set up over all this attention, Clarissa Eileen, my rival," said Marta to the child. "You are the only little girl and I am the only big girl within reach. If there were lots of others it would be different."

She had occasional glimpses of Hugo Mallin on his crutches, keeping in the vicinity of the shrubbery that screened the stable from the house. How Marta longed to talk with him! But he was always attended by a soldier, and under the rigorous discipline that held all her impulses subservient to her purpose she passed by him without a word lest she compromise her position.

Bouchard was losing flesh; his eyes were sinking deeper under a heavier frown. His duty being to get information, he was gaining none. His duty being to keep the Grays' secrets, there was a leak somewhere in his own department. He quizzed subordinates; he made abrupt transfers, to no avail.

Meanwhile, the Grays were taking the approaches to the main line of defence, which had been thought relatively immaterial but had been found shrewdly placed and their vulnerability overestimated. The thunders of batteries hammering them became a routine of existence, like the passing of trains to one living near a railroad. The guns went on while tea was being served; they ushered in dawn and darkness; they were going when sleep came to those whom they later awakened with a start. Fights as desperate as the one around the house became features of this period, which was only a warming-up practice for the war demon before the orgy of the impending assault on the main line.

Marta began to realize the immensity of the chess-board and of the forces engaged in more than the bare statement of numbers and distances. If a first attack on a position failed, the wires from the Galland house repeated their orders to concentrate more guns and attack again. In the end the Browns always yielded, but grudgingly, calculatingly, never being taken by surprise. The few of them who fell prisoners said, "God with us! We shall win in the end!" and answered no questions. Gradually the Gray army began to feel that it was battling with a mystery which was fighting under cover, falling back

under cover—a tenacious, watchful mystery that sent sprays of death into every finger of flesh that the Grays thrust forward in assault.

Page 206

“Another position taken. Our advance continues,” was the only news that Westerling gave to the army, his people, and the world, which forgot its sports and murders and divorce cases in following the progress of the first great European war for two generations. He made no mention of the costs; his casualty lists were secret. The Gray hosts were sweeping forward as a slow, irresistible tide; this by Partow’s own admission. He announced the loss of a position as promptly as the Grays its taking. He published a daily list of casualties so meagre in contrast to their own that the Grays thought it false; he made known the names of the killed and wounded to their relatives. Yet the seeming candor of his press bureau included no straw of information of military value to the enemy.

Westerling never went to tea at the Gallands’ with the other officers, for it was part of his cultivation of greatness to keep aloof from his subordinates. His meetings with Marta happened casually when he went out into the garden. Only once had he made any reference to the “And then” of their interview in the arbor.

“I am winning battles for *you*!” he had exclaimed with that thing in his eyes which she loathed.

To her it was equivalent to saying that she had tricked him into sending men to be killed in order to please her. She despised herself for the way he confided in her; yet she had to go on keeping his confidence, returning a tender glance with one that held out hope. She learned not to shudder when he spoke of a loss of “only ten thousand.” In order to rally herself when she grew faint-hearted to her task, she learned to picture the lines of his face hard-set with five-against-three brutality, while in comfort he ordered multitudes to death, and, in contrast, to recall the smile of Dellarme, who asked his soldiers to undergo no risk that he would not share. And after every success he would remark that he was so much nearer Engadir, that position of the main line of defence whose weakness she had revealed.

“Your Engadir!” he came to say. “Then we shall again profit by your information; that is, unless they have fortified since you received it.”

“They haven’t. They had already fortified!” she thought. She was always seeing the mockery of his words in the light of her own knowledge and her own part, which never quite escaped her consciousness. One chamber of her mind was acting for him; a second chamber was perfectly aware that the other was acting.

“One position more—the Twin Boulder Redoubt, it is called,” he announced at last. “We shall not press hard in front. We shall drive in masses on either side and storm the flanks.”

This she was telephoning to Lanstron a few minutes later and having, in return, all the news of the Browns. The sheer fascination of knowing what both sides were doing exerted its spell in keeping her to her part.

“They’ve lost four hundred thousand men now, Lanny,” she said.

Page 207

“And we only a hundred thousand. We’re whittling them down,” answered Lanstron.

“Whittling them down! What a ghastly expression!” she gasped. “You are as bad as Westerling and I am worse than either of you! I—I announced the four hundred thousand as if they were a score—a score in a game in our favor. I am helping, Lanny? All my sacrifice isn’t for nothing?” she asked for the hundredth time.

“Immeasurably. You have saved us many lives!” he replied.

“And cost them many?” she asked.

“Yes, Marta, no doubt,” he admitted; “but no more than they would have lost in the end. It is only the mounting up of their casualties that can end the war. Thus the lesson must be taught.”

“And I can be of most help when the attack on the main defence is begun?”

“Yes.”

“And when Westerling finds that my information is false about Engadir—then—”

She had never put the question to him in this way before. What would Westerling do if he found her out?

“My God, Marta!” he exclaimed. “If I’d had any sense I would have thought of that in the beginning and torn out the ’phone! I’ve been mad, mad with the one thought of the nation—inhuman in my greedy patriotism. I will not let you go any further!”

It was a new thing for her to be rallying him; yet this she did as the strange effect of his protest on the abnormal sensibilities that her acting had developed.

“Thinking of me—little me!” she called back. “Of one person’s comfort when hundreds of thousands of other women are in terror; when the destiny of millions is at stake! Lanny, you are in a blue funk!” and she was laughing forcedly and hectically. “I’m going on—going on like one in a trance who can’t stop if he would. It’s all right, Lanny. I undertook the task myself. I must see it through!”

After she had hung up the receiver her buoyancy vanished. She leaned against the wall of the tunnel weakly. Yes, what if she were found out? She was thinking of the possibility seriously for the first time. Yet, for only a moment did she dwell upon it before she dismissed it in sudden reaction.

“No matter what they do to me or what becomes of me!” she thought. “I’m a lost soul, anyway. The thing is to serve as long as I can—and then I don’t care!”

XXXVII

THUMBS DOWN FOR BOUCHARD

Haggard and at bay, Bouchard faced the circle of frowns around the polished expanse of that precious heirloom, the dining-room table of the Gallands. The dreaded reckoning of the apprehensions which kept him restlessly awake at night had come at the next staff council after the fall of the Twin Boulder Redoubt. With the last approach to the main line of defence cleared, one chapter of the war was finished. But the officers did not manifest the elation that the occasion called for, which is not saying that they were discouraged. They had no doubt that eventually the Grays would dictate peace in the Browns' capital. Exactly stated, their mood was one of repressed professional irritation. Not until the third attempt was Twin Boulder Redoubt taken. As far as results were concerned, the nicely planned first assault might have been a stroke of strategy by the Browns to drive the Grays into an impassable fire zone.

Page 208

“The trouble is we are not informed!” exclaimed Turcas, opening his thin lips even less than usual, but twisting them in a significant manner as he gave his words a rasping emphasis. The others hastened to follow his lead with equal candor.

“Exactly. We have no reports of their artillery strength, which we had greatly underestimated,” said the chief of artillery.

“Our maps of their forts could not be less correct if revealed to us for purposes of deceit. Again and again we have thought that we had them surprised, only to be surprised ourselves. In short, they know what we are doing and we don’t know what they are doing!” said the tactical expert.

There the chief of the aerostatic division took the defensive.

“They certainly don’t learn our plans with their planes and dirigibles!” he declared energetically.

“Hardly, when we never see them over our lines.”

“The Browns are acting on the defensive in the air as well as on the earth!”

“But our own planes and dirigibles bring little news,” said Turcas. “I mean, those that return,” he added pungently.

“And few do return. My men are not wanting in courage!” replied the chief aerostatic officer. “Immediately we get over the Brown lines the Browns, who keep cruising to and fro, are on us like hawks. They risk anything to bring us down. When we descend low we strike the fire of their high-angle guns, which are distributed the length of the frontier. I believe both their aerial fleet and their high-angle artillery were greatly underestimated. Finally, I cannot reduce my force too much in scouting or they might rake the offensive.”

“Another case of not being informed!” concluded Turcas, returning grimly to his point.

He looked at Bouchard, and every one began looking at Bouchard. If the Gray tacticians had been outplayed by their opponents, if their losses for the ground gained exceeded calculations, then it was good to have a scapegoat for their professional mistakes. Bouchard was Westerling’s choice for chief of intelligence. His blind loyalty was pleasing to his superior, who, hitherto, had promptly silenced any suggestion of criticism by repeating that the defensive always appeared to the offensive to be better informed than itself. But this time Westerling let the conversation run on without a word of excuse for his favorite.

Each fresh reproach from the staff, whose opinion was the only god he knew, was a dagger thrust to Bouchard. At night he had lain awake worrying about the leak; by day

he had sought to trace it, only to find every clew leading back to the staff. Now he was as confused in his shame as a sensitive schoolboy. Vaguely, in his distress, he heard Westerling asking a question, while he saw all those eyes staring at him.

“What information have we about Engadir?”

“I believe it to be strongly fortified!” stammered Bouchard.

Page 209

“You believe! You have no information?” pursued Westerling.

“No, sir,” replied Bouchard. “Nothing—nothing new!”

“We do seem to get little information,” said Westerling, looking hard and long at Bouchard in silence—the combined silence of the whole staff.

This public reproof could have but one meaning. He should soon receive a note which would thank him politely for his services, in the stereotyped phrases always used for the purpose, before announcing his transfer to a less responsible post.

“Very little, sir!” Bouchard replied doggedly.

“There is that we had from one of our aviators whose machine came down in a smash just as he got over our infantry positions on his return,” said the chief aerostatic officer. “He was in a dying condition when we picked him up, and, as he was speaking with the last breaths in his body, naturally his account of what he had seen was somewhat incoherent. It would be of use, however, if we had plans of the forts that would enable us to check off his report intelligently.”

“Yet, what evidence have we that Partow or Lanstron has done more than to make a fortunate guess or show military insight?” Westerling asked. “There is the case of my own belief that Bordir was weak, which proved correct.”

“Last night we got a written telegraphic staff message from the body of a dead officer of the Browns found in the Twin Boulder Redoubt,” said the vice-chief, “which showed that in an hour after our plans were transmitted to our own troops for the first attack they were known to the enemy.”

“That looks like a leak!” exclaimed Westerling, “a leak, Bouchard, do you hear?” He was frowning and his lips were drawn and his cheeks mottled with red in a way not pleasant to see.

Stiffening in his chair, a flash of desperation in his eye, Bouchard’s bony, long hand gripped the table edge. Every one felt that a sensation was coming.

“Yes, I have known that there was a leak!” he said with hoarse, painful deliberation. “I have sent out every possible tracer. I have followed up every sort of clew I have transferred a dozen men. I have left nothing undone!”

“With no result?” persisted Westerling impatiently

“Yes, always the same result: That the leak is here in this house—here in the grand headquarters of the army under our very noses. I know it is not the telegraphers or the clerks. It is a member of the staff!”

“Have you gone out of your head?” demanded Westerling. “What staff-officer? How does he get the information to the enemy? Name the persons you suspect here and now! Explain, if you want to be considered sane!”

Here was the blackest accusation that could be made against an officer! The chosen men of the staff, tested through many grades before they reached the inner circle of cabinet secrecy, lost the composure of a council. All were leaning forward toward Bouchard breathless for his answer.

Page 210

“There are three women on the grounds,” said Bouchard. “I have been against their staying from the first. I——.”

He got no further. His words were drowned by the outburst of one of the younger members of the staff, who had either to laugh or choke at the picture of this deep-eyed, spectral sort of man, known as a woman-hater, in his revelation of the farcical source of his suspicions.

“Why not include Clarissa Eileen?” some one asked, Starting a chorus of satirical exclamations.

“How do they get through the line?”

“Yes, past a wall of bayonets?”

“When not even a soldier in uniform is allowed to move away from his command without a pass?”

“By wireless?”

“Perhaps by telepathy!”

“Unless,” said the chief of the aerostatic division, grinning, “Bouchard lends them the use of our own wires through the capital and around by the neutral countries across the Brown frontier!”

“But the correct plans and location of their forts and the numbers of their heavy guns and of their planes and dirigibles—your failure to have this information is not the result of any leak from our staff since the war began,” said Turcas in his dry, penetrating voice, clearing the air of the smoke of scattered explosions.

All were staring at Bouchard again. What answer had he to this? He was in the box, the evidence stated by the prosecutor. Let him speak!

He was fairly beside himself in a paroxysm of rage and struck at the air with his clenched fist.

“—— —— Lanstron!” he cried.

“There’s no purpose in that. He can’t hear you!” said Turcas, dryly as ever.

“He might, through the leak,” said the chief aerostatic officer, who considered that many of his gallant subordinates had lost their lives through Bouchard’s inefficiency. “Perhaps Clarissa Eileen has already telepathically wigwagged it to him.”

To lose your temper at a staff council is most unbecoming. Turcas would have kept his if hit in the back by a fool automobilist. Westerling had now recovered his. He was again the superman in command.

“It is for you and not for us to locate the leak; yes, for you!” he said. “That is all on the subject for the present,” he added in a tone of mixed pity and contempt, which left Bouchard freed from the stare of his colleagues and in the miserable company of his humiliation.

All on the subject for the present! When it was taken up again his successor would be in charge. He, the indefatigable, the over-intense, with his mediaeval partisan fervor, who loathed in secret machines like Turcas, was the first man of the staff to go for incompetency.

“And Engadir is the key-point,” Westerling was saying.

“Yes,” agreed Turcas.

“So we concentrate to break through there,” Westerling continued, “while we engage the whole line fiercely enough to make the enemy uncertain where the crucial attack is to be made.”

Page 211

“But, general, if there is any place that is naturally strong, that—” Turcas began.

“The one place where they are confident that we won’t attack!” Westerling interrupted. He resented the staff’s professional respect for Turcas. After a silence and a survey of the faces around, he added with sententious effect: “And I was right about Bordir!”

To this argument there could be no answer. The one stroke of generalship by the Grays, who, otherwise, had succeeded alone through repeated mass attacks, had been Westerling’s hypothesis that had gained Bordir in a single assault.

“Engadir it is, then!” said Turcas with the loyalty of the subordinate who makes a superior’s conviction his own, the better to carry it out.

Hazily, Bouchard had heard the talk, while he was looking at Westerling and seeing him, not at the head of the council table, but in the arbor in eager appeal to Marta.

“I shall find out! I shall find out!” was drumming in his temples when the council rose; and, without a word or a backward glance, he was the first to leave the room.

XXXVIII

HUNTING GHOSTS

In his search for the medium of the leak to the enemy Bouchard had studied every detail of the Galland premises and also of the ruins of the castle, with the exception of one feature mentioned in the regular staff records, prepared before the war, in the course of their minute description of the architecture of buildings which were accessible to the spies of the Grays. The tunnel to the dungeons could be reached only through the private quarters of the Gallands.

When he came out onto the veranda from the staff council a glimpse of Mrs. Galland walking in the garden told him that one of the guardians who stood between him and the satisfaction of his desperate curiosity was absent. He started for the tower and found the door open and the sitting-room empty. In his impatience he had one foot across the threshold before a prompting sense of respect for form made him pause. After all, this was a private residence. There being no bell, he rapped, and was glad that it was Minna and not Marta who appeared. He watched her intently for the effect of his abrupt announcement as he exclaimed:

“I want to go into the tunnel under the castle!”

There was no mistaking her shock and alarm. Her lips remained parted in a letter O as a sweep of breath escaped. Yet, in the very process of recovering her scattered faculties, her feminine quickness noted a triumphant gleam in his eye. She knew that

her manner had given conviction to his suspicions. She knew that she alone stood between him and his finding Marta talking to Brown headquarters. As she was in a state of astonishment, why, astonishment was her cue. She appeared positively speechless from it except for the emission of another horrified gasp. Time! time! She must hold him until Marta left the telephone.

Page 212

“What an idea! That musty, horrible, damp tunnel!” she exclaimed, shuddering. “I never think of it without thinking of ghosts!”

“I am looking for ghosts,” replied Bouchard with saturnine emphasis.

“Oh, don’t say that!” cried Minna distractedly. “Sometimes at night I hear their chains clanking and their groans and cries for water,” she continued, playing the superstitious and stupid maid servant. “That is, I think I do. Miss Galland says I don’t.”

“Does she go into the tunnel?” asked Bouchard.

“Yes, she’s been in to show me that there were no ghosts,” replied Minna. “But not the whole way—not into the dungeons. I believe she got frightened herself, though she wouldn’t admit it. I know there are ghosts! She needn’t tell me! Don’t you believe there are?” she asked solemnly, with dropped jaw.

“I’m going to find out!” he said, taking a step forward.

But Minna, just inside the doorway, did not move to allow him to enter.

“Oh, I’m so glad!” she exclaimed. “Then we’ll know the truth. But no!” and she turned wild with protest. “No, no! I know there are! It’s dangerous, sir! You’d never come out alive! Unseen hands would seize you and draw you down and strangle you—those terrible spirits of the dark ages!”

Her hands uplifted, fingers stretched apart in terror, lace white with fear, Minna’s distress was real—very real, indeed!—while she listened impatiently for Marta’s step in the adjoining room.

“Good heavens!” exclaimed Bouchard in disgust. “I didn’t know such superstition existed in this day.”

“I didn’t, sir, until the groans and the clanking of the chains kept me awake,” replied Minna.

“Have you a lantern?” asked Bouchard in exasperation.

“A lantern?” repeated Minna blankly. Time! time! She must gain time!

“Yes, you gawk, a lantern!”

“Certainly; you’ll need one,” said Minna—“a big one! Go and fetch a big army one—and some soldiers to fight the ghosts. But what are soldiers against ghosts? Oh, sir, I don’t like to think of you going at all. Please, sir, don’t, for the sake of your life!”

There Bouchard frowned heavily and his hawk eyes flashed in command and decision.

“Enough of this farce! A lamp, a candle will do. Come, get me one immediately!”

Just as she was at her wits’ end and it seemed as if there were nothing left to do but to scream and fall in a faint in front of Bouchard, her ear caught the welcome sound which told her that Marta had returned from the tunnel.

“Yes, sir. Won’t you come in, sir? Of course, sir,” she said, standing aside. “Won’t you be seated, sir?”

“Good day, Colonel Bouchard!” called Marta, appearing in the doorway.

“He wants to go into the dungeons to see the ghosts!” Minna exclaimed in a return of horror before Bouchard had time to say a word, while she screwed up the side of her face away from him suggestively to Marta. “Those terrible ghosts! I’m afraid for him. Like a man, he may go right into the dungeons, even if you didn’t dare to, Miss Galland.”

Page 213

“I wish he would!” Marta joined in eagerly. “That might cure you of your silly imaginings, Minna. She actually thinks, Colonel Bouchard, that she hears them groan and moan and even shriek. Didn’t you say they shrieked as well as groaned and moaned once about 3 A.M.?” she asked jocularly.

“A ghost must be hard put to it when he shrieks,” observed Bouchard, glaring from one to the other.

“It’s all very well for you to make fun of me because you have the advantage of an education,” said Minna to Marta, “but you yourself—you—”

“Yes, I did hear what sounded like moaning voices,” admitted Marta rather sheepishly. “But of course it was imagination. Now we have a man with nerve enough to go into the dungeons, we’ll lay this ridiculous psychological bugaboo at once; that is, if you have the nerve!” She arched her brows in challenging scrutiny of Bouchard, while her eyes twinkled at the prospect of adventure. “I thought I had, myself, but before I got to the dungeons the clammy air wilted it and I was rubbing my eyes to keep from seeing all kinds of apparitions.”

She puzzled Bouchard, she was so facile, so ready, so many-sided. But the more she puzzled him the stronger became his conviction of her guilt. He guessed that all this talk was only a prelude to some trick to keep him out of the tunnel. Poor at speech at best, slightly fussed by her candid good humor and teasing, he hesitated as to his next remark. He was going to be short with her in stating that he would go into the tunnel immediately, when she took the words out of his mouth.

“This way, please. I’m all impatience. I only wish that you had suggested it before.”

As they passed out of the room Minna leaned against the wall, exhausted and wonder-struck.

“Miss Galland is beyond me!” she thought. “Does she think those hawk eyes will miss that little button of the panel door?”

“We’ll need a lantern,” said Marta as she took up the one she had been using from a corner of the tool room; while Bouchard, slowly turning his head like some automaton, was examining every detail of floor and wall, spades, hoes, and weeders, for a hidden significance. The lantern was still hot, and Marta’s finger smarted with a burn, but she did not twitch. She was so keyed up that she felt capable of walking over red-hot coals, while she joked about ghosts. “There!” she exclaimed, after the lantern was lighted. “This is going to be great sport. Ghost hunting—think of that! We might have made a ghost party Too bad we didn’t think of it in time. Yes, it’s a pity to be so exclusive about it. Even now we might send for General Westerling and some of the other staff-officers.”

She paused and looked at Bouchard questioningly, perhaps challengingly; at least, he thought challengingly. He had half a mind to concur. Could anything be better than to have Westerling present if suspicions proved correct? But no. She wanted Westerling and that was the best reason why he should not be present. Yet there was no sign of chicane in the brimming fun of her eyes that went with the suggestion. Bouchard's search for the proper words of dissent left him rather confused and at a disadvantage. With sympathetic quickness she seemed to guess his thoughts, and in a way that he found all the more exasperating.

Page 214

“No, no! We’re too impatient! We can’t wait, can we?” she exclaimed. “Let’s go. Let’s get the ghosts single-handed, you and I. If we win we’ll demand a specially large bronze cross to be struck for us.”

“Yes,” he agreed with an affectation of humor that made him feel ludicrous. He always felt ludicrous when he tried to be humorous.

“Come on!” said Marta, going to the stairway.

He extended his hand to take the lantern with an “If you please!”

“No. When we approach the enemy I’ll let you lead,” she replied, refusing the offer. “I’ll be only too glad then; but these stairs are very tricky if you don’t know them. Keep watch!” she warned him as she started to descend, picking her way slowly.

Once in the tunnel she held the lantern a little back of her in her right hand, which threw a shadow to the left on the side of the panel door. She was walking very fast, too fast to please Bouchard. In the swinging rays he could not fly-speck the surroundings with the care that he desired. Yet how could he ask her to slacken her pace? This she did of her own accord before they had gone far.

“Isn’t it damp and deathlike? Think of it!” she exclaimed. “No ray of sunlight has been in here since the tunnel was dug—no, not even then; for probably it was dug after the castle was built. Think of the stories these walls could tell after the silence of centuries! Think of the prisoners driven along at the point of the halberd to slow death in the dungeons! You feel their spirits in the cold, clammy air.” Her elocution was excellent, as her voice sank to an awed whisper, impressing even Bouchard with a certain uncanniness. Her steps became slow, as with effort, while he was not missing a square inch of the top, bottom, or sides of the tunnel. “But I’ll not—I’ll not this time, when I have a soldier with me. For once I’ll go to the end!” she cried with forced courage, suddenly starting forward at a half run that sent the lantern’s rays lurching and dancing in a way that confused the hawk eyes. Then her burst of strength seemed to give out in collapse and she dropped against the wall for support, her back covering the panel door.

“I can’t! I’m just foolishly, weakly feminine!” she whispered brokenly. “According to reason there aren’t any ghosts, I know. But it gets on my nerves too much-my imaginings!” She held out the lantern with a trembling hand. “I will wait here. You go on in!” she begged. “Please do and show me what a fool I am! Show that it is all a woman’s hysteria—for we are all hysterical, aren’t we? Go into every dungeon, please!”

She did seem on the verge of hysteria, quivering as die was from head to foot. But Bouchard, holding the lantern and staring at her, his eyes unearthly lustrous in the yellow rays, hesitated to agree to the request because it was hers. Marta was not so near hysteria that she did not divine his thought.

Page 215

“Has it got on your nerves, too?” she inquired. “Are you, too, afraid?”

“No, I’m not afraid!” replied Bouchard irritably. “But aren’t you afraid to be left alone in the dark? I’ll take you back to the sitting-room and you can wait there,” he added with a show of gallantry, which she improved on with a flattering if scared smile.

“I’m not afraid with you between me and the dungeons,” she said. “I’ll hold my ground. Don’t think me altogether a craven.”

“Very well,” was all that he could say. “I came to see the dungeons, and I’ll see them!”

After the lantern flame grew fainter and finally disappeared around a bend, Marta emitted a peculiar, squeaky little laugh. It sounded to her as if her own ghost—the ghost of her former self—were laughing in satire. There was a devilish, mischievous joy in battling to outwit Bouchard more than in her deceit of Westerling. Satire, yes—-needle-pointed, acid-tipped! Melodrama done in burlesque, too. In the name of the noble art of war, a bit of fooling about ghosts in a tunnel might influence the fate of armies that were the last word in modern equipment. And men played at killing with a grand front of martial dignity, when such a little thing could turn the balance of slaughter! The ghosts in the dungeons seemed about as real as anything, except the childishness of adult humanity in organized mass. She laughed again, this time very softly, as she moved away from the panel door a few steps farther along the wall toward the entrance and again leaned back for support.

She had to wait a half-hour before she saw a yellow flame reappear and heard the dully echoing steps of Bouchard approaching. That tiny push-button on the panel, of the color of stone, was in the shadow of her figure against the lantern’s rays, which gave a glazed and haunted effect to Bouchard’s eyes, rolling as he studied the walls and ceiling and floor of the tunnel in final baffled and desperate inquiry.

“Did you see anything? Did you go into all the dungeons?” Marta called to him.

Bouchard did not answer. Perhaps he was too full of disgust for words. Marta, however, had plenty of words in her impatience for knowledge.

“If there were you must have caught them with a quick strangle-hold. Or, did you see one and not dare to go on? Tell me! tell me!” she insisted when he stopped before her, his expression a strange mixture of defiance and dissatisfaction while he was searching the wall around her figure. Before his eye had any inclination to look as far away from her as the button she stepped free of the wall and laid her hand on Bouchard’s arm. “I can’t wait! I’ve nearly perished of suspense!” she cried. “I’m just dying to know what you found. Please tell me!”

Meanwhile, she was looking into his eyes, which were eagerly devouring the spot that her figure had hidden. He saw nothing but bare stone. Marta slipped her hand behind her and began brushing her back.

Page 216

“My gown must be a sight!” she exclaimed. “But I do believe you saw a ghost and that he struck you speechless!”

“No!” exploded Bouchard. “No, I saw nothing!”

“Nothing!” she repeated. She half turned to go. He passed by her with the lantern, while she kept to the side of the wall which held the button, covering it with her shadow successfully. “Nothing! No bones, no skulls—not even any anklets fastened by chains to the clammy, wet stones?”

“Yes, just an ordinary set of Middle Age dungeons and some staples in the walls!” he grumbled.

This was no news to her as, with Minna for company, she had explored all the underground passages.

“Wonderful! I suppose a little courage will always lay ghosts!” She even found it difficult to conceal a note of triumph in her tone, for the button was now well behind them. “It’s all right, Minna; there aren’t any ghosts!” she called as they entered the sitting-room. And Minna, in the kitchen, covered her mouth lest she should scream for joy.

“Thank you!” said Bouchard grudgingly as Marta saw him to the door.

“On the contrary, thank you! It was such fun—if I hadn’t been so scared,” replied Marta, and their gaze held each other fast in a challenge, hers beaming good nature and his saturnine in its rebuff and a hound-like tenacity of purpose, saying plainly that his suspicions were not yet laid.

When Bouchard returned to his desk he guessed the contents of the note awaiting him, but he took a long time to read its stereotyped expressions in transferring him to perfunctory duty well to the rear of the army. Then he pulled himself together and, leaden-hearted, settled down to arrange routine details for his departure, while the rest of the staff was immersed in the activity of the preparations for the attack on Engadir. He knew that he could not sleep if he lay down. So he spent the night at work. In the morning his successor, a young man whom he himself had chosen and trained, Colonel Bellini, appeared, and the fallen man received the rising man with forced official courtesy.

“In my own defence and for your aid,” he said, “I show you a copy of what I have just written to General Westerling.”

A brief note it was, in farewell, beginning with conventional thanks for Westerling’s confidence in the past.

“I am punished for being right,” it concluded. “It is my belief that Miss Galland sends news to the enemy and that she draws it from you without your consciousness of the fact. I tell you honestly. Do what you will with me.”

It took more courage than any act of his life for the loyal Bouchard to dare such candor to a superior. Seeing the patchy, yellow, bloodless face drawn in stiff lines and the abysmal stare of the deep-set eyes in their bony recesses, Bellini was swept with a wave of sympathy.

“Thank you, Bouchard. You’ve been very fine!” said Bellini as he grasped Bouchard’s hand, which was icy cold.

Page 217

“My duty—my duty, in the hope that we shall kill two Browns for every Gray who has fallen—that we shall yet see them starved and besieged and crying for mercy in their capital,” replied Bouchard. He saluted with a dismal, urgent formality and stalked out of the room with the tread of the ghost of Hamlet’s father.

The strange impression that this farewell left with Bellini still lingered when, a few moments later, Westerling summoned him. Not alone the diffidence of a new member of the staff going into the Presence accounted for the stir in his temples, as he waited till some papers were signed before he had Westerling’s attention. Then Westerling picked up Bouchard’s note and shook his head sadly.

“Poor Bouchard! You can see for yourself,” and he handed the note to Bellini. “I should have realized earlier that it was a case for the doctor and not for reprimand. Mad! Poor Bouchard! He hadn’t the ability or the resiliency of mind for his task, as I hope you have, colonel.”

“I hope so, sir,” replied Bellini.

“I’ve no doubt you have,” said Westerling. “You are my choice!”

XXXIX

A CHANGE OF PLAN

That day and the next Westerling had no time fix strolling in the garden. His only exercise was a few periods of pacing on the veranda. Turcas, as tirelessly industrious as ever, developed an increasingly quiet insistence to leave the responsibility of decisions about everything of importance to a chief who was becoming increasingly arbitrary. The attack on Engadir being the jewel of Westerling’s own planning, he was disinclined to risk success by delegating authority, which also meant sharing the glory of victory.

Bouchard’s note, though officially dismissed as a matter of pathology, would not accept dismissal privately. In flashes of distinctness it recurred to him between reports of the progress of preparations and directions as to dispositions. At dusk of the second day, when all the guns and troops had their places for the final movement under cover of darkness and he rose from his desk, the thing that had edged its way into a crowded mind took possession of the premises that strategy and tactics had vacated. It passed under the same analysis as his work. His overweening pride, so sensitive to the suspicion of a conviction that he had been fooled, put his relations with Marta in logical review.

He had fallen in love in the midst of war. This fact was something that his egoism must resent. Any woman who had struck such a response in him as she had must have great

depths. Had she depths that he had not fathomed? He recalled her sudden change of attitude toward war, her conversion to the cause of the Grays, and her charm in this as in all their relations.

Was it conceivable that the change was not due to a personal feeling for him? Was her charm a charm with a purpose? Had he, the chief of staff, been beguiled into making a woman his confidant in military secrets? Just what had he told her? He could not recollect anything definite and recollection was the more difficult because he could not call to mind a single pertinent military question that she had ever asked him. Such information as he might have imparted had been incidental to their talks.

Page 218

He had enveloped her in glamour; his most preciously trained mental qualities lapsed in her presence. It was time that she was regarded impersonally, as a woman, by the critical eye of the chief of staff. A cool and intense impatience possessed him to study her in the light Of his new scepticism, when, turning the path of the first terrace, he saw her watching the sunset over the crest of the range.

She was standing quite still, a slim, soft shadow between him and the light, which gilded her figure and quarter profile. Did she expect him? he wondered. Was she posing at that instant for his benefit? And the answer, could he have searched her secret brain, was, Yes—yes, if the conscious and the subconscious mind are to be considered as one responsible intelligence. He usually came at that hour. But he had not come last night. They had not met since Bouchard's ghost hunt.

There was no firing near by; only desultory artillery practice in the distance. She heard the familiar crunch of five against three on the gravel. She knew that he had stopped at the turn of the path, and she was certain that he was looking at her! But she did not make the slightest movement. The golden light continued to caress her profile. Then, crunch, crunch, rather slowly, the five against three drew nearer. The delay had been welcome; it had been to her a moment's respite to get her breath before entering the lists. When she turned, her face in the shadow, the glow of the sunset seemed to remain in her eyes, otherwise without expression, yet able to detect something unusual under externals as they exchanged commonplaces of greeting.

"Well, there's a change in our official family. We have lost Bouchard—transferred to another post!" said Westerling.

Marta noted that, though he gave the news a casual turn, his scrutiny sharpened.

"Is that so? I can't say that my mother and I shall be sorry," she remarked. "He was always glaring at us as if he wished us out of his sight. Indeed, if he had his way, I think he would have made us prisoners of war. Wasn't he a woman-hater?" she concluded, half in irritation, half in amusement.

"He had that reputation," said Westerling. "What do you think led to his departure?" he continued.

"I confess I cannot guess!" said Marta, with a look at the sunset glow as if she resented the loss of a minute of it.

"There has been a leak of information to the Browns!" he announced.

"There has! And he was intelligence officer, wasn't he?" she asked, turning to Westerling, her curiosity apparently roused as a matter of courtesy to his own interest in the subject.

“Who do you think he accused? Why, *you*,” he added, with a peculiar laugh.

She noted the peculiarity of the laugh discriminatingly.

“Oh!” Her eyes opened wide in wonder—only wonder, at first. Then, as comprehension took the place of wonder, they grew sympathetic. “That explains!” she exclaimed. “His hateful glances were those of delusion. He was going mad, you mean?”

Page 219

“Yes,” said Westerling, “that—that would explain it!”

“I have been told that when people go mad they always ascribe every injury done to them to the person who happens to have excited their dislike,” she mused.

“Which seems to have been the case here,” Westerling assented. He did not know what else to say.

“It was the strain of war, wasn’t it?” Marta proceeded thoughtfully. “I notice that all the staff-officers are showing it; that is,” she added on second thought, quite literally, as she regarded him for an instant of silence, “all except you. You remain the same, calm and decisive.” There she looked away with a flutter of her lashes, as if she were shamed at having allowed herself to be caught in open admiration of him. “Look! The last effulgence of rose!” she went on hurriedly about the sunset. “Why shouldn’t we think of the sky as heaven, as Nirvana? What better immortality than to be absorbed into that?”

“None!” he agreed, but he was looking at her rather than at the sky. His pride was recovering its natural confidence in the infallibility of his judgment of human beings. He was seeing his suspicions as ridiculous enough to convict him of a brain as disordered as Bouchard’s.

Marta was thinking that she had been skating on very thin ice and that she must go on skating till she broke through. There was an exhilaration about it that she could not resist: the exhilaration of risk and the control of her faculties, prompted by a purpose hypnotically compelling. Both were silent, she watching the sky, he in anticipation and suspense. The rose went violet and the shadows over the range deepened.

“The guns and the troops wait. With darkness the music begins!” he said slowly, with a sort of stern fervor.

“The music—the music! He calls it music!” ran through Marta’s mind mockingly, but she did not open her lips.

“According to my plan—and your plan!” he added.

“My plan—my plan!” she thought. Her plan that was to send men into a shambles!

“They wait, ready, every detail arranged,” he continued proudly.

The violet melted into an inky blue; silence, vast, heavy, prevailed—silence where the millions lay on their arms. Even the guns in the distance had ceased their echoing rumble. He felt the power of her presence and of the moment. It was she who had given the information that had enabled him to confound the scepticism of the staff by the easy taking of Bordir. Through her he might repeat Bordir in a larger way at Engadir, proving his theories of frontal attack. His courage of initiative would shine out against

the background of his staff's scepticism as a light to the world's imagination. The first great man in forty years; the genius of the new system of tactics to meet the demands of a new age as Napoleon had met those of his, Grant of his, and Von Moltke of his! Engadir taken, and his place on Valhalla would be secure.

Page 220

The very silence with its taut expectancy was of his planning. Alone with her he waited for the thunders of his planning that were to break it. The sky merged into the shadows of the landscape that spread and thickened into blackness. Out of the drawn curtains of night broke an ugly flash and farther up the slope spread the explosive circle of light of a bursting shell.

“The signal!” he exclaimed.

Right and left the blasts spread along the Gray lines and right and left, on the instant, the Browns sent their blasts in reply. Countless tongues of flame seemed to burst from countless craters, and the range to rock in a torment of crashes. In the intervening space between the ugly, savage gusts from the Gray gun mouths, which sent their shells from the midst of exploding Brown shells, swept the beams of the Brown search-lights, their rays lost like sunlight in the vortex of an open furnace door.

“Splendid! splendid!” exclaimed Westerling, in a sweep of emotion at the sight that had been born of his command. “Five thousand guns on our side alone! The world has never seen the equal of this!”

“Five thousand guns!” Marta was thinking. What wouldn’t their cost have bought in books, in gardens, and in playgrounds! Every shot the price of a year’s schooling for a child!

“You see, we are pounding them along the whole frontier quite impartially, so they shall not know where we are going to press home the attack!” he continued.

“But they do know! I’ve told them!” shot the burning arrow of mockery through Marta’s brain.

“Their search-lights are watching for the infantry—and we shall press the infantry forward, too,” he added; “everywhere we make a show of fight!”

Then it occurred vividly to her, as a sudden discovery in the midst of the blinding display, that this was not a kind of chaos like that of the beginning of the world, not nature’s own elemental debauch, but men firing guns and men waiting for the charge under that spray of death-dealing missiles.

“Splendid! splendid!” he repeated.

Marta looked away from the range to his face, very distinct in the garish illumination. It was the face of a maestro of war seeing all his rehearsals and all his labors come true in symphonic gratification to the eye and ear; the face of a man of trained mind, the product of civilization, with the elation of a party leader on the floor of a parliament in a crisis.

“Soon, now!” said Westerling, and looked at his watch.

Shortly, in the direction of Engadir, to the rear of the steady flashes broke forth line after line of flashes as the long-range batteries, which so far had been silent, joined their mightier voices to the chorus, making a continuous leaping burst of explosions over the Brown positions, which were the real object of the attack.

Page 221

“The moment I’ve lived for!” exclaimed Westerling. “Our infantry is starting up the apron of Engadir! We held back the fire of the heavy guns concentrated for the purpose of supporting the men with an outburst. Three hundred heavy guns pouring in their shells on a space of two acres! We’re tearing their redoubts to pieces! They can’t see to fire! They can’t live under it! They’re in the crater of a volcano! When our infantry is on the edge of the wreckage the guns cease. Our infantry crowd in—crowd into the house that Partow built. He’ll find that numbers count; that the power of modern gun-fire will open the way for infantry in masses to take and hold vital tactical positions! And—no—no, their fire in reply is not as strong as I expected.”

“Because they are letting you in! It will be strong enough in due season!” thought Marta in the uncontrollable triumph of antagonism. Five against three was in his tone and in every line of his features.

“It’s hard for a soldier to leave a sight like this, but the real news will be awaiting me at my desk,” he concluded, adding, as he turned away: “It’s fireworks worth seeing, and if you remain here I will return to tell you the results.”

She had no thought of going. That arc of dreadful lightnings held her with ghastly fascination. Suddenly all the guns ceased. Faintly in the distance she heard a tumult of human voices in the high notes of a savage cheer; the rattling din of rifles; the purring of automatics; and then, except for the firefly flashes of scattered shots around Engadir, silence and darkness. But she knew that chaos would soon be loosed again—chaos and murder, which were the product of her own chicanery. The Grays would find themselves in the trap of Partow’s and Lanny’s planning.

Turning her back to the range for the moment, she saw the twinkle of the lights of the town and the threads of light of the wagon-trains and the sweep of the lights of the railroad trains on the plain; while in the foreground every window of the house was ablaze, like some factory on a busy night shift. She could hear the click of the telegraph instruments already reporting the details of the action as cheerfully as Brobdingnagian crickets in their peaceful surroundings. Then out of the shadows Westerling reappeared.

“The apron of Engadir is ours!” he called. “Thanks to you!” he added with pointed emphasis. Back in the house he had received congratulations with a nod, as if success were a matter of course. Before her, exultation unbent stiffness, and he was hoarsely triumphant and eager. “It’s plain sailing now,” he went on. “A break in the main line! We have only to drive home the wedge, and then—and then!” he concluded.

She felt him close, his breath on her cheek.

“Peace!” she hastened to say, drawing back instinctively.

And then! The irony of the words in the light of her knowledge was pointed by a terrific renewal of the thunders and the flashes far up on the range, and she could not resist rejoicing in her heart.

Page 222

“That’s the Browns!” exclaimed Westerling in surprise.

The volume of fire increased. With the rest of the frontier in darkness, the Engadir section was an isolated blaze. In its light she saw his features, without alarm but hardening in dogged intensity.

“They’ve awakened to what they have lost! They have been rushing up reserves and are making a counter-attack. We must hold what we have gained, no matter what the cost!”

His last sentence was spoken over his shoulder as he started for the house.

Thus more fire called for more fire; more murder for more murder, she thought. Her mind was projected into the thick of the battle. She saw a panic of Grays caught in their triumph; of wounded men writhing and crawling over their dead comrades, their position shown to the marksmen by a search-light’s glare. The dead grew thicker; their glassy eyes were staring at her in reproach. She heard the hoarse and straining voices of the Browns in their “God with us!” through the din of automatics. Men snuggled for cover amidst torn flesh and red-tinged mud in the trenches, and other men trampled them in fiendish risk of life to take more lives.

Without changing her position, hardly turning her head, she watched until the firing began to lessen rapidly. Then she breathed, “Engadir must be ours again!” and realized that she was weak and faint. Suspense had sapped her strength. She sought a seat in the arbor, where the nervous force of other thoughts revived her. What would Westerling say when he found that her information had led his men into a trap—when staff scepticism was proven right and he a false prophet?

From the house came the confused sound of voices in puzzling chorus. It was not a cheer. It had the quality of a rapid fire of jubilant exclamation as a piece of news was passed from lip to lip. Then she heard that step which she knew so well. Sensitive ears noted that it touched the gravel with unusual energy and quickness, which she thought must be due to vexation over the repulse. She rose to face him, summoning back the spirit of the actress.

“This is better yet! I came to tell you that the counter-attack failed!” he said as he saw her appear from the shelter of the arbor.

She wondered if she were going to fall. But the post of the trellis was within reach. She caught hold of it to steady herself. Failed! All her acting had served only to make such a trap for the Browns as Lanny had planned for the Grays! She was grateful for the darkness that hid her face, which was incapable of any expression now but blank despair. Westerling’s figure loomed very large to her as she regained her self-possession—large, dominant, unconquerable in the suggestion of five against three.

And felicitations were due! She drew away from the post, swaying and trembling, nerves and body not yet under command of mind. She could not force her tongue to so false a sentiment as congratulation.

Page 223

“The killing—it must have been terrible!” her mind at last made her exclaim to cover her tardiness of response to his mood.

“You thought of that—as you should—as I do!” he said.

He took her hands in his, pulsing warm with the flowing red of his strength. She let them remain lifelessly, as if she had not the will to take them away, the instinct of her part again dominant. To him this was another victory, and it was discovery—the discovery of melting weakness in her for the first time, which magnified his sense of masculine power. He tightened his grip slightly and she shuddered.

“You are tired!” he said, and it hurt her that he could be so considerate.

“The killing—to end that! It’s that I want!” she breathed miserably.

“And the end is near!” he said. “Yes, now, thanks to you!”

Thanks to her! And she must listen and submit to his touch!

“The engineers and material were ready to go in,” he continued. “Before morning, as I had planned, we shall be so well fortified in the position that nothing can budge us. This success so strengthens my power with the staff and the premier that I need not wait on Fabian tactics. I am supreme. I shall make the most of the demoralization of this blow to the enemy. I shall not wait on slow approaches in the hope of saving life. To-morrow I shall attack and keep on attacking till all the main line is ours.”

“Now you are playing your real part, the conqueror!” she thought gladly. “Your kind of peace is the ruin of another people; the peace of a helpless enemy. That is better”—better for her conscience. Unwittingly, she allowed her hands to remain in his. In the paralysis of despair she was unconscious that she had hands. She felt that she could endure anything to retrieve the error into which she had been the means of leading the Browns. And the killing—it would not stop, she knew. No, the Browns would not yield until they were decimated.

“We have the numbers to spare. Numbers shall press home—home to terms in their capital!” Westerling’s voice grew husky as he proceeded, harsh as orders to soldiers who hesitated in face of fire. “After that—after that”—the tone changed from harshness to desire, which was still the desire of possession—“the fruits of peace, a triumph that I want you to share!” He was drawing her toward him with an impulse of the force of this desire, when she broke free with an abrupt, struggling pull.

“Not that! Not that! Your work is not yet done!” she cried.

He made a move as if to persist, then fell back with a gesture of understanding.

“Right! Hold me to it!” he exclaimed resolutely. “Hold me to the bargain! So a woman worth while should hold a man worth while.”

“Yes!” she managed to say, and turned to go in a sudden impetus of energy. His egoism might ascribe her precipitancy to a fear of succumbing to the tenderness which he thought that she felt for him, when her one wish was to be free of him; her one rallying and tempestuous purpose of the moment to reach the telephone.

Page 224

Mrs. Galland and Minna saw her ghostlike as she passed through the living-room, their startled questions unheeded. Could it be true that she had betrayed every decent attribute of a woman in vain? Why had the counter-attack failed? Because Westerling had been too strong, too clever, for old Partow? Because God was still with the heaviest battalions? Half running, half stumbling, the light of the lantern bobbing and trembling weirdly, she hastened through the tunnel. Usually the time from taking the receiver down till Lanny replied was only a half minute. Now she waited what seemed many minutes without response. Had the connection been broken? To make sure that her impatience was not tricking her she began to count off the seconds. Then she heard Lanstron's voice, broken and hoarse:

"Marta, Marta, he is dead! Partow is dead!"

Recovering himself, Lanstron told the story of Partow's going, which was in keeping with his life and his prayers. As the doctor put it, the light of his mind, turned on full voltage to the last, went out without a flicker. Through the day he had attended to the dispositions for receiving the Grays' attack, enlivening routine as usual with flashes of humor and reflection ranging beyond the details in hand. An hour or so before dark he had reached across the table and laid his big, soft palm on the back of Lanstron's hand. He was thinking aloud, a habit of his, in Lanstron's company, when an idea requiring gestation came to him.

"My boy, it is not fatal if we lose the apron of Engadir. The defences behind it are very strong."

"No, not fatal," Lanstron agreed. "But it's very important."

"And Westerling will think it fatal. Yes, I understand his character. Yes—yes; and if our counter-attack should fail, then Miss Galland's position would be secure. Hm-m-m—-those whom the gods would destroy—hm-m-m. Westerling will be convinced that repeated, overwhelming attacks will gain our main line. Instead of using engineering approaches, he will throw his battalions, masses upon masses, against our works until his strength is spent. It would be baiting the bull. A risk—a risk—but, my boy, I am going to—"

Partow's head, which was bent in thought, dropped with a jerk. A convulsion shook him and he fell forward onto the map, his brave old heart in its last flutter, and Lanstron was alone in the silent room with the dead and his responsibility.

"The order that I knew he was about to speak, Marta, I gave for him," Lanstron concluded. "It seemed to me an inspiration—his last inspiration—to make the counter-attack a feint."

"And you're acting chief of staff, Lanny? You against Westerling?"

“Yes.”

XL

WITH FRACASSE’S MEN

We have heard nothing of Jacob Pilzer, the butcher’s son, and Peterkin, the valet’s son, and others of Fracasse’s company of the 128th of the Grays since Hugo Mallin threw down his rifle when they were firing on scattered Brown soldiers in retreat.

Page 225

It was in one of the minor actions of the step-by-step advance after the taking of the Galland house that the judge's son received official notice of a holiday in the form of a nickel pellet from the Browns which made a clean, straight hole the size of a lead pencil through his flesh and then went singing on its way without deflection, as if it liked to give respites from travail to tired soldiers.

"Grazed the ribs—no arteries!" remarked the examining surgeon. "You'll be well in a month."

"We'll hold the war for you!" called the banker's son cheerily after the still figure on the stretcher.

"And you'll get gruel and custards, maybe," said the barber's son. "I like custards."

Once the judge's son had thought that nothing could be so grand as to be wounded fighting for one's country. He had in mind then, as the object of his boyish admiration, a young officer returned from a little campaign against the blacks in Africa, when, the casualties being few and the scene distant and picturesque, all heroes with scars had an aspect of romantic exclusiveness. But there was no more distinction now in being wounded than in catching cold. Truly, colonial wars were the only satisfactory kind.

The judge's son found himself one of many men on cots in long rows in the former barracks of the Browns near La Tir. Daily bulletins told the patients the names of the positions taken and daily they heard of fresh batches of wounded arriving, which were not mentioned on the bulletin-board.

"We continue to win," said the doctors and nurses invariably in answer to all questions. "General Westerling announces that everything is going as planned."

"You must know that speech well!" observed the judge's son to the nurse of his section.

Her lips twitched in a kind of smile.

"Letter-perfect!" she replied "It's official."

In two weeks, so fast had the puncture from the aseptic little pellet of civilized warfare healed under civilization's medical treatment, the judge's son was up and about, though very weak. But the rules strictly confined his promenades to the barracks yard. There might be news coming down the traffic-gorged castle road out of the region where the guns sounded that convalescents were not intended to hear. For news could travel in other ways than by bulletin-boards; and the judge's son, merely watching the faces of medical officers, guessed that it was depressing. But after the first attack on Engadir their faces lighted. The very thrill of victory seemed to be in the air.

“It’s in the main line of defence!” called the doctor on his morning rounds of the cots. “They’ve made Westerling a field-marshal. He’s outwitted the Browns! In a few days now we’ll have the range!”

How staggering was the cost he was not to realize till later, when the ambulance stewards kept repeating:

“More to come!”

Page 226

A newcomer, who took the place of a man who had died on the cot next to the judge's son, had been in the fight. He was still ether-sick and weak from the amputation of his right arm, with a dazed, glassy, and far-away look in his eyes, as if everything in the world was strange and uncertain.

"The fearful flashes—the explosions—the gusts of steel in the air!" he whispered.

The next night Westerling followed up his supposed advantage at Engadir as he had planned, and there was no sleep for the thunders and the light of the explosions through the barracks-room windows.

"I can see what is happening and feel—and feel!" said the man who had been at Engadir.

In the morning the bulletin announced that more positions were taken, with very heavy losses—to the enemy. But the news that travelled unofficially from tongue to tongue down the castle road and spoke in the faces of doctors and nurses said, "And to us!" plainly enough, even if the judge's son had not heard a doctor remark:

"It's awful—inconceivable! Not a hospital tent in this division is unoccupied. Most of the houses in town are full, and we're preparing for another grand attack!"

Now for two days the guns kept up their roar.

"Making ready for the infantry to go in," ran the talk around the barracks yard.

After the infantry had gone in and the result was known, the doctor on his morning round said to the judge's son:

"You're pretty pale yet, but you'll do. We must make room for a big crowd that is coming and the orders are to get every man who is in any condition to fight to the front."

"And if I get another hole in me you'll patch me up again?"

"Get any number and we'll patch you up if they're in the right place," was the answer. "But be careful about that detail."

Soon the judge's son was with a score of convalescents who were marched down to the town, where they formed in column with other detachments.

"Not with that cough!" exclaimed a doctor as they were about to start, ordering a man out of line. "You'd never get to the front. You'd only have to be brought back in an ambulance."

An enlightening march this for the judge's son from hospital to trenches, moving with a tide of loaded commissariat wagons and empty ambulances and passing a tide of loaded ambulances and empty commissariat wagons. A like scene was on every road to the front; a like scene on every vista of landscape along any part of the frontier. All trees and bushes and walls and buildings that would give cover to the enemy the Browns had razed. On every point of rising ground were the trenches and redoubts that the Browns had yielded after their purpose of making the Grays earn their way by trenches of their own had been served. The fields were trampled by the feet of infantry, cut by gun wheels, ploughed by shells, and sown with the conical nickel pellets from rifles and the round lead bullets of shrapnel. An escarpment of rock, where the road-bed was slashed into a hillside in a sharp turn, struck by the concentrated fire of automatics, appeared to have been beaten by thousands of sharp-headed hammers, leaving a pile of chips and dust.

Page 227

The traffic of the main roads spread into branch roads which ended in the ganglia of supply depots, all kept in touch by the network of wires focussing through different headquarters to Westerling. In this conquered territory with its face of desolation there were no fighting men except reserves or convalescents on their way to the front. All the rest were wounded or dead or occupied in the routine of supply and intelligence. The organization which had been drilled through two generations of peace for this emergency exhibited the signs of pressure.

Eyes that met when commands were given and received were dull from want of sleep or hectically bright as a hypochondriac's. Voices spoke in a grim, tired monotone, broken by sudden flashes of irritation or eruptions of anger. Features were drawn like those of rowers against a tide. The very proportions of the ghastly harvest after the last, the heaviest of all, of the attacks brought spasms of nausea to men already hardened to blood and death. If the officers of the staffs in their official conspiracy of silence would not talk, the privates and the wounded would. The judge's son, observing, listening, thinking, was gathering a story to tell his comrades of Company B of the 128th.

That night he and his comrade convalescents slept in the open. Their bodies were huddled close together under their blankets for warmth, while aching limbs twitched from the fatigue of the march. The morning showed that others had coughs which should have kept them from the front.

"Four or five cases of pneumonia due in that lot!" a doctor remarked to a hospital-corps sergeant. "Put them in empties right away."

After this announcement other coughs developed. Amusing, these sudden, purposeful efforts should one happen to think of them in that way. But no one did.

"No you don't, you malingerers!" said the doctor sharply. "I've been at this business long enough to know a real cough."

Now the judge's son and a dozen others were separated from the rest of their companions and started over a hill. From the top they had a broad view. Across a strip of valley lay the main rise to the heights of the range. Along the summit nothing warlike was visible except the irregular landscape against the horizon. There the enemy rested in his fortifications. The slopes, as far as the judge's son could see on either hand, were like the warrens of an overpopulated rabbit world in hiding. Here was the army of the Grays in its redoubts and trenches A thousand times as many men as were ever at work on the Panama Canal had been digging their way forward—digging regardless of union hours; digging to save their own lives and to take lives. And the nearer they came to the top of the range the deeper they had to dig and the slower their progress.

As the little group of convalescents descended into a valley a bursting shell from the Browns scattered its fragments over the earth near by.

Page 228

“They drop one occasionally, though they don’t expect to get more than a man or two by chance, which is hardly worth the cost of the charge,” some one explained. “You see that they must know just what our positions are from their understanding of our army’s organization, and the purpose is to bother us about bringing up supplies and reserves. Start a commissariat train or a company in close order across, and—whew! The air screams!”

Once on the other side of the valley, and the maze of zigzags and parallels leading into the warrens was simplified by signs indicating the location of regiments. At length the judge’s son found himself in the home cave of his own tribe. His comrades were resting at the noon-hour, their backs against the wall of their shell-proof. In the faint light their faces were as gray as the dust on the dirty uniforms that hung on their gaunt bodies. Dust was caked in the seams around their eyes; their cheeks were covered with dusty beards. Their greeting of the returned absentee was that of men who had passed through a strain that left existence untouched by the spring of average sensations.

“Did you get the custards?” asked the barber’s son in a squeaky voice.

“No, but I got a jelly once—only once!”

“Snob!” said the barber’s son.

“Jelly! I could eat a hogshead of jelly and still be empty! What I want is fresh meat!” growled Pilzer, the butcher’s son.

“A hogshead of jelly might be good to bathe in!” said the banker’s son. “I haven’t had a bath for a month.”

“I have. I turned my underclothes inside out!” said the barber’s son. He was aiming to take Hugo’s place as humorist, in the confidence of one sprung from a talkative family.

Scanning the faces, the judge’s son found many new ones—those of the older reservists—while many of the faces of barrack days were missing.

“Whom have we lost?” he asked.

The answer, given with dull matter-of-factness, revealed that, of the group that had talked so light-heartedly of war six weeks before, only little Peterkin, the valet’s son, and Pilzer, the butcher’s son, and the barber’s and the banker’s sons survived. They were sitting in a row, from the instinct that makes old associates keep together even though they continually quarrel. The striking thing was that Peterkin looked the most cheerful and well-kept of the four. As the proud possessor of a pair of scissors, he had trimmed a surprisingly heavy beard Van Dyck fashion, which emphasized his peaked features and a certain consciousness of superiority; while the barber’s son sported only a few scraggly hairs. The scant, reddish product of Pilzer’s cheeks, leaving bare the liver

patch, only accentuated its repulsiveness and a savagery in his voice and look which was no longer latent under the conventional discipline of every-day existence. The company had not been in the first Engadir assault, but, being near the Engadir position, had suffered heavily in support.

Page 229

“You were in the big attack night before last?” asked the judge’s son.

“We started in,” said Peterkin, “but Captain Fracasse brought us back,” he added in a way that implied that only orders had kept him from going on.

Peterkin, the trembling little Peterkin of the baptismal charge across the line of white posts, had been the first out of the redoubt on to the glacis in that abortive effort, living up to the bronze cross on his breast. He was one of the half dozen out of the score that had started to return alive. The psychology of war had transformed his gallantry; it had passed from simulation to reality, thanks to his established conviction that he led a charmed life. Little Peterkin, always pale but never getting paler, was ready to lead any forlorn hope. A superstitious nature, which, at the outset of the war, had convinced him that he must be killed in the first charge, now, as the result of his survival, gave him all the faith of Eugene Aronson that the bullet would never be made that could kill him.

“Was the attack general all along the front?” some one asked. “We couldn’t tell. All we knew was the hell around us.”

“Yes,” answered the judge’s son.

“Did we accomplish anything?”

“A few minor positions, I believe.”

“But we will win!” said Peterkin. “The colonel said so.”

“And the news—what is the news?” demanded the barber’s son. “You needn’t be afraid,” he added. “The officers are on the other side of the redoubt. They get sick of the sight of us and we of them and this is their recess and ours from the eternal digging.”

“Yes, the news from home!”

“Yes, from home! We don’t even get letters any more. They’ve shut off all the mails.”

“I met a man from our town,” said the judge’s son. “He said that after that story was published in the press about Hugo’s damning patriotism and hurrahing for the Browns—it was fearfully exaggerated—his old father and mother shut themselves up in the house and would not show their faces for shame. But his sweetheart, however much her parents stormed, refused to renounce him. She held her head high and said that the more they abused him the more she loved him, and she knew he could do nothing wrong.”

“Hugo was not a patriot. It takes red blood to make a patriot!” said Peterkin. In the pride of heroism and prestige, he was becoming an oracular enunciator of commonplaces from the lips of his superiors.

“The absence of any word from the front only increases the suspense of the people. They do not know whether their sons and brothers and husbands are living or dead,” continued the judge’s son.

“Up to a week ago they let us write,” said Pilzer, “though they wouldn’t let us say anything except that we were well.”

“That was because it might give information to the enemy,” said Peterkin.

“As if I didn’t know that!” grumbled Pilzer. “The enemy seems to be always ready for us, anyway,” he added.

Page 230

“The chief of staff stopped the letters because he said that mothers who received none took it for granted that their sons were dead,” explained the judge’s son. “Besides, he asserts that casualties are not heavy and asks for patience in the name of patriotism.”

“The—!” exclaimed Pilzer, referring to Westerling. He who had set out to be an officers’ favorite had become bitter against all officers, high and low.

Peterkin was speechlessly aghast. The others said nothing. They were used to Pilzer’s oaths and obscenity, with a growing inclination to profanity on their own part. Besides, they rather agreed with his view of the chief of staff.

“Did you see many dead and wounded?” asked a very tired voice, that of one of the older reservists who was emaciated, with a complexion like blue mould.

“How can I tell you what I saw? Ought I to tell you?”

“When you’ve had to wipe a piece of brains out of your eye, as I have—it was warm and jelly-like,” said Pilzer, “you ain’t as squeamish as Hugo Mallin. I wonder they don’t give him a bronze cross!”

“Bronze crosses are given for bravery in action,” said Peterkin in his new-fashioned parrot way since he had become great. “You should not do anything to affect the spirit of corps.”

“The boy wonder from the butler’s pantry! Our dear, natty little buttons! Bullets glide off him!” snarled Pilzer, who had set out to win a bronze cross, only to see it won by a pygmy.

“Did you see many dead and wounded?” persisted the very tired voice of the old reservist.

“Yes, yes—and every kind of destruction!” answered the judge’s son. “And—I kept thinking of Hugo Mallin.”

“I’m glad they didn’t shoot Hugo,” said the very tired voice. “I’m sorry for his old father and mother. I’m a father myself.”

“I certainly had a good farewell kick at him!” declared Pilzer. “Lean on yourself!” he added, giving a shove to the old reservist who was next him.

“I saw men who had ceased to be human. That reminds me, Pilzer,” the judge’s son went on, “I saw one wounded man, lying beside another, turn and strike him, and he said: ‘I had to hit somebody or something!’ And I heard a wounded man who was waiting in line before the surgeon’s table say: ‘There’s others hurt worse than me. I can wait.’ I heard men begging the doctors to put them out of their misery. I saw two dead

men with their hands clasped as they were when they died. Then there were the men who went mad. One had to be held by force. He kept crying with demoniacal laughs: 'I want to go back and kill—kill! Let's all kill, kill, kill!' Another insisted on dancing, despite a bandaged leg. 'Look, look at the little red spots!' he was saying. 'You must step on one every time; if you don't, the automatic will get you!' Another declared that he had been through hell and insisted that he would live forever now. Another was an artist, a landscape-painter, who had lost his eyesight. He was seeing beautiful landscapes, and the nurses had to strap him to his cot to keep him from struggling to his feet and trying to use an imaginary brush on imaginary canvases. He died seeing beautiful landscapes.

Page 231

“A pretty dreary sight, too, was the field of the dead, as I called it. As the bodies were brought in they were laid in long rows, until there was no more room without moving a supply depot. So there was nothing to do but begin to pile them two deep. A service-corps man took off each man’s metal identification tag and tossed it into an ammunition box. One box was already full and a second half full. Chink-chink-chink—tags of the rich man’s son and the poor man’s son, the doctor of philosophy and the illiterate; chink-chink-chink—a life each time. They’ll take the tags to the staff office and tired clerks will find the names that go with the numbers.”

“You cannot make an omelet without breaking eggs,” said Peterkin, quoting high authority. “Some have to be killed.”

“The last I heard from home my wife and one of the children were sick and my employer had gone bankrupt,” broke in the very tired voice rather irrelevantly.

“Yes, my father’s last letter was pretty blue about business,” said the banker’s son. He was looking at his dirty hands. The odor of clothes unlaundered for weeks, in which the men had slept, tortured his sensitive nostrils. “A millionaire and filthy as swine in a sty!” he exclaimed. “Digging like a navvy in order to get admission to the abattoir!”

“Were there any reserves coming our way?” asked the barber’s son.

“Yes, masses.”

“Perhaps they will relieve us and we’ll go into the reserves for a while,” suggested the very tired voice.

“No fear!” growled Pilzer.

“They have called out the old men, the fellows of forty-five to fifty, who were supposed to be out of it for good,” said the judge’s son. “Westerling says they are to guard prisoners and property when we cross the range and start on the march to the Browns’ capital. Then all the other men can be on the firing-line and force the war to a mercifully quick end with a minimum loss. I saw numbers of them just arriving at La Tir, footsore and limping.”

“I know. Mine’s been indoor work, making paints,” said the very tired voice. “When you’ve had long hours in the shop and had to sit up late with sick babies, you aren’t fit for marching. And I think I’ve got lead-poisoning.”

“Whew!” The judge’s son put his hand over his nose as a breeze sprang up from the direction of the Brown lines.

“I thought we got them all,” said the barber’s son.

“Must have missed one that was buried by a shell and another shell must have dug him up!” muttered Pilzer, glaring at the barber’s son. “It’s not nice on people with ladylike nostrils. James, get the *eau de cologne* and draw his bath for our plutocrat!”

“You see, something had to be done about the dead between the redoubts,” explained the barber’s son, “though the officers on both sides were against it.”

“Naturally. It afforded opportunities for observation,” put in Peterkin, repeating the colonel’s words.

Page 232

“But finally it was agreed to let a dozen from either side go out without arms,” the barber’s son concluded.

“I heard there was great complaint from the women,” went on the judge’s son. “Women aren’t like what they were in the last war. They want to know what has become of their men-folk. They have been gathering in crowds and making trouble for the police. One of the old reservists was telling me of talk of an army of women marching to the front to learn the truth of the situation.”

“If you don’t stop leaning on me I’ll give you a punch you’ll remember!” exclaimed Pilzer as he rammed his elbow into the old reservist’s ribs.

“I beg pardon! It was because I am tired and sort of blank-minded,” the old reservist explained.

“You brute!” snapped the banker’s son to Pilzer.

“Mallin thrashed you once and I’ve done it once. On my word, I’ve a mind to again!”

“No, you don’t! No, you can’t! And this time your boxing tricks will do you no good. I’ll finish you!”

The two had sprung to their feet with hectic energy: Pilzer’s liver patch a mottled purple in the midst of his curly red beard, his head lowered in front of his short, thick neck as before a spring, and the banker’s son, lighter and quicker, awaiting the attack. Some of the others half rose, while the rest looked on in curiosity mixed with indifference.

“I’ll call the captain!” piped Peterkin.

The judge’s son stopped Peterkin and put a hand on either of the adversaries’ shoulders.

“Can’t we get enough fighting from the Browns without fighting each other?” he asked.

The banker’s son and Pilzer dropped back in their places, in the reaction of men who had spent their strength in defiance.

“The thick of it last night, I heard, was still at Engadir, where Westerling is determined to break through,” the judge’s son proceeded. “At one point they sent in a regiment with a regiment covering it from the rear, and the fellows ahead were told that they wouldn’t be allowed to come back alive—just what occurred at Port Arthur, you know—so they had better take the position.”

“What happened?” asked the very tired voice.

“Those who reached the enemy’s works alive were taken prisoner.”

Further talk was interrupted by a volume of voices singing, which seemed to issue from a cellar not far away. It had the swell of a hymn of resolute purpose.

“The Browns’ song—something new since you were with us,” explained the barber’s son to the judge’s son.

“Yes, their whole line sung it in the silence of dawn following last night’s repulse,” said the banker’s son. “Notice the hammer beat to it and then the earth rumble, like pounding nails in a coffin box and rattling the earth on top of the box after it is lowered.”

“Yes, and I get the words,” said the judge’s son, who knew the language of the Browns: “’God with us, not to take what is theirs, but to keep what is ours! God with us!’”

Page 233

“They say some private—Stransky, I believe his name is—composed the words from a saying of Partow, their chief of staff, and it spread,” put in the very tired voice.

“As it would at a time of high pressure like this, when all humanity’s nerves form an electric circuit,” said the judge’s son. “‘God with us!’ What a power they put into that!”

“But God is with us, not with them!” put in Peterkin earnestly. “Let’s have our song to answer them,” he added, striking up the tune.

So they sung the song they had sung as they started off to the war—a song about camping in the squares of the Browns’ capital and dining in the Browns’ government palace; a hurrahing, marchy song, but without exactly the snap in keeping with its character.

“The trouble is that they lie at the mouths of their burrows and get us naked to their fire,” said the banker’s son. “We have to take their positions—they don’t try to take ours.”

“But we must go on! We can’t give up now!” said the barber’s son.

“Yes, we must go on!” agreed some of the others stubbornly.

“Yes, yes,” came faintly from the very tired voice.

“We shall win! The aggressive always wins!” declared Peterkin.

Then the redoubt shook with an explosion and their eyes were blinded with dust.

“I thought it was about time!” said the barber’s son.

“Yes, the—!” snarled Pilzer.

The shell had struck some distance away from where they sat, and as the dust settled they heard the news of the result:

“One fellow had his arm broken and another had his head crushed.”

“It’ll keep us from working on the mine while we mend the breach,” said the barber’s son.

While the judge’s son was telling the news, the colonel of the 128th and Captain Fracasse were eating their biscuits together and making occasional remarks rather than holding a conversation.

“Well, Westerling is a field-marshal,” said the colonel.

“Yes, he’s got something out of it!”

“The men seem to be losing their spirit—there’s no doubt of it!” exclaimed the colonel, more aloud to himself than to Fracasse, after a while.

“No wonder!” replied Fracasse. Martinet though he was, he spoke in grumbling loyalty to his soldiers. “What kind of spirit is there in doing the work of navvies? Spirit! No soldiers ever fought better—in invasion, at least. Look at our losses! Spirit! Westerling drives us in. He thinks we can climb Niagara Falls! He—”

“Stop! You’re talking like an anarchist!” snapped the colonel. “How can the men have spirit when you feel that way?”

“I shall continue to obey orders and do my duty, sir!” replied Fracasse. “And they will, too, or I’ll know the reason why.”

There was a silence, but at length the colonel exploded:

“I suppose Westerling knows what he is doing!”

Page 234

“Still, we must go on! We must win!”

“Yes, the offensive always wins in the end. We must go on!”

“And once we have the range—yes, once we’ve won one vital position—the men will recover their enthusiasm and be crying: ’On to the capital!’”

“Right! We were forgetting history. We were forgetting the volatility of human nature.”

XLI

WITH FELLER AND STRANSKY

Far up on a peak among the birds and aeroplanes, in a roofed, shell-proof chamber, with a telephone orderly at his side, a powerful pair of field-glasses and range-finders at his elbow, and a telescope before his eye, Gustave Feller, one-time gardener and now acting colonel of artillery, watched the burst of shells over the enemy’s lines. While other men had grown lean on war, he had taken on enough flesh to fill out the wrinkles around eyes that shone with an artist’s enjoyment of his work. Down under cover of the ridge were his guns, the keys of the instrument that he played by calls over the wire. Their barking was a symphony to his ears; errors of orchestration were errors in aim. He talked as he watched, his lively features reflective of his impressions.

“Oh, pretty! Right into their tummies! Right in the nose! La, la, la! But that’s off—and so’s that! Tell Battery C they’re fifty yards over. Oh, beady-eyed gods and shiny little fishes—two smacks in the same spot! Humph! Tell Battery C that the trouble with that gun is worn rifling; that’s why it’s going short. Elevate it for another hundred yards—but it ought not to wear out so soon. I’d like to kick the maker or the inspector. The fellows in B 21 will accuse us of inattention. It’s time to drop a shell on them to show we’re perfectly impartial in our favors. La, la, la! Oh, what a pretty smack! Congratulations!”

B 21 was the position of Fracasse’s company and the pretty smack the one that broke one man’s arm and crushed another’s head.

* * * * *

The “God with us!” song was singularly suited to the great, bull voice of its composer, born to the red and become Captain Stransky in the red business of war. It was he who led the thunder of its verses not far from where Peterkin led the song of the Grays.

“I certainly like that song,” said Stransky. Well he might. It had made him famous throughout the nation. “There’s Jehovah and brimstone in it. Now we’ll have our own.”

“Our own” was also of Stransky’s composition and about Dellarme; for Stransky, child of the highways and byways, of dark, tragic alleys and sunny fields, had music in him, the music of the people. The skin on his high cheek-bones was drawn tighter than before, further exaggerating the size of his nose, and the deeper set of his eyes gave their cross a more marked character. He carried on the spirit of Dellarme in the company in his own

Page 235

fashion. The survivors among his men were as lean and dirty as Fracasse's, but, never having expected to reach the enemy's capital, war had brought few illusions. They had known sleepless vigils, but not much digging since they had fallen back on the main line into the fortifications which, with all resources at command, the engineers had built before the war. And the Browns still held the range! The principal fortifications of Engadir and every other vital point of the main line was theirs. All that the enemy had gained in his latest attack were a few minor positions.

"But we're always losing positions!" complained one of the men. "Little by little they are getting possession."

"They say the offensive always wins," said another.

"Five against three! They count on numbers," said Lieutenant Tom Fragini.

"There you go, Tom! Any other pessimists or anarchists want to be heard?" called out Stransky. "Just how long, at the present rate, will it take them to get the whole range? There's a limit to the number of even five millions."

"Yes, but if they ever break through in one place and get their guns up—"

"As you've said before, Tom!"

"As we want to keep saying—as we want to keep fighting our damnedest to make sure they won't," Tom explained.

"Yes, that's it!" declared a chorus.

"That's it, no matter what we pay!" declared Stransky. "We're not going back there except in hearses!" He swung his hand in a semicircle toward the distant hills, gold and purple in their dying foliage under the autumn sunlight.

Then the telephone in the redoubt brought some news. The staff begged to inform the army that the enemy's casualties in the last three days had been two hundred thousand! Immediately everybody was talking at once in Stransky's parliament, as he sometimes called that company of which he was, in the final analysis, unlimited monarch.

"How do they know?"

"Do you think it's fake?"

"That sums up to pretty near a million!"

“My God! Think of it—a million!”

“We’re whittling them down!”

“It doesn’t make any difference whether Partow or Lanstron is chief of staff!”

“They’re paying!”

“Paying for our fellows that they’ve killed! Paying for being in the wrong!”

“Let’s have the song again! Come on!”

“Yes, the song! The song!”

“No; hold on!” cried Tom. “Not because men are killed!”

“That’s right, that’s right!” said Stransky. “After all, they’re our brothers.” It was the first time since he had undergone the transformation which the war had wrought in him that he had mentioned any of his world-brotherhood ideas. “I still believe in that. We’re fighting for that!” he concluded.

With the ready change of subject of soldiers who have been long in company, they were soon talking about other things—things that concerned the living.

Page 236

“Say, wouldn’t I like a real bath—an altogether!”

“And plenty of soap all over!”

“A welter of lather from head to foot and blowing bubbles from between my lips!”

“And to shave off this beard!”

“Think of the beards that are going when the war is over!”

“Not if you can’t grow any more than John!”

“I’m not fighting out of ambush like you!” replied John. “I haven’t got a place for the birds to nest!”

“I’m going to trim mine down gradually,” said another; “first an imperial and mustache with mutton choppers; then mow my cheeks; then a great, sweeping mustache; then a dandy little mustache; then—”

“Mow is the word! Don’t inflict a barber!”

“And, after the bath, clean underclothes, and, oh, me!—a home dinner!”

“Stop with your home dinners! That’s barred. Army biscuits!”

“Yes, we all prefer army biscuits!”

“We wouldn’t touch a home dinner!”

Stransky, his eyes drawing inward in their characteristic slant, was well pleased with his company, and the scattered exclamatory badinage kept on until it was interrupted by the arrival of the mail. Partow and Lanstron, understanding their machine as human in its elements, had chosen that the army should hear from home.

“How’s this!” exclaimed one man, reading from a newspaper. “They’re going to put up a statue of Partow in the capital! It’s to show him as he died, dropped forward on the map, and in front of his desk a field of bayonets. On one face of the base will be his name. Two of the other faces will have ‘God with us!’ and ‘Not for theirs, but for ours!’ The legend on the fourth face the war is to decide.”

“Victory! Victory!” cried those who had listened to the announcement.

“My mother says just what yours says, Tom. I needn’t come home unless we win.”

“The girl I’m going to marry said that, too!”

“If we go back with the Gray army at our heels we shall strike a worse fire than if we stick!”

Stransky was thinking that they had to do more than hold the Grays. Before he should see his girl they had to take back the lost territory. He carried two pictures of Minna in his mind: one when she had struck him in the face as he had tried to kiss her and the other as he said good-by at the kitchen door. There was not much encouragement in either.

“But when she gets better acquainted with me there’s no telling!” he kept thinking. “I was fighting out of cussedness at first. Now I’m fighting for her and to keep what is ours!”

XLII

THE RAM

“I’ve learned that the greatest, most desperate attack of all is coming,” Marta told Lanstron. “But I don’t know at what point. I see Westerling only when he comes into the garden, and he does not come so frequently of late.”

Page 237

Very sweet and very harrowing to him was the intimacy of their conspiracy over that underground wire. With the prolongation of the strain, he feared for her. He understood how she suffered. Sometimes he felt that the Marta of their holiday comradeship was dead and it was the impersonal spirit of a great purpose that brought him information and inspiration. Her voice was taut, without inflection, as if in pain, occasionally breaking into a dry sob, only to become even more taut after a silence.

“I don’t—I can’t urge you to any further sacrifice,” Lanstron replied. “You have endured enough.”

“But it will help? It will be of vital service?”

“Yes, tremendously vital.”

“I will try to learn more when I see him,” she continued. “But it cannot be done by questioning. A single question might be fatal. The thing must come in a burst of confidence. That’s the horrible part of it, the—” There was a dry sob over the wire as the voice broke and then went on steadily: “But I’m game! I’m game!”

In the closet off the Galland library, where the long-distance telephone was installed, Westerling was talking with the premier in the Gray capital.

“Your total casualties are eight hundred thousand! That is terrific, Westerling!” the premier was saying.

“Only two hundred thousand of those are dead!” replied Westerling. “Many with only slight wounds are already returning to the front. Terrific, do you say? Two hundred thousand in five millions is one man out of every twenty-five. That wouldn’t have worried Frederick the Great or Napoleon much. Eight hundred thousand is one out of six. The trouble is that such vast armies have never been engaged before. You must consider the percentages, not the totals.”

“Yet, eight hundred thousand! If the public knew!” exclaimed the premier.

“The public does not know!” said Westerling.

“They guess. They realize that we stopped the soldiers’ letters because they told bad news. The situation is serious.”

“Why not give the public something else to think about?” Westerling demanded.

“I’ve tried. It doesn’t work. The murmurs increase. I repeat, my fears of a rising of the women are well grounded. There is mutiny in the air. I feel it through the columns of the press, though they are censored. I—”

“Then, soon I’ll give the public something to think about, myself!” Westerling broke in. “The dead will be forgotten. The wounded will be proud of their wounds and their fathers and mothers triumphant when our army descends the other side of the range and starts on its march to the Browns’ capital.”

“But you have not yet taken a single fortress!” persisted the premier. “And the Browns report that they have lost only three hundred thousand men.”

“Lanstron is lying!” retorted Westerling hotly. “But no matter. We have taken positions with every attack and kept crowding in closer. I ask nothing better than that the Browns remain on the defensive, leaving initiative to us. We have developed their weak points. The resolute offensive always wins. I know where I am going to attack; they do not. I shall not give them time to reinforce the defence at our chosen point. I have still plenty of live soldiers left. I shall go in with men enough this time to win and to hold.”

Page 238

“The army is yours, Westerling,” concluded the premier. “I admire your stolidity of purpose. You have my confidence. I shall wait and hold the situation at home the best I can. We go into the hall of fame or into the gutter together, you and I!”

For a while after he had hung up the receiver Westerling’s head drooped, his muscles relaxed, giving mind and body a release from tension. But his spine was as stiff as ever as he left the closet, and he was even smiling to give the impression that the news from the capital was favorable. When the telegraphers’ jaws had dropped as the reports of casualties came in, when discouragement lengthened the faces around him and whispered in the very breezes from the fields of the dead, he had automatically maintained his confident mien. Any sign of weakening would be ruinous in its effect on his subordinates. The citadel of his egoism must remain unassailable. He must be the optimist, the front of Jove, for all.

When he called his chiefs of divisions it was hardly for a staff council. Stunned by the losses and repulses, loyally industrious, their opinions unasked, they listened to his whirlwind of orders without comment—all except Turcas.

“If they are apprised of our plan and are able to concentrate more artillery than our guns can silence, the losses will be demoralizing,” he observed.

Westerling threw up his head, frowning down the objection.

“Suppose they amount to half the forces that we send in!” he exclaimed. “Isn’t the position, which means the pass and the range, worth it?”

“Yes, if we both take and hold it; not if we fail,” replied Turcas, quite unaffected by Westerling’s manner.

“Failure is not in my lexicon!” Westerling shot back. “For great gains there must be great risks.”

“We prepare for the movement, Your Excellency,” answered Turcas.

It was a steel harness of his own will that Westerling wore, without admitting that it galled him, and he laid it off only in Marta’s presence. With her, his growing sense of isolation had the relief of companionship. She became a kind of mirror of his egoism and ambitions. He liked to have her think of him as a great man unruffled among weaker men. In the quiet and seclusion of the garden, involuntarily as one who has no confidant speaks to himself, reserving fortitude for his part before the staff, while she, under the spell of her purpose, silently, with serene and wistfully listening eyes, played hers, he outlined how the final and telling blow was to be struck.

“We must and we shall win!” he kept repeating.

* * * * *

Through a rubber disk held to his ear in the closet of his bedroom a voice, tremulous with nervous fatigue, was giving Lanstron news that all his aircraft and cavalry and spies could not have gained; news worth more than a score of regiments; news fresh from the lips of the chief of staff of the enemy. The attack was to be made at the right of Engadir, its centre breaking from the redoubt manned by Fracasse's men.

Page 239

“Marta, you genius!” Lanstron cried. “You are the real general! You—”

“Not that, please!” she broke in. “I’m as foul and depraved as a dealer in subtle poisons in the Middle Ages! Oh, the shame of it, while I look into his eyes and feign admiration, feign everything which will draw out his plans! I can never forget the sight of him as he told me how two or three or four hundred thousand men were to be crowded into a ram, as he called it—a ram of human flesh!—and guns enough in support, he said, to tear any redoubts to pieces; guns enough to make their shells as thick as the bullets from an automatic!”

“We’ll meet ram with ram! We’ll have some guns, too!” exclaimed Lanstron. “We’ll send as heavy a shell fire at their infantry as they send into our redoubts.”

“Yes; oh, yes!” she replied. “Westerling couldn’t say it any better! What difference is there between you? Each at his desk is saying: ’This regiment will die here; that regiment will die there!’ I bring you word of one human ram going to destruction in order that you may send another to destroy and be destroyed! And I’m worse than you. I am the go-between in the conspiracy of universal murder, sleeping in a good bed every night, in no danger—when I can sleep; but I can’t. I go mad from thinking of my part, keying myself up deliriously to each fresh deceit!”

With every sentence her voice broke and it seemed that she would not be able to utter another. Yet she kept on in the alternation of taut, pitiful monotone and dry, coughing sobs.

“How have I ever been able to go as far as I have? How did I get through this last scene? When it seems as if I were about to collapse, something supports me. When the thing grows too horrible and I am about to cry out to Westerling that I am false, I hear his boast that he made the war as a last step in his ambition. And there is Dellarme’s smile rising before me. He died so finely in defence of our garden! When my brain goes numb and I can’t think what to say, can’t act, Feller appears, prompting with ready word and facile change of expression, and I have my wits again. I go on! I go on!”

A racking sob, now, and silence; then, in the sudden effort of one who must change the subject to hold his sanity, she asked:

“How is Feller? Is he doing well?”

“Yes.”

“At least I have brought him happiness. Sometimes I think that is about all the good I have accomplished—I, his successor in carrying out your plans! Oh, I’m burned out, Lanny! I’m ashes. It doesn’t seem that I can ever be sane or clean and human again.

In order to forget I should have to find a new life, like Feller. Each morning when I look in the mirror I expect to see my hair turned white, like his."

Lanstron felt her suffering as if it were his own. He had let his patriotic passion overwhelm every other consideration. He had allowed her to be a spy; he had sacrificed her sensibilities along with the battalions he had sent into battle. She was right: he was only the inhuman head of a machine. And she and Feller—they were human. Destiny playing in the crux of war's inconsistencies had formed a bond between them.

Page 240

“But, go on, Lanny. Play your part as you see it—as Westerling sees his and Feller his and I mine,” she said. “That is the only logic clear to me; only I can’t play any more. I haven’t the strength.”

“Yes, I shall go on, Marta,” he replied, “but you must not. Your work is over, and perhaps this last service may bring a quick end and save countless lives.”

“Don’t. It’s too like Westerling! It has become too trite!” she protested. “The end! If I really were helping toward that and to save lives and our country to its people, what would my private feelings matter’ My honor, my soul—what would anything matter? For that, any sacrifice. I’m only one human being—a weak, lunatic sort of one, just now!”

“Marta, don’t suffer so! You are overwrought. You—”

“I can say all that for you, Lanny,” she interrupted with the faintest laugh. “I’ve said it so many times to myself. Perhaps when I call you up again I shall not be so hysterical. Tell Feller how I have played his part, and, in the midst of all your responsibilities, remember to give him a chance.”

Lanstron was not thinking of war or war’s combination when he hung up the receiver.

“Yes, it is Gustave!” he thought. “I understand!” It was some moments before he returned to the staff room, and then he had mastered his emotion. He was the soldier again.

* * * * *

“They are clearing the wires for the chief of staff to speak to you, sir,” announced the telephone aide in Feller’s eyrie artillery lookout.

Feller received the word with his clucking “La, la, la!” and hummed a tune while the connection was being made. He had not spoken with Lanny since his own promotion to a colonelcy and Partow’s death.

“My ear-drums split for joy at hearing your voice again!” Feller cried. “A regiment of guns for yours truly! You’ve made me the happiest man in the world. And haven’t I smacked the Grays in the tummy, not to mention in the nose and on the shins! Well, I should say so! La, la, la!”

“You certainly have, you bully old boy!” said Lanstron. “Miss Galland sends her congratulations and regards.”

“Eh, what? Her regards to me! The telephone still continues to work? Our own original trunk-tunnel private line? Eh? Tell me; tell me, quick!”

“Yes, she has performed the greatest service of the war—better than you could have done it, Gustave!”

“Whee-ee! Why not? Of course! I’m not surprised. She’s the greatest woman in the world, I tell you, and I know! And she sends her regards to her old gardener? Think of that! If trouble never comes singly, why shouldn’t joys come in a pour? Oh, it she could see me now, so cosey up here among the birds, chucking shells about as cheerily as if I were tossing roses to the ladies in a ballroom!”

“She wants you to have every chance,” said Lanstron.

Page 241

“She asks that for me!”

The peculiar intimate fervor of the exclamation sprang from a Feller in an officer’s uniform who could now move in Marta’s world. Lanstron hurried on to explain the nature of the next attack.

“If we repulse them we are going to throw in a ram of our own,” he said. “We’re going to take the aggressive for the moment. It is the only sure policy for successful defence.”

“Right! Now you’re talking. We learned that principle at school, didn’t we?”

“And that means a bigger chance for you, Gustave. We are bringing up reserve artillery and making new dispositions. I am going to give you charge of the field-guns. But the chief of artillery will tell you about your work.”

“This is heaven, Lanny! How am I ever going to—”

“There, no thanks, Gustave. You are the man. It is a time when only efficiency must be considered.”

“Then I have made good! Then I’ve been worthy of my opportunity! I’d rather be a good gunner than a king. I’ll eat this new work and smack my lips for more. Tell Miss Galland that every shell that hits the mark is a thought from the old gardener for her. Six weeks ago trimming rose-bushes and now—this is life! La, la, la! There’s been romance and destiny in the whole business for us both, Lanny. And you—you are acting chief of staff! I forgot to congratulate you, Your Excellency. Your Excellency! Think of that! But it’s no surprise to me. Didn’t we go to school together? How could any one ever go to school with me and not be a great man? And I’m wearing a flower in my buttonhole! La, la, la!”

All that night and day before the night set for the attack, while the guns were being emplaced and the infantry formed in a gray carpet behind the slopes, a chill, misty rain fell, which the devout of the Grays might say proved that God was with them rather than with the Browns; for it screened their movements from the Brown lookouts. The judge’s son and Peterkin and others of Fracasse’s company had finished their mine; the fuses were laid. There was no dry place for a seat in their flooded redoubt and they had to stand, eating cold rations and shivering in their filthy, wet clothes. The whole army was drenched; the whole army shivered.

If only the air did not clear when darkness fell! The last thing the staff of the Grays wanted was to see a star in the sky. Had they believed in prayer they would have gone on their knees for a black fog, unaware that all that they would hide had been made known to the Browns through Marta almost from the hour that the preparations for the attack were begun.

With darkness, the rain ceased; but the mist remained a thick mantle over the landscape, impenetrable to the watchful search-lights of the Browns, which never stopped playing from sunset to dawn. The gray carpet of the reserves that were to form Westerling's ram moved over the slopes, dipping and rising with the convolutions of the earth, with no word spoken except the repeated whispered warnings of silence from the officers. Sweeping on up toward the redoubts, it found that parallels and trenches had been filled to give footing for the swifter impulse of the tide, once it was started for the heights.

Page 242

A flash from Fracasse's pocket lamp showed faces pasty white and eyes of staring glassiness. Fracasse's face and the colonel's were also white—white with the rigidity of carved marble, carved with a set frown of determination. Fracasse was going in with his company and the colonel with his regiment. It was their duty. Both realized the nature of the risk; and, worse, each knew that the men realized it. In another age, when education was not so common and unthinking, unforeseeing passion could be aroused in ignorant minds, a stimulant on an empty stomach might have made them animals, oblivious to danger. They were about to offer their lives to pave the way for others to reach the works that none of them, probably, would ever reach. For the like of this, in gathering the enemy's spears to his breast, a saga had risen around one national hero. But Fracasse's veterans were only the shivering units of the millions; the part of the machine that happened to be the first to strike another machine in collision. Such was the end of all the training, the marching, the drilling in the gallant business of arms, with no more romance or glory than beeves going to the slaughter.

"You'll be the first out into the glacis, the first into the enemy's redoubt," said the colonel, forcing a tone of good, old-fashioned "up-guards-and-at-'em" vigor, as he touched the bronze cross on Peterkin's breast with his forefinger.

Little Peterkin, always pale but not so pale now as his comrades, flushed at the distinction.

"Yes, sir!" and he saluted.

In his eyes was the exaltation of his simple-minded faith. He did not think too much. What more could kings and conquerors ask than such a soldier as the valet's son, secure in the belief that his charmed life would bring him through the assault unharmed?

"My God! I can't!" exclaimed the banker's son. "I've suffered enough. There's life and wealth and all that it gives waiting for me at home! I'm young—I can't!"

There was a rustle of bodies in a restless movement of drawn breaths at common thought taking form, desperately fraught with alarm to Fracasse.

"You will!" Fracasse said, thrusting his revolver muzzle against the ribs of the banker's son. "If you don't, I'll shoot you dead, or you'll be trampled to death by the rush from the rear!"

The wedge point may not strike back at the hammer that drives it. Close packed behind Fracasse's company was a seemingly limitless mass of soldiery, palpitant with their short breaths, a steamy, sickening odor rising from their water-soaked clothes. Here were men so wet, so tired, so nerve-worn that they did not care when death came; men who wanted to curse and strike out against their fate; men who wanted to turn in flight,

their natural impulse held down by the bonds of discipline and that pride of fellowship which is shamed to confess to a shiver along the spine. Some saw pictures of home, of sweethearts; some saw nothing. Some were in a coma of merciless suspense that grew more and more unendurable, until it seemed that anything to break it would be welcome.

Page 243

Occasionally came a sob from a man gone hysterical under the strain, a moan of mental misery; and once a laugh, a strange, hiccoughy, delirious laugh, a strident attempt at the wit that keeps up courage; and from Pilzer, the butcher's son, a string of oaths mixed with brimstone and obscenity. After each outbreak an automatic, irritable whisper for silence came from an officer. Legs and arms, bodies and souls and brains in a nauseating press! Humanity reckoned by the pound, high-priced from breeding and rearing and training; yet very cheap.

Hearts thumped and watches ticked off the time, until suddenly the heavens were racked by the prologue of the guns. Child's play that baptism of shell fire in the first charge of the war beside later thunders; and these, in turn, mild beside this terrific outburst, with all the artillery concentrated to support the ram in a sudden blast. The passing projectiles formed the continuous scream and roar of some many-toned siren that penetrated the flesh as well as the ears with its sound. Orders could not have been heard if given. There was no need for orders. Fracasse, counting off the minutes between him and eternity on his watch face by his flash-light, saw that ten had passed. Then his finger that pressed a button, his brain that spoke to his hand, were those of an automaton acting by time release. He exploded the mine. This was the signal for the charge; for all the legs of the ram to move.

XLIII

JOVE'S ISOLATION

An hour or so before the attack the telegraph instruments in the Galland house had become pregnantly silent. There were no more orders to give; no more reports to come from the troops in position until the assault was made. Officers of supply ceased to transmit routine matters over the wire, while they strained their eyes toward the range. Officers of the staff moved about restlessly, glancing at their watches and going to the windows frequently to see if the mist still held.

No one entered the library where Westerling was seated alone with nothing to do. His suspense was that of the mothers who longed for news of their sons at the front; his helplessness that of a man in a hospital lobby waiting on the result of an operation whose success or failure will save or wreck his career. The physical desire of movement, the conflict with something in his own mind, drove him out of doors.

"I want to blow my lungs in the fresh air! Call me if I am needed. I shall be in the garden," he told his aide; and he thought that his voice sounded calm and natural, as became Jove in a crisis that unnerved lesser men. "Though I fancy it is the other chief of staff who will have the work to do this evening, eh?" he added, forcing one of the smiles which had been the magnetic servant of his personal force in his rise to power.

“Yes, Your Excellency,” said the aide.

Page 244

Westerling was rather pleased with the fact that he could still smile; pleased with the loyalty of this young officer when, day by day, the rest of the staff had grown colder and more mechanical in the attitude that completed his isolation. Walking vigorously along the path toward the tower, the exercise of his muscles, the feel of the cool, moist air on his face, brought back some of the buoyancy of spirit that he craved. A woman's figure, with a cape thrown over the shoulders and the head bare, loomed out of the mist.

"I couldn't stay in—not to-night," Marta said, as Westerling drew near. "I had to see. It's only a quarter of an hour now, isn't it?"

"The Browns may sing 'God with us,' but He seems to have been with the Grays," Westerling answered. "Our whole movement was perfectly screened by the heavy weather."

"But they know—they know every detail that you have told me!" ran her mocking, scarifying thought. "And this will be the most terrible attack of all?" she asked faintly.

"Yes, such a concentration of men and guns as never were driven against any position—an irresistible force," he said. "Irresistible!" he repeated with a heavy emphasis.

"But if the Browns did know where you were going to attack?" she asked absently and still more faintly. "The sacrifice of lives then would be all the greater?"

"Yes, we should have to pay a higher price, but still we should be irresistible—-irresistible!" he answered.

Ghastly faces were staring at her, their lips moving in death to excoriate her. It was not too late to tell him the truth; not too late to stop the attack. Her head had sunk; she trembled and swayed and a kind of moan escaped her. She seemed utterly frail and so distraught that Westerling, in an impulse of protection, laid his hands on her relaxed shoulders. She could feel the pressure of each finger growing firmer in its power, while a certain eloquence possessed him in defiance of his apprehensions.

"Our cause is at stake to-night," he declared, "yours and mine! We must win, you and I! It is our destiny!"

"You and I!" repeated Marta. "Why you and I?"

It seemed very strange to be thinking of any two persons when hundreds of thousands were awaiting the signal for the death prepared by him. He mistook the character of her thought in the obsession of his egoism.

"What do lives mean?" he cried with a sudden desperation, his grip of her shoulders tightening. "It is the law of nature for man to fight. Unless he fights he goes to seed. One trouble with our army is that it was soft from the want of war. It is the law of nature

for the fittest to survive! Other sons will be born to take the place of those who die tonight. There will be all the more room for those who live. Victory will create new opportunities. What is a million out of the billions on the face of the earth? Those who lead alone count—those who dwell

Page 245

in the atmosphere of the peaks, as we do!" The pressure of his strong hands in the unconscious emphasis of his passion became painful; but she did not protest or try to draw away, thinking of his hold in no personal sense but as a part of his self-revelation. "All—all is at stake there!" he continued, staring toward the range. "It's the Rubicon! I have put my career on to-night's cast! Victory means that the world will be at our feet—-honor, position, power greater than that of any other two human beings! Do you realize what that means—the honor and the power that will be ours? I shall have directed the greatest army the world has ever known to victory!"

"And defeat means—what does defeat mean?" she asked narrowly, calmly; and the pointed question released her shoulders from the vise.

What had been a shadow in his thoughts became a live monster, striking him with the force of a blow. He forgot Marta. Yes, what would defeat mean to *him*? Sheer human nature broke through the bonds of mental discipline weakened by sleepless nights. Convulsively his head dropped as he covered his face.

"Defeat! Fail! That I should fail!" he moaned.

Then it was that she saw him in the reality of his littleness, which she had divined; this would-be conqueror. She saw him as his intimates often see the great man without his front of Jove. Don't we know that Napoleon had moments of privacy when he whined and threatened suicide? She wondered if Lanny, too, were like that—if it were not the nature of all conquerors who could not have their way. It seemed to her that Westerling was beneath the humblest private in his army—beneath even that fellow with the liver patch on his cheek who had broken the chandelier in the sport of brutal passion. All sense of her own part was submerged in the sight of a chief of staff exhibiting no more stoicism than a petulant, spoiled schoolboy.

While his head was still bent the artillery began its crashing thunders and the sky became light with flashes. His hands stretched out toward the range, clenched and pulsing with defiance and command.

"Go in! Go in, as I told you!" he cried. "Stay in, alive or dead! Stay till I tell you to come out! Stay! I can't do any more! You must do it now!"

"Then this may be truly the end," thought Marta, "if the assault fails."

And silently she prayed that it would fail; while the flashes lighted Westerling's set features, imploring success.

No commander was a more prodigal employer of spies than Napoleon. Did he or any other conqueror ever acknowledge a success due to the despised outcasts who brought

him information? No. The brilliance of combinations, the stroke of genius of the swift march and the decisive blow in flank, the splendid charges—these always win in the historian's narrative and public imagination. Think of any place in the frieze of the statue of the great leader for that hypocrite, that poor devil in disguise, whose news made the victory possible!

Page 246

“Good generalship is easy if you know what the enemy is going to do,” Lanstron remarked to a member of the staff council who said something complimentary to him. Compliments from subordinates to superiors had not received Partow’s favor and, therefore, not Lanstron’s. Eccentric old Partow had once disparaged the Napoleonic idea as a fetich which had nothing to do with modern military efficiency, and he had added that if Napoleon were alive to-day nobody would be so prompt to see it as Napoleon himself. If he did not, and tried to incarnate the idea of the time by making himself the supreme genius of war, he would fail, because ability was too nearly universal and the age too big for another Colossus.

Through Marta’s information every detail of Westerling’s plan outlined itself to the trained minds of the Brown staff. Amazement at their dependence on an underground wire and a woman’s word for shaping vast affairs was not reflected in any scepticism or hesitation as to the method of meeting the assault.

The fortifications that had sheltered the Brown infantry, including Stransky’s men of the 53d, would be the object of the artillery fire which was to support the Gray charge. Well Lanstron knew that no fortifications could withstand the gusts of shells to be concentrated on such a small target. The defenders could not see to fire for the dust. Their rifles would be knocked out of their hands by the concussions. They must be crushed or imprisoned by the destruction of the very walls that had been their protection. So they were withdrawn to other redoubts in the rear, where a line of automatics placed under their rifles were in pointblank range of their old position which the Grays’ shells would tear to pieces.

Back of them was a brown carpet of waiting soldiery of as close a pile as Westerling’s carpet of gray. The rain-drenched Brown engineers dug as fast as the enemy’s. Lanstron massed artillery against massed artillery. For every Gray gun he had more than one Brown gun. The Grays might excel by ratio of five to three in human avoirdupois, but a willing Brown government had been generous with funds. Money will buy guns and skill will man them. Battery back of battery in literal tiers, small calibres in front and heavy calibres in the rear, with ranges fixed to given points—more guns than ever fired on a single position before—were to pour their exploding projectiles not into redoubts but into the human wedge.

In the Browns’ headquarters, as in the Grays’, telegraph instruments were silent after the preparations were over. Here, also, officers walked about restlessly, glancing at their watches. They, too, were glad that the mist continued. It meant no wind. When the telegraph did speak it was with another message from some aerostatic officer, saying, “Still favorable,” which was taken at once to Lanstron, who was with the staff chiefs around the big table. They nodded at the news and smiled to one another; and some who had been pacing sat down and others rose to begin pacing afresh.

Page 247

“We could have emplaced two lines of automatics, one above the other!” exclaimed the chief of artillery.

“But that would have given too much of a climb for the infantry in going in—delayed the rush,” said Lanstron.

“If they should stick—if we couldn’t drive them back!” exclaimed the vice-chief of staff.

“I don’t think they will!” said Lanstron.

To the others he seemed as cool as ever, even when his maimed hand was twitching in his pocket. But now, suddenly, his eyes starting as at a horror, he trembled passionately, his head dropping forward, as if he would collapse.

“Oh, the murder of it—the murder!” he breathed.

“But they brought it on! Not for theirs, but for ours!” said the vice-chief of staff, laying his hand on Lanstron’s shoulder.

“And we sit here while they go in!” Lanstron added. “There’s a kind of injustice about that which I can’t get over. Not one of us here has been under fire!”

Even the minute of the attack they knew; and just before midnight they were standing at the window looking out into the night, while the vice-chief held his watch in hand. In the hush the faint sound of a dirigible’s propeller high up in the heavens, muffled by the fog, was drowned by the Gray guns opening fire.

* * * * *

Before the mine exploded, by the light of the shell bursts breaking their vast prisms from central spheres of flame for miles, with the quick sequence of a moving-picture flicker, Fracasse’s men could see one another’s faces, spectral and stiff and pasty white, with teeth gleaming where jaws had dropped, some eyes half closed by the blinding flashes and some opened wide as if the lids were paralyzed. Faces and faces! A sea of faces stretching away down the slope—faces in a trance.

Up over the breastworks, over rocks and splintered timbers, Peterkin and the judge’s son and their comrades clambered. When they moved they were as a myriad-legged creature, brain numbed, without any sensation except that of rapids going over a fall. Those in front could not falter, being pushed on by the pressure of those in the rear. For a few steps they were under no fire. The scream of their own shells breaking in infernal pandemonium in front seemed to be a power as irresistible as the rear of the wedge in driving them on.

Then sounds more hideous than the flight of projectiles broke about them with the abruptness of lightnings held in the hollow of the Almighty's hand and suddenly released. The Browns' guns had opened fire. Explosions were even swifter in sequence than the flashes that revealed the stark faces. Dust and stones and flying fragments of flesh filled the air. Men went down in positive paralysis of faculties by the terrific crashes. Sections of the ram were blown to pieces by the burst of a shrapnel shoulder high; other sections were lifted heavenward by a shell burst in the earth.

Page 248

Peterkin fell with a piece of jagged steel embedded in his brain. He had gone from the quick to the dead so swiftly that he never knew that his charm had failed. The same explosion got Fracasse, sword in hand, and another buried him where he lay. The banker's son went a little farther; the barber's son still farther. Men who were alive hardly realized life, so mixed were life and death. Infernal imagination goes faint; its wildest similes grow feeble and banal before such a consummation of hell.

But the tide keeps on; the torn gaps of the ram are filled by the rushing legs from the rear. Officers urge and lead. Such are the orders; such is the duty prescribed; such is human bravery even in these days when life is sweeter to more men in the joys of mind and body than ever before. Precision, organization, solidarity in this charge such as the days of the "death-or-glory" boys never knew! Over the bodies of Peterkin and the barber's and the banker's sons, plunging through shell craters, stumbling, staggering, cut by swaths and torn by eddies of red destruction in their ranks, the tide proceeded, until its hosts were oftener treading on flesh than on soil. And all they knew was to keep on—keep on, bayonet in hand, till they reached the redoubt, and there they were to stay, alive or dead.

In that pulsating, fierce light, while the ground under their feet trembled with the concussions, Westerling's face was as clear to Marta as if he were staring in at a furnace door. The lines of breeding and of restrained authority which gave it distinction had faded. It had the eager ferocity of the hunt. His short, tense exclamations explained the stages of progress of the attack as revealed to his sight.

"It cannot fail! No! Impossible! Look at the speed of our gun-fire! But I judge that we have not been able to silence as many of their guns as we ought to—they're using shell into our close order. But all the guns in creation shall not stop us! I have men enough this time—enough, enough, enough! There! Our shorter-range guns have ceased firing! That shows we are in the redoubts. The longer-range guns continue. They are firing beyond the redoubt against any counter-attack, if the Browns try to recover what they have lost. But every minute brings another battalion into place. Engineers and guns will follow. The war is as good as won!"

He caught at Marta's hand, but she drew away; and her start of revulsion at his touch was almost coincident with a start on his part for another reason. A huge shadow shot at railway-train speed over their heads. Something very like fear flashed into his expression.

"One of our dirigibles!" he exclaimed. "I confess it came so near that it gave me a sort of shock, too."

"Only a shadow with no death in it," she said. "And there is death in every flash there on the range. General Westerling, have you ever been under fire?" she asked suddenly.

Page 249

He had scarcely heard the question. He took a step forward, with head raised and shading his eyes.

“Not ours! One of theirs!” he exclaimed. “Theirs—and any number of theirs!”

Driving toward the volcano’s centre were many Brown dirigibles, slowing down as they approached. Greater eruptions than any from shells rose from the earth as they passed.

“So that’s what they’ve had their dirigibles in reserve for—for the last desperate defence!” he said. “The defence that can never win! Not their dirigibles—not any power known to man can stop my men. I have sent in so many that enough must survive. But where are *our* dirigibles? A few are up—why don’t they close in? And our guns—why don’t they fire at a target before their eyes as big as a house? There they go, and they got one!”—as a circle of flame brighter than the illumination of other explosions broke in the sky. “And one of ours is closing in! Look, both have blown up as they collided! That shows that two can play at the game! But what a swarm they have—more than we knew! Bouchard’s intelligence at fault again! However, if they try to stop our fortifying the redoubt our guns will care for them. That clever trick of Lanstron’s may have cost us a few extra casualties, but it will not change the result. It’s time we had details over the wire,” he concluded, turning back to the house rather precipitately. “Then there may be work for me.”

* * * * *

“After hell, more hell, and then still more hell!” was the way that Stransky expressed his thought when the engineers had taken the place of the 53d of the Browns in the redoubt. They put their mines and connections deep enough not to be disturbed by shell fire. After the survivors in the van of the Grays’ charge, spent of breath, reached their goal and threw themselves down, the earth under them, as the mine exploded, split and heaved heavenward. But those in the rear, slapped in the face by the concussion, kept on, driven by the pressure of the mass at their backs, and, in turn, plunged forward on their stomachs in the seams and furrows of the mine’s havoc. The mass thickened as the flood of bodies and legs banked up, in keeping with Westerling’s plan to have “enough to hold.”

Now the automatics and the rifles from the redoubt to which the Browns had fallen back opened fire. So close together were these bullet-machines that the orbit of each one’s swing made a spray of only a few yards’ breadth over the old redoubt, where the Browns’ gun-fire had not for a moment ceased its persistent shelling, with increasingly large and solid targets of flesh for their practice. The thing for these targets to do, they knew, was to intrench and begin to return the infantry and automatics’ fire. Desperately, with the last effort of courage, they rose in the attempt—rose into playing hose streams of bullets whose close hiss was a steady undertone between shell bursts. In the garish,

jumping light brave officers impulsively stood up to hearten their commands in their work, and dropped with half-uttered urgings, threats, and oaths on their lips.

Page 250

The bullets from the automatics missing one mark were certain to find another, perhaps four or five in a row, such was their velocity and power of penetration. Where shells made gaps and tore holes in the human mass, the automatics cut with the regularity of the driven teeth of a comb. The men who escaped all the forms of slaughter and staggered on to the ruins of the redoubt, pressed their weight on top of those in the craters or hugged behind the pyramids of debris, and even made breastworks from the bodies of the dead. The more that banked up, the more fruitless the efforts of the officers to restore order in the frantic medley of shell screams and explosions at a time when a minute seemed an age.

Meanwhile, between them—this banked-up force at the charge's end—and the Brown redoubt with its automatics, the Gray gunners were making a zone of shell bursts in order to give the soldiers time to make their hold of the ground they had gained secure. Through this zone Stransky and his men were to lead the Browns in a counter-attack.

At the very height of the Gray charge, when all the reserves were in, dark objects fell out of the heavens, and where they dropped earth and flesh were mingled in the maceration. Like some giant reptile with its vertebrae breaking, gouged and torn and pinioned, the charge stopped, in writhing, throbbing confusion. Those on the outer circle of explosions were thrown against their fellows, who surged back in another direction from an explosion in the opposite quarter. From the rear the pressure weakened; the human hammer was no longer driving the ram. Blinded by the lightnings and dust, dizzy from concussions and noise, too blank of mind to be sane or insane, the atoms of the bulk of the charge in natural instinct turned from their goal and toward the place whence they had come, with death from all sides still buffeting them. Staggeringly, at first, they went, for want of initiative in their paralysis; then rapidly, as the law of self-preservation asserted itself in wild impulse.

As sheep driven over a precipice they had advanced; as men they fled. There was no longer any command, no longer any cohesion, except of legs struggling in and out over the uneven footing of dead and wounded, while they felt another pressure, that of the mass of the Browns in pursuit. Of all those of Fracasse's company whom we know, only the judge's son and Jacob Pilzer were alive. Stained with blood and dust, his teeth showing in a grimace of mocking hate of all humankind, Pilzer's savagery ran free of the restraint of discipline and civilized convention. Striking right and left, he forced his way out of the region of shell fire and still kept on. Clubbing his rifle, he struck down one officer who tried to detain him; but another officer, quicker than he, put a revolver bullet through his head.

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Page 251

Westerling, who had buried his face in his hands in Marta's presence at the thought of failure, must keep the pose of his position before the staff. With chin drawn in and shoulders squared in a sort of petrified military habit, he received the feverish news that grew worse with each brief bulletin. He, the chief of staff; he, Hedworth Westerling, the superman, must be a rock in the flood of alarm. When he heard that his human ram was in recoil he declared that the repulse had been exaggerated—repulses always were. With word that a heavy counter-attack was turning the retreat into an ungovernable rout, he broke into a storm. He was not beaten; he could not be beaten.

"Let our guns cut a few swaths in the mob!" he cried. "That will stop them from running and bring them back to a sense of duty to their country."

The irritating titter of the bell in the closet off the library only increased his defiance of facts beyond control. He went to the long distance with a reply to the premier's inquiry ready to his lips.

"We got into the enemy's works but had to fall back temporarily," he said.

"Temporarily! What do you mean?" demanded the premier.

"I mean that we have only begun to attack!" declared Westerling. He liked that sentence. It sounded like the shibboleth of a great leader in a crisis. "I shall assault again to-morrow night."

"Then your losses were not heavy?"

"No, not relatively. To-morrow night we press home the advantage we gained to-night."

"But you have been so confident each time. You still think that—"

"That I mean to win! There is no stopping half-way."

"Well, I'll still try to hold the situation here," replied the premier. "But keep me informed."

Drugged by his desperate stubbornness, Westerling was believing in his star again when he returned to the library. All the greater his success for being won against scepticism and fears! He summoned his chiefs of divisions, who came with the news that the Browns had taken the very redoubt from which the head of the Gray charge had started; but there they had stopped.

"Of course! Of course they stopped!" exclaimed Westerling. "They are not mad. A few are not going to throw themselves against superior numbers—our superior numbers beaten by our own panic! Lanstron is not a fool. You'll find the Browns back in their old position, working like beavers to make new defences in the morning. Meanwhile, we'll

get that mob of ours into shape and find out what made them lose their nerve. To-morrow night we shall have as many more behind them. We are going to attack again!"

The staff exchanged glances of amazement, and Turcas, his dry voice crackling like parchment, exclaimed:

"Attack again? At the same point?"

"Yes—the one place to attack!" said Westerling. "The rest of our line has abundant reserves; a needless number for anything but the offensive. We'll leave enough to hold and draw off the rest to Engadir at once."

Page 252

“But their dirigibles! A surprising number of them are over our lines,” Bellini, the chief of intelligence, had the temerity to say.

“You will send our planes and dirigibles to bring down theirs!” Westerling commanded.

“I have—every last one; but they outnumber us!” persisted Bellini. “Even in retreat they can see. The air has cleared so that considerable bodies of troops in motion will be readily discernible from high altitudes. The reason for our failure last night was that they knew our plan of attack.”

“They knew! They knew, after all our precautions! There is still a leak! You—”

Westerling raised his clenched hand threateningly at the chief of intelligence, his cheeks purple with rage, his eyes bloodshot. But Bellini, with his boyish, small face and round head set close to his shoulders, remained undisturbedly exact.

“Yes, there is a leak, and from the staff,” he answered. “Until I have found it this army ought to suspend any aggressive—”

“I was not asking advice!” interrupted Westerling.

“But, I repeat, the leak is not necessary to disclose this new movement that you plan. Their air craft will disclose it,” Bellini concluded. He had done his duty and had nothing more to say.

“Dirigibles do not win battles!” Westerling announced. “They are won by getting infantry in possession of positions and holding them. No matter if we don’t surprise the enemy. Haven’t the Browns held their line with inferior numbers? If they have, we can hold the rest of ours. That gives us overwhelming forces at Engadir.”

“You take all responsibility?” asked Turcas.

“I do!” said Westerling firmly. “And we will waste no more time. The premier supports me. I have decided. We will set the troops in motion.”

With fierce energy he set to work detaching units of artillery and infantry from every part of the line and starting them toward Engadir.

“This means an improvised organization; it breaks up the machine,” said the tactical expert to Turcas when they were alone.

“Yes,” replied Turcas. “He wanted no advice from us when he was taking counsel of desperation. If he succeeds, success will retrieve all the rest of his errors. We may have a stroke of luck in our favor.”

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In the headquarters of the Browns, junior officers and clerks reported the words of each bulletin with the relief of men who breathed freely again. The chiefs of divisions who were with Lanstron alternately sat down and paced the floor, their restlessness now that of a happiness too deeply thrilling to be expressed by hilarity. Each fresh detail only confirmed the completeness of the repulse as that memorable night in the affairs of the two nations slowly wore on. Shortly before three, when the firing had died down after the Brown pursuit had stopped, a wireless from a dirigible flying over the frontier came, telling of bodies of Gray troops and guns on the march. Soon planes and other dirigibles flying over other positions were sending in word of the same tenor. The chiefs drew around the table and looked into one another's eyes in the significance of a common thought.

Page 253

“It cannot be a retreat!” said the vice-chief.

“Hardly. That is inconceivable of Westerling at this time,” Lanstron replied. “The bull charges when wounded. It is clear that he means to make another attack. These troops on the march across country are isolated from any immediate service.”

It was Lanstron’s way to be suggestive; to let ideas develop in council and orders follow as out of council.

“The chance!” exclaimed some one.

“The chance!” others said in the same breath. “The God-given chance for a quick blow! The chance! We attack! We attack!”

It was the most natural conception to a military tactician, though any man who made it his own might have builded a reputation on it if he knew how to get the ear of the press. Their faces were close to Lanstron as they leaned toward him eagerly. He seemed not to see them but to be looking at Partow’s chair. In imagination Partow was there in the life—Partow with the dome forehead, the pendulous cheeks, the shrewd, kindly eyes. A daring risk, this! What would Partow say? Lanstron always asked himself this in a crisis: What would Partow say?

“Well, my boy, why are you hesitating?” Partow demanded. “I don’t know that I’d have taken my long holiday and left you in charge if I’d thought you’d be losing your nerve as you are this minute. Wasn’t it part of my plan—my dream—that plan I gave you to read in the vaults, to strike if a chance, this very chance, were to come? Hurry up! Seconds count!”

“Yes, a chance to end the killing for good and all!” said Lanstron, coming abruptly out of his silence. “We’ll take it and strike hard.”

The staff bent over the map, Lanstron’s finger flying from point to point, while ready expert answers to his questions were at his elbow and the wires sang out directions that made a drenched and shivering soldiery Who had been yielding and holding and never advancing grow warm with the thought of springing from the mire of trenches to charge the enemy. And one, Gustave Feller, in command of a brigade of field-guns—the mobile guns that could go forward rumbling to the horses’ trot—saw his dearly beloved batteries swing into a road in the moonlight.

“La, la, la! The worm will turn!” he clucked. “It’s a merry, gambling old world and I’m right fond of it—so full of the unexpected for the Grays! That lead horse is a little lame, but he’ll last the night through. Lots of lame things will! Who knows? Maybe we’ll be cleaning the mud off our boots on the white posts of the frontier to-morrow! A whole

brigade mine! I live! You old brick, Lanny! This time we are going to spank the enemy on the part of his anatomy where spanks are conventionally given. La, la, la!”

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Page 254

If not his own pain, the moans, the gasps, the appeals for water, the convulsive shivers from cold, and the demoniacal giggles from a soldier gone insane in medley around him would have kept the judge's son awake. After he had fallen, struck by he knew not what, and consciousness had returned, came the surging charge of the Browns in the counter-attack, with throaty cries and threshing tread. He was able to turn over on his face and cover the back of his head with his hands, as a slight protection from steps that found footing on his body instead of on the earth. After that he had understood vaguely that a newcomer on the field of the fallen needed help with a first aid, and he had found his knife and slit a sleeve and applied a bandage to check the bleeding of an artery. Before dawn broke the sky was all alight again with a far-reaching gun-fire—that of the Brown advance—throwing the scene of slaughter into spectral relief, which became more real and terrible in the undramatic light of day.

Thick, ghastly thick, the dead and wounded; and the faces—faces half buried, faces black with congealed blood, faces staring straight up at the sky, faces with eyes popping where necks had been twisted! Near by was the distorted metal work of a dirigible, with the bodies of its crew burned beyond recognition, and farther away were other dirigible wrecks. A wounded Gray, who had not the strength to do it himself, begged some one to lift a corpse off his body. A Gray and a Brown were locked in a wrestling embrace in which a shrapnel burst had surprised them. Piles of dead and wounded had been scattered and torn by a shell which found only dead and wounded for destruction at the point of its explosion. The living were crawling out from under the shields they had made of corpses in shell craters, and searching for water in the canteens and biscuits in the haversacks of the dead. One Gray who was completely entombed except his head remarked that he was all right if some one would dig him out. At his side showed the legs of a man who had been buried face downward. Ribs of the wounded broken in; features of the dead mashed by the heels of the Brown countercharge! With every turn of his glance his surroundings grew more intimate in details of horror to the judge's son. On the earth, saturated with rivulets and little lakes of blood, gleamed the lead shrapnel bullets and the brighter, nickelled rifle-bullets and the barrels of rifles dropped from the hands of the fallen.

"I'd have bled to death if you hadn't put on that bandage. You saved my life!" whispered the man next to the judge's son, who was Tom Fragini.

"Did I? Did I?" exclaimed the judge's son. "Well, that's something."

"It certainly is to me," replied Tom, holding out his hand, and thus they shook hands, this Gray and this Brown. "Maybe some time, when the war's over, I can thank you in more than words."

"More than words! Perhaps you can do that now. You—you haven't a cigarette, old fellow?" asked the judge's son. "I haven't smoked for three days."

Page 255

“Yes, only I roll mine,” said Tom.

“So do I mine,” said the judge’s son.

“But with a game hand I—”

“Oh, I’ve the hands. It’s my leg that’s been mashed up,” said the judge’s son. “Labor and capital!” he added cheerily as he dropped the cosmopolitan tobacco on the cosmopolitan wafer of rice-paper.

They smoked and smiled at each other in the glow of that better passion when wounds have let out the poison of conflict, while the doctors and the hospital-corps men began their attention to the critical cases and on down the slopes the mills of war were grinding out more dead and wounded.

“At the hospital where I was interne before the war we were trying to save a crippled boy the use of his leg,” remarked a reserve surgeon. “Half a dozen surgeons held consultations over that boy—yes, just for one leg. And now look at this!”

XLIV

TURNING THE TABLES

“I shall take a little nap. There will be plenty to do later,” said Westerling, after the last telegram detaching the reserves for concentration had gone.

Yes, he would rest while the troops were in motion. The staff should see that he was still the same self-contained commander whose every faculty was the trained servant of his will. His efforts at sleep resulted in a numbing brain torture, which so desensitized it to outward impressions that his faithful personal aide entering the room at dawn had to touch him on the shoulder to arouse attention.

“There’s nothing like being able to order yourself to sleep, whatever the crisis,” he said. But suddenly he winced as if a blast of bullets had crashed through a window-pane and buried themselves in the wall beside his bed. “What is that?” he gasped “What?” With appalling distinctness he heard a cannonade that seemed as wide-spread as the horizon.

“I was to tell you that the enemy has been attacking along the whole front,” the aide explained.

“Attacking! The Browns attacking!” Westerling exclaimed as he gathered his wits. “Well, so much the worse for them. I rather expected they would,” he added.

Then through the door which the aide had left open the division chiefs, led by Turcas, filed in. To Westerling they seemed like a procession of ghosts. The features of one were the features of all, graven with the weariness of the machine's treadmill. Their harness held them up. A moving platform under their feet kept their legs moving. They grouped around the great man's desk silently, Turcas, his lips a half-opened seam, his voice that of crinkling parchment, acting as spokesman.

"The enemy seized his advantage," he said, "when he found that our reserves were on the march, out of touch with the wire to headquarters."

Westerling forced a smile which he wanted to be a knowing smile.

"Exactly! Of course their guns are making a lot of noise," he said. "It seems strange to you, no doubt, that they and not we should be attacking. Excellent! Let them have a turn at paying the costs of the offensive. Let them thrash their battalions to pieces. We want them exhausted when we go in to-night."

Page 256

“However, we had not prepared our positions for the defensive,” continued that very literal parchment voice. “They began an assault on our left flank first and we’ve just had word that they have turned it.”

“Probably a false report. Probably they have taken an outpost. Order a counter-attack!” exclaimed Westerling.

“Nor is that the worst of it,” said the vice-chief. “They are pressing at other well-chosen points. They threaten to pierce our centre.”

“Our centre!” gibed Westerling. “You do need rest. Our centre, where we have the column of last night’s attack still concentrated! If anything would convince me that I have to fight this war-alone—I—” Westerling choked in irritation.

“Yes. The ground is such that it is a tactically safe and advantageous move for Lanstron to make. He strikes at the vitals of our machine.”

“But what about the remainder of the force that made the charge? What about all our guns concentrated in front of Engadir?”

“I was coming to that. The rout of the assaulting column was much worse than we had supposed. Those who are strong enough cannot be got to reform. Many were so exhausted that they dropped in their tracks. Our guns are at this moment in retreat—or being captured by the rush of the Browns’ infantry. Your Excellency, the crisis is sudden, incredible.”

“Our wire service has broken down. We cannot communicate with many of our division commanders,” put in Bellini, the chief of intelligence.

“Yes, our organization, so dependent on communication, is in danger of disruption,” concluded Turcas. “To avoid disorder, we think it best to retreat across the plain to our own range.”

At the word “retreat” Westerling sprang to his feet, his cheeks purple, the veins of his neck and temples sculptured as he took a threatening step toward the group, which fell back before the physical rage of the man, all except the vice-chief, his mouth a thin, ashy line, who held his own.

“You cowards!” Westerling thundered. “Retreat when we have five millions to their three!”

“We have not that odds now,” replied the parchment voice. “All their men are engaged. They have caught us at a disadvantage, unable to use our numbers except in detail in trying to hold on in face of—”

“I tell you we cannot retreat!” Westerling interrupted. “That is the end. I know what you do not know. I am in touch with the government. Yes, I know—”

This brought fresh alarm into faces which had become set in grim stoicism by many alarms. If the people were in ignorance of the losses and the army in ignorance of the nation’s feeling, the officers of the staff were no less in ignorance of what passed over the long-distance wire between the chief of staff and the premier.

Page 257

“I know what is best—I alone!” Westerling continued, driving home his point. “Tell our commanders to hold. Neither general nor man is to budge. They are to stick to the death. Any one who does not I shall hold up to public shame as a poltroon. Who knows but Lanstron’s attack may be a council of desperation? The Browns may be worse off than we are. Hold, hold! If are are tired, they are tired. Frequently it takes only an ounce more of resolution to turn the tide of battle. Hold, hold! To-morrow will tell a different story! We are going to win yet! Yes, we are going to win!”

“It is for you to decide, Your Excellency,” said Turcas, slowly and precisely. “You take the responsibility.”

“I take the responsibility. I am in command!” replied Westerling in unflinching pose.

“Yes, Your Excellency.”

And they filed out of the room, leaving him to his isolation.

A little later, when Francois came in unannounced, bringing coffee, he found his master with face buried in hands. Westerling was on the point of striking the valet in anger at the discovery, but instead attempted a yawn to deceive him.

“I fell asleep; there’s so little to worry about, Francois,” he explained.

“Yes, Your Excellency. There is no need of worrying as long as you are in command,” said Francois; and Westerling gulped at the coffee and chewed at a piece of roll, which was so dry in his mouth and so hard to swallow that he gave up the attempt.

After Marta had learned, over the telephone, from Lanstron of the certain repulse of the Gray assault, fatigue—sheer physical fatigue such as made soldiers drop dead in slumber on the earth, their packs still on their backs—overcame her. Her work was done. The demands of nature overwhelmed her faculties. She slept with a nervous twitching of her muscles, a restless tossing of her lithe body, until hammers began beating on her temples, beating, beating with the sound of shell bursts, as if to warn her that punishment for her share in the killing was to be the eternal concussion of battle in her ears. At length she realized that the cannonading was real.

Hastening out-of-doors, as her glance swept toward the range she saw bursts of shrapnel smoke from the guns of the Browns nearer than since the fighting had begun on the main line, and these were directed at bodies of infantry that were in confused retreat down the slopes, while all traffic on the pass road was moving toward the rear. Impelled by a new apprehension she hurried to the tunnel. Lanstron answered her promptly in a voice that had a ring of relief and joy in place of the tension that had characterized it since the outbreak of the war.

“Thanks to you, Marta!” he cried. “Everything goes back to you—thanks to you came this chance to attack, and we are succeeding at every point! You are the general, you the maker of victories!”

“Yes, the general of still more killing!” she cried in indignation. “Why have you gone on with the slaughter? I did not help you for this. Why?”

Page 258

No reply came. She poured out more questions, and still no reply. She pressed the button and tried again, but she might as well have been talking over a dead wire.

* * * * *

Though the morning was chill, Mrs. Galland, in a heavy coat, was seated outside the tower door, beatifically calm and smiling; for she would miss rejoicing over no detail of the spectacle. The battle's sounds were sweet music—symphony of retribution. Oh, if her husband and her father could only be with her to see the ancient enemy in flight! Her cheeks were rosy with the happy thrumming of her heart; a delirious beat was in her temples. She wanted to sing and cheer and give thanks to the Almighty. The advancing bursts of billowy shrapnel down the slopes were a heavenly nimbus to her eyes. She breathed a silent blessing on a manoeuvring Brown dirigible. They were coming! The soldiers of her people were coming to take back their own from the robber hosts and restore her hearth to her. Soon she would be seated on the veranda watching the folds of her flag floating over La Tir.

"Isn't it wonderful? Isn't it like some good story?" she said to Marta. "Yes, like a miracle—and there has been a Galland in every war of the Browns and you were in this!"

Having no son, she had given her daughter in sacrifice on the altar of her country's gods, who had answered with victory. Her old-fashioned patriotism, true to the "all-is-fair-in-war" precept, delighted in the hour of success in every trick of Marta's double-dealing, though in private life she could have been guilty of no deceit.

"Marta, Marta, I shall never tease you again about your advanced ideas or about journeying all the way around the world without a chaperon. Your father and my father would have approved!" She squeezed Marta's hands and pressed them to her cheek. Marta smiled absently.

"Yes, mother," she said, but in such a fashion that Mrs. Galland was reminded again that Marta had always been peculiar. Probably it was because she was peculiar that she had been able to outwit the head of an army.

"Oh, that mighty Westerling who was going to conquer the whole world! How does he feel now?" mused Mrs. Galland "Westerling and his boasted power of five against three!"

For the Grays were barbarians to her and the Browns a people of a superior civilization, a superior aristocracy, a superior professional and farming and laboring class. There was nothing about the Browns to Mrs. Galland that was not superior. War, that ancient popular test of superiority in art, civilization, morals, scholarship, the grace of woman and the manliness of man, had proved her point in the high court, permitting of no appeal.

One man alone against the tide—rather, the man who has seen a tide rise at his orders now finding all its sweep against him—Westerling, accustomed to have millions of men move at his command, found himself, one man out of the millions, still and helpless while they moved of their own impulses.

Page 259

As news of positions lost came in, he could only grimly repeat, “Hold! Tell them to hold!” fruitlessly, like adjurations to the wind to cease blowing. The bell of the long distance kept ringing unheeded, until at last his aide came to say that the premier must speak either to him or to the vice-chief. Westerling staggered to his feet and with lurching steps went into the closet. There he sank down on the chair in a heap, staring at the telephone mouthpiece. Again the bell rang. Clenching his hands in a rocking effort, he was able to stiffen his spine once more as he took down the receiver. To admit defeat to the premier—no, he was not ready for that yet.

“The truth is out!” said the premier without any break in his voice and with the fatalism of one who never allows himself to blink a fact. “Telegraphers at the front who got out of touch with the staff were still in touch with the capital. Once the reports began to come, they poured in—decimation of the attacking column, panic and retreat in other portions of the line—chaos!”

“It’s a lie!” Westerling declared vehemently.

“The news has reached the press,” the premier proceeded. “Editions are already in the streets.”

“What! Where is your censorship?” gasped Westerling.

“It is helpless, a straw protesting against a current,” the premier replied. “A censorship goes back to physical force, as every law does in the end—to the police and the army; and all, these days, finally to public opinion. After weeks of secrecy, of reported successes, when nobody really knew what was happening, this sudden disillusioning announcement of the truth has sent the public mad.”

“It is your business to control the public!” complained Westerling.

“With what, now? With a speech or a lullaby? As well could you stop the retreat with your naked hands. My business to control the public, yes, but not unless you win victories. I gave you the soldiers. We have nothing but police here, and I tell you that the public is in a mob rage—the whole public, bankers and business and professional men included. I have just ordered the stock exchange and all banks closed.”

“There’s a cure for mobs!” cried Westerling. “Let the police fire a few volleys and they’ll behave.”

“Would that stop the retreat of the army? We must sue for peace.”

“Sue for peace! Sue for peace when we have five millions against their three!”

“It seems so, as the three millions are winning!” said the premier.

“Sue for peace because women go hysterical? Do you suppose that the Browns will listen now when they think they have the advantage? Leave peace to me! Give me forty-eight hours more! I have told our troops to hold and they will hold. I don’t mistake cowardly telegraphers’ rumors for facts—”

Page 260

“Pardon me a moment,” the premier interrupted. “I must answer a local call.” So astute a man of affairs as he knew that Westerling’s voice, storming, breaking, tightening with effort at control, confirmed all reports of disaster. “In fact, the crockery is broken—for you and for me!” said the premier when he spoke again. His life had been a gamble and the gamble had turned against him in playing for a great prize. There was an admirable stoicism in the way he announced the news he had received from the local call: “The chief of police calls me up to say that the uprising is too vast for him to hold. There isn’t any mutiny, but his men simply have become a part of public opinion. A mob of women and children is starting for the palace to ask me what I have done with their husbands, brothers, sons, and fathers. They won’t have to break in to find me. I’m very tired. I’m ready. I shall face them from the balcony. Yes, Westerling, you and I have achieved a place in history, and they’re far more bitter toward you than me. However, you don’t have to come back.”

“No, I don’t have to go back! No, I was not to go back if I failed!” said Westerling dizzily.

Again defiance rose strong as the one tangible thought, born of his ruling passion. It was inconceivable that so vast an ambition should fail. Failure! He defied it! He burst into the main staff room, where the tired officers regarded him with a glare, or momentary, weary wonder, and continued packing up their papers for departure. He went on into the telegraphers’ room. Some of the operators were packing their instruments.

“The news? What is the news?” Westerling asked hoarsely.

An operator who was still at the key, without even half rising let alone saluting, glanced up from the cavernous sockets of eyes unawed by the chief of staff’s presence.

“All that comes in is bad,” he said. “Where we get none because the wires are down we know it’s worse. We’ve been licked.”

He went on sending a message, wholly oblivious of Westerling, who stumbled back into the staff room and paused inarticulate before Turcas.

“The army is going—resisting by units, but going. It has made its own orders!” Turcas said. The other division chiefs nodded in agreement. “Your Excellency, we are doing our best,” added the vice-chief, holding the door for Westerling to return to his own office. “The nation is not beaten. Given breathing time for reorganization, the army will settle down to the defensive on our own range. There the enemy may try our costly tactics against the precision and power of modern arms, if they choose. No, the nation is not beaten.”

The nation! Westerling was not thinking of the nation.

“You—” he began, looking around from face to face.

Page 261

Not one showed any sign of softening or deference, and, his mind a blank, he withdrew, driven back to his isolation by an inflexible ostracism. The world had come to an end. Public opinion was master—master of his own staff. He sank down before his desk, staring, just staring; hearing the roar of battle which was drawing nearer; staring at the staff orderlies, who came in to take down the wall maps, and at his aide packing up the papers and leaving him in a room bare of all the appurtenances of his position, with little idea in his coma of despair of the hour or even that time was passing. Finally, some one touched him on the shoulder. He looked up to see his aide at his elbow saluting and Francois, his valet, standing by with an overcoat.

“We must go, Your Excellency,” said the aide.

“Go?” asked Westerling dazedly.

“Yes, the staff has already gone to a new headquarters.”

The announcement was the needle prick that once more aroused him to a sense of his situation. He rose and struck his fist on the desk in a pulsing outbreak of energy and stubbornness.

“But I stay! I stay!” he cried. “The enemy is not near. He can’t be!”

“Very near, general. You can see for yourself, said the aide.

“I will!” Westerling replied. “I will see how the conspiracy of the staff has made ruin of my plans!”

Again something of his old manner returned; something of the stoic’s fatalism flashed in his eye. He shook his head to Francois, refusing to slip his arms into the sleeves of the coat which Francois dropped on to his shoulders.

“Yes, I will see for myself!” he repeated, as he led the way out to the veranda. “I’ll see what goblin scared my pusillanimous staff and robbed me of victory!”

* * * * *

Every cry of triumph in war is paid for by a cry of pain. On one side, anguish of heart; on the other, inexpressible ecstasy. The Gray staff were oblivious of fatigue in the glum, overpowering necessity of restoring the organization of the Gray army for a second stand. The Brown staff were oblivious of fatigue in the exhilaration of victory.

Had a picture of the sight which the judge’s son had witnessed at dawn in the path of the attack and the counter-attack been thrown on the wall of the big lobby room of the Brown headquarters, there might have been less exultation on the part of the junior officers of the staff gathered there. They were not seeing or thinking of the dead. They

were seeing only brown-headed pins pushing gray-headed pins out of the way on the map, as the symbol of an attack become a pursuit and of better than their dreams come true—the symbol of security for altar fires and race and nation. They were of the living, in the mightiest thrill that a soldier may know.

Page 262

No doubt now! No more suspense! Labor and sacrifice rewarded! Fervent thanks to the Almighty were mingled with whistled snatches of wedding marches and popular songs. An aide taking a message to the wire preferred leaping over a chair to going around it. A subaltern and a colonel danced together. Victory, victory, victory out of the burr of automatics, the pounding of artillery, the popping roar of rifles! Victory out of the mire of trenches after brain-aching strain! Victory for you and for me and for sweethearts and wives and children! Aren't we all Browns, orderly and captain, boyish lieutenant and gray-haired general? A taciturn martinet of a major hugged a telegrapher to whom he had never spoken a single unofficial word. Hadn't the telegraphers, those silent men who were the tongue of the army, received the good news and passed it on? Some officers who could be spared from duty went to their quarters, where they dropped like falling logs on their beds. To them, after their spell of rejoicing, victory meant sleep for the first time in weeks without forked lightnings of apprehension stabbing their sub-consciousness.

Fellowship was in the victory, the fellowship which, developed under Partow, who believed that Napoleons and Colossi and gods in the car and all such gentlemen belonged to an archaic farce-comedy, had grown under Lanstron. "The staff reports," began the messages that awakened a world, retiring with the idea that the Browns were grimly holding the defensive, to the news that three millions had outgeneralled and defeated five.

In the inner room, whose opening door gave glimpses of Lanstron and the division chiefs, a magic of secret council which the juniors could not quite understand had wrought the wonder. Lanstron had not forgotten the dead. He could see them; he could see everything that happened. Had not Partow said to him: "Don't just read reports. Visualize men and events. Be the artillery, be the infantry, be the wounded—live and think in their places. In this way only can you really know your work!"

His elation when he saw his plans going right was that of the instrument of Partow's training and Marta's service. He pressed the hands of the men around him; his voice caught in his gratitude and his breaths were very short at times, like those of a spent, happy runner at the goal. Feeding on victory and growing greedy of more, his division chiefs were discussing how to press the war till the Grays sued for peace; and he was silent in the midst of their talk, which was interrupted by the ringing of the tunnel telephone. When he came out of his bedroom, Lanstron's distress was so evident that those who were seated arose and the others drew near in inquiry and sympathy. It seemed to them that the chief of staff, the head of the machine, who had left the room had returned an individual.

"The connection was broken while we were speaking!" he said blankly. "That means it must have been cut by the enemy—that the enemy knows of its existence!"

Page 263

“Perhaps not. Perhaps an accident—a chance shot,” said the vice-chief.

“No, I’m sure not,” Lanstron replied. “I am sure that it was cut deliberately and not by her.”

“The 53d Regiment is going forward in that direction—the same regiment that defended the house—and it can’t go any faster than it is going,” the vice-chief continued, rather incoherently. He and the others no less felt the news as a personal blow. Though absent in person, Marta had become in spirit an intimate of their hopes and councils.

“She is helpless—in their power!” Lanstron said. “There is no telling what they might do to her in the rage of their discovery. I must go to her! I am going to the front!”

The announcement started a storm of protest.

“But you are the chief of staff! You cannot leave the staff!”

“You’ve no right to expose yourself!”

“A chance shell or bullet—”

“You do not seem to realize what this victory means to you. You might be killed at the very moment of triumph.”

“I haven’t had any triumph. But if I had, could there be a better time?” Lanstron asked with a half-bantering smile.

“You couldn’t reach there before the 53d Regiment anyway!” declared the vice-chief, having in mind the fact that the staff was fifteen miles to the rear, where it could be at the wire focus. “You will find the roads blocked with the advance. You’ll have to ride, you can’t go all the way in a car.”

“Terrible hardship!” replied Lanstron. “Still, I’m going. Things are well in hand. I can keep in touch by the wire as I proceed. If I get out of touch then you,” with a nod to the vice-chief, “know as well as I how to meet any sudden emergency. Yes, you all know how to act—we’re so used to working together. The staff will follow as soon as the Galland house is taken. We shall make our headquarters there. I’m free now. I can be my own man for a little while—I can be human!”

A certain awe of him and of his position, born of the prestige of victory, hushed further protest. Who if not he had the right to go where he pleased in the Brown lines now? They noted the eagerness in his eyes, the eagerness of one off the leash, shot with a suspense which was not for the fate of the army, as he left headquarters.

* * * * *

A young officer of the Grays who was with a signal-corps section, trying to keep a brigade headquarters in touch with the staff during the retreat, two or three miles from the Galland house, had seen what looked like an insulated telephone wire at the bottom of a crater in the earth made by the explosion of a heavy shell. The instructions to all subordinates from the chief of intelligence to look for the source of the leak in information to the Browns made him quick to see a clew in anything unusual. He jumped down into the crater and not only found his pains rewarded, but that the wire was intact and ran underground

Page 264

in either direction. Who had laid it? Not the Grays. Why was it there? He called for one of his men to bring a buzzer, and it was the work of little more than a minute to cut the wire and make an attachment. Then he heard a woman's voice talking to "Lanny." Who was Lanny? He waited till he had heard enough to know that it was none other than Lanstron, the chief of staff of the Browns, and the woman must be a spy. An orderly despatched to the chief of intelligence with the news returned with the order:

"Drop everything and report to me in person at once."

"For this I have made my sacrifice!" Marta thought. "The killing goes on by Lanny's orders, not by Westerling's, this time."

Leaving her mother to enjoy the prospect, a slow-moving figure, trance-like, she went along the first terrace path to a point near the veranda where the whole sweep of landscape with its panorama of retreat magnetized her senses. Like the gray of lava, the Gray soldiery was erupting from the range; in columns, still under the control of officers, keeping to the defiles; in swarms and batches, under the control of nothing but their own emotions. Mostly they were hugging cover, from instinct if not from direction, but some relied on straight lines of flight and speed of foot for escape. Coursing aeroplanes were playing a new part. Their wireless was informing the Brown gunners where the masses were thickest. This way and that the Brown artillery fire drove retreating bodies, prodding them in the back with the fearful shepherdry of their shells. Officers' swords flashed in the faces of the bolters or in holding rear-guards to their work. Officers and orderlies were galloping hither and thither with messages, in want of wires. Commanders had been told to hold, but how and where to hold? They saw neighboring regiments and brigades going and they had to go. The machine, the complicated modern war machine, was broken; the machine, with its nerves of intelligence cut, became a thing of disconnected parts, each part working out its own salvation. Authority ceased to be that of the bureau and army lists. It was that of units racked by hardship, acting on the hour's demand.

Gorged was the pass road, overflowing with the struggling tumult of men and vehicles. Self-preservation breaking the bonds of discipline was in the ascendant, and it sought the highway, even as water keeps to the river bed. Like specks on the laboring tide was the white of bandages. An ambulance trying to cut out to one side was overturned. The frantic chauffeur and hospital-corps orderly were working to extricate the wounded from their painful position. A gun was overturned against the ambulance. A melee of horses and men was forming at the foot of the garden gate in front of the narrowing bounds of the road into the town, as a stream banks up before a jam of driftwood. The struggle for right of way became increasingly wild; the dam of men, horses, and wagons grew. A Brown dirigible was descending toward the great target; but on closer view its commander forbore, the humane impulse outweighing the desire for retribution for

colleagues in camp and mess who had gone down in a holocaust in the aerial battles of the night.

Page 265

Thus far the flight had seemed in the face of an unseen pursuer, like that of an army fleeing from some power visible to itself but not to Marta. Now she began to observe the flashes of rifles from the crests that the rear-guards of the Grays were deserting; then the rush of the Brown skirmish line to close quarters. Her glance pausing long on no detail, so active the landscape with its swarms and tumult, returned to the scene in front of the house. A Gray field-battery, cutting out to one side of the road, knocking over flimsier vehicles and wounded who got in the way, careening, its drivers cursing and officers shouting, galloped out in the open field and unlimbered to support a regiment of infantry that was hastily intrenching as a point to steady the retreating masses on its front and protect them in their flight when they had passed.

Marta saw how desperately the gunners worked; she could feel their fatigue. Nature had sunk in her heart a partisanship for the under dog. She who had stood for the three against five, now stood for the shaken, bewildered five in the cockpit under the fire of the three. Her sympathies went out to every beaten, weary Gray soldier. What was the difference between a Gray and a Brown? Weren't they both made of flesh and bone and blood and nerves?

Under the awful spell of the panorama, she did not see Westerling, who had stopped only a few feet distant with his aide and his valet, nor did he notice her as the tumult glazed his eyes. He was as an artist who looks on the ribbons of the canvas of his painting, or the sculptor on the fragments of his statue. Worse still, with no faith to give him fortitude except the materialistic, he saw the altar of his god of military efficiency in ruins. He who had not allowed the word retreat to enter his lexicon now saw a rout. He had laughed at reserve armies in last night's feverish defiance, at Turcas's advocacy of a slower and surer method of attack. In those hours of smiting at a wall with his fists and forehead, in denial of all the truth so clear to average military logic, if he had only given a few conventional directions all this disorder would have been avoided. His army could have fallen back in orderly fashion to their own range. The machine out of order, he had attempted no repair; he had allowed it to thrash itself to pieces.

The splinters of its debris—steel splinters—were lacerating his brain. He had a sense that madness was coming and some instinct of self-preservation made the whole scene grow misty, as he tried to resolve it out of existence in the desire for some one object which was not his guns and his men in demoralization. A bit of pink caught his eye—the pink of a dress, a little girl's dress, down there at the edge of the garden by the road, at the same moment that some guns of the Browns, in a new position, opened on an inviting target. Over her head was a crack and a blue tongue of smoke whipped out of nothing; while a shower of shrapnel bullets made spurts of dust around her. She started to run toward the terrace steps and another burst made her run in the opposite direction, while she looked about in a paralysis of fear and then threw herself on her face.

Page 266

“My God! That little girl—there—there!” Westerling exclaimed distractedly.

“Clarissa! Clarissa!” cried Marta, seeing the child for the first time.

She started precipitately to the rescue, but a hand on her arm arrested her and she turned to see Hugo Mallin bound past her down the slope. Still remaining on the premises under guard while Westerling had neglected to dispose of the case, he had the run of the grounds that morning while the staff was feverishly preparing for departure.

Marta watched him leaping from terrace to terrace. Before he had reached Clarissa worse than shrapnel bursts happened. The spatter of the fragments and bullets falling on either side of the road whipped the edges of the struggling human jam inward. In the midst of this a percussion shell struck, bursting on contact with the road and spreading its own grist of death and the stones of the road in a fan-shaped, mowing swath. Legs and bodies were thrown out as if driven centrifugally by a powerful breath, with Hugo lost in the smoke and dust of the weaving mass. He came out of it bearing Clarissa in his arms, up the terrace steps. To Marta, this was an isolated deed of saving life, of mercy in the midst of merciless slaughter; a parallel to that of Stransky bringing in Grandfather Fragini pickaback.

“Big fireworks!” said Clarissa Eileen as Hugo set her down in front of Marta, whose heart was in her eyes speaking its gratitude.

The artillery’s maceration of the human jam suddenly ceased; perhaps because the gunners had seen the Red Cross flag which a doctor had the presence of mind to wave. Westerling turned from a sight worse to him than the killing—that of the flowing retreat along the road pressing frantically over the dead and wounded in growing disorder for the cover of the town, and found himself face to face with the mask-like features of that malingerer who had told him on the veranda that the Grays could not win. Gall flooded his brain. In Hugo he recognized something kindred to the spirit that had set his army at flight, something tangible and personified; and through a mist of rage he saw Hugo smiling—smiling as he had at times at the veranda court—and saluting him as a superior officer.

“Now I am going to fight,” said Hugo, “if they try to cross the white posts; to fight with all the skill and courage I can command. But not till then. They are still in their own country and we are not in ours. Then they, in the wrong, will attack and we, in the right, will defend—and, God with us, we shall win.”

Thus a second time he had given to the prayer of Marta’s children the life of action. She could imagine how steadfastly and exaltedly he would face the invader.

“Thank you, Miss Galland,” he said. “And say good-by to your mother and Minna for me.”

Page 267

He was gone, without waiting for any reply, this stranger whom her part had not permitted to know well. A thousand words striving for utterance choked her as she watched him pass out of sight. Westerling was regarding her with a stare which fixed itself first on one thing and then on another in dull misery. Near by were Bellini, the chief of intelligence, and a subaltern who had arrived only a minute before. The subaltern was dust-covered. He seemed to have come in from a hard ride. Both were watching Marta, as if waiting for her to speak. She met Westerling's look steadily, her eyes dark and still and in his the reflection of the vague realization of more than he had guessed in her relations with Hugo.

"Well," she breathed to Westerling, "the war goes on!"

"That's it! That's the voice!" exclaimed the subaltern in an explosion of recognition.

A short, sharp laugh of irony broke from Bellini; the laugh of one whose suspicions are confirmed in the mixture of the sublime and the ridiculous. Marta looked around at the interruption, alert, on guard.

"You seem amused," she remarked curiously.

"No, but you must have been," replied Bellini hoarsely. "Early this morning, not far from the castle, this young officer found in the crater made by a ten-inch shell a wire that ran in a conduit underground. The wire was intact. He tapped it. He heard a voice thanking some one for her part in the victory, and it seems that the woman's voice that answered is yours, Miss Galland. So, General Westerling, the leak in information was over this wire from our staff into the Browns' headquarters, as Bouchard believed and as I came to believe."

So long had Marta expected this moment of exposure that it brought no shock. Her spirit had undergone many subtle rehearsals for the occasion.

"Yes, that is true," she heard herself saying, a little distantly, but very quietly and naturally.

Westerling fell back as from a blow in the face. His breath came hard at first, like one being strangled. Then it sank deep in his chest and his eyes were bloodshot, as a bull's in his final effort against the matador. He raised a quivering, clenched fist and took a step nearer her.

But far from flinching, Marta seemed to be greeting the blow, as if she admitted his right to strike. She was without any sign of triumph and with every sign of relief. Lying was at an end. She could be truthful.

"Do you recall what I said in the reception-room at the hotel?" she asked.

The question sent a flash into a hidden chamber of his mind. Now the only thing he could remember of that interview was the one remark which hitherto he had never included in his recollection of it.

“You said I could not win.” He drew out the words painfully.

Page 268

“And I pleaded with your selfishness—the only appeal to be made to you,” she continued, “to prevent war, which you could have done. When you said that you brought on this war to gratify your ambition, I chose to be one of the weapons of war; I chose, when driven to the wall, to be true to that part of my children’s oath that made an exception of the burglar, the highwayman, and the invader. In war you use deceit and treachery, under the pleasanter names of tactics and strategy, to draw men to their death in traps, in order to increase the amount of your killing. It was strategy, tactics, manoeuvres—give it any fine word you please—that hideous and shameless part which I played. With fire I fought fire. I fought for civilization, for my home, with the only means I had against the wickedness of a victory of conquest—the precedent of it in this age—a victory which should glorify such trickery as you practised on your people.”

“I should like to shoot you dead!” cried Bellini.

“No doubt. I like your honesty in saying so,” said Marta. “Why not? The business of war is murder; and as I have engaged in it I can claim no exception. And why shouldn’t women engage in it? Why should they be excepted from the sport when they pay so many of the costs? It’s easy to die and easy to kill. The part you force on women is much harder. By killing me you admit me to full equality.”

“You—you—” But Bellini had no adequate word for her, and his anger softened into a kind of admiration of her, of envy, perhaps, that he had had no such adjutant. It hardened again as he looked Westerling up and down, before turning to leave without a salute or even a direct word.

“And you let me make love to you!” Westerling said in a dazed, groping monotone to Marta.

Such a wreck was he of his former self that she found it amazing that she could not pity him. Yet she might have pitied him had he plunged into the fight; had he tried to rally one of the broken regiments; had he been able to forget himself.

“Rather, you made love to yourself through me,” she answered, not harshly, not even emphatically, but merely as a statement of passionless fact. “If you dared to endure what you ordered others to endure for the sake of your ambition; if—”

She was interrupted by a sharp zip in the air. Westerling dodged and looked about wildly.

“What is that?” he asked. “What?”

Five or six zips followed like a charge of wasps flying at a speed that made them invisible. Marta felt a brush of air past her cheek and Westerling went chalky white. It

was the first time he had been under fire. But these bullets were only strays. No more came.

“Come, general, let us be going!” urged the aide, touching his chief on the arm.

“Yes, yes!” said Westerling hurriedly.

Francois, who had picked up the coat that had fallen from Westerling’s shoulders with his start at the buzzing, held it while his master thrust his hands through the sleeves.

Page 269

“And this is wiser,” said the aide, unfastening the detachable insignia of rank from the shoulders of the greatcoat. “It’s wiser, too, that we walk,” he added.

“Walk? But my car!” exclaimed Westerling petulantly.

“I’m afraid that the car could not get through the press in the town,” was the reply. “Walking is safer.”

The absence in him of that quality which is the soldier’s real glory, the picture of this deserted leader, this god of a machine who had been crushed by his machine, his very lack of stoicism or courage—all this suddenly appealed to Marta’s quick sympathies. They had once drunk tea together.

“Oh, it was not personal! I did not think of myself as a person or of you as one—only of principles and of thousands of others—to end the killing—to save our country to its people! Oh, I’m sorry and, personally, I’m horrible—horrible!” she called after him in a broken, quavering gust of words which he heard confusedly in tragic mockery.

He made no answer; he did not even look around. Head bowed and hardly seeing the path, he permitted the aide to choose the way, which lay across the boundary of the Galland estate.

They had passed the stumps of the linden-trees and were in the vacant lot on the other side, when something white fluttered toward him, rustled by the breeze that carried it, and lay still almost at his feet. He saw his own picture on the front page of a newspaper, with the caption, “His Excellency, Field-Marshal Hedworth Westerling, Chief of Staff of Our Victorious Army.” He stared at the picture and the picture stared at him as if they knew not each other. A racking shudder swept through him. He turned his face with a kind of resolution, appealing in its starkness, toward the battle and his glance rested on the battery and the shattered regiment of infantry in the fields opposite the Galland gate, under a canopy of shrapnel smoke, bravely holding their ground.

“I should be there. That is the place for me!” he exclaimed with a trace of his old forcefulness.

The aide’s lips parted as if to speak in protest, but they closed in silence, while a glance of deep human understanding, dissolving the barriers of caste, passed between him and the valet, eloquent of their approval and their loyal readiness to share the fate of their fallen chief.

The canopy of shrapnel smoke grew thicker; the infantry began to break.

“But, no!” said Westerling. “The place for a chief of staff is at his headquarters.”

XLV

THE RETREAT

Page 270

Marta remained where Westerling had left her, rooted to the ground by the monstrous spell of the developing panorama of seemingly limitless movement. With each passing minute there must be a hundred acts of heroism which, if isolated in the glare of a day's news, would make the public thrill. At the outset of the war she had seen the Browns, as part of a preconceived plan, in cohesive rear-guard resistance, with every detail of personal bravery a utilized factor of organized purpose. Now she saw defence, inchoate and fragmentary, each part acting for itself, all deeds of personal bravery lost in a swirl of disorganization. That was the pity of it, the helplessness of engineers and of levers when the machine was broken; the warning of it to those who undertake war lightly.

The Browns' rifle flashes kept on steadily weaving their way down the slopes, their reserves pressing close on the heels of the skirmishers in greedy swarms. A heavy column of Brown infantry was swinging in toward the myriad-legged, writhing gray caterpillar on the pass road and many field-batteries were trotting along a parallel road. Their plan developed suddenly when a swath of gun-fire was laid across the pass road at the mouth of the defile, as much as to say: "Here we make a gate of death!" At the same time the head of the Brown infantry column flashed its bayonets over the crest of a hill toward the point where the shells were bursting. These men minded not the desperate, scattered rifle-fire into their ranks. Before their eyes was the prize of a panic that grew with their approach. Kinks were out of legs stiffened by long watches. The hot breath of pursuit was in their nostrils, the fever of victory in their blood.

In the defile, the impulse of one Gray straggler, who shook a handkerchief aloft in fatalistic submission to the inevitable, became the impulse of all. Soon a thousand white signals of surrender were blossoming. As the firing abruptly ceased, Marta heard the faint roar of the mighty huzzas of the hunters over the size of their bag.

In the area visible to Marta was the strife of forces larger than the largest that Napoleon ever led in battle; as large as fought the decisive battle in the last war of the Grays. But here was only a section of the raging whole from frontier end to frontier end. The immensity of it! All the young manhood of a nation employed! Marta ceased to see any particular incident of the scene. All was confused in a red mist—red as blood. She, the one being in that landscape who was a detached observer, felt herself condemned to watch the war go on forever.

An edge of the curtain of mist lifted. Sight and mind and soul concentrated on the nearest horror. She saw the whirlpool at the foot of the garden, horses and men in a straggle among dead and wounded, which had grown fiercer now that the portion of the retreat that had not been cut off in the defile pressed forward the more madly. She had thought of herself as ashes; as an immovable creature of flayed nerves, incapable of raising her hand to change the march of events. But the misery that she saw intimately, almost within stone's throw of her door, broke the spell with its appeal. The hectic energy of battle speeded her steps in the blessed oblivion of action.

Page 271

Some doctors of different regiments thrown together in the havoc of remnants of many organizations, with the help of hospital-corps men, were trying to extricate the wounded from among the dead. They heard a woman's voice and saw a woman's face. They did not wonder at her presence, for there was nothing left in the world for them to wonder at. Had an imp from hell or an angel from heaven appeared, or a shower of diamonds fallen from the sky, they would not have been surprised. Their duty was clear; there was work of their kind to do, endless work. Units of the broken machine, in the instinct of their calling they struggled with the duty nearest at hand.

"What do you need? What can I do?" Marta asked.

"Rest, shelter, safety for these poor fellows," answered one of the doctors.

"There is the house—our house!" said Marta.

"My God! Aren't you men?" bellowed an officer. "Get away from the road! Come out here! Form line! You—you; I mean you!"

"You who can walk—you who aren't hurt, you cowards, give us a hand with the wounded!" shouted another doctor.

The soldiers were deaf to commands, but they heard a feminine voice above the oaths and groans and heavy breathing and rustle of pressing bodies and thrusting arms; a feminine voice, clear and steadying in that orgy of male ferocity. It was like a chemical precipitate clearing muddy water. Their wild glances saw a woman's features in exaltation and in her eyes something as definite as the fire of command. She was shaming them for their unmanliness; shaming their panic—the foolish panic at a theatre exit—and giving orders as if that were her part and theirs was to obey; a woman to soldiers, the weak sex to the strong. They did obey, under the spell of the amazing fact of her presence, in the relief of having some simple human purpose to cling to.

After the work was begun they needed no urging to carry the wounded up the terrace steps; and men who had knocked down and trampled on the wounded were gentle with them now, under the guidance of better impulses. How could they falter directed by a woman unmindful of occasional shells and bullet whistles? They begged her to go back to the house; this was no place for her.

But Marta did not want safety. Danger was sweet; it was expiation. She was helping, actually helping; that was enough. She envied the peaceful dead—they had no nightmares—as she aided the doctors in separating the bodies that were still breathing from those that were not; and she steeled herself against every ghastly sight save one, that of a man lying with his legs pinned under a wagon body. His jaw had been shot away. Slowly he was bleeding to death, but he did not realize it. He realized nothing in his delirium except the nature of his wound. He was dipping his finger in the cavity and,

dab by dab, writing “Kill me!” on the wagon body. It sent reeling waves of red before her eyes. Then a shell burst near her and a doctor cried out:

Page 272

“She’s hit!”

But Marta did not hear him. She heard only the dreadful crack of the splitting shrapnel jacket. She had a sense of falling, and that was all.

The next that she knew she was in a long chair on the veranda and the vague shadows bending over her gradually identified themselves as her mother and Minna.

“I remember when you were telling of the last war that you didn’t swoon at the sight of the wounded, mother,” Marta whispered.

“But I was not wounded,” replied Mrs Galland.

Marta ceased to be only a consciousness swimming in a haze. With the return of her faculties, she noticed that both her mother and Minna were looking significantly at her forearm; so she looked at it, too. It was bandaged.

“A cut from a shrapnel fragment,” said a doctor. “Not deep,” he added.

“Do I get an iron cross?” she asked, smiling faintly. It was rather pleasant to be alive.

“All the crosses—iron and bronze and silver and gold!” he replied.

“You forgot platinum,” she said almost playfully, as she found nerves, muscles, and bones intact after that drop over a precipice into a black chasm. It was like the Marta of the days before she had undertaken to reform all creation, her mother was thinking. “Did I help any?” she asked seriously.

“Well, I should say so!” declared the doctor. “I should say so!” he repeated. “You did the whole business down there by the gate.”

“Yes, the whole business! I brought it all on—all! I—” She flung a wild gesture at the landscape and then buried her face in her hands. “Yes, I did the whole business I—I played, smiled, lied! That awful sight—and he might not have been writing ‘kill me’ if I —”

The doctor grasped her shoulders to keep her from rising. He spoke the first soothing words that came to mind. There was another shudder, an effort at control, and her hands dropped and she was looking up with a dull steadiness.

“I’m not going mad!” she exclaimed. “What happened to—to that man who was pleading for death? Did any one who had been engaged in killing men who wanted to live kill the one who wanted to die?”

“The shell burst that wounded you finished him,” said the doctor.

“Which, of course, was quite according to the tenets of civilization, which wouldn’t have allowed it to be done as an open act of mercy!” said Marta. “But that is only satire. It is of no service,” she added, rising to a sitting posture to look around.

The struggle by the gate was over. All the uninjured had made good their escape. A Red Cross flag floated above the wounded and the debris of overturned wagons. Brown skirmishers were descending the near-by slopes and crossing the path of the cavalry charge. Signal-corps men were spinning out their wires. A regiment of guns were being emplaced behind a foot-hill. A returning Brown dirigible swept over the town. All firing except occasional scattered shots had ceased in the immediate vicinity, though in the distance could be heard the snarl of the firmer resistance that the Grays were making at some other point. The Galland house, for the time being, was isolated —in possession of neither side.

Page 273

“Isn’t there something else I can do to help with the wounded?” Marta asked. She longed for action in order to escape her thoughts.

“You’ve had a terrible shock—when you are stronger,” said the doctor.

“When you have had something to eat and drink,” observed the practical Minna authoritatively.

Marta would not have the food brought to her. She insisted that she was strong enough to accompany Minna to the tower. While Minna urged mouthfuls down Marta’s dry throat as she sat outside the door of the sitting-room with her mother a number of weary, dust-streaked faces, with feverish energy in their eyes, peered over the hedge that bounded the garden on the side toward the pass. These scout skirmishers of Stransky’s men of the 53d Regiment of the Browns made beckoning gestures as to a crowd, before they sprang over the hedge and ran swiftly, watchfully, toward the linden stumps, closely followed by their comrades. Soon the whole garden was overrun by the lean, businesslike fellows, their glances all ferret-like to the front.

“Look, Minna!” exclaimed Marta. “The giant who carried the old man in pickaback the first night of the war!”

“Yes, the bold impudence of him!” said Minna. “As if there was nothing that could stand in his way and what he wanted he would have!”

But Minna was flushing as she spoke. The flush dissipated and she drew up her chin when Stransky, looking around, recognized her with a merry, confident wave of his hand.

“See, he’s a captain and he wears an iron cross!” said Marta as Stransky hastened toward them.

“He acts like it!” assented Minna grudgingly.

Eager, leviathan, his cap doffed with a sweeping gesture as he made a low bow, Stransky was the very spirit of retributive victory returning to claim the ground that he had lost.

“Well, this is like getting home again!” he cried.

“So I see!” said Minna equivocally.

Stransky drew his eyes together, sighting them on the bridge of his nose thoughtfully at this dubious reception.

“I came back for the chance to kiss a good woman’s hand,” he observed with a profound awkwardness and looking at Minna’s hand. “Your hand!” he added, the cast in his eyes straightening as he looked directly at her appealingly.

She extended her finger-tips and he pressed his lips to them. Then she drew back a step, a trifle pale, her eyes sad and questioning, more than ever Madonna-like, and curled her arm around little Clarissa Eileen, who had stolen to her mother’s side.

“What is that?” asked Clarissa Eileen, pointing to the cross on Stransky’s breast.

“That,” observed Stransky deliberately, “is a little piece of metal that I got for an inspiration of manhood. It doesn’t cost the price of a day’s rations, but it’s one of the things which money can’t buy—not yet—in this commercial age. One of those institutions of barbarism that we anarchists call government gave it to me, and I’ll never part with it!”

Page 274

“Because he was a brave soldier, Clarissa,” explained Marta in simpler terms. “Because he was ready to die for his country.”

“And for your mother!” put in Stransky, seizing Clarissa in his great hands and lifting her lightly to the level of his face. “Oh, I’ve got stories,” he said to her, “a soldier-man’s stories, to tell you, young lady, one of these days—and such stories!”

He crossed his eyes over his big nose in a fashion that made Clarissa clap her hands and burst into a peal of laughter.

“You’re an awfully funny man!” she declared as Stransky set her down.

“So your mother thinks,” said Stransky, blinking at Minna, who had indulged in a smile which his remark promptly ironed out.

This irrepressible soldier, given so much as an inch, would be demanding a province. But erasing a smile is not destroying the fact of it. Stransky took heart for the charge on seeing a breach in the enemy’s lines.

“Yes, I was fighting for you!” he burst out to Minna. “When the other fellows were reading letters from their sweethearts I was imagining letters from you. I even wrote out some and posted them from one pocket to another, in place of the regular mails.”

“What did you say in those letters?” asked Marta.

“Why, you’re big and awkward and cross-eyed, Stransky, but you’ve a way with you, and maybe—”

“Humph!” sniffed Minna.

“I kept seeing the way you looked when you belted me one in the face,” he went on unabashed to Minna, “and knocked any anarchism out of me that was left after the shell burst. I kept seeing your face in my last glimpse when the Grays made me run for it from your kitchen door before I had half a chance for the oration crying for voice. You were in my dreams! You were in battle with me!”

“This sounds like a disordered mind,” observed Minna. “I’ve heard men talk that way before.”

“Oh, I have talked that way to other women myself!” said Stransky.

“Yes,” said Minna bitterly. His candor was rather unexpected.

“I have talked to others in passing on the high road,” he continued. “But never after a woman had struck me in the face. That blow sank deep—deep—deep as what

Lanstron said when I revolted on the march. I say it to you with this"—he touched the cross—"on my breast. And I'm not going to give you up. It's a big world. There's room in it for a place for you after the war is over and I'm going to make the place. Yes, I've found myself. I've found how to lead men. My home isn't to be in the hedgerows any more. It's to be where you are. You and I, whom society gave a kick, will make society give us a place!" He was eloquent in his strength; eloquent in the fire of resolution blazing from his eyes. "And I'll be back again," he concluded. "You can't shake me. I'll camp on your door-step. But now I've got to look after my company. Good-by till I'm back—back to stay! Good-by, little daughter!" he added with a wave of his hand to Clarissa as he turned to go. "Maybe we shall have our own automobile some day. It's no stranger than what's been happening to me since the war began."

Page 275

“If you don’t marry him, Minna, I’ll—I’ll—” Mrs. Galland could not find words for the fearful thing that she would do.

“Marry him! I have only met him three times for about three minutes each time!” protested Minna. She was as rosy as a girl and in her confusion she busied herself retying the ribbon on Clarissa Eileen’s hair. “He called you little daughter!” she said softly to the child as she withdrew into the tower.

“I am glad we didn’t send Minna away when misfortune befell her,” said Mrs. Galland. “You were right about that, Marta, with your new ideas. What a treasure she has been!”

Marta was scarcely hearing her mother; certainly not finding any credit for herself in the remark. She was thinking what a simple, what a glorious thing was a love such as Stransky’s and Minna’s: the mating of a man and a woman whose brains were not oversensitized by too complicated mentality; of a man and a woman direct and sincere, primarily and clearly a man and a woman. Such happiness could never be for her now; for her who had let a man make love to her for his own undoing.

The skirmishers having halted beyond the linden stumps, the reserves were stacking their rifles and dropping to rest in the garden. The sight of the uniforms of the deliverers, of her own people, stirred Mrs. Galland to unwonted activity. She moved here and there among them with smiles of mothering pride. She told them how brave they were; how her husband had been a colonel of Hussars in the last war. They must be tired and hungry. She hurried in to Minna, and together they emptied the larder of everything, even to the lumps of sugar, which were impartially bestowed.

But Marta remained in the chair by the doorway of the tower, weak and listless. She was weary of the sight of uniforms and bayonets. In the dreary opaqueness of her mind flickered one tiny, bright light as through a blanket; that she herself had been in danger. She had been under fire. She had not merely sent men to death; she had been in death’s company.

Now her lashes were closed; again they opened slightly as her gaze roved the semicircle of the horizon. A mounted officer and his orderly galloping across the fields to the pass road caught her desultory attention and held it, for they formed the most impetuous object on the landscape. When the officer alighted at the foot of the garden and tossed his reins to the orderly, she detected something familiar about him. He leaped the garden wall at a bound and, half running, came toward the tower. Not until he lifted his cap and waved it did she associate this lithe, dapper artillerist with a stooped old gardener in blue blouse and torn straw hat who had once shuffled among the flowers at her service.

“Hello! Hello!” he shouted in clarion greeting at sight of her. “Hello, my successor!”

Only in the whiteness of his hair was he like the old Feller. His tone, the boyish sparkle of his black eyes, those full, expressive lips playing over the brilliant teeth, his easy grace, his quick and telling gestures—they were of the Feller of cadet days. Something in his look as he stopped in front of her startled Marta. Suddenly he bent over and drew down his face, with dropping underlip.

Page 276

“I’m deaf—stone deaf, if you please!” he wheezed in senile fashion.

She had to laugh and he laughed, too, with the ringing tone of youth that made him seem younger than his years.

“Not a gardener—a colonel of artillery, in the uniform, under the flag again, thanks to you!” he cried. “An officer once more!”

“I’m glad!” she exclaimed. Here was one thing more to the credit of war.

“Thanks to you, instead of being shot as a spy—thanks to you!” More than the emotion of the brimming gratitude of his heart shone through his mobile features.

“It was your choice; you improved it. You fulfilled a faith that I had in you,” she said.

“Faith in me! That is the finest tribute of all—better than this, better than this!” He touched the iron cross on his coat as Stransky had to Minna.

“And I took your place,” said Marta with a dull, slow emphasis.

Yes, he did owe much to her, she was thinking. In his place she had lied; his part she had played in shame and no future act, she felt, could ever expiate it. The teacher of peace, she had become the partisan of war in wicked cunning.

He guessed nothing of what lay behind her words. He had forgotten her children’s school.

“And did my work better than I could! You are wonderful, wonderful!” He was aglow with admiration, with awe, with adoration.

She smiled faintly, bitterly, while he burst into a flood of talk.

“I was back with the guns you had given me when I heard that you were taking my place. Then I thought, can I be worthy of this—of what you have done for me, giving me back my own world, your world? I vowed I would be worthy—worthy of you. Heavens! How I made the guns play—bang-bang-bang!” He cupped his bands over his eyes as an imaginary range-finder, sweeping the field. “Oh, they are beautiful guns, these new models! With a battalion I won a regiment. I asked Lanny to tell you; did he?”

“Yes, and also of the iron cross.”

“A fine bit of metal, the cross, and they have not been giving them too promiscuously, either,” said Feller. “But they’re not gun-metal! That is the real metal. It was my guns that closed the gate to the pass,” he went on, swept by the flood of enthusiasm. “I didn’t open fire till I could concentrate so as to make a solidly locked gate. I tell you, the guns

are the thing! You ought to have seen that retreat curl up on itself. And where the shells struck on the hard road—phew! They lifted the Grays upward to meet shrapnel pounding them from the sky! We could have torn the whole Column to pieces if they hadn't surrendered. What a bag of rifles and guns and stores is going to our capital! Oh, our friends the Grays were a little too fast! They didn't know what the guns meant in defence. The guns—they are back to their old place of glory! They rule!"

"Was it your guns that fired into the melee there by the gate?" Marta asked.

Page 277

“Yes. I saw that soft target early. They put up a Red Cross flag at first, but I soon realized that it wasn’t any dressing station; only stragglers; only the kind that run away without orders. So I let them have it, for that’s the law of war, and the way they would give it to us and did, more than once. But I took care that no shots were fired at the house, though if it had not been your house I’d have sent a shell or two on the chance that some of the Gray staff might still be there. Then, after the surrender, I kept spanking that lot with intermittent shells till I was sure the Red Cross flag was justified.”

“The fire was very accurate, as I happen to know, for it wounded me,” said Marta.

So intent had he been in talking to his audience, to her eyes, that now for the first time he noticed the bandage on her forearm. His impressionable features were as struck with alarm and horror at sight of the tiny red spot as if she had been in danger of immediate death.

“You—you were down by the road?” he gasped. “My guns were firing at you? Why—-how?”

“Helping with the wounded.”

“The Gray wounded?”

“Yes.”

“Of course, you would—with any wounded!” he cried. “Splendid! Like you! It is not bad? It does not pain you?”

He bent over the red spot, his lips very near it and twitching, all his volatile force melting into solicitude and his voice taut, as if he himself were suffering the anguish of a dozen wounds.

“Only a scratch. Don’t worry about it!” she assured him soothingly, with a peculiar smile.

Now he made a gesture of amazement, catching at another thought that darted as a shooting star across his mind.

“Wonderful—wounded! Wonderful! Was there ever such a woman?” he cried. “No, I knew from the first there never was. The minute the way was clear and I could be spared from my guns I came to you—to you! This time I come not as a deaf, cringing, watery-eyed old gardener”—for an instant he was the gardener—“but as one of your world, to which I was bred,” and his shoulders, rising, filled out his uniform in the grace of the commander of men in action. “Destiny has played with us. It sent a spy to your garden. It put you in my place. A strange service, ours—yes, destiny is in it!”

“Yes,” she breathed painfully, his suggestion striking deep.

She was staring at the ground, her face very still. Yes, it was he who had started the train of circumstances that had left her with a memory more tragic than the one that had whitened his hair. His memory was already erased. What could ever erase hers? He had begun anew. How could she ever begin anew? The fact of this man talking of everything as destiny—of the slaughter, the misery, as destiny—was the worst mockery of all. Yet he was true to himself. His enjoyed facility of fervid expression, his boyishness, his gift of making the lived moment the greatest of his life, was the very gift she had craved to make her forget her yesterdays. Only faintly did she hear his next outburst, until he came to the end.

Page 278

“I come with the question which I had sealed in my lonely heart,” he was saying, “while I lived a lie and trimmed rose-bushes and hung on your words. You saved me. I fought for you. You were in my eyes, in my angers, in my brain as I directed the fire of my guns. ’She will be pleased to hear that I am a colonel!’ I kept thinking. I love you! I love you!”

Marta started up from her chair, her eyes moist and open wide, amazed, but growing kind and troubled. Had she been guilty of giving him hope? Was there something in her that had led him on, a shame that came natural to her since she had let Westerling proceed with his love? Her guilt in Feller’s case was worse than in Westerling’s. A thousand Westerlings were not worth one Feller. And he had been near her, near as a comrade, in imagination, with his ready suggestions of how to play her part in its most exacting moments! While he stood, the picture of the eager, impatient lover trembling for an answer that seemed to mean heaven or perdition for him, the kindness that went with the trouble in her eyes warmed to fondness, as she laid her fingers on his shoulder.

“You would want me to love you, wouldn’t you?” she asked gently. “And if I cannot? Yes, if I can neither act nor play at love, so real must love be to me?”

He turned miserable, with eyes seeming to sink into his head, and body to wilt in the dejection of that pitiful, hopeless attitude when his secret had been discovered in the tower sitting-room.

“Act! Act!” he murmured.

“Yes.” Her fingers exercised the faintest pressure on his shoulder. “Your true love, your one enduring love, is the guns. All other loves come and go. To-morrow, if not, next day, in this big, throbbing world, with your future assured, as you lived other great moments you would look back on this moment as another part that you had acted—and so beautifully acted.”

“Act! Act!” he repeated, like one who is coming to grip with facts.

For a period he stared at the ground before he reached for the hand on his shoulder, which he pressed in both of his, looking soberly into her eyes. He smiled; smiled apparently at a memory, let her hand drop, and raised his own hands, palms out, in a gesture of good-humored comprehension.

“You know me!” he exclaimed. “But I did it well, didn’t I?” he asked, after a pause.

“Beautifully. I repeat, it was convincingly real,” she replied, laughing in relief.

“If I hadn’t, it would have been most disappointing after all my rehearsals,” he went on. “Yes, you know me! Why, I might have been wanting to break the engagement in a week because I was beginning other rehearsals!” He laughed, too, as if relishing the

prospect. “Yes, I act—act always, except with the guns. They alone are real!” he burst out in joyous fury. “We are going on, I and my guns, on to the best yet—on in the pursuit! Nothing can stop us! We shall hit the Grays so fast and hard that they can never get their machine in order again. God bless you! Everything that is fine in me will always think finely of you! You and Lanny—two fixed stars for me!”

Page 279

“Truly!” She was radiant. “Truly?” she asked wistfully.

“Yes, yes—a yes as real as the guns!”

“Then it helps! Oh, how it helps!” she murmured almost inaudibly.

“Good-by! God bless you!” he cried as he started to go, adding over his shoulder merrily: “I’ll send you a picture post-card from the Grays’ capital of my guns parked in the palace square.”

She watched him leap the garden wall as lightly as he had come and gallop away, an impersonation of the gay, adventurous spirit of war, counting death and wounds and hardship as the delights of the gamble. Yes, he would follow the Grays, throwing shells in the irresponsible joy of tossing confetti in a carnival. Pursuit! Was Feller’s the sentiment of the army? Were the Browns not to stop at the frontier? Were they to change their song to, “Now we have ours we shall take some of theirs”? The thought was fresh fuel to the live coals that still remained under the ashes.

A brigade commander and some of his staff-officers near by formed a group with faces intent around an operator who was attaching his instrument to a field-wire that had just been reeled over the hedge. Marta moved toward them, but paused on hearing an outburst of jubilant exclamations:

“A hundred thousand prisoners!”

“And five hundred guns!”

“We’re closing in on their frontier all along the line!”

“It’s incredible!”

“But the word is official—it’s right!”

From mouth to mouth—a hundred thousand prisoners, five hundred guns—the news was passed in the garden. Eyes dull with fatigue began flashing as the soldiers broke into a cheer that was not led, a cheer unlike any Marta had heard before. It had the high notes of men who were weary, of a terrible exultation, of spirit stronger than tired legs and as yet unsatisfied. Other exclamations from both officers and men expressed a hunger whetted by the taste of one day’s victory.

“We’ll go on!”

“We’ll make peace in their capital!”

“And with an indemnity that will stagger the world!”

“Nothing is impossible with Lanstron. How he has worked it out—baited them to their own destruction!”

“A frontier of our own choosing!”

“On the next range. We will keep all that stretch of plain there!”

“And the river, too!”

“They shall pay—pay for attacking us!”

Pay, pay for the drudgery, the sleepless nights, the dead and the wounded—for our dead and wounded! No matter about theirs! The officers were too intent in their elation to observe a young woman, standing quite still, her lips a thin line and a deep blaze in her eyes as she looked this way and that at the field of faces, seeking some dissentient, some partisan of the right. She was seeing the truth now; the cold truth, the old truth to which she had been untrue when she took Feller’s place. There could be no choice of sides in war unless you believed in war. One who fought for peace must take up arms against all armies. Her part as a spy appeared to her clad in a new kind of shame: the desertion of her principles.

Page 280

Nor did the officers observe a man of thirty-five, wearing the cords of the staff and a general's stars, coming around the corner of the house. Marta's feverish, roving glance had noted him directly he was in sight. His face seemed to be in keeping with the other faces, in the ardor of a hunt unfinished; hand in blouse pocket, his bearing a little too easy to be conventionally military—the same Lanny.

She was dimly conscious of surprise not to find him changed, perhaps because he was unaccompanied by a retinue or any other symbol of his power. He might have been coming to call on a Sunday afternoon. In that first glimpse it was difficult to think of him as the commander of an army. But that he was, she must not forget. She was shaken and trembling; and a mist rose before her, so that she did not see him clearly when, with a gesture of relief, he saw her.

"Lanstron!" exclaimed an officer in the first explosive breath of amazement on recognizing him; then added: "His Excellency, the chief of staff!"

But the one word, Lanstron, had been enough to thrill all the officers into silence and ramrod salutes. Marta noted the deference of their glances as they covertly looked him over. On what meat had our Caesar fed that he had grown so great? This was the man who had pleaded with her to allow a spy in her garden; for whom she herself had turned spy. To-morrow his name would be in the head-lines of every newspaper in the world. His portrait would become as familiar to the eyes of the world as that of the best-advertised of kings. He was the conqueror whose commonplace sayings would be the sparks of genius because the gamble of war had gone his way. He had grown so great by sending shells into the stricken eddy at the foot of the garden and driving punishing columns against the retreating masses in the defile. The god in the car and of the machine, with his quiet manner, his intellectual features; this one-time friend, more subtle in pursuit of the same ambitions than the blind egoism of Westerling! These officers and men and all officers and men and herself were pawns of his plans and his will. Yes, even herself. Had he stopped with the repulse of the enemy? No. Would he stop now? No. Her disillusion was complete. She knew the truth; she felt it as steel stiffening against him and against every softer impulse of her own.

"I wanted a glimpse of the front as well as the rear," Lanstron remarked in explanation of his presence to the general of brigade as he passed on toward Marta, who was thinking that she, at least, was not in awe of him; she, at least, saw clearly and truly his part.

"Marta! Marta!"

Lanstron's voice was tremulous, as if he were in awe of her, while he drank in the fact that she was there before him at arms' length, safe, alive. She did not offer her hand in greeting. She was incapable of any movement, such was her emotion; and he, too, was held in a spell, as the reality of her, after all that had passed, filled his eyes. He waited for her to speak, but she was silent.

Page 281

“Marta—that bandage! You have been hurt?” he exclaimed.

Unlike Feller, he had not been so obsessed with a purpose as to be blind to externals. Her hostile mood was quick to recall that no smallest detail of anything under his sight ever escaped him. This was his kind of strength—the strength that had wrecked Westerling as a fine, intellectual process. He could act, too. In the tone of the question, “You’ve been hurt?” without tragic emphasis, was a twitching, throbbing undercurrent of horror, which set the hand hidden in the pocket of his blouse quivering. Why care if she were hurt? Why not think about the hundreds of thousands of others who were wounded. Why not care for that poor fellow whose ghastly wound kept staring at her as he wrote “Kill me!” on the wagon body?

“It’s the fashion to be wounded,” she said, eyebrows lifted and lashes lowered, with a nervous smile. “I played Florence Nightingale, the natural woman’s part, I believe. We should never protest; only nurse the victims of war. After helping to send men to death I went under fire myself, and—and that helped.”

She could be kind to Feller but not to Lanstron. He was not a child. He was Lanny, who, as she thought of him now, did nothing except by calculation.

“Yes, that would help,” he agreed, wincing as from a knife thrust.

Her old taunt: sending men to death and taking no risk himself! She saw that he winced; she realized that she had stayed words that were about to come in a flood. Then she seemed to see him through new lenses. He appeared drawn and pale and old, as if he, too, had become ashes; anything but the conqueror. Her feelings grew contradictory. Why all this fencing? How weak, how silly! She had much to say to him —a last appeal to make. Her throat held a dry lump. She was marshalling her thoughts to begin when the brittle silence was broken by a rumbling of voices, a stirring of feet, and a cheer.

“Lanstron! Lanstron! Hurrah for Lanstron!”

The soldiers in the garden did not bother with any “Your Excellency, the chief of staff” formula when word had been passed of his presence. Marta looked around to see their tempestuous enthusiasm as they tossed their caps in the air and sent up their spontaneous tribute from the depths of their lungs. Conqueror and hero to the living, but the dead could not speak, whispered some fiend in her heart.

Lanstron uncovered to the demonstration impulsively, when the conventional military acknowledgment would have been a salute. He always looked more like the real Lanny to her with his forehead bare. It completed the ensemble of his sensitive features. She saw that he was blinking almost boyishly at the compliment and noted the little deprecatory shake of his head, as much as to say that they were making a mistake.

“Thank you!” he called, and the cheeriness of his voice, she thought, expressed his real self; the delight of victory and the glowing anticipation of further victories.

Page 282

“Thank *you*!” called a private with a big voice.

“Yes, thank *you*!” repeated some of the officers in quick appreciation of a compliment as real as human courage.

“We’re going to put your headquarters in the Grays’ capital!” cried the soldier with the big voice.

Another cheer rose at the suggestion.

“You will follow the staff?” Lanstron called in sudden intensity.

“Yes, yes, yes!” they shouted. “Yes, yes; follow you!”

“You think our staff led you wisely?” he continued distinctly, slowly, and very soberly. “You think we can continue to do so? You trust us? You trust our judgment?”

“Yes, yes, yes!”

“Thank you!” he said with a long-drawn, happy breath.

“Thank *you*!” they shouted.

He stood smiling for a moment in reply to their smiles; then, still smiling, but in a different way, he said to Marta:

“As you say, that helps!” with a nod toward the bandage on her forearm and hurriedly turned away.

She saw him involuntarily clutch the wrist above the pocket of his blouse to still the twitching; but beyond that there was no further sign of emotion as he went to the telephone. She had been about to cry out her protest against the continuance of the war in the name of humanity, of justice, of every bit of regard he had ever had for her. When he was through talking she should go to him in appeal—yes, on her knees, if need be, before all the officers and soldiers—to stop the killing; but instantly he was through he started toward the pass road, not by the path to the steps, but by leaping from terrace to terrace and waving his hand gayly to the soldiers as he went. The officers stared at the sight of a chief of staff breaking away from his communications in this unceremonious fashion. They saw him secure a horse from a group of cavalry officers on the road and gallop away.

Marta having been the object of Lanstron’s attention now became the object of theirs. It was good to see a woman, a woman of the Browns, after their period of separation from feminine society. She found herself holding an impromptu reception. She heard some other self answering their polite questions; while a fear, a new kind of fear, was taking

hold of her real self; a fear inexplicable, insidiously growing. Lanstron was still in the officers' minds after his strange appearance and stranger departure. They began to talk of him, and Marta listened.

"He said something about being a free man now!"

"Yes, he looked as eager as a terrier after rats."

"He knows what he is doing. He sees so far ahead of what we are thinking that it's useless to guess his object. We'll understand when it's done."

"How little side he has! So perfectly simple. He hardly seems to realize the immensity of his success. In fact, none of us realizes it; it's too enormous, overwhelming, sudden!"

Page 283

“And no nerves!”

“No nerves, did you say? There you are wrong. Did you see that hand twitching in his pocket? Of course, you’ve heard about the hand? Why, he’s a bundle of nerve-wires held in control; a man of the age; master of his own machine, therefore, able to master the machine of an army.”

Of course, they guessed nothing of Marta’s part in his success. The very things they were saying about him built up a figure of the type whose character she had keenly resented a few minutes before.

“But, Miss Galland, you seem to know him far better than we. This is not news to you,” remarked the brigade commander.

“Yes, I saw the accident of his first flight when his hand was injured,” she said, and winced with horror. Never had the picture of him as he rose from the wreck appeared so distinct. She could see every detail of his looks; feel his twinges of pain while he smiled. Was the revelation the more vivid because it had not once occurred to her since the war began? It shut out the presence of the officers; she no longer heard what they were saying. Black fear was enveloping her. Vaguely she understood that they were looking away at something. She heard the roar of artillery not far distant and followed their gaze toward the knoll where Dellarme’s men had received their baptism of fire, now under a canopy of shrapnel smoke.

“That’s about their last stand in the tangent, their last snarl on our soil,” remarked the brigade commander.

“And we’re raining shells on it!” said his aide. “With our glasses we’ll be able to watch the infantry go in.”

“Yes, very well.”

“We’re all used to how it feels, now we’ll see how it looks at a distance,” piped one of the soldiers.

Not until he had shouted to them did they notice a division staff-officer who had come up from the road. He had a piece of astounding news to impart before he mentioned official business.

“What do you think of this?” he cried. “Nothing could stop him! Lanstron—yes, Lanstron has gone into that charge with the African Braves!”

In these days, when units of a vast army in the same uniform, drilled in the same way, had become interchangeable parts of a machine, the African Braves still kept regimental fame. They had guarded the stretches of hot sand in one of the desert African colonies

of the Browns; and they had served in the jungle in the region of Bodlapoo, which, by the way, was nominally the cause of the war. They had fought Mohammedan fanatics and black savages. It did not matter much to them when they died; now as well as ever. If they had mothers or sisters they were the secrets of each man's heart. The scapegrace youth, the stranded man of thirty who would forget his past, the born adventurer, the renegade come a cropper, the gentleman who had gambled, the remittance man whose remittance had stopped, the peasant's son who had run away from home, criminals and dreamers, some

Page 284

minor poets, some fairly good actors, scholarly fellows who chanted the “Odyssey,” and both oath-ripping and taciturn, quiet-mannered fellows who could neither read nor write found a home in the African Braves’ muster-roll. Their spirit of corps had a dervish fatalism. They had begged to have a share in the war and Partow had consented. In the night after their long journey, while Westerling’s ram was getting its death-blow, they had detrained and started for the front. But the Grays were going as fast as the Braves, and they had been unable to get into action.

“Wait for us! We want to be in it!” cried their impatience. “We’ll show you how they fight in Africa! Way for us!”

“Give them a chance!” said Lanstron.

This order a general of corps repeated to a general of division, who repeated it to a general of brigade.

“Give them a chance! Give them a chance!”

Reserves along the route of their advance knew them at a glance by their uniform, their Indian tan, and their jaunty swagger and gave a cheer as they passed. They touched the chord of romance in the hearts of officers, who regarded them as an archaic survival which sentiment permitted in an isolated instance in Africa, where it excellently served. And officers looked at one another and shook their heads knowingly, out of the drear, hard experience in spade approaches, when they thought of that brilliant uniform as a target and of frontier tactics against massed infantry and gun-fire.

“Once will be enough,” said the cynical. “There won’t be many left to tell the tale!”

And the African Braves knew how the army felt. They had a reputation out of Africa to sustain, this band of exotics among the millions of home-trained comrades. They didn’t quite believe in all this machine business. Down the slopes with their veteran stride, loose-limbed and rhythmic, they went, past the line of the Galland house, with no fighting in sight. What if they had to return to Africa without firing a shot? The lugubrious prospect saddened them. They felt that a battle should be ordered on their account.

“You will take that regiment’s place and it will fall back for support, while you storm the knoll beyond!” said the brigade commander, a twinkle in his eye.

“Is it much of a job, do you think?” asked the colonel of the Braves.

He had two fingers’ length of service colors on his blouse. Lean he was and bony-jawed, with deep-set eyes. He loved every mother’s son of the Braves, from illiterate to

the chanter of the “Odyssey”; from peasant’s son to penniless nobleman, and thought any one of his privates rather superior to a home brigade commander.

“A pretty good deal. I think the Grays’ll make a snappy resistance,” said the brigade commander honestly. “The way we feel them out, they’re getting back their wind, and for the first time we’ll be fighting them up-hill. Yes, there’s a sting in a retreating army’s tail when it gets over its demoralization.”

Page 285

“Good!” observed the colonel as if he had a sweet taste in his mouth.

“And if you find it too stiff,” the brigade commander went on, “why, I’ve seasoned veterans back of you who will press in to your support.”

“Veterans, you say, and seasoned? I have some of my own, too! Thank you! Thank you most kindly!” said the colonel, saluting stiffly, with a twist to the corner of his mouth. “When we need their help it will be to bury our dead,” he added. “Can we do it alone? Will we?”

He passed these inquiries along the line, which rose to the suggestion with different kinds of oaths and jests and grins and grim whistles. The scholar suddenly transferred his affections from the Greeks’ phalanx to the Roman legions and began with the first verse of Virgil’s “AEneid.” He always made the change when action was near. “The Greeks for poetry and the Romans for war!” he declared, and could argue his company to sleep if anybody disputed him.

“I want to be in one fight. I haven’t been under fire in the whole war,” Lanstron explained to the colonel, who understood precisely the feeling.

“Lanstron is with us! The chief of staff is watching us!” ran the whisper from flank to flank of the Braves. It was not wonderful to them that he should be there. This complicated business of running a war over a telephone was not in the ken of their calculations. The colonel was with them, so all the generals ought to be. “We’ll show Lanstron!” determined the Braves. “We’ll show him how we fight in Africa!”

“With the first rush you go to the bottom of the valley; with the second, take the knoll!” Such were the colonel’s simple tactics. “But stop on the top of the knoll. Though we’d like to take the capital this afternoon, it’s against orders.”

Lanstron, dropping into place in the line, felt as if he were about to renew his youth. He had the elation of his early aeroplane flights, when he was likely to be hung on a church steeple. Now he was not sending men to death; he was having his personal fling. It was all very simple beside sitting at a desk with battle raging in the distance. He dodged at the first bullet that whistled near his head and looked rather sheepishly at the man next him, who was grinning.

“Lots of fellows do that with the first one, no matter how many times they’ve been under fire,” said the comrade. “But if they do it with the second one—” He dropped the corners of his mouth with a significance that required no further comment to express his views on that kind of a soldier.

“I shan’t!” said Lanstron; and he kept his word.

“I knew by the cut of your jib you wouldn’t!” observed the Brave, speaking not to the chief of staff but to the man. What were chiefs of staff to him? Everybody on the firing-line was simply another Brave.

Lanstron liked the compliment. It pleased him better than those endowing him with military genius. It was free of rank and etiquette and selfishness.

Page 286

Of such stuff were the Braves as Caesar's veterans who walloped the Belgae, the adventurous ruffians of Cortez, the swashbucklers who fought in Flanders, the followers of Bonnie Prince Charlie, and the regulars of the American Indian campaigns. When they rose to the charge with a yell, in a wave of scarlet and blue, flashing with brass buttons, their silken flag rippling in the front rank, they made a picture to please the romantic taste. Here on the brown background of the commonplace three millions of moderns was a patch of the color and glamour that story-tellers, poets, artists, and moving-picture men would choose as the theme of real military glory.

Intoxication of all the senses, of muscles and nerves, with the mesmerism of movement and burning desire which calls the imagination of youth to arms! The supreme moment of fury and splendid rush, which becomes the recollection to the survivor to be told from the knee to future generations in a way to make small boys love to play with soldiers! These men knew nothing except that they had legs and that ahead was a goal. Oaths and laughter were mingled in their souls; the energy of a delirium sped their steps. They were so many human missiles fired by an impulse, with too much initial velocity to stop at the bottom of the valley as the colonel had directed. Lord, no! Let's have the thing over with, bit in teeth! The common instinct of the living, who neither saw nor thought of those who fell, swept them up the slope. Every man who survived was the whole regiment in himself; its pride, its gallantry, its inheritance in his keeping.

"Fiends of hell and angels of heaven! We're here and we did it alone!" gasped the winded, ragged line that reached the crest.

"I thought they would!" said the brigade commander, who had watched the charge through his glasses from an eminence. "But at what a cost! It was lucky for them that it was only a rear-guard resistance. However, it certainly thrills the imagination and it will be a good thing for Brown prestige in Africa."

"Why?" Marta heard the officers around her asking after their exclamations of amazement at the news that Lanstron was going in the charge. "Why should the chief of staff risk his life in this fashion?"

Marta knew. All her taunts about sending others to death from his office chair, uttered as the fugitive sarcasm of a mood, recurred in the merciless hammer-beat of recollection. For a moment she was aghast, speechless. Then the officers, occupied with the startling news, heard a voice, wrenched from a dry throat in anguish, saying:

"The telephone! Try to reach him! Tell him he must not!"

"We can hardly say 'must not' to a chief of staff," said the general automatically.

"Tell him I ask him not to! Try to reach him—try—you can try!"

“Yes, yes! Certainly!” exclaimed the general, turning to the telephone operator.

Page 287

He had seen now what the younger men had seen at a glance. They were recalling Lanstron's relief at seeing her; how he had passed them by to speak to her; the intensity of the two in their almost wordless meeting. Her bloodless lips, the imploring passion in her eyes, her quivering impatience told the rest.

"Division headquarters!" called the operator. "They're getting brigade headquarters," he added while he waited in silence. "Brigade headquarters says the Braves have no wire. It's too late. The charge is starting."

"So it is!" cried one of the subalterns. "Look! Look!"

Marta looked toward the rising ground this side of the knoll in time to see bayonets flash in the waning afternoon sunlight and disappear as they descended the slope.

"There! They're up on the other slope without stopping!" exclaimed the general. "Quick! Don't you want to see?" He offered his glasses to Marta.

"No, I can see well enough," she murmured, though the landscape was moving before her eyes in giddy waves.

"The madness of it! The whole slope is peppered with the fallen!"

"What a cost! Magnificent, but not war. Carrying their flag in the good old way, right at the front!"

"Heavens! I hope they do it!"

"The flag's down!"

"Another man has it—it's up!"

"Now—now—splendid! They're in!"

"So they are! And the flag, too!"

"Yes, what's left are in!"

"And Lanstron was there—in that!"

"What if—"

"Yes, the chief of staff, the head of the army, in an affair like that!"

"The mind of the army—the mind that was to direct our advance!"

"When all the honors of the world are his!"

Their words were acid-tipped needles knitting back and forth through Marta's brain. Was Lanny one of those black specks that peppered the slope? Was he? Was he?

"Telephone and—and see if Lanny is—is killed!" she begged.

She knew not how she uttered that monstrous word killed. But utter it she did in its naked terror. Now she knew a simpler feeling than that of the grand sympathy of the dreamer with the horrors of war as a whole. She knew the dumb, helpless suspense of the womenfolk remaining at home watching for the casualty lists that Westerling had suppressed. What mattered policies of statesmen and generals, propagandas and tactics, to them? The concern of each wife or sweetheart was with one—one of the millions who was greater to the wife or the sweetheart than all the millions. Marta was not thinking of sending thousands to death. Had she sent *him* to death? The agony of waiting, waiting there among these strangers, waiting for that little instrument at the end of a wire to say whether or not he were alive, became insupportable.

"I'll go—I'll go out there where he is!" she said incoherently, still looking toward the knoll with glazed eyes. She thought she was walking fast as she started for the garden gate, but really she was going slowly, stumblingly.

Page 288

“I think you had better stop her if you can,” said the general to his aide.

The aide overtook her at the gate.

“We shall know about His Excellency before you can find out for yourself,” he said; and, young himself, he could put the sympathy of youth with romance into his tone. “You might miss the road, even miss him, when he was without a scratch, and be for hours in ignorance,” he explained. “In a few minutes we ought to have word.”

Marta sank down weakly on the tongue of a wagon, overturned against the garden wall in the melee of the retreat, and leaned her shoulder on the wheel for support.

“If the women of the Grays waited four weeks,” she said with an effort at stoicism, “then I ought to be able to wait a few minutes.”

“Depend on me. I’ll bring news as soon as there is any,” the aide concluded, and, seeing that she wished to be alone, he left her.

For the first time she had real oblivion from the memory of her deceit of Westerling, the oblivion of drear, heart-pulling suspense. All the good times, the sweetly companionable times, she and Lanny had had together; all his flashes of courtship, his outburst in their last interview in the arbor, when she had told him that if she found that she wanted to come to him she would come in a flame, passed in review under the hard light of her petty ironies and sarcasms, which had the false ring of coquetry to her now, genuine as they had been at the time. Through her varying moods she had really loved him, and the thing that had slumbered in her became the drier fuel for the flame—-perhaps too late.

Her thought, her feeling was as if he were not chief of staff, but a private soldier, and she were not a woman who had girdled the world and puckered her brow over the solution of problems, but a provincial girl who had never been outside her village—his sweetheart. All questions of the army following up its victory, of his responsibilities and her fears that he would go on with conquest, faded into the fact of life—his life, as the most precious thing in the world to her. For him, yes, for him she had played the spy, as that village girl would for her lover, thinking of warm embraces; for him she had kept steady under the strain.

Without him—what then? It seemed that the fatality that had let him escape miraculously from the aeroplane accident, made him chief of staff, and brought him victory, might well choose to ring down the curtain of destiny for him in the charge that drove the last foot of the invader off the soil of the Browns.... A voice was calling.... She heard it hazily, with a sudden access of giddy fear, before it became a cheerful, clarion cry that seemed to be repeating a message that had already been spoken without her understanding it.

“He’s safe, safe, safe, Miss Galland! He was not hit! He is on his way back and ought to be here very soon!”

She heard herself saying “Thank you!” But that was not for some time. The aide was already gone. He had had his thanks in the effect of the news, which made him think that a chief of staff should not receive congratulations for victory alone.

Page 289

Lanny would return through the garden. She remained leaning against the wagon body, still faint from happiness, waiting for him. She was drawing deeper and longer breaths that were velvety with the glow of sunshine. A flame, the flame that Lanny had desired, of many gentle yet passionate tongues, leaping hither and thither in glad freedom, was in possession of her being. When his figure appeared out of the darkness the flame swept her to her feet and toward him. Though he might reject her he should know that she loved him; this glad thing, after all the shame she had endured, she could confess triumphantly.

But she stopped short under the whip of conscience. Where was her courage? Where her sense of duty? What right had she, who had played such a horrible part, to think of self? There were other sweethearts with lovers alive who might be dead on the morrow if war continued. The flame sank to a live coal in her secret heart. Another passion possessed her as she seized Lanstron's hand in both her own.

"Lanny, listen! Not the sound of a shot—for the first time since the war began! Oh, the blessed silence! It's peace, peace—isn't it to be peace?" As they ascended the steps she was pouring out a flood of broken, feverish sentences which permitted of no interruption. "You kept on fighting to-day, but you won't to-morrow, will you? It isn't I who plead—it's the women, more women than there are men in the army, who want you to stop now! Can't you hear them? Can't you see them?"

In the fervor of appeal, before she realized his purpose, they were on the veranda and at the door of the dining-room, where the Brown staff was gathered around the table.

"I still rely on you to help me, Marta!" he whispered as he stood to one side for her to enter.

XLVI

THE LAST SHOT

"Miss Galland!"

Blinking as she came out of the darkness into the bright light, with a lock of her dew-sprinkled dark hair free and brushing her flushed cheek, Marta saw the division chiefs of the Browns, after their start when Lanstron spoke her name, all stand at the salute, looking at her rather than at him. The reality in the flesh of the woman who had been a comrade in service, sacrificing her sensibilities for their cause, appealed to them as a true likeness of their conceptions of her. In their eyes she might read the finest thing that can pass from man's to woman's or from man's to man's. These were the strong men of her people who had driven the burglar from her house with the sword of justice.

Their tribute had the steadfast loyalty of soldiers who were craving to do anything in the world that she might ask, whether to go on their knees to her or to kill dragons for her.

“I may come in?” she asked.

“Who if not you is entitled to the privilege of the staff council?” exclaimed the vice-chief.

Page 290

The others did not propose to let him do all the honors. Each murmured words of welcome on his own account.

“We are here, thanks to you!”

“And, thanks to you, our flag will float over the Gray range!”

She must be tired, was their next thought. Four or five of them hurried to place a chair for her, the vice-chief winning over his rivals, more through the exercise of the rights of rank than by any superior alacrity.

“You are appointed actual chief of staff and a field-marshal!” said the vice-chief to Lanstron. “The premier says that every honor the nation can bestow is yours. The capital is mad. The crowds are crying: ’On to the Gray capital!’ To-morrow is to be a public holiday and they are calling it Lanstron Day. The thing was so sudden that the speculators who depressed our securities in the world’s markets have got their due—-ruin! And we ought to get an indemnity that will pay the cost of the war.”

Seated at one side, Marta could watch all that passed, herself unobserved. She noted a touch of color come to Lanstron’s cheeks as he made a little shrug of protest.

“It never rains but it pours!” he said. “We were all just as able and loyal yesterday as to-day when we find ourselves heroic. We owe our victory to Partow’s plans, to the staff’s industry, the spirit of the people and the army, and—” He threw a happy smile toward Marta.

“Perhaps it ought to be Galland Day rather than Lanstron Day,” remarked the vice-chief. “The crowds at the capital when they know her part might cheer her more frenziedly than you, general.”

“No, no—please, no!” Marta was hectic in alarm and protest.

“Your secret is ours! It’s in the family!” the vice-chief hastened to assure her. Where could a secret be safe if not in the keeping of an army staff?

“That was almost like teasing!” she exclaimed with a laugh of relief.

“We’re all in pretty good humor,” remarked the vice-chief. He seemed to have a pleasant taste in his mouth that would last him for life.

Then Marta saw their faces grow businesslike and keen, as they gathered around the table, with Lanstron at the head. They were oblivious of her presence, immured in a man’s world of war.

“Your orders were obeyed. We have not passed a single white post yet!” said the vice-chief impatiently. “As the Grays never expected to take the defensive, their fortresses are inferior. Every hour we wait means more time for them to fortify, more time to recover from their demoralization. Our dirigibles having command of the air—we had a wireless from one reporting all clear half-way to the Gray capital—why, we shall know their concentrations while they are ignorant of ours. It’s the nation’s great opportunity to gain enough provinces to even the balance of population with the Grays. With the unremitting offensive, blow on blow, using the spirit of our men to drive in mass attacks at the right points, the Gray range is ours!”

Page 291

Marta scanned the faces of the staff for some sign of dissent only to find nothing but the ardor of victory calling for more victory, which reflected the feeling of the coursing crowds in the capital. Though Lanny wished to stop the war, he was only a chip on the crest of a wave. Public opinion, which had made him an idol, would discard him as soon as he ceased to be a hero in the likeness of its desires. She saw him aloof as the others, in preoccupation, bent over the map outlining the plan of attack that they had worked out while awaiting their chief's return from the charge. He was taking a paper from his pocket and looking from one to another of his colleagues studiously; and she was conscious of that determination in his smile which she had first seen when he rose from the wreck of his plane.

"This is from Partow: a message for you and the nation!" he announced, as he spread a few thin, typewritten pages out on the table. "I was under promise never to reveal its contents unless our army drove the Grays back across the frontier. The original is in the staff vaults. I have carried this copy with me."

At the mention in an arresting tone of that name of the dead chief, to which the day's events had given the prestige of one of the heroes of old, there was grave attention.

"I think we have practically agreed that the two individuals who were invaluable to our cause were Partow and Miss Galland," Lanstron remarked tentatively. He waited for a reply. It was apparent that he was laying a foundation before he went any further.

"Certainly!" said the vice-chief.

"And you!" put in another officer, which brought a chorus of assent.

"No, not I—only these two!" Lanstron replied. "Or, I, too, if you prefer. It little matters. The thing is that I am under a promise to both, which I shall respect. He organized and labored for the same purpose that she played the spy. When we sent the troops forward in a counter-attack and pursuit to clear our soil of the Grays; when I stopped them at the frontier—both were according to Partow's plan. He had a plan and a dream, this wonderful old man who made us all seem primary pupils in the art of war."

Could this be that terrible Partow, a stroke of whose pencil had made the Galland house an inferno? Marta wondered as Lanstron read his message—the message out of the real heart of the man, throbbing with the power of his great brain. His plan was to hold the Grays to stalemate; to force them to desist after they had battered their battalions to pieces against the Brown fortifications. His dream was the thing that had happened—-that an opportunity would come to pursue a broken machine in a bold stroke of the offensive.

"I would want to be a hero of our people for only one aim, to be able to stop our army at the frontier," he had written. "Then they might drive me forth heaped with obloquy, if

they chose. I should like to see the Grays demoralized, beaten, ready to sue for peace, the better to prove my point that we should ask only for what is ours and that our strength was only for the purpose of holding what is ours. Then we should lay up no legacy of revenge in their hearts. They could never have cause to attack again. Civilization would have advanced another step."

Page 292

Lanstron continued to read to the amazed staff, for Partow's message had looked far into the future. Then there was a P.S., written after the war had begun, on the evening of the day that Marta had gone from tea on the veranda with Westerling to the telephone, in the impulse of her new purpose.

"I begin to believe in that dream," he wrote. "I begin to believe that the chance for the offensive will come, now that my colleague, Miss Galland, in the name of peace has turned practical. There is nothing like mixing a little practice in your dreams while the world is still well this side of Utopia, as the head on my old behemoth of a body well knows. She had the right idea with her school. The oath so completely expressed my ideas—the result of all my thinking—that I had a twinge of literary jealousy. My boy, if you do reach the frontier, in pursuit of a broken army, and you do not keep faith with my dream and with her ideals, then you will get a lesson that will last you forever at the foot of the Gray range. But I do not think so badly as that of you or of my judgment of men."

"Lanny! Lanny!"

The dignity of a staff council could not restrain Marta. Her emotion must have action. She sprang to his side and seized his hand, her exultation mixed with penitence over the why she had wronged him and Partow. Their self-contained purpose had been the same as hers and they had worked with a soldier's fortitude, while she had worked with whims and impulses. She bent over him with gratitude and praise and a plea for forgiveness in her eyes, submerging the thing which he sought in them. He flushed boyishly in happy embarrassment, incapable of words for an instant; and silently the staff looked on.

"And I agree with Partow," Lanstron went on, "that we cannot take the range. The Grays still have numbers equal to ours. It is they, now, who will be singing 'God with us!' with their backs against the wall. With Partow's goes my own appeal to the army and the nation; and I shall keep faith with Partow, with Miss Galland, and with my own ideas, if the government orders the army to advance, by resigning as chief of staff—my work finished."

Westerling and his aide and valet, inquiring their way as strangers, found the new staff headquarters of the Grays established in an army building, where Bouchard had been assigned to trivial duties, back of the Gray range. As their former chief entered a room in the disorder of maps and packing-cases, the staff-officers rose from their work to stand at salute like stone images, in respect to a field-marshal's rank. There was no word of greeting but a telling silence before Turcas spoke. His voice had lost its parchment crinkle and become natural. The blue veins on his bulging temples were a little more pronounced, his thin features a little more pinched, but otherwise he was unchanged and he seemed equal to another strain as heavy as the one he had undergone.

Page 293

“We have a new government, a new premier,” he said. “The old premier was killed by a shot from a crowd that he was addressing from the balcony of the palace. After this, the capital became quieter. As we get in touch with the divisions, we find the army in better shape than we had feared it would be. There is a recovery of spirit, owing to our being on our own soil.”

“Yes,” replied Westerling, drowning in their stares and grasping at a straw. “Only a panic, as I said. If—” his voice rising hoarsely and catching in rage.

“We have a new government, a new premier!” Turcas repeated, with firm, methodical politeness. Westerling looking from one face to another with filmy eyes, lowered them before Bouchard. “There’s a room ready for Your Excellency up-stairs,” Turcas continued. “The orderly will show you the way.”

Now Westerling grasped the fact that he was no longer chief of staff. He drew himself up in a desperate attempt at dignity; the staff saluted again, and, uncertainly, he followed the orderly, with the aide and valet still in loyal attendance.

Meanwhile, the aerial scouts of the Grays were puzzled by a moving cloud on the landscape several miles away. It filled the highway and overflowed into the fields, without military form: women and men of every age except the fighting age, marching together in a sinister militancy of purpose.

“Bring the children, too!” cried the leaders. “They’ve more right to be heard than any of us.”

From such a nucleus it seemed that the whole population of the land might be set in motion by a common passion. Neither the coming of darkness nor a chill rain kept recruits from village and farmhouse from dropping their tasks and leaving meals unfinished to swell the ranks. What Westerling had called the bovine public with a parrot’s head had become a lion.

“There’s no use of giving any orders, to stop this flood,” said an officer who had ridden fast to warn the Gray staff. “The police simply watch it go by. Soldiers ready to lay down their lives to hold the range give it Godspeed when they learn what it wants. Both are citizens before they are soldiers or policemen. The thing is as elemental as an earthquake or a tidal wave.”

“Public opinion! Unanimous public opinion! Nothing can stop that!” exclaimed Turcas in dry fatalism. “You will inform His Excellency,” he said to Westerling’s aide, “that they are coming for him—all the people are coming, and we are powerless. And—” Even Turcas’s calmness failed him and his voice caught in a convulsive swallow.

“I—I understand!” the aide said thickly, and went up-stairs.

He had suffered worse than in seeing his chief beaten; but even in disillusion he was loyal. He was back immediately, and paused at the foot of the stairs stonily, in the attitude of one who listens for something; while the tramp of thousands of feet came pressing in upon all sides.

Page 294

As one great, high-pitched voice, the crowd shouted its merciless demand; and eyes eager with the hunt as those of soldiers in pursuit gleamed through the windows out of the darkness. Bouchard, hawk-eyed, stern, was standing by the street door. His mediaeval spirit revolted at the thought of any kind of a mob. For such demonstrations he had a single simple prescription—cold lead.

“We cannot strike the overwhelming spirit which we would forge into the nation’s defence,” said Turcas.

The door was flung open and Bouchard drew back abruptly at the sight; he drew back in fear of his own nature. If any one should so much as lay hands on him when he was in uniform, a sword thrust would resent the insult to his officer’s honor; and even he did not want to strike grandfathers and children and mothers.

Two figures were in the doorway: a heavy-set market woman with a fringe of down on her lip and a cadaverous, tidily dressed old man, who might have been a superannuated schoolmaster, with a bronze cross won in the war of forty years ago on his breast and his eyes burning with the youthful fire of Grandfather Fragini’s.

“They got the premier in the capital. We’ve come for Westerling! We want to know what he did with our sons! We want to know why he was beaten!” cried the market woman.

“Yes,” said the veteran. “We want him to explain his lies. Why did he keep the truth from us? We were ready to fight, but not to be treated like babies. This is the twentieth century!”

“We want Westerling! Tell Westerling to come out!” rose the impatient shouts behind the two figures in the doorway.

“You are sure that he has one?” whispered Turcas to Westerling’s aide.

“Yes,” was the choking answer—“yes. It is better than that”—with a glance toward the mob. “I left my own on the table.”

“We can’t save him! We shall have to let them—”

Turcas’s voice was drowned by a great roar of cries, with no word except “Westerling” distinguishable, that pierced every crack of the house. A wave of movement starting from the rear drove the veteran and the market woman and a dozen others through the doorway toward the stairs. Then the sound of a shot was heard overhead.

“The man you seek is dead!” said Turcas, stepping in front of the crowd, his features unrelenting in authority. “Now, go back to your work and leave us to ours.”

“I understand, sir,” said the veteran. “We’ve no argument with you.”

“Yes!” agreed the market woman. “But if you ever leave this range alive we shall have one. So, you stay!”

Looking at the bronze cross on the veteran’s faded coat, the staff saluted; for the cross, though it were hung on rag’s, wherever it went was entitled by custom to the salute of officers and “present arms” by sentries.

Page 295

As news of the shot travelled among the people the cries dropped into long-drawn breaths of thirst satiated. Their mission was fulfilled. The tramp of their feet as they dispersed homeward mingled with the urging of officers to weary men and the rumbling of wagons and guns and the sound of pick and spade on the range, where torches flickered over the heads of the working parties. But no other shot after the one heard from Westerling's room was fired. The Grays were at grip with the fact of disaster. An angry, wounded animal that had failed of its kill was facing around at the mouth of its lair for its own life.

"We're tired—we're all tired; but keep up—keep up!" urged the officers. "We have a new chief of staff and there will be no more purposeless sacrifices. It's their turn at the charge; ours to hold. We'll give them some of the medicine they've been giving us. God with us! Our backs against the wall!"

After Lanstron's announcement to the Brown staff of his decision not to cross the frontier, there was a restless movement in the chairs around the table, and the grimaces on most of the faces were those with which a practical man regards a Utopian proposal. The vice-chief was drumming on the table edge and looking steadily at a point in front of his fingers. If Lanstron resigned he became chief.

"Partow might have this dream before he won, but would he now?" asked the vice-chief. "No. He would go on!"

"Yes," said another officer. "The world will ridicule the suggestion; our people will overwhelm us with their anger. The Grays will take it for a sign of weakness."

"Not if we put the situation rightly to them," answered Lanstron. "Not if we go to them as brave adversary to brave adversary, in a fair spirit."

"We can—we shall take the range!" the vice-chief went on in a burst of rigid conviction when he saw that opinion was with him. "Nothing can stop this army now!" He struck the table edge with his fist, his shoulders stiffening.

"Please—please, don't!" implored Marta softly. "It sounds so like Westerling!"

The vice-chief started as if he had received a sharp pin-prick. His shoulders unconsciously relaxed. He began a fresh study of a certain point on the table top. Lanstron, looking first at one and then at another, spoke again, his words as measured as they ever had been in military discussion and eloquent. He began outlining his own message which would go with Partow's to the premier, to the nation, to every regiment of the Browns, to the Grays, to the world. He set forth why the Browns, after tasting the courage of the Grays, should realize that they could not take their range. Partow had not taught him to put himself in other men's places in vain. The boy who had kept up his friendship with engine-drivers after he was an officer knew how to sink the plummet

into human emotions. He reminded the Brown soldiers that there had been a providential answer to the call of “God with us!” he reminded the people of the lives that would be lost to no end but to engender hatred; he begged the army and the people not to break faith with that principle of “Not for theirs, but for ours,” which had been their strength.

Page 296

“I should like you all to sign it—to make it simply the old form of ‘the staff has the honor to report,’” he said finally.

There was a hush as he finished—the hush of a deep impression when one man waits for another to speak. All were looking at him except the vice-chief, who was still staring at the table as if he had heard nothing. Yet every word was etched on his mind. The man whose name was the symbol of victory to the soldiers, who would be more than ever a hero as the news of his charge with the African Braves travelled along the lines, would go on record to his soldiers as saying that they could not take the Gray range. This was a handicap that the vice-chief did not care to accept; and he knew how to turn a phrase as well as to make a soldierly decision. He looked up smilingly to Marta.

“I have decided that I had rather not be a Westerling, Miss Galland,” he said. “We’ll make it unanimous. And you,” he burst out to Lanstron—“you legatee of old Partow; I’ve always said that he was the biggest man of our time. He has proved it by catching the spirit of our time and incarnating it.”

Vaguely, in the whirl of her joy, Marta heard the chorus of assent as the officers sprang to their feet in the elation of being at one with their chief again. Lanstron caught her arm, fearing that she was going to fall, but a burning question rose in her mind to steady her.

“Then my shame—my sending men to slaughter—my sacrifice was not in vain?” she exclaimed.

Misery crept into her eyes; she seemed to be seeing some horror that would always haunt her. These businesslike men of the council were touched by a fresh understanding of her and of the reason for her success, which had demanded something more than human art—something pure and fine and fearless underneath art. They sought to win one more victory that should kill her memory of what she had done.

“Miss Galland,” said the vice-chief, “Westerling’s fate, whatever it is, would have been the same. He could never have taken our range. He would have only more lives to answer for, and Partow’s dream could not have come true.”

“You think that—you—all of you?” she asked.

“All! All!” they said together.

“Yes, but for you the losses on both sides would have been greater—hundreds of thousands greater,” concluded the vice-chief. “And to-night I think you helped me to see right; you struck a light in my mind when I was about to forget the law of service.”

“You see, then, you did hasten the end, Marta,” said Lanstron.

“Yes, I do see, Lanny!” she whispered. She was weak now, with no spur to her energy except her happiness as she leaned on his arm. Then he felt an impulsive pressure as she looked up at him. “The law of service, as you say!” she said, turning to the vice-chief. “Isn’t that the finest law of all? Couldn’t I help you with the appeal? Perhaps I might put in it a thought to reach the women. They are a part of public opinion”

Page 297

“I was going to suggest it, but you seemed so weary that I hadn’t the heart,” said Lanstron.

“Just the thing—the mothers, wives, and sweethearts!” declared the vice-chief.

“I’m not a bit tired now!” Marta assured them brightly. “I’m fresh for the fight again.”

“Another thing,” added Lanstron, “we ought to have the backing of the corps and division commanders.”

“Precisely,” agreed the vice-chief. “We want to make sure of this thing. We’d look silly if the old premier ordered the army on and left us high and dry; and it would mean certain disaster. Shall I get them on the telephone?”

“Yes,” said Lanstron.

It was long after midnight when the collaborative composition of that famous despatch was finished.

“Now I’m really tired, Lanny,” said Marta as she arose from the table. “I can think only of prayers—joyful little prayers of thanks rising to the stars.”

She slipped her arm through his. As they moved toward the door the chiefs of divisions, keeping to the etiquette that best expressed their soldierly respect, saluted her.

“If this were told, few would believe it; nor would they believe many other things in the inner history of armies which are forever held secret,” thought the vice-chief.

Outside, the stars were twinkling to acknowledge those little prayers of thanks, and the night was sweet and peaceful, while the army slept.

XLVII

THE PEACE OF WISDOM

The sea of people packed in the great square of the Brown capital made a roar like the thunder of waves against a breakwater at sight of a white spot on a background of gray stone, which was the head of an eminent statesman.

“It looks as if our government would last the week out,” the premier chuckled as he returned to his colleagues at the cabinet table.

As yet only the brief bulletins whose publication in the newspapers had aroused the public to a frenzy had been received. The cabinet, as eager for details as the press, had remained up, awaiting a fuller official account.

“We have a long communication in preparation,” the staff had telegraphed. “Meanwhile, the following is submitted.”

“Good Heavens! It’s not from the army! It’s from the grave!” exclaimed the premier as he read the first paragraphs of Partow’s message. “Of all the concealed dynamite ever!” he gasped as he grasped the full meaning of the document, that piece of news, as staggering as the victory itself, that had lain in the staff vaults for years. “Well, we needn’t give it out to the press; at least, not until after mature consideration,” he declared when they had reached the end of Partow’s appeal. “Now we’ll hear what the staff has to say for itself after gratifying the wish of a dead man,” he added as a messenger gave him another sheet.

“The staff, in loyalty to its dead leader who made victory possible, and in loyalty to the principles of defence for which the army fought, begs to say to the nation—”

Page 298

It was four o'clock in the morning when this despatch concluded with "We heartily agree with the foregoing," and the cabinet read the names of all the general staff and the corps and division commanders. Coursing crowds in the streets were still shouting hoarsely and sometimes drunkenly: "On to the Gray capital! Nothing can stop us now!" The premier tried to imagine what a sea of faces in the great square would look like in a rage. He was between the people in a passion for retribution and a headless army that was supposed to charge across the frontier at dawn.

"The thing is sheer madness!" he cried. "It's insubordination! I'll have it suppressed! The army must go on to gratify public demand. I'll show the staff that they are not in the saddle. They'll obey orders!"

He tried to get Lanstron on the long distance.

"Sorry, but the chief has retired," answered the officer on duty sleepily. "In fact, all the rest of the staff have, with orders that they are not to be disturbed before ten."

"Tell them that the premier, the head of the government, their commander, is speaking!"

"Yes, sir. But the staff were up all last night and most of to-night, not to mention a pretty busy day. When they had finished their report to you, sir, they were utterly done up. Yes, the orders not to disturb them are quite positive, and as a junior I could not do so except by their orders as superiors. The chief, before retiring, however, repeated to me, in case any inquiry came from you, sir, that there was nothing he could add to the staff's message to the nation and the army. It is to be given to the soldiers the first thing in the morning, and he will let you know how they regard it."

"Confound these machine minds that spring their surprises as fully executed plans!" exclaimed the premier.

"It's true—Par tow and the staff have covered everything—met every argument. There is nothing more for them to say," said the foreign minister.

"But what about the indemnity?" demanded the finance minister. He was thinking of victory in the form of piles of gold in the treasury.

This question, too, was answered.

"War has never brought prosperity," Partow had written. "Its purpose is to destroy, and destruction can never be construction. The conclusion of a war has often assured a period of peace; and peace gave the impetus of prosperity attributed to war. A man is strong in what he achieves, not through the gifts he receives or the goods he steals. Indemnity will not raise another blade of wheat in our land. To take it from a beaten man will foster in him the desire to beat his adversary in turn and recover the amount and more. Then we shall have the apprehension of war always in the air, and soon

another war and more destruction. Remove the danger of a European cataclysm, and any sum extorted from the Grays becomes paltry beside the wealth that peace will create. An indemnity makes the purpose of the courage of the Grays in their assaults and of the Browns in their resistance that of the burglar and the looter. There is no money value to a human life when it is your own; and our soldiers gave their lives. Do not cheapen their service."

Page 299

“Considering the part that we played at The Hague,” observed the foreign minister, “it would be rather inconsistent for us not to—”

“There is only one thing to do. Lanstron has got us!” replied the premier. “We must jump in at the head of the procession and receive the mud or the bouquets, as it happens.”

With Partow’s and the staff’s appeals went an equally earnest one from the premier and his cabinet. Naturally, the noisy element of the cities was the first to find words. It shouted in rising anger that Lanstron had betrayed the nation. Army officers whom Partow had retired for leisurely habits said that he and Lanstron had struck at their own calling. But the average man and woman, in a daze from the shock of the appeals after a night’s celebration, were reading and wondering and asking their neighbors’ opinions. If not in Partow’s then in the staff’s message they found the mirror that set their own ethical professions staring at them.

Before they had made up their minds the correspondents at the front had set the wires singing to the evening editions; for Lanstron had directed that they be given the ran of the army’s lines at daybreak. They told of soldiers awakening after the debauch of yesterday’s fighting, normal and rested, glowing with the security of possession of the frontier and responding to their leaders’ sentiment; of officers of the type favored by Partow who would bring the industry that commands respect to any calling, taking Lanstron’s views as worthy of their profession; of that irrepressible poet laureate of the soldiers, Captain Stransky, I.C. (iron cross), breaking forth in a new song to an old tune, expressing his brotherhood ideas in a “We-have-ours-let-them-keep-theirs” chorus that was spreading from regiment to regiment.

This left the retired officers to grumble in their coiners that war was no longer a gentleman’s vocation, and silenced the protests of their natural ally in the business of making war, the noisy element, which promptly adapted itself to a new fashion in the relation of nations. Again the great square was packed and again a wave-like roar of cheers greeted the white speck of an eminent statesman’s head. All the ideas that had been fomenting in the minds of a people for a generation became a living force of action to break through the precedents born of provincial passion with a new precedent; for the power of public opinion can be as swift in its revolutions as decisive victories at arms. The world at large, after rubbing its forehead and readjusting its eye-glasses and clearing its throat, exclaimed:

“Why not? Isn’t that what we have all been thinking and desiring? Only nobody knew how or where to begin.”

The premier of the Browns found himself talking over the long distance to the premier of the Grays in as neighborly a fashion as if they had adjoining estates and were arranging a matter of community interest.

Page 300

“You have been so fine in waiving an indemnity,” said the premier of the Grays, “that Turcas suggests we pay for all the damage done to property on your side by our invasion. I’m sure our people will rise to the suggestion. Their mood has overwhelmed every preconceived notion of mine. In place of the old suspicion that a Brown could do nothing except with a selfish motive is the desire to be as fair as the Browns. And the practical way the people look at it makes me think that it will be enduring.”

“I think so, for the same reason,” responded the premier of the Browns. “They say it is good business. It means prosperity and progress for both countries.”

“After all, a soldier comes out the hero of the great peace movement,” concluded the premier of the Grays. “A soldier took the tricks with our own cards. Old Partow was the greatest statesman of us all.”

“No doubt of that!” agreed the premier of the Browns. “It’s a sentiment to which every premier of ours who ever tried to down him would have readily subscribed!”

The every-day statesman smiles when he sees the people smile and grows angry when they grow angry. Now and then appears an inscrutable genius who finds out what is brewing in their brains and brings it to a head. He is the epoch maker. Such an one was that little Corsican, who gave a stagnant pool the storm it needed, until he became overfed and mistook his ambition for a continuation of his youthful prescience.

* * * * *

Marta had yet to bear the shock of Westerling’s death. After learning the manner of it she went to her room, where she spent a haunted, sleepless night. The morning found her still tortured by her visualization of the picture of him, irresolute as the mob pressed around the Gray headquarters.

“It is as if I had murdered him!” she said. “I let him make love to me—I let my hand remain in his once—but that was all, Lanny. I—I couldn’t have borne any more. Yet that was enough—enough!”

“But we know now, Marta,” Lanstron pleaded, “that the premier of the Grays held Westerling to a compact that he should not return alive if he lost. He could not have won, even though you had not helped us against him. He would only have lost more lives and brought still greater indignation on his head. His fate was inevitable—and he was a soldier.”

But his reasoning only racked her with a shudder.

“If he had only died fighting!” Marta replied. “He died like a rat in a trap and I—I set the trap!”

“No, destiny set it!” put in Mrs. Galland.

Lanstron dropped down beside Marta’s chair.

“Yes, destiny set it,” he said, imploringly.

“Just as it set your part for you. And, Marta,” Mrs. Galland went on gently, with what Marta had once called the wisdom of mothers, “Lanny lives and lives for you. Your destiny is life and to make the most of life, as you always have. Isn’t it, Marta?”

Page 301

“Yes,” she breathed after a pause, in conviction, as she pressed her mother’s hands. “Yes, you have a gift of making things simple and clear.”

Then she looked up to Lanstron and the flame in her eyes, whose leaping, spontaneous passion he already knew, held something of the eternal, as her arms crept around his neck.

“You are life, Lanny! You are the destiny of to-day and to-morrow!”

* * * * *

Though it was very late autumn now, such was the warmth of the sun that, with a wrap, Mrs. Galland was sitting on the veranda. She was content—too content to go to town. As she had said to Marta, no doubt it would be a wonderful sight, but she had never cared for public celebrations since she had lost her husband. She could get all the joys of peace she wanted looking at the garden and the landscape; and it did not matter at all now if Marta were twenty-seven, or even if she were thirty or thirty odd.

For the last week the people of La Tir had been returning to their homes, and with the early morning those from the country districts had come swarming in for the great day. Faintly she heard the cheers of the crowds pouring toward the frontier—cheers for the Gray premier and cheers for Lanstron and for Turcas as they gathered for a purpose which looked further ahead than the mere ratification of the very simple terms of peace that left the white posts where they were before the war.

“I would rather meet you here than on your range,” said Lanstron to Turcas.

“You certainly find me in a more genial frame of mind than you would have if you had met me there. And I am very delighted that things have turned out as they have,” replied Turcas. As soldiers of a common type of efficiency, who understood each other, they might exchange ideas.

Marta in the family carriage, surrounded by her children, looked on. Hugo Mallin, who had suggested getting acquainted with the Browns in a common manoeuvre, witnessed his dream come true in miniature. His sturdy sweetheart had become a heroine of the home town since the newspapers had published the whole story of her lover’s insubordination, and how he had stood at the white posts rallying stragglers, which appealed to the sentiment of the moment. People pointed her out as an example of the loyalty of conviction. His father and mother, far from hiding their faces in shame, carried their heads high in parental distinction.

There was nothing unfamiliar to the student of human nature in campaigns, which many historians overlook, so keen are they to get their dates and circumstantial details correct, in the way that the Gray and the Brown veterans fraternized in groups, crossing

and recrossing the frontier line as they labored with each other's tongues. This frequently comes with peace, when the adversaries have been of the same metal and standards of civilization. The new thing was the theme of their talk. They had little

Page 302

to say of the campaign itself. They drew the curtain on the horrors for purposes of personal glory and raised it only to point a lesson that should prevent another war. No, they would never try killing again. That sort of business was buried as securely as Westerling's ambition. Partow's name kept recurring; one of the paragraphs of his message, showing how clearly he had foreseen the effect on sentiment, was frequently quoted:

"We have had war's test; who wants it repeated? We have kept peace with force between these two brave, high-spirited peoples; why not have the peace of wisdom? Former sacrifices of blood have been for the glory of victory of one country over another. Why not consider this one a sacrifice in common for the glory of a victory in common? If the leaders of the great nations that boast their civilization cannot find a way to a permanent understanding among themselves, while they stand for the peace of the world, then the very civilization which produced the resolute, intelligent courage and the arms and organization that we have seen in being is a failure. Surely, the brains that directed these great armies ought to be equal to some practical plan. Meet the conditions of international distrust, if you will, by establishing a neutral zone ten miles broad along the frontier free of all defences. Let the Grays guard five miles of it on the Brown side and the Browns five miles on the Gray side, as insurance against surprise or the ambitions of demagogues. What an example for those other nations beyond Europe, as yet lacking your organization and progress, whom you must aid and direct! What a return to you in both moral and commercial profit! Keep armed, in reason; keep strong, but only as an international police force."

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The keen air had given Mrs. Galland the best appetite she had had for months. She was beginning to fear a late luncheon, when Marta appeared at the garden gate with the man whose legions had followed in the footsteps of other winning armies through the pass. He was happier than the old baron, when plundering was at its best, or the Roman commander with Rome cheering him. Mrs. Galland's smile had the bliss of family paradise regained as she watched them in a swinging hand-clasp coming up the terrace steps. The picture they made might have seemed effeminate to the baron. Yet we are not so sure of that. Marta had always insisted that he was perfectly human, too, according to his lights. Possibly the Roman commander swung hands with a Roman girl as soon as he could get away from the crowd around his triumphal car.

Page 303

“Mother, it’s a shame that you missed it!” Marta called. “Why, there are so many great things in the air that it makes me feel a conservative! They’re actually discussing disarmament and an international peace pact for twenty years,” she continued, “that nothing can break. Partow’s statue in our capital is to have not victory, but peace on the fourth face of the plinth. They’re even talking of putting up a statue to him in the Gray capital. Why not? The Grays have a statue of one of our great poets and we of one of their great scientists. And, to be as polite as they, we propose to honor one of their old generals who was almost as generous in victory as Partow. What a session of the school next Sunday! We’re going to have the children from both La Tir and South La Tir!... The only trouble is that if Lanny keeps on giving Partow all the credit for the good work he will succeed in making everybody think that every time he winked after Partow’s death it was according to Partow’s directions for the conduct of the war!”

“Then I shall have the more time for you,” replied Lanstron, who, being a real soldier of his time, did not care for hero worship. It was entirely contrary to Partow’s teachings.