

The Forest of Swords eBook

The Forest of Swords by Joseph Alexander Altsheler

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Page 1

IN PARIS

John Scott and Philip Lannes walked together down a great boulevard of Paris. The young American's heart was filled with grief and anger. The Frenchman felt the same grief, but mingled with it was a fierce, burning passion, so deep and bitter that it took a much stronger word than anger to describe it.

Both had heard that morning the mutter of cannon on the horizon, and they knew the German conquerors were advancing. They were always advancing. Nothing had stopped them. The metal and masonry of the defenses at Liege had crumbled before their huge guns like china breaking under stone. The giant shells had scooped out the forts at Maubeuge, Maubeuge the untakable, as if they had been mere eggshells, and the mighty Teutonic host came on, almost without a check.

John had read of the German march on Paris, nearly a half-century before, how everything had been made complete by the genius of Bismarck and von Moltke, how the ready had sprung upon and crushed the unready, but the present swoop of the imperial eagle seemed far more vast and terrible than the earlier rush could have been.

A month and the legions were already before the City of Light. Men with glasses could see from the top of the Eiffel Tower the gray ranks that were to hem in devoted Paris once more, and the government had fled already to Bordeaux. It seemed that everything was lost before the war was fairly begun. The coming of the English army, far too small in numbers, had availed nothing. It had been swept up with the others, escaping from capture or destruction only by a hair, and was now driven back with the French on the capital.

John had witnessed two battles, and in neither had the Germans stopped long. Disregarding their own losses they drove forward, immense, overwhelming, triumphant. He felt yet their very physical weight, pressing upon him, crushing him, giving him no time to breathe. The German war machine was magnificent, invincible, and for the fourth time in a century the Germans, the exulting Kaiser at their head, might enter Paris.

The Emperor himself might be nothing, mere sound and glitter, but back of him was the greatest army that ever trod the planet, taught for half a century to believe in the divine right of kings, and assured now that might and right were the same.

Every instinct in him revolted at the thought that Paris should be trodden under foot once more by the conqueror. The great capital had truly deserved its claim to be the city of light and leading, and if Paris and France were lost the whole world would lose. He could never forget the unpaid debt that his own America owed to France, and he felt how closely interwoven the two republics were in their beliefs and aspirations.

“Why are you so silent?” asked Lannes, half angrily, although John knew that the anger was not for him.

“I’ve said as much as you have,” he replied with an attempt at humor.



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“You notice the sunlight falling on it?” said Lannes, pointing to the Arc de Triomphe, rising before them.

“Yes, and I believe I know what you are thinking.”

“You are right. I wish he was here now.”

John gazed at the great arch which the sun was gilding with glory and he shared with Lannes his wish that the mighty man who had built it to commemorate his triumphs was back with France—for a while at least. He was never able to make up his mind whether Napoleon was good or evil. Perhaps he was a mixture of both, highly magnified, but now of all times, with the German millions at the gates, he was needed most.

“I think France could afford to take him back,” he said, “and risk any demands he might make or enforce.”

“John,” said Lannes, “you’ve fought with us and suffered with us, and so you’re one of us. You understand what I felt this morning when on the edge of Paris I heard the German guns. They say that we can fight on, after our foes have taken the capital, and that the English will come in greater force to help us. But if victorious Germans march once through the Arc de Triomphe I shall feel that we can never again win back all that we have lost.”

A note, low but deep and menacing, came from the far horizon. It might be a German gun or it might be a French gun, but the effect was the same. The threat was there. A shudder shook the frame of Lannes, but John saw a sudden flame of sunlight shoot like a glittering lance from the Arc de Triomphe.

“A sign! a sign!” he exclaimed, his imaginative mind on fire in an instant. “I saw a flash from the arch! It was the soul of the Great Captain speaking! I tell you, Philip, the Republic is not yet lost! I’ve read somewhere, and so have you, that the Romans sold at auction at a high price the land on which Hannibal’s victorious army was camped, when it lay before Rome!”

“It’s so! And France has her glorious traditions, too! We won’t give up until we’re beaten—and not then!”

The gray eyes of Lannes flamed, and his figure seemed to swell. All the wonderful French vitality was personified in him. He put his hand affectionately upon the shoulder of his comrade.

“It’s odd, John,” he said, “but you, a foreigner, have lighted the spark anew in me.”

“Maybe it’s because I *am* a foreigner, though, in reality, I’m now no foreigner at all, as you’ve just said. I’ve become one of you.”



“It’s true, John, and I won’t forget it. I’m never going to give up hope again. Maybe somebody will arrive to save us at the last. Whatever the great one, whose greatest monument stands there, may have been, he loved France, and his spirit may descend upon Frenchmen.”

“I believe it. He had the strength and courage created by a republic, and you have them again, the product of another republic. Look at the flying men, Lannes!”

Lannes glanced up where the aeroplanes hovered thick over Paris, and toward the horizon where the invisible German host with its huge guns was advancing. The look of despair came into his eyes again, but it rested there only a moment. He remembered his new courage and banished it.

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“Perhaps I ought to be in the sky myself with the others,” he said, “but I’d only see what I don’t like to see. The *Arrow* and I can’t be of any help now.”

“You brought me here in the *Arrow*, Lannes,” said John, seeking to assume a light tone. “Now what do you intend to do with me? As everybody is leaving Paris you ought to get me out of it.”

“I hardly know what to do. There are no orders. I’ve lost touch with the commander of our flying corps, but you’re right in concluding that we shouldn’t remain in Paris. Now where are we to go?”

“We’ll make no mistake if we seek the battle front. You know I’m bound to rejoin my company, the Strangers, if I can. I must report as soon as possible to Captain Colton.”

“That’s true, John, but I can’t leave Paris until tomorrow. I may have orders to carry, I must obtain supplies for the *Arrow*, and I wish to visit once more my people on the other side of the Seine.”

“Suppose you go now, and I’ll meet you this afternoon in the Place de l’Opera.”

“Good. Say three o’clock. The first to arrive will await the other before the steps of the Opera House?”

John nodded assent and Lannes hurried away. Young Scott followed his figure with his eyes until it disappeared in the crowd. A back may be an index to a man’s strength of mind, and he saw that Lannes, head erect and shoulders thrown back, was walking with a rapid and springy step. Courage was obviously there.

But John, despite his own strong heart, could not keep from feeling an infinite sadness and pity, not for Lannes, but for all the three million people who inhabited the City of Light, most of whom were fleeing now before the advance of the victorious invader. He could put himself in their place. France held his deepest sympathy. He felt that a great nation, sedulously minding its own business, trampled upon and robbed once before, was now about to be trampled upon and robbed again. He could not subscribe to the doctrine, that might was right.

He watched the fugitives a long time. They were crowding the railway stations, and they were departing by motor, by cart and on foot. Many of the poorer people, both men and women, carried packs on their backs. The boulevards and the streets were filled with the retreating masses.

It was an amazing and stupefying sight, the abandonment by its inhabitants of a great city, a city in many ways the first in the world, and it gave John a mighty shock. He had been there with his uncle and Mr. Anson in the spring, and he had seen nothing but peace and brightness. The sun had glittered then, as it glittered now over the Arc de



Triomphe, the gleaming dome of the Invalides and the golden waters of the Seine. It was Paris, soft, beautiful and bright, the Paris that wished no harm to anybody.

But the people were going. He could see them going everywhere. The cruel, ancient times when cities were destroyed or enslaved by the conqueror had come back, and the great Paris that the world had known so long might become lost forever.



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The stream of fugitives, rich and poor, mingled, poured on without ceasing. He did not know where they were going. Most of them did not know themselves. He saw a great motor, filled high with people and goods, break down in the streets, and he watched them while they worked desperately to restore the mechanism. And yet there was no panic. The sound of voices was not high. The Republic was justifying itself once more. Silent and somberly defiant, the inhabitants were leaving Paris before the giant German guns could rain shells upon the unarmed.

It was three or four hours until the time to meet Lannes, and drawn by an overwhelming curiosity and anxiety he began the climb of the Butte Montmartre. If observers on the Eiffel Tower could see the German forces approaching, then with the powerful glasses he carried over his shoulder he might discern them from the dome of the Basilica of the Sacred Heart.

As he made his way up the ascent through the crooked and narrow little streets he saw many eyes, mostly black and quick, watching him. This by night was old Paris, dark and dangerous, where the Apache dwelled, and by day in a fleeing city, with none to restrain, he might be no less ruthless.

But John felt only friendliness for them all. He believed that common danger would knit all Frenchmen together, and he nodded and smiled at the watchers. More than one pretty Parisian, not of the upper classes, smiled back at the American with the frank and open face.

Before he reached the Basilica a little rat of a young man stepped before him and asked:

“Which way, Monsieur?”

He was three or four years older than John, wearing uncommonly tight fitting clothes of blue, a red cap with a tassel, and he was about five feet four inches tall. But small as he was he seemed to be made of steel, and he stood, poised on his little feet, ready to spring like a leopard when he chose.

The blue eyes of the tall American looked steadily into the black eyes of the short Frenchman, and the black eyes looked back as steadily. John was fast learning to read the hearts and minds of men through their eyes, and what he saw in the dark depths pleased him. Here were cunning and yet courage; impudence and yet truth; caprice and yet honor. Apache or not, he decided to like him.

“I’m going up into the lantern of the Basilica,” he said, “to see if I can see the Germans, who are my enemies as well as yours.”



“And will not Monsieur take me, too, and let me have look for look with him through those glasses at the Germans, some of whom I’m going to shoot?”

John smiled.

“If you’re going out potting Germans,” he said, “you’d better get yourself into a uniform as soon as you can. They have no mercy on *franc tireurs*.”

“I’ll chance that. But you’ll take me with you into the dome?”

“What’s your name?”

“Pierre Louis Bougainville.”



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“Bougainville! Bougainville! It sounds noble and also historical. I’ve read of it, but I don’t recall where.”

The little Frenchman drew himself up, and his black eyes glittered.

“There is a legend among us that it was noble once,” he said, “but we don’t know when. I feel within me the spirit to make it great again. There was a time when the mighty Napoleon said that every soldier carried a marshal’s baton in his knapsack. Perhaps that time has come again. And the great emperor was a little man like me.”

John began to laugh and then he stopped suddenly. Pierre Louis Bougainville, so small and so insignificant, was not looking at him. He was looking over and beyond him, dreaming perhaps of a glittering future. The funny little red cap with the tassel might shelter a great brain. Respect took the place of the wish to laugh.

“Monsieur Bougainville,” he said in his excellent French, “my name is John Scott. I am from America, but I am serving in the allied Franco-British army. My heart like yours beats for France.”

“Then, Monsieur Jean, you and I are brothers,” said the little man, his eyes still gleaming. “It may be that we shall fight side by side in the hour of victory. But you will take me into the lantern will you not? Father Pelletier does not know, as you do, that I’m going to be a great man, and he will not admit me.”

“If I secure entrance you will, too. Come.”

They reached side by side the Basilique de Sacre-Coeur, which crowns the summit of the Butte Montmartre, and bought tickets from the porter, whose calm the proximity of untold Germans did not disturb. John saw the little Apache make the sign of the cross and bear himself with dignity. In some curious way Bougainville impressed him once more with a sense of power. Perhaps there was a spark of genius under the red cap. He knew from his reading that there was no rule about genius. It passed kings by, and chose the child of a peasant in a hovel.

“You’re what they call an Apache, are you not?” he asked.

“Yes, Monsieur.”

“Well, for the present, that is until you win a greater name, I’m going to call you Geronimo.”

“And why Zhay-ro-nee-mo, Monsieur?”

“Because that was the name of a great Apache chief. According to our white standards he was not all that a man should be. He had perhaps a certain insensibility to the



sufferings of others, but in the Apache view that was not a fault. He was wholly great to them.”

“Very well then, Monsieur Scott, I shall be flattered to be called Zhay-ro-nee-mo, until I win a name yet greater.”

“Where is the Father Pelletier, the priest, who you said would bar your way unless I came with you?”

“He is on the second platform where you look out over Paris before going into the lantern. It may be that he has against me what you would call the prejudice. I am young. Youth must have its day, and I have done some small deeds in the quarter which perhaps do not please Father Pelletier, a strict, a very strict man. But our country is in danger, and I am willing to forgive and forget.”

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He spoke with so much magnanimity that John was compelled to laugh. Geronimo laughed, too, showing splendid white teeth. The understanding between them was now perfect.

“I must talk with Father Pelletier,” said John. “Until you’re a great man, as you’re going to be, Geronimo, I suppose I can be spokesman. After that it will be your part to befriend me.”

On the second platform they found Father Pelletier, a tall young priest with a fine but severe face, who looked with curiosity at John, and with disapproval at the Apache.

“You are Father Pelletier, I believe,” said John with his disarming smile. “These are unusual times, but I wish to go up into the lantern. I am an American, though, as you can see by my uniform, I am a soldier of France.”

“But your companion, sir? He has a bad reputation in the quarter. When he should come to the church he does not, and now when he should not he does.”

“That reputation of which you speak, Father Pelletier, will soon pass. Another, better and greater will take its place. Our friend here, and perhaps both of us will be proud to call him so some day, leaves soon to fight for France.”

The priest looked again at Bougainville, and his face softened. The little Apache met his glance with a firm and open gaze, and his figure seemed to swell again, and to radiate strength. Perhaps the priest saw in his eyes the same spark that John had noticed there.

“It is a time when France needs all of her sons,” he said, “and even those who have not deserved well of her before may do great deeds for her now. You can pass.”

Bougainville walked close to Father Pelletier, and John heard him say in low tones:

“I feel within me the power to achieve, and when you see me again you will recognize it.”

The priest nodded and his friendly hand lay for a moment on the other’s shoulder.

“Come on, Geronimo,” said John cheerfully. “As I remember it’s nearly a hundred steps into the lantern, and that’s quite a climb.”

“Not for youth like ours,” exclaimed Bougainville, and he ran upward so lightly that the American had some difficulty in following him. John was impressed once more by his extraordinary strength and agility, despite his smallness. He seemed to be a mass of highly wrought steel spring. But unwilling to be beaten by anybody, John raced with him



and the two stood at the same time upon the utmost crest of the Basilique du Sacre-Coeur.

They paused a few moments for fresh breath and then John put the glasses to his eye, sweeping them in a slow curve. Through the powerful lenses he saw the vast circle of Paris, and all the long story of the past that it called up. Two thousand years of history rolled beneath his feet, and the spectacle was wholly magnificent.

He beheld the great green valley with its hills, green, too, the line of the Seine cutting the city apart like the flash of a sword blade, the golden dome of the Hotel des Invalides, the grinning gargoyles of Notre Dame, the arches and statues and fountains and the long green ribbons that marked the boulevards.

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Although the city stood wholly in the sunlight a light haze formed on the rim of the circling horizon. He now moved the glasses slowly over a segment there and sought diligently for something. From so high a point and with such strong aid one could see many miles. He was sure that he would find what he sought and yet did not wish to see. Presently he picked out intermittent flashes which he believed were made by sunlight falling on steel. Then he drew a long and deep breath that was almost like a sigh.

“What is it?” asked Bougainville who had stood patiently by his side.

“I fear it is the glitter of lances, my friend, lances carried by German Uhlans. Will you look?”

Bougainville held out his hands eagerly for the glasses, and then drew them back a little. In his new dignity he would not show sudden emotion.

“It will give me gladness to see,” he said. “I do not fear the Prussian lances.”

John handed him the glasses and he looked long and intently, at times sweeping them slowly back and forth, but gazing chiefly at the point under the horizon that had drawn his companion’s attention.

John meanwhile looked down at the city glittering in the sun, but from which its people were fleeing, as if its last day had come. It still seemed impossible that Europe should be wrapped in so great a war and that the German host should be at the gates of Paris.

His eyes turned back toward the point where he had seen the gleam of the lances and he fancied now that he heard the far throb of the German guns. The huge howitzers like the one Lannes and he had blown up might soon be throwing shells a ton or more in weight from a range of a dozen miles into the very heart of the French capital. An acute depression seized him. He had strengthened the heart of Lannes, and now his own heart needed strengthening. How was it possible to stop the German army which had come so far and so fast that its Uhlans could already see Paris? The unprepared French had been defeated already, and the slow English, arriving to find France under the iron heel, must go back and defend their own island.

“The Germans are there. I have not a doubt of it, and I thank you, Monsieur Scott, for the use of these,” said Bougainville, handing the glasses back to him.

“Well, Geronimo,” he said, “having seen, what do you say?”

“The sight is unpleasant, but it is not hopeless. They call us decadent. I read, Monsieur Scott, more than you think! Ah, it has been the bitterness of death for Frenchmen to hear all the world say we are a dying race, and it has been said so often that some of us ourselves had begun to believe it! But it is not so! I tell you it is not so, and we’ll soon



prove to the Germans who come that it isn't! I have looked for a sign. I sought for it in all the skies through your glasses, but I did not find it there. Yet I have found it."

"Where?"



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“In my heart. Every beat tells me that this Paris of ours is not for the Germans. We will yet turn them back!”

He reminded John of Lannes in his dramatic intensity, real and not affected, a true part of his nature. Its effect, too, upon the American was powerful. He had given courage to Lannes, and now Bougainville, that little Apache of the Butte Montmartre, was giving new strength to his own weakening heart. Fresh life flowed back into his veins and he remembered that he, too, had beheld a sign, the flash of light on the Arc de Triomphe.

“I think we have seen enough here, Geronimo,” he said lightly, “and we’ll descend. I’ve a friend to meet later. Which way do you go from the church?”

“To the army. I shall be in a uniform tonight, and tomorrow maybe I shall meet the Germans.”

John held out his hand and the Apache seized it in a firm clasp.

“I believe in you, as I hope you believe in me,” said young Scott. “I belong to a company called the Strangers, made up chiefly of Americans and English, and commanded by Captain Daniel Colton. If you’re on the battle line and hear of the Strangers there too I should like for you to hunt me up if you can. I’d do the same for you, but I don’t yet know to what force you will belong.”

Bougainville promised and they walked down to the second platform, where Father Pelletier was still standing.

“What did you see?” he asked of John, unable to hide the eagerness in his eyes.

“Uhlans, Father Pelletier, and I fancied that I heard the echo of a German forty-two centimeter. Would you care to use the glasses? The view from this floor is almost as good as it is from the lantern.”

John distinctly saw the priest shudder.

“No,” he replied. “I could not bear it. I shall pray today that our enemies may be confounded; tomorrow I shall throw off the gown of a priest and put on the coat of a soldier.”

“Another sign,” said John to himself, as they continued the descent. “Even the priests will fight.”

When they were once more in the narrow streets of Montmartre, John said farewell to Bougainville.



“Geronimo,” he said, “I expect to see you leading a victorious charge directly into the heart of the German army.”

“If I can meet your hopes I will, Monsieur Scott,” said the young Frenchman gayly, “and now, *au revoir*, I depart for my uniform and arms, which must be of the best.”

John smiled as he walked down the hill. His heart had warmed toward the little Apache who might not be any Apache at all. Nevertheless the name Geronimo seemed to suit him, and he meant to think of him by it until his valor won him a better.

He saw from the slopes the same endless stream of people leaving Paris. They knew that the Germans were near, and report brought them yet nearer. The tale of the monster guns had traveled fast, and the shells might be falling among them at any moment. Aeroplanes dotted the skies, but they paid little attention to them. They still thought of war under the old conditions, and to the great mass of the people flying machines were mere toys.

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But John knew better. Those journeys of his with Lannes through the heavens and their battles in the air for their lives were unforgettable. Stopping on the last slope of Montmartre he studied space with his glasses. He was sure that he saw captive balloons on the horizon where the German army lay, and one shape larger than the rest looked like a Zeppelin, but he did not believe those monsters had come so far to the south and west. They must have an available base.

His heart suddenly increased its beat. He saw a darting figure and he recognized the shape of the German Taube. Then something black shot downward from it, and there was a crash in the streets of Paris, followed by terrible cries.

He knew what had happened. He caught another glimpse of the Taube rushing away like a huge carnivorous bird that had already seized its prey, and then he ran swiftly down the street. The bomb had burst in a swarm of fugitives and a woman was killed. Several people were wounded, and a panic had threatened, but the soldiers had restored order already and ambulances soon took the wounded to hospitals.

John went on, shocked to the core. It was a new kind of war. The flying men might rain death from the air upon a helpless city, but their victims were more likely to be women and children than armed men. For the first time the clean blue sky became a sinister blanket from which dropped destruction.

The confusion created by the bomb soon disappeared. The multitude of Parisians still poured from the city, and long lines of soldiers took their place. John wondered what the French commanders would do. Surely theirs was a desperate problem. Would they try to defend Paris, or would they let it go rather than risk its destruction by bombardment? Yet its fall was bound to be a terrible blow.

Lannes was on the steps of the Opera House at the appointed time, coming with a brisk manner and a cheerful face.

“I want you to go with me to our house beyond the Seine,” he said. “It is a quaint old place hidden away, as so many happy homes are in this city. You will find nobody there but my mother, my sister Julie, and a faithful old servant, Antoine Picard, and his daughter, Suzanne.”

“But I will be a trespasser?”

“Not at all. There will be a warm welcome for you. I have told them of you, how you were my comrade in the air, and how you fought.”

“Pshaw, Lannes, it was you who did most of the fighting. You’ve given me a reputation that I can’t carry.”



“Never mind about the reputation. What have you been doing since I left you this morning?”

“I spent a part of the time in the lantern of the Basilica on Montmartre, and I had with me a most interesting friend.”

Lannes looked at him curiously.

“You did not speak of any friend in Paris at this time,” he said.

“I didn’t because I never heard of him until a few hours ago. I made his acquaintance while I was going up Montmartre, but I already consider him, next to you, the best friend I have in France.”



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“Acquaintanceship seems to grow rapidly with you, Monsieur Jean the Scott.”

“It has, but you must remember that our own friendship was pretty sudden. It developed in a few minutes of flight from soldiers at the German border.”

“That is so, but it was soon sealed by great common dangers. Who is your new friend, John?”

“A little Apache named Pierre Louis Bougainville, whom I have nicknamed Geronimo, after a famous Indian chief of my country. He has already gone to fight for France, and, Philip, he made an extraordinary impression upon me, although I don’t know just why. He is short like Napoleon, he has the same large and beautifully shaped head, and the same penetrating eyes that seem able to look you through and through. Maybe it was a spark of genius in him that impressed me.”

“It may be so,” said Lannes thoughtfully. “It was said, and said truly that the First Republic meant the open career to all the talents, and the Third offers the same chance. One never can tell where military genius is going to appear and God knows we need it now in whatever shape or form it may come. Did you hear of the bomb?”

“I saw it fall. But, Phil, I don’t see the object in such attacks. They may kill a few people, nearly always the unarmed, but that has no real effect on a war.”

“They wish to spread terror, I suppose. Lend me your glasses, John.”

Lannes studied the heavens a long time, minutely examining every black speck against the blue, and John stood beside him, waiting patiently. Meanwhile the throng of fleeing people moved on as before, silent and somber, even the children saying little. John was again stirred by the deepest emotion of sympathy and pity. What a tremendous tragedy it would be if New York were being abandoned thus to a victorious foe! Lannes himself had seemed to take no notice of the flight, but John judged he had made a powerful effort of the will to hide the grief and anger that surely filled his heart.

“I don’t see anything in the air but our own machines,” said Lannes, as he returned the glasses. “It was evidently a dash by the Taube that threw the bomb. But we’ve stayed here long enough. They’re waiting for us at home.”

He led the way through the multitude, relapsing into silence, but casting a glance now and then at his own peculiar field, the heavens. They reached the Place de la Concorde, and stopped there a moment or two. Lannes looked sadly at the black drapery hanging from the stone figure that typified the lost city of Strassburg, but John glanced up the great sweep of the Place to the Arc de Triomphe, where he caught again the glittering shaft of sunlight that he had accepted as a sign.



“We may be looking upon all this for the last time,” said Lannes, in a voice of grief. “Oh, Paris, City of Light, City of the Heart! You may not understand me, John, but I couldn’t bear to come back to Paris again, much as I love it, if it is to be despoiled and ruled by Germans.”

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"I do understand you, Philip," said John cheerfully, "but you mustn't count a city yours until you've taken it. The Germans are near, but they're not here. Now, lead on. It's not like you to despair!"

Lannes shook himself, as if he had laid violent hands upon his own body, and his face cleared.

"That was the last time, John," he said. "I made that promise before, but I keep it this time. You won't see me gloomy again. Henceforward it's hope only. Now, we must hurry. My mother and Julie will be growing anxious, for we are overdue."

They crossed the Seine by one of the beautiful stone bridges and entered a region of narrow and crooked streets, which John thought must be a part of old Paris. In an American city it would necessarily have been a quarter of the poor, but John knew that here wealth and distinction were often hidden behind these modest doors.

He began to feel very curious about Lannes' family, but he was careful to ask no questions. He knew that the young Frenchman was showing great trust and faith in him by taking him into his home. They stopped presently before a door, and Lannes rang a bell. The door was opened cautiously in a few moments, and a great head surmounted by thick, gray hair was thrust out. A powerful neck and a pair of immense shoulders followed the head. Sharp eyes under heavy lashes peered forth, but in an instant, when the man saw who was before him, he threw open the door and said:

"Welcome, Monsieur."

John had no doubt that this was the Antoine Picard of whom Lannes had spoken, and he knew at the first glance that he beheld a real man. Many people have the idea that all Frenchmen are little, but John knew better.

Antoine Picard was a giant, much over six feet, and with the limbs and chest of a piano-mover. He was about sixty, but age evidently had made no impression upon his strength. John judged from his fair complexion that he was from Normandy. "Here," young Scott said to himself, "is one of those devoted European family servants of whom I've heard so often."

He regarded the man with interest, and Picard, in return, measured and weighed him with a lightning glance.

Lannes laughed.

"It's all right, Antoine," he said. "He's the young man from that far barbarian country called America, who escaped from Germany with me, only he's no barbarian, but a highly civilized being who not only likes France, but who fights for her. John, this is Antoine Picard, who rules and protects this house."



John held out his hand, American fashion, and it was engulfed in the mighty grasp of the Norseman, as he always thought of him afterward.

“Madame, your mother, and Mademoiselle, your sister, have been anxious,” said Picard.

“We were delayed,” said Lannes.

They stepped into a narrow hall, and Picard shut the door behind them, shooting into place a heavy bolt which sank into its socket with a click like the closing of the entrance to a fortress. In truth, the whole aspect of the house reminded John of a stronghold. The narrow hall was floored with stone, the walls were stone and the light was dim. Lannes divined John’s thoughts.

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“You’ll find it more cheerful, presently,” he said. “As for us, we’re used to it, and we love it, although it’s so old and cold and dark. It goes back at least five centuries.”

“I suppose some king must have slept here once,” said John. “In England they point out every very old house as a place where a king passed the night, and make reverence accordingly.”

Lannes laughed gayly.

“No king ever slept here so far as I know,” he said, “but the great Marshal Lannes, whose name I am so proud to bear, was in this house more than once, and to me, a staunch republican, that is greater than having had a king for a tenant. The Marshal, as you may know, although he took a title and served an Emperor, was always a republican and in the early days of the empire often offended Napoleon by his frankness and brusque truths. But enough of old things; we’ll see my mother.”

He led the way up the steps, of solid stone, between walls thick enough for a fortress, and knocked at a door. A deep, full voice responded “Enter!” and pushing open the door Lannes went in, followed by John.

It was a large room, with long, low windows, looking out over a sea of roofs toward the dome of the Invalides and Napoleon’s arch of triumph. A tall woman rose from a chair, and saying “My son!” put her hands upon Lannes shoulders and kissed him on the forehead. She was fair like her son, and much less than fifty years of age. There was no stoop in her shoulders and but little gray in her hair. Her eyes were anxious, but John saw in them the Spartan determination that marked the women of France.

“My friend, John Scott, of whom I have already spoken to you, Madame my mother,” said Lannes.

John bowed. He knew little of French customs, particularly in the heart of a French family, and he was afraid to extend his hand, but she gave him hers, and let it rest in his palm a moment.

“Philip has told me much of you,” she said in her deep, bell-like voice, “and although I know little of your far America, I can believe the best of it, if its sons are like you.”

John flushed at the compliment, which he knew to be so sincere.

“Thank you, Madame,” he said. “While my country can take no part in this war, many of my countrymen will fight with you. France helped us once, and some of us, at least, will help France now.”

She smiled gravely, and John knew that he was welcome in her house. Lannes would see to that anyhow, but he wished to make a good impression on his own account.



“I know that Philip risks his life daily,” she said. “He has chosen the most dangerous of all paths, the air, but perhaps in that way he can serve us most.”

She spoke with neither complaint nor reproach, merely as if she were stating a fact, and her son added briefly:

“You are right, mother. In the air I can work best for our people. Ah, John, here is my sister, who is quite curious about the stranger from across the sea.”



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A young girl came into the room. She was tall and slender, not more than seventeen, very fair, with blue eyes and hair of pure gold. John was continually observing that while many of the French were dark and small, in accordance with foreign opinion that made them all so, many more were blonde and tall. Lannes' sister was scarcely more than a lovely child, but his heart beat more quickly.

Lannes kissed her on the forehead, just as he kissed his mother.

"Julie," he said lightly and yet proudly, "this is the young American hero of whom I was telling you, my comrade in arms, or rather in the air, and adopted brother. Mr. John Scott, my sister, Mademoiselle Julie Lannes."

She made a shy curtsy and John bowed. It was the first time that he was ever in the heart of an old French home, and he did not know the rules, but he felt that he ought not to offer his hand. Young girls, he had always heard, were kept in strict seclusion in France, but the great war and the approach of the German army might make a difference. In any event, he felt bold enough to talk to her a little, and she responded, a beautiful color coming into her face.

"Dinner is ready for our guest and you," said Madame Lannes, and she led the way into another apartment, also with long, low windows, where the table was set. The curtains were drawn from the windows, and John caught through one of them a glimpse of the Seine, of marching troops in long blue coats and red trousers, and of the great city, massing up beyond like a wall.

He felt that he had never before sat down to so strange a table. The world without was shaking beneath the tread of the mightiest of all wars, but within this room was peace and quiet. Madame was like a Roman matron, and the young Julie, though shy, had ample dignity. John liked Lannes' manner toward them both, his fine subordination to his mother and his protective air toward his sister. He was glad to be there with them, a welcome guest in the family.

The dinner was served by a tall young woman. Picard's daughter Suzanne, to whom Lannes had referred, and she served in silence and with extraordinary dexterity one of the best dinners that he ever ate.

As the dinner proceeded John admired the extraordinary composure of the Lannes family. Surely a woman and a girl of only seventeen would feel consternation at the knowledge that an overwhelming enemy was almost within sight of the city they must love so much. Yet they did not refer to it, until nearly the close of the dinner, and it was Madame who introduced the subject.

"I hear, Philip," she said, "that a bomb was thrown today from a German aeroplane into the Place de l'Opera, killing a woman and injuring several other people."



“It is true, mother.”

John glanced covertly at Julie, and saw her face pale. But she did not tremble.

“Is it true also that the German army is near?” asked Madame Lannes, with just the faintest quiver in her voice.



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“Yes, mother. John, standing in the lantern of the Basilique du Sacre-Coeur, saw through his glasses the flash of sunlight on the lances of their Uhlans. A shell from one of their great guns could fall in the suburbs of Paris.”

John’s covert glance was now for Madame Lannes. How would the matron who was cast in the antique mold of Rome take such news? But she veiled her eyes a little with her long lashes, and he could not catch the expression there.

“I believe it is not generally known in Paris that the enemy is so very near,” said Philip, “and while I have not hesitated to tell you the full truth, mother, I ask you and Julie not to speak of it to others.”

“Of course, Philip, we would add nothing to the general alarm, which is great enough already, and with cause. But what do you wish us to do? Shall we remain here, or go while it is yet time to our cousins, the Menards, at Lyons?”

Now it was the mother who, in this question of physical peril, was showing deference to her son, the masculine head of the family. John liked it. He remembered an old saying, and he felt it to be true, that they did many things well in France.

Lannes glanced at young Scott before replying.

“Mother,” he said, “the danger is great. I do not try to conceal it from you. It was my intention this morning to see you and Julie safe on the Lyons train, but John and I have beheld signs, not military, perhaps, but of the soul, and we are firm in the belief that at the eleventh hour we shall be saved. The German host will not enter Paris.”

Madame Lannes looked fixedly at John and he felt her gaze resting like a weight upon his face. But he responded. His faith had merely grown stronger with the hours.

“I cannot tell why, Madame,” he said, “but I believe as surely as I am sitting here that the enemy will not enter the capital.”

Then she said decisively, “Julie and I remain in our own home in Paris.”

CHAPTER II

THE MESSENGER

There was little more talk. The dignified quiet of the Lannes family remained unchanged, and John imitated it. If they could be so calm in the face of overwhelming disaster it should be no effort for him to remain unmoved. Yet he glanced often, though covertly, at Julie Lannes, admiring her lovely color.



When dinner was over they returned to the room in which Madame Lannes had received them. The dark had come already, and Suzanne had lighted four tall candles. There was neither gas nor electricity.

“Mr. Scott will be our guest tonight, mother,” said Lannes, “and tomorrow he and I go together to the army.”

John raised his hand in protest. It had not been his intention when he came to remain until morning, but Lannes would listen to no objection; nor would his mother.

“Since you fight for our country,” she said, “you must let us give you shelter for at least one night.”

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He acquiesced, and they sat a little while, talking of the things furthest from their hearts. Julie Lannes withdrew presently, and before long her mother followed. Lannes went to the window, and looked out over Paris, where the diminished lights twinkled. John stood at the other window and saw the great blur of the capital. All sounds were fused into one steady murmur, rather soothing, like the flowing of a river.

He seemed to hear presently the distant thunder of German guns, but reason told him it was only a trick of the imagination. Nerves keyed high often created the illusion of reality.

“What are you thinking about, Lannes?” he asked.

“Of my mother and sister. Only the French know the French. The family tie is powerful with us.”

“I know that, Phil.”

“So you do. You’re an adopted child of France. Madame Lannes is a woman of great heart, John. I am proud to be her son. I have read of your civil war. I have read how the mothers of your young soldiers suffered and yet were brave. None can know how much Madame, my mother, has suffered tonight, with the Germans at the gates of Paris, and yet she has shown no sign of it.”

John was silent. He did not know what to say, but Lannes did not pursue the subject, remaining a full five minutes at the window, and not speaking again, until he turned away.

“John,” he said then, “let’s go outside and take a look about the quarter. It’s important now to watch for everything.”

John was full willing. He recognized the truth of Lannes’ words and he wanted air and exercise also. A fortress was a fortress, whether one called it a home or not, Lannes led the way and they descended to the lower hall, where the gigantic porter was on watch.

“My friend and I are going to take a look in the streets, Antoine,” said Lannes. “Guard the house well while we are gone.”

“I will,” replied the man, “but will you tell me one thing, Monsieur Philip? Do Madame Lannes and Mademoiselle Julie remain in Paris?”

“They do, Antoine, and since I leave tomorrow it will be the duty of you and Suzanne to protect them.”

“I am gratified, sir, that they do not leave the capital. I have never known a Lannes to flee at the mere rumor of the enemy’s coming.”



“And I hope you never will, Antoine. I think we’ll be back in an hour.”

“I shall be here, sir.”

He unbolted the door and Lannes and John stepped out, the cool night air pouring in a grateful flood upon their faces. Antoine fastened the door behind them, and John again heard the massive bolt sink into its place.

“The quarter is uncommonly quiet,” said Lannes. “I suppose it has a right to be after such a day.”

Then he looked up, scanning the heavens, after the manner that had become natural to him, a flying man.

“What do you see, Philip?” asked John.

“A sky of dark blue, plenty of stars, but no aeroplanes, Taubes or other machines of man’s making.”

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"I fancy that some of them are on the horizon, but too far away to be seen by us."

"Likely as not. The Germans are daring enough and we can expect more bombs to be dropped on Paris. Our flying corps must organize to meet theirs. I feel the call of the air, John."

Young Scott laughed.

"I believe the earth has ceased to be your natural element," he said. "You're happiest when you're in the *Arrow* about a mile above our planet."

Lannes laughed also, and with appreciation. The friendship between the two young men was very strong, and it had in it all the quality of permanence. Their very unlikeness in character and temperament made them all the better comrades. What one could not do the other could.

As they walked along now they said but little. Each was striving to read what he could in that great book, the streets of Paris. John believed Lannes had not yet told him his whole mission. He knew that in their short stay in Paris Philip had spent an hour in the office of the military governor of the city, and his business must be of great importance to require an hour from a man who carried such a fearful weight of responsibility. But whatever Lannes' secret might be, it was his own and he had no right to pry into it. If the time came for his comrade to tell it he would do so.

When they reached the Seine the city did not seem so quiet. They heard the continuous sound of marching troops and people were still departing through the streets toward the country or the provincial cities. The flight went on by night as well as day, and John again felt the overwhelming pity of it.

He wondered what the French generals and their English allies would do? Did they have any possible way of averting this terrible crisis? They had met nothing but defeat, and the vast German army had crashed, unchecked, through everything from the border almost to the suburbs of Paris.

They stood in the Place Valhubert at the entrance to the Pont d'Austerlitz, and watched a regiment crossing the river, the long blue coats and red trousers of the men outlined against the white body of the bridge. The soldiers were short, they looked little to John, but they were broad of chest and they marched splendidly with a powerful swinging stride.

"From the Midi," said Lannes. "Look how dark they are! France is called a Latin nation, but I doubt whether the term is correct. These men of the Midi though are the real Latins. We of northern France, I suspect, are more Teutonic than anything else, but we are all knitted together in one race, heart and soul, which are stronger ties than blood."



“We are to go early in the morning, are we not, Philip?”

“Yes, early. The *Arrow* is at the hangar, all primed and eager for a flight, fearful of growing rusty from a long rest.”

“I believe you actually look upon your plane as a human being.”

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“A human being, yes, and more. No human being could carry me above the clouds. No human being could obey absolutely and without question the simplest touch of my hand. The *Arrow* is not human, John, it is superhuman. You have seen its exploits.”

The dark emitted a figure that advanced toward them, and took the shape of a man with black hair, a short close beard and an intelligent face. He approached John and Lannes and looked at them closely.

“Mr. Scott!” he exclaimed, with eagerness, “I did not know what had become of you. I was afraid you were lost in one of the battles!”

“Why, it’s Weber!” said John, “our comrade of the flight in the automobile! And I was afraid that you too, were dead!”

The two shook hands with great heartiness and Lannes joined in the reunion. He too at once liked Weber, who always made the impression of courage and quickness. He wore a new uniform, olive in color with dark blue threads through it, and it became him, setting off his trim, compact figure.

“How did you get here, Mr. Weber?” asked John.

“I scarcely know,” he replied. “My duties are to a certain extent those of a messenger, but I was caught in the last battle, wounded slightly, and separated from the main French force. The little company which I had formed tried to break through the German columns, but they were all killed or captured except myself, and maybe two or three others. I hid in a wood, slept a night there, and then reached Paris to see what is going to happen. Ah, it is terrible! terrible! my comrades! The Germans are advancing in five great armies, a million and a half strong, and no troops were ever before equipped so magnificently.”

“Do you know positively that they have a million and a half?” asked Lannes.

“I did not count them,” replied Weber, smiling a little, “but I have heard from many certain sources that such are their numbers. I fear, gentlemen, that Paris is doomed.”

“Scott and I don’t think so,” said Lannes firmly. “We’ve gained new courage today.”

Weber was silent for a few moments. Then he said, giving Lannes his title as an officer:

“I’ve heard of you, Lieutenant Lannes. Who does not know the name of France’s most daring aviator? And doubtless you have information which is unknown to me. It is altogether likely that one who pierces the air like an eagle should bear messages between generals of the first rank.”



Lannes did not answer, but looked at Weber, who smiled.

“Perhaps our trades are not so very different,” said the Alsatian, “but you shoot through clouds while I crawl on the ground. You have a great advantage of me in method.”

Lannes smiled back. The little tribute was pleasing to the dramatic instinct so strong in him.

“You and I, Mr. Weber,” he said, “know enough never to speak of what we’re going to do. Now, we’ll bid you good night and wish you good luck. I’d like to be a prophet, even for a day only, and tell what the morrow would bring.”



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“So do I,” said Weber, “and I must hurry on my own errand. It may not be of great importance, but is vital to me that I do it.”

He slid away in the darkness and both John and Lannes spoke well of him as they returned to the house. Picard admitted them.

“May I ask, sir, if there is any news that favors France?” he said to Philip.

“Not yet, my good Antoine, but it is surely coming.”

John heard the giant Frenchman smother a sigh, but he made no comment, and walked softly with Lannes to the little room high up that had been assigned to him. Here when he was alone with his candle he looked around curiously.

The room was quite simple, not containing much furniture, in truth, nothing of any note save on the wall a fine picture of the great Marshal Lannes, Napoleon’s dauntless fighter, and stern republican, despite the ducal title that he took. It was a good portrait, painted perhaps by some great artist, and John holding up the candle, looked at it a long time.

He thought he could trace some likeness to Philip. Lannes’ face was always stern, in repose, far beyond his years, although when he became animated it had all the sunniness of youth. But he noticed now that he had the same tight lips of the Marshal, and the same unfaltering eyes.

“Duke of Montebello!” said John to himself. “Well, you won that title grandly, and while the younger Lannes may do as well, if the chance comes to him, the new heroes of France will be neither dukes nor princes.”

Then, after removing all the stiff pillows, inclines, foot pieces and head pieces that make European beds so uncomfortable, he slipped between the covers, and slid quickly into a long and soothing sleep, from which he was awakened apparently about a minute later by Lannes himself, who stood over him, dressed fully, tall and serious.

“Why, I just got into bed!” exclaimed John.

“You came in here a full seven hours ago. Open your window and you’ll see the dawn creeping over Paris.”

“Thank you, but you can open it yourself. I never fool with a European window. I haven’t time to master all the mechanism, inside, outside and between, to say nothing of the various layers of curtains, full length, half length and otherwise. Nothing that I can conceive of is better fitted than the European window to keep out light and air.”

Lannes smiled.



“I see that you’re in fine feather this morning,” he said, “I’ll open it for you.”

John jumped up and dressed quickly, while Lannes, with accustomed hand, laid back shutters and curtains.

“Now, shove up the window,” exclaimed John as he wielded towel and brush. “A little fresh air in a house won’t hurt you; it won’t hurt anybody. We’re a young people, we Americans, but we can teach you that. Why, in the German hotels they’d seal up the smoking-rooms and lounges in the evenings, and then boys would go around shooting clouds of perfume against the ceilings. Ugh! I can taste now that awful mixture of smoke, perfume and thrice-breathed air! Ah! that feels better! It’s like a breath from heaven!”



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“Ready now? We’re going down to breakfast with my mother and sister.”

“Yes. How do I look in this uniform, Lannes?”

“Very well. But, Oh, you Americans! we French are charged with vanity, but you have it.”

John had thought little of his raiment until he came to the house of Lannes, but now there was a difference. He gave the last touch to his coat, and he and Philip went down together. Madame Lannes and Julie received them. They were dressed very simply, Julie in white and Madame Lannes in plain gray. Their good-morning to John was quiet, but he saw that it came from the heart. They recognized in him the faithful comrade in danger, of the son and brother, and he saw once more that French family affection was very powerful.

It was early, far earlier than the ordinary time for the European breakfast, and he knew that it had been served so, because he and Lannes were to depart. He sat facing a window, and he saw the dawn come over Paris in a vast silver haze that soon turned to a cloud of gold. He again stole glances at Julie Lannes. In all her beautiful fairness of hair and complexion she was like one of the blonde American girls of his own country.

When breakfast was over and the two young men rose to go John said the first farewell. He still did not know the French custom, but, bending over suddenly, he kissed the still smooth and handsome hand of Madame Lannes. As she flushed and looked pleased, he judged that he had made no mistake. Then he touched lightly the hand of the young girl, and said:

“Mademoiselle Julie, I hope to return soon to this house with your brother.”

“May it be so,” she said, in a voice that trembled, “and may you come back to a Paris still French!”

John bowed to them both and with tact and delicacy withdrew from the room. He felt that there should be no witness of Philip’s farewell to his mother and sister, before going on a journey from which the chances were that he would never return.

He strolled down the hall, pretending to look at an old picture or two, and in a few minutes Lannes came out and joined him. John saw tears in his eyes, but his face was set and stern. Neither spoke until they reached the front door, which the giant, Picard, opened for them.

“If the worst should happen, Antoine,” said Lannes, “and you must be the judge of it when it comes, take them to Lyons, to our cousins the Menards.”



“I answer with my life,” said the man, shutting together his great teeth, and John felt that it was well for the two women to have such a guardian. Under impulse, he said:

“I should like to shake the hand of a man who is worth two of most men.”

Whether the French often shake hands or not, his fingers were enclosed in the mighty grasp of Picard, and he knew that he had a friend for life. When they went out Lannes would not look back and was silent for a long time. The day was warm and beautiful, and the stream of fugitives, the sad procession, was still flowing from the city. Troops too were moving, and it seemed to John that they passed in heavier masses than on the day before.

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“I went out last night while you slept,” said Lannes, when they were nearly at the hangar, “and I will tell you that I bear a message to one of our most important generals. I carry it in writing, and also in memory in case I lose the written word. That is all I feel at liberty to tell you, and in truth I know but little more. The message comes from our leader to the commander of the army at Paris, who in turn orders me to deliver it to the general whom we’re going to seek. It directs him with his whole force to move forward to a certain point and hold fast there. Beyond that I know nothing. Its whole significance is hidden from me. I feel that I can tell you this, John, as we’re about to start upon a journey which has a far better prospect of death than of life.”

“I’m not afraid,” said John, and he told the truth. “I feel, Philip, that great events are impending and that your dispatch or the effect of it will be a part in some gigantic plan.”

“I feel that way, too. What an awful crisis! The Germans moved nearer in the dark. I didn’t sleep a minute last night. I couldn’t. If the signs that you and I saw are to be fulfilled they must be fulfilled soon, because when a thing is done it’s done, and when Paris falls it falls.”

“Well, here we are at the hangar, and the *Arrow* will make you feel better. You’re like the born horseman whose spirits return when he’s on the back of his best runner.”

“I suppose I am. The air is now my proper medium, and anyway, John, my gallant Yankee, for a man like me the best tonic is always action, action, and once more action.”

The *Arrow* was in beautiful condition, smooth, polished and fitted with everything that was needed. They put on their flying clothes, drew down their visors, stowed their automatics in handy pockets, and took their seats in the aeroplane. Then, as he put his hand on the steering rudder and the attendants gave the *Arrow* a mighty shove, the soul of Lannes swelled within him.

They rose slowly and then swiftly over Paris, and his troubles were left behind him on the earth. Up, up they went, in a series of graceful spirals, and although John, at first, felt the old uneasy feeling, it soon departed. He too exulted in their mounting flight and the rush of cold air.

“Use your glasses, John,” said Lannes, “and tell me what you can see.”

“Some captive balloons, five other planes, all our own, and on the horizon, where the German army lies, several black specks too vague and indefinite for me to make out what they are, although I’ve no doubt they’re German flyers.”

“I’d like to have a look at the Germans, but our way leads elsewhere. What else do you see, John?”



“I look downward and I see the most magnificent and glittering city in the world.”

“And that’s Paris, our glorious Paris, which you and I and a million others are going to save. I suppose it’s hope, John, that makes me feel we’ll do something. Did you know that the Germans dropped two more bombs on the city last night? One, luckily, fell in the Seine. The other struck near the Madeleine, close to a group of soldiers, killing two and wounding four more.”

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“Bombs from the air can’t do any great damage to a city.”

“No, but they can spread alarm, and it’s an insult, too. We feel as the Germans would if we were dropping bombs on Berlin. I wish you’d keep those glasses to your eyes all the time, John, and watch the skies. Let me know at once, if you see anything suspicious.”

John, continually turning in his seat, swept the whole curve of the world with the powerful glasses. Paris was now far below, a blur of white and gray. Above, the heavens were of the silkiest blue, beautiful in their infinite depths, with tiny clouds floating here and there like whitecaps on an ocean.

“What do you see now, John?”

“Nothing but one of the most beautiful days that ever was. It’s a fine sun, that you’ve got over here, Philip. I can see through these glasses that it’s made out of pure reddish gold.”

“Never mind about that sun, John. America is a full partner in its ownership and you’re used to it. I’ve heard that you have more sunshine than we do. Watch for our companions of the air, friend or foe.”

“I see them flying; over Paris, but none is going in our direction. How far is our port of entry, Lannes?”

“We should be there in two hours, if nothing happens. Do we still have the course to ourselves or is anything coming our way now?”

“No company at all, unless you’d call a machine about three miles off and much lower down, a comrade.”

“What does it look like?”

“A French aeroplane, much resembling the *Arrow*.”

“Is it following us?”

“Not exactly. Yes, it is coming our way now, although it keeps much lower! A scout, I dare say.”

Lannes was silent for a little while, his eyes fixed on his pathway through the blue. Then he said:

“What has become of that machine, John?”



“It has risen a little, but it’s on our private course, that is, if we can claim the right of way all down to the ground.”

Lannes glanced backward and downward, as well as his position would allow.

“A French plane, yes,” he said thoughtfully. “There can be no doubt of it, but why should it follow us in this manner? You do think it’s following us, don’t you, John?”

“It begins to look like it, Phil. It’s rising a little now, and is directly in our wake.”

“Take a long look through those glasses of yours.”

John obeyed, and the following aeroplane at once increased in size tenfold and came much nearer.

“It’s French. There cannot be any doubt of it,” he said, “and only one man is in it. As he’s hidden by his flying-suit I can’t tell anything about him.”

“Watch him closely, John, and keep your hand on the butt of your automatic. I don’t like that fellow’s actions. Still, he may be a Frenchman on an errand like ours. We’ve no right to think we’re the only people carrying important messages today.”

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“He’s gaining pretty fast. Although he keeps below us, it looks as if he wanted to communicate with us.”

The second aeroplane suddenly shot forward and upward at a much greater rate of speed. John, still watching through his glasses, saw the man release the steering rudder for an instant, snatch a rifle from the floor of his plane, and fire directly at Lannes.

John uttered a shout of anger, and in action, too, he was as quick as a flash. His automatic was out at once and he rained bullets upon the treacherous machine. It was hard to take aim, firing from one flying target, at another, but he saw the man flinch, turn suddenly, and then go rocketing away at a sharp angle.

Blazing with wrath John watched him, now far out of range, and then reloaded his automatic.

“Did you get him, John?” asked Lannes.

“I know one bullet found him, because I saw him shiver and shrink, but it couldn’t have been mortal, as he was able to fly away.”

“I’m glad that you at least hit him, because he hit me.”

“What!” exclaimed John. Then he looked at his comrade and saw to his intense horror that black blood was flowing slowly down a face deadly pale.

“His bullet went through my cap and then through my head,” said Lannes. “Oh, not through my skull, or I wouldn’t be talking to you now. I think it glanced off the bone, as I know it’s gone out on the other side. But I’m losing much blood, John, and I seem to be growing numb.”

His voice trailed off in weakness and the *Arrow* began to move in an eccentric manner. John saw that Lannes’ hand on the rudder was uncertain and that he had been hard hit. He was aghast, first for his friend, to whom he had become so strongly attached, and then for the *Arrow*, their mission and himself. Lannes would soon become unconscious and he, no flying man at all, would be left high in air with a terrible weight of responsibility.

“We must change seats,” said Lannes, struggling against the dimness that was coming over his eyes and the weakness permeating his whole body. “Be careful, Oh, be careful as you can, and then, in your American language, a lot more. Slowly! Slowly! Yes, I can move alone. Drag yourself over me, and I can slide under you. Careful! Careful!”

The *Arrow* fluttered like a wounded bird, dropping, darting upward, and careering to one side. John was sick to his soul, both physically and mentally. His head became giddy



and the wind roared in his ears, but the exchange of seats was at last, successfully accomplished.

“Now,” said Lannes, “you’re a close observer. Remember all that you’ve seen me do with the plane. Resolve to yourself that you do know how to fly the *Arrow*. Fear nothing and fly straight for our destination. Don’t bother about the bleeding of my wound. My thick hair and thick cap acting together as a heavy bandage will stop it. Now, John, our fate rests with you.”

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The last words were almost inaudible, and John from the corner of his eye saw his comrade's head droop. He knew that Lannes had become unconscious and now, appalling though the situation was, he rose to the crisis.

He knew the immensity of their danger. A sudden movement of the rudder and the aeroplane might be wrecked. And in such a position the nerves of a novice were subject at any time to a jerk. They might be assailed by another treacherous machine, the dangers, in truth, were uncountable, but he was upborne by a tremendous desire to carry the word and to save Lannes and himself.

In the face of intense resolve all obstacles became as nothing and his hand steadied on the rudder. He knew that when it came to the air he was no Lannes and never could be. The solid earth, no matter how much it rolled around the sun or around itself, was his favorite field of action, but he felt that he must make one flight, when he carried with him perhaps the fate of a nation.

The *Arrow* was still rocking from side to side and dipping and jumping. Slowly he steadied it, handling the rudder as if it were a loaded weapon, and gradually his heart began to pound with triumph. It was no such flying as the hand of Lannes drew from the *Arrow*, but to John it seemed splendid for a first trial. He let the machine drop a little until it was only six or seven hundred yards above the earth, and took wary glances from side to side. He feared another pursuer, but the air seemed clear.

Lannes had sunk a little further forward. John saw that the bleeding from his head had ceased. There was a dark stain down either cheek, but it was drying there, and as Lannes had foreseen, his hair and the cap had acted as a bandage, at last checking the flow effectively. His breathing was heavy and jerky, but John believed that he would revive before long. It was not possible that one so vital as Lannes, so eager for great action, could die thus.

Now he looked ahead. Their landmarks as Lannes had told him before the fight, were to be a high hill, a low hill, and a small stream flowing between. Just behind it they would find a great French army marching northward and their errand would be over. He did not yet see the hills, but he was sure that he was still in the pathway of the air.

He had left Paris far behind, but when he looked down he saw a beautiful country, a fertile land upon which man had worked for two thousand years, too beautiful to be trodden to pieces by armies. He saw the cultivated fields, varying in color like a checker board, and the neat villages with trees about them. Here and there the spire of a church rose high above everything. Churches and wars were so numerous in Europe!

John checked the speed of the *Arrow*. He was afraid, despite all his high resolve, to fly fast, and then he must not go beyond the army for which he was looking. He dropped a little lower as he was passing over a wood, and then he heard the crack of rifles



beneath him. Bullets whizzed and sang past his ears and he took one fearful glance downward.



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He saw men, spiked helmets on their heads, galloping among the trees, and he knew that they were a daring band of Uhlans, actually scouting inside the French lines. They were shooting at the *Arrow* and firing fast.

He attempted to rise so suddenly that the plane gave a violent jerk and quivered in every fiber. He thought for a moment they were going to fall, and the sickening sensation at his heart was overpowering. But the trusty *Arrow* ceased quivering, and then rose swiftly at an angle not too great.

Bullets still whizzed around the plane, and one glanced off its polished side, but John's first nervous jerkiness in handling the machine had probably saved him. The target had been so high in air, and of such a shifting nature that the Uhlans had little chance to hit it.

He was now beyond the range of any rifle, and he drew a long breath of relief that was like a deep sigh. Then he took a single downward glance, and caught a fleeting glimpse of the Uhlans galloping away. Doubtless they were making all speed back to their own army.

He flew on for a minute or two, searching the horizon eagerly, and at last, he saw a tall hill, a low hill and a flash of water between. He felt so much joy that he uttered a cry, and an echo of it came from a point almost by his side.

"Did I hear firing, John?"

It was Lannes' voice, feeble, but showing all the signs of returning strength, and again John uttered a joyous shout.

"You did," he replied. "It was Uhlans in a grove. I was flying low and their bullets whistled around us. But the *Arrow* has taken no harm. I see, too, the hills and the stream which are our landmarks. We're about to arrive, Philip, with our message, but there's been treachery somewhere. I wish I knew who was in that French plane."

"So do I, John. It certainly came out of Paris. In my opinion it meant to destroy us and keep our message from reaching the one for whom it was intended. Who could it have been and how could he have known!"

"Feeling better now, aren't you, Phil?"

"A lot better. My head aches tremendously, but the dimness has gone from before my eyes, and I'm able to think, in a poor and feeble way, perhaps, but I'm not exactly a dumb animal. Where are the hills?"

John pointed.



“I can see them,” said Lannes exultantly. “Since they did no harm I’m glad the Uhlans fired at the *Arrow*. Their shots aroused me from stupor and as we’re to reach the army I want to be in possession of my five senses when I get there.”

John understood perfectly.

“It’s your message and you deliver it,” he said.

Lannes’ strength continued to increase, and his mind cleared rapidly. His head ached frightfully, but he could think with all his usual swiftness and precision. He sat erect in his seat.

“Pass me your glasses, John,” he said.



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“Now I see the troops,” he said, after a long look. “Frenchmen, Frenchmen, Frenchmen, infantry in thousands and scores of thousands, big guns in scores and hundreds, cuirassiers, hussars, cannoneers! Ah! It’s a sight to kindle a dead heart back to life! John, this is one of the great wheels in the mighty machine that is to move forward! Here come two aeroplanes, scouts sent forward to see who and what we are.”

“You are sure they contain genuine Frenchmen? Remember the fellow who shot you.”

“Frenchmen, good and true. I can see them for myself.”

He moved his hand, and in a few moments John heard hissing and purring near, as if great birds were flying to meet him. The outlines of the hovering planes showed by his side, and Lannes called in a loud voice to shrouded and visored men.

“Philip Lannes and his comrade, John Scott, with a message from Paris to the commander!” he exclaimed.

He was his old self again, erect, intense, dramatic. He evidently expected the name Philip Lannes to be known well to them, and it was, as a cheer followed high in air.

“Now, John,” said Lannes, “Be careful! Your hardest task is before you, to land. But I’ve noticed that with you the harder the task the better you do it. Make for that wide green space to the left of the stream and come down as slowly and gently as you can. Just slide down.”

John had a fleeting glimpse of thousands of faces looking upward, but he held a true course for the grassy area, and with a multitude looking on his nerve was never steadier. Amid great cheering the *Arrow* came safely to rest at her appointed place. John and Lannes stepped forth, as an elderly man in a quiet uniform came forward to meet them.

Lannes, holding himself stiffly erect, drew a paper from his pocket and extended it to the general.

“A letter, sir, from the commander-in-chief of all our armies,” he said, saluting proudly.

As the general took the letter, Lannes’ knees bent beneath him, and he sank down on his face.

CHAPTER III

IN THE FRENCH CAMP



John rushed forward and grasped his comrade. The sympathetic hands of others seized him also, and they raised him to his feet, while an officer gave him stimulant out of a flask, John meanwhile telling who his comrade was. Lannes' eyes opened and he flushed through the tan of his face.

"Pardon," he said, "it was a momentary weakness. I am ashamed of myself, but I shall not faint again."

"You've been shot," said the officer, looking at his sanguinary cap and face.

"So I have, but I ask your pardon for it. I won't let it occur again."

Lannes was now standing stiffly erect, and his eyes shone with pride, as the general, a tall, elderly man, rapidly read the letter that Philip had delivered with his own hand. The officer who had spoken of his wound looked at him with approval.



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"I've heard of you, Philip Lannes," he said, "you're the greatest flying man in the world."

Lannes' eyes flashed now.

"You do me too much honor," he said, "but it was not I who brought our aeroplane here. It was my American friend, John Scott, now standing beside me, who beat off an attack upon us and who then, although he had had no practical experience in flying, guided the machine to this spot. Born an American, he is one of us and France already owes him much."

John raised his hand in protest, but he saw that Lannes was enjoying himself. His dramatic instinct was finding full expression. He had not only achieved a great triumph, but his best friend had an important share in it. There was honor for both, and his generous soul rejoiced.

Both John and Lannes stood at attention until the general had read the letter not once but twice and thrice. Then he took off his glasses, rubbed them thoughtfully a moment or two, replaced them and looked keenly at the two. He was a quiet man and he made no gestures, but John met his gaze serenely, read his eyes and saw the tremendous weight of responsibility back of them.

"You have done well, you two, perhaps far better than you know," said the general, "and now, since you are wounded, Philip Lannes, you must have attention. De Rougemont, take care of them."

De Rougemont, a captain, was the man to whom they had been talking, and he gladly received the charge. He was a fine, well built officer, under thirty, and it was obvious that he already took a deep interest in the two young aviators. Noticing Lannes' anxious glances toward his precious machine, he promptly detailed two men to take care of the *Arrow* and then he led John and Lannes toward the group of tents.

"First I'll get a surgeon for you," he said to the Frenchman, "and after that there's food for you both."

"I hope you'll tell the surgeon to be careful how he takes off my cap," said Lannes, "because it's fastened to my head now by my own dried blood."

"Trust me for that," said de Rougemont. "I'll bring one of our best men."

Then, unable to suppress his curiosity any longer, he added:

"I suppose the message you brought was one of life or death for France."

"I think so," said Lannes, "but I know little of its nature, myself."



“I would not ask you to say any more. I know that you cannot speak of it. But you can tell me this. Are the Germans before Paris?”

“As nearly as I could tell, their vanguard was within fifteen miles of the capital.”

“Then if we strike at all we must strike quickly. I think we’re going to strike.”

Lannes was silent, and they entered the tent, where blankets were spread for him. A surgeon, young and skillful, came promptly, carefully removed the cap and bound up his head. John stood by and handed the surgeon the bandages.



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“You’re not much hurt,” he said to Lannes as he finished. “Your chief injury was shock, and that has passed. I can keep down the fever and you’ll be ready for work very soon. The high powered bullet makes a small and clean wound. It tears scarcely at all. Nor will your beauty be spoiled in the slightest, young sir. Both orifices are under the full thickness of your hair.”

“I’m grateful for all your assurances,” said Lannes, his old indomitable smile appearing in his eyes, “but you’ll have to cure me fast, faster than you ever cured anybody before, because I’m a flying man, and I fly again tomorrow.”

“Not tomorrow. In two or three days, perhaps—”

“Yes, tomorrow, I tell you! Nothing can keep me from it! This army will march tonight! I know it! and do you think such a wound as this can keep me here, when the fate of Europe is being decided? I’d rise from these blankets and go with the army even if I knew that it would make me fall dead the next day!”

He spoke with such fierce energy that the surgeon who at first sternly forbade, looked doubtful and then acquiescent.

“Go, then,” he said, “if you can. The fact that we have so many heroes may save us.”

He left John alone in the tent with Lannes. The Frenchman regarded his comrade with a cool, assured gaze.

“John,” he said, “I shall be up in the *Arrow* tomorrow. I’m not nervous and excited now, and I’ll not cause any fever in my wound. Somebody will come in five minutes with food. I shall eat a good supper, fall quietly to sleep, sleep soundly until night, then rise, refreshed and strong, and go about the work for which I’m best fitted. My mind shall rule over my body.”

“I see you’re what we would call at home a Christian Scientist, and in your case when a mind like yours is brought to bear there’s something in it.”

The food appeared within the prescribed time, and both ate heartily. John watched Lannes. He knew that he would suffer agonies of mortification if he were not able to share in the great movement which so obviously was about to take place, and, as he looked, he felt a growing admiration for Philip’s immense power of self-control.

Mind had truly taken command of body. Lannes ate slowly and with evident relish. From without came many noises of a great army, but he refused to be disturbed or excited by them. He spoke lightly of his life before the war, and of a little country home that the Lannes family had in Normandy.



“We own the two places, that and the home in the city,” he said. “The house in Normandy is small, but it’s beautiful, hidden by flower gardens and orchards, with a tiny river just back of the last orchard. Julie has spent most of her life there. She and my mother would go there now, but it’s safer at Lyons or in the Midi. A wonderful girl, Julie! I hope, John, that you’ll come for a long stay with us after the war, among the Normandy orchards and roses.”

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“I hope so,” said John. He was dreaming a little then, and he saw young Julie sitting at the table with them back in Paris. Truly, her golden hair was the purest gold he had ever seen, and there was no other blue like the blue of her blue eyes.

“Now, John,” said Lannes, “I’ll resume my place on the blankets and in ten minutes I’ll be asleep.”

He lay down, closed his eyes and three minutes short of the appointed time slept soundly. John gazed at him for a moment in wonder and admiration. The triumph of will over body had been complete. He touched Lannes’ head. It was normally cool. Either the surgeon’s skill had been great or the very strength of his resolve had been so immense that he had kept nerves and blood too quiet for fever to rise.

John left the tent, feeling for the time a personal detachment from everything. He had no position in this army, and no orders had been given to him by anybody. But he knew that he was among friends, and while he stood looking about in uncertainty Captain de Rougemont appeared.

“How is young Lannes?” he asked.

“Sleeping and free from fever. He will move with the army, or rather he will be hovering over it in his aeroplane. I never before saw such extraordinary power of will.”

“He’s a wonderful fellow. Of course, most of us have heard of him through his marvelous flying exploits, but it’s the first time that I’ve ever seen him. What are you going to do?”

“I don’t know. I seem to be left high and dry for the present, at least. My company is with one of the armies, but where that army is now is more than I can tell.”

“Nor do I know either. We’re all in the dark here, but any young strong man can certainly get a chance to fight in this war. I’m on the staff of General Vaugirard, a brigade commander, and he needs active young officers. You speak good French, and the fact that you came with Lannes will be a great recommendation, I’ll provide you with a horse and all else necessary.”

John thanked him with great sincerity. The offer was in truth most welcome. He knew that Lannes would willingly take him in the *Arrow*, but he felt that he would be in the way there and, as he had said to his friend, the rolling earth rather than the air around it was his true field of action. His first enrollment in the French army had been hurried and without due forms, but war had made it good.

“I’ll not come back for you until afternoon,” said de Rougemont, “because we’re already making preparations to advance, and I shall have much to do meanwhile. You can watch over Lannes and see that he’s not interrupted in his sleep. He’ll need it.”



“Yes, I have reason to know that he did not sleep at all last night, and he must be in a state of complete exhaustion. But, just as he predicted, he’ll rise, his old self again.”

Captain de Rougemont hurried away, and John was left alone in the midst of a great army. He stood before Lannes’ tent, which was in the midst of a grassy and rather elevated opening, and he heard once more the infinite sounds made by two hundred thousand armed men, blending into one vast, fused note.

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The army, too, was moving, or getting ready to move. Batteries of the splendid French artillery passed before him, squadrons of horsemen galloped by, and regiments of infantry followed. It all seemed confused, aimless to the eye, but John knew that nevertheless it was proceeding with order and method, directed by a master mind.

Often trumpets sounded and the motion of the troops seemed to quicken. Now he beheld men from the lands of the sun, the short, dark, fierce soldiers of the Midi, youths of Marseilles and youths of the first Roman province, whose native language was Provençal and not French. He remembered the men of the famous battalion who had marched from Marseilles to Paris singing Rouget de Lisle's famous song, and giving it their name, while they tore down an ancient kingdom. Doubtless, spirits no less ardent and fearless than theirs were here now.

He saw the Arabs in turbans and flowing robes, and black soldiers from Senegal, and seeing these men from far African deserts he knew that France was rallying her strength for a supreme effort. The German Empire, with the flush of unbroken victory in war after war, could command the complete devotion of its sons, but the French Republic, without such triumphs as yet, could do as well. John felt an immense pride because he, too, was republican to the core, and often there was a lot in a name.

It was about noon now, and the sun was shining with dazzling brilliancy. The tall hill and the low hill were clothed in deep green, and the waters of the little river that ran between, sparkled in the light. The air was crisp with a cool wind that blew from the west, and John felt that the omens were good for the great mysterious movement which he believed to be at hand.

He looked into the tent and saw that Lannes was sleeping soundly, with a good color in his face. A powerful constitution aided by a strong will had done its work and he was sure that on the morrow Lannes would again be the most daring French scout of the air.

John found the waiting hard work. There was so much movement and action that he wanted to be a part of it. He had thrown in his lot with this army and he wanted to share its work at once. Yet much time passed, and de Rougemont did not return. The evidences that the great French army was marching to the point designated in the note brought by Lannes multiplied. From the crest of the hill he already saw large bodies of troops marching forward steadily, their long blue coats flapping awkwardly about their legs. He wondered once more why they wore such an inharmonious and conspicuous uniform as blue frock coats and baggy red trousers.

He heard presently the martial sounds of the Marseillaise, and the regiment singing it passed very close to him. The men were nearly all short, dark, and very young. But the spring and fire with which they marched were magnificent. As they thundered out the grand old tune their feet seemed scarcely to touch the earth, and fierce eyes glowed in dark faces.



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John, with a start, recognized one, a petty officer, a sergeant it seemed, who marched beside the line. He was the most eager of them all, and his face was tense and wrapt. It was Geronimo, the little Apache, in whom the spark of patriotism had lit the fire of genius. His call had come and it had drawn him from a half savage life into one of glorious deeds for his country.

"He'll be a general if he isn't killed first," murmured John, with absolute conviction.

Geronimo, at that moment, looked his way and recognized him. His hand flew to his head in a military salute, which John returned in kind, and his eyes plainly showed pleasure at sight of this new friend whom he had made in a few minutes on the Butte Montmartre.

"We meet again," he said, "and before the week is out it will be victory or death."

"I think so, too," said John.

"I know it," said Geronimo, and, saluting once more, he marched on with his regiment. John saw them pass across the valley and join the great mass of troops that filled the whole northern horizon. About an hour later a cheerful voice called to him, and he beheld Lannes standing in the door of the tent, his head well bandaged, but his eyes clear and strong and the natural color in his face.

"What has happened, John?" he asked.

"You've slept six or seven hours."

"And while I slept, the army, as I can see, has begun its march according to the order we brought. I'm sorry I had to miss any of it, but I was bound to sleep."

"You're a marvel."

"No marvel at all. I'm merely one of a million Frenchmen molded on the same model. An army can't move fast and tonight the *Arrow* and I will be hovering over its front. There's your old place for you in the plane."

"I'd only be in your way, Philip. But can't you wait until tomorrow? Don't rush yourself while you've got a new wound."

"The wound is nothing. I'm bound to go tonight with the *Arrow*. But what are you going to do if you don't go with me?"

"A new friend whom I've made while you slept has found a place for me with him, on the staff of General Vaugirard, a brigade commander. I shall serve there until I'm able to rejoin the Strangers."



“General Vaugirard! I’ve seen him. An able man, and a most noticeable figure. You’ve fared well.”

“I hope so. Here comes Captain de Rougemont.”

The captain showed much pleasure at seeing Lannes up and apparently well.

“What! Has our king of the air revived so soon!” he exclaimed.

“The dead themselves would rise when we’re about to strike for the life of France,” said Lannes, his dramatic quality again coming to the front.

“Well spoken,” said de Rougemont, the color flushing into his face.



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"I return to my aeroplane within two hours," said Lannes. "I hold a commission from our government which allows me to operate somewhat as a free lance, but, of course, I shall conform for the present to the wishes of the man who commands the flying corps of this army. Meanwhile, I leave with you my young Yankee friend here, John Scott. For some strange reason I've conceived for him a strong brotherly affection. Kindly see that he doesn't get killed unless it's necessary for our country, and this, I think, is a long enough speech for me to make now."

"I'll do my best for him," said de Rougemont earnestly. "I've come for you, Scott."

"Good-bye, Philip," said John, extending his hand.

"Good-bye, John," said Lannes, "and do as I tell you. Don't get yourself killed unless it's absolutely necessary."

Usually so stoical, his voice showed emotion, and he turned away after the strong pressure of the two hands. John and de Rougemont walked down the valley, where they joined General Vaugirard and the rest of his staff.

As soon as John saw the general he knew what Lannes meant by his phrase "a noticeable figure." General Vaugirard was a man of about sixty, so enormously fat that he must have weighed three hundred pounds. His face was covered with thick white beard, out of which looked small, sharp red eyes. He reminded John of a great white bear. The little red eyes bored him through for an instant, and then their owner said briefly:

"De Rougemont has vouched for you. Stay with him. An orderly has your horse."

A French soldier held for him a horse bearing all the proper equipment, and John, saluting the general, sprang into the saddle. He was a good horseman, and now he felt thoroughly sure of himself. If it came to the worst, and he was unseated, the earth was not far away, but if he were thrown out of the *Arrow* he would have a long and terrible time in falling.

General Vaugirard had not yet mounted, but stood beside a huge black horse, fit to carry such a weight. He was listening and looking with the deepest attention and his staff was silent around him. John saw from their manner that these men liked and respected their immense general.

More trumpets sounded, much nearer now, and a messenger galloped up, handing a note to General Vaugirard, who glanced at it hastily, uttered a deep Ah! of relief and joy and thrust it into his pocket.

Then saying to his staff, "Gentlemen, we march at once," he put one hand on his horse's shoulder, and, to John's immense surprise, leaped as lightly into the saddle as if



he had been a riding master. He settled himself easily into his seat, spoke a word to his staff, and then he rode with his regiments toward that great mass of men on the horizon who were steadily marching forward.

John kept by the side of de Rougemont. There were brief introductions to some of the young officers nearest him, and he felt an air of friendliness about him. As de Rougemont told them he had already given ample proof of his devotion to the cause, and he was accepted promptly as one of them.



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John was now conscious how strongly he had projected himself into the life of the French. He was an American for generations back and his blood by descent was British. He had been among the Germans and he liked them personally, he had served already with the English, and their point of view was more nearly like the American than any other. But he was here with the French and he felt for them the deepest sympathy of all. He was conscious of a tie like that of blood brotherhood.

He knew it was due to the old and yet unpaid help France had given to his own country, and above all to the conviction that France, minding her own business, had been set upon by a greater power, with intent to crush and destroy. France was attacked by a dragon, and the old similes of mythology floated through his mind, but, oftenest, that of Andromeda chained to the rock. And the figure that typified France always had the golden hair and dark blue eyes of slim, young Julie Lannes.

They advanced several hours almost in silence, as far as talk was concerned, but two hundred thousand men marching made a deep and steady murmur. General Vaugirard kept well in front of his staff, riding, despite his immense bulk, like a Comanche, and occasionally putting his glasses to those fiery little red eyes. At length he turned and beckoned to John, who promptly drew up to his side.

“You speak good French?” he said in his native tongue.

“Yes, sir,” replied John promptly.

“I understand that you came with the flying man, Lannes, who brought the message responsible for this march, and that it is not the only time you’ve done good service in our cause?”

John bowed modestly.

“Did you see any German troops on the way?”

“Only a band of Uhlans.”

“A mere scouting party. It occurred to me that you might have seen masses of troops belonging to the foe, indicating perhaps what is awaiting us at the end of our march.”

“I know nothing, sir. The Uhlans were all the foes we saw from the air, save the man who shot Lannes.”

“I believe you. You belong to the youngest of the great nations. Your people have not yet learned to say with the accents of truth the thing that is not. I am sixty years old, and yet I have the curiosity to know where I am going and what I am expected to do when I get there. Behold how I, an old man, speak so frankly to you, so young.”



“When I saw your excellency leap into the saddle you did not seem to me to be more than twenty.”

John called him “your excellency” because he thought that in the absence of precise knowledge of what was fitting the term was as good as another.

A smile twinkled in the eyes of General Vaugirard. Evidently he was pleased.

“That is flattery, flattery, young man,” he said, “but it pleases me. Since I’ve drawn from you all you know, which is but little, you may fall back with your comrades. But keep near; I fancy I shall have much for you to do before long. Meanwhile, we march on, in ignorance of what is awaiting us. Ah, well, such is life!”



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He seemed to John a strange compound of age and youth, a mixture of the philosopher and the soldier. That he was a real leader John could no longer doubt. He saw the little red eyes watching everything, and he noticed that the regiments of Vaugirard had no superiors in trimness and spirit.

They marched until sundown and stopped in some woods clear of undergrowth, like most of those in Europe. The camp kitchens went to work at once, and they received good food and coffee. As far as John could see men were at rest, but he could not tell whether the whole army was doing likewise. It spread out much further to both right and left than his eyes could reach.

The members of the staff tethered their horses in the grove, and after supper stood together and talked, while the fat general paced back and forth, his brow wrinkled in deep thought.

“Good old Papa Vaugirard is studying how to make the best of us,” said de Rougemont. “We’re all his children. They say that he knows nearly ten thousand men under his command by face if not by name, and we trust him as no other brigade commander in the army is trusted by his troops. He’s thinking hard now, and General Vaugirard does not think for nothing. As soon as he arrives at what seems to him a solution of his problem he will begin to whistle. Then he will interrupt his whistling by saying: ‘Ah, well, such is life.’”

“I hope he’ll begin to whistle soon,” said John, “because his brow is wrinkling terribly.”

He watched the huge general with a sort of fascinated gaze. Seen now in the twilight, Vaugirard’s very bulk was impressive. He was immense, strong, primeval. He walked back and forth over a line about thirty feet long, and the deep wrinkles remained on his brow. Every member of his staff was asking how long it would last.

A sound, mellow and soft, but penetrating, suddenly arose. General Vaugirard was whistling, and John’s heart gave a jump of joy. He did not in the least doubt de Rougemont’s assertion that an answer to the problem had been found.

General Vaugirard whistled to himself softly and happily. Then he said twice, and in very clear tones: “Ah, well, such is life!” He began to whistle again, stopped in a moment or two and called to de Rougemont, with whom he talked a while.

“We’re to march once more in a half-hour,” said de Rougemont, when he returned to John and his comrades. “It must be a great converging movement in which time is worth everything. At least, General Vaugirard thinks so, and he has a plan to get us into the very front of the action.”



“I hope so,” said John. “I’m not anxious to get killed, but I’d rather be in the battle than wait. I wonder if I’ll meet anywhere on the front that company to which I belong, the Strangers.”

“I think I’ve heard of them,” said de Rougemont, “a body of Americans and Englishmen, volunteers in the French service, commanded by Captain Daniel Colton.”



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“Right you are, and I’ve two particular friends in that company—I suppose they’ve rejoined it—Wharton, an American, and Carstairs, an Englishman. We went through a lot of dangers together before we reached the British army near Mons, and I’d like to see them again.”

“Maybe you will, but here comes an extraordinary procession.”

They heard many puffing sounds, uniting in one grand puffing chorus, and saw advancing down a white road toward them a long, ghostly train, as if a vast troop of extinct monsters had returned to earth and were marching this way. But John knew very well that it was a train of automobiles and raising the glasses that he now always carried he saw that they were empty except for the chauffeurs.

General Vaugirard began to whistle his mellowest and most musical tune, stopping only at times to mutter a few words under his breath. John surmised that he was expressing deep satisfaction, and that he had been waiting for the motor train. War was now fought under new conditions. The Germans had thousands and scores of thousands of motors, and perhaps the French were provided almost as well.

“I fancy,” said de Rougemont, who was also watching the arrival of the machines, “that we’ll leave our horses now and travel by motor.”

De Rougemont’s supposition was correct. The line of automobiles began to mass in front, many rows deep, and all the chauffeurs, their great goggles shining through the darkness, were bent over their wheels ready to be off at once with their armed freight. It filled John with elation, and he saw the same spirit shining in the eyes of the young French officers.

General Vaugirard began to puff like one of the machines. He threw out his great chest, pursed up his mouth and emitted his breath in little gusts between his lips, “Very good! Very good, my children!” he said, “Oil and electricity will carry us now, and we go forward, not backward!”

True to de Rougemont’s prediction, the horses were given to orderlies, and the staff and a great portion of the troops were taken into the cars. General Vaugirard and several of the older officers occupied a huge machine, and just behind him came de Rougemont, John and a half-dozen young lieutenants and captains in another. Before them stretched a great white road. Far overhead hovered many aeroplanes. John had no doubt that the *Arrow* was among them, or rather was the farthest one forward. Lannes’ eager soul, wound or no wound, would keep him in front.

They now moved rapidly, and John’s spirits continued to rise. There was something wonderful in this swift march on wheels in the moonlight. As far back as he could see the machines came in a stream, and to the left and right he saw them proceeding on



other roads also. All the country was strange to John. He could not remember having seen it from the aeroplane, and he was sure that the army, instead of going to Paris, was bound for some point where it would come in instant contact with the German forces.



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“Do you know the road?” he asked of de Rougemont.

“Not at all. I’m from the Gironde country. I’ve been in Paris, but I know little of the region about it. A good way to reach the front, is it not, Mr. Scott?”

“Fine. I fancy that we’re hurried forward to make a link in a chain, or at least to stop a gap.”

“And those large birds overhead are scouting for us.”

“Look! One of them is dropping down. I dare say it’s making a report to some general higher in rank than ours.”

He pointed with a long forefinger, and John watched the aeroplane come down in its slanting course like a falling star. It was a beautiful night, a light blue sky, with a fine moon and hosts of clear stars. One could see far, and soon after the plane descended John saw it rise again from the same spot, ascend high in air, and shoot off toward the east.

“That may have been Lannes,” he said.

“Likely as not,” said de Rougemont.

John now observed General Vaugirard, who sat erect in the front of his automobile, with a pair of glasses, relatively as huge as himself, to his eyes. Occasionally he would purse his lips, and John knew that his favorite expression was coming forth. To the young American’s imaginative mind his broad back expressed rigidity and strength.

The great murmuring sound, the blended advance of so many men, made John sleepy by-and-by. In spite of himself his heavy eyelids drooped, and although he strove manfully against it, sleep took him. When he awoke he heard the same deep murmur, like the roll of the sea, and saw the army still advancing. It was yet night, though fine and clear, and there before him was the broad, powerful back of the general. Vaugirard was still using the glasses and John judged that he had not slept at all. But in his own machine everybody was asleep except the man at the wheel.

The country had grown somewhat hillier, but its characteristics were the same, fertile, cultivated fields, a small wood here and there, clear brooks, and church spires shining in the dusk. Both horse and foot advanced across the fields, but the roads were occupied by the motors, which John judged were carrying at least twenty thousand men and maybe forty thousand.

He was not sleepy now, and he watched the vast panorama wheel past. He knew without looking at his watch that the night was nearly over, because he could already



smell the dawn. The wind was freshening a bit, and he heard its rustle in the leaves of a wood as they pushed through it.

Then came a hum and a whir, and a long line of men on motor cycles at the edge of the road crept up and then passed them. One checked his speed enough to run by the side of John's car, and the rider, raising his head a little, gazed intently at the young American. His cap closed over his face like a hood, but the man knew him.

"Fortune puts us on the same road again, Mr. Scott," he said.



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"I don't believe I know you," said John, although there was a familiar note in the voice.

"And yet you've met me several times, and under exciting conditions. It seems to me that we're always pursuing similar things, or we wouldn't be together on the same road so often. You're acute enough. Don't you know me now?"

"I think I do. You're Fernand Weber, the Alsatian."

"And so I am. I knew your memory would not fail you. It's a great movement that we've begun, Mr. Scott. France will be saved or destroyed within the next few days."

"I think so."

"You've deserted your friend, Philip Lannes, the finest of our airmen."

"Oh, no, I haven't. He's deserted me. I couldn't afford to be a burden on his aeroplane at such a time as this."

"I suppose not. I saw an aeroplane come down to earth a little while ago, and then rise again. I'm sure it was his machine, the *Arrow*."

"So am I."

"Here's where he naturally would be. Good-bye, Mr. Scott, and good luck to you. I must go on with my company."

"Good-bye and good luck," repeated John, as the Alsatian shot forward. He liked Weber, who had a most pleasing manner, and he was glad to have seen him once more.

"Who was that?" asked de Rougemont, waking from his sleep and catching the last words of farewell.

"An Alsatian, named Fernand Weber, who has risked his life more than once for France. He belongs to the motor-cycle corps that's just passing."

"May he and his comrades soon find the enemy, because here is the day."

The leaves and grass rippled before the breeze and over the eastern hills the dawn broke.

CHAPTER IV

THE INVISIBLE HAND



It was a brilliant morning sun, deepening the green of the pleasant land, lighting up villages and glinting off church steeples. In a field a little distance to their right John saw two peasants at work already, bent over, their eyes upon the ground, apparently as indifferent to the troops as the troops were to them.

It was very early, but the sun was rising fast, unfolding a splendid panorama. The French army with its blues and reds was more spectacular than the German, and hence afforded a more conspicuous target. John was sure that if the war went on the French would discard these vivid uniforms and betake themselves to gray or khaki. He saw clearly that the day of gorgeous raiment for the soldier had passed.

The great puffing sound of primeval monsters which had blended into one rather harmonious note ceased, as if by signal, and the innumerable motors stopped. As far as John could see the army stretched to left and right over roads, hills and fields, but in the fields behind them the silent peasants went on with their work—in fields which the Republic had made their own.



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"I think we take breakfast here," said Rougemont. "War is what one of your famous American generals said it was, but for the present, at least, we are marching *de luxe*. Here comes one of those glorious camp-kitchens."

An enormous motor vehicle, equipped with all the paraphernalia of a kitchen, stopped near them, and men, trim and neatly dressed, served hot food and steaming coffee. General Vaugirard had alighted also, and John noticed that his step was much more springy and alert than that of some officers half his age. His breath came in great gusts, and the small portion of his face not covered by thick beard was ruddy and glowing with health. He drank several cups of coffee with startling rapidity, draining each at a breath, and between times he whistled softly a pleasing little refrain.

The march must be going well. Undoubtedly General Vaugirard had received satisfactory messages in the night, while his young American aide, and other Frenchmen as young, slept.

"Well, my children," he said, rubbing his hands after his last cup of coffee had gone to its fate, "the day dawns and behold the sun of France is rising. It's not the sun of Austerlitz, but a modest republican sun that can grow and grow. Behold we are at the appointed place, set forth in the message that came to us from the commander-in-chief through Paris, and then by way of the air! And, look, my children, the bird from the blue descends once more among us!"

There were flying machines of many kinds in the air, but John promptly picked out one which seemed to be coming with the flight of an eagle out of its uppermost heights. He seemed to know its slim, lithe shape, and the rapidity and decision of its approach. His heart thrilled, as it had thrilled when he saw the *Arrow* coming for the first time on that spur of the Alps near Salzburg.

"It's for me," said General Vaugirard, as he looked upward. "This flying demon, this man without fear, was told to report directly to me, and he comes at the appointed hour."

Something of the mystery that belongs to the gulf of the infinite was reflected in the general's eyes. He, too, felt that man's flight in the heavens yet had in it a touch of the supernatural. Lannes' plane had seemed to shoot from white clouds, out of unknown spaces, and the general ceased to whistle or breathe gustily. His chest rose and fell more violently than usual, but the breath came softly.

The plane descended rapidly and settled down on the grass very near them. Lannes saluted and presented a note to General Vaugirard, who started and then expelled the breath from his lungs in two or three prodigious puffs.



“Good, my son, good!” he exclaimed, patting Lannes repeatedly on the shoulder; “and now a cup of coffee for you at once! Hurry with it, some of you idle children! Can’t you see that he needs it!”

John was first with the coffee, which Lannes drank eagerly, although it was steaming hot. John saw that he needed it very much indeed, as he was white and shaky. He noticed, too, that there were spots of blood on Lannes’ left sleeve.



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“What is it, Philip?” he whispered. “You’ve been attacked again?”

“Aye, truly. My movements seem to be observed by some mysterious eye. A shot was fired at me, and again it came from a French plane. That was all I could see. We were in a bank of mist at the time, and I just caught a glimpse of the plane itself. The man was a mere shapeless figure to me. I had no time to fight him, because I was due here with another message which made vengeance upon him at that time a matter of little moment.”

He flicked the red drops off his sleeve, and added:

“It was but a scratch. My weary look comes from a long and hard flight and not from the mysterious bullet. I’m to rest here an hour, which will be sufficient to restore me, and then I’m off again.”

“Is there any rule against your telling me what you’ve seen, Philip?”

De Rougemont and several other officers had approached, drawn by their curiosity, and interest in Lannes.

“None at all,” he replied in a tone all could hear, “but I’m able to speak in general terms only. I can’t give details, because I don’t know ’em. The Germans are not many miles ahead. They’re in hundreds of thousands, and I hear that this is only one of a half-dozen armies.”

“And our own force?” said de Rougemont eagerly.

Lannes’ chest expanded. The dramatic impulse was strong upon him again.

“There is another army on our right, and another on our left,” he replied, “and although I don’t know surely, I think there are others still further on the line. The English are somewhere with us, too.”

John felt his face tingle as the blood rose in it. He had left a Paris apparently lost. Within a day almost a tremendous transformation had occurred. A mighty but invisible intellect, to which he was yet scarcely able to attach a name, had been at work. The French armies, the beaten and the unbeaten, had become bound together like huge links in a chain, and the same invisible and all but nameless mind was drawing the chain forward with gigantic force.

“A million Frenchmen must be advancing,” he heard Lannes saying, and then he came out of his vision. General Vaugirard bustled up and gave orders to de Rougemont, who said presently to John:

“Can you ride a motor cycle?”



“I’ve had some experience, and I’m willing to make it more.”

“Good. In this army, staff officers will no longer have horses shot under them. We’re to take orders on motor cycles. They’ve been sent ahead for us, and here’s yours waiting for you.”

The cycles were leaning against trees, and the members of the staff took their places beside them. General Vaugirard walked a little distance up the road, climbed into an automobile and, standing up, looked a long time through his glasses. Lannes, who had been resting on the grass, approached the general and John saw him take a note from him. Then Lannes went away to the *Arrow* and sailed off into the heavens. Many other planes were flying over the French army and far off in front John saw through his own glasses a fleet of them which he knew must be German.



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Then he heard a sound, faint but deep, which came rolling like an echo, and he recognized it as the distant note of a big gun. He quivered a little, as he leaned against his motor cycle, but quickly stiffened again to attention. The faint rolling sound came again from their right and then many times. John, using his glasses, saw nothing there, and the giant general, still standing up in the car and also using his glasses, saw nothing there either.

Yet the same quiver that affected John had gone through this whole army of two hundred thousand men, one of the huge links in the French chain. There was none among them who did not know that the far note was the herald of battle, not a mere battle of armies, but of nations face to face.

General Vaugirard did not show any excitement. He leaped lightly from the car, and then began to pace up and down slowly, as if he were awaiting orders. The men moved restlessly on the meadows, looking like a vast sea of varied colors, as the sun glimmered on the red and blue of their uniforms.

But no order came for them to advance. John thought that perhaps they were saved to be driven as a wedge into the German center and whispered his belief to de Rougemont, who agreed with him.

"They are opening on the left, too," said the Frenchman. "Can't you hear the growling of the guns there?"

John listened and soon he separated the note from other sounds. Beyond a doubt the battle had now begun on both flanks, though at distant points. He wondered where the English force was, though he had an idea that it was on the left then. Yet he was already thoroughly at home with the staff of General Vaugirard.

The growling on either side of them seemed soon to come a little closer, but John knew nevertheless that it was many miles away.

"Not an enemy in sight, not even a trace of smoke," said de Rougemont to him. "We seem to be a great army here, merely resting in the fields, and yet we know that a huge battle is going on."

"And that's about all we do know," said John. "What has impressed me in this war is the fact that high officers even know so little. When cannon throw shells ten or twelve miles, eyesight doesn't get much chance."

A wait for a full half-hour followed, a period of intense anxiety for all in the group, and for the whole army too. John used his glasses freely, and often he saw the French soldiers moving about in a restless manner, until they were checked by their officers. But most



of them were lying down, their blue coats and red trousers making a vast and vivid blur against the green of the grass.

All the while the sound of the cannon grew, but, despite the power of his glasses, John could not see a sign of war. Only that roaring sound came to tell him that battle, vast, gigantic, on a scale the world had never seen before, was joined, and the volume of the cannon fire, beyond a doubt, was growing. It pulsed heavily, and either he or his fancy noticed a steady jarring motion. A faint acrid taint crept into the air and he felt it in his nose and throat. He coughed now and then, and he observed that men around him coughed also. But, on the whole, the army was singularly still, the soldiers straining eye or ear to see something or hear more of the titanic struggle that was raging on either side of them.

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John again searched the horizon eagerly with his glasses, but it showed only green hills and bits of wood, bare of human activity. The French aeroplanes still hovered, but not in front of General Vaugirard. They were off to right and left, where the wings of the nations had closed in combat. He was ceasing to think of the foes as armies, but as nations in battle line. Here stood not a French army, but France, and there stood not a German army, but Germany.

As he looked toward the left he picked out a narrow road, running between hedges, and showing but a strip of white even through the glasses. He saw something coming along this road. It was far away when he first noticed it, but it was coming with great speed, and he was soon able to tell that it was a man on a motor cycle. His pulse leaped again. He felt instinctively that the rider was for them and that he bore something of great import. The figure, man and cycle, molded into one, sped along the narrow road which led to the base of the hill on which General Vaugirard and his staff stood.

The huge general saw the approaching figure too, and he began to whistle melodiously like the note of a piccolo, with the vast thunder of the guns accompanying him as an orchestra. John knew that the cyclist was a messenger, and that he was eagerly expected. An order of some kind was at hand! All the members of the staff had the same conviction.

The cyclist stopped at the bottom of the hill, leaped from the machine and ran to General Vaugirard, to whom he handed a note. The general read it, expelled his breath in a mighty gust, and turning to his staff, said:

“My children, our time has come. The whole central army of which we are a part will advance. It will perhaps be known before night whether France is to remain a great nation or become the vassal of Germany. My children, if France ever had need for you to fight with all your hearts and souls, that need is here today.”

His manner was simple and majestic, and his words touched the mind and feeling of every one who heard them. John was moved as much as if he had been a Frenchman too. He felt a profound sympathy for this devoted France, which had suffered so much, to which his own country still owed that great debt, and which had a right to her own soil, fertilized with so many centuries of labor.

General Vaugirard, resting a pad on his knee, wrote rapid notes which he gave to the members of his staff in turn to be delivered. John's was to a Parisian regiment lying in a field, and expanding body and mind into instant action, he leaped upon the cycle and sped away. It was often hard for him now to separate fact from fancy. His imagination, vivid at all times, painted new pictures while such a tremendous drama passed before him.



Yet he knew afterward that the sound of the battle did increase in volume as he flew over the short distance to the regiment. Both east and west were shaking with the tremendous concussion. One crash he heard distinctly above the others and he believed it was that of a forty-two centimeter.



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He reached the field, his cycle spun between the eager soldiers, and as he leaped off in the presence of the colonel he fairly thrust the note into his hand, exclaiming at the same time in his zeal, "It's an order to advance! The whole Army of the Center is about to attack."

He called it the Army of the Center at a guess, but names did not matter now. The colonel glanced at the note, waved his sword above his head and cried in a loud voice:

"My lads, up and forward!"

The regiment arose with a roar of cheering and began to advance across the fields. John caught a glimpse of a petty officer, short and small, but as compact and fierce as a panther, driving on men who needed no driving. "Geronimo is going to make good," he said to himself. "He'll do or die today."

As he raced back for new orders, if need be, he knew now that fact not fancy told him the battle was growing. The earth shook not only on right and left but in front also. A hasty look through the glasses showed little tongues of fire licking up on the horizon before them and he knew that they came from the monster cannon of the Germans who were surely advancing, while the French were advancing also to meet them.

General Vaugirard sprang into his automobile, taking only two of his senior officers with him, while the rest followed on their motor cycles. As far as John could see on either side the vast rows of French swept across hills and fields. There was little shouting now and no sound of bands, but presently a shout arose behind them: "Way for the artillery!"

Then he heard cries, the rumble of wheels and the rapid beat of hoofs. With an instinctive shudder, lest he be ground to pieces, he pulled from the road, and saw the motor of General Vaugirard turn out also. Then the great French batteries thundered past to seek positions soon in the fields behind low hills. He saw them a little later unlimbering and making ready.

The French advance changed from a walk to a trot. John saw the Parisian regiment, not far away, but at the very front and he knew that among all those ardent souls there was none more ardent than that of the little Apache, Bougainville. Meanwhile, Vaugirard in his motor kept to the road and the staff on their motor cycles followed closely.

On both flanks the thunder of massed cannon was deepening, and now John, who used his glasses occasionally, was able to see wisps and tendrils of smoke on the eastern and northern horizons. The tremor in the air was strong and continuous. It played incessantly upon the drums of his ears, and he found that he could not hear the words of the other aides so well as before. But there was no succession of crashes. The sound was more like the roaring of a distant storm.



They advanced another mile, two hundred thousand men, afire with zeal, a whole vast army moved forward as the other French armies were by the hidden hand which they could not see, of which they knew nothing, but the touch of which they could feel.



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John heard a whizzing sound, he caught a glimpse of a dark object, rushing forward at frightful velocity, and then he and his wheel reeled beneath the force of a tremendous explosion. The shell coming from an invisible point, miles away, had burst some distance on his right, scattering death and wounds over a wide radius. But Vaugirard's brigades did not stop for one instant. They cheered loudly, closed up the gap in their line, and went on steadily as before. Some one began to sing the Marseillaise, and in an instant the song, like fire in dry grass, spread along a vast front. John had often wished that he could have heard the armies of the French Revolution singing their tremendous battle hymn as they marched to victory, and now he heard it on a scale far more gigantic than in the days of the First French Republic.

The vast chorus rolled for miles and for all he knew other armies, far to right and left, might be singing it, too. The immense volume of the song drowned out everything, even that tremor in the air, caused by the big guns. John's heart beat so hard that it caused actual physical pain in his side, and presently, although he was unconscious of it, he was thundering out the verses with the others.

He was riding by the side of de Rougemont, and he stopped singing long enough to shout, at the top of his voice:

"No enemy in sight yet?"

"No," de Rougemont shouted back, "but he doesn't need to be. The German guns have our range."

From a line on the distant horizon, from positions behind hills, the German shells were falling fast, cutting down men by hundreds, tearing great holes in the earth, and filling the air with an awful shrieking and hissing. It was all the more terrible because the deadly missiles seemed to come from nowhere. It was like a mortal hail rained out of heaven. John had not yet seen a German, nothing but those tongues of fire licking up on the horizon, and some little whitish clouds of smoke, lifting themselves slowly above the trees, yet the thunder was no longer a rumble. It had a deep and angry note, whose burden was death.

They must maintain their steady march directly toward the mouths of those guns. John comprehended in those awful moments that the task of the French was terrible, almost superhuman. If their nation was to live they must hurl back a victorious foe, practically numberless, armed and equipped with everything that a great race in a half-century of supreme thought and effort could prepare for war. It was spirit and patriotism against the monstrous machine of fire and steel, and he trembled lest the machine could overcome anything in the world.

He was about to shout again to de Rougemont, but his words were lost in the rending crash of the French artillery. Their batteries were posted on both sides of him, and they,



too, had found the range. All along the front hundreds of guns were opening and John hastily thrust portions that he tore from his handkerchief into his ear, lest he be deafened forever.



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The sight, at first magnificent, now became appalling. The shells came in showers and the French ranks were torn and mangled. Companies existed and then they were not. The explosions were like the crash of thunderbolts, but through it all the French continued to advance. Those whose knees grew weak beneath them were upborne and carried forward by the press of their comrades. The French gunners, too, were making prodigious efforts but with cannon of such long range neither side could see what its batteries were accomplishing. John was sure, though, that the great French artillery must be giving as good as it received.

He was conscious that General Vaugirard was still going forward along the long white road, sweeping his glasses from left to right and from right to left in a continuous semi-circle, apparently undisturbed, apparently now without human emotion. He was no figure of romance, but he was a man, cool and powerful, ready to die with all his men, if death for them was needed.

Still the invisible hand swept them on, the hand that a million men in action could not see, but which every one of the million, in his own way, felt. The crash of the guns on both sides had become fused together into one roar, so steady and continued so long that the sound seemed almost normal. Voices could now be heard under it and John spoke to de Rougemont.

“Can you make anything of it?” he asked. “Do we win or do we lose?”

“It’s too early yet to tell anything. The cannon only are speaking, but you’ll note that our army is advancing.”

“Yes, I see it. Before I’ve only beheld it in retreat before overwhelming numbers. This is different.”

General Vaugirard beckoned to his aides, and again sent them out with messages. John’s note was to the commander of a battery of field guns telling him to move further forward. He started at once through the fields on his motor cycle, but he could not go fast now. The ground had been cut deep by artillery and cavalry and torn by shells and he had to pick his way, while the shower of steel, sent by men who were firing by mathematics, swept over and about him.

Shivers seized him more than once, as shrapnel and pieces of shell flew by. Now and then he covered his eyes with one hand to shut out the horror of dead and torn men lying on either side of his path, but in spite of the shells, in spite of the deadly nausea that assailed him at times, he went on. The rush of air from a shell threw him once from his motor cycle, but as he fell on soft clodded earth he was not hurt, and, springing quickly back on his wheel, he reached the battery.



The order was welcome to the commander of the guns, who was anxious to go closer, and, limbering up, he advanced as rapidly as weapons of such great weight could be dragged across the fields. John followed, that he might report the result. They were now facing toward the east and the whole horizon there was a blaze of fire. The shells were coming thicker and thicker, and the air was filled with the screaming of the shrapnel.

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The commander of the battery, a short, powerful Frenchman, was as cool as ice, and John drew coolness from him. One can get used to almost anything, and his nervous tremors were passing. Despite the terrible fire of the German artillery the French army was still advancing. Many thousands had fallen already before the shells and shrapnel of the invisible foe, but there had been no check.

The cannon crossed a brook, and, unlimbering, again opened a tremendous fire. To one side and on a hill here, a man whom the commander watched closely was signaling. John knew that he was directing the aim of the battery and the French, like the Germans, were killing by mathematics.

He rode his cycle to the crest of a little elevation behind the battery and with his newfound coolness began to use his glasses again. Despite the thin, whitish smoke, he saw men on the horizon, mere manikins moving back and forth, apparently without meaning, but men nevertheless. He caught, too, the outline of giant tubes, the huge guns that were sending the ceaseless rain of death upon the French.

He also saw signs of hurry and confusion among those manikins, and he knew that the French shells were striking them. He rode down to the commander and told him. The swart Frenchman grinned.

“My children are biting,” he said, glancing affectionately at his guns. “They’re brave lads, and their teeth are long and sharp.”

He looked at his signal man, and the guns let loose again with a force that sent the air rushing away in violent waves. Batteries farther on were firing also with great rapidity. In most of these the gunners were directed by field telephones strung hastily, but the one near John still depended upon signal men. It was composed of eight five-inch guns, and John believed that its fire was most accurate and deadly.

Using his glasses again, he saw that the disturbance among those manikins was increasing. They were running here and there, and many seemed to vanish suddenly—he knew that they were blown away by the shells. To the right of the great French battery some lighter field guns were advancing. One drawn by eight horses had not yet unlimbered, and he saw a shell strike squarely upon it. In the following explosion pieces of steel whizzed by him and when the smoke cleared away the gun, the gunners and the horses were all gone. The monster shell had blown everything to pieces. The other guns hurried on, took up their positions and began to fire. John shuddered violently, but in a moment or two, he, too, forgot the little tragedy in the far more gigantic one that was being played before him.

He rode back to General Vaugirard and told him that his order had been obeyed. The general nodded, but did not take his glasses from the horizon, where a long gray line

was beginning to appear against the green of the earth. "It goes well so far," John heard him say in the under note which was audible beneath the thunder of the battle.



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In a quarter of an hour the great batteries limbered up again, and once more the French army went forward, the troops to lie down and wait again, while the artillery worked with ferocious energy. It was yet a battle of big guns, at least in the center. The armies were not near enough to each other for rifles; in truth not near enough yet to be seen. John, even with his glasses, could only discern the gray line advancing, he could make little of its form or order or of what it was trying to do.

But a light wind was now bringing smoke from one flank where the battle was far heavier than in the center, and the concussion of the artillery at that point became so frightful that the air seemed to come in waves of the utmost violence and to beat upon the drum of the ear with the force of a hammer. Owing to the wind John could not hear the battle on the other flank so well, but he believed that it was being fought there with equal fury and determination.

He was watching with such intentness that he did not hear the sweep of an aeroplane behind him, but he did see Lannes run to General Vaugirard's car and give him a note.

While the general read and pondered, Lannes turned toward the wheel on which John sat. Although he tried to preserve calm, John knew that he was tremendously excited. He had taken off his heavy glasses and his wonderful gray eyes were flashing. It was obvious to his friend, who now knew him so well, that he was moved by some tremendous emotion.

John rode up by the side of Lannes and said:

"What have you seen, Philip? You can tell a little at least, can't you?"

"More than a little! A lot! The *Arrow* and I have looked over a great area, John! Miles and miles and yet more miles! and wherever we went we gazed down upon armies locked in battle, and beyond that were other armies locked in battle, too! The nations meet in wrath! You can't see it here, nor from anywhere on the earth! It's only in the air high overhead that one can get even a partial view of its immensity! The English army is off there on the flank, a full thirty miles away, and you're not likely to see it today!"

He would have said more, but General Vaugirard beckoned to him, gave him a note which he had written hastily, and in a few more minutes Lannes was flitting like a swallow through the heavens. Then General Vaugirard's car moved forward and brigade after brigade of the French army resumed its advance also.

John felt that the great German machine had been met by a French machine as great. Perhaps the master mind that thrills through an organism of steel no less than one of human flesh was on the French side. He did not know. The invisible hand thrusting forward the French armies was still invisible to him. Yet he felt with the certainty of conviction that the eye and the brain of one man were achieving a marvel. In some

mysterious manner the French defense had become an offense. The Republican troops were now attacking and the Imperial troops were seeking to hold fast.



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He seemed to comprehend it all in an instant, and a mighty joy surged over him. De Rougemont saw his glistening eye and he asked curiously:

“What is it that you are feeling so strongly, Mr. Scott?”

“The thrill of the advance! The unknown plan, whatever it is, is working! Your nation is about to be saved! I feel it! I know it!”

De Rougemont gazed at him, and then the light leaped into his own eyes.

“A prophet! A prophet!” he cried. “Inspired youth speaks!”

A great crisis may call into being a great impulse, and de Rougemont’s words were at once accepted as truth by all the young aides. Words of fire, words vital with life had gone forth, predicting their triumph, and as they rode among the troops carrying orders they communicated their burning zeal to the men who were already eager for closer battle.

The storm of missiles from the cannon was increasing rapidly. John now distinctly saw the huge German masses, not advancing but standing firm to receive the French attack, their front a vast line of belching guns. He knew that they would soon be within the area of rifle fire and he knew with equal truth that it would take the valor of immense numbers, wielded by the supreme skill of leaders to drive back the Germans.

The guns, some drawn by horses and others by motors, were moving forward with them. When the horses were swept away by a shell, men seized the guns and dragged them. Then they stopped again, took new positions and renewed the rain of death on the German army.

They began to hear a whistle and hiss that they knew. It was that of the bullets, and along the vast front they were coming in millions. But the French were using their rifles, too, and at intervals the deep thundering chant of the Marseillaise swept through their ranks. In spite of shell, shrapnel and bullets, in spite of everything, the French army in the center was advancing and John believed that the armies on the other parts of the line were advancing, too.

The bullets struck around them, and then among them. One aide fell from his cycle, and lay dead in the road, two more were wounded, but two hundred thousand men, their artillery blazing death over their heads, went on straight at the mouths of a thousand cannon.

Companies and regiments were swept away, but there was no check. Nor did the other French armies, the huge links in the chain, stop. A feeling of victory had swept along the whole gigantic battle front. They were fighting for Paris, for their country, for the soil which they tended, alive, and in which they slept, dead, and just at the moment when

everything seemed to have been lost they were saving all. The heroic age of France had come again, and the Third Republic was justifying the First.

The battle deepened and thickened to an extraordinary degree, as the space between the two fronts narrowed. John for the first time saw the German troops without the aid of glasses. They were mere outlines against a fiery horizon, reddened by the mouths of so many belching cannon, but they seemed to him to stand there like a wall.



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Another giant shell burst near them, and two more members of the staff fell from their cycles, dead before they touched the ground. That convulsive shudder seized John again, but the crash of tremendous events was so rapid that fear and horror alike passed in an instant. A piece of the same shell struck General Vaugirard's car and put it out of action at once. But the general leaped lightly to the ground, then swung his immense bulk across one of the riderless motor cycles and advanced with the surviving members of his staff. Imperturbable, he still swept the field with his glasses. Two aides were now sent to the right with messages, and a third, John himself, was despatched to the left on a similar errand.

It was John's duty to tell a regiment to bear in further to the left and close up a vacant spot in the line. He wheeled his cycle into a field, and then passed between rows of grapevines. The regiment, its ranks much thinned, was now about a hundred yards away, but shell and bullets alike were sweeping the distance between.

Nevertheless, he rode on, his wheel bumping over the rough ground, until he heard a rushing sound, and then blank darkness enveloped him. He fell one way, and the motor cycle fell another.

CHAPTER V

SEEN FROM ABOVE

John's period of unconsciousness was brief. The sweep of air from a gigantic shell, passing close, had taken his senses for a minute or two, but he leaped to his feet to find his motor cycle broken and puffing out its last breath, and himself among the dead and wounded in the wake of the army which was advancing rapidly. The turmoil was so vast, and so much dust and burned gunpowder was floating about that he was not able to tell where the valiant Vaugirard with the remainder of his staff marched. In front of him a regiment, cut up terribly, was advancing at a swift pace, and acting under the impulse of the moment he ran forward to join them.

When he overtook the regiment he saw that it had neither colonel, nor captains nor any other officers of high degree. A little man, scarcely more than a youth, his head bare, his eyes snapping fire, one hand holding aloft a red cap on the point of a sword, had taken command and was urging the soldiers on with every fierce shout that he knew. The men were responding. Command seemed natural to him. Here was a born leader in battle. John knew him, and he knew that his own prophecy had been fulfilled.

"Geronimo!" he gasped.

But young Bougainville did not see him. He was still shouting to the men whom he now led so well. The point of the sword, doubtless taken from the hand of some fallen



officer, had pierced the red cap which was slowly sinking down the blade, but he did not notice it.

John looked again for his commander, but not seeing him, and knowing how futile it was now to seek him in all the fiery crush, he resolved to stay with the young Apache.



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“Geronimo,” he cried, and it was the last time he called him by that name, “I go with you!”

In all the excitement of the moment young Bougainville recognized him and something droll flashed in his eyes.

“Did I boast too much?” he shouted.

“You didn’t!” John shouted back.

“Come on then! A big crowd of Germans is just over this hill, and we must smash ’em!”

John kept by his side, but Bougainville, still waving his sword, while the red cap sank lower and lower on the blade, addressed his men in terms of encouragement and affection.

“Forward, my children!” he shouted. “Men, without fear, let us be the first to make the enemy feel our bayonets! Look, a regiment on the right is ahead of you, and another also on the left leads you! Faster! Faster, my children!”

An angle of the German line was thrust forward at this point where a hill afforded a strong position. Bullets were coming from it in showers, but the Bougainville regiment broke into a run, passed ahead of the others and rushed straight at the hill.

It was the first time that men had come face to face in the battle and now John saw the French fury, the enthusiasm and fire that Napoleon had capitalized and cultivated so sedulously. Shouting fiercely, they flung themselves upon the Germans and by sheer impact drove them back. They cleared the hill in a few moments, triumphantly seized four cannon and then, still shouting, swept on.

John found himself shouting with the others. This was victory, the first real taste of it, and it was sweet to the lips. But the regiment was halted presently, lest it get too far forward and be cut off, and a general striding over to Bougainville uttered words of approval that John could not hear amid the terrific din of so many men in battle—a million, a million and a half or more, he never knew.

They stood there panting, while the French line along a front of maybe fifty miles crept on and on. The French machine with the British wheels and springs cooeperating, was working beautifully now. It was a match and more for their enemy. The Germans, witnessing the fire and dash of the French and feeling their tremendous impact, began to take alarm. It had not seemed possible to them in those last triumphant days that they could fail, but now Paris was receding farther and farther from their grasp.

John recovered a certain degree of coolness. The fire of the foe was turned away from them for the present, and, finding that the glasses thrown over his shoulder, had not



been injured by his fall, he examined the battle front as he stood by the side of Bougainville. The country was fairly open here and along a range of miles the cannon in hundreds and hundreds were pouring forth destruction. Yet the line, save where the angle had been crushed by the rush of Bougainville's regiment, stood fast, and John shuddered at thought of the frightful slaughter, needed to drive it back, if it could be driven back at all.



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Then he glanced at the fields across which they had come. For two or three miles they were sprinkled with the fallen, the red and blue of the French uniform showing vividly against the green grass. But there was little time for looking that way and again he turned his glasses in front. The regiment had taken cover behind a low ridge, and six rapid firers were sending a fierce hail on the German lines. But the men under orders from Bougainville, withheld the fire of their rifles for the present.

Bougainville himself stood up as became a leader of men, and lowered his sword for the first time. The cap had sunk all the way down the blade and picking it off he put it back on his head. He had obtained glasses also, probably from some fallen officer, and he walked back and forth seeking a weak spot in the enemy's line, into which he could charge with his men.

John admired him. His was no frenzied rage, but a courage, measured and stern. The springs of power hidden in him had been touched and he stood forth, a born leader.

"How does it happen," said John, "that you're in command?"

"Our officers were all in front," replied Bougainville, "when our regiment was swept by many shells. When they ceased bursting upon us and among us the officers were no longer there. The regiment was about to break. I could not bear to see that, and seizing the sword, I hoisted my cap upon it. The rest, perhaps, you saw. The men seem to trust me."

"They do," said John, with emphasis.

Bougainville, for the time at least, was certainly the leader of the regiment. It was an incident that John believed possible only in his own country, or France, and he remembered once more the famous old saying of Napoleon that every French peasant carried a marshal's baton in his knapsack.

Now he recalled, too, that Napoleon had fought some of his greatest defensive battles in the region they faced. Doubtless the mighty emperor and his marshals had trod the very soil on which Bougainville and he now stood. Surely the French must know it, and surely it would give them superhuman courage for battle.

"I belong to the command of General Vaugirard," he said to Bougainville. "I'm serving on his staff, but I was knocked off my motor cycle by the rush of air from a shell. The cycle was ruined and I was unconscious for a moment or two. When I revived, my general and his command were gone."

"You'd better stay with me a while," said Bougainville. "We're going to advance again soon. When night comes, if you're still alive, then you can look for General Vaugirard. The fire of the artillery is increasing. How the earth shakes!"



“So it does. I wish I knew what was happening.”

“There comes one of those men in the air. He is going to drop down by us. Maybe you can learn something from him.”

John felt a sudden wild hope that it was Lannes, but his luck did not hold good enough for it. The plane was of another shape than the *Arrow*, and, when it descended to the ground, a man older than Lannes stepped out upon the grass. He glanced around as if he were looking for some general of division for whom he had an order, and John, unable to restrain himself, rushed to him and exclaimed:

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“News! News! For Heaven’s sake, give us news! Surely you’ve seen from above!”

The man smiled and John knew that a bearer of bad news would not smile.

“I’m the friend and comrade of Philip Lannes,” continued John, feeling that all the flying men of France knew the name of Lannes, and that it would be a password to this man’s good graces.

“I know him well,” said the air scout. “Who of our craft does not? My own name is Caumartin, and I have flown with Lannes more than once in the great meets at Rheims. In answer to your question I’m able to tell you that on the wings the soldiers of France are advancing. A wedge has been thrust between the German armies and the one nearest Paris is retreating, lest it be cut off.”

Bougainville heard the words, and he ran among the men, telling them. A fierce shout arose and John himself quivered with feeling. It was better, far better than he had hoped. He realized now that his courage before had been the courage of despair. Lannes and he, as a last resort, had put faith in signs and omens, because there was nothing else to bear them up.

“Is it true? Is it true beyond doubt! You’ve really seen it with your own eyes?” he exclaimed.

Caumartin smiled again. His were deep eyes, and the smile that came from them was reassuring.

“I saw it myself,” he replied. “At the point nearest Paris the gray masses are withdrawing. I looked directly down upon them. And now, can you tell me where I can find General Vaugirard?”

“I wish I could. I’m on his staff, but I’ve lost him. He’s somewhere to the northward.”

“Then I’ll find him.”

Caumartin resumed his place in his machine. John looked longingly at the aeroplane. He would gladly have gone with Caumartin, but feeling that he would be only a burden at such a time, he would not suggest it. Nevertheless he called to the aviator:

“If you see Philip Lannes in the heavens tell him that his friend John Scott is here behind a low ridge crested with trees!”

Caumartin nodded, and as some of the soldiers gave his plane a push he soared swiftly away in search of General Vaugirard. John watched him a moment or two and then turned his attention back to the German army in front of them.



The thudding of the heavy guns to their left had become so violent that it affected his nerves. The waves of air beat upon his ears like storm-driven rollers, and he was glad when Bougainville's regiment moved forward again. The Germans seemed to have withdrawn some of their force in the center, and, for a little while, the regiment with which John now marched was not under fire.

They heard reserves now coming up behind them, more trains of motor cars, bearing fresh troops, and batteries of field guns advancing as fast as they could. Men were busy also stringing telephone wires, and, presently, they passed a battery of guns of the largest caliber, the fire of which was directed entirely by telephone. Some distance beyond it the regiment stopped again. The huge shells were passing over their heads toward the German lines, and John believed that he could hear and count every one of them.



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The remains of the regiment now lay down in a dip, as they did not know anything to do, except to wait for the remainder of the French line to advance.

Something struck near them presently and exploded with a crash. Steel splinters flew, but as they were prone only one man was injured.

"They're reaching us again with their shell fire," said John.

"Not at all," said Bougainville. "Look up."

John saw high in the heavens several black specks, which he knew at once were aeroplanes. Since the bomb had been dropped from one of them it was obvious that they were German flyers, and missiles of a like nature might be expected from the same source. Involuntarily he crouched close to the ground, and tried to press himself into it. He knew that such an effort would afford him no protection, but the body sought it nevertheless. All around him the young French soldiers too were clinging to Mother Earth. Only Bougainville stood erect.

John had felt less apprehension under the artillery fire and in the charge than he did now. He was helpless here when death fell like hail from the skies, and he quivered in every muscle as he waited. A crash came again, but the bomb had struck farther away, then a third, and a fourth, each farther and farther in its turn, and Bougainville suddenly uttered a shout that was full of vengeance and exultation.

John looked up. The group of black specks was still in the sky, but another group was hovering near, and clapping his glasses to his eyes he saw flashes of light passing between them.

"You're right, Bougainville! you're right!" he cried, although Bougainville had not said a word. "The French flyers have come and there's a fight in the air!"

He forgot all about the battle on earth, while he watched the combat in the heavens. Yet it was an affair of only a few moments. The Germans evidently feeling that they were too far away from their base, soon retreated. One of their machines turned over on its side and fell like a shot through space.

John shuddered, took the glasses down, and, by impulse, closed his eyes. He heard a shock near him, and, opening his eyes again, saw a huddled mass of wreckage, from which a foot encased in a broad German shoe protruded. The ribs of the plane were driven deep into the earth and he looked away. But a hum and swish suddenly came once more, and a sleek and graceful aeroplane, which he knew to be the *Arrow*, sank to the earth close to him. Lannes, smiling and triumphant, stepped forth and John hailed him eagerly.



“I met Caumartin in an aerial road,” said Lannes, in his best dramatic manner, “and he described this place, at which you were waiting. As it was directly on my way I concluded to come by for you. I was delayed by a skirmish overhead which you may have seen.”

“Yes, I saw it, or at least part of it.”

“I came in at the end only. The Taubes were too presuming. They came over into our air, but we repelled the attack, and one, as I can see here, will never come again. I found General Vaugirard, although he is now two or three miles to your right, and when I deliver a message that he has given me I return. But I take you with me now.”

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John was overjoyed, but he would part from Bougainville with regret.

“Philip,” he said, “here is Pierre Louis Bougainville, whom I met that day on Montmartre. All the officers of this regiment have been killed and by grace of courage and intuition he now leads it better than it was ever led before.”

Lannes extended his hand. Bougainville’s met it, and the two closed in the clasp of those who knew, each, that the other was a man. Then a drum began to beat, and Bougainville, waving his sword aloft, led his regiment forward again with a rush. But the *Arrow*, with a hard push from the last of the soldiers, was already rising, Lannes at the steering rudder and John in his old place.

“You can find your cap and coat in the locker,” said Lannes without looking back, and John put them on quickly. His joy and eagerness were not due to flight from the field of battle, because the heavens themselves were not safe, but because he could look down upon this field on which the nations struggled and, to some extent, behold and measure it with his own eyes.

The *Arrow* rose slowly, and John leaned back luxuriously in his seat. He had a singular feeling that he had come back home again. The sharp, acrid odor that assailed eye and nostril departed and the atmosphere grew rapidly purer. The rolling waves of air from the concussion of the guns became much less violent, and soon ceased entirely. All the smoke floated below him, while above the heavens were a shining blue, unsullied by the dust and flame of the conflict.

“Do you go far, Philip?” John asked.

“Forty miles. I could cover the distance quickly in the *Arrow*, but on such a day as this I can’t be sure of finding at once the man for whom I’m looking. Besides, we may meet German planes. You’ve your automatic with you?”

“I’m never without it. I’m ready to help if they come at us. I’ve been through so much today that I’ve become blunted to fear.”

“I don’t think we’ll meet an enemy, but we must be armed and watchful.”

John had not yet looked down, but he knew that the *Arrow* was rising high. The thunder of the battle died so fast that it became a mere murmur, and the air was thin, pure and cold. When he felt that the *Arrow* had reached its zenith he put the glasses to his eyes and looked over.

He saw a world spouting fire. Along a tremendous line curved and broken, thousands of cannon great and small were flashing, and for miles and miles a continuous coil of whitish smoke marked where the riflemen were at work. Near the center of the line he saw a vast mass of men advancing and he spoke of it to Lannes.

“I’ve seen it already,” said the Frenchman. “That’s where a great force of ours is cutting in between the German armies. It’s the movement that has saved France, and the mind that planned it was worth a million men to us today.”



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"I can well believe it. Now I see running between the hills a shining ribbon which I take to be a river."

"That's the Marne. If we can, we'll drive the Germans back across it. Search the skies that way and see if you can find any of the Taubes."

"I see some black specks which I take to be the German planes, but they don't grow."

"Which indicates that they're not coming any nearer. They've had enough of us for the present and it's to their interest too to keep over their own army now. What do you see beneath us?"

"A great multitude of troops, French, as I can discern the uniform, and by Jove, Lannes, I can trace far beyond the towers and spires of Paris!"

"I knew you could. It marks how near the Germans have come to the capital, but they'll come no nearer. The great days of the French have returned, and we'll surely drive them upon the Marne."

"Suppose we fly a little lower, Lannes. Then we can get a better view of the field as we go along."

"I'll do as you say, John. I rose so high, because I thought attack here was less possible, but as no enemy is in sight we'll drop down."

The *Arrow* sank gradually, and now both could get a splendid view of a spectacle, such as no man had ever beheld until that day. The sounds of battle were still unheard, but they clearly saw the fire of the cannon, the rapid-firers, and the rifles. It was like a red streak running in curves and zigzags across fifty or maybe a hundred miles of country.

"We continue to cut in," said Lannes. "You can see how our armies off there are marching into that great open space between the Germans. Unless the extreme German army hastens it will be separated entirely from the rest. Oh, what a day! What a glorious, magnificent day! A day unlike any other in the world's story! Our heads in the dust in the morning and high in the air by night!"

"But we haven't won yet?"

"No, but we are winning enough to know that we will win."

"How many men do you think are engaged in that battle below?"

"Along all its windings two millions, maybe, or at least a million and a half anyhow. Perhaps nobody will ever know."



Then they relapsed into silence for a little while. The *Arrow* flew fast and the motor drummed steadily in their ears. Lannes let the aeroplane sink a little lower, and John became conscious of a new sound, akin nevertheless to the throb of the motor. It was the concussion of the battle. The topmost and weakest waves of air hurled off in circles by countless cannon and rifles were reaching them. But they had been softened so much by distance that the sound was not unpleasant, and the *Arrow* rocked gently as if touched by a light wind.

John never ceased to watch with his glasses, and in a few minutes he announced that men in gray were below.

“I expected that,” said Lannes. “This battle line, as you know, is far from straight, and, in order to reach our destination in the quickest time possible, we must pass over a portion of the German army, an extended corner or angle as it were. What are they doing there, John?”



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“Firing about fifty cannon as fast as they can. Back of the cannon is a great huddle of motors and of large automobile trucks, loaded, I should say, with ammunition.”

“You’re quite sure of what you say?” asked Lannes, after a silence of a moment or two.

“Absolutely sure. I fancy that it’s an ammunition depot.”

“Then, John, you and I must take a risk. We are to deliver a message, but we can’t let go an opportunity like this. You recall how you threw the bombs on the forty-two centimeter. I have more bombs here in the *Arrow*—I never fly now without ’em—little fellows, but tremendously powerful. I shall dip and when we’re directly over the ammunition depot drop the bombs squarely into the middle of it.”

“I’m ready,” said John, feeling alternate thrills of eagerness and horror, “but Philip, don’t you go so near that if the depot blows up it will blow us up too.”

“Never fear,” said Lannes, laughing, not with amusement but with excitement, “I’ve no more wish to be scattered through the firmament than you have. Besides, we’ve that message to deliver. Do you think the Germans have noticed us?”

“No, a lot of smoke from their cannon fire has gathered above them and perhaps it veils us. Besides, their whole attention must be absorbed by the French army, and I don’t think it likely that they’re looking up.”

“But they’re bound to see us soon. We have one great advantage, however. The target is much larger than the forty-two centimeter was, and there are no Taubes or dirigibles here to drive us off. Ready now, John, and when I touch the bottom of my loop you throw the bombs. Here they are!”

Four bombs were pushed to John’s side and they lay ready to his grasp. Then as the *Arrow* began its downward curve, he laid his glasses aside and watched. The most advanced German batteries were placed in a pit, into which a telephone wire ran. Evidently these guns, like the French, were fired by order from some distant point. John longed to hurl a bomb at the pit, but the chances were ten to one that he would miss it, and he held to the ammunition depot, spread over a full acre, as his target.

Now the Germans saw them. He knew it, as many of them looked up, and some began to fire at the *Arrow*, but the aeroplane was too high and swift for their bullets.

“Now!” said Lannes in sudden, sharp tones.

The aeroplane dipped with sickening velocity, but John steadied himself, and watching his chance he threw four bombs so fast that the fourth had left his hands before the first touched the ground. An awful, rending explosion followed, and for a minute the *Arrow*



rocked violently, as if in a hurricane. Then, as the waves of air decreased in violence, it darted upward on an even keel.

John saw far below a vast scene of wreckage, amid which lay many dead or wounded men. Motors were blown to pieces and cannon dismounted.



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“Score heavily for us,” said Lannes. “I scarcely hoped for such a goodly blow as this while we were on our way!”

John would not look down again. Despite the value of the deed, he shuddered and he was glad when the *Arrow* in its swift flight had left the area of devastation far behind.

“We’re flying over the French now,” he said. “So I expected,” said Lannes. “Can you see a hill crested with a low farm house?”

“Yes,” replied John, after looking a little while. “It’s straight ahead. The house is partly hidden by trees.”

“Then that’s the place. You wouldn’t think we’d come nearly fifty miles, would you, John?”

“Fifty miles! It feels more like a thousand!”

Lannes laughed, this time with satisfaction, not excitement.

“You’ll find there the general to whom we reported first,” he said, “and he’ll be glad to see us! I can’t tell you how glad he will be. His joy will be far beyond our personal deserts. It will have little to do with the fact that you, John Scott, and I, Philip Lannes, have come back to him.”

The circling *Arrow* came down in a meadow just behind the house, and officers rushed forward to meet it. Lannes and John, stepping out, left it in charge of two of the younger men. Then, proudly waving the others aside, they walked to the low stone farmhouse, in front of which the elderly, spectacled general was standing. He looked at Lannes inquiringly, but the young Frenchman, without a word, handed him a note.

John watched the general read, and he saw the transformation of the man’s face. Doubting, anxious, worn, it was illumined suddenly. In a voice that trembled he said to the senior officers who clustered about him:

“We’re advancing in the center, and on the other flank. Already we’ve driven a huge wedge between the German armies, and Paris, nay, France herself, is saved!”

The officers, mostly old men, did not cheer, but John had never before witnessed such relief expressed on human faces. It seemed to him that they had choked up, and could not speak. The commander held the note in a shaking hand and presently he turned to Lannes.

“Your fortune has been great. It’s not often that one has a chance to bear such a message as this.”



“My pride is so high I can’t describe it,” said Lannes in a dramatic but sincere tone.

“Go in the house and an orderly will give food and wine to you and your comrade. In a half hour, perhaps, I may have another message for you.”

Both John and Lannes needed rest and food, and they obeyed gladly. The strain upon the two was far greater than they had realized at the time, and for a few moments they were threatened with collapse which very strong efforts of the will prevented. They were conscious, too, as they stood upon the ground, of a quivering, shaking motion. They were assailed once more by the violent waves of air coming from the concussion of cannon and rifles past counting. The thin, whitish film which was a compound of dust and burned gunpowder assailed them again and lay, bitter, in their mouths and nostrils.



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“The earth shakes too much,” said Lannes in a droll tone. “I think we’d better go back into the unchanging ether, where a man can be sure of himself.”

“I’m seasick,” said John; “who wouldn’t be, with ten thousand cannon, more or less, and a million or two of rifles shaking the planet? I’m going into the house as fast as I can.”

It was a building, centuries old, of gray crumbling stone, with large, low rooms, and, to John’s amazement, the peasant who inhabited it and his family were present. The farmer and his wife, both strong and dark, were about forty, and there were four children, the oldest a girl of about thirteen. What fear they may have felt in the morning was gone now, and, as they knew that the French army was advancing, a joy, reserved but none the less deep, had taken its place.

John and Lannes sat down at a small table covered with a neat white cloth, and Madame, walking quickly and lightly, served them with bread, cold meat and light red wine. The smaller children hovered in the background and looked curiously at the young foreigner who wore the French uniform.

“May I ask your name, Madame?” John asked politely.

“Poiret,” she said. “My man is Jules Poiret, and this farm has been in his family since the great revolution. You and your comrade came from the air, as I saw, and you can tell us, can you not, whether the Poiret farm is to become German or remain French? The enemy has been pushed back today, but will he come so near to Paris again? Tell me truly, on your soul, Monsieur!”

“I don’t believe the Germans will ever again be so near to Paris,” replied John with sincerity. “My friend, who is the great Philip Lannes, the flying man, and I, have looked down upon a battle line fifty, maybe a hundred miles long, and nearly everywhere the Germans are retreating.”

She bent her head a little as she poured the coffee for them, but not enough to hide the glitter in her eye. “Perhaps the good God intervened at the last moment, as Father Hansard promised he would,” she said calmly. “At any rate, the Germans are gone. I gathered as much from chance words of the generals—never before have so many generals gathered under the Poiret roof, and it will never happen again—but I wished to hear it from one who had seen with his own eyes.”

“We saw them withdrawing, Madame, with these two pairs of eyes of ours,” said Lannes.

“And then Poiret can go back to his work with the vines. Whether it is war or peace, men must eat and drink, Monsieur.”



“But certainly, Madame, and women too.” “It is so. I trust that soon the Germans will be driven back much faster. The house quivers all the time. It is old and already several pieces of plaster have fallen.”

Her anxiety was obvious. With the Germans driven back she thought now of the Poiret homestead. John, in the new strength that had come to him from food and drink, had forgotten for the moment that ceaseless quiver of the earth. He held the little bottle aloft and poured a thin stream of wine into his glass. The red thread swayed gently from side to side.



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"You speak truly, Madame," he said. "The rocking goes on, but I'm sure that the concussion of the guns will be too far away tonight for you to feel it."

They offered her gold for the food and wine, but after one longing glance she steadfastly refused it.

"Since you have come across the sea to fight for us," she said to John, "how could I take your money?"

Lannes and John returned to the bit of grass in front of the house, where the elderly general and other generals were still standing and using their glasses.

"You are refreshed?" said the general to Lannes.

"Refreshed and ready to take your orders wherever you wish them to go."

John stepped aside, while the general talked briefly and in a low tone to his comrade. He looked upon himself merely as a passenger, or a sort of help to Lannes, and he would not pry into military secrets. But when the two rose again in the *Arrow*, the general and all his suite waved their caps to them. Beyond a doubt, Lannes had done magnificent work that day, and John was glad for his friend's sake.

The *Arrow* ascended at a sharp angle, and then hovered for a little while in curves and spirals. John saw the generals below, but they were no longer watching the aeroplane. Their glasses were turned once more to the battle front.

"Ultimately we're to reach the commander of the central army, if we can," said Lannes, "but meanwhile we're to bend in toward the German lines, in search of your immediate chief, General Vaugirard, who is one of the staunchest and most daring fighters in the whole French Army. If we find him at all it's likely that we'll find him farther forward than any other general."

"But not any farther than my friend of Montmartre, Bougainville. There's a remarkable fellow. I saw his military talent the first time I met him. Or I should better say I felt it rather than saw it. And he was making good in a wonderful manner today."

"I believe with you, John, that he's a genius. But if we find General Vaugirard and then finish our errand we must hasten. It will be night in two hours."

He increased the speed of the aeroplane and they flew eastward, searching all the hills and woods for the command of General Vaugirard.



CHAPTER VI

IN HOSTILE HANDS

The task that lay before the two young men was one of great difficulty. The battle line was shifting continually, although the Germans were being pressed steadily back toward the east and north, but among so many generals it would be hard to find the particular one to whom they were bearing orders. The commander of the central army was of high importance, but the fact did not bring him at once before the eye.

They were to see General Vaugirard, too, but it was possible that he had fallen. John, though, could not look upon it as a probability. The general was so big, so vital, that he must be living, and he felt the same way about Bougainville. It was incredible that fate itself should snuff out in a day that spark of fire.

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Lannes, uncertain of his course, bore in again toward the German lines, and dropped as low as he could, compatible with safety from any kind of shot. John meanwhile scanned every hill and valley wood and field with his powerful glasses, and he was unable to see any diminution in the fury of the struggle. The cannon thundered, with all their might, along a line of scores of miles; rapid firers sent a deadly hail upon the opposing lines; rifles flashed by the hundred thousand, and here and there masses of troops closed with the bayonet.

Seen from a height the battle was stripped of some of its horrors, but all its magnitude remained to awe those who looked down upon it. From the high, cold air John could not see pain and wounds, only the swaying back and forth of the battle lines. All the time he searched attentively for men who did not wear the red and blue of France, and at last he said:

“I’ve failed to find any sign of the British army.”

“They’re farther to the left,” replied Lannes. “I caught a glimpse of their khaki lines this morning. Their regular troops are great fighters, as our Napoleon himself admitted more than once, and they’ve never done better than they’re doing today. When I saw them they were advancing.”

“I’m glad of that. It’s curious how I feel about the English, Philip. They’ve got such a conceit that they irritate me terribly at times, yet I don’t want to see them beaten by any other Europeans. That’s our American privilege.”

“A family feeling, perhaps,” said Lannes, laughing, “but we French and English have been compelled to be allies, and after fighting each other for a thousand years we’re now the best of friends. I think, John, we’ll have to go down and procure information from somebody about our general. Otherwise we’ll never find him.”

“We must be near the center of our army, and that’s where he’s likely to be. Suppose we descend in the field a little to the east of us.”

Lannes looked down, and, pronouncing the place suitable, began to drop in a series of spirals until they rested in a small field that had been devoted to the growth of vegetables. Here John at once felt the shaking of the earth, and tasted the bitter odor again. But woods on either side of them hid the sight of troops, although the sound of the battle was as great and violent as ever.

“We seem to have landed on a desert island,” said Lannes.

“So we do,” said John. “Evidently there is nobody here to tell us where we can find our dear and long lost general. I’ll go down to the edge of the nearest wood and see if any of our skirmishers are there.”



“All right, John, but hurry back. I’ll hold the *Arrow* ready for instant flight, as we can’t afford to linger here.”

John ran toward the wood, but before he reached the first trees he turned back with a shout of alarm. He had caught a glimpse of horses, helmets and the glittering heads of lances. Moreover, the Uhlans were coming directly toward him.



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In that moment of danger the young American showed the best that was in him. Forgetful of self and remembering the importance of Lannes' mission, he shouted:

"The Uhlans are upon us, Philip! I can't escape, but you must! Go! Go at once!"

Lannes gave one startled glance, and he understood in a flash. He too knew the vital nature of his errand, but his instant decision gave a wrench to his whole being. He saw the Uhlans breaking through the woods and John before them. He was standing beside the *Arrow*, and giving the machine a sharp push he sprang in and rose at a sharp angle.

"Up! Up, Philip!" John continued to cry, until the cold edge of a lance lay against his throat and a brusque voice bade him to surrender.

"All right, I yield," said John, "but kindly take your lance away. It's so sharp and cold it makes me feel uncomfortable."

As he spoke he continued to look upward. The *Arrow* was soaring higher and higher, and the Uhlans were firing at it, but they were not able to hit such a fleeting target. In another minute it was out of range.

John felt the cold steel come away from his throat, and satisfied that Lannes with his precious message was safe, he looked at his captors. They were about thirty in number, Prussian Uhlans.

"Well," said John to the one who seemed to be their leader, "what do you want with me?"

"To hold you prisoner," replied the man, in excellent English—John was always surprised at the number of people on the continent who spoke English—"and to ask you why we find an American here in French uniform."

The man who spoke was young, blond, ruddy, and his tone was rather humorous. John had been too much in Germany to hate Germans. He liked most of them personally, but for many of their ideas, ideas which he considered deadly to the world, he had an intense dislike.

"You find me here because I didn't have time to get away," he replied, "and I'm in a French uniform because it's my fighting suit."

The young officer smiled. John rather liked him, and he saw, too, that he was no older than himself.

"It's lucky for you that you're in some kind of a uniform," the German said, "or I should have you shot immediately. But I'm sorry we didn't take the man in the aeroplane instead of you."

John looked up again. The *Arrow* had become small in the distant blue. A whimsical impulse seized him.

“You’ve a right to be sorry,” he said. “That was the greatest flying man in the world, and all day he has carried messages, heavy with the fate of nations. If you had taken him a few moments ago you might have saved the German army from defeat today. But your chance has gone. If you were to see him again you would not know him and his plane from others of their kind.”

The officer’s eyes dilated at first. Then he smiled again and stroked his young mustache.



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"It may be true, as you say," he replied, "but meanwhile I'll have to take you to my chief, Captain von Boehlen."

John's heart sank a little when he heard the name von Boehlen. Fortune, he thought, had played him a hard trick by bringing him face to face with the man who had least cause to like him. But he would not show it.

"Very well," he said; "which way?"

"Straight before you," said the officer. "I'd give you a mount, but it isn't far. Remember as you walk that we're just behind you, and don't try to run away. You'd have no chance on earth. My own name is Arnheim, Wilhelm von Arnheim."

"And mine's John Scott," said John, as he walked straight ahead.

They passed through a wood and into another field, where a large body of Prussian cavalry was waiting. A tall man, built heavily, stood beside a horse, watching a distant corner of the battle through glasses. John knew that uncompromising figure at once. It was von Boehlen.

"A prisoner, Captain," said von Arnheim, saluting respectfully.

Von Boehlen turned slowly, and a malicious light leaped in his eyes when he saw John on foot before him, and wholly in his power.

"And so," he said, "it's young Scott of the hotel in Dresden and of the wireless station, and you've come straight into my hands!"

The whimsical humor which sometimes seized John when he was in the most dangerous situation took hold of him again. It was not humor exactly, but it was the innate desire to make the best of a bad situation.

"I'm in your hands," he replied, "but I didn't walk willingly into 'em. Your lieutenant, von Arnheim here, and his men brought me on the points of their lances. I'm quite willing to go away again."

Von Boehlen recognized the spirit in the reply and the malice departed from his own eyes. Yet he asked sternly:

"Why do you put on a French uniform and meddle in a quarrel not your own?"

"I've made it my own. I take the chances of war."



“To the rear with him, and put him with the other prisoners,” said von Boehlen to von Arnheim, and the young Prussian and two Uhlans escorted him to the edge of the field where twenty or thirty French prisoners sat on the ground.

“I take it,” said von Arnheim, “that you and our captain have met before.”

“Yes, and the last time it was under circumstances that did not endear me to him.”

“If it was in war it will not be to your harm. Captain von Boehlen is a stern but just man, and his conduct is strictly according to our military code. You will stay here with the other prisoners under guard. I hope to see you again.”

With these polite words the young officer rode back to his chief, and John’s heart warmed to him because of his kindness. Then he sat down on the grass and looked at those who were prisoners with him. Most of them were wounded, but none seemed despondent. All were lying down, some propped on their elbows, and they were watching and listening with the closest attention. A half-dozen Germans, rifle in hand, stood near by.



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John took his place on the grass by the side of a fair, slim young man who carried his left arm in a bandage.

“Englishman?” said the young man.

“No, American.”

“But you have been fighting for us, as your uniform shows. What command?”

“General Vaugirard’s, but I became separated from it earlier in the day.”

“I’ve heard of him. Great, fat man, as cool as ice and as brave as a lion. A good general to serve under. My own name is Fleury, Albert Fleury. I was wounded and taken early this morning, and the others and I have been herded here ever since by the Germans. They will not tell us a word, but I notice they have not advanced.”

“The German army is retreating everywhere. For this day, at least, we’re victorious. Somebody has made a great plan and has carried it through. The cavalry of the invader came within sight of Paris this morning, but they won’t be able to see it tomorrow morning. Whisper it to the others. We’ll take the good news quietly. We won’t let the guards see that we know.”

The news was circulated in low tones and every one of the wounded forgot his wound. They spoke among themselves, but all the while the thunder of the hundred-mile battle went on with unremitting ferocity. John put his ear to the ground now, and the earth quivered incessantly like a ship shaken at sea by its machinery.

The day was now waning fast and he looked at the mass of Uhlans who stood arrayed in the open space, as if they were awaiting an order. Lieutenant von Arnheim rode back and ordered the guards to march on with them.

There was none too severely wounded to walk and they proceeded in a file through the fields, Uhlans on all sides, but the great mass behind them, where their commander, von Boehlen, himself rode.

The night was almost at hand. Twilight was already coming over the eastern hills, and one of the most momentous days in the story of man was drawing to a close. People often do not know the magnitude of an event until it has passed long since and shows in perspective, but John felt to the full the result of the event, just as the old Greeks must have known at once what Salamis or Plataea meant to them. The hosts of the world’s greatest military empire were turned back, and he had all the certainty of conviction that they would be driven farther on the next day.

The little band of prisoners who walked while their Prussian captors rode, were animated by feelings like those of John. It was the captured who exulted and the



captors who were depressed, though neither expressed it in words, and the twilight was too deep now for faces to show either joy or sorrow.

John and Fleury walked side by side. They were near the same age. Fleury was an Alpinist from the high mountain region of Savoy and he had arrived so recently in the main theater of conflict that he knew little of what had been passing. He and John talked in whispers and they spoke encouraging words to each other. Fleury listened in wonder to John's account of his flights with Lannes.



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“It is marvelous to have looked down upon a battle a hundred miles long,” he said. “Have you any idea where these Uhlans intend to take us?”

“I haven’t. Doubtless they don’t know themselves. The night is here now, and I imagine they’ll stop somewhere soon.”

The twilight died in the west as well as the east, and darkness came over the field of gigantic strife. But the earth continued to quiver with the thunder of artillery, and John felt the waves of air pulsing in his ears. Now and then searchlights burned in a white blaze across the hills. Fields, trees and houses would stand out for a moment, and then be gone absolutely.

John’s vivid imagination turned the whole into a storm at night. The artillery was the thunder and the flare of the searchlights was the lightning. His mind created, for a little while, the illusion that the combat had passed out of the hands of man and that nature was at work. He and Fleury ceased to talk and he walked on, thinking little of his destination. He had no sense of weariness, nor of any physical need at all.

Von Arnheim rode up by his side and said:

“You’ll not have to walk much further, Mr. Scott. A camp of ours is just beyond a brook, not more than a few hundred yards away, and the prisoners will stay there for the night. I’m sorry to find you among the French fighting against us. We Germans expected American sympathy. There is so much German blood in the United States.”

“But, as I told Captain von Boehlen, we’re a republic, and we’re democrats. In many of the big ideas there’s a gulf between us and Germany so wide that it can never be bridged. This war has made clear the enormous difference.”

Von Arnheim sighed.

“And yet, as a people, we like each other personally,” he said.

“That’s so, but as nations we diverge absolutely.”

“Perhaps, I can’t dispute it. But here is our camp. You’ll be treated well. We Germans are not barbarians, as our enemies allege.”

John saw fires burning in an ancient wood, through which a clear brook ran. The ground was carpeted with bodies, which at first he thought were those of dead men. But they were merely sleepers. German troops in thousands had dropped in their tracks. It was scarcely sleep, but something deeper, a stupor of exhaustion so utter, both mental and physical, that it was like the effect of anesthesia. They lay in every imaginable position, and they stretched away through the forest in scores of thousands.



John and Fleury saw their own place at once. Several hundred men in French uniforms were lying or sitting on the ground in a great group near the forest. A few slept, but the others, as well as John could see by the light of the fires, were wide awake.

The sight of the brook gave John a burning thirst, and making a sign to the German guard, who nodded, he knelt and drank. He did not care whether the water was pure or not, most likely it was not, with armies treading their way across it, but as it cut through the dust and grime of his mouth and throat he felt as if a new and more vigorous life were flowing into his veins. After drinking once, twice, and thrice, he sat down on the bank with Fleury, but in a minute or two young von Arnheim came for him.



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"Our commander wishes to talk with you," he said.

"I'm honored," said John, "but conversation is not one of my strong points."

"The general will make the conversation," said von Arnheim, smiling. "It will be your duty, as he sees it, to answer questions."

John's liking for von Arnheim grew. He had seldom seen a finer young man. He was frank and open in manner, and bright blue eyes shone in a face that bore every sign of honesty. Official enemies he and von Arnheim were, but real enemies they never could be.

He divined that he would be subjected to a cross-examination, but he had no objection. Moreover, he wanted to see a German general of high degree. Von Arnheim led the way through the woods to a little glade, in which about a dozen officers stood. One of them, the oldest man present, who was obviously in command, stood nearest the fire, holding his helmet in his hand.

The general was past sixty, of medium height, but extremely broad and muscular. His head, bald save for a fringe of white hair, had been reddened by the sun, and his face, with its deep heavy lines and his corded neck, was red, too. He showed age but not weakness. His eyes, small, red and uncommonly keen, gazed from under a white bushy thatch. He looked like a fierce old dragon to John.

"The American prisoner, sir," said von Arnheim in English to the general.

The old man concentrated the stare of his small red eyes upon John for many long seconds. The young American felt the weight and power of that gaze. He knew too instinctively that the man before him was a great fighter, a true representative of the German military caste and system. He longed to turn his own eyes away, but he resolutely held them steady. He would not be looked down, not even by an old Prussian general to whom the fate of a hundred thousand was nothing.

"Very well, Your Highness, you may stand aside," said the general in a deep harsh voice.

Out of the corner of his eye John saw that the man who stood aside was von Arnheim. "Your Highness!" Then this young lieutenant must be a prince. If so, some princes were likable. Wharton and Carstairs and he had outwitted a prince once, but it could not be von Arnheim. He turned his full gaze back to the general, who continued in his deep gruff voice, speaking perfect English:

"I understand that you are an American and your name is John Scott."

“And duly enrolled and uniformed in the French service,” said John, “You can’t shoot me as a *franc tireur*.”

“We could shoot you for anything, if we wished, but such is not our purpose. I have heard from a captain of Uhlans, Rudolf von Boehlen, a most able and valuable officer, that you are brave and alert.”

“I thank Captain von Boehlen for his compliment. I did not expect it from him.”

“Ah, he bears you no malice. We Germans are large enough to admire skill and courage in others. He has spoken of the affair of the wireless. It cost us much, but it belongs to the past. We will achieve what we wish.”



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John was silent. He believed that these preliminaries on the part of the old general were intended to create an atmosphere, a belief in his mind that German power was invincible.

“We have withdrawn a portion of our force today,” continued the general, “in order to rectify our line. Our army had advanced too far. Tomorrow we resume our march on Paris.”

John felt that it was an extraordinary statement for an old man, one of such high rank, the commander of perhaps a quarter of a million soldiers, to be making to him, a young American, but he held his peace, awaiting what lay behind it all.

“Now you are a captive,” continued the general, “you will be sent to a prison, and you will be held there until the end of the war. You will necessarily suffer much. We cannot help it. Yet you might be sent to your own country. Americans and Germans are not enemies. I know from Captain von Boehlen who took you that you have been in an aeroplane with a Frenchman. Some account of what you saw from space might help your departure for America.”

And so that was it! Now the prisoner’s eye steadily confronted that of the old general.

“Your Highness,” he said, as he thought that the old man might be a prince as well as a general, “you have read the history of the great civil war in my country, have you not?”

“It was a part of my military duty to study it. It was a long and desperate struggle with many great battles, but what has it to do with the present?”

“Did you ever hear of any traitor on either side, North or South, in that struggle?”

The deep red veins in the old general’s face stood out, but he gave no other sign.

“You prefer, then,” he said, “to become a charge upon our German hospitality. But I can say that your refusal will not make terms harder for you. Lieutenant von Arnheim, take him back to the other prisoners.”

“Thank you, sir,” said John, and he gave the military salute. He could understand the old man’s point of view, rough and gruff though he was, and he was not lacking in a certain respect for him. The general punctiliously returned the salute.

“You’ve made a good impression,” said von Arnheim, as they walked away together.

“I gather,” said John, “from a reference by the general, that you’re a prince.”

Von Arnheim looked embarrassed.



“In a way I am,” he admitted, “but ours is a mediatized house. Perhaps it doesn’t count for much. Still, if it hadn’t been for this war I might have gone to your country and married an heiress.”

His eyes were twinkling. Here, John thought was a fine fellow beyond question.

“Perhaps you can come after the war and marry one,” he said. “Personally I hope you’ll have the chance.”

“Thanks,” said von Arnheim, a bit wistfully, “but I’m afraid now it will be a long time, if ever. I need not seek to conceal from you that we were turned back today. You know it already.”



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“Yes, I know it,” said John, speaking without any trace of exultation, “and I’m willing to tell you that it was one of the results I saw from the aeroplane. Can I ask what you intend to do with the prisoners you have here, including myself?”

“I do not know. You are to sleep where you are tonight. Your bed, the earth, will be as good as ours, and perhaps in the morning we’ll find an answer to your question.”

Von Arnheim bade him a pleasant good night and turned to duties elsewhere. John watched him as he strode away, a fine, straight young figure. He had found him a most likable man, and he was bound to admit that there was much in the German character to admire. But for the present it was—in his view—a Germany misled.

The prisoners numbered perhaps six hundred, and at least half of them were wounded. John soon learned that the hurt usually suffered in stoical silence. It was so in the great American civil war, and it was true now in the great European war.

Rough food was brought to them by German guards, and those who were able drank at the brook. Water was served to the severely wounded by their comrades in tin cups given to them by the Germans, and then all but a few lay on the grass and sought sleep.

John and his new friend, Fleury, were among those who yet sat up and listened to the sounds of battle still in progress, although it was far in the night. It was an average night of late summer or early autumn, cool, fairly bright, and with but little wind. But the dull, moaning sound made by the distant cannonade came from both sides of them, and the earth yet quivered, though but faintly. Now and then, the searchlights gleamed against the background of darkness, but John felt that the combat must soon stop, at least until the next day. The German army in which he was a prisoner had ceased already, but other German armies along the vast line fought on, failing day, by the light which man himself had devised.

Fleury was intelligent and educated. Although it was bitter to him to be a prisoner at such a time, he had some comprehension of what had occurred, and he knew that John had been in a position to see far more than he. He asked the young American many questions about his flight in the air, and about Philip Lannes, of whom he had heard.

“It was wonderful,” he said, “to look down on a battle a hundred miles long.”

“We didn’t see all of it,” said John, “but we saw it in many places, and we don’t know that it was a hundred miles long, but it must have been that or near it.”

“And the greatest day for France in her history! What mighty calculations must have been made and what tremendous marchings and combats must have been carried out to achieve such a result.”

“One of the decisive battles of history, like Plataea, or the Metaurus or Gettysburg. There go the Uhlans with Captain von Boehlen at their head. Now I wonder what they mean to do!”



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A thousand men, splendidly mounted and armed, rode through the forest. The moonlight fell on von Boehlen's face and showed it set and grim. John felt that he was bound to recognize in him a stern and resolute man, carrying out his own conceptions of duty. Nor had von Boehlen been discourteous to him, although he might have felt cause for much resentment. The Prussian glanced at him as he passed, but said nothing. Soon he and his horsemen passed out of sight in the dusk.

John, wondering how late it might be, suddenly remembered that he had a watch and found it was eleven o'clock.

"An hour of midnight," he said to Fleury.

Most all the French stretched upon the ground were now in deep slumber, wounded and unwounded alike. The sounds of cannon fire were sinking away, but they did not die wholly. The faint thunder of the distant guns never ceased to come. But the campfire, where he knew the German generals slept or planned, went out, and darkness trailed its length over all this land which by night had become a wilderness.

John was able to trace dimly the sleeping figures of Germans in the dusk, sunk down upon the ground and buried in the sleep or stupor of exhaustion. As they lay near him so they lay in the same way in hundreds of thousands along the vast line. Men and horses, strained to their last nerve and muscle, were too tired to move. It seemed as if more than a million men lay dead in the fields and woods of Northeastern France.

John, who had been wide awake, suddenly dropped on the ground where the others were stretched. He collapsed all in a moment, as if every drop of blood had been drained suddenly from his body. Keyed high throughout the day, his whole system now gave way before the accumulated impact of events so tremendous. The silence save for the distant moaning that succeeded the roar of a million men or more in battle was like a powerful drug, and he slept like one dead, never moving hand or foot.

He was roused shortly before morning by some one who shook him gently but persistently, and at last he sat up, looking around in the dim light for the person who had dragged him back from peace to a battle-mad world. He saw an unkempt, bearded man in a French uniform, one sleeve stained with blood, and he recognized Weber, the Alsatian.

"Why, Weber!" he exclaimed, "they've got you, too! This is bad! They may consider you, an Alsatian, a traitor, and execute you at once!"

Weber smiled in rather melancholy fashion, and said in a low tone:



“It’s bad enough to be captured, but I won’t be shot Nobody here knows that I’m an Alsatian, and consequently they will think I’m a Frenchman. If you call me anything, call me Fernand, which is my first name, but which they will take for the last.”

“All right, Fernand. I’ll practice on it now, so I’ll make no slip. How did you happen to be taken?”



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“I was in a motor car, a part of a train of about a hundred cars. There were seven in it besides myself. We were ordered to cross a field and join a line of advancing infantry. When we were in the middle of the field a masked German battery of rapid-firers opened on us at short range. It was an awful experience, like a stroke of lightning, and I don't think that more than a dozen of us escaped with our lives. I was wounded in the arm and taken before I could get out of the field. I was brought here with some other prisoners and I have been sleeping on the ground just beyond that hillock. I awoke early, and, walking the little distance our guards allow, I happened to recognize your figure lying here. I was sorry and yet glad to see you, sorry that you were a prisoner, and glad to find at least one whom I knew, a friend.”

John gave Weber's hand a strong grasp.

“I can say the same about you,” he said warmly. “We're both prisoners, but yesterday was a magnificent day for France and democracy.”

“It was, and now it's to be seen what today will be.”

“I hope and believe it will be no less magnificent.”

“I learned that you were taken just after you alighted from an aeroplane, and that a man with you escaped in the plane. At least, I presume it was you, as I heard the Germans talking of such a person and I knew of your great friendship for Philip Lannes. Lannes, of course was the one who escaped.”

“A good surmise, Fernand. It was no less a man than he.”

Weber's eyes sparkled.

“I was sure of it,” he said. “A wonderful fellow, that Lannes, perhaps the most skillful and important bearer of dispatches that France has. But he will not forget you, Mr. Scott. He knows, of course, where you were taken, and doubtless from points high in the air he has traced the course of this German army. He will find time to come for you. He will surely do so. He has a feeling for you like that of a brother, and his skill in the air gives him a wonderful advantage. In all the history of the world there have never before been any scouts like the aeroplanes.”

“That's true, and that, I think, is their chief use.”

Impulse made John look up. The skies were fast beginning to brighten with the first light in the east, and large objects would be visible there. But he saw nothing against the blue save two or three captive balloons which floated not far above the trees inside the German lines. He longed for a sight of the *Arrow*. He believed that he would know its shape even high in the heavens, but they were speckless.



The Alsatian, whose eyes followed his, shook his head.

“He is not there, Mr. Scott,” he said, “and you will not see him today, but I have a conviction that he will come, by night doubtless.”

John lowered his eyes and his feeling of disappointment passed. It had been foolish of him to hope so soon, but it was only a momentary impulse, Lannes could not seek him now, and even if he were to come there would be no chance of rescue until circumstances changed.



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“Doubtless you and he were embarked on a long errand when you were taken,” said Weber.

“We were carrying a message to the commander of one of the French armies, but I don’t know the name of the commander, I don’t know which army it is, and I don’t know where it is.”

Weber laughed.

“But Lannes knew all of those things,” he said. “Oh, he’s a close one! He wouldn’t trust such secrets not even to his brother-in-arms.”

“Nor should he do so. I’d rather he’d never tell them to me unless he thought it necessary.”

“I agree with you exactly, Mr. Scott. Hark! Did you hear it? The battle swells afresh, and it’s not yet full day!”

The roaring had not ceased, but out of the west rose a sound, louder yet, deep, rolling and heavy with menace. It was the discharge of a great gun and it came from a point several miles away.

“We don’t know who fired that,” said Weber, “It may be French, English or German, but it’s my opinion that we’ll hear its like in our forest all day long, just as we did yesterday. However, it shall not keep me from bathing my face in this brook.”

“Nor me either,” said John.

The cold water refreshed and invigorated him, and as he stooped over the brook, he heard other cannon. They seemed to him fairly to spring into action, and, in a few moments, the whole earth was roaring again with the huge volume of their fire.

Other prisoners, wounded and unwounded, awakened by the cannon, strolled down to the brook and dipped into its waters.

“I’d better slip back to my place beyond the hillock,” said Weber. “We’re in two lots, we prisoners, and I belong in the other lot. I don’t think our guards have noticed our presence here, and it will be safer for me to return. But it’s likely that we’ll all be gathered into one body soon, and I’ll help you watch for Lannes.”

“I’ll be glad of your help,” said John sincerely. “We must escape. In all the confusion of so huge a battle there ought to be a chance.”

Weber slipped away in the crowd now hurrying down to the stream, and in a few moments John was joined by Fleury, whose attention was centered on the sounds of



the distant battle. He deemed it best to say nothing to him of Weber, who did not wish to be known as an Alsatian. Fleury's heavy sleep had made him strong and fresh again, but he was in a fury at his helplessness.

"To think of our being tied here at such a time," he said. "France and England are pushing the battle again! I know it, and we're helpless, mere prisoners!"

"Still," said John, "while we can't fight we may see things worth seeing. Perhaps it's not altogether our loss to be inside the German army on such a day."

Fleury could not reconcile himself to such a view, but he sought to make the best of it, and he was cheered, too, by the vast increase in the volume of the cannon fire. Before the full day had crossed from east to west the great guns were thundering again along the long battle line. But in their immediate vicinity there was no action. All the German troops here seemed to be resting on their arms. No Uhlans were visible and John judged that the detachment under von Boehlen, having gone forth chiefly for scouting purposes, had not yet returned.



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They received bread, sausage and coffee for breakfast from one of the huge kitchen automobiles, and nearly all ate with a good appetite. Their German captors did not treat them badly, but John, watching both officers and men, did not see any elation. He had no doubt that the officers were stunned by the terrible surprise of the day before, and as for the men, they would know nothing. He had seen early that the Germans were splendid troops, disciplined, brave and ingenious, but the habit of blind obedience would blind them also to the fact that fortune had turned her face away from them.

He wished that his friend von Arnheim—friend he regarded him—would appear and tell him something about the battle, but his wish did not come true for an hour and meanwhile the whole heavens resounded with the roar of the battle, while distant flashes from the guns could be seen on either flank.

The young German, glasses in hand, evidently seeking a good view, walked to the crest of the hillock behind which Weber had disappeared. John presumed enough on their brief friendship to call to him.

“Do you see anything of interest?” he asked.

Von Arnheim nodded quickly.

“I see the distant fringe of a battle,” he replied amiably, “but it’s too early in the morning for me to pass my judgment upon it.”

“Nevertheless you can look for a day of most desperate struggle!”

Von Arnheim nodded very gravely.

“Men by tens of thousands will fall before night,” he said.

As if to confirm his words, the roar of the battle took a sudden and mighty increase, like a convulsion.

CHAPTER VII

THE TWO PRINCES

John sat with the other prisoners for more than two hours listening to the thunder of the great battle or rather series of battles which were afterwards classified under the general head the Battle of the Marne. He was not a soldier, merely a civilian serving as a soldier, but he had learned already to interpret many of the signs of combat. There was an atmospheric feeling that registered on a sensitive mind the difference between victory and defeat, and he was firm in the belief that as yesterday had gone today was going. Certainly this great German army which he believed to be in the center was not



advancing, and something of a character most menacing was happening to the wings of the German force. He read it in the serious, preoccupied faces of the officers who passed near. There was not a smile on the face of the youngest of them all, but deepest anxiety was written alike on young and old.

John and Fleury sat together at the edge of the brook, and for a while forgot their chagrin at not being on the battle line. The battle itself which they could not see, but which they could hear, absorbed them so thoroughly that they had no time to think of regrets.

John had thought that man's violence, his energy in destruction on the first day could not be equalled, but it seemed to him now that the second day surpassed the first. The cannon fire was distant, yet the waves of air beat heavily upon them, and the earth shook without ceasing. Wisps of smoke floated toward them and the air was tainted again with the acrid smell of burned gunpowder.



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"You're a mountaineer, Fleury, you told me," said Scott, "and you should be able to judge how sound travels through gorges. I suppose you yodel, of course?"

"Yodel, what's that?"

"To make a long singing cry on a peak which is supposed to reach to somebody on another peak who sends back the same kind of a singing cry. We have a general impression in America that European mountaineers don't do much but stand in fancy costumes on crests and ridges and yodel to one another."

"It may have been so once," said the young Savoyard, "but this is a bad year for yodeling. The voice of the cannon carries so far that the voice of man doesn't amount to much. But what sound did you want me to interpret?"

"That of the cannon. Does its volume move eastward or westward? I should think it's much like your mountain storms and you know how they travel among the ridges."

"The comparison is just, but I can't yet tell any shifting of the artillery fire. The wind brings the sound toward us, and if there's any great advance or retreat I should be able to detect it. I should say that as far as the second day is concerned nothing decisive has happened yet."

"Do you know this country?"

"A little. My regiment marched through here about three weeks ago and we made two camps not far from this spot. This is the wood of Senouart, and the brook here runs down to the river Marne."

"And we're not far from that river. Then we've pressed back the Germans farther than I thought. It's strange that the German army here does not move."

"It's waiting, and I fancy it doesn't know what to do. I've an idea that our victory yesterday was greater than the French and British have realized, but which the Germans, of course, understand. Why do they leave us here, almost neglected, and why do their officers walk about, looking so doubtful and anxious? I've heard that the Germans were approaching Paris with five armies. It may be that we've cut off at least one of those armies and that it's in mortal danger."

"It may be so. But have you thought, Fleury, of the extraordinary difference between this morning and yesterday morning?"

"I have. In conditions they're worlds apart. Hark! Listen now, Scott, my friend!"



He lay on the grass and put his ear to the ground, just as John had often done. Listening intently for at least two minutes, he announced with conviction that the cannonade was moving eastward.

“Which means that the Germans are withdrawing again?” said John.

“Undoubtedly,” said Fleury, his face glowing.



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They listened a quarter of an hour longer, and John himself was then able to tell that the battle line was shifting. The Germans elsewhere must have fallen back several miles, but the army about him did not yet move. He caught a glimpse of the burly general walking back and forth in the forest, his hands clasped behind him, and a frown on his broad, fighting face. He would walk occasionally to a little telephone station, improvised under the trees—John could see the wires stretching away through the forest—and listen long and attentively. But when he put down the receiver the same moody look was invariably on his face, and John was convinced as much by his expression as by the sound of the guns that affairs were not going well with the Germans.

Another long hour passed and the sun moved on toward noon, but a German army of perhaps a quarter of a million men lay idle in the forest of Senouart, as John now called the whole region.

Presently the general walked down the line and John lost sight of him. But Weber reappeared, coming from the other side of the hillock, and John was glad to see him, since Fleury had gone back to attend to a wounded friend.

“There doesn’t seem to be as much action here as I expected,” said Weber, cheerfully, sitting down on the grass beside young Scott.

“But they’re shaking the world there! and there!” said John, nodding to right and to left.

“So they are. This is a most extraordinary reversal, Mr. Scott, and I can’t conceive how it was brought about. Some mysterious mind has made and carried through a plan that was superbly Napoleonic. I’d give much to know how it was done.”

John shook his head.

“I know nothing of it,” he said.

“But doubtless your friend Lannes does. What a wonderful thing it is to carry through the heavens the dispatches which may move forward a million armed men.”

“I don’t know anything about Lannes’ dispatches.”

“Nor do I, but I can make a close guess, just as you can. He’s surely hovering over the battle field today, and as I said last night he certainly has some idea where you are, and sooner or later will come for you.”

John looked up, but again the heavens were bare and clear. Then he looked down and saw walking near them a heavy, middle-aged, bearded man to whom all the German officers paid great deference. The man’s manner was haughty and overbearing, and John understood at once that in the monarchical sense he was a personage.



“Do you know the big fellow there?” he said to Weber. “Have you heard anyone speak of him?”

“I saw him this morning, and one of the guards told us who he is. That is Prince Karl of Auersperg. The house of Auersperg is one of the oldest in Germany, much older than the Emperor’s family, the Hohenzollerns. I don’t suppose the world contains any royal blood more ancient than that of Prince Karl.”



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“Evidently he feels that it’s so. I’m getting used to princes, but our heavy friend there must be something of a specialist in the princely line. I should judge from his manner that he is not only the oldest man on earth, speaking in terms of blood, but the owner of the earth as well.”

“The Auerspergs have an immense pride.”

“I can see it, but a lot of pride fell before Paris yesterday, and a lot more is falling among these hills and forests today. There seems to be a lot of difference between princes, the Arnheims and the Auerspergs, for instance.”

Then a sudden thought struck John. It had the vaguest sort of basis, but it came home to him with all the power of conviction.

“I wonder if Prince Karl of Auersperg once owned a magnificent armored automobile,” he said.

Weber looked puzzled, and then his eyes lightened.

“Ah, I know what you mean!” he exclaimed. “The one in which we took that flight with Carstairs the Englishman and Wharton the American. It belonged to a prince, without doubt, yes. But no, it couldn’t have been Prince Karl of Auersperg who owned the machine.”

“I’m not so sure. I’ve an intuition that it is he. Besides, he looks like just the kind of prince from whom I’d like to take his best automobile, also everything else good that he might happen to have. I shall feel much disappointed if this proves not to be our prince.”

“You Americans are such democrats.”

“I don’t go so far as to say a man is necessarily bad because of his high rank, but as I reminded you a little while ago, there are princes and princes. The ancient house of Auersperg as it walks up and down, indicating its conviction of its own superiority to everything else on earth, does not please me.”

“The Uhlans are coming back!” exclaimed Weber in tones of excitement.

“And that’s von Boehlen at their head! I’d know his figure as far as I could see it! And they’ve had a brush, too! Look at the empty saddles and the wounded men! As sure as we live they’ve run into the French cavalry and then they’ve run out again!”

The Uhlans were returning at a gallop, and the German officers of high rank were crowding forward to meet them. It was obvious to every one that they had received a



terrible handling, but John knew that von Boehlen was not a man to come at a panicky gallop. Some powerful motive must send him so fast.

He saw the Prussian captain spring from his horse and rush to a little group composed of the general, the prince and several others of high rank who had drawn closely together at his coming.

Von Boehlen was wounded slightly, but he stood erect as he saluted the commander and talked with him briefly and rapidly. John's busy and imaginative mind was at work at once with surmises, and he settled upon one which he was sure must be the truth. The French advance in the center was coming, and this German army also must soon go into action.

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He was confirmed in his belief by a hurried order to the guards to go eastward with the prisoners. As the captives, the wounded and the unwounded, marched off through the forest of Senouart they heard at a distance, but behind them, the opening of a huge artillery fire. It was so tremendous that they could feel the shaking of the earth as they walked, and despite the hurrying of their guards they stopped at the crest of a low ridge to look back.

They gazed across a wide valley toward high green hills, along which they saw rapid and many flashes. John longed now for the glasses which had been taken from him when he was captured, but he was quite sure that the flashes were made by French guns. From a point perhaps a mile in front of the prisoners masked German batteries were replying. Fleury with his extraordinary power of judging sound was able to locate these guns with some degree of approximation.

“Look! the aeroplanes!” said John, pointing toward the hills which he now called to himself the French line.

Numerous dark shapes, forty or fifty at least, appeared in the sky and hovered over the western edge of the wide, shallow basin. John was sure that they were the French scouts of the blue, appearing almost in line like troops on the ground, and his heart gave a great throb. No doubt could be left now, that this German army was being attacked in force and with the greatest violence. It followed then that the entire German line was being assailed, and that the French victory was continuing its advance. The Republic had rallied grandly and was hurling back the Empire in the most magnificent manner.

All those emotions of joy and exultation that he had felt the day before returned with increased force. In daily contact he liked Germans as well as Frenchmen, but he thought that no punishment could ever be adequate for the gigantic crimes of kings. Napoleon himself had been the champion of democracy and freedom, until he became an emperor and his head swelled so much with success that he thought of God and himself together, just as the Kaiser was now thinking. It was a curious inversion that the French who were fighting then to dominate Europe were fighting now to prevent such a domination. But it was now a great French republican nation remade and reinvigorated, as any one could see.

The guards hurried them on again. Another mile and they stopped once more on the crest of a low hill, where it seemed that they would remain some time, as the Germans were too busy with a vast battle to think much about a few prisoners. It was evident that the whole army was engaged. The old general, the other generals, the princes and perhaps dukes and barons too, were in the thick of it. John's heart was filled with an intense hatred of the very name of royalty. Kings and princes could be good men personally, but as he saw its work upon the huge battle fields of Europe he felt that the institution itself was the curse of the earth.



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"We shall win again today," said Fleury, rousing him from his absorption. "Look across the fields, Scott, my friend, and see how those great masses of infantry charging our army have been repulsed."

It was a far look, and at the distance the German brigades seemed to be blended together, but the great gray mass was coming back slowly. He forgot all about himself and his own fate in his desire to see every act of the gigantic drama as it passed before him. He took no thought of escape at present, nor did Fleury, who stood beside him. The fire of the guns great and small had now blended into the usual steady thunder, beneath which human voices could be heard.

"We don't have the forty-two centimeters, nor the great siege guns," said Fleury, "but the French field artillery is the best in the world. It's undoubtedly holding back the German hosts and covering the French advance."

"That's my opinion, too," said John. "I saw its wonderful work in the retreat toward Paris. I think it saved the early French armies from destruction."

The German army was made of stern material. Having planted its feet here it refused to be driven back. Its cannon was a line of flaming volcanoes, its cavalry charged again and again into the face of death, and its infantry perished in masses, but the stern old general spared nothing. Passing up and down the lines, listening at the telephone and receiving the reports of air scouts and land scouts, he always hurled in fresh troops at the critical points and Fritz and Karl and Wilhelm and August, sober and honest men, went forward willingly, sometimes singing and sometimes in silence, to die for a false and outworn system. John as a prisoner had a better view than he would have had if with the French army. In a country open now he could see a full mile to right and left, where the German hosts marched again and again to attack, and while the French troops were too far away for his eyes he beheld the continuous flare of their fire, like a broad red ribbon across the whole western horizon.

The passing of time was nothing to him. He forgot all about it in his absorption. But the sun climbed on, afternoon came, and still the battle at this point raged, the French unable to drive the Germans farther and the Germans unable to stop the French attacks. John roused himself and endeavored to dissociate the thunder on their flanks from that in front, and, after long listening, he was able to make the separation, or at least he thought so. He knew now that the struggle there was no less fierce than the one before him.

The Kaiser himself must be present with one or the other of these armies, and a man who had talked for more than twenty years of his divine right, his shining armor, his invincible sword and his mailed fist must be raging with the bitterness of death to find that he was only a mortal like other mortals, and that simple French republicans were defeating the War Lord, his Grand Army and the host of kings, princes, dukes, barons,



high-born, very high-born, and all the other relics of medievalism. Dipped to the heel and beyond in the fountain of democracy, John could not keep from feeling a fierce joy as he saw with his own eyes the Germans fighting in the utmost desperation, not to take Paris and destroy France, but to save themselves from destruction.



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The afternoon, slow and bright, save for the battle, dragged on. Scott and Fleury kept together. Weber appeared once more and spoke rather despondently. He believed that the Germans would hold fast, and might even resume the offensive toward Paris again, but Fleury shook his head.

"Today is like yesterday," he said.

"How can you tell?" asked Weber.

"Because the fire on both flanks is slowly moving eastward, that is, the Germans there are yielding ground. My ears, trained to note such things, tell me so. My friend, I am not mistaken."

He spoke gravely, without exultation, but John took fresh hope from his words. Toward night the fire in their front died somewhat, and after sunset it sank lower, but they still heard a prodigious volume of firing on both flanks. John remembered then that they had eaten nothing since morning, but when some of the prisoners who spoke German requested food it was served to them.

Night came over what seemed to be a drawn battle at this point, and after eating his brief supper John saw the automobiles and stretchers bringing in the wounded. They passed him in thousands and thousands, hurt in every conceivable manner. At first he could scarcely bear to look at them, but it was astonishing how soon one hardened to such sights.

The wounded were being carried to improvised hospitals in the rear, but so far as John knew the dead were left on the field. The Germans with their usual thorough system worked rapidly and smoothly, but he noticed that the fires were but very few. There was but little light in the wood of Senouart or the hills beyond, and there was little, too, on the ridges that marked the French position.

John kept near the edges of the space allotted to the prisoners, hoping that he might again see von Arnheim. He had discovered early that the Germans were unusually kind to Americans, and the fact that he had been taken fighting against them did not prevent them from showing generous treatment. The officer in charge of the guard even wanted to talk to him about the war and prove to him how jealousy had caused the other nations to set upon Germany. But John evaded him and continued to look for the young prince who was serving as a mere lieutenant.

It was about an hour after dark when he caught his first glimpse of von Arnheim, and he was really glad to see that he was not wounded.

"I've come to tell you, Mr. Scott," said von Arnheim, "that all of you must march at once. You will cross the Marne, and then pass as prisoners into Germany. You will be well



treated there and I think you can probably secure your release on condition that you return to your own country and take no further part in the war.”

John shook his head.

“I don’t expect any harshness from the Germans,” he said, “but I’m in this war to stay, if the bullets and shells will let me. I warn you now that I’m going to escape.”



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Von Arnheim laughed pleasantly.

"It's fair of you to give us warning of your intentions," he said, "but I don't think you'll have much chance. You must get ready to start at once."

"I take it," said John, "that our departure means the departure of the German army also."

Von Arnheim opened his mouth to speak, but he closed it again suddenly.

"It's only a deduction of mine," said John.

Von Arnheim nodded in farewell and hurried away.

"Now I'm sure," said John to Fleury a few minutes later, "that this army is going to withdraw."

"I think so too," said Fleury. "I can yet hear the fire of the cannon on either flank and it has certainly moved to the east. In my opinion, my friend, both German wings have been defeated, and this central army is compelled to fall back because it's left without supports. But we'll soon see. They can't hide from us the evidences of retreat."

The prisoners now marched in a long file in the moonlight across the fields, and John soon recognized the proof that Fleury was right. The German army was retreating. There were innumerable dull, rumbling sounds, made by the cannon and motors of all kinds passing along the roads, and at times also he heard the heavy tramp of scores of thousands marching in a direction that did not lead to Paris.

John began to think now of Lannes. Would he come? Was Weber right when he credited to him a knowledge near to omniscience? How was it possible for him to pick out a friend in all that huge morass of battle! And yet he had a wonderful, almost an unreasoning faith in Philip, and, as always when he thought of him, he looked up at the heavens.

It was an average night, one in which large objects should be visible in the skies, and he saw several aeroplanes almost over their heads, while the rattle of a dirigible came from a point further toward the east.

The aeroplane was bound to be German, but as John looked he saw a sleek shape darting high over them all and flying eastward. Intuition, or perhaps it was something in the motion and shape of the machine, made him believe it was the *Arrow*. It must be the *Arrow*! And Lannes must be in it! High over the army and high over the German planes it darted forward like a swallow and disappeared in a cloud of white mist. His hair lifted a little, and a thrill ran down his spine.



He still looked up as he walked along, and there was the sleek shape again! It had come back out of the white mist, and was circling over the German planes, flying with the speed and certainty of an eagle. He saw three of the German machines whirl about and begin to mount as if they would examine the stranger. But the solitary plane began to rise again in a series of dazzling circles. Up, up it went, as if it would penetrate the last and thinnest layer of air, until it reached the dark and empty void beyond.



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The *Arrow*—he was sure it could be no other—was quickly lost in the infinite heights, and then the German planes were lost, too, but they soon came back, although the *Arrow* did not. It had probably returned to some point over the French line or had gone eastward beyond the Germans.

John felt that he had again seen a sign. He remembered how he and Lannes had drawn hope from omens when they were looking at the Arc de Triomphe, and a similar hope sprang up now. Weber was right! Lannes would come to his rescue. Some thought or impulse yet unknown would guide him.

Light clouds now drifted up from the southwest, and all the aeroplanes were hidden, but the heavy murmur of the marching army went on. The puffing and clashing of innumerable automobiles came from the roads also, though John soon ceased to pay attention to them. As the hours passed, he felt an increased weariness. He had sat still almost the whole day, but the strain of the watching and waiting had been as great as that of the walking now was. He wondered if the guards would ever let them stop.

They waded another brook, passed through another wood and then they were ordered to halt. The guards announced that they could sleep, as they would go no farther that night. The men did not lie down. They fell, and each lay where he fell, and in whatever position he had assumed when falling.

John was conscious of hearing the order, of striking the grass full length, and he knew nothing more until the next morning when he was aroused by Fleury. He saw a whitish dawn with much mist floating over the fields, and he believed that a large river, probably the Marne, must be near.

As far as he could see the ground was covered with German soldiers. They too had dropped at the command to stop, and had gone to sleep as they were falling. The majority of them still slept.

“What is it, Fleury? Why did you wake me up?” asked John.

“The river Marne is close by, and I’m sure that the Germans are going to retreat across it. I had an idea that possibly we might escape while there’s so much mist. They can’t watch us very closely while they have so much else to do, and doubtless they would care but little if some of us did escape.”

“We’ll certainly look for the chance. Can you see any sign of the French pursuit?”

“Not yet, but our people will surely follow. They’re still at it already on the flanks!”

The distant thunder of cannon came from both right and left.

“A third day of fighting is at hand,” said Fleury.



“And it will be followed by a fourth.”

“And a fifth.”

“But we shall continue to drive the enemy away.”

Both spoke with the utmost confidence. Having seen their armies victorious for two days they had no doubt they would win again. All that morning they listened to the sounds of combat, although they saw much less than on the day before. The prisoners were in a little wood, where they lay down at times, and then, restless and anxious, would stand on tiptoe again, seeking to see at least a corner of the battle.



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John and Fleury were standing near noon at the edge of the wood, when a small body of Uhlans halted close by. Being not more than fifty in number, John judged that they were scouts, and the foaming mouths of their horses showing that they had been ridden hard, confirmed him in the opinion. They were only fifty or sixty yards from him, and although they were motionless for some time, their eager faces showed that they were waiting for some movement.

It was pure chance, but John happened to be looking at a rather large man who sat his horse easily, his gloved hand resting on his thigh. He saw distinctly that his face was very ruddy and covered with beads of perspiration. Then man and horse together fell to the ground as if struck by a bolt of lightning. The man did not move at all, but the horse kicked for a few moments and lay still.

There was a shout of mingled amazement and horror from the other Uhlans, and it found its echo in John's own mind. He saw one of the men look up, and he looked up also. A dark shape hovered overhead. Something small and black, and then another and another fell from it and shot downward into the group of Uhlans. A second man was hurled from his horse and lay still upon the ground. Again John felt that thrill of horror and amazement.

"What is it? What is it?" he cried.

"I think it's the steel arrow," said Fleury, pressing a little further forward and standing on tiptoe. "As well as I can see, the first passed entirely through the head of the man and then broke the backbone of the horse beneath him."

John saw one of the Uhlans, who had dismounted, holding up a short, heavy steel weapon, a dart rather than an arrow, its weight adjusted so that it was sure to fall point downward. Coming from such a height John did not wonder that it had pierced both horse and rider, and as he looked another, falling near the Uhlan, struck deep into the earth.

"There goes the aeroplane that did it," said John to Fleury, pointing upward.

It hovered a minute or two longer and flew swiftly back toward the French lines, pursued vainly a portion of the distance by the German Taubes.

"A new weapon of death," said Fleury. "The fighters move in the air, under the water, on the earth, everywhere."

"The Uhlans are off again," said John. "Whatever their duty was the steel arrows have sent them on it in a hurry."

"And we're about to move too. See, these batteries are limbering up preparatory to a withdrawal."



Inside of fifteen minutes they were again marching eastward, though slowly and with the roar of battle going on as fiercely behind them as ever. John heard again from some of the talk of the guards that the Germans had five armies along their whole line, but whether the one with which he was now a prisoner was falling back with its whole force he had no way of knowing. Both he and Fleury were sure the prisoners themselves would soon cross the Marne, and that large detachments of the enemy would go with them.



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Thoughts of escape returned. Crossing a river in battle was a perilous operation, entailing much confusion, and the chance might come at the Marne. They could see too that the Germans were now being pressed harder. The French shells were coming faster and with more deadly precision. Now and then they exploded among the masses of German infantry, and once or twice they struck close to the captives.

"It would be a pity to be killed by our own people," said Fleury.

"And at such a time as this," said John. "Do you know, Fleury, that my greatest fear about getting killed is that then I wouldn't know how this war is going to end?"

"I feel that way myself sometimes. Look, there's the Marne! See its waters shining! It's the mark of the first great stage in the German retreat."

"I wonder how we're going to cross. I suppose the bridges will be crowded with artillery and men. It might pay the Germans just to let us go."

"They won't do that. There's nothing in their rules about liberating prisoners, and they wouldn't hear of such a thing, anyhow, trouble or no trouble."

"I see some boats, and I fancy we'll cross on them. I wonder if we couldn't make what we call in my country a get-away, while we're waiting for the embarkation."

"If our gunners become much more accurate our get-away, as you call it, will be into the next life."

Two huge shells had burst near, and, although none of the flying metal struck them, their faces were stung by fine dirt. When John brushed the dust out of his eyes he saw that he was right in his surmise about the crossing in boats, but wrong about probable delays in embarkation. The German machine even in retreat worked with neatness and dispatch. There were three boats, and the first relay of prisoners, including John and Fleury, was hurried into them. A bridge farther down the stream rumbled heavily as the artillery crossed on it. But the French force was coming closer and closer. A shell struck in the river sixty or eighty feet from them and the water rose in a cataract. Some of the prisoners had been put at the oars and they, like the Germans, showed eagerness to reach the other side. John noted the landing, a narrow entrance between thick clumps of willows, and he confessed to himself that he too would feel better when they were on the farther bank.

The Marne is not a wide river, and a few powerful pulls at the oars sent them near to the landing. But at that moment a shell whistled through the air, plunged into the water and exploded practically beneath the boat.

John was hurled upward in a gush of foam and water, and then, when he dropped back, the Marne received him in its bosom.



CHAPTER VIII

THE SPORT OF KINGS

John Scott, who was suffering from his second immersion in a French river, came up with mouth, eyes and nose full of water. The stream around him was crowded with men swimming or with those who had reached water shallow enough to permit of wading. As well as he could see, the shell had done no damage besides giving them a huge bath, of which every one stood in much need.

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But he had a keen and active mind and it never worked quicker than it did now. He had thought his chance for escape might come in the confusion of a hurried crossing, and here it was. He dived and swam down the stream toward the willows that lined the bank. When he could hold his breath no longer he came up in one of the thickest clumps. The water reached to his waist there, and standing on the bottom in all the density of willows and bushes he was hidden thoroughly from all except watchful searchers. And who would miss him at such a time, and who, if missing, would take the trouble to look for him while the French cannon were thundering upon them and a perilous crossing was to be made?

It was all so ridiculously easy. He knew that he had nothing to do but stand close while the men pulled themselves out of the river and the remaining boats made their passage. For further protection he moved into water deep enough to reach to his neck, while he still retained the cover of the willows and bushes. Here he watched the German troops pass over, and listened to the heavy cannonade. He soon noted that the Germans, after crossing, were taking up strong positions on the other side. He could tell it from the tremendous artillery fire that came from their side of the Marne.

John now found that his position, while safe from observation, was far from comfortable. The chill of the water began to creep into his bones and more shells struck unpleasantly near. Another fell into the river and he was blinded for a moment by the violent showers of foam and spray. He began to feel uneasy. If the German and French armies were going to fight each other from the opposing sides of the Marne he would be held there indefinitely, either to be killed by a shell or bullet or to drown from cramp.

But time passed and he saw no chance of leaving his watery lair. The chill went further into his bones. He was lonesome too. He longed for the companionship of Fleury, and he wondered what had become of him. He sincerely hoped that he too had reached a covert and that they should meet again.

No rumbling came from the bridge below, and, glancing down the stream, John saw that it was empty. There must be many other bridges over the Marne, but he believed that the German armies had now crossed it, and would devote their energy to a new attack. He was squarely between the lines and he did not see any chance to escape until darkness.

He looked up and saw a bright sun and blue skies. Night was distant, and so far as he was concerned it might be a year away. If two armies were firing shells directly at a man they must hit him in an hour or two, and if not, a polar stream such as the Marne had now become would certainly freeze him to death. He had no idea French rivers could be so cold. The Marne must be fed by a whole flock of glaciers.

His teeth began to chatter violently, and then he took stern hold of himself. He felt that he was allowing his imagination to run away with him, and he rebuked John Scott

sternly and often for such foolishness. He tried to get some warmth into his veins by jumping up and down in the water, but it was of little avail. Yet he stood it another hour. Then he made one more long and critical examination of the ground.



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Shells were now screaming high overhead, but nobody was in sight. He judged that it was now an artillery battle, with the foes perhaps three or four miles apart, and, leaving the willows, he crept out upon the bank. It was the side held by the Germans, but he knew that if he attempted to swim the river to the other bank he would be taken with cramps and would drown.

There was a little patch of long grass about ten yards from the river, and, crawling to it, he lay down. The grass rose a foot high on either side of him, but the sun, bright and hot, shone directly down upon his face and body. It felt wonderfully good after that long submersion in the Marne. Removing all his heavy wet clothing, he wrung the water out of it as much as he could, and lay back in a state of nature, for both himself and his clothing to dry. Meanwhile, in order to avoid cold, he stretched and tensed his muscles for a quarter of an hour before he lay still again.

A wonderful warmth and restfulness flowed back into his veins. He had feared chills and a serious illness, but he knew now that they would not come. Youth, wiry and seasoned by hard campaigning, would quickly recover, but knowing that, for the present, he could neither go forward nor backward, he luxuriated in the grass, while the sun sucked the damp out of his clothing.

Meanwhile the battle was raging over his head and he scarcely noticed it. The shells whistled and shrieked incessantly, but, midway between the contending lines, he felt that they were no longer likely to drop near. So he relaxed, and a dreamy feeling crept over him. He could hear the murmur of insects in the grass, and he reflected that the smaller one was, the safer one was. A shell was not likely to take any notice of a gnat.

He felt of his clothing. It was not dry yet and he would wait a little longer. Anyhow, what was the use of hurrying? He turned over on his side and continued to luxuriate in the long grass.

The warmth and dryness had sent the blood pulsing in a strong flood through his veins once more, and the mental rebound came too. Although he lay immediately between two gigantic armies which were sending showers of metal at each other along a line of many miles, he considered his escape sure and the thought of personal danger disappeared. If one only had something to eat! It is curious how the normal instincts and wants of man assert themselves even under the most dangerous conditions. He began to think of the good German brown bread and the hot sausage that he had devoured, and the hot coffee that he had drunk. One could eat the food of an enemy without compunction.

But it was folly to move, even to seek dinner or supper, while the shells were flying in such quantities over his head. As he turned once more and lay on his back he caught glimpses as of swift shadows passing high above, and the whistling and screaming of shells and shrapnel was continuous. It was true that a missile might fall short and find



him in the grass, but he considered the possibility remote and it did not give him a tremor. As he was sure now that he would suffer no bodily ill from his long bath in the Marne he might remain in the grass until night and then creep away. Blessed night! It was the kindly veil for all fugitives, and no one ever awaited it with more eagerness than John Scott.



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The sun was now well beyond the zenith, and its golden darts came indirectly. His clothing was thoroughly dry at last, and he put it on again. Clad anew he was tempted to seek escape at once, but the sound of a footstep caused him to lie down in the shelter of the grass again.

His ear was now against the earth and the footsteps were much more distinct. He was sure that they were made by a horse, and he believed that a Uhlan was riding near. He remembered how long and sharp their lances were, and he was grateful that the grass was so thick and tall. He longed for the automatic revolver that had been such a trusty friend, but the Germans had taken it long since, and he was wholly unarmed.

He was afraid to raise his head high enough to see the horseman, lest he be seen, but the footsteps, as if fate had a grudge against him, were coming nearer. His blood grew hot in a kind of rebellion against chance, or the power that directed the universe. It was really a grim joke that, after having escaped so much, a mere wandering scout of a Uhlan should pick him up, so to speak, on the point of his lance.

He pressed hard against the earth. He would have pressed himself into it if he could, and imagination, the deceiver, made him think that he was doing so. The temptation to raise his head above the grass and look became more violent, but will held him firm and he still lay flat.

Then he noticed that the hoofbeats wandered about in an irregular, aimless fashion. Not even a scout hunting a good position for observation would ride in such a way, and becoming more daring he raised his head slowly, until he could peep over the grass stems. He saw a horse, fifteen or twenty feet from him, but without rider, bridle or saddle. It was a black horse of gigantic build like a Percheron, with feet as large as a half-bushel measure, and a huge rough mane.

The horse saw John and gazed at him out of great, mild, limpid eyes. The young American thought he beheld fright there and the desire for companionship. The animal, probably belonging to some farmer who had fled before the armies, had wandered into the battle area, seeking the human friends to whom he was so used, and nothing living was more harmless than he. He reminded John in some ways of those stalwart and honest peasants who were so ruthlessly made into cannon food by the gigantic and infinitely more dangerous Tammany that rules the seventy million Germans.

The horse walked nearer and the look in his eyes became so full of terror and the need of man's support that for the time he stood as a human being in John's imagination.

"Poor old horse!" he called, "I'm sorry for you, but your case is no worse than mine. Here we both are, wishing harm to nobody, but with a million men shooting over our backs."



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The horse, emboldened by the friendly voice, came nearer and nuzzled at the human friend whom he had found so opportunely, and who, although so much smaller than himself, was, as he knew, so much more powerful. This human comrade would show him what to do and protect him from all harm. But John took alarm. He too found pleasure in having a comrade, even if it were only a horse, but the animal would probably attract the attention of scouts or skirmishers. He tried to shoo him away, but for a long time the horse would not move. At last he pulled a heavy bunch of grass, wadded it together and threw it in his face.

The horse, staring at him reproachfully, turned and walked away. John's lively fancy saw a tear in the huge, luminous eye, and his conscience smote him hard.

"I had to do it, Marne, old fellow," he called. "You're so big and you stick up so high that you arouse attention, and that's just what I don't want."

He had decided to call the horse Marne, after the river near by, and he noticed that he did not go far. The animal, reassured by John's friendly after-word, began to crop the grass about twenty feet away. He had a human friend after all, one on whom he could rely. Man did not want to be bothered by him just then, but that was the way of man, and he did not mind, since the grass was so plentiful and good. He would be there, close at hand, when he was needed.

John was really moved by the interlude. The loneliness, and then the friendliness of the horse appealed to him. He too needed a comrade, and here he was. He forgot, for a time, the moaning of the shells over his head, and began to think again about his escape. So thinking, the horse came once more into his mind. He showed every sign of grazing there until dark came. Then why not ride away on him? It was true that a horse was larger and made more noise than a fugitive man slipping through the grass, but there were times when strength and speed, especially speed, counted for a lot.

The last hours of the afternoon waned, trailing their slow length, minute by minute, and throughout that time the roar of the battle was as steady as the fall of Niagara. It even came to the point that John paid little attention to it, but the sport of kings, in which thousands of men were ground up, they knew not why, went merrily on. None of the shells struck near John, and with infinite joy he saw the coming of the long shadows betokening the twilight. The horse, still grazing near by, raised his head more than once and looked at him, as if it were time to go. As the sun sank and the dusk grew John stood up. He saw that the night was going to be dark and he was thankful. The Marne was merely a silver streak in the shadow, and in the wood near by the trees were fusing into a single clump of darkness.

He stood erect, stretching his muscles and feeling that it was glorious to be a man with his head in the air, instead of a creature that grovelled on the ground. Then he walked over to the horse and patted him on the shoulder.



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“Marne, old boy,” he said, “I think it’s about time for you and me to go.”

The horse rubbed his great head against John’s arm, signifying that he was ready to obey any command his new master might give him. John knew from his build that he was a draught horse, but there were times in which one could not choose a particular horse for a particular need.

“Marne, old fellow,” he said, stroking the animal’s mane, “you’re not to be a menial cart horse tonight. I am an Arabian genie and I hereby turn you into a light, smooth, beautifully built automobile for one passenger only, and I’m that passenger.”

Holding fast to the thick mane he sprang upon the horse’s back, and urged him down the stream, keeping close to the water where there was shelter among the willows and bushes. He had no definite idea in his head, but he felt that if he kept on going he must arrive somewhere. He was afraid to make the horse swim the river in an effort to reach the French army. Appearing on the surface of the water he felt that he would almost certainly be seen and some good rifleman or other would be sure to pick him off.

He concluded at last that if no German troops came in sight he would let the horse take him where he would. Marne must have a home and a master somewhere and habit would send him to them. So he ceased to push at his neck and try to direct him, and the horse continued a slow and peaceful progress down the stream in the shadow of small trees. The night was darker than those just before it, and the dampness of the air indicated possible flurries of rain. Cannon still rumbled on the horizon like the thunder of a summer night.

While trusting to the horse to lead him to some destination, John kept a wary watch, with eyes now growing used to the darkness. If German troops appeared and speed to escape were lacking, he would jump from Marne’s back and hunt a new covert. But he saw nobody. The evidences of man’s work were present continually in the cannonade, but man himself was absent.

The horse went on with ponderous and sure tread. Evidently he had wandered far under the influence of the firing, but it was equally evident that his certain instinct was guiding him back again. He crossed a brook flowing down into the Marne, passed through a wheat field, and entered a little valley, where grew a number of oaks, clear of undergrowth.

When he saw what was lying under the oaks he pulled hard at the rough mane, until the horse stopped. He had distinctly made out the figures of men, stretched upon the ground, apparently asleep, and sure to be Germans. He stared hard at them, but the horse snorted and tried to pull away. The action of the animal rather than his own eyesight made him reckon aright.



A horse would not be afraid of living men, and, slipping from the back of Marne, John approached cautiously. A few rays of wan moonlight filtered through the trees, and when he had come close he shuddered over and over again. About a dozen men lay on the ground and all were stone dead. The torn earth and their own torn figures showed that a shell had burst among them. Doubtless it had been an infantry patrol, and the survivors had hurried away.

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John, still shuddering, was about to turn back to his horse, when he remembered that he needed much and that in war one must not be too scrupulous. Force of will made him return to the group and he sought for what he wanted. Evidently the firing had been hot there and the rest of the patrol had not lingered in their flight.

He took from one man a pair of blankets. He could have had his choice of two or three good rifles, but he passed them by in favor of a large automatic pistol which would not be in the way. This had been carried by a young man whom he took to be an officer, and he also found on him many cartridges for the pistol. Then he searched their knapsacks for food, finding plenty of bread and sausage and filling with it one knapsack which he put over his shoulder.

He returned hastily to his horse, guided him around the fatal spot, and when he was some distance on the other side dismounted and ate as only a half-starved man can eat. Water was obtained from a convenient brook and carefully storing the remainder of the food in the knapsack he remounted the horse.

“Now go on, my good and gallant beast,” he said, “and I feel sure that your journey is nearly at an end. A draught horse like you, bulky and slow, would not wander any great distance.”

The horse himself immediately justified his prediction by raising his head, neighing and advancing at a swifter pace. John saw, standing among some trees, a low and small house, built of stone and evidently very old, its humble nature indicating that it belonged to a peasant. Behind it was a tiny vineyard, and there was a stable and another outhouse.

“Well, Marne, my lad, here’s your home, beyond a doubt,” said John. But no answer came to the neigh. The house remained silent and dark. It confirmed John’s first belief that the horse belonged to some peasant who had fled with his family from the armies. He stroked the animal’s neck, and felt real pity for him, as if he had been a child abandoned.

“I know that while I’m a friend I’m almost a stranger to you, but come, we’ll examine things,” he said.

He sprang off the horse, and drew his automatic. The possession of the pistol gave him an immense amount of courage and confidence, but he did not anticipate any trouble at the house as he was sure that it was abandoned.

He pushed open the door and saw a dark inside. Staring a little he made out a plainly furnished room, from which all the lighter articles had been taken. There was a hearth, but with no fire on it, and John decided that he would sleep in the house. It was in a lonely place, but he would take the risk.



The horse had already gone to the stable and was pushing the door with his nose. John let him in, and found some oat straw which he gave him. Then he left him munching in content, and as he departed he struck him a resounding blow of friendliness on the flank.



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“Good old Marne,” he said, “you’re certainly one of the best friends I’ve found in Europe. In fact, you’re about the only living being I’ve associated with that doesn’t want to kill somebody.”

He entered the house and closed the door. In addition to the sitting-room there was a bedroom and a kitchen, all bearing the signs of recent occupancy. He found a small petroleum lamp, but he concluded not to light it. Instead he sat on a wooden bench in the main room beside a small window, ate a little more from the knapsack, and watched a while lest friend or enemy should come.

It had grown somewhat darker and the clouds were driving across the sky. The wind was rising and the threatened flurries of rain came, beating against the cottage. John was devoutly glad that he had found the little house. Having spent many hours immersed to his neck in a river he felt that he had had enough water for one day. Moreover, his escape, his snug shelter and the abundance of food at hand, gave him an extraordinary sense of ease and rest. He noticed that in the darkness and rain one might pass within fifty feet of the cottage without seeing it.

The wind increased and moaned among the oaks that grew around the house, but above the moaning the sounds of battle, the distant thunder of the artillery yet came. The sport of kings was going merrily on. Neither night nor storm stopped it and men were still being ground by thousands into cannon food. But John had now a feeling of detachment. Three days of continuous battle had dulled his senses. They might fight on as they pleased. It did not concern him, for tonight at least. He was going to look out for himself.

He fastened the door securely, but, as he left the window open, currents of fresh cool air poured into the room. He was now fully revived in both mind and body, and he took present ease and comfort, thinking but little of the future. The flurries of rain melted into a steady pour. The cold deepened, and as he wrapped the two blankets around him his sense of comfort increased. Lightning flared at infrequent intervals and now and then real thunder mingled with that of the artillery.

He felt that he might have been back at home. It was like some snug little place in the high hills of Pennsylvania or New York. Like many other Americans, he often felt surprise that Europe should be so much like America. The trees and the grass and the rivers were just the same. Nothing was different but the ancient buildings. He knew now that history and a long literature merely created the illusion of difference.

He wondered why the artillery fire did not die, with the wind sweeping such gusts of rain before it. Then he remembered that the sound of so many great cannon could travel a long distance, and there might be no rain at the points from which the firing came. The cottage might stand in a long narrow valley up which the clouds would travel.

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Not feeling sleepy yet he decided to have another look about the house. A search revealed a small box of matches near the lamp on the shelf. Then he closed the window in order to shut in the flame, and, lighting the lamp, pursued his investigation.

He found in the kitchen a jar of honey that he had overlooked, and he resolved to use a part of it for breakfast. Europeans did not seem able to live without jam or honey in the mornings, and he would follow the custom. Not much was left in the other rooms, besides some old articles of clothing, including two or three blue blouses of the kind worn by French peasants or workmen, but on one of the walls he saw an excellent engraving of the young Napoleon, conqueror of Italy.

It showed him, horseback, on a high road looking down upon troops in battle, Castiglione or Rivoli, perhaps, his face thin and gaunt, his hair long and cut squarely across his forehead, the eyes deep, burning and unfathomable. It was so thoroughly alive that he believed it must be a reproduction of some great painting. He stood a long time, fascinated by this picture of the young republican general who rose like a meteor over Europe and who changed the world.

John, like nearly all young men, viewed the Napoleonic cycle with a certain awe and wonder. A student, he had considered Napoleon the great democratic champion and mainly in the right as far as Austerlitz. Then swollen ambition had ruined everything and, in his opinion, another swollen ambition, though for far less cause, was now bringing equal disaster upon Europe. A belief in one's infallibility might come from achievement or birth, but only the former could win any respect from thinking men.

It seemed to John presently that the deep, inscrutable eyes were gazing at him, and he felt a quivering at the roots of his hair. It was young Bonaparte, the republican general, and not Napoleon, the emperor, who was looking into his heart.

"Well," said John, in a sort of defiance, "if you had stuck to your early principles we wouldn't have all this now. First Consul you might have been, but you shouldn't have gone any further."

He turned away with a sigh of regret that so great a warrior and statesman, in the end, should have misused his energies.

He returned to the room below, blew out the lamp and opened the window again. The cool fresh air once more poured into the room, and he took long deep breaths of it. It was still raining, though lightly, and the pattering of the drops on the leaves made a pleasant sound. The thunder and the lightning had ceased, though not the far rumble of artillery. John knew that the sport of kings was still going on under the searchlights, and all his intense horror of the murderous monarchies returned. He was not sleepy yet, and he listened a long time. The sound seemed to come from both sides of him, and he

felt that the abandoned cottage among the trees was merely a little oasis in the sea of war.

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The rain ceased and he concluded to scout about the house to see if any one was near, or if any farm animals besides the horse had been left. But Marne was alone. There was not even a fowl of any kind. He concluded that the horse had probably wandered away before the peasant left, as so valuable an animal would not have been abandoned otherwise.

His scouting—he was learning to be very cautious—took him some distance from the house and he came to a narrow road, but smooth and hard, a road which troops were almost sure to use, while such great movements were going on. He waited behind a hedge a little while, and then he heard the hum of motors.

He had grown familiar with the throbbing, grinding sound made by many military automobiles on the march, but he waited calmly, merely loosening his automatic for the sake of precaution. He felt sure that while he stood behind a hedge he would never be seen on a dark night by men traveling in haste. The automobiles came quickly into view and in those in front he saw elderly men in uniforms of high rank. Nearly all the German generals seemed to him to be old men who for forty or fifty years had studied nothing but how to conquer, men too old and hardened to think much of the rights of others or ever to give way to generous emotions.

He also saw sitting erect in one of the motors the man for whom he had felt at first sight an invincible repulsion. Prince Karl of Auersperg. Young von Arnheim had represented the good prince to him, but here was the medieval type, the believer in divine right, and in his own superiority, decreed even before birth. John noted in the moonlight his air of ownership, his insolent eyes and his heavy, arrogant face. He hoped that the present war would sweep away all such as Auersperg.

He watched nearly an hour while the automobiles, cyclists, a column of infantry, and then several batteries of heavy guns drawn by motors, passed. He judged that the Germans were executing a change of front somewhere, and that the Franco-British forces were still pressing hard. The far thunder of the guns had not ceased for an instant, although it must be nearly midnight. He wished he knew what this movement on the part of the Germans meant, but, even if he had known, he had no way of reaching his own army, and he turned back to the cottage.

Having fastened the door securely again he spread the blankets on the bench by the window and lay down to sleep. The tension was gone from his nerves now, and he felt that he could fall asleep at once, but he did not. A shift in the wind brought the sound of the artillery more plainly. His imagination again came into vivid play. He believed that the bench beneath him, the whole cottage, in fact, was quivering before the waves of the air, set in such violent motion by so many great guns.

It annoyed him intensely. He felt a sort of personal anger against everybody. It was past midnight of the third day and it was time for the killing to stop. At least they might



rest until morning, and give his nerves a chance. He moved restlessly on the bench a half hour or more, but at last he sank gradually to sleep. As his eyes closed the thunder of the cannonade was as loud and steady as ever. He slept, but the murderous sport of kings went on.



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CHAPTER IX

THE PUZZLING SIGNAL

When John awoke a bright sun was shining in at the window, bringing with it the distant mutter of cannon, a small fire was burning on the hearth on the opposite side of the room, a man was bending over the coals, and the pleasant odor of boiling coffee came to his nostrils. He sat up in amazement and looked at the man who, not turning around, went on placidly with his work of preparing breakfast. But he recognized the figure.

"Weber!" he exclaimed.

"None other!" said the Alsatian, facing about, and showing a cheery countenance. "I was in the boat just behind you when your own was demolished by the shell. In all the spray and foam and confusion I saw my chance, and dropping overboard from ours I floated with the stream. I had an idea that you might escape, and since you must come down the river between the two armies I also, for the same reasons, chose the same path. I came upon this cottage several hours ago, picked the fastenings of the door and to my astonishment and delight found you, my friend, unharmed, but sound asleep upon the bench there. I slept a while in the corner, then I undertook to make breakfast with provisions and utensils that I found in the forest. Ah, it was easy enough last night to find almost anything one wished. The fields and forest were full of dead men."

"I provided myself in the same way, but I'm delighted to see you. I was never before in my life so lonely. How chance seems to throw us together so often!"

"And we've both profited by it. The coffee is boiling now, Mr. Scott. I've a good German coffee pot and two cups that I took from the fallen. God rest their souls, they'll need them no more, while we do."

"The battle goes on," said John, listening a moment at the window.

"Somewhere on the hundred mile line it has continued without a break of an instant, and it may go on this way for a week or a month. Ah, it's a fearful war, Mr. Scott, and we've seen only the beginning! But drink the coffee now, while it's hot. And I've warmed too, some of the cold food from the knapsacks. German sausage is good at any time."

"And just now it's heavenly. I'm glad we have such a plentiful supply of sausage and bread, even if we did have to take it from the dead. I want to tell you again how pleasant it is to see you here."

"I feel that way too. We're like comrades united. Now if we only had your English friend Carstairs, your American friend Wharton, and Lannes we'd be quite a family group."



“I fancy that we’ll see Lannes before we do Carstairs and Wharton.”

“I think so too. He’ll certainly be hovering today somewhere over the ground between the two armies—either to observe the Germans or more likely to carry messages between the French generals. I tell you, Mr. Scott, that Philip Lannes is perhaps the most wonderful young man in Europe. In addition to his extraordinary ability in the air he has courage, coolness, perception and quickness almost without equal. There’s something Napoleonic about him.”



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“You know he’s descended from the family of the famous Marshal, Lannes, not from Lannes himself, but from a close relative, and the blood’s the same. They say that blood will tell, and don’t you think that the spirit of the great Lannes may have reappeared in Philip?”

“It’s altogether likely.”

“I’ve been thinking a lot about Napoleon. There’s a wonderful picture of him as a young republican general in a room here. Perhaps it’s the conditions around us, but at times I am sure the heroic days of the First Republic have returned to France. The spirit that animated Hoche and Marceau and Kleber and Bonaparte, before he became spoiled, seems to have descended upon the French. And there were Murat, Lannes and Lefebvre, and Berthier and the others. Think of that wonderful crowd of boys leading the republican armies to victories over all the kings! It seems to me the most marvelous thing in the history of war, since the Greeks turned back the Persians.”

Weber refilled his coffee cup, drank a portion of it, and said:

“I have thought of it, Mr. Scott, I have thought of it more than once. It may be that the Gallic fury has been aroused. It has seemed so to me since the German armies were turned back from Paris. The French have burned more gunpowder than any other nation in Europe, and they’re a fighting race. It would appear now that the Terrible Year, 1870, was merely an aggregation of mistakes, and did not represent either the wisdom or natural genius of the nation.”

“That is, the French were then far below normal, as we would say, but have now returned to their best, and that the two Kaisers made the mistake of thinking the French in their lowest form were the French in their usual form?”

“It may be so,” said Weber, thoughtfully. “Nations reckon their strength in peace, but only war itself discloses the fact. Evidently tremendous miscalculations have been made by somebody.”

“By somebody? By whom? That’s why I’m against the Kaisers and all the secret business of the military monarchies. War made over night by a dozen men! a third of the world’s population plunged into battle! and the rest drawn into the suffering some way or other! I don’t like a lot of your European ways.”

Weber shook his head.

“We’ve inherited kings,” he said. “But how did you find this place?”

“Accident. Stumbled on it, and mighty grateful I was, too. It kept me warm and dry after standing so long in the Marne I thought I was bound to turn into a fish. Isolated little place, but the Germans have been passing near. Before sleeping last night, I went out



scouting and as I stood behind a hedge I saw a lot of them. I recognized in a motor the Very High Born, his High Mightiness, the owner of the earth, the Prince of Auersperg.”

Weber took another drink of coffee.

“An able man and one of our most bitter enemies,” he said. “A foe of democracy everywhere. I think he was to have been made governor of Paris, and then Paris would have known that it had a governor. I’ve seen him in Alsace, and I’ve heard a lot about him.”



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“But all that’s off now. I fancy that the next governor of Paris, if it should have a governor, will be a Frenchman. But the day is advancing, Weber; what do you think we ought to do?”

“I’ve been thinking of your friend Lannes. I’ve an idea that he’ll come for you, if he finds an interval in his duties.”

“But how could he possibly find me? Why, it’s the old needle in the haystack business.”

“He couldn’t unless we made some sort of signal.”

“There’s no signal that I can make.”

“But there’s one that I can. Look, Mr. Scott.”

He unbuttoned his long French coat, and took from his breast a roll of red, white and blue. He opened it and disclosed a French flag about four feet long.

“If that were put in a conspicuous place,” he said, “an aviator with glasses could see it a long way, and he would come to find out what it meant.”

“The top of a tree is the place for it!” exclaimed John. “Now if you only had around here a real tree, or two, in place of what we call saplings in my country, we might do some fine signaling with the flag.”

“We’ll try it, but I think we should go a considerable distance from the cottage. If Germans instead of French should come then we’d have a better chance of escaping among the hedges and vineyards.”

John agreed with him and they quickly made ready, each taking his automatic and knapsack, and leaving the fire to die of itself on the hearth.

“I’m telling that cottage good-bye with regret,” said John, as they walked away. “I spent some normal and peaceful hours there last night and it’s a neat little place. I hope its owners will be able to come back to it. As soon as I open the stable door, in order that the horse may go where he will, I’ll be ready.”

He gave the big animal a friendly pat as he left and Marne gazed after him with envious sorrowful eyes.

They walked a full mile, keeping close to the Marne, where the trees and bushes were thickest, and listened meanwhile to the fourth day’s swelling roar of the battle. Its long continuance had made it even more depressing and terrifying than in its earlier stages. To John’s mind, at least, it took on the form of a cataclysm, of some huge paroxysm of the earth. He ate to it, he slept to it, he woke to it, and now he was walking to it. The



illusion was deepened by the fact that no human being save Weber was visible to him. The country between the two monstrous battle lines was silent and deserted.

“Apparently,” said Weber, “we’re in no danger of human interference as we walk here.”

“Not unless a shell coming from a point fifteen miles or so beyond the hills should drop on us, or we should be pierced by an arrow from one of our Frenchmen in the clouds. But so far as I can see there’s nothing above us, although I can make out one or two aeroplanes far toward the east.”

“The air is heavy and cloudy and that’s against them, but they’ll be out before long. You’ll see. I think, Mr. Scott, that we’ll find a good tree in that little grove of beeches there.”



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“The tall one in the center. Yes, that’ll suit us.”

They inspected the tree and then made a long circuit about it, finding nobody near. John, full of zeal and enthusiasm, volunteered to climb the tree and fasten the flag to its topmost stem, and Weber, after some claims on his own behalf, agreed. John was a good climber, alert, agile and full of strength, and he went up the trunk like an expert. It was an uncommonly tall tree for France, much more than a sapling, and when he reached the last bough that would support him he found that he could see over all the other trees and some of the low hills. At a little distance ran the Marne, a silver sheet, and he thought he could discern faint puffs of smoke on the hills beyond. No human being was in sight, but although high in the tree he could still feel the vibrations of the air beneath the throb of so many great guns. Several aeroplanes hovered at points far distant, and he knew that others would be on the long battle line.

Reaching as high as he could he tied the flag with a piece of twine that Weber had given him—the Alsatian seemed to have provided for everything—and then watched it as it unfolded and fluttered in the light breeze. He felt a certain pride, as he had done his part of the task well. The flag waved above the green leaves and any watcher of the skies could see it.

“How does it show?” he called to Weber.

“Well, indeed. You’d better climb down now. If the Germans come from the air they’ll get you there, and if they come on land they’ll have you in the tree. You’ll be caught between air and earth.”

“That being the case I’ll come down at once,” said John, and he descended the tree rapidly. At Weber’s advice they withdrew to a cluster of vines growing near, where they would be well hidden, since their signal was as likely to draw enemies as friends.

“I think Lannes will surely see that flag,” said Weber.

“Why do you have such great confidence in his coming?” asked John.

“He inspires confidence, when you see him, and there’s his reputation. I’ve an idea that he’ll be carrying dispatches between the two wings of the French army, dispatches of vast importance, since the different French forces have to cooperate now along a line of four or five score miles. Of course the telephone and the telegraph are at work, too, but the value of the aeroplane as a scout and dispatch bearer cannot be over estimated.”

“One is coming now,” said John, “and I think it has been attracted by our flag. I take it to be German.”



“Then we’d better keep very close. Still, there’s little chance of our being seen here, and the aviators, even if they suspect a presence, can’t afford to descend, leave their planes and search for anybody.”

“I agree with you there. One can remain here in comparative safety and watch the results of our signal. That machine is coming fast and I’m quite sure it’s German.”



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“An armored machine with two men and a light rapid fire gun in it. Beyond a doubt it will circle about our tree.”

The plane was very near now, and assuredly it was German. John could discern the Teutonic cast of their countenances, as the two men in it leaned over and looked at the flag. They dropped lower and lower and then flew in circles about the tree. John, despite his anxiety and suspense, could not fail to notice the humorous phase of it. The plane certainly could not effect a landing in the boughs, and if it descended to the ground in order that one of their number might get out, climb the tree and capture the flag, they would incur the danger of a sudden swoop from French machines. Besides, the flag would be of no value to them, unless they knew who put it there and why.

“The Germans, of course, see that it’s a French flag,” he said to Weber. “I wonder what they’re going to do.”

“I think they’ll have to leave it,” said Weber, “because I can now see other aeroplanes to the west, aeroplanes which may be French, and they dare not linger too long.”

“And our little flag may make a big disturbance in the heavens.”

“So it seems.”

The German plane made circle after circle around the tree, finally drew off to some distance, and then, as it wavered back and forth, its machine gun began to spit fire. Little boughs and leaves cut from the tree fell to the ground, but the flag, untouched, fluttered defiantly in the light breeze.

“They’re trying to shoot it down,” said John, “and with such an unsteady gun platform they’ve missed every time.”

“I doubt whether they’ll continue firing,” said Weber. “An aeroplane doesn’t carry any great amount of ammunition and they can’t afford to waste much.”

“They’re through now,” said John. “See, they’re flying away toward the east, and unless my imagination deceives me, their machine actually looks crestfallen, while our flag is snapping away in the wind, haughty and defiant.”

“A vivid fancy yours, Mr. Scott, but it’s easy to imagine that German machine looking cheap, because that’s just the way the men on board it must feel. Suppose we sit down here and take our ease. No flying man can see through those vines over our heads, and we can watch in safety. We’re sure to draw other scouts of the air, while for us it’s an interesting and comparatively safe experience.”



“Our flag is certainly an attraction,” said John, making himself comfortable on the ground. “There’s a bird of passage now, coming down from the north as swift as a swallow.”

“It’s a little monoplane,” said Weber, “and it certainly resembles a swallow, as it comes like a flash toward this tree. I thought at first it might be Lannes in the *Arrow*, but the plane is too small, and it’s of German make.”

“I fancy it won’t linger long. This is not a healthy bit of space for lone fellows in monoplanes.”



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The little plane slackened its speed, as it approached the tree, and then sailed by it at a moderate rate. When it was opposite the flag a spurt of flame came from the pistol of the man in it, and John actually laughed.

"That was sheer spite," he said. "Did he think he could shoot our flag away with a single bullet from a pistol when a machine gun has just failed? That's right, turn about and make off as fast as you can, you poor little mono!"

The monoplane also curved around the tree, but did not make a series of circles. Instead, when its prow was turned northward it darted off again in that direction, going even more swiftly than it had come, as if the aviator were ashamed of himself and wished to get away as soon as possible from the scene of his disgrace. Away and away it flew, dwindling to a black speck and then to nothing.

John's shoulders shook, and Weber, looking at him, was forced to smile too.

"Well, it was funny," he said. "Our flag is certainly making a stir in the heavens."

"I wonder what will come next," said John. "It's like bait drawing birds of prey."

The heavens were now beautifully clear, a vault of blue velvet, against which anything would show. Far away the cannon groaned and thundered, and the waves of air pulsed heavily, but John noticed neither now. His whole attention was centered upon the flag, and what it might call from the air.

"In such a brilliant atmosphere we can certainly see our visitors from afar," he said.

"So we can," said Weber, "and lo! another appears out of the east!"

The dark speck showed on the horizon and grew fast, coming apparently straight in their direction. John did not believe it had seen their flag at first, owing to the great distance, but was either a messenger or a scout. As it soon began to descend from its great height in the air, although still preserving a straight course for the tree, he felt sure that the flag had now come into its view. It grew very fast in size and was outlined with startling clearness against the burning blue of the sky.

The approaching machine consisted of two planes alike in shape and size, superimposed and about six feet apart, the whole with a stabilizing tail about ten feet long and six feet broad. John saw as it approached that the aviator sat before the motor and screw, but that the elevating and steering rudders were placed in front of him. There were three men besides the aviator in the machine.

"A biplane," said John.

"Yes," said Weber, "I recognize the type of the machine. It's originally a French model."



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“But in this case, undoubtedly a German imitation. They’ve seen our flag, because I can make out one of the men with glasses to his eyes. They hover about as if in uncertainty. No wonder they can’t make up their minds, because there’s the tricolor floating from the top of that tall tree, and not a thing in the world to explain why it’s in such a place. A man with a rifle is about to take a shot at it. Bang! There it goes! But I can’t see that the bullet has damaged our flag. Look, how it whips about and snaps defiance! Now, all the men except the aviator himself have out glasses and are studying the phenomenon of our signal. They come above the tree, and I think they’re going to make a swoop around the grove near the ground. Lie close, Weber! As I found out once before, a thick forest is the best defense against aeroplanes. They can’t get through the screen of boughs.”

They heard a whirring and drumming, and the biplane not more than fifty feet above the earth made several circles about the little wood. John saw the men in it very clearly. He could even discern the German cast of countenance where all except the one at the wheel that controlled the two rudders had thrown back their hoods and taken off their glasses. The three carried rifles which they held ready for use, in case they detected an enemy.

Whirling around like a vast primeval bird of prey the biplane began to rise, as if disappointed of a victim, and winding upward was soon above the trees. Then John heard the rapid crackle of rifles.

“Shooting at our flag again!” he exclaimed.

But the whizz of a bullet that buried itself in the earth near him told him better.

“It isn’t possible that they’ve seen us!” he exclaimed.

“No,” said Weber, “they’re merely peppering the woods and vines in the hope that they’ll hit a concealed enemy, if such there should be.”

“That being the case,” said John, “I’m going to make my body as small as possible, and push myself into the ground if I can.”

He lay very close, but the rifle fire quickly passed to other portions of the wood, and then died away entirely. John straightened himself out and saw the biplane becoming smaller, as it flew off in the direction whence it had come.

“I hope you’ll come to no good,” he said, shaking his fist at the disappearing plane. “You’ve scared me half to death with your shots, and I hope that both your rudders will get out of gear and stay out of gear! I hope that the wheel controlling them will be smashed up! I hope that the top plane will crash into the bottom one! I hope that a



French shell will shoot your tail off! And I hope that you'll tumble to the earth and lie there, nothing but a heap of rotting wood and rusty old metal!"

"Well done, Mr. Scott!" said Weber. "That was quite a curse, but I think it will take something more solid to disable the biplane."

"I think so too, but I've relieved my feelings, and after a man has done so he can work a lot better. What are we to look for now, Weber? We don't seem to have success in attracting anything but Germans. If Lannes is coming at all, as you think he will, he'll get a pretty late ticket of admission to our reserved section of the air."



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“You must remember that the sky above us is a pretty large place, and at any rate we’re a drawing power. We’re always pulling something out of the ether.”

“And our biggest catch is coming now! Look, Weber, look! If that isn’t one of Herr Zeppelin’s railroad trains of the air then I’ll eat it when it gets here!”

“You’re right, Mr. Scott. There the monster comes. It can’t be anything but a Zeppelin! They must have one of their big sheds not far east of us.”

“We’ll hear its rattling soon. Like the others it will surely see our flag and make for it. But if they take a notion to shoot up the wood, as the men on that biplane did, we’d better hunt holes. A Zeppelin can carry a lot of soldiers.”

The Zeppelin was not moving fast. It had none of the quick graceful movements of the aeroplanes, but came on slowly like some huge monster of the air, looking about for prey. It turned southeast for a moment or two, then some one on board saw the flag and coming back it lumbered toward the tree.

“Ugly things,” said John. “Lannes and I blew up one once, and I wish I had the same chance against that fellow up there. But they’re in the same puzzled state that the other fellows were. Men on both platforms are examining the flag through glasses, and the flag doesn’t give a rap for them. It’s standing out in the wind, now, straight and stiff. It seems to know that old Noah’s ark can’t make it out.”

The huge Zeppelin drew its length along the grove, coming as close to the trees as it dared, then passed above, and after some circling lumbered away to the south.

“Good-bye, old Mr. Curiosity,” exclaimed John. “You weren’t invited here, and I don’t care whether you ever come again. Besides, you’re nothing but a big bluff, anyway. There’s our flag, still standing straight out in the wind, so you can see every stripe on it, and yet you haven’t, despite your visit, the remotest idea why it was put there!”

Weber smiled.

“They’ve all gone away as ignorant as they were when they came,” he said, “but we must be due for a French visitor or two. After so long a run of Germans we should have Frenchmen soon.”

“I begin to believe with you that Lannes will arrive some time or other. He flies fast and far and in time he must see our signal.”

“I’ve never doubted it. Meanwhile I think I’ll take a little luncheon, and I’d advise you to do the same. We haven’t had such a bad time here, saving those random rifle shots from the biplane.”



“Not at all. It’s like watching a play, and you certainly have a clear field for observation, when you look up at the heavens. The stage is always in full view.”

John was feeling uncommonly good. Their concealment while they watched the scouts and messengers from the skies coming to see the meaning of the flag had been easy and restful. Much of his long and painful tension had relaxed. The hum of distant artillery was in his ears as ever, like a moaning of the wind, but he was growing so used to it that he would now have noticed its absence rather than its presence. So he ate his share of bread and sausage with a good appetite, meanwhile keeping a watchful eye upon the heavens which burned in the same brilliant blue.



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It was now about noon. The rain the night before had given fresh tints to the green of grass and foliage. The whole earth, indifferent to the puny millions that struggled on its vast bosom, seemed refreshed and revitalized. A modest little bird in brown plumage perched on a bough near them, and, indifferent too, to war, poured forth a brilliant volume of song.

“Happy little fellow,” John said. “Nothing to do but eat and sleep and sing.”

“Unless he’s snapped up by some bigger bird,” said Weber, “but having been an hour without callers we’re now about to have a new one. And as this comes from the west it’s likely to be French.”

John felt excitement, and stood up. Yes, there was the machine coming out of the blue haze in the west, soaring beautifully and fast. It was very high, but his eye, trained now, saw that it was descending gradually. He felt an intense hope that it was Lannes, but he soon knew that it was not lie. The approaching machine could not possibly be the *Arrow*.

“It’s a Bleriot monoplane,” said Weber. “I can tell the type almost as far as I can see it. It’s much like a gigantic bird, with powerful parchment wings mounted upon a strong body. The wings as you see now present a concave surface to the earth. They always do that. The flyer sits between the two wings and has in front of him the lever with which he controls the whole affair.”

“You seem to know a good deal about flying machines, Weber.”

“Oh, yes, I’ve observed them a lot. I’ve always been curious about them and I’ve attended the great flying meets at Rheims, but personally I’m a coward about heights. I study the types of these wonderful machines, but I don’t go up in ’em. That’s a little fellow coming now and he’s seen the flag.”

“There’s only one man in the plane, but as he’s undoubtedly French what do you think we ought to do? He can’t carry us away with him in the machine, it’s too small. Do you think we should signal him to come to the ground and have a talk?”

“Perhaps we’d better let him pass, Mr. Scott. We have no real information to give. He might suspect that we are Germans and a lot of time would be lost maneuvering. Suppose we remain in hiding, and say nothing until Lannes himself appears.”

“You still feel sure that he will come?”

“It’s a conviction.”



“Same way with me, and I agree with you that we’d better let our friend in the Bleriot go by. He’s descending fast now. The plane certainly does look like a bird. Reminds me somewhat of a German Taube, though this machine is much smaller.”

“The pilot will take only a look or two at the flag. Then, if we don’t hail him, he’ll sail swiftly back to the west.”

“For good reasons too. The air here is chiefly in the German sphere of influence, and if I were in his place I’d take to my heels too at a single glance.”

“That’s what he’s doing now. He’s flying past the flag just as one of the Germans did. He leans over to take a look at it, can’t make out what it means, glances back apprehensively toward the German quarter of the heavens, and now he’s sliding like a streak through the blue for French air.”



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“So near and yet so far! A friend in the air just over our heads, and we had to let him go. Well, he couldn’t have done us any good.”

“No, he couldn’t, and he’s gone back so fast that he’s out of sight already, but another and different inhabitant of the air is coming out of the south. See, the shape off there, Mr. Scott. Wait until it comes nearer, and I think I can tell you what it is. Now it’s made out the flag and is steering for it.”

“What class of plane is it, Weber? Can you tell that yet?”

“Yes. It’s an Esnault-Pelterie, an invention of a young Frenchman. It’s a monoplane with flexible, warped wings. It’s made of steel tubes, welded together, and it has two wheels, one behind the other for contact with the ground.”

“I noticed something queer in its appearance. It’s the wheels. I don’t call this machine any great beauty, but it seems to cut the air well. I suppose we’d better treat it as we did the Bleriot—let it go as it came, none the worse and none the wiser?”

“I think so. But we have no other choice! That flyer is a suspicious fellow and he isn’t taking any chances. He’s come fairly close to the flag, and now he’s sheering off at an angle.”

“I don’t blame him. He probably has something more important to do than to unravel the meaning of a flag in a tree top.”

“Nor I either. But whatever comes we’ll wait for Lannes, always for Lannes. The heavens here, Mr. Scott, are peopled with strange birds, but of all the lot there is one particular bird for which we are looking.”

“Right again. My eyes have grown a little weary of watching the skies. For a long stare, blue isn’t as soft and easy a sight as green, and I think I’ll look at the grass and leaves for a little while.”

“Then while you rest I’ll keep an outlook and when I’m tired you can relieve me.”

“Good enough.”

John lay down in the grass and rested his body while he eased his worn eyes. Weber commented now and then on the new birds in the heavens, aeroplanes of all kinds, but they kept their distance.

“The air over us is not held now by either French or Germans,” said Weber, “and I imagine that only the more daring make incursions into it. Perhaps, too, they are kept busy elsewhere, because, as my ears distinctly tell me, the battle is increasing in volume.”



“I noticed the swelling fire when I lay down here,” said John. “It seems a strange thing, but for a while I had forgotten all about the battle.”

Presently Weber took his eyes from the heavens, moved about and looked uneasy.

“If I’m not mistaken,” he said, “I caught a glimpse of steel down the river. I think it was a lance head glittering in the sun, and Uhlans may be near.”

“How far away do you think it was.”

“A half-mile or more. I must take a look in that direction. I’m a good scout, Mr. Scott, and I’ll see what’s up. Watch here will you, until I come back? It may be some time.”



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“All right, but don’t get yourself captured, Weber. I’d be mighty lonesome without you.”

“Don’t fear for me. Of course, as I told you, I’ll be gone for some time, and if I may suggest, Mr. Scott, I wouldn’t move from among the vines.”

“Catch me doing it! I’ll say here in my green bower and as my eyes are back in form I’ll watch the heavens.”

“Good-bye, then, for a while.”

Weber slipped away. His tread was so light that he vanished, as if he had melted into air.

“That man would certainly have made a good scout in our old Indian days,” thought John, and with the thought came the conviction that Weber was too clever to let himself be caught. Then he turned his attention back to the heavens.

They were now well on into the afternoon, and the sun was at the zenith. A haze of gold shimmered against the vast blue vault. A wind perfumed with grass and green leaves, brought also the ceaseless roar of the guns, and now and then the bitter taste of burned gunpowder. The faint trembling of the earth, or rather of the air just above it, went on, and John, turning about in his little bower, surveyed the heavens from all quarters.

He saw shapes, faint, dark and floating on every horizon, but none of them came near until a full half-hour had elapsed. Then one shot out of the west, sailed toward the northeast, but curving suddenly, came back in the direction of the tree. As the shape grew larger and more defined John’s heart began to throb. He had seen many aeroplanes that day, and most of them had been swift and graceful, but none was as swift and graceful as the one that was now coming.

It was a machine, beautiful in shape, and as lithe and fast as the darting swallow. There could be none other like it in the heavens, and his heart throbbed harder. Intuition, perhaps, was back of knowledge and he never for a moment doubted that it was he for whom they had looked so long.

The aeroplane seemed fairly to shoot out of space. First its outlines became visible, and then the man at the rudder. He came straight toward the tree, dropped low and circled about it, while John rushed from the vines and cried as loud as he could:

“Lannes! Lannes, it’s me! John Scott! I’ve been waiting for you!”

The *Arrow* dropped further, barely touched the earth, and Lannes, leaning over, shouted to John in tones, tense and sharp with command:



“Give the plane a shove with all your might, and jump in. For God’s sake don’t linger, man! Jump!”

The impulse communicated by Lannes was so powerful that before he knew what he was doing John pushed the *Arrow* violently and sprang into the extra seat, just as it was leaving the earth.

Lannes gave the rudder a strong twist and the aeroplane shot up like a mounting bird. John got back his breath and presence of mind.

“Wait, Philip! Wait!” he cried. “We’re leaving behind our friend Weber! He’s down there, somewhere by the river!”



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Lannes made no reply. The *Arrow* continued its rise, sharp and swift, and John heard a crackling sound below. Little missiles, steel and deadly, shot by them. One passed so close to his face that his breath went again. When he recovered it once more the *Arrow*, its inmates, unharmed, was far above the range of rifles, flying in a circle.

"Look down, John," said Lannes.

CHAPTER X

OLD FRIENDS

John, obeying Lannes' command, glanced down, as one looks over the side of a ship toward the sea, and he saw many horsemen galloping across the field. He recognized at once the Uhlans, and, for all he knew; they might be von Boehlen's own command.

"Hand me your glasses, will you?" he said.

When Lannes passed them to him he looked long and well, but he did not see any sign of a prisoner among the Prussians. He also searched the woods and other fields near by, but they were empty. The whole Prussian force was gathered beneath them. John breathed a deep sigh of relief.

"It's evident that Weber has escaped," he said. "Doubtless this was the very troop of Uhlans of which the Alsatian had caught a glimpse. He is clever and swift and I've no doubt he found a covert."

"I'm sorry we had to leave him," said Lannes, "but there was no other choice. I came to the tree to examine the flag, and being above I saw the Uhlans nearby before you did. Then I heard your shout and dropped down. But as I knew the Uhlans were coming for us I made you jump almost before you knew it, and we got away by a hair. The *Arrow* was struck twice, but the bullets glanced off its polished sides. There are two slight scars, but I can have them removed."

John laughed.

"Philip," he said, "I believe you love the *Arrow* as a fellow loves his best girl."

"Well spoken, Monsieur Jean the Scott, and the *Arrow* never fails me. And so you've been with Weber?"

"It's a long tale. I was in a boat crossing the Marne. It was sunk by one of the French shells, and I escaped. I reached the deserted cottage of a peasant, and Weber, who was wandering around, happened to come there, too. We've been trying to escape today, and we put that flag up in the tree as a sort of signal, while we hid among the



vines below, until you should come, as he believed you would. He was right, but he was unlucky enough to be absent when you arrived.” “Maybe it couldn’t have happened in a better way. The *Arrow* can carry only two, and I don’t know what we’d have done with him. He’s a clever fellow and he’ll make his way back to the army.”

“I hope so, in fact I feel so. But, Philip, it’s glorious to be with you again, and to be up here, where the bullets can’t reach you.”

“That is, so long as the German flyers don’t come near enough to take shots at us.”



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"I don't see any in sight, and meanwhile I intend to be comfortable. Good old *Arrow*! The best little rescuer in the world! Lannes, I believe it's a large part of your business to fly about over fields of battle and rescue me."

"You certainly give me plenty of opportunities," laughed Lannes.

"What's been happening? I fancy that a lot of water has flowed under the bridges of the Marne since I left you."

"We continue to gain," replied Lannes, with quiet satisfaction. "We press the German armies back everywhere. Our supreme chief is a silent man, but he has delivered a master stroke. We've emerged from the very gulf of defeat and despair to the heights of victory. We're not only driving the Germans across the Marne, but we're driving them further. Moreover, their armies are cut apart, and one is fighting for its existence, just as the French and English were fighting for theirs in that terrible retreat from Mons and Charleroi."

"It's glorious, but we mustn't be too sanguine, Lannes. The powers that overcome the German and Austro-Hungarian Empires will not forget for a hundred years that they had a war."

"You're not telling me any news, Monsieur Jean the Scott. I've been in Germany often, and like you I've seen what they have and what they are. We're only beginning."

"Where are you going now, Philip?"

"Toward the end of our line. I've some dispatches for the commander of the British force. Your friends, Carstairs and Wharton, are there, and you may see them. But I understand that the Strangers are to remain with the French, so you, Carstairs and Wharton will have to consider yourselves Frenchmen and stay under our banner."

"That's all right. I hope we'll be under the command of General Vaugirard. Do you know anything of him?"

"Not today, but he was alive yesterday. Take the glasses now, John, will you, and be my eyes as you have been before. One needs to watch the heavens all the time."

John took Lannes' powerful glasses, and objects invisible before leaped into view.

"I see two or three rivers, a dozen villages, and troops," he said. "The troops are to the west, and although they are this side of the Marne, I should judge that they are ours."

"Ours undoubtedly," said Lannes, glancing the way John's glasses pointed. "Not less than a hundred thousand of our men have crossed the Marne at that point, and more



will soon be coming. It's a part of the great wedge thrust forward by our chief. But keep your eye on the air, John. What do you see there?"

"Nothing that's near. In the east I barely catch seven or eight black dots that I take to be German aeroplanes, but they seem to be content with hovering over their own lines. They don't approach."

"Doubtless they don't, because they're beginning to watch the air over the Marne as a danger zone. That pretty little signal of yours may have scared them."



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Lannes laughed. It was evident that he was in a most excellent humor.

“All right, have your fun,” said John, showing his own teeth in a smile. “If our flag didn’t frighten away the German army it at least achieved what we wanted, that is, it brought you. The whole episode would be perfect if it were not for the fact that we lost sight of Weber.”

“I tell you again not to worry about him. That man has shown uncommon ability to take care of himself.”

“All right. I’ll let him go for the present. Hello, here we are crossing the Marne again, and without getting our feet wet.”

“We’re a good half mile above it, but we’ll cross it once more soon. I’m following the shortest road to the British army and that takes us over a loop of the river.”

“Yes, here we are recrossing, and now we’re coming to a region of chequered fields, green and brown and yellow. I always like these varied colors of the French country. It’s a beautiful land down there, Philip.”

“So it is, but see if it isn’t defaced by sixty or seventy thousand sunburnt men in khaki, the khaki often stained with blood. The men, too, should be tired to death, but you can’t tell that from this height.”

“The British army you mean? Yes, by all that’s glorious, I see them, or at least a part of them! I see thousands of men lying down in the fields as if they were dead.”

“They’re not dead, though. They just drop in their tracks and sleep in any position.”

“I saw the Germans doing that, too. I suppose we’ll land soon, Philip, won’t we? They’ve sighted us and a plane is coming forward to meet us.”

“We’ll make for the meadow over there just beyond the little stream. I think I can discern the general’s marquee, and I must deliver my message as soon as possible. Wave to that fellow that we’re friends.”

An English aeroplane was now very near them and John, leaning over, made gestures of amity. Although the aviator’s head was almost completely enshrouded in a hood, he discerned a typically British face.

“Kings of the air, with dispatches for your general!” John cried. He knew that the man would not hear him, but he was so exultant that he wanted to say something, to shout to him, or in the slang of his own land, to let off steam.



But while the English aviator could not understand the words the gestures were clear to him, and he waved a hand in friendly fashion. Then, wheeling in a fine circle, he came back by their side as an escort.

The *Arrow*, like a bird, folding its wings, sank gracefully into the meadow, and Lannes, hastily jumping out, asked John to look after the aeroplane. Then he rushed toward a group of officers, among whom he recognized the chief of the army.

John himself disembarked stiffly, and stretched his limbs, while several young Englishmen looked at him curiously. He had learned long since how to deal with Englishmen, that is to take no notice of them until they made their presence known, and then to acquiesce slowly and reluctantly in their existence. So, he took short steps back and forth on the grass, flexing and tensing his muscles, as abstractedly as if he were alone on a desert island.



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"I say," said a handsome fair young man at last, "would you mind telling us, old chap, where you come from?"

John continued to stretch his muscles and took several long and deep breaths. After the delay he turned to the fair young man and said:

"Beg pardon, but did you speak to me?"

The Englishman flushed a little and pulled at his yellow mustache. An older man said:

"Don't press His Highness, Lord James. Don't you see that he's an American and therefore privileged?"

"I'm privileged," said John, "because I was with you fellows from Belgium to Paris, and since then I've been away saving you from the Germans."

Lord James laughed. He had a fine face and all embarrassment disappeared from it.

"We want to be friends," he said. "Shake hands."

John shook. He also shook the hand of the older man and several others. Then he explained who he was, and told who had come with him, none less than the famous young French aviator, Philip Lannes.

"Lannes," said Mr. Yellow Mustache, who, John soon learned, was Lord James Ivor. "Why, we've all heard of him. He's come to the chief with messages a half-dozen times since this battle began, and I judge from the way he rushed to him just now that he has another, that can't be delayed."

"I think so, too," said John, "although I don't know anything about it myself. He's a close-mouthed fellow. But do any of you happen to have heard of an Englishman, Carstairs, and an American, Wharton, who belong to a company called the Strangers in the French army, but who must be at present with you—that is, if they're alive?"

John's voice dropped a little, as he added the last words, but Lord James Ivor walked to the brow of a low hill, called to somebody beyond, and then walked back.

"It's a happy chance that I can tell you what you want to know," he said. "Those two men have been serving in my own company, and they're both alive and well. But they were lying on the grass there, dead to the world, that is, sleeping, as if they were two of the original seven sleepers."

Two figures appeared on the brow of the hill, gazed at first in a puzzled manner at John and then, uttering shouts of welcome, rushed toward him. Carstairs seized him by one hand and Wharton by the other.



“Not killed, I see,” said Carstairs.

“Nor is he going to be killed,” said Wharton.

“Now, where have you been?” asked Carstairs.

“Yes, where have you been?” asked Wharton.

“I’ve been taking a couple of pleasure trips with my friend, Lannes,” replied John.

“Between trips I was a prisoner of the Germans, and I’ve seen a lot of the great battle. Has the British army suffered much?”

A shade flitted over the face of Carstairs as he replied:



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“We haven’t been shot up so much since Waterloo. It’s been appalling. For days and nights we’ve been fighting and marching. Whenever we stopped even for a moment we fell on the ground and were asleep before we touched it. Half the fellows I knew have been killed. I think as long as I live I’ll hear the drumming of those guns in my ears, and, confound ’em, I still hear ’em in reality now. If you turn your attention to it you can hear the confounded business quite plainly! But what I do know, Scott, is that we’ve been winning! I don’t know where I am and I haven’t a clear idea of what I’ve been doing all the time, but as sure as we’re in France the victory is ours.”

“But won by the French chiefly” John could not keep from saying.

“Quite true. Our own army is not large, but it has done as much per man.”

“And the moral support,” added John. “The French have felt the presence of a friend, a friend, too, who in six months will be ten times as strong as he is now.”

“Where is Lannes?” asked Wharton.

“He’s got your job, Wharton,” replied John with a smile. “He’s Envoy Extraordinary and Bearer of Messages concerning Life and Death between the armies. As soon as he landed he went directly to the British commander, and they’re now conferring in a tent. That will never happen to you. You will never be closeted with the leader of a great army.”

“I don’t know. I may not be able to fly like the Frenchman, but he can’t handle the wireless as I can, and he isn’t the chain-lightning chauffeur that Carstairs is. Please to remember those facts.”

“I do. But here comes Lannes, the man of mystery.”

Lannes seemed preoccupied, but he greeted Carstairs and Wharton warmly.

“I’m about to take another flight,” he said. “No, thank you so much, but I’ve time neither to eat nor to drink. I must fly at once, though it’s to be a short flight. Take care of my friend, Monsieur Jean the Scott, while I’m gone, won’t you? Don’t let him wander into German hands again, because I won’t have time to go for him once more.”

“We won’t!” said Carstairs and Wharton with one voice. “Having got him back we’re going to keep him.”

Lannes smiling sprang into the *Arrow*. The willing young Englishmen gave it a mighty push, and rising into the blue afternoon sky he sailed away toward the south.

“He’ll be back all right,” said Carstairs. “I’ve come to the conclusion that nothing can ever catch that fellow. He’s a wonder, he is. One of the most difficult jobs I have, Scott,



is to give the French all the credit that's due 'em. I've been trained, as all other Englishmen were, to consider 'em pretty poor stuff that we've licked regularly for a thousand years, and here we suddenly find 'em heroes and brothers-in-arms. It's all the fault of the writers. Was it Shakespeare who said: 'Methinks that five Frenchmen on one pair of English legs did walk?'"



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"No," said Lord James Ivor, "It was the other way around. 'Methinks that one Englishman on five pairs of French legs did walk.'"

"I'm not so sure about the number, either," interjected Wharton. "Are you positive it was five?"

"Whatever it was," said Carstairs, "the Frenchman was slandered, and by our own great bard, too. But come and take something with us, if Lord James, our immediate chief, is willing."

"He's willing, and he'll go with you," said Lord James Ivor. "I need a bite myself and in war like this a man can't afford to neglect food and drink, when the chance is offered."

"The habits of you Europeans are strong," said John, whose spirits were still exuberant. "If you didn't have to stop now and then to work or to fight you'd eat all the time. One meal would merge into another, making a beautiful, savory chain linked together. I know the Englishman's heaven perfectly well. It's made of lakes of ale, beer, porter and Scotch highballs, surrounded by high banks of cheese, mutton and roast beef."

"There could be worse heavens," said Carstairs, "and if it should happen that way it wouldn't be long before you Yankees would be trying to break out of your heaven and into ours. But here's a taste of it now, the cheese, for instance, and the beer, although it's in bottles."

A spry Tommy Atkins served them, and John, thankful at heart, ate and drank with the best of them. And while they ate the pulsing waves of air from the battle beat upon their ears. It seemed to these young men to have been beating that way for weeks.

"Lannes will be back soon," said John to Carstairs and Wharton, "and he'll tear you away from your friends here. You think, Carstairs, that you're an Englishman, and you're convinced, Wharton, that you're an American, but you're both wrong. You're Frenchmen, and you're going back to the French army, where you belong. Then Captain Daniel Colton of the Strangers will want to know from you why you haven't returned sooner."

"But how are we to go?" said Carstairs.

"And where are we to go?" said Wharton.

"I'd go in a minute," added Carstairs, "if the German army would let me."

"So would I," said Wharton, "but the Germans fight so hard that we can't get away."

"Lannes will attend to all those matters," said John. "I'll rest until he comes, if I have the chance. Is that your artillery firing?"



“It’s our big guns out in front,” said Lord James Ivor. “Jove, but what work they’ve done! A lot of our guns have been smashed, one half of our gunners maybe have been smashed with ’em, but they’ve never flinched. They covered our retreat from Belgium, and they’ve been the heralds of our advance here on the Marne! Listen to ’em! How they talk!”

The heavy crash of guns far in front and the thunder of the German guns replying came back to their ears. It was a louder note in the general and ceaseless murmur of the battle, but the young men paid it only a passing moment of attention. Carstairs presently added as an afterthought:



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“Unless Lannes returns soon I don’t think we’ll hear from him. That blaze of the guns in front of us indicates close fighting again, and we’ll probably be ordered forward soon.”

“I don’t think so,” said Lord James Ivor. “Our guns and the German guns will talk together for quite a while before the infantry advance. You can spend a good two hours with us yet, and still have time to depart for the French army.”

It was evident that Lord James Ivor knew what he was talking about, since, as far as John could see, the khaki army lay outspread on the turf. These men were too much exhausted and too much dulled to danger to stir merely because the cannon were blazing. It took the sharp orders of their officers to move them. Shells from the German guns began to fall along the fringe of the troops, but thousands slept heavily on.

John, after disposing of the excellent rations offered to him, sat down on the grass with Wharton, Carstairs and Lord James Ivor. The sun was now waning, but the western sky was full of gold, and the yellow rays slanting across the hills and fields made them vivid with light. Lord James handed his glasses to John with the remark:

“Would you like to take a look there toward the east, Scott?”

John with the help of the glasses discerned the English batteries in action. He saw the men working about them, the muzzles pointing upward, and then the flash. Some of the guns were completely hidden in foliage, and he could detect their presence only by the heavy detonations coming from such points. Yet, like many of the English soldiers about him, John’s mind did not respond to so much battle. He looked at the flashes, and he listened to the reports without emotion. His senses had become dulled by it, and registered no impressions.

“We’ve masked our batteries as much as possible,” said Lord James. “The Germans are great fellows at hiding their big guns. They use every clump of wood, hay stacks, stray stacks and anything else, behind which you could put a piece of artillery. They trained harder before the war, but we’ll soon be able to match ’em.”

While Lord James was talking, John turned the glasses to the south and watched the sky. He had observed two black dots, both of which grew fast into the shape of aeroplanes. One, he knew, was the *Arrow*. He had learned to recognize the plane at a vast distance. It was something in the shape or a trick of motion perhaps, almost like that of a human being, with which he had become familiar and which he could not mistake. The other plane, by the side of Lannes’ machine, bothered him. It was much larger than the *Arrow*, but they seemed to be on terms of perfect friendship, each the consort of the other.

“Lannes is coming,” announced John. “He’s four or five miles to the south and he’s about a quarter of a mile up, but he has company. Will you have a look, Lord James?”



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Lord James Ivor, taking back his own glasses, studied the two approaching planes.

“The small one looks like your friend’s plane,” he said, “and the other, although much bigger, has only one man in it too. But they fly along like twins. We’ll soon know all about them because they’re coming straight to us. They’re descending now into this field.”

The *Arrow* slanted gently to the earth and the larger machine descended near by. Lannes stepped out of one, and an older man, whom John recognized as the aviator Caumartin, alighted from the other.

“My friends,” said Lannes, cheerily, “here we are again. You see I’ve brought with me a friend, Monsieur Caumartin, a brave man, and a great aviator.”

He paused to introduce Caumartin to Wharton and the Englishmen, and then went on:

“This flying machine in which our friend Caumartin comes is not so swift and so graceful as the *Arrow*—few aeroplanes are—but it is strong and it has the capacity. It is what you might call an excursion steamer of the air. It can take several people and our good Caumartin has come in it for Lieutenant Wharton and Lieutenant Carstairs. So! he has an order for them written by the brave Captain Colton of the Strangers. Produce the order, Monsieur Caumartin.”

The aviator took a note from a pocket in his jacket and handed it to Lord James Ivor, who announced that it was in truth such an order.

“You’re to be delivered to the Strangers F.O.B.,” said John.

“What’s F.O.B.?” exclaimed Carstairs.

“It’s a shipping term of my country,” replied John. “It means Free on Board, and you’ll arrive among the Strangers without charge.”

“But,” said Carstairs, looking dubiously at the big, ugly machine, “automobiles are my specialty!”

“And the wireless is mine!” said Wharton in the same doubting tone.

“Oh, it’s easy,” said John lightly. “Easiest thing in the world. You have nothing to do but sit still and look calm and wise. If you’re attacked by a Zeppelin, throw bombs—no doubt Caumartin has them on board—but if a flock of Taubes assail you use your automatics. I congratulate you both on making your first flight under such auspices, with two armies of a million men each, more or less, looking at you, and with the chance to dodge the shells from four or five thousand cannon.”



“Your trouble, Scott, is talking too much,” said Wharton, “because you went up in the air when you had no other way to go, you think you’re a bird.”

“So I am at times,” laughed John. “A bird without the feathers. Come now, brace up! Remember that the solid earth is always below you, a long way below, perhaps, but it’s there, and Friend Caumartin is bound to deliver you soon to your rightful master, Captain Daniel Colton, who will talk to you like an affectionate but stern parent.”

“For Heaven’s sake, let’s start and get away from this wild Yankee,” said Carstairs.



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“But you won’t get away from me,” rejoined John. “Lannes and I in the *Arrow* will watch over you all the way, and, if we can, rescue you, should your plane break down.”

Caumartin supplied Wharton and Carstairs with suitable coats and caps, and they took their places unflinchingly in the big plane. Their hearts may have been beating hard, but they would not let their hands tremble.

“I suppose the *Omnibus* starts first, Philip, doesn’t it?” asked John.

“Yes,” replied Lannes, smiling, “and we can overtake it. *Omnibus* is a good name for it. We’ll call it that. It looks awkward, John, but it’s one of the safest machines built.”

Plenty of willing hands gave the *Omnibus* a lift and then did a like service for the *Arrow*. As they rose, aviators and passengers alike waved a farewell to Lord James Ivor, and he and the Englishmen about him waved back. But the thousands lying on the grass slept heavily on, while the cannon on their utmost fringe thundered and crashed and the German cannon crashed and thundered, replying.

The *Arrow* kept close to the *Omnibus*, so close that John could see the white faces of Wharton and Carstairs and their hands clenching the sides. But he remembered his own original experience, and he was not disposed to jest at them now.

“They’re air-sick—as I was,” he said to Lannes. “Call to them to look westward at the troops,” said Lannes. “Great portions of the French and English armies are now visible, and such a sight will make them forget their natural apprehensions.”

Lannes was right. When they beheld the magnificent panorama spread out for them the color came back into the faces of Carstairs and Wharton, and their clenched fingers relaxed. The spectacle was indeed grand and gorgeous as they looked up at the sky, down at the earth, and at the line where they met. The sun was now low, but mighty terraces of red and gold rose in the west, making it a blaze of varied colors. In the east the terraces were silver and silver gray, and the light there was softer. The green earth beneath was mottled with the red and silver and gold from the skies.

The German army was yet invisible beyond the hills, although the cannon were flashing there, but to the west they saw vast masses of infantry, some stationary, while others moved slowly forward. Looking upon this wonderful sight, Wharton and Carstairs forgot that they were high in the air. Their hearts beat fast, and their eyes became brilliant with enthusiasm. They waved hands at the *Arrow* which flew near like a guiding friend.

“Wonderful, isn’t it?” shouted John.

“I never expect to see its like again,” Carstairs shouted back, and then, lest he should not be true to his faith, he added:

“But I won’t desert the automobile. It’s my best friend.”

“British obstinacy!” shouted John.



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Carstairs shouted back something, but the planes were now too far apart for him to hear. John saw that the *Omnibus*, despite her awkward look, was flying well and he also saw through Lannes' glasses four aeroplanes bearing up from the east. He did not say much until he had examined them well and had concluded that they were Taubes.

"Lannes," he said, "German machines are trespassing on our air, and unless I'm mistaken they're making for us."

"It's likely. Just under the locker there you'll find a rifle, and a belt of cartridges. It's a good weapon, and if the pinch comes you'll have to use it. Are your friends good shots?"

"I think they are, and I know they're as brave as lions."

"Then they'll have a chance to show it. The *Omnibus* carries several rifles and an abundance of ammunition. She might be called a cargo boat, as there's a lot of room on her. I'm going to bear in close, and you tell Caumartin and the others of the danger."

The *Arrow* swerved, came near to the *Omnibus*, and John shouted the warning. Carstairs and Wharton instantly seized rifles and he saw them lay two others loaded at their feet. With the prospect of a battle for life air-sickness disappeared.

"You can rely on them, Philip," said John as the *Arrow* bore away a little, "but I don't like the looks of one of those German machines."

"What's odd about it?"

"It's bigger than the others. Ah, now I see! It carries a machine gun."

"That's bad. It can send a hail of metal at us. It's lucky that aeroplanes are such unstable gun-platforms. When platforms and targets are alike swerving it's hard to hit anything. We're going to rise and dive, and rise and dive and swerve and swerve, John, so be ready. I'll signal to Caumartin to do the same, and maybe the machine gun won't get us."

John was quite sure that the *Arrow* could escape by immediate flight, but he knew that Lannes would never desert the *Omnibus*, and its passengers, and he felt the same way. The subject was not even mentioned by either.

The German machines, approaching rapidly, spread out like a fan, the heavier one with the machine gun in the center. John could see the man at the rapid firer, but he did not yet open with it. The *Arrow* and the *Omnibus* were wavering like feathers in a storm and closer range was needed. John sat with his own rifle across his knee and then looked at Wharton in the *Omnibus* scarcely a hundred yards away. The figure of



Wharton was tense and rigid. His rifle was raised and his eyes never left the man at the machine gun.

“I forgot to tell you, Philip,” said John, “that Wharton is a great sharpshooter. It’s natural to him, and I don’t believe the shifting platform will interfere with his aim.”

“Then I hope that he never has done better sharp-shooting than he will do today. Ah, there goes the machine gun!”



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There was a rapid rat-a-tat, not so clear and distinct as it would have been at the same distance on ground, and a stream of bullets poured from the machine gun. But they passed between the *Arrow* and the *Omnibus*, and only cut the unoffending air. Meanwhile Wharton was watching. A wrath, cold but consuming, had taken hold of him. The fact that he was high above the earth, perched in a swaying unstable seat was forgotten. He had eyes and thought only for the murderous machine gun and the man who worked it. An instinctive marksman, he and his rifle were now as one, and of all the birds of prey in the air at that moment Wharton was the most dangerous.

The machine gun was silent for a minute. The riflemen in the Taubes on the wings of the attacking force fired a few shots, but all of them went wild. John, tense and silent, sat with his own rifle raised, but half of the time he watched Wharton.

The two forces came a little nearer. Again the machine gun poured forth its stream of bullets. Two glanced off the sides of the *Omnibus*, and then John saw Wharton's rifle leap to his shoulder. The movement and the flash of the weapon were so near together that he seemed to take no aim. Yet his bullet sped true. The man at the machine gun, who was standing in a stooped position, threw up his hands, fell backward and out of the plane. A thrill of horror shot through John, and he shut his eyes a moment to keep from seeing that falling body.

"What has happened?" asked Lannes, who had not looked around.

"Wharton has shot the man at the machine gun clean out of the aeroplane. He must be falling yet."

"Ghastly, but necessary. Has anybody taken the slain man's place?"

"Yes, another has sprung to the gun! But he's gone! Wharton has shot him too! He's fallen on the floor of the car, and he lies quite still."

"Your friend is indeed a sharpshooter. How many men are left in the plane?"

"Only one! No, good God, there's none! Wharton has shot the third man also, and now the machine goes whirling and falling through space!"

"I said that friend of yours must be a sharpshooter," said Lannes, in a tone of awe, "but he must be more! He must be the king of all riflemen. It's evident that the *Omnibus* knows how to defend herself. I'll swing in a little, and you can take a shot or two."

John fired once, without hitting anything but the air, which made no complaint, but the battle was over. Horrified by the fate that had overtaken their comrades and seeing help for their enemy at hand the Taubes withdrew.



The *Arrow* and the *Omnibus* flew on toward the French lines, whence other machines were coming to meet them.

CHAPTER XI

THE CONTINUING BATTLE

The *Arrow* bore in toward the *Omnibus*. Wharton had put his rifle aside and was staring downward as if he would see the wreck that he had made. Lannes called to him loudly:



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“You’ve saved us all!”

Wharton looked rather white, but he shouted back:

“I had no other choice.”

The French aeroplanes were around them now, their motors drumming steadily and the aviators shouting congratulations to Lannes and Caumartin, whom they knew well. It was a friendly group, full of pride and exultation, and the *Arrow* and the *Omnibus* had a triumphant escort. Soon they were directly over the French, and then they began their descent. As usual, when they reached the army they made it amid cheers, and the first man who greeted John was short and young but with a face of pride.

“You have come back to us out of the air, Monsieur Scott,” he said, “and I salute you.”

It was Pierre Louis Bougainville, made a colonel already for extraordinary, almost unprecedented, valor and ability in so young a man. John recognized his rank by his uniform, and he acknowledged it gladly.

“It’s true, I have come back, Colonel Bougainville,” he said, “and right glad I am to come. I see that your country has had no cause to complain of you in the last week.”

“Nor of hundreds of thousands of Frenchmen,” said Bougainville. “Your company, the Strangers, is close at hand, and here is your captain now.”

Captain Daniel Colton, thin and ascetic, walked forward. John gave him his best salute and said:

“Captain Colton, I beg to report to you for duty.”

A light smile passed swiftly over Cotton’s face.

“You’re a little late, Lieutenant Scott,” he said.

“I know it, sir, but I’ve brought Lieutenant Carstairs and Lieutenant Wharton with me. There have been obstacles which prevented our speedy return. We’ve done our best.”

“I can well believe it. You left on horseback, and you return by air. But I’m most heartily glad to see all three of you again. I feared that you were dead.”

“Thank you, sir,” said John. “But we don’t mean to die.”

“Nevertheless,” said Captain Colton, gravely, “death has been all about us for days and nights. Many of the Strangers are gone. You will find the living lying in the little valley just beyond us, and you can resume your duties.”



Lannes, after a word or two, left them, and Caumartin took the *Omnibus* to another part of the field. Lannes' importance was continually growing in John's eyes, nor was it the effect of imagination. He saw that under the new conditions of warfare the ability of the young Frenchman to carry messages between generals separated widely could not be overrated. He might depart that very night on another flight.

"May I ask, sir," he said to Captain Colton, "to what command or division the Strangers are now attached?"

"To that of General Vaugirard, a very able man."

"I'm glad to hear it, sir. I know him. I was with him before I was taken by the Germans."

"It seems that you're about to have a general reunion," said Carstairs to young Scott, as they walked away.



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"I am, and I'm mighty happy over it. I'll admit that I was rather glad to see you, you blooming Britisher."

About one-third of the Strangers were gone forever, and the rest, except the higher officers, were prostrate in the glade. White, worn and motionless they lay in the same stupor that John had seen overtake the German troops. Some were flat upon their backs, with arms outstretched, looking like crosses, others lay on their faces, and others were curled up on their sides. Few were over twenty-five. Nearly all had mothers in America or Great Britain.

While they slept the guns yet grumbled at many points. The sound on the horizon had gone on so long now that it seemed normal to John. He knew that it would continue so throughout the night, and maybe for many more days and nights. Unless it came near and made him a direct personal menace he would pay no attention to it.

It was growing late. Night was spreading once more over the vast battle field, stretching over thirty leagues maybe. The common soldier knew nothing, majors and colonels knew little more, but the silent man whose invisible hand had swept the gigantic German army back from Paris knew much. While the fire of the artillery continued under the searchlights the exhausted infantry sank down. Then the telephones began to talk over a vast stretch of space, dazzling white lights made signals, the sputtering wireless sent messages in the air, and the flying machines shot through the heavens. Commanders talked to one another in many ways now, and they would talk all through the night.

John and his comrades ate supper, while most of the Strangers slept around them. Those who were awake recognized them, shook hands and said a few words. They were a taciturn lot. After supper Carstairs and Wharton dropped upon the grass and were soon sound asleep. Scott was inclined to be wakeful and he walked along the edge of the glade, looking anxiously at the sleeping forms.

He saw the loom of a fire just beyond the ridge and going to the crest to look at it he beheld outlined before it a gigantic figure that he recognized at once. It was General Vaugirard, and John would have been glad to speak to him, but he hesitated to approach a general. While he stood doubting a hand fell upon his shoulder and a glad voice said in his ear:

"And our young American has come back! Ah, my friend, let me shake your hand!"

It was Captain de Rougemont, trim, erect and without a wound. John gladly let him shake. Then in reply to de Rougemont's eager questions he told briefly of all that had happened since they parted.



“The general has asked twice if we had any news of you,” said de Rougemont. “He does not forget. A great mind in a vast body.”

“Could I speak to him?”

“Of a certainty, my friend; come.”

They advanced toward the fire. General Vaugirard was walking up and down, his hands clasped behind his back, and whistling softly. His huge figure looked yet more huge outlined against the flames. He heard the tread of the two young men and looking up recognized John instantly.



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"Risen from the dead!" he exclaimed with warmth, clasping the young man's hand in his own gigantic palm. "I had despaired of ever seeing you again! There are so many more gallant lads whom I will certainly never see! Ah, well, such is life! The roll of our brave young dead is long, very long!"

He reclasped his hands behind his back and walking up and down began to whistle again softly. His emotion over the holocaust had passed, and once more he was the general planning for victory. But he stopped presently and said to John:

"The Strangers, to whom you belong, have come under my command. You are one of my children now. I have my eye on all of you. You are brave lads. Go and seek rest with them while you can. You may not have another chance in a month. We have driven the German, but he will turn, and then we may fight weeks, months, no one knows how long. Ah, well, such is life!"

John saluted respectfully, and withdrew to the little open glade in which the Strangers were lying, sleeping a great sleep. Captain Colton himself, wrapped in a blanket, was now a-slumber under a tree, and Wharton and Carstairs near by, stretched on their sides, were deep in slumber too. Fires were burning on the long line, but they were not numerous, and in the distance they seemed mere pin points. At times bars of intense white light, like flashes of lightning, would sweep along the front, showing that the searchlights of either army still provided illumination for the fighting. The note of the artillery came like a distant and smothered groan, but it did not cease, and it would not cease, since the searchlights would show it a way all through the night.

John sat down, looked at the faint flashes on the far horizon and listened to that moaning which grew in volume as one paid close attention to it. Europe or a great part of it had gone mad. He was filled once more with wrath against kings and all their doings as he looked upon the murderous aftermath of feudalism, the most gigantic of all wars, made in a few hours by a few men sitting around a table. Then he laughed at himself. What was he! A mere feather in a cyclone! Certainly he had been blown about like one!

His nervous imagination now passed quickly and throwing himself upon the ground he slept like those around him. All the Strangers were awakened at early dawn by the signal of a trumpet, and when John opened his eyes he found the air still quivering beneath the throb of the guns. As he had foreseen they had never ceased in the darkness, and he could not remember how many days and nights now they had been raining steel upon human beings.

He was refreshed and strengthened by a night of good sleep, but his mind was as sensitive as ever. In the morning no less bitterly than at night he raged against the folly and ambition of the kings. But the others paid no attention to the cannon. They were

light of heart and easy of tongue. They chaffed one another in the cool dawn, and cried to the cooks for breakfast, which was soon brought to them, hot and plentiful.



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"I suppose it's forward again," said Carstairs between drinks of coffee.

"I fancy you're right," said Wharton. "Since we've been put in the brigade of that giant of a general, Vaugirard, we're always going forward. He seems to have an uncommon love of fighting for a fat man."

"It's an illusion," said John, "that a fat man is more peaceful than a thin one."

"How are you going to prove it?" asked Wharton.

"Look at Napoleon. When he was thin he was a great fighter, and when he became stout he was just as great a fighter as ever. Fat didn't take away his belligerency."

"I hear that the whole German army has been driven across the Marne," said Carstairs, "and that the force we hoped to cut off has either escaped or is about to escape. If that's so they won't retreat much further. The pride of the Germans is too great, and their army is too powerful for them to yield much more ground to us."

"I think you're right, or about as near right as an Englishman can be, Carstairs," said John. "What must be the feelings of the Emperor and the kings and the princes and the grand dukes and the dukes and the martial professors to know that the German army has been turned back from Paris, just when the City of Light seemed ready to fall into their hands?"

"Pretty bitter, I think," said Carstairs, "but it's not pleasant to have the capital of a country fall into the hands of hostile armies. I don't read of such things with delight. It wouldn't give me any such overwhelming joy for us to march into Berlin. To beat the Germans is enough."

Another trumpet blew and the Strangers rose for battle again with an invisible enemy. All the officers, like the men, were on foot, their horses having been killed in the earlier fighting, and they advanced slowly across the stubble of a wheat field. The morning was still cool, although the sun was bright, and the air was full of vigor. The rumbling of the artillery grew with the day, but the Strangers said little. Battle had ceased to be a novelty. They would fight somewhere and with somebody, but they would wait patiently and without curiosity until the time came.

"I suppose Lannes didn't come back," said Carstairs. "I haven't heard anyone speak of seeing him this morning."

"He may have returned before we awoke," said John. "The *Arrow* flies very fast. Like as not he delivered his message, whatever it was, and was off again with another in a few minutes. He may be sixty or eighty miles from here now."



“Odd fellow that Lannes,” said Carstairs. “Do you know anything about his people, Scott?”

“Not much except that he has a mother and sister. I spent a night with them at their house in Paris. I’ve heard that French family ties are strong, but they seemed to look upon him as the weak would regard a great champion, a knight, in their own phrase, without fear and without reproach.”



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“That speaks well for him.”

John’s mind traveled back to that modest house across the Seine. It had done so often during all the days and nights of fighting, and he thought of Julie Lannes in her simple white dress, Julie with the golden hair and the bluest of blue eyes. She had not seemed at all foreign to him. In her simplicity and openness she was like one of the young girls of his own country. French custom might have compelled a difference at other times, but war was a great leveler of manners. She and her mother must have suffered agonies of suspense, when the guns were thundering almost within hearing of Paris, suspense for Philip, suspense for their country, and suspense in a less degree for themselves. Maybe Lannes had gone back once in the *Arrow* to show them that he was safe, and to tell them that, for the time at least, the great German invasion had been rolled back.

“A penny for your dream!” said Carstairs.

“Not for a penny, nor for a pound, nor for anything else,” said John. “This dream of mine had something brilliant and beautiful and pure at the very core of it, and I’m not selling.”

Carstairs looked curiously at him, and a light smile played across his face. But the smile was sympathetic.

“I’ll wager you that with two guesses I can tell the nature of your dream,” he said.

John shook his head, and he, too, smiled.

“As we say at home,” he said, “you may guess right the very first time, but I won’t tell you whether you’re right or wrong.”

“I take only one guess. That coruscating core of your dream was a girl.”

“I told you I wouldn’t say whether you were right or wrong.”

“Is she blonde or dark?”

“I repeat that I’m answering no questions.”

“Does she live in one of your Northern or one of your Southern States?”

John smiled.

“I suppose you haven’t heard from her in a long time, as mail from across the water isn’t coming with much regularity to this battle field.”

John smiled again.



“And now I’ll conclude,” said Carstairs, speaking very seriously. “If it is a girl, and I know it is, I hope that she’ll smile when she thinks of you, as you’ve been smiling when you think of her. I hope, too, that you’ll go through this war without getting killed, although the chances are three or four to one against it, and go back home and win her.”

John smiled once more and was silent, but when Carstairs held out his hand he could not keep from shaking it. Then Paris, the modest house beyond the Seine, and the girl within it, floated away like an illusion, driven from thought in an instant by a giant shell that struck within a few hundred yards of them, exploding with a terrible crash and filling the air with deadly bits of flying shell.



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There was such a whistling in his ears that John thought at first he had been hit, but when he shook himself a little he found he was unhurt, and his heart resumed its normal beat. Other shells coming out of space began to strike, but none so near, and the Strangers went calmly on. On their right was a Paris regiment made up mostly of short, but thick-chested men, all very dark. Its numbers were only one-third what they had been a week before, and its colonel was Pierre Louis Bougainville, late Apache, late of the Butte Montmartre. All the colonels, majors and captains of this regiment had been killed and he now led it, earning his promotion by the divine right of genius. He, at least, could look into his knapsack and see there the shadow of a marshal's baton, a shadow that might grow more material.

John watched him and he wondered at this transformation of a rat of Montmartre into a man. And yet there had been many such transformations in the French Revolution. What had happened once could always happen again. Napoleon himself had been the son of a poor little lawyer in a distant and half-savage island, not even French in blood, but an Italian and an alien.

Crash! Another shell burst near, and told him to quit thinking of old times and attend to the business before him. The past had nothing more mighty than the present. The speed of the Strangers was increased a little, and the French regiments on either side kept pace with them. More shells fell. They came, shrieking through the air like hideous birds of remote ages. Some passed entirely over the advancing troops, but one fell among the French on John's right, and the column opening out, passed shudderingly around the spot where death had struck.

Two or three of the Strangers were blown away presently. It seemed to John's horrified eyes that one of them entirely vanished in minute fragments. He knew now what annihilation meant.

The heavy French field guns behind them were firing over their heads, but there was still nothing in front, merely the low green hills and not even a flash of flame nor a puff of smoke. The whistling death came out of space.

The French went on, a wide shallow valley opened out before them, and they descended by the easy slope into it. Here the German shells and shrapnel ceased to fall among them, but, as the heavy thunder continued, John knew the guns had merely turned aside their fire for other points on the French line. Carstairs by his side gave an immense sigh of relief.

"I can never get used to the horrible roaring and groaning of those shells," he said. "If I get killed I'd like it to be done without the thing that does it shrieking and gloating over me."



They were well in the valley now, and John noticed that along its right ran a dense wood, fresh and green despite the lateness of the season. But as he looked he heard the shrill snarling of many trumpets, and, for a moment or two, his heart stood still, as a vast body of German cavalry burst from the screen of the wood and rushed down upon them.



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It was not often in this war that cavalry had a great chance, but here it had come. The ambush was complete. The German signals, either from the sky or the hills, had told when the French were in the valley, and then the German guns had turned aside their fire for the very good reason that they did not wish to send shells among their own men.

John's feeling was one of horrified surprise. The German cavalry extending across a mile of front seemed countless. Imagination in that terrific moment magnified them into millions. He saw the foaming mouths, the white teeth and the flashing eyes of the horses, and then the tense faces and eyes of their riders. Lances and sabers were held aloft, and the earth thundered with the tread of the mounted legions.

"Good God!" cried Wharton.

"Wheel, men, wheel!" shouted Captain Colton.

As they turned to face the rushing tide of steel, the regiment of Bougainville whirled on their flank and then Bougainville was almost at his side. He saw fire leap from the little man's eye. He saw him shout commands, rapid incisive, and correct and he saw clearly that if this were Napoleon's day that marshal's baton in the knapsack would indeed become a reality.

The Paris regiment, kneeling, was the first to fire, and the next instant flame burst from the rifles of the Strangers. It was not a moment too soon. It seemed to many of the young Americans and Englishmen that they had been ridden down already, but sheet after sheet of bullets fired by men, fighting for their lives, formed a wall of death.

The Uhlans, the hussars and the cuirassiers reeled back in the very moment of triumph. Horses with their riders crashed to the ground, and others, mad with terror, rushed wildly through the French ranks.

John, Carstairs and Wharton snatched up rifles, all three, and began to fire with the men as fast as they could. A vast turmoil, frightful in its fury, followed. The German cavalry reeled back, but it did not retreat. The shrill clamor of many trumpets came again, and once more the horsemen charged. The sheet of death blazed in their faces again, and then the French met them with bayonet.

The Strangers had closed in to meet the shock. John felt rather than saw Carstairs and Wharton on either side of him, and the three of them were firing cartridge after cartridge into the light whitish smoke that hung between them and the charging horsemen. He was devoutly thankful that the Paris regiment was immediately on their right, and that it was led by such a man as Bougainville. General Vaugirard, he knew, was farther to their left, and now he began to hear the rapid firers, pouring a rain of death upon the cavalry.

“We win! we win!” cried Carstairs. “If they couldn’t beat us down in the first rush they can’t beat us down at all!”

Carstairs was right. The French had broken into no panic, and, when, infantry standing firm, pour forth the incessant and deadly stream of death, that modern arms make possible, no cavalry can live before them. Yet the Germans charged again and again into the hurricane of fire and steel. The tumult of the battle face to face became terrific.



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John could no longer hear the words of his comrades. He saw dimly through the whitish smoke in front, but he continued to fire. Once he leaped aside to let a wounded and riderless horse gallop past, and thrice he sprang over the bodies of the dead.

The infantry were advancing now, driving the cavalry before them, and the French were able to bring their lighter field guns into action. John heard the rapid crashes, and he saw the line of cavalry drawing back. He, too, was shouting with triumph, although nobody heard him. But all the Strangers were filled with fiery zeal. Without orders they rushed forward, driving the horsemen yet further. John saw through the whitish mist a fierce face and a powerful arm swinging aloft a saber.

He recognized von Boehlen and von Boehlen recognized him. Shouting, the Prussian urged his horse at him and struck him with the saber. John, under impulse, dropped to his knees, and the heavy blade whistled above him. But something else struck him on the head and he fell senseless to the earth.

CHAPTER XII

JULIE LANNES

John Scott came slowly out of the darkness and hovered for a while between dusk and light. It was not an unpleasant world in which he lingered. It seemed full of rest and peace. His mind and body were relaxed, and there was no urgent call for him to march and to fight. The insistent drumming of the great guns which could play upon the nervous system until it was wholly out of tune was gone. The only sound he heard was that of a voice, a fresh young voice, singing a French song in a tone low and soft. He had always liked these little love songs of the kind that were sung in a subdued way. They were pathetic and pure as a rose leaf.

He might have opened his eyes and looked for the singer, but he did not. The twilight region between sleep and consciousness was too pleasant. He had no responsibilities, nothing to do. He had a dim memory that he had belonged to an army, that it was his business to try to kill some one, and to try to keep from getting killed, but all that was gone now. He could lie there, without pain of body or anxiety of mind, and let vague but bright visions pass through his soul.

His eyes still closed, he listened to the voice. It was very low, scarcely more than a murmur, yet it was thrillingly sweet. It might not be a human voice, after all, just the distant note of a bird in the forest, or the murmur of a brave little stream, or a summer wind among green leaves.

He moved a little and became conscious that he was not going back into that winter region of dusk. His soul instead was steadily moving toward the light. The beat of his



heart grew normal, and then memory in a full tide rushed upon him. He saw the great cavalry battle with all its red turmoil, the savage swing of von Boehlen's saber and himself drifting out into the darkness.



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He opened his eyes, the battle vanished, and he saw himself lying upon a low, wooden platform. His head rested upon a small pillow, a blanket was under him, and another above him. Turning slowly he saw other men wrapped in blankets like himself on the platform in a row that stretched far to right and left. Above was a low roof, but both sides of the structure were open.

He understood it all in a moment. He had come back to a world of battle and wounds, and he was one of the wounded. But he listened for the soft, musical note which he believed now, in his imaginative state, had drawn him from the mid-region between life and death.

The stalwart figure of a woman in a somber dress with a red cross sewed upon it passed between him and the light, but he knew that it was not she who had been singing. He closed his eyes in disappointment, but reopened them. A man wearing a white jacket and radiating an atmosphere of drugs now walked before him. He must be a surgeon. At home, surgeons wore white jackets. Beyond doubt he was one and maybe he was going to stop at John's cot to treat some terrible wound of which he was not yet conscious. He shivered a little, but the man passed on, and his heart beat its relief.

Then a soldier took his place in the bar of light. He was a short, thick man in a ridiculous, long blue coat, and equally ridiculous, baggy, red trousers. An obscure cap was cocked in an obscure manner over his ears, and his face was covered with a beard, black, thick and untrimmed. He carried a rifle over his shoulder and nobody could mistake him for anything but a Frenchman. Then he was not a prisoner again, but was in French hands. That, at least, was a consolation.

It was amusing to lie there and see the people, one by one, pass between him and the light. He could easily imagine that he was an inspection officer and that they walked by under orders from him. Two more women in those somber dresses with the red crosses embroidered upon them, were silhouetted for a moment against the glow and then were gone. Then a man with his arm in a sling and his face very pale walked slowly by. A wounded soldier! There must be many, very many of them!

The musical murmur ceased and he was growing weary. He closed his eyes and then he opened them again because he felt for a moment on his face a fragrant breath, fleeting and very light. He looked up into the eyes of Julie Lannes. They were blue, very blue, but with infinite wistful depths in them, and he noticed that her golden hair had faint touches of the sun in it. It was a crown of glory. He remembered that he had seen something like it in the best pictures of the old masters.

"Mademoiselle Julie!" he said.



“You have come back,” she said gently. “We have been anxious about you. Philip has been to see you three times.”

He noticed that she, too, wore the somber dress with the red cross, and he began to comprehend.



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"A nurse," he said. "Why, you are too young for such work!"

"But I am strong, and the wounded are so many, hundreds of thousands, they say. Is it not a time for the women of France to help as much as they can?"

"I suppose so. I've heard that in our civil war the women passed over the battle fields, seeking the wounded and nursed them afterward. But you didn't come here alone, did you, Mademoiselle Julie?"

"Antoine Picard—you remember him—and his daughter Suzanne, are with me. My mother would have come too, but she is ill. She will come later."

"How long have I been here?"

"Four days."

John thought a little. Many and mighty events had happened in four days before he was wounded and many and mighty events may have occurred since.

"Would you mind telling me where we are, Mademoiselle Julie?" he asked.

"I do not know exactly myself, but we are somewhere near the river, Aisne. The German army has turned and is fortifying against us. When the wind blows this way you can hear the rumble of the guns. Ah, there it is now, Mr. Scott!"

John distinctly heard that low, sinister menace, coming from the east, and he knew what it was. Why should he not? He had listened to it for days and days. It was easy enough now to tell the thunder of the artillery from real thunder. He was quite sure that it had never ceased while he was unconscious. It had been going on so long now, as steady as the flowing of a river.

"I've been asking you a lot of questions, Mademoiselle Julie, but I want to ask you one more."

"What is it, Mr. Scott?"

"What happened to me?"

"They say that you were knocked down by a horse, and that when you were falling his knee struck your head. There was a concussion but the surgeon says that when you come out of it you will recover very fast."

"Is the man who says it a good surgeon, one upon whom a fellow can rely, one of the very best surgeons that ever worked on a hurt head?"



“Yes, Mr. Scott. But why do you ask such a question? Is it your odd American way?”

“Not at all. Mademoiselle Julie. I merely wanted to satisfy myself. He knows that I’m not likely to be insane or weak-minded or anything of the kind, because I got in the way of that horse’s knee?”

“Oh, no, Mr. Scott, there is not the least danger in the world. Your mind will be as sound as your body. Don’t trouble yourself.”

She laughed and now John knew that it was she whom he had heard singing the chansonette in that low murmuring tone. What was that little song? Well, it did not matter about the words. The music was that of a soft breeze from the south blowing among roses. John’s imaginings were growing poetical. Perhaps there were yet some lingering effects from the concussion.

“Here is the surgeon now,” said Mademoiselle Julie. “He will take a look at you and he will be glad to find that what he has predicted has come true.”



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It was the man in the white jacket, and with that wonderful tangle of black whiskers, like a patch cut out of a scrub forest.

"Well, my young Yankee," he said, "I see that you've come around. You've raised an interesting question in my mind. Since a cavalry horse wasn't able to break it, is the American skull thicker than the skulls of other people?"

"A lot of you Europeans don't seem to think we're civilized."

"But when you fight for us we do. Isn't that so, Mademoiselle Lannes?"

"I think it is."

"War is a curious thing. While it drives people apart it also brings them together. We learn in battle, and its aftermath, that we're very much alike. And now, my young Yankee, I'll be here again in two hours to change that bandage for the last time. I'll be through with you then, and in another day you can go forward to meet the German shells."

"I prefer to run against a horse's knee," said John with spirit.

Surgeon Lucien Delorme laughed heartily.

"I'm confirmed in my opinion that you won't need me after another change of bandages," he said. "We've a couple of hundred thousand cases much worse than yours to tend, and Mademoiselle Lannes will look after you today. She has watched over you, I understand, because you're a friend of her brother, the great flying man, Philip Lannes."

"Yes," said John, "that's it, of course."

Julie herself said nothing.

Surgeon Delorme passed through the bar of brilliant light and disappeared, his place being taken by a gigantic figure with grizzled hair, and the stern face of the thoughtful peasant, the same Antoine Picard who had been left as a guardian over the little house beyond the Seine. John closed his eyes, that is nearly, and caught the glance that the big man gave to Julie. It was protecting and fatherly, and he knew that Antoine would answer for her at any time with his life. It was one remnant of feudalism to which he did not object. He opened his eyes wide and said:

"Well, my good Picard, perhaps you thought you were going to look at a dead American, but you are not. Behold me!"



He sat up and doubled up his arm to show his muscle and power. Picard smiled and offered to shake hands in the American fashion. He seemed genuinely glad that John had returned to the real world, and John ascribed it to Picard's knowledge that he was Lannes' friend.

Julie said some words to Picard, and with a little *au revoir* to John, went away. John watched her until she was out of sight. He realized again that young French girls were kept secluded from the world, immured almost. But the world had changed. Since a few men met around a table six or seven weeks before and sent a few dispatches a revolution had come. Old customs, old ideas and old barriers were going fast, and might be going faster. War, the leveler, was prodigiously at work.



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These were tremendous things, but he had himself to think about too, and personality can often outweigh the universe. Julie was gone, taking a lot of the light with her, but Picard was still there, and while he was grizzled and stern he was a friend.

John sat up quite straight and Picard did not try to keep him from it.

“Picard,” he said, “you see me, don’t you?”

“I do, sir, with these two good eyes of mine, as good as those in the head of any young man, and fifty is behind me.”

“That’s because you’re not intellectual, Picard, but we’ll return to our lamb chops. I am here, I, a soldier of France, though an American—for which I am grateful—laid four days upon my back by a wound. And was that wound inflicted by a shell, shrapnel, bomb, lance, saber, bullet or any of the other noble weapons of warfare? No, sir, it was done by a horse, and not by a kick, either, he jostled me with his knee when he wasn’t looking. Would you call that an honorable wound?”

“All wounds received in the service of one’s country or adopted country are honorable, sir.”

“You give me comfort, Picard. But spread the story that I was not hit by a horse’s knee but by a piece of shell, a very large and wicked piece of shell. I want it to get into the histories that way. The greatest of Frenchmen, though he was an Italian, said that history was a fable agreed upon, and you and I want to make an agreement about myself and a shell.”

“I don’t understand you at all, sir.”

“Well, never mind. Tell me how long Mademoiselle Julie is going to stay here. I’m a great friend of her brother, Lieutenant Philip Lannes. Oh, we’re such wonderful friends! And we’ve been through such terrible dangers together!”

“Then, perhaps it’s Lieutenant Lannes and not his sister, Mademoiselle Julie, that you wish to inquire about.”

“Don’t be ironical, Picard. I was merely digressing, which I admit is wrong, as you’re apt to distract the attention of your hearer from the real subject. We’ll return to Mademoiselle Julie. Do you think she’s going to remain here long?”

“I would tell you if I could, sir, but no one knows. I think it depends upon many circumstances. The young lady is most brave, as becomes one of her blood, and the changes in France are great. All of us who may not fight can serve otherwise.”

“Why is it that you’re not fighting, Picard?”



The great peasant flung up his arms angrily.

“Because I am beyond the age. Because I am too old, they said. Think of it! I, Antoine Picard, could take two of these little officers and crush them to death at once in my arms! There is not in all this army a man who could walk farther than I can! There is not one who could lift the wheel of a cannon out of the mud more quickly than I can, and they would not take me! What do a few years mean?”

“Nothing in your case, Antoine, but they’ll take you, later on. Never fear. Before this war is over every country in it will need all the men it can get, whether old or young.”



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"I fear that it is so," said the gigantic peasant, a shadow crossing his stern face, "but, sir, one thing is decided. France, the France of the Revolution, the France that belongs to its people, will not fall."

John looked at him with a new interest. Here was a peasant, but a thinking peasant, and there were millions like him in France. They were not really peasants in the old sense of the word, but workingmen with a stake in the country, and the mind and courage to defend it. It might be possible to beat the army of a nation, but not a nation in arms.

"No, Picard," said John, "France will not fall."

"And that being settled, sir," said Picard, with grim humor, "I think you'd better lie down again. You've talked a lot for a man who has been unconscious four days."

"You're right, my good Picard, as I've no doubt you usually are. Was I troublesome, much, when I was out in the dark?"

"But little, sir. I've lifted much heavier men, and that Dr. Delorme is strong himself, not afraid, either, to use the knife. Ah, sir, you should have seen how beautifully he worked right under the fire of the German guns! Psst! if need be he'd have taken a leg off you in five minutes, as neatly as if he had been in a hospital in Paris!"

John felt apprehensively for his legs. Both were there, and in good condition.

"If that man ever comes near me with the intention of cutting off one of my legs I'll shoot him, good fellow and good doctor though he may be," he said. "Help me up a little higher, will you, Picard? I want to see what kind of a place we're in."

Picard built up a little pyramid of saddles and knapsacks behind him and John drew himself up with his back against them. The rows and rows of wounded stretched as far as he could see, and there was a powerful odor of drugs. Around him was a forest, of the kind with which he had become familiar in Europe, that is, of small trees, free from underbrush. He saw some distance away soldiers walking up and down and beyond them the vague outline of an earthwork.

"What place is this, anyway, Picard?" he asked.

"It has no name, sir. It's a hospital. It was built in the forest in a day. More than five thousand wounded lie here. The army itself is further on. You were found and brought in by some young officers of that most singular company composed of Americans and English who are always quarreling among one another, but who unite and fight like demons against anybody else."



“A dollar to a cent it was Wharton and Carstairs who brought me here,” said John, smiling to himself.

“What does Monsieur say?”

“Merely commenting on some absent friends of mine. But this isn’t a bad place, Picard.”

The shed was of immense length and breadth and just beyond it were some small buildings, evidently of hasty construction. John inferred that they were for the nurses and doctors, and he wondered which one sheltered Julie Lannes. The forest seemed to be largely of young pines, and the breeze that blew through it was fresh and wholesome. As he breathed it young Scott felt that he was inhaling new life and strength. But the wind also brought upon its edge that far faint murmur which he knew was the throbbing of the great guns, miles and miles away.



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"Perhaps, Monsieur had better lie down again now and sleep awhile," said Picard insinuatingly.

"Sleep! I need sleep! Why, Picard, by your own account I've just awakened from a sleep four days and four nights long."

"But, sir, that was not sleep. It was the stupor of unconsciousness. Now your sleep will be easy and natural."

"Very well," said John, who had really begun to feel a little weary, "I'll go to sleep, since, in a way, you order it, but if Mademoiselle Julie Lannes should happen to pass my cot again, will you kindly wake me up?"

"If possible, sir," said Picard, the faintest smile passing over his iron features, and forced to be content with that reply, John soon slept again. Julie passed by him twice, but Picard did not awaken him, nor try. The first time she was alone. Trained and educated like most young French girls, she had seen little of the world until she was projected into the very heart of it by an immense and appalling war. But its effect upon her had been like that upon John. Old manners and customs crumbled away, an era vanished, and a new one with new ideas came to take its place. She shuddered often at what she had seen in this great hospital in the woods, but she was glad that she had come. French courage was as strong in the hearts of women as in the hearts of men, and the brusque but good Dr. Delorme had said that she learned fast. She had more courage, yes, and more skill, than many nurses older and stronger than she, and there was the stalwart Suzanne, who worked with her.

She was alone the first time and she stopped by John's cot, where he slept so peacefully. He was undeniably handsome, this young American who had come to their house in Paris with Philip. And her brother, that wonderful man of the air, who was almost a demi-god to her, had spoken so well of him, had praised so much his skill, his courage, and his honesty. And he had received his wound fighting so gallantly for France, her country. Her beautiful color deepened a little as she walked away.

John awoke again in the afternoon, and the first sound he heard was that same far rumble of the guns, now apparently a part of nature, but he did not linger in any twilight land between dark and light. All the mists of sleep cleared away at once and he sat up, healthy, strong and hungry. Demanding food from an orderly he received it, and when he had eaten it he asked for Surgeon Delorme.

The surgeon did not come for a half hour and then he demanded brusquely what John wanted.



“None of your drugs,” replied happy young Scott, “but my uniform and my arms. I don’t know your procedure here, but I want you to certify to the whole world that I’m entirely well and ready to return to the ranks.”

Surgeon Delorme critically examined the bandage which he had changed that morning, and then felt of John’s head at various points.

“A fine strong skull,” he said, smiling, “and quite undamaged. When this war is over I shall go to America and make an exhaustive study of the Yankee skull. Has bone, through the influence of climate or of more plentiful food, acquired a more tenacious quality there than it has here? It is a most interesting and complicated question.”



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“But it’s solution will have to be deferred, my good Monsieur Delorme, and so you’d better quit thumping my head so hard. Give me that certificate, because if you don’t I’ll get up and go without it. Don’t you hear those guns out there, doctor? Why, they’re calling to me all the time. They tell me, strong and well, again, to come at once and join my comrades of the Strangers, who are fighting the enemy.”

“You shall go in the morning,” said Surgeon Delorme, putting his broad hand upon young Scott’s head. “The effects of the concussion will have vanished then.”

“But I want to get up now and put on my uniform; can’t I?”

“I know no reason why you shouldn’t. There’s a huge fellow named Picard around here who has been watching over you, and who has your uniform. I’ll call him.”

When John was dressed he walked with Picard into the edge of the forest. His first steps were wavering, and his head swam a little, but in a few minutes the dizziness disappeared and his walk became steady and elastic. He was his old self again, strong in every fiber. He would certainly be with the Strangers the next morning.

Many more of the wounded, thousands of them, were lying or sitting on the short grass in the forest. They were the less seriously hurt, and they were cheerful. Some of them sang.

“They’ll be going back to the army fast,” said Picard. “Unless they’re torn by shrapnel nearly all the wounded get well again and quickly. The bullet with the great power is merciful. It goes through so fast that it does not tear either flesh or bone. If you’re healthy, if your blood is good, psst! you’re well again in a week.”

“Do you know if Lieutenant Lannes is expected here?” asked John.

“I heard from Mademoiselle Julie that he would come at set of sun. He has been on another perilous errand. Ah, his is a strange and terrible life, sir. Up there in the sky, a half mile, maybe a mile, above the earth. All the dangers of the earth and those, too, of the air to fight! Nothing above you and nothing below you. It’s a new world in which Monsieur Philip Lannes moves, but I would not go in it with him, not for all the treasures of the Louvre!”

He looked up at the calm and benevolent blue sky and shuddered.

John laughed.

“Some of us feel that way,” he said. “Many men as brave as any that ever lived can’t bear to look down from a height. But sunset is approaching, my gallant Picard, and Lannes should soon be here.”



The rays of the sun fell in showers of red gold where they stood, but a narrow band of gray under the eastern horizon showed that twilight was not far away. The two stood side by side staring up at the heavens, where they felt with absolute certainty the black dot would appear at the appointed time. It was a singular tribute to the courage and character of Lannes that all who knew him had implicit faith in his promises, not alone in his honesty of purpose, but in his ability to carry it out in the face of difficulty and danger. The band of gray in the east broadened, but they still watched with the utmost faith.



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"I see something to the eastward," said John, "or is it merely a shadow in the sky?"

"I don't think it's a shadow. It must be one of those terrible machines, and perhaps it's that of our brave Monsieur Philip."

"You're right, Picard, it's no shadow, nor is it a bit of black cloud. It's an aeroplane, flying very fast. The skies over Europe hold many aeroplanes these days, but I know all the tricks of the *Arrow*, all its pretty little ways, its manner of curving, looping and dropping, and I should say that the *Arrow*, Philip Lannes aboard, is coming."

"I pray, sir, that you are right. I always hold my breath until he is on the ground again."

"Then you'll have to make a record in holding breath, my brave Picard. He is still far, very far, from us, and it will be a good ten minutes before he arrives."

But John knew beyond a doubt, after a little more watching, that it was really the *Arrow*, and with eager eyes he watched the gallant little machine as it descended in many a graceful loop and spiral to the earth. They hurried forward to meet it, and Lannes, bright-eyed and trim, sprang out, greeting John with a welcome cry.

"Up again," he exclaimed, "and, as I see with these two eyes of mine, as well as ever! And you too, my brave Picard, here to meet me!"

He hastened away with a report, but came back to them in a few minutes.

"Now," he said, "We'll go and see my sister."

John was not at all unwilling.

They found her in one of the new houses of pine boards, and the faithful and stalwart Suzanne was with her. It was the plainest of plain places, inhabited by at least twenty other Red Cross nurses, and John stood on one side until the first greeting of brother and sister was over. Then Lannes, by a word and a gesture, included him in what was practically a family group, although he was conscious that the stalwart Suzanne was watching him with a wary eye.

"Julie and Suzanne," said Lannes, "are going tomorrow with other nurses to the little town of Menouville, where also many wounded lie. They are less well supplied with doctors and nurses than we are here. Dr. Delorme goes also with a small detachment as escort. I have asked that you, Monsieur Jean the Scott, be sent with them. Our brave Picard goes too. Menouville is about eight miles from here, and it's not much out of the way to the front. So you will not be kept long from your Strangers, John."

"I go willingly," said John, "and I'm glad, Philip, that you've seen fit to consider me worth while as a part of the escort."



He spoke quietly, but his glance wandered to Julie Lannes. It may have been a chance, but hers turned toward him at the same time, and the eyes, the blue and the gray, met. Again the girl's brilliant color deepened a little, and she looked quickly away. Only the watchful and grim Suzanne saw.



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“Do you have to go away at once, Philip?” asked Julie.

“In one hour, my sister. There is not much rest for the *Arrow* and me these days, but they are such days as happen perhaps only once in a thousand years, and one must do his best to be worthy. I’m not preaching, little sister, don’t think that, but I must answer to every call.”

The twilight had spread from east to west. The heavy shadows in the east promised a dark night, but out of the shadows, as always, came that sullen mutter of the ruthless guns. Julie shivered a little, and glanced at the dim sky.

“Must you go up there in the cold dark?” she said. “It’s like leaving the world. It’s dangerous enough in the day, but you have a bright sky then. In the night it’s terrible!”

“Don’t you fear for me, little sister,” said Lannes. “Why, I like the night for some reasons. You can slip by your enemies in the dark, and if you’re flying low the cannon don’t have half the chance at you. Besides, I’ve the air over these regions all mapped and graded now. I know all the roads and paths, the meeting places of the clouds, points suitable for ambush, aerial fields, meadows and forests. Oh, it’s home up there! Don’t you worry, and do you write, too, to Madame, my mother, in Paris, that I’m perfectly safe.”

Lannes kissed her and went away abruptly. John was sure that an attempt to hide emotion caused his brusque departure.

“Believe everything he tells you, Mademoiselle Julie,” he said. “I’ve come to the conclusion that nothing can ever trap your brother. Besides courage and skill he has luck. The stars always shine for him.”

“They’re not shining tonight,” said Picard, looking up at the dusky sky.

“But I believe, Mr. Scott, that you are right,” said Julie.

“He’ll certainly come to us at Menouville tomorrow night,” said John, speaking in English—all the conversation hitherto had been in French, “and I think we’ll have a pleasant ride through the forest in the morning, Miss Lannes. You’ll let me call you Miss Lannes, once or twice, in my language, won’t you? I like to hear the sound of it.”

“I’ve no objection, Mr. Scott,” she replied also in English. She did not blush, but looked directly at him with bright eyes. John was conscious of something cool and strong. She was very young, she was French, and she had lived a sheltered life, but he realized once more that human beings are the same everywhere and that war, the leveler, had broken down all barriers.



“I’ve not heard who is to be our commander, Miss Lannes,” he continued in English, “but I’ll be here early in the morning. May I wish you happy dreams and a pleasant awakening, as they say at home?”

“But you have two homes now, France and America.”

“That’s so, and I’m beginning to love one as much as the other. Any way, to the re-seeing, Miss Lannes, which I believe is equivalent to *au revoir*.”



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He made a very fine bow, one that would have done credit to a trained old courtier, and withdrew. The fierce and watchful eyes of Suzanne followed him.

John was up at dawn, as strong and well as he had ever been in his life. As he was putting on his uniform an orderly arrived with a note from Lieutenant Hector Legare, telling him to report at once for duty with a party that was going to Menouville.

The start was made quickly. John found that the women with surgical supplies were traveling in carts. The soldiers, about twenty in number, walked. John and the doctor walked with them. All the automobiles were in use carrying troops to the front, but the carts were strong and comfortable and John did not mind. It ought to be a pleasant trip.

CHAPTER XIII

THE MIDDLE AGES

The little party moved away without attracting notice. In a time of such prodigious movement the going or coming of a few individuals was a matter of no concern. The hood that Julie Lannes had drawn over her hair and face, and her plain brown dress might have been those of a nun. She too passed before unseeing eyes.

Lieutenant Legare was a neutral person, arousing no interest in John who walked by the side of the gigantic Picard, the stalwart Suzanne being in one of the carts beside Julie. The faint throbbing of the guns, now a distinct part of nature, came to them from a line many miles away, but John took no notice of it. He had returned to the world among pleasant people, and this was one of the finest mornings in early autumn that he had ever seen.

The country was much more heavily forested than usual. At points, the woods turned into what John would almost have called a real forest. Then they could not see very far ahead or to either side, but the road was good and the carts moved forward, though not at a pace too great for the walkers.

Picard carried a rifle over his shoulders, and John had secured an automatic. All the soldiers were well armed. John felt a singular lightness of heart, and, despite the forbidding glare of Suzanne, who was in the last cart, he spoke to Julie.

"It's too fine a morning for battle," he said in English. "Let's pretend that we're a company of troubadours, minnesingers, jongleurs, acrobats and what not, going from one great castle to another."

"I suppose Antoine there is the chief acrobat?"

"He might do a flip-flap, but if he did the earth would shake."



“Then you are the chief troubadour. Where is your harp or viol, Sir Knight of the Tuneful Road?”

“I’m merely imagining character, not action. I haven’t a harp or a viol, and if I had them I couldn’t play on either.”

“Do you think it right to talk In English to the strange young American, Mademoiselle? Would Madame your mother approve?” said Suzanne in a fierce whisper.



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“It is sometimes necessary in war, Suzanne, to talk where one would not do so in peace,” replied Julie gravely, and then she said to John again in English:

“We cannot carry out the pretense, Mr. Scott. The tuneful or merry folk of the Middle Ages did not travel with arms. They had no enemies, and they were welcome everywhere. Nor did they travel as we do to the accompaniment of war. The sound of the guns grows louder.”

“So it does,” said John, bending an ear—he had forgotten that a battle was raging somewhere, “but we’re behind the French lines and it cannot touch us.”

“It was a wonderful victory. Our soldiers are the bravest in the world are they not, Mr. Scott?”

John smiled. They were still talking English. He liked to hear her piquant pronunciation of it, and he surmised too that the bravest of hearts beat in the bosom of this young girl whom war had suddenly made a woman. How could the sister of such a man as Lannes be otherwise than brave? The sober brown dress, and the hood equally sober, failed to hide her youthful beauty. The strands of hair escaping from the hood showed pure gold in the sunshine, and in the same sunshine the blue of her eyes seemed deeper than ever.

John was often impressed by the weakness of generalities, and one of them was the fact that so many of the French were so fair, and so many of the English so dark. He did not remember the origin of the Lannes family, but he was sure that through her mother’s line, at least, she must be largely of Norman blood.

“What are you thinking of so gravely, Mr. Scott?” she asked, still in English, to the deep dissatisfaction of Suzanne, who never relaxed her grim glare.

“I don’t know. Perhaps it was the contrast of our peaceful journey to what is going on twelve or fifteen miles away.”

“It is beautiful here!” she said.

Truly it was. The road, smooth and white, ran along the slopes of hills, crested with open forest, yet fresh and green. Below them were fields of chequered brown and green. Four or five clear brooks flowed down the slopes, and the sheen of a little river showed in the distance. Three small villages were in sight, and, clean white smoke rising from their chimneys, blended harmoniously into the blue of the skies. It reminded John of pictures by the great French landscape painters. It was all so beautiful and peaceful, nor was the impression marred by the distant mutter of the guns which he had forgotten again.



Julie and Suzanne, her menacing shadow, dismounted from the wagon presently and walked with John and Picard. Lieutenant Legare was stirred enough from his customary phlegm to offer some gallant words, but war, the great leveler, had not quite leveled all barriers, so far as he was concerned, and, after her polite reply, he returned to his martial duties. John had become the friend of the Lannes family through his association with Philip in dangerous service, and his position was recognized.



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The road ascended and the forest became deeper. No houses were now in sight. As the morning advanced it had grown warmer under a brilliant sun, but it was pleasant here in the shade. Julie still walked, showing no sign of a wish for the cart again. John noticed that she was very strong, or at least very enduring. Suddenly he felt a great obligation to take care of her for the sake of Lannes. The sister of his comrade-in-arms was a precious trust in his hands, and he must not fail.

The wind shifted and blew toward the east, no longer bringing the sound of guns. Instead they heard a bird now and then, chattering or singing in a tree. The illusion of the Middle Ages returned to John. They were a peaceful troupe, going upon a peaceful errand.

"Don't tell me there isn't a castle at Menouville," he said. "I know there is, although I've never been there, and I never heard of the place before. When we arrive the drawbridge will be down and the portcullis up. All the men-at-arms will have burnished their armor brightly and will wait respectfully in parallel rows to welcome us as we pass between. His Grace, the Duke of Light Heart, in a suit of red velvet will be standing on the steps, and Her Graciousness, the Duchess, in a red brocade dress, with her hair powdered and very high on her head, will be by his side to greet our merry troupe. Behind them will be all the ducal children, and the knights and squires and pages, and ladies. I think they will all be very glad to see us, because in these Middle Ages of ours, life, even in a great ducal castle, is somewhat lonely. Visitors are too rare, and there is not the variety of interest that even the poor will have in a later time."

"You make believe well, Mr. Scott," she said.

"There is inspiration," he said, glancing at her. "We are here in the deeps of an ancient wood, and perhaps the stories and legends of these old lands move the Americans more than they do the people who live here. We're the children of Europe and when we look back to the land of our fathers we often see it through a kind of glorified mist."

"The wind is shifting again," she said. "I hear the cannon once more."

"So do I, and I hear something else too! Was that the sound of hoofs?"

John turned in sudden alarm to Legare, who heard also and stiffened at once to attention. They were not alone on the road. The rapid beat of hoofs came, and around a corner galloped a mass of Uhlans, helmets and lances glittering. Picard with a shout of warning fired his rifle into the thick of them. Legare snatched out his revolver and fired also.

But they had no chance. The little detachment was ridden down in an instant. Legare and half of the men died gallantly. The rest were taken. Picard had been brought to his knees by a tremendous blow from the butt of a lance, and John, who had instinctively

sprung before Julie, was overpowered. Suzanne, who endeavored to reach a weapon, fought like a tigress, but two Uhlans finally subdued her.



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It was so swift and sudden that it scarcely seemed real to John, but there were the dead bodies lying ghastly in the road, and there stood Julie, as pale as death, but not trembling. The leader of the Uhlans pushed his helmet back a little from his forehead, and looked down at John, who had been disarmed but who stood erect and defiant.

“It is odd, Mr. Scott,” said Captain von Boehlen, “how often the fortunes of this war have caused us to meet.”

“It is, and sometimes fortune favors one, sometimes the other. You’re in favor now.”

Von Boehlen looked steadily at his prisoner. John thought that the strength and heaviness of the jaw were even more pronounced than when he had first seen the Prussian in Dresden. The face was tanned deeply, and face and figure alike seemed the embodiment of strength. One might dislike him, but one could not despise him. John even found it in his heart to respect him, as he returned the steady gaze of the blue eyes with a look equally as firm.

“I hope,” said John, “that you will send back Mademoiselle Lannes and the nurses with her to her people. I take it that you’re not making war upon women.”

Von Boehlen gave Julie a quick glance of curiosity and admiration. But the eyes flashed for only a moment and then were expressionless.

“I know of one Lannes,” he said, “Philip Lannes, the aviator, a name that fame has brought to us Germans.”

“I am his sister,” said Julie.

“I can wish, Mademoiselle Lannes,” said von Boehlen, politely in French, “that we had captured your brother instead of his sister.”

“But as I said, you will send them back to their own people? You don’t make war upon women?” repeated John.

“No, we do not make war upon women. We are making war upon Frenchmen, and I do not hesitate to say in the presence of Mademoiselle Lannes that this war is made upon very brave Frenchmen. Yet we cannot send the ladies back. The presence of our cavalry here within the French lines must not be known to our enemies. Moreover, I obey the orders of another, and I am compelled to hold them as prisoners—for a while at least.”

Von Boehlen’s tone was not lacking in the least in courtesy. It was more than respectful when he spoke directly to Julie Lannes, and John’s feeling of repugnance to him underwent a further abatement—he was a creation of his conditions, and he believed in his teachings.



“You will at least keep us all as prisoners together?” said John.

“I know of no reason to the contrary,” replied von Boehlen briefly. Then he acted with the decision that characterized all the German officers whom John had seen. The women and the prisoners were put in the carts. Dismounted Uhlans took the place of the drivers and the little procession with an escort of about fifty cavalry turned from the road into the woods, von Boehlen and the rest, about five hundred in number, rode on down the road.



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John was in the last cart with Julie, Suzanne and Picard, and his soul was full of bitter chagrin. He had just been taking mental resolutions to protect, no matter what came, Philip Lannes' sister, and, within a half hour, both she and he were prisoners. But when he saw the face of Antoine Picard he knew that one, at least, in the cart was suffering as much as he. The gigantic peasant was the only one whose arms were bound, and perhaps it was as well. His face expressed the most ferocious anger and hate, and now and then he pulled hard upon his bonds. John could see that they were cutting into the flesh. He remembered also that Picard was not in uniform. He was in German eyes only a *franc tireur*, subject to instant execution, and he wondered why von Boehlen had delayed.

"Save your strength, Antoine," he whispered soothingly. "We'll need it later. I've been a prisoner before and I escaped. What's been done once can be done again. In such a huge and confused war as this there's always a good chance."

"Ah, you're right, Monsieur," said Antoine, and he ceased to struggle.

Julie had heard the whisper, and she looked at John confidently. She was the youngest of all the women in the carts, but she was the coolest.

"They cannot do anything with us but hold us a few days," she said.

John was silent, turning away his somber face. He did not like this carrying away of the women as captives, and to him the women were embodied in Julie. They were following a little path through the woods, the German drivers and German guards seeming to know well the way. John, calculating the course by the sun, was sure that they were now going directly toward the German army and that they would pass unobserved beyond the French outposts. The path was leading into a narrow gorge and the banks and trees would hide them from all observation. He was confirmed in his opinion by the action of their guards. The leader rode beside the carts and said in very good French that any one making the least outcry would be shot instantly. No exception would be made in the case of a woman.

John knew that the threat would be kept. Julie Lannes paled a little, and the faithful Suzanne by her side was darkly menacing, but they showed no other emotion.

"Don't risk anything," said John in the lowest of whispers. "It would be useless."

Julie nodded. The carts moved on down the gorge, their wheels and the hoofs of the horses making but little noise on the soft turf. The crash of the guns was now distinctly louder and far ahead they saw wisps of smoke floating above the trees. John was sure that the German batteries were there, but he was equally sure that even had he glasses he could not have seen them. They would certainly be masked in some adroit fashion.

The roaring also grew on their right and left. That must be the French cannon, and soon they would be beyond the French lines. His bitterness increased. Nothing could be more galling than to be carried in this manner through one's own forces and into the camp of the enemy. And there was Julie, sitting quiet and pale, apparently without fear.



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He reckoned that they rode at least three miles in the gorge. Then they came into a shallow stream about twenty feet wide that would have been called a creek at home. Its banks were fairly high, lined on one side by a hedge and on the other by willows. Instead of following the path any further the Germans turned into the bed of the stream and drove down it two or three miles. The roar of the artillery from both armies was now very great, and the earth shook. Once John caught the shadow of a huge shell passing high over their heads.

All the prisoners knew that they were well beyond hope of rescue for the present. The French line was far behind them and they were within the German zone. It was better to be resigned, until they saw cause for hope.

When they came to a low point in the eastern bank of the stream the carts turned out, reached a narrow road between lines of poplars and continued their journey eastward. In the fields on either side John saw detachments of German infantry, skirmishers probably, as they had not yet reached the line of cannon.

"Officer," said John to the German leader, "couldn't you unbind the arms of my friend in the cart here? Ropes around one's wrists for a long time are painful, and since we're within your lines he has no chance of escape now."

The officer looked at Picard and shrugged his shoulders.

"Giants are strong," he said.

"But a little bullet can lay low the greatest of them."

"That is so."

He leaned from his horse, inserted the point of his sword between Picard's wrists and deftly cut the rope without breaking the skin. Picard clenched and unclenched his hands and drew several mighty breaths of relief. But he was a peasant of fine manners and he did not forget them. Turning to the officer, he said:

"I did not think I'd ever thank a German for anything, but I owe you gratitude. It's unnatural and painful to remain trussed up like a fowl going to market."

The officer gave Picard a glance of pity and rode to the head of the column, which turned off at a sharp angle toward the north. The great roar and crash now came from the south and John inferred that they would soon pass beyond the zone of fire. But for a long time the thunder of the battle was undiminished.

"Do you know this country at all?" John asked Picard.

The giant shook his head.



“I was never here before, sir,” he said, “and I never thought I should come into any part of France in this fashion. Ah, Mademoiselle Julie, how can I ever tell the tale of this to your mother?”

“No harm will come to me, Antoine,” said Julie. “I shall be back in Paris before long. Suzanne and you are with me—and Mr. Scott.”

Suzanne again frowned darkly, but John gave Julie a grateful glance. Wisdom, however, told him to say nothing. The officer in command came back to the cart and said, pointing ahead:



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“Behold your destination! The large house on the hill. It is the headquarters of a person of importance, and you will find quarters there also. I trust that the ladies will hold no ill will against me. I’ve done only what my orders have compelled me to do.”

“We do not, sir,” said Julie.

The officer bowed low and rode back to the head of the column. He was a gallant man and John liked him. But his attention was directed now to the house, an old French chateau standing among oaks. The German flag flew over it and sentinels rode back and forth on the lawn. John remembered the officer’s words that a “person of importance” was making his headquarters there. It must be one of the five German army commanders, at least.

He looked long at the chateau. It was much such a place as that in which Carstairs, Wharton and he had once found refuge, and from the roof of which Wharton had worked the wireless with so much effect. But houses of this type were numerous throughout Western Europe.

It was only two stories in height, large, with long low windows, and the lawn was more like a park in size. It was now the scene of abundant life, although, as John knew instinctively, not the life of those to whom it belonged. A number of young officers sat on the grass reading, and at the edge of the grounds stood a group of horses with their riders lying on the ground near them. Not far away were a score of high powered automobiles, several of which were armored. John also saw beyond them a battery of eight field guns, idle now and with their gunners asleep beside them. He had no doubt that other troops in thousands were not far away and that, in truth, they were in the very thick of the German army.

The chateau and its grounds were enclosed by a high iron fence and the little procession of carts stopped at the great central gate. A group of officers who had been sitting on the grass, reading a newspaper, came forward to meet them and John, to his amazement and delight, recognized the young prince, von Arnheim. It was impossible for him to regard von Arnheim as other than a friend, and springing impulsively from the cart he said:

“I had to leave you for a while. It had become irksome to be a prisoner, but you see I’ve come back.”

Von Arnheim stared, then recognition came.

“Ah, it’s Scott, the American! I speak truth when I say that I’m sorry to see you here.”

“I’m sorry to come,” said John, “but I’d rather be your prisoner than anybody else’s, and I wish to ask your courtesy and kindness for the young lady, sitting in the rear of the



cart, Mademoiselle Julie Lannes, the sister of that great French aviator of whom everybody has heard.”

“I’ll do what I can, but you’re mistaken in assuming that I’m in command here. There’s a higher personage—but pardon me, I must speak to the lieutenant.”

The officer in charge was saluting, obviously anxious to make his report and have done with an unpleasant duty. Von Arnheim gave him rapid directions in German and then asked Julie and the two Picards to dismount from the cart, while the others were carried through the gate and down a drive toward some distant out-buildings.



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John saw von Arnheim's eyes gleam a little, when he noticed the beauty of young Julie, but the Prussian was a man of heart and manner. He lifted his helmet, and bowed with the greatest courtesy, saying:

"It's an unhappy chance for you, but not for us, that has made you our prisoner, Mademoiselle Lannes. In this chateau you must consider yourself a guest, and not a captive. It would not become us to treat otherwise the sister of one so famous as your brother."

John noticed that he paid her no direct compliment. It was indirect, coming through her brother, and he liked von Arnheim better than ever, because the young captive was, in truth, very beautiful. The brown dress and the sober hood could not hide it as she stood there, the warm red light from the setting sun glancing across her rosy face and the tendrils of golden hair that fell from beneath the hood. She was beautiful beyond compare, John repeated to himself, but scarcely more than a child, and she had come into strange places. The stalwart Suzanne also took note, and she moved a little nearer, while her grim look deepened.

"We will give you the best hospitality the house affords," continued von Arnheim. "It's scarcely equipped for ladies, although the former owners left—"

He paused and reddened. John knew his embarrassment was due to the fact that the house to which he was inviting Julie belonged to one of her own countrymen. But she did not seem to notice it. The manner and appearance of von Arnheim inspired confidence.

"We'll be put with the other prisoners, of course," said John tentatively.

"I don't know," replied von Arnheim. "That rests with my superior, whom you shall soon see."

They were walking along the gravel toward a heavy bronze door, that told little of what the house contained. Officers and soldiers saluted the young prince as he passed. John saw discipline and attention everywhere. The German note was discipline and obedience, obedience and discipline. A nation, with wonderful powers of thinking, it was a nation that ceased to think when the call of the drill sergeant came. Discipline and obedience had made it terrible and unparalleled in war, to a certain point, but beyond that point the nations that did think in spite of their sergeants, could summon up reserves of strength and courage which the powers of the trained militarists could not create. At least John thought so.

The long windows of the house threw back the last rays of the setting sun, and it was twilight when von Arnheim and his four captives entered the chateau. A large man, middle-aged, heavy and bearded, wearing the uniform of a German general rose, and a

staff of several officers rose with him. It was Auersperg, the medieval prince, and John's heart was troubled.

Von Arnheim saluted, bowing deeply. He stood not only in the presence of his general, but of royalty also. It was something in the German blood, even in one so brave and of such high rank as von Arnheim himself, that compelled humility, and John, like the fierce democrat he was, did not like it at all. The belief was too firmly imbedded in his mind ever to be removed that men like Auersperg and the mad power for which they stood had set the torch to Europe.



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“Captain von Boehlen took some prisoners, Your Highness,” said von Arnheim, “and as he was compelled to continue on his expedition he has sent them here under the escort of Lieutenant Puttkamer. The young lady is Mademoiselle Julie Lannes, the sister of the aviator, of whom we all know, the woman and the peasant are her servants, and the young man, whom we have seen before, is an American, John Scott in the French service.”

He spoke in French, with intention, John thought, and the heavy-lidded eyes of Auersperg dwelt an instant on the fresh and beautiful face of Julie. And that momentary glance was wholly medieval. John saw it and understood it. A rage against Auersperg that would never die flamed up in his heart. He already hated everything for which the man stood. Auersperg’s glance passed on, and slowly measured the gigantic figure of Picard. Then he smiled in a slow and ugly fashion.

“Ah, a peasant in civilian’s dress, captured fighting our brave armies! Our orders are very strict upon that point. Von Arnheim, take this *franc tireur* behind the chateau and have him shot at once.”

He too had spoken in French, and doubtless with intention also. John felt a thrill of horror, but Julie Lannes, turning white, sprang before Picard:

“No! No!” she cried to Auersperg. “You cannot do such a thing! He is not a soldier! They would not take him because he is too old! He is my mother’s servant! It would be barbarous to have him shot!”

Auersperg looked again at Julie, and smiled, but it was the slow, cold smile of a master.

“You beg very prettily, Mademoiselle,” he said.

She flushed, but stood firm.

“It would be murder,” she said. “You cannot do it!”

“You know little of war. This man is a *franc tireur*, a civilian in civilian’s garb, fighting against us. It is our law that all such who are caught be shot immediately.”

“Your Highness,” said von Arnheim, “I have reason to think that the lady’s story is correct. This man’s daughter is her maid, and he is obviously a servant of her house.”

Auersperg turned his slow, heavy look upon the young Prussian, but John noticed that von Arnheim met it without flinching, although Picard had really fired upon the Germans. He surmised that von Arnheim was fully as high-born as Auersperg, and perhaps more so. John knew that these things counted for a lot in Germany, however ridiculous they might seem to a democratic people. Nevertheless Auersperg spoke with irony:



“Your heart is overworking, von Arnheim,” he said “Sometimes I fear that it is too soft for a Prussian. Our Emperor and our Fatherland demand that we shall turn hearts of steel to our enemies, and never spare them. But it may be, my brave Wilhelm, that your sympathy is less for this hulking peasant and more for the fair face of the lady whom he serves.”

John saw Julie’s face flush a deep red, and his hand stole down to his belt, but no weapon was there. Von Arnheim’s face reddened also, but he stood at attention before his superior officer and replied with dignity:



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"I admire Mademoiselle Lannes, although I have known her only ten minutes, but I think, Your Highness, that my admiration is warranted, and also that it is not lacking in respect."

"Good for you, von Arnheim," said John, under his breath. But the medieval mind of Auersperg was not disturbed. The slow, cruel smile passed across his face again.

"You are brave my Wilhelm," he said, "but I am confirmed in my opinion that some of our princely houses have become tainted. The harm that was done when Napoleon smashed his way through Europe has never been undone. The touch of the democracy was defilement, and it does not pass. Do you think our ancestors would have wasted so much time over a miserable French peasant?"

This was a long speech, much too long for the circumstances, John thought, but von Arnheim still standing stiffly at attention, merely said:

"Your Highness I ask this man's life of you. He is not a *franc tireur* in the real sense."

"Since you make it a personal matter, my brave young Wilhelm, I yield. Let him be held a prisoner, but no more requests of the same kind. This is positively the last time I shall yield to such a weakness."

"Thank you, Your Highness," said von Arnheim. Julie gave him one flashing look of gratitude and stepped away from Picard, who had stood, his arms folded across his chest, refusing to utter a single word for mercy. "This indeed," thought John "is a man." Suzanne was near, and now both he and his daughter turned away relaxing in no wise their looks of grim resolution. "Here also is a woman as well as a man," thought John.

"I hope, Your Highness, that I may assign Mademoiselle Lannes and her maid to one of the upper rooms," said von Arnheim in tones respectful, but very firm. "Here also is another man," thought John.

"You may," said Auersperg shortly, "but let the peasant be sent to the stables, where the other prisoners are kept."

Two soldiers were called and they took Picard away. Julie and Suzanne followed von Arnheim to a stairway, and John was left alone with medievalism. The man wore no armor, but when only they two stood in the room his feeling that he was back in the Middle Ages was overpowering. Here was the baron, and here was he, untitled and unknown.

Auersperg glanced at Julie, disappearing up the stairway, and then glanced back at John. Over his heavy face passed the same slow cruel smile that set all John's nerves to jumping.



“Why have you, an American, come so far to fight against us?” he asked.

“I didn’t come for that purpose. I was here, visiting, and I was caught in the whirl of the war, an accident, perhaps. But my sympathies are wholly with France. I fight in her ranks from choice.”

Auersperg laughed unpleasantly.

“A republic!” he said. “Millions of the ignorant, led by demagogues! Bah! The Hohenzollerns will scatter them like chaff!”



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“I can’t positively say that I saw any Hohenzollern, but I did see their armies turned back from Paris by those ignorant people, led by their demagogues. I’m not even sure of the name of the French general who did it, but God gave him a better brain for war, though he may have been born a peasant for all I know, than he did to your Kaiser, or any king, prince, grand duke or duke in all the German armies!”

John had been tried beyond endurance and he knew that he had spoken with impulsive passion, but he knew also that he had spoken with truth. The face of Auersperg darkened. The medieval baron, full of power, without responsibility, believing implicitly in what he chose to call his order, but which was merely the chance of birth, was here. And while the Middle Ages in reality had passed, war could hide many a dark tale. John was unable to read the intent in the cruel eyes, but they heard the footsteps of von Arnheim on the stairs, and the clenched hand that had been raised fell back by Auersperg’s side. Nevertheless medievalism did not relax its gaze.

“What to you is this girl who seems to have charmed von Arnheim?” he asked.

“Her brother has become my best friend. She has charmed me as she has charmed von Arnheim, and as she charms all others whom she meets. And I am pleased to tell Your Highness that the spell she casts is not alone her beauty, but even more her pure soul.”

Auersperg laughed in an ugly fashion.

“Youth! Youth!” he exclaimed. “I see that the spell is upon you, even more than it is upon von Arnheim. But dismiss her from your thoughts. You go a prisoner into Germany, and it’s not likely that you’ll ever see her again.”

Young Scott felt a sinking of the heart, but he was not one to show it.

“Prisoners may escape,” he said boldly, “and what has been done once can always be done again.”

“We shall see that it does not happen a second time in your case. Von Arnheim will dispose of you for the night, and even if you should succeed in stealing from the chateau there is around it a ring of German sentinels through which you could not possibly break.”

Some strange kink appeared suddenly in John’s brain—he was never able to account for it afterward, though Auersperg’s manner rasped him terribly.

“I mean to escape,” he said, “and I wager you two to one that I do.”

Auersperg sat down and laughed, laughed in a way that made John’s face turn red. Then he beckoned to von Arnheim.



“Take him away,” he said. “He is characteristic of his frivolous democracy, frivolous and perhaps amusing, but it is a time for serious not trifling things.”

John was glad enough to go with von Arnheim, who was silent and depressed. Yet the thought came to him once more that there were princes and princes. Von Arnheim led the way to a small bare room under the roof. John saw that there were soldiers in the upper halls as well as the lower, and he was sorry that he had made such a boast to Auersperg. As he now saw it his chance of escape glimmered into nothing.



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“You should not have spoken so to His Highness,” said von Arnheim. “I could not help but hear. He is our commander here, and it is not well to infuriate one who holds all power over you?”

“I am but human,” replied John.

“And being human, you should have had complete control over yourself at such a time.”

“I admit it,” said John, taking the rebuke in the right spirit.

“You’re to spend the night here. I’ve been able to secure this much lenity for you, but it’s for one night only. Tomorrow you go with the other prisoners in the stables. Your door will be locked, but even if you should succeed in forcing it don’t try to escape. The halls swarm with sentinels, and you would be shot instantly. I’ll have food sent to you presently.”

He spoke brusquely but kindly. When he went out John heard a huge key rumbling in the lock.

CHAPTER XIV

A PROMISE KEPT

The room in which John was confined contained only a bed, a chair and a table. It was lighted by a single window, from which he could see numerous soldiers below. He also heard the distant mutter of the cannon, which seemed now to have become a part of nature. There were periods of excitement or of mental detachment, when he did not notice it, but it was always there. Now the soldiers in the grounds were moving but little, and the air pulsed with the thud of the great guns.

He recalled again his promise, or rather threat, to Auersperg that he would escape. Instinctively he went to the narrow but tall window and glanced at the heavens. Then he knew that impulse had made him look for Lannes and the *Arrow*, and he laughed at his own folly. Even if Lannes knew where they were he could not slip prisoners out of a house, surrounded by watchful German troops.

He heard the heavy key turning in the lock, and a silent soldier brought him food, which he put upon the table. The man remained beside the door until John had eaten his supper, when he took the dishes and withdrew. He had not spoken a word while he was in the room, but as he was passing out John said:

“Good-bye, Pickelbaube! Let’s have no ill feeling between you and me.”



The German—honest peasant that he was—grinned and nodded. He could not understand the English words, but he gathered from John's tone that they were friendly, and he responded at once. But when he closed the door behind him John heard the heavy key turning in the lock again. He knew there was little natural hostility between the people of different nations. It was instilled into them from above.

Food brought back new strength and new courage. He took his place again at the window which was narrow and high, cut through a deep wall. The illusion of the Middle Ages, which Auersperg had created so completely, returned. This was the dungeon in a castle and he was a prisoner doomed to death by its lord. Some dismounted Uhlans who were walking across the grounds with their long lances over their shoulders gave another touch to this return of the past, as the first rays of the moonlight glittered on helmet and lance-head.



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He was not sleepy at all, and staying by the window he kept a strange watch. He saw white flares appear often on a long line in the west. He knew it was the flashing of the searchlights, and he surmised that what he saw was meant for signals. The fighting would go on under steady light continued long, and that it would continue admitted of no doubt. He could hear the mutter of the guns, ceaseless like the flowing of a river.

He saw the battery drive out of the grounds, then turn into the road before the chateau and disappear. He concluded that the cannon were needed at some weak point where the Franco-British army was pressing hard.

Then a company of hussars came from the forest and rode quietly into the grounds, where they dismounted. John saw that many, obviously the wounded, were helped from their horses. In battle, he concluded, and not so far off. Perhaps not more than two or three miles. Rifle-fire, with the wind blowing the wrong way, would not be heard that distance.

The hussars, leading their horses, disappeared in a wood behind the house, and they were followed presently by a long train of automobiles, moving rather slowly. The moonlight was very bright now and John saw that they were filled with wounded who stirred but little and who made no outcry. The line of motors turned into the place and they too disappeared behind the chateau, following the hussars.

Two aeroplanes alighted on the grass and their drivers entered the house. Bearers of dispatches, John felt sure, and while he watched he saw both return, spring into their machines and fly away. Their departure caused him to search the heavens once more, and he knew that he was looking for Lannes, who could not come.

Now von Arnheim passed down the graveled walk that led to the great central gate, but, half way, turned from it and began to talk to some sentinels who stood on the grass. He was certainly a fine fellow, tall, well built, and yet free from the German stoutness of figure. He wore a close uniform of blue-gray which fitted him admirably, and the moonlight fell in a flood on his handsome, ruddy face.

"I hope you won't be killed," murmured John. "If there is any French shell or shrapnel that is labeled specially for a prince and that must have a prince, I pray it will take Auersperg in place of von Arnheim."

It was a serious prayer and he felt that it was without a trace of wickedness or sacrilege. Evidently von Arnheim was giving orders of importance, as two of the men, to whom he was talking, hurried to horses, mounted and galloped down the road. Then the young prince walked slowly back to the house and John could see that he was very thoughtful. He passed his hand in a troubled way two or three times across his forehead. Perhaps the medieval prince inside was putting upon the modern prince outside labors that he was far from liking.



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John's unformed plan of escape included Julie Lannes. He could not go away without her. If he did he could never face Lannes again, and what was more, he could never face himself. It was in reality this thought that made his resolve to escape seem so difficult. It had been lurking continuously in the back of his head. To go away without Julie was impossible. Under ordinary circumstances her situation as a prisoner would not be alarming. Germans regarded women with respect. They had done so from the earliest times, as he had learned from the painful study of Tacitus. Von Arnheim had received a deep impression from Julie's beauty and grace. John could tell it by his looks, but those looks were honest. They came from the eyes and heart of one who could do no wrong. But the other! The man of the Middle Ages, the older prince. He was different. War re-created ancient passions and gave to them opportunities. No, he could not think of leaving without Julie!

He kept his place at the tall, narrow window, and the night was steadily growing brighter. A full, silver moon was swinging high in the heavens. The stars were out in myriads in that sky of dusky, infinite blue, and danced regardless of the tiny planet, Earth, shaken by battle. From the hills came the relentless groaning which he knew was the sound of the guns, fighting one another under the searchlights.

Then he heard the clatter of hoofs, and another company of Uhlans rode up to the chateau. Their leader dismounted and entered the great gate. John recognized von Boehlen, who had taken off his helmet to let the cool air blow upon his close-cropped head. He stood on the graveled walk for a few minutes directly in a flood of silver rays, every feature showing clearly. He had been arrogant and domineering, but John liked him far better than Auersperg. His cruelty would be the cruelty of battle, and there might be a streak of sentimentalism hidden under the stiff and harsh German manner, like a vein of gold in rock. As von Boehlen resumed his approach to the house he passed from John's range of vision, and then the prisoner watched the horizon for anything that he might see. Twice he beheld the far flare of searchlights, but nobody else came to the chateau, and the night darkened somewhat. No rattle of arms or stamp of hoofs came from the hussars in the grounds, and he judged that all but the sentinels slept. Nor was there any sound of movement in the house, and in the peaceful silence he at last began to feel sleepy. The problems of his position were too great for him to solve—at least for the present—and lying down on the cot he was fast asleep before he knew it.

Youth does not always sleep soundly, and the tension of John's nerves continued long after he lapsed into unconsciousness. That, perhaps, was the reason why he awoke at once when the heavy key began to turn again in the lock. He sat up on the cot—he had not undressed—and his hand instinctively slipped to his belt, where there was no weapon.



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The key was certainly turning in the lock, and then the door was opening! A shadow appeared in the space between door and wall, and John's first feeling was of apprehension. An atmosphere of suspicion had been created about him and he considered his life in much more danger there than it had been when he was first a prisoner.

The door closed again quickly and softly, but somebody was inside the room, somebody who had a light, feline step, and John felt the prickling of the hair at the back of his neck. He longed for a weapon, something better than only his two hands, but he was reassured when the intruder, speaking French, called in a whisper:

"Are you awake, Mr. Scott?"

It was surely not the voice and words of one who had come to do murder, and John felt a thrill of recognition.

"Weber!" he exclaimed.

"Yes, it's Weber, Mr. Scott."

"How under the sun did you get here, Weber?"

"By pretending to be a German. I'm an Alsatian, you know, and it's not difficult. I'm doing work for France. It's terribly dangerous. My life is on the turn of a hair every moment, but I'm willing to take the risk. I did not know you were here until late tonight, when I came to the chateau to see if I could discover anything further about the numbers and movements of the enemy. You must get away now. I think I can help you to escape."

There was a tone in Weber's voice that aroused John's curiosity.

"It's good of you, Weber," he said, "to take such a risk for me, but why is it so urgent that I escape tonight?"

"I've learned since I came to the chateau that the Prince of Auersperg is much inflamed against you. Perhaps you spoke to him in a way that gave offense to his dignity. Ah, sir, the members of these ancient royal houses, those of the old type, consider themselves above and beyond the other people of the earth. In Germany you cannot offend them without risk, and it may be, too, that you stand in his way in regard to something that he very much desires!"

Although Weber spoke in a whisper his voice was full of energy and earnestness. His words sank with the weight of truth into John's heart.

"Can you really help me to escape?" he asked.



“I think so. I’m sure of it. The guards in the house are relaxed at this late hour, and they would seem needless anyhow with so many sentinels outside.”

“But, Weber, Julie Lannes, the sister of Philip Lannes, is here a prisoner also. She was taken when I was. She is a Red Cross nurse, and although the Germans would not harm a woman, I do not like to leave her in this chateau. Your Prince of Auersperg does not seem to belong to our later age.”

“Perhaps not. He holds strongly for the old order, but the young von Arnheim is here also. His is a devoted German heart, but his German eyes have looked with admiration, nay more, upon a French face. He will protect that beautiful young Mademoiselle Julie with his life against anybody, against his senior in military rank, the Prince of Auersperg himself. Sir, you must come! If you wish to help Philip Lannes’ sister you can be of more help to her living than dead. If you linger here you surely disappear from men tomorrow!”



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“How do you know these things, Weber?”

“I have been in the house three or four hours and there is talk among the soldiers. I pray you, don't hesitate longer!”

“How can you find a way?”

“Wait a minute.”

He slipped back to the door, opened it and looked into the hall.

“The path is clear,” he said, when he returned. “There is no sentinel near your door, and I've found a way leading out of the chateau at the back. Most of these old houses have crooked, disused passages.”

“But suppose we succeed in reaching the outside, Weber, what then? The place is surrounded by an army.”

“A way is there, too. One man in the darkness can pass through a multitude. We can't delay, because another chance may not come!”

John was overborne. Weber was half pulling him toward the door. Moreover, there was much sense in what the Alsatian said. It was a commonplace that he could be of more service to Julie alive than dead, and the man's insistence deciding him, he crept with the Alsatian into the hall. They stood a few minutes in the dark, listening, but no sound came. Evidently the house slept well.

“This way, Mr. Scott,” whispered Weber, and he led toward the rear of the house. Turning the corner of the hall he opened a small door in the wall, which John would have passed even in the daylight without noticing.

“Put a hand on my coat and follow me,” said Weber.

John obeyed without hesitation, and they ascended a half dozen steps along a passage so narrow that his shoulders touched the walls. It was very dark there, but at the top they entered a room into which some moonlight came, enough for John to see barrels, boxes and bags heaped on the floor.

“A storeroom,” said Weber. “The French are thrifty. The owner of this house had splendor below, and he has kept provision for it above, almost concealed by the narrowness of the door and stair. But we'll find a broader stair on the other side, and then we'll descend through the kitchen and beyond.”

“This looks promising. You're a clever man, Weber, and my debt to you is too big for me.”



“Don’t think about it. Be careful and don’t make any noise. Here’s the other stair. You’d better hold to my coat again.”

They stole softly down the stair, crossed an unused room, went down another narrow, unused passage, and then, when Weber opened a door, John felt the cool air of the night blowing upon his face. When the attempt at escape began, he had not been so enthusiastic, because he was leaving Julie behind, but with every step his eagerness grew and the free wind brought with it a sort of intoxication. He did not doubt now that he would make good his flight. Weber, that fast friend of his, was a wonderful man. He worked miracles. Everything came out as he predicted it would, and he would work more miracles.

“Where are we now?” asked John.



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“This door is by the side of the kitchens. A little to the left is an extensive conservatory, nearly all the glass of which has been shattered by a shell, but that fact makes it all the more useful as a path for us. If we reach it unobserved we can creep through the mass of flowers and shrubbery to a large fishpond which lies just beyond it. You’re a good swimmer, as I know—and you can swim along its edge until you reach the shrubbery on the other side. Then you ought to find an opening by which you can reach the French army.”

“And you, Weber?”

“I? Oh, I must stay here. The Prince of Auersperg is a man of great importance. He is high in the confidence of the Kaiser. Besides his royal rank he commands one of the German armies. If I am to secure precious information for France it must be done in this house.”

“Come away with me, Weber. You’ve risked enough already. They’ll catch you and you know the fate of spies. I feel like a criminal or coward abandoning you to so much danger, after all that you’ve done for me.”

“Thank you for your good words, Mr. Scott, but it’s impossible for me to go. Keep in the shadow of the wall, and a dozen steps will take you to the conservatory.”

John wrung the Alsatian’s hand, stepped out, and pressed himself against the side of the house. The breeze still blew upon his face, revivifying and intoxicating. The lazy, feathery clouds were yet drifting before the moon and stars.

He saw to his right the gleam of a bayonet as a sentinel walked back and forth and he saw another to his left. His heart beat high with hope. He was merely a mote in infinite night, and surely they could not see him.

He walked swiftly along in the shadow of the house, and then sprang into the conservatory, where he crouched between two tall rose bushes. He waited there a little while, breathing hard, but he had not been observed. From his rosy shelter he could still see the sentinels on either side, walking up and down, undisturbed. Around him was a frightful litter. The shell, the history of which he would never know, had struck fairly in the center of the place, and it must have burst in a thousand fragments. Scarcely a pane of glass had been left unbroken, and the great pots, containing rare fruits and flowers, were mingled mostly in shattered heaps. It was a pitiable wreck, and it stirred John, although he had seen so many things so much worse.

He walked a little distance in a stooping position, and then stood up among some shrubs, tall enough to hide him. He noticed a slight dampness in the air, and he saw, too, that the feathery clouds were growing darker. The faint quiver in the air brought with it, as always, the rumble of the guns, but he believed that it was not a blended



sound. There was real thunder on the horizon, where the French lay, and then he saw a distant flash, not white like that of a searchlight, but like yellow lightning. Rain, a storm perhaps, must be at hand. He had read that nearly all the great battles in the civil war in his own country had been followed at once by violent storms of thunder, lightning and rain. Then why not here, where immense artillery combats never ceased?



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Near the end of the conservatory he paused and looked back at the house. Every window was dark. There must be light inside, but shutters were closed. His heart throbbed with intense gratitude to Weber. Without him escape would have been impossible. He would make his way to the French. He would find Lannes and together in some way they would rescue Julie, Julie so young and so beautiful, held in the castle of the medieval baron. In the lowering shadows the house became a castle and Auersperg had always been of the Middle Ages.

The wind freshened and a few drops of rain struck his face. He stood boldly erect now, unafraid of observation, and picked a way through the mass of broken glass and overturned shrubbery toward the end of the conservatory, seeing beyond it a gleam of water which must be the big fishpond.

He turned to the left and reached the edge of the pond just as four figures stepped from the dusk, their raised rifles pointing at him. The shock was so great that, driven by some unknown but saving impulse, he threw himself forward into the water just as the soldiers fired. He heard the four rifles roaring together. Then he swam below water to the far edge of the pond and came up under the shelter of its circling shrubbery, raising above its surface only enough of his face for breath.

As his eyes cleared he saw the four soldiers standing at the far edge of the pond, looking at the water. Doubtless they were waiting for his body to reappear, as his action, half fall, half spring, and the roaring of the rifles had been so close together that they seemed a blended movement.

He was trembling all over from intense nervous exertion and excitement, but his mind steadied enough for him to observe the soldiers. Undoubtedly they were talking together, as he saw them making the gestures of men who speak, but, even had he heard them, he could not have understood their German. They were watching for his body, and as it did not reappear they might make the circle of the pond looking for it. He intended, in such an event, to leap out and run, but the elements were interceding in his favor. Thunder now preponderated greatly in that rumble on the western horizon, and a blaze of yellow lightning played across the surface of the pond. It was followed by a rush of rain and the soldiers turned back toward the house, evidently sure that they had not missed.

John drew himself out of the water and climbed up the bank. His knees gave way under him and he sank to the ground. Excitement and emotion had been so violent that he was robbed of strength, but the condition lasted only a minute or two. Then he rose and began to pick a way.

The rain was driving hard, and it had grown so dark that one could not see far. But he felt that the German sentinels now would seek a little shelter from the wrath of the skies, and keeping in the shelter of a hedge he passed by the stables, where many of the

hussars and Uhlans slept, through an orchard, the far side of which was packed with automobiles, and thence into a wood, where he believed at last that he was safe.



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He stopped here a little while in the lee of a great oak to protect himself from the driving rain, and he noticed then that it was but a passing shower, sent, it seemed then to him, as a providential aid. The part of the rumble that was real thunder was dying. The yellow flare of the lightning stopped and the rain swept off to the east. The moon and stars were coming out again.

John tried to see the chateau, but it was hidden from him by trees. They would miss him there, and then they would know that it was he whom the soldiers had fired upon at the edge of the pond. All of them would believe that he was dead, and he remembered suddenly that Julie, who was there among them, would believe it, too. Would she grieve? Or would he merely be one of the human beings passing through her life, fleeting and forgotten, like the shower that had just gone? It was true that he had escaped, but he might be killed in some battle before she was rescued from Auersperg—if she was rescued.

These thoughts were hateful, and turning into the road by which they had come to the chateau he ran down it. He ran because he wanted motion, because he wished to reach the French army as quickly as he could, and help Lannes organize for the rescue of Julie.

He ran a long distance, because his excitement waned slowly, and because the severe exercise made the blood course rapidly through his veins, counteracting the effects of his cold and wetting. When he began to feel weary he turned out of the road, knowing that it was safer in the fields. He had the curious belief or impression now that the black shower was all arranged for his benefit. Providence was merely making things even. The soldiers had been brought upon him when the chances were a hundred to one against him, and then the shower had been sent to cover him, when the chances were a hundred to one against that, too.

He saw far to the south a sudden faint radiance and he knew that it was the last of the lightning. The little feathery clouds, which looked so friendly and pleasant against the blue of the sky, came back and the moaning on the western horizon toward which he was traveling was wholly that of the guns.

He heard a noise over his head, a mixture of a whistle and a scream, and he knew that a shell was passing high. He walked on, and heard another. But they could not be firing at him. He was still that mere mote in the infinite darkness, but, looking back for the bursting of the shells, he saw a blaze leap up near the point from which he had come.

A cold shiver seized him. The range was that of the chateau, and Julie was there. The French gunners could have no knowledge that their own people were prisoners in the building, and if one of those huge shells burst in it, ruin and destruction would follow. The conservatory had been a silent witness of what flying metal could do. He stopped,



appalled. He had been wrong to leave without Julie, and yet he could have done nothing else. It was impossible to foresee a shelling of the chateau by the French themselves.

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The screaming and whistling came again, but he did not see any explosion near the chateau. One could not tell much from such a swift and passing sound, but he concluded that it was a German shell replying. He had seen a German battery near the house and it would not remain quiet under bombardment.

He had no doubt that the French gunners, having got the range, would keep it. Somebody, perhaps an aeroplane or an officer with flags in a tree, was signaling. It was horrible, this murderous mechanism by which men fired at targets miles away, targets which they could not see, but which they hit nevertheless. Every pulse beating hard, John shook his fist at the invisible German guns and the invisible French guns alike.

Then he recovered himself with an angry shake and began to run again. He knew now that he must go forward and secure a French force for rescue. But no matter how much he urged himself on, a great power was pulling at him, and it was Julie Lannes, a prisoner of the Germans in the chateau. Often he stopped and looked back, always in the same direction. Twice more he saw shells burst in the neighborhood of the house, and then his heart would beat hard, but after brief hesitation he would always pursue his course once more toward the French army.

He did not know the time, but he believed it to be well past midnight. He had his watch, but his immersion in the fish pond had caused it to stop. Still, the feel of the air made him believe that he was in the morning hours. Shells continued to pass over his head, and now they came from many points. He had seen or heard so much firing in the last eight or ten days that the world, he felt, must be turned into a huge ammunition factory to feed all the guns. He laughed to himself at his own grim joke. He was overstrained and he began to see everything through a red mist.

His clothing was drying fast, but his throat was very hot from excitement and exertion. He came to a little brook, and kneeling down, drank greedily. Then he bathed his face and felt stronger and better. His nerves also grew steadier. There was not so much luminous mist in the atmosphere. Ahead of him the crash of the guns was much louder, and he knew that he had already come a long distance. It seemed that the passing of the storm had renewed the activity of the gunners. The mutter had become rolling thunder, and both to north and south the searchlights flared repeatedly.

He heard the beat of hoofs, and he hoped that they were French cavalry on patrol, but they proved to be German Hussars, Bavarians he judged by the light blue uniforms, and they were coming from the direction of the French lines. They had been scouting there, he had no doubt, but they passed in a few moments, and, leaving his hedge, he resumed his own rapid flight, continually hoping that he would meet some French force, scouting also.

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But he was doomed to a long trial of patience. Twice he saw Germans and hid until they had gone by. They seemed to be scouting in the night almost to the mouths of the French guns, and he admired their energy although it stood in the way of his own plans. He came to a second brook, drank again, and then took a short cut through a small wood. He had marked the reports of guns from a hill about two miles in front of him, and he was sure that a French battery must be posted there. He reckoned that he could reach it in a half hour, if he exerted himself.

Half way through the wood and human figures rose up all about him. Strong hands seized his arms and an electric torch flashed in his face.

“Who are you?” came the fierce question in French.

But it was not necessary for John to answer. The man who held the torch was short, but very muscular and strong, his face cut in the antique mold, his eyes penetrating and eager. It was Bougainville and John gave a gasp of joy. Then he straightened up and saluted:

“Colonel Bougainville,” he said, “I see that you know me! I have just escaped from the enemy for the second time. There is a house in that direction, and it is occupied by the Prince of Auersperg, one of the German generals.”

He pointed where the chateau lay, and Bougainville uttered a shout:

“Ah!”

“He holds there a prisoner, Mademoiselle Julie Lannes, the sister of the great Philip Lannes, the aviator; and other Frenchwomen.”

“Ah!” said Bougainville again.

“You will help rescue them, will you not?”

Bougainville smiled slightly.

“An army can’t turn aside for the rescue of women,” he replied, “but it happens that this brigade, under General Vaugirard is marching forward now to find, if possible, an opening between the German armies, and you’re the very man to lead it.”

John’s heart bounded with joy. He would be again with the general whom he admired and trusted, and he would certainly guide the brigade straight to the chateau.

“Is General Vaugirard near?” he asked.



“Just over the brow of this hill, down there where the dim light is visible among the trees.”

“Then take me to him at once.”

CHAPTER XV

THE RESCUE

Escorted by Bougainville, John went down a little slope to a point where several officers stood talking earnestly. The central figure was that of a huge man who puffed out his cheeks as he spoke, and whose words and movements were alive with energy. Even had he seen but a dim outline, John would have recognized him with no difficulty as General Vaugirard, and beside him stood de Rougemont.

Bougainville saluted and said;

“The American, John Scott, sir. He has just escaped from the enemy and he brings important information.”

Vaugirard puffed out his great cheeks and whistled with satisfaction.



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"Ah, my young Yankee!" he said. "They cannot hold you!"

"No, my general," replied John, "I've come back again to fight for France."

General Vaugirard looked at him keenly.

"You're exhausted," he said. "You've been under tremendous pressure."

"But I can guide you. I want neither sleep nor rest."

"You need both, as I can see with these two old eyes of mine. Sleep you can't have now, but rest is yours. You go with me in my automobile, which this war has trained to climb mountains, jump rivers, and crash through forests. The motor has become a wonderful weapon of battle."

"May I ask one question, General?" said John.

"A dozen."

"Do you know where the aviator, Philip Lannes, is? His sister is held a prisoner by a German general in a chateau toward which we will march, and doubtless he would wish to go at once to her rescue."

"He is not here, but his friend, Caumartin, is only a half-mile away. I'll send a man at once with a message to him to find Lannes, who will surely follow us, if he can be found. And now, my brave young Yankee, here is my machine. Into it, and we'll lead the way."

John sprang into the automobile, and sank down upon the cushions. He had a vast sense of ease and luxury. He had not known until then, the extent of his mental and physical overstrain, but de Rougemont, who was also in the machine, observed it and gave him a drink from a flask, which revived him greatly.

Then the automobile turned into the road and moved forward at a slow gait, puffing gently like a monster trying to hold in his breath. From the wood and the fields came the tread of many thousand men, marching to the night attack. Behind their own automobile rose the hum of motors, bearing troops also, and dragging cannon.

John felt that he was going back in state, riding by the side of a general and at the head of an army. He found both pride and exultation in it. Sleep was far from his eyes. How could one think of sleep at such a moment? But youth, the restorer, was bringing fresh strength to his tired muscles and he was never more alert.

At one point they stopped while the general examined the dusky horizon through his glasses, and a company of men with faces not French marched past them. They were



John's own Strangers, and despite the presence of General Vaugirard both Wharton and Carstairs reached up and shook his hand as they went by.

"Welcome home," said Wharton.

"See you again in the morning," said Carstairs.

"God bless you both," said John with some emotion.

Captain Daniel Colton nodded to him. They were not effusive, these men of the Strangers, but their feelings were strong. When the automobile in its turn passed them again and resumed its place at the head of the column, they seemed to take no notice.



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No more shells passed over John's head. He knew that General Vaugirard had sent back word for the batteries to cease firing in that direction, but both to south and north of them the sullen thunder went on. The night remained light, adorned rather than obscured by the little white clouds floating against the sky. The only sound that John could hear was the great hum and murmur of a moving army, a sound in which the puffing of automobiles had introduced a new element. He wondered why they had not roused up German skirmishers, but perhaps those vigilant gentlemen, had grown weary at last.

They reached the first brook, and, as they were crossing it, the rifle fire expected so long began to crackle in front. Then the French trumpets shrilled, and the whole force marched rapidly, rifles and field guns opening in full volume. But the French had the advantage of surprise. Their infantry advanced at the double quick, a powerful force of cavalry on their right flank galloped to the charge, and Bougainville's Paris regiment and the Strangers swept over the field.

A heavy fire met them, but the general's automobile kept in front puffing along the main road. General Vaugirard puffed with it, but now and then he ceased his puffing to whistle. John knew that he was pleased and that all was going well. The battle increased in volume, and their whole front blazed with fire. The dark was thinning away in the east and dawn was coming.

"The chateau! The chateau!" cried John as a dark shape rose on the horizon. Even as he looked a shell burst over it and it leaped into flames. He cried aloud in fear, not for himself, but for those who were there. But General Vaugirard was calmly examining the field and the house through powerful glasses.

"They're pouring from the building," he said, "and it's full time. Look how the fire gains! What a pity that we should destroy the home of some good Frenchman in order to drive out the enemy."

"Faster, sir! Faster! Ah, I pray you go faster!" exclaimed John, whose heart was eaten up with anxiety as he saw the chateau roaring with flames. But he did not need the general's glasses now to see the people stream from it, and then rush for refuge from the fire of the French. The surprise had been so thorough that at this point the enemy was able to offer little resistance, and, in a few moments more, the automobile reached the grounds surrounding the burning chateau.

John, reckless of commands and of everything else, leaped out of the machine and ran forward. A gigantic man bearing a slender figure in his arms emerged from the shrubbery. Behind him came a stalwart young woman, grim of face. John shouted with joy. It was Picard, carrying Julie, and the woman who followed was the faithful Suzanne.



Picard put Julie down. She stood erect, pale as death. But the color flooded into her face when she saw John, and uttering a cry of joy she ran forward to meet him. She put her hands in his and said:



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"I knew that you would save me!"

Time and place were extraordinary, and war, the great leveler, was once more at work.

"The chateau was set on fire by shells, Monsieur Scott," Picard said, "and when the enemy saw the French force appearing across the fields they took to flight. That dog of a prince, the Auersperg, tried to carry off Mademoiselle Julie in his automobile, but the young prince interfered and while they were quarreling I seized her and took her away. All the other women have escaped too."

"Thank God, Picard," exclaimed John, wringing the huge hand of the peasant, who was at once a peasant and a prince too.

"And look," said Carstairs, who with Wharton had approached unnoticed. "An aeroplane comes like the flight of an eagle, and my guess is poor if it is not our friend, the great Lannes."

Caumartin in truth had found Philip, and he came like the lightning, circling and swooping until he touched the ground almost at Julie's feet. Brother and sister were united in a close embrace, and Lannes turned to John.

"I have heard from Caumartin that it was you who brought the word. We can never repay you."

"We'll wait and see," said John.

Her brother did not see Julie flush rosily, as she turned her face away.

"And now," said Lannes, "we go to Paris. My duties allow me enough time for the flight. No, John, my friend, don't object. She's been up in the *Arrow* with me before. Picard, you and Suzanne can come later."

The thunder of the battle rolling toward the east still reached them, but Lannes quickly threw a coat around Julie, gave her a cap and huge glasses to put on, and exclaimed:

"Now we go."

"But I must first thank Mr. Scott himself for saving me," she said.

She put her hand, small and warm, in his, American fashion, and the two palms met in a strong clasp.

"Good-bye, Mr. Scott," she said.

"Good-bye, but not forever. I'm coming back to Paris."



“And it’s my hope, too, that it’s not forever.”

She and her brother took their seats in the *Arrow*. Carstairs, Wharton and the others gave it a push, and it soared up into the fresh blue of the dawn. An ungloved hand, white and small, reached over the side and waved farewell, a farewell which John felt was for him.

To the east the battle still rolled, but John had forgotten its existence. Higher and higher rose the *Arrow*, flying toward Paris, until it diminished to a mere dot in the sky, and then was gone.

THE END

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