

CHAMBERS

ROBERT

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LORRAINE

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Robert W. Chambers Lorraine: A Romance

TO MY FATHER

LORRAINE!

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

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

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

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

R. W. C.

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

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

R. W. C.

New York, September, 1897.

CHAPTER I

A MAKER OF MAPS

There was a rustle in the bushes, the sound of twigs snapping, a soft foot-fall on the dead leaves. Marche stopped, took his pipe out of his mouth, and listened.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Come, now," said the man, recovering his balance, "you had better stop this before I lose patience. Go back!"

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

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

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

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

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

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

The man scowled and stepped towards her.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Lorraine de Nesville?" he repeated, curiously.

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

"What?" asked Marche.

She pushed back her splendid hair and faced him.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Yes," said Marche.

"Then you are Monsieur Jack Marche?"

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

She glanced at his leggings.

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

"Wolves?" she repeated, horrified.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"But I shall tell nobody," laughed Marche.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"It is," said Marche, fervently.

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

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

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

"Then!" repeated Marche.

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

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

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

She looked up quickly.

"Do you wish to?"

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

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

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

He was silent.

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

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

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

"And when your gowns arrive from Paris—"

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

"Don't!" he protested.

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

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

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

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

CHAPTER II

TELEGRAMS FOR TWO

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

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

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

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

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

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

He did. He suggested a great many, and wrote a list for his wife. That prudent young woman carefully crossed out every name, saying, "Thorald! I am ashamed of you!" and substituted another list. She had chosen, besides Dorothy Marche and Betty Castlemaine, the two nieces in question, Barbara Lisle and her inseparable little German friend, Alixe von Elster; also the latter's brother, Rickerl, or Ricky, as he was called in diplomatic circles. She closed the list with Cecil Page, because she knew that Betty Castlemaine, Madame de Morteyn's younger niece, looked kindly, at times, upon this blond giant.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"I saw her once," observed Sir Thorald.

"You generally do," added his wife.

"What?"

"See what others don't."

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

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

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

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

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

"Astride?" cried Sir Thorald.

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

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

Betty Castlemaine looked at Cecil, and Dorothy Marche laughed.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"A poor little hawk?" asked Betty.

"No—a poor little wolf!"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Going? Where?"

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

But Rickerl von Elster turned away without answering.

CHAPTER III

SUMMER THUNDER

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

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

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

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

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

"No, dear."

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

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

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

"Helen?"

"Dear?"

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

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

"It is hot; be careful, dear."

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

"Helen, are you thinking of that morning?"

"Yes, Georges."

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

"Yes, Georges."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Yes, dear."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The vicomte laughed and picked up the knight again.

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

"Georges!"

"That's what I say, my dear—"

"Georges!"

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

Madame de Morteyn leaned over the parapet.

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

"Perhaps he has the Paris papers."

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

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

"The politics, dear?"

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

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

"Yes, Helen."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Yes; I thought him brusque and malicious."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Or what, Georges?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"How far away are you going, Helen?"

"Only to the Lisse."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Yes, dear."

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

"A blackbird singing in the pear-tree."

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

"It is a gendarme riding fast towards the Rhine."

CHAPTER IV

THE FARANDOLE

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

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

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

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

"Will you tell me?"

"Yes, to-morrow."

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

"Yes."

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

"To-morrow—perhaps to-night."

"Perhaps to-night?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

He nodded; eyes fixed on hers.

"At the Diplomatic Ball?"

"Yes."

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

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

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

"It was not a year ago."

"We were young," she repeated, coldly.

"Yet I shall never forget, Dorothy."

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

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

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

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

Dorothy raised her head with an icy smile.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"It was tangled across your face—then."

"Taisez-vous, Monsieur Marche!"

"And you seem to have grown taller—"

"It is my ball-gown."

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

"Non, monsieur."

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

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

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

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

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

"You do not hold it right—there—"

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

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

"They are dancing," she repeated.

"Must we go?"

"No."

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

"My father is restless; I must return soon," she said, with a little sigh. "I shall go in presently and make my adieux. I wish you might know my father. Will you? He would like you. He speaks to few people except me. I know all that he thinks, all that he dreams of. I know also all that he has done, all that he is doing, all that he will do—God willing. Why is it I tell you this? Ma foi, I do not know. And I am going to tell you more. Have you heard that my father has made a balloon?"

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

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

"A montgolfier?" asked Marche, curiously.

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

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

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

"And you know?"

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

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

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

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

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

"Has he tried it?"

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

"Do people know this, too?"

"Germany does. Once we sailed, papa and I, up over our forest and across the country to the German frontier. We were not very high; we could see the soldiers at the custom-house, and they saw

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

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

"Symbol of France," she whispered.

"Symbol of Lorraine," he said, aloud.

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

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

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

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

"France and Germany—I—I—"

"What?" cried Sir Thorald, violently.

"War was declared at noon to-day!"

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

Inside the ballroom the orchestra was still playing the farandole.

CHAPTER V

COWARDS AND THEIR COURAGE

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

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

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

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

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

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

"I love you, Ricky," she gasped.

And they say women are cowards!

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

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

"Yes."

"Then you are mine!"

"Yes. May God spare you!"

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

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

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

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

"And uncle—and our aunt De Morteyn?"

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

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

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

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

After a moment he added, "It seems incredible, this news. They say, in the village, that the King of Prussia insulted the French ambassador, Count Benedetti, on the public promenade of Ems. It's all about that Hohenzollern business and the Spanish succession. Everybody thought it was settled, of course, because the Spanish ambassador said so, and Prince Leopold von Hohenzollern withdrew his claim. I can't understand it; I can scarcely believe it."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The groom touched his cap and hastened away.

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

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

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

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

"Are you going?"

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

"Yes—I suppose so."

"You are very near the Rhine."

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

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

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

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

"Have you never seen war?"

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

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

"From the river? Can you?"

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

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

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

"Are you going?"

"I don't know. Yes."

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

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

"Are you angry?" she whispered.

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

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

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

"Fear?" he asked, gently.

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

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

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

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

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

"I am—I tremble—see! I shiver."

"It was the wolf—"

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

"No."

"Listen—ah, listen!"

"It is the noise of the river."

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

"The wind."

"Hark!"

"The wind again—"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Are you hit?" he cried.

"No! no! Ride!"

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

"Are you hit?" he asked again.

"Yes, it is nothing! Ride!"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Her face was deadly pale; the blood oozed from the wounded shoulder. For the first time her father saw that she had been shot. He stared at her, clutching the steel box in his nervous hands.

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

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

CHAPTER VI

TRAINS EAST AND WEST

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

He stopped, colouring up a little.

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

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

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

Madame de Morteyn shook her head gently.

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

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

She leaned back and shook her head decisively.

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

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

"Helen—" he began.

"Yes, dear, we will both stay; the city is too hot in July," she said; "Sir Thorald, some coffee? No more? Betty, you want another muffin?—they are there by Cecil. Children, I think I hear the carriages coming; you must not make Lady Hesketh wait."

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

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

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

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

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

"Eh?" cried Sir Thorald.

"You're a brute!"

"Molly, what the deuce is the matter?"

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

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

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

"What, my dear?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Oui, mamam!"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Jack!" she gasped.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Good-by, Dorrie!" cried Jack.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

CHAPTER VII

THE ROAD TO PARADISE

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

CHAPTER VIII

UNDER THE YOKE

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"None for me?" asked Jack.

"Sugar?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Would you—really?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Long live—your king!"

"My king?"

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

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

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

"I accepted—"

"What!"

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

"Do you care?" he asked, carelessly.

"I? Why, no."

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

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

"Oh, what did you mean?"

"Provisionally meant—with your consent."

"My—my consent?"

"Yes—if it is your pleasure."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Yes. I know his name, too."

Jack sat up on the moss and listened anxiously.

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

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

"Go on," he whispered.

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

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

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

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

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

"I? You don't think so!—do you?"

"You are the bravest, sweetest—"

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

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

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

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

This also is a law in the world.

CHAPTER IX

SAARBRÜCK

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

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

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

"Nonsense!" said Jack, sharply.

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

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

"I had been to Forbach, where my cousin Passerat is a miner in the coal-mines. This morning I left to drive to Saint-Lys, having in my wagon these sacks of coal that my cousin Passerat procured for me, à prix réduit. It would take all day; I did not care—I had bread and red wine—you understand, my cousin Passerat and I, we had been gay in Saint-Avold, too—dame! we see each other seldom. I may have had more eau-de-vie than another—it is permitted on fête-days! Monsieur, I was tired—I possibly slept—the road was hot. Then something awakes me; I rub my eyes—behold me awake!—staring dumfounded at what? Parbleu!—at two ugly Uhlans sitting on their yellow horses on a hill! 'No! no!' I cry to myself; 'it is impossible!' It is a bad dream! Dieu de Dieu! It is no dream! My Uhlans come galloping down the hill; I hear them bawling 'Halt! Wer da!' It is terrible! 'Passerat!' I shriek, 'it is the hour to vanish!'"

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

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

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

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

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

"I believe you had a dream."

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

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

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

Jack looked after him.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"That groom told you, Aunt Helen?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

Beneath, in a girlish hand, a single line:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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