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The Blond Beast

By

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Author of

“For the White Christ,
“Into the Primitive,” “Which One?” etc.



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The Blond Beast

To

MY ONLY SON

who is giving himself

and to

ALL OTHER SONS

who are giving themselves

for freedom and country

for democracy against autocracy

for Christ against the Blond Beast

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The Blond Beast

CHAPTER I

VERBOTEN

June of 1914 — the last month of the Forty Years' Peace.

The lavas of the great volcano had seethed up close under the thin crust of appearances, but the rumble of the approaching cataclysm was too low and deep-pitched for most ears to hear. The mass of humanity had risen to the level of "live and let live." They believed in peace on earth; good will among men.

America was busy making and spending money. England had thought for little else than labor troubles and the Home Rule imbroglio. France's tongue clicked delectably over the Caillaux case. Still more scandalous tales about the grand dukes and the monk Rasputin leaked across the Russian frontier. Germany re-echoed with disputes over the Zabern affair in irreconcilable Alsace.... And down beyond mongrel Austria-Hungary, little Serbia was nursing her wrath against the big bully who had robbed her of the Old Serbia lands — the country of her fellow Serbs that she had freed from the Turk at heavy cost of blood and treasure.

The hissing in Alsace gave fair warning of the menace beneath the surface. Yet superheated steam may rise from a dying volcano. The Zabern resentment of military tyranny was so regarded. No public attention was attracted by the Serbian wrath. Its silence was as profound as that of the German General Staff regarding The Day when the mighty Teutonic war-machine, painstakingly upbuilt for forty years, should thunder forth to crush Europe under its Jugger-naut wheels.

To the world in general, and in large part to herself, Germany still remained the land of music and mysticism, though now bright with the white glory of scientific achievement and humming like a gigantic beehive with peaceful industry and commerce. Few persons even within her own borders understood the trickery in her tradesmen's methods of "dumping" on foreign markets. Still fewer suspected the insidious network of espionage with which her rulers had enmeshed every other country.

Only a few statesmen and diplomats and a handful of clear-sighted students of events realized that the land of Goethe and Schiller had lost its noble idealism. Most foreigners smiled at the assertions of modern German philosophers that the State is above morality and that might makes right. They thought these doctrines no more than the academic vaporings of militaristic writers who had pored too intently over the works of mad Nietzsche.

Allan Thorpe was among the great majority who saw Germany as the forefront of modern

civilization, the great protagonist of science and efficiency and *kultur*. He had come over from America prepared to be favorably impressed by all things Teutonic. Close friendship with Kurt von Kissel, his roommate during their last year at Yale, had enabled him to make allowance for the caste arrogance of Prussian officers. Though Kurt was now a lieutenant in the Imperial Guard, his gentleness and fine qualities put the spirit of his fellow aristocrats in the best possible light.

Bismarck called Berlin a wilderness of brick and newspapers. Had Thorpe been an artist, he might have preferred one of the old romantic South German towns. The Imperial capital, most modern of all modern cities, is the epitome of Prussianism. But the lack of winding lanes and the Philistinism of the heavy buildings did not trouble Thorpe. He saw only the breadth and scrupulous cleanliness of the streets. His natural trait of orderliness enabled him to accept without friction the countless governmental rules and prohibitions. The omnipresent police never irritated him.

He had plunged at once into his postgraduate year in science. What little time his lectures and studies and laboratory work left on his hands, motherly Frau von Kissel took care to fill in with social entertainment. The good frau was deeply grateful for the favors and companionship that Thorpe had been only too glad to give her son in America.

No less potent in rose-tinting the visitor's view of all things Teutonic was Kurt's young sister Elsa. She was attending a very strict school

for high-born frauleins, an institution patronized by the Empress herself. No callers were permitted, for a nunnery could not have been more severe in its rules. But during the Christmas holidays, and again at Easter, Thorpe had met the girl at her home.

Each time she had been surrounded by relatives and elderly friends, whom German hospitality required her to serve with the attentiveness of a Japanese daughter-in-law. She was altogether too modest and too restrained by her severe training to permit Thorpe any opening, though she had shown herself unaffectedly pleased to meet her brother's American friend.

Thorpe was far more than pleased. Elsa was a golden blonde, with a milk and coral complexion almost unbelievably perfect, and eyes that were heavenly not alone in color. To an American she had the novel charm of the still-typical German fraulein, who regards her elders with reverence and the men of her class with meek respect. She would as soon have recanted her unquestioning religious faith as to have disobeyed the authority of her mother and brother.

To Thorpe the girl's disposition was even more angelic than her beauty. He had left home dejected and exasperated by a rebuff from a girl as typically American as Elsa von Kissel was German. He had tweaked the "pigtail" of Lucy Carew and lugged her books to and from high school in the days before her father worked himself into millions and a mausoleum. During his college years, his friendship for the girl had warmed to love. But Lucy had forestalled his

proposal and sent him hurrying off to Europe, humiliated by the surmise that she believed he had been seeking her fortune.

He was still sore and aching when, months later, the sweetness and soft beauty of Elsa von Kissel came into his life as a healing balm. To grasp at the relief was natural, and no effort was needed to center his thoughts on the lovely young sister of his friend. His next meeting with her, during the Easter holidays, confirmed the first ardent visionings of her adorableness.

When he confided his feelings to Kurt, the young aristocrat smiled indulgently, yet a bit soberly, and suggested that the paying of court to his mother might be advisable. The hint was sufficient. Before the close of Elsa's last term of school life, Thorpe had ensconced himself deeper than ever in the good graces of the kindly German lady. But, unlike an European, he said nothing to her about his desire for her daughter. Even after his many months in Germany, he still clung to the American idea of winning the girl before asking the parental blessing.

At last came the eventful day when Elsa should finish with the narrow discipline of school and return home a duly educated and marriageable high-born fraulein. Though Thorpe had already written his thesis and won his post-graduate degree, he was attending a special course at the university. For once, however, he turned a deaf ear to the call of his lifework, and cut an unusually important lecture.

He could not have lived many months in Deutschland and failed to realize that no German

girl without a dot can expect proposals of marriage. He also knew that Elsa's dowry was very small. Yet as an American he could not but feel certain that the girl's loveliness would far more than outbalance her lack of fortune. He looked forward with no little apprehension to the hot rivalry that he expected from the many titled young junkers and officers of her social class.

In honor of Elsa's graduation, the Von Kissels had sent out cards for a reception. Thorpe planned to be the first man who should congratulate her. As an untitled foreigner of small income, he thought he must take particular pains to be early in the field. The exercises at the school would not be over until afternoon. But mid-morning found him already dressing with a fastidiousness that he had not shown since Easter.

He was anxiously inspecting the general result of his labors when, close upon noon, his buxom landlady came puffing up to his attic flat with a very smartly costumed French chauffeur. The man favored him with a bow of suave dignity, and presented an unsealed note.

The monogram embossed on the heavy linen envelope would have been sufficient identification of the sender even without the round un-German writing of the address. Thorpe's hazel eyes clouded as he took out the note. But as he read the missive, his tightened lips relaxed and his eyes cleared.

In the peremptory tone of assured trust and friendship, Lucy Carew demanded that "Dear

Lan ” come to her hotel at once and shoo off the horrid Dutch police. His smile of relief gave way too quickly to concern for the girl to allow room for any dwelling upon past resentment. He caught up his hat.

The waiting Frenchman led him down to a wondrous touring car, the first glimpse of which told Thorpe that it was Lucy's property. He could not mistake the perfect matching of her hair by the burnished golden-copper finish of the body. The trimmings were as near in tint to her sea-green eyes as mere pigment could attain. Cushions and linings told that her complexion was still rose and old gold.

As he expected, the French chauffeur motored him, at the extreme speed permitted of civilians, to the most expensive hotel in Berlin. Ushered to Lucy's luxurious suite, he found his exquisite young countrywoman serving tea to a pair of severe and unmistakably bewildered secret service agents.

At the last moment he remembered to feel a momentary embarrassment. But her greeting ignored any cause for constraint. Instead of meeting him coldly or springing up in agitated appeal for his aid, she smiled in her most friendly manner, beckoned him to a chair, and tilted her teapot with perfect aplomb.

“ I knew you'd come, Lan, if Henri could find you,” she said. “ Still take three lumps of sugar, do you? — Just tell these officers I'm too harmless to jail. Then we'll have a good old-time chin-chin. I did England in a week, and Holland in five days. Just got to Berlin. Now I

want your advice on my tour through Germany.”

Thorpe looked closer at the unwelcome visitors, and recognized the senior as an acquaintance of Kurt von Kissel's. His card and a courteous question in German brought about a slight unbending of official rigidity. With guttural preciseness the senior agent explained to “Herr Allan Dorp” the charges against the Americanisch fraulein. — She had crossed from Holland without a passport; she had taken photographs of the Krupp works at Essen, and her chauffeur had exceeded the speed limit for civilians in Berlin.

True, the last infraction of governmental regulations was a matter to be satisfied by payment of a fine. Also true, passports had not in recent years been rigidly required of tourists, except on the Russian frontier. Nevertheless, the Americanisch fraulein's lack of a passport became serious in connection with the heinous fact that she had taken photographs at Essen, which was *verboten*.

Lucy Carew suspected of being a spy! — A year before, Thorpe would have laughed in the faces of the solemn officials. Now he did not feel the slightest impulse to indulge in mirth. He knew his Germany. With unfeigned gravity he vouched for the harmlessness of his wealthy and eminently respectable friend Miss Carew. Her offense had been due to innocent ignorance of Imperial laws. She would be eager to make amends for whatever unintentional harm had been done.

After this clearing of the ground, Thorpe proceeded to suggest an arrangement of the affair. The junior secret service man frowned in stern disapproval. His superior considered, and reluctantly agreed.

“The Herr Inspector is most kind, Miss Carew,” said Thorpe, greatly relieved. “It is well the officials are used to our American happy-go-lucky ways. Had you been of any other nationality, they’d have arrested you as a spy the moment you took those Krupp photographs.”

Lucy’s lovely green eyes widened.

“A spy — and only a few snapshots with my baby kodak? How silly!”

“Not to Europeans. But I have explained your innocence of all intent to do wrong. I am to take you to our embassy for a passport — after you have handed over the forbidden photographs.”

“Give up my pictures?” protested the girl. “What a shame! I’ll not do it.”

“You forget this is not America,” Thorpe came back at her with rather more of the tone of the domineering Prussian male than the deference to which she was accustomed. “You will give up the photos, or they will be taken — and you too. Though the charge may seem absurd to you, these officials are doing their strict duty — no more. The arrangement I have made is an unusual courtesy.”

“It’s an outrage!” exclaimed Lucy, her eyes flashing. “I shall have our ambassador demand an apology and — ”

“ We’ll go to him at once. But first, turn over those photographs, else we shall be required to go to the police station.”

Lucy looked the stern-faced Germans up and down with haughty disdain, and called over her shoulder: “ Marcelle, my camera.”

The elderly French maid, who had been hovering in the background, hastened to fetch a pocket kodak. Her mistress took out the spool, coolly stepped to the window, and, with a sudden sweep, unrolled the film in the full glare of the mid-day sun. The senior official sprang to snatch the roll from her. He poured out a torrent of mingled threats and chidings in harsh, jagged English. Lucy confronted him with the chill dignity of an offended princess.

The restraint of Thorpe’s German training snapped. He thrust between, and pushed back the angry denouncer.

“ Enough of that,” he said. “ This is an American lady. We shall see what our ambassador has to say about your insulting behavior.”

“ *Himmel!* My superiors vill the say haf,” spluttered the German. “ She the photographs gespoilt! ”

“ I am not taking snapshots for other people,” said Lucy. “ If I can’t keep my memento views, no one else shall have them.”

“ You see,” Thorpe caught at the point. “ The fraulein took the photos merely as mementos of her tour. She has now destroyed the *verboten* film. What more could you ask? We will go immediately to the American embassy



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CHAPTER II

UNTER DEN LINDEN

Thorpe waved Lucy to hasten into her dressing-room. Instead of going, she clasped his out-thrust arm between both her jeweled hands and beamed up into his concerned face with what he took to be the glow of gratitude.

“You dear old stand-by!” she murmured. “No matter if you did run off to Europe last year without saying good-by—no matter if you’ve never written me a line! I knew I could count on you, Lan. I want to tell you—”

“Later,” broke in Thorpe. “There’s no guessing what the secret service and the police may do next. Get on your hat and come down at once. I’ll make sure your car is ready.”

He was out in the corridor before she could reply. A few years earlier she would have pouted over her disappointment. Now she smiled and hastened to select the hat she thought would best please him. His hurry and brusqueness had been due to concern for her. After they had been to the embassy and he was sure of her safety from the impertinent police, he would find time to speculate on what had brought her to Berlin.

In the meantime Thorpe had thought only for the danger in which he believed his country-

woman had been placed by her indiscretion. He met her at the elevator and hurriedly led the way to the car. All during the drive to the embassy, he was silent and kept an alert eye out for the many soldierly policemen on guard in the broad streets. He did not notice the charming hat of his companion — or her face. By the time the car rolled along the Wilhelm Platz to the American embassy, the look of tender eagerness in her eyes had disappeared behind a cool, rather over-bright surface luster.

Though the ambassador was away, Thorpe knew the *attachés*, and Lucy's munificent letters of credit on a Paris bank established her identity in most convincing manner.

"You see, I came over prepared to buy a chateau — or a title," she remarked to the legation secretary in a tone that struck Thorpe as not altogether facetious.

"Hats too," he rallied. "No doubt you'll soon be fitting to Paris. Mr. Thorpe will tell you that *schlosses* but not *chateaux* are made in Germany. As for titled husbands, it's long odds that the French brand will be the less unmanageable."

Lucy met the banter with a very fair imitation of a French shrug.

"Oh, if I marry in Germany, I'll expect to honor and obey."

Thorpe took up her carefully made-out passport, the photograph on which was a snapshot from her own kodak. Going out to the car, he remarked on the excellence of the likeness.

"My baby camera has a hundred-dollar lens,"

she explained. "It takes perfect pictures. Those stupid policemen—to make me ruin a whole film!"

"Why did you? Some of the exposures may not have been *verboden*."

"Of course not. They were all cows and peasants and geese."

"All...geese! But those views you took at Essen?" queried Thorpe, pausing in perplexity with his hand on the tonneau door of the car.

"Oh, the Krupp pictures," answered the girl. "Those were three or four films back."

The car door swung open to Thorpe's jerk. He half lifted his companion up into the seat and sprang in after her.

"Back to the hotel—quick!" he called to the chauffeur.

"Why—why, Lan, what's the hurry?" remonstrated Lucy. "One would think you were in America."

"If only we were!" rejoined Thorpe as the car swung around. "Those confounded snapshots! If your baggage is searched before we get back—"

Lucy patted his arm with a reassuring hand.

"Don't worry about them. They're nearer us than the hotel, and perfectly safe. Before I took them I knew the Germans wouldn't like it. Henri had told me. So I've taken care of them. They'll be so cute when developed. One's of a huge ugly squat cannon—oh, so enormous! It made me think of those monstrous reptiles in the museums—the fossil creatures they call dynamos."

“Dynosaur,” corrected Thorpe.

“Yes. Well, the guide led our party past a door that had a great big *Verboten* painted on it. So I slipped back and took a peek inside. That funny dynamo cannon was so big I couldn't see past it. The workman I asked to pose in front when I took the snaps must have tattled on me. But don't worry. The film isn't at the hotel.”

Thorpe bent forward to re-direct the chauffeur: “To the right, into the Thiergarten. Drive slow.”

“No wonder you were followed,” he reproved, as he relaxed on the luxurious cushions beside the girl. “Right now you'd be in a cell if you weren't an heiress, an American, and a beauty.”

Lucy flashed him an eager glance that he failed to catch. He was staring dubiously at the back of the French chauffeur. Reaction lent a touch of tartness to the girl's reply:

“If they hadn't made such a fuss, I'd have given them the real film. I don't permit anyone to be rude to me. That is why I spoiled the other film to fool them.”

“Yes, you duped them — and added enough proof to your first indiscretion to convict yourself of spying, if those snapshots are found on you,” said Thorpe.

“How you do keep on at that! They're safe, I tell you. In the embassy I addressed them to myself, at Paris, and slipped them into the dispatch-pouch that the courier said was to be taken to our French embassy.”

Thorpe leaned back again and mopped his

forehead, too astonished for an immediate reply.

“For sheer transatlantic nerve, Loo Carew, you are the limit,” he groaned. “Of course, you’re safe on this affair now. But to think of a girl like you running loose around Europe without an asylum attendant!”

“Well, you see, I’m counting on you to take the position,” countered the girl.

Her eyelids drooped under his surprised stare, and the rose of her cheeks deepened a shade.

“I—I mean—it would be so bothersome to have the usual courier, and I thought—that perhaps you—as an old friend, you know...”

Even the conclusion of the faltering explanation failed to clear away Thorpe’s frown.

“Conventions are strict enough at home, Loo. Here they are iron-clad,” he chided. “After such an indiscretion, you’d never have a ghost of a show, even for a French title.”

“You stupid old silly!” cried the girl. “Can’t you guess that I—”

“A maid isn’t enough,” cut in Thorpe. “You’d need a chaperon of a social standing at least equal to Frau von Kissel’s...I’m sorry, though, Loo. It’s mighty good of you to let bygones be bygones and give me a chance for the grand tour. I had been planning to tramp it this summer, if I couldn’t get a lift...only now, you see, my work—”

Lucy half raised her gaze, her eyes very dark under their shadowing lashes. Her red lips parted in a bantering smile.

“No, I don’t see her; but I’d like to. What’s her name?”

Thorpe's embarrassed flush was sufficient confirmation of his companion's suspicion.

"I thought so!" she rallied. "I half guessed it right at first, when you put on that brotherly air... One of those so-lofely Gretchens, I suppose — indigo eyes and straw-colored hair."

"Indigo eyes!" protested the victim. "For that, I shall take you to Fraulein von Kissel's reception and —"

"Do, by all means. When is it? I'm dying to meet some of these grand opera officers. Their eyes are all steel-gray or china-blue."

She smiled at the resplendently uniformed young hussar and grenadier officers who were cantering by on highstrung thoroughbreds or whirling along in military cars.

Thorpe somewhat curtly called her attention to the groups of marble statues on the other side.

"If you want to look at the real Prussians, here they are," he said. "The Emperor had all his ancestors carved for the Thiergarten, each with a pair of counsellors."

Lucy's dark eyebrows arched as he pointed out in turn the statues of the Great Elector, of Frederick the Great, and all the other blood-and-iron rulers who had beaten back foes on every side and welded together first Prussia, then all Germany, with their hard hammering in the forge of war.

"What an endless lot of fighters," she criticized. "Not a single angel or — other fraulein — to break the monotony. No wonder some of the English are trying to get up a scare over the War Lord and his shiny sword. What can

you expect of a Kaiser who'd put so much good marble to a use like this? "

The badinage failed to win any smile from Thorpe.

"The Emperor is a very remarkable man," he reproved. "No one in Germany speaks lightly of him. In his hand rests the peace of Europe. The militarists here number only one million of the sixty-seven million Germans. But they are very influential. According to my friend Kurt von Kissel, if it were not for the Kaiser — "

"Oh, yes — Kurt!" exclaimed Lucy with sudden vivacity. "Such a nice boy. Don't you remember? You introduced him to me at the Yale-Harvard game."

"Finest fellow I know," said Thorpe — "Born aristocrat, yet American in so many ways. He has little taste for army life. Intends to resign his commission as soon as permissible, and devote himself to the management of his estate."

"I should think he'd wish to keep his position as an officer, even if he doesn't like the idle life," remarked Lucy. "Just look at the gorgeousness of those uniforms — scarlet and gold and silver and Prussian blue and green — white plumes and leopard skins, clinky sabres and — and death's-heads! "

"Idle?" Thorpe caught up the fair critic. "All those military models were up at five to drill their men — and their salaries no more than a sergeant's pay in America. As for Kurt — like most Prussian *vons*, he's as poor as he's blue-blooded. Related to a dozen high-born



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make the acquaintance of your friend, and I take it you have no objection to traveling in the same party with Miss von Kissel. Who knows? We may become related by marriage, after all."

The bitter-sweet irony of this last struck under Thorpe's feet. He was afloat in a golden cloud of anticipation. To bowl through Europe for a fortnight or a month side by side with Elsa von Kissel — what a blissful prospect!

"You're a brick, Loo. Just like you to forget my foolishness and take me back on the old chum basis. And the Von Kissels — they're of the real nobility, though the title is in another branch. You're bound to be friends with Elsa. She's adorably artless and sincere."

"Indeed? Then of course I can't hope to resist her charms, any more than you have — straw hair, indigo eyes, and all. For your sake, I'm glad she's blond, and not a dark angel."

The rather fatuous smile with which Thorpe met this badinage vanished as his glance flicked along the great avenue. Ahead, in the direction of Potsdam, cars were swerving aside and pedestrians lining up along the walks. At a sharp word from Thorpe, the French chauffeur turned in and stopped beside the curb.

Lucy's glance followed Thorpe's, and was held by the sight of policemen, soldiers and officers clicking their heels together and raising their hands in precise military salute to a big car that came tearing along Unter den Linden from out Potsdam way. Men not in uniform lifted their hats and bowed sweepingly. Even women and children faced the car with profound respect.

Behind the jäger chauffeur soon effulged into view a silver-helmeted royalty with resplendent uniform and order-bespangled breast. He sat severely erect in the rear seat, acknowledging the "*Hochs!*" of the people with dignified military upliftings of his right hand. Thorpe sprang up to lift his hat and bow almost as deferentially as the German civilians.

For a moment, as the car passed, the amused ironical smile of the American girl caught and fixed the piercing glance of *Majestät*. The cold blue eyes froze to offended hauteur, the strong jaw set like iron. With the tightening of the thin lips, the uptwisted mustache ends seemed to threaten like the tushes of a wild boar.

Another moment, and *Majestät* had swept past. Thorpe bent down to speak to his companion. She was still and rather white, and no longer smiling.

"Don't you understand, Loo?" he asked. "That was His Imperial Majesty, the Emperor."

The girl quivered with a little shudder of repugnance.

"Yes," she murmured. "He looked at me... I remember my father said, 'I don't like that man William.' It was when he read how the Kaiser sat in a hunting lodge and shot down two hundred tame deer as they were driven past."

"But, Loo, that's merely the German idea of sport. It's only the custom of the —"

"Did you see his look?" broke in the girl. "And you say he has the peace of Europe in his hand — in the mailed fist he talks so much about. Poor little dove!"

“Cut it,” warned Thorpe, with an uneasy glance towards a passing car of Death’s Head Lancers. “Ridicule of the Kaiser is a serious offense — *lèse-majesté*, you know. Besides, he’s not at all what you think him. Everyone says he is very gracious, particularly to Americans. Whatever you do, say nothing against him to any German.”

Lucy rallied from her somber mood.

“Oh, I’ll agree not to snub him if he’s presented to me, Lan. But let’s talk about something pleasant. We passed a *café* a little way back. No — we needn’t wait for Henri to turn round. He can wait here.”

CHAPTER III

INTO THE GUTTER

The *café* was equal to the best in New York. But Lucy's surprise over the deliciousness of the German cooking forced from Thorpe an admission that all high-class Berlin restaurants and hotels employed French *chefs*.

To offset this, he took up most of the luncheon time with an enthusiastic laudation of German achievements in science and in *kultur*. Lucy was inclined to be critical. She had the normal American impatience over governmental restraints.

“I'd never get used to all these *verbotens*,” she said. “Life here is like being in a cage and tied up to the bars. Then all those soldier police with their swords! I never saw so many in my life.”

“But look at the results,” argued Thorpe. “Here we have an almost crimeless city, with streets so clean you could eat in the gutters. Compared with Apache-infested Paris — ”

“And with French hats and cooking!” interjected Lucy.

“You shall soon have a taste of German hospitality,” rejoined Thorpe. “I'll phone to the Von Kissels.”

He came back from the telephone beaming.

“ Frau von Kissel is like a mother to me. She urged that I bring you to Elsa’s reception. It’s a very informal affair. If we go early, there will be time for you to get acquainted before the crush.”

“ Of course I’ll go,” agreed Lucy, her eyes like polished jade. “ I’m just dying to see your straw-haired angel...and there’s Kurt, too — and maybe I’ll meet counts and barons and dukes, since the Kissels are what you call high-born.”

She was still bantering when Thorpe led her out of the *café*. A policeman had required Henri to move her car to a point half a block away. The Frenchman was lolling with his back to them, a cigarette perked between his lips, and his black eyes seeking to intrigue all the flaxen-haired maidens who chanced to pass.

Midway between car and *café*, a row of hilarious Prussian officers came sweeping along, linked arm in arm across the sidewalk and singing at the top of their voices a beer-song of the Student Corps. As they advanced, all the women and men before them seemed to have urgent business in the nearest shops. Thorpe took Lucy’s arm and sought to lead her to the doorway adjoining the *café*.

“ Step in here a moment,” he urged.

But Lucy’s interest was centered upon the novel spectacle of the chorusing officers.

“ Wait,” she said. “ I want to hear the sextette. Just look at them. What a hit they’d make in musical comedy with that assortment of uniforms! ”

Before Thorpe could explain the situation, she jerked free from his detaining arm and slanted out along the sidewalk directly before the row of officers. They bore down upon her, stretched all the way across from building line to curb, their spurs jingling and sabre scabbards flashing.

The American girl might have posed as Beauty Adorned. But even the youngest of the officers was too engrossed in his singing to heed her. Though Thorpe hurried to overtake the unsuspecting girl, she was out beyond the middle of the walk before he could regain his position beside her. The long, swinging strides of the officers had already brought them close. Thorpe grasped Lucy's arm and drew her over to the curb. But as he stepped into the gutter she perceived his purpose and jerked free.

The outermost officer of the row was a tall captain of the Imperial Guard, whose florid hatchet face bore the purplish scars of many rapier slashes above the tush-like prongs of his ash-yellow mustache. Lucy, of course, expected him to step aside for her to pass. He did not so much as look down or falter a single note of the jolly beer-song as he swung full tilt against her. The impact knocked her reeling into the gutter. Only the quick clutch of Thorpe saved her from falling headlong.

She did not scream. The cry that she flung at the back of the tall captain was hot with scorn. As if challenged, he broke free from the next officer and wheeled about, harsh-faced and threatening. His abruptly silenced comrades

gave him the sympathetic support of frowns and arrogant stares at the foreign fraulein who had the impertinence to be indignant at a Prussian officer.

Anger had served only to heighten Lucy's beauty. As the captain eyed her flushed cheeks and gracefully erect form, his severity relaxed to insolent admiration. Gallantry impelled him to forgive the charming lady for her presumption over obstructing the sidewalk.

"Next time, miss, you will know better than to get in the way of an officer," he admonished in precisely accented English.

Lucy replied with the deliberate distinctness of white-hot anger: "Next time I shall know what to expect of clumsy boors."

Two or three of the younger officers, already flushed with beer or wine, flamed crimson and grasped at their sabre hilts, infuriated by so scandalous an insult from a female. The captain waved them back and fixed his steel-blue eyes upon Thorpe in an icy stare.

"So," he jeered. "Your pretty bird's feathers are ruffled. You have perhaps a remark to make — *nicht?*"

Thorpe's jaw was hard-set, his face white. His hazel eyes met the provocative challenge of the Prussian's look without wavering. Neither the menacing gaze nor the mocking, arrogant smile stung him out of his self-control.

"Come," he said to Lucy, and he led her away towards the car.

Within a few paces the captain came up beside her other elbow.



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mockery. The captain was the senior of his companions in rank. None would presume to comment upon his rebuff. He faced about and swaggered back to link his arm again with that of the outermost lieutenant, as if nothing had occurred.

Lucy came to the car and stepped in without either looking around or appearing to see the hand that Thorpe held out to help her. In the tonneau she turned about to block him from following, and spoke in the same tone that she had used to the Prussian:

“I shall no longer require your very kind services, Mr. Thorpe.”

He gazed up at her with no sign of surprise or of shame. A steady look into her cool eyes convinced him of the disdain behind her surface graciousness. He closed the tonneau door, lifted his hat, and stepped back to go. Lucy flung out her hand in a gesture of distress.

“Lan! Wait! Come back here...The idea! You're not going off without a single word in defense of yourself. I'll not permit it.”

“You dismissed me, Miss Carew.”

“Nonsense! Give Henri the Kissel address, and get in here at once.”

Thorpe obeyed with the docility of a German soldier at drill.

“Now,” ordered the girl as the car rolled off with them. “Tell me why you didn't.”

Thorpe's set face did not relax.

“Nothing could have given me greater pleasure than to have tweaked the Prussian's big nose and then laid him in the gutter.”

“ Well? ” queried Lucy. “ I know you used to box and you must admit that the boor needed a good thrashing.”

“ Boxing here is considered brutal...I might have dropped him before he could draw on me. But there were all his companions.”

“ They would have attacked you? — The cowards! ”

“ Don't be hasty, Loo. These officers are a caste apart from the great mass of good-natured, peace-loving Germans. I'm only a civilian. They would have been compelled to avenge the insult to their superior officer. You see, I didn't enjoy the prospect of being carved up, and I thought it might be rather unpleasant to you — even more so than the captain's attentions.”

Lucy drew in a sharp breath. “ They wouldn't really have hurt you — badly? ”

“ Judge for yourself,” said Thorpe. “ In a crowded *café* the other evening a workman happened to jog the elbow of an officer. The officer drew his sword and deliberately killed the unfortunate fellow in cold blood. His defense before court martial was that his dignity had been affronted. He was sentenced to a month or so of confinement to his own quarters.”

“ For a murder like that! ”

“ Many officers consider the punishment unduly harsh. They would have rewarded him for enforcing due respect to their rank.”

Lucy could not restrain her indignation. “ I must say, if Mr. von Kissel is at all like that — ”

“ What! Kurt? He wouldn't hurt a fly, nor even the feelings of a Frenchman,” asserted

Thorpe. "He was quite at home in America."

The frown left Lucy's broad forehead. She listened smilingly to her companion's praises of the Von Kissels, while the car purred rapidly out along the broad avenues.

CHAPTER IV

PLAYS FOR POSITION

The modest Von Kissel mansion stood well back in its grounds, massed about with the old-fashioned June flowers of a German home garden. Thorpe was pleased when he saw no coupés or sedans in the drive, and no approaching beavies of fraus and frauleins. He and Lucy were first to arrive at the reception.

At the door Lucy dropped her free-and-easy manner to assume the formal haughty carriage with which she expected to be met. The arrogance of the Prussian officers had colored her anticipations of the deportment of German hostesses.

There was a delay at the entrance that annoyed her and confirmed these unpleasant expectations. Thorpe rang a second time. Then the door opened with a hospitable sweep, and before the guests appeared, not the butler or liveried footman for whom Lucy looked, but a radiant angelic vision of blond loveliness.

The vision blushed deliciously as she greeted "Herr Thorpe" with the meek deference due to a male guest. Her manner was so artless and her dress so simple that Lucy might have mistaken her for a Cinderella maid-servant, had

not Thorpe hastened to stammer out an introduction.

For a moment Lucy's hauteur became more intense. But the sweetness and innocence of the younger girl were irresistible. Though Lucy's eyes clouded as she perceived the look with which Thorpe was regarding Fraulein von Kissel, she smiled and clasped the plump white hand of the welcomer.

"So you are Gold Elsie," she said. "I know all about you. I met your brother in America."

Elsa beamed with artless delight. "*Ach!* That Kurt remembers Miss Carew is not to be wondered — is it, Herr Thorpe?"

"Perhaps," admitted Thorpe. "But she must not flatter herself that she is the only fraulein easy to remember."

Though the German girl's extreme unsophistication might have been puzzled by the words, the look in Thorpe's eyes was unmistakable. She blushed more delectably than before. But inbred hospitality enabled her to overcome the confusion of embarrassment. She courtesied the guests into a parlor whose old mahogany furniture was as satisfying to an artistic eye as was the rich mellow-toned decorations.

Thorpe received the first invitation to be seated. He insisted upon choosing a plain chair. The slightly flustered fraulein then led Lucy across to the small sofa at the head of the room. As the visitor sat down, she made a gesture that invited the young hostess to share the sofa. Fraulein Elsa's eyes rounded at the suggestion of two occupying the seat of honor. Such a

breach of etiquette would be most improper.

“Mother is helping Grethel with the cakes,” she informed Thorpe. “Such a stupid girl we now have! I shall ask your pardon that I may take Mother’s place, for her to welcome you.”

Thorpe ventured a bold move that brought him first to the rear door. He blocked it to the scarlet-cheeked girl.

“Stay and visit with Miss Carew, fraulein,” he urged. “I shall tell the mother of our arrival. The kitchen latch is used to my hand.”

He disappeared without waiting for a reply. The fraulein gazed around at Lucy, her big blue eyes violet with indecision.

“Don’t mind him,” reassured the American girl. “It’s just our Yankee brashness. From what he told me, I gather he is quite at home with your mother and brother.”

“*Ja*, he is Kurt’s beloved friend,” murmured Elsa. She blushed as she spoke, and hastened back to her guest, radiant with child-like admiration.

“*Ach*, fraulein, you are most lovely—such exquisiteness and style! I feel I shall be greatly fond of you. Is it not strange? I have met not many Americans, and they all are—what do you say?—most nice. In our school we are taught that Americans are red Indians—those who are not Deutsch. But Kurt says there are many others. He told me about you. I wondered he could admire a fraulein not Deutsch. Now I do not wonder.”

Lucy wavered. To cherish resentment against this innocent child was all but impossible.

“My dear,” she replied, “I, for my part, no longer wonder that Lan Thorpe believes angels are golden-haired. He would be even more delighted than I am, if you would say to him what you have to me — about fondness.”

Elsa's blue eyes sank, and a deep blush swept from her white forehead down across her coral cheeks to her milky throat.

“At — at our school,” she faltered, “we are taught not to — talk about men. Besides — it is for parents and elders to choose.”

There was no need for the verbal confidences that decorum forbade the girl to speak. Her blush had all too clearly confessed her feelings. The rose faded from Lucy's cheeks, leaving them almost sallow. Her eyes darkened. Yet after a long moment of tension, her lips curved in a smile that held no trace of bitterness.

“I can't blame Lan. You're sweet enough to eat.”

She sighed, rallied, and impulsively sprang up to pat the pink and white cheek of the adorable maiden. Though a full hand's-breadth the shorter, she had the appearance of smiling down upon the younger girl.

“I'm sure we shall be friends,” she declared. “Sit down. We'll leave out the men, and have a good gabble about dresses.”

Too fascinated to resist, Elsa yielded to the clasp that drew her down upon the sofa beside her new friend.

Thorpe had already reached the kitchen. He found motherly Frau von Kissel in the midst of the glazed tile-work and polished metal, direct-



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love with Elsa. He made a masked move in flank.

“ Oh, of course, if you feel that way, Tante... Still, you'll enjoy Miss Carew's acquaintance, I know. She has beauty and charm as well as money. I thought I'd speak to you before one of the titled officers snaps her up. These international marriages are becoming quite the custom.”

Frau von Kissel nodded with indignant emphasis.

“ *Ja*, it is a shame! The high-born spend-thrifts must have foreign heiresses to pay off their gambling debts. They are not content with Deutsch frauleins who have not so large dots. Most different it would be for Elsa if my rich bachelor cousin should die. He owns much Krupp stock, and he has promised half his fortune to each of my children.”

Thorpe did not miss his opportunity. “ In America a fraulein is not required to have a dot. If she possesses beauty and charm, no more is expected.”

“ What foolishness! In America, you have told me, undutiful children marry to please themselves. In Deutschland the wedding is as the parents wish.”

“ I know you will do your best to make your children happy, dear Tante,” soothed Thorpe. “ There are sons and daughters of rich merchants who desire marriage with aristocratic families. Only, as you have often remarked, the trouble with them is that Germans of the lower classes are always unmistakable; but the Amer-

ican wives of the high-born soon acquire the manners of nobility.”

This was a shot out of her own locker. The good frau gave Grethel explicit directions for serving the refreshments, dusted the flour from her fingers, unfastened her voluminous kitchen apron, and heaved a deep sigh.

“*Ach, himmel!* It is the truth you tell, Allant. In the Fatherland people are born low or high, and they cannot be changed by marriage. We require deference from our inferiors, and we give honor to those above us, with our God-appointed Kaiser ruling high over all.”

“Yet when your sons do marry outside their caste, American heiresses seem to make the most satisfactory wives,” thrust Thorpe. “However, you need have no fear for Kurt. Miss Carew expects offers of titles. She will be able to pick and choose. It was only that I thought Kurt might possibly win her, with your help, if he should be quick to grasp his opportunity. But since you do not wish him to marry an American, all you need do is to introduce her to young men of title. From her point of view, a count or a baron would of course be much more eligible than Kurt.”

Frau von Kissel paused beside the door, which Thorpe had opened for her with a courtesy that few German men would have extended to any other than youth and beauty.

“Such over-politeness, Allant,” she chided. “Do not, I beg you. It is too French-like... About your friend, we shall see. I do not admit that any foreign fraulein is too good for

Lieutenant von Kissel of the Imperial Guard.”

“ She’d be the last to claim it, Tante. But if she can make a far better match, can you blame her? ”

Satisfied by the thoughtful puckering of the mother’s severe lips, Thorpe inquired about Elsa’s graduation in as casual a tone as he could effect. The reply was all too brief and meagre. In Germany the affairs of a son are vastly more important than those of a daughter. Thorpe had succeeded only too well in fixing the mind of Frau von Kissel upon the foreign fraulein. This worked in his favor, however, when they reached the parlor.

Lucy and Elsa were seated side by side on the state sofa, chatting with the intimacy of old friends. Elsa sprang up, shocked at the realization of her incorrect behavior, while Lucy stifled to hauteur under the severe eye of the hostess. But when formally presented by Thorpe, she met the buxom matron’s greeting with tactful graciousness. Even more tactfully she caught at the frau’s mention of kitchen and household duties.

An inquiry regarding a picture enabled Thorpe to maneuver Elsa to the far corner of the parlor. No little skill was required to accomplish this. A single ardent word or look would have alarmed the girl’s modesty and sent her edging back to shelter beside her mother. But Thorpe was not a Continental lover. He knew that the way to win the confidence of a shy youngster is to divert attention from personal topics. At nineteen Elsa was still an unsophis-

ticated child, naïve and free from artifice.

The American's matter-of-fact manner and genuine interest in her brother soon overcame the girl's constraint. To her wonderment, she found him almost as easy to talk to as Miss Carew. He quoted approvingly many of Kurt's views on the army and navy and the management of estates; he extolled German music and science; he pointed out the surprising truth that cooking was a domestic form of chemistry and hardly less important. By a strange and delightful coincidence of tastes, he happened to be most fond of the flowers that she mentioned as her favorites. Close beside her in the niche of the corner window, he gazed out at the masses of bloom in the garden and expressed his esthetic pleasure. She readily agreed to do a bit of botanizing with him at the first opportunity.

The ring of the doorbell interrupted their delightful *tête-à-tête*. Though Thorpe was more than annoyed, he found consolation in the candid disappointment that clouded Elsa's lovely eyes as she rose to leave him.

The neighbor's servant, borrowed for the occasion to attend the door, had not yet come up from the kitchen. Elsa hastened to admit and welcome the first of the reception callers, Frau Herr Upper-Director-of-Posts-and-Dispatches Hegelbaum.

Frau von Kissel broke off the conversation with Lucy Carew that had rendered her oblivious to Elsa and Thorpe. She sprang up to greet the new caller. Lucy had not been so engrossed. Her veiled glance had more than once found its

way past the amplitude of her hostess to the smiling couple in the corner window. Left alone, she settled back on the state sofa, a picture of serene composure.

Thorpe perceived only the outward insouciance of his countrywoman. A smile of gleeful anticipation lightened the gloom of his frown. He had not long to wait. With the firmness of a grenadier, Frau von Kissel took Lucy's arm and drew the surprised girl up from the sofa. Frau Herr Upper-Director-of-Posts-and-Dispatches Hegelbaum was then ensconced on the throne of honor.

Her reign was brief. Next to arrive at the reception was Elsa's godmother, the old Baroness von Schlagel-Eisenen. Frau Upper-Director promptly abdicated in favor of her superior in rank. The borrowed servant girl now took Elsa's place at the door. But the change proved of no benefit to Thorpe. After the baroness the female guests followed in flocks. The blushing daughter of the house was required to stand fast beside her mother and return thanks for the congratulations and gifts brought by her well-wishers.

Aside from the state sofa, however, there was nothing formal about the reception. Hostess and guests gave themselves over to general talk and laughter. Lucy was presented to the fraus and introduced to the frauleins. Whenever the other guests understood that she was not English but American, her inability to speak German met with good-natured tolerance.

She drifted around to where Thorpe was exchanging dignified greetings with various fraus

of his acquaintance. A question about the garden drew him away from them into the niche of the window beside her. He could not see her lowered eyes, but her red lips were parted in a smile of ironical amusement.

“Two was company...After that the deluge,” she said. “You must feel lost in the flood of hens and chickens.”

“Help is near,” he predicted with the assurance of experience. “The other men will soon arrive. It’s about time for the refreshments... You seem to make a hit with Tante von Kissel. How about the tour?”

Lucy’s smile became a trifle more ironical. “No wonder you’re impatient. The child is sweet enough to eat.”

“Child? She’s over nineteen.”

“Nineteen months. She makes me think of a duckling just out of the shell — or a downy baby swan, if that’s more poetical to you.”

Thorpe winced. “Don’t, Loo. You’ve agreed to be chums again. Stand by me. I—I love Elsa. I’ve got to win her...and I’m afraid I can’t without your help.”

Lucy faced away to gaze out into the garden, her smile fading.

“Is it as bad as that — really?” she bantered as she turned to meet his anxious gaze, cool-eyed and smiling. “Buck up, old fellow, I already have Mama Kissel feeding out of my hand. You needn’t fancy, though, I’ll invite the family for my tour until I’ve had another look at Herr Lieutenant Kurt.”

CHAPTER V

THE HIGH-BORN COUNT

Elderly and middle-aged men who had completed their official duties for the day began to arrive. Lucy's brows lifted as she saw how fraus and frauleins hastened to give up the best seats to the male guests.

Afternoon tea was now served, a bevy of Elsa's young friends helping her hand around the cups, together with generous platefuls of rusks and little cakes. Thorpe mildly scandalized the company by waiting upon himself and Lucy. When, with well-loaded plates, he came coasting back to their inset window, he found her gazing demurely across the room. The object was a handsome young officer unmistakably like Elsa.

"Yes, you've spotted him — that's Kurt," rallied Thorpe.

Attracted by his beckoning gesture, the son of the house glimpsed Lucy and hastened to make his way through the crowd. His popularity was evident from the number of friends — herrs, fraus and frauleins — who sought to detain him. With polite excuses, he passed all by and sprang around the last group to clasp Lucy's hand in a hearty American grip.



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excitement. No less a personage than General von Hausen, Chief of Staff to the Duke of Wurttemberg, had come with Baron von Schlagel-Eisenen to her reception. He was asking for her lieutenant brother. Kurt clicked his heels for an abrupt bow to Lucy, and hastened off under the guidance of his sister.

“That’s the military of it,” remarked Thorpe. “The duke’s army is quite distinct from that of Prussia, yet you see how Kurt jumped at the mere mention of an officer of the High Command. It’s a pity that one of his gentle spirit has to be a cog in a war-machine.”

“But think of the gorgeous uniforms,” mocked the American girl. “They make our men look like waiters.”

Thorpe spoke up for his friend with loyal enthusiasm:

“There’s no one better entitled to fine feathers than Kurt. He’s a splendid fellow, clean and true and manly. Even Captain von Pappheim voted for him when, as is the custom, the officers of his regiment decided whether he should become one of its lieutenants.”

“Oh, yes, he’s nice enough; but you might say as much for yourself, if you weren’t so modest. The point is, there must be others with titles and higher rank, and if I’m to get value received for my Yankee dollars, why, a mere second lieutenant — ”

The sudden break in the girl’s ironical banter and a slight narrowing of her eyes sent Thorpe’s glance darting across the room. Midway from the door was the tall Prussian captain who had

knocked Lucy into the gutter. He stood twirling an end of his up-crooked mustache, his steel-blue eyes fixed upon the American fraulein in a stare of cool assurance. The look expressed his conviction that ample time had elapsed for her to have realized the unseemliness of that penny outrage on his dignity.

Frau von Kissel was deferentially introducing the newly arrived guest to her meek and shrinking daughter. Thorpe frowned. For Elsa even to meet an officer of such insolence seemed to him little short of desecration. The captain paid slight heed to his hostess and scarcely more to the lovely daughter of the house. After a perfunctory compliment to Elsa, he checked the effusive remarks of her mother with a brusque inquiry about her American guests.

Elsa slipped away unobserved, her artless face disclosing to Thorpe's intent gaze how relieved she was to escape. Frau von Kissel hastened forward with her high-born guest. She presented the heart's friend of her beloved Kurt to Herr Captain, Count Wolf von Pappheim. The stiffness of the bows exchanged by the men was unnoticed by their hostess. She was gazing perplexedly at the deliberately turned back of the American girl.

“Fraulein,” she remonstrated — “Mees Carew, the will of Herr Captain — ”

“Pardon me, but I'm not a German girl, Frau von Kissel,” interrupted Lucy. “I must decline to meet that man. He knows why.”

The captain leaned towards Thorpe, and peered at him menacingly.

“ You will advise the miss, *n'est-ce pas?* ”

That big high-curved Prussian nose was most tempting. Thorpe's fingers crooked.—Sanity and breeding enabled him to resist the impulse. The apprehensive glance that Lucy turned upon him was reassured by the quiet smile with which he met the threat.

“ If that is meant as a challenge, Herr Count,” he remarked, “ the pleasure is mine of naming machine-guns at five paces.”

The captain blinked. Was the American trifling, or was he in deadly earnest. His smile might be taken either way. The one certainty was that he betrayed no trace of intimidation.—To draw one's sabre at a reception is not good form, even for a taunted officer.

Count Wolf von Pappheim favored his hostess with the full view of his purple-scarred face.

“ The fraulein is newly arrived, *nicht?* She does not understand our customs. Because, through ignorance, she is offended, I am willing that you present to her my apologies.”

Lucy also addressed the flustered frau: “ Be so kind as to reply that there are offenses for which apologies are not acceptable.”

The Prussian's face flamed scarlet; his close-cropped tow hair bristled...But, immediately upon his arrival at the reception, envious tongues had clacked into his ear exaggerated accounts of the American heiress's fortune. He had already seen on the street that her face and form were enravishing. To one surfeited with flaxen blondes, there was a double fascination in the foreign fraulein's richly tinted skin and copper

red hair. No less fascinating was the exquisite charm of her costume in the roomful of large, ill-dressed German ladies.

Herr Captain, Count Wolf von Pappheim, visibly checked himself on the verge of angry denunciation. He clicked his heels and bowed low to the obdurate fraulein.

“I beg to offer my profound apologies. The collision was unpremeditated — an accident — I give my word. Afterwards I misthought the fraulein to be English. Pardon the error and accept, I beg you, my most humble apologies.”

Thorpe was almost as astonished as Frau von Kissel. He knew how men of the count's stamp looked down upon ladies even of their own caste. Lucy neither knew nor cared. She took the aristocrat's self-humiliation as coolly as if he had been a young business clerk of her home town. His behavior had been abominable... However, he had pleaded difference of custom and he had made a real apology.

“If you wish, Frau von Kissel, you may introduce him,” she granted her permission with an air of condescension that brought a deeper flush into the count's face.

Thorpe's expression remained impeccably sober. Lucy alone caught the momentary twinkle in his eyes. The count was bending to her in a bow meant to convey an impression of gratefulness. As he unbent he flashed at Thorpe a glance like a rapier stab. The American's eyes did not again twinkle.

Lucy perceived this. She also perceived the concern of Frau von Kissel and its cause. With

a few pleasant words she relieved her hostess by putting the embarrassed officer at his ease. The good frau bustled off, beaming her gratification. The scandal of a scene had been averted, and the herr count's anger was appeased.

As Von Pappheim opened a rather heavily gallant conversation with his charming conqueress, Thorpe looked about him with the intention of joining Elsa. Before he could leave the corner, Lucy deftly prevented his escape by a remark that brought him into a trio with her and the displeased count, and so rounded out her triumph. Her skill forced the Prussian into a pretense of courteousness to the unwelcome foreign civilian. At the same time she goaded him to rivalry by the friendly intimacy of her banter with Thorpe.

The return of Kurt, boyishly eager to share Miss Carew's company, gave Thorpe his opportunity to slip away. He presumed that the son of the house would serve as well as himself for Lucy's purpose and might be more interesting to her, if not to Von Pappheim.

But as Thorpe started to leave, he was again brought to a halt, this time by a teasing remark from Lucy to the gallant captain. In true Prussian style, Von Pappheim had been vaunting the superiority of German governmental efficiency. Heedless of the consequences to herself, Lucy was puncturing the national conceit with the taunt of how she had duped the secret service agents.

Thorpe cut in and sought to check the disclosure at the point where the girl told about the

apparent destruction of the film. Lucy either could not or would not perceive his warning hints. She went on to relate in full detail how she had obliterated the substituted film and made sure of her Krupp pictures by dropping them into the embassy dispatch-pouch. Thorpe's attempts to silence her made him appear to be the consciously guilty accomplice of her act of espionage.

He affected to make light of the affair —

“ You see how little we know about such matters in America, Captain. Miss Carew still thinks she has played a gay joke on your police. She doesn't realize you'll have her court-martialed and shot at sunrise for the high crime of *lèse majesté*.”

Kurt von Kissel's cheeks had lost their girlish rosiness. There was unmistakable dread in the look that he turned upon his senior officer. Von Pappheim was still regarding Lucy with utmost gallantry. Though his hard eyes had narrowed ever so slightly when she thrust at him how she had outwitted the Imperial police, he uttered no word of denunciation as Kurt and Thorpe both expected. On the contrary, he met Thorpe's sally with a loud laugh.

“ *Ach!* So clever a little teaser!” he flung at Lucy in a half rueful, half gallant tone. “ It is well you are not a Russian or French or English fraulein. That would mean a sad duty for your most ardent admirer to perform. But because you are American, it is certain your act was due only to innocent playfulness, *n'est-ce pas?* ”

Lucy accepted the assurance with careless indifference. Not so Kurt von Kissel. He bent close to her, his eyes still dark with anxiety.

“Will you not write an order, Miss Carew, for the film to be delivered in Paris to the German embassy? That would clear you entirely.”

“But it’s so utterly silly for anyone to try to make me out a spy,” said Lucy. “Count von Pappheim understands. I gave those impertinent detectives what they deserved. Had they acted like gentlemen, I’d have handed over the pictures. Now I shall keep every one.”

“Good—most good, fraulein. Your spirit has my high esteem,” approved Von Pappheim. “Hold fast to what is yours. There need be nothing more said about the views. May I request permission to call at your hotel?”

The adroit move was met no less skillfully—

“It is kind of you to ask, Captain. Only I shall have no hotel. Mrs. von Kissel has invited me for a visit.”

“Most delightful,” said the count, with a flatness of tone that belied the words. “The pleasure shall be mine of calling often at the home of my esteemed young friend Von Kissel.”

Kurt acknowledged this piece of condescension with the required phrases of hospitality. Followed a clicking of heels, a salute, the gallant kissing of Lucy’s hand by the count, and his withdrawal into the throng of departing guests.

Left alone a brief period with Lucy, Thorpe went at her with brotherly brusqueness:

“Good Lord, Loo; have you gone clean dotty? It was bad enough, your snapping those views.



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hand what her husband is capable of doing. There would be the advantage that Count von Pappheim would have no surprises for me.”

“Don’t joke, Loo. The man is impossible as the husband of an American girl.”

“Really? Well, even at that, I fail to see that it is any concern of yours.”

Thorpe did not reply. To avoid feeling concern for his old friend and one-time chum was more easily said than done. But if she denied him the right of friendship, what other right had he to interfere?

She awaited his rejoinder with an eagerness in her half lowered eyes that he took for ready combativeness. When, without speaking, he faced away to smile at the approaching Elsa, the corners of her firm-set challenging lips curved down in a pensive droop.

All the other guests had gone. As Kurt hurried his mother back from the door, he told her that Miss Carew had consented to become their house guest. The deeply gratified frau beamed no less delightedly than Elsa over the joyous news. They would not hear of Lucy’s returning to the hotel even to settle her bill.

CHAPTER VI

STIRRING UP THE TIGERS

The week that followed played havoc with Thorpe's attendance at the university. But he tossed a bone to his scientific conscience by botanizing Elsa's flowers and gravely explaining to her the various chemical reactions of cooking. These prosaic talks and his avoidance of open ardor led Frau von Kissel to believe that his interest in Elsa was no more than brotherly. He had not asked permission to woo... The preoccupation of the good lady over Kurt was further reason for her failure to realize that the American was courting her daughter along the lines of least resistance.

Elsa was intensely domestic. She could be won only by successive passage through the gateways of her confidence, esteem, friendship and affection. Thanks to his standing with her mother and brother and to his abstention from all gallantry, Thorpe attained his first objective within a week. Elsa came to trust him as she trusted Kurt, and, in the candor of her artlessness, she made no attempt to conceal her growing fondness for him.

But Frau von Kissel was by this time more than ever engrossed over her son and their house

guest. As Thorpe had foreseen, the honest matron had required only the briefest of acquaintances with Lucy to forget her prejudice against international marriages — so far as sons were concerned. In the German sense of the term, Lucy was not accomplished. She had taken a course in domestic science. But her tastes were not domestic, and she frequently displayed a shocking irreverence towards authority. Yet she had a way with her that even race and caste could not resist. There was also her beauty and fortune.

Kurt had needed no parental urgings to begin his suit. By the second day he was heels over head in love with their charming guest. Not that Lucy had sought to be fascinating. She had treated him with the same offhand friendliness that she showed towards Thorpe, promising no more than she gave. Even his mother could not say that he had any right to be aggrieved by the attentions that she permitted from the somewhat arrogantly ardent Count von Pappheim.

The situation reached a crisis in the midst of the motor rides and concerts and other simple entertainments. Von Pappheim managed to procure for Miss Carew — with Frau von Kissel as chaperon — an invitation to the garden *fête* of a Highness. Lucy proved to be the most beautiful and charming girl present, and she was so unconsciously lacking in awe of royalty that a certain exalted heir known for his gallantries dubbed her the American Princess. The attention from this imperial direction not only disquieted Von Pappheim but inflamed him to redoubled ardor.

Frau von Kissel was correspondingly depressed.

“*Ach, liebe fraulein,*” she sighed when, above the home threshold, the count kissed Lucy’s hand and took his leave. “For you to have been complimented by His Imperial Highness! You are too splendid for such poor folk as we. My Kurt — he will be sad.”

Lucy patted the mother’s plump arm.

“Why cross bridges before you come to them? My motto is, Pleasure before Business. I’m in no hurry to marry. I came abroad to enjoy myself. What do you say to motoring through France, Italy and Switzerland with me?”

The frau’s blue eyes suffused with tears.

“Fraulein, the longing of my life has been to make the grand tour. You are most kind. If I could but leave my beloved children!”

“But why leave them? — The more the merrier. It’s double fun to have friends along. If you go, I can get Lan Thorpe to personally conduct the party.”

“All as your guests, fraulein? — so many! The expense — ”

“A trifle.”

“You say it — only a trifle... *Ach! Ach! mein lieber Kurtziel!* To get leave of absence is not so easy for a staff lieutenant.”

“Well, he can at least try. Elsa says he’s not had a holiday since his promotion, and that Colonel van Houses — ”

“Vait! Vait!” interrupted the shocked frau. “You should say, Herr General von Hausen.”

“Oh, a rose by any other name, you know — ”

The point is, he spoke well of some idea of Kurt's about lightening the soldiers' packs."

"*Ja*, the boy wants to ease the load. Count von Pappheim says it is a foolishness. He says the cattle need big loads to keep them down where they belong. The general he says, '*Nein*. With cartridges we will replace what weight Kurt takes off the pack. So much more lead for the enemy when *Der Tag* comes, *nicht?*' — You see, *liebe fraulein*, how the army works so hard always to become more efficient. It is for the Fatherland... But the general is of the Wurttemberg High Command. He is not of the Prussian. That is sad for Kurt."

Lucy smiled and shrugged. Like most persons of decisiveness, she disliked being forced to an issue, and Von Pappheim had begun to press his suit with over-urgent ardor. In the morning she made her suggestion of the tour direct to Kurt. He caught at the possibility of ridding himself for a time of the man he considered his most dangerous rival. His visions of the tour in company with his beloved one were no less blissful than Thorpe's anticipations of joy in the companionship of Elsa.

He hastened to apply for a month's leave of absence. That evening Von Pappheim called to express his condolences. He had been spoken to about the application, and had put in a good word for his esteemed young friend, but he feared the leave would not be granted.

"What a shame! Think of their being so strict in peaceful times like these," exclaimed Lucy. She added, not altogether jokingly, "I'll

have to drop the Crown Prince a note. I know he'd let Mr. von Kissel go if *I* asked him."

Even Thorpe joined in the startled protests against such a shocking breach of etiquette. Lucy ignored him and the others to smile archly into Von Pappheim's jealous eyes.

"Oh, but that's the beauty of it, you see," she rallied. "I'm supposed to be quite ignorant about court and military etiquette, and I'll mention that Kurt knows nothing of my request. Besides, if I'm an American princess, why shouldn't I enjoy the privileges of my rank?"

Frau von Kissel herself perceived that further remonstrance would serve only to make her willful guest the more determined. Count von Pappheim set his lean florid jaw and made persistent attempts throughout the remainder of the evening to obtain a *tête-à-tête* with the heiress. Lucy betrayed no desire to avoid his attentions. Yet, somehow, both in the house and out among the moonlit flower beds, either Kurt or his mother kept near her until the baffled captain gave over the siege and reluctantly took his leave.

Thorpe had lingered in the hall behind the others for his parting with Elsa. As he passed out with Kurt, Lucy was unconsciously wiping the back of the hand that the count had saluted. She gaily held up both her hands for the good-night clasps of the friends. They swung out side by side into the moonlight and left her standing in the shadow of the doorway.

Thorpe was almost as concerned as his companion.

"Well, the best thing is to get her across the

border as soon as we can. It's up to you to pull all your wires for that leave."

Kurt winced. "Perhaps I may win permission to join you later. She must go at once."

To this Thorpe heartily agreed. But when, the next day, they urged the new plan upon Lucy, she laughed at their apprehensions.

"Oh, I'll chance the lord high executioner and his big bright broadax. Civilized people no longer starve women...They give them forcible feeding. And everyone I meet keeps reminding me that Germany is the most civilized of all countries. So why should I be afraid? Just to show you, I'll stir up the tigers by cutting that motor ride with the count and going to Lan's lecture."

The announcement did not tend to lessen the anxiety of the friends. Von Pappheim was not the kind of man one trifles with. Yet Kurt could not feel other than pleased. The plan had been for him to go to the university with Thorpe and Elsa while his mother chaperoned Lucy on her outing with the count.

Thorpe was a Prussian year distant from his life as an American undergraduate. When Lucy inquired about the lecture, he replied with real enthusiasm that the eminent president of the Imperial University was to favor the public with an open address on the spirit of Deutschland. He went on to explain that, like the pastors of the State Church, the university professors were all officials under direct governmental supervision, and their utterances were therefore doubly authoritative. Lucy made no other com-



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eager to see the new Parisian styles. Lucy's assent was so keen that he and Kurt exchanged smiles of relief. A little more, and she would flit over the frontier, safe beyond annoyance from the Prussian secret service.

They were still happy in this thought when her car brought the party whirling into the Von Kissel drive. Beside the entrance was waiting the big gray car of Count von Pappheim. Lucy smiled at her grave-faced companions.

"Maybe I stirred up the tigers before they arrived, but they don't seem to have stirred since. Let's go in and hear them roar."

Von Pappheim was seated, sternly erect, between the perturbed Frau von Kissel and an empty bottle of her choicest wine. At sight of the party he paused in the adjustment of the boar's tusk points of his ash-yellow mustache, pocketed the mirror and comb, and rose to frown down at Lucy from his full height. The impressive effect was spoiled by Lucy's seeming obliviousness to his displeasure.

"Delightful day, Herr Count, isn't it? I see you've been holding the fort. So good of you to entertain Mrs. von Kissel."

"I came to keep the appointment I had with Fraulein Carew," stiffly replied Von Pappheim.

"That's so — that spin of ours out to Potsdam to see the palace while the Kaiser is at Kiel. Now it's too late."

"You have spoken truth, fraulein," jerked out the captain, his eyes glinting like the steel of his sword sheath. "The Emperor will return swiftly from his yachting. Soon all Deutschland

shall shudder at the deed of hideous frightfulness whose results are destined to shake the world. The vile, treacherous Serb swine have most foully assassinated Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the double throne of Austria-Hungary."

Kurt and his mother uttered exclamations of horrified pity and indignation, in which Thorpe rather mildly joined. Elsa gazed at the bearer of the startling news with the wide open eyes and parted lips of a wondering child. Lucy alone showed indifference.

"Isn't that just like those Austrian archdukes?" she remarked. "They're always committing suicide or running off with actresses or getting shot. I suppose this will mean another ugly little Balkan war. After grabbing most of the territory freed by the Serbians from the Turks, and then blocking their window on the Adriatic, I suppose the Austrian bully will catch at the pretext to jump on the little fellow he has wronged."

Von Pappheim's florid hatchet face was crimson with outraged pride of race and caste. A burst of harsh criticism was in order. But to the surprise of all except Lucy, he restrained his wrath and spoke with a show of gallant tolerance.

"The fraulein is American, and so should be excused for her ignorance. She does not realize that the Austrians, though the lesser breed, are yet of our noble Deutsch race, while the Serbs are no more than Slavic swine. They have proved their murderous vileness in this crime against royalty, which is of personal concern to me and

to you, fraulein. Of that, with your kind permission, I would speak to you in private.”

Even to Elsa the count's purpose was evident in the avid ardor and rapacity of his look. Lucy met it without the slightest change in her air of cool aplomb. She turned her gaze around past the anxious Kurt to Thorpe. His assured smile told not only that he was confident she would refuse the request, but also that he felt no rivalry towards the Prussian. Her cheeks lost a trifle of color and as quickly flushed to a shade above their usual rose, as she gave her gracious reply to the eager suitor:

“I am sure, my dear Count, a *tête-à-tête* on the subject would be very interesting.”

Kurt covered his distress by the excuse that he must hasten off to learn the details of the assassination. His mother withdrew to the kitchen. Thorpe promptly seized the opportunity for a *tête-à-tête* of his own with Elsa in the garden.

Left alone with Lucy, the count escorted her to a chair, seated himself very near, and impressed an ardent kiss upon her gloved hand.

“Fraulein, I had intended to wait longer. Now my will is to speak. That — what do you say? — that lucky misplay of the fool Serbs has lighted the fuse of the great bomb. Our press and our diplomats may make denial — it is their part to lie and raise a dust — but Der Tag is now dawning. Perhaps its red sun may rise in a week, perhaps in half a year.”

“Der Tag?” queried Lucy. “What's that?”

“Ach, you shall know! It is The Day — the

Time when all Deutschland shall spring up in shining armor; shall crush the hated underling nations with the might of the mailed fist; shall sweep clear with the sword a wide place in the sun. *Deutschland über Alles!* ”

“ You mean — you can't mean that Germany will go to war! ”

“ All is arranged. Der Tag will now soon be set. First we will sweep over weak, degenerate France; then we will take so much of Russia as we choose. After that the *Engländer schweine*. With the French and Russian fleets added to our own, we will cross over the Channel through the boastful British fleet. As for the contemptible little British army — *pfui!* ”

“ O-oh — I see,” murmured Lucy. “ But my country — how about America? ”

Von Pappheim masked the rapacious glint in his steel-blue eyes and smiled ingratiatingly.

“ Americans care only for trade and money. They do not threaten us. We wish only to win our rightful place in the sun. When we have done that and freed the seas from the tyranny of the British navy, we will take Canada and be your good friends and protectors. I speak now because Der Tag is dawning. I wish not to wait. As Deutschland and America shall unite, so also my will now is that we unite. *Liebe fraulein*, I have the high honor of asking for your hand — in marriage. ”

Lucy musingly slipped off a glove and ran her dainty fingertips along the fluff of hair under her hat brim. Her green eyes looked the avidly eager suitor and his gorgeous uniform

up and down as though with calm appraisal.

“ Well, I’m not altogether sure,” she at last replied. “ You see, I’m my own man of business. I have to consider everything. You have your title. But I fancy I represent something more than my money, and, in my opinion — ”

“ *Ja, ja, liebe fraulein*, most charming fraulein!” broke in Von Pappheim, all smiles and gallantry and hot ardor. “ You have beauty, grace, style, *verve*. You will make a greatly-to-be-desired frau.”

“ You really think so? ”

“ How else? *Ach, liebe fraulein*, it is then all agreed...except the dot. Your fortune — it is twenty million marks, *nicht?* ”

The hand with which Lucy was still caressing her hair paused and then came down across her face, politely to hide an ennuied yawn.

“ Ah, pray pardon me, Herr Count,” she murmured. “ That lecture on the grandeur of Deutschland, you know — The beating of the big bass drum always has the effect of wearying me.”

Von Pappheim stiffened. “ We are engaged in the needed settlement of the betrothal terms. The matter is most serious, fraulein.”

“ Indeed, it is,” agreed Lucy. “ Rather too much so. Tante von Kissel has been lecturing me on the duties of a German wife. She tells me *Majestät* and all his dutiful male subjects believe that woman’s sphere should be limited to church, children and kitchen. Well, *I* believe in woman suffrage and in my ability to manage myself and my fortune. And I do *not* believe

in marriage on the European plan. I must therefore decline with thanks the high honor you would confer upon me.”

The bolt struck Von Pappheim a stunning blow square in the center of his arrogant pride. For several moments he stared as if unable to credit his own ears.

“*Donnerwetter!*” he muttered. “You would refuse me — a count of Imperial Prussia? It is not possible! You — a low girl of no birth! *Nein! nein!*”

In Germany a rejected suitor is said to be given the basket. Lucy had heard this. She picked up Elsa’s sewing box and offered it to the lordly Prussian. He struck it from her hand and sprang to his feet, livid with rage.

“*Pfui!*” he hissed. “Jilt! To flirt with me — lead me on! *Gott!* I despise you beyond all measure!”

Lucy tilted her brows in a look of pensive resignation.

“Dear me! I am so sorry. I wanted to say that first. If only you were capable of realizing what I think of noble counts who knock ladies into the gutter and then offer them insulting attentions! I tried to make allowances, thinking you may have been intoxicated. But now I see — ”

“Silence! you coquette — you — you *cocotte!*” shouted Von Pappheim, beside himself with fury. “You think you could play with me and cast me aside with derision. Wait — you shall learn different.”

“Too bad you have to take it so hard,” com-

miserated Lucy. “I’d have thought a heroic captain and noble count of Imperial Prussia would be more game. What — must you go? — You’re forgetting your basket.”

Von Pappheim stalked out, enraged beyond speech, his boot heels jarring on the polished floor.



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“The militarists have brooded too much over the writings of Treitschke and Bernhardi. They would make war for war’s sake. The Crown Prince is of their party.”

“Yes, he told me. I thought he was only trying to show off.”

“He told you! — Be sure he was not joking. The militarists have forgotten how to laugh — especially when war is the topic. Thank God, we may have every confidence in our peace-loving Emperor to restrain their plans. — So now, dear Miss Carew, hasten to enjoy your tour of the lands across the Rhine. June is almost gone. Switzerland will be at its best in mid-summer. You will give great pleasure to the dear mother and Elsa, and I shall hope to join you later.”

The girl’s eyes narrowed a line and her smile changed.

“I will not start with your seat empty. You forget that Lan will have eyes only for Elsa.”

The refusal to go without him so thrilled the young man that he failed to heed the reference to his friend. His concern for Lucy’s safety, however, was redoubled.

“Yet you should not delay,” he urged. “Berlin in summer is all too dull. There are delightful baths just across the border in Belgium.”

“Oh, I’m not yet in need of a cure — even for ennui,” rallied Lucy. “Why this eagerness to drive me away? I begin to suspect you wish to be rid of your guest.”

“It is true, dear fraulein,” admitted Kurt, his face very grave. “I wish to drive you safe

over the frontier into France or Belgium. You have rejected Captain von Pappheim. He knows about your thoughtless snapshots. He has friends in the High Command. You may be subjected to great annoyance — if not worse.”

Lucy's eyes flashed. “He would not dare. The American ambassador — ”

“Is away,” broke in Kurt. “For you to be forced into prison, even though for a single day, would not be easy to bear.”

“They'd do that? Try to scare me? How foolish they are! Why it's the very thing to make me feel like never giving up those pictures. I'd have been only too willing to turn over every one, there at the first, if they had sent a gentleman to ask for them in a quiet way.”

“It is the army training, that brusqueness. But the thought of your danger...If only you would cross over into France or Belgium or Switzerland!”

The defiant lustre in Lucy's eyes softened to insouciant languor.

“You forget I'm American: Even herr count admitted that your war dogs have no bone to pick with my country. It's absurd to think anyone will bother me over those little snapshots.”

Kurt was silenced until, during dinner, Lucy let the others know that she had declined the proposals of Von Pappheim. Elsa and her mother could not conceal their delight, and they naively disclosed its mainspring by beaming their congratulations at Kurt. He sought to divert attention from himself by telling why Lucy should hasten out of Germany.

But Lucy held firmly to her determination to delay her departure until Kurt should obtain his leave. To argue was futile. Kurt realized the fact almost as clearly as Thorpe. But neither was prepared to give up his efforts to help the willful girl, while waiting for Von Pappheim to strike. Thorpe called at the American legation, and in the absence of the ambassador, consulted with the *chargé d'affaires*. He learned that there was no way in which the arbitrary police could be prevented from arresting Lucy if she were accused of espionage. The best that Thorpe could do was to obtain an assurance of diplomatic intervention after she had been taken into custody.

Kurt's efforts promised even less. Upon his first return from service at headquarters, he brought the ill news that his application for leave had been refused. A repetition of the request brought him the humiliation of an official reprimand. Yet in his fear for Lucy's safety, love so spurred him that he ventured to write to General von Hausen about his wish for a trip.

Hardly had the letter been posted when he received an order relieving him from staff duty and requiring him to report to his company commander. Von Pappheim greeted him with a smile of grim satisfaction, and gave command to be left alone with Herr Lieutenant von Kissel.

When Kurt came hastening home, he astonished all with the loud-voiced announcement that he had been granted a month's leave. His mother and Elsa at once so overflowed with joyful delight and enthusiasm for the tour that

Lucy could say nothing against an immediate start. Her assent was clinched by Kurt's pessimistic remark that it would be like his luck to have his leave recalled after the first few days.

"Then we must whirl off with you, and crowd every minute of your holiday full of fun," declared Lucy.

Thorpe alone noticed that the outburst of delight with which his friend took this was rather over-acted. Behind the mask of gaiety, that failed to set as well as it might on the young officer's frank face, Thorpe perceived deepened concern, instead of the relief for which he looked. His natural inference was that Kurt had more reason than ever to fear a blow at Lucy. The case against her would be all the stronger if she were arrested at the frontier as a fugitive.

This conjecture was, in Thorpe's opinion, rather confirmed than refuted when the German authorities formally *viséed* his own and Lucy's passports with a readiness that indicated they had received official instructions.

Yet when, after a swift run south across Thuringia and Wurttemberg, the party came to the Swiss frontier near Lake Constance, Thorpe was most agreeably disappointed. Their passage into Switzerland met with no other check than the slight delay caused by a perfunctory examination of passports and baggage. Once across the border, Thorpe heaved a deep breath of relief over Lucy's escape, and gave himself up to the delight of Elsa's company.

Several days passed before he observed that

Kurt at times still betrayed signs of worry under his outward glow of love and pleasure.

“Forget it,” he urged. “Loo is safe now. No reason why you should be so down in the mouth.”

“No reason?” sighed his friend. “If you but knew! What if I am forced to—if I am recalled before—before I can ask her?”

Thorpe smiled sympathetically.

“Faint heart ne'er won fair lady. Buck up. This mountain climbing is better for muscles than heart. But we'll soon be in Paris.”

But from the moment of the party's arrival, Kurt's gaiety in the gayest of capitals was forced. On the third day his last pretense of enjoyment broke down. Lucy had gone to the American embassy with Elsa and Thorpe. Their return found Frau von Kissel weeping and Kurt despondently pacing the reception rooms of the luxurious hotel suite.

“*Ach! ach!*” moaned the grieved mother. “He will not stay. He will go back to Berlin.”

“Don't tell me his leave has been recalled!” exclaimed Lucy with a warmth of regret that brought Kurt a congratulatory glance from Thorpe.

But the young officer only winced and faced away. His mother gazed at Lucy in tearful reproach.

“His leave—it was not recalled,” she answered. “Much worse it was. You should know, fraulein.”

“Mother!” reproved Kurt with unwonted sharpness. . . . “Pardon us, Miss Carew, I beg of

you. The mother has misunderstood. I have other reasons that she cannot conjecture. I cannot express how very sorry I am to go — ”

“ But you’re not going,” declared Lucy. “ We’ll not give you leave... Will we, Elsa?... We can’t spare you, Kurt. We are to have a house party. At the embassy, while Elsa and Lan were cracking up Berlin to some American multimillionaires, I met an old school friend — Polly Jones — and her husband Etienne — the Duke of Montmar, you know. He is a major of Turcos — African troops — and has been ordered to Algeria. So Polly is going home for a visit, and I’m to have the Castle of Montmar as long as I wish. It’s a grand old pile, somewhere south of the Marne, they say, not far from a place called Fere Champenoise, and on cool high ground among the pine hills.”

“ *Ach*, but there will be no joy without Kurt,” sighed Elsa. She leaned towards Thorpe with confident appeal in her lovely blue eyes. “ Persuade him to stay with us, dear friend.”

The trustful tenderness of her look inspired Thorpe. He smiled and thrust out at Kurt in bantering challenge: “ You’re no quitter, old man. You’re not going to cut out and leave us in the lurch without good reason. Either you stick along, or you tell us why you must throw us over.”

Kurt’s firm-set young jaw slackened; his pink cheeks whitened. He turned away to hide the fear that glinted in his clouded eyes.

“ My reasons — they are good. Yet I cannot — cannot tell them,” he murmured. “ *Ach*,

himmel! To think I lack strength!...But I must try...I will at least go as far as this castle.”

“Fine!” exclaimed Lucy. “Once we get you there, I’ll clap you in the dungeon, and then you’ll not be able to escape, even if you wish.”

“That would be heavenly — for you to hold me fast,” said Kurt, with an earnestness that brought an added tint of rose into Lucy’s cheeks.

Elsa and her mother smiled their delight over the blush. Only Thorpe perceived in Kurt’s reply something else than ardor. But he soon forgot his concern over the hidden trouble of his friend in the enjoyment of the peaceful pretty countryside, with its quiet woodlands and well-tilled grain fields, its toylike hamlets and genial, vivacious French villagers.

Later, the car brought the party up among the rolling pine-clad hills of a high tableland. The Castle of Montmar proved to be all and more than even Lucy had expected — a grand chateau of the Louis XV period, crowning a steep hill on the border of the Marshes of St. Gond. All about it were elaborate gardens, walled or hedged, with ponds and arbors, and paths that wound in and out among beds of enchanting flowers.

The interior of the castle, restored by the wealth of its American countess, was little less magnificent than a palace. Thorpe at first felt out of place among such resplendent surroundings. Within a few hours, however, all the visitors were moving about in the midst of their semi-regal setting as if to the manor born.



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She was pressing a half-blown Jacqueminot bud to her exquisite lips when Thorpe came through an opening in the high box hedge, not three paces away. She smiled at him, startled yet pleased. Then she saw the look in his eyes, and drew back, her big blue eyes wide with maidenly panic.

“Goose!” he chuckled in joyous banter. “Don’t try to fly away. It’s no use. The sly fox has you cornered at last—and you know you want to be caught. What?”

At the smiling accusation the girl’s fear gave place to confusion. Her eyes drooped, and a deep blush swept down her half-averted face.

“You darling!” cried Thorpe. “If only you could see yourself! Beside you that rose is a poor faded weed.”

Elsa flung out her hands in startled protest and drew them back to hide her scarlet face.

“*Ach! ach!*” she moaned. “You mock—you make play of me—you break my heart!”

Thorpe affected Prussian curtness: “What, *fraulein*—your heart broken? Then must it be mended. Come here. March!”

Elsa quivered and hesitated, between embarrassment and renewed panic. But instinctive obedience to authority impelled her forward. With timid, faltering steps she crept towards her lover, peeping up at him between her fingers like a bashful child.

“So far, good. Now up with your hands,” he commanded, when she was within arm’s-reach.

Blushing and trembling, with eyes downcast

and fair young bosom heaving, the girl raised her hands to his shoulders in meek surrender. He clasped her to him with such adoring tenderness that her large garden hat thrust back and fell off. He kissed the crown of her bright hair.

“Gold Elsie — beloved!” he whispered. “Tell me you love me.”

Her cheek pressed softly over his fast beating heart.

“*Ich liebe dich — Ich liebe dich!*” she murmured the sweet confession.

“Prove it. Salute — *auf*,” he commanded.

She obediently raised her rose-flushed face and pressed her fragrant lips upon his in her first tremulous kiss of love.

Thorpe kissed the silken fringe of her lowered eyelids. “Look at me, beloved. You are now my betrothed. We shall go, like good children, and ask the blessing of your mother.”

Elsa looked up — but not to return his ardent gaze with the tender love-light he expected. The pupils of her beautiful eyes were dilating with amazement and dismay.

“You have not told her before? You have not first asked her permission?...*Ach, Gott!* What have I done? To be so unmaidenly! so undutiful!”

Thorpe resisted her gentle struggles to free herself from his embrace.

“Hush,” he soothed. “Be quiet, dear heart. I have you fast, and I shall not let you go. There’s no need to grieve. I told Kurt months ago. He wished me success. Your mother will give her consent to our betrothal when she learns

that you love me and knows that Kurt approves.”

“ Yet it is — is not proper! ” panted Elsa. “ *Ach!* the shame! You have not her permission. She may refuse... And my dot is so little! When you see how little, you will not wish to wed so poor a fraulein.”

“ Goose, goose, goose,” tenderly reproached Thorpe, and he caught her drooping head between his hands. “ This dear nubbin is, I fear, quite empty; but on top of it is the most priceless of yellow gold, and down below is a gold heart overflowing with dutifulness and kindness and love. What greater treasure could a bride have for her dot? ”

Tears gushed into the girl’s uplifting eyes. She flung up her arms again to clasp Thorpe’s neck in an ecstasy of devotion.

“ I will work for you — *ach*, so hard I will work!... Only — only persuade the mother, that I may wed you and serve you all my life! ”

“ She’ll be glad to give us her blessing,” confidently predicted Thorpe. “ Come. We’ll go to her now, and have our happy surprise all ready to spring on Kurt and Lucy.”

Elsa trembled, but docilely permitted him to lead her around through the rose garden and into the castle.

Frau von Kissel had wakened from her nap and sent out one of the French maids to summon Elsa. She lost her expectant smile when the maid brought back word that Monsieur Thorpe wished leave to present himself in the boudoir with Mademoiselle von Kissel. Her usually kind motherly face was severe as Elsa appeared, pale

and drooping, close beside her lover. Thorpe clasped the hand that the frightened girl would have drawn away from his arm.

“Here we are,” he sang out, cheerfully disregarding the chillness of their welcome. “Dear Tante, I’ve come to ask your blessing. I wish the right to call you ‘Liebe Mutter.’ Elsa and I have made the happy discovery that we love each other. Tell us how soon I may wed her.”

The frau’s heavy face became still more severe.

“What is this?” she demanded in German. “Have I lived to rear so undutiful a daughter? Can it be true a fraulein of the Von Kissels is without shame? Come away from the foreigner, girl.”

Stricken to the heart, Elsa slipped free from Thorpe’s clasp and ran to sink down on her knees beside her mother’s chair. Thorpe was not so readily subdued. He faced the indignant frau with cool determination.

“Is it wise or kind to speak in haste, Tante?” he reproached. “At least you shall not blame Elsa. She believed that I had your consent to tell her of my love.”

“You deceived her? I would not have thought it of you, Allant!”

“Not intentionally, but that was her belief. She is innocent of all wrong. The fault, if any, is mine and mine alone.”

The mother’s frown relaxed in a look of profound relief.

“*Ach*, I should have known. For a daughter of the Von Kissels to be undutiful, that would be impossible.”

Elsa burst into a storm of joyous tears and flung herself upon the ample bosom of her mother.

“You forgive me! You are not angered! You will give your consent...Mother, I love him with my whole heart, even as he loves me — and — and he cares not that the dot is so little.”

“It’s not American to require dots, Tante,” cut in Thorpe. “I went ahead and won Elsa on the American plan. Forgive me for not first asking your consent. Kurt was willing. You see how Elsa loves me. Won’t you give us your blessing?”

The face of Frau von Kissel was again very stern.

“Kurt did not tell me. He has been undutiful. You have deceived me. What if it is the American custom? That is the worst. I will not have a foreigner in my family.”

“So you said before you met Miss Carew. But since then — ”

“A good friend you have spoilt, Allant Thorpe,” reproached the injured lady. “You should know how different it was. A wife is the property of her husband. Kurt’s wife will be a Prussian because he is a Prussian. But Elsa — I will not that a daughter of the Von Kissels should be lost to the Fatherland. No more shall I listen.”

“I’ll not ask you to,” retorted Thorpe. “I thought you’d be glad to make Elsa happy. You know she loves me, and you know what I’m like. All this time you’ve treated me as a son. You know that I have Kurt’s best wishes — that he

and I are the closest of friends. Yet because I'm an American you'd make Elsa miserable; you'd — ”

“ You made love to her by stealth, ” flung back the offended frau.

“ No, only in the usual and honorable manner of my own country, ” Thorpe defended himself.

“ *Ja, ja*, you would prove it, *nicht?* The honorable manner of your land is not honorable in the Fatherland. No people are so high as Germans. No daughter of the Von Kissels shall wed a man of a lower race. ”

“ Mother! ” gasped Elsa.

Thorpe smiled reassuringly into her grief-stricken face.

“ Americans are made up of the pick of all races, the German included, ” he asserted. “ For another thing, we judge a man by what he is himself. Kurt considers me worthy to be his heart's friend. What more need you ask, dearest? You love me. Let your mother keep your dot, if she wishes to be unjust. Only — marry me. We shall go to live in America and be happy. ”

But Elsa's golden head drooped in despairing resignation.

“ The mother has not consented, ” she sighed. “ It may not be. ”

“ Then you do not really love me, ” replied Thorpe.

Elsa quivered but only clung the closer to her mother. Thorpe turned away and walked out of the boudoir in a white heat.

CHAPTER IX

A BEE IN THE HONEY

By the time Kurt and Lucy returned from their motoring, Thorpe's anger had cooled. He had taken thought of the strict training in obedience to parental dictation under which Elsa had been reared from infancy. Unquestioning compliance with Authority had been made her second nature by those who had moulded her young life. Like the privates of the German army, all her will and initiative had been drilled and subdued, until she lacked even the inclination to disobey. She was not to blame.

The passing of his hot indignation left Thorpe only the more resolute. He had won the daughter's love. Now he would force the consent of the mother...He was waiting on the steps of the *porte-cochère* when Kurt handed the beaming Lucy from her car as if she were a piece of priceless porcelain.

"'Lo, Loo. What's this?" he greeted. "Looks as if you've cured Kurt of his grouch."

A fist blow could not have more completely dashed the young officer's blissfulness than the well-meant banter. Kurt stared at his friend a moment; then abruptly hung his head as if stricken with grief or shame, and hurried into the castle.



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“ No, I — we — Don't joke about it, Loo! I'd be the happiest of men — She loves me! She told me so... Only, you see, her mother forbids.”

“ Another *verboten*. The angel could not dream of anything else than minding mother. What a dutiful, docile wife she would be — the made in Germany brand! ”

“ Shall be,” corrected Thorpe. “ I'm going to have her, and you are going to help.”

“ Oh, am I? ”

“ All we need is to crack the shell of Tante's confounded race prejudice. She is willing to accept you because a wife merges into her husband's family. That's the whole trouble. She likes me, but she believes Elsa will be lowered by becoming an American.”

“ Well, if you're not enough of a Lochinvar — ”

“ You know that's out of the question, Loo. I might persuade the child, but she would suffer. Unless her mothers consents, it will break her heart.”

Lucy's level gaze wavered and sank. After a perceptible pause, she asked in a listless tone: “ What is it you wish me to do? ”

“ Put in a good word for me with Tante,” answered Thorpe, his eyes aglow with eagerness. “ I know you can persuade her. She'd do anything for Kurt.”

“ And you think I'd do anything for you? ”

“ I love her, Loo. I've no chance to get her if you don't help me.”

The appeal seemed to fall on deaf ears. Lucy did not look up. When she replied, her tone

was more listless than before: "Oh, I can't say. I'll think about it."

She left Thorpe standing in a daze of disconcertion. Her indifferent bearing remained unchanged until she was alone in her magnificent Louis XV bedchamber, with all the doors bolted. Then, safe even from the sympathetic gaze of her elderly maid, she began in outward stillness to fight the hardest of all battles that can come to one who loves.

Solitude is the refuge and defense of those who suffer most deeply.

Lucy remained secluded in her chamber. She refused to see anyone except her maid until mid-morning of the next day. Then, at last, she gave permission to admit the anxiously waiting Frau von Kissel. The good lady found her in bed, a trifle pale and languid but otherwise unchanged.

"*Ach, liebe fraulein!*" she sighed her relief. "I feared you had a bad sickness incurred. I must hasten to tell my Kurtzie. The poor boy is most sad. Do not tell me, *liebe fraulein*, you have refused him!"

The tone of the fond mother was tragic. Lucy did not smile. She herself was still suffering far too acutely.

"I have yet to refuse him," she replied.

"Yet!"

"He has not asked. When he does it will be time for me to consider the advisability of marrying into a family that despises me."

"*Nein, nein!*" remonstrated the frau. "With the highest regard we regard you, *liebe fraulein* — the most highest!"

Lucy lifted her dark eyebrows in an expression that was both incredulous and mildly ironical.

“ You say that, yet believe Americans to be an inferior race. Is it my fortune that makes the difference between your feelings for me and those you hold towards Allan Thorpe? ”

Frau von Kissel blinked. Her plump jowl drooped. Not so would any German fraulein speak to a frau of noble family. But a mother must think first of her son.

“ My duty is to my children, ” she replied with a dignity that was not altogether lacking in appeal. “ Above all I must be sure they make good marriages. My Kurt is high-born and high-minded. You shall be sure he wants not your fortune. He is most unhappy with love for yourself only. ”

“ Is it any worse for him to be unhappy than for others? ” murmured Lucy, her darkening eyes fixed in a gaze that looked through and beyond all earthly objects. “ Lan Thorpe is as much of a man as Kurt is. I am no less an American than he. In scorning him you scorn me. ”

The rounded mouth of the frau fell frankly agape. She stared at the unseeing girl beside her in wide-eyed perplexity.

“ But why would you do it? ” she queried. “ Why would you give him up to Elsa if you so love him? ”

This wonder of intuitive perception from the phlegmatic Teutonic matron seemed neither to surprise nor to stir Lucy.

“ I do not admit — I have not admitted that I

love any man," she replied with cool composure.

Again Frau von Kissel ruminated —

"So...good, good...Love that comes after the wedding is better...I will forgive those naughty children. The foolish Elsa weeps her eyes out...Then you will accept my *lieber* Kurt, *nicht?*"

"I shall make no promises," said Lucy.

"*Ach* — but that is wise — and maidenlike. We will send for those undutiful children, and after they are made joyful —"

"Not — here!" whispered Lucy, the hidden nails of her clasped fingers cutting into the white skin.

Frau von Kissel gave the girl a motherly kiss on the temple and wisely withdrew without speaking. She sent a footman for Thorpe. The servant found him vainly attempting to play a more dispirited game of billiards than Kurt. The message roused the young officer to a glow of generous gratulation.

"Hang the score, Lan. Hit out," he said. "If the mother has sent for you, it must mean a fair-weather change."

Thorpe was far less sanguine. His doubts were not lessened when he saw Elsa drooping with shame before her sternly indignant mother.

"Good morning, Tante," he said. "I understand you wish to see me."

"I could wish I might never see you again, Allant," chided the frau. "You have been most so undutiful as this bad daughter. I have sent for you to make me apologies for your so-wrong doings."

“That is more than I can agree to,” replied Thorpe. “I am very sorry that you are displeased, but I see no reason to apologize for loving Elsa and winning her love in the manner that is considered right and honorable by my own people.”

“Your people — *ach*, that is the hardness! But Fraulein Carew — she has said weighty words. *Ja, und* some better Americans may be better as some worse Deutsch, *nicht?*”

“Yes, that is possible, Tante,” assented Thorpe, his eyes brightening as he sensed the purport of this reluctant admission.

Frau von Kissel sighed and went on heavily:

“You should know, Allant, I have otherwise loved you as a son. You have done wrong, but it was after the manner of your outlandish, undutiful custom. Besides, you have said Elsa believed you had asked my permission. Now you shall both behave as lovers not yet betrothed.”

The reversal was too sudden for Elsa to more than half grasp. She stood motionless, gazing at her mother in wide-eyed bewilderment. But Thorpe was prepared. The first hint of yielding on the part of the prejudiced mother gave proof that Lucy had interposed. He sprang to clasp his arm about Elsa's bowed shoulders.

The girl's startled glance darted around to his ardent face and back to her mother in timid appeal. Though still reluctant to yield, Frau von Kissel smoothed out her frown and even melted to a half smile.

“To love is not forbidden, child,” she said.

“Only there is no binding. The betrothal cannot be until we go home to Berlin.”

“But I shall consider myself bound,” pledged Thorpe, and he kissed his trembling captive without waiting for the parental permission.

The faded eyes of the frau suddenly brimmed with tears.

“*Ach! ach!*” she sighed. “To be young — to love — how joyous, how good!”

Elsa uttered a cooing little cry of gladness and pressed her blushing cheek against Thorpe’s shoulder. He led her out through the open casement window and down the terrace steps into the rose garden where he had won the confession of her love.

The sanction of her mother had cleared the girl’s conscience from the guilt of disobedience. Love now melted the last barrier of her maidenly shyness — a love so innocent that it felt no restraint of false modesty.

“What happiness we now have!” blissfully whispered Elsa. “Would that everybody were this happy!...Poor Kurt!”

“Ungrateful Kurt,” rallied Thorpe. “Think how kind Loo has been to him. Yet he goes around glum as a loser.”

“If you could but cheer him!” sighed Elsa. “I cannot understand him. First I thought it was because he had not the pictures. Yet now that I have given them to him, he is vexed with me.”

“Pictures?” idly inquired Thorpe, his thoughts centered on the exquisite tint and texture of the girl’s cheek.

“Not even are they that yet,” she replied, hardly less casually. “It is the kodak film for which we went to the embassy in Paris. Kurt was so fearful it might make trouble for Lucy. He said if I brought it to him, he could tell if the views really were *verboten*.”

Thorpe roused to sudden interest. “You asked Loo for the film, and she let you have it?”

The girl looked up at him with a trustful, unwavering gaze of perfect innocence.

“*Nein*. I took it without her knowledge. Kurt feared that she might say no. I did not like to take it without asking. But Kurt said the service was for the Fatherland. Whatever is done to serve the Fatherland cannot be wrong. That is known to all.—Why do you look at me so strangely, Allan?”

With a mental wrench, Thorpe brought himself up sharp and forced a reassuring smile. A kiss completely calmed and satisfied the girl.

“Come,” he said. “The minutes have darted past like bees honey-gathering. We must not stay longer, else the mother may be cross.”



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cool composure, Lucy flung her arms about the grieved child-woman.

Thorpe found Kurt still trying to kill thought in half-hearted billiard play. He sought to lighten the blow that he must strike.

“Chop off, brother-to-be,” he ordered. “There’s something...But first, I want to tell you that Barkis is willing, and the mother does not object, though the betrothal must wait until our return to Berlin.”

Kurt dropped his cue and grasped Thorpe’s hand, all his moody dejection overflowed by the wave of sympathetic delight that welled up at the first intimation of the good news.

“I knew you’d feel that way,” Thorpe broke in on the fervid congratulations. “You’re as square a pal as Loo...Which reminds me. I’m going to speak now not only as a friend but as your brother — as a coming member of the family. Elsa opened her heart to me. You understand how that was, and so will not blame her. Among other things, she told me about the film.”

Automatically as a boxer’s reflex to a blow, Kurt drew himself up to military rigidity, heels clicking, chin out-thrust.

“What I have done was done in the service of the Fatherland,” he declared. “That is enough for me, whatever the consequences.”

Thorpe stared. This was an entirely new Kurt to him.

“That’s rather beyond me, old man,” he said. “Well, what’s done is done. Next thing is to make the best of the mess. You’ve had your look at the views. Better slip the film back

again before Loo takes a notion to look for it.”

“I have my orders. The views are *verboten*. They must be delivered to the Greater Headquarters.”

“Must be?” Thorpe caught at the point. “Then you’ve not yet sent them?”

“No,” admitted Kurt, after a moment of hesitancy.

“Thank God!” ejaculated Thorpe. He caught his friend’s shoulder in a hard grip and looked straight into the clear blue eyes that were so like Elsa’s.

“Listen, old man. You know the saying that a blunder is worse than a crime. Your Prussian secret service have fozzled this deal from the first. They may know German psychology, but what they do not know about the people of other nations would fill a library. You remember how Loo felt over the way they tried to bully her. What will she think of the officer and gentleman who, under the pretense of courtship, took advantage of her kindly intimacy — of her friendly hospitality — to steal her property?”

The blow struck with merciless force, but it was delivered straight from the shoulder, and the look in the striker’s steady eyes told of the spirit behind it. No flame of anger or resentment flared in the young Prussian’s white cheeks. He flinched before the sudden dismaying revelation of how persons other than of German rearing must regard what he had done.

“God knows — God knows it was not easy!” he groaned. “Yet my orders... The service of the Fatherland!”

“You believed that your duty required you to betray a friend — to steal from the woman you love — from a friend who trusts you? No wonder you have suffered! I see it all now. Poor old Kurt!...Orders — this crazy idea of loyalty — what a hell for you...That is, if you haven’t been shamming love.”

“Shamming! You can think that?” — The tortured man stared at his friend in an agony of reproach and appeal. “But you must believe me! Not alone loyal service — the fear for her. — Von Pappheim threatened...”

Thorpe’s convulsive grip relaxed. His eyes cleared.

“Then it was for her sake — to save her? Now I can understand. Yet for you, of all men, to do such a thing, Kurt! Had you only asked her for the film, on the plea that to turn it in would help your career! Ten to one, there’s nothing really harmful in the views. Now is there? Own up.”

“I do not know, Allan. My orders were to secure the film from — from the accused without her knowledge, and to bring it myself to Greater Headquarters, undeveloped.”

This time Thorpe put a hand on each shoulder of his friend with a clasp as sympathetic as it was firm.

“You’re in a tight box, old man. I can see that. But I know what you will do, now that you see what I think of it and what Lucy would have thought if you had gone ahead as planned.”

“You — mean — that I — ”

“Who wished the damnable spy work on



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“No — wait, Allan... My word of honor — I shall go to her. After she has developed the views she may permit... But no, I can no longer hope. You know what I shall be required to do when I have made report of my failure. My one wish is that you will stay in the Fatherland and take my place as son and head of the family.”

“But, Kurt, I can’t believe it!”... Thorpe’s unnerved arms fell flaccidly to his sides — “The ax, too! You’re joking — you must be joking! Germany, of all countries — enlightened Germany!”

The young officer left him groping in a daze of perplexity over this paradox. He found Lucy still with his mother and sister.

“I wish to see Miss Carew alone.”

Quietly as he spoke, his look sent Frau von Kissel hurrying out as wonderstruck and frightened as Elsa. But Lucy gave no sign that she noticed his haggard face and burning eyes. There was no change in her tone and manner —

“What is it, Kurt? Don’t tell me your leave has been recalled.”

“A longer leave is before me,” he replied — “a leave from which there is no returning. That is nothing of itself. The bitterness is that I shall no more see you.”

Lucy’s brows lifted inquiringly.

“A poor riddle, is it not?” he flicked at himself. “Enough of it. Now for the plain truth. Here are your *verboten* snapshots, Miss Carew.”

He handed over the little box that had held

the film during its journey from Berlin to Paris in the American legation dispatch-pouch. Lucy's eyes widened ever so slightly as she took it and turned it over in her hand. The seal was still unbroken.

“Why, of all things,” she murmured. “My absurd little white elephant. Where could I have dropped it?”

“You did not,” replied Kurt, stiffening to tense erectness. “I spied upon you—I stole the film. It is true I see no dishonor in that. High above all else is loyalty and service to the Fatherland. Yet Allan has opened my eyes to how base, how treacherous you will regard my act. From that there is no escape—and I shall be the one to pay...No more about me...You and the Fatherland—”

“Stop!” broke in Lucy. “I can't even guess—You're talking like a crazy man. I can't believe you've been drinking.”

“They jeered at me in the Student Corps because I would never drink to intoxication. No, I am sober, and I am not crazed. A soldier must obey, whatever the consequences. My orders were to bring that film, undeveloped, to Berlin. Allan has shown me that I must ask your permission and that the views must first be developed to make certain they are harmless.”

“How can they be otherwise—such tiny snapshots?”

“Unfortunately, the lens of your little camera is of the most perfect German make. Most of your snapshots can be magnified to a very large size. If these disclose the details of the howitzer

you photographed, the secret might fall into the hands of the Fatherland's enemies."

"Oh, I see...and all the time I thought it only the fussiness of your *verboten* cranks. But it was their own fault. Why didn't they tell me? ...And you!" — The girl's half-amused smile vanished in the sudden straightening of her lovely lips. "Why did you not ask permission before you — took?"

Miserable as were the young officer's eyes, their straightforward gaze did not flinch or waver.

"My orders were to secure the film without your knowledge."

"Your orders? Would any gentleman give such orders, or any gentleman carry them out?"

Kurt quivered as if lashed in the face. "You have power to make me suffer...You are not of the Fatherland; you do not understand that I had no choice but to obey."

"Then why have you returned the film after doing — what you have done?"

The shrewd query pierced the barrier of pride and shame that had constrained him. Out burst his pent-up emotion in a flood of passionate entreaty:

"Lucy, you will, you must believe me! Von Pappheim said that vengeance would be exacted against you if the film were not secured. My thought was not alone to serve the Fatherland. No less was it to save you. Can you doubt my love, when for you I have failed the Fatherland — have disobeyed the orders of the High Command, and shall pay with my life?"



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the film. Take it to Herr. Count von Pappheim, with my compliments on his silliness.”

Kurt drew back from the proffered prize as if it had been an adder.

“But you do not understand,” he remonstrated. “Allan pointed out to me the trap.”

“Lan?”

“Yes. If the views are harmful, Von Pappheim will use them as proof that you are a dangerous spy.”

Lucy smiled ironically. “What of it? They can’t touch me outside Germany, and I don’t have to go back.”

“Yet if you do not!” exclaimed Kurt, his voice a-quiver with dread and longing. “Never then will I have any chance to win you! And it is not true that you would be safe in other lands — no, not even in your own... Listen, dearest fraulein! There is one way — one only. Destroy this fatal film before witnesses — before the mother and Elsa, Allan and myself. Then become my betrothed. They will make my punishment for disobedience light, for I shall have saved the *verboten* views from our enemies and won you over to loyalty to the Fatherland — and we shall be happy!”

Had he asked only for the destruction of the film Lucy would have complied. She might even have gone further and yielded to the ardent entreaty of his proposal. Her own suffering made her all the more sympathetic with his evident yearning for her. She had already given him her affection — and now the realization that he was in danger of death or disgrace because

of what she had done filled her generous heart with pity and alarm.

For a moment she stood hesitant, her decision trembling in a balance. Suddenly, in a flash, the full import of Kurt's remarks came home to her. He had said she would not be safe even in her own country! How dare any government make such a threat! All of Lucy's independence and high spirit welled up within her.

Her kind, almost tender look of commiseration hardened.

"I'll not be scared into an engagement nor into destroying my snapshots," she gave him her answer.

"But — but to save yourself, dearest Lucy!"

"Oh, I know your own safety is a secondary matter with you, Kurt, and I shall bear that in mind. I'll not give up my film before I know whether the views really are harmful. Of course I've waited. It wouldn't have been fair to let a French photographer do the developing."

"That was most kind of you, and I can tell the High Command of it in proof of your innocence of all wrong intent."

Lucy shrugged.

"It's all their fault, making a serious matter out of a trifle. I will develop the film myself. If the views are so harmless that you believe the herr count cannot use them against me, you may take the negatives to him. But if they are dangerous, I'll neither give them up nor destroy them. I will put them in a safe place, with directions that they are to be turned over to the French military authorities

if the least injury is done to you or to myself.”

“Lucy!” cried the young officer, between consternation over the danger to his beloved Fatherland and admiration for the girl’s clever scheme to baffle Von Pappheim.

“That’s my answer,” she said. “The sooner we find out, the better. You might ask Lan to take a spin to-morrow morning and see if he can get me a kodak developer. I tried in Sezanne, when you were at the garage. But they did not seem to have the kodak tanks.”



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lock up the film. Pass the word around that you're suddenly called away on official business."

A few minutes later the friends came out to the car, followed by a servant with Kurt's suitcase and bag. They found Henri chatting volubly with one of the castle chauffeurs who had previously called himself to the attention of the visitors as a Swiss from one of the German-speaking cantons. He stepped back and stood at attention, as blank-faced and deferential as a waiter.

Thorpe directed Henri to drive to Chalons with all haste, as Lieutenant von Kissel wished to reach that city as soon as possible. He looked significantly at the bag and suitcase, and jumped into the tonneau after Kurt.

As Henri whirled the car off around the drive, Thorpe's backward look glimpsed the other chauffeur running towards the garage.

"Thought so, old man. That wooden-faced Swiss watch has been keeping tick on you — he's your shadow. Must be scooting to phone. Can't expect to overhaul us himself, after what I said to Henri. But a phone message — Suppose we switch to Vitry? Might be awkward results if one of your secret service men saw us go into a photographer's."

"No. We might have to pass through the Camp de Mailly, the great French maneuver grounds. My orders do not require me to obtain information in that line," replied the young Prussian, with the first trace of bitterness that Thorpe had ever known him to display.

Nothing could have proved more positively

that spy-work was repugnant to his fine high-strung spirit. Thorpe glanced back, but did not change the directions he had given to Henri.

The car was already out through the main gates and sweeping around the sharp curves of the road that wound down the hillside. From the last turn that gave Thorpe a view of the gates he saw a motorcyclist whiz out of the chateau grounds.

“Look!” he called Kurt’s attention. “Your Swiss watch has a fast movement. — Touch her up a notch, Henri. You don’t fancy you’re hawgeeing an ox-cart, do you?”

“What’s the use?” said Kurt. “No touring car can out-race a good motorcycle.”

“We’ll at least give him a run for his money,” replied Thorpe as he jammed his hat on tighter.

The car had whirled out of the trees, around the last return curve that brought it to the foot of the castle hill. A mile or two west was the main road that ran north from Sezanne, down across the Marshes of St. Gond and on through a forest, to Epernay on the Marne. Henri turned east, towards Fere Champenoise and Vitry. The last down-swoop gave the car full headway. At a mile a minute clip it took the long, easy, winding upgrade. It was still on high, booming along nearly forty miles an hour, when it came up among the rolling pine-clad hills of the plateau.

But the expectancy in Kurt’s backward glance was justified. The pursuing motorcycle whizzed up the last rise at a speed that fast overhauled the car. Thorpe instinctively doubled his fist. Kurt half drew his service automatic pistol.

Though the motorcycle rider wore big green goggles, his identity was unmistakable as his machine came roaring up behind the car. Yet Thorpe and Kurt could not see that he so much as glanced at them. He whirled alongside and rocketed ahead along the level road at fully sixty-five miles an hour. Thorpe shouted for Henri to keep the motorcyclist in sight. With a roar from the opened cut-out, the powerful car leaped forward like a dinosaur in chase of its prey.

Yet still the motorcycle gained. It, too, had put on speed. After a few whirlwind miles, it was almost out of sight when it came to a fork in the road. The pursuers saw it swerve south-eastwards towards the village of Fere Champe-noise and shoot on with no lessening of its terrific speed. -

A few moments later Henri approached the fork at rapidly slackening speed. He turned to the northeast. Kurt jerked out his French road map.

“*Donnerwetter!*” he ejaculated. “That fire-devil is heading straight for Camp de Maily. Can it be he is a French spy — not German?”

“All the more reason, if that’s true, for you to loop the loop while I warn Loo. They can’t jail you for making the little trip. You took out your passports as a Prussian officer, and they’ll find on you nothing out of the way.”

“Yes, there is that to be thankful for. I have been spared what is usually required of our officers in foreign lands. In his eagerness to trap Lucy, Von Pappheim omitted the general



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heim hurriedly muttered to Kurt in English:

“ You bring the film...good...about to... after you...complete Maily plans, but could not...Verdun...less than a week now until... secret mobilization...the seventeenth...”

The line had moved along. Kurt bought his ticket, not to the German frontier, as planned, but to Charleroi, in Belgium. While Von Pappheim, affecting a Spanish accent, booked passage to Liége, the younger officer stepped back of him and scribbled a few words on a visiting card. He slipped the message into Thorpe's hand and gave him a nudge to hurry off. He then riveted Von Pappheim's attention upon himself by dashing for a train. Thorpe slipped away in the opposite direction and hastened to read the message in the nearest secluded corner.

At first glance the writing seemed to be an unmeaning jumble —

“ Sienkiewicz Noah Swiss Ararat wings.”

But he puzzled only a few moments over the imprumtu code before he caught the clue. “ Noah ” and “ Ararat ” suggested the Flood, otherwise “ The Deluge ” — that terrible war novel of the Polish writer Sienkiewicz. Instantly the interpretation of the entire message flashed out with startling clearness:

“ War deluge. Flee to Switzerland.”

There had been no need to mention Frau von Kissel and the girls. The purpose of the flight would of course be to save the ladies — the German ones in particular — from the annoyance or danger of detention in the midst of a hostile nation. What Thorpe had overheard of Von

Pappheim's talk served to piece out the picture. One of the big Powers was already secretly mobilizing. A declaration of war might be expected within a week. Von Pappheim had been spying at Camp de Mailly, but had failed to get plans of the mighty fortress of Verdun.

Thorpe's first impulse was to order Henri about for the return trip at breakneck speed. But he knew Lucy. She had sent for a developing tank. With the help of Henri, he hunted Chalons until he found an open photo-supply shop that had in stock the desired tank and chemicals.

The return trip required nearly three hours. On arriving at the castle, Thorpe learned that madame and the mademoiselles had retired, and he decided not to disturb them.

Early in the morning Elsa appeared at the breakfast table beaming and blushing with delight. She was as fresh and lovely as any dew-gemmed bud in the rose garden. The French butler discreetly withdrew at the first hint that his services were not required. Thorpe gave himself over to the bliss of the brief half hour alone with his darling. He said nothing about Kurt's message. To have dashed the joyous spirits of the dear girl would have been cruel.

All too soon Lucy sent word that she and Frau von Kissel were waiting to hear about Kurt. Elsa accompanied Thorpe to the boudoir. Frau von Kissel, primly costumed for the day, was attacking a hearty German breakfast of sausages and boiled cabbage, while Lucy lolled in a lacy negligee, neglectful of her French roll

and coffee. She took the kodak developing tank from Thorpe and handed it to Marcelle, with a word of smiling dismissal.

“Where’s Kurt?” she broke in on Thorpe’s dutiful greeting to his promised mother-in-law. “I wish to develop that nuisance of a film as soon as possible. It’s beginning to get on my nerves.”

“He took the train for Belgium,” said Thorpe. “I’m afraid he has been recalled by Von Pappheim and can’t come back at all—unless with the German army—which means never.”

He showed Kurt’s card. His interpretation of the words, coupled with what he had heard of Von Pappheim’s talk, drew many “*Achs!*” from Elsa and her mother. But while the girl was readily reassured by Thorpe’s disbelief that actual danger of war impended, Frau von Kissel was not to be consoled.

“*Krieg! krieg!*” she moaned over her last sausage. “*Mein lieber Kurtzie! Der Tag is set!*”

“But that’s absurd,” remonstrated Lucy. “I agree with Lan. You know how Kurt insists that the Kaiser can and will keep Europe from being so silly. Haven’t we peace treaties and the Hague Court to settle all disputes between nations? War is out of date.”

Frau von Kissel swallowed a mouthful of cabbage.

“You are Americanisch—you do not understand. The baroness wrote that all harvesting had ceased. Now I see why. The secret mobilization has taken all the young peasants.—We



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—I may never again have the chance to be the chatelaine of a chateau minus the encumbrance of a marital attachment. We're far too comfortable here to think of running—if Kurt was lied to by herr count.”

“*Nein, nein, fraulein!*” exclaimed the shocked frau. “Herr Count von Pappheim is too high-born to lie to even a lower officer. *Der Tag* is set. We shall have *krieg*.”

“That's German for ‘war,’ isn't it? Well, then, here's the other thing—If you people of Europe are so crazy as to go to fighting each other, I propose to keep out of the mess, like a good American. There's herr count and those ridiculous *verboten* snapshots to make me keep clear of Germany until—”

“No doubt that's why Kurt suggested Switzerland,” broke in Thorpe. He knows that the little republic will be an Ararat of peace in the midst of the war deluge.”

“Yes, but I don't care to be in the midst. The flood might rise too high—if the diplomatic engineers are foolish enough to let the dam break at all. Kurt once told me that the neutrality of Belgium is absolutely guaranteed by France and England and Germany. If I have to leave my ducal castle, I shall go there.”

Thorpe held up the card message. “Must be sweltering down in the Belgian lowlands,” he said. “No place in Europe cooler now than the Alps.”

“*Ja, fraulein,*” added ‘Frau von Kissel. “Besides, has not Kurt given command for us?”

“By what right?” demanded Lucy, her eyes

flashing dangerously at Thorpe. "I am not a German frau — as yet. If I leave here at all, I choose to go towards the coast, where I shall be free to sail home whenever I wish."

"All right," Thorpe hastened to agree. "It doesn't matter, just so we get into territory certain to remain neutral. Tante and Elsa can cross the German frontier from Belgium as easily as from Switzerland, and we can all tour Belgium together, if the war scare blows over — as no doubt it will. Only I know how Kurt would worry if we should leave you alone, here in a country that, ten to one, will be in the fight, if there is one."

"Yes, if there is a fight," Lucy repeated the qualification.

"I could hurry Elsa and Tante straight into Germany by way of Chalons and Verdun, or the Vitry-Nancy route. But — you would then be without a chaperon, Loo. I couldn't very well come back."

Lucy smiled ironically and looked up at the angelic face of Elsa. "That's true, Lan. And, anyway, why should you?"

"Because you're my countrywoman and my — old chum!" he rejoined with unexpected heat. "Come now, Loo. It's hard to tear yourself away from this soft snap, I know. But be a sport. Make it Belgium with us. You know how we'd miss you."

The girl's eyes sank before his eager affectionate gaze.

"Well, I'm not sure. I'll see — if you don't try to rush me too much," she murmured.

CHAPTER XII

QUI VIVE?

Frau von Kissel promptly hurried Elsa off to begin their packing. Thorpe sauntered from the boudoir and, once clear, headed swiftly for the garage. He soon had Henri and the garage men hard at work overhauling Lucy's car.

At luncheon all appeared in their motoring costumes, except Lucy. She wore one of her most fragile house dresses.

“Going for a spin?” she bantered.

“No, we thought that you — But don't think we're trying to push you, Loo,” Thorpe cut in ahead of Frau von Kissel. “If you really don't feel like starting to-day — ”

“Do not say it, Allant,” reproached the frau. “Better should we urge the *liebe* fraulein to hasten... *Ach*, Loocee, the French are a low, treacherous, degenerate folk, altogether unlike our noble, high Deutsch race. I fear much for you and Elsa should war overtake us among them.”

Lucy smiled.

“You talk as if we were living in the Dark Ages or the Balkans. If Europe is so crazy as to go to war, your country will show what its *kultur* means, and the others will respond in kind — and



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the whole and various details of a monstrous squat cannon, of a type he had never before seen.

“Hello,” he said. “This must be one of the new howitzers that the German militarists have kept hidden but have been bragging about — just as they have blurped over their Zeppelins.”

“Would you say these snapshots are harmful?” asked Lucy.

Thorpe handed them back, with a doubtful shake of his head.

“If enlarged, they might reveal valuable information. Can’t say. I’m no army man.”

“Then I shall do what I told Kurt — leave them here, addressed to Polly’s husband, the duke, but not to be opened unless he hears of the Germans having harmed Kurt or myself.”

“Good idea,” approved Thorpe. “I always suspected you had brains, Loo.”

“Maybe I have, but — I haven’t always used them,” murmured the girl. She turned away brusquely. “That’s all. Go back to your indigo-eyed angel.”

Thorpe went off, not a little puzzled and ruffled by her curt dismissal. His afternoon and evening were not as pleasant as they might have been. Frau von Kissel kept Elsa near her and fretted over the delay in the departure. Kurt had expressed his will. Not to go at once was most wrong... Perhaps to escape these complaints, Lucy appeared only in time to share the Sunday feast prepared by the chateau’s *chef*. After the dessert she again left her guests alone.

In the morning Frau von Kissel appeared at

the breakfast table as early as Elsa and quite as ready for the trip. Her usual phlegmatic placidity had long been lost in a whirl of agitation when, past mid-morning, Lucy at last came on the scene.

“ I’ve been repacking all the trunks I ordered sent on from Paris,” she explained. “ They must be ready for shipment to me, in case I don’t come back to play chatelaine again.”

“ *Ach, fraulein*, once escaped from this land of frog and snail eaters, you must never venture to return among the low chatter-apes,” urged Frau von Kissel. “ I fear more every moment.”

Lucy took pity upon her panic-stricken guest — “ If you’ll order out the car, Lan.”

A few minutes later the visitors passed out through the gateway of the grand chateau as they had entered it, with the exception that Kurt’s seat in the car was unoccupied.

A leisurely trip brought them to Chalons early in the afternoon. After luncheon in a quaint provincial *café*, Lucy smiled apologetically at Frau von Kissel.

“ I do so wish to shop a bit. That would mean stopping overnight. Perhaps it’s a mistake — our Belgian tour. Lan could take you and Elsa by train, straight through to your own frontier, in a few hours.”

But the fact that the trip was under way had quieted the frau’s panic. Lack of any excitement on the part of the volatile French continued to lull her apprehensions. She lay abed the next forenoon, while Thorpe and the girls visited the magnificent Gothic cathedral where Joan of Arc

brought to be crowned the weakling whose kingdom she had saved.

Upon their return to the hotel, the tourists for the first time learned of Austria's astounding declaration of war on Serbia.

Yet still the French and their newspapers remained calm. It was believed that the trouble would be localized—perhaps another Balkan war would be staged, with obstreperous little Serbia for victim. Even Frau von Kissel was completely reassured.

Instead of hurrying out of France, the tourists leisurely traveled west to Soissons, crossed to the north of the Aisne, and meandered back eastwards along the Chemin des Dames.

The second of August found them loitering among the beautiful forested hills of the Ardennes... But even this peaceful remote countryside was jarred by the first thunderclap of the out-roaring war storm—

Mid-afternoon the car's passage through one of the larger villages was blocked by a massed crowd of gaping, chattering peasants clustered before the *mairie*. In response to Henri's sharp queries, scores of loud tongues clacked the news, to the accompaniment of long-drawn "O-oo-lalas!" — Belgrade bombarded by the Austrians; Jaurès, the pacifist, murdered in Paris; war declared by Germany on Russia; general order of mobilization throughout France...

Henri rose in his seat and faced about to the tonneau, transformed in a twinkling from a rather subservient mechanic to an erect, flashing-eyed soldier.



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The distance to the Belgian frontier on the east was somewhat the nearer; but with the war deluge bursting the floodgates, the name of Sedan was ominous. Thorpe headed north, on the west side of the Meuse, for the deep indentation of Belgian territory that curves southward from between Namur and Mons.

Though the car whirled honking through the country, hamlets without the slightest attempt being made to check its flight, the village on the frontier was not reached until close upon midnight. Here, between inexperience with war conditions and his anxiety for the safety of his charges, Thorpe fell into a serious blunder. At so remote and quiet a village the party might have been permitted to cross over the neutral frontier into Belgium without trouble, despite the German passports of Elsa and her mother. The regular course would have been for the party to have gone to the inn for the night and presented themselves to the customs inspector at a comfortable hour in the morning.

Thorpe, however, figured that all the border guards had been hurried away to defend the German frontier south of the Duchy of Luxembourg. He whirled into the village at high speed, determined to "buck the line" and shoot over into Belgium before the sleepy French officials could question his passage. The map showed no stream to be crossed or fortifications to be passed at this point.

All the village appeared sunk in the placid stillness of midnight slumber. The great purring car shot swiftly down the center of the wide

main street. A minute or two more, and the party would be over the line on Belgium soil—

Out of the dark shadow of a house front shrilled a sharply challenging “*Qui vive?*”

Thorpe whirled on past the sentry. An instant later the sharp report of a military rifle shattered the silence of the night. Thorpe flung his weight on the accelerator. But even as the car leaped into racing speed, the road ahead glared with the lurid dazzle of a red flare. Thorpe threw on the brakes and managed to stop the car within half a length of the heavy timber barricade that barred the road.

From beyond the obstruction six or eight red-legged blue-coated French soldiers came running. They charged the car with bayonets held ready to lunge. Elsa's terrified shriek sent the deadly points to an up-tilt as the wielders perceived that the occupants of the tonneau were all women. No less suddenly, every weapon was swung around to menace Thorpe. He folded his arms and stared at the angry soldiers with a frown of well-feigned surprise and indignation.

“Here you! Put down those guns. They might hurt somebody,” he reproved. “What d'you mean by this?”

A corpulent gray-mustached little captain of Territorials appeared from behind the car, bowed profoundly to the ladies, and fixed Thorpe with a suspicious eye.

“Monsieur have ze frontier attempt to steal,” he accused.

“The frontier!” exclaimed Thorpe with simulated surprise. “Why, how is that? I know we

are still west of the Meuse, and this can't be Givet."

"Ah! ah! But *ze qui vive?* You do not stop. Explain, *s'il vous plaît.*"

Lucy leaned out to smile at the interrogator in her most graciously condescending manner.

"My dear Captain, how happy I am that we have found an officer and gentleman of France to advise us. Like myself, Mr. Thorpe is an American. We of course sent our chauffeur hurrying to mobilize, the instant we learned about the call for the army. Since then Mr. Thorpe has been driving as best he could with the road map for guide."

"Ah, *mademoiselle, très bien.* Chauffeur ver' excellen' who drive rapid in ze night. But Americaine — *oui, oui.* Ze totaile partee Americaine, *n'est-ce pas?*"

"No, only Miss Carew and myself," put in Thorpe, as he saw the captain's shrewd old eye glance in past Lucy to her shrinking companions.

The officer spoke to his men, bowed gallantly to the ladies, and with a polite request for permission, stepped up into the tonneau.

"Be so kind as to reverse," he directed Thorpe. "Ze pleasure I have to escort to ze *hôtel de ville.*"



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Elsa forgot her timidity. Her mother was confirmed in the belief that the little man feared to be stern. The touch of the steel under the velvet was not felt until, at luncheon, the captain gave his decision.

There was no reason why the maid and the Americans should not be permitted to cross into Belgium. But as for *les Allemandes*, alas! — was not their country at war with La France? Already an enemy patrol had set foot on the sacred soil of *la patrie*, and although the invaders had been destroyed to a man, the war was on. A thousand pardons, but distinguished madame and most charming angelic mademoiselle must be pleased to content themselves with official hospitality until orders regarding their disposal should be received from headquarters.

When the meaning of this forced itself upon the comprehension of the over-confident Frau von Kissel, she burst into a storm of vituperation that amazed Thorpe no less than Lucy. Though the Americans knew the German high-born lady to be somewhat prejudiced, she had always before appeared well bred and, as a rule, kindly. They now were forced to realize for the first time the profound depth and bitterness of racial hatred as fostered and cherished by the spirit of Prussianism.

Lucy turned to the suave little officer. “My dear Captain, you see that my friends are frightened out of their wits over what’s to become of them.”

“Alas, mademoiselle, my ver’, ver’ profoun’ regret. Have I not endeavor pleasance?”

“ Indeed, yes. You will continue no less kind, I am sure, while I take your messenger back to Paris and get the order to release my friends.”

“ *Très bien, mademoiselle.*”

“ You — you’d go, Luce — ” gasped Elsa, clutching Thorpe’s shoulder. “ But I cannot let Allan leave me! To be left here without him — I shall die! ”

The ironic glance that Lucy shot at Thorpe melted to half-amused, half-pitying tenderness as it rested upon the golden head of the terrified girl.

“ Never fear, honey. I’ll not take him from you. I qualified as my own chauffeur years ago. Allan shall stay here with you and your mother, while I go back to straighten out this tangle.”

“ *Nein, nein, fraulein!* ” protested Frau von Kissel. “ For you to go alone — that I cannot permit.”

“ I shall have Marcelle with me, and for protector the honest soldier whom our friend the captain will select as his messenger. Please say no more. I ran you into this mess. It’s for me to get you out.”

“ I don’t know about that, Loo,” said Thorpe, his eyes clouded with concern. “ Anyway, Tante is right. We had better try telegraphing. I don’t like the idea of your going back into France. At least wait a day or two — ”

“ Not a minute,” broke in Lucy, and she directed Marcelle to fetch her traveling bags from the inn.

Thorpe’s anxiety was eased when the mature, steady-eyed Territorial selected as messenger

by the captain proved to be a professional courier of known repute. He could be relied upon to safeguard Lucy against all annoyances and dangers, and he could advise her how to get in touch with officials.

At the start, haste may have caused the girl to draw away the hand to which Thorpe was clinging in reluctant farewell. The courier entered the tonneau with Marcelle, as requested by Lucy, who kissed Elsa and her mother, took gracious leave of the little captain, and calmly swung up into the driver's seat. The car slanted clear of the gutter, gliding smoothly from low into high. It left the village at something over forty miles an hour.

“*Mon Dieu!*” exclaimed the little captain.

“But *la belle Américaine* — she ees *une grande générale!*”

Thorpe set his teeth. He felt done — set down. Here he was left to cool his heels in innocuous desuetude while Lucy played the man's part. That was just the trouble with her. She was so determined never to be the clinging vine.

Thanks be, no girl was so absolutely her opposite in this respect as Elsa... He would at least have the privilege of protecting his golden-haired darling — of quieting her maidenly fears and enjoying her naïve love.

Yet during the days of anxious waiting that followed, even this blissful duty far from satisfied him. With startling rapidity, strange and shocking events began to shatter in quick succession the peace and serenity of all Europe. His concern over what might befall Elsa and her



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not to cross the border. Yet this was of small comfort to Thorpe. He knew that the French army might now be expected to sweep north over the line, to meet and check the invaders in the Cockpit of Europe.

Elsa and her mother trembled at the thought of being overtaken by the horde of "base degenerates." They prayed for the speedy return of Lucy. They besought Thorpe to bribe the French soldiers, or find other means of escape over the frontier.

Soon came horrible rumors that put an end to even Frau von Kissel's insistent urgings. From the north reports spread of dreadful outrages being committed upon the Belgian civil population by the German soldiers. Frau von Kissel at once denounced these tales as Belgian lies, and Thorpe quite agreed with her. The very hideousness of the alleged atrocities made them incredible to him. Scores of peaceful townsfolk and peasants shot down in cold blood without provocation; houses burned, often with their occupants; women raped and murdered; even little children mutilated, if not bayoneted — *Pah!* It was all unbelievable. Such savagery might have been possible in the Balkans. But in Western Europe — above all, to be attributed to the highly disciplined troops of *kultured* Germany — sheer nonsense!

Rumors and fragments of real news flew thick and fast — exaggerated accounts of the first British landing in France; the slaughter of Germans in their first rush on Liége; their return and destruction of the famous Liége forts with

monstrous howitzers; the French attack and repulse from Alsace; Italy's declaration of neutrality; the acknowledgment of the German chancellor that the invasion of Belgium was against international law and would be recompensed; and, along with this last, new and more hideous tales of atrocities.

Then came the flood that Elsa and her mother had so dreaded. Up out of the south swirled a rush of French cavalry, light artillery, infantry. At first only a few squads were routed through this little frontier village off the main routes of travel. The bulk of the French vanguard had passed northwards on either side before the eventful morning when a regiment of the Line appeared on the road from the south.

Opposite the first cottages the regimental band swelled out into the grand notes of the Marseillaise. The response was a crashing roar of soldiers' voices that rose above, dominated, and drowned out the blare of the instruments. Before the appalling burst of sound Frau von Kissel fled with Elsa to hide under the ancient bed of their tiny inn chamber, and Thorpe drew back from the window out of which they had been peering.

This was not the melodious, piquant Gallic national air of his indifferent memory. It was the harsh, defiant, menacing battle-shout of war-eager soldiers marching to hurl themselves upon the enemy. The measured thud of their down-stamping feet was like the beating of a titanic deadened drum. Their shouts were not singing, not music, but the fierce, almost ferocious cries of war-fired men who were prepared

to die for the sake of vengeance and liberty.

The rhythmic din roared nearer, thundered past the inn, and rolled on across the Belgian border. Thorpe found himself standing with hands clenched and muscles aquiver. His feeling was not fear; only awe and wonderment. He was as one who at the same moment has come in contact with fire and ice. A breath from the yawning steel-fanged maw of the god of war had swept over him and left him gasping.

He sprang forward to the window and leaned out to peer after that red-legged blue column of death, that was driving northwards to crash into the van of the German invaders. When at last it vanished in the dusty distance of the sweltering August forenoon, he brought his gaze to a shorter focus. The timber barricade had been hurled aside into the gutter. There were no sentries up the road. The guard before the door also had disappeared.

Thorpe sauntered through the inn and out around the little garden. Still no sign of any guard. In the front doorway he found the innkeeper and his wife gazing northwards up the road, their faded old eyes still aglow. His casually spoken request to see the captain was met by an upflinging of hands.

“*Oo-oo-la-la!* But did not monsieur know that *le capitaine* had marched off with the gallant regiment — marched off straight for Berlin?”

“The guards?”

“All gone, all gone. *Pouf!* — no more billet pay. But the kind patronage of monsieur and madame and mademoiselle — ”



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CHAPTER XIV

EDGE OF THE TEMPEST

Thorpe's first plan was to work eastward. Study of the road map caused him to reconsider. To cross the spur of French territory that thrust down the Meuse to Givet, they would have to twice pass the French boundary, in and out, and would then find themselves with forty miles of Belgium still between them and the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg. He decided to hold to a more northerly course, until they could swerve across the Meuse in Belgian territory, between Givet and Dinant.

Ten miles or so of trundling along in the clumsy cart behind the slow-plodding oxen, brought them to a main road in the beautiful country near Couvin. At a wayside shrine of "Our Lady of Sorrows" that was a-flutter with white paper pendants, an old Belgian peasant woman was kneeling in prayer beside her worn wooden shoes. Inquiry proved that she knew nothing of the district beyond Couvin. Like most peasants, she had never been a day's walk away from the home farm. Thorpe tossed her a coin, took a few of the unripe pears that she offered out of her basket, and drove on along the lesser road.

The fugitives had gone hardly a mile when

behind them, around the last tree-screened bend in the road, swept a car whose red-gold body shone like burnished copper. Elsa's timidity had kept her watchful of the road rearwards. She was first to see the coming car. At her cry Thorpe halted the oxen and stared around.

The car was already close. It sagged to an easy stop alongside the cart. In the tonneau sat Marcelle and the courier. From the driver's seat Lucy looked across at Thorpe, the extreme lustre of her eyes contradicting the ironic amusement of her smile.

"Hello, Lan," she greeted. "What's your hurry?"

"Got tired of waiting for you. The captain moved on, and we decided to follow suit."

"You don't call this moving, do you?" she bantered. "Only thing it could beat is the snail trot of the red tape-ists. I thought I'd never —"

"But you are here, Loo — thank God!" cried Thorpe with a fervor that brought a sudden flood of color into the girl's cheeks.

She bit her lip, and by a sharp gesture towards the cart, checked his rush to clasp her hand.

"You're delaying the game. Help them shift."

Thorpe swung down the over-joyed Elsa and eased the heavy descent of her heat-flushed but now smiling mother. The courier sprang to transfer from cart to car the bags and suitcases of the fugitives. Elsa had darted ahead into the tonneau, to reach over and fling her arms about Lucy.

“ Beloved, brave friend! ” she cried. “ What gladness that you also have escaped! ”

Lucy returned the young girl’s fervent kiss, gave the embracing arms a pat, loosened them, and crooked a finger at Thorpe. He took the seat beside her. The courier sprang in behind. Away whirled the car, while behind it the abandoned oxen began slowly to swing around towards the grass at the edge of the roadway.

The innkeeper had told Lucy about the release of the prisoners, and she had been directed by the old peasant woman at the cross roads. She did not wait for Thorpe to ask questions.

“ Such a mess, ” she said. “ I thought I’d never get back. If the rest of the world is like Paris, it’s on its head, spinning like a groggy top. The bureau clerks had me tangled in a hopelessly hard knot. Our embassy is literally swamped with a jam of panicky tourists — our own and the Germans and Austrians. I couldn’t bother the ambassador. I laid in wait with my car, and at last had the luck to give a cabinet member a lift. His card won me an audience with the war minister, who happens to be an intimate friend of Polly’s husband. That and my offer to take my courier guard to the front with dispatches — ”

“ To the front! ” exclaimed Thorpe. “ But isn’t that unsafe? And have we the right as neutrals to help the French? ”

“ If you’d seen how they’re seizing all private cars...I’d have been left stranded. The truth is, they took my car for the courier, but were courteous enough to let me come along. I wanted



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that in previous wars the skirmish would have been called a battle. The light field guns of the French had been too much for the machine-guns of the Germans.

Frau von Kissel looked contemptuously incredulous until the party passed a column of German prisoners — jägers with feathers in their caps — that were being marched southwards. Her jowl fell at the disconcerting sight, and her faded blue eyes gazed back at the prisoners, wide with bewilderment. She was still in a daze when the car turned down into the picturesque valley of the Meuse, near Dinant, and was directed to the headquarters of the French forces.

The commander was away, up along the railroad on the west bank. But the young staff lieutenant in charge proved to be even more affable than the little captain on the border. There was a homelike American twang in his introduction of himself as a graduate of the Boston Tech.

“Dee-lighted to meet you, Miss Carew — you too, Mr. Thorpe — and the ladies of the opposition... No need to hold you over for the Old Man. These orders are positive. I’ll issue passes to Dinant and out through our patrol lines... Only thing, I’ll have to lift your joy-wagon, Miss Carew. Sorry, but we need it in our business. Out east you may pick up an ox cart. It’s only about twenty-five miles to where the — er — Dutchmen are entrenched on the Ourthe.”

Lucy peaked her dark eyebrows at her friends, shrugged, and submitted to the inevitable.

“It’s too bad, Lan. I had planned to walk back to Dinant, and let you motor them on

through the German lines. Now it's impossible."

"You were? But there'll be no need. We must keep together," urged Thorpe. "You're coming on with us."

"*Ja*, dear Luce," murmured Elsa. "We cannot with you part."

"I'm afraid your police would think the same, honey. Anyway, my mind has been made up all along. I shan't venture into Germany, unless it's behind the French army."

The lieutenant bowed his appreciation of the double compliment. Frau von Kissel exclaimed in shocked protest at the bare suggestion:

"Impossible, fraulein! No invader shall ever set foot on the holy soil of the Fatherland."

"Then I'll beg to be excused until herr count retires from active service," said Lucy. "My idea was to run home out of this silly war mess. But to part with my car —"

She smiled at the handsome young Frenchman.

"Consider the circumstances, Lieutenant. My beloved chugger never would be the same again without me to match its symphony of hues. If it is commandeered, I go along as chauffeur."

"But — but, mademoiselle! —"

"Ataboy," put in Thorpe. "If she won't come with us, ship her straight to Calais. This is no place for stray girls."

Lucy smiled.

"Pay no attention to him, Lieutenant. He's engaged. I'm not — but I mean to be. I've learned that neutrals can help in Red Cross work. My ultimatum is: Car and girl, one and inseparable, for hospital service — Marcelle thrown

in to boot. United we run, divided we fall by the wayside.”

The black eyes of the lieutenant flashed admiring approval.

“*Très bien!* Ultimatum accepted P. D. Q., subject to endorsement by the Old Man. We’re short on ambulances... There are no Fritziees in Dinant to-day. You might chase your friends across before reporting at the field hospital for your insignia. Here is an order to the head surgeon.”

There followed gracious bows and smiles from all except Frau von Kissel. The car shot away and soon was rolling across the Meuse bridge. It turned along the river-front street where the picturesque little Belgian town lay huddled between the river and the limestone cliffs on which towered an undefended, obsolete old fortress. Here and there the buildings were scarred with shrapnel and bullet marks that told of the recent clash between the French and Germans.

Lucy stopped at the hotel St. Jacques, where a street sloped up at right angles to the river and connected with an eastward road.

“This is about as far as I should go, I guess,” she said. “Wouldn’t the hotel be a good place for you to stop over-night, Lan? You might be able to get some kind of rig for to-morrow.”

“Right-o,” agreed Thorpe.

While he handed down Elsa and Frau von Kissel, Lucy pointed out their luggage to a pair of very ready porters. She came around to clasp the hand of her departing chaperon.

“Good-by, Tante. I’m so sorry you can’t



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queer movie things... Well, I must get back and find out my future duties."

"They'll never allow a girl to stay near the front. It's against all military rules. Thanks be, they'll send you packing!"

"*Quien sabe?* Good-bye — and, say, Lan —" the girl's voice lost its ironic note — "keep away from the fighting. You have Elsa, and with Kurt gone from home, she and Tante will need you in Berlin."

"I'll steer clear of the mess if you will," bargained Thorpe.

Her gauntleted hands drew free from his reluctant clasp.

"Wait, fraulein — wait," whispered Frau von Kissel. She cast a glance over her shoulder at the group of Belgians in front of the hotel *café*, and bent closer. "We go to our glorious army. You have come from Paris. Maybe you have information about the French mobilization — information that shall help the crushing of the chatter-apes, *nicht?*"

"Oh, but don't you see, I'm an American — a neutral?" explained Lucy. "I'm not supposed to tell things that might help either side."

Frau von Kissel flushed. "What! Not even for the Fatherland against these low races? I had thought you more noble-minded. Besides, is it not Kurt loves you? Come, now, *liebe* fraulein. Nobody will tell you told."

"You heard me say I'm a neutral," said Lucy. As if to offset the sharpness of this, she turned to kiss Elsa with quivering tenderness. "Lan loves you, honey. Be good to him!" she

whispered as she embraced the tearful-eyed girl.

With a wave to the others and a quick, exultant laugh, she popped into the car. It swirled around under her skilled guidance and shot off up the street.

The Belgian hotel-keeper reassured his three new guests with the positive assertion that they could safely remain in Dinant for days if they wished. True, the long delayed advance of the German army from the Ourthe had begun. But there would be no fighting in Dinant. The French had withdrawn to the west bank of the Meuse, and not one of all the inhabitants of the town so much as dreamed of resisting the invaders. They knew too well the dreadful fate that had befallen the alleged *franc-tireurs* at Liège and other places in the north. Not the slightest excuse should the Germans have for suspecting Dinant of resistance. Notices had been posted and every weapon in town collected, ready to be delivered over to the invaders.

“That settles it, Tante,” said Thorpe. “You and Elsa shall have a comfortable night. If I can’t scare up some kind of a conveyance this evening, to-morrow morning we’ll hike out eastwards, afoot, till we can find another cart.”

To this Frau von Kissel readily agreed. As Thorpe was out of funds, he presented her letter of credit to the hotel keeper, with the explanation that her son was a Prussian officer of high connections. The eagerness with which the Belgian offered to pay gold for the full face of the draft betrayed the dread that lay behind his obsequiousness.

But even the gold and the aid of an eager interpreter failed to locate any means of transportation in Dinant. All conveyances and horses had been swept away by the contending French and Germans. Thorpe had to return to the hotel with no better news than the information that the bridge had been mined by the French. At his advice, Elsa and her mother retired early, to be rested for the next day's tramp eastwards.

A few minutes later, at a quarter past nine, Thorpe also turned in for the night. Hardly, it seemed, had he fallen asleep when he was roused by a clattering roar somewhat like the racket of a racing motorcycle. In the midst came explosions that shook the hotel. He jerked on his clothes and peered out into the hotel corridor.

Cries of terror and a smell of powder fumes sent him darting to the door of his companions' room. Elsa was shrieking. When at last he was able to make himself heard, Frau von Kissel opened the door. In the alarm of the moment, neither she nor Thorpe nor Elsa had thought for their *deshabille*. The terror-stricken girl cast herself into her lover's arms and clung to him, shuddering. But the instant he perceived that neither she nor her mother had been injured he put her from him.

“Dress yourselves,” he commanded. “There's no shooting on this side of the hotel. All is in front. I'll see what's happening.”

“*Nein, nein!*” shrieked Elsa.

He eluded her desperate attempt to again clutch him, slammed the door, and rushed back to his own room. The average white man is a



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Five rifles swung up with muzzles pointed at Thorpe's breast. He glared at them, astounded. During the instant that the corporal waited to bark out the command to fire, a myriad of thoughts flashed across the field of Thorpe's consciousness: Could this be war — this murderous attack on an unarmed, inoffensive neutral? He was being given no chance, not even a drumhead court martial!... And their own countrywomen to perish in the bombed hotel!... The horror of Lucy's fate, if captured!... War — bloody, merciless, blundering... What harm had he done?... To be shot down like a dog — he, one of Germany's most ardent admirers!...

The snarl-drawn lips of the corporal started to pucker for the word of death — A cloak-wrapped figure flung forward past Thorpe's shoulder. Between his hard-staring, unflinching eyes and the deadly rifle muzzles came a maze of disheveled golden hair. The girl's hands stretched out to the soldiers in tremulous appeal.

“*Ach! Ach!*” she quavered. “My betrothed — spare him! Do not — do not shoot! He is the friend of my brother, Lieutenant von Kissel of the Imperial Guard. *Ach!* spare him, good men!”

The German of Elsa's face could not be mistaken even by the fight-maddened soldiers. Their snarls became transformed into the slavering grins of boarhounds.

“Schmitz — Heinz,” commanded the corporal, “escort the fraulein and the American clear of the town. When they are passed back, the Prussian Guard can tell if they lie. Hasten.”

“My mother!” cried Elsa. “She is in the hotel. We cannot leave her.”

“Then fetch her quickly, fraulein. We shall hold your betrothed as hostage against treachery.”

Elsa kissed her lover and darted into the hotel. All except two guards charged back up the street, where many houses were bursting out in flames. Along the river front motor cars armed with machine-guns were pouring a hail of bullets into the defenseless town.

“Have the French been firing across the river?” asked Thorpe.

“*Nein*,” answered one of the guards. “Civilians have fired—the *verdammte franc-tireurs*.”

“But how can that be? All the weapons in town have been delivered up to the burgo-master.”

“We have our orders,” growled the soldier. He added significantly: “Only an enemy will say that what we do is bad.”

Thorpe asked no more questions.

CHAPTER XV

THE GRAY TORRENT

Very soon Elsa came hurrying back with her mother. The high-born frau was fully dressed. She was also fully self-possessed. The reaction from fright had filled her with vast indignation. When Thorpe sprang to take the baggage borne by her and Elsa, she shook her head and turned severely upon the two soldiers.

“Idle dogs!” she chided. “How dare you so disturb high-born noblewomen and loaf while they carry out their bags? I will report you to the High Command.”

In any circumstances less tragic, Thorpe could have laughed outright at the consternation of the morose pair. With startled “*Aufs!*” they clicked their heels and came to rigid salute, only to double over in forward lurches to relieve the high-born ladies of their burdens. Neither man objected when Thorpe ran into the hotel for his own baggage.

When he dashed out again the others were crunching off over the splintered glass of the hotel windows. He overtook them as they hurried up the middle of the roadway between the blazing houses. An unarmed man in civilian clothes lay sprawled across the gutter, his face



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the care of its black-bearded surgeon. Though the four soldiers who had been injured by their own bombs lay on the stretchers, there was room left to accommodate the refugees and their baggage.

As the two guards saluted and hastened back to rejoin the attack on unresisting Dinant, Thorpe drew in a shuddering breath of relief. Thanks be, the ambulance was swiftly bearing him and Elsa away from that fringe of hell!—But what was this the surgeon was saying?

In reply to Elsa's gentle regrets that even the enemy must suffer, the man of healing sought to soothe her with cheerful assertions of the alleviation that modern surgery would bring to the battlefields. The war would be overwhelming to the enemy, and therefore mercifully short. In a week or two the French army would be crushed and Paris captured. There would be none of the sickness and starvation and wastage of a long-drawn-out war. Given more Red Cross helpers, the suffering even of the wounded would be brief. Greatest need of all was stretcher-bearers not afraid to pick up wounded men in the midst of the fighting and rush them back to where they could be given surgical aid.

Before Thorpe's mental gaze rose a vision of Lucy wheeling her big car along the French lines, with bullet-maimed blue-coated soldiers staining her delicate tonneau linings a more vivid red than that of their absurd pantaloons. If she, a mere slip of a girl, could think of lingering within sound of the cannon, what of himself? Here was this black-bearded surgeon recounting how many

more of the injured could be saved if treated before the infection of their wounds by gangrene.

Of a sudden Thorpe heard his own voice asking a sharp question: "A neutral — can he be a stretcher-bearer in your service?"

"*Ja, ja*, and most welcome, Herr Thorpe."

But Elsa had caught the purport of the inquiry.

"Allan! You will not — you cannot so leave me! There is no need. We are glad that Kurt fights for the Fatherland. But you — you are not bound. You will come with us to Berlin!"

Thorpe pointed to the stretchers.

"Can you ask that of me, darling, when you hear those poor fellows groaning. You know how glad I'd be to stay with you — always. But we've seen a little of what war means."

"You are not a soldier. There will be no glory — only danger!"

"Glory be hanged! You must understand, Elsa. It's the thought of men lying out there, suffering, in the rain or blistering sun. Think how it may be with Kurt."

Frau von Kissel roused from the half doze into which the vibrant humming of the ambulance had lulled her — "*Ach, mein Kurtzie*... Be not so selfish, Elsa. If Allant helps, another man will be able to fight, *nicht?*"

"But I can't vounteer if that is true, Tante," protested Thorpe. "It wouldn't be neutral."

"*Pfui!*" she hissed. "Neutral? You so near to a betrothal... and against French apes and Russian *schweinhunds!*"

"The aid of Herr Thorpe would make no change in the regular hospital and ambulance

contingent," interposed the surgeon opportunely.

"That settles it, Doctor," Thorpe hastened to hush Elsa's entreaties. "But you're with the Saxons, you say. Could I get with the Prussian Guard Corps? I'd like to be near my friend, Lieutenant von Kissel."

"*Ja.* The Prussian Guard marches behind us — all under the High Command of Herr General von Hausen, late chief of staff of the Duke of Wurtemberg."

Frau von Kissel flushed and beamed with the delight of a fond mother. "God be praised! Kurtzie — Kurtzie! *Ach!* to see him!"

"I'll be with his regiment, sweetheart," Thorpe whispered in the pretty ear of his silently weeping beloved. "Isn't that bully?"

The girl pressed her quivering lips upon his hand in a fervor of abnegation. "For Kurt — and the Fatherland — go. But do not take needless risks!"

"Oh, I'm like the Chocolate Soldier. Count on me to dodge lead and lie doggo when the lying is good," rallied Thorpe.

Elsa nestled closer to him. The surgeon had turned to examine by the light of an electric torch one of the wounded men who had ceased moaning. Frau von Kissel was dozing off again. The lovers thrilled with the bliss of touching heads and hands and shoulders... while almost within arm's reach of them the face of the soldier who no longer moaned turned gray and cold. Nowhere does life pulse warmer than in the presence of death. Nowhere is heaven more heavenly than on the brink of hell. .



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A vast number of units had already marched on from the night's bivouac, led by uhlands and the bicycle corps. Other multitudes were swinging into or along the road with the precision and absolute lack of confusion that iron discipline alone could have enforced among such numbers. Uhlands on magnificent horses dashed forward beside the dense columns in the road, their lance pennants fluttering and bell-like bugles blowing.

The young aide's staff car raced at high speed eastward on the narrow strip of roadway, that was left clear along the side by the westward-advancing river of troops. Thorpe's astonishment increased, instead of lessening. The on-sweeping gray host was not a mere stream — it was a flood. There was nothing about it to suggest the traditional gay-plumaged pageant of war. All the vast menacing torrent was the same dull and somber field gray — regiment after regiment with iron-shod boots beating time on the dusty gray macadam, rattling gray machine-guns and three-inch cannon, ponderous rumbling misshapen gray howitzers of six- and nine- and twelve-inch calibre, gray ammunition carts and transportation wagons, gray staff cars that whisked back and forth at terrific speed along the rigidly straight clean-cut edge of the gigantic unbroken torrent.

In partial offset to the lack of bright colors and the ominous heavy rumbling of the war monsters, there was relief in the many blaring bands and the frequent bursts of song from the swift-marching thousands of infantry — most often “*Deutschland, Deutschland über Alles.*” Thorpe

did not have to tax his imagination to picture the invading myriads as a gray tide of storm and death sweeping irresistibly onward to deluge and overwhelm all France.

Yet somewhere far back in his consciousness lingered a shadow of a doubt. He remembered the fierce defiance with which the French regiment had shouted the Marseillaise as they marched into Belgium to meet the gray invaders. Such men would fight to the death... Yes, to the death... And what of it? How could even such zeal as that avail against the tremendous invincible might of Imperial Germany?

Endless as seemed the grim array of the Saxon corps, the speeding car at last swirled past the main body and turned aside to a chateau that had been chosen for staff headquarters. Here the monotonous field gray was relieved by the brighter uniforms of high staff officers — light blue and silver, scarlet and gold, burnished helmets, patent leather boots, gay plumes — all the familiar gorgeous military panoply to which Thorpe was accustomed in Berlin.

The young aide escorted his guests in, past a dubious sentry. Fortune favored the visitors. The big commander of the Third Army had breakfasted well, his plans were working with clock-like smoothness, and a lull had come in his morning's rush of reports and orders. He was pleased to greet with gruff condescension Frau and Fraulein von Kissel and Herr Thorpe, all just escaped from France. To be sure, when he found how little his callers had to tell about conditions in France, his cordiality noticeably

cooled. But his smile returned at Elsa's naïve expression of thankfulness in the safety of his protection and at Frau von Kissel's congratulations over his appointment to the command of the Saxon Army and the Imperial Guard.

“*Ach, himmel*—could I but have a chance to show my strategy,” he rumbled from his outswelling chest. “The French are too simple. Had not fool little Belgium chosen to commit suicide, we should have jumped in at the French side door while old Joffre blocked the front between Verdun and Switzerland. Still better, though, we now shall catch the red-legged rats out of their holes, *nicht?* We struck at Liege, but stopped our advance to the south. These two weeks we have waited while the French have rushed into the trap. Now Von Kluck is already so far as Brussels. Bülow swings after, on his left wing. On my left, Wurttemberg and the Crown Prince strike through the Ardennes, to break in and cut off the French retreat. The nutcrackers will close as I smash at the middle. Another Sedan for all the Belgian and French forces between Antwerp and the Aisne, before the real Sedan Day of September the Fourth, when we shall have wiped out the other French armies and taken Paris.”

“But, Herr General,” ventured Thorpe, “how about passing Namur and Maubeuge and Verdun and the other great fortresses, if Liège held out so long?”

The general smiled his contempt.

“*Phuff!* Those boxes will last two days, maybe three, before our howitzers. I have said



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“ You would serve? Good. *Ach*, now I see. The tender blue eyes fire you to serve the Fatherland and keep watch upon the brother — *nicht?* ”

“ Herr General is a good guesser. May I ask the favor of a car to take the frau and fraulein to the rear, with permission for them to see Kurt in passing? ”

“ Go, fetch the son. I would see him myself. I have not forgotten his suggestion of a lighter pack, though *Der Tag* came too soon for the change to be made. If he receives favorable mention in the first fighting, I will detail him to my personal staff. ”

In the midst of Frau von Kissel's effusive thanks to the pompous general, Thorpe hastened out with a written order in his hand. It won him a car and a military chauffeur to whir on eastward to the as yet unbroken bivouac of the Prussian Guard. Once in the camp of that *corps d'élite* of all the magnificent German armies, inquiry sent the chauffeur speeding on a shoot up a cross road to a small chateau where was established the headquarters of Kurt's regiment.

Thorpe had handed over General von Hausen's order to the chauffeur. Full of impetuous eagerness to find his friend, he now rushed in without asking the man to accompany him. He darted past the outer sentry before the slow-witted peasant could interpose. Inside the courtyard a more alert sentry brought him up short at the point of a leveled bayonet. The man cried out. Other guards came running to seize the civilian.

What followed seemed to Thorpe's bewildered mind more the insensate, grotesque happenings

of a nightmare than logical reality. His attempts to speak — to explain — were silenced by blows on the mouth and menacing bayonet pricks. Brutal hands jerked and dragged him into a little garden whose trampled flowers were strewn with shattered wine bottles. Around a fine old mahogany table that had been tumbled out through the smashed French windows on the chateau terrace, a group of officers sat guzzling champagne and roaring a discordant beer-song. The bullet-riddled corpse of a Belgian gentleman, probably the owner of the chateau, was lashed upright in a chair at the head of the table, in cynical imitation of the classical skeleton at the feast.

The sight of Thorpe in the grasp of the guards brought a sudden ominous hush to the drunken merriment.

“Another *franc-tireur!*” yelled a lieutenant, and he jerked out his service pistol.

“*Engländer schweinhund!*” cursed a major.

“No — Americanisch — Americanisch!” gasped Thorpe, half choked by his captors.

“Silence the dog!” commanded a harsh voice, and the tall figure of Captain von Pappheim reared up at the far side of the bottle-heaped table. “The rascal is known to me. He fled from Berlin to France with a spy woman. Go on with your toasts, gentlemen. I will attend to him.”

A dirty cloth had been whipped around over Thorpe’s mouth. He was wrenched about and dragged back into the courtyard. Behind him he heard a peal of hoarse laughter and shouts of “*Prosit!*” The orgy was under full way again.

Von Pappheim came around before the pris-

oner, his legs perceptibly unsteady and his steel-blue eyes reddened from drink.

“So the American fool also walked into the trap!” he gloated. “Speak quickly, you swine dog! Where is that copper-haired *cocotte*?”

At a sign from him, the men removed their captive’s gag. Thorpe gasped his smothered lungs full of air, looked Von Pappheim squarely in the eye, and answered with cool deliberation: “I do not know any copper-haired *cocotte*.”

“Liar!” shouted the Prussian. “Tell quickly! That spy woman Carew — where is she?”

Thorpe’s bruised lips quirked in a bantering smile. “By now, Miss Carew should be well on her way to Calais.”

The drink-flushed face of Von Pappheim purpled with chagrin. At his gesture the soldiers thrust their prisoner against the outer wall of the courtyard. For the second time in less than a full day Thorpe found himself confronted by a firing squad.

“Hold,” commanded Von Pappheim. “Bullets would be too easy for the spy pig. Cold steel will make him squeal louder. Begin only with a tickling.”

Kurt von Kissel swung in through the gateway, beaming with joyful anticipation. At sight of Thorpe, penned against the wall by the semi-circle of soldiers he cried out in horror and flung himself forward between his friend and the thrusting bayonets. Von Pappheim’s eyes blazed with malevolent fury.

“Aside!” he commanded.

The disciplined lieutenant obediently stepped



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“ You let her stay, Allan — stay with those duped Frenchmen? ” he cried. “ You do not know! They are all trapped. She’ll be caught in the very midst... Our big guns — Frightful accounts have come from Liége and Namur about our high-explosive nine- and twelve-inch shells... Great pits blasted out of the solid concrete at every shot. Yet she — I thought you my friend! ”

“ Buck up, ” encouraged Thorpe, his own face by no means smiling. “ Trust the parley-vous to keep her back out of range. Besides, the Red Cross is of course safe from rifle fire and shelling — hospitals, ambulances, and stretcher-bearers — luckily for me. ”

Kurt smiled in cheerful reaction from his apprehensions.

“ With our Kaiser and God, soon it shall be ended. A short campaign and joyous! We shall win our just war for freedom and defense, and then — then Lucy need not fear to return. The claws of the Fatherland’s envious foes will have been clipped for all time, and we, like America, will no longer have reason to suspect anyone of spying. ”

“ Hope so, ” put in Thorpe. “ Well, here we are — No need to tell you how keen the mother and Elsa are to see their soldier boy. ”

The general was busy again with his reports and orders. The ladies had been escorted to a secluded room, where they could embrace and weep over Kurt without disturbing others or being disturbed. A car was waiting to take the party to the nearest railway station, with an

order from the High General for the ladies to be given accommodations on one of the returning munitions trains.

A train was on the point of leaving. There was a final parting on the station platform, under the eyes of the gaping trainmen and guards — an embrace of the tearful frau by Kurt, and of the still more tearful Elsa by Thorpe — then the train rolled swiftly away towards the German frontier. Thorpe gazed after it, heavy with longing for the angelically sweet girl that it was bearing away from him, yet vaguely relieved that there would be no more tears to dampen his shirt front. Elsa was the epitome of loveliness — he still thrilled from the delicious tenderness of her parting embrace. But he had been born and bred an American. He was not used to public demonstrations of grief and love.

At Thorpe's suggestion, the car was dismissed, and the friends cut across country, afoot, for the bivouac of Kurt's regiment.

CHAPTER XVI

THE BEAST RAMPANT

The Imperial Prussian Guard, that largest and most magnificent of all German corps, had got under way in the wake of the Saxon army. Its more than fifty thousand horse, foot and artillery were moving forward in perfect order towards the left, or Givet-Dinant, wing of General von Hausen's van. His battle line extended from the north tip of the French frontier spur, down the Meuse to the already half destroyed Belgian fortress of Namur.

When the hurrying friends overtook Kurt's regiment, the young officer gave Thorpe a warm introduction to a medical acquaintance. Quite unintentionally, his wording of the bare facts about the American volunteer left room for colorful inferences. The big surgeon-major actually paused in the eating of his pocket lunch of sausage and champagne to wring Thorpe's hand.

“*Ach!* A *protegé* of Herr General von Hausen, a heart's friend of Herr Lieutenant von Kessel, a representative of the great American people who has proved the sympathy of his country for the Fatherland by volunteering to give aid — most welcome is so high-minded a helper!”

Kurt dropped a hint that Thorpe, being a gen-



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wine from the chateaux and villas that had been overlooked or only partly looted by the hurried raiding parties of the Saxons.

During the afternoon Thorpe remained with his ambulance section, and was so intent upon his lessons in first-aid that he paid no heed to what was happening around him. At nightfall, however, the ravaging of the invaders was forced upon his attention. All over the country ahead, pillars of flame-reddened smoke told of burning villages, farm houses and chateaux. Like those terrible war novels of Sienkiewicz, "Fire and Sword" was preceding "The Deluge."

Kurt introduced Thorpe at officers' mess, which was served upon carved rosewood tables in the *salon* of a particularly artistic chateau. Everyone except Von Pappheim greeted the volunteer with suave cordiality. All were jubilant over the most recent rumor: The United States had declared war on Japan and was about to enter into an alliance with Germany. Even Kurt fatuously bolted the fantastic tale whole. Thorpe masked his incredulity.

The officers acted like exultant madmen. Even the higher ones had become intoxicated with champagne and the still headier wine of the war fever. Thorpe sat at table next to Kurt and tried to look pleasant while his new messmates shouted toasts and sang and guzzled amazing quantities of wine. The careless Saxons had overlooked five thousand bottles in the lower cellars of the chateau. Before long, the younger officers began to vaunt how the enemy civilians were being pacified —

Shots had been fired — soldiers injured. What matter if the miserable villagers howled and prayed? What matter if they whined that the soldiers had fired on each other by mistake, or that French patrols had sought to harass the advance? The cattle needed blood-letting. Mere suspicion of resistance was good enough excuse to shoot down the *schweinhunds*. Clean them out, man, woman and child together, the foul pigs, and burn their sties. Terrify the *verdammte franc-tireurs*.

So should the enemy ahead be stricken with panic. So should all Belgium and France be paralyzed by frightfulness and unable to offer resistance to the invincible armies of Deutschland. Had not the High Command and the All-Highest, *Majestät* himself, declared that any means of winning was justifiable; that ruthlessness was scientific and meant a short war; that to suffer was uplifting, and to inflict suffering on the enemy still more uplifting? — “*Hoch der Kaiser! Deutschland, Deutschland über Alles!*”

For a time Von Pappheim kept a morose watch on the American guest, who was barely touching his wineglass to his lips at each toast. He at last broke in on the drunken merriment to fix the attention of all upon Thorpe with a query of mock concern:

“*Himmel!* Our good Herr Volunteer does not drink. Can it be that the wine is distasteful to him, or is it the toasts?”

Thorpe stood up and raised his glass of sparkling champagne. In the sudden hush his voice rang out clear and assured:

“ I am one of those creatures, most strange to you — a total abstainer. But I now offer to the officers of *Majestät* this toast: Victory to the heroes who fight in the defense of their beloved country.”

There was a great shout, and every glass in the *salon* was emptied to the last drop. Every wine-fuddled Prussian took the toast as a personal compliment. Even Von Pappheim mellowed to half maudlin amity. Kurt alone might have detected the audacious ambiguity of his friend's words, but he also was too overcome with wine for clear thinking. The war fever had broken down his habitual abstemiousness.

The wild carousal now fast developed into a drunken orgy. At the close of an obscene beer-song Von Pappheim raised a shout: “ Where are the hostesses? Bring them in — bring them in! They should entertain their merry guests! ”

At once a dozen maudlin voices caught up the cry. Several of the waiter orderlies hurried out. They rushed back, half-dragging, half-carrying in their brutal grasp a slender little Belgian lady and her daughter, a pretty petite black-eyed girl of sixteen or seventeen. Both were white-faced and wide-eyed with dread. They were greeted with a babel of mocking compliments and felicitations, above which rose Von Pappheim's raucous shout:

“ Dance! Dance! — Stand clear, you louts! Make room for the frau and fraulein to dance for their merry guests! ”

The orderlies fell back from the taunted ladies, kicking the parquetry floor clear of the broken



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friend slipped down and fell under the table in a drunken stupor.

The backward darting glance of Thorpe showed to him the slender little Belgian lady defiantly erect, with her shamed and terrified daughter clasped to her bosom. Over the dainty, down-bent head of the girl her dark eyes flashed at Von Pappheim with a scorn and loathing that had risen above all fear.

“Hun!” she screamed — “Blond Beast! I shall die before I give you permission to touch my pure child with your filthy paws!”

Von Pappheim’s Prussian-cut tow hair stood up like the bristles on the back of a white boar.

“Die then, sow!” he growled.

His pistol was jerked out, aimed and fired with machine-like rapidity. Mother and daughter went down together, still locked fast in each other’s arms. The steel-pointed mauser bullet had pierced through the girl’s slender neck into the mother’s heart. In the momentary hush that followed the shattering report of the pistol, the murderer’s curse rang out venomously:

“*Donnerwetter* — too low! A wine-shot, *nicht?* I meant only to shoot the old sow and keep the young one for pleasure — You gawking louts, *heraus mit die schweine!*”

As the orderlies sprang to clutch and drag out the bodies, several officers drunkenly began to quarrel with Von Pappheim for having robbed them of their chance at the girl.

“*Pfui!*” he snarled back at them. “Only one young pig! Plenty more pretty girls across the Meuse, and oceans of wine. — Here, you

goose-footed boors, champagne! more champagne! To leave a bottle unbroken would be a crime.”

All caught up the cry. Some began a beer-song. The orgy broke again into full swing, as if nothing had occurred to jar on its coarse hilarity.

Unheeded even by Von Pappheim, Thorpe left his seat and groped his way out of the wine-reeking, tobacco-fumed, blood-stained place of infamy. He was nauseated — stunned. He was a-tremble with shudders of horror and loathing. Never had he imagined that war could be so maddening, so perverting of the good will of men. And this was only a beginning!

His first impulse was to hand in his Red Cross badges, ask for a pass, and make for the rear. He must hasten to escape before being swirled on into the midst of the hideous maelstrom... Then came the thought of Lucy. She could not so much as have dreamt — she could not possess the vaguest inkling of the hell-storm that was about to burst across the Meuse. She was there with the duped self-entrapped French. What might not happen to her if she should be overtaken and seized by the war-mad invaders?

No — he could not run away — or even wait here for the battle-front to rip and hack and burn its frightful way forward over the doomed Belgians and French. He must advance as rapidly as possible, prepared to attempt a rescue of the willful girl if she were made prisoner, as had been these unfortunate Belgian ladies. Kurt probably would not be able to leave his

regiment even to inquire about her. But a volunteer stretcher-bearer might not be so closely attached to any one military unit. His services would be welcomed wherever wounded Germans were to be found.

The horror that he had witnessed made sleep seem impossible, though the stretcher assigned to his use in the ambulance was far more comfortable than most cots. His mind kept dwelling on the sight of Von Pappheim with the half-lowered pistol, and those two graceful forms crumpled upon the *salon* floor like a fragile rose and a half-open bud crushed down together under the hoof of a wild boar.

The mother victim had spoken frightful truth when in her brave scorn she branded Von Pappheim as the Blond Beast. Worst of all, the murderous captain appeared to be no more than a leader in the devil's play with which the German army was harrying the helpless inhabitants of Belgium. The spirit of the Blond Beast, of insane Nietzsche's monstrous Obermann — ruthless, ferocious, lustful — had obsessed the wine-inflamed invaders.

Thorpe realized all too clearly that it would be useless to accuse Von Pappheim to General von Hausen. From what he had seen, from what Kurt had disclosed, from what the other officers had vaunted of the widespread shooting and stabbing and burning, he knew that in so iron-disciplined a machine as the Germany army, such outrages were not possible without the connivance of the High Command. His first explanation of the atrocities had been that they were



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CHAPTER XVII

FIRE AND SWORD

At dawn command came for the advance. The crossing of the Meuse had begun. Kurt's regiment, most of whose officers were morose from the after effects of champagne, marched forward to join in the new attack on the French. Thorpe's last view of the château, at sunrise, showed him a squad of soldiers loading the carefully boxed grand piano and gramophone into an army transport. A married officer had "requisitioned" the instruments to be shipped home by railway to his family.

The regiment came down to the Meuse bank south of where Lucy had brought over Thorpe and Elsa and Frau von Kissel.

Half of Dinant was ablaze, or sending up smoke from its German-fired dwellings and shops and public buildings. One of the worst massacres of the unfortunate inhabitants had taken place in this southern suburb. While the Saxons were laying pontoons to bridge the Meuse, French troops had fired across the river. The Germans claimed that the shooting was by Belgian *franc-tireurs*. They had seized eighty or more of the helpless townsfolk, shoved them against a wall, and shot all together, men and women and children.

Before that, midway down through the town, other families had been lined up along the river front, as a screen for the Germans against the French riflemen on the west bank. Others had been murdered in batches and singly. A woman left lying with a broken leg, had burned to death when her home was set on fire by the Saxons. And the butchery and burning and pillaging was still continuing on this cruel morning after the Sunday's orgy of fire and blood.

Thorpe's ambulance stopped some distance back from the river. While the portly surgeon re-dressed the arm of a wounded Saxon, the big heavy-jowled brute told gloatingly of how the *franc-tireurs* had been and still were being executed. With his teeth clenched behind a forced smile, Thorpe sought to close his ears against the man's coarse details and the sight of soldiers breaking into houses in the vicinity.

One of the pillaging bands appeared close at hand. They smashed the windows and door of a pretty little house near the ambulance, and rushed in, yelling like fiends. Half a dozen of them soon came out again, dragging a wounded civilian and a woman who carried in her arms a little girl of three or four years.

The soldiers stepped clear for elbow room to use their barbarous saw-edged bayonets. The man and woman fell upon their knees, praying for mercy. Two of the lunging blades struck the man in the face. The woman thrust the child away to save it from the blades that plunged into her bosom. One of them, in passing, gashed the little girl's uplifted arm.

Thorpe sprang from the ambulance and flashed a desperate glance at the surgeon.

“The child—she is hurt!” he choked out. “Come!”

The portly doctor stared, and then suddenly swung down to run after Thorpe. He was barely in time to check a savage attack on the American by the nearest of the blood-mad soldiers. Of the others, one thin-faced young fellow was looking over his shoulder at the little girl, with tears rolling down his pale cheeks. The rest had squatted beside the dying Belgian to loot his pockets.

Thorpe had recoiled before the bloody bayonet point of his assailant. The surgeon caught him in a protecting clutch.

“Come back. You are a friend of *Excellenz*. You, in civilian clothes—To interfere is dangerous.”

Unable to speak, lest he should curse *Majestät* and all his Super race, Thorpe pointed to the little girl, who was clinging to the skirt of her dead mother and whimpering with pain.

“*Ach*—the child—she is hurt,” rumbled the surgeon. He heaved a deep, sentimental sigh, and spoke to the soldier. “The poor little one suffers, and no one is left to care for it. Better it should go with the father and mother—*nicht?*”

No direct order was needed. The soldier grinned and swung around, with his bayonet drawn back for lunging. Thorpe could bear to see no more. But as he faced away he heard a faint childish scream. He rushed back to the



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section to follow the regiment. All the smaller cannon were now across the river. The instruments of death had been given precedence over the savers of life. As Thorpe's ambulance rolled out on the army pontoon bridge, relief from immediate contact with the bloody work in Dinant enabled him to force his thoughts into other channels.

As diversion from the maddening remembrance of the little girl, he sought to locate the positions of the German guns by their different notes. The most monstrous of the gigantic field pieces seemed to be still on the east side of the river, hurling their nine- and twelve-inch shells from behind screening knolls, high over the stream and the hills beyond, at the now-distant French lines. On the west bank the ugly misshapen six-inch howitzers were roaring away at the same living targets, with an almost continuous thunder that drowned out the distant, lighter crashing of the three-inch guns.

All about the nearer howitzers were to be seen the proofs of their own and their mates' destructiveness. Great trees shattered or mowed down, yawning raw pits in river bank and hill sides, blasted houses — all forewarned Thorpe of the terribleness of modern shell fire. At that moment, thousands of soldiers were fighting in the midst of such a storm of shrapnel and high-explosive shells as had worked this devastation before him.

Between the howitzers the Guard regiments were hastening to the battle front to back up the Saxon corps. Word had been received that

the desperately fighting French troops, outnumbered, out-generaled and out-gunned, were being driven back. The men of the Guard rushed forward, shouting and yelling songs of victory, every one from general to private aflame with fierce ardor to strike the shaken enemy.

Thorpe lacked the stimulating hot-blooded enthusiasm of those who were to fight. Yet, to his great surprise, he found himself quite without fear. As he was borne forward towards the battle he thought neither of his danger nor of his deliciously sweet Elsa, to whom he might never return—for ahead of this on-sweeping gray deluge of the invaders, somewhere before or in the midst of the frightful tidal-wave of death, was Lucy Carew, his countrywoman, his dear old-time chum.

Precedence for right of way through the jam of reserves and munition trains was given to the guns and caissons. But Thorpe's ambulance managed to dodge around a stalled six-inch howitzer and crowd into line behind a battery of three-inch pieces that was dashing forward at full gallop.

The swift pace soon brought them within range of the French seventy-fives. The screaming three-inch shells began to whizz from over the woods ahead, to burst all around. Out of the white puffs pinged deadly shrapnel that killed or wounded all creatures within its cone of dispersion and rattled on hard surfaces like hailstones. These messengers of death were interspersed with high explosive shells that smashed everything they struck. One of them fell

between two teams of the guns before the ambulance and blew the galloping horses into fragments.

The car skidded as it swerved through the red mess, around the abruptly stopped cannon. Close ahead were other wrecks — disabled guns, exploded caissons, ghastly bits of men and horses. The French had the exact range of the road and were concentrating on it a fire intended to cut off reserves and munitions from the German front lines. The shelling had already so shattered the advancing column and pitted the once-perfect macadam roadway with shell-holes that horse, foot and artillery were all alike swinging out on either side to labor forward through the grain fields. Signal Corps men were stringing a new field telephone line on slender, jointed poles.

With startling abruptness the bombardment ceased. The portly surgeon chuckled and pointed skyward to where a great sparrow-hawk form was soaring in vulturine circles.

“The taubes — they are signalling the range to our howitzers. Our bombardment is driving the little French guns back. So it has been from the start — back, back, back go the red-legged apes, their guns out-ranged by our lovely Busy Berthas, and their infantry running before our brave heroes.”

Yet the French guns, even though driven back, had not been silenced. The ambulance, dashing past the half-stalled German guns and columns of breathless infantrymen, quickly came up behind the line of bursting shells that marked the advanced German position. On the way



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pierced by bayonets. Some died on the stretchers, others on the operating table or after amputations. The dead were unceremoniously pitched aside to make way for the living.

As the morning advanced the heat became sweltering. Flies buzzed about the dressing station. Back-drifting acrid powder fumes, smoke from the smouldering farm house ruins, the odors of sweat and blood, the shrieks and moans of the injured—all tended to sicken and unnerve Thorpe. Yet he toiled on, braced by the example of the surgeon.

Though brutal and callous in his talk, the portly medical-major was proving himself quite efficient for the task in hand. Bare-armed, spattered with crimson, puffing and sweating, he worked with machine-like precision, bandaging and suturing, probing for bullets and shell fragments, slashing off shattered limbs that required immediate amputation.

“*Ach!* a pretty one you now bring me, Herr Thorpe,” he exclaimed over a corporal whose head had been laid open by a piece of shell. “Beautiful case of brain exposure. In Berlin I could save him—No time to waste here. Take him off the table...Next case, quick. *Himmel!* No end of work—all this cannon-fodder, and more to come. Those French shells are the devil...Hans, crumble up cheese in wine for me to drink. I cannot stop to eat.”

Towards noon the rush slackened. Thorpe dropped panting on the cannon-jarred ground, in the shade of a shell-scarred pear tree. His stretcher-mate methodically opened the cowhide

knapsacks of the nearest dead Germans until he found two bottles of champagne. Thorpe discovered that he was ravenously hungry. He gorged on the "iron rations" of the dead men, washing down the food with champagne. Though tepid from the mid-day heat, the wine supplemented the food in reviving his strength and clearing his mind of the daze into which it had been shocked by the incessant cannonading and contact with so much suffering. He hastened to the dressing station, where the surgeon still labored and sweated over the red work of mercy.

"May I go to the front?" he requested. "I am anxious to see if all is right with my friend Lieutenant von Kissel."

"*Ja,*" panted the surgeon. "You have done good work. Go. We will soon move forward to a new station."

Thorpe promptly swung away up the wooded slope where columns of reinforcements were rushing to the front with the swift, skating route-step of German infantrymen. From the fact that the surf of bursting French shells had receded, he surmised that the invaders had overwhelmed or hurled back the defenders. He came to a field telephone and followed the line at a jog trot. On the way he caught up a dead German's spiked helmet of lacquered leather. It fitted well, was light, and made a good sunshade. His own soft hat he crammed into a pocket of the surgeon's coat.

The thin-wired slender-poled telephone line led over a long rise, down across a hollow, and up a higher undulation, or ridge, to a beautiful

old Gothic church. Red Cross flags proclaimed it to be occupied as a hospital. But shattered spires and gaping shell holes in the roof told that the flag of mercy had not been respected by the German artillery. Not so the French shells that swept the ridge on either side. None were bursting close to the church.

A group of mounted officers were peering at the country beyond from behind a shell-tattered hedge that bounded the ancient cemetery at the right end of the church. From the number of field telephone lines that led up to them Thorpe guessed that he was approaching the temporary field headquarters of the Guard commander. He dropped the helmet, put on his own hat, and advanced towards the cemetery.

While he was yet several yards away, a young staff officer rode at him, sabre in hand, and reined up across his path, to stare suspiciously at his motley attire and arrogantly demand that he account for himself. Thorpe showed the pass given him by his surgeon, and explained that the High Commander, General von Hausen, had accepted his services as a volunteer. When he added that he had permission to hunt up his friend Lieutenant von Kissel, the young aristocrat unbent from his hauteur.

“Pardon for requesting you to go around the other way, Herr Thorpe. The battle is now at its height. Baron von Plattenberg is occupied with reports and orders. At another time he would be pleased to receive you as a friend of the High Commander. Lieutenant von Kissel’s regiment has not yet gone into action. You



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reflect or reason was impossible. The staccato clatter of the machine-guns, the irregular yet continuous bursts of rifle fire, the cannon concussions, the crash of the French shells — all combined in a deafening, maddening, infernal cacophony. Even more soul-shaking were the horrible tearing siren screeches and thunderous explosions of the six-, nine- and twelve-inch shells which came hurtling over at the French from miles behind the German front.

As Thorpe stood transfixed, staring down aslant the ridge, one of the biggest shells struck a farm house in the midst of the fields. The detonation was so terrific that the solid brick walls dissolved into an immense puffball of red dust and smoke, out of whose up-shooting expanse flared still higher a gush of flaming gases. On the open ground others of the monstrous missiles plunged deep into the soft earth and blasted craters from seven to ten yards across. Dust was hurled aloft hundreds of feet, along with clouds of greasy black smoke as large as a city block.

Thorpe marveled how any troops could withstand so awful a bombardment. That the French batteries were affected soon appeared certain to him. Their fire was rapidly slackening. This must have been the moment for which the commander of the Guard had been waiting. The many lines of infantrymen on the upper part of the ridge massed in close formation and heaved forward down the slope with the slow but solid momentum of a starting landslide.

CHAPTER XVIII

HELL

On the upper slope the dense yet orderly mass of the Guard regiments was still more or less screened from the French by the fruit trees.

First to burst into the open grain fields was a detachment of hussars that spurred ahead of the hidden left front of the invaders. Though less than a quarter mile away, Thorpe could not have seen the wild riders had they been unmounted, so perfectly did the field gray of the German uniform merge into the landscape. But his eye was caught by the glitter of steel lance-tips and the dark mass of the galloping horses.

The French had already sighted the charging cavalry. Even as Thorpe looked, the air before and above the hussars filled with twinkling flashes, each followed by a white cottony puff of smoke that told of a bursting shrapnel shell. All the seemingly half-silenced batteries of French seventy-fives appeared to be concentrating their fire on the horsemen.

The effect was frightful. A hail of deadly shrapnel struck down men and horses by scores and hundreds; high explosive shells blew them into fragments. Before the charge could reach the first French line, the flying mass of horse-

men was shattered, blasted, almost annihilated. The few survivors broke and fled in utter rout.

But the seconds gained by the fatal charge gave the massed infantry time to sweep down out of the trees. They advanced into the open fields at their swift, skating route-step, singing, or rather, yelling their war songs. The destruction of the hussars had filled Thorpe with awed wonderment over the terrific effectiveness of the French shell-fire. He thought he now saw the answer in this magnificent massed array of bayonet-bristling Guards that surged forward with the momentum of a tidal wave, shoulder to shoulder, rank upon rank, regiment in perfect line with regiment.

“The steam-roller!” he shouted, torn between an irresistible wild exultation over the marvelous living war-machine and dismay for the plucky French, whom the juggernaut was about to smash down and crush into the earth. “Good-bye, *la belle France!*”

Above the near end of the German tidal wave, against the dull blue of the powder-hazed sky, flashed a lightning-star, instantly followed by the cottony puff of the burst shell—then other white flash-stabs and puffs that increased with frightful rapidity to a storm of shell fire. Before the annihilation of the hussars Thorpe and the Prussians alike had thought the French seventy-fives half destroyed. Now it was seen that the batteries had merely been shifting from the positions spotted by the vulturine German aeroplanes. Their renewed shelling was far more violent than any that had gone before.



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“Go back — quick!” he shouted above the infernal din. “If one of those damnable shells should come this way!”

A wave of rose flooded into her white cheeks. The compassion-drooped corners of her lips curved upwards. Her lovely eyes, darkened and dilated with horror, relaxed from their fixed stare and softened into a glow of tender warmth.

“Oh, Lan, you were afraid for me! You came back...”

“You — you ought to be spanked!” he scolded — “staying here in this fighting — Good God! Those shells — Come away! If one should fly across here!”

Hot scorn flashed from the girl’s eyes.

“No fear of that. Trust the base, degenerate French to shoot wide of us. It’s only the noble German Supermen who bombard hospitals. Look!”

She pointed to the jagged hole in the red-stained bosom of her nurse’s costume.

“The shell that crashed through the rose window and burst midway of the nave killed several of our wounded and struck down Sister Cecile. This was her dying gift to me. The helpers are all too few. Wearing *her* dress, I could not desert even if I wished.”

Thorpe shuddered. He had turned his head to stare down at the massive Prussian battle line, now at the edge of the grain fields. Its dense ranks had perceptibly thinned. Behind them, all the slope was littered with dead and wounded. Yet they still drove forward, unchecked, at the same swift, sliding march step.

In their furious eagerness to close with their enemies the battle-maddened men were yelling like view hounds. Out of the woods on the far side of the church, other regiments of infantry and several bodies of cavalry had streamed into the fields to strike across at the French flank.

“ Cannon - fodder — more cannon - fodder! ” groaned Thorpe.

But the remembrance of his friend down in that hell of flying lead and steel goaded him back to self-control.

“ Loo, I'm also in the service. The surgeon loaned me his coat. If you're quite sure you're safe here — Kurt is there, with his regiment. ”

Lucy clutched at his arm. “ No, Lan! no! You're not — you cannot go! You're not one of their soldiers! ”

Thorpe stared. “ I thought you cared for him... Besides, he's my friend. ”

The girl stepped back and burst into a shrill peal of hysterical laughter.

“ Yes, yes — your friend — and Elsa's brother! Go... No, no! come back! I didn't mean it! — Oh, Lan, dear Lan! You'll be killed! I can't bear it! Come back! ”

But Thorpe was already sprinting down the slope, deafened to her screams by the thunderous clashing uproar of the guns. The frightfully punished yet steadily advancing gray billow of infantry was extending its right end to connect with the obliquely charging regiments of the Guard Corps' right wing. Thorpe ran straight down the road from the church towards the point where he thought the Prussian battle line would

be linked together for the concerted onslaught.

Until near the foot of the incline the road was well off to the side of that ghastly spread of wrecked humanity that littered the wake of the gray battle wave. As Thorpe ran down it he glimpsed, over the heads of the Guards, a ragged row of black dots that vanished almost as soon as seen. The attackers had flushed the first line of their enemies. Maddened by their fearful losses, all they needed to infuriate them beyond restraint was a single look at the dark faces and mustard-colored tunics of the soldiers who leaped up out of the yellow grain and fled. In a twinkling their shell-mangled yet still rigid ranks plunged forward and dissolved into a raging, rushing mob... Over and above them still burst the hell-storm of the French seventy-fives, only partly checked by the far more spectacular but blindly aimed bombardment of the heavier German shells.

Midway down to the fields Thorpe abruptly veered to the left, athwart the death-struck path of the Guards. He dashed along the slope, leaping over the dead and dodging around the wounded, many of whom cried out to him or held up beseeching arms. At last he saw men who bore the insignia of Kurt's regiment. He checked his headlong rush and began to dart from wounded man to wounded man, giving first-aid to those who could not help themselves and shouting inquiries for Kurt.

Within a few moments he came upon a mortally injured sergeant, who gasped that Herr Lieutenant von Kissel had been ahead of him.



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clamor ahead brought Thorpe's gaze up out of the pit. Other than off on the far right flank the French batteries had abruptly ceased their terrific fire. Yet the Prussian battle wave was no longer surging forward. It seemed to have dashed against a solid reef. Its already shell-riddled formless mass was more than checked. Instead of driving on over the obstruction, it was beginning to ebb back. In the thick of the gray swirl appeared dots and streaks and patches of mustard yellow.

At the astounding sight Thorpe's mouth gaped half open — and thereby saved his eardrums. An unusually vicious, zipping, rending shell-screech ended in the tremendous thud of a huge projectile a little way behind him. The impact crumbled the loose dirt under his feet, and the air gust of the shell toppled him forward. In the same instant a stupendous cataclysm, that was at the same time earthquake, cyclone and volcanic eruption, shattered the whole universe back into Primal Chaos...

Dimly and as it were through the Night of Ages, Thorpe groped his way out of the blackness to the garish light — of hell. All about the rim of his particular hell-hole, fiends were howling and shrieking, blaspheming and tearing each other to pieces in a devilish saturnalia. Satan himself — tall, eagle-nosed, malignant-eyed, fiery-faced, head covered with the whitish flames of brimstone — was wielding a bar of lightning...

Thorpe tried to move, and found himself helpless. The shock of the terrific explosion that had flung him down into the shell hole atop the dead

Prussians and Algerians, seemed also to have paralyzed him. But the daze that obscured his mind and his eyes was fast clearing. Satan transformed himself into the unhelmeted, sweating, disheveled figure of Count von Pappheim. He was beating the backs of his retreating soldiers with the flat of his sword. Thorpe did not wonder that the Prussians had been hurled back and were still giving ground. The Algerians were flinging themselves at their enemies like mad dervishes, eager to die fighting. The play of their knives and bayonets was appalling.

Von Pappheim's squad would have been put to rout and slaughtered like sheep had he not interlarded his sword pounding with bursts of coolly aimed pistol shots. Yet for all the deadly precision with which he struck down the swarthy assailants, others came charging from the front and side like enraged panthers.

On the opposite side of the shell crater the half demoralized Guards had already been driven back. Thorpe glanced again at Von Pappheim. The captain had bent over to reload his automatic. A flurried private jerked his gun back to shorten it for a bayonet thrust at the Turco who was stabbing a sergeant close before him. The butt struck the front of Von Pappheim's helmetless head. He dropped like a steer under the sledge. A moment later his lax body was under the feet of the charging Turcos.

Unbraced by the fall of their officer, the Prussians reeled rearwards beyond the constricted limit of Thorpe's vision. Madly the battle-crazed Turcos pressed forward. But then a

clear-toned rallying cry rolled out above the yells of the victors:

“*Vorwärts! vorwärts! Hurrah!*”

Forward again into the scope of Thorpe's vision spumed a rush of frenzied Guards, whose impact hurled back the Turcos and drove a dent several yards deep into their ranks. At the head of the counter-charge Kurt von Kissel was fighting the fierce Algerians with a cool-headed valor and skill that more than offset their fury. He parried their slashing knives and stabbing bayonets with his sword and struck back with the deadly thrusts of a born fencer, while in the brief moments between combats his service pistol dropped Turco after Turco.

At sight of his friend — Elsa's brother — fighting so valiantly against odds, something within Thorpe seemed to snap. The paralysis of shell shock that had benumbed his motor nerves and held him helpless gave way before a tremendous impulse of will and desire. He bounded to his feet and scrambled up the side of the pit.

Two of the men in the rear rank of Kurt's platoon were lifting the half revived Von Pappheim. Thorpe caught hold of the captain-count and sent the men jumping to meet the flank attack of the Turcos who had rushed around from the far side of the shell crater. While he supported the tottering officer, the platoon fought its way back to the general line of retreat.



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ment. Neither side could shell the enemy infantry without danger of injuring its own. From the moment the bayonet wielders interlocked, they had been left to fight out their deadly struggle with cold steel. But as Thorpe plodded up the slope to the old church with his burden, he saw machine-gun squads hidden behind coppices. A change was toward.

With radiant relief beaming in her green eyes, Lucy ran out to meet Thorpe and steady his tottering steps as he bore the wounded boy into the church. Coming straight from the battle-hell of hate and strife, what Thorpe saw under the shell-riddled roof of the House of God seemed a miracle. His own portly German surgeon-major was toiling side by side with a slender little French surgeon and several Sisters of Charity. They were straightening out the jumbire of Prussian casualties that hurried ambulance men had dumped and still were dumping helter-skelter among the rows of French wounded on the straw-strewn floor of the church. The whole interior reeked with the sickening dank odors of sweat and fresh blood and disinfectants. A black-robed Belgian priest was distributing quantities of medicines from beside the altar. Above him the bandage-hung image of Our Lady of Sorrows gazed down with pensive compassion upon the slashed and mangled victims.

But now the shrieks within the extemporized hospital were drowned in the ferocious clamor of the up-driving battle line. Above the heavy booming thunder of the bombardment rose the piercing yells of the Turcos, the deeper shouts

of the Germans, the clash of steel on steel. Then, suddenly, above all else, crashed the snappy, clacking rattle of machine-guns.

As Thorpe hurried to the portal Lucy darted ahead of him and barred his exit with outstretched entreating arms. Over her white-clad head he saw the Prussians still backing up the slope. The moment their ranks had cleared the machine-guns, an enfilading fire had been opened on the Turcos, the gunners pouring their torrents of bullets straight down the lines, regardless of out-jutting bends and wedges of their own soldiers.

The fusillade stopped as abruptly as it had burst out. Turcos had rushed the machine-gun squads. Though the brief cross-fire had been very deadly, the fierce Algerians who survived bounded over the silenced machine-guns and flung themselves at their foes even more furiously than before.

“*Les blessés! les blessés!*” cried a voice at Thorpe’s shoulder, and the French surgeon sprang forward to tug at one of the ponderous iron-studded doors.

Thorpe hastened to close the other door. He had no need of explanations. The fighters of both sides must be barred out of the hospital. The church was now doubly a sanctuary. As the massive doors clanged shut, and their heavy iron bolts shot into the sockets, Lucy hastened to help the French surgeon bind up the shell-smashed shoulder of the young German brought in by Thorpe.

Though the fierce clash and clamor outside

was half muffled by the thick doors, it told that the furious wave of fighters was surging up around the church. Thorpe picked his way over a row of wounded men to a pediment from which he could peer out through one of the high slit windows. The Turcos, though still inferior in numbers to their enemies, were continuing to drive back the superbly trained men of *Majestät's corps d'élite* everywhere within Thorpe's range of vision.

Without machine-guns or cavalry or infantry reserves, and helped little against their immediate opponents by the shells of the seventy-fives, the Algerians out-fought and out-gamed the blond manhood of the "Super race." They were led, not driven, by their French officers. Clear up over the round of the slope, past the church, and through the orchard, almost down to the German batteries, the brave French Colonials prodded back their enemies with bayonet and knife. In more than one place the Prussians were beginning to break into utter rout.

But then a mass of reinforcements, all the Guard reserve, was hurled forward at the attackers. Through the tattered breaking line of their own defeated van charged regiment after regiment, furious to avenge the bitter disgrace of the Guard's retreat.

The Turcos, already half exhausted by the tremendous task they had accomplished, gave back before this fresh gray flood of enemies. Here and there deep salients were driven into their thin lines by the impact of solid charging columns. Yet they fought as terrifically in their



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priest lifted upon their litter the one who seemed most in need of immediate surgical aid. As they swung out and around the corner of the church with the stoically silent sufferer, a half company of Guards in scattered line advanced into view past the far corner. They were methodically bayoneting the wounded Turcos and searching them for money and ornaments.

At the near end walked Kurt, his girlish cheeks white and his head downbent in shame. Von Pappheim was midway out along the line, directing the work with much gusto. The red dazzle of the sunrays on the side of Lucy's car fixed his avidly roving gaze. He came striding towards it, with an eagerness that told he had recognized its unique copper-colored body.

His harsh command for the men to follow forced the attention of Kurt, who looked up and perceived first the car and then Thorpe. But a guttural order from Von Pappheim checked him as he started to run to his friend.

“Quick — quick!” Thorpe urged the priest. “In with our *blessé* — *en avant! pronto!*”

His cassocked bearer-mate was already breaking into a jog. They came to the portal. In another moment they would have swung into the deep entrance. Von Pappheim, already beside Kurt, snatched the automatic pistol from the lieutenant's holster and fired three shots in rapid succession. The priest, who was directly in line before Thorpe, fell prone on his face, dropping the front of the litter with a suddenness that pitched Thorpe over and down on top the wounded Turco.

He rolled clear and sprang to his feet. Kurt, hurrying forward beside Von Pappheim, struck up the out-thrust pistol. The bullet whistled close over Thorpe's head. The astounded captain glared at his inferior and thrust the pistol muzzle against his breast.

“Mutiny!” he snarled.

Kurt clicked his heels together and saluted, steady-eyed.

“No, Herr Captain — not mutiny. He is of ours. He helped save you from the Turcos.”

Even the Blond Beast Superman is not always perfect in his practise of ruthlessness. Von Pappheim was silenced and checked, at least for the moment, by the reminder of his debt to the hated American. Yet it was not in his arrogant, domineering Prussian nature to give way with good grace.

“Your sword,” he demanded.

Kurt offered scabbard and all. Von Pappheim jerked out the blade, and, backed by the battle-drunk soldiers, turned to confront Thorpe.

“You have been aiding the filthy black swine,” he accused.

Thorpe silently pointed to the Red Cross on the sleeve of his surgeon's coat.

“*Verdammend* to that fetish!” cursed the captain. “The French degenerates have disgraced civilization by bringing these barbarians to trample on German *kultur*. You shall see how we treat the filth. You are in our service. I command you to take this pistol and shoot the black devil.”

“You are mistaken,” rejoined Thorpe. “I

am a neutral and in the service of the Red Cross alone — therefore not subject to your commands. I shall appeal to my friend General von Hausen.”

Von Pappheim lowered the menacing pistol. The training of his ilk was to bully inferiors and cringe at the displeasure of his superiors. The mere mention of the High Commander's name was enough to turn the pistol away from the American. But the wounded Turco could not claim an acquaintance with *Excellenz*. Von Pappheim kicked the helpless man in the face, and signed to the nearest soldier.

“*Kaput,*” he commanded.

Quickly as the grinning Prussian brandished his bayonet to pin the “black swine” to the earth, Thorpe managed to swing around into the portal before the blow fell. As he entered the church Von Pappheim shouldered violently past him, with Kurt's sword and pistol held ready for an attack. The sudden change from the sun glare into the semi-gloom of the church brought him to a blinking halt. The blood-maddened soldiers came crowding in behind, itching for another Turco massacre.

Kurt edged around to breathe a whisper in Thorpe's ear: “Lucy...where...?”

Before Thorpe could reply the girl hastened forward with the slender little French surgeon to meet the intruders. Kurt was beside her even sooner than Thorpe. Von Pappheim smiled gloatingly, and the next moment scowled at the surgeon.

“Scoundrel! Someone fired from here,” he



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carved Gothic walls and pillars reverberated with the yells of the soldiers as they rushed forward to bayonet the helpless French wounded. With the bloodthirsty shouts of the butchers mingled the screams of the nurses, the shrieks of white French *blessés* for mercy and the howls of the Turco and Prussian injured. All were so intermingled, and so many shrapnel and bayonet torn faces were masked with bandages, that friend and foe alike were trampled and jabbed in the blood-fury of the slayers.

From the altar, which he had been using as an operating table, the portly German surgeon came lumbering into the shambles, his fat face purple with rage.

“*Heraus!*” he bellowed. “*'Raus*, you blundering fools! Out with you, blockheads! numskulls! Goose-step, you ganders! I will have you shot — court-martialed! *'Raus!*”

Before that roar of angered authority, the murderers not only ceased their bloody work but cringed back like ferocious curs under the lash of their master. Von Pappheim shouldered his way forward through their midst, his steel-blue eyes glaring with cold malevolence.

“Beware how you interfere with military orders, Herr Doctor,” he threatened. “I myself gave command to clean out the black filth.”

“*'Raus, 'raus* — out with you all!” bellowed the surgeon, not a whit intimidated. “My hospital — I command here! Look to your bungling work, Herr Captain Furioso. Your mad cattle have trampled and gored our own injured. Such foolishness!”

“But all these swinish enemy-women, gouging eyes —” began Von Pappheim.

The surgeon cut short the black slander —

“*Pfui!* that silly bosh! *Heraus*, else I demand a court-martial on you...All those thousands lying out on the battle field! Every nurse means scores of lives saved for the Fatherland — arms saved to shoot...And that little French medic — Where is my little French medic.”

Von Pappheim shook his sword in the surgeon's face.

“The hairy ape tasted that. You may taste the same. Already have you given me grounds for a challenge.”

“Bah!” jeered the surgeon. “A perfect suture-fastener — and for you to go and kill him when he is so needed. You bungler! Challenge — *ja, ja*, challenge. For weapon I will use a needle-squirt full of porridge. With it I shall fill the empty hole inside your skull... *Ach!* how fine it will sound to the high command when I make report. Herr Captain, Count Wolf von Pappheim, killing my assistant and taking my women nurses for his men's pleasure, when thousands of good cannon-fodder die for lack of binding up.”

Even Von Pappheim's arrogance could not withstand such satire, backed by the threat of accusation to the High Command.

“There shall be no need to make report, Herr Doctor,” he replied in what was meant for a conciliatory tone. “If I struck over-hastily, I had good excuse. The little French

poisoner was insolent. As offset to his loss, my men shall clean out all this black trash for you. The order has come to give no quarter. Operations of troops are not to be hampered by the guarding of prisoners. With these dirty savages flung out, there will be more room for our brave wounded. Also, I give you leave to keep your women nurses — except that one with green eyes and copper hair. She is a spy confessed.”

“That is a bold-faced lie, Doctor,” interjected Thorpe. “I ask you to safeguard us to General von Hausen.”

“Later — later. Now shall you stay here to help,” answered the surgeon. He glared again at Von Pappheim and pointed towards the door. “I will cut off the arms and legs of all the Turcos, if I choose, but I want no help from bunglers. *Heraus!* — You, also, ganders. Set free my nurse and stretcher-bearer. *'Raus — 'raus!*”

Von Pappheim had met his match, and knew it. He stalked out, muttering a command to release the spies. Abjectly eager to appease all the angry officers, the stupid soldiers set free their lieutenant along with the Americans.



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it to make sure the hand could be used. When she looked up, her lips had regained a trace of color and were no longer quivering. She turned her compassion-darkened eyes to Thorpe, looking past Kurt as if he were invisible.

“We stand here, Lan — yet the shrieks of those beasts’ victims!”

She started towards a big, coarse-featured Prussian who was crying for his mother with the piteous wail of an injured, frightened child. Kurt caught her arm.

“Wait — wait!” he urged.

Unable to draw herself free, she stood silent, icily disdainful.

“Let her go,” interposed Thorpe. “You should know how she feels — all this... Later on, perhaps —”

“No, at once!” exclaimed Kurt. “She — you both — you must come at once. If Von Pappheim is first to reach the High Commander! —”

“What! You think he — Come along, Loo!” ordered Thorpe.

He jerked Lucy away from Kurt and flung an arm about her shoulders to force her to the door. But at his touch her frozen rigidity gave way. If she did not go willingly, she at least made no resistance. Kurt, darting out ahead, shouted his relief that Von Pappheim had not made off with her car.

Battles were still raging between forces of the defenders and the invaders. But none sounded near at hand. The cannonading had dulled to a deep pounding roar like distant

thunder. Out beyond the middle of the fields a few French shells were falling short of the newly dug Prussian trenches. Evidently the batteries of seventy-fives had drawn back, along with the tattered regiments of Turcos. A solitary howitzer shell screeched high overhead, like a fallen angel hurtling from heaven to hell. But all the light batteries and all the torn regiments of the Guard in the vicinity were inactive. True, they had defeated the enemy and now held possession of the battlefield. No less true, they had been so smashed by the seventy-fives and so mauled by the Turco panthers that none among them had any stomach left for fighting.

Thorpe stopped short with Lucy inside the church portal. The last of Von Pappheim's bloody crew were just disappearing through the broken archway of the flying buttress. The moment the last man passed from sight Thorpe hurried Lucy to her car.

A vain attempt, probably by Von Pappheim, had been made to start the engine. Kurt was staring in dismay at a flat rear tire that had been punctured by a bayonet, either during the fight, or wantonly by one of Von Pappheim's party. Lucy gave no heed to it until she had thrust her key into the magneto lock and tested the self-starter. The engine began to purr. She shut it off and faced Thorpe.

“Nothing broken. Open the tool-box, Lan.”

With feverish haste both Thorpe and Kurt set about jacking up the car and changing to the spare tire. Lucy came back and glanced

over into the tonneau. In the hospital she had spent long hours, helping with unfaltering steadiness to bind up wounds of the most ghastly character. Yet now the mere sight of the darkening crimson stains on the tonneau cushions utterly unnerved her. She sank down upon the running board, faint and dizzy. Kurt thrust out his arms to support her. Thorpe brusquely shoved him aside.

“Hold on. This isn’t playing the game, Loo,” he rallied, and he sprang the old quip, “Cheer up; the worst is yet to come.”

“That — that — stain — on my — cushions!” she gasped.

Thorpe swung her up bodily into the clean front seat, whipped the dust robe over the rear seat, and flung dirt on the floor of the tonneau. With the eager assistance of Kurt, he then completed the change of tires in utmost haste. Lucy moved over into the driver’s seat.

“With me,” she directed Thorpe.

Kurt drew himself stiffly erect, his boyish face white.

“Miss Carew, how I have offended you I cannot tell. Yet whatever the cause of your displeasure, I must beg leave to go with you and Allan. Your safety is above all else.”

Lucy’s cold gaze glowed into the heat of scornful reproach.

“I do not wish to be unjust to you, Mr. von Kissel. But this — this hideousness... Oh! if the very awfulness of it did not make it seem unreal, I’d go mad!... Those soldier beasts — Von Pappheim! That little French doctor —



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of you apart from that — Von Pappheim and — the others,” she murmured. “You may come, if you wish.”

Without lifting his bowed head, Kurt entered the blood-stained tonneau.

Under the girl's skillful guidance the big car began to weave its way between the bodies that strewn the ground. No one seemed to know anything definite about the battle or the location of Von Hausen's headquarters. After wandering about at random, Lucy hit upon the scheme of following staff cars. Three lured her off towards the booming battle front. The fourth, in which Kurt recognized one of Von Hausen's personal aides, was traveling the other way. As Lucy swung around to pursue it she gave a little cry, stopped the car, and sagged over against Thorpe's shoulder. The pain of a strained tendon in the wrist bruised by the soldier's brutal grip had become excruciating. Thorpe unceremoniously lifted her over the back of the seat into Kurt's arms, and grasped the steering-wheel.

The car leaped into high. The staff car was making over fifty miles an hour. Thorpe came up on it so rapidly that he was only a hundred yards in the rear when the gray racer slowed to make a turn. Regiments of Saxon reserves were marching down the main road to the front as the two cars went spinning along with almost unvarying speed. Dusk had almost set in when the gray car stopped at the chateau that served as headquarters for the Third Army.

Thorpe had called back instructions to his passengers. Lucy replaced her Red Cross coif. When her car came to a stop behind its leader, Thorpe and Kurt sprang out to hand her from the tonneau with an exaggerated deference calculated to impress all onlookers. Though the twilight was fading, the splendor of Lucy's car was still clearly discernible. Her torn and crimson-stained Red Cross costume lent a touch of mystery to the proceeding.

The aide had paused in the entrance to see who had presumed to pursue him. Kurt drew Thorpe towards him and saluted.

“Captain, I am Lieutenant Kurt von Kissel, not unknown to *Excellenz*. I have the honor to introduce Herr Thorpe, the American gentleman whose services as volunteer were personally accepted by the High Commander. To-day Herr Thorpe has saved my captain from the bayonets of the charging Turcos.”

The aide mellowed, and bowed pleasantly to Thorpe, who modestly accepted the imputation of heroism. Kurt struck while the iron was hot —

“When *Excellenz* is at leisure, Herr Thorpe desires to pay his compliments in person and introduce a lady who also has been of great service.”

“You are the Von Kissel of whom *Excellenz* has spoken, *nicht?*” said the aide. He peered closer at Lucy's beautiful eyes, twirled his waxed mustache, and bowed gallantly. “The most charming fraulein is welcome — and Herr Thorpe. Follow.”

With such an escort, the visitors had slight difficulty in passing the sentries. As the chateau housed the High Commander, it had as yet been only partly pillaged. In the *salon* a pair of young aides were amusing themselves by shooting each other's image in the magnificent mirrors. The captain ordered them out, bowed Lucy to a chair, and withdrew, smiling.

The minutes of waiting dragged. In the deepening dusk Kurt began to pace the *salon*. Thorpe sat still beside Lucy, but a cold sweat moistened his forehead. Much time had been lost in the race from the hospital. What if Von Pappheim had arrived before them and gained the general's ear?

An orderly came to light the cut-glass chandeliers. Another quarter hour of anxious waiting. A disquieting memory flashed into Thorpe's consciousness.

"Kurt!" he exclaimed—"That dodge of ours at Chalons over the *verboden* film—what did Papp do about it?"

The young officer's tense face relaxed in a half smile.

"He does not know. I jumped aboard the wrong train, as it was moving. He missed it. At home mobilization was under way. I was given a special detail. I did not join my regiment on the Ourthe until the advance began. Since then all this upset and fighting. He has not yet questioned me."

Thorpe nodded. "That is well. If asked, you will tell only that you were unable to make off with the film."



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CHAPTER XXI

PAWNS IN THE GAME

Both Thorpe and Kurt turned dismayed looks upon Lucy. She gazed up inquiringly at Thorpe.

“Kurt spoke of your saving the count?”

“He himself drove back the Turcos. I merely helped Papp to the rear.”

“All the better. Trump the knave.”

The aide had announced the callers. A morose voice boomed through the doorway—
“*Herein!*”

Thorpe placed Lucy's hand on Kurt's arm, and led the way. *Excellenz* was sagged down in an easy chair, puffing away at a long-stemmed meerschaum. On a tray at his elbow stood a full stein of champagne. One of his uplifted spurred boots was roweling the piano finish of a hand-carved rosewood table, the far side of which was heaped with food-messed silverware and eggshell china half covered by the back-flung wine-stained damask cloth. From the far end of the table Von Pappheim watched the entrance of Lucy with a cruel smile.

Seemingly oblivious to herr general's scowl, Thorpe advanced with a show of suave deference. It was no time to stickle over non-essentials. He could imagine all too vividly

what would be Lucy's fate if Von Pappheim had his way.

“Congratulations, *Excellenz!*” he exclaimed. “I hear that we have won all along the line. But what else could be expected with you in command?”

The frown of the High Commander began to relax. Von Pappheim put in a hasty stroke.

“*Excellenz*, that is the spy-woman — that she-wolf in sheep's clothing.”

Lucy bowed to him with mock graciousness.

“What a gallant compliment from noble Captain Furioso! Yet it rather differs from those he paid me before I gave him the basket.”

Von Pappheim's twitching mustache tushes betrayed that the neat counter-thrust had pierced to the quick. General von Hansen scrunched his spurred heel off the table and set up to glower at the impertinent nurse.

“*Himmel!* You dare come before me, you foreign spy-woman, and flout an officer of my army?”

Kurt stepped before Lucy, his whole body quivering with the intensity of his emotion.

“*Excellenz*, I beg leave to speak for Miss Carew. She saved the mother and Elsa — brought them safe out of France after war was declared.”

Again the general's frown relaxed.

“So? — Your good mother spoke highly of the fraulein. Yet for her to turn back before our lines — that looks not so well. You would wed her. You are prejudiced in her favor, *nicht?*”

“May not Captain von Pappheim be no less prejudiced against her, *Excellenz*? From the first he knew of the innocent indiscretion committed by Miss Carew, upon which he now bases his charge of espionage. She herself told him the whole truth, and he made light of the matter—until after he failed to win her hand.”

Von Pappheim met the general's look of inquiry with a cynical smile.

“*Excellenz* knows my connection with the secret service. There is no discredit in making love to win the confidence of a spy-woman. I made light of her crime until I could get possession of full proofs.”

“Pardon me, General,” interposed Thorpe, as Kurt stood speechless before this adroit move. “Pardon me, but I wish to inform you that this noble count detective is what in America we would term a fourflusher and an ingrate. In the first place, he has not a particle of proof against Miss Carew—not even sufficient evidence to condemn her before a drum-head court-martial. As for—”

The general held up a hand for silence, and again looked inquiringly at the accused. Von Pappheim was no longer smiling. He frowned at Kurt.

“The *verboden* film—you delivered it as ordered?”

Kurt clicked his heels together and saluted. “I have to report that I was unable to bring away the alleged *verboden* film.”

“So you failed the Fatherland,” gibed Von Pappheim. He cast a significant look at the



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“Down! Back, you Prussian! You forget I am here. Sheathe your sword!”

The voice of Authority sent Von Pappheim backward, and brought down his sword arm, though he still was so enraged that he could not speak. Thorpe thrust again—

“Would it not be gracious, *Excellenz*, for the noble count to return the sword to its owner? He borrowed it to kill a French surgeon, who, like Miss Carew, was busy saving your soldiers. His own sword he lost when he fell under the feet of the Turcos.”

“*Donnerwetter!*” rumbled the general. “What fool’s tale is this?”

“Mine,” claimed Thorpe. “I was fool enough to follow at the rear of the Guard’s great charge. When the Turcos countered, Captain von Pappheim was struck down and over-run by the enemy. Lieutenant von Kissel led a rally that saved him. No man has ever done a braver deed. All the Guard line was giving back before the fearful rush of the Turcos. Yet my friend here smashed a hole through the mad dervishes, leading a long pace in front of his men.”

Kurt blushed like a girl. “I could not permit my captain to be taken, *Excellenz*. Besides, it was Herr Thorpe who ran in and supported the captain until we regained the line.”

“So — so, boy. This begins to have a different look,” muttered the general. He raised his lowering gaze to Von Pappheim. “Shall witnesses be called? The Iron Cross cannot be given without clear proof.”

Von Pappheim started as if lashed across the face, bowed stiffly, and replied: "I do not deny the rescue; though how I was struck down, unless by a treacherous blow from behind —"

A meaning glance towards Thorpe completed the sentence. Thorpe smiled.

"The noble count runs true to form. As it happens, however, the blow was from the front — the backward jerk of a gun butt as herr captain bent to reload his pistol. The bump still shows at the upper edge of his forehead."

General von Hausen stared, pondered, took a puff at his neglected pipe, and asked with explosive suddenness: "The tale of bayoneting our casualties in the hospital, Herr Count — you would call the surgeon to disprove, *nicht?*"

"My men, *Excellenz*, were still hot from fighting. A few mistakes may have been made. As for the French ape-doctor, he was insolent."

Lucy's pent-up scorn flared —

"That is a deliberate, malicious lie, Count von Pappheim! You know it... And here are Mr. Thorpe and Mr. von Kissel to prove it. You accused the little doctor of assassination. He protested his innocence. But before he could tell that your own surgeon was there, you — murdered him!"

Von Pappheim gave back a step before the impact of this passionate charge.

"So — so. The fraulein also is a good fencer," rumbled the general, a frosty twinkle

in his cold eyes. "The accused strike back at you, Captain. Perhaps not alone your men may have made a few mistakes....Your proof that the fraulein is a spy! I would now make examination."

Crimson with chagrin, Von Pappheim pointed a shaking finger at Kurt. "He has confessed his failure to secure the *verboten* film, as ordered."

"*Ach!* — And you choose for the mission a boy untrained in secret service work. Enough. No more of your little mistakes. Report yourself to your regiment. Lieutenant von Kissel will join my staff until further orders. Keep his sword. After the use to which you have put it, he will prefer another. A blunder is worse than a crime. To kill a surgeon who was saving our good cannon-fodder — *pfui!* *Heraus!*"

Von Pappheim, his face like a death mask, saluted and stalked out as if on parade. Before he was through the doorway, Thorpe was bowing to the general.

"*Excellenz*, permit me the honor of presenting to you my countrywoman, Fraulein Carew, a lady of wealth and high position, an intimate friend of the Von Kissels, and by His Imperial Highness, the Crown Prince, named the American Princess."

"The prince has an eye for pretty women," disapproved the general. "And this stained dress — it does not become a princess."

Lucy made no attempt to be gracious. Her green eyes met the frown of the High Com-



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“*Ja ja*, everything — forts and all.”

“So I saw no reason why I shouldn't take a roll of snapshots at Essen. When I reached Berlin, two Prussian detectives tried to scare me into giving up the film. I substituted another, and slipped the one they wanted into the dispatch-pouch of the American ambassador. I know now this was all very silly, but I thought it a good joke to dupe those stupid detectives. Had they been decent about it — even half-way polite — I'd willingly have given up the film. But for them to come at me as if I were a criminal!...I always have abominated bullying.”

The general puffed at his pipe, pondered, and remarked in a tone of fatherly mildness: “You will give the *verboten* film to me, and all will be blown over — *nicht?* ”

“I wish I could, sir; only, you see, it is — ” the girl paused a moment at Thorpe's nudge, but went on again in her candid manner — “it is in France.”

The High Commander bristled into sudden irascibility —

“In France? So — Von Pappheim was right. You have confessed it. You are a spy-woman. I will have you court-martialed. This Herr Thorpe — he is an accomplice, as Von Pappheim charges.”

Lucy checked Kurt's horrified protest with a gesture, and faced the general, quiet and disdainful.

“Can't you call in Baron Munchausen to corroborate the herr count? He would make a

more plausible witness at the court-martial.”

“Do not trifle with me,” sternly admonished the general. “Women spies are shot, as well as men.”

“You will do no such thing!” cried Lucy. “It’s all a silly bungle, this making a mountain out of a molehill. You scolded the herr count for blundering. How about yourself? Those snapshots are in France, where you cannot get them. So far I have kept them secret, but I have arranged that if harm is done to me—or to Mr. Thorpe—they shall be delivered to the French army.”

Von Hausen leaned forward, a grim smile on his harsh lips.

“So—you call Checkmate. I see you are no fool.”

“Nor are you, sir,” Lucy returned the compliment. “You have yourself said that a blunder is worse than a crime. Frankly, I do not believe those pictures are the least bit harmful. But if you want the French to make sure on that point, you have only to shoot me or Mr. Thorpe.”

“And if not?”

“Then I’ll get them as soon as I can and present them to you, providing you will treat these silly accusations of Count von Pappheim with the contempt they and he deserve. You have seen how little his truthfulness and judgment are to be trusted.”

The general leaned over and tapped emphatically upon the scratched rosewood table.

“Fraulein, by Sedan Day, September fourth,

our invincible army shall have crushed France down to the lowness of Spain, and on that day of glorious memory for the Fatherland the Crown Prince shall enter Paris. No pictures from Essen could bring help to the French army in so short a time.”

Thorpe, himself sickened by this smashing bludgeon blow that shattered Lucy's defense into fragments, reached out to catch her as she swayed. But she rallied and replied with a fair degree of steadiness:

“If that is true, General, I then have only your sense of right and justice between me and the — vicious false charges of Count von Pappheim.”

“*Nein, fraulein.* There is yet one chance for you,” rumbled the master. His fingers again tapped emphatically on the ruined table top. “You have shown yourself most clever. That which has put your head into the lion's mouth can pull it out again. Herr Thorpe will remain my guest — under guard — while you will escape through the lines to Paris. You will make loud complaint of how you have been mistreated, you will get that *verboten* film, and you will learn much about the French armies. Then you will come back quickly and report.”

“Good God! You can't mean that!” cried Thorpe. “The French will shoot her!”

“*Ach* — and I will have only you to shoot if she does not come back. In war one must take risks. I risk that she will stay with the French, and allow you to die. A most small risk, fraulein — *nicht?* ”



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At the look on the High Commander's face, Kurt flung himself forward, his hands imploringly outstretched.

“*Excellenz!* She is beside herself — overwrought! Von Pappheim lied! She is innocent! I pledge my life she is innocent!”

Death glared from the reddened eyes of the High Commander. He spoke with a clipped, precise enunciation, more menacing than a roar: “Innocent or guilty, she shall go, or she shall be shot.”

“If I go, how do I know I will not be shot when I come back?” cried Lucy.

The tightly drawn lips of the general relaxed in their grim smile.

“Good — You will go, fraulein. When you have succeeded, then a reward to you and freedom for Herr Thorpe. I pledge you my word.”

“Was not the honor of Germany pledged to respect the neutrality of Belgium?”

This time Thorpe felt certain that the order of execution would be given — The general merely widened his smile.

“Bah! A scrap of paper, as Hollweg has well said. Treaties and pledges are mere smoke and ashes when self-interest no longer backs them.”

“Then your own word of honor?” queried Lucy.

“It will stand fast. To break a good tool would be a blunder. Later you can be used among the *Engländer schweine.*”

Lucy shuddered, glanced up at Thorpe's dis-

mayered face, drew in a quick breath, and quietly inquired: "When do I start for Paris?"

"Good—most good! I thought you would see the point, fraulein. War is a great chess game. All the pawns should be used for taking the kings and castles. To show there is no hard feeling, I will accept the parole of Herr Thorpe not to escape. He will report each day to his friend Von Kissel...Your *parole d'honneur* to that, Herr Thorpe."

"Why, if you—Yes, I give you my word of honor, *Excellenz*."

The dictator turned again to Lucy.

"You will start at once. Von Pappheim has told me that you have a fine car. You will be taken to where there is a hole through the French lines. There, in your so-sad dress, you will escape from us, with perhaps one or two dying Frenchmen. Now you will say farewell to your friends while I write the orders. Much time I have lost on this little matter. Now I must go to work."

"My maid is at that hospital," said Lucy. "She must go with me."

"*Ja*, fraulein, *ja*. A fraulein should go nowhere without a chaperon."

CHAPTER XXII

INTO FRANCE

The High Commander drained down at one enormous draught the brimming steinful of champagne, heaved himself to his feet, and started towards the anteroom.

“*Herein,*” he called.

One of the aides who had shot the mirrors in the *salon* popped through the doorway and came sharply to attention.

“Food for three — at once — good food,” snapped the master.

The young officer saluted and dashed out again. As Von Hansen pompously followed him, Thorpe swung around before Lucy.

“Whoops, Loo! Three cheers for the lamb who bearded the lion in his den and pulled the wool over — *Tut, tut, tut!* Buck up, old chum. Cut out the weeps. You’ve played him to a fare-ye-well. Tight pinch for a while — sure. But now it’s all over except the shouting and the getaway. You’ll make Paris in two or three days, nail those confounded snapshots, and streak out for the good old U. S. A.”

Kurt pressed closer, his boyish face distorted with conflicting emotions.

“Hush!” he warned. “If she is to do that



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out by the boot straps before we are through.”

The brave banter failed to lighten Thorpe's dejection. “It's no joke, Loo. I tell you flatly, if you'll not promise to —”

“*Sh-s-sh!*” she warned. “That captain and — Oh, thank goodness! Vittles and drink — a meal, a real civilized meal! I've not had a bite all day. I could eat a fried gargoyle!”

All private talk was now at an end. With the orderlies who appeared to serve dinner for the High Commander's “guests” came the young aide and the captain whose car had led the party to headquarters. While the captain gravely explained that he had been chosen to escort the fraulein through the lines, one of the orderlies cleared the table by the simple process of gathering up the used table service in the cloth and hurling all into a corner.

But even the crash of the shattered eggshell china could not divert Lucy from her delight over the dinner that was served on a fresh cloth. The cream of the land had been skimmed for the High Commander and the mess of his personal staff. Kurt shared Lucy's high spirits from the start, and Thorpe hastened to make pretense of light-heartedness. To have continued glum might have depressed the girl when she most needed strengthening.

The captain sat at the fourth side of the table, politely attentive to the needs of the guests and observant of all that passed between them. After the dessert he summoned a brawny German deaconess dressed in black, with a white coif and Red Cross armlets. She took

Lucy for a half hour's rest, while the men went to see that the car was ready. Soldier mechanics were carefully overhauling the engine and running gear. A staff car whirled up out of the darkness, with Lucy's elderly French maid, Marcelle, cowering between a pair of young aides in the tonneau.

All too soon for Thorpe, Lucy appeared with her duenna, the German amazon deaconess. Framed about by the dark wrap that covered her nurse's coif, the girl's face looked very white. But she flung a reassuring greeting to Marcelle, who had been transferred to the tonneau of her car, and smiled with seeming cheerfulness as she gave a hand to each of her anxious friends.

“Good-by! Don't worry. — Yes, I'll soon be back, Kurt. — Take care of yourself, Lan.”

Thorpe felt her hand cling lingeringly in his palm. He gave her a comrade-like pat on the shoulder.

“Buck up — and keep going, as I told you,” he muttered. “After the war Kurt can come to you.”

She drew her hand away and sprang up into the driver's seat. Kurt had turned to her escort. He spoke rapidly, in German:

“Herr Captain, the fraulein is an intimate friend of my mother. I have asked her to be my wife. You will do me the courtesy of seeing that she is treated with utmost respect.”

“Ja. *Excellenz* has so ordered,” replied the captain.

He swung in beside Lucy, leaving Marcelle

alone in the tonneau. The engine began to purr. A last glance and wave from Lucy, and the car shot away into the night.

An orderly showed the friends to the magnificent and as yet unvandalized bedchamber assigned to their use.

Between exhaustion from the stress of that fearful day, and the shred of comfort given by the aide's parting assurance, Thorpe fell asleep while trying to picture Lucy's night ride across the battle front. In that mad chaos of death there might well be peril awaiting her—a shot from an over-zealous picket, the devilish leaden spray of a machine-gun, a chance shell. But Von Hausen had spoken of a gap in the French lines, and there was the escort captain to safeguard the car past the German out-posts...

Dawn brought a day of brooding inaction for Thorpe, of joyful activity to Kurt. All behind the German front there was a furious rushing up of guns and munitions, and hurried attempts to maneuver and tactically mass the excess of troops.

Stray bits of information leaked out or were openly announced at General Headquarters. Up the Meuse on the line to Verdun, Wurttemberg and the Crown Prince had not smashed through the French armies, after all. The *Engländer schweine* were not yet penned up. They were running away too fast. But at Cambrai Von Kluck's flanking corps would sweep around and slaughter them all. Then he would crumple up the exposed left flank of the French.

Everywhere was victory. On the Alsace-



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British. And the British, attacked again as at Mons by five times their number, again fought their way clear, and in turn saved the French wing before Von Kluck could trap them with his southward rushing horde.

At General Headquarters Thorpe heard much cursing when word was received that the *Engländer schweine* had once more escaped annihilation. Kurt was challenged by half a dozen furious young fellow aides merely for remarking that the British must be good soldiers. The duels were averted only by the veto of the High Commander, to whom the usual officers' court of honor referred the matter.

“*Donnerwetter!* To kill each other, so long as there is a Frenchman alive — *nein! nein!...* The disloyal talk of Lieutenant von Kissel? — *Ach*, I will show what I think of that boy.”

The “show” came at an inspection of the Imperial Guard Corps, which was still re-forming in the rear of the battle front. Before the rigidly saluting Von Pappheim and his company and the regimental officers, an order was read citing Lieutenant von Kissel for his brave rescue of the captain, and announcing his promotion to a first lieutenancy. The High Commander with his own hands then pinned the Iron Cross on the breast of the blushing, gulping hero.

After this there were no more black looks and sneering smiles at the new aide of the High Commander. Instead, both Ober-lieutenant von Kissel and his Americanisch friend came in for all the pleasant attentions at Gen-

eral Headquarters that the rush and hurly-burly of the advance would permit.

Thorpe could not have brought himself to the point of currying favor. But he did not go out of his way to avoid it. He tried to be wise in his generation. The better the impression he made on the *entourage* of the High Commander, the better his chance of saving Lucy from her cruel dilemma — if she returned. That she would attempt to come back he had not the slightest doubt. His fervent hope was that the French would stop her. But this was qualified by the acute dread that their interference might turn on the discovery that she was acting as a spy.

With the advance of the armies, General Headquarters also were moved forward. Kurt's modest share in the loot of the chateau was a fine rosewood piano for Elsa and a set of magnificent furs for the mother. As Thorpe saw the carefully labeled boxes trundled off towards Germany in Red Cross trucks, along with the other plunder from the burning chateau, he suddenly realized how little he had been thinking of the deliciously sweet fraulein to whom he was all but betrothed.

Throughout the fearfully eventful hours and days since their parting, his mind had been glutted with the horrors of war — of fire and massacre, fighting, pillaging, slaughter. And to this frightfulness had been added the black dread of danger to Lucy. Was not that sufficient explanation why he had so forgotten all else in the world — even the adorable, darling

girl who had parted from him so reluctantly?

But now that he remembered, he hastened to write her a long and loving letter. Consideration for her feelings made impossible any mention of the massacres of civilians and wounded and the outrages upon women and girls that had accompanied the advance of the gray host of *Majestät*. Still more unthinkable was any reference to the defilement of the few villas and chateaux left unburned.

After this first letter, Thorpe wrote three or four more, one for each day of the cyclonic advance down into France. But he omitted to mention the frightful fate of the frontier village where she and the mother had been detained by the courteous little captain of Territorials.

All the officers and men of Von Hausen's forward driving columns were wildly jubilant. The fat of the land was theirs for the taking, and they took with both hands — wine and jellies, poultry and jewels; also women when they pleased — ladies for the officers, village and peasant girls for the men. Wine, women and war — what more could be asked? "To suffer is strengthening; to inflict suffering is more strengthening." *Hurrah* for the blond beasts of Nietzsche!

But at the shifting General Headquarters, all was not merry. Why did not the sly French rats stand and fight, so that they might be hacked to pieces? But no, they must fall back and fall back; and Von Kluck was still stretching his legs off to outflank the *Engländer schweine*, who kept shooting down windrows of



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Britishers to escape annihilation was now past... With this good news came the report of three whole Russian army corps destroyed or captured in the Masurian Marshes; also a report that Deutschland's new allies, the Americans, were helping to defend her Chinese possessions against the Japanese.

Thorpe smiled neither at the real news nor at the *canard*. He was far too concerned over Kurt's insistence upon leaving the staff. Zealous to share in the final drive that was to make an end of France, Cher-lieutenant von Kissel had applied for a vacancy created in his own company by the enemy. *Excellenz* approved such high spirit. Kurt went back to the line, and with him went Thorpe, still under parole not to escape.

CHAPTER XXIII

A NIGHT SURPRISE

Back to Berlin flashed glowing reports of how at last the net was really closing about the hard-driven quarry. And while all Germany drew in breath after the Masurian victory-cry to shout the triumph in France, the pig-headed Englisher dogs must go and break through again out of the St. Quentin snare, leaving their usual memento of high-heaped Deutsch cannon-fodder.

Worse still, the unobliging French must continue to fall back in line with their hateful flank guard. How was the scientific German High Command to display its strategy if the enemy did not act as had been scientifically forecast? To add insult to injury, the enemy continually fought strong rear guard actions that tantalized with the promise of the final death grapple, yet always ended in another retreat.

At the crossing of the Aisne, on the way to Rheims, the uhlan scouts of the leading Guard column were ambushed by Turcos left to defend the half-destroyed bridge. The sun had set. To win the bridgehead before dark, Kurt's regiment charged across the stream without waiting for a bombardment to clear the way. The Turcos fled with the haste of stampeded cattle. Such a

weak defense — such a panic-stricken flight — here at last was certain proof that the enemy had become demoralized by continuously retreating before the tidal wave of Deutschland's invincible host.

The bulk of the Prussian column contentedly bivouaced on the north side of the stream, while their engineers repaired the bridge. Kurt's regiment threw forward a picket line, and settled down for the night in the deserted hamlet on the south bank. Thorpe helped the other Red Cross men gather up the few Prussian wounded and bring them to the tiny *mairie*. There were no Turco wounded — after the Guards were done with them.

A long day's march beside Kurt had already tired Thorpe. At the end of his stretcher work, instead of going to officers' mess, as usual, he took a sandwich supper in company with the portly surgeon, requisitioned a "feather bed," and sought rest on the floor of the *mairie* attic. He was shivering from the damp cold of the September nightfall that had followed the intense smothering heat of the day. But, rolled in the voluminous softness of the wide mattress, he soon glowed into soporific warmth.

Either his sleep was very heavy or a thick corner of the feather-filled mattress muffled his ears. Bedlam was raging around the *mairie* before he heard and roused up... There was no mistaking those panther yells that rose above the rattle-clack of machine-guns and irregular reports of rifles. The wild Turcos had doubled back to strike the head of the Guard column.



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him, before he could retreat. He whirled to face them. An instant later he was reeling backwards towards the street door before their menacing weapons. As he stumbled on the threshold, there was a rush outside. Wiry hands gripped his arms and dragged him swiftly off up the night-shrouded street, away from the wild flashing and flaring of shots, the yells and shrieks and furious in-fighting of the surprise attack.

Thorpe made no attempt to struggle or hang back. He could feel the prickle of a dagger-point at the nape of his neck. Behind and overhead bright lights glared out. The Prussians were sending up rockets from across the Aisne. At once three-inch shells began to burst all in and around the village. Thorpe lengthened his stride. He realized he was now in more danger from the Prussians than from his captors.

As he fled from the bombardment in the midst of the little squad that had taken him prisoner, he conjectured that the Turcos had stealthily killed or captured the Prussian pickets, and then rushed the village before the regiment could form ranks. Triumphant yells told that the half-armed Prussians were being driven into the river. But the absence of up-rushing reserves led Thorpe to believe the attack no more than a show of force — a bluff to hold up the advance of the invading column.

The Turco squad raced on out of the village and between untrampled fields to the shelter of a wood. Here they sagged from top speed into a jog trot. At the end of half an hour, a “*Qui*

vive? ” brought them up short. One advanced and gave the password. After that followed another jog of a mile or two, and another challenge; then on a little way farther to a lone inn, before which a bunch of saddled horses were munching wheat from the nearby field.

A muttered word at the door, and Thorpe — panting, sweating, reeling from exhaustion — was thrust into a candle-lit taproom. At the table a major of Turcos was supping upon dainty French sandwiches. As he caught sight of Thorpe’s clean-shaven face, surgeon’s coat and civilian trousers, his thin aristocratic face lighted with a gracious smile.

“A thousand pardons that monsieur has been hurried,” he apologized in faultless English. “Pray be seated.”

Thorpe dropped into a chair, with a gasp: “*Whew!* Thanks — awfully!”

The major bowed. “Pardon me, but have I not the pleasure of addressing Monsieur Allan Thorpe?”

“Yes, I’m — ” Thorpe paused to muster a responsive smile — “I hope it’s a real pleasure, sir.”

The officer rose. “Request is made that monsieur give his parole he will not attempt to escape.”

Thorpe stared in sudden dismay.

“If Loo is — has returned!” he gasped, and he flung out his hand in desperate appeal. “Major, I’m only a neutral, a Red Cross volunteer. Permit me to rejoin the Guard ambulance! I gave my word to the High Commander. I

have the best of reasons. I—I must go back!”

“Monsieur has not broken his word to the barbarian general. He has been taken prisoner. The circumstances are known to me. As an officer and gentleman, I assure monsieur that the obligation to his honor has been removed. A surprise awaits him. Will he now give his parole not to return, or must force be required to detain him!”

“It’s very kind of you to give me the alternative, sir; but—there’s something else. Even if it means shooting, I’m bound to break away if I can.”

The major called in half a dozen swarthy Turcos, spoke to them in their own language, bowed regretfully, and passed out at the side door. The men closed around Thorpe. Resistance would have been futile. He stood still while they bound his hands behind him. He was taken out, placed upon a horse, and started off between a pair of mounted men.

At midnight his guards stopped at an inn before which he made out the dim bulk of a big touring car.

“Headquarters—third degree for mine,” he muttered. “I thought that Frenchman was a bit too polite.”

One of the Turcos went in. After a brief delay he came out to help lift the prisoner down from the saddle and push him, still bound, through the doorway. As Thorpe stood blinking in the bright light, a joyful voice cried at his shoulder:

“Oh, Lan! So he has caught you—at last!”



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particular, savage tales about the ferocity of the Turcos were current in the German ranks. Yet he recalled how, in the *mairie*, his fight-heated captors had refrained from killing a single injured Prussian.

“ I don't know about that,” he replied. “ The point is, I'm now doubly a prisoner.”

“ Oh, no. I've told you Etienne understands. I gave him my word you had done no more than help in Red Cross work and that you would not act as a spy for the Germans if released from them and set free. Haven't you still your passport with the French *visé*? Etienne allowed me to keep my car, on condition that I give it up at Paris. Our ambassador is giving out money and tickets. All we need do is make for England, where we can get a steamer home. Etienne advises that we get clear away from the Germans.”

A quick reproof passed Thorpe's lips before he could check it: “ You seem to have made a sudden hit with — Etienne.”

Lucy lowered her dark lashes to veil the sparkle in her lovely green eyes. “ Oh — Etienne — he is simply charming! Such kindness and perfect manners! ”

Thorpe believed himself speaking in a tone of brotherly admonition: “ Don't forget the man is French — and the husband of your friend.”

“ How could I? ” queried Lucy, masking a smile. “ You should see the bulging envelopeful of envy and covetousness I've written to Polly. Etienne is a — a Chevalier Bayard, brave as a

lion, gentle as a dove. After such un-French officers as Von Pappheim, I have found him irresistibly fascinating. — You haven't yet told me about Kurt."

The abrupt shift threw into Thorpe's mind a spotlight that shone through the flimsy mask of his self-deception. The mention of Kurt inevitably brought up the image of Elsa. He flushed hotly in the vivid realization that his concern over Lucy's interest in the Duke of Montmar had not been based altogether on brotherly feeling. He sought to rally.

"I don't understand about your Bayard, but Kurt is what you dubbed him — a Sir Galahad. You know how he saved Von Pappheim from the Turcos —"

"With your help," murmured Lucy.

"No, he was leading man — the whole show. I merely acted as a supe. It has already won him the Iron Cross. And since then... He has the bad habit of leading, instead of driving his men. If only he escaped those savage Turcos to-night!"

"Indeed, yes!" exclaimed Lucy. But after a moment's pause, she remarked in her old-time ironic tone: "Let us not forget that those Turco savages have pulled you out of the frying pan, and so saved me the annoyance of jumping back in."

Thorpe stared. "You can't mean, Loo, that you really intended to carry out that fool notion of going back? I gathered that Polly's husband put his foot down on it."

"Not at all. He merely required me to wait

while the effort was being made to rescue you. To-morrow I was to race down to Montmar for those miserable snapshots; then back here, to wait for the Boches, with a notebook full of information that the French wish to fall into their hands.”

“Information that the French wished... You’d have done that — would have double-crossed the High Commander?”

“Didn’t he force me to try to spy on the French?”

“But — but the danger you’d have been in if you’d tried it! Good Lord, Loo! Haven’t you any sense? All you need have done was to streak for home, as I told you.”

Lucy quivered at the acute concern in his look and tone, but bit her red lip and replied tartly:

“I have at least a sense of obligation. Your getting into that mess was all because of me. The least I could do was to get you out. Besides, every bit of information was to be absolutely accurate. If the facts were so selected that the Boches drew wrong inferences, they’d have had no excuse to blame me for their stupidity. Etienne’s first thought was for my safety. Won’t it be great fun teasing Polly about it when we get home?”

Thorpe forced a laugh.

“Ripping! — Let’s hop into your go-cart and hit the high places. Where’s Marcelle? We have no time to hang around. Von Kluck may already have cut us off from Paris. I’m going to ship you out of France before everything falls to pieces.”



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CHAPTER XXIV

A FATEFUL MEETING

A few moments after Lucy left Thorpe, a servant brought him a bottle of light wine, bread, and writing materials. Lucy soon returned with the blinking Marcelle, two suitcases, and a civilian coat. Upon the sleeves of the coat, mistress and maid promptly began to sew French Red Cross emblems.

“Now change coats,” ordered Lucy. “We’ll take the surgeon’s jacket along as a curiosity. Soldiers are bringing all kinds of queer trophies from the front.”

The food and drink had so refreshed Thorpe that he insisted upon driving. With a stately Turco orderly at his side to answer the challenges of French patrols and sentries, he motored Lucy and her maid into Rheims. The city was undefended, as the French had already evacuated the forts. But instead of hastening on towards Paris, Lucy chose to spend the remainder of the night at a hotel. The Turco returned to his command.

As the party sat at a none too early breakfast, word came that Prussian uhlans were entering the city. Lucy ordered out her car. Before a start could be made, reports were received that

other German columns farther west had already flooded in between Rheims and Paris. Lucy directed Thorpe to head south, parallel with the French-wrecked railway.

. At Epernay, where the party crossed the Marne about mid-afternoon, they fell in with a force of French troops. The commander approved the pass given by the Duke of Montmar, but promptly requisitioned the services of herself, Thorpe, the maid and the car for hospital use. She and Marcelle joined the Sisters of Mercy who were nursing those of the French wounded that had been brought to this part of the Marne in the Great Retreat.

Thorpe was set to motoring injured officers on south across the summer-dried Marshes of St. Gond and up past the Castle of Montmar to Sezanne. He was astonished to find the French soldiers far other than the demoralized, disintegrating mob that he had expected. For over two weeks they had been hurled back by that tremendous gray flood of invaders. They had suffered defeat after defeat. They were wonder-struck over the endless myriads of their enemies. Yet now they contemptuously asserted that *les Allemands* were stupid clumsy brutes who could not shoot and who dreaded the bayonet.

Though Thorpe far from agreed with the slighting opinion of the Frenchmen, it compelled him to realize the marvelous morale of these troops that the Germans considered as good as bagged. After all these days of hard fighting and no less hard marching, after being flanked or flooded back for nearly a hundred and fifty

miles, the best of troops might well have been disheartened. Instead, every man Thorpe saw was aquiver with eagerness for the word to turn and charge the hated invaders; every man was certain of victory.

Even the wounded officers, with whom Thorpe talked on the way to Sezanne, were as confident as their uninjured fellow officers and the men. In reply to his references to the overwhelming numbers of the Germans, their superior training, and highly scientific generals, the Frenchmen merely smiled and shrugged and advised him to wait a little longer before he passed judgment. They gave him no military information, but spoke confidently of their own General Foch and of the little-known silent Commander-in-Chief Joffre. From this, no less than from the number of troops that were entrenching in the Marshes of St. Gond and on the heights to the south, Thorpe surmised that the French expected soon to halt their line for the last desperate struggle against annihilation by the invincible death-flood of Germans.

In the meantime, the countless gray columns of the invaders were streaming on southward with fearful rapidity. Besides the larger part of Belgium, most of the coal and manufacturing portion of North France, already lay crushed under the iron heel of the conquerors. Friday, the fourth of September, found them across the Marne all the way from Chalons, west to within twenty-five miles of Paris.

Throughout the sickening heat of Thursday and the bleak dank chill of the misty night that



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might let go my arm, Lan. It must be black and blue — and I'm not apt to jump out now."

He pushed back in his seat, easing the grip of his elbow that had clamped her arm against his side with convulsive force.

"You little loon," he growled. "Think I'd let them get you?"

Lucy patted her bruised arm, smiled demurely, and inquired in the same meek voice: "What are you going to do with me, Lochinvar?"

He frowned at such levity.

"I'd lecture you if I had time," he answered in the same tone of angry concern. "The French Government stampeded to Bordeaux yesterday. Looks as if they have thrown up the sponge for all North France. They must know Von Kluck isn't headed for Paris. It is heavily fortified. Von Moltke would be an idiot to allow the investment of the city before the French armies are crushed. The French soldiers know it. That's why their troops nearest Paris — the British — have dropped back south and east of the city."

"Von Moltke?" Lucy repeated the harsh name. "Isn't he Chief of the German General Staff? — A scout who slipped through from Rheims reported that he was coming to Epernay with General von Hausen."

"Moltke there?" exclaimed Thorpe. "And Von Hausen's army the strongest of all — Saxons and the Imperial Guard — must be at least two hundred thousand. No guess about it! Von Kluck's attempt to flank has failed. They're going to smash through the French line right here in the middle. We had better scoot past

Sezanne and hit the high places for Bordeaux.”

Joy sparkled in Lucy's eyes. She started to speak, checked herself, and pressed her smiling lips tightly together.

A few minutes brought the speeding car to the marshes. Thorpe whirled on across the Petit Morin. Over beyond, at the base of the plateau slope, he swooped up on a squad of Turcos, two of whom were supporting a mounted officer in his saddle. They had just turned into a side road that led southeastward towards Fere Champenoise. Four or five wheeled about to cover the approaching car with their rifles.

As Thorpe came to a quick stop, Lucy stood up to gaze over the heads of the grimy sweaty leg-weary Turcos at the bowed back of their wounded leader.

“Etienne!” she called — “Etienne!”

In an effort to straighten and look about, the duke wrenched the bullet wound in his side. He swooned into the arms of the big Turco on his right. Lucy sprang out and ordered him placed in the tonneau. Supported between her and Marcelle, he was soon revived by a stimulant. But the continued pallor of his haggard pain-racked face told that his wound was extremely serious. At sight of the girl his sunken eyes lighted and he forced a smile.

“*Ah, ma belle amie Lucy! Bon jour,*” he murmured feverishly. “But be pleased to return me to my saddle. I go to the chateau. You must not linger north of Sezanne. The Boches come quickly. Be so kind as to bear to Polie my loving *adieu.*”

“Yes, yes,” soothed Lucy. “But first Mr. Thorpe will take us all to Sezanne.”

“*Non, belle amie*—My horse... This wound is beyond surgery... Montmar... I prefer to die at the chateau.”

“To the chateau, then. Have no fear for my safety, Etienne. There’s lots of time—hours to spare.”

The duke smiled his thanks, whispered a command to his men, and closed his eyes. A Turco sprang in beside Thorpe. The others tramped wearily after the car as it swung around and up the side road to the Castle of Montmar.

In reply to Thorpe’s questions, his swarthy seat-mate told with vengeful rage how a large patrol of Prussians had treacherously wounded his major. By using flags of truce, they had lured into a machine-gun ambush the scant company of the duke’s battalion that had survived their night attack at the Aisne. Thorpe bit his lip with shame as Marcelle interpreted the fiercely indignant account. He could not doubt the act of treachery. It was too much in keeping with what he had seen of the cynical German disregard for all the accepted rules of warfare and the Hague conventions.

When the car wound up the ascent to the grand gateway of the castle grounds, the duke revived from his half swoon to lucid consciousness. This lasted until he had bade all his servants and retainers a kindly farewell and ordered them to seek safety in immediate flight. Though several protested a wish to stay, all obeyed the duke’s command except an aged



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Thorpe. "I'm some nurse myself. Scoot."

"Don't fourflush, Lan. You're dead on your feet, and don't know it...Two nights and a day without sleep! But I'll rest too. The old servant woman is to sit by him. The hypodermic will keep him quiet several hours."

Somewhat reluctantly, Thorpe allowed himself to be persuaded. After his first hot bath in a fortnight, he stretched out in an American bed, and did not waken until noon the next day. The duke was mercifully in a semi-comatose condition, from which he roused only to brief moments of pain-tortured consciousness. Thorpe went out to the gate lodge, where Lucy had quartered the Algerians.

The Turco sergeant was peering with his desert-trained eyes into the northern sky. He uttered a guttural curse and pointed with his swarthy finger. A black speck was floating across the smoky blue of the heat haze. It changed to a line that appeared to stop still in mid-air and thicken. In a few moments Thorpe made out the all-too-well-known outlines of a German taube. The aeroplane was driving straight towards the castle, high above the Marshes of St. Gond. The droning throb of its engine was plainly audible before it wheeled and soared eastward along the French entrenchments like an angry vulture.

WOLF IN SHEEP'S CLOTHING

As at Dinant, a Sunday — the day of rest and worship — saw the gray deluge sweep forward to overwhelm the French lines. First came the scouting patrols and reconnoissance columns, hovered over and led by the guiding aeroplanes. To the west, Van Bülow's van was already across the Petit Morin at Montmiral. The Saxon corps dashed forward east of Fere Champenoise, while on their right flank the Prussian Guard flooded down into the Marshes of St. Gond.

From the front tower of the castle Thorpe could look northwards for miles over the swamp lands below the heights. The air was already rumbling with the distant thunder of cannon. With the aid of the duke's field glasses he could see the spots of smoke from bursting shells spread laterally. The Prussian columns were deploying into battle line as they advanced across the dried clay surface of the marshes. Their field gray remained invisible; but before long Thorpe could make out dark dots and dashes that approached, stopped, and approached irregularly. These were the retreating French forces. With them approached the smoke of the shell fire.

Thorpe hurried down to inquire the condition of his host. Lucy came out to him, weeping.

“Oh, Lan, it is so pitiful!” she cried. “He is delirious all the time now — and all his talk of *la belle France*. Not a word for anything else — not even for Polly. I’m afraid he can’t last much longer.”

“If he knew and had the choice, he’d be glad to go quickly — as I would in his place,” said Thorpe. “The French are retreating. Think how he will suffer if he survives long enough to know you have been captured because of him. It’s now only a question of a few hours at most. I’m going to get out the car and send you to Sezanne with Marcelle.”

“And you?” asked Lucy, her eyes very bright.

“I’ll stay with the duke, of course.”

“Really? — I’ll fetch your Prussian surgeon’s coat. It’s in my suitcase.”

“Now you’re talking, Loo! You’ll start at once?”

“Don’t be silly,” she answered. “It was only the way you said you’d stay... I don’t care if the Kaiser himself is coming. I shall not leave Polly’s husband until he — goes.”

Thorpe turned away, bitterly disappointed. Yet he went down to the garage and put in several hours on her car. The servants had loaded the chateau cars and all other conveyances with the most valuable laces and art glass in the duke’s collection and taken them to Sezanne. After carefully overhauling the engine and running gear, Thorpe found a quantity of



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up the grand stairway to the duke's private suite. On the door of the anteroom he had already chalked in German the words that he had seen on an occasional unburned house north of the Aisne:

“ Good friends within. No harm to them.”

Lucy was waiting at the bedside of the delirious duke with her maid and the frightened old French couple. Hardly had Thorpe joined them and changed to his surgeon's coat when a wild hubbub broke out in the corridor. The unlocked anteroom door flew open. Thorpe sprang to meet the inrush of battle-mad Prussians, with his arms outflung in angry gestures.

“ *Heraus!* ” he bellowed in German, after the manner of the portly surgeon whose coat he wore. “ Numskulls! dolts! Can you not read? *'Raus! 'raus!* ”

There were no officers with the soldiers. Thorpe's arrogant tone of command, backed by the sight of his surgeon's coat, sent the venerated of Authority to the right about. But Thorpe had made out their regimental number.

“ Halt,” he ordered. “ A corporal's squad to stand guard at the door. Who are your officers? ”

“ Captain von Pappheim, Herr Surgeon, and Ober-lieutenant von Kissel.

“ Enough. Find Lieutenant von Kissel. Tell him Herr Dorp would see him.”

All but the guard rushed off to help hunt out and bayonet the remaining French defenders. Thorpe paced the anteroom, fearful lest Von Pappheim might be first to enter. There was

a sudden saluting by the men at the door — Kurt rushed in to grasp the outstretched hands of his friend. He was thin, almost haggard, but he had come through all the fighting without a scratch.

“Allan!” he cried. “You’re the last man I expected to see this side of America!”

“I gave General von Hausen my word not to escape.”

“Then it’s true — Von Pappheim insisted you had broken parole. But I have the written testimony of the wounded men who saw you forced from the *mairie* by Turcos, and I have the written parole you gave a major of Turcos. Found it at an inn near Rheims. Though his name is not given — ”

“Major, the Duke of Montmar,” explained Thorpe. “This is his castle. He had previously captured Lucy — ”

“*Himmel!* Don’t tell me she is here — within our lines? The general is furious over her failure to return and your alleged breaking of parole.”

“Come and see,” said Thorpe.

At sight of Lucy, the eager young officer ran to greet her; only to stop short, clap on his helmet, and jerk out his pistol. The delirious duke was shouting for his Turcos to charge. Lucy sprang in between.

“Save your ammunition,” she scoffed. “He is dying.”

Kurt blushed crimson and hastened to replace his pistol.

“Can you think that of me, Lucy? I heard

him cry out as I entered, but saw only you.”

The scorn in Lucy's eyes gave place to a look of half-welcome.

“ I'm sorry, Kurt, if I — Oh!...Etienne — ”

The duke had sunk back on his pillows, silent and inert. She darted to his bedside and bent over to make certain he yet lived.

From the anteroom sounded the muffled tread of heavy feet on the silken rugs. Von Pappheim stalked in, followed by the squad on guard.

“ Good — most good, my dear Von Kissel,” he mocked. “ I see you have trapped the parole breaker — and our pretty spy girl. Another decoration for you from the general, *nicht?* ”

“ You are mistaken,” rejoined Kurt. “ My pleasure has been to release Herr Thorpe, of our Red Cross service, and my friend Fraulein Carew, both of whom were taken prisoner by this wounded major of Turcos, the Duke of Montmar.”

“ *Ach*, a Turco duke,” sneered von Pappheim. “ Shall we see if he is shamming? ”

Lucy sought to bar his advance. He rudely shoved her aside and tore the bandages from the gangrened wound of the French officer. The sight shamed even his Superman callousness.

“ *Pfui!* — it is far gone! ” he sought to hide his disconcertion.

White with horror of what he had done, Lucy sought with quivering hands to re-dress the wound. Thorpe choked down his rage and loathing.

“ Herr Count, speaking to you as an officer and a nobleman, on behalf of this French officer



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the arrogant Prussian officer conducted himself.

Kurt became as uneasy as Thorpe. When Lucy excused herself to return to her patient, the young officer rather ostentatiously handed her a gold-inlaid little automatic pistol that had been found in the pillaging.

“To use in case one of our men becomes intoxicated and seeks to bother you,” he said.

Von Pappheim’s look of chagrin betrayed the dark purpose that the pistol was apt to frustrate. With difficulty Thorpe masked his cold fury behind a pretense of banter —

“What a libel on our *kultured* goose-steppers! But Kurt and I shall take the lounge in the anteroom to guard you against a return of the effete French.”

Now far from bland, Von Pappheim shoved back his chair and went out, leaving his last glass of champagne untouched.

Throughout the night Thorpe and Kurt took turns on watch in the anteroom.

Morning found the duke still alive; and Von Pappheim had no excuse to linger at the chateau while the renewed battle advanced towards Sezanne. He took with him Thorpe and Kurt and most of the men, but left a detail to see that Lucy did not escape. They were also instructed to begin shipment of the loot in the Red Cross motor-vans that had followed the battle line across the marshes.

To the west, advanced columns had already penetrated south beyond the Grand Morin. To the east, desperate fighting had driven the French back from around Fere Champenoise.

But between these extremes the tremendous Prussian rush had been checked by the French on the heights of Sezanne, back of Montmar.

When the laggards came up, their regiment was already trying to drive a half regiment of French out of a grove. Von Pappheim was ordered to flank with his company. A motor ambulance was detailed to follow the party. Thorpe left Kurt and went to join the Red Cross men. But he was not invited to ride in the ambulance, the doors of which remained inhospitably closed.

Hardly had the company rounded into the potato field at the end of the wood, when a volley of shots came flying from a company of French infantry of the Line, three or four hundred feet ahead. Thorpe followed the ambulance as it wheeled out from the left flank of the deploying company. The French flattened on the ground. The Prussians had lost only two or three men, owing to the poor aim of their enemies. But, instead of charging, all promptly stretched prone at the command of Von Pappheim, who was the first man down.

There followed a furious exchange of rifle fire, each side shooting many hundreds of rounds within a few minutes. Thorpe looked on openly from beside the rear of the ambulance, for not a single shot was fired by the French at the Red Cross. So far as he could see, few if any more Prussians were struck. But the more conspicuously uniformed French appeared to suffer several casualties.

After the fusillade had continued for over a

quarter hour, the French suddenly leaped up and charged. To Thorpe's amazement, the Prussians stood erect and began to give back. Their rapid firing dropped a few more men in the already ragged French line. But their withdrawal brought the gallant attackers on with redoubled ardor.

The retreating Prussians were thirty yards or more back of their first position when the panting, yelling, bayonet-brandishing, fiercely triumphant French came in line with the ambulance. The doors of the van of Mercy flew open. Out of its yawning rear poured a leaden jet of machine-gun bullets.

Under that frightful enfilading fire the French went down almost in a windrow, most of them pitching prone on their faces. Of all their number, five alone staggered through the treacherous hail of death to the line of their gloating enemies. They were surrounded and stabbed from all sides. Other Prussians rushed forward to bayonet the wounded.

A few moments, and the last Frenchman was murdered. At a sharp command from Von Pappheim, the Red Cross machine gunners closed the doors of the ambulance. It wheeled around with the company to drive into the wood on the now unguarded flank of the larger French force. Thorpe did not follow. He had leaned up against a tree, sickened by the black treachery of the machine-gun in the ambulance and by the slaughter of the wounded.

In the rush for the new attack, no one paid any heed to him or to the few Prussian casualties.



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WINE AND WOMAN

In the loot-heaped courtyard of the chateau Lucy stood among her own trunks and several more of Duchess Polly's, while a soldier labeled them with Kurt's name and home address in Berlin. The man finished, set down his brush and pot of marking fluid, pocketed the fat fee offered by Lucy, and went off to help his fellows. Lucy took the brush and began substituting Kurt's address on the boxes of ducal plate and rare enamels that Von Pappheim had marked as his own especial loot. The guards were too hard at work helping Red Cross motormen load the plunder to notice the changing of names.

The girl's clever ruse to salvage a small part of her friend's property from the vandals was interrupted by a cry for help. Thorpe came reeling and staggering into the courtyard with Kurt on his back. Overcome by loss of blood, the young officer fainted as a pair of Red Cross drivers ran to take him in their arms. On the way into the chateau Thorpe managed to recover breath enough to gasp an appeal:

“Loo — won't you be good to him — for my sake — and Elsa's? You know how he loves you.”

“ You ask that — you? ” cried Lucy.

“ Of course! I — It was here you helped me win Elsa — made me happy! I want to see Kurt happy — You, too, Loo!...Kurt is a thoroughbred. And he worships the ground you tread on. Won't you listen to him, Loo? ”

Lucy's head had drooped forward. Her down-bent gaze wavered and slowly lifted, just high enough to take in Kurt's backward sagging head and pallid face.

“ I'll — I'll see,” she murmured.

Within a few minutes they managed, between them, to sterilize and pack the wound. Kurt revived to feverish consciousness. At sight of Lucy bending over him, the blue of his eyes deepened into violet.

“ *Liebe fraulein! liebe fraulein!* ” he whispered his adoration. “ You will not leave me? ”

“ Etienne is in the next room,” she soothed. “ I shall care for you both.”

He clasped her hand and drew it to his lips. Thorpe quietly went out. In the courtyard he found that the busy pillagers had brought around Lucy's redecorated car and were loading it with loot.

“ Stop,” he ordered. “ This car is reserved for officers' use.”

“ Who are you to command? ” growled a sergeant. “ Herr Captain has told you have no authority.”

“ Tell him of this order,” rejoined Thorpe. “ I speak for Lieutenant von Kissel.”

Though surly and reluctant, the men unloaded the car. Thorpe next noticed the trunks with

Lucy's initials, addressed to Kurt. He perceived the ruse, and in Kurt's name commanded other boxes to be marked the same. From Berlin the salvaged loot could, in time, be shipped to Duchess Polly in America.

Along with this idea Thorpe thought out a far more vital scheme. At the least, Kurt was out of the fighting for a month or more. Why not slip away north with him while Von Pappheim was still fighting? Lucy could go in the rôle of nurse. Once clear of the captain and General von Hausen, Kurt might get her over the Holland frontier before her flight could be traced.

When he told the plan to Kurt and Lucy, both thought it perfect. The only obstacle was Lucy's unshaken determination to remain at the chateau until the death of the duke — And he, though now almost constantly in the ominous coma that was so like death, continued to linger on, as if unable to die while the fate of France still hung in the balance.

Another day passed in this state of dread and suspense. All the strength of the magnificent Imperial Guard was now being exerted to hack a way over the heights of Sezanne. The Prussians hurled themselves forward to the attack both day and night. Yet somehow their most desperate massed charges failed to break through the half-dug French entrenchments on the plateau back of Montmar.

The chagrined assailants reported that Foch must have concentrated the larger part of his small army along the line west of Fere Champe-noise. This was apparently confirmed by the



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he was too ravenous to more than interject into the conversation an occasional sneer at the French, and boast how soon the delayed Sedan Day should now be celebrated in Paris. He washed down the savory food with steinfuls of the rare 'ninety-three champagne and the still more rare old port that poured like liquid rubies.

A field telephone had been brought back to the chateau. After gorging his fill, Von Pappheim flung back his chair and went to communicate with the front. He returned to order a bed prepared for himself. Later Thorpe saw him lead a squad of pioneers into the private office at the end of the duke's suite. After a few minutes the walls and floors of the chateau shook with a detonation as violent as that of a three-inch shell.

Thorpe rushed to discover the cause. He found Von Pappheim in the act of ransacking a chilled steel vault, which the unskilled pillagers had for days vainly tried to drill and blow open. Gold, silver, family jewels, bonds, banknotes — all were thrust into a suitcase by the titled thief. Having skimmed the cream, Von Pappheim began to glance over and tear up the duke's deeds and other non-negotiable papers.

In the midst he came upon a bulky envelope addressed to the duke by Lucy. On the packet was written a condition that it was not to be opened unless the duke learned she was being treated as a spy by the German secret service.

The first glance at the envelope's contents brought a look of cruel gloating into Von Pappheim's drink-flushed hatchet face. He rushed out

so hurriedly that he left the unlocked suitcase on the vault floor and failed to notice Thorpe in the shadowed corner behind the pioneers.

These engineers belonged to a reserve regiment, and were all strangers to Thorpe. With a curt command for them to make way, he elbowed through their midst, shut and locked the suitcase, and smiled condescendingly.

“Enough, my good men. I will attend to the herr captain’s property. You will immediately rejoin your company.”

They saw the number of Von Pappheim’s regiment on the surgeon’s coat, and marched off like the well-drilled automatons they were. Their company was two or three miles away. Thorpe transferred all the contents of the suitcase, except the silver, to a strong-box. Leaving the suitcase and silver in the vault, he carried the coffer out to the garage, carefully painted on it Kurt’s name and home address, and locked it in the car trunk. All this passed unnoticed. The chateau guards, as he knew, were intoxicated with champagne.

He returned into the chateau and found Von Pappheim seated with Lucy and Kurt at the dinner table. By the simple process of dumping, the cloth and service had been cleared off to make room for a stack of wine bottles. Lucy was scornfully defiant, Von Pappheim leering like a satyr, Kurt pale with dread and indignation.

“Come on in, Lan,” called Lucy. “You’re just in time to hear the joke. The noble count has stolen my snapshots and is using them to blackmail me into marrying him.”

The captain's leer hardened into a menacing glare.

“You will do well to curb your poisoned tongue, my pretty frau-to-be,” he advised. “Were it not that beauty shows best in a golden frame, I would take you now, without waiting for a wedding. Consider the choice I have offered — To be upraised into the high position of Countess von Pappheim, or shot as a convicted spy.”

Lucy's scorn flared. “By all means the lesser evil! — How soon can you order out your firing squad?”

“I do not jest, fraulein,” warned Von Pappheim, the tushes of his mustache bristling.

“Well, you are quite sufficiently ridiculous when you fancy that any girl could bring herself to marry you if she has the choice of dying instead.”

Kurt leaned forward, his normally mild blue eyes half starting from their sockets.

“This matter is personal with me, Herr Captain. I shall lay it before a court of honor. You insult and abuse the lady whom I have asked to become my wife. If you prefer not to wait for the court, I will meet you with pistols at dawn — or immediately.”

Von Pappheim smiled cynically.

“I have not forgotten your mutinous refusal to obey my orders at the hospital where I first caught this spy-woman. — You see, my pretty girl, I have another card or two. You will now agree to marry me, or your lover shall stand with you before the firing squad.”



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Kurt. Instantly Thorpe flung himself down around Lucy's chair and heaved up the end of the table. The downward cascading wine bottles disconcerted the aim of Von Pappheim's up-jerked pistol. Before he could fire, the edge of the table was on his knees and the top tilting up to topple against him. He saved himself from being smashed backwards with his chair only by dropping his pistol to wrench the table sideways.

As the table crashed down, Thorpe fell on his hands and knees before the upleaping captain. He plunged forward to seize the pistol, which was lying among the shattered wine bottles. Von Pappheim could have whipped out his sword and slashed his unexpected assailant. But, flurried for perhaps the first time in his life, he dashed for the door. He was outside before Thorpe could scramble up and level the pistol.

"Oh — oh — Lan!" gasped Lucy. "You're hurt! Your hands!"

Thorpe glanced down.

"That? — Only the port wine. May be a little cut or two. But I sure have messed the situation. How about it, Kurt?"

"Badly," agreed Kurt, who had jumped to place himself before Lucy. "He will return with a squad. There is only one chance now. Lucy, give me your pledge to marry me. Later you may recall it, if you wish, but now you must become my betrothed."

The girl stepped down from her chair and looked from him to Thorpe with widening eyes. "Do you really think it would — would save Lan — and you?" she inquired.

“All of us — just a chance, but the only one,” said Kurt firmly.

“I’ll go out and pot the tow-headed beast before he can sic his war dogs on us,” proposed Thorpe. “Even if they get me for it, Kurt, the coast will then be clear for you to make a get-away with Loo.”

“No — no, wait! You sha’n’t go, Lan!” cried the girl. “I — I’ll accept Kurt’s offer. — If you want me, Kurt, with only what I can give you now — and if you really believe it will — will save — us.”

“My ring — quick!” urged the young officer.

Lucy drew off the emerald ring that sparkled on the little finger of his outstretched left hand. She slipped it upon her engagement finger.

“Now we are betrothed,” he said. “Into the duke’s room with her, Allan. Bolt the far door. If I do not turn them back, try to shoot your way out. If that is impossible, kill her before permitting her to fall into his hands.”

“Of course,” agreed Thorpe.

He rushed the unresisting girl into the ducal chamber, secured the far door, and ran back to stand with Von Pappheim’s pistol beside the half-closed door into the anteroom. He saw Kurt seated on Lucy’s chair, facing the outer entrance.

There was a tramping of heavy feet outside in the rug-looted corridor. The squad of guards marched in with fixed bayonets. Behind them Von Pappheim peered cautiously into the anteroom. Seeing only his wounded lieutenant, he stepped in after his men:

Kurt called out, very distinctly and rapidly, in

a tone of sharp command: "Halt! Look, men, at that spilled wine, the bottles and table. The herr captain drank himself into delirium. He is wine-mad. He imagines —"

"*Gott!*" swore Von Pappheim. "Shoot down the mutinous *schweinhund*, you dolts! Take aim —"

Up swung every rifle of the squad, with mechanical precision. But Kurt's finger was pointing at the Iron Cross on his left breast.

"*Auf!*" he commanded. "Salute the Cross placed here by the High Commander."

"Fire!" yelled Von Pappheim.

The soldiers, caught with rifles jerking down to the position of present arms, hesitated like marionettes whose strings are crossed.

"*Auf!*" repeated Kurt, rising severely erect. "A mad officer has no authority. I command here. About face — March."

The men feared their martinet captain as much as they hated him. But they loved their lieutenant, and they had seen the High Commander pin that Iron Cross on his breast. His cool, stern tone and bearing were more authoritative than his superior's furious repetition of the order to fire. The squad faced about. Speechless with rage, Von Pappheim cut down the nearest man with a slash of his sword. The others, rattled and panic-stricken, bolted past him out into the corridor. He advanced across the room with his reddened sword ready to strike.

Kurt deliberately drew his pistol.

"You will be well advised to sheathe your sword, Herr Captain," he remarked in a very



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you, or am I to have the pleasure of telephoning our regiment about the campaign of the champagne bottles? ”

The pill was bitter. Von Pappheim hesitated. “What assurance have I that no mention will be made of — that *unselig* incident? ”

“My word as an officer,” replied Kurt. “You accept the terms? ”

“*Ja!* ” The monosyllable exploded like a curse.

“Your most binding pledge,” exacted Kurt. Von Pappheim’s face purpled. Yet after only a moment he spat out venomously: “I give my word of honor as an officer and nobleman.”

Kurt bowed with unfeigned gravity.

“The gracious word of Herr Captain, Count Wolf von Pappheim; is accepted.”

Most ungraciously Von Pappheim turned his back and stalked out, absurdly like the balked villain of a melodrama. The pistol clattered on the floor beside Kurt’s chair as he slumped down.

Lucy came darting from the inner chamber, to bend down beside him and clasp his limp hand. Without looking up at Thorpe, who was gripping his uninjured shoulder, she cried out breathlessly:

“Splendid, Kurt, splendid! If you wish, you may — may — ”

Her lips offered themselves for the betrothal kiss. Thorpe abruptly faced away and hurried across to close and bolt the corridor door.

CHAPTER XXVII

BESIEGED

On the morning of September the ninth, that most fateful Wednesday in all the history of France, the dank, foggy night was followed by a deluge of cold rain. The caked surface clay of the Marshes of St. Gond quickly melted to mire, which was in turn liquified into bog by the flood freshets that poured down from the drenched heights and slopes.

Soon after dawn Lucy roused up and went in to relieve the watch of her maid at the bedside of the duke. All night he had lain so completely sunk in the fatal coma that only the slight haze on a mirror held to his lips told that he was still alive.

Yet hardly had Lucy sent Marcelle to rest when the sunken eyes of the dying man flicked open. They stared up past Lucy, bright with the eager, probing look of one who sees or hears some wondrous event. A moment of expectancy, and they flamed with wildly exultant ardor. The strength of delirium wrenched that torpor-deadened body to a sitting position. The right arm flung up and outward. The blue-white lips parted, in a fiercely joyous shout of attack:

“*En avant! En avant! A bas les Boches! Vive la France! Vive —*”

The cry broke short in a gasp and rattle all too familiar to Lucy. The convulsive up-straightened body dropped back on the pillows, leaden and inert. Thorpe rushed in and found Lucy stooped to close the staring dark eyes that would never again flash with ardor for *la patrie*. Her own eyes were brimming with tears of compassion.

“Oh, Lan, to think he should go like this — and Polly not here!”

“He’s past suffering now, thank God,” replied Thorpe. “You’ve done all you could... Must think of yourself now. Jump lively. I’ll turn out Kurt and get up the car top. Bundle up well. It’s a cold rain.”

Lucy shivered. “Needn’t tell me.—But Etienne? The way they are thrown together in ditches! There must be a grave where Polly can find it — and a — coffin of some kind.”

Thorpe’s jaw tightened. But he hastened off, with no attempt to reason against this new condition. Sentiment and a woman’s will are beyond reason — or above it. He roused Kurt with the news and ventured out into the corridor. Loud snores drew him to the open door of a once resplendent bedchamber, now littered ankle-deep with Duchess Polly’s toilet sets and silk hosiery, bric-a-brac, pictures, and lacy lingerie. Empty wine bottles were strewn beside the stately canopied bed, upon which Von Pappheim lay with his spurs entangled in the silk coverlet.



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Brief as had been his absence in the garden, his return into the chateau found the drunken carousal of the soldiers transformed into a bedlam of fear and hate. The non-commissioned officers and the least drunken of the men were beating and kicking the others and pounding the insteps of the sodden sleepers. There could be only one explanation for such an interruption of the debauch.

Thorpe dashed through the mob and up the grand stairway. At the top he met a double squad that came hurrying with Kurt and Lucy in their midst. He too was caught and swept along to the room into which the field telephone had been brought. Von Pappheim, with his tow head dripping from a plunge in cold water and his face livid with rage, was shouting commands into the transmitter. He lowered the instrument and twisted about to glare at the newcomers.

“The French have struck!” divined Thorpe. “Your forces are being driven back!”

Von Pappheim sprang up, aflame with rage and shame.

“You *schweinhund!* to taunt at such a time! *Gott strafe—*”

“Hold!” broke in Kurt. “You gave your word.—This alarm?...What report—”

“What? what? *Gott im Himmel!* The *verdammte* French apes are too big fools to know they are defeated. They have come jumping down at our lines like maniacs. Already the Guard is giving ground. No wonder, when on our right the Turco devils are chasing Bülow’s

Hanoverians to the Petit Morin. We are flanked.”

“But to the east?” cried Kurt.

“No word from the Saxons...Yet what to expect? Through all our left wing the mad dogs are biting like knives through cheese. *Schrecklich!*”

Lucy's eyes had widened with awed wonderment.

“Etienne!” she exclaimed. “He must have known — he must have seen a vision of it... Dying — all but dead...Yet to rouse up — shout the charge — call to his soldiers!...Yes, yes, he *knew!*”

“I heard,” muttered Thorpe, more than half convinced that the dying man had received a telepathic message of the French assault. “Herr Captain, you speak as if the chateau may soon be under fire. Give leave for Lieutenant von Kissel to escort Miss Carew out of danger.”

Von Pappheim's mustache tushes curved in towards his big, thin nose.

“*Nein.* The terms to which I agreed have no reference to an attack by the enemy. My orders are to hold the chateau to the last man. My back-falling regiment is to be our garrison.”

He turned to snap out a command in German: “Sergeant, return these prisoners to their quarters. Watch them with utmost care.”

Back in the duke's private suite, under heavy guard, Thorpe's lips tightened at the bitter thought that they might now be whirling away towards the Marne if Lucy had not insisted upon delaying for the burial. And as it was,

the delay had failed to win that for which she had given up their chance of escape. The guards refused even Kurt's request that the half-finished coffin be brought in, and Captain von Pappheim was far too busy planning the defenses of the chateau to heed any messages.

The eagle-nosed count was as skillful and determined as he was remorseless. From the side windows of the suite the prisoners glimpsed soldiers rapidly but methodically felling the ornamental trees and shrubs of the beautiful chateau gardens to form barricades and chevaux-de-frise.

Wounded men began to stream back from the front. Every one of them able to handle an ax or pick or spade was set to work and task-driven with merciless rigor.

By noon the back-hurled flood of invasion was beginning to seethe and eddy about the chateau. Von Pappheim gathered in the few batteries that came his way, and did his utmost to obtain reinforcements for the remnants of his regiment that had managed to win back before the fury of the French charges. But in the wild confusion of the retreat, that was already half rout, all lines of communication were broken, and not a single officer or man would stay behind who had other choice.

The war storm first broke upon the chateau in a volley of shrapnel shells from the plateau towards Sezanne. Then came preliminary gushes of the blue-coated French infantry, interspersed with detachments of Turcos. The main front of the Imperial Guard had already been driven



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to have their line shattered by the terrific shock of the Africans. Some stood and fought. The greater number fled in wild panic. At their backs bounded the screaming Turco panthers, lunging and slashing.

Close before the inner line of defense, enfilading machine-guns burst into terrific action. The surviving Guard fugitives were slaughtered with the Turcos. But a blue wave of bearded Territorials was already breaking over the undefended outer barrier. The sturdy Frenchmen, driven back a hundred and fifty miles from their frontier, beaten for weeks, assaulted for two days by vastly superior numbers, now dashed at the vaunted Imperial Guards with all the *élan* of those first shouters of the Marseillaise who smashed back the invading Prussians on the bloody field of Valmy in 1792.

A chance high-explosive shell splashed one bastion-nest of machine-guns. The murderous fire of the other succeeded in mowing down only half the new assailants. What was left of the blue line surged over the inner breastwork and trench and struck the defenders with frightful impact. Though superior in numbers, the Guards gave back before the desperate fury of the Territorials. They would have broken, had not reserves rushed out from the chateau to stiffen their ranks and swarm around the flanks of the assailants. Not a prisoner was taken. Every Frenchman fought with patriotic frenzy until pierced through and through by the Prussian bayonets.

Thorpe heard Kurt's awed cry above the

roar of the battle: "Such fighting! — and only Territorials! *Lieber Gott!* Who can face such fighting?"

A shell-scream, a frightful explosion — and the side of the tower went crashing downwards. A shell had struck close below the rash observers. Half stunned, the friends hurried to pick their way down the wrecked staircase. This end of the chateau was becoming too hot for non-combatants. Loud crashes told them that the sides also were being bombarded. They went forward to the front, which overlooked the marshy valley lands.

Kurt carried his own superb field glasses, and Thorpe had retained the duke's. The heavy rainfall had cleared for a time the September haze and mist. No French guns were in position to shell the front of the chateau.

For the remainder of that frightful afternoon the friends watched the gray lines of the Imperial Guard recede down the lower slopes and out into the flooded Marshes of St. Gond, driven by the terrific fire of the seventy-fives and the almost superhuman ardor of the smaller French force. With their own guns mired in the swamps, the defeated *corps d'élite* broke into wild rout before the awful shelling that continued to slaughter them far out into the bog.

The setting sun of the most crucial day in modern history flooded plateau and plain, hills and marshes all a deep blood-red.

From Mailly to Montmiral, Foch's army, greatly inferior in numbers but directed by a

master strategist, had out-fought, out-maneuvered, hurled back, and put to rout a quarter-million Prussians and Saxons, the flower of all the German armies. On this fifteen-mile front of the Battle of Fere Champenoise, the combined losses of victors and vanquished totaled two hundred thousand casualties, fifty thousand more than all the forces engaged in the Battle of Waterloo.

Kurt and Thorpe saw only that part of the debacle that took place in the marshes. But they could well imagine the equally frightful slaughter of the Saxons at Maily. No mortal men — not even the blond beasts of Nietzsche — could hope to stand before those patriots in most unscientific horizon-blue coats, who charged and charged and charged, until the last one fell dead with his bayonet out-flung at his foe.

The gloomy closing down of the dank evening mists broke the terrible fascinating spell of the holocaust that held the friends in a nightmare trance. They were astonished to realize that the fight about the chateau was still raging — that the garrison still held out against the desperate assailants. Lighted by the electric torch chained to Kurt's coat, and keeping as nearly as possible to the middle of the castle, they descended into the cellars to assure Lucy of their safety.

Nightfall brought a lull in the assault. The French ceased their furious attempts to carry the chateau by storm and rested behind the barricades that they had taken. But a steady



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CHAPTER XXVIII

THE STRATAGEM

Throughout the night the defenders of the chateau lay on their arms in tense expectancy of surprise attacks. None was made. Shortly before daybreak bottles of port were passed around to key up the courage of the chilled soldiers against the expected dawn assault. The gray light in the east reddened into a cloudy sunrise — and still the French held off.

But a view of the neighboring slopes and adjacent high ground told that the attackers were only waiting to destroy the defenders without loss to themselves. The chateau was now surrounded on all sides by their redoubled forces, and a frightful burst of shell fire from all around told not only that great numbers of batteries had been brought up during the night, but that among them were guns much larger than the seventy-fives.

After one terrific salvo, the artillery fell silent. Under a white flag a French staff officer advanced to demand the unconditional surrender of the Prussians. He was blindfolded and led in to where Von Pappheim was having a slight scalp wound dressed. Lucy, in her Sister of Mercy coif and white dress, was feeding broth

to the helplessly wounded men. Thorpe had shed his surgeon's coat to lift around a new batch of the injured. The unblindfolded Frenchman glanced at them with vivid interest and gravely returned their bows.

To Von Pappheim he bowed with punctilious and icy politeness. The statement of his mission was clear-cut and direct. His commander was prepared to blow the chateau into fragments. But to avert further effusion of blood on the part of the gallant defenders, the offer was made to accept their immediate unconditional surrender.

Von Pappheim asked for time.

“But, *Monsieur le Capitaine*, consider your friends,” objected the Frenchman. “We desire to share again their gay company. That we should move quickly is necessary if we are to accompany them on their return tour, *n'est-ce pas?*”

“They shall come again soon,” snapped Von Pappheim. “Until then I will hold this strategic position.”

“Ah, a thousand regrets! Refusal is then made to surrender and save your brave soldiers from inevitable annihilation?”

“My orders are to hold the chateau to the last man. I am a captain of the Imperial Guard. What more need be said?”

Von Pappheim's tone was arrogantly defiant, but his mustache tushes twitched. The French had fought far too superbly for the prediction of annihilation to be considered empty bragging. The uneasy glance of the steel-blue Prus-

sian eyes chanced to turn towards Lucy. The Frenchman's ironic smile sobered.

“Pardon, *Monsieur le Capitaine*. ‘This young Sister of Mercy — to permit her to remain here where death is certain would be barbarous.’”

The lids of Von Pappheim's clouded eyes narrowed to mask a sudden crafty glint.

“Her own choice,” he rejoined. “Besides, she is not a nun, only an American woman. She came here with that Red Cross man over there, to nurse the Duke of Montmar.”

“Ah! ah! the duke — a brave officer! All grieved to hear of his wound. You hold him prisoner?”

Von Pappheim smiled sardonically. “He — and this American friend of his duchess — will be as dead as the rest of us when you have finished with your annihilating.”

“*Nom de Dieu!*” exclaimed the French officer. “But if mademoiselle is a neutral? And the duke a wounded prisoner — Barbarous!... Is there then no escape for them, monsieur?”

“The duke is wounded, yet he is my prisoner,” said Von Pappheim. “To allow him to go free when you threaten to destroy all my forces would be farcical. The girl is obstinate. She will not go without her patient.”

“But you say she is a neutral!”

“*Himmel!*” exclaimed Von Pappheim, as if struck with a sudden thought. “We shall see who is the more barbarous. I offer to release the girl and her patient, if you give one of my wounded officers safe escort with them to your nearest hospital.”



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“ Oh — I had not thought you — It is most kind, Herr Count! You haven't forgotten that Kurt saved your life. You will send him with me, and of course Lan — Mr. Thorpe.”

“ My most profound regrets, fraulein, but the number is strictly limited. Seriously wounded officers must be given first place.”

“ Then take mine for another.”

“ But, fraulein, the Frenchman has told what is the truth. They have brought up many batteries. The chateau will be smashed into atoms by their hellish fire.”

Lucy gazed up at Thorpe, her eyes darkening with anguish.

“ Then I will die with my — friend.”

Thorpe's face became grave. “ Rot! ” he snapped. “ Don't be a sentimental noodle, Loo.”

“ *Ach, fraulein,*” deplored Von Pappheim, “ that unaccommodating French devil! Positive refusal was made of permission for Herr Thorpe to go. Look for yourself. He is not named in the pass.”

The girl's troubled glance saw only the angular German script. She thrust the notebook out to Thorpe.

“ You know I don't read German. Besides, it doesn't matter the least bit. I will not go without Mr. Thorpe — and Kurt.”

Von Pappheim's eyes hardened to polished steel.

“ You will go. I command.”

Thorpe looked up, perplexed, from the two passes.

“ What does this mean about the Duke of

Montmar going to hospital? ” he asked. “ Have you forgotten he is dead? ”

“ We shall have a resurrection, *nicht?* ” answered Von Pappheim, and he bent towards Lucy with a show of deep concern. “ Fraulein, the French talk loudly of German barbarities. Yet I have planned this stratagem to save you from their murderous guns. The blue devil refused to permit you or any other person to escape, until I stipulated that you and one of our officers should be saved if I released the duke. I did not say that the duke is already dead. We shall swathe up his face in bandages. When safe past the attackers, you can say that he died on the way to the hospital. My will is that you shall go, even if I have to tie you like a pig for market. ”

Lucy's eyes flashed.

“ Oh, you will? Well, then, unless you send Kurt and Mr. Thorpe with me, I shall tell the French of the scheme to dupe them, and how you and your fellow Huns kill wounded men in hospitals! ”

The steely blue-white of Von Pappheim's eyes began to redden. The veins on his high forehead swelled. Thorpe tensed, ready to leap in for the death struggle. But before the determination in Lucy's flashing eyes the Obermann curbed his anger. *Kultur* requires that might shall be directed by the intellect. To give rein to the passions at a cost to one's self that is preventable is to blunder unscientifically.

“ So be it, ” he yielded with harsh reluctance. “ To save you from your willful foolishness I

will even make a forgery. No one shall say that I permitted you to stay and be killed by those merciless blue devils.—If I send Herr Thorpe and Lieutenant von Kissel with you, have I your promise and the word of Herr Thorpe to carry out the stratagem of the duke, whoever the other wounded officer may be?”

“Yes — yes,” agreed Thorpe and Lucy in a breath.

“Good.—Give me the French pass.”

He took the notebook from Thorpe, and with the art of one skilled in secret service work, changed from singular to plural Lieutenant Dupoy’s French words for officer and nurse.

“So — It is done. I have risked my honor for your sake, fraulein. Be quick. Make ready our resurrected duke — his jaw tied up and his eyes swathed about. His uniform and mustache will be sufficient to dupe the French apes.—The touring car, Herr Thorpe.—I will summon Lieutenant von Kissel.”

“Wait,” said Lucy. “My maid and those old servants — I cannot leave them.”

“*Pfui!*” hissed the aggravated captain. “To load up with such vermin! — But anything, anything to get you safe out of this hell-house, *liebe fraulein!* We can drop the French menials in their own lines.—Hasten all. The time is too brief!”

He glanced at his watch, and rushed from the room. The others hastened to carry out his orders. Thorpe found the car still safe in the garage. Before running it out into the shell-pitted courtyard he locked a large can of



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to escape and report our urgent need of aid.”

Kurt nodded in confirmation, his blue eyes beaming with hope.

“If only I can win through, and persuade the High Commander into a back stroke!”

“God with you!” invoked the crippled officer.

The car rolled slowly out of the courtyard and around the debris-strewn drive. Von Pappheim jerked the coat from his left arm, which was wrapped about with bloody bandages. He thrust the arm into a sling made of his handkerchief, and shook open the coat to drape it, right side out, over his shoulders. Lucy recognized the garment as Thorpe's borrowed surgeon's coat. But Thorpe did not see it. His entire attention was centered on the difficult task of guiding the car down the shell-torn drive.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE WAY OUT

All outside the castle the Prussian defenses had been demolished by the French fire or captured by the assailants. Less than half way to the great gateway, the car was halted by a squad of fierce-eyed mud-covered Turcos, who were crouched behind a fragment of garden wall. Thorpe's heart leaped into his throat. If the Africans were of the duke's own regiment they might try to talk with his corpse.

Von Pappheim did not lack self-possession and adroitness. He thrust out the French pass to the wounded young Parisian in command of the Turcos, and spoke quickly, in a tone of sympathetic concern:

“As you see, monsieur, the duke is in a bad way. The sooner we get him through to a good hospital the better.”

The lieutenant handed back the pass, with a sharp gesture for the party to proceed. Thorpe looked at Von Pappheim, expecting him to get out and walk back to the chateau. He was met by a stern command:

“Drive on, fool! We have been passed. Hasten — The duke will die!”

The sight of his own surgeon coat on the

captain's shoulders quickened Thorpe's perception. He sent the car rolling forward. What matter if Von Pappheim was deserting his command? — Not to be rid of him was a bitter disappointment. But the main thing now was to get Lucy clear away from the chateau.

The succeeding French lines were as easily negotiated as the first, and the road was less shell pitted on down the hill. Even the younger French officers spared only a deferential glance or two for Lucy and the "wounded" duke. All were on tiptoe, waiting for the bombardment of the chateau to begin.

Down in the valley a bearded major of Territorials read the pass with more care than his predecessors. He ordered a pair of keen-eyed chasseurs into the tonneau, in place of the old servant couple. But at Lucy's protest, Marcelle was permitted to go on with the party. Lucy draped the face of her ghastly seat-mate, as if to shade it from the out-shining sun.

The guards crowded in beside Marcelle, and sat facing Lucy and Kurt and the corpse. Von Pappheim glanced askance at their backs, over his shoulder, and smiled grimly.

Just before Thorpe brought the now speeding car to the Sezanne-Epernay road the air was rent with a terrific outcrashing roar. The French batteries had begun the bombardment. All around and about the grand old castle burst a multitude of shells, whose out-puffing smoke merged into a gray pall.

The chasseurs sprang erect in the tonneau, to shout for France and victory. Von Pappheim



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grimly at the living occupants of the tonneau.

“Why so horrified, fraulein?” he mocked. “War is war. Strong situations require stronger methods...And you, Von Kissel—I did not think you so white-livered. But as well you made no attempt to draw your pistol. I have been watching you out of the corner of my eye.”

Kurt's eyes flashed. “We shall see, if you attempt to harm my betrothed.”

“Have I not given my word to bring you safe to the High Commander?” reproved Von Pappheim. “Oblige me, fraulein, with the chasseur's rifle and cap.”

The point of the bayonet on the rifle had caught in the front of the duke's uniform. Lucy disentangled it and gently lifted the *kepi* from the head on her lap.

“Now the coat,” said Von Pappheim. “I shall pass as one of those traitor *schweine* who deserted to France from Alsace.”

As soon as the coat was off, he opened the tonneau door and rolled the chasseur out among the carcasses of horses and the corpses of French and Prussians that were thickly strewn alongside the road. A few moments later he had on the *kepi* and long blue coat. He sat, rifle in hand, to all appearances a French chasseur of Alsatian parentage.

The car was now pounding slowly along through the ruck and welter of swamp and battle-wreckage. For the first mile the flotsam and jettison of the awful war-storm had increased in quantity and ghastliness—broken down trucks and caissons, guns bogged to the

trunions out in the mud and water, knapsacks, clothing, broken rifles, bodies of men and horses, in whole and in parts; worst of all, wounded men crying piteously from the edge of the shell-ripped road.

In places the up-built macadam had been so blasted away that its telford sub-bed was overflowed with the crimsoned slime of the swamps. Thorpe's best efforts could not have worried the car across, had not French engineers, during the night, filled in the worst holes and heaved the more bulky obstacles out of the roadway. Von Pappheim cursed virulently as he gazed at the number of guns that could be seen to the eastward, far out in the heart of the marshes, where the routed Guards had been driven by the cross-charges of Turcos from the west.

The far side of the swamps bounded the worst of the slaughter, though the debacle had continued on across country towards the Marne. On the left, the Moroccans had hurled back Von Bülow's Hanoverians, along with the Prussians.

The road presently became much better. The party soon came in view of French patrols that were beating the woods and coppices for squads of fugitive Germans. Ahead appeared French munition trains and long columns of reserves, all streaming north towards the Marne.

At Von Pappheim's command, Kurt put on the surgeon's coat and hid his spiked helmet. When the car overtook the troops, it whirled along beside them, honking for the right of way with the imperiousness of a General Staff

machine. Audacity, the chasseur's uniform, and the Red Cross, carried the party clear through to where a desperate rear-guard action was delaying the French rush at Epernay. Here the car veered west, behind the main French forces, found a hole in the line, and slipped through to the Marne.

Once in sight of the retreating German rear-guard, Von Pappheim stripped off the chasseur's coat and climbed over into the tonneau. With a jeer of mock *adieu*, he wrenched the corpse of the Duke of Montmar out of the overstrained grasp of Lucy and Kurt, and dumped it into the road behind the car. Overcome by the horror of this, Lucy swooned for the first time in all her frightful weeks in the maelstrom of war.

North of the Marne there was, in places, some degree of orderliness about the German retreat. While Kurt held Lucy on the rear seat with his one arm and sought to revive her, Thorpe obeyed Von Pappheim's command to zigzag eastwards. Lucy had hardly recovered consciousness when the headquarters of the Guard Corps staff were located.

Von Pappheim, who had removed the bloody bandage from his uninjured left arm, reported that he and Lieutenant von Kissel had broken through the French lines to seek aid for the chateau's garrison. The staff officers stared at him as if he were idiotic. Their half-distracted commander peremptorily ordered him to report for duty at the Epernay bridgehead. Even as the general spoke, he turned away to catch an



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foe. East of him the Duke of Wurttemberg's army was rather more than holding its own against the next French army. But the duke's flank had been exposed by the flight of the Guard and Saxons. Foch struck it a lightning side blow. This started a general retreat, that did not end until both Wurttemberg and the Crown Prince were back in the Argonne.

To the west, Von Kluck and Von Bülow were sharing Von Hausen's retreat to the Aisne, abandoning in places immense quantities of munitions and equipment. Had there been a single corps of French reserves to dash into the shattered German center, the mightiest war-machine of all history would have been put to utter rout. Even as it was, Foch's depleted little army, despite exhaustion from its tremendous exertions, continued to hammer back Von Hausen's vastly superior numbers. The other French armies, everywhere inferior in numbers to their opponents, shared in the smashing drive that did not end until the invincible host of Deutschland took refuge in the howitzer-protected trenches that had been prepared for its "strategic retreat."

On the eleventh, Thorpe and Kurt, taking advantage of a dispatch to the Aisne, had shifted Lucy to Rheims. There Kurt met a friend in the Commissariat, who was able to arrange a railway passage for Lucy to Brussels. She refused to go without Thorpe unless certain he was no longer in danger from Von Hausen. She believed Kurt's assurance that Von Pappheim could not now harm Thorpe. But she seemed

obsessed by the threat of the High Commander to execute him as her spy accomplice.

In vain Kurt told her the rumor that the Kaiser had said Von Hausen should have shot himself after so disgraceful a defeat.—But then came the official announcement that Von Hausen had been relieved of his command. Lucy permitted herself to be reassured.

At the same time Kurt received orders to go home on sick leave. Thorpe felt a sudden longing to see Elsa. But Lucy would hear nothing of accompanying them to Berlin. To the intense distress of Kurt, she insisted upon going to Brussels.

“I’ve had enough of war to last me for a lifetime,” she shudderingly replied to his pleadings. “No doubt the American minister at Brussels can help me get to England by way of Holland. I want to go home, out of all this. I don’t want to seem hard, Kurt, but the very sight of your soldiers sickens me. After the war you can come over, and we will see how I feel. Until then I shall consider myself bound by our engagement.”

“My betrothed!” murmured Kurt, his mild eyes violet with love. “God grant I may come to you soon!”

Her parting with Thorpe was—on the surface—very offhand and comradelike. “My love to Elsa, and kind remembrances to the mother. Watch out for the herr count.”

“Neither Kurt nor I have seen or heard of him this side the Marne,” replied Thorpe.

“Well, don’t go out of your way to stir up

the tigers, Lan. They're ferocious enough."

Kurt's commissariat friend had provided a German Red Cross deaconess as chaperon for the herr lieutenant's betrothed. This rather salved Thorpe's conscience as he and Kurt watched the train bear Lucy away on her lonely journey. Yet he felt a half guilty uneasiness that lingered in his consciousness until overborne by his happy anticipations as another train swept him and Kurt Berlin-ward. Behind them they left Lucy's war-roughed car, still in the service of the Guard Staff. But Kurt carried as part of his baggage the strong-box with the ducal treasures rescued by Thorpe.



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Hardly less harsh was the treatment of the civilian enemy aliens. Men and women alike had been seized and incarcerated in the box stalls and hay lofts of the vile detention camp at Ruhleben.

All the land was aflame with a hell-fire of hate, derision and triumph. Here was none of the mortification and humiliation, the bitter shame and furious chagrin, that had eaten like acid into the pride of the arrogant invaders of North France. The Kaiser-controlled press and pulpit and rostrum had already explained away that disastrous rout and backward flight from the Marne as a withdrawal for strategic purposes. As soon as reinforcements should arrive, the invincible army of the Fatherland would advance again and blot France off the map.

Hate, that most frightful of all the human passions, had become a Government-inspired cult. Deutschland was singing hymns in worship of war and the blond beast. Scientists, soldiers, and ministers called Christian, had acclaimed the German race as morally and intellectually high above all other races; and in the same breath lauded the shelling of Rheims cathedral, the burning of the Louvain library, the Hun-like destruction of world-famous art treasures, the infliction of pain and misery, and the crushing of free peoples.

Why should the Super race spare the base under races in the inevitable triumphant on-surge to its place in the sun and the fulfillment of its glorious destiny as dominator of

the world? Let Deutschland's enemies beware!

“ War is the king and father of all, necessary and glorious. We have nothing to apologize for. They call us barbarians. What of it? We feel no shame...*Gott strafe* the Russian beasts, the silly Belgian fanatics, the degenerate French — above all, the false, envious *Engländer schweine*, whose contemptible little army of mercenaries kept us from rolling up the French flank and cheated our heroic Crown Prince of his Sedan Day in Paris!...Against all our enemies let there be only hate — and hate also for the greedy Americans, who are selling their powder and shells to kill our brave heroes. Teach hate, act hate, cultivate the desire to hate. To us is given faith, hope and hatred, but the greatest of these is hatred! ”

Such was the talk of civilians and soldiers, of men and women, all the long journey to Berlin. Thorpe did not realize the savage depth and intensity of this volcanic eruption of hell-fire until he happened to speak in English to Kurt within hearing of a group of minor officials. Before this, his Red Cross sleeve bands, his idiomatic, high-class German speech and the companionship of Kurt had won him a half share of the flattering attentions showered upon the returning officer heroes.

Now his infuriated train-mates denounced and cursed him as an English spy. He was struck and spat at, and would have been dragged off the train under arrest had not Kurt shouted down the false charges. He repeated over and over again that Thorpe was not British, but an

American Red Cross volunteer who had helped save an officer of the Imperial Guard. When at last the truth had been hammered into the thick Teutonic heads, the fury of Thorpe's assailants transformed itself into a gush of sentimentality like the slaver and gloze of boar hounds. There were many emotional apologies and much uncorking of beer. Thorpe thought of Elsa, and for Kurt's sake tried to be cordial.

Smoothly as all train service was now being operated throughout Germany, a movement of troops caused a change that brought Kurt and Thorpe into Berlin a full two hours ahead of the scheduled time. As they came out of the station with their scant war-scarred baggage, an enthusiastic merchant insisted upon loaning them his limousine and chauffeur.

The drive through the city astonished Thorpe and even Kurt. Berlin was not only busier and livelier and gayer than before the outbreak of war, but it more than ever swarmed with soldiers. While the grimy shell-torn armies of the invasion lay behind the howitzer-guarded trenches of the Aisne line, panting from their rearward race, vast numbers of officers and men swaggered the streets of the imperial capital in all the garish panoply of military parade dress.

The sober field gray was conspicuous by its absence. Instead, Berlin was dazzled as usual, or more than usual, by generals in gold and blue, jägers in vivid green, arrogant hussars in blazing red. Scabbards flashed like mirrors; spurred heels clicked. Near the Tiergarten,



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Lucy's friend, Duchess Polly, even as he thrilled with blissful anticipations of Elsa's kisses. Box in hand, he hurried after Kurt. The door of the villa was locked. Thorpe was at the steps before it leisurely swung open in response to Kurt's impatient clanging of the old-fashioned doorbell.

Framed in the opening Thorpe saw a vision of blond loveliness, most stylishly attired in a Parisian motoring costume. With a shriek of joy, the vision flung herself at Kurt. He dodged just quickly enough to save his half-healed wound by taking the impact on his left shoulder.

"Gently — gently, eager one," he chided. "You are most tender, but so is my hurt."

He gave the disconcerted girl an emphatic brotherly kiss, whirled her about towards Thorpe, and dashed into the house. Thorpe was springing forward. For the first time Elsa caught sight of him. Her bewildered face instantly became radiant with love and joy. She flung out her arms to Thorpe. He dropped the box and caught her to him. His lips pressed upon her delicious lips, upon her scarlet cheeks, upon her soulfully tender eyes.

"Darling! — my darling!" he murmured.

But then, as suddenly as if he had changed into a monster, the blissful radiance of the girl's look vanished. Her eyes dilated with grief and dread; her blushes faded into the pallor of panic. She jerked her arms from about his neck, to push against his breast with convulsive force.

"*Ach! ach!* I forgot!" she panted. "God

help us!—Let me go! You must not hold me! It is—is wicked—sinful!”

Thorpe was amazed. Yet he held fast against her struggle to thrust free.

“Wicked?” he remonstrated. “When we are to be married!”

“*Nein! nein!—Ach! lieber Gott!* I am—betrothed to—another!”

Stunned by the blow, Thorpe stood motionless while the girl thrust herself out of his relaxing arms and fled into the house. The first impulse that stirred his benumbed brain was the instinct that drives a stricken creature to creep off alone. He turned gropingly towards the drive. His foot was half down to the first step when a flash of pain and anger stabbed through his daze and roused him to clear consciousness. He turned about and walked resolutely into the house.

Joyful exclamations came from the parlor. Thorpe first saw Kurt standing with his sound arm clasped about his weeping, smiling, overjoyed mother. Like Elsa, she was dressed for the trip to the station. Thorpe recognized the magnificent set of furs looted from the chateau that had been Von Hausen's headquarters after the battle of Mons-Charleroi. In the far corner of the parlor was the rosewood piano that Kurt had at the same time shipped to his beloved sister.

Another step brought Thorpe through the parlor doorway into full view of the room. At the left, resplendent in the dress uniform of a major of the Imperial Guard, decorated

with the Iron Cross and the Red Eagle, stood Von Pappheim. He looked arrogantly at Thorpe, his thin lips curving in a cynical smile that tilted the tushes of his yellowish-white mustache.

Thorpe gave him a cold nod of recognition, and looked around for Elsa. She was not in the room. He stepped forward towards her mother. As Frau von Kissel caught sight of him her beaming face sobered and dulled to a look of heavy obstinacy that held more than a hint of resentment. Kurt stared from her to Thorpe and back again, suddenly dashed and perplexed.

“Have you no welcome for Allan, mother — for my heart’s friend — for Elsa’s beloved?” he reproached.

“*Nein!*” she denied. “Not Elsa’s beloved. That was all a mistake. I have sad news for you, *lieber* son. My kind cousin whose beard Elsa could not endure has been reported killed on the Russian front. The will leaves half to you and half to Elsa, the ungrateful child! She now has a real dot. A high honor also has come to her, undeserving as she is. I have accepted for her the marriage proposals of Count Wolf von Pappheim.”

“Mother!” cried Kurt — “When you know how she and Allan love!”

“She will no longer love an unwealthy, untitled foreigner. She has now her large dot and the love of her betrothed, the high-born Count von Pappheim. A dutiful wife can love only her husband.”

Thorpe had at last got himself in hand.



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pare a trousseau. The wedding is to be a week from to-day."

"Trunks — Parisian gowns?" exclaimed Kurt. "I sent nothing like that."

"They are Lucy's," explained Thorpe. "She had her trunks sent here from the Castle of Montmar. As your betrothed, she thought they would be safe at your home. I can hardly believe that the herr count would enjoy seeing his bride wear the used gowns of the lady who gave him the basket."

Von Pappheim put a hand on the hilt of his sword.

"*Pfui!* — I will endure no insults from a low outland dog."

"Is that well spoken to my friend, who helped save your life?" thrust Kurt.

"Masters owe small thanks for the services of underlings," replied Von Pappheim. "I far more than evened the score by bringing him and you safe out of Montmar."

"*Ach! ach!* You have forgotten that, you two," chided Frau von Kissel. "Be shamed! Where is your gratitude?"

"So he has duped you, poor foolish mother!" pitied Kurt. "He would have left us to be blown to pieces, had not Lucy, who is now my betrothed, refused to leave without us. He had to have her to help carry out his ghastly cheat with the dead Duke of Montmar."

"He would have left you? *Ach, himmel!* — Is it possible you would have left my *lieber Kurtzie* to die, Herr Count?"

"Where is that *verdammt* spy-woman?" Von

Pappheim strategically shifted from defense to attack.

“My betrothed is now safe from your false charges,” parried Kurt.

“Your betrothed?” questioned the mother, her attention fixed by his second reference to the relationship. “But that also is changed. You must cast her off. No more do you need her money, and as she is a spy-woman—”

“No, Tante!” broke in Thorpe. “That is a lie. The noble count is seeking to persecute her because she has twice given him the basket.”

“Be silent, you!” commanded Von Pappheim, and he again grasped his sword hilt.

“This is my house, Count von Pappheim,” warned Kurt. “Do not threaten, else I call the servant to show you to the door. You are the one who should be silent—with shame. Out of spite you made false charges against my betrothed. Out of greed you flatter my mother into forcing Elsa to a betrothal with you when you learn she has a large dot. Even without that dot, you would seek to hold my sister fast, out of spite to her beloved, the man who saved your life. You have sought to get rid of him and me. Now we shall rid ourselves of you. You will consent to the breaking of the betrothal, or I will report to our high general how you, the officer in command, fled from the Castle of Montmar to save your life, and left your forces to perish. Would you enjoy having your Cross and Red Eagle and major’s insignia torn from your uniform before our regiment?”

“Be not hasty, my good young friend,” jeered Von Pappheim. “Let us see who holds the stronger hand. Other crosses may be more loosely fastened than mine. Prefer charges for a court-martial if you wish. I have been cited for brilliant service in holding up the French pursuit with my rearguard defense of the chateau and for my daring and craft in breaking through to seek rescue for my command.”

“We admit the craft,” interjected Thorpe.

Von Pappheim did not turn his menacing stare from Kurt.

“As for you, my good young friend, no disgrace shall happen if you curb your rash tongue. Because of my betrothal to your sister, I have made no charges against you for the two times that you refused to obey my orders. I will have silence from you, and you will give me your sister for wife, or you will pay the penalty for mutiny.”

Frau von Kissel screamed and frantically tore away the looted furs from about her thick neck as she cried for Kurt to agree and for Von Pappheim to spare her beloved son. Several moments passed before Thorpe and Kurt managed to quiet her hysteria and get her, panting and clucking, into a chair. Thorpe drew back and gazed at her with contemptuous pity.

“You’ve no need to worry, Tante,” he said. “Kurt was my friend long before I ever saw his sister. I shall give her up rather than allow him to risk disgrace and death. He would



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CHAPTER XXXI

BROKEN TIES

As Thorpe passed out into the portico Kurt's hand clasped over his shoulder. He faced about and saw the kindly blue eyes of his friend dark with sympathetic misery.

“Buck up, old man. You're not to blame,” he consoled. “Any message for Loo?”

“Give her my heart's — But you're not going to rush back to America, Allan — not yet. I'd be greatly to blame if I let you go while there is yet the slightest chance. I can't bear to think of your suffering — and Elsa's! You'll at least wait until I have made sure whether Von Pappheim can make good his threat. Think of Elsa — of how she will grieve!”

Thorpe flinched. “Don't...It would be far worse for her if Pappheim had you shot.”

“No danger to me in your waiting a few days. You're no quitter, Allan. Until she is actually married you can't give up trying.”

“What chance, with a girl of her rearing?” questioned Thorpe. “But I'll wait and see... You'll find me at my old lodgings.”

Kurt picked up the box of treasure, which lay in front of the other baggage.

“Better take this to your ambassador. I'll

try to ship Lucy's trunks to her. But this is too valuable. It would be seized at the frontier. The embassy may consent to take charge of it as the property of an American. At the same time it will be well for you to have your passport checked up. Von Pappheim may try to be disagreeable."

Thorpe took the strong-box and set off for the nearest bus line. Many additions had been made to the embassy staff and several of the former *attachés* were gone. But Thorpe had the good fortune to chance upon the one he knew best. A brief statement of his war experiences was taken for the secret archives of the embassy, and all the jewels and other valuables, except the gold, were transferred to an official dispatch-box. At the *attaché's* suggestion, Thorpe kept the coins and gave a check for the amount, payable to the Duchess of Montmar at his New York bank.

As he set off with the empty strong-box, the gold and a new passport, the *attaché* gave him a parting hint:

"Drop in on us, Thorpe, when you get ready to hit out for God's country. We'll commission you as an official dispatch-bearer. Otherwise you may strike snags at the frontier."

The days that followed were the most bitter that Thorpe had ever known. He could not go to the Von Kissel villa. Yet day and night he was tortured with longing to see Elsa and with grief over his certainty that she was lost to him. Berlin was in a whirl of balls and concerts and *bierabends*, gayer than it had ever

been before so early in the season. Yet there was no diversion for Thorpe. To him the festivities seemed only a mockery of his loss, even as the swagger and garishness of the military display kept him constantly in mind of the arrogant Prussian who had robbed him of love and happiness.

Twice Kurt telephoned, but only to say that Elsa seemed absolutely subject to Von Pappheim's domination, that the mother remained obdurate, and that he was not yet sure whether the threatened accusation of mutiny would hold water. On the morning before the wedding day he again telephoned, this time hurriedly to make an appointment for a meeting in a certain isolated corner of a park.

Though the day was very raw and disagreeable even for Berlin's autumn weather, Thorpe flung on his new raincoat and set out at once in the wind and sleet and freezing slush. He arrived so soon at the meeting place that he had to wait several minutes. He was chilled to the bone, when a limousine came whirling around the drive and stopped before him.

Kurt, muffled to the ears in a chauffeur's coat, leaned out of the front and motioned towards the tonneau. Thorpe hurried around to the lee side. The windows there were hardly less blurred by the sleet than those to windward. As he stepped up into the car he laid aside his hat and flung open his dripping raincoat.

A be-furred figure was shrinking over to the far corner. The uptilting of the big hat exposed a maze of softly glinting gold. In a twinkling



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“Duel?” muttered Thorpe,—“Duel?”

The girl read his thought in the icy hardening of his eyes. Her arms flung up about his neck in frantic entreaty.

“Do not—not challenge him!” she gasped. “He will not fight you. He will call you a spy... That also he has told me. Many persons have been shot as spies—even Americans!... *Lieber Gott!* There is no way to turn—no way! If you are killed, or if Kurt is killed, I shall die!”

Thorpe clenched his jaw to hold back a groan. What the cruelly tortured girl had said was true. There was no way out. Von Pappheim had them fast. He had won, not by braveness or skill, but by craft and brutal disregard for all moral considerations. Thorpe, like Kurt, might have made light of the danger to himself; and Elsa had said she would even disobey her mother. But the way to their elopement was barred. Von Pappheim had Kurt in such position that for them to escape, they must tread on the trigger of the set-gun that was pointed at Kurt's heart.

A broken whisper forced out between Thorpe's stiffened lips: “Why, then—did you come?”

The ready tears gushed into Elsa's grief-darkened eyes and rolled down her satiny cheeks.

“To—to—say—farewell!” she sobbed. “Kurt said it would not be wicked to-day. But to-morrow—then I can no longer love you. The mother has said it.”

Thorpe drew her up still closer in a despairing embrace... Her clinging arms and innocent,

agonized child eyes were more than he could endure. He thrust himself away from her and plunged out of the limousine, to rush off through the icy sleet, too distracted to know what he was doing. The sleet beat down pitilessly upon his bare head and in through the open front of his raincoat. He was drenched when at last he staggered into his lodging house.

The next morning his landlady discovered him tossing in the delirium of fever. When he came to consciousness, he found himself in a hospital. Frau von Kissel, in her magnificent Belgian furs, was stroking his whitened hand. She beamed kindly when she saw that his eyes were open and conscious.

“Good, *lieber* Allant,” she said in a tone of patronizing graciousness. “The nurse says you are safe past the crisis. You have had pneumonia. So foolish of you to run about in the wet! But now you will soon be well, and you can come back as our good friend. The wedding was most lovely and grand. It was military — and Kurt also was much noticed. But, of course, the center of all eyes was my high-born son-in-law, the *lieber* Wolf!”

A faint whisper breathed from between Thorpe's fever-parched lips: “So you've thrown your own lamb to the wolf!”

He shut his eyes and turned away his head... Frau von Kissel did not again come to the hospital.

In the two weeks that passed before Thorpe could return to his lodgings Kurt came often to visit. He was still on leave.

No word of Lucy had been received. From the west end of the Aisne entrenched line, the Germans were working north past Cambrai towards the Channel, against the French and English, each side striving to out-flank the other. Von Pappheim had been ordered to staff duty at Brussels, and had taken Elsa with him — to the great distress and anxiety of the mother. The Belgian army had been driven back into Antwerp, which was besieged and under bombardment.

Thorpe felt mildly grateful to his friend and rather enjoyed his visits. Otherwise he looked upon everything and everybody, upon the war, upon life itself, with an indifference that verged on morbid apathy. Even his grief over Elsa seemed to have been deadened. After he left the hospital, a full week passed before he began to think of returning to America.

The day of the fall of Antwerp Kurt rushed in on his friend to tell the news, and to supplement it with an item of personal interest to them both. He himself had received the Red Eagle, and — this was the joyful surprise he had for his friend — the Iron Cross was to be given to Thorpe.

“Think of it!” he exulted. “You, a civilian — an American — and only in the Red Cross service; yet to win so high an honor — Wonderful! glorious! Not but what you deserve it, and more, too — yet a civilian and a neutral! Think of it!”

Thorpe thought. He thought at first coldly; then with a growing heat whose burning at last



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should be able to see it yourself — as a possibility, at least. You saw the invincible war-machine withdrawn strategically from the Marne. A new hell — made in Germany! At home the preaching of hatred as a noble passion; throughout the invaded regions the systematic, scientific, methodical enactment of frightfulness — pillaging, burning, shooting of prisoners, raping of women, killing and torturing of children . . . And all this by the nation that has vaunted to the world about its *kultur*, its leadership in civilization, its superiority over all mankind as the highest and noblest of all the races! I tell you, when the world realizes — ”

Kurt covered his face with his hands. The gesture was more effective than any spoken entreaty. Thorpe caught himself up.

“ All right, old man. I’m not going to rub it in. But you see how impossible it would be for me to accept one of those iron symbols of crucified Belgium. Just quietly let the higher-ups know I must decline the honor because American citizens are not permitted to accept decorations without a special act of Congress. That is true of our officials and officers, and it will serve.”

The young Prussian, who had rushed to his friend in a glow of joyous exultation, went away drooping and dejected.

Roused from his apathy, Thorpe settled his few accounts and made ready for the coming journey. The following day he went to the American embassy. The offer of his services as courier to England was accepted. He was

formally appointed an *attaché* and sent to the Imperial Foreign Office in Wilhelmstrasse to have his regular passport and a special one as *attaché* courier *viséed* by the Geheimer Legationsrat.

The move was made none too soon. When he returned to his lodgings he surprised a pair of military secret service men methodically ferreting through all his books, writings, letters and outfit. No apologies were made even when he showed his *attaché* passport. On the contrary, he was held prisoner while the search continued. Only after urgent demand could he obtain permission to telephone to the embassy.

An *attaché* replied in what the listening secret service men very naturally mistook for code: "Keep on your shirt, old man. We're going to bat."

Certain wires must have sizzled. As the ferrets gathered up the papers that they suspected might be suspicious, and ordered Thorpe to come with them to the police station, the telephone buzzed with an urgent call from Wilhelmstrasse. Promptly followed ungracious guttural apologies for the "so-regretful mistake," and Thorpe found himself alone with all his possessions. He gathered up the hastily dropped papers, repacked his baggage, and went to the legation.

When he was motored to the train in an embassy car, he held in his own hands a pouch of diplomatic correspondence and the dispatch-box containing the jewels and other valuables of Lucy's friend, the duchess.

CHAPTER XXXII

ON THE RELIEF

The trip from Berlin across the flat country to the Holland border was as uneventful as it was uninteresting, except that midway the train was delayed for hours by a movement of troop and munition trains. This brought Thorpe to Bentheim, on the frontier, at dusk.

In the custom house, demand was made that he turn over for inspection the official sealed pieces with his other baggage. He showed his courier's passport, and clung fast to the pouch and satchel and dispatch-box. As a result he was held all night under guard. The Germans may have hoped he would fall asleep and give them a chance to pry into the sealed packages. Seals can be detached and replaced by experts.

But Thorpe was too well posted on German methods to be caught napping. He kept alertly awake, and wrote a telegram to the American ambassador every hour. Even Prussian contempt for international law had not yet reached the audacity of committing violence on the diplomatic representative of a powerful neutral. Whether his telegrams were sent or delivered Thorpe never knew. But in the morning his minutely inspected personal baggage was re-



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Nor were the wretched exiles yet safe from their barbarous persecutors. German mines, set afloat or planted in the sea ways, had already sunk over twenty ships. Hardly three weeks past, a single German submarine had torpedoed three British light cruisers within an hour or less. The new sea terrors were known to be lurking near the Channel. According to general belief, only ships of war needed to fear their torpedoes. But Thorpe felt by no means sure of this. He had seen German warfare on land.

The misery of the refugees was increased by the roughness of the passage across the corner of the North Sea, a passage prolonged by the need of the ship to follow a zigzag course through the known mine fields. The few Belgians who were not seasick found difficulty in getting food. The saloon floor was a-whirl with fragments of dishes that had jumped the table racks in the wild plunging and rolling of the ship. To escape the sight of his suffering fellow-passengers, Thorpe borrowed a suit of oilskins and spent hours on the storm-flooded decks. The howl of the gale, the lowering clouds, the foam-blotched black-green wave mountains that tossed the steamer skyward, only to drop it with a dizzy slump into their yawning liquid valleys—all were in keeping with his mood of gloomy uneasiness. Even after the wave-battered steamer fought its way safe into port, his restlessness and depression did not lessen until he witnessed the warm-hearted welcome given by the English to the refugee

Belgians the moment the ship reached the wharf.

He was agreeably astonished at this new aspect of English life. On his way to Germany from America he had passed through the Mother Country of Anglo-Saxon civilization. But his prejudiced eyes had seen only the fog and reek of the political squabblings, the hysteria of the suffragettes, and the squalor of the slums. All the year in Germany he had had dinned into his ears constant assertions that the British were envious, low-minded money-grubbers, fairly successful on the sea, but incapable of devoting themselves to the heroism of land warfare.

His return now found the Tight Little Island in the throes of a tremendous military preparation. A self-contained nation that with only half attention had read about the heroic sacrifice of its little professional army, now had been inflamed to war-fury by the dropping of Zeppelin bombs among its women and children. Everywhere volunteers were drilling, some with sticks, all without rifles. Territorials hardly less raw were embarking for the front, to the blare and shout of "Tipperary." Crowds surged about posters that told the young men their king and country had need of them.

Thorpe went direct to the American embassy, to deliver the dispatch-pouch and leave the dispatch-box and his gold for safe keeping. An *attaché* casually inquired whether he had any idea of joining the Belgian Relief.

"What's that?" asked Thorpe.

"Haven't you heard? — The Germans have requisitioned the Belgian crops and other food

supplies. An American engineer over here — man named Hoover — heads a commission that is trying to feed the starving population. He has a bunch of our college graduates running that end.”

Thorpe shook his head.

“I’d like to help, but I’m too fed up with this war stuff, as the English say. I’m going back to God’s country. A man can stand only so much. I was in the lines — Red Cross — from Dinant down across the Marne and back to the Aisne.”

“Indeed? Must have been a great show. Something to remember.”

“To forget — to get thousands of miles away from!” burst out Thorpe. “If I should tell you what I’ve seen, you wouldn’t believe it — you couldn’t. Do you — do our people at home — believe what has happened to the civilian population of Belgium and North France — what is happening to-day? No, not one person in a thousand. It’s unbelievable — unthinkable! Even when you’ve seen with your own eyes, it’s so horrible it seems unreal... But it sticks in a man’s memory... And the hellish work of the shells — men and beasts torn, mashed, blown to pieces... God! I want to get away — I want to forget!”

“Well, no one can blame you, if that’s the way you feel. Maybe you saw what the President replied to the Kaiser, last month, about a day of accounting for all wrongs committed. But we can thank our lucky stars we’re out of the game. The U. S. is booming along, mopping



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Morning found him aboard one of the Belgium Relief ships, with instructions to report for service at Brussels. Back across the Channel, zigzagging to avoid mine fields; then up the Scheldt, through tranquil, peace-blessed Holland, to German-shelled, German-clutched Antwerp.

His passport and credentials and fluent German speech won the new Relief worker easy passage of the military cordon. He went direct to the Commission's offices in Antwerp.

A battered little coupé was standing at the curb before the door. On the front of the muddied hood fluttered an American flag. Almost reverently Thorpe turned to lift his hat to the emblem of his country... The door of the coupé flew open. A young lady, dressed in hard-worn khaki and leather, sprang out to grasp his hand and pump it up and down.

“Why, Lan! You old surprise party! What are you doing here?”

“Grinning,” said Thorpe. “Ought to be cussing. I see you still haven't got sense enough to go in when it rains, and all Belgium in the Hun deluge!”

She flashed a smiling glance at the bleak drizzling clouds.

“Oh, I've turned into a Flanders goose.”

“Well, you've given me a wild-goose chase. I thought you were safe across the duck-pond weeks ago. Thought you'd be as glad as I was to head for home.”

The girl's sparkling eyes clouded and darkened.

“But this proves it was the same with you as with me,” she said. “We know what has

happened — is happening. We couldn't help staying to do our bit."

"I could have, if it hadn't been for you," rejoined Thorpe. "It was like pulling teeth, but I had to stop my home run and join the Relief to get over here and look after you. Kurt told me that Von Pappheim had been ordered to Brussels."

The rich rose in Lucy's cheeks deepened and as quickly faded.

"You shouldn't have come, Lan. Herr Count is very civil — rather too much so, if anything. And with Kurt coming...Elsa wired him about me; so he waived sick leave and asked for a detail to Brussels. She received his telegram last night.—But you, Lan! For you to see the way he treats her...Better take charge of a district over towards Liége."

Thorpe set his jaw.

"I'm ordered to Brussels. Besides, it's not a question of myself now. I've seen Pappheim in action. It's up to me to stand by till you're married to Kurt — or aboard ship."

The color flooded back into Lucy's cheeks.

"Run in and tell Mr. Burlew he will have to walk to Brussels, as I've found a handsomer man.—Oh, don't be afraid of hurting his feelings. He'll know you're not, as soon as he sees you. And he was going merely because he's afraid I'm not to be trusted out alone."

"A wooden Indian would know that," said Thorpe.

Burlew closely resembled the Apollo Belvedere, and was *not* glad to lose the ride with

Miss Carew. He shook hands with the new helper all the way out to the coupé.

“No,” said Lucy, as Thorpe offered to drive. “Ed will tell you I’m the only one versed in the multifarious idiosyncrasies of this dolorous vehicle. You can be the shover whenever it skids into a shell hole.—*Au revoir*, Ed. Isn’t it nice I’ve found a substitute to save you the trip?”

The creaking, clattering coupé started off along the street. Thorpe glanced back at the Greek god.

“How about it, Loo? My guess is that Ed could have found fortitude to set his teeth and endure your company for an hour or two without perishing.”

“Not if I could help it. He has proposed five times already, once for every trip, though I showed him Kurt’s ring. It’s getting monotonous.—Want to go around by way of Louvain?”

Thorpe shuddered. “I saw Dinant...Do you remember that old-fashioned Thanksgiving we spent at your aunt’s in the country?”

“When you rescued me from the mooley cow!”

The coupé clattered and bumped and skidded along the broken muddy road, past cleared barricades and futile trenches. The drizzle of the leaden sky chilled into sleet. But the pair within the decrepit rattletrap had soared away on the wings of fancy, back through time and space to the sunny golden days of peace and childhood.



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explained. "We're going to see Elsa. Come along. You may as well make the plunge now as later."

"I hadn't expected —" he hesitated. "Yet if you say so —"

He followed the couple out into the gray drizzle.

The Von Pappheim establishment was large. The Belgian owner of the mansion had been provided lodgings in prison, and all of Elsa's new fortune was now controlled by her husband. In the portico stood an alert orderly, who gave the inevitable Prussian military touch to the ménage.

"*Ja*, the Countess Wolf von Pappheim is at home, though indisposed.—Her brother Captain von Kissel?—*Ja, ja*. There is no order against the countess receiving her brother. Be pleased to enter."

They were conducted by a hard-featured German housekeeper through a magnificent suite to a small sewing room. Elsa sat alone, meekly bowed over the tiny garment to which she was sewing a narrow edging of lace.

At the first word of the housekeeper's announcement of the callers, the young bride started as if frightened, and hastily wiped away the tears that were rolling down her cheeks. Her first glance perceived only Kurt, who had sprung ahead to embrace her.

Thorpe held back behind Lucy, striving hard to conceal and repress the upwelling of compassion that threatened to master him. One look had shown him that the dew-fresh half-

blown rosebud whom he had wooed in the garden of Montmar was no more. The wife of Wolf von Pappheim was a colorless lily, already broken in spirit and beginning to wilt.

At a sharp command from Kurt, the primly on-looking housekeeper left the room with sour reluctance. Kurt patted his weeping sister on the back and wiped her streaming eyes.

“Smile, little sister! Here are dear friends, come with me to call on you.”

Lucy drew Thorpe forward and covered the sudden shrinking of Elsa with a tactfulness that purposely misconstrued its cause.

“No wonder you take Lan for a ghost, honey. I, too, thought he was in America, when he bobbed up. He came to help the Relief — Didn't expect the honor of meeting the Countess von Pappheim.”

The deft mention of her title brought the bride's head up and gave Thorpe his cue.

“May I felicitate you on the magnificence of your home, Countess? It is perfectly in keeping with your high rank.”

Elsa found strength to stand without clinging to her brother.

“You are most kind to say it, Herr Thorpe. — Please all be seated. I shall ring for refreshments.”

Thorpe at once began to talk about his new work as though he had no other thought or interest. This bridged the interval until the serving of a characteristic German afternoon luncheon. Kurt had missed his noon meal. He attacked the sausages and beer. Elsa, still

tearful-eyed, promptly followed his lead. Neither noticed how Thorpe's face fell. He declined the food and hastily drained one cup of coffee after another. Lucy nibbled at a caviare sandwich and lingered over her cup of tea, as she thoughtfully watched the brother and sister clear away the luncheon.

The Americans could not refuse to drink when Kurt proposed a toast to the Relief Commission. Thorpe responded with a toast of felicitation to the new captain. The second glass of champagne, following the beer, brought a flush of color into Elsa's wan face and an unnatural brightness into her grief-dulled eyes. She began to tell Thorpe with feverish gaiety about her presentation as a countess before *Majestät* and about the high court functions that she had already attended.

Thorpe listened with grave attentiveness, and drank more coffee. Kurt, overcome with ardent adoration, moved his chair around beside Lucy's and asserted his betrothal right to hold her hand in his fond clasp. He was begging her for a kiss when she shrugged and motioned towards the entrance.

Von Pappheim stood in the doorway, cynically smiling. Kurt's involuntary exclamation drew Elsa's attention to her husband. She stopped short in the midst of a shrill sentence, her mouth agape with fright. All the color was as if blotted out of her cheeks. Her eyes dilated. As Von Pappheim advanced, she cowered as if expecting a blow. His cruel smile changed to suave gallantry. He bowed low to Lucy.



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ful, frightened look of inquiry. "What — what did you say?"

"You heard him taunt me," said Thorpe. "He thinks Americans will not fight. They won't unless they're sure they have something worth fighting for...Dueling is out of style among civilized people — but I have seen Count Wolf von Pappheim at war, and I can imagine his treatment of you. In plain American, it's more than I can stand for."

An agony of terror seized the girl-wife. She tottered to her feet and stood panting and gasping, her hands clutched hard over her heart.

"Do not — do not — fight? He will kill you! ...Shame to me...my husband! Even to listen ...so wicked — most wicked! Go — far away... I beg you to go —"

Thorpe saw her sway. He was quick enough to spring around and catch her as she fell. He called loudly for help. Elsa's face was a deathly grayish white. There was no response to his calls. He lifted the swooning bride and rushed towards the adjoining room, where he remembered having seen a lounge. As he hurried through the doorway he all but collided with Von Pappheim.

With a guttural curse, the Prussian seized the flaccid body of his wife and tore her out of Thorpe's arms. In the face of his half insane fury, any attempt at explanations would have been futile. Thorpe quietly stepped past him and went out through the suite of rooms. Lucy and Kurt were nowhere in sight.

He left the mansion and hunted up one of his new American acquaintances.

“Lee,” he said, “you’re a Virginian. You’ve seen samples of applied German *kultur*. I’m expecting a Prussian officer to challenge me. Can I count on you?”

“Sure. We’ll make it brickbats at forty rods — or forty-two centimeter howitzers at five.”

“I’m not joking, Lee. It’s that Von Pappheim you had a set-to with for stealing half the flour shipped to your district.”

“That tow-headed buzzard? *Whee!* Got your coffin ordered? How’ll you take yours — cold steel or lead?”

“Lead. I don’t know enough about fencing to go through the motions.”

“All right. Lead she is. Anything to accommodate. It’ll be a deuced nuisance, though, losing your services. There’s a shipment through Ghent that you might look after while you’re waiting for the hearse.”

Thorpe’s deadly earnestness cracked into a half reluctant grin.

“You’re a peach of a Job’s comforter, you are! Dig up the invoices of that shipment *my pronto*, or I’ll challenge *you*.”

Invoices and instructions were promptly forthcoming. Thorpe took the shipment to the distributing agents, who were up the Lys River, southwest from Ghent, towards Ypres and Lille. In three days he was back again at Brussels. His first act was to call on Lee.

“Nothing doing,” reported the Virginian. “No buzz from the buzzard. He must be eat-

ing crow — or hatching out rattlesnake eggs. — By the way, Miss Carew wanted you to call her up, soon as you pulled in... At her pension... Rather done up, I'm afraid. Looked kind of pale under the gills. Say, but she's the real goods. Seems her German *fiancé* brought on a slew of trunks for her from Berlin. She has turned all over for the Belgian ladies that the Huns stripped."

Thorpe was already half through the doorway. When he reached the pension and impetuously burst into Lucy's reception room, Kurt was pacing the floor, too perturbed to stand still. Lucy sat at the table, as quiescent as her *fiancé* was restless. The corners of her mouth drooped. There were black circles under her eyes. The look she gave Thorpe was dark with misery and despair.

"Oh, Lan! If only we could have wired you to try breaking through the lines! No chance any other way."

"What has that devil done now?" demanded Thorpe.

Kurt tried to speak, choked, and turned away with a gesture of impotence. Lucy's face had flamed scarlet.

"He — wants — me," she murmured. "You are to testify to relations with Elsa that will give him a divorce, or I am to — be his — without — marriage."

Thorpe found himself of a sudden strangely cool.

"What's the alternative?" he asked.

"Court-martial for the both of us as spies,"



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and Von Pappheim and a few other officers to a little farewell dinner? I will create a diversion, during which you and Lucy can slip out of the city together. She can travel as your wife or as a Red Cross nurse. There must be some way by which you can smuggle her out through the lines to the British."

"But that devil—he will follow! He will overtake us!"

"If he does, you'll still have your pistol. But I will do what I can to keep him here. If I have luck, you'll see me instead of him."

Lucy's eyes glowed. "I'll let you try it, Lan. It's better for you than a wall and a firing squad. You'll challenge him?"

"No. He'll challenge me."

"Impossible!" exclaimed Kurt. "You are only a civilian, and he has the more certain way of getting rid of you."

"Wait and see. Hop lively, old man. Land him first; then at least half a dozen other officers— young ones. So-long, Loo!"

Lucy clung to his hand while she held her cheek for Kurt's fervent but hasty kiss.

At the street door Thorpe held back until Kurt had turned the corner before he started for Relief headquarters. On arriving there, he wrote out his resignation. This he sealed up and gave to Lee, with the request to "misplace" it for a day or two.

An hour later Kurt was introducing him to seven young staff officers in a private dining room of Brussels' most fashionable hotel. All were very cordial, for Von Pappheim had not

yet arrived, and Kurt exaggerated Thorpe's services as volunteer during the campaign to the Marne. There followed a rather prolonged delay. Thorpe suggested a champagne toast to good-fellowship. It was drunk standing.

As the empty glasses were lowered, Von Pappheim came in, rather more haughty than usual. He drew himself up while his juniors clicked heels and saluted. Thorpe had taken a position near the entrance. He stepped up to Von Pappheim from the side and spoke to him in a clear-cut, deliberate tone that reached every ear in the room:

“Count von Pappheim, permit me to observe that I do not like the shape of your nose.”

With the swift jab of a boxer, his hand darted up to grasp the objectionable feature. The astounded count tottered after his outraged nose half across the room before Thorpe released his grip and coolly stepped clear.

From the other guests came gasps and murmurs, followed by a single derisive titter. Von Pappheim jerked his sword from the scabbard—and found himself looking into the muzzle of his brother-in-law's pistol.

“Gentlemen, kindly do not interfere,” Kurt called to his guests. “As you perceive, this is an affair of honor.”

“Not on the part of Count von Pappheim,” broke in Thorpe. “He is a poltroon, a—”

“Liar! spy!” shouted the insulted major. “I will have you shot, you *schweinhund!*”

“You hear him, gentlemen—afraid to meet me—afraid to challenge one of those meek

Americans who never will fight! On his breast the Red Eagle. Within it—”

“*Donnerwetter!*” cursed Von Pappheim, uplifting his sword.

Thorpe pulled a doleful face. “So sad, *nicht?* Under the Red Eagle a chicken heart. But on his face an eagle beak—*ja, ja, a red eagle beak.*”

Von Pappheim’s rage froze into icy malignancy. He lowered his sword.

“God with me!” he blasphemed. “I will slice off your ears. I will— — — — —”

The hideousness of the last threat made even his fellow officers shudder as they came in between him and the two friends. Thorpe nudged Kurt to leave, and replied to the threatener with punctilious politeness:

“The second of Count Wolf von Pappheim will be welcomed by my friend, Mr. Lee, of the Relief Commission. The Herr Count is requested to bear in mind that the slightest attempt to prefer any false charges of espionage before this affair is concluded, will obtrude the red eagle’s beak into every newspaper from Berlin to Hong Kong.—I see that the delicacy of Captain von Kissel’s position has forced him to withdraw. But I know he will be grieved if his uninvolved guests do not remain to dine and drink success to him at the Front.”

All except Von Pappheim responded to the parting bow of the American with unfeigned cordiality that held more than a hint of respect. He had forced a meeting with one of the most dreaded duelists of all Prussia.



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“ However, every man to his taste. My principal may believe your principal to be a four-flusher. At any rate, four is our limit. We stand pat on that. Do you call us, or do you lay down? ”

“ *Bitte?* ”

“ I inquire, do you accept the terms for your principal, or do we post him as a poltroon? ”

The German stiffened. “ Accepted. — The time and place? ”

“ Nearest point of the woods east of the city, at sunrise — or at the time the sun *should* rise if it wasn't for those blamed chilly fogs. ”

“ Entirely agreeable, Herr Lee. You may expect us punctually. ”

Lee bowed him out, and faced about to his cool-eyed principal in the doorway of the inner room.

“ Get that, Thorpe. We're to expect them *puncturely*. The question now before the house is, who's to be punk, and who's to be punctured. Do the ayes have it, or is it the noes — the red eagle noes? ”

“ Cut it, ” said Thorpe. “ I'm scared all right, but I'm scared stiff. My knees won't wobble. Of course he'll get me. But I'll have at least a chance to lay him up for repairs until Loo is safe. I've been practising that finger-along-the-barrel stunt you showed me. ”

“ Good boy! Let's feed and then go by-by. I'll set the old alarm clock for five. *Brrrh!* Wish we could postpone the joy-ride till noon next June. My artistic soul abhors these Made-in-Flanders October sunrises. They're too chill,

too unsympathetic, too — ah — blank wet-blankety. However, a dash of sleet will account for your shivering. Why didn't you insist on three paces — and machine-guns? ”

Thorpe ate little, but slept well. Morning found him in the same mood of cool desperation. Though the terms of the meeting gave him a fighting chance with his expert enemy, he knew that the odds were heavily against him. He had fired a pistol hardly a dozen times in all his life. But he firmly believed that, unless he was killed outright at the first shot or two, his determination to save Lucy and avenge the abuse of Elsa would enable him to shoot straight.

He was too absorbed to perceive the real reason why Lee asked for and took his sparkling tie pin and the little American-flag lapel button. Nothing so assists the aim of a duelist as a bright point on the breast of an opponent. Lee's grim jest was that mementos were the rightful perquisites of a second.

The dank, dripping, morning mists were rolling and breaking when Thorpe's rusty but well-engined old racing car brought him and Lee to the place agreed upon for the meeting. A three-seated cabriolet emerged from a wisp of fog just ahead and stopped at sight of the car. Out popped a nervous little German surgeon-lieutenant, who held the door open for the German second and Von Pappheim. Beside his smaller companions, the count loomed tall and bulky, especially about the chest, which bulged like a pouter pigeon's.

“ My eye! ” derided Lee. “ Maybe you can’t hit a barn door, but you deserve to be shot if you can’t hit the barn itself. ”

There was an exchange of exceedingly formal bows, in which the principals did not participate. Von Pappheim, arrogant and impatient, led his party around behind the nearest coppice. Lee and Thorpe followed to within a few yards of where the others halted. The German second came to meet Lee half way. He produced for inspection a pair of mauser automatics and two clips of cartridges.

“ These are lead bullets; not your regular jacketed kind, ” observed Lee.

“ *Ja.* We believed your principal would prefer bullets that, at short range, are more murderers — *nicht?* ”

“ Sure, ” cheerfully agreed Lee, and he made random choice of a pistol, after both had been loaded by his fellow second.

The German then drew a line, and stretched his legs in four long strides.

“ Hold on, ” drawled Lee. “ The average pace is only thirty-two inches. ”

“ But my principal paces a full meter. ”

“ When returning from the Marne, ” murmured Lee to himself. He spoke out in a tone of flat finality. “ We’ll split and call it four yards, but your man must toe the scratch. Here’s a tape line I brought along as first-aid. ”

When the distance had been measured off with scrupulous exactness, the German suavely remarked: “ Because of the chill and dampness, my principal will remove only his helmet. ”



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at the pistol trigger... Von Pappheim, with pistol only half raised, reeled as if hit on the chest with a sledge, and toppled over backwards. He thudded down flat on his back and lay motionless, the unfired pistol slipping out of his flaccid hand. A scarlet blotch spread swiftly down through his tow pompadour below the spot struck by the third bullet of Thorpe's up-kicking pistol.

“*Schrecklich!*” yelled the astounded German second. “Through the head! *Kaput!* — All that wadding wasted! *Donnerwetter!*”

He started to bound forward, and stopped short. Thorpe had pointed his pistol down at the fallen man, and stood poised, waiting for him to move. The little surgeon, half around the tree, popped back again out of sight. But Von Pappheim did not stir. He lay deathly still. Lee stepped forward, and bent over the inert body.

“Enough, Thorpe,” he called. “One in the head and two in the chest, both of which must have —”

The drawling remark broke off abruptly as the utterer's hasty jerk flung open Von Pappheim's overcoat. Lee snatched up the unfired pistol, and confronted his fellow second.

“The skunk! — You knew it, too!”

The German smiled cynically. “Stratagem is the soul of war. A duel is private warfare. The terms agreed upon did not forbid the use of defensive protection.”

“Nor do they forbid my shooting you down for your dirty treachery.—Thorpe, come and look while I keep him covered.”

Thorpe came stiffly forward and stooped down. The cause of Von Pappheim's inflated chest was now self-evident. The upper part of his overcoat was lined with a coverless atlas, half an inch thick. Across the front of his body hung a piece of medieval ring-mail from the Brussels museum. Thorpe drew it aside and jerked open the field-gray uniform coat. Under it was a second wadding of atlas paper, also half an inch thick. He ripped open the shirt. There were no wounds — only two big bruises. Neither bullet had pierced the "defensive protection."

The attempt to stretch the agreed distance and the all-lead bullets were now also explained. At twelve feet a steel-tipped bullet would have gone through everything. But lead is not good for penetrating books — and the bullets may have been backed by only light charges of powder. Even at that, however, one of them had penetrated the outer paper armor and splattered through the links of the ring-mail. Thorpe's finger, probing into the torn uniform, felt a flat packet. One look at the lead-ripped envelope was enough. He held it up before the German officer and the forward-edging surgeon.

"This, herr, as you see, is in the handwriting of a lady. It is the property of a friend of mine, and was stolen by Count von Pappheim. Do I take it by your consent, or do I take his overcoat, jacket and defensive protection for public exhibition?"

"*Himmel!*" ejaculated the officer, and he dropped on his knees so that his body hid Von Pappheim's face. "In God's name, take the

lady's love notes — take them and begone!"

"You'll make this out an accident?" demanded Lee. "No charges of any kind to be made against us?"

"*Ja, ja*, my word to it. Go! — leave us alone with our dead."

Passing the cabriolet, Lee jabbed his penknife blade into one of the tires.

"A stick in time may save thine," he observed. "There's no trusting Hun treaties — when they use their scraps of paper to line their craws."

The racing car fairly burned up the road until it whirled into Brussels. Thorpe dropped Lee on the outskirts. A brief handgrip, a word of thanks, a dry joke from the Virginian, and Thorpe circled off through the suburbs. At the Von Pappheim mansion a new orderly was on guard. Thorpe dashed up into the portico.

"Quick! quick!" he cried breathlessly in German. "The count is hurt! A message to the countess!"

He had only a minute or so to warm his hands at the grate fire in the reception hall. Elsa came hurrying down the stairway, a dressing robe flung about her *robe de nuit*, and her snowy ankles showing above the fur-topped juliets. Two thick braids of spun gold glinted on her heaving bosom.

At sight of Thorpe her tear-swollen sleep-blurred eyes stretched still wider open. He authoritatively shook the packet of snapshots and forgeries at the sour-faced housekeeper, who was hastening in from the rear hall.

"Out with you!" he commanded. "This is



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you to stand and tell me — tell me with your own lips! Murderer! low foreigner that you are!...To rob me of my husband! my Wolf! my high-born Wolf! — *Ach! ach! ach!*”

Servants came running from all directions. Thorpe, astounded, bewildered, cut to the quick, drew away from the screaming, hysterical bride. Near the outer entrance the orderly sought to bar his way. A fist blow on the point of the jaw sent the clumsy boor reeling.

CHAPTER XXXV

FLIGHT

Back in his racing car, Thorpe drove towards the center of the city until out of sight of the Von Pappheim mansion, then turned abruptly westward. Once clear of the suburbs, he put on full speed. As there had been no fighting directly west, between Brussels and the new Front, the roads had not been pitted with shell craters, and most of them were in fairly good condition. He made the Scheldt, a few miles east of Courtrai, in an hour.

A run southwest, up along the east side of the river, avoiding the roads most crowded with German supply transports, brought him opposite Roubaix by mid-forenoon. At Roubaix he was held up by a suspicious German captain. But his credentials as a worker with the Relief Commission, his fluent German, and the free use of Kurt's name, at last won him a pass through to Lille.

Shortly after noon he reached the hotel that Kurt had named for the meeting. When he told that he was the gentleman expected by Captain von Kissel he was at once shown upstairs. Before the door to which he was ushered he dismissed the hotel attendant, knocked, and stepped in.

At first glance he might not have recognized Lucy, who was in the costume of a German Red Cross deaconess. But Kurt was seated close to her, clinging to her hand. His flushed face, no less than his posture, showed the agitation and ardor with which he had been pleading. Lucy sprang up and darted to meet Thorpe, her drooping lips suddenly curved in a smile of joyful relief, her anxiety-clouded eyes beaming.

“Lan! — They haven’t caught you — yet!”

The relief and gladness in her lovely eyes and the affectionate clasp of her hands gave Thorpe an irresistible impulse.

“With Kurt’s permission!” he said, and he pressed what he intended for a brotherly kiss full upon her smiling red lips. She jerked her hands free to hide her flaming face.

“Oh, oh, Lan! How could you?” she sobbed.

Kurt sprang to clasp his arm protectingly about her quivering shoulders. The look he fixed upon Thorpe was hot with resentment.

“How dare you?” he demanded. “She is my betrothed — mine. And you pretending to love Elsa! You will apologize!”

The swift subsidence of Thorpe’s emotional up-welling left him more than grave. That impulsive, unpremeditated kiss had, as it were, unlocked a sealed chamber in his heart. In a flash of self-revelation he saw the truth. And with this realization came darting before him sparks of memory — remembrances of words, looks, incidents, all now vividly clear and focused on a common center. . . . But realization that comes too late can give only bitter regret and sorrow.



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from Brussels to staff headquarters here, describing you and Lucy as spies and also charging you with — ”

“ No proofs, ” said Thorpe. “ Lucy at least is safe. I found all on Pappheim — snapshots, his forgeries, everything. They’re gone now — burnt up. And with him dead — ”

“ But he’s not, Lan, he’s not! ” cried Lucy. “ Tell him, Kurt. ”

“ He himself sent the wire, ” said Kurt.

“ Impossible! I saw the wound close to — just above the forehead. He never stirred after he fell on his back. ”

“ Stunned, ” suggested Kurt. “ Your bullet must have glanced on his skull. Anyway, the telegram came with his name as sender. You’re charged with robbery and deadly assault upon an officer... That was only half an hour ago. I cut my staff work and rushed here to see if you had come. No doubt orders have been sent out already and posters are being printed. Of course he is wiring elsewhere — to all points on this Front, from Holland around to here and on down into France. ”

Thorpe thought quickly. If Lucy should be taken in his company, there would be no hope for her. She was pledged to marry Kurt later. She must be saved at all cost. The only chance seemed to lie in immediate marriage to Kurt. She must be forced to consent. Thorpe could think of only one way to break her determination.

“ That devil! ” he muttered. “ Must be furious. If he gets me now!... Loo, why don’t you do as Kurt wishes?... With you along I won’t

have half the chance — Haven't I done enough for you already? ”

The eager delight that beamed from Kurt's anxious eyes blurred into a bewilderment in which loyal faith struggled against a rising jealousy. But Lucy's gaze never wavered. Before the look in her clear eyes Thorpe flushed and stared over her head.

“ Don't you think you're smart, Lan Thorpe? ” she scoffed. “ You always were a fizzle at make-believe...Kurt will write a semi-official note, recommending you as Herr A. Thorpe from Berlin, a personal friend whose offer to volunteer for Red Cross work was personally accepted by the High Commander of the Third Army, and who served through the Marne campaign. Meantime, you will go down the back stairs to the shops in the side street. Try to get clothes, hat, pipe and glasses like those of a German professor. I have Red Cross armlets for you.”

“ But, Loo, you must stay and marry Kurt. If you're caught!...Promise you'll stay.”

“ You know I'd stay if I thought it would give you a better chance,” she said. “ But it's just the opposite. My dress is what will put over the act. Do as I say, at once.”

Thorpe met Kurt's look, shook his head helplessly, and obeyed.

He returned another man. By good chance he had found the shop of an old French costumer in the side street and had risked everything by telling the man his need to escape. His Relief Commission credentials had carried conviction. Nothing could gratify the old Frenchman more

than to help balk the Boches. There was no crudeness about his work. The clothes were commonplace yet suggestive of German style, the goggles were merely tinted. His master touch came in the mustache, which presented an absurdly ineffectual yet loyal effort to imitate the tushes of *Majestät*.

A blond wig and a pair of coarse, low-heeled shoes had been sent for Lucy. She decided that the wig made too unnatural a contrast with her dark eyebrows and lashes. But she put on the shoes, and with them a heavy German manner.

In exchange for Kurt's note and a verbal list of German positions near Lille, Thorpe handed over his Relief Commission credentials to be destroyed.

"Time to start," he said.

"Save her for me!" murmured Kurt.

His lips quivered and his eyes became violet as he held out his arms to Lucy. She passively submitted to his farewell embrace and kisses until Thorpe, who had turned to the door, uttered an impatient call. Left alone in the room, Kurt paced back and forth for a moment. The arrangement was for him to go out through the main entrance. Thorpe and Lucy went down the back stairs and out through a covered court to the side street.

"Hope you're good for a stiff hike, Gretchen," he said. "My car would have been a dead give-away. I left it around the corner from the shop of our French friend. He agreed to have it run off to another quarter of the city."

"*Vorwärts, Herr Dorp.*" Lucy's attempt at



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upon his own concerns to heed the couple that passed by with the bearing of persons who have a very definite destination in view.

If an officer looked at them, Thorpe saluted and respectfully inquired what regiment occupied the next position to the north. Once a morosely suspicious Bavarian stopped to growl a harsh command for them to account for themselves. Thorpe flurriedly handed over Kurt's note and launched into an extravagant laudation of how the Imperial Prussian Guard had fought at the battle of Charleroi. No one hates the Prussians more than do the Bavarians. The officer flung the note back at Thorpe and told him to go to the devil with his Red Cross wench.

Toward sunset a drizzling rain set in. They came to where there was a gap in the battle line or it bowed away westward out of sight. The last German soldiers and wagons had been passed half a mile back. From a turn in the road where a battery had fired several shells at the British, Thorpe picked up an empty shell basket as he helped Lucy over the ditch. They cut across the fields towards a small farmhouse.

Though unharmed by gunfire, the place appeared to be deserted. There were no fowls or animals about, and no smoke rose from the chimney. Passing the pig sty Thorpe chanced to glance inside. The body of an elderly French peasant lay in the muck, horribly mutilated. Thorpe hurried Lucy on to the house. The doors were open and all the lower rooms had been ransacked. Thorpe asked Lucy to close the doors while he looked upstairs.

What he saw filled him with horror. Quietly going downstairs, he told Lucy that the house was too defiled to be habitable.

But the rain had now set in more heavily. They took refuge in a root-shed, where the pilaging Germans had left a few scattered vegetables. After a supper of raw carrots, Thorpe got together enough dry straw and sacking to make Lucy a warm bed. He burrowed into a straw stack near the shed. Despite the raw, dank cold of the all-night rain, both were so wearied that they slept until dawn.

While they were breakfasting on three or four stray potatoes roasted in the fire that Thorpe had built to warm their chilled, cramped limbs, Lucy suddenly noticed that his mustache was gone. Wetted in the rain the evening before, it had rubbed off during the night. Thorpe found it crumpled up in his straw-stack burrow. He had lain upon it during the night. Even Lucy's deft fingers were unable to get it into shape again or to make it stick on his lip.

"Oh, dear!" she sighed. "It was such a perfect disguise. It made everyone smile."

"Throw it away. It's hopeless," replied Thorpe. "Maybe the sun will smile. The clouds seem to be breaking."

He filled the shell basket with such of the remaining vegetables as were eatable. An hour later the rain had ceased. Watery sun-rays began to straggle through the gray clouds. Thorpe and Lucy plodded westward across the muddy stubble fields, away from the ill-omened house of death.

CHAPTER XXXVI

VALLEY OF THE SHADOW

A mile along a rutted country road brought the fugitives within sound of firing. They came up a wooded slope, and suddenly found themselves in the midst of a troop of uhlans, who were riding out from a small village, in a circling maneuver. Without his false mustache Thorpe was no longer taken as a matter of course.

The uhlan captain read Kurt's note, and abruptly began to ask searching questions of Lucy. She of course could neither understand nor answer his guttural German talk. Thorpe attempted a voluble explanation that "his wife" was American, that they had been married at New York in June, when he had brought her to his home in Berlin. She had not yet had time to learn German, but, being a good nurse, had insisted upon joining him in hospital work.

The officer frowned dubiously, and ordered two of his men to take the couple into the village for investigation.

The British had recently been driven back out of the village by German engineer troops, the work of whose saw-edged bayonets was all too evident on the corpses of village folk and



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schweinhund! You have confessed to being Americans. That is enough, with the girl in disguise.”

He turned to the lieutenant who had ogled Lucy.

“To bother longer with such vermin, when we are about to attack, is foolishness. A squad and the nearest wall.”

The lieutenant smiled gloatingly. “The girl is pretty, Major. Give me permission first to enjoy her.”

Lucy did not understand the words, but the look that the young officer fixed upon her was unmistakable. She pressed close to Thorpe.

“Lan, dear Lan,” she whispered, “as you love me, kill me — quick!”

“Yes,” he assured her, his jaw tightening.

He stood ready, his hands on her quivering shoulders. He knew he could save her. A sudden clutch of her dainty head, a twist of her slender neck — and she would be beyond reach of the blond beast. He waited only for the answer to the lieutenant’s request.

The major had turned to look off over the woods in the direction taken by the uhlans. A rocket flared red against the gray sky.

“*Donnerwetter!*” he cursed. “Already the signal, and we have yet to start. Put the spies in the herd with the other *schweine*. They shall serve us and be killed by their *verdammt* friends. — *Vorwärts!*”

Thorpe swung Lucy around and hurried her into the midst of the cowering French peasants. Swiftly as he moved, he received a thrust in

the thigh from one of the prodding saw-edged bayonets. A jerk of his forearm barely succeeded in knocking up another bayonet that lunged at Lucy's face. Fortunately she did not understand the vile jeers of the soldiers.

Once among their fellow victims, Thorpe pushed forward into the lead. Behind him burst out screams of pain and terror as the soldiers prodded with their bayonets or struck with their rifle butts those of the peasants who did not start off quickly enough. Forgetful of her own terror, Lucy wrenched about in Thorpe's grasp to cry out in denunciation of the brutality. Thorpe clapped his hand over her mouth and dragged her on with him. In his single backward glance he had seen a very old man fall under the blow of a rifle butt and a young baby tossed up to be caught on three or four bayonet points.

The huddled drove of victims hurried out of the village and westward down the road before their cruel goaders. The pitiful maskers of the advance soon came to clumps of bullet-clipped coppices, from which German pickets were firing towards their enemy. A turn of the road brought the party into view of the British trenches, only a hundred and fifty yards away.

Thorpe heard the ping and zipp of rifle bullets. He forced Lucy around behind him. A young woman next to them gave a little gurgling gasp and pitched face down in the muddy road. Suddenly the shots ceased. The British evidently could see only the civilians at the head of the advancing party. The Germans ceased to tor-

ture their victims, but pressed up close behind them, stooping low to hide behind the living screen and dragging along in their van a pair of machine-guns. The peasants continued to surge forward, impelled by the ferocious threats of the soldiers.

Lucy and Thorpe, still among the foremost of the terror-stricken flock, saw the distance to the British trenches rapidly narrow. They came within a hundred yards — and still the British did not perceive how they were being duped. Thorpe caught sight of a machine-gun at the log barrier that had been thrown across the road.

Into his super-tense mind flashed a frightfully clear perception of the situation. The British might refrain from firing upon the civilians, but the Germans were only waiting to get as near as possible to the trenches. The moment they were discovered they would open fire with their machine-guns through the thick of their living ambush screen. Meantime, every foot of advance was giving them so much the more advantage for their surprise charge... The victims were already doomed. Then why should they not die in time to save their friends?

Thorpe drew in a deep breath, and shouted at the top of his lungs: “Germans! Germans! — *Fire!*”

Over his shoulder he cried to the peasants: “*A bas! à bas!*”

He flung himself down with Lucy, shielding her with his body as best he could. Some of the peasants dropped to the ground behind them. Most of the others were struck down by the first



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Highlands. On — on — came the kilted wave:

The foremost Germans went down like nine-pins before the shock of the counter assailants. Others, too close to flee, dropped their rifles and flung up their hands, with loud shrieks of "*Kamerad! Kamerad!*" The rest doubled about and came flying to rearward, hotly pursued by the fierce-shouting, rawboned "ladies of hell."

The German machine gunners drove a murderous fire through the scattered flight of their own comrades, in a desperate attempt to stop the charge of the Scots. They might as well have tossed handfuls of gravel. Several Highlanders went down. But a score or more rushed at the machine-guns from three directions.

Close before Thorpe a whooping young subaltern, two jumps ahead of his men, staggered, spun half around, and fell. He struggled up on his elbow, to urge his men forward. There was no need. As Thorpe ran to aid him, the skirted fighters closed in on the machine gunners. The rattle-clatter of the maxim abruptly ceased.

"On! on!" shouted the wounded lieutenant. "Chevy 'em! Beat the coppices!"

"Uhlans — your flank!" warned Thorpe. "Uhlans — cavalry! Your left flank or rear!"

The boyish subaltern stared hard at him, glanced to the left, and jerked out his whistle. Its shrill note stopped the wild Highlanders at the very height of their furious charge. The few who might have hesitated about giving over the pursuit, swerved and sprinted to the rallying point at sight of the on-coming uhlans.

Thorpe was assisting the wounded officer to

his feet. The young aristocrat was as cool as ice.

“Form square,” he commanded. “Man the maxims. Fire.”

The uhlans had burst out through a wood not over three hundred yards away. There was no time for the Highlanders to form a square. But the nearest ones massed along the roadside in triple ranks, from beyond the machine-guns to a point on the left of the officer. They began to shoot, firing at will but with the cool aim of veterans. Manned by Scotch gunners, both German maxims burst into a clattering roar. The Highlanders who had been farthest out on the left flank veered clear of the line of fire as they rushed to the ends of the defensive formation. Those from the right wing came panting, to dash across the road over the bodies of the dead and wounded peasants.

The number of empty saddles in the van of the charging uhlans rapidly increased. But to stop the massed rush of a body of cavalry in full gallop is no easy matter. The uhlans had already covered half the distance — heads down, lances leveled, horses skimming over the ground at racing speed. Thorpe’s heart leaped into his throat. The sheer velocity and mass of so much on-hurtling horse-flesh must surely smash through and over the footmen. Lucy would be trampled under those pounding hoofs.

He released his supporting arm from the subaltern and bent sideways to dart back to where he had left Lucy lying...She was not there. His anxious glance swept the road in

all directions. When it came around to the opposite side, it was fixed and riveted upon a black and white figure crouched under the far elbow of the young officer.

Unheeded by either Thorpe or the wounded man, in the tense excitement of the uhlan charge, Lucy had helped herself to the subaltern's first-aid kit and was calmly bandaging the wound above his bare knee. Utterly unconscious of her presence, he was balancing himself on his sound leg with the pressure of his left hand on her downbent head.

Thorpe's half assured glance flicked forward over the down-bent heads of the Highlanders. Through the haze of the blazing Scotch rifles the uhlands loomed alarmingly near. Yet in the brief moments since Thorpe's last look a great change had taken place among the furious chargers. The machine gunners had lowered their aim. Horses, struck in the head or chest by the hail of bullets, were crashing down with their riders. Those behind stumbled and plunged headlong over the bodies, or, leaping clear, were struck down in turn by the terrible rifle fire. There was no shock. At thirty yards the swirl of surviving horses and riders burst apart and fled into the thickets.

“After them, lads! After them!” shouted the subaltern. “Beat the coppices! On to the village!”

He made an impetuous leap to put himself in the lead of his men. His wounded leg doubled under him. He came down with stunning violence. The hot-blooded men were already charg-



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M. C. They will help you with the civilians. I can make out to hobble on ahead, with one of those long Hun rifles for crutch. Pardon me for hastening off. I'm C. O., you know. Can't leave my lads. They'd be ganging on to Berlin. What?...Ah, I say, most kind of you, old chap. This will be topping."

With white, pain-racked face, but dauntless eye, the young aristocrat took the German rifle from which Thorpe had detached the barbarous saw-edged bayonet, and staggered away up the corpse-littered road towards the village.

CHAPTER XXXVII

THE BATTLE OF BATTLES

All the remainder of the day Thorpe and Lucy labored in company with the one Scotch surgeon and his scant handful of trained ambulance assistants in caring for the wounded. The bayonet stab in Thorpe's thigh, though painful, was not disabling.

So far as the Americans could see, their fellow-workers made absolutely no distinction in their treatment of Highlanders and Germans. Only the peasant children received special attention. Those of the women and older children who had escaped injury gave all the aid they could to the Red Cross workers. A small villa, half a mile to the west, was turned into a hospital.

During the afternoon an English regiment of Territorials came to relieve the Highlanders, who were being attacked in the village by a full regiment of German reinforcements. Much to the discontent of the Scots, they were ordered to the rear for re-formation.

When commanded to report to hospital, and not a moment before, Lieutenant the Honorable Malcolm Stuart collapsed. He plaintively voiced his grievances to Lucy as she re-dressed his wound —

“Rotten luck, Miss Carew. All those bally Territorials nosing in. Why couldn't they have dug up their own Huns? Not very sporting of them to push in on our particular game. What? ...And to order me off the firing line — mere scratch like this. Game leg for hurdling, I dare say, but jolly good enough for a king while holding a position where one has only to limp around.”

In the side room Thorpe was acting as assistant to the busily operating surgeon. He spoke of the subaltern's gallantry. The dour Scotchman squeezed out a half smile.

“A bonny lad, is he not? Wi' us a fortnight, no more. His brother, the heir, at home dying. Shrapnel wound at Soissons — Led his company at Mons. Alas, 'twas a dolorous fight thot. We started in wi' a regiment of eleven hun' red braw lads. A scant three hun' red crossed the Marne. Ever facing us two, three, oft times five Germans to our one, wi' more seeking to come 'round by the flank. A bitter drubbing they gie us.”

“Had you mustered one man against two, you'd never have had need to give back an inch,” said Thorpe.

“I'm no disagreeing to thot, sir. We came back from across the Marne, and we ha' come back here. Yester noon the Huns fell upon us in force — routed us out of the village. By the time they drove us through the first bosks, yon lad was our sole commissioned officer left. He led counter-charges till the Huns quit cold. Then he laid out trenches, and we dug in. Fairly has he won his Victoria Cross, and him not a day



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neutrals. But the Red Cross — I've a right to serve as stretcher-bearer or ambulance man."

"Not a particle more than I have," asserted Lucy.

Thorpe sought to humor her. "Of course — of course. But remember what the C. O. said about regulations against women."

"Yes. I heard. What the regulations mean is ineffectual females. I can run a car as well as you, and I'm better on first-aid. — We'll cable for funds from Calais."

"But, Loo, you can't mean — "

"Don't be silly, Lan. After what I have seen, you know it is as impossible for me to leave as for you, so long as brave men are suffering and dying to save the world from those cruel beasts."

Thorpe winced. "Yes — yes... Yet Kurt?"

The girl's flashing eyes clouded and dulled.

"You know I have given him my promise. If he comes to me with his own hands still clean, and renounces those who are responsible for that frightfulness — if he becomes a true American citizen... But I would kill myself sooner than be the wife of one who justifies the master murderers."

"Poor Kurt," muttered Thorpe. "I believe he was beginning to see the truth. We must not forget he has been reared from babyhood to worship the Kaiser."

Lucy shuddered.

"I have never forgotten the face of that — that Attila as he rode past along Unter den Linden... And then Von Pappheim! Like mas-

ter, like man! . . . Yet you could think I'd go home, when the wonderful French, the crushed Belgians, and our own blood cousins, the British, are battling so desperately to wall up and force back this terrible wave of medieval barbarism!"

Thorpe no longer even wished to remonstrate.

"We'll cable from Calais for funds," he repeated her decision with grave approval.

Less than a week later they were on the Ypres front with an ambulance, three American students from Oxford, a young American doctor, and two trained nurses from London. All the equipment and the maintenance was at Lucy's own expense.

Neither permission nor aid was asked of the British military authorities. The little ambulance unit simply appeared at the front and set to work. The Americans — women as well as men — were received without question, as a matter of course, even gratefully, in so far as surgeons and helpers, toiling night and day until they dropped, were capable of realizing gratitude. But the wounded Tommies, torn and mangled by bullets and shell fire and bayonets, blessed the Yankees for carrying them off the battle field, and blessed them twice for their prodigal gifts of good cigarettes.

The unwounded soldiers and their anxious commanders had no thought for anything else than the deadly need to cling fast against the tremendous blows that sought to hurl them back across the few remaining miles to the French coast. The whole Ypres front was a raw wound of humanity in a volcano of German shell fire —

a hell-pit lined with heroes who, with few batteries and scant ammunition, indomitably held on and on against the bombardment of the heavy German howitzers and against the gray flood of Teutons, who often outnumbered them five to one.

For twenty terrific days of blood and steel and fire, the little British army faced the impact of the gigantic German war-machine. Against the enormous numbers of light and heavy artillery, against the overwhelming masses of enemy infantry, the British had little else to oppose than rifle fire, bayonets, flesh, and the bulldog game-ness of their race. The mixed Anglo-Saxon-Celts, bred to peace and democracy, stood up to the vastly greater numbers of the much-vaunted, better-armed, war-trained Teutonic Supermen—stopped their mighty rush, fought them to a stand, out-gamed them, hurled them back until, as at the Aisne, they took refuge in their trenches.

Such was the first battle of Ypres, one of the most terrible, one of the most desperate, of all battles in history. Of the hundred and twenty thousand British troops engaged, fifty thousand fell. But the loss was not all on one side. As during the great rush in France, solid masses of the half million attackers were flung forward openly, to be slaughtered by rifle and machine-gun fire. In the schemes of the cold-blooded Teutonic battle-thinkers, any expenditure of their abundant cannon-fodder was a cheap price to pay, if only they could smash through the British line and sweep on to the Channel coast from Dunkirk and Calais down to Dieppe.



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Tommy and tuck in the blanket with precise carefulness while a big shell burst near enough to fling mud over the ambulance. She paid no more heed to the cottony puffs of shrapnel shells, out of which descended death showers of metallic hail. Once, driving back from the trenches to the dressing station of her surgeon, an exploding shell, only a few yards ahead, splashed a three-inch gun and its double team of horses. She drove the ambulance over the splinter-strewn, reddened spot without a tremor.

Thorpe's wonderment increased rather than lessened when he found that the mature women nurses appeared no less unconscious of any personal danger. As the battle line shifted forward and back with the fluctuations of attack and counter-attack, the dressing station often came within range of the German shells. On one occasion, small shells smashed through the roof of the farmhouse in which the station was located. One nurse went on helping the doctor dress the wounds of a fresh batch of casualties, while the other climbed upon the tottery roof and stretched tarpaulins over the shell holes to shut out a threatened downpour of rain.

Whether owing to sheer courage or to self-forgetfulness in their devotion to the injured, these members of the supposedly timid weaker sex toiled like the men for hour after hour and day after day, amidst surroundings and in the face of conditions that might well have appalled a Joan of Arc — big shells and small, the bitter fumes of burnt powder, the sight of stricken men, their delirious groans and shrieks, their

patient suffering when conscious, their dying, the sickening sweetish odor of gangrene, the reek of disinfectants, the dirt and mud, the cold and wet, the lack of conveniences.

Both nurses were mature women and trained by severe discipline. But to explain how a delicately nurtured girl like Lucy could endure what she did, and continue to endure it, after all her nerve-shattering experiences in France and in the flight from Brussels — Thorpe gave up the mystery as beyond him. No less a mystery was how she always kept her hair well brushed and contrived to appear neat even when splashed with mud or smeared with oil from tinkering the ambulance motor.

At first Thorpe went about haunted with the cold dread that, sooner or later, her dainty graceful body would be mashed and torn, or her beautiful face mangled into a hideous featureless mask. But in time her cheerful serenity so reacted upon him that he ceased to fear over her danger of death and even over her danger of mutilation.

There were rare happy occasions when the station happened to be cleared of cases by the British evacuating ambulances, and perhaps some one found time and energy to cook a hot meal. Stale old American jokes would be cracked; one of the students would spout Keats or Tennyson; another would pump a wheezy accordian found in the attic, while all joined in the jolly old college songs. Once Lucy and Thorpe fell to talking of that far-away almost unbelievable land of "Home," where people they once had known

still danced and went to theatres and receptions and wondered when the bothersome squabble in Europe would stop interfering with tourist trips to the interesting historical spots "abroad."

"Dr. Blair tells me the home papers still poo-poo all accounts of the Hun frightfulness as hysterical exaggerations, and our capitalists rejoice that America is capturing the world markets of England and Germany," said Lucy. "Will they never understand?"

Thorpe shook his head doubtfully.

"They do not realize that the British fleet alone stands between us and a fate more terrible than Belgium's. They do not realize that the Prussian war-lords look upon America as wolves eye a fat sheep in a pen. Our people would not give up their arms. They would seek to defend their homes — and they would be slaughtered by the tens of thousands as *franc-tireurs*. Even the British, close as they are, did not really understand until the Zeppelins began dropping bombs on defenseless women and children."

Lucy shuddered.

"Bombs — and torpedoes! Word has just come that a submarine has torpedoed without warning one of the French ships that was taking refugees across the Channel. Those Hun leaders are cold-blooded monsters. I remember what the Crown Prince said. 'First France, then Russia, then England.' Now I know we shall be next — if the British front breaks."

"It will not break — it cannot!" assured Thorpe.

He had seen the thin khaki lines hold, time



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the vicinity of the dressing station. The ambulance came to an abrupt stop. Thorpe sprang out to help re-start it. The ground around was level, and the motor was still running. Lucy pointed ahead. The surroundings were unmistakable. But where the house had stood, there was now only a shell crater —

Lucy drove on to the nearest field hospital. It was being evacuated. The Prussian Guard had stormed and taken the first trenches and were forcing the British back by the sheer weight of their mass charges. The Americans were ordered to help in the evacuation. They did not get back to the fighting lines until late in the day.

At mid-afternoon the mauled and shattered British, badly beaten — and unaware of the fact — flung themselves against the victory-flushed Germans as Foe's army had turned on the over-confident victors of Fere Champenoise. Only here the Teuton odds were far greater, and they were fully backed by their field and heavy artillery. To rout them was impossible.

Yet the scant remnants of Britain's small professional army, her half-drilled Territorials and raw volunteers, again jolted the invincible war-machine of the Nietzschean Supermen to a stop. Not content with this miracle, they pried back the juggernaut, yard after yard, across all the fresh ground it had rolled over — back across all the captured British trenches — back beyond its own front trenches.

Close behind the reapers in the harvest field of Death followed the gleaners, gathering in the

down-cut cannon-fodder while the hail of steel and fire still blasted man and beast and earth itself.

When Thorpe came upon a wounded Prussian whose helmet bore the number of Kurt's regiment, a sharp query in German won the information that Captain von Kissel had led his company into the battle. Whether he had been wounded or killed the Guard could not say. There had been no time to look at officers when the "ladies of hell" began to counter-charge.

Thorpe sent back Lucy and the student with the loaded ambulance. He himself began to run about through the powder-smoke haze, searching the shell pits and trenches.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

THE GIVERS

Past the scattering of rearward-bound wounded Highlanders, Thorpe came to the in-caved flattened British front trench. The battle was sweeping forward towards the German trenches. From a big shell crater just beyond him Thorpe saw a wounded Scotchman crawl out and stagger away towards the fighting. He ran to look into the crater.

The first he saw was a major of the Prussian Guard, stealthily creeping up to peer after the Highlander. The alertness of his movements showed that he was unwounded. Assured that the Highlander was leaving, the officer turned to glance over the pit rim to side and rear. At sight of the newcomer he cursed and threw up his hands. Thorpe found himself staring into the hate-distorted face of Von Pappheim.

Two or three more steps brought him to the near edge of the crater. Down the slopes and in the bottom lay several dead Highlanders and nearly twice as many Prussians. A Scotch officer, with bandages about his head, was dressing the body wound of a Guard officer. At Von Pappheim's curse he had glanced up and around. On his shoulder was the insignia of a captain, on



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dered just as soon as the others went down.”

Thorpe bent over to complete the dressing of Kurt's wound. The young Highland officer, though faint and dizzy from his head wound, insisted upon helping. Neither noticed how Von Pappheim was slowly working his feet down the soft earth slope on his side of the crater.

“Beastly mess, all this,” sighed the boy. “Seemed sporting at first, you know, but one gets awfully fed up with it. Must carry on, of course — all that. My word, though! To think of a real chap like this being done in, and all to enable the Kaiser — ”

The report of a pistol rang across the crater bottom. Young Stuart swayed and crumpled down across Kurt's knees. Thorpe stared up into Von Pappheim's out-thrust pistol muzzle. Behind it the hatchet face was convulsed with hate.

“Stand and salute, *schweinhund!*” came the gloating command.

Thorpe turned over on his hands and knees, half rose in the position of a sprinter, and bounded straight at his enemy. The down-sloped pistol was within two feet of his head when the firing-pin clicked — the barrel was empty. Thorpe was already plunging for a low tackle. Von Pappheim went down so hard that the pistol jerked out of his grasp. Thorpe kicked it aside and stepped back.

“Get up,” he said.

The Prussian scrambled to his feet and raised his hands as high overhead as he could reach. Thorpe was cold as ice.

“ You — beast,” he said. “ If only I could kill a prisoner! — Hands down. I’m unarmed. Defend yourself.”

Von Pappheim jumped back towards where his sword lay. Thorpe flashed in, straightened the down-stooping Prussian with a brace of uppercuts, and flung the sword out of the pit. Forced to fight with nature’s weapons, the noble count came at Thorpe with crooked fingers, furiously seeking to scratch and gouge and choke —

Long before Thorpe was done with him, the murderer was begging for mercy and shielding his battered face with his arms. In the end, he flung himself down between two of the dead soldiers and clung fast to them, moaning and gasping. Thorpe stepped over beside Kurt and called sharply:

“ That’s all I can do now — worse luck! Unfortunately I’m civilized, not *kultured*. Come here and help carry Captain von Kissel. Wake up — step lively! ”

The beaten count staggered to his feet and tottered over to take the legs of his brother-in-law under his arms as Thorpe raised the forebody. Kurt screamed and swooned. Thorpe stiffened Von Pappheim’s wobbly knees with the threat of another beating if he should fall or release his hold on Kurt. By the time they came to the second of the former British lines Von Pappheim’s face was so swollen that he could not see. Thorpe had to warn him where to step.

Not far beyond they met the ambulance returning to the front. Von Pappheim’s tow hair was clotted and grimed, his mustache as shapeless

as his face. Lucy gazed at him pityingly. He was unrecognizable.

“Poor man,” she said as she swung down. “Shrapnel, of course.”

“No — my fists — that beast Von Pappheim,” jerked out Thorpe. “Here’s Kurt — dying.”

The statement was true, though not precisely in the sense intended. Kurt was still alive when they brought him to the hospital. The overworked surgeon, at Lucy’s urging, gave the wound a second and more careful examination, only to again shake his head.

“Sorry, Miss Carew — hopeless. To operate would be immediately fatal. Give an opiate if he comes out of the coma.”

The hospital was already full of the seriously wounded. But a cot was jammed into a corner for Kurt. The student found a new crew for the ambulance. Thorpe remained to help dress wounds. He could not force himself away while his friend yet lived. Lucy put on a white dress and quietly took charge of Kurt and the patients near. The other nurses noted her deft assured movements, and welcomed her assistance without question. With thousands of wounded waiting even for first aid, this was no time to quibble over formalities.

Kurt lingered while others with far less fatal injuries died all about him. His youth, clean flesh and unusual vitality brought him out of the coma. When he opened his eyes and saw Lucy, love added all its power to his struggle for life. He attempted to make light of his agony, rather than take the opiate and lose his con-



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militarists — the Pan-Germanists — dominate a now yoked and servile people. Upon Europe are let loose the blond beasts of Nietzsche, trampling women and children under the iron heel of frightfulness...and at their head, abetting, encouraging, commanding to ruthlessness, the man whom I thought chosen of God — the man whom I believed the peace Emperor! ”

Exhausted by this flare of anguish, the sufferer lapsed into a coma, from which he roused with the last flicker of his life flame. His whisper, though broken and barely audible, was clearly coherent:

“ Peace and rest — an end to pain and grief! Do not weep...Think of me as you knew me in that free land of yours...You would not take my fortune — then I give you to each other... My Iron Cross and Red Eagle — drop them overboard — at night — where the ocean is deepest... ”

The whisper ceased...Thorpe looked, and drew the blanket up over the face of the sufferer who had found peace and rest. — Those who yet lived had neither peace nor rest, but war and work. Thorpe lifted Lucy from her knees and led her out.

When they were quite alone, she put her hands upon his shoulders and pressed her tear-wet face against his breast.

“ Oh, Lan! You heard him. He saw! ”

“ He saw all — he understood all, ” said Thorpe, and his arms closed about the sobbing girl. “ We kept the faith with him. He knew and was glad. The bitterness was for those who

have not kept the faith — ‘My Iron Cross... where the ocean is deepest.’ ”

“For him to say that, Lan — he who ‘all but worshiped his Kaiser. How he must have suffered!... The Kaiser and count and all their like — apostles and disciples of frightfulness — blond beasts of Nietzsche!’ ”

Thorpe pushed her back to look resolutely into her compassionate eyes.

“Can you marry a man who is about to lose his American birthright, Lucy? I must do more than this ambulance work. For me to act as a neutral any longer is impossible. I must take my place in the trenches. That means loss of citizenship.”

“But America will understand in time, dear. Then it too can no longer remain neutral... Will I marry you? Why, dear heart, what else do you suppose I followed you to Europe for? ”

“I believe,” said Thorpe, “that it must have been to inspire me to do with all my strength my part in this great struggle.”

Lucy shuddered and drew herself close again in his sheltering arms.

“The struggle to free the Elsas and Kurts, no less than to save ourselves from the fate of Belgium!” she cried. “I give you to that. The mark of the Beast is upon those who have yoked their own people and goaded them into this mad frenzy of frightfulness.”

Thorpe clenched his fist.

“Better that America should give every dollar of her vast wealth for the defense of freedom and right — better for all American men to shed

the last drop of their blood in the protection of their women and children—than for us to submit to the dominance of those cold-blooded monsters for whom no treachery, no dishonor is too black or repulsive.”

“Our women too must help,” said Lucy—
“yes, and the children... You will go into the trenches, but I will work behind the trenches to help my man win the struggle for the freedom of the world.”

THE END