THE YELLOW DOCUMENT
FANTÔMAS OF BERLIN

MARCEL ALLAIN

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The Fantômas Detective Novels

THE YELLOW DOCUMENT

OR

"FANTÔMAS OF BERLIN"

BY

MARCEL ALLAIN

NEW YORK
BRENTANO'S
1919

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The Yellow Document

PROLOGUE

A MONSTER

DRESSED in a colonel's uniform of the Death's Head Hussars—the sixth uniform he had worn since the morning—William II left the card table. His moustache curled upward and a conquering air concealed the infirmity of his short left arm. With a Napoleonic gesture, he spoke with forced gaiety.

"Ambassadress, I have beaten you."

"Your Majesty was pitiless."

"Naturally, Ambassadress."

And moving away a step, he added:

"I do not hold with the French that one must never beat a woman, even with a flower."

William II pushed aside the small card table upon which he had just concluded a well-fought battle with the wife of the Russian ambassador, and continued:

"My opinion is that every charming woman is a demon. I should not choose a flower, but a sword, to beat them with."

The ambassadress bowed, smiling. William II

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turned on his heel and moved away, muttering, "A fool."

That evening an intimate dinner had taken place at the Potsdam Court in honor of the Kaiser's birthday anniversary.

It was in 1893. The emperor had just reached his thirty-fourth year. One glance at him would be enough to guess that he hoped great things of the future and believed in the promise of a glorious destiny.

Pride, daring, avidity—all the defects which stamp the soul of an adventurer, characterized his imperial features. One might also read there rascality and hypocrisy.

William II now leaned toward the empress, Augusta Victoria, and questioned her more than amiably:

"Does not the heat disturb you, my dear? You are very pale."

In reality, the Kaiser was quite indifferent to the health of the empress, but this show of attention was part of the rôle he played. William II did not disdain from time to time to affect the virtues of a good bourgeois—at least before his guests—to give the impression of being an excellent husband.

What answer did the empress make? William II moved away from her chair without waiting to hear, and touched a Prussian general, one of his favorites, on the arm.

"Well, my dear fellow, and what about your soldiers? Do you think those recruits we were talking of the other day will maintain the prestige of our

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army? Are the troops of '93 worth those of '70?"

"Without doubt, Sire."

The emperor's question produced a chill in the big drawing-room where the evening's guests remained silent each time he deigned to utter a word. The French ambassador grew pale.

William II noticed it.

He frequently made "breaks" with a heaviness of wit which proved a total lack of *savoir-vivre*. He wasn't disturbed, however, and shrugging his shoulders, he laughed and turned the conversation. It was his way of excusing himself. That day, however, he gave a slight shudder when he met the energetic and determined eyes of the French ambassador. He started to speak, stopped, and then questioned:

"What has happened to your military attaché, Ambassador; that Captain Bayen? Will he soon be back again?"

The ambassador articulated clearly:

"Very soon, I hope, Sire. He is finishing his studies in tactics—which enable the French army to remain what it has always been, the first army in the world."

The reply was sharp, brutal even, and the ambassador, a courteous man, must have felt pushed beyond the limit by the insolence of William II to dare it.

The Kaiser appeared not to understand.

"By Jove, I was forgetting—I must leave you for a few moments. I have some work."

And as nobody answered, the emperor, keeping

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up the pretense of middle-class virtue, added:

"I have my mail to sign. Ah, Germany & Co. is a great firm and being emperor is a hard position."

He went to the door, nodded ironically and condescendingly to his guests, then left the room, waving aside the chamberlains who were about to accompany him:

"Not necessary; I shall return in a moment."

The Kaiser gained his private apartments. Certainly, it was not an ordinary worry that made him leave the drawing-rooms. William II, in fact, appeared very upset. Two porters stood like statues at the door of the imperial rooms.

The emperor questioned sharply:

"Where is the officer of the portfolio?"

"In his office, Sire."

"What orders has he given you?"

"His excellency has charged us to notify his majesty's ministers that his majesty will grant no audience today."

"Very good."

William II entered the room which was softly lighted by an electric lamp encased in an alabaster vase.

"Nobody here yet?" he murmured.

But at this moment from the shadows of the room, a dim figure emerged, seemingly from the wall, and advanced with a deep bow.

William II grew so pale that he seemed about to collapse.

"Ah!" he cried in a hoarse voice. "You are here already, my private counsellor?"

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The emperor waved to a seat and continued:

"The porters did not announce your arrival, Doctor Krampft. You nearly frightened me."

"I beg your majesty to forgive the servants," the man replied slowly. "Nobody saw me enter."

"Did you come in through the walls then?"

"Perhaps."

The emperor nodded:

"After all, that would not be impossible to you."

He raised a warning finger:

"Do you know what they call you, Krampft?"

"Will your majesty deign to tell me?"

"My household calls you 'Fantômas of Berlin.'"

The Kaiser dropped onto a sofa and continued:

"And the title is deserved. You have the audacity and the cunning of the man they designate as 'The Genius of Crime.' The master of frightfulness."

"Is this a reproach, Sire?"

"It's a compliment, Krampft."

A grim laugh followed and the Kaiser added:

"That's enough. Fantômas, since you are Fantômas, what have you learned?"

"Nothing, Sire."

"What! Nothing!"

The Kaiser started and his voice grew violent.

"The yellow document? That cursed document. Are you going to get it for me?"

"No, Sire, it is in the hands of Captain Bayen."

"Do you know at least, if it is complete?"

"I am sure it is not, Sire."

With a gesture, silencing his master, the emperor,

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the mysterious individual called Fantômas of Berlin, pronounced slowly:

"Sire, your majesty will allow me to define the situation which you do not quite understand. A man, an Austrian, has invented a machine of such power that the country owning it would be assured of world supremacy. This man offered his secret to your government. Your government did not believe in him. So without hesitation, he offered it elsewhere. It was then that Captain Bayen, attaché of the French embassy, sacrificed his private fortune and bought the secret."

"Alas!" sighed the Kaiser.

"Sire, do not despair," murmured the enigmatical individual. "This man sold his secret, but he did not sell the whole of it. Captain Bayen has only the description of a machine. He has not the method of using it to get the full results. The inventor asks for millions; Captain Bayen has applied to his government for the money. We shall not have lost until Captain Bayen possesses the whole secret."

Herr Krampft folded his arms and added calmly:

"Now Captain Bayen will never know the whole secret."

"Why not? France is rich—"

"I ask your majesty's pardon. Captain Bayen will never know the secret because the inventor cannot tell him. He is dead."

"Dead?"

"Dead, Sire. He died yesterday, poisoned by his dinner."

Herr Krampft did not shudder in announcing the

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poisoning of the inventor, which might be called murder.

The Kaiser rose, agitated.

He took the hands of his counsellor and pressed them:

"Krampft, you have saved Germany."

"No, Sire."

"No? Why not?"

"The man can no longer speak, Sire, but perhaps he has already spoken."

A glance from the Kaiser forced Fantômas of Berlin to explain further. And truly Doctor Krampft must have been daring indeed to retain such complete calm in the presence of his master's anxiety.

"Sire, the man is dead. But he died in Captain Bayen's very house. That is where he lived. It was Mme. Bayen, the young wife of this cursed French officer, who was with him at the end."

Krampft, in a low tone, admitted:

"I am afraid, Sire—terribly afraid."

Nervously the Kaiser paced up and down the huge room where so many state secrets had been discussed, where so many infamous plans had received his royal seal. He walked and walked with half shut eyes, apparently oblivious to the presence of his private counsellor.

A strange man this Krampft. Scarcely thirty years of age, he wore the court dress, but wore it badly. Beneath it he had a common air. Slender, he gave the impression of size on account of his thick and knotted limbs. The squareness of his head,

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added to an abundant moustache and beard, enlarged his face and hid his mouth and the most of his cheeks.

William II stopped abruptly.

"That woman must never be able to speak."

"Yes, Sire."

"Yet she must live so that if ever we secure the yellow document from her husband, she may be able to explain to us how it can be utilized."

"That is true, Sire."

"It is necessary."

William II placed both hands on the doctor's shoulders.

"Krampft, do you recall the mission I entrusted you with three weeks ago?"

"I recall it, if your majesty orders me to do so."

"Krampft, I advised you that a child would be put into your charge. I told you that you would have the bringing up of that child. I told you the child is my child, my bastard. Krampft, I gave to you then a proof of my confidence."

"Sire, I hope I have and will always deserve it."

"Undoubtedly, Krampft—well, I have another mission for you . . . as serious a one—"

"I am at your majesty's orders."

"Krampft, this is what I have decided: Mme. Bayen must die!"

"Die, Sire?"

"Apparently die, Krampft."

"I don't understand, your majesty."

"And yet it is quite simple. Captain Bayen is guilty of espionage in buying the yellow document

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here . . . Krampft, I shall see his wife and say to her: 'Madame, your husband will get twenty years of prison if you refuse to save him. You can save him by giving up the secret confided to you by the inventor who died yesterday. Until then, you will be my prisoner.' Madame Bayen is French. She is a woman in love—she will speak and save her husband."

"And you would release her, Sire?"

"No! never!"

There was a moment of silence.

Krampft dared to break it.

"If your majesty thinks to force this woman to speak, your majesty is mistaken. She is not only French, she is Alsatian. She will hold her tongue. Or else she will provoke a scandal. She will write—telegraph—she will escape!"

The Kaiser shook his head.

"Krampft," he murmured, "you forget my agents who open all letters, my police who arrest those who try to escape—you forget that I am the master and that I shall say to this woman: 'If you attempt to escape, Captain Bayen will run the risk of a mortal accident—' You forget something else, Krampft."

"What, Sire?"

"That Mme. Bayen is enceinte, that she expects a child—and that the child will serve as a hostage. We shall steal it from her if necessary!"

Another silence reigned.

The emperor began his pacing again. He finally spoke:

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"Krampft, a terrible struggle is about to take place for this yellow document. Captain Bayen has won the first point, I shall win the second. I hold him through his wife, and I hold his wife through her child."

But Krampft shook his head.

"You are not convinced?" asked the Kaiser.

"No," replied the counsellor calmly.

Ah! It was not a question of fright or horror for the infamous plan which William II dared to expose.

But he foresaw redoubtable consequences of that plan, and these consequences alarmed him.

"Sire, your majesty seems to me too daring," he ventured, at length. "Your majesty may possibly hold Mme. Bayen prisoner by reason of her child, but consider, it is not only a question of Mme. Bayen —what will your majesty say to the captain when he returns?"

"That his wife is dead, Krampft."

"And if he doesn't believe you?"

"He will believe me, Krampft, for he will mourn at her tomb—without suspecting that his wife is in confinement, perhaps not far away. Such things are easily brought about when one is who I am—the emperor. You know that very well."

Certainly William II would have been well served had his counsellor seized him by the throat and strangled him as one strangles the most odious criminal.

But Krampft merely smiled:

"May I put a question to your majesty?"

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"Speak, Krampft."

"Has your majesty already chosen Mme. Bayen's jailer?"

"Certainly," replied the emperor. "That jailer will be you." And he added jeeringly:

"It is a position which belongs of right to Fantômas of Berlin."

An hour later, Krampft left the imperial palace.

But in spite of the high confidence which the Kaiser had shown in him by making him his associate in crime, Krampft appeared anxious. He muttered to himself in a low tone: "The emperor is mistaken! His majesty does not know French hearts. Hate blinds him! Whether he tortures the wife or the mother, Mme. Bayen is Alsatian and will not speak. And as for Captain Bayen, the soldier, even though he think his wife dead, even though he be condemned to silence, he will not forget—he will have his revenge."

Krampft felt chilled from head to feet.

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I

A JOKE

ALTHOUGH three o'clock had struck at a neighboring school, the heat was scarcely less intense than at noon and the buildings of the cavalry quarters of Lunéville, whitewashed, with roofs of red tile, seemed to flame under the pitiless sky.

Javot, cavalryman on duty at the barracks, questioned the quartermaster with visible anxiety:

"What's your idea, Quartermaster, is it to be war?"

For a week past the newspapers had been filled with sensational news about the "difficulties of Europe," of the "diplomatic tension," hinting by degrees that a war was not impossible, that it was likely, that it was certain.

The quartermaster shrugged his shoulders, and like the fighter he was, gripped the hilt of his sabre.

"Hum! War! War! Then mobilize—and there you are!"

"Everyone is talking of it here, Quartermaster."

In fact in Lunéville, a town so near the frontier, so French, and with such hatred of Germany, war was the only topic of conversation.

Will war really be declared?

Javot, who was curious, but lacked in ideas, remarked:

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"Things are stirring, but we won't get war tonight."

At this moment the men had their attention drawn to an old white-haired priest who had stopped at the gate, apparently hesitating to enter.

Javot rose leisurely, stretched himself, yawning, then buttoning his dolman, asked:

"Say, d'you think the chap in the cassock means to join us since he's inspecting the barracks?"

A hearty laugh greeted this sally.

"Doesn't look as if he'd make much of a cavalryman."

And in truth the priest scarcely suggested the type of a warrior.

He appeared to be well over sixty and wore a huge pair of spectacles awry on his nose. He leaned on a thick stick which served practically as a crutch.

Timid and hesitating, he went forward and backward, much to the amusement of the men.

The quartermaster, dragging his sabre and clinking his spurs, advanced.

"He's dying to ask questions, but he doesn't dare. Have to help him."

Stepping down, he addressed him:

"Pardon, sir, but do you want anything?"

The priest immediately became alarmed. He bowed, hat in hand and stammered:

"Yes—no—that is—Colonel Bayen?"

"And what do you want with the colonel, sir?"

"I want to speak to him—I mean, I want him to know that I am at his service—or rather—"

What the devil could this priest want with the

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"father" of the regiment? "He'll get a quick right-about-face," thought the quartermaster. Then smilingly:

"Well, sir, it's very easy to see the colonel."

And turning to the sentry, he ordered:

"Call the adjutant on duty."

The order was carried forward and finally reached the officer, who was cursing in the canteen.

"Well, what is it?"

The quartermaster announced:

"It's about the priest here who wants to see the colonel. Shall I send an orderly?"

"Oh, give me a rest. I've other fish to fry. Pass along the priest. The colonel will see him if he wants to."

The adjutant turned on his heels and moved off with his customary cursing.

"What an outfit! Lot of loafers! I'll give them a spell of the cooler!"

He could not have said whom he was threatening. His anger was vain, perpetual, and without effect.

Now, while Javot conducted the priest to Colonel Bayen's quarters, that officer was pacing up and down in his study, his hands behind his back, and plunged in deep thought.

Colonel Bayen?

Those who formerly had met the young military attaché in Berlin would probably not recognize him now—the passing years and possible troubles had so aged him. His eyes alone had remained as they used to be, energetic and strong-willed. His grey hair and moustache, tanned face, and quick move-

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ments were typical of the highest class of officer.

He was no longer a drawing-room officer. Upon his breast he wore the Legion of Honor, a distinction gained at the point of the sword.

Colonel Bayen had fought in the colonies and his bravery had advanced him while still a young man to the grade of colonel. His career had been full of excitement.

The 32nd dragoons were doubtless ignorant of his history, but his fellow officers sometimes spoke of it.

It was known that Colonel Bayen had suddenly resigned his post of embassy attaché, giving up a sure career upon the death of his young wife.

It was known that her death had occasioned him such despair that for a time it was feared he might lose his mind.

Then, suddenly, it was noticed that the officer had pulled himself together again.

He went to Algeria and won his advancement by the courage with which he punished the rebel tribes.

It was only six months ago that Captain Bayen, receiving the grade of colonel, had returned to France.

By what mysterious influence, by what recommendation to the ministry had he obtained command of the 32nd dragoons at Lunéville? Nobody knew. But certain traits of his character were better known. Strict as to military matters, he lived alone, traveled seldom and passed his time either on horseback or in his study.

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Colonel Bayen abruptly stopped his anxious pacing as Javot knocked at the door.

"Come in," he cried.

The orderly opened the door and stood at attention.

"Colonel, there's a priest here—he says you are expecting him—or that he wants to see you."

Certainly Colonel Bayen had made no appointment with a priest. He seemed surprised:

"Where is he?"

"In the salon, Colonel."

"In the salon?"

A vague smile fluttered over the officer's face.

Next door to his study, a small room, narrow and dirty, encumbered with papers, was considered by his cavalrymen as the "salon."

The name was traditional and had been handed down from class to class until nobody dared to correct the pretension.

Colonel Bayen thought for a moment.

"I've something else to do than receive visits. . . ."

He was about to refuse when suddenly he changed his mind.

"All right, send him in."

"May as well get it over," he thought. "I suppose this priest has come to recommend some young soldier. I'd better see him today—for tomorrow—"

Evidently tomorrow's events would preclude the reception of any visitor.

A moment later, the priest made his humble apparition in Colonel Bayen's study.

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He made a deep bow and then waited to be addressed by the officer.

Colonel Bayen, not understanding his attitude, spoke:

"Well, abbé, I am listening."

Then the priest came to a decision and conquered his timidity sufficiently to burst out volubly:

"You see I am punctual, Colonel: After receiving the visit you know about, I did not delay an instant. Alas! in these days with rumors of war in the air, one must not put off until tomorrow what one can do today. And since you have been touched by divine grace and have done me the signal honor, I who am a humble priest—"

Colonel Bayen, who had been seated at his desk, rose abruptly, interrupting the priest.

"Excuse me, abbé, but I haven't the least idea what you are talking about . . . touched by divine grace? The visit you received? What the devil do you mean?"

If the colonel seemed surprised, the abbé appeared more so. Then a quick smile spread over his face.

"Oh, pardon, you are right. I have forgotten to introduce myself. I am Abbé Jandron, second curate of the church of Saint Jacques."

"Abbé Jandron, second curate of the church of Saint Jacques?"

Mechanically and in an amazed tone, the colonel repeated the words, which didn't convey any meaning to him. Slightly impatient, he questioned:

"Forgive me, abbé, but I'm rather in a hurry. Kindly explain the object of your visit."

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"But, Colonel, you know quite well why I am here since you sent for me yourself."

"I sent for you?"

"Why, certainly."

"When? How? Why?"

The priest, seeing the officer's amazement, had a sudden thought.

"I'm afraid that in my absent-mindedness I have made another mistake. You are not Colonel Bayen?"

"Pardon, I am Colonel Bayen."

"Then, it is my turn to be at a loss."

And while the colonel, now amused at the evident discomfiture of his visitor, questioned him by a look, the priest continued:

"Colonel, I am very distressed at what has happened! I am, doubtless, the victim of a stupid joke —one in very bad taste. I see now you did not send for me."

"No, abbé, once more, no."

Colonel Bayen, becoming serious, questioned:

"Please explain. How did you come here?"

The priest, no longer timid, replied:

"In two words, this is what happened:

"An hour ago I was in my garden. I was reading my breviary when my servant came to announce that a woman, to be exact, a lady, wished to see me. Naturally, I acceded to her request, thinking she was some penitent—"

"And that was not the case?"

"No, Colonel. I found myself in the presence of a most distinguished and amiable person, who said:

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'Abbé, I am sent by Colonel Bayen, commandant of the 32nd regiment of dragoons, in barracks in the town. The colonel has been suddenly touched by divine grace. On the eve of a possible war and probable death, he wishes to speak with a minister of God so that his conscience may be at rest and in peace.' And that is all that brought me here, Colonel."

The priest was silent for a moment, then continued:

"If you did not send this person to me, you see that I am the victim of a joke—and that I can only apologize for having disturbed you."

"One moment, abbé!"

Colonel Bayen had grown pale and his voice betrayed his nervousness.

"What did this person look like?"

The priest made a vague gesture.

"Alas, Colonel, I scarcely saw her—she wore a very thick veil. Still, I do remember she had regular features, very white hair and a simple but elegant costume."

The good abbé was able to add no further details, and doubtless he had never before spoken at such length of a woman, nor of what he called in the catechism, external signs of beauty.

Colonel Bayen, frowning, had appeared to listen eagerly to the priest's words.

"This woman is unknown to you?"

"Absolutely, Colonel."

"She is not a member of your parish?"

"I have never seen her—"

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"There can have been no mistake?"

"No, especially as she herself gave me directions for coming here."

The priest, with some curiosity, asked:

"Do you know who it could be? Among your friends is there one who might be interested in your soul's salvation?"

Already the habits of the confessor were regaining their importance in his spirit.

"Perhaps one of your relatives may have been planning an interview with me through pure christian zeal? Have you not really decided to study our holy religion? Don't you think that in view of a possible war—"

The priest stopped suddenly.

Leaving his chair, and seemingly oblivious of the ecclesiastic, Colonel Bayen, very pale, began pacing, feverishly up and down his study.

The abbé distinctly heard him murmur.

"It's a warning—it's a warning—certain—"

"A warning from heaven," declared the good priest. "In the noble profession of arms, it is well to make peace with God before the battle. Tureune, Condé, Bayard—"

His eloquence was again interrupted.

"Abbé, one question. Did this woman actually speak of 'probable death'? Do you recall the words?"

The priest seemed to make a great effort of memory.

"No," he declared at last. "I could not guarantee the words but I very well remember this: She said,

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'If war breaks out, Colonel Bayen may be killed, he must be converted, he must win to heaven.' "

Colonel Bayen did not reply. He continued his walk, growling and apparently furious:

"It's queer—it's more than queer!"

Before his anger, the unhappy curate became still more alarmed. He bowed and bowed:

"Pray believe that I am so sorry—this stupid joke —in such bad taste."

"It is not a joke, abbé."

Colonel Bayen spoke in a low voice and then appeared to regret his words. He quickly continued:

"Please don't apologize, abbé; it's of no importance whatever. I will have you escorted to the door."

It was a dismissal. The priest did not insist further. Following Javot and bowing to all the officers he passed, the abbé left the barracks.

In the meantime Colonel Bayen, alone in his study, livid, his arms folded, his head bent, reflected:

"Who?" he asked himself. "Who is the woman? And above all, who sent her? Why? For what end? Is it known, by any chance—"

He did not finish the thought.

Suddenly he shrugged his shoulders.

"All right," he murmured. "But I must decide —decide without losing a second. It is urgent—it may be even now too late."

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II

A TRAGIC APPEAL

IN excessively bad humor and clanking his sabre on the stairs, Louis Monet, lieutenant of the 2nd squadron of the 32nd regiment of dragoons, returned at ten o'clock at night to his very modest apartment. Louis Monet was returning from leave and was decidedly angry. While he climbed to his rooms he grumbled to himself.

"Fine business! I'll bet I'll get a brick on my head next! What the deuce! When one is on furlough one is on furlough! What does this telegram mean? Why recall me posthaste? What has happened?"

Louis Monet reached his door and groped for the keyhole, cursing the while. At length he found it and entered the hall shouting:

"Hullo, La Flemme! La Flemme!"

He had a good resonant voice which rang through the apartment without getting any reply.

"La Flemme! Come here or I'll give you a taste of the cooler."

And then he suddenly quieted down.

"The begger isn't here!"

He lit a match, glanced round the room which served for sitting-room and study, then went into his bed-room. He had made the round of his apartment.

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"Nobody," he grumbled, "Not a soul. La Flemme is on a spree!"

He threw his sabre on a sofa, then lighting his lamp, which began to smoke abominably, he broke out again:

"Good lord! It's poisoning me. And my orderly off without leave! I'll give him four days!"

To hear him one would suppose that Louis Monet had a disagreeable character and that he was in the habit of punishing his unfortunate orderly.

Nothing was further from the truth. If he took it out of his servant, well named La Flemme, it was simply because he had to find an object for his anger. But that anger was harmless as La Flemme himself knew very well.

The officer now lit a cigarette and calmed down immediately.

"The whole thing is absurd," he murmured.

"What can the colonel want with me? Why this urgent recall?"

And for the twentieth time at least, Louis Monet reread the telegram which had been given to him some hours previously at Epinal where he had expected to get a good dinner at an old aunt's house, having a week's leave of absence. Louis Monet seemed very young. Entering Saint-Cyr with honors, he had gone from there to Saumur. He then joined the 32nd dragoons as second lieutenant and had had the luck to advance rapidly to the grade of lieutenant. He had now been a scant three months in garrison at Lunéville. His furlough, so unfortunately interrupted, was the

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first he had obtained since his nomination to the corps.

A charming man and a good sport. That was his reputation among his men. He did not seem greatly surprised at the absence of his orderly.

"After all, the beggar couldn't guess that I would return so unexpectedly."

And lighting another cigarette, he opened the window and leaned out.

The streets were already deserted. The life of the small town had sunk into silence and the night. Louis Monet gave a sigh.

"Not much like the boulevards! And if it were not for her!"

At this moment his expression suddenly changed. The lieutenant became grave, serious. A shadow of melancholy seemed to veil his eyes. His imagination evoked an exquisite picture, intoxicating—a picture, the mere thought of which made his heart beat.

"For her," he repeated. "Yes, it's just for her that I came here."

A sigh escaped him.

He recalled his efforts at the ministry to effect the change from Paris to the less agreeable Lunéville.

Ah! the real joy, the gentle emotion he had felt in establishing himself in the place where she lived!

He spoke her name tenderly, a name which fitted the wilful grace of her youth, the elegance of her person, the piquant seduction of her figure: Colette.

It was for Colette, whom he loved above all others, that the rich and young lieutenant came to vegetate in this hole.

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And what wonderful luck it was had drawn him to this sincere and pure love that now occupied his whole heart. Colette. . . . She was everything to him, and six months ago he did not even know her. Chance selected him to be sent to the obscure village where she lived, on a cartographic appointment. Her father, M. Ravignon, a prosperous gentleman farmer and important personage, happened to be mayor of Cirey, and it was thus he made her acquaintance. And since then, how quickly things had moved! How thrilled he was the first time he realized that Colette did not view him with indifference.

And how much greater the thrill when he would again meet her, she whom he called his "fiancée."

And yet Louis Monet sighed.

To meet her—that would not be easy.

Since his arrival in Lunéville, the lieutenant had not been able to get an hour's talk with Colette.

Naturally he had called upon the mayor of Cirey. He had also had the pleasure of bowing to Colette, who became very white on learning that he was now an officer of the 32nd dragoons. Still, Louis Monet could not help noticing the chilly reception given him by Colette's parents. He had been received; he had not been asked to call again.

He had been treated as a friend, but amazement was shown that he should have been transferred to Lunéville.

"Certainly old Ravignon doesn't look favorably on me," he muttered.

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This unpleasant fact depressed him for a moment and then he shrugged his shoulders:

"After all, to the deuce with him. Colette loves me. We will overcome his objections. Why should he refuse his consent? I'm richer than his daughter, I have a future, and if war should break out. . . . War! Good lord! These politicians are a nuisance allowing things to drag along. If Germany wants a beating, let her have it and be done with it."

Once more his expression changed.

Without doubt Louis Monet loved his profession. He loved it for its nobility and its unselfishness. He loved it because to be a soldier is not to belong to oneself; it is to be a man with a single love, the greatest of all loves—love of country.

Ah! let the signal be given, let war be declared and he will be ready!

Woe to the enemy, woe to Germany! It would be a holy mission to drive those robbers of '70 beyond the frontiers of Alsace and Lorraine.

"But war is not coming, alas!" he added.

The papers bought at the station gave reassuring news.

England was making every effort to force Germany to a peaceful attitude. Austria no longer refused to negotiate with Russia. St. Petersburg and Vienna appeared to be in accord.

"So it can't be on account of war that the colonel has recalled me. It was a private telegram I received, not an official one."

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And annoyed, worried at this unexpected return, Louis Monet declared:

"I've nothing on my conscience either, no scrape, no row, what the deuce can they want with me?"

He turned his head and glanced into the shadows of the street.

At the extreme end, the cavalry barracks stretched away with geometrical precision, the buildings all alike, stables, storehouses, guardhouse.

"It looks peaceful and calm," he admitted.

"If there was anything in the wind, inspection or preparations for mobilization, I'd see some signs of life."

He threw away his cigarette half smoked, crossed the room to choose some book to while away an hour on his sofa.

Suddenly he listened.

The door of his apartment slammed and a voice frightfully off the key began to sing:

Allons chasseurs, vite en selles,
Formez vos escadrons
Dites adieu à vos belles
Car demain nons partons
Tontaine, ton ton, Tontaine—Ton ton!

Louis Monet immediately shouted:

"La Flemme!"

A hulking big dragoon, helmet on one side, sabre under his arm, and an enormous pipe in his month, appeared in the doorway.

"Hullo!" he cried.

Furious, Louis Monet shouted:

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"Where the devil do you come from? What right have you to be away without leave? You'll get a week for this."

La Flemme smoked his pipe calmly.

"Lieutenant, where have you sprung from? Why are you here?"

Louis Monet could not help smiling. "Attention! and stop smoking."

"Can't, Lieutenant, can't let Josephine get cool or she won't draw."

La Flemme seemed in no wise disturbed by the lieutenant's anger. He had an excellent reason, too, for his calmness.

He had been Monet's orderly for five years and the friendship he felt for the officer had been amply returned.

If La Flemme took advantage of it occasionally to be slack in his duties, Monet's threats of dire punishment never amounted to anything in the end.

Imperturbable, as usual, he continued to smoke his pipe, continuing his questions.

"Why the devil are you here, Lieutenant?"

"No use staring at me like that," replied the officer. "I was on furlough and I have returned."

"I know that," calmly answered La Flemme.

"You know it? Who told you?"

"Why, the colonel."

"The colonel!—How's that?"

La Flemme rubbed his eyes.

"It's quite simple, Lieutenant. The colonel said to me just now, 'La Flemme, you are Lieutenant

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Monet's orderly?' 'Yes,' says I. 'Then go to the station and watch out for his return from Epinal. When he gets in send him direct to me, however late it may be. I shan't go to bed till I've seen him.' "

Louis Monet seemed astounded.

That such an order should be given to La Flemme must mean the matter was serious.

But what could be the motive for recalling him and for Colonel Bayen's anxiety to see him?

La Flemme was about to make suggestions but the officer stopped him abruptly.

"Shut up, idiot. Give me my sabre and come with me to the colonel."

A moment later, Louis Monet, followed at a respectful distance by La Flemme who grumbled at being kept out of bed, walked down the street to the colonel's quarters.

The sentry on duty saluted.

"Announce me," ordered Monet.

As he entered the room his anxiety increased.

The study, usually in perfect order, seemed topsy-turvy. Drawers were open showing piles of documents. In the fireplace bundles of paper were burning. But what most struck Louis Monet was the attitude of Colonel Bayen.

He was extremely pale. Standing in front of the fire, he stirred the burning papers. Upon seeing Monet he murmured:

"At last."

"Colonel, I beg you to excuse me. I might have been here several minutes earlier if my orderly had caught me at the station."

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"It's of no importance, Lieutenant. I suppose you wonder why I sent for you?"

"I am at your orders, Colonel."

"I will enlighten you. Just a moment."

The colonel opened the door.

"Sentry, send here the officer on duty."

The call rang out on the bugle.

"One moment," repeated Colonel Bayen. "I'll be with you in an instant. Above all, not a word of this before the adjutant."

Louis Monet became still more bewildered.

He felt some mystery in the air.

The adjutant appeared in haste.

"You sent for me, Colonel?"

"Yes, to give you an order. Take ten men, and harness the five baggage wagons that are in the courtyard. Get horses from B Stable. The guard has been notified."

The colonel turned away his face as though he did not wish to see the adjutant's surprise.

"When the wagons are harnessed, gallop them round the courtyard. It is a test I want to make. I shall come down in a quarter of an hour. Go."

Too well trained to venture a remark, the adjutant moved off.

But Louis Monet was on the point of asking himself if the colonel had taken leave of his senses.

To harness the wagons at such an hour! To drive them at full gallop round the courtyard! It was incomprehensible, it was disturbing.

Coloney Bayen turned to him:

"A moment more and I will explain everything."

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A profound silence reigned in the study.

While Monet waited patiently, the colonel opened the windows wide; he then stamped down the cinders of the burnt paper.

Several minutes passed. Then abruptly a noise was heard. The wagons rumbled over the courtyard with a loud rattle and the clanging of horses' hoofs.

The colonel beckoned Monet to the windows.

"Forgive me for keeping you waiting, Lieutenant. I warrant you have no idea of what is going on?"

"No, Colonel."

"You cannot guess why I brought out the wagons?"

"No, Colonel."

"And you think my actions rather strange? Well, what I have to say to you is so serious that I had to take precautions."

The colonel paused a moment, leaned out and examined the progress of the wagons.

"Lieutenant, those wagons make a great deal of noise. Do you know the advantage of that noise?"

Louis Monet was so amazed that he did not answer.

The colonel continued:

"This noise will guarantee the privacy of our interview. One might listen at the door, Lieutenant, there might be a dictograph nearby, the very walls may have ears, but in this racket I defy any but you to hear what I have to say. You understand?"

"Colonel, I am most anxious to hear what you

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have to confide to me. Have you a complaint to make of me?"

"No, Lieutenant."

"An order?"

"No, it is not an order."

"What is it then, Colonel?"

The colonel seemed to hesitate. For a moment he remained silent while his face contracted under some terrible emotion."

"It is an appeal I have to make," Colonel Bayen declared at last.

Louis Monet felt the ground slipping away; he became dizzy.

"An appeal, Colonel? What appeal?"

Colonel Bayen drew near him and placed both hands on his shoulders. He looked at Monet with the eyes of a leader of men.

"Lieutenant, you are 26, you are young, you are rich, the future opens brightly before you. Well, you must give it all up. You must die, Lieutenant—die shamefully, perhaps. In any case, without glory. You must die because death is a duty—your duty—"

Colonel Bayen pointed to the flag of the regiment under its glass case, and the flag itself seemed to live and glow under the words:

"Lieutenant, in the name of France, I appeal to you to consent to die."

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III

IN DANGER OF DEATH

COMPLETELY staggered by the unexpected declaration of Colonel Bayen, Louis Monet could scarcely refrain from a gesture of alarm. To die! Die for France—certainly that is what he had decided a long while ago.

The young officer had often dreamed of the glorious death of a soldier.

But the half-told confidences of the colonel had already convinced him that it was a question of something else.

A death "perhaps shameful" was what the chief had said.

And this death was unquestionably a mysterious one.

There was mystery in the way the colonel broached the subject.

"Listen to me, Lieutenant, and upon your honor, do not give a hasty reply. I repeat—what I have to say is more than serious, more than terrible! You will have to bind yourself and you must not do so lightly."

Louis Monet grew slightly pale.

He stood staring at Colonel Bayen, literally drinking in his words.

The colonel drew his attention to the extraor-

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dinary method he had used to assure the "privacy of the interview."

"Above all, Lieutenant, I desire to call your attention to this of which you must be thoroughly persuaded—nobody can know what I am saying to you, nobody by any chance can overhear my words. You agree with me?"

Louis Monet nodded.

It was, in fact, materially impossible to make out what the colonel was saying. The wagons made such a racket in the courtyard that Monet himself had to stand by his ear to catch the words. Furthermore, nobody could be hidden near the two officers who were leaning on the window sill.

The study was empty, that was sure.

"Colonel, I beg you to finish."

"Not yet, Lieutenant. I have another thing to call to your attention. I have appealed to you, Lieutenant, because you are the richest and most popular of all my young officers, also because I know you are a bachelor. But I need some further information."

The colonel's voice trembled a little.

"Is there any woman in your life?"

"No, Colonel."

Louis Monet had answered instinctively. He added:

"That is to say, I have no mistress."

His hesitation did not escape the colonel, who insisted:

"You love nobody?"

"Yes, Colonel, I have a fiancée."

The colonel's face clouded over.

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"A fiancée? Truly a fiancée? Will you swear it? A young girl worthy of every respect?"

"Of every respect, Colonel."

"Well, you must cast that love out of your heart."

Louis Monet folded his arms.

"That is impossible."

"Monsieur, I ask you in the name of France!"

"Colonel, my country does not require, cannot require such a sacrifice! I am ready to die, I am not ready to cease loving the woman I love!"

The young lieutenant spoke with such feeling that Colonel Bayen realized that it was not a question of some passing affair, easy to terminate.

"Very well," he said, at length. "I see you love truly. In that case I can speak all the same. I have a mission to give you, Lieutenant—a serious mission, upon which may depend the fate of the war."

"Then you think we shall have war, Colonel?"

"War is not probable, Lieutenant—it is certain!"

"Certain, Colonel?"

"Yes, Lieutenant. And it will be a horrible war."

The colonel's voice again trembled, but he controlled his emotion.

"Lieutenant, you know very little of me and I have not much to tell you. However, this much you must know: Twenty years ago, when I was attaché at the Berlin embassy, I was the victim of a horrible tragedy. The man you see before you now is a man vowed to vengeance and devotion—"

Louis Monet, who did not understand, bowed.

"Lieutenant, chance, or rather circumstances, put

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me in possession of a terrible secret, a secret which is able to secure to France a victory over Germany. For twenty years I have devoted myself to this. For twenty years I have performed a prodigy. I have kept alive—I have not been murdered—so that when the hour strikes, I might save my country and my vengeance."

The colonel opened his dolman and took out a yellow envelope which he gave to Louis Monet.

"Take this, hide it and listen to me."

The officer thought for a moment, then continued his strange instructions.

"Lieutenant, I said that for twenty years I have run a daily risk of assassination. From the moment this document is in your pocket, you yourself are in danger. You will not have a moment's peace of mind, a moment's confidence or rest. Every means to kill you may be used. An accident one would not dream of prepared by others; a duel, during which a cut-throat will deliver a mortal blow by treachery; poison you could not guard against; your revolver may explode in your hand; you pass by a scaffolding and a mason drops an implement on your head; in crossing a river, the ferryman will capsize his boat. Lieutenant, you will be alone against everybody. If you should be suspected of possessing this document, you will have against you a hundred thousand German spies!"

Louis Monet was deeply impressed by the colonel's words.

Although he had never been actively concerned with espionage, he knew the terrible German organ-

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ization by hearsay and from having read a critical study of it.

And will he now be tracked by these scoundrels in the pay of William II?

"Colonel," he replied in a voice he tried to make firm, "it little matters what dangers I run in the service of my country. This document will be delivered to whom you designate."

"That is not your mission, Lieutenant."

"What is it then?"

"It is threefold, Lieutenant."

The colonel spoke with difficulty. He weighed each of his words with anxiety, fearful of saying too much and not saying enough.

"Lieutenant, these are your orders—pardon, what I beg you to do: In the first place you will hide this document in a place only known to yourself, confide it to somebody who cannot be suspected. Put it where you can recover it if misfortune should overtake you. Do you understand?"

"Yes, Colonel, but—"

"Pardon— Then, upon official mobilization, you will go to the strategic bridge of Vezouse. You will walk up and down, keeping the closest lookout. If anyone suspicious appears, do not hesitate, fire, kill him."

"But, Colonel—"

"Wait! Finally, when the bridge guard has been reinforced by the territorials which will be sent without delay, you will return here to quarters—and if I should be dead—"

"Ah, Colonel!"

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"If I should be dead, I repeat, you will get possession of the document, you will open it and follow the instructions which it contains."

Louis Monet was going through an agony of mind, his lips refused to emit a sound. How strange were the colonel's instructions.

"Ah, I forgot one thing, Lieutenant. After my death you had better call upon the second curate of the church of Saint Jacques. Here is a note in which I ask him to explain to you in detail the visit he made me."

This time Louis Monet could not restrain a cry of amazement.

"But, Colonel, why speak in this way of your death? Are you in danger?"

Colonel Bayen shrugged his shoulders.

"I run the risk of every man who holds a state secret. I run the risk which you are going to run, Lieutenant—that of being murdered, and at the very time when I least expect it."

He gave a strange laugh and continued:

"Ah, pardon, Lieutenant, as a matter of fact I exaggerate. I shall not be killed without warning. They have had the irony to do that—they sent a confessor to me."

The laugh faded from the colonel's face. His affected gaiety dropped.

"I owe you further explanations, Lieutenant. I told you I singled you out because you are rich. But riches are not a proof of honesty! But I had to take into consideration that Germany would be willing to pay millions for the paper you have in your

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pocket. I may add that if I give it to you instead of sending it to the ministry, it is because it is too late now to communicate with the ministry."

"Too late, Colonel?"

"Yes, Monsieur, too late."

On seeing the lieutenant's surprise, Colonel Bayen explained further:

"A messenger would not reach his destination—he would be killed on the way. If I should attempt the journey I would fall before I reached the station. As for letters, it is evident that they are read in the 'private office'—not one escapes observation."

"But it is impossible, Colonel—German espionage is powerfully organized, but—"

"German espionage dares everything and can accomplish everything! And as for this particular document, they would stop at nothing, believe me."

Louis Monet grew paler. He felt dizzy and could scarcely take in what he heard.

Colonel Bayen insisted:

"You are in danger of death, Lieutenant, in terrible danger. And yet I have done everything possible to prevent eavesdropping, so that not a soul may suspect what has passed between us. You are a witness that no one has overheard our talk?"

Monet glanced round the room and then out of the window to the courtyard where the wagons were still clattering.

"Yes, Colonel, no one can possibly have heard what we are saying."

"Consequently any indiscretion committed must come from you."

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"Colonel, you may be sure—"

"I know, Lieutenant."

He reassured the young officer by a look.

He had thoroughly investigated the patriotism of Louis Monet. And he was not mistaken.

Louis Monet now felt the fever of war—that war announced by Colonel Bayen, inevitable and certain. Instinctively the young man straightened up, throwing out his chest and raising his head.

He was in danger of death.

He had everything to fear—the unforeseen accident, the treachery of murder, hidden ambush, a quarrel designed to lead to a duel.

He must fear everything and sacrifice everything to the mission he had been given.

Very well, so be it. He accepted the struggle.

Perhaps his life would be the price of success, but life mattered little in such an affair.

Louis Monet bowed to his chief.

"Colonel, a thousand thanks for the confidence you have shown in me."

Simply, Colonel Bayen wrung his hand.

"Good luck, Lieutenant. If—we should not meet again you may know that I died like a brave man, a victim to my duty."

Louis Monet was choked with emotion. He wished to speak but could not utter a word.

He was about to go when the colonel called him back:

"An instant, Lieutenant. In such a case it is not enough to be brave—you must also be clever, which is harder for a soldier. Be sure that it will be

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known that I sent for you in haste and that I saw you tonight. We must therefore have a pretext to throw them off the scent. This pretext I have already spread in the town."

"What is it, Colonel?"

"I have simply spread the report that you have been gaming a bit too hard and this interview is to reprimand you for your losses at the card table."

The lieutenant smiled at this likely excuse, which was also so untrue, as he rarely played.

After a moment's reflection, he said:

"Then I'd better drop in to the club now?"

"Certainly, Lieutenant."

The colonel held out his hand.

"There is nothing more to be said, and in fact, in future we had better avoid each other except during hours of service. Good-by, Lieutenant, and good luck. Either you or I will not go through it alive, I made my sacrifice a long time ago. I hope you will be the one to triumph."

Without a word, too upset to reply, Louis Monet started to go.

The colonel recalled him once more:

"That I may have no regrets or scruples let me be sure I have given you thorough warning. From this minute you must beware of everything. You no longer have the right to be yourself. You belong to your mission—you belong to the country! And that the country may be victorious, you must think ceaselessly:

" 'Death is stalking me!' Go, Lieutenant."

Louis Monet left the room.

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IV

FACING CONTEMPT

LOUIS MONET had scarcely closed the door of the study, when he seemed to awake from some nightmare and began to doubt the reality of things.

Had he properly understood the words of his chief?

Had not the colonel exaggerated the seriousness of this mission he had been given?

"I am in danger of death," repeated the lieutenant.

But the defining of this certainty caused him a feeling almost joyful.

Fear? Anxiety? These he did not experience. He simply felt that pleasant fever which animates soldiers when the hour of battle arrives.

But while he crossed the courtyard, fresh doubts took possession of him.

He had not forgotten one of his instructions. He knew that his first duty was to hide the precious document confided to him.

"I must hide it where nobody will think of searching, but where it can be found if anything happens to me."

While he pondered this problem, another thought came into his mind.

Colette!

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He did not fear for himself, but he feared for her. Must he give up his love?

The young lieutenant, as in a dream, saw the sweet face of her he loved so tenderly.

He recalled the tender meeting which led to what he considered their engagement.

Colette! At first he only knew her beauty, her slender figure and fair hair, which had intoxicated him from the moment he met her. Then once during a walk he had a chance to speak alone with her. He felt her thrill to him. And finally, shortly before he went away, he burst out with his love and tenderness.

To die would be nothing. But to give up Colette!

It seemed to Louis Monet that his heart would break with pain.

He was in danger of death!

And a deep anger rose in him against the father of the young girl, against Ravignon, a thick-headed and obstinate peasant who declined an officer for a son-in-law.

How could he manage to see Colette?

Ah, it would take more than a trifle to stop him.

He recalled a charming and mad arrangement they had conceived during their last walk together.

Colette had picked a bouquet of flowers and had given him half of it.

"Here, take it, and if ever you have need to see me, if anything serious should happen in your life, you have only to send me one of these flowers and I shall understand—and that very evening I shall be at the spot we are now—"

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Louis Monet had smiled at this romantic tryst proposed by Colette. He never expected to have the need of meeting the young girl alone at midnight.

He had smiled then. Now he was deeply stirred.

What a strange coincidence that Colette should have almost divined the tragic turn his life had taken.

He reached the gate of the cavalry barracks.

He felt now as though he were leaving the last place of safety and that once outside, he would be exposed to the most dangerous risks of war.

He knocked with his sabre upon the guardroom door.

"La Flemme!"

"Lieutenant?"

"Forward, march!"

La Flemme rubbed his eyes, muttered, "They won't let you sleep in peace," and approached the officer.

"What is it?"

"Come and I'll tell you."

Louis Monet drew his orderly rapidly away from the barracks.

The young man had recovered his self-possession.

He had calmed his nerves, over-excited a moment before. He spoke, smiling and joking, in his usual manner.

"La Flemme, open your ears and try to understand me. You are a brute."

"Yes, Lieutenant."

"You always try to do the least possible."

"Yes, Lieutenant."

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"But at bottom you're a pretty decent sort. That's why I'm going to ask you a favor."

"Go ahead, Lieutenant."

"It's rather a nasty job."

"Hell! No job's nasty if it's for you."

He spoke simply but with sincerity.

The lieutenant did not wish the matter to seem important.

From his pocketbook he took a dried flower and slipped it into an envelope.

"La Flemme, I'm going to give you a commission if you will swear to forget it after you have done it."

"All right, I swear, Lieutenant."

"Hold on—it's pretty hard to fulfill and has to be handled carefully."

A broad smile spread over La Flemme's face.

"I'll bet there's a woman in it."

"You're right, La Flemme."

"You have a dame then, Lieutenant?"

Louis Monet could not help smiling.

"La Flemme, try to understand me—and keep your opinions to yourself. I haven't a 'dame,' as you say. It concerns my fiancée."

"Your fiancée? Are you going to be married?"

"Possibly—in any case, the matter is a serious one."

"Yes, Lieutenant."

"And you mustn't make any break."

"Lieutenant, I know how to handle love affairs."

"In that case, this is what you have to do: Tomorrow morning at daybreak you will saddle your

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horse and you will go to Cirey. There, without being seen, you must manage to give this dried flower to Mlle. Ravignon."

"To Mlle. Ravignon?"

La Flemme laughed as though pleased.

"Well, Lieutenant, I congratulate you. She's devilish pretty and not in the least stuck up—only, there's the old man."

"La Flemme!"

"The old man who'll be your father-in-law. Say, let me tell you something, Lieutenant. I can't stomach him. To begin with he don't take to you—the proof being that just now at the station—"

Louis Monet paled.

"Shut up, La Flemme! Take care!"

An automobile came down the street.

La Flemme gave one glance at it and began to laugh.

"Why, there it goes. It's M'sieur Ravignon's car. I told you I'd seen him at the station."

Louis Monet had quickly turned into a side street, to avoid being passed by the auto.

"La Flemme, you met M. Ravignon? Did you speak to him?"

"Sure, I said, 'howdy do.'"

"And then?"

"Nothing. He hardly answered me. I guess he was after stamps for his collection."

La Flemme chuckled.

"At his age! To collect stamps! He must be cracked."

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La Flemme began to laugh again, but Louis Monet quickly stopped him:

"So you quite understand? You are to take this flower to Mlle. Ravignon and then return here."

"I swear to, Lieutenant."

La Flemme offered his hand, then spat on the ground to make his oath the more binding.

"Naturally the old man, nor the mother mustn't get on to it. All right—don't worry—they won't. What! Are you stopping at the club, Lieutenant?"

Louis Monet had come to a halt outside a small clubhouse, with the pretentious name of "The Elegants' Club," frequented by officers and rich young men of the town.

"Yes, I'll go up for five minutes. You are free for the rest of the night, only I count on you tomorrow morning at Cirey—and, above all, succeed at any cost."

Louis Monet could not explain to his orderly the reason for his abrupt decision. He felt satisfied that La Flemme would carry out his commission, that Colette would receive the dried flower, and that he would see her the following evening at midnight.

On entering the club he was met with a torrent of questions.

"What! You!"

"Must have been recalled in a hurry!"

"Any news of the war?"

Before him stood a young man of twenty-three or twenty-four, with folded arms.

"How about the wigging?"

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Louis Monet burst out laughing.

He guessed without trouble why his entrance had made a sensation. Had he not announced his week's furlough?

And Paul de Tersy's remark about the wigging referred to the reprimand Colonel Bayen was supposed to give him.

"Here I am, gentlemen, ashamed but not repentant."

He purposely exaggerated his pretended anger:

"Pretty tough, don't you think? One hasn't the right to lose ten louis at baccarat now! Upon my soul Colonel Bayen must think he is in command of school boys, not of dragoons!"

His words were greeted with laughter.

"What did you answer?"

"I suppose you swore to give up cards?"

Louis Monet, in pursuance of his rôle, drew up a chair at one of the card tables.

"Gentlemen, I made no answer. But as I consider myself free to do as I please when off duty, here is my reply—I take the bank for twenty louis; who will play with me?"

"That's right, Monet—they can't scare you."

Paul de Tersy applauded loudly. He was an inveterate gambler. He did not live in Lunéville proper, but owned a château not far from Cirey. He appeared at the club regularly every evening. An orphan and rich, he played with a recklessness which would have earned him some notoriety in Paris but which exposed him to criticism in the small provincial town.

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The table quickly filled with players and those who did not play stood around watching the game and offering criticisms.

"Colonel Bayen is an idiot. If he had called down de Tersy one could understand it, but Louis Monet rarely plays."

Now the luck seemed to be with Monet this evening; he won bet after bet until de Tersy finally rose.

"I've had enough. I've already dropped thirty louis. Whose turn next?"

"Seems to bring you luck to be hauled over the coals by the colonel."

A business man sat down and announced:

"I'll take the bank—twenty louis."

He had scarcely finished speaking when de Tersy, who had been examining the cards, gave a sharp cry.

"Ah!"

And as the other players were about to take their places, he added:

"One moment, gentlemen!"

"What is it? What's the matter?"

De Tersy did not reply at once—he continued to examine the cards, an extraordinary smile on his lips.

"It's very queer."

"What is queer?" answered Monet, drawing near.

The young man pretended not to hear; he turned his back to the officer, remarking:

"Luck is a vain word, but some know how to help it. Then we call it cleverness—"

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With a grim laugh, he tore the cards while the players watched him, amazed.

"What's the matter with you, de Tersy?"

"I have lost thirty louis with marked cards."

A hand touched his shoulder and swung him round.

"What do you mean?"

De Tersy answered calmly:

"What I mean is that I have lost thirty louis playing with marked cards."

Louis Monet pressed harder:

"Do you accuse me of cheating?"

"My dear fellow, you can take it as you will. If the cap fits, wear it. These gentlemen will understand."

He gathered the torn cards and showed unmistakable markings on them.

"What do you think of that?"

Had de Tersy seen Monet's eyes he would have been very much afraid.

The lieutenant had concentrated into his look all the fury that was in his heart.

There could be no mistake. He had taken the previous bank. It was he whom de Tersy accused of cheating.

A complete silence reigned in the room.

The club members stood around, unable to deny the evidence. The cards had been marked.

That, however, did not prove the guilt of Louis Monet.

"Well, gentlemen, what do you think of it?"

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At this moment Monet suddenly remembered a fact he had forgotten under the insult.

Had he the right to retaliate?

Ought he to accept or provoke a duel?

With acute suffering, he recalled the last words of Colonel Bayen.

"You are in danger of death! Any pretext may be used to kill you, either by crime, accident, or a duel. You no longer belong to yourself, you belong to France—you belong to your mission."

Louis Monet made a supreme effort to avoid taking de Tersy by the throat.

"All this is childish," he replied at length. "I am above suspicion. My only mistake was to play with Monsieur de Tersy since he clings so hard to his money."

And while his words were received in chilly silence, Louis Monet left the room and the clubhouse.

Ah! how shocking it was, this appearance of cowardice!

And yet he had done right to leave.

He recognized this.

"Had I remained a second longer, I would have struck him. A duel would have followed."

A duel! Had he escaped one of the traps which Colonel Bayen had warned him against? In that case, de Tersy was a spy, a wretch in the pay of Germany.

Louis Monet stopped.

This conclusion made him shrug his shoulders. De Tersy a spy? It wasn't possible! De Tersy lived at Cirey and was known to the Ravignon's.

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Colette herself treated him as a friend, often played tennis with him. . . .

This young man, rich and idle, could not follow the wretched trade he accused him of.

"No, the quarrel had not been prearranged. How could he have known that I was to be attacked? *Nobody could have heard what Colonel Bayen said to me!* Consequently—"

A neighboring clock struck midnight.

"I'm crazy. There's no sense in walking about this way. The first thing to do is to return home and place the document in a safe place."

Mechanically he felt his pocket. The document was still there. For a moment he feared it might have been stolen.

Again the shock of his apparent cowardice made him start, and he kept repeating to himself:

"That's not worth a moment's thought. France comes first, myself afterwards."

A fine motto the unhappy officer had chosen.

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V

COLETTE

THE cavalry barracks slept; it had not yet struck four in the morning and reveille was still distant when La Flemme appeared before the sentries.

Naturally he was questioned.

"Where do you come from? What do you want? Where's your permit?"

La Flemme, staggering slightly, did not propose to be bothered.

"Where do I come from? Can't tell you. Where I'm going—that's more important, and as to my permit, you'd have to have pretty big spectacles to see it."

He then passed along, throwing behind him:

"Detailed to the cartography."

That caused a laugh.

"Go on! You're as much detailed as I am," cried one man. "You wouldn't be so cocky if you weren't the lieutenant's orderly."

"Maybe so," replied La Flemme, calmly, "but then you see I am."

He moved off, clanking his spurs and whistling a military march.

La Flemme was not forgetting his commission, but with his natural modesty, he worried a little over the method of accomplishing it.

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But his anxiety soon gave way to optimism.

"Bah! After all, I understand women. I'll talk very politely to her and everything will be all right."

La Flemme crossed the courtyard and entered the stables, hailing the guard.

The man quickly climbed out of a manger where he was taking a nap against the regulations, and, expecting a punishment, he stammered:

"Present, Lieutenant!"

La Flemme burst out laughing.

"That's all right. Only me."

A few moments later he was trotting down the highroad towards Cirey thinking how he might accomplish his mission.

"For after all," he thought, "it isn't enough to get there. I've got to see the lady to give her the flower —without being seen, too—without the father or mother suspecting. That's not so easy."

It seemed to him that his chances of seeing her alone were mighty small.

"Have to prepare a plan first," he growled.

He brought his horse to a walk and lit a cigarette. Very soon he rubbed his hands.

"I have it," he cried joyfully, and imitating an officer's voice, he ordered:

"Prepare to charge! Charge!"

The same day that La Flemme was galloping towards Cirey, M. Ravignon at ten o'clock in the evening was seated at home, drinking his coffee after a good dinner and preparing to spend a quiet evening.

He was a thickset individual, about fifty, with

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stubby hair and moustache, broad shoulders and rough peasant manner.

He was, besides, a man of importance in Cirey, who watched over the interests of the commune with the same thoroughness he displayed towards his own.

"Father Ravignon," as he was called by the village children, did not belong to Cirey. Fifteen years before he had made his appearance there as a simple workman, offering his services for the harvest. But this simple workman knew how to save.

Two years later he bought land. This was the beginning of his fortune, which grew constantly, by fortunate speculations in the corn market, by advantageous deals with army contractors, by a series of commercial operations in which he displayed a marvelous ability—and the knowledge of a lawyer.

Rich and honored, Ravignon was considered one of the most popular men in Cirey, even before his election as mayor, a piece of good luck that had crowned his life with success.

Of very simple tastes, he preferred to live in a reconstructed farmhouse rather than build a new dwelling, and this went by the name of "The Domain."

Still, he knew how to make himself comfortable. The bathroom he had installed was the talk of the place, as were the dresses of his daughter, the exquisite and pretty Colette.

Colette herself was considered as a living enigma.

Her extreme fairness, delicacy, and elegance had won for her the nickname of "The Parisian."

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Mme. Brigitte Ravignon was also alien to the race of strong, heavily built country women.

For a number of years it was not known that Ravignon was married until one day he announced in the Café des Negociants:

"Well, I think I've saved up enough pennies to bring here my wife and daughter."

This produced a small-sized scandal.

People asked why he had hitherto concealed his marriage. But when Brigitte and Colette arrived, gossip finally ceased and the incident was forgotten.

It was known, or thought to be known, that Ravignon was the son of Breton peasants. He was supposed to have married, against his parents' wishes, a maid from an inn at Rennes. Occasionally it was whispered that perhaps Colette was not his daughter.

But Ravignon, powerful and rich, simply paid no attention to these calumnies.

Although a thorough miser and absorbed in his money, yet Ravignon had one real passion. He collected postage stamps with a craze amounting almost to madness.

He was at this moment occupied in placing in his album a precious example of a rare San Domingo issue. He glanced up, annoyed, as his study door opened.

"Is that you, Brigitte?"

"Yes, master."

Brigitte was a complete contrast to Ravignon, being slight and delicate in build, with white hair and a look of constant fear in her eyes.

"What do you want?"

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"I'm worried about Colette's health."

Ravignon burst out, angrily, thumping the table with his heavy fist.

"Colette! She's a little fool—that's my opinion. And she'd feel as well as I do if she wouldn't waste her time in ridiculous mooning. Besides, it's a bit your fault, Brigitte. The child needs good advice, but instead, you encourage her in her dreams. Ah! very intelligent of you, I must say."

Once started he did not stop.

"What's the matter now? Why hasn't de Tersy been here?"

"Master, I think they've had a quarrel, so M. de Tersy must have gone back to Lunéville."

And then she added hesitatingly.

"He must have met Lieutenant Monet at Lunéville."

"Lieutenant Monet! That worthless fellow! Because he's rich he imagines he has the right to idle his time away. For an officer in peace time has nothing to do."

Brigitte ventured timidly:

"But M. de Tersy—"

"M. de Tersy owns land. He is noble and a friend of the farmer. His estate adjoins mine and when he marries my child the boundaries will be pulled down. Ah! 'The Domain' will then be worthy of its name—wide and broad."

Brigitte again protested:

"When M. de Tersy marries your daughter. But first Colette must be willing."

"She'll agree, that I warrant."

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"Then she must cease loving Lieutenant Monet."

Ravignon thumped the table again.

"I don't want to hear any more about that loafer. And if he comes here again, I'll kick him out!"

Brigitte sighed, not daring to answer.

"Good night, master."

"Good night, good night."

Ravignon took up his magnifying glass and bent over his stamps. His conscience was at peace.

Brigitte went noiselessly towards her room.

The poor woman was strangely upset.

Tears came to her eyes.

"Poor child," she murmured.

As she passed Colette's door, a shaft of light shone beneath it.

Mme. Ravignon opened the door.

"You are not asleep, Colette?"

"No, mother. It's such a beautiful evening I am watching the stars."

"And thinking of the man you love," replied Mme. Ravignon tenderly.

"Yes—that's true."

"That soldier belonged to his regiment, didn't he?"

"Yes, mother, the 32nd dragoons."

"He didn't speak of him?"

"Oh, no, mother."

"And you didn't send any message?"

"I didn't dare to."

Mme. Ravignon smiled.

That afternoon, during Ravignon's absence an

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incident, or rather an accident, had happened to excite the inhabitants of the farm.

A cavalryman of the 32nd dragoons who was known to be the orderly of Louis Monet had fallen from his horse just in front of the house.

He struggled to his feet, apparently half stunned and uttering unintelligible words; finally he had begged Colette and Mme. Ravignon insistently:

"Something to drink, my good ladies."

He had been taken in and made to lie down and not long afterwards he was able to leave, apparently quite recovered.

"The soldier made me think of Louis Monet," sighed Mme. Ravignon, and she added as she kissed Colette good night:

"I don't blame you, dear, for being true to the man you love and I shall never blame you for having chosen him."

The good woman then went to bed, convinced that she knew all the secret thoughts of her daughter.

What would she have said had she seen Colette, left alone, take a dried flower from her breast and fondly kiss it?

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VI

LOYALTY

AT ten in the evening of the same day, Louis Monet had the impression of waking from a strange dream.

He had been wandering about for a long time, watchful, with nerves on edge, and now suddenly he became quiet and peaceful both in mind and in body.

"Ah, upon my word, I've been imagining nonsense for the past twenty-four hours.

"The colonel was exaggerating. Hang the danger—I'm going to see Colette!

"But will she keep the appointment? Will she understand? Remembering her promise? The urgent appeal that dried flower represents? And even if she has understood, can she escape from her home?"

Ah! he did not doubt her. He remembered too well the deep sincerity in her tones when she said:

"If ever you should be in danger or be passing through a hard time, if you should ever need my tenderness and love, don't hesitate. Send me one of these flowers and I will come to you."

The lieutenant reached one of the crossroads in the woods on his way to Cirey and stopped. He

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tethered his horse by the bridle and began his wait. And as the moments sped, he felt that tender happiness which the approach of the loved one inspires.

After two good hours, a footfall made him start.

"It is she."

And then a great fear struck him. Suppose she had been followed. Suppose he had enticed her into danger!

He hid behind a hedge, revolver in hand.

But his alarm was unnecessary.

It was Colette—Colette, alone and walking timidly glancing right and left into the shadows.

He sprang toward her and gave a great cry of love and gratitude.

"Colette! You? Oh, how good of you to come!"

He took her two hands, scarcely daring to touch her lips.

The young girl was trembling and on the verge of collapsing.

"If you only knew," she murmured. "If you only knew how afraid I have been—when your orderly pretending to be hurt, gave me your flower. You are not ill? You are not in danger?"

Louis Monet, who had hoped to give up to love these first moments so ardently longed for, and keep silent as to his motive for coming, betrayed himself.

Ah! It was not Colette alone he saw before him, it was not only his sweetheart that he clasped in his arms.

As he had done the evening before, he now experienced a strange hallucination.

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Colette, his heart, his love, she was much more, she was France!

He realized in a flash what it is that binds a man so solidly to his country.

His country was the blessed land of the hearth. His country was there where Colette lived.

Tremblingly he replied:

"Colette, I begged you to come because I had to see you, because we swore to share our joys and our sorrows, to hold our hopes and dangers in common."

It would have been a surprising speech from the lips of the brave lieutenant of dragoons had another heard it, but Colette did not misunderstand his words.

She guessed that a mystery lay hidden in them—a serious and tragic mystery which sometimes passes like a tornado over the lives of the most peaceful.

"What is it?"

"I cannot tell you."

And as Colette betrayed a movement of surprise, at his apparent lack of confidence, he continued:

"Colette, I have sworn on my honor to keep silent."

Colette realized that she had not the right to insist further.

Timidly, she asked:

"And war? Shall we have war?"

"Yes," he replied simply.

"Soon?"

"Very soon."

"And you will be among the first to go?"

"Without doubt—if I am still living."

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"If you are still living? What do you mean?"

He avoided a direct reply, determined to keep his oath of silence.

"Colette, you love France?"

She answered him in the words he had himself imagined:

"France? Yes, France is she whom I love—It is you."

So she thought as he did, mingling as he had done the idea of love and of country.

"Well, Colette, for France I must face a danger, a terrible danger! And if I have sought this interview tonight, it is that I might loyally and honestly give you your liberty."

He lowered his voice:

"You can no longer be my fiancée. It would be cowardice on my part to hold you prisoner to your promise. Colette, I have consented to die!"

Colette protested ardently:

"You have consented to die? But you have consented to die for France. Do you think that makes you less dear to me? Do you think that because I risk becoming your widow I can give up my love?"

Ah, what a brave soul lay hidden in this frail and fragile young girl! What superb defiance of fatality!

"Your widow." The word was a promise, an oath of love.

"In speaking this way," she continued, "you are not only thinking of the war that may break out?"

"That is true, Colette."

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"And this mission, is it important?"

"Very important, Colette."

The gentle girl hesitated. She seemed almost to guess a part of the tragic truth.

"To die is nothing," she murmured. "To do one's duty, that is what counts. Oh, if I could only help you."

She implored him:

"I beg you to be frank. Can I do nothing? Am I to be debarred from helping?"

Louis Monet felt a strange agony of mind. Ought he to reject such devotion? Had he the right, on the contrary, to expose the woman he loved?

He was afraid to make a decision.

Colette feverishly continued to beg.

"You hesitate, Louis. Don't you trust me?"

The lieutenant grew pale and trembling, at the very thought of what he had to do—what he ought to do. An echo of Colonel Bayen's words came to his memory.

"You must hide this document where nobody can find it—but where it can always be recovered. In case of death, your mission would pass to the person who survives, as I myself pass it on to you."

Alas! the meaning of these words was unmistakable.

Who would dream of looking for the mysterious and tragic document in the peaceful home of the Ravignons?

What German spy would tear it from Colette's

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hands? And was not Colette the faithful friend, devoted unto death to him and to France? But it meant exposing Colette to the terrible vengeance of the enemy.

Louis Monet cried:

"I won't, I won't!"

But Colette, by his side, still pleaded:

"For France."

And he gave in. He knew in a flash the glorious defeat of voluntary sacrifice.

Ah! What a strange love scene was this tragic and painful interview!

Louis Monet now took out the redoubtable yellow envelope.

"Colette, this document is of inestimable value—my first duty is to preserve it. Nobody yet knows that it is in my hands, therefore nobody can guess that I place it in yours. If any misfortune should happen to me you will receive from me the necessary instructions. Colette, will you accept this charge? Will you help me to keep it?"

Colette, quivering, had taken the envelope and hidden it in her corsage.

"I will keep this document," she said in a broken voice, "as I keep the promise of your love."

But he insisted further. There must be no possible mistake. Although it hurt to do so, he must point out the danger of such a trust.

"Colette, they would kill me to get this document, and they might kill you also. It is for France that I ask it of you."

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"And it is for France that I will second you—and also because I love you."

Louis Monet would have liked to express his love and admiration, but the words would not come.

Alas! It was not the time for love.

He had to fight first, to conquer.

After would come the laurel of victory and the perfume of kisses.

A silence between them was broken by Colette:

"When shall I see you again?"

He feared the future, but he had to answer:

"Will you ever see me again?"

Another silence, the silence of the hostile forest, in whose heavy shadows it seemed that mystery lurked, waiting for the dawn.

Colette held out her hand.

"Dear, I must leave you."

Almost coldly he said good-by.

The shadows were not only around him, they were within. He doubted whether he had done right.

But as Colette moved away, he rushed to her, clasping her in his arms.

"Colette, I love you!"

"I love you," she answered.

It was love's eternal duet.

"I shall love you always."

"Always?"

"If I die, my last thought will be of you."

"I don't want you to die."

Triumphant, their love revolted against Destiny.

Colette, with a quick movement, escaped.

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"Go, go! Someone is coming!"

"Who? Nay, it isn't possible."

"I'm sure of it! Do go! We mustn't be seen together!"

"But I can't leave you alone!"

"It is not a question of me. You mustn't think of me!"

She placed her hand over the document.

"Ah," cried Monet, "what a sad parting!"

Then, yielding to her prayer, he plunged into a by-path and ran to his horse.

A few moments later he started at full gallop as though in flight.

In the meantime a young man suddenly appeared before Colette, flashing a pocket lantern into her face and bowing with a sarcastic smile.

"You! Mademoiselle Ravignon? And alone? Here in the woods! At such an hour? I can't believe it."

Paul de Tersy appeared in utter amazement.

But Colette played her part perfectly.

"Alas, it is I, and alone—and I shall be well scolded if you tell on me."

Paul de Tersy smiled again.

"I'll hold my tongue," he declared, "but if it is not indiscreet, may I ask where you have been?"

"Oh, what curiosity," she replied, adding: "You might have guessed, I think. I've been to see my friend Berthe. We've made a plan together to induce father to take me to Lunéville on Sunday to the prefect's garden party."

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Paul de Tersy continued to smile, and that smile would have doubtless troubled Colette if she had seen it.

She took his arm playfully:

"Come as far as the house with me. I'll go in by the side door."

So arm in arm, like two comrades, they walked down the road.

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VII

A CASE OF CONSCIENCE

FOR the tenth time at least, La Flemme, on tip-toe, opened Louis Monet's bedroom door.

He grumbled to himself.

"The idea of still snoring at eleven in the morning!"

La Flemme, who would have slept until three in the afternoon if allowed, thought it his duty to wake his lieutenant.

His method of doing this was somewhat peculiar.

He began by calling:

"Lieutenant! Lieutenant!"

But the sleeping man did not wake.

Louis Monet had reached home very late the night before, and was now resting in a deep sleep.

La Flemme had an inspiration.

On the mantelpiece a vase filled with water waited for the flowers it was to contain. La Flemme, with his duster, gently knocked it to the floor.

But this had no effect.

"Good lord! What a spree he must have been on last night!" exclaimed La Flemme.

He next threw down a clock which fell with great clatter.

Louis Monet continued to sleep.

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Then La Flemme lost his temper.

"I shall have to tickle his feet if this goes on!"

But another plan suggested itself.

By the wall stood a picture which Louis Monet had not yet hung. La Flemme seized and flung it on the bed.

This time Louis Monet woke with a start.

Furiously angry, he cried:

"Animal! Brute! Idiot! You'll get a week for this!"

La Flemme smiled amiably.

"I am doing the room, Lieutenant."

Louis Monet now caught sight of the broken clock and vase on the floor.

He sat up.

"Doing the room, clumsy. What's all that?"

"Débris, Lieutenant. I haven't swept yet."

Nothing ever worried La Flemme.

"Débris! You're trying to make game of me. You'll get a week for this."

"All right," replied La Flemme tranquilly. "One and one make two."

"And what's your idea of throwing pictures at my head?"

"I didn't know you were there, Lieutenant."

The lie was so prodigious, it quite disarmed Louis Monet. He burst out laughing.

"You didn't know I was there? Why, you idiot!"

"I thought you were at the quarters."

"I'm not on duty today.

"Maybe, but the lieutenant colonel wants to see

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you in a hurry. That's why I have wakened you, Lieutenant."

"The lieutenant colonel? What for?"

He scented a fresh mystery.

"You're not drunk? It isn't the colonel who wishes to see me?"

"No, Lieutenant! The lieutenant colonel."

"Well, get my things ready. I'll dress."

An hour later, Louis Monet, out of breath from a quick walk, presented himself at the cavalry quarters.

He felt anxious and somewhat nervous.

What was he going to hear now? What had he to fear? And above all what was he to do if the lieutenant colonel gave him an order jeopardizing his mission?

Scarcely had he appeared in the guardroom when an orderly addressed him:

"Lieutenant."

"What is it?"

"You are expected in the audience room."

"All right, orderly."

Louis Monet fancied that the man had slightly smiled as he performed his commission.

Why?

Was it generally known that the lieutenant colonel wanted to see him?

More and more uneasy Louis Monet presented himself before his chief a few moments later.

The officer was reading a newspaper which he threw aside with a movement of anger.

"Ah! there you are! Have you slept well?"

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"Why—certainly—Colonel."

"You are sober again?"

Louis Monet started.

What did this greeting mean? This scornful tone and attitude?

"Sober again? I don't understand you, Colonel."

The officer rose, folding his arms and speaking with sarcastic emphasis.

"Really? You don't understand me?"

"No, Colonel."

"Do you deny being drunk yesterday and the day before?"

Louis Monet answered dryly:

"Colonel, I'm not good at guessing puzzles."

"Which means?"

"That I beg you to explain your insults."

Louis Monet spoke with such force that the colonel in his turn seemed surprised.

"Ah! You think I insult you by supposing you drunk? I thought I was offering you an excuse."

"An excuse? For what, Colonel?"

"For what you have done."

Louis Monet completely lost his head.

"Good heavens! What have I done?"

The lieutenant colonel took a step toward him.

"Lieutenant, some things are not done, and when they are done, there is only one way of making reparation. There are things which must be wiped out with blood."

"With blood?"

Louis Monet mechanically repeated the words.

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Was the lieutenant colonel crazy? What was he talking about?

With the end of his riding whip the colonel picked up one of the papers from the floor.

Scornfully he handed it to Louis Monet.

"Read that, Lieutenant."

"What?"

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"Do you deny it?"

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Shaken with anger, Louis Monet flung down the paper.

"It's abominable!"

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The lieutenant colonel was impressed.

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Nobody could be aware of it.

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"Colonel Bayen is absent—in any case he would send you to fight."

"I cannot fight, Colonel."

"Why?"

"Because—I cannot."

A long silence ensued.

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Colette, his heart, his love, she was much more, she was France!

He realized in a flash what it is that binds a man so solidly to his country.

His country was the blessed land of the hearth. His country was there where Colette lived.

Tremblingly he replied:

"Colette, I begged you to come because I had to see you, because we swore to share our joys and our sorrows, to hold our hopes and dangers in common."

It would have been a surprising speech from the lips of the brave lieutenant of dragoons had another heard it, but Colette did not misunderstand his words.

She guessed that a mystery lay hidden in them—a serious and tragic mystery which sometimes passes like a tornado over the lives of the most peaceful.

"What is it?"

"I cannot tell you."

And as Colette betrayed a movement of surprise, at his apparent lack of confidence, he continued:

"Colette, I have sworn on my honor to keep silent."

Colette realized that she had not the right to insist further.

Timidly, she asked:

"And war? Shall we have war?"

"Yes," he replied simply.

"Soon?"

"Very soon."

"And you will be among the first to go?"

"Without doubt—if I am still living."

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"If you are still living? What do you mean?"

He avoided a direct reply, determined to keep his oath of silence.

"Colette, you love France?"

She answered him in the words he had himself imagined:

"France? Yes, France is she whom I love—It is you."

So she thought as he did, mingling as he had done the idea of love and of country.

"Well, Colette, for France I must face a danger, a terrible danger! And if I have sought this interview tonight, it is that I might loyally and honestly give you your liberty."

He lowered his voice:

"You can no longer be my fiancée. It would be cowardice on my part to hold you prisoner to your promise. Colette, I have consented to die!"

Colette protested ardently:

"You have consented to die? But you have consented to die for France. Do you think that makes you less dear to me? Do you think that because I risk becoming your widow I can give up my love?"

Ah, what a brave soul lay hidden in this frail and fragile young girl! What superb defiance of fatality!

"Your widow." The word was a promise, an oath of love.

"In speaking this way," she continued, "you are not only thinking of the war that may break out?"

"That is true, Colette."

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"And this mission, is it important?"

"Very important, Colette."

The gentle girl hesitated. She seemed almost to guess a part of the tragic truth.

"To die is nothing," she murmured. "To do one's duty, that is what counts. Oh, if I could only help you."

She implored him:

"I beg you to be frank. Can I do nothing? Am I to be debarred from helping?"

Louis Monet felt a strange agony of mind. Ought he to reject such devotion? Had he the right, on the contrary, to expose the woman he loved?

He was afraid to make a decision.

Colette feverishly continued to beg.

"You hesitate, Louis. Don't you trust me?"

The lieutenant grew pale and trembling, at the very thought of what he had to do—what he ought to do. An echo of Colonel Bayen's words came to his memory.

"You must hide this document where nobody can find it—but where it can always be recovered. In case of death, your mission would pass to the person who survives, as I myself pass it on to you."

Alas! the meaning of these words was unmistakable.

Who would dream of looking for the mysterious and tragic document in the peaceful home of the Ravignons?

What German spy would tear it from Colette's

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hands? And was not Colette the faithful friend, devoted unto death to him and to France? But it meant exposing Colette to the terrible vengeance of the enemy.

Louis Monet cried:

"I won't, I won't!"

But Colette, by his side, still pleaded:

"For France."

And he gave in. He knew in a flash the glorious defeat of voluntary sacrifice.

Ah! What a strange love scene was this tragic and painful interview!

Louis Monet now took out the redoubtable yellow envelope.

"Colette, this document is of inestimable value—my first duty is to preserve it. Nobody yet knows that it is in my hands, therefore nobody can guess that I place it in yours. If any misfortune should happen to me you will receive from me the necessary instructions. Colette, will you accept this charge? Will you help me to keep it?"

Colette, quivering, had taken the envelope and hidden it in her corsage.

"I will keep this document," she said in a broken voice, "as I keep the promise of your love."

But he insisted further. There must be no possible mistake. Although it hurt to do so, he must point out the danger of such a trust.

"Colette, they would kill me to get this document, and they might kill you also. It is for France that I ask it of you."

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"And it is for France that I will second you—and also because I love you."

Louis Monet would have liked to express his love and admiration, but the words would not come.

Alas! It was not the time for love.

He had to fight first, to conquer.

After would come the laurel of victory and the perfume of kisses.

A silence between them was broken by Colette:

"When shall I see you again?"

He feared the future, but he had to answer:

"Will you ever see me again?"

Another silence, the silence of the hostile forest, in whose heavy shadows it seemed that mystery lurked, waiting for the dawn.

Colette held out her hand.

"Dear, I must leave you."

Almost coldly he said good-by.

The shadows were not only around him, they were within. He doubted whether he had done right.

But as Colette moved away, he rushed to her, clasping her in his arms.

"Colette, I love you!"

"I love you," she answered.

It was love's eternal duet.

"I shall love you always."

"Always?"

"If I die, my last thought will be of you."

"I don't want you to die."

Triumphant, their love revolted against Destiny.

Colette, with a quick movement, escaped.

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"Go, go! Someone is coming!"

"Who? Nay, it isn't possible."

"I'm sure of it! Do go! We mustn't be seen together!"

"But I can't leave you alone!"

"It is not a question of me. You mustn't think of me!"

She placed her hand over the document.

"Ah," cried Monet, "what a sad parting!"

Then, yielding to her prayer, he plunged into a by-path and ran to his horse.

A few moments later he started at full gallop as though in flight.

In the meantime a young man suddenly appeared before Colette, flashing a pocket lantern into her face and bowing with a sarcastic smile.

"You! Mademoiselle Ravignon? And alone? Here in the woods! At such an hour? I can't believe it."

Paul de Tersy appeared in utter amazement.

But Colette played her part perfectly.

"Alas, it is I, and alone—and I shall be well scolded if you tell on me."

Paul de Tersy smiled again.

"I'll hold my tongue," he declared, "but if it is not indiscreet, may I ask where you have been?"

"Oh, what curiosity," she replied, adding: "You might have guessed, I think. I've been to see my friend Berthe. We've made a plan together to induce father to take me to Lunéville on Sunday to the prefect's garden party."

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Paul de Tersy continued to smile, and that smile would have doubtless troubled Colette if she had seen it.

She took his arm playfully:

"Come as far as the house with me. I'll go in by the side door."

So arm in arm, like two comrades, they walked down the road.

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VII

A CASE OF CONSCIENCE

FOR the tenth time at least, La Flemme, on tip-toe, opened Louis Monet's bedroom door.

He grumbled to himself.

"The idea of still snoring at eleven in the morning!"

La Flemme, who would have slept until three in the afternoon if allowed, thought it his duty to wake his lieutenant.

His method of doing this was somewhat peculiar.

He began by calling:

"Lieutenant! Lieutenant!"

But the sleeping man did not wake.

Louis Monet had reached home very late the night before, and was now resting in a deep sleep.

La Flemme had an inspiration.

On the mantelpiece a vase filled with water waited for the flowers it was to contain. La Flemme, with his duster, gently knocked it to the floor.

But this had no effect.

"Good lord! What a spree he must have been on last night!" exclaimed La Flemme.

He next threw down a clock which fell with great clatter.

Louis Monet continued to sleep.

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Then La Flemme lost his temper.

"I shall have to tickle his feet if this goes on!"

But another plan suggested itself.

By the wall stood a picture which Louis Monet had not yet hung. La Flemme seized and flung it on the bed.

This time Louis Monet woke with a start.

Furiously angry, he cried:

"Animal! Brute! Idiot! You'll get a week for this!"

La Flemme smiled amiably.

"I am doing the room, Lieutenant."

Louis Monet now caught sight of the broken clock and vase on the floor.

He sat up.

"Doing the room, clumsy. What's all that?"

"Débris, Lieutenant. I haven't swept yet."

Nothing ever worried La Flemme.

"Débris! You're trying to make game of me. You'll get a week for this."

"All right," replied La Flemme tranquilly. "One and one make two."

"And what's your idea of throwing pictures at my head?"

"I didn't know you were there, Lieutenant."

The lie was so prodigious, it quite disarmed Louis Monet. He burst out laughing.

"You didn't know I was there? Why, you idiot!"

"I thought you were at the quarters."

"I'm not on duty today.

"Maybe, but the lieutenant colonel wants to see

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you in a hurry. That's why I have wakened you, Lieutenant."

"The lieutenant colonel? What for?"

He scented a fresh mystery.

"You're not drunk? It isn't the colonel who wishes to see me?"

"No, Lieutenant! The lieutenant colonel."

"Well, get my things ready. I'll dress."

An hour later, Louis Monet, out of breath from a quick walk, presented himself at the cavalry quarters.

He felt anxious and somewhat nervous.

What was he going to hear now? What had he to fear? And above all what was he to do if the lieutenant colonel gave him an order jeopardizing his mission?

Scarcely had he appeared in the guardroom when an orderly addressed him:

"Lieutenant."

"What is it?"

"You are expected in the audience room."

"All right, orderly."

Louis Monet fancied that the man had slightly smiled as he performed his commission.

Why?

Was it generally known that the lieutenant colonel wanted to see him?

More and more uneasy Louis Monet presented himself before his chief a few moments later.

The officer was reading a newspaper which he threw aside with a movement of anger.

"Ah! there you are! Have you slept well?"

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"Why—certainly—Colonel."

"You are sober again?"

Louis Monet started.

What did this greeting mean? This scornful tone and attitude?

"Sober again? I don't understand you, Colonel."

The officer rose, folding his arms and speaking with sarcastic emphasis.

"Really? You don't understand me?"

"No, Colonel."

"Do you deny being drunk yesterday and the day before?"

Louis Monet answered dryly:

"Colonel, I'm not good at guessing puzzles."

"Which means?"

"That I beg you to explain your insults."

Louis Monet spoke with such force that the colonel in his turn seemed surprised.

"Ah! You think I insult you by supposing you drunk? I thought I was offering you an excuse."

"An excuse? For what, Colonel?"

"For what you have done."

Louis Monet completely lost his head.

"Good heavens! What have I done?"

The lieutenant colonel took a step toward him.

"Lieutenant, some things are not done, and when they are done, there is only one way of making reparation. There are things which must be wiped out with blood."

"With blood?"

Louis Monet mechanically repeated the words.

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Was the lieutenant colonel crazy? What was he talking about?

With the end of his riding whip the colonel picked up one of the papers from the floor.

Scornfully he handed it to Louis Monet.

"Read that, Lieutenant."

"What?"

"Head of the third column."

Louis Monet searched for the article published in a small local paper.

"Do you deny it?"

Louis Monet did not trouble to answer.

The letters danced before his eyes.

"A rather serious scandal has taken place at the 'Elegants' Club.' While playing with the honorable gentleman farmer, M. Paul de Tersy, well known in our district, an officer of the garrison, a lieutenant of the 32nd dragoons, M. L. M., sufficiently designated by stating that he belongs to the cartographic department, committed a deplorable mistake.

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"I cannot fight, Colonel."

"Why?"

"Because—I cannot."

A long silence ensued.

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By a supreme effort of will Louis Monet remained rigid, in an attitude of disciplined respect. From the pallor of his face he seemed more dead than alive.

The lieutenant colonel stopped abruptly:

"Lieutenant, you will return to your rooms. I shall take no decision until the return of Colonel Bayen—since you appeal to his authority. But I cannot hide my surprise. Go, Monsieur. Consider yourself under arrest."

"Very good, Colonel."

Louis Monet saluted and went out.

In the street he walked like a drunken man.

The blow was terrible—the worst that an officer and a brave man could receive.

"I am doing my duty, and I let myself be treated as a coward. It is horrible."

And other thoughts came to add to his misery. Colette would read the papers. And did she not know this Paul de Tersy? The young girl, like the others, would take him for a wretched coward.

And again, what did Colonel Bayen's absence mean?

While war seemed to be more and more imminent it was unbelievable that the father of the regiment should have left town.

Might not his departure have something to do with the terrible mission he had entrusted to Louis Monet?

But another question occupied the young man. It obsessed him, it haunted him.

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"There are but two hypotheses, and one of them only can be the right one.

"Has this shameful accusation to do with my mission or has it no connection with the yellow document that I gave to Colette?"

Louis Monet returned home under arrest in a distressing bewilderment of feelings.

La Flemme questioned him jokingly.

"Well, Lieutenant, did you get a calling down?"

But Louis Monet gave him a look which quickly silenced him.

"Leave me," he ordered, "leave me alone until I call you."

"All right, I understand."

Now at six in the evening while Louis Monet was lying on his sofa in an agony of mind he heard two gentle raps at his door.

He sprang up and cried:

"Come in!"

La Flemme put his head in.

"I told you to leave me alone."

But La Flemme's face expressed such excitement, that the lieutenant questioned him:

"What is it? What do you want?"

"Lieutenant, it's war! We are mobilizing!"

Louis Monet seized his orderly by the arms.

"War! You are sure? Is it official?"

"Yes, Lieutenant."

"La Flemme, I am under arrest—and I must go out—at any cost! Go and find the lieutenant colonel—if you have to force your way in. Say to him:

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'By everything you hold sacred, Lieutenant Louis Monet asks a day's leave.' "

Ten minutes later La Flemme ran at full speed towards the cavalry quarters, muttering:

"Good God!—It's enough to send a man crazy. What's got into the lieutenant? If only the lieutenant colonel will see me."

Meanwhile Louis Monet paced up and down his room like a wild animal in a cage.

He repeated to himself Colonel Bayen's last words.

"Immediately mobilization is official, you will go to the strategic bridge of Vezouse. You will go there at any cost, and in spite of whatever orders you may receive from your superiors."

And, terrified at the thought of what he might have to dare, Louis Monet sighed:

"If only the lieutenant colonel gives me permission."

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VIII

FRANCE COMES FIRST

TWENTY minutes later a heavy footstep shook the stairs and a door banged violently.

La Flemme, in spite of his lazy tendencies, had hurried. He returned out of breath and perspiring.

"Well?"

"Well, there's a fine mix-up," panted La Flemme. "Everybody's up in the air—organizing, packing. It's no joke, I can tell you."

Louis Monet ground his teeth impatiently.

"I don't care about that. What did the lieutenant colonel say?"

"The lieutenant colonel? Nothing—but he swore like a truck driver—and then he wrote something on a card."

"For me?"

"I guess so—it wasn't for the pope."

La Flemme unbuttoned his dolman and took out a visiting card in an envelope with some lines written upon it.

Louis Monet shook with anxiety.

His fate was about to be decided. What had his chief said? He could scarcely make out the words, but finally he deciphered the order.

The lieutenant colonel had simply written this:

"If you want leave for the purpose of fighting, I

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grant it. If it is for any other motive, I refuse permission."

The following words were underscored:

"Mobilization is official. In the absence of Colonel Bayen, I prefer to be minus an officer than to have a coward in my regiment."

Louis Monet collapsed on the sofa as though he had been shot.

"It's horrible!" he muttered.

Mobilization was official.

War was about to begin—a war of revenge—a war to the death between Germany and France, the eternal enemies.

And he was under arrest on parole!

His honor obliged him to keep to his rooms to wait for the orders of his chief.

At the same time he knew that he ought to set out for the strategic bridge of Vezouse without a moment's waste of time to begin the work he had been entrusted with, upon which might depend the fate of the campaign.

"If I break my parole, I shall be dishonored," he muttered, "and if I remain faithful to it and a prisoner here, I shall fail in my mission."

And then suddenly, he saw his duty clearly.

Of what value was this absurd thing called conventional honor?

To fail in honor because he broke his parole in such circumstances! Absurd! He called La Flemme.

The orderly, who had withdrawn, worried by the lieutenant's manner, presented himself.

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"Well, what's to be done?"

Louis Monet, without a tremor in his voice, gave him his orders:

"La Flemme, go to the cavalry quarters, see that my equipment is in order, then return here and wait for me. Wait as long as it is necessary; I may need you."

"Begging your pardon, Lieutenant, but what are you up to? You have a queer look."

Louis Monet did not answer this indiscreet question. He added:

"Give me my revolver."

"Your service revolver, Lieutenant? It is in quarters."

"Give me my Browning."

"All right, here it is."

La Flemme handed it to the officer, but his manner was so odd that Louis Monet questioned him:

"What's the matter with you?"

"Why, Lieutenant, I thought—that you were under arrest—so—and now I see you getting ready to go out—that won't do!"

Louis Monet gave him such a look that the orderly felt he had gone too far.

"I've made a break, eh?"

The officer put his hand on his shoulder.

"Look here, never talk carelessly. You don't know and you cannot know. One thing you may be sure of: I am going to do my duty."

And leaving La Flemme completely bewildered, Louis Monet went out.

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In truth, the officer had a strange repugnance for the part he was to play.

Like all Frenchmen he disliked any work connected with espionage.

And what was this work to be?

What was he to do when he found himself upon the bridge?

"You are to watch," said Colonel Bayen, "and you are to kill without hesitation, anyone who approaches in a suspicious manner."

Louis Monet could not help a shudder in recalling this strange command.

He knew the Vezouse bridge very well. It had been built by the engineers, and it was said had a close connection with special mobilization plans.

Was it only on account of its strategic value that he was to guard it?

Louis Monet thought:

"One might suppose that Colonel Bayen sent me there for the sole purpose of letting me kill a German spy."

Another thought struck him.

Colonel Bayen was absent.

He was not at Lunéville.

Where was he?

On the Vezouse bridge, of course!

And this hypothesis seemed very likely.

Foreseeing mobilization, it was not improbable that Colonel Bayen himself had gone to take a look at the bridge.

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Monet had still several miles to go. He hurried on, jumping the hedges and ditches.

How charming the country looked in the failing light.

Who would guess the approaching horror, which doubtless would cover the country with blood?

War! It was certain, almost declared.

Monet quivered with joy.

Something expanded within him—the pride of youth, pride of his profession, the joy of duty to accomplish.

He laughed at his former scruples.

He complained of having to do spy work as if any work was vile which served the country!

Suddenly he came to a halt. A cry escaped his lips:

"Good God! Too late!"

What was happening?

The peace of the evening had been broken by a report, followed by faint explosions.

Louis Monet instinctively guessed:

"The bridge! The bridge!"

Forgetting his weariness and the advice of Colonel Bayen to be prudent, he rushed headlong like a madman.

"Ah, the scoundrels! German espionage was capable of everything. Only a few hours ago mobilization had been decided upon and already hostilities had begun."

When he reached the top of the hill and came in view of Vezouse a cry escaped him.

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He had not been deceived.

A mine had blown up the strategic bridge.

Débris and a thick dust filled the air, together with the acrid smell of gunpowder.

Not a living soul was to be seen.

The lieutenant shook his fist in impotent rage against the cowardly and invisible enemy.

At ten o'clock La Flemme was beginning to be seriously alarmed when a rap on the door announced the return of Louis Monet.

"You, Lieutenant," cried La Flemme as he let him in.

Louis Monet was pale and exhausted. His torn clothes and muddy boots gave evidence of his long search along the banks on the Vezouse for the scoundrelly author of the catastrophe. He dropped on to his sofa and then for the first time remarked the pallor of La Flemme's face.

"What's the matter," he cried, "what has happened?"

"Lieutenant, have you heard the news?"

"Good lord, no! What is it?"

"Colonel Bayen has been murdered."

"Colonel Bayen!"

"His clothes were found covered with blood and with a bullet hole through them. He had been shot through the heart."

Overwhelmed, Louis Monet bowed his head.

Presently, however, a new feeling asserted itself.

Colonel Bayen had fallen. Very well. His death had been foreseen. The soldier for a long

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time had made his sacrifice. And was not he there, his substitute, ready to continue the work, ready to avenge him?

But at this moment, he met La Flemme's eyes and read in them further news.

Louis Monet felt instinctively that he had something horrible to learn.

"Well, what else is there?"

"Lieutenant, I daren't tell you."

"Why not? Speak!"

La Flemme stood against the door of the room as though to bar the way to his officer.

"Lieutenant, to begin with, I must ask you to have confidence in me—that I have no hesitation—that I know it isn't true, and above all, that there is nothing I wouldn't do for you."

La Flemme stammered out his protestations of devotion.

Louis Monet, not understanding, repeated:

"Speak!"

Then La Flemme in a low tone explained the horrible thing.

"You see, Lieutenant, it's this way. When the death of the colonel was known, why it made a big stir. Well I was about to return here when the lieutenant colonel ordered me to wait for him."

"And then?"

"The lieutenant colonel came here."

Louis Monet shrugged his shoulders. What did a broken parole matter? He was indeed above the opinion of the lieutenant colonel. The drama of his secret mission, of which he was henceforth to carry

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the burden alone, made him indifferent to smaller matters.

"Well, he came here and didn't find me—what then?"

"Then—then—"

Louis Monet seized him by the arm and shook him violently:

"Go ahead! What else?"

"Afterwards something extraordinary happened. When the lieutenant colonel and I arrived here, do you know what we found? Your uniform—No. 2—on the floor and your revolver on the sofa! Yes, your service revolver—the one you asked for before going out and which I thought was at the quarters."

Louis stared in amazement.

The lieutenant did not yet understand what his orderly was driving at.

He could not gather his wits together. He spoke almost calmly:

"Well, what does that prove?"

The orderly declared briefly:

"Seems that a shot had been fired from your revolver—and besides, your uniform was covered with mud like the mud on the banks of the Vezouse—and it's on the banks of the Vezouse that the colonel's effects were found—it's supposed that his body must have been thrown into the water—so—"

This time Louis Monet understood.

"It can't be possible," he cried, shaking with anger. "They don't believe that!"

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La Flemme continued:

"The lieutenant colonel then began questioning me—and then he sent for the captain and they talked together for ever so long. In the end, Lieutenant, they believe—I have to tell you—they believe that it was you who killed the colonel—and you are to be arrested!"

"Arrested!"

To the amazement of La Flemme, Louis Monet burst out laughing.

Arrest him! What nonsense!

The thing was too ridiculous! Arrest him for murder!

Why his innocence would be easy to prove.

Besides, La Flemme was mistaken. He could not have understood what had happened.

If they had wanted to arrest him, they would have left a guard at the entrance—they would have laid a trap.

But La Flemme went on:

"You are to be arrested, Lieutenant, or rather, you are already under arrest. So am I. Five men are hidden on the stairs—four to prevent your escape, the fifth to give warning at the quarters. I am not allowed to go out, either."

La Flemme, once started, gave all the details, and as Louis Monet listened, bit by bit it dawned on him that he was wrong to shrug his shoulders at the absurd accusation brought against him.

His innocence could easily be proved, but how long might it take to establish it?

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And now when from one end of the country to the other there would be a fever of mobilization, could he expect to get quick justice?

And then he grew pale as the truth dawned on him, clear and precise without the consolation of any doubt.

In a flash he saw the whole terrible intrigue which had unfolded during the past days.

Himself menaced, and in fear of not accomplishing his mission, Colonel Bayen had confided his tragic secret to him, had charged him with safeguarding the official document.

And then the German espionage had got to work.

The adventure at the Elegants' Club had been arranged to dishonor him.

To prevent his presence at the Vezouse bridge, the papers had been made to publish his cowardice, and he had been placed under arrest.

Then Colonel Bayen had fallen, a victim to his duty. And as the authorities required a guilty man, he had been chosen for the purpose.

Ah! the monstrous power of German espionage!

It was known that he was hastening to the Vezouse bridge and it had been blown up before his arrival.

It was known that he had left his rooms and during his absence they had left there a uniform similar to his and covered with mud—and his revolver with one shot missing.

The plan was so simple, so marvelous, and so tragic in its consequences.

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Naturally the military authorities could not be mistaken.

He would be arrested, locked up.

And at the very moment when seconds were worth years! When he had to recover the famous document and its instructions upon which the issue of the campaign depended.

Quick action was necessary; he must find some way of tricking the German espionage.

Louis Monet leaned on the table, his head in his hands, and reflected:

"To begin with, I must get back the mysterious document and to do that I must dodge the German spies.

"If I should die my mission would be lost."

And who were these spies who seemed to be so perfectly informed?

How could they have organized the adventure of the Elegants' Club twenty minutes after Colonel Bayen had spoken during the noise of the galloping horses?

Once more the name of de Tersy came to his lips.

Many things seemed to point to him, but many others to his innocence.

Besides, how could de Tersy be in the confidence of the German espionage?

With a gesture of indifference and rage, he muttered:

"No matter who the man is, I must get back the document for which Colonel Bayen died."

He turned to La Flemme.

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"Listen, terrible things are happening, La Flemme, which I cannot explain to you. Have you confidence in me?"

"Yes, Lieutenant."

"And are you willing to die for France?"

"That goes without saying, Lieutenant."

"Very well, then make haste—"

Louis Monet drew the orderly across the small apartment, repeating the phrase he had made his motto:

"France comes first! Myself afterwards.

"All for the country—for the war of revenge."

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IX

A MYSTERIOUS PHOTOGRAPH

"WHERE are they? Do you see them?"

"They are just below, Lieutenant."

"Who commands them?"

"I can't see very well, but I think it's the captain of the 3rd squadron."

"Very well. Step back and listen."

Five minutes went by and the plight of the unfortunate lieutenant seemed worse than ever.

Louis Monet had not been deceived when he thought he heard the sound of a patrol in the street. As La Flemme had said, one of the soldiers left on guard had hastened to give the alarm that the supposed murderer of Colonel Bayen had returned. Immediately a mounted guard had been sent and stationed outside the building.

"Lieutenant, they are knocking."

"Are they all coming in?"

"No, two remain outside."

"All right—we'll manage in spite of them."

The young man, at this moment, seemed ready for the most desperate measures.

He had no scruples left.

Since the German espionage was trying to crush him in such a terrible manner, he would accept the challenge—even with joy—calm, now that the struggle was inevitable.

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"La Flemme, listen well to me."

The orderly was visibly trembling.

"They are coming up, Lieutenant. You can hear their feet on the stairs."

Louis Monet shrugged his shoulders.

"We have still five minutes, it will take that time to break in the door."

Did the lieutenant intend to revolt against military authority?

"La Flemme," continued Monet, "I can't explain to you what is happening. The situation is very simple—either you believe in me or you think me a scoundrel."

"I believe," interrupted La Flemme, "what next?"

"Next, I'm going to ask you to go to the quarters—yes—by and by—try to find out what the orders are—where the regiment is going—if anything further has been heard about Colonel Bayen."

"Right! And afterwards?"

"Afterwards—you will rejoin me."

"The devil! Where!"

"I'll wait for you in the sand quarry just outside Lunéville on the Epinal road—you know it?"

"Yes—but—"

"But what?"

La Flemme scratched his head, embarrassed:

"Why, Lieutenant—without offense—I think you'll be put in handcuffs."

"No, they won't handcuff me."

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