

BRIDE of BATTLE

A Romance of the American Army Fighting in the Battlefields of France

By VICTOR ROUSSEAU

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CHAPTER XIII.

No word had come of any project of attack on the morning. In this the sergeant's prediction had probably proved false; yet the feeling in the air of something impending seemed to have communicated itself to the enemy's lines.

A wiring party and a listening post party were out from the American trenches, and Mark was on duty with three others of the stretcher bearers' company, ready for a call.

A corporal was at the dugout door. "Stretcher bearers!" he whispered.

The four men were on their feet immediately, two stretchers ready.

"A man hit between the lines," said the corporal. "You've got to bring him in. You can see him from this loop-hole."

Mark stepped upon the sentry's platform and saw, indistinct in the darkness, a huddled form about half-way to the German trenches.

Then he heard Kellerman's voice at his side.

"A man of the — got hit," he said. "Bring him in, Weston. Make a quick job of it. Corporal Haines, you'll take charge. You two will be ready to take out your stretcher in case anything happens," he added to the two others.

The corporal led the way, crouching, toward the gap in the wires. They passed two lines, traversed a diagonal lane, and emerged beyond the third, into the open. The body of the wounded man, which had disappeared, came into light, a black patch under the stars.

"Get down!" whispered the corporal.

They flung themselves to the ground, and proceeded to wriggle forward, under his directions, pushing the stretcher as noiselessly as possible across the rough ground. Suddenly the man with Mark uttered an exclamation.

"What the devil's he sent us on this job for?" he demanded truculently.

"Shut up, you fool!" whispered the corporal hoarsely.

"That ain't the man. He's been there these past three days. Dutchman he is; every listening post party knows him. What's the good of bringing him in? He ain't got no head to him."

"What you talking about?" snarled the corporal. "That's the man the Major said, and there ain't no other in sight. Telt!"

They flattened themselves as a rocket burst into the air above the German lines.

Then the machine guns burst forth. "Rat-tat-tat-tat!" sang the bullets overhead.

They swished through the grass and pattered on the ground. No answer came from the section of the American line immediately behind the defenders, but on each side there came answering volleys, making the air an inferno of crackling death. Then, gradually, the alarm subsided. The rocket showers died down.

"Now, boys!" whispered the corporal.

They crawled onward. The huddled form came into clear view. The body seemed to be already blending with the earth, melting into formlessness; and there was no need to wonder whether this was of a dead or wounded man.

The corporal swore.

"I told you so!" mumbled Mark's companion. "I told you so. What's he sent us here for, the fool?"

His words ended in a gurgle. From behind the shelter of the corpse leaped five men. Noiselessly they flung themselves upon the party of three. Mark felt a pistol at his temple.

"Surrender!" hissed a voice in his ear.

In a flash he realized the trap. The three were unarmed, noncombatants; it was a counter-raid—and Kellerman had known that the enemy were abroad that night and suspected their rendezvous.

He saw his two companions being dragged, unresisting, toward the German lines. Three men were with them; besides his immediate antagonist there was only one other figure in the immediate vicinity, and that one had half turned away.

And the thought of the infernal trap goaded Mark to madness. As his captor, never suspecting resistance on his part, led the muzzle of the pistol droop, Mark drew back his hand and struck upward with all his might.

He felt the burn of the powder as the discharged bullet sped under his chin, he heard the startled cry of the Germans; and then a furious outburst of machine-gun fire came from the trenches opposite. Two Very lights went up, revealing the two struggling men to the sentries on either side.

Mark saw a powerful man, a sergeant, he thought, with close-cropped yellow hair and the body of a Hercules. The man dashed at him, striking madly with his bare fists. The two fought amid a hailstorm of bullets.

Suddenly the German uttered a choking cry and dropped, blood spurting from his throat, where a chance bullet had found him. As he fell, Mark precipitated himself upon him and lay flat on the ground.

The firing died away. Captain Mark began to crawl back toward the parapet of his lines. A whispered challenge, an answer, and he had scaled the sandbags and descended into the mud of the trench, to find the firing posts crowded and himself facing Kellerman and the company captain.

Inwardly boiling, he stood still. It was too dark to see the expression on Kellerman's face, but he could imagine the sneering grin that disfigured it.

"Well?" said Kellerman sharply.

"The man you sent me to bring in was dead. He had been there for days."

"Where are your companions?" demanded Kellerman.

"Captured."

"And you?"

"We were attacked in the dark. I fought with my man until a bullet killed him. The others were taken."

"And your stretcher?" asked Kellerman with a bland sneer.

"I left it between the lines. Do you wish me to go back for it, sir?"

"This man is lying," said Kellerman to the Captain calmly. "He abandoned his companions and ran away. He lost his stretcher. Put him under arrest."

The Captain beckoned to the platoon sergeant, who came forward.

"I'd like to say one thing," said Mark, striving to keep his voice steady. "We three were sent out to bring in a dead man, who had been dead for days—anyone here will bear me out in this. Was any man wounded tonight? There was only one body in this section."

In their verdict, and the fourth, of high rank, who had passed the sentence, stood rather stiffly at the door of the little headquarters village house, watching Mark as, with hands chained, he was marched away by two armed guards toward the jail.

When he was out of sight they unbent.

"D—n it!" said one.

"My sentiments," answered another. "What do you think, McKinnon?"

"I don't want to think about it."

"If it had been some tough who had got roped into the army—a gunman or that sort—but—"

"Well, if the fellow's a gentleman, why did he do it? He must have known."

"And, after all, he might have been respited for the blow, but the gross cowardice—"

"I don't see that. The blow was worse than the cowardice. A new hand, between the lines at night, his first night—Kellerman shouldn't have sent him—"

"I don't follow you there. Kellerman had known the man in the U. S. and wanted to give him a chance to redeem himself."

At nightfall Mark was sitting in his cell. He had eaten, he had composed himself to meet his end according to the traditions of his caste and race; but he could not meet it calmly. He had deliberately flung everything away; he had let Kellerman goad him to madness; he was going to die without even the soldier's satisfaction of duty honorably done. And he could not compose himself.

Suddenly he heard the outer gate of the prison click; then came the sound of voices, footsteps, a woman's swishing skirts; Eleanor and Colonel Howard stood at the barred entrance with the guard.

Mark rose from his bed and stood staring at them; he could hardly believe them real. The guard unlocked the door of the cell. Eleanor shrank back against the corner of the manor, her kerchief to her lip, her face chalky white. Suddenly she started forward. The Colonel whispered a word, she brushed him aside as if she had not heard him. Her arms sought Mark's neck and found it. She pressed her lips to his.

"Captain Mark! Dear Captain Mark!" she sobbed.

And, holding her closely to him, and forgetting Howard's presence and everything else, Mark found his peace.

Colonel Howard was trying to calm her, to assuage her frantic grief. At last he persuaded her to sit down. He took Mark by the arm as if he were a child, and placed him beside her.

"Mark, my dear boy—Mark, I heard of it only five minutes ago," he said. "I had to spend the night here, and Eleanor had got leave to meet me. I've just learned the outlines of it. I'm trying to get the General. Yes, yes, I know he refused this morning, but he didn't know. I'm only going to ask for a respite till I can see him personally. It will come out all right. Now tell me, Mark, what happened? How did Kellerman meet you? Why did you strike him? I don't ask about the charge of cowardice, because that isn't worth speaking about. I'll settle that with the General—I haven't forgotten Santiago. But about that blow, Mark—how did it all happen? Tell me exactly, so that I—"

It was unlike the old Colonel to gabble so fast. Perhaps he was afraid of breaking down.

"Can't tell the General. Now begin, Mark. Tell me from the beginning."

But Mark did not open his lips. And before Colonel Howard could resume Eleanor had sprung up and faced Mark eagerly.

"Now, Captain Mark, listen! If you've never listened to me before, listen now!" she cried. "I know you aren't going to tell the Colonel. It's like you, Captain Mark. You're stubborn. You have a stupid, wicked streak of stubbornness in you that always prevents you from letting the world see what a dear, good, splendid man you are. I know you through and through, though you've never known I did. You've ruined your life by your silly silences. You seem to like to be misunderstood. You like things to go wrong with you, so that you can suffer undeservingly. But it isn't her fault, you know, Captain Mark. It's stubborn and wrong, and where others are concerned, it's criminal. Where others are concerned—others who love you, Captain Mark!"

She spoke with intense passion, but when she ended, she put her arms quietly about his neck. "Tell the Colonel, Captain Mark, because of me," she said.

"There's nothing to tell, my dear," said Mark, groping for the words that would not come. "I struck him because he—"

And he could say nothing. Of Kellerman's blow outside the inn, of his false offer of friendship, of the treachery that had risked three lives that Mark might die on a false errand—nothing! And, if he had been able to speak, he could not have told. Yet he was ignorant of the inhibitory process that now, as always, held him in silence.

But Eleanor clung to him. "Yes, Captain Mark. Because he—"

"He sent three of us out to rescue a wounded man unnecessarily," said Mark lamely.

He saw a spasm pass over Howard's face. This was worse than Howard could have believed. The Colonel was shaken; his faith was strong, but he was one of those who accept the obvious.

"Listen, Captain Mark!" said Eleanor, speaking as if to a baby. "That isn't what you wanted to say. You had no thought of criticizing your superior officer, even if you thought him wrong."

That isn't what you meant. Perhaps he'll tell me, father! Stand back a little. Now, whisper it, Captain Mark!"

But in the shelter of Eleanor's arms Mark felt altogether at peace. What did it matter, all this of long ago?

"Are you going to marry Kellerman, Eleanor?" he asked.

Very softly, in the obscurity, he felt her shake her head. And the action had precisely the opposite effect of what Eleanor had intended.

For nothing mattered any more, nothing at all. He couldn't find excuses—Mark Wallace had never excused himself in his life.

Eleanor drew herself out of his arms and looked at him. He looked from her face to the Colonel's. Why were they worrying him? How could he hope to save his life by going into the obscure details and explanations that they required of him?

And what a long rignarole, beginning back in the war department! Mark could not string a case together; his mind was not constructed in that fashion.

Eleanor laid her hand on his arm. "Captain Mark—don't you see that every moment is torture to us?" she asked.

There was a terrible intensity in her tone, as if she were holding herself rigidly in restraint, for fear that she would fall should she yield to her emotion.

"I struck him," stammered Mark. "I told you why. I thought he was wrong to risk those lives—I—"

The look upon each face seemed to be frozen there; it was as if their lives and not Mark's, hung upon his words.

Suddenly a shriek pierced the sky, cutting off Mark's speech, and a shell burst somewhere by with a shattering detonation, followed by the dull boom of a distant gun. The Colonel started, and then resumed his gaze.

It seemed to Mark as if that was an eternity of torture. He struggled in his mind desperately to find words to say when the noise subsided.

But there came a stunning sound that seemed to split his ear-drums. He fell forward, and felt as if some one had lifted him; looked out into darkness, sought Eleanor and knew nothing.

(Continued next week.)

NOTICE OF FINAL SETTLEMENT.

Notice is hereby given that the undersigned executor of the estate of Robert Griffin, deceased, has filed his account for the final settlement of said estate in the County Court of the State of Oregon in Lane County, and that Monday, the 6th day of January, 1919, at the Court Room of said Court, in Eugene, Oregon, at 11 o'clock a. m., has been by said Court fixed as the time and place of hearing objections thereto and for final settlement of said estate, by order made and entered of record the 3rd day of December, 1918. All parties interested will therefore take notice.

A. E. JURY, Executor of the estate of Robert Griffin, deceased. H. J. Shinn, attorney for said estate, j3

SHERIFF'S SALE ON EXECUTION IN FORECLOSURE.

Notice is hereby given that by virtue of an execution in foreclosure issued out of the Circuit Court of Lane County, Oregon, on the 27th day of November, 1918, in a suit wherein on the 28th day of November, 1918, in the above entitled court, Louisa M. Harding, plaintiff, recovered judgment against defendants Alta King as administrator of the estate of J. H. Derby, deceased, D. C. Derby, Alva Derby, John F. Derby, Fred Leslie Derby, Rollin Woolley and Bertha E. Woolley, for \$686.80 with interest thereon from the 25th day of September, 1918, at the rate of 10 per cent per annum, and \$68.00 attorney fees, and the further sum of \$50.00 costs and disbursements, which judgment was enrolled and docketed in the clerk's office of said County in said county on the 27th day of November, 1918, and said execution to me directed commanding me in the name of the State of Oregon, in order to satisfy said judgment, attorneys fees, costs and disbursements and accruing costs, to sell the following described real property, to-wit:

The northeast quarter of the northeast quarter of section two (2) in township twenty-one (21) south range four (4) west of Willamette meridian, in Lane County, Oregon.

Now, therefore, in the name of the State of Oregon, in compliance with said execution and order of sale and in order to satisfy said judgment, attorneys fees, costs and disbursements and accruing costs, I will, on Saturday, the 4th day of January, 1919, at one o'clock in the afternoon of said day, at the southwest door of the county court house in Eugene, Lane County, Oregon, offer for sale and sell for cash at public auction, subject to redemption as provided by law, all of the right, title and interest of said defendants, or any of them or any other person or persons claiming by, through or under them or any of them in and to said mortgaged premises.

Dated this 3rd day of December, A. D. 1918.

D. A. ELKINS, d6-j3 Sheriff of Lane County, Oregon.

NOTICE TO CREDITORS.

Notice is hereby given that the undersigned was, on the 14th day of December, A. D. 1918, duly appointed administratrix of the estate of Samuel H. McKernan, deceased, by the County Court of Lane County, State of Oregon. All persons having claims against the said estate are hereby notified and required to present the same to the undersigned, verified as by law required, at her residence on North Pacific Highway, in Cottage Grove, Lane County, Oregon, within six months from the date of the first publication of this notice.

LAURA E. McKERNAN, Administratrix of the estate of Samuel H. McKernan, deceased.

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Swift & Company, U. S. A.



SHERIFF'S SALE ON EXECUTION IN FORECLOSURE.

Notice is hereby given that by virtue of an execution in foreclosure issued out of the Circuit Court of Lane County, Oregon, on the 10th day of December, 1918, in a suit wherein on the 10th day of December, 1918, in the above entitled court, John W. Trunnell and Mary R. Trunnell, plaintiffs, recovered judgment against the defendants, Mintie R. Tonole and Pete Tonole, for \$311.15 with interest thereon from the 30th day of October, 1918, at the rate of 10 per cent per annum and \$50.00 attorneys fees and the further sum of \$16.00 costs and disbursements, which judgment was enrolled and docketed in the Clerk's office of said county in said county on the 10th day of December, 1918, and said execution to me directed commanding me in the name of the State of Oregon, in order to satisfy said judgment, attorneys fees, costs and disbursements and accruing costs, to sell the following described real property, to-wit:

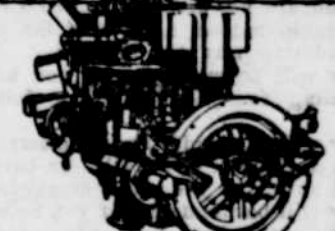
Beginning at a point in section twelve (12) Twp. twenty-one (21) S. R. four (4) west, where the west line of Ira Hawley's D. L. C. crosses the north

line of the right of way of the O. & C. railroad thence north on said Ira Hawley's west line 30 feet, thence west 30 feet distant from and parallel to said right of way 500 feet, thence south 30 feet to said north line of right of way and thence east 500 feet to the place of beginning, formerly in Douglas county but now in Lane county, Oregon.

Now, therefore, in the name of the State of Oregon, in compliance with said execution and order of sale and in order to satisfy said judgment, attorneys fees, costs and disbursements and accruing costs, I will on Saturday, the 11th day of January, 1919, at one o'clock in the afternoon of said day at the southwest door of the county court house in Eugene, Lane county, Oregon, offer for sale and sell for cash, at public auction subject to redemption as provided by law, all of the right, title and interest of said defendants, Mintie R. Tonole and Pete Tonole, or either of them or any person or persons claiming by, through or under them or either of them in and to said mortgaged premises.

D. A. ELKINS, D13-j10 Sheriff of Lane County, Ore.

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CHAPTER XIV.

The three officers who had brought