

BRIDE of BATTLE

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

By VICTOR ROUSSEAU

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CHAPTER XVI.

Even as he kissed her in return he saw the startled glance that she cast behind her, and, following it with his eyes, he saw a tall figure in uniform emerge from the recesses of the orifice; and again he stood face to face with Kellerman.

Eleanor released him and stood, still clinging to him, at his side, her hand drawn through his arm. The contrast between the two men was extraordinary. Kellerman looked as if he had just stepped into his uniform; his gloved hands, his adjusted belt, the creases in his tunic were those of the fashion-plate. Looking at Mark, he saw a dirty, grimed, almost unrecognizable figure, with uniform that hung about him in great tatters, blotched and stained with blood.

"You said he would not come back!" cried Eleanor. "You see he has come back. What have you to say more?"

"You misunderstood me, Eleanor—" "I understand you now for the first time in my life. I liked you, Major Kellerman. I trusted you and I believed in you. When you told me that you were working to get Captain Wallace his recognition I was glad, and proud of you both, and happy. What did you do?"

"What did he do?" cried Kellerman furiously. "Why should you believe evil things of me, because he said them?"

"He never spoke one word against you!"

"When the decision has already been made by an impartial court, anxious to clear a soldier's character, if that were possible?"

"Because I have a woman's instinct, Major Kellerman."

"Enough of this," interposed Mark. "What are you doing here, sir?"

He snapped the last word out in irony so bitter that Kellerman winced.

"So you've cheated the firing party, Private Weston!" he said, with his habitual sneer.

"O, call me Mark while you're about it," answered Wallace. "Or please remember that I am no longer under your command, nor a soldier in the American army. Technically I am a dead man, Major Kellerman, and dead men—"

"Tell no tales, eh?" responded Kellerman savagely. "Well, here we stand man to man, and the conditions warrant plain speaking. It is not my business to plac you under arrest. But, if I do so, you are aware that your life will be worth about five minutes' purchase. So go, Mr. Weston, or Wallace, or whatever you call yourself now. Go—if Miss Eleanor here says the one word that will set you free. Go—and in this confusion you will have a reasonable chance to escape, with those ready wits of yours."

"The one word?" Eleanor gasped.

"The one word 'yes,'" responded Kellerman.

"I will never become your wife, Major Kellerman."

"So you told me the other day, after leading me to suppose that it was your intention," answered Kellerman easily. "Stop, Mr. Weston, if you please, and let me finish. War doesn't leave much sentimentality in a man. We know what life is worth, and we know that life's a matter of bargaining. When we were in America I might have accepted my dismissal, Eleanor. But here we three stand under the naked heaven, like ants on a hill. All artificial distinctions have fallen away. I've loved you for many months, Eleanor, and I want to marry you. That's the bald truth of it. In order to persuade you, I am willing to let this gentleman escape—to facilitate his escape, even to make our marriage dependent on my success. That's fair, isn't it? And, what have you against me? Is it my fault that he was court-martialed and sentenced to death for striking an officer?"

The man's effrontery took Mark's breath away.

"My answer," responded Eleanor steadily, "is 'no.' And even if you could send him to his death it would still be 'no.' Because he himself would wish that. But you can't harm him. Something convinces me that all the harm that has come to him has come from you. And it tells me, too, that your power has ended. 'No,' is my answer."

"And yours, Mr. Weston?" asked Kellerman, looking at Mark.

Mark, unable to reply, pointed toward the opening of the recess. Kellerman turned and strode toward it. Then he

turned.

"There's one thing more to say," he said. "Your action in dismissing me, Miss Howard, savors of the romantic drama. Your life has been a romantic one, with a certain high-strung idealism in it, due to the circumstances of your upbringing. It was that, I believe, which made you think it your

duty to follow your adopted father's unit to the front. I think you ought to know who you are. Your father died on the battlefield of Santiago. He was a fugitive from justice. He was the notorious Hampton."

Mark uttered a cry. He sprang toward Kellerman, but Kellerman dealt him a blow that sent him stumbling among the bricks.

"That's a lie, Kellerman!" said Colonel Howard quietly.

The old Colonel's eyes were wide open. He laid his hands laboriously upon the edge of the brick wall and, with a great effort, raised himself to his feet.

"That's a lie," he repeated.

"It is no lie, Colonel Howard. You told the whole story to Captain Wallace in the hospital tent. Never mind how I know. I know."

"You damned, dirty spy!" said the old Colonel.

"A confession," answered Kellerman blandly. "Your words were strong ones, Colonel Howard. Deny them if you can. You said, 'A thousand years of hell wouldn't atone for that crime.' You said 'it was calculated, cold-blooded deliberation.' You said, 'The case against Hampton was absolutely proven. He was to have been hanged as soon as we captured Santiago. He was born rotten. He sold his country to pay his gambling debts.' And you called him by the worst name one man can call another. That was why you tried to persuade Mark Wallace not to adopt Hampton's child. Like father, like daughter."

He swung round upon Eleanor, and for the first time seemed to lose his self-control.

"That's who you are!" he cried. "The child of a wretched traitor, who worked

for the Confederacy!"

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"Nothing much, sir," answered the Colonel, attempting to make the passage.

The General gave him his arm and assisted him, and, when he stood still, placed one arm about him to steady him.

"Do you recognize that man?" he asked.

The Colonel stiffened; Kellerman fell back against the wall.

"As I'm a living man," cried Colonel Howard, "it's Hampton!"

CHAPTER XVII.

Hartley sat up on the stretcher and fixed his eyes on Howard's face. It was evident that he was desperately wounded. One of the orderlies knelt beside him and held him.

"This man," said the General, chewing at his mustache in emotion which he could not altogether hide, "was once an officer in the service of our country. He was engaged in confidential work in the war department. He was accused of espionage—unjustly accused."

With a low cry Eleanor rushed forward and knelt beside the stricken man; she placed her arms about him and drew his head down upon her shoulder, looking pitiously into the weary eyes. Hampton raised her hand to his lips and kissed it.

"Unjustly accused," repeated the General. "Major Kellerman, stand to attention, sir! You shall be heard later. He was the victim of the System, which was even then laying its plans in Washington. He was the victim of a woman named Morsheim—Hilda Morsheim, whose activities were well known, though we could then do nothing to counteract them. She made a specialty of luring young officers into gambling dens, winning large sums from them, and thus leading them down the slope toward disgrace and death."

"She had a confederate who was highly placed in the war department. When, by their united efforts, they failed to make a traitor of Captain Hampton, they compassed his ruin. How they did so I need not describe now. The facts are of record; it is enough to say that they succeeded. Hampton was driven into exile; but they were not satisfied with that. They broke his career, they drove him from the company of all decent men. But that was not enough. They broke his wife's heart; she died. They made his name one of execration. Still they were not satisfied. With devilish ingenuity they sought to cover their tracks by making it appear that Hampton was still carrying on his trade, still selling government secrets. You see why, Colonel?" he continued, turning to Howard. "Because they themselves were continuing their vile work, and the new leakages had to be accounted for."

Kellerman, ghastly white, leaned against the brick wall; he was fumbling nervously in his tunic pocket.

"I suppose, sir, that you are accusing—" he began.

"Be silent, sir! Gentlemen," he continued, addressing Mark and the Colonel, "you are interested in knowing what happened to this man Hampton. He could not rid himself of the belief that justice, though slow, is pretty sure. He had faith in God. Unfortunately he had less faith in himself. Am I wronging you, Hampton?" he continued, addressing Hartley.

"No, sir," muttered the man on the stretcher, feebly.

"He wishes me to tell the whole story. He went to Cuba and fung in his lot with the rebels. He became disgusted with their means and methods, obtained a pardon from General Weyler, and took up his residence in Santiago. The outbreak of the war surprised him there. He knew that Santiago would fall, and he had been warned that he would receive short shrift at the hands of our people."

"He longed for death, but he had two things that kept alive the desire for life. One was his child, the other the desire for vindication, which had become a monomania. He tried to escape into the jungle. He saw that it was hopeless."

"He was hiding in a little hut when he heard footsteps. An American soldier, who had strayed from his company, was coming into the clearing. At that moment a stray bullet caught him in the head, killing him instantly. Hampton saw his chance. He took off the dead man's clothing and put it on; he dressed the body in his own. He knew that by this means he could pass through the lines in the guise of a wounded man, until he had a chance to get rid of his uniform in the cabin of some Cuban, who would be only too well pleased to give him some rags in exchange for it. And, leaving his money and papers on the dead man, he knew that he left his identity behind, for the bullet had destroyed the features."

"There was the child—but Hampton knew that he could take her no further. With the Americans she would receive food—which he had not—and shelter and protection. Afterward he would regain her. He lurked in the bushes until he saw Captain Wallace appear, watched him, trusted him, and went away."

"He learned of the child's adoption, and for years he haunted her home, her school, all places that were her residence, ever craving her, ever restrained by the realization that, till his name was cleared, he had no right to her. His idea of vindication had become, as I said, a monomania."

"Now, gentlemen, I have little time to spare, but I must carry this story to the end. I said that he had less faith in himself than he had in God. Once, for three years, Hampton lost his child. She had gone to San Francisco. In his despair he went to Washington, he sought out Hilda Morsheim, who was still plying her trade, and

begged, as he had never begged anyone, that she would vindicate his name."

There was a stillness as of utter death inside the little cave.

"She saw in him one of those useful spies such as her organization used, broken men with inside knowledge of conditions. She used him, held out promises, broke them; in his despair he made himself a slave to her—and her confederate, forgetting his manhood and what he had been. Time and again they broke faith with him. He had just realized that he had nothing to hope for from them when Captain Wallace appeared on the scene."

"Yes, he was a rotten dog, sir," said Kellerman, with the ghost of a smile. "Is it on such evidence that you presume—?"

"No, sir, it is not!" thundered the General. "It is on the evidence of the woman Hilda Morsheim, alias Kenson, secured by Hampton under circumstances which—"

Kellerman ptered a low cry; he was trembling now, and all his bravado seemed to have oozed away.

"This woman, strangely enough, loved her confederate," went on the General remorselessly, fixing his eyes full on Kellerman's now, while Kellerman blinked like a bat in daylight, and turned his head weakly from side to side, as if under the intolerable glare of a searchlight. "Her class on him were strong enough, God knows! She wanted him to marry her, to take her away from the old scenes that they might have a chance to redeem their wretched lives together. He had promised her that so many times—and the worst of women is as wax in the hands of the man she loves."

"But he had become infatuated with another, with a girl as much above him as—"

With a cry that seemed hardly human Colonel Howard sprang toward Kellerman, his fingers twitching as if he sought to fasten them about his throat. Mark caught him and held him, while the old man swayed to and fro, his outstretched arm extended toward Kellerman as if in imprecation.

Eleanor, at Hartley's side, did not even look toward them.

"This woman, Morsheim—Kenson—whatever you call her, came to France, upon receipt of a message which had

cut her to the heart, shown her the hopelessness of her dreams, and taught her that the one man in whom she had believed was worthless clay. To do her justice, let us suppose that, even in her worst acts, she had been sustained by a sense of duty to her country."

"She met her confederate in an inn at a village not far distant. Frantic at her appearance, he induced her to let him drive her back through the lines, and on the way renewed his lying promises. This time she doubted him."

"Two men had overheard their conversation. One was Captain Wallace, whom the pair had broken as they broke poor Hampton. Him the traitor had seen, and he devised a scheme to send him to the trenches and contrive to have him sent on a false and fatal errand. With that point I shall not now deal. The other man was Hampton, who had enlisted under an alias, in the belief that he would obtain a clue that would unmask the traitor. He contrived to go back through the lines, found the woman, and somehow—perhaps by God's wonderful mercy—obtained her signed confession—which I have here, in full!"

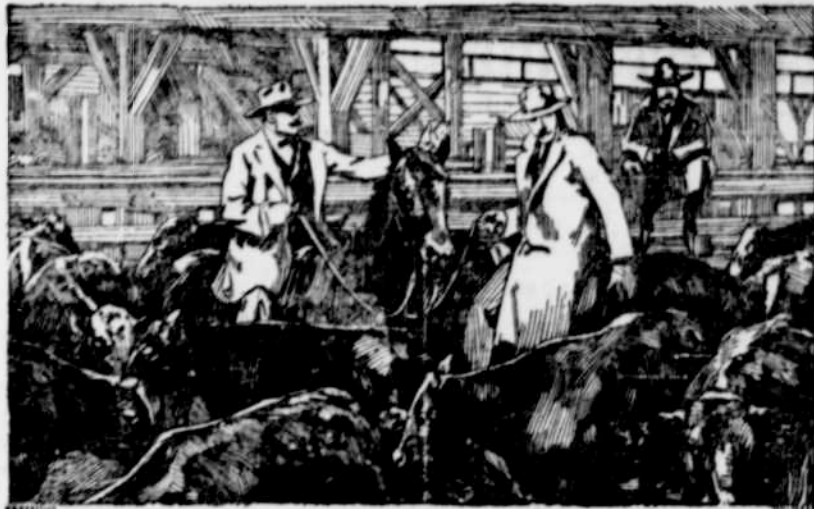
He wheeled upon Kellerman. "Major Kellerman," he said in a deep voice that vibrated almost with pity, so charged with significance that its meaning could not escape either Howard or Mark, "you are under arrest. You will go toward your quarters, first removing your belt and arms."

Kellerman saluted weakly and stumbled out of the cave. The General looked at Mark.

"The soldier Weston receives a free and full pardon for his valor in the field this day," he said. "He is also discharged honorably from the service of the United States government."

Mark looked at the general in astonishment; this was the last thing that he desired.

The General approached and clapped him on the shoulder. "Captain Wallace," he said, "your written resignation from the United States army cannot be accepted, owing to the state of war. After the war it will receive con-



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Swift & Company, U. S. A.



Red Cross Roll Call

(Continued from page 1)

Star Allen, Fairy D. Fisher, Frank Kerr, Clyde Owen, Mrs. L. D. Pitcher, Miles Shearer, Pearl Stewart, J. B. Spahr, Hattie

Spahr, James Shearer, Harry Wicks, Miles Wicks, Ida M. Williams, Frank Vannosman, Frank

Wildwood Cline, H. S. Cameron, C. J. Cameron, Mrs. C. J. Damewood, J. E.

Damewood, Bernice Damewood, Bertha Hunt, L. W. Hunt, Mrs. L. W. Hunt, Johnnie Mitchell, Gladys Pugh, Mr. and Mrs. I. Suter, Eva Whitlock, Avanello (Continued next week)

sideration. In the meantime you will resume your duties on the headquarters staff."

Tears rushed to Mark's eyes. He tried to speak, he was conscious that the General and Howard were shaking him by the hand; and then a quick glance from Eleanor drew him to where she knelt by Hartley.

A single look showed him that the man was dying.

Mark knelt on one side of him, with Eleanor facing him over the stretcher. The bearers, who had fallen back, stood still as images behind. And behind them Mark had the dim consciousness in the background of his mind of Kellerman, broken as he had broken so many, and fumbling, always fumbling, now with his tunic, now with the belt that he was trying to detach with shaking fingers.

"Hartley!" whispered Mark, holding the dying man's hand in his. "That was you today—I missed you, but I believed in you. You saved me."

There was a fluttering pressure of Mark's hand in turn. Hampton was speaking; he was asking for the Colonel.

"I am here, Hampton," said Colonel Howard in a choked voice, as he leaned over him.

"You believe in me now, sir?" muttered the dying man, rolling his head unwearily in the effort to see.

"May God forgive me, Hampton! May she—your wife—forgive me. Tell her that, and tell her her words came true. I betrayed my best friend, and

I've suffered for it, and I shall suffer to the last day of my life."

"She forgives you, Howard," said Hampton, speaking now with such solemnity that his words seemed to his listeners to be inspired. "There's—only one thing—I want, Howard, old man."

"Yes, my dear boy—yes, Hampton."

"Put my name—back on the mess list," whispered Hampton.

Through his tears Mark was conscious that the interminable fumbling outside the cave had ceased. As Hampton fell back there came the sudden crack of a revolver shot.

The General's form blocked the entrance as they raised their heads. Mark placed his hands across Eleanor's eyes and drew her away.

(Continued next week.)

Night Letters Cheaper.

A new telegraph night letter rate went into effect January 1 whereby people of Cottage Grove may send short messages to the Atlantic coast for as low as 50 cents with an added charge of only 2 cents a word for messages above the minimum. The minimum before was \$1. Other night rates have been proportionately reduced. Delivery of messages at the reduced rate will be made in the city of receipt by postal carrier.

If a news item is not printed, it is because we do not know of it. We have neither friends nor enemies when it comes to publishing the news. If you have an item, grab the phone and tell us about it.