

BRIDE OF BATTLE

A Romance of the
AMERICAN ARMY
Fighting on the Battlefields of
FRANCE



By VICTOR ROUSSEAU

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CHAPTER II.

He stopped, astonished at the way Major took his suggestion. How he began to stutter, paced the inside of the tent for some moments, muttering to himself, and then swung round on his heel, facing the lieutenant.

"Good God, no, Wallace! Whatever that infernal idea into your head?" exploded. "See here, now! You're well enough to talk this thing over. Some day I'll tell you why my proposal is impossible."

"That's all very well, Major. I don't know what you mean, but if you don't like my proposition you know what you can do. I'm quite well enough to go to what's worrying you. Dig it!"

"I haven't time, Wallace. There's these stragglers to be sorted out. Not at all that can be done tonight, I suppose. Sometime I'll tell you—"

He swung round on his heel and made for the entrance, stopped and returned.

"I suppose I'd better tell you now," exclaimed. "I had thought it might as well not to tell you ever. You don't happen to know who this child's mother was—that man in the tent?"

"What do you mean, Major? Some soldier caught by a bullet, I suppose." "Hampton!" said Major Howard, sharply.

Lieutenant Wallace sat bolt upright in the bed and stared at the other in amazement.

"The man who sold our mobilization to Spain?" he whispered, conscious of a sudden terror for the child. The major nodded. "It's years ago we worked together in the war," he answered. "And, frankly, I don't know the face. You wouldn't know, would you, after the work that a bullet had done? One of those—"

"—dum-dums. But—you didn't know this, did you?"

He took a purse from his pocket, opened it and shook out three gold coins into his hand. "That was on a bet about the body," he said. "And"

He looked at the other in amazement.

"There were some papers—not the ones I wanted, but enough to identify Hampton." It was Hampton all right.

He went to the tent door and looked out. "Here, Johnson!" he called.

The negro servant appeared almost automatically within the opening and stood to attention.

"Could you use three gold pieces, Johnson?" inquired Major Howard.

"Well, sah, I don't know as I'd oblige," replied the negro, grinning.

"It's part of a sum that was paid in an American soldier for betraying his country."

"Oh, Lord, no, Major!" answered Johnson.

"Then do what you think best with them." The negro looked at the gold coins in his hand, stepped outside the tent and swung his arm. The pieces fell in the jungle grass far beyond the equipment. Major Howard shied to the left after them and went back to the Major. Wallace still sat upright on the bed. He noticed, with a certain grimace of spirit, that one of the lieutenant's hands rested on the child's fair hair.

"Well, Wallace?" he asked. "It's damnable." "I can't exactly make his child a regimental pet, can we?" Wallace was silent, and the Major

sat down on the edge of the bed beside him.

"I had orders to watch for him," he said. "He was to have been hanged as soon as we captured Santiago. That's why he was making for the jungle. He was detected and allowed to escape with his life, but he had been working as a Spanish agent since he was drummed out of America. His career ended at the luckiest moment for him. He seems to have had the one redeeming quality of affection for the child, though if he had had a particle of unselfishness in him he would have left her behind him. I suppose she was the only thing he had in his wretched life."

"Of course there's no palliation," suggested Wallace. "But the man may have been born good and—gone downhill."

"He was born rotten," answered the Major. "He sold his country to pay his gambling debts. Cuba was about the only place that would hold him, I imagine. And to think that swine was once in our regiment! Sorry I had to tell you, Wallace!"

He hesitated a while; Wallace had not moved; but the child at his side stirred and breathed heavily. The major's fists clenched.

"I'm trying to be just to the dead," he said. "But I feel that a thousand years of hell wouldn't atone for that crime, Wallace."

Mark Wallace looked up. "I'm not sure that I know all the facts about the case, Major," he said.

"The facts are that it was no sudden act of fear or temptation, but calculated, cold-blooded deliberation. We knew at the war office that there was a leakage. It had been traced to the mobilization division, where Kellerman and I were working. Even we were under suspicion for a time. Then it narrowed down to Hampton and another."

"Wallace, those months were the worst time I've ever spent. Hampton was my best friend, and Kellerman's, too. We spied on him—had to."

"Well, you know what happened, more or less. There was a woman go-between, as there generally is—a fine-looking young woman, little more than a girl, named Hilda Morsheim. One of those French-German Alsatians, Wallace. Kellerman got some hold on her, and she confessed. The case against Hampton was absolutely proven."

"There wasn't any trial. The fellow could have been shut up for a good many years; he had cost his country millions; he ought to have been hanged. But he was quietly cashiered and allowed to disappear. Maybe it was a foolish move, but we felt the shame pretty badly and wanted to forget it. Hampton was let go, on the understanding that he leave the country forever. Oh, yes, he assumed the innocent air quite dramatically. Some of the war office people believed in him until the damning documents were laid before them."

"And he was still somehow in touch with things, Wallace, and the leakages went on afterward. That's why we had orders to hang him as soon as Santiago was taken. He did the kindest thing he could have done to himself when he got in the way of that sniper's bullet."

"I'll tell you who the child's mother was, Wallace, because I was unfortunate enough to know her. She was a Miss Rennie, Miss Marjorie Rennie, of a Baltimore family—fine people, and, of course, with a tradition like that, she believed in the scoundrel absolutely. She came to me twice. The first time was before the informal trial held by the department. She begged me to believe he was innocent and the victim of a trap. I wouldn't even listen. You know, when a man has to run down his friend he has to harden his heart."

"She came to me again, after Hampton was broken. She told me I had played false to my best friend and that I'd suffer for it to the last day of my life. I've never forgotten that interview, and you can guess how it made me mad to hang Hampton when we learned that he was still keeping up the game from his exile in Cuba. He must have got quite a number of confidential papers out of the war office. That's about all."

"It's enough," said Wallace. "The girl married him, then?"

"So much we learned. And also that she died later. You see, we've been pretty close on the fellow's track the last couple of years—ever since the war became a probability, in fact. Most of the officers in the regiment are since that time, but I guess they all knew something, and kept it quiet, like you."

Wallace nodded. "I fancy there's a good deal of feeling," he said.

"Quite a good deal," said the major, dubiously. "And I guess you'll agree with me that this makes it—let's say, a bit

the difficult to adopt his child officially?" "You mean the remembrance would be too bitter?"

"I mean that that position is the one and only position that she is disqualified from holding, by reason of birth."

"Still," urged Wallace, "it isn't in the blood. The mother was decent. Why should that baby be tarnished with her father's treachery?"

"It's written in the Good Book—" began the major.

"And there's something else about coats of fire, too, Major, which came as a sort of revision of the old law. It's just what we ought to do, because it's the only way to adjust the matter."

"Adjust it? Adjust what?" cried the Major, with sudden passion.

"The whole of that hellish business, Major. The man was once an officer of the Seventieth. He's dead and his crimes have died with him. We want to forget that such a thing could have happened, and the only way is to leave him to God's judgment and to cast out all bitterness from our hearts. You quoted Scripture to me—well, I gave you the answer from the same Book. Let death bring oblivion to the man's memory. He's left us the child. Start here. Start fresh. I have the right to the kid, but what you have told me makes me feel strongly that there's a Providence in this affair, and I'll lend her to you—mark that word, Major!—on that condition or none."

Major Howard pulled at his mustache in agitation. "You don't really mean it, Wallace?" he asked.

"I do. If you want me to let you take her till the war's over—"

"It means forgiving that black-guard."

"It means forgetting him and letting the Judge judge."

"It goes against every instinct. I'd bring her up away from the regimental life. Besides, there are the others."

"Who else knows?"

"Well, of course, nobody else knows who the dead man was. The colonel will have to know. But he needn't know we've adopted the child. He's going South after the war. However, I'm afraid Kellerman knows. He recognized what was left of the face, or suspected somehow. I could tell from his manner."

"I don't see any overwhelming difficulty in that. You can trust Kellerman?"

The major nodded, and it occurred to Wallace that he would rather trust any of the officers than Kellerman. He had conceived a prejudice against him which he could not have explained.

"And Hampton's name was erased from the old mess list," Wallace continued.

The major, who had been pulling at his mustache and thinking deeply, came to his decision.

"Well, I'll take her on those terms, Wallace," he said. "The fellow was a bad lot, but, as you say, there may be no reason why this little animal should suffer for his sins. The mother was decent, and there may be something in that idea of a vicarious restitution. I'll agree, Wallace, if you'll let me take over the charge of her till the war's ended. We'll enter her on the mess book and settle a fictitious parentage on her afterward, and may she never know her father's history. By the time she's old enough to understand a mascot's duties, flirt with the lieutenants, and plead for the drunks, maybe we'll have forgotten it ourselves. Good-night, my boy. Take care of your wound. I'll send in that milk and biscuit and a couple of cakes of naphtha soap, and a porcelain tub with silver

trimmings, for you to make a start on her in the morning."

He glanced at the sleeping child, took Mark's hand and went quickly out of the tent. Under the sky he stood still for a few moments.

"The d—d scoundrel!" he muttered.

At that instant his alert ear heard what the sentry, posted some distance away, had failed to catch—the rustling of some moving figure in the dense jungle grass at the edge of the camp.

The major remained perfectly motionless, except for his right hand, which was swiftly withdrawing his revolver from its case. Suddenly he was transformed into action. He leaped between the two last tents of the line, to see a man confront him for an instant. In the light of the quarter-moon the major could not distinguish how the intruder was dressed. It was evident, however, that he had been prowling outside the tent which held Wallace and the child.

"Halt!" shouted the major and the sentry together, and, as the man dropped into the grass, the rifle and revolver rang out simultaneously.

The sentry, shouting to the guard, came running up. The major and he searched the spot, but they found nobody.

"One of those d—d Cuban sneak-thieves!" muttered Major Howard as he replaced his revolver in its case. And he hurried away to look after his men.

CHAPTER III.

Several years later Captain Mark Wallace descended from a street car and walked up the grounds of a very select young ladies' boarding school in Westchester county, New York, kept by two maiden ladies. Entering the colonial portico, the captain rang the bell and asked to see Miss Howard. Five minutes afterward, having satisfied the lady principal that he stood in the avuncular relation to her charge, and was a man of blameless life, he met Eleanor in the reception room.

It was some years since he had seen her. The primy little wife of the San-

tiago battlefield had shot up into a slim, long-legged schoolgirl, with brown hair tied back with a ribbon, and a face that already showed the promise of beauty.

The girl hurried forward as if expecting an embrace, realized Mark's intention, and checked herself quickly and held out both hands.

"Dear Uncle Mark!" she exclaimed. "I've been looking forward to you ever since I got your letter telling me that you were coming East."

"Well, it's nice to be appreciated like that," said Mark, laughing.

"I couldn't quite persuade myself that it was true, and that I should really see you at last. And you're not in the least like your photograph."

"Homelier, Eleanor?"

"No, but different. Older—very much older. You must be awfully old—quite thirty, I should say."

"Nearly," admitted Mark, wondering whether the long years in the West, with the sweltering heat and arduous service, had really aged him prematurely. Mark had had no influence to secure him anything better than a border post. He often wondered why he had not gone into civil life, like so many of his class, and amassed a competency in the first booming years of the twentieth century.

Something in the blood, perhaps, had held him to the army life, which he loved so much in principle and hated so much in practice. He was not far short of thirty; he had nothing but his meager pay; no ties but a married sister in Chicago and the girl in the boarding school, who filled so great a part of his thoughts, so disproportionate a share.

For until that day he had only seen her once since he picked her up in the jungle, and she had been too young to retain the memory of the meeting in Major Howard's home.

"I expected a young man, but I'm just as pleased to see you," said Eleanor. "I don't like very young men."

Mark received her amends with amusement, and they sat down deep by side upon the sofa, and were soon deep in conversation. Mark learned all

about her school and her friends. She was very happy there and would regret not going back at the end of the holidays. However, Major and Mrs. Howard had only placed her there for a few months while they went on a visit to the West.

"I always felt that you are really my guardian, even if you did give me up to Major Howard," said Eleanor.

"But I have only lent you," said Mark. "I couldn't very well take care of you when I was sent to Texas. And it has always been understood that you belong to me—I mean, that I am your guardian, Eleanor."

"I know," she said. "And you write me such splendid letters, with such good advice in them."

"Which you don't follow."

"Indeed I do," said the girl, eagerly. "Only sometimes it is just a little out of date, Uncle Mark."

"In what particular?" inquired Mark, beginning to feel a little like a prig in the presence of this self-possessed young person. It is so easy to assume the task of adviser from a distance, but difficult to retain the role face to face.

"Well, when you wrote me last year to remember not to be pert and forward, like modern children, Uncle Mark. Pertness comes at seven or eight. One isn't pert at twelve—at least, not in the way you meant. They call it ill-bred, then."

"I suppose I didn't realize how big you were getting," said Mark penitently. "But you can't think how glad I am to see you, anyway."

"It's a shame sticking you for years out in that horrible desert," said the girl. "I wish, Uncle Mark, you hadn't stayed in the army after the war."

"Why, my dear?"

"Because then you could have gone into business in New York, like Captain Murray and Captain Crawford."

"I've been thinking about as much myself, Eleanor. But I guess the army got hold of me."

"But they haven't treated you rightly, Uncle Mark. They haven't promoted you for years, and they have turned all sorts of officers over your

head. Major Howard was saying so only before he left for Alaska. But, of course, he's out of favor, and he wouldn't have any influence, anyway. It's years since he was in the army."

"I suppose I'm a back number, my dear. Some of us have to be. Perhaps I'll get my chance. I'm not thirty yet, you know, and thirty isn't considered awfully old in the army. At least, it isn't the retiring age."

"Don't be so absurd, Uncle Mark! You don't look an old man at all. It was just that your photograph was taken so long ago, and I didn't reflect that you must have changed."

"And if ever another war comes I'm sure my experience will count for a lot. And I'll probably have command over Captain Murray and Captain Crawford if ever the National Guard is called on for serious work. And then you'll have your function as our mascot, you know."

He was surprised at the girl's sudden responsiveness to his words. She grew very serious.

"I've often thought about that, Uncle Mark," she answered.

"But, of course, it may never happen."

"I suppose not. But if ever it does I mean to try to be what you meant me to be when you made that condition to the major. How I wish—how I wish—"

"Yes, my dear?"

"That we knew who my father was. Sometimes I think he was only an American planter, perhaps, who lived in Cuba and was forced to flee when the war began. And then again I dream that he may have been a brave soldier who was trying to serve his country by going into the Spanish lines in disguise, and I hope that I may be worthy of him."

"You don't remember anything, Eleanor?"

"Yes, Uncle Mark. I'm sure I do—and yet I've thought so much about it that I'm not sure how much of it is memory and how much is just child's inventions. Perhaps I invented all of

"I know that she was my mother."

It, and made myself believe I remembered it. And yet I am sure part of it is memory."

"What do you remember?" asked Mark rather fearfully.

(To be continued)

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One of the big eastern structural companies, having a contract to build a traveling crane above a coal handling plant at a dock, decided to employ a surgeon to retrain "on the job." The "honored one" was given a note which read, "Please hand this to the foreman in charge and tell him that you will look after any of the men who may be injured by falling from the work." The doctor without ado went out to the plant, looked up at the false work that was being built in preparation for the crane, and it was so high that the men on it looked like lilliputians. He thought of the possibilities if one of them should fall to the dock, and he said to the foreman: "I think the company made a mistake. It should have addressed this letter to an undertaker."

—Argonaut.

The Wise Men of old followed the Star, but the wise men of to-day would look at it through a telescope.

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