

# BRIDE OF BATTLE

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

VICTOR ROUSSEAU

## CHAPTER XII.

And he slept, though he had not expected to close his eyes that night. He slept as soundly as his comrades, wakening, as was his habit, a few minutes before reveille, with a mind singularly clarified by sleep. He would look to parade before his commanding officer in the morning and state the facts, leaving the rest to fate.

He was not destined to, for the same corporal who had put him on duty during his previous afternoon "off" called in five minutes before parade.

"You can leave them buttons, Weston," he said with a grin. "You won't need to polish 'em where you're going, the sergeant major wants you at once."

Mark hurried to the office, to find the sergeant major in company with one of the senior captains; then he remembered that rumors of the preceding evening had sent the Major away with an inspecting General. His interview must be postponed, then.

"Weston, you'd better get your breakfast at once," said the sergeant major. "And have your kit packed in ten minutes. You and Hartley are going up to the front."

The senior captain temporarily commanding the detachment unbent from his official air which he was trying to hold to assume.

"You were specially asked for from headquarters," he said, "with another in; and I'm sending Hartley because he's your friend. They want two men for the stretcher bearers' company. We'll be sorry to lose you, Weston."

Mark saluted and went out just as Hartley appeared at the door. The sergeant major enlightened Hartley fully.

"You must have some pull at headquarters, Weston," he said. "Do you know Major Kellerman?"

A little, sir, answered Mark grimly. Well, he seems to know all about it, and he told the O. C. over the telephone that he must have you. He'll get your O. C. now for a while, so you ought to run smoothly for you."

He's not a doctor, sir. No, but the stretcher bearers aren't medical corps; they're attached to the infantry.

Mark hurried away. In the barracks, at breakfast, the two were the object of mingled jests and congratulations. The stretcher bearers, formerly it was, the last supports of the infantry, shared with them the proportion of casualties. Kellerman's scheme was perfectly clear to all.

He was in a wretched state of mind when the car steamed into the depot at the end of the narrow-gauge line, descended into a city, a mushroom of the supply and transportation department.

Sergeant and corporal, with nine men of the stretcher bearers' company, were waiting for the two, any little troop was returning to the lines after five days of relief at a camp.

"You're the two men from the base, aren't you?" asked the sergeant. "All right. Fall in. Right turn! Quick march!"

They moved away down a slope and to pick their way along the beginning of a maze of trenches. The roar of guns, which had never been by night or day, and had long been to be noticeable, was louder suddenly the sergeant stopped.

"There was ten of you," he said to the corporal.

"Here," responded the corporal. "The sergeant turned to Mark. 'He's your mate?' he asked."

"He's gone, the silly fool!" he said. "Must have taken the wrong turn at the bend. Go back and find where he is."

The sergeant ran back a few paces, then returned, breathless and red in the face. "He's gone, the silly fool!" he said. "Must have taken the wrong turn at the bend. Go back and find where he is."

Hartley was not at the bend. The sergeant joined Mark, incredulous. "He's gone, the silly fool!" he said. "Must have taken the wrong turn at the bend. Go back and find where he is."

"Taken the wrong turn some-where?" insisted the sergeant. "Come with me! We've got to find him."

He began doubling back, shouting to the men who reached the end of the system. Still Hartley could not be found.

"Ain't on hand I'll be broke," grumbled. "And I'll break for him. You medical corps are like a bunch of babies. Ought to be like a nurse and baby carriage for the infantry."

He abandoned the search and returned to the lines.

and they rejoined the others. The sergeant, in an ugly mood, ordered them sharply onward, but could not resist casting occasional looks back to see if the missing man was coming. However, at last he resigned himself to what seemed inevitable. The trench widened into a deep, wide, parallel one extending in zigzags to right and left of them.

A large dugout, made shell-proof, or as nearly as possible so, by a roof of heavy beams, sandbags and corrugated steel, bore the Red Cross upon the door. Inside a number of stretcher bearers were lounging.

The sergeant halted his men and stepped into a smaller dugout beside it. In a minute he came out and beckoned to Mark to follow him. Mark entered, to find himself in the presence of the captain commanding the stretcher bearers' company, and Kellerman. He saluted and stood to attention, watching Kellerman's eyes wander over him appraisingly.

"Orderly, where's the man who came with you?" inquired the Captain briskly.

"He disappeared on the way up, sir," answered Mark.

"What do you mean by disappeared? Did you see him go back? Or was he with you one minute and gone the next?"

"I thought he was behind me, sir. I didn't see him go, or know anything about it."

The Captain, who had been holding the receiver of his telephone, and evidently waiting for his connection, got it. Mark heard him sending out a general notice of the absent man. He gave his number, and the name "Hartley."

No doubt he had mistaken it as he received it by telephone from the hospital that morning.

"You'll parade before me tomorrow morning," said Captain Keyes to the sergeant. "Till then you are under arrest."

The sergeant saluted. "Right turn!" he said to Mark.

"Wait a minute," interposed Kellerman. "I'd like to have a few words with this man, Captain Keyes."

"By all means, sir," replied the Captain, rising.

He stroled, humming, to the door of the dugout, leaving Kellerman and Mark together.

"So you've enlisted under the name Weston?" inquired Kellerman.

"That is my name, sir."

"It was a shock to me yesterday, Wallace. I never expected it. Your disappearance stirred Washington a good deal. The war office would have exonerated you."

In spite of his loathing of the man, Mark felt his heart begin to hammer with hope. He looked at Kellerman with pathos in his eyes; he could not hide his feelings; he was groping amid the ruins of his world and trying to reconstruct them.

"I've no doubt you misunderstood me," said Kellerman. "My association with the Kenson woman was a part of my official duties—the most distasteful part, but one that had to be carried out. You and I were the victims of an acute piece of trickery. That fact was wired."

"From your room, sir," said Mark.

"From my room," answered Kellerman. "And, no doubt, by the Kenson woman's agent, that spy who called to see you at the war office the same morning. Colonel Howard knows all about it. He means to stand by you. He heard you had enlisted, but he did not know you were in the medical corps, nor under an alias. He is at the base now, Wallace. When he comes up next week I shall make it my business to see him about you."

"No, sir," gasped Mark. "It doesn't matter now."

"It matters to me, if not to yourself, Wallace. I cannot rid myself of the sense of partial responsibility. And as for what happened last night, you took me off my guard. I'll be frank with you. It was my duty to interest the Kenson woman. I succeeded too well. She followed me here. I couldn't bring myself to denounce her. For that I have placed my own position in jeopardy. When you appeared I did not know what to do or say."

"You found a course of action," answered Mark, torn between the desire to return blow for blow and to do justice to Kellerman, whose story left him doubtful and wondering.

"Will you accept my frank apology?" asked Kellerman, extending his hand.

Mark took it. "I will, Major Kellerman," he answered.

And he made his way to the door of the dugout, with a feeling of warmth in his heart such as he had not known for many a month. He believed Kellerman—and yet . . . but he fought down his instinct and still believed him.

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 loophole."

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—th got hit," he said. "Bring him in, Weston. Make a quick job of it. Corporal Baines, 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 stretchers 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. Teht!"

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, let the muzzle of the pistol drop,

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 German; and then a furious outburst of machine-gun fire came from the trench 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 line. A whispered challenge, an answer, and he had scaled

CHAPTER XIV.

The three officers who had brought 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 masonry, 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 reprieve 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 makes you pretend things, and 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 heroic of you, 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—"

(To be continued)

Full stomachs and settled governments evidently go together—also why food to prevent Bolshevism?

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White ratine is making a bid for a return to popularity in frocks for the coming season. It is the material employed in this neat and serviceable walking gown, and is one of fashion's latest offerings for the girl who is going "Palm Beaching" or into the Southland during the cold months of the North.

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No. 2, Prairie 1:15 A. M.

Sumpter 2:35 P. M.

Arrives Baker 4:15 P. M.

### Departs

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Sumpter 1:05 A. M.

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