

BRIDE OF BATTLE

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

By VICTOR ROUSSEAU

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WALLACE HAS AN UNEXPECTED ENCOUNTER WITH MAJOR KELLERMAN.

Synopsis.—Lieut. Mark Wallace, U. S. A., is wounded at the battle of Santonio. While wandering alone in the jungle he comes across a dead man in a but outside of which a little girl is playing. When he is rescued he takes the girl to the hospital and announces his intention of adopting her. His commanding officer, Major Howard, tells him that the dead man was Hampton, a friend of his, who sold department secrets to an international gang in Washington and was detected by himself and Kellerman, an officer in the same office. Howard pleads to be allowed to send the child home to his wife and they agree that she shall never know her father's shame. Several years later Wallace visits Hampton at a young lady's boarding school. She gives him a pleasant shock by declaring that when she is eighteen she intends to marry him. More years pass and Wallace remains in the West. At the outbreak of the European war Colonel Howard calls Wallace to a staff post in Washington. He finds Eleanor there, also Kellerman, in whom he discerns an antagonist.

CHAPTER V.—Continued.

"Schoolgirls can judge character as well as grown-ups."

"And so you think you know me, and you're not altogether disappointed?" asked Mark, smiling at last.

"I'm not disappointed in you at all, if you aren't in me. Dear Uncle Mark, people don't really change."

"Only they learn to adapt themselves to their environments. You are just the same as ever—just the quiet, sensitive, chivalrous Uncle Mark I've always dreamed of."

"Well," said Mark, "I see that there are hopes that I shall remain the little ward whom I've always thought about. And, of course, I ought to have reflected that your environment has been very different from the one I could have given you."

"I wish I'd been with you, Uncle Mark," she answered impulsively.

"Why didn't you keep me when you got your chance, if you wanted me? Oh, dear Uncle Mark, that was so like you, too—giving up to others. And you never sent me that photograph!"

"I've never had one taken since, Eleanor."

"But I've got you yourself now," said the girl. "So you mustn't give me up any more, no matter who seems to have a better claim on me. Will you promise me that?"

Mark knew now for certain that he had found his own. "I promise," he answered.

"Because, you know, I've been very happy with Colonel and Mrs. Howard. But this isn't the best and biggest part of me that you see here. If I could have had my way I'd rather have been living a more useful life somewhere—somewhere where I had a chance to do many things that I want. Colonel Howard gives me everything he thinks I want. But you see, Uncle Mark, something is missing. You remember what we talked about my being the regimental mascot?"

Mark nodded, watching her face closely.

"Well, all that's over and gone. There isn't any regiment now, and you're all the old people have gone out of it. And we were three years in San Francisco, you know. And—Oh, Uncle Mark, I wish we could have those days again, when I used to dream about my father and—"

"I know, my dear," said Mark. "I've always secretly hoped that I should know, some day. But I've almost stopped hoping, except for the silver that I've never told anybody. You remember what I said to you about a man watching me?"

"He doesn't watch you now, Eleanor."

She nodded. "He has come back," she answered. "He's older and grayer, but he's the same man. I've seen him here, in Washington. And I've never dared to speak of it, even to Colonel Howard, but I know it's not a delusion, Uncle Mark."

"And you think he has some connection with your father, Eleanor?" asked Mark.

"I don't know what to think. What do you think, Uncle Mark?" asked the girl.

"I think, my dear," said Mark deliberately, "that it isn't the same man. It stands to reason it can't be. Why should he have watched you for all these years and never spoken to you? No, Eleanor, I think you've had this idea so long that you have misinterpreted it."

"I know what you mean, Uncle Mark. Well, it doesn't matter. And now I must go back to Mrs. Howard or they will be wondering what has become of me. But we've picked up our memories, haven't we? And I'll see a lot of you, Uncle Mark, before you go to the war?"

CHAPTER VI.

But Mark refused Colonel Howard's invitation to become his guest, and avoided the house in Massachusetts as much as he could with decency. He was courageous enough to analyze his reasons and he did not conceal the result from himself.

He wanted Eleanor with all the pent-up longing of the denied years in the desert. His love was the strongest

passion that he had ever felt, and yet, strangely for a man of his years, it had in it much more of the paternalistic than of the lover's. All his life he had been almost blind, his only sister was dead, he wanted Eleanor's presence, Eleanor with him, to see her every day, whether as wife or daughter, to acknowledge that this love, selfless in a measure, threatened to become a consuming passion if he did not hold himself rigidly in check.

He, the middle-aged, single, and Eleanor, with her education, her prospects, and her beauty—it was an impossible dream, or one that would ruin the girl's life, if in some wild moment, she made it true.

He had his reasons. In Eleanor's increasing restraint, but quite visible indignation, that he had taken apart again, after that single meeting. It was a poor reward, but the sort that Mark had received all his life. He had fought, but the girl's life, if in some wild moment, she made it true.

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Brigadier was more furious than Howard. "I don't know how it happened, Colonel, and I don't care!" he cried, thumping the table. "No great harm has been done so far, and of course none of the departmental clerks can be suspected. But it's got to stop, and we've got to find out how it originated."

It was on that night that Mark felt at the end of his powers.

It was early, but Mark's sleep had been disturbed by his appointment; nothing seemed of any value to him at that moment, and his thoughts were ranging round their eternal subject.

Had it been necessary that he should have been boorish, to protect himself?

He put on his hat and went out, meaning to pay them a visit, or, at least, to walk toward their house while it was still dark.

He did not get to the time he reached Massachusetts drive, and as he stopped in doubt, he saw a man across the road, staring up at the house.

Of a sudden Eleanor's story returned to his mind with vivid force. The man was obviously watching the house, and he meant to stay there.

But, as Mark started toward him, the man seemed to take care, and disappeared away. Something in his gait brought back to Mark's mind the recollection of the man whom he had seen outside the Misses Harpers' school.

And he began to follow him. It was a role that he had never played before, but justified, in his mind, by the necessity of discovering the fellow's identity.

Without any very clear intention in his mind how he was to accomplish this, Mark made his way over the solitary figure, keeping well behind it.

It soon became clear that the man, although he looked like a tramp, had a definite objective.

Mark followed him, and he discovered that he was wearing the least desirable pair of Washington, where location, so near the residence of the chief executive, had always been the wonder and scandal of visitors.

He was in one of those streets that start bravely in the city and debouch into the low-lying land in that interme-

diante and hardly reclaimed region bordering the Potomac. The houses here were old, many appearing vacant and tumble-down, and for the most part standing each in a little garden.

Mark was beginning to this of pursuit, was about fifty paces in front of him, when suddenly the man turned in at the tiny garden of an apartment house, and disappeared.

Mark hesitated for a moment, but he was the mistress of one of those gambling establishments that flourish of necessity along the avenues of the earlier alphabet.

The man seemed to be pleading with him, his gestures were growing frantic. He looked about five and forty years of age; his face struck Mark with a certain odd familiarity, though he had never seen him closely before.

And here traces of breeding, blurred either by dissolute habits or by misfortune.

Mark heard a subdued scream, and then the man's voice in angry altercation.

He was talking to the woman who had opened the door. She looked about five and thirty years of age, and her face, distinctly visible against the light in the hall, was veiled, if not attracted, by the same odd familiarity that Mark had seen in the man.

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