

WOODSTOCK, N. B., MARCH 15, 1905.

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WHEN GERMANS BESIEGED PARIS

Story of a Loaded Shell.

New Year's Day and its customary gifts always reminded me of an incident during the Siege of Paris, which I recall with a distinct feeling of pleasurable pride.

Let my readers be reassured, however, I am not about to lead them to the beleaguered ramparts of the city, nor to the outposts but simply to the Rue de Trevis, to the home of my old friend Dutailly, a rich merchant, husband of a most excellent wife, father of a charming daughter, a clever business man, a good patriot, somewhat of a crank as regards politics, but one of the best men in the world, and a good friend always.

Surprised by the investment of Paris just as he was packing his trunk to depart, the worthy man consoled himself with the belief that the city would not be held a week. Mme. Dutailly, better advised, hastened to lay in such a stock of provisions that even had the siege lasted three months longer the Dutaillys would never have known what famine meant. She concluded her wise work by turning her garden into a cow pasture, a hen farm, and a residence for pigs, which, three months later, were worth their weight in gold.

When the autumn came and the siege still continued her family rose up and called her blessed, and so did I, for I dined twice a week with the Dutaillys, and on Thursday and Sundays I made up for the privations of the rest of the week. There are no words worthy to express my emotion at the sight of a real omelette, one which was not the mere fiction of a dream, and my Sunday dinners became like enchanted feasts to me.

I was not the only guest at this hospitable table. There was another seat placed beside mine. This was for young Anatole Brichaut, head clerk in the big store and Dutailly's future partner and son-in-law.

He was an honest lad, a trifle melancholy and rather timid, but deeply and sincerely in love with his chief's daughter, Mlle. Gertrude, who did not appear insensible to his affection. Although it was not as yet an acknowledged fact, the Dutaillys thought sufficiently well of the probable marriage to receive the young man constantly at their house.

Unfortunately, the war proved the obstacle in the course of true love. Brichaut, a corporal in the corps of the Seine, did his duty as a soldier methodically and conscientiously, but without enthusiasm and consequently without glory.

This indifference exasperated the honest merchant. He was constantly predicting decisive victories for the French troops. Brichaut, incredulous, timidly offered various objections, and later, when the victories unhappily proved grave defeats, Dutailly felt that it was all the work of his chief clerk.

The presence of a new guest at the table complicated matters still further. One evening, arriving rather late, I was surprised to find my seat already occupied by a stranger, with red cheeks and very broad shoulders, and an air of great bravado. He wore a captain's stripes sewed on a uniform that must have been looted from some theater and enormous boots which proclaimed to all the world that a hero trod in them.

"M. Robillard," said Dutailly, introducing

us, "the Captain of the famous Lost Children of Courbevoie."

I had heard of the Captain. His exploits consisted of removing from deserted houses in the outskirts of the city furniture and valuables which might otherwise have awakened the cupidity of the enemy and storing them in safe places quite without the knowledge of the owners.

I wondered how this brute with his bristling mustaches had ever succeeded in forming part of our family party when Mme. Dutailly explained, with much emotion what had occurred. Just at dusk she had fallen quite heavily on one of the icy boulevards and Robillard, who was passing, ran to her assistance, and helped her home. Grateful for his prompt aid, the lady felt that she could do no less than invite him to dinner, an invitation which the Captain was very ready to accept.

M. Robillard was clearly no fool. He knew how to make himself agreeable, although his conceit was colossal.

According to his stories, his prowess at the head of the Lost Children had been unequalled. With a few other leaders like himself the war would have been ended long before.

Mme. Dutailly listened eagerly to his blatant stories; her husband applauded them enviously; Mile Gertrude alone proved indifferent. As for the poor little corporal, paler and more timid looking than ever, in his coat which was three sizes too large, and, moreover, suffering from a bad cold in the head which always makes a man ridiculous, he seemed completely crushed by his overpowering neighbor.

As soon as dinner was over I invented an excuse to leave the house bored by the graceless lies of the vulgar Captain to whom I fervently hoped I had said farewell forever. But this hope was doomed to a bitter disappointment. The following Sunday I found him in the same place, again on Thursday. Finally, his place was regularly spread.

The Dutaillys were completely fascinated. Madame because the tender gallantry shown her by Robillard never fails to affect ladies of her age, and Papa Dutailly because of the interest the dashing Captain took it in his warlike predictions. Anatole, his cold more than ever, lost ground visibly at each meal.

One day the corporal was obliged to keep to his bed, and for several weeks he was absent from our repast. During this time the Captain boldly made known his aspirations for the hand of Mile. Gertrude and his advances were not repulsed by her parents.

The day Anatole, convalescent and thin as a pipe stem, returned to our weekly dinners it seemed to me that the young lady's pretty eyes were red and that there must have been some dispute during the day between her and her mother, now completely infatuated with her Robillard. I felt that the time had come to interfere in the interest of these poor children. It happened to be the last Sunday in the year, and naturally we fell to talking of New Year's Day, which we were to spend together.

"Upon my word dear madame," cried the Captain, "I must prepare some surprise with which to offer you my good wishes for the New Year."

It was the remark that gave me the idea of my own.

On the 1st of January Dutailly received us with open arms. A glorious victory had been foretold by his favorite paper and the obstinate patriot was delighted.

Anatole brought with him a rabbit, which he had trapped himself. As for the captain, he presented to Mme. Dutailly a large bag of marrous glasses, encased in a German helmet.

"What!" she exclaimed, almost speechless with admiration, "Did you kill them?"

"Expressly for your fair sake," replied Robillard, striking an attitude, "expressly and entirely that his helmet might serve as a box for your bonbons!"

"Dear me," said I, "I am not so bold as to try to rival such a man as the Captain, but I, too, have prepared a little surprise."

"I wonder what it can be?" cried Mme. Dutailly as the servant brought in a large package.

"It is a bombshell dear madame," I replied. "Dutailly has told me several times that he would like to have one, a real one, and at my request Rolland, commanding the battery, sent me one." As I spoke, I removed the paper and the shell appeared, black sinister, and menacing.

"Gracious," objected my hostess, "what if it should explode!"

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"Do not be uneasy," I hastened to say. "Of course, Rolland would not have sent me any but an empty shell. Besides, here is his letter."

I opened a note which lay beside the bomb, but as I read it my face must have expressed surprise, and then consternation, for my friends exclaimed anxiously:

"Is anything the matter?"

"Gracious powers! Why—but listen—"

and I read:
Dear Friend: Here is the bombshell you asked me for. It has been impossible for me just now to get hold of an armorer to empty it, but if you will take it to the Avenue de l'Opera the man there can do it. Let me warn you to use the greatest precaution, the slightest shock or jar will cause the shell to explode. Yours. R.

A shriek of fright filled the room.

"Take it away!" screamed Mme. Dutailly.

"It is frightful! A bombshell in my parlor! Horrible!"

"The man who brought it has gone," said the servant, his red cheeks white.

"Then," said I, "I will take it."

"I forbid you," exclaimed Dutailly quickly.

"You are not strong enough to carry that heavy thing all the way from here to the Avenue de l'Opera. You might drop it anywhere—in the stairs—in the vestibule!"

Mme. Dutailly clutched hold of my coat-tails.

"Not you," she implored, "it is too dangerous!"

"Besides," added her husband, "this is the deed of a soldier, of a brave soldier! Fortunately, the Captain is here."

"If" stammered the heroic leader of the Lost Children, turning pale. "A bombshell? The devil! Can't you wait and have it taken away to-morrow?"

"What?" shrieked Mme. Dutailly. "I could not close my eyes all night with that thing here!"

Then Anatole said quietly: "Do not be uneasy, dear madame, I will take the shell."

But Dutailly stopped him.

"Impossible, my dear fellow—your arm, you know!"

"Yes, indeed," I added, "it is not a thing for a man with a wounded arm to attempt."

"I have perfect confidence in the Captain, however," said Dutailly. "Come, sir, take away this monster and rid us of such a terrible night-mare. We all know your prowess!"

The Captain looked unhappy, but he was not to be disconcerted for so little.

"Delighted to be of service," he said, "but I could not think of carrying it over these icy streets. I will go and get my friend's carriage where he is dining just around the corner, at Brebant's, and will return in ten minutes."

"Do hurry," begged Mme. Dutailly. "I shall be in agony until it is out of the house."

The Captain hastened out of the room. Judging from the noise on the stairs, it was evident that he was literally hurrying.

Without appearing to have any special purpose in mind, I walked over to the window.

"It would have been so simple to have let me take it," murmured Anatole.

"Don't say such a thing," cried Dutailly, surprised at the young man's quiet courage.

"It is much better for the Captain to see to it."

"If he only will not be long," groaned his wife.

"There is no use to wait for him," I remarked from my position by the window.

"He will never come back."

"Never come back?" they all cried.

"No," I said. "Had he gone to Brebant's he would have turned to the left. Instead, he went to the right, and seemed to be walking very quickly, too."

"What can it mean?" they cried again.

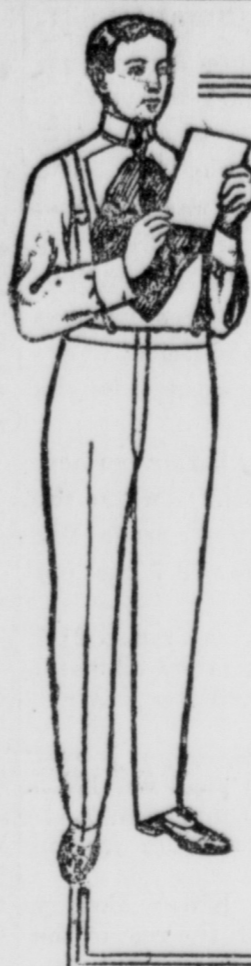
"It means, my dear friends," I said quietly, "that the Captain is a mere impostor, whom I rejoice to have exposed by this contrivance on the table."

And seized a photograph album. I struck a violent blow upon the bomb-shell, which exploded in a thousand fragments—of chocolate! The candies inside were scattered in all directions. A burst of laughter followed this explosion, and, I may say, this denouement!

For, three months later, Anatole married Mile. Gertrude.

And of the Captain, nothing more!

Kuropatkin's flank has been turned so often that he hardly knows which side he is lying on. The St. Petersburg correspondents make amends for the deficiency by lying on all sides.

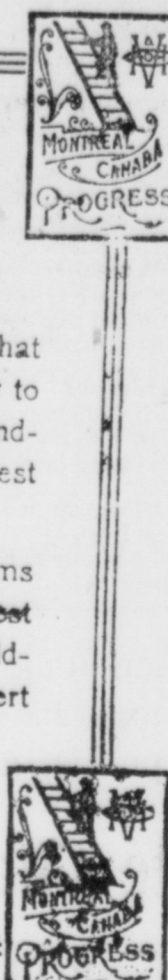


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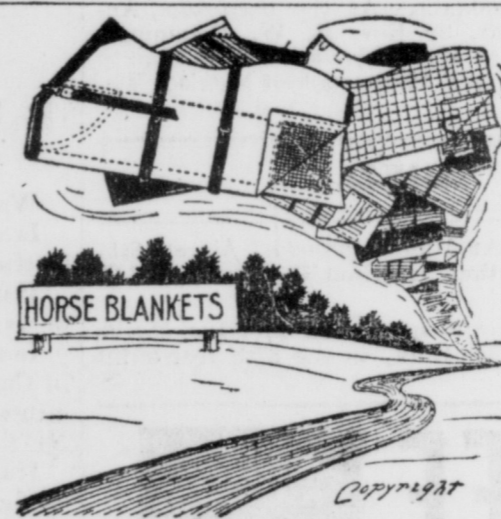
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Discovered.

From The Cleveland Leader.

"Oh! George!" I murmured the sweet thing, reproachfully, "what would papa say if he knew that you ever touched liquor?"
"He has discovered it already, dearest," admitted her fiance sadly.
"Mercy! And what did he say?"
"He said: 'Well, George, I don't care if I do!'"

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