

Jean Renault—Conscript

By HOWARD P. ROCKEY

(Copyright, The Frank A. Munsey Co.)

"My friends," said Jean Renault, "I ask you to wish me untold success. This day I have signed my most wonderful contract! I stand before you, Jean Renault, the greatest of all tenors—I who have just been engaged for three years by the leading impresario of modern times—M. Gatti-Carranza. It is he, the most divine of men in appreciation, who has the rare good judgment to acclaim me the utmost in vocal attainment."

"Ah bah!" exclaimed M. Dupre with some heat. "I, who have heard the most wonderful operatic voices of the age, doubt you. I cannot believe what you say."

Renault, the handsome, the egotist, the accomplished, shrugged his shoulders.

"Monseigneur," he said quite calmly for a Frenchman provoked, "not without affront, I challenge thee, even thee, to scan the agreement I have this day made with M. Gatti-Carranza. It means that next season I shall be the highest-paid tenor in operatic history. You will doubt me, for heretofore no singer has ever commanded such a salary. This next six months—which is the New York season with the Metropolitan opera—I shall earn \$3,500 a night, and I shall have a guaranty of \$250,000 a year for three years, with additional compensation for extra performance. I beg of you, my friend, to read my agreement."

"Hein!" almost gasped Dupre. "It is impossible. It is written—I read it—yet it cannot be!"

"So one might think," answered Renault quickly. "Yet in America such things are true."

Beautiful Alys Dupre advanced slowly across the gravel path. She put her arms about the shoulders of Renault and smiled down at him. "You are a dreamer, mon cher," she said softly. "Is this thing true thou sayest to mon pere?"

"Quite true," answered Renault with smiling eyes. "Will you come with me over the seas as my wife and share with me the honors and the gold that will be mine in New York this winter?"

Alys gazed into his eyes, her hand stole into his, and she let him kiss her softly upon the lips.

Renault gazed over her shoulder at the pleasant village lying beyond the garden.

He thought of the peace and quiet of the place and of the bustle and hurry of New York, but he longed to be there with Alys and the beginning of his triumph.

Now M. Dupre, aged and dignified, put down his pipe, rose from his seat, and took a tottering step forward.

"Oh, mon fils," he said with a sob in his voice, "I have read this wonderful paper of agreement signed by the great judge of merit across the seas, and I am happy and proud to give unto thee my daughter. May she be worthy of thee!"

Renault wrung the old man's hand. "Worthy?" he repeated. "Who am I—only a great tenor—to deserve her?" Just then a powerful motor car came along the dusty road and stopped before the garden wall. From it a foreigner descended, entered the pretty garden, and doffed his hat.

"My dear Renault!" the man exclaimed. Then, to the embarrassment of the new arrival, the great tenor embraced him effusively. Red of face, but accepting the situation as a part of his experience abroad, the newcomer permitted Renault to introduce him to his companions.

"The chairman of the committee from the wonderful opera company called the Metropolitan of New York!" exclaimed Renault with enthusiasm; "the powerful and wise organization that has engaged me—Jean Renault. I am entranced! You, monseigneur, are come just in time to congratulate me—and oh, thou shy dog, thou hast put M. Gatti-Carranza up to engaging me. I congratulate thee."

The new arrival smiled indulgently. "But congratulate me once more," Renault went on. "I am just affianced to the most beautiful woman in the world. What is more, I, Jean Renault, have won her from Heinrich Berghoff—an inferior director of the orchestra at the Metropolitan—who has had the audacity to plead for the hand of my divinity!"

"Impossible," said the American. "Yet I hear that Herr Berghoff has renounced all thought of returning to the States this season. He has applied for a commission in the army."

"Bah!" exclaimed Renault contemptuously. "Let him handle a sword as clumsily as he handled a baton, and France will have an easy victory over Germany!"

The American laughed heartily. "Permit me," he said to the company about them. "M. Renault is so enthusiastic, so happy, that he has forgotten to introduce me save by a title which amounts to but little, except in that it gives me an opportunity to show my appreciation of the art of M. Renault. I am Richard Van der Wynt," he said. "Pray be seated."

He had heard of multimillionaires across the sea.

"And now," said Van der Wynt as he sat down in a rustic chair. "I wish to ask a great favor. I am music hungry. It has been months since I have heard M. Renault sing the 'Vesti la giubba' from 'Pagliacci.' Would you consent to sing it for us here—now?"

All eyes turned to Renault, who stood up self-consciously. The lights, the excitement, the many "bravos" of the opera rang in the ears of his memory. He had all the old-time inspiration and passion, he recalled the flattery, the adulation of his past performances. And added to this was the presence of Alys.

Renault thought of their marriage, of their departure to the States, of the triumphs they would share there. And then he sang.

Calmly he began as they all listened intently. His voice seemed wonderful even at the outset, then it seemed like the voice of one gifted by heaven.

At last he ceased. His head sank upon his breast. He was overcome with emotion.

And then, and then only was it that everyone in the little garden looked up as a saber clanked against a spur and an officer in uniform entered. Reverently he had stood by the gate while Renault sang. Now, with doffed cap and courteous air, he came toward the little group. He appeared to hesitate, yet his manner was businesslike, as that of a man who had an unpleasant duty which would best be performed quickly.

"M. Renault," he said quietly, yet with the voice of authority, "M. Renault, France calls you. You are needed with her sons to suppress our foes. It seems a sacrilege to intrude upon so great an artist, yet, pardon me, it is no fault of mine; all the sons of our country are drafted for the military service. You are a citizen—a reservist. France beckons—calls to you to take up the sword against the enemy." The man replaced his cap and saluted as his spurs clinked together sharply.

Renault arose to his full height. He twirled his mustache. He was dramatic, tragic, theatric.

"I am Jean Renault!" he exclaimed. "I leave shortly for America, where I have contracted to appear. I, Jean Renault, sing—I do not fight!"

"Sing it to the minister of war!" said the soldier contemptuously. "Sing it to whomsoever you like, but come with me. It is the military law of France. It is a pity. I am no great singer, I earn no fabulous sums. I



"I Shall Earn \$3,500 a Night."

am a blower of glass. Yet France calls us together, perhaps to die side by side, even Jean Renault the great and Antoine Marceau who earns ten francs the day. Such is fate. So France wills."

Van der Wynt spoke up. "What is the fee for the release of a conscript?" he asked the officer. "I will gladly pay any sum you ask to free M. Renault from service. I will buy a substitute for him."

The soldier smiled. "There will be no substitute," he said. "If there were men available for substitution we would draft them, too. France calls all—rich and poor alike."

Renault paled. Then the dramatic side of the situation appealed to him. He turned to Alys.

"Dear heart," he said, "I go to war. I go for France and for thee. No longer shall I be a soldier of the foot-lights—a make-believe warrior with a sword against a singing enemy. From this moment I am a soldier of France. I shall show them. I, Jean Renault, shall return to thee not only the greatest of living tenors, but a wearer of the Legion d'Honneur—a hero of this war with Germany. Bah! May I encounter this boaster Berghoff. He is less than the shadow of a dog—a miserable whining conscript who cannot even beat time with a baton let alone parry the sword-thrusts of Jean Renault!"

"Then, with the instinct of a dramatic exit, he strode from the garden while the saber of the soldier accompanying him clanked against the stones."

A few hours later Jean Renault, who had not seen military service for five years, stood uniformed and armed at the railway station, not in the center of the stage, but one of a com-

pany of pale-faced, nervous recruits about to entrain for the frontier. Yet even under these conditions Renault enjoyed a certain distinction. His companions knew him, held him in awe, the greatest of French tenors. They boarded the cars. The train moved, and Jean Renault, soldier of France, was being hurried toward the enemy.

The journey's end arrived. The men were hastily formed into line beside the railroad track. There was a sharp command and the company moved off toward the site chosen for their camp.

Night came, and with it a feeling of awe. No camp-fires were permitted to be lighted, and the sole faint glimmer came from the tent of the general commanding the division, where a small electric-battery lamp was carefully shrouded to prevent its rays being seen from a distance. On the ground, wrapped in his blanket, lay Jean Renault, thinking of Alys and dreaming of his contract with the Metropolitan Opera company. Also he thought of the possibility of his being shot, and his flesh grew cold. Overhead there was a faint whirling sound. Dimly he made out a great bird-like shape hovering down in his direction. He sat up and then laughed softly. It was an aeroplane, and now it touched the earth almost noiselessly.

A scout of course. Renault turned over and tried to sleep. But a few moments later a dark figure edged toward him. A hand was placed upon his shoulder and he sat up, startled. "M. le General wishes to see you," said the man, and then, beckoning to Renault to follow, started off through the darkness.

Renault arose. He dusted off his clothing and twirled his mustache. He, Jean Renault, must make a creditable appearance before his commandant—this man, a mere soldier, not yet, if ever he should be, a world-known figure. Doubtless, thought Renault, the general wished him to join his staff.

But just inside the flap of the commander's tent a sharp voice awakened the tenor from his reverie.

"Renault," said the grizzled veteran of Sedan, "my aeroplane scout has just reported that the enemy are invading France. They have crossed the border and are marching between our column and that of the Marshal Le Fèvre. As they proceed they are wrecking the telephone and telegraph wires. Our wireless outfit is crippled. I must go back 50 years in warfare and send an orderly with dispatches because I dare not risk betraying our position by using rockets or firebrand signals."

"How interesting," remarked Renault with a smile.

The general scowled. "There is one man in my ranks who can pass the German lines without detection—at least without being hindered. It is you, Renault."

Renault swelled out his chest. One man in the army of France—Renault. Naturally, in time of danger the general would turn to him. It was to be expected.

"You are known throughout the world as a singer—a play actor," the general continued. Renault overlooked the slip of the tongue and accepted the compliment.

"I wish you to carry a dispatch to Marshal Le Fèvre," the general went on. "If overtaken by the enemy you will admit that you are Jean Renault, the famous singer—say that you are fleeing to catch a steamer for America to fill your theatrical engagement there. In that event they will probably believe you, and even permit you to pass on as a noncombatant. Here is the dispatch. Civilian clothes will be supplied you, and you will start at once in an automobile."

Renault was about to reply. He was planning an impressive speech, but suddenly the general turned upon his heel and disappeared. An orderly hurried the singer from the tent, gave him clothing, and bade him change.

It was too hurried—not effective enough, Renault told himself. But a few minutes later, disguised as himself, the world's greatest tenor found himself speeding along a rough road in a high-powered motor—a messenger of France.

It was only a trip of 50 miles. Running cautiously through the darkness without a headlight, the chauffeur should make it in an hour and a half in so powerful a machine. But now, after 40 minutes of rapid running, the chauffeur suddenly brought the great car to a standstill. Ahead was some obstacle, and now from its direction flashed a searchlight. Dimly Renault made out another automobile. It was filled with officers in the field uniform of Germany.

Now was his chance, the time to act, his task being to deceive these officers by pretending to be what he really was, and not a soldier of France. He saw revolvers leveled at him and his companion. He heard other machines drawing up. It was the advance guard—the scouting party of the invading army. He would quickly satisfy their questions and then proceed at top speed to warn Marshal Le Fèvre.

But suddenly his brow clouded. In the uniform of a colonel of German hussars he recognized his old-time enemy—Heinrich Berghoff. And at the same time Berghoff recognized Renault. Berghoff would vouch for the truth of his story, would identify him, and he would shortly be upon his way again. However, something in Berghoff's smile chilled him, and he trembled.

"It is Renault, the notable tenor!" exclaimed one officer. "Coward—he is fleeing!"

"Capital!" thought Renault. "It will be too easy."

But Berghoff was beside the car now. He grinned, and the blue mole upon his nose offended Renault as it had never done before.

"Fleeing?" queried Berghoff. "May-be. But let us see. Search him!" the German soldier-director commanded.

A trooper bade Renault descend, and he did so with sinking heart. Quickly his hands passed through Renault's pockets and now in triumph he held up to light the envelope the general had given the tenor.

Berghoff took it with savage glee, tore it open, and scanned the writing. Then he said: "Arrest that man and take him to the rear!"

It was over. Renault felt ill—he was almost afraid. He, the great Jean Renault, was a prisoner of war.

In his own machine, under guard, he was hurried back across the frontier into Germany. The night was growing old and the first faint streaks of dawn began to appear in the sky. The machine drew up before a roadside inn, and Renault was ushered into its public room.

There, gathered about a table, sat a group of officers covered with medals and gold lace. They were the brains of the war. Among them was the commander in chief of the forces of Germany, the royal-blooded, fierce-



They Listened Intently, Wonderingly.

mustached "god-man" before whom Renault had sung several times in the Imperial opera house in Berlin.

The great one looked up. The officer who had Renault in charge recited the circumstances and laid upon the table the letter Renault had carried.

Renault made no defense—could not even find words. But the man of the bristling mustache found them. They were short, sharp, menacing.

And a moment later Jean Renault was led away. He was not made to walk far. They stood him up against a tree, and now a man would have blundered him. But Renault struck down his hand. In that moment he recognized the officer who had brought him there. It was Berghoff, and the blue mole was more disgusting to Renault than ever before. All this time he had been Berghoff's prisoner, and had not noticed the fact.

"Bah!" exclaimed Renault. "I scorn you! I bite you!"

"Bite the dust, fool!" sneered Berghoff. "You are no more a soldier than you are a singer. Do you recall the argument we had over the bars of Mario's death-song when I conducted 'La Tosca'? Do you remember how I drowned your impossible voice with my beautiful orchestra? Do you remember—animal?"

"Pig!" shouted Renault. "Who are you—a conductor who must put down the baton to take up the murderer's knife. It looks well in your hand. It is just the hand to hold such an implement."

"We are waiting," Berghoff reminded him. "You delay us. Time is precious. We must on to Paris, where I shall conduct a gala performance of the opera for his imperial majesty." Renault looked him squarely in the eye.

"Berghoff," he said, "you will never conduct a gala performance in Paris. Your emperor will never command such a performance. I, Jean Renault, prophesy that. But, now, while your troops stand waiting, I shall permit you and them to hear Jean Renault, the greatest of all tenors, sing the last song of Mario as it was never sung before. Attend."

The sun came up. Facing the firing squad, and while Berghoff looked on half awed, half smiling, Jean Renault stepped forward and began to sing. The stern faces of his executioners softened. They listened intently, wonderingly. Never before had they heard such singing. And the man who could do this was the man they were about to kill. Just outside the inn, some distance away, a little group of officers stood spellbound. One with a bristling mustache seemed about to lift his hand to stay the proceeding.

But then, as Renault uttered the last note, Berghoff raised his saber. A muttered command came from his lips. The soldiers, ready to break into applause, sighted their rifles.

A shot rang out.

Jean Renault had sung the role of Mario before the firing squad for the last time.

A Corsican Calls

By FRANK M. O'BRIEN

(Copyright, The Frank A. Munsey Co.)

The sun, after a long struggle with the smoky fog, slunk down in his course. The light changed to a dull gray, kindly shutting out the sight of red blotches on greenish-yellow grass, a hideous contrast. There were no sounds except those muffled clicks and snaps that tell when an army is going to rest for the night.

The war master sat in a field tent, gazing down the trampled hill to the meadows where his hopes—for the day—had been realized. Tomorrow? No human being was near, unless one could count as human the rigid figures of the imperial guard. These statues, formed in squares and lanes, were as still as the night.

One lane was a long, narrowing patch of haze, for the moon had not yet risen to its vain task of trying to shine through the murk. And in this lane, as the war master watched with eyes that were focused on nothing at all, something appeared. At first it seemed like a gray veil, floating in the outline of a human form.

And now, still without salute or challenge, the silent thing, less like a gray veil and more like the film of a man, came to the tent slowly and entered. Entered confidently, with the air of an equal, and bowed, but only from the neck and not from the hips. There was no mistaking the cut of the cloak and the cock of the hat.

The war master's eyes were cold, too, returning the bow, but not so calm. A sneer, whether in word or look, is the easiest fashion of covering surprise—or alarm. The war master did not rise.

"One of the allies, I believe," he said.

"No," said the visitor in a dull voice, "say, rather, a neutral."

"Indeed!" said the war master. "Is not Corsica loyal to France?"

"After a man's death," said the visitor, "his politics and fealties do not change; they merely disappear."

"I am pleased to hear that, Herr—"

"M. Bonaparte, if you will, or even Mister. I became accustomed to hearing the latter title aboard the Belerophon."

The war master did not seem to be listening. He was watching his visitor narrowly.

"I wonder—" he began, and then ceased to speak.

"You wonder," said the visitor, smiling, "whether I am not real. I beg to assure your majesty that I am not real. I understand, of course, the trend of your thoughts. It has occurred to you, as it would occur to most trained men under similar circumstances, that I might be some new output of the wizardry of war—an impalpable man, free to come and go among the tents of the enemy. I saw the brief flash of annoyance when it came into your mind that if there was any such devilry possible your gentlemen of the laboratories should have discovered it first."

"Such," said the war master arrogantly, "is our custom."

"The speed of thought is one of the few human things at which I still may marvel," pursued the Corsican. "You revolved in your mind not only that possibility, but a dozen ways in which the magic might be used. There is nothing contra in the rules of war, I believe."

The war master raised his brows in mock modesty.

"A dozen ways!" he repeated. "You flatter!"

"No," said the Corsican, "at least a dozen, perhaps a score. I know. I should have thought of fifty."

"With such talent," began the war master, "your total of successes—"

"Let me save your voice," interposed the Corsican blandly. "You would remind me that where I ended in failure at that very spot you began with success. But I would remind you that any town is Waterloo where Waterloo is found."

"A ghostly warning," said the war master, laughing. He had risen as if to end the interview. It was a habit, and he did not realize his error until he saw the Corsican smiling at it.

"No, not a warning," said the visitor. "It was idle chatter, mere words. But you see I have the whole evening for my errand. Perhaps I expected a more cordial meeting. I thought to be formal, as people were long ago."

"You were not famed for formality," suggested the war master.

"I had no time for it," returned the Corsican a bit sadly. "But I have plenty now."

"Then you have the advantage of me," said the war master. "What is your errand? To ask questions?"

A patient smile crossed the face of the Corsican.

The war master turned upon his visitor with almost savageness.

"Who—who sent you?" he cried.

"Jan Bedanow," replied the Corsican. "The war master's shoulders, raised in suspense, fell to their normal angle."

"I do not remember him," he said.

"You never knew him," said the Corsican.

sican. "His name is not in any book that you have seen."

"You knew him?" asked the war master. "In—in life?"

"I killed him," said the Corsican. "I hanged his son at Lonceville because he would not guide us through an ambushed valley. He was a peasant. His father was an old man, and bedridden. The shock, administered by me, killed him."

"And now?" said the war master. "Now," said the Corsican, "Jan Bedanow sends me on the errand to you."

The war master took a step forward. "You! You are at the beck and call of peasants' fathers?"

"Where I come from," said the Corsican's even voice, "there are no peasants, no war masters, no first consuls."

"But this errand for Jan Bedanow," said the war master.

"It will help me," replied the Corsican, "to repair the wrong. In another hundred years, or a thousand, or a million—as men count time—I may do something more, if occasion fortunately should arise, to make amends."

"I see," conceded the war master. "And what of other things which are in the histories?"

"Each in its turn," said the Corsican, "but Jan Bedanow's matter first."

The war master leaned across the map-strewn pine table, his eyes aflame.

"You mean," he choked, "that that is all—there is—beyond—for one like you—or—"

"Or you," said the Corsican in his even tone. "It is all the same for all. The South American who kills with his blowgun is on even footing with the chancellor who kills with his pen. All the trappings and the titles remain here—for inheritance."

The war master stood up. "I shall not change my plans," he said stiffly.

"I do not ask you to," said the Corsican. "My business is not yours, but Jan Bedanow's."

"And that," said the war master, "is what?"

"On the road near Effeau," answered the Corsican, "you will find at the crossroads beside the corner of the Gray Forest, a little triangle in which there is a grave. It is the grave of Jan Bedanow's wife. When

"I shall not change my plans," he said.



"I Shall Not Change My Plans."

your majesty's troops pass that way they would naturally, owing to the width of the column, ride across this triangle of grass. They would, perhaps without meaning to, break down the wooden emblem—an emblem familiar to us both—which lies almost hidden in the weeds."

"Yes," said the war master. "What I ask, on behalf of Jan Bedanow, is that this be avoided."

"On the road, near Effeau," repeated the war master.

"Yes," said the Corsican, "you must pass it on your way to—"

"How do you know," he cried, "that I am going there?"

The Corsican smiled wearily. "I would have known," he said, "even if I did not come from where everything is known. I would have known, in the years ago, the minds of men who plan on paper. I would have known that you were going there. And I, at the other end, would have been waiting for you."

"Will they be ready for me tomorrow?" whispered the war master. The Corsican shrugged his shoulders.

"Have they my mind?" he countered; "or even Wellington's?"

"But tell me!" cried the war master. "It were better for the whole world—"

"The whole world!" mocked the Corsican. "A tiny, whirling thing on which there is nothing so important to me now as the grave of Jan Bedanow's wife. Good-night, your majesty!"

The tent flaps fluttered as he went. Now it was darker and the eye of the war master could not follow. He seized the telephone.

"Von Zohn," he said to the marshal at the other end of the line, "I have decided to ride at the head of the column in the morning—at least as far as the corner of the Gray Forest."

Then he leaned back and let his gaze, once more unfocused, fall upon the lane of the guard. The moonlight, seeping through the disappearing haze, glowed feebly on the brass eagles of the helmeted giants.

"And that is all!" he muttered. "Nothing more than that? I wonder!"