

UNDER FIRE

A European War story based on the drama of
ROI COOPER MEGRUE

SYNOPSIS.

The chief characters are Ethel Willoughby, Henry Streetman and Capt. Larry Redmond. The minor characters are Sir George Wargast, of the British Admiralty and Charlie Brown, a New York newspaper correspondent. Ethel, a resident of Sir George's household, secretly married to Streetman, a German spy, though she did not know him as such. Captain Redmond, her old lover, returns to England after long absence. From him she learns the truth about Streetman; furthermore, that he has betrayed her simply to learn naval secrets. The European war breaks out. Ethel prepares to accompany Streetman to Brussels as a German spy in order to get revenge and serve England.

In this installment is given a remarkable picture of Belgian village life—its peacefulness and hopefulness—just before the German host swept the little nation in 1914. You will enjoy Charlie Brown's meeting with the innkeeper, and sympathize with old Henri in his pathetic effort to reassure his frightened daughter of her safety. You will thrill at the meeting of spies.

Capt. Larry Redmond, a British spy, discusses plans with a French spy in a Belgian village inn.

CHAPTER XI—Continued.

Larry swiftly cautioned him to be careful.

"Pardon! A slip of the tongue!" his ally apologized.

"You have arranged matters as I planned with your General Jacques?" Larry asked.

"Yes! Last night we have strung a wire from the fort to this inn. Even now the end of it is dangling in that chimney." He nodded toward the huge fireplace across the room. "I have outside a telephone. . . . I wait only the opportunity to connect the instrument."

"Now sit over there!" Larry commanded, waving the man to a chair at one of the tables. The fellow obeyed him without question. And after a quick survey of the place to make sure that there were no eavesdroppers, Captain Redmond joined him.

"Good!" he said. "Now the Germans will be here tonight," he confided, as he seated himself upon the table and leaned toward his fellow-spy.

"So soon?"

"They march fast," Larry said. "Here the road forks. One turns to the left, the other to the right. The safety of your fort depends on which road they take."

"I know," the other assented. "And



"The Germans Will Be Here Tonight." on their arrival a woman will send us word by our telephone."

Larry had not learned that.

"A woman?" he exclaimed. "Who is she?"

"I do not know, m'sieu."

"Is she here now?" Larry persisted. A suspicion had suddenly swept across his mind, filling him half with hope, half with fear, that the unknown woman might be Ethel Willoughby.

The Frenchman shook his head.

"No, m'sieu, I wait her return," he explained.

"She was not, perhaps, a Madame de Lorde—" Larry mused.

"I was not told her name, m'sieu. I am to find her by code."

"I thought possibly it might be a Madame de Lorde," Larry told him.

"Until two days ago we were working together in Brussels. Then I had to leave. . . . I thought she might have come this way." He slipped the table onto his feet. "Still, no matter!" he added, as the French spy looked at him a bit too inquisitorily.

"You can depend on this woman?" he inquired.

The fellow shrugged his shoulders.

"She serves General Jacques. He trusts her," he replied, as if that fact absolved him of responsibility.

"Explain everything carefully to me," Larry cautioned him.

"Everything, m'sieu!" the little man promised. "Shall you return here later?" he asked, as Larry started to leave him.

"I do not know if my regiment will stop here, or if it will go on; so I must rely on you and the woman," Captain Redmond warned him. "Remember—it is imperative your general know if the attack be direct or by a flanking movement."

"Yes, yes! . . . Now I shall get the telephone," the Gallic gentleman announced. And then he exclaimed quickly, in French, "Vous avez raison!"

His change to his own language, no less than the inflection of warning in his voice, brought Captain Redmond around sharply; and he saw that they were no longer alone. It was the innkeeper, Henri Christophe, who had come back to serve his leisurely patron.

"Ah, gentlemen! Something to drink?" Christophe asked them, rubbing his hands in anticipation of the feel of good coin in them.

"No, thank you! My friend is leaving now," the Frenchman said.

"But I will be back soon," Larry promised. And with that Henri Christophe had to be content.

Again the indefatigable newspaper reader returned to his favorite pastime, while Henri Christophe regarded him with a mild pensiveness. The fellow had loafed much in his inn during the past two days; but he had been altogether too abstemious to suit the proprietor's notions of what was due him from a guest. And then all at once old Henri's face turned happy once more, at the sight of a quaint little creature who tripped into the room and called to him:

"Ah, father! You are home again! What news of the war?"

"Nothing, ma petite," he said. "Nothing! Do not be alarmed."

"But all say the Germans are coming through Belgium," she told him plaintively.

Her remark seemed to exasperate him. What with poor business, and the worry of the last few days—for Henri Christophe did not entirely share the complacency of his more placid patrons regarding rumors that were in the air—with those things to trouble him his patience had become fine-spun. The good God knew that he did not desire war to sweep over his fatherland. He hoped passionately that it might escape that calamity. And dreading it as he did, he took occasion, whenever the possibility was mentioned, to denounce the contingency as being beyond reason. Somehow, he derived comfort simply from asserting his disbelief in such a thing.

"All say it!" he repeated after her with an irritation which was strange in him. "So always it is with you women—you exaggerate every rumor," he cried. "I tell you—your father—we are a neutral country. All the big nations they have promised us that our land is safe from invasion. It is nearly a hundred years since they gave us their word and always they have kept it."

"But still I am frightened," his daughter reaffirmed. She was, in truth, a timid little thing—just the sort to be thrown into a twitter of excitement over a mouse—or a war. It mattered not what one might tell her to calm her. She would still be alarmed. And now Jeanne looked up at her father with such fear in her great dark eyes that he forgot his anger in his attempt to soothe her.

"But why?" he asked her more gently. "They did not come through our country in 1870 in the Franco-Prussian war. Why should they now? The Germans make much money from us and we from them. They are our friends. . . . No, ma petite, thanks to God we need fear nothing."

"I hope, father, you may be right," she said, albeit somewhat doubtful still.

"You shall see! You shall see!" he reassured her. He made his way to the cigar counter and busied himself setting things to rights there. "What worries me far more than the Germans, my little one," he went on, "what worries me is that we have so few Americans automobiling this summer. Always in August there are many; and they pay well."

"Perhaps it is the Germans who keep them away," she ventured unhappily.

"Will you cease?" he cried angrily. "Always you talk of the Germans. Soon you will have me nervous like you," he complained, as if he were not already that.

"I am sorry, mon pere," she said in filial repentence.

"There, there!" he exclaimed, as if ashamed that he had chided her. "I did not mean to be cross. Come! Forget your fears and pray to your saints that business will be better. To think that in August we have only that one lady lodger!"

At his remark the French spy glanced up quickly from his newspaper. He had not known that there was a lady staying in the house. And he wondered whether she might not prove to be the person for whom he was on the lookout.

"And what do you suppose she is doing?"

"Explain everything carefully to me here in Courvoisier?" little Jeanne asked her father. "It was not quite the usual thing for a foreign—or any other lady to stay in an inn without an escort."

"That I do not know—nor do I care, ma petite," Henri Christophe said.

"She is not French as she says. One may tell from her accent," the girl remarked. It was patent that her woman's curiosity had been aroused by their feminine guest.

"But she pays, my little one—and she minds her own business," her father responded. "Let us do likewise. . . . Wipe off the table yonder!" he directed Jeanne, as if he would give her something to think of that would take her mind off such idle thoughts.

Little Jeanne took the cloth from a nearby hook and proceeded to polish the table-top at which the two peasants had lately sat. And while she was thus engaged their too frugal French guest folded up his paper, rose, and left them.

CHAPTER XII.

Lost—A War!

A stranger—unmistakably American—pedaled a decrepit bicycle up to the very threshold of the Lion d'Or before he threw a leg wearily over the rear wheel and stood there, leaning heavily upon the handle bars and saddle. It was Charlie Brown, though his best friend might not have recognized him without some difficulty. He was both dirty and disheveled, and hot and tired as well. Dust lay thick upon his shoes. And now he gazed mournfully into the inn, somewhat as a thirst-parched wanderer in a desert might have looked upon an oasis, with its promise of shade and cooling water.

Henri Christophe did not see him at first, for his broad back was toward the street. But he sprang up quickly as Mr. Brown called to him in very bad French—

"Musser le proprietor!"

It was like music in the innkeeper's ears.

"A customer, and an American!" he exclaimed under his breath. "Oul, monsieur!" he responded delightedly.

"I am very tired," Charlie explained—though he scarcely needed to dilate upon that obvious fact. "I desire a chamber with—a bed, immediately."

"Oul, monsieur—I have a very good room, on the mezzanine floor—excellent for monsieur! . . . Ten francs a day!"

"Ten?" said Charlie. "Cheap enough! Go to it!"

And while little Jeanne went to prepare the room for him, he threw himself into a chair and cast a paper parcel—his sole baggage—upon the table in front of him. Beyond a few fresh collars its contents were negligible.

"I want to go to my room now," Charlie informed his host. "I'm dead to the world." Unconsciously he had lapsed into his own vernacular. And then he realized that a Belgian innkeeper in a country town could by no manner or means comprehend him. "Oh, how the devil do you say 'I want to go to my room' in French?" he groaned.

"But I speak English, sir!" the innkeeper interposed. He had a decided accent, it was true. But to Charlie Brown's ears the words were as grateful as the sound of a rippling brook upon a hot summer's day.

"You do? Why didn't you say so?" he demanded.

"Pardon me, sir!" the polite innkeeper begged him. "But so many Americans like to exhibit their knowledge of French that I have found it wisest never to speak English to an American until I am asked."

"Say—how did you know I was an American?" Charlie asked him with sudden suspicion. He would have liked to know just what it was about his appearance that seemed to stamp him as being beyond reason. Somehow, he derived comfort simply from asserting his disbelief in such a thing.

"I hope, father, you may be right," she said, albeit somewhat doubtful still.

"You shall see! You shall see!" he reassured her. He made his way to the cigar counter and busied himself setting things to rights there. "What worries me far more than the Germans, my little one," he went on, "what worries me is that we have so few Americans automobiling this summer. Always in August there are many; and they pay well."

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"I am sorry, mon pere," she said in filial repentence.

"There, there!" he exclaimed, as if ashamed that he had chided her. "It is always just our peaceful little village! We harvest our crops; we brew some beer; we make a little wine—good wine. Monsieur shall sample it and see," he added parenthetically. "We go to church on Sunday, we live and die in the quiet sunshine. . . . There will be no war here."

Charlie Brown did not like to break rudely upon the good man's placid dream. But at the same time he saw no reason for dissembling. If trouble were coming—as he believed—he considered it as well that the innkeeper

should be prepared for it as well as might be.

"But they say the Germans are coming through Belgium," he ventured.

Henri Christophe picked up the checkerboard that the two peasants had used to amuse themselves, and placed it upon the counter.

"Ah, no, m'sieu! And even should they, our people are good people. They will not touch us," he said as optimistically as he could.

"Well—I hope not," Charlie agreed. "But at least I'd like to see some of the beggars. It's d—d irritating to look for a war and not be able to find it." He rose stiffly from his chair and strolled to the cigar counter. "Got anything to smoke?" he asked, leaning over the glass case. The innkeeper fumbled inside the showcase and laid his wares out for his guest's inspection.

"Gosh, Peter!" Mr. Brown exclaimed in delight. "And a real cigar counter,

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