



The MARSHAL

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CHAPTER I.

The Prophecy.

Half a dozen high, little French voices floated shrilly into the garden, on a sunny morning of 1820 from the great entry of an old farmhouse in the valley under the Jura mountains. The grandmother, sitting white-capped in the center of the hub-bub, heard one more willingly than the others, for not only was Francois her best loved, but also the story he asked for was the story she liked to tell.

Smiling, the grandmother began: "You must know, my children, that it was on a day in the month of May, in the year 1813, that he came. You, Lucie, and you, Pierre, and Marie were not born, only Francois and Tomas. Francois was the older—not quite three years old. The mother had gone to care for your Aunt Lucie, who was ill, and I kept the house for your father. It was the year of the great conscription, when the emperor took all the men to fight, not only the strong ones, but the boys, and the old and infirm, if they might but drag themselves at the tail of a regiment. So the few men who were not under the flag were sorely needed by their families, for it was necessary, if the women and children were not to starve, that some should stay to work in the fields. Your father was of the few who had escaped in our village of Vicques.

"One morning a man appeared in the village and said that Napoleon would pass this way within a few hours.

"Outside I heard the neighbors calling the same two words—'Napoleon comes'—one called it to another. If the trumpet of the angel sounded the end of the world, they could not have had more fear. Then your father kissed me, and knelt and held you, Francois, and Tomas, in his arms, and I saw tears, but he was brave—but yes. 'Courage, little mother,' he said, 'for me and for the babies. Courage.' "And at that your father, who was my little lad once, you know, my dears, had gone, and I stood with an ache where my heart should have been, and for a moment I was stupid and could not think.

"As I stood so, like a blow there was a rush of galloping horses in a shower of noise down the street, and my heart stopped, for the horses drew up at this house. So that I was still in the middle of the floor when the door opened.

"It opened, that door there, and against the light I saw men crowding in the entry. They wore uniforms of bright colors, and swords hung at their sides, and on their heads were hats with trimmings of gold. Then I saw—Napoleon. With a step toward me he spoke in a kind voice, half smiling. 'Madame,' he said, 'will you let us use this room and this table for an hour? You shall not be disturbed in your work.'

"I made my courtesy to these great gentlemen as I had been taught, and I found myself saying quite easily to his majesty the emperor, as easily as if I talked to Monsieur le Cure, to whom I was accustomed, that he was welcome; that I would serve him gladly if he wished to command me. And then I left them. I went into the kitchen and began to get dinner, but I was so dazed that I could not seem to make the soup as usual. When, suddenly, I heard a child cry, and with no thought then but of my babies, I flew to the door of the great room and stood looking, for I could not pass the sentinel.

"Among the officers in their uniforms there lay on the floor little Francois in his night-dress, and all the officers looked at him and laughed. The child, sleeping in the farther room, had waked at the voices and had climbed down from his crib and toddled out to see. The glitter of the uniforms must have pleased him, and as they all bent over the papers on the table he had pulled at the sword of one whom I afterward knew to be the great Marshal Ney. He wore a dark coat all heavy with gold lace, my children, and white pantaloons and high shining black boots, and across his breast a scarlet ribbon. He sat next the emperor. The marshal, turning sharply at the tug, knocked the little one over. It was then Francois cried out.

"Napoleon himself who spoke as I peered under the sentinel's arm. He shook his finger at his officer.

"'Marshal, Marshal,' he cried, 'are you not too quick to overthrow so young a soldier, so full of love for arms?'

"The emperor seemed to joke, for he laughed a little, yet there was a sound in his voice as if some part was serious. He turned sharply to the marshal. 'What is the child's name?'

"The marshal was our friend and knew the babies. 'Francois Beaupre, sire,' he answered tremblingly.

"The emperor gave a short nod. 'Make him kneel,' he said. 'Marshal, your sword.'

"It was still for a moment, and all the officers stood up silent, and then the emperor took the marshal's sword and struck the baby's shoulder a light blow with the flat of it.

"Rise Chevalier Francois Beaupre," he said clearly, and in the pause he added, with a look in his eyes as if one gazed forward: "Some day, perhaps, a marshal of France under another Bonaparte."

CHAPTER II.

The Stranger.

On an afternoon in July in the year of 1820, Francois, being ten years old and a dreamer, came alone through the gate and sat down with his short legs dangling over an ancient wall, fifteen feet sheer down. He sat there, quite comfortable and secure, and kicked his heels, and thought of his brilliant future, and also of the story of the great dog and the treasure. The tradition ran that ages back, in the time of Caesar, fifty years after Christ, a Roman governor in this Gallic province had built a formidable castle on this hill outside the village. The castle had great granaries to hold the grain which the governor tortured from the peasants and sent to Rome to sell. So he grew rich by oppression, and the gold wrung from the people he piled in cellars deep in his castle. When it came to be a great amount he sent it to the north and got a huge dog, and this dog he trained to a terrible ferocity, so that anyone coming near in the long underground corridors where he guarded the treasure was sure to be torn in pieces, except always the governor.

For years things went on in this way, the governor grinding the peasants, and the giant dog guarding him and his treasure, till at last there came a thunderbolt—the governor was sent for to come to Rome to give an account of the riches which he had kept from the emperor. He had to go, but he left the dog in charge, and the night after he was gone the peasantry gathered and set fire to the chateau and burned it to the ground, and the dog and the treasure were buried in it, and there they are to this day. The people of Vicques believe that if a man will go to dig that treasure and will stay till midnight, that at twelve exactly a colossal dog will rise from the ruined stones and come, breathing flames; in his mouth will be the key of the treasure-vault, and back of him will stand the ghost of the Roman governor wrapped in white, his face covered. And if the man will be bold enough to take the key from the flaming mouth, then dog and governor will vanish in a clap of thunder, and in front of the daring one will rise the door of the treasure-vault, and he may turn the key and go in and help himself.

Francois considered, and, feeling no fear in his soul, decided that he was the man destined to take the key out of the dog's mouth and get the treasure, which he would at once transfer intact to his mother. He had no need for treasure; there were things more important. It was for him to become a marshal of France. Napoleon had said so; it must be so; but he should like, on the way to this goal, to face the dog and take the key and give his mother the treasure.

In the gaiety of the thought, and feeling both ambitious all but accomplished by this decision, he lifted himself on the palms of his hands and kicked out lightly over the abyss. As



"Rise, Chevalier Francois Beaupre!" he kicked there was a sudden strong grip on his shoulder; he was jerked backward and rolled on the grass.

"Are you tired of life at this age then?" a strident voice demanded, and Francois lay on his back and regarded, wondering, at ease, the bronzed lined face of a big man standing over him. Francois smiled; then laughed with assurance of the other's friendliness up into the strange man's face. He got to his feet and stood.

"No, m'sieur," he said politely. "I was only pleased at thinking what I am going to be some day."

"Ah! Is it permitted to ask what magnificence it is that you are to be?" "Certainly it is permitted, m'sieur," Francois answered in his courteous, courteous way. "I shall one day be a marshal of France under another Bonaparte."

The stranger watched him, astonished, and then he laid his hand on the

slim shoulder in its homespun blouse, and his grave voice was gentle. "My child, be careful how you say words like those; you may get your father into trouble. It is a good belief to keep in one's heart, and you and I may yet shout 'Vive l'Empereur' for a Napoleon again. Yes, who knows? But I must go on. Good day, my friend, the marshal."

CHAPTER III.

Without Fear.

The gilder sat at work gilding the great ball on top of the church steeple. Every twenty years this had to be done, and it was an event in the village. Moreover, it was dangerous, and, like all dangers, fascinating.

The boys of Vicques stood in groups in the street with their heads bent back, watching the tiny figure of a man that crept up an invisible ladder far in the air, lashed to the side of the steeple. Up and up it went, like a fly, crawling on the fleche, and there was a sinking feeling in each boy's stomach which was delightful, to think how at any moment that creeping black spot which was the gilder might fall down, down, and be dashed to pieces.

Achille Dufour suggested, "Even Francois would not dare climb that ladder to the ball. Dare you?"

The great brown eyes of Francois turned about the group; the boys waited eagerly for his answer. It was always this one who led into the dangerous places; always this one who went a bit further when the others' courage failed.

"I dare," said Francois. Then the dark heads came together in an uneasy mass, and there was whispering.

At the dinner-hour that day several mothers of the village remarked that their small lads were restless, not in fact as usual on the black bread and the soup of chopped vegetables and the green beans—all anxious to finish and get away. Only the mother of Francois, however, reasoned from this that mischief was brewing. When the slim, wiry, little figure slipped from the table and out through the open door, she rose and followed and stood in the great entry watching him race across the field toward the church. He veered but once in his straight path—to turn to the Pripoteaux cottage, where the gilder lodged while in Vicques.

"How soon will one be at work up there again?" he asked through the window of Auguste Philpoteaux sitting at his dinner, and the man answered good-naturedly:

"It may be in half an hour, my boy. Not sooner." And Francois raced on. By this time a boy here and a boy there had stolen from their dinner tables and were gathering in groups down the street, but the elders paid no attention. Francois disappeared into the church; the boys began to grow breathless.

"It will take some minutes for the stairs," one said, and they waited. Two minutes, three, perhaps five; something rose out of the trap-door leading to the platform from which the steeple sprang—a figure, looking very small so far up above them. Instantly it attached itself, like a crawling fly, to the side of the steeple; it moved upward. Henri Dufour, below in the street, jumped as a hand gripped his arm. He looked up frightened at La Claire.

"Is that my Francois?" she demanded sternly, but the boy did not need to answer.

With that, by degrees people came from the cottages as at some mysterious warning and stood silent, afraid to breathe, watching the little figure creeping up, up the dizzy narrowing peak of the church steeple. A rider galloped down the road; seeing the groups, he pulled in his bay horse and his eyes followed the upward glance of the whole village.

"Who is it?" he flung at the nearest knot of peasants; his voice was abrupt and commanding.

The men pulled off their caps, and one answered respectfully: "It is little Francois Beaupre, my seigneur; it is a child who has no fear; he is almost at the top, but we dread it when he descends."

"Mon dieu!" the man on horseback growled. "If he looks down he is lost; the lad is a born hero or a born lunatic."

The crawling spot up there showed dark in the sunlight against the new gilding of the ball. It stopped; the blot was fixed for a second; another second. From the crowd rose gasps, and excited broken sentences.

"He has the vertigo! He is lost!" The dark blot clung against the gilding. Then suddenly it moved, began to make a slow way downward, and a long sigh, like a ripple on water, ran through the ranks of people. No one spoke; all the eyes watched the little figure slip down, down the unseen ladder in the air. At last it was at the bottom; it disappeared into the trap-door. Every one began to talk volubly at once; a woman cried for joy, then a child spoke in a high voice.

"See," she said shrilly, "the mother of Francois goes to meet him!"

Le Claire was far down the street, gliding toward that church door

which was under the steeple. As she reached it the little lad came out, his face flushed, his eyes shining with excitement and triumph. She took his hand silently, hardly looking at him, and turned so, quietly, without a word of either joy or reproof, her face impassive. She had got her boy again from the dead, it seemed to Claire, and those first moments were beyond words or embraces. To touch his warm hand was enough. The man on the bay horse, trotting slowly along, saw the meeting.

"It is a woman out of the common, that one," he spoke aloud. "She rules herself and the boy." And the boy looked up as he came and smiled and tugged at his cap with the hand which his mother did not hold.

"Good morning, m'sieur," he said with friendliness, and the rider stared. "Sacre bleu!" he flung back in his strong sudden voice. "It is my friend, the marshal. Was it you, then, played up there? Yet another fashion to play with death, eh? Nom d'un chien! You have a star of good luck—you are saved for something great, it must be."

"M'sieur the Marshal," he flung at Francois. "Come and see me in the chateau."

There was a clatter of galloping hoofs; the bay mare and her rider were far down the street.

"Who is it, my mother—the fierce gentleman?" Francois asked.

"You are fortunate today, Francois," Claire answered him. "The good God has saved your life from a very great foolishness, and also I think you have made a friend. It is the new seigneur."

CHAPTER IV.

Coming to His Own.

Six years ago, before Waterloo, Napoleon had given the new chateau of Vicques and its lands to general the Baron Gaspard Gourgaud, whom he had before then fashioned into a very good pattern of a soldier out of material left over from the old aristocracy. Vicques lay in the Valley Delesmontes—"of the mountains"—a league from the little city Delesmontes, whose six thousand inhabitants constituted it the chief city of this valley of the Jura. Over Vicques hung the mountain called Le Rose, behind Le Rose loomed that greater mountain called Le Raimu; back of Le Raimu rolled the Jura range.

The Baron-General Gourgaud, taking possession of the chateau in this month of July, thought it lucky he had not seen this domain of his before, else the vision would have turned his heart from his duty. After a full career almost in boyhood—for the Cross of the Legion of Honor had come to him at twenty-four—after service in the Spanish and Austrian campaigns and diplomatic missions; after saving the emperor's life at Moscow; after Waterloo, Napoleon had chosen him as one of three officers to go with him to St. Helena. The chateau and estate of Vicques had been given to him by the emperor after that brave and lucky moment at Moscow when, the first man to enter the Kremlin, he had snatched the match from a mass of gunpowder which would a moment later have blown up both officers and emperor.

Ten years before he had married; four years after that his wife had died, and the daughter she left was now a girl of seven, a fairly type of girl.

"You are perfect in every way but one, Alixe," he said, as he swung her high to kiss her. "You are—"

"I know," the little girl interrupted, comrade-like. "I know the fault I have. I am not a boy. But I do not wish to be a boy, father. I would then grow to be a great fierce person with a mustache—like you. Imagine me, father, with a mustache," and the two laughed together.

"Father, father!" Alixe dashed into the library.

"There is a queer, little, village boy—but a good boy, father. He has brought you a bunch of lettuce—such white fat lettuce! Will you see him? He is a very good boy."

"Alixe, you are impayable," the general growled. "I am your plaything! Yes, send for all the village—that will help me with my writing."

Alixe, ignoring sarcasm, had flown. In a minute she was back and led by the hand Francois.

"Ah!" the general greeted him sternly. "My friend, the marshal! You have already begun the attack on my chateau, it seems?"

"No, my seigneur," the boy answered gravely. "Not yet. I bring you some salad as a present. It is from my mother's garden. I chose the best."

"I thank you," said the general with seriousness. "I am not sure if your mother will thank you equally. It is a good present."

Francois was gratified. Le Claire had this morning sent him to the garden with a wide margin of time, and the inspiration had come as he looked down the gleaming row of white lettuce that he would take a tribute and make the visit which the seigneur had asked him to make.

st on a table so that it rattled and Francois started—but not Alixe.

"Sabre de bois!" he threw at the two children. "You have ruined my morning between you. I meant to finish those cursed chapters this morning. But let them wait. Having the honor to receive a visit from an officer of high rank, the least I can do is to entertain him. What amusement do you prefer, M'sieur the Marshal? I am at your service."

It was natural to Francois to believe every one kindly; he accepted with simplicity, if with slight surprise, the general's speech.

"The seigneur has fought battles under the great emperor himself?" the boy asked in an awed tone.

"Yes," came the abrupt answer. "Think!" whispered the French boy. "To have fought under the emperor!"

And the old soldier's heart thrilled suddenly. The child went on. "If the seigneur would tell me a story of one fight—of just one!"

"Ratisbon, Ratisbon!" clamored Alixe, and she scrambled over the arm of his chair to her father's knee and her hand went around his neck. "Tell about Ratisbon and the ditch and the ladders, father."

"Halt!" ordered the general. "I have not a week to talk. But I will tell about Ratisbon if you wish."

The deep voice stopped, then went on again. "The Austrians held Ratisbon and the bridge across the Danube river. The emperor wished to take the town and that bridge. Marshal Lannes was ordered to do it. You see, my children, the walls were very old but filled with Austrian artillery, and there was infantry on the parapets. An old ditch lay under the walls, a large ditch, dry, but twenty feet high and fifty feet wide. All the bottom of it was a vegetable garden. To take that town it was necessary to go down into that ditch and climb up again to the walls, and all the time one would be under fire from the Austrians on the walls—do you understand that, children? Very well. Twice the marshal asked for fifty volunteers to take the ladders and place them in the ditch. Twice one hundred men sprang forward, and it was necessary to choose the fifty. Twice they dashed out, carrying the ladders, from behind the great stone barn which had covered them, and each time the detail was wiped out—fifty men wiped out. It was like that, my children, the fight at Ratisbon."

"The emperor!" Francois breathed—"the emperor was there!"

"Probably nothing, which had not to do with his daughter, could have touched General Gourgaud as did that tribute."

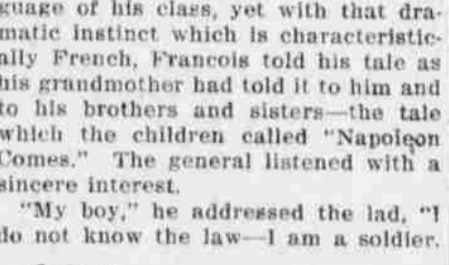
"Sapristi!" he growled. "The arm of the little corporal reaches a long way. The child has not even seen him, and volia, he loves him."

The child's face flushed. "But yes, my seigneur," Francois spoke quickly. "But yes, I have seen the emperor."

"You have seen Napoleon?" The general was surprised. "How is that?"

In a boyish fashion, in homely language of his class, yet with that dramatic instinct which is characteristically French, Francois told his tale as his grandmother had told it to him and to his brothers and sisters—the tale which the children called "Napoleon Comes." The general listened with a sincere interest.

"My boy," he addressed the lad, "I do not know the law—I am a soldier."



"Come and See Me in the Chateau."

Yet by my idea you are chevalier, created so by the act of the most powerful monarch who ever ruled France—by our Emperor Napoleon. The time may come when, as the emperor said, you may be a marshal of France under another Bonaparte. But that is a small thing if the time comes when you may help another Bonaparte to come to his right, to rule over France. It is that of which you must think till the hour strikes, and then it is that which you must give your life for."

Little Francois, the visionary, the hero worshiper, trembled. "I will do it, my seigneur," he said, frightened yet inspired, lifted into a tremendous dizzying atmosphere. And with that a secret which he had told no one, not even his mother, broke forth. "My seigneur, a strange thing happens—"

sometimes—I have dreams—yet they are not dreams—in broad daylight, I see things—I hear voices—which are not of our village. Three times I saw a long road up a mountain, and over the mountain was a large star. I saw it three times, and once a voice said 'It is the star of the Bonapartes, but also your star, Francois. Follow it.'

The general was a hard-headed person for all his cult of Napoleon, and vision-seeing appeared to him nonsense. He pooh-poohed at once the idea of a star divided between the house of Bonaparte and a small peasant. "Your mother had better put a wet cloth in your cap," he advised. "Parbleu—seeing stars in midday! Some one-legged old fighter has been gabbling before you about the star of the Bonapartes, and that and a touch of sunstroke in this heat, it may be, have turned you silly. Let me hear no more of stars, but keep at your lesson and learn to be—"

With that he was aware that the boy did not hear him. The light figure was on tiptoes—the large eyes stared at the wall, and the child spoke in an uninflected voice as if something muffled spoke through him.

"I see the star," he said. "I see it through a window where there are iron bars. . . . Ah!" The interjection was in the boy's natural accent, and he shivered violently. "Ugh!" His teeth chattered and he looked about vaguely. "It is like an iceberg. I do not like those dreams; they make me so cold. Seigneur, it is late; my mother will not be pleased. And I must stop at the garden and pick the vegetables for supper—carrots and peas. I must hurry to get the peas and carrots."

Little Alixe, clutching her father's thumb, watched as the boy disappeared. Then, to the general's astonishment, she began to sob. "I—I don't know," she answered his quick question. "But I—I think it is because I am sorry the little boy was so cold."

CHAPTER V.

A Game of Cards.

Francois Beaupre—Le Francois of Vicques—sober, laborious, had in him a certain pig-headedness, and also a vein of the gambler which had swollen with use; yet because it had so far brought him only good luck the neighbors called this good judgment. He was a dealer in working oxen; he bought and raised and sold them, and only his wife knew what chances he often took in buying young heaves. It was a simple solid form of speculation, yet it was that.

On a day in September he left Vicques early in the morning to drive to the market in Delesmontes, a league distant, two pairs of oxen which he had bought as calves for almost nothing from poor stock out of a farm leagues away. He had fed and trained and cared for them till now they were all well set-up and powerful and smooth-working—ready to sell for a good price. At the market he found that there were few oxen to be disposed of, none which compared to his, and his ideas of value went up—he would get nine hundred francs for them, which delayed the sale.

So it came to be, by the time his bargain was closed, three o'clock in the afternoon, and he had had no dinner. With the cattle off his hands and the money in his pocket he felt a sense of leisure and of wealth. Hungry as a wolf he felt also, and he turned into the inn of Delesmontes, where the sign of a huge bear, cut out of tin and painted black, swung before the door.

A waitress approached him—a sommeliere—trim in her short calico skirt and white apron, her hair done in the picturesque fashion of the place. The girl took his order; as she turned to go a man just coming in knocked against her, and apologizing with many words, caught sight of Francois. "Good day!" he saluted him heartily. "Good day, Monsieur Beaupre," and Francois, friendly always, answered "Good day," but with a reserve, for he did not recall the man. "You don't remember me? That is natural, for we met but once. Yet I have not forgotten you. It was at the house of my cousin, Paul Noirjean of Devillier."

Now Paul Noirjean was an old acquaintance and a solid man, and though Beaupre did not see him often, living six leagues away, he respected him highly. A cousin of his was to be considered, and Francois was embarrassed that his memory could not focus on the meeting. He tried to cover this with cordiality, and invited the stranger to share his meal.

"Not at all, not at all," the other answered. "Yet we must have a bottle of wine together, but it shall be my bottle."

Francois objected; the man insisted. At length: "See, we will play cards for that bottle," the unknown man suggested, and the cards were brought, and a game of La rams—euchre—was in progress in two minutes.

Meanwhile the wine had come, and Francois, a touch more generous and more cordial for it, was generally sorry when he won and the stranger must pay.

(TO BE CONTINUED)