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The Point Of Honor

By

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I

Napoleon the First, whose career had the quality of a duel against the whole of Europe, disliked duelling between the officers of his army. The great military emperor was not a swashbuckler, and had little respect for tradition.

Nevertheless, a story of duelling which became a legend in the army runs through the epic of imperial wars. To the surprise and admiration of their fellows, two officers, like insane artists trying to gild refined gold or paint the lily, pursued their private contest through the years of universal carnage. They were officers of cavalry, and their connection with the high-spirited but fanciful animal which carries men into battle seems particularly appropriate. It would be difficult to imagine for heroes of this legend two officers of infantry of the line, for example, whose fantasy is tamed by much walking exercise and whose valour necessarily must be of a more plodding kind. As to artillery, or engineers whose heads are kept cool on a diet of mathematics, it is simply unthinkable.

The names of the two officers were Feraud and D'Hubert, and they were both lieutenants in a regiment of hussars, but not in the same regiment.

Feraud was doing regimental work, but Lieutenant D'Hubert had the good fortune to be attached to the person of the general commanding the division, as officier d'ordonnance. It was in Strasbourg, and in this agreeable and important garrison, they were enjoying greatly a short interval of peace. They were enjoying it, though both intensely warlike, because it was a sword-sharpening, firelock-cleaning peace dear to a military heart and undamaging to military prestige inasmuch that no one believed in its sincerity or duration.

Under those historical circumstances so favourable to the proper appreciation of military leisure Lieutenant D'Hubert could have been seen one fine afternoon making his way along the street of a cheerful suburb towards Lieutenant Feraud's quarters, which were in a private house with a garden at the back, belonging to an old maiden lady.

His knock at the door was answered instantly by a young maid in Alsatian costume. Her fresh complexion and her long eyelashes, which she lowered modestly at the sight of the tall officer, caused Lieutenant D'Hubert, who was accessible to esthetic impressions, to relax the cold, on-duty expression of his face. At the same time he observed that the girl had over her arm a pair of hussar's breeches, red with a blue stripe.

"Lieutenant Feraud at home?" he inquired benevolently.

"Oh, no, sir. He went out at six this morning."

And the little maid tried to close the door, but Lieutenant D'Hubert, opposing this move with gentle firmness, stepped into the anteroom jingling his spurs.

"Come, my dear. You don't mean to say he has not been home since six o'clock this morning?"

Saying these words, Lieutenant D'Hubert opened without ceremony the door of a room so comfortable and neatly ordered that only from internal evidence in the shape of boots, uniforms and military accoutrements, did he acquire the conviction that it was Lieutenant Feraud's room. And he saw also that Lieutenant Feraud was not at home. The truthful maid had followed him and looked up inquisitively.

"H'm," said Lieutenant D'Hubert, greatly disappointed, for he had already visited all the haunts where a lieutenant of hussars could be found of a fine afternoon. "And do you happen to know, my dear, why he went out at six this morning?"

"No," she answered readily. "He came home late at night and snored. I heard him when I got up at five. Then he dressed himself in his oldest uniform and went out. Service, I suppose."

"Service? Not a bit of it!" cried Lieutenant D'Hubert. "Learn, my child, that he went out so early to fight a duel with a civilian."

She heard the news without a quiver of her dark eyelashes. It was very obvious that the actions of Lieutenant Feraud were generally above criticism. She only looked up for a moment in mute surprise, and Lieutenant D'Hubert concluded from this absence of emotion that she must have seen Lieutenant Feraud since the morning. He looked around the room.

"Come," he insisted, with confidential familiarity. "He's perhaps somewhere in the house now?"

She shook her head.

"So much the worse for him," continued Lieutenant D'Hubert, in a tone of anxious conviction. "But he has been home this morning?"

This time the pretty maid nodded slightly.

"He has!" cried Lieutenant D'Hubert. "And went out again? What for? Couldn't he keep quietly indoors? What a lunatic! My dear child...."

Lieutenant D'Hubert's natural kindness of disposition and strong sense of comradeship helped his powers of observation, which generally were not remarkable. He changed his tone to a most insinuating softness; and gazing at the hussar's breeches hanging over the arm of the girl, he appealed to the interest she took in Lieutenant Feraud's comfort and happiness. He was pressing and persuasive. He used his eyes, which were large and fine, with excellent effect. His anxiety to get hold at once of Lieutenant Feraud, for Lieutenant Feraud's own good, seemed so genuine that at last it overcame the girl's discretion. Unluckily she had not much to tell. Lieutenant Feraud had returned home shortly before ten; had walked straight into his room and had thrown himself on his bed to resume his slumbers. She had heard him snore rather louder than before far into the afternoon. Then he got up, put on his best uniform and went out. That was all she knew.

She raised her candid eyes up to Lieutenant D'Hubert, who stared at her incredulously.

"It's incredible. Gone parading the town in his best uniform! My dear child, don't you know that he ran that civilian through this morning? Clean through as you spit a hare."

She accepted this gruesome intelligence without any signs of distress. But she pressed her lips together thoughtfully.

"He isn't parading the town," she remarked, in a low tone. "Far from it."

"The civilian's family is making an awful row," continued Lieutenant D'Hubert, pursuing his train of thought. "And the general is very angry. It's one of the best families in the town. Feraud ought to have kept close at least...."

"What will the general do to him?" inquired the girl anxiously.

"He won't have his head cut off, to be sure," answered Lieutenant D'Hubert. "But his conduct is positively indecent. He's making no end of trouble for himself by this sort of bravado."

"But he isn't parading the town," the maid murmured again.

"Why, yes! Now I think of it. I haven't seen him anywhere. What on earth has he

done with himself?"

"He's gone to pay a call," suggested the maid, after a moment of silence.

Lieutenant D'Hubert was surprised. "A call! Do you mean a call on a lady? The cheek of the man. But how do you know this?"

Without concealing her woman's scorn for the denseness of the masculine mind, the pretty maid reminded him that Lieutenant Feraud had arrayed himself in his best uniform before going out. He had also put on his newest dolman, she added in a tone as if this conversation were getting on her nerves and turned away brusquely. Lieutenant D'Hubert, without questioning the accuracy of the implied deduction, did not see that it advanced him much on his official quest. For his quest after Lieutenant Feraud had an official character. He did not know any of the women this fellow who had run a man through in the morning was likely to call on in the afternoon. The two officers knew each other but slightly. He bit his gloved finger in perplexity.

"Call!" he exclaimed. "Call on the devil." The girl, with her back to him and folding the hussar's breeches on a chair, said with a vexed little laugh:

"Oh, no! On Madame de Lionne." Lieutenant D'Hubert whistled softly. Madame de Lionne, the wife of a high official, had a well-known salon and some pretensions to sensibility and elegance. The husband was a civilian and old, but the society of the salon was young and military for the greater part. Lieutenant D'Hubert had whistled, not because the idea of pursuing Lieutenant Feraud into that very salon was in the least distasteful to him, but because having but lately arrived in Strasbourg he had not the time as yet to get an introduction to Madame de Lionne. And what was that swashbuckler Feraud doing there? He did not seem the sort of man who...

"Are you certain of what you say?" asked Lieutenant D'Hubert.

The girl was perfectly certain. Without turning round to look at him she explained that the coachman of their next-door neighbours knew the maitre-d'hôtel of Madame de Lionne. In this way she got her information. And she was perfectly certain. In giving this assurance she sighed. Lieutenant Feraud called there nearly every afternoon.

"Ah, bah!" exclaimed D'Hubert ironically. His opinion of Madame de Lionne went down several degrees. Lieutenant Feraud did not seem to him specially worthy of attention on the part of a woman with a reputation for sensibility and elegance. But there was no saying. At bottom they were all alike--very practical rather than

idealistic. Lieutenant D'Hubert, however, did not allow his mind to dwell on these considerations. "By thunder!" he reflected aloud. "The general goes there sometimes. If he happens to find the fellow making eyes at the lady there will be the devil to pay. Our general is not a very accommodating person, I can tell you."

"Go quickly then. Don't stand here now I've told you where he is," cried the girl, colouring to the eyes.

"Thanks, my dear. I don't know what I would have done without you."

After manifesting his gratitude in an aggressive way which at first was repulsed violently and then submitted to with a sudden and still more repellent indifference, Lieutenant D'Hubert took his departure.

He clanked and jingled along the streets with a martial swagger. To run a comrade to earth in a drawing-room where he was not known did not trouble him in the least. A uniform is a social passport. His position as officier d'ordonnance of the general added to his assurance. Moreover, now he knew where to find Lieutenant Feraud, he had no option. It was a service matter.

Madame de Lionne's house had an excellent appearance. A man in livery opening the door of a large drawing-room with a waxed floor, shouted his name and stood aside to let him pass. It was a reception day. The ladies wearing hats surcharged with a profusion of feathers, sheathed in clinging white gowns from their armpits to the tips of their low satin shoes, looked sylphlike and cool in a great display of bare necks and arms. The men who talked with them, on the contrary, were arrayed heavily in ample, coloured garments with stiff collars up to their ears and thick sashes round their waists. Lieutenant D'Hubert made his unabashed way across the room, and bowing low before a sylphlike form reclining on a couch, offered his apologies for this intrusion, which nothing could excuse but the extreme urgency of the service order he had to communicate to his comrade Feraud. He proposed to himself to come presently in a more regular manner and beg forgiveness for interrupting this interesting conversation....

A bare arm was extended to him with gracious condescension even before he had finished speaking. He pressed the hand respectfully to his lips and made the mental remark that it was bony. Madame de Lionne was a blonde with too fine a skin and a long face.

"C'est ça!" she said, with an ethereal smile, disclosing a set of large teeth. "Come this evening to plead for your forgiveness."

"I will not fail, madame."

Meantime Lieutenant Feraud, splendid in his new dolman and the extremely polished boots of his calling, sat on a chair within a foot of the couch and, one hand propped on his thigh, with the other twirled his moustache to a point without uttering a sound. At a significant glance from D'Hubert he rose without alacrity and followed him into the recess of a window.

"What is it you want with me?" he asked in a tone of annoyance, which astonished not a little the other. Lieutenant D'Hubert could not imagine that in the innocence of his heart and simplicity of his conscience Lieutenant Feraud took a view of his duel in which neither remorse nor yet a rational apprehension of consequences had any place. Though Lieutenant Feraud had no clear recollection how the quarrel had originated (it was begun in an establishment where beer and wine are drunk late at night), he had not the slightest doubt of being himself the outraged party. He had secured two experienced friends or his seconds. Everything had been done according to the rules governing that sort of adventure. And a duel is obviously fought for the purpose of someone being at least hurt if not killed outright. The civilian got hurt. That also was in order. Lieutenant Feraud was perfectly tranquil. But Lieutenant D'Hubert mistook this simple attitude for affectation and spoke with some heat.

"I am directed by the general to give you the order to go at once to your quarters and remain there under close arrest."

It was now the turn of Lieutenant Feraud to be astonished.

"What the devil are you telling me there?" he murmured faintly, and fell into such profound wonder that he could only follow mechanically the motions of Lieutenant D'Hubert. The two officers--one tall, with an interesting face and a moustache the colour of ripe corn, the other short and sturdy, with a hooked nose and a thick crop of black, curly hair--approached the mistress of the house to take their leave. Madame de Lionne, a woman of eclectic taste, smiled upon these armed young men with impartial sensibility and an equal share of interest. Madame de Lionne took her delight in the infinite variety of the human species. All the eyes in the drawing-room followed the departing officers, one strutting, the other striding, with curiosity. When the door had closed after them one or two men who had already heard of the duel imparted the information to the sylphlike ladies, who received it with little shrieks of humane concern.

Meantime the two hussars walked side by side, Lieutenant Feraud trying to fathom the hidden reason of things which in this instance eluded the grasp of his intellect; Lieutenant D'Hubert feeling bored by the part he had to play; because the general's instructions were that he should see personally that Lieutenant

Feraud carried out his orders to the letter and at once.

"The chief seems to know this animal," he thought, eyeing his companion, whose round face, the round eyes and even the twisted-up jet black little moustache seemed animated by his mental exasperation before the incomprehensible. And aloud he observed rather reproachfully, "The general is in a devilish fury with you."

Lieutenant Feraud stopped short on the edge of the pavement and cried in the accents of unmistakable sincerity: "What on earth for?" The innocence of the fiery Gascon soul was depicted in the manner in which he seized his head in both his hands as if to prevent it bursting with perplexity.

"For the duel," said Lieutenant D'Hubert curtly. He was annoyed greatly by this sort of perverse fooling.

"The duel! The..."

Lieutenant Feraud passed from one paroxysm of astonishment into another. He dropped his hands and walked on slowly trying to reconcile this information with the state of his own feelings. It was impossible. He burst out indignantly:

"Was I to let that sauerkraut-eating civilian wipe his boots on the uniform of the Seventh Hussars?"

Lieutenant D'Hubert could not be altogether unsympathetic toward that sentiment. This little fellow is a lunatic, he thought to himself, but there is something in what he says.

"Of course, I don't know how far you were justified," he said soothingly. "And the general himself may not be exactly informed. A lot of people have been deafening him with their lamentations."

"Ah, he is not exactly informed," mumbled Lieutenant Feraud, walking faster and faster as his choler at the injustice of his fate began to rise. "He is not exactly.... And he orders me under close arrest with God knows what afterward."

"Don't excite yourself like this," remonstrated the other. "That young man's people are very influential, you know, and it looks bad enough on the face of it. The general had to take notice of their complaint at once. I don't think he means to be over-severe with you. It is best for you to be kept out of sight for a while."

"I am very much obliged to the general," muttered Lieutenant Feraud through his

teeth.

"And perhaps you would say I ought to be grateful to you too for the trouble you have taken to hunt me up in the drawing-room of a lady who..."

"Frankly," interrupted Lieutenant D'Hubert, with an innocent laugh, "I think you ought to be. I had no end of trouble to find out where you were. It wasn't exactly the place for you to disport yourself in under the circumstances. If the general had caught you there making eyes at the goddess of the temple.... Oh, my word!... He hates to be bothered with complaints against his officers, you know. And it looked uncommonly like sheer bravado."

The two officers had arrived now at the street door of Lieutenant Feraud's lodgings. The latter turned toward his companion. "Lieutenant D'Hubert," he said, "I have something to say to you which can't be said very well in the street. You can't refuse to come in."

The pretty maid had opened the door. Lieutenant Feraud brushed past her brusquely and she raised her scared, questioning eyes to Lieutenant D'Hubert, who could do nothing but shrug his shoulders slightly as he followed with marked reluctance.

In his room Lieutenant Feraud unhooked the clasp, flung his new dolman on the bed, and folding his arms across his chest, turned to the other hussar.

"Do you imagine I am a man to submit tamely to injustice?" he inquired in a boisterous voice.

"Oh, do be reasonable," remonstrated Lieutenant D'Hubert.

"I am reasonable. I am perfectly reasonable," retorted the other, ominously lowering his voice. "I can't call the general to account for his behaviour, but you are going to answer to me for yours."

"I can't listen to this nonsense," murmured Lieutenant D'Hubert, making a slightly contemptuous grimace.

"You call that nonsense. It seems to me perfectly clear. Unless you don't understand French."

"What on earth do you mean?"

"I mean," screamed suddenly Lieutenant Feraud, "to cut off your ears to teach

you not to disturb me, orders or no orders, when I am talking to a lady."

A profound silence followed this mad declaration--and through the open window Lieutenant D'Hubert heard the little birds singing sanely in the garden. He said coldly:

"Why! If you take that tone, of course I will hold myself at your disposal whenever you are at liberty to attend to this affair. But I don't think you will cut off my ears."

"I am going to attend to it at once," declared Lieutenant Feraud, with extreme truculence. "If you are thinking of displaying your airs and graces to-night in Madame de Lionne's salon you are very much mistaken."

"Really," said Lieutenant D'Hubert, who was beginning to feel irritated, "you are an impracticable sort of fellow. The general's orders to me were to put you under arrest, not to carve you into small pieces. Good-morning." Turning his back on the little Gascon who, always sober in his potations, was as though born intoxicated, with the sunshine of his wine-ripening country, the northman, who could drink hard on occasion, but was born sober under the watery skies of Picardy, made calmly for the door. Hearing, however, the unmistakable sound, behind his back, of a sword drawn from the scabbard, he had no option but to stop.

"Devil take this mad Southerner," he thought, spinning round and surveying with composure the warlike posture of Lieutenant Feraud with the unsheathed sword in his hand.

"At once. At once," stuttered Feraud, beside himself.

"You had my answer," said the other, keeping his temper very well.

At first he had been only vexed and somewhat amused. But now his face got clouded. He was asking himself seriously how he could manage to get away. Obviously it was impossible to run from a man with a sword, and as to fighting him, it seemed completely out of the question.

He waited awhile, then said exactly what was in his heart:

"Drop this; I won't fight you now. I won't be made ridiculous."

"Ah, you won't!" hissed the Gascon. "I suppose you prefer to be made infamous. Do you hear what I say?... Infamous! Infamous! Infamous!" he shrieked, raising

and falling on his toes and getting very red in the face. Lieutenant D'Hubert, on the contrary, became very pale at the sound of the unsavoury word, then flushed pink to the roots of his fair hair.

"But you can't go out to fight; you are under arrest, you lunatic," he objected, with angry scorn.

"There's the garden. It's big enough to lay out your long carcass in," spluttered out Lieutenant Feraud with such ardour that somehow the anger of the cooler man subsided.

"This is perfectly absurd," he said, glad enough to think he had found a way out of it for the moment. "We will never get any of our comrades to serve as seconds. It's preposterous."

"Seconds! Damn the seconds! We don't want any seconds. Don't you worry about any seconds. I will send word to your friends to come and bury you when I am done. This is no time for ceremonies. And if you want any witnesses, I'll send word to the old girl to put her head out of a window at the back. Stay! There's the gardener. He'll do. He's as deaf as a post, but he has two eyes in his head. Come along. I will teach you, my staff officer, that the carrying about of a general's orders is not always child's play."

While thus discoursing he had unbuckled his empty scabbard. He sent it flying under the bed, and, lowering the point of the sword, brushed past the perplexed Lieutenant D'Hubert, crying: "Follow me." Directly he had flung open the door a faint shriek was heard, and the pretty maid, who had been listening at the keyhole, staggered backward, putting the backs of her hands over her eyes. He didn't seem to see her, but as he was crossing the anteroom she ran after him and seized his left arm. He shook her off and then she rushed upon Lieutenant D'Hubert and clawed at the sleeve of his uniform.

"Wretched man," she sobbed despairingly. "Is this what you wanted to find him for?"

"Let me go," entreated Lieutenant D'Hubert, trying to disengage himself gently. "It's like being in a madhouse," he protested with exasperation. "Do let me go, I won't do him any harm."

A fiendish laugh from Lieutenant Feraud commented that assurance. "Come along," he cried impatiently, with a stamp of his foot.

And Lieutenant D'Hubert did follow. He could do nothing else. But in vindication

of his sanity it must be recorded that as he passed out of the anteroom the notion of opening the street door and bolting out presented itself to this brave youth, only, of course, to be instantly dismissed: for he felt sure that the other would pursue him without shame or compunction. And the prospect of an officer of hussars being chased along the street by another officer of hussars with a naked sword could not be for a moment entertained. Therefore he followed into the garden. Behind them the girl tottered out too. With ashy lips and wild, scared eyes, she surrendered to a dreadful curiosity. She had also a vague notion of rushing, if need be, between Lieutenant Feraud and death.

The deaf gardener, utterly unconscious of approaching footsteps, went on watering his flowers till Lieutenant Feraud thumped him on the back. Beholding suddenly an infuriated man, flourishing a big sabre, the old chap, trembling in all his limbs, dropped the watering pot. At once Lieutenant Feraud kicked it away with great animosity; then seizing the gardener by the throat, backed him against a tree and held him there shouting in his ear:

"Stay here and look on. You understand you've got to look on. Don't dare budge from the spot."

Lieutenant D'Hubert, coming slowly down the walk, unclasped his dolman with undisguised reluctance. Even then, with his hand already on his sword, he hesitated to draw, till a roar "En garde, fichtre! What do you think you came here for?" and the rush of his adversary forced him to put himself as quickly as possible in a posture of defence.

The angry clash of arms filled that prim garden, which hitherto had known no more warlike sound than the click of clipping shears; and presently the upper part of an old lady's body was projected out of a window upstairs. She flung her arms above her white cap, and began scolding in a thin, cracked voice. The gardener remained glued to the tree looking on, his toothless mouth open in idiotic astonishment, and a little farther up the walk the pretty girl, as if held by a spell, ran to and fro on a small grass plot, wringing her hands and muttering crazily. She did not rush between the combatants. The onslaughts of Lieutenant Feraud were so fierce that her heart failed her.

Lieutenant D'Hubert, his faculties concentrated upon defence, needed all his skill and science of the sword to stop the rushes of his adversary. Twice already he had had to break ground.

It bothered him to feel his foothold made insecure by the round dry gravel of the path rolling under the hard soles of his boots. This was most unsuitable ground, he thought, keeping a watchful, narrowed gaze shaded by long eyelashes upon

the fiery staring eyeballs of his thick-set adversary. This absurd affair would ruin his reputation of a sensible, steady, promising young officer. It would damage, at any rate, his immediate prospects and lose him the good will of his general. These worldly preoccupations were no doubt misplaced in view of the solemnity of the moment. For a duel whether regarded as a ceremony in the cult of honour or even when regrettably casual and reduced in its moral essence to a distinguished form of manly sport, demands perfect singleness of intention, a homicidal austerity of mood. On the other hand, this vivid concern for the future in a man occupied in keeping sudden death at sword's length from his breast, had not a bad effect, inasmuch as it began to rouse the slow anger of Lieutenant D'Hubert. Some seventy seconds had elapsed since they had crossed steel and Lieutenant D'Hubert had to break ground again in order to avoid impaling his reckless adversary like a beetle for a cabinet of specimens. The result was that, misapprehending the motive, Lieutenant Feraud, giving vent to triumphant snarls, pressed his attack with renewed vigour.

This enraged animal, thought D'Hubert, will have me against the wall directly. He imagined himself much closer to the house than he was; and he dared not turn his head, such an act under the circumstances being equivalent to deliberate suicide. It seemed to him that he was keeping his adversary off with his eyes much more than with his point. Lieutenant Feraud crouched and bounded with a tigerish, ferocious agility--enough to trouble the stoutest heart. But what was more appalling than the fury of a wild beast accomplishing in all innocence of heart a natural function, was the fixity of savage purpose man alone is capable of displaying. Lieutenant D'Hubert in the midst of his worldly preoccupations perceived it at last. It was an absurd and damaging affair to be drawn into. But whatever silly intention the fellow had started with, it was clear that by this time he meant to kill--nothing else. He meant it with an intensity of will utterly beyond the inferior faculties of a tiger.

As is the case with constitutionally brave men, the full view of the danger interested Lieutenant D'Hubert. And directly he got properly interested, the length of his arm and the coolness of his head told in his favour. It was the turn of Lieutenant Feraud to recoil. He did this with a blood-curdling grunt of baffled rage. He made a swift feint and then rushed straight forward.

"Ah! you would, would you?" Lieutenant D'Hubert exclaimed mentally to himself. The combat had lasted nearly two minutes, time enough for any man to get embittered, apart from the merits of the quarrel. And all at once it was over. Trying to close breast to breast under his adversary's guard, Lieutenant Feraud received a slash on his shortened arm. He did not feel it in the least, but it checked his rush, and his feet slipping on the gravel, he fell backward with great violence. The shock jarred his boiling brain into the perfect quietude of

insensibility. Simultaneously with his fall the pretty servant girl shrieked piercingly; but the old maiden lady at the window ceased her scolding and with great presence of mind began to cross herself.

In the first moment, seeing his adversary lying perfectly still, his face to the sky and his toes turned up, Lieutenant D'Hubert thought he had killed him outright. The impression of having slashed hard enough to cut his man clean in two abode with him for awhile in an exaggerated impression of the right good will he had put into the blow. He went down on his knees by the side of the prostrate body. Discovering that not even the arm was severed, a slight sense of disappointment mingled with the feeling of relief. But, indeed, he did not want the death of that sinner. The affair was ugly enough as it stood. Lieutenant D'Hubert addressed himself at once to the task of stopping the bleeding. In this task it was his fate to be ridiculously impeded by the pretty maid. The girl, filling the garden with cries for help, flung herself upon his defenceless back and, twining her fingers in his hair, tugged at his head. Why she should choose to hinder him at this precise moment he could not in the least understand. He did not try. It was all like a very wicked and harassing dream. Twice, to save himself from being pulled over, he had to rise and throw her off. He did this stoically, without a word, kneeling down again at once to go on with his work. But when the work was done he seized both her arms and held them down. Her cap was half off, her face was red, her eyes glared with crazy boldness. He looked mildly into them while she called him a wretch, a traitor and a murderer many times in succession. This did not annoy him so much as the conviction that in her scurries she had managed to scratch his face abundantly. Ridicule would be added to the scandal of the story. He imagined it making its way through the garrison, through the whole army, with every possible distortion of motive and sentiment and circumstance, spreading a doubt upon the sanity of his conduct and the distinction of his taste even into the very bosom of his honourable family. It was all very well for that fellow Feraud, who had no connections, no family to speak of, and no quality but courage which, anyhow, was a matter of course, and possessed by every single trooper in the whole mass of French cavalry. Still holding the wrists of the girl in a strong grip, Lieutenant D'Hubert looked over his shoulder. Lieutenant Feraud had opened his eyes. He did not move. Like a man just waking from a deep sleep he stared with a drowsy expression at the evening sky.

Lieutenant D'Hubert's urgent shouts to the old gardener produced no effect--not so much as to make him shut his toothless mouth. Then he remembered that the man was stone deaf. All that time the girl, attempting to free her wrists, struggled, not with maidenly coyness but like a sort of pretty dumb fury, not even refraining from kicking his shins now and then. He continued to hold her as if in a vice, his instinct telling him that were he to let her go she would fly at his eyes. But he was greatly humiliated by his position. At last she gave up, more

exhausted than appeased, he feared. Nevertheless he attempted to get out of this wicked dream by way of negotiation.

"Listen to me," he said as calmly as he could. "Will you promise to run for a surgeon if I let you go?"

He was profoundly afflicted when, panting, sobbing, and choking, she made it clear that she would do nothing of the kind. On the contrary, her incoherent intentions were to remain in the garden and fight with her nails and her teeth for the protection of the prostrate man. This was horrible.

"My dear child," he cried in despair, "is it possible that you think me capable of murdering a wounded adversary? Is it... Be quiet, you little wildcat, you," he added.

She struggled. A thick sleepy voice said behind him:

"What are you up to with that girl?"

Lieutenant Feraud had raised himself on his good arm. He was looking sleepily at his other arm, at the mess of blood on his uniform, at a small red pool on the ground, at his sabre lying a foot away on the path. Then he laid himself down gently again to think it all out as far as a thundering headache would permit of mental operations.

Lieutenant D'Hubert released the girl's wrists. She flew away down the path and crouched wildly by the side of the vanquished warrior. The shades of night were falling on the little trim garden with this touching group whence proceeded low murmurs of sorrow and compassion with other feeble sounds of a different character as if an imperfectly awake invalid were trying to swear. Lieutenant D'Hubert went away, too exasperated to care what would happen.

He passed through the silent house and congratulated himself upon the dusk concealing his gory hands and scratched face from the passers-by. But this story could by no means be concealed. He dreaded the discredit and ridicule above everything, and was painfully aware of sneaking through the back streets to his quarters. In one of these quiet side streets the sounds of a flute coming out of the open window of a lighted upstairs room in a modest house interrupted his dismal reflections. It was being played with a deliberate, persevering virtuosity, and through the fioritures of the tune one could even hear the thump of the foot beating time on the floor.

Lieutenant D'Hubert shouted a name which was that of an army surgeon whom

he knew fairly well. The sounds of the flute ceased and the musician appeared at the window, his instrument still in his hand, peering into the street.

"Who calls? You, D'Hubert! What brings you this way?"

He did not like to be disturbed when he was playing the flute. He was a man whose hair had turned gray already in the thankless task of tying up wounds on battlefields where others reaped advancement and glory.

"I want you to go at once and see Feraud. You know Lieutenant Feraud? He lives down the second street. It's but a step from here."

"What's the matter with him?"

"Wounded."

"Are you sure?"

"Sure!" cried D'Hubert. "I come from there."

"That's amusing," said the elderly surgeon. Amusing was his favourite word; but the expression of his face when he pronounced it never corresponded. He was a stolid man. "Come in," he added. "I'll get ready in a moment."

"Thanks. I will. I want to wash my hands in your room."

Lieutenant D'Hubert found the surgeon occupied in unscrewing his flute and packing the pieces methodically in a velvet-lined case. He turned his head.

"Water there--in the corner. Your hands do want washing."

"I've stopped the bleeding," said Lieutenant D'Hubert. "But you had better make haste. It's rather more than ten minutes ago, you know."

The surgeon did not hurry his movements.

"What's the matter? Dressing came off? That's amusing. I've been busy in the hospital all day, but somebody has told me that he hadn't a scratch."

"Not the same duel probably," growled moodily Lieutenant D'Hubert, wiping his hands on a coarse towel.

"Not the same.... What? Another? It would take the very devil to make me go out

twice in one day." He looked narrowly at Lieutenant D'Hubert. "How did you come by that scratched face? Both sides too--and symmetrical. It's amusing."

"Very," snarled Lieutenant D'Hubert. "And you will find his slashed arm amusing too. It will keep both of you amused for quite a long time."

The doctor was mystified and impressed by the brusque bitterness of Lieutenant D'Hubert's tone. They left the house together, and in the street he was still more mystified by his conduct.

"Aren't you coming with me?" he asked.

"No," said Lieutenant D'Hubert. "You can find the house by yourself. The front door will be open very likely."

"All right. Where's his room?"

"Ground floor. But you had better go right through and look in the garden first."

This astonishing piece of information made the surgeon go off without further parley. Lieutenant D'Hubert regained his quarters nursing a hot and uneasy indignation. He dreaded the chaff of his comrades almost as much as the anger of his superiors. He felt as though he had been entrapped into a damaging exposure. The truth was confoundedly grotesque and embarrassing to justify; putting aside the irregularity of the combat itself which made it come dangerously near a criminal offence. Like all men without much imagination, which is such a help in the processes of reflective thought, Lieutenant D'Hubert became frightfully harassed by the obvious aspects of his predicament. He was certainly glad that he had not killed Lieutenant Feraud outside all rules and without the regular witnesses proper to such a transaction. Uncommonly glad. At the same time he felt as though he would have liked to wring his neck for him without ceremony.

He was still under the sway of these contradictory sentiments when the surgeon amateur of the flute came to see him. More than three days had elapsed. Lieutenant D'Hubert was no longer officier d'ordonnance to the general commanding the division. He had been sent back to his regiment. And he was resuming his connection with the soldiers' military family, by being shut up in close confinement not at his own quarters in town, but in a room in the barracks. Owing to the gravity of the incident, he was allowed to see no one. He did not know what had happened, what was being said or what was being thought. The arrival of the surgeon was a most unexpected event to the worried captive. The amateur of the flute began by explaining that he was there only by a special

favour of the colonel who had thought fit to relax the general isolation order for this one occasion.

"I represented to him that it would be only fair to give you authentic news of your adversary," he continued. "You'll be glad to hear he's getting better fast."

Lieutenant D'Hubert's face exhibited no conventional signs of gladness. He continued to walk the floor of the dusty bare room.

"Take this chair, doctor," he mumbled.

The doctor sat down.

"This affair is variously appreciated in town and in the army. In fact the diversity of opinions is amusing."

"Is it?" mumbled Lieutenant D'Hubert, tramping steadily from wall to wall. But within himself he marvelled that there could be two opinions on the matter. The surgeon continued:

"Of course as the real facts are not known--"

"I should have thought," interrupted D'Hubert, "that the fellow would have put you in possession of the facts."

"He did say something," admitted the other, "the first time I saw him. And, by-the-bye, I did find him in the garden. The thump on the back of his head had made him a little incoherent then. Afterwards he was rather reticent than otherwise."

"Didn't think he would have the grace to be ashamed," grunted D'Hubert, who had stood still for a moment. He resumed his pacing while the doctor murmured.

"It's very amusing. Ashamed? Shame was not exactly his frame of mind. However, you may look at the matter otherwise----"

"What are you talking about? What matter?" asked D'Hubert with a sidelong look at the heavy-faced, gray-haired figure seated on a wooden chair.

"Whatever it is," said the surgeon, "I wouldn't pronounce an opinion on your conduct...."

"By heavens, you had better not," burst out D'Hubert.

"There! There! Don't be so quick in flourishing the sword. It doesn't pay in the long run. Understand once for all that I would not carve any of you youngsters except with the tools of my trade. But my advice is good. Moderate your temper. If you go on like this you will make for yourself an ugly reputation."

"Go on like what?" demanded Lieutenant D'Hubert, stopping short, quite startled. "I! I! make for myself a reputation.... What do you imagine----"

"I told you I don't wish to judge of the rights and wrongs of this incident. It's not my business. Nevertheless...."

"What on earth has he been telling you?" interrupted Lieutenant D'Hubert in a sort of awed scare.

"I told, you already that at first when I picked him up in the garden he was incoherent. Afterwards he was naturally reticent. But I gather at least that he could not help himself...."

"He couldn't?" shouted Lieutenant D'Hubert. Then lowering his voice, "And what about me? Could I help myself?"

The surgeon rose. His thoughts were running upon the flute, his constant companion, with a consoling voice. In the vicinity of field ambulances, after twenty-four hours' hard work, he had been known to trouble with its sweet sounds the horrible stillness of battlefields given over to silence and the dead. The solacing hour of his daily life was approaching and in peace time he held on to the minutes as a miser to his hoard.

"Of course! Of course!" he said perfunctorily. "You would think so. It's amusing. However, being perfectly neutral and friendly to you both, I have consented to deliver his message. Say that I am humouring an invalid if you like. He says that this affair is by no means at an end. He intends to send you his seconds directly he has regained his strength--providing, of course, the army is not in the field at that time."

"He intends--does he? Why certainly," spluttered Lieutenant D'Hubert passionately. The secret of this exasperation was not apparent to the visitor; but this passion confirmed him in the belief which was gaining ground outside that some very serious difference had arisen between these two young men. Something serious enough to wear an air of mystery. Some fact of the utmost gravity. To settle their urgent difference those two young men had risked being broken and disgraced at the outset, almost, of their career. And he feared that the

forthcoming inquiry would fail to satisfy the public curiosity. They would not take the public into their confidence as to that something which had passed between them of a nature so outrageous as to make them face a charge of murder--neither more nor less. But what could it be?

The surgeon was not very curious by temperament; but that question, haunting his mind, caused him twice that evening to hold the instrument off his lips and sit silent for a whole minute--right in the middle of a tune--trying to form a plausible conjecture.