



# Remember Tomorrow

By THEODORE ROSCOE

Author of "Mother Damnation," "Two Hours to Go," etc.

Through the Forest of Fire they march, the soldier dead whose battle is never finished. For in that Valley of the Somme, vast armies sleep, rousing at night to strike terror to the hearts of the living. And tomorrow is as yesterday, ever alive and remembering. Beginning a fine new novel

In the summer after the Battle of Landen, the most sanguinary battle of the Seventeenth Century in Europe, the earth, saturated with the blood of twenty thousand slain, broke forth into millions of poppies, and the traveler who passed that vast sheet of scarlet might well fancy that the earth had given up her dead—

Taboos, etc. Frazer's Golden Bough.

*Accursed Battle Ground, One Day Its Bones Shall Rise, The Captains Be Accused—*

Aftermath of Glory

## CHAPTER I

NO BATTLE CEASED

**B**ILL SHEPHERD didn't like it. . . . The road was lonely, and the dead man stared. He could not have been dead long, his eyes were open and glassy.

Outstretched there in a nest of fresh poppies alongside the road, stiffly horizontal, he resembled a body on display in a bed of floral tributes. But an undertaker would have pried open the clenched fists and sewed shut the eyelids. Bill Shepherd didn't like those eyes, unblinded by the car-lights, staring up at him in glassy fixation. At distance they had showed as discs of green, and he had stopped, expecting a dog.

Perspiration broke out on his forehead as he saw it was a peasant, a farmer in loose blue smock and corduroy, lying face up, dead on a slope of wet wildflowers. Bill Shepherd switched off the engine of his roadster and listened, hoping to hear another car.

Immediately the night sneaked in around him; woodsy silence composed of a thous-



There it stood, the Castle of Fire, frowning over the graves of a hundred thousand dead

and infinitesimal sounds, water rustling through grass, a creaking limb, somewhere a tree frog—the silence of a forest after rain, dripping and leafy. Beyond the rays of the car-lights the summer night, drenched after thunder-shower, was an inky oblivion.

There was only visible a short stretch of road—brown mud furrowed by deep coffee-filled ruts—a steamy corridor walled by dark underbrush and the skeletal silhouettes of black trees.

Dead men can be frightening on any road at night, but this Forêt de Feu was different. Knowing what he knew, Bill Shepherd could feel his hair going up. The poppy bed made a splash of orange against a background of charred timber—the peasant's smock was pale blue among the blossoms—the sightless eyes were agate-green—the upturned face glistened, a grimacing death-mask of wet marble.

Bill Shepherd swallowed and looked around.

No use wishing—the nearest village was eight miles back, and another car wasn't coming. He found himself glaring at tire-tracks printed in the roadway ahead. Of course. Some hit and run driver had skidded around that bend, and sideswiped this poor farmer. Pretending his stomach wasn't squirming, Bill Shepherd leaned out for a closer look.

The trouble was—and he'd realized this at first glance—that body didn't look as if it had been struck by a car. No muddy splatter or mangling. Rigid frame and staring eyes, the man might have died there of a fit.

SHEPHERD gulped. Whether he wanted to or not, he had to climb out and examine that body. He kicked open the low-slung door and stepped gingerly down into the mud.

Then it wanted some resolution to cross over to that poppy-grown knoll. A sweat bead trickled down from his temple, and cords were ticking in his throat.

It wasn't that he was afraid of corpses—that would be a laugh after ten years of bodies on stairways, bodies plunging through trap doors, cadavers hanging from chandeliers, jamming fireplace chimneys, mouldering under beds. Yet the nearest he'd come to that sort of thing until now was his typewriter.

The minute he moved away from his car and let the night close in behind him, all those stories he'd heard today prowled into his thoughts and made his neck-hairs quiver in apprehension.

"Bah!" he said aloud. "I've invented enough yarns of my own! Ought to know more than to believe the bedtime stories of these fool Frenchmen!"

He slogged around the front of his

roadster. The road was a paste, and his shoes made a sucking sound, sinking to their laces in the mud. Swearing, he forced himself to the poppy knoll, went to one knee beside the body, and tried, bluffly nonchalant, to flex an arm.

The dead man's stare was impersonal, his arm rigid and wooden.

Bill Shepherd thought: "I suppose it's rigor mortis!" and couldn't remember how long it was supposed to be before rigor mortis set in. He could remark no evidence of violence, accidental or otherwise, and he managed to hunt through the man's trouser pockets for something that might identify him.

He found a new St. Christopher medalion and five francs. Then he supposed he'd better take a good look at the dead man's face. Kneeling as he was, he intercepted the lights from the car, and he'd purposely avoided that glassy stare. Leaning to one side, he braved a hasty glance at the dead man's features.

Breath went out of him with a sound of "Hunnnnh!"

He sprang up, looked around wildly, hunting the roadside underbrush and a path that came down through it, glaring about him with frightened eyes. Trees in the background assumed fantastic shapes, dark stumps and jagged limbs were witch-like arms reaching for him out of the undergrowth; he wheeled and shied at a gray hulk crouching in the brambles beyond the poppy bed, a dark monster squatting in readiness to leap out.

Then he saw the crouching hulk was a trench mortar tilted in rusty disuse, its muzzle draped by wild grape, its base buried under a tangle of briar and woodbine. These woods were littered with the abandoned machinery of War—old engines of death left to rust in thickets that were nourished by a compost of human blood and bone. But their harvest time had been 1916—this murder, not an hour old, was out of season.

The peasant had been strangled! Murder-steeled fingers, clenching the man's throat, had left the mark of nails and

talons deep-printed in the flesh. A queerish, blue-pink pallor tinted the suffocated face. But in the ground around that body there was no track, no trampling, no footprint other than the peasant's own which came down the muddy path out of the woods.

Black thunder fell down a stairway in the sky and rolled off into smothery silence. He wheeled; jumped for the car.

The road was a channel of liquefied clay, and the old Hispano-Suiza swerved and slewed as he drove in headlong panic, pursued by black shadows and blacker imaginings through the witchy silhouettes of the forest.

"The Forêt de Feu—?"

Memory quoted so loudly in his mind he could almost feel the breath of whispered words in his ear. "But I would not go into those woods at night, *monsieur*. For a million francs—for ten million, I would not go! Because the Forêt de Feu is in the Red Zone, *monsieur*—and there the dead have not yet died. The World War is not over, *monsieur*. The Battle of the Somme is still going on, and the soldiers who died in the Red Zone are still fighting it, and their front line is in the Forêt de Feu!"

## CHAPTER II

### CASTLE DANGEROUS

IT HAD all started that morning in the Paris office of Bertrand et Frer, although the Paris office of Bertrand et Frer looked like the last place in the world for anything like that to start.

Opening the door of Bertrand et Frer, you disturbed one of those sad thimble-like little bells such as announce the advent of a customer in an old maid's notion shop. The jingle, in this case, warned the visitor he was intruding. The quiet wanted to be left alone.

The place was as dim as evening. A skeletal chandelier, converted from gas to electricity, burned one feeble bulb as a sop to the present era. Walls of brown books and a massive table that looked like a casket in a library formed in the gloom.

Bill Shepherd had said, "Hello," to no one in particular, and sat down.

Faint echo of taxi horns in the Faubourg outside reminded him that Paris was still there. The august mahogany door marked *Private* at room's end should at least have acknowledged his presence by opening far enough to tell him to wait. He tried a discreet cough, and nothing happened. Bertrand had died? Or was it Frer?

He contemplated waking up that little bell over the entry once more. He walked to the table and wrote *Silence Please* in the dust. Then he put his hands in his pockets and jangled some coins. This reminded him of the purpose behind his errand, and in abrupt resolution he started toward the impervious mahogany door. He touched the round brass knob with a tentative finger; then heard a murmur of voices beyond the paneling; cocked an ear to listen.

Distinctly he heard a woman's low voice say, "—Château de Feu!"

Bill Shepherd jerked his finger from the knob with the same reflex that sent his eyebrows up. He hadn't meant to eavesdrop, but circumstances alter cases. Deliberately he listened to:

"—Château de Feu. *Oui, oui, oui*, I remind you it is dangerous." The feminine voice blurred into an undertone he couldn't translate.

Bill Shepherd thought: "Now, what the—?"

A reedy voice piped on the other side of the door, "But, *mademoiselle*—!"

"Attend," the low voice cut in firmly, "I remind you it is dangerous. Not a word of this to be divulged, you comprehend."

"Very well, *mademoiselle*."

Sound of chairs scuffing back on carpet. Rustle of movement. Bill Shepherd returned to his chair. He was lighting a cigarette as the door at room's end began to open.

**H**E THOUGHT the woman who came across the threshold recoiled as she saw him, but he wasn't sure. He was only

certain, as she passed his chair hurriedly and brushed on out into the hall, that she knew how to wear black, and that her eyes were as interesting as any that had ever given him a look. The bell jingled excitedly at her exit. He had stood up swiftly to open the door for her departure, but her haste had outmaneuvered this gallantry. Holding the door ajar he had a glimpse of her as she reached the street.

A slow grin twitched up one corner of William Shepherd's mouth. The hushed and dim-lit reception room, the voices behind closed doors, ("I remind you it is dangerous—"), the mysterious lady in black— The other side of his mouth went up. *Chapter One!*

No. The thing was really a disease. He was back at his old game again, and of course he was imagining intrigue. Certainly in France there might be more than one Château de Feu.

A voice from the other end of the room said, "Monsieur Shepherd?"

He wheeled, a little abashed.

The figure now occupying the inner doorway looked as if it had just stepped out of one of the older law books on the shelves. It was dry, and needed dusting off and a new binding. William Shepherd was put in mind of a dummy that had been for a long time in the window of a customer's store. Black frock coat that rustled its hem around rusty knee-caps. High stock collar and plush cravat. A black toupee. A face like an old portrait painting with dried-up little eyes behind pince-nez.

Bill Shepherd admitted his identity by a gesture with his cigarette. "I'm afraid I came early. I was anxious to see Monsieur Bertrand about—"

"I am Monsieur Bertrand."

"*Je suis très content de faire votre connaissance*, Monsieur Bertrand."

"I too am most happy to make the acquaintance of the son of a client who was always to me the most amiable. Your father was regarded not only as client by us, *monsieur*, but, if I may say so, as a friend. In Paris he was more than highly

esteemed. Your father was a great, a famous man. We thought of him almost, one might say, as a Frenchman."

Bill Shepherd thought how that would have amused his father—to be called great, famous and a Frenchman. He had a mental picture of the big boisterous man passing ten-dollar bills and champagne around the Moulin Rouge and Zelli's.

Monsieur Bertrand was going on, clearing his throat at just the right place for *douleur*: "Yes, how well I recall his last visit. Two years after the War. Does it seem seventeen years ago? And your mother, she died the same year. It was tragic, yes? It is sad."

Bill Shepherd said rather stiffly, "Yes, it is."

"But," Monsieur Bertrand sighed, "Bertrande et Frer will always recall that most happy association."

"My father always felt, Monsieur Bertrand, that when he left his European affairs in the hands of Bertrand et Frer they were as safe as if he had deposited them in the Bank of France."

"Bertrand et Frer were honored to have been chosen as your father's European executors, and feel confident there is no house in France whose integrity is better able to uphold this trust."

"I'm sure of that, Monsieur Bertrand. Incidentally, before we get down to business, who was the lady who left your office just now?"

"*Monsieur* wishes to know—?"

"I'm sorry. I don't want to appear inquisitive, but I thought I'd met her somewhere before—Biarritz or maybe Monte Carlo."

"So. But there is no reason why I should not divulge the lady's name. It is Madame—eh—Madame Mallarmier. Her husband was a French officer and a suicide, poor fellow. Left her in many legal difficulties. She happens to be Swiss; perhaps you met her at St. Moritz. She is here to settle the matter of an estate in Switzerland."

"Well, although I don't seem to know her after all, I sympathize with her. I'm here to settle the matter of my own estate

in France, and have to do it in a hurry. As I told you over the telephone yesterday, I've come to see about the Château de Feu."

"The—? *Ah oui, certainement, alors.* The Château de Feu. Of course—the Château de Feu. Please come in, Monsieur Shepherd. I am afraid you are going to be disappointed, *monsieur*. It seems there are some difficulties in the matter of the Château de Feu."

**B**ILL SHEPHERD was surprised. For the last two years he had been well aware of "difficulties" in the matter of Château de Feu, but a beautiful and unknown lady in black had not previously been connected with them. Somehow his father—that surprising man—had recognized and cherished the love of the wife whose faith in him had lifted him by the bootstraps out of a Scranton coal mine. Impervious to nothing else that money could buy, Old Bill would have had no investment in Paris romance. Probably the Château de Feu had been Old Bill's last white elephant to hand down to an impoverished heir.

Certainly the title was clear. Too clear. Taxes and assessments to be paid the first of the month had left young Bill no doubt of that. And those, up to now, had been the "difficulties." How to meet the neglected taxes on the place.

Living in New York, he'd all but forgot this obscure French *château* left him by his father, as one forgets something cumbersome and gaudy tucked away for sentimental reasons in moth balls. A French *château*—he'd kept it as a gesture to Old Bill, and because Hugh, his older brother, had died under fire somewhere around there, wherever it was, during the War. They'd never found the body, but Hugh's last letter had said he was running a dressing station "of all places, in Father's foolish *château*."

He had never seen the Château de Feu; somehow hadn't wanted to. But now the day for extravagance and sentiment had passed; a *château* in France was hardly



the keepsake for an American stranded in Paris with two hundred francs and a second-hand Hispano-Suiza that drank gasoline with the insatiable thirst of a broken-down Russian Duke. There were bills. His very name was characterized by Bill. Not that he'd expected to raise any money on the *château* but he'd hoped for something from the place, if only a secluded roof to think under for a while. A mysterious woman in the woodpile, however, had not been among his anticipations.

Smiling expressionlessly at Monsieur Bertrand, Bill Shepherd wondered if he hadn't imagined those words he'd heard through the door. The office of Bertrand et Frer looked too crustily respectable for any mystery. Conceivably the beauty in black might own a Château de Feu in Switzerland, and have been referring to a condition of the floors.

Bill Shepherd said, when it became apparent Monsieur Bertrand was waiting for him to speak: "As I wrote you from America, Monsieur Bertrand, it is necessary for me to sell the Château de Feu."

Monsieur Bertrand adjusted his pince-nez. If voice had color, Bill Shepherd thought, this one would be the color of sand. "Ah. I trust you had a pleasant voyage coming from America, Monsieur Shepherd?"

"Rough all the way," Bill Shepherd said cheerfully. "You see, I thought if I came over personally to see about the sale of the *château* it would save a lot of—"

"And how are things at present in the United States, Monsieur Shepherd?"

"Now about the *château*—"

"But the Depression in America, it has lifted—?"

"NOT for me," Bill Shepherd declared doggedly. Monsieur Bertrand's evasive technique was entertaining, but Bill Shepherd told himself he would be even more entertained when he learned the reason for this evasion.

He faced Monsieur Bertrand squarely. "The Depression hasn't lifted for me, as the unpaid taxes on the Château de Feu

may have indicated to you. I've run out of pocket money. I'm broke. I can't afford a bottle of Scotch right now, much less the upkeep on a historical French estate. I thought if you could sell the *château* for me—"

"But *monsieur!*" the dry face looked shocked. "Bertrand et Frer had no idea you were in such financial—eh—straits. A man of your position—"

"—Is usually riding the brake-rods on a freight train out of town. Instead of that, I came to Europe the southern route and stopped for a night at Monte Carlo. They say the wheel is on the level, too. I did get out with my trousers, but you can understand—"

"But your father's bonds, Monsieur Shepherd! Your father's American holdings—!"

"Burned up eight years ago. Swedish Matches and a short circuit in Mid-West Power. I can't imagine what happened to the rest— I'm only a mystery-story writer. It seems I'm left with this French property, and I can't afford to keep it. The point is, Monsieur Bertrand"—Bill Shepherd put both hands firmly on the desk-top, leaning forward a little—"have you been able to find a buyer for the Château de Feu?"

Monsieur Bertrand's eyeglasses reflected surprise. He murmured, "Ah." He nodded. "Yes. But then. A buyer." He put the tips of dry fingers together, tilted back in his chair and gravely regarded a point in the ceiling. The Château de Feu was somewhere overhead among cracks in the ceiling-plaster; it was surrounded by difficulties which Monsieur Bertrand could see, and, seeing them, Monsieur Bertrand was reluctant to reveal them to his client.

"*Non*, Monsieur Shepherd, it distresses me to confess the inability of Bertrand et Frer to find as yet a prospective buyer for the Château de Feu."

"It doesn't distress you, Monsieur Bertrand, anywhere near as much as it distresses me."

"However, I wish to emphasize 'as yet.' Given more time—"

"I wish I had more time," Bill Shepherd said flatly. "The French government's given me a month's notice. Pay up the back taxes or they'll be forced to confiscate the property. I know it's my fault for letting 'em slide at a time when I was able to pay 'em, but I haven't got the money any more, and I couldn't raise it now in a month of Sundays. I can't even meet my hotel bill at the Crillon. If I can't sell that château I'll lose it. Of course you advertised the property for sale?"

"The *château* and the surrounding estate, as you advised in your letter." Monsieur Bertrand shook his head. "There were a number of inquiries, but they failed to materialize."

"You made the price interesting?"

"Following your instructions, Monsieur Shepherd, we made the price positively a bargain. *Non*, it is *deplorable*." Monsieur Bertrand's shoulders lifted in sympathy. "We could find no interested prospects."

"But if you put the sale up to a good real estate operator—?"

"We have placed the matter in the hands of one of the largest, the most enterprising realty houses in France. Attend. I will show you their report." Monsieur Bertrand made a dry rustling of papers in a desk drawer; extracted a letter from a file. "However,"—pinching off his glasses and tapping the correspondence with a shiny lens—"before I give this to you, it might be well for me to prepare you—it is an unusual letter, believe me!—by reminding you of the condition of the estate in question, the *château*, Monsieur Shepherd. It has not been—how do you say? modernized."

"You mean there isn't electricity, ice cubes, a two-car garage—?"

"Perhaps; but that is not exactly"—Monsieur Bertrand paused, frowned at the letter—"not exactly what I mean. You comprehend, *monsieur*, the location of the *château*—"

"In the country."

"In France, *oui*. But in the north of France. Several hundred miles from Paris. An afternoon's drive, I should say, north

of the city of Amiens. In the Province of Picardy. *Voilà!* Monsieur Shepherd realizes there was a war—"

"My older brother was killed—"

"Indeed, I remember well your father on his last visit to Paris speaking of it. *Quel dommage*. A pity. But so. It was because of this, that your father refused thereafter to occupy the *château*. You comprehend? The *château* was somewhat damaged during the war; not utterly, I understand, but there is some ruin. And it has not since been repaired."

BILL SHEPHERD nodded. "Of course under those circumstances a buyer wouldn't want to sink a lot of money in the place, with the back taxes and all. But there's a hundred acres in timber on the estate. The Forêt de Feu. Certainly that ought to be worth something."

Monsieur Bertrand sighed. "There are difficulties."

"More difficulties?"

Monsieur Bertrand's blink was troubled. He fastened on his eyeglasses, squinted at the paper in his hand, frowned exasperation at Bill Shepherd. "*Monsieur!* It seems this Forêt de Feu—*ma foi*—it is that which comprises the chief difficulty in the matter of selling the estate. *Monsieur* will agree with me that here is a problem the most extraordinary. This timber, *monsieur*—this forest—never in all my experience have I encountered a matter as incredible. Regard."

The office of the Agency Honneteau wished to thank Monsieur Bertrand for his kind consignment, and hoped he was as well as they were. The letter continued with the usual indirections and then:

Our Amiens office advises us it has been impossible to sell the old Château de Feu, not only because of a prohibitive accumulation of unpaid taxes; but the estate, as you know, is situated in the Forêt de Feu, midway between the villages of Contalmaison and Thiepval, off the main road, and lying in the very heart of that region devastated by the World War, known as the Red Zone.

Some of the surrounding country has

remained unrehabilitated; the *château*, itself, stands in considerable disrepair; and a further barrier to disposal of this property comes in lieu of the ugly local reputation the *château* and forested *demesne* seems to have attained.

Imagine the reluctance of a prospective customer when, at mere mention of the Forêt de Feu, the peasants of the district start shaking their heads and crossing themselves. Investigation discloses the most astounding rumors concerning the place—stories common to illiterate peasantry—some of which, however, seem to have foundation in several sinister occurrences recent to the forest.

Bodies found in the uncleared woods have recalled the days of the Invasion, and lately, it appears, there have been one or two unexplained deaths in the neighborhood. This may be no more than gossip; yet, perhaps as nowhere else in France, the countryside there remains still overshadowed by the last War, and under such adverse publicity an outright sale of the Château de Feu seems unlikely."

BILL SHEPHERD narrowed a stare at the concluding paragraph. *Ugly local reputation. Sinister occurrences. A crinkle hardened at the corners of his eyes as they flicked back over the line: one or two unexplained deaths. Really, that casual "one or two" was overdoing it.*

This cryptic epistle on a matter of real estate read like the opening installment of *Three-Fingered Jack's Last Clue*, and made less sense. He folded the letter slowly.

"What is it all about?"

Monsieur Bertrand raised dismayed shoulders, "Truly, I know no more than the letter indicates. *Non*, I am quite baffled—"

Pushing back his chair, Bill Shepherd said with forced amiability, "Well, there's only one thing for me to do, and that's go there and find out."

Monsieur Bertrand spried to his feet. For the first time during the interview his features showed open distress. "But my dear young sir. Do you not think it would be better to wait, to inquire of the real estate agent, to make a thorough investigation of—"

"Yes on the last two; no on the waiting. There isn't time for a lot of letter writing. If something funny has been happening around there—"

"But Monsieur Shepherd! I assure you—" The other made a deprecatory gesture. "Do not take this letter too literally. French peasants are given to such talk—old wives' tales—nonsense—the back-country districts, in particular those devastated by the War, are alive with stupid—"

"That's just it," he interrupted with some heat. "After all, I own the *château*, and if it's been devalued by some sort of vicious gossip I'd like to know about it. Time I looked up the old place, anyway." He picked up his hat in resolution. "Ten o'clock now, I ought to be able to drive out there before dark, only a couple of hundred miles. Matter of fact, I was going there anyway since I can't afford to stay at the Crillon."

Monsieur Bertrand said almost shrilly, "I advise against it. There is only the caretaker—that one employed years ago by your father, and he has been there ever since—Archambaud Landru. The place will be in no condition for you! You would arrive late at night and find the *château* locked and dark—"

Bill Shepherd was thinking of a throaty voice behind this mahogany door, an intriguing whisper. He said, giving Monsieur Bertrand a steady look, "I can make it before dark."

"Do not consider it!" A wallet was quivering in the dry brown hands. "*Tiens!* a thousand francs to establish your hotel credit. You shall remain in Paris; continue at the Crillon in the comfort to which an American is accustomed. *Non*, but you must allow me the honor of this small hospitality. Meantime, do nothing hasty.

"I regret the impetuosity of showing you such an item: it was merely that I wished you to comprehend the delay. One cannot expedite business, you must realize, in a country such as this, stranded always between the ruins of the last war and the specter of the next one.

"Stay in Paris and do not worry about



the *château*. Tomorrow—no, the day after—let us confer. Certain authorities can be consulted on this matter. Given a little more time, Monsieur Shepherd, I am convinced Bertrand et Frer will be able to negotiate a more than satisfactory arrangement on the *Château de Feu*.”

But he had not stayed in Paris, and now, driving through storming blackness in the *Forêt de Feu*, with that dead man in the night behind him, he wished he had taken the lawyer's advice.

Only he hadn't believed in Monsieur Bertrand. He hadn't believed in that letter from the realty agent. He had stuffed the thousand francs into his pocket, nodded pleasantly, sauntered out to his car, and started out to visit the *Château de Feu*.

### CHAPTER III

#### THE SILENT LAND

ONCE free of the city, the morning's adventure was credible. Black veiled lady—stuffed-fox lawyer—haunted *château*—penniless heir—he had written such stuff a hundred times. Bill Shepherd sighed. Any editor would have rejected Monsieur Bertrand.

He let out the big *Hisso*. Traffic was sparse in the yellow July heat, but the breeze at sixty-five was cool.

Rationalize it or not, old Bertrand *had* been on pins and needles. Why all the throat-clearing and hedging about a mere real-estate transaction? That letter, too, with its whispery insinuations of the sinister—maybe it needed confirmation at that.

Bill Shepherd put his hand into his pocket, half expecting the letter to have been imagined. No, there was the letter, and there he was, himself, thirty kilometers out of Paris, the white road ahead. An arrow told him to take a left turn for Amiens and points north, and in the noon-day doldrum a village's roofs and treetops and steeple were set in his windshield like a painting. Better stop and tank up with petrol, if he was going on with this; but before he went further he wanted another look at that letter.

He pulled over to the curb of a sleepy village square; opened the letter skeptically. There it was, all right—that line about bodies found in the uncleared woods and “one or two unexplained deaths” in the neighborhood. His eye traveled on to the sentence: *Yet, perhaps as nowhere else in France, the countryside there remains still overshadowed by the last War*—and then he stiffened his stare on the typewritten page.

Slanted across the paper in his hand, as if summoned there by the words themselves, was the thin gray shadow of a bayonet.

Bill Shepherd looked up startled, and saw standing over his car a giant soldier.

YOU began to pass them in the first little villages north of Paris; you didn't notice them at first, then you did. A public square, a monument overlooking the curb, a granite Poilu standing guard above the cobbles; or a grieving Mother France with a dying soldier in bronze cradled in her arms.

*Liberte, Egalite, Fraternite  
Pour la France—1914-1918*

“To those who gave their lives . . .  
“To the valiant soldiers who died . . .  
“To the sons of this village who were slain . . .”

Above bronze-plated death lists like the pages of telephone directories, the stone gunners died or stood at silent attention on their pedestals; buglers blew a soundless Last Post; Mother France knelt down with drooping Phrygian cap, her face buried in sorrowful hands. You saw these mourning figures in every town, village and cross-roads; they intruded on a traveler's consciousness like some endless series of advertising displays; and as the highway went further northward you saw what had sculpted them there.

In a landscape of checkerboard pastures and quaint French farms, geese and indolent bicycles and lazy wains—on a road that swept smoothly toward a cobalt horizon where slow clouds grazed like flocks of

washed sheep—you passed (instead of highway billboards for soft drinks, gasolines and chewing gums) the pages of history. Tablets along the roadside recording a time marched by. Signposts that measured the highwater mark, the tidal inrush and ebb of a disaster that had come and gone and left those names in bronze on the village squares.

*Here The Uhlans of Von Kluck Penetrated To Their Farthest Point To Be Stopped By The Army Of Gallieni, 4 September, 1914.* (Nineteen miles from Paris—that had been close!)

*At This Bridge French Cavalry Of Manoury Withstood For Five Hours Three Prussian Guard Regiments Of The German Right Wing.* (Blue and gray-green horsemen grappling over a trout stream.)

*In The Orchard At The Right The Second British Army Corps Under General Smith-Dorrien Made Its Headquarters After The Retreat From Compiègne.* (The Old Contemptibles had come!)

*On The Night of 15 September '14, General Joffre Occupied The Farmhouse On The Left And Issued Orders For The Battle Of The Marne.* (The turning of the tide!)

Along that highway to Amiens the names and dates were like the lingering echoes of yesterday's half-forgotten songs. Joffre. Von Kluck. The Old Contemptibles. Fragments of the past, left strewn along the roadside in the summer weeds. Von Bissing. Sir John French. The Blue Devils. 1914-1915. Years and names unremembered in America where they thought of the War as 1918 and a song by George M. Cohan.

But the echoes you heard along that Amiens turnpike were not *Over There* and *Where Do We Go From Here*, but the *Marseillaise*, the *Brabançonne*, *It's A Long Way To Tipperary*, and *Ein Feste Burg Ist Unser Gott*.

You heard the clack of cavalry, the summer's doze startled by the first shocks of iron thunder, the tramp, tramp, tramp of hobnails coming out of the east. The little markers along the highway were like bulletins crying the alarm, telling a story of French Red-legs in desperate retreat,

refugees in panic-stricken migration, Tommies from across the Channel fumbling their khaki lines on unfamiliar roads. You could picture a sullen tide of gray rolling slowly, implacably across the landscape, like a flood of smoking lava, incinerating all before it as it came.

MEMORIES followed that north-bound highway across France. Of miles of bayonets falling back before miles of machine guns. Of burning grain fields and shell-chopped trees. Rivers of helmets, banging artillery trains, cavalcades of ambulance, foraging parties, charging infantry, attack and counter-attack.

The captains and the kings had departed, but the landmarks remained—a broken mill with vines overgrowing its stalled wheel, a deserted roadside inn with the sky showing through its roof, farmhouse walls splashed with plaster patches that looked like adhesive on old wounds.

You were surprised to see the Germans had come so far; and if you'd had a brother with the Allies, you might feel a surge of sentimental pride at the crossroads where an assault of Canadian Regulars had driven the Prussians back. You might wonder what colossal gall had brought that invasion goose-stepping here; what god-like conceit had given it permission.

Then at Amiens, where Bill Shepherd stopped for lunch, the echoes loudened. There was a cathedral spire moth-eaten by shrapnel holes, and he drove across a bridge marked *The River Somme*. He hadn't heard of the Somme, or thought of it, since a letter, one of the last, from Hugh. Odd to come across it now. Like dreaming of a place you'd seen before in a dream. He paused to read about it on a tablet at the bridge-head.

**The Battle of the Somme—July-November 1916. The British Supported by the French in an Attempt to Hurl the Germans from the Fields of Picardy. Stalemate of Trench Warfare was not Broken by this Tremendous Allied Effort—The Germans Holding Their Lines—The Allies Counting A Loss Of Half A Million Men.**

1916, Red-Legs and the Old Contemptibles had gone; there were new names on the roadside plaques. Sir Douglas Haig and General Rawlinson. General Micheler and General Fayolle. Today the Somme was placid, ribboning soapy green across the landscape, but as you followed its bank beyond Amiens, you saw where monster cannon had once smashed its bridges and churned its channel to a boiling torrent. The furies of that tempest had left something more than bronze tablets in the landscape beyond Amiens.

Late in the afternoon, driving slowly along a ridge-top, Bill Shepherd came upon a vista such as he had never imagined. A road sign directed him to look at the view, and he stopped the car, and climbed out, shading his eyes to stare.

Before him spread Picardy—rolling miles of tableland nested with little pottery-roofed villages and meandered by winding pasture streams. Nowhere did the land-scaping rise to obstruct the view; the eye seemed to carry as far as the Belgian border.

How still it was. . . .

In all that horizon-bound distance of earth and sky nothing stirred. He had read somewhere that the Picards called their country the Silent Land, but this hush was something more than a phenomenon caused by a configuration of land-surface. It was as if the afternoon had paused in its waning, and time with space here remained suspended in a spell. Somewhere back there near Amiens a detour had turned him off the national highway, and he might have come to the edge of a country in mirage.

The stillness around him was that of a reflection in a mirror-quiet lake. Smoke stood becalmed in an erect blue tendril above the chimney of a far-seen cottage; southward on a ridge above the marshy greens of the Somme valley a miniature train moved motionlessly and soundlessly across the picture; far westward an airplane was a gnat-speck stationary in a high distillation of azure. The quiet deepened for the murmuring of bees, and the landscape was a painting by Corot.

What struck Bill Shepherd next was the brilliant color-work of flowered poppy fields emblazoned across the nearer meadows like red flannel blankets spread out to dry in the sun. And in the panorama beyond, what seemed a curious litter—at first glance, of odd-shaped rocks and boulders left scattered across the terrain as if by some long-ago glacier—and acres of white that, patchworked in pattern across the whole topography, looked like ranging expanses of unmelted snow.

A pointer at the roadside directed his attention to a pair of field binoculars mounted on a little platform nearby—*See The Battleground Of The Somme—4 fr.* There was a map for tourists, and arrows pointing out the various sectors. Bill Shepherd peered through the glasses, inserted the coins, adjusted the directional finder, and brought the lenses into focus.

Then he saw the littered objects weren't glacial boulders, but monuments—cenotaphs, monoliths, marble pylons, granite sculptures in distant perspective diminished to the size of figurines. Monuments everywhere as far as the eye could see. And the acres of white were armies of men.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE MARCHING DEAD

THE Troops! They came uphill from the direction of Albert Village and swept, company after company, across the pasture lands below him. They formed on a rise behind a stone barn at his right—*Headquarters Thirteenth British Army Corps*—and marched on toward a salient posted *Sausage Valley*. In the north they advanced along a highroad, platoon formation, moving in on Aveluy and Gommecourt, sweeping up the slopes of Beaumont Hamel. Eastward their ranks stood close about La Boiselle, Ovilliers, Mametz Wood.

More troops! Occupying the far banks of the River Ancre; extending their lines across the misty farm lands beyond. Gathered in companies along the road to Pozières; holding the turnpike going to Peronne.

Uphill and downdale they traversed the fields, debauched from sleepy woods, massed along country lanes.

What names they wore, and what actions they engaged. He consulted the map which digrammed their intricate battle positions.

There were the Black Watch and the Gordon Highlanders. The Sixth Dragoon Guards, and a battalion of the Ulster Division. The London Territorials. The Connaught Rangers. The First South-African Infantry. The Inniskillens. The South Wales Borderers. The King's Royal Rifles. The Manchester Guard.

The British were supported by battalions of the French—Fayolle's First Army Corps—companies of Lorrainers, Zouave detachments, Colonial Cavalry, Tirailleurs, Blue Devils, troops all the way from Arras to Avignon.

Sighted through the binoculars, their formations were seen to be orderly, their ranks ruled in precise parade, their flanking obliques and advance stations in perfect military alignment. Following their battle lines, Bill Shepherd could make out their dugouts and earthworks, weedy trenches running zigzag across the meadows, slopes where great shell holes had been gouged, mine craters, patches of charred timber, barren stretches of No Man's Land where hurricanes of shellfire had left a soil of loose ore. He focused the binoculars on an abandoned village—a clutter of broken walls and mounds of gray ash—and on a ridge to the east he found the German line.

The German emplacements were strangely labeled—*The Zollern Redoubt—The Schwaben Redoubt*. Holding these heights were battalions of the Prussian Guard, Bavarians, Potsdammers, Magdeburgers. 10,000 Guards Fusiliers. 18,000 Badenens. 24,000 of the Lehr Regiment. Company after company of the German Fifth Division. A battalion of the famous Cockchäfers. The crack troops of Brandenburg. Their High Command was not present, but their names were recorded on the battlemap. Ludendorf. Von Quast. Von Gallwitz. Sixt von Arnim.

On those distant slopes Bill Shepherd could make out concrete gun-pits, steel-roofed pillboxes, the brush-screened parapets of deep fortifications. The map made note of these fortifications extending for miles, but it was not the magnitude of these Martian engineerings that impressed Bill Shepherd. The limitless numbers of those men out there—!

There were thousands massed within range of his binoculars, countless thousands out of range in the rolling meadows of Picardy beyond.

In the foreground you could make them out as platoons, regiments, battalions—shoulder to shoulder on parade—each one erect, face front, the uniform twin of the next. But stepping back from a pair of high-powered field glasses, you could not find them with the naked eye. In distance their ranks merged into fused legions, their numbers blurred into multitudes.

In the presence of this vast and silent host, Bill Shepherd felt hollow and queer inside. Involuntarily he took off his hat, and as he did so there was a faint far muttering in the east where some clouds had blundered together, and there came to his mind a passage from *The Shropshire Lad*.

*On the idle hill of summer,  
Sleepy with the sound of streams,  
Far I hear the steady drummer,  
Drumming like a noise in dreams.*

*Far and near and low and louder,  
On the roads of earth go by,  
Dear to friends and food for powder,  
Soldiers marching all to die.*

But those soldiers out there were no longer marching.

The acres of white were acres of little white crosses, and a signpost in a near-by bed of poppies named the rendezvous. *The Red Zone*.

"Killed," a voice behind Bill Shepherd pronounced somberly. "Two hundred thousand of them, *monsieur*. All of them killed."

BILL SHEPHERD turned with a start; that sermon-toned voice might have spoken out of the air. An old peasant had

approached him without making a sound.

Posed beside the car, he made a shadowy watcher in waning sunlight, bearded and weather-beaten. He was faded and bleached, and his dimmed eyes dreamed at the landscape. He might have been regarding Infinity, the shore the other side of Jordan. Bill Shepherd was a stranger, and the oldest inhabitant had paused to explain the Silent Land.

"All killed, you comprehend. All of them. All."

He spoke like the Last Survivor of a country whose population had passed away. His eyes musing, his head silver-haloed in sunshine like the hoary blossom of an autumn dandelion that might at any moment become detached and float away, the old man did not look quite mortal.

"Can you see them out there?" he quavered at Bill Shepherd. "Do you realize how many there are? *Non*, you do not, for I see you are young—you would not remember—you were not here. There are over two hundred thousand in the fields out there, *monsieur*. Over two hundred thousand—all killed."

"Do you remember them, *grandpère*?" Bill Shepherd asked. "Do you remember them, when they were here?"

He was afterward to recall how the faded eyes gave him a strange look. "When they were here?" Then, making a sweeping gesture with a bloodless, almost transparent hand, "But they are still here, *monsieur*. Still here. You can see them out there—those that never went home."

One arm outstretched, the old man wheeled and pointed like a creaky weather-vane, naming off the villages and interlaced roads, pointing out the actions fought, identifying the regiments by number and name as a general might have conned that battle-front.

"I used to be a guide," he told Bill Shepherd. "The tourists who came here in the first years after the War, I would take them over these battlefields. They would steal the little flags from the graves and scatter picnic luncheons among the memorials. Today they prefer the Paris boule-

wards. They have forgotten the last War, preparing for the next. But I know that country out there by every *hectare*. I was here when the Germans arrived, and I was here to see the great Battle of the Somme when the British joined with the French to drive them out."

Eyes rheumed with the mists of reminiscence, he stared off across the sleeping landscape and droned on, describing the movements of the battle. Bill Shepherd listened. Some vague urgency kept tugging at the back of his thoughts, reminding him he had come here for another reason, but the old man's voice was part of a spell which seemed to be holding him, hat in hand, with the afternoon at a standstill.

"It was Nineteen-sixteen, the First of July," the old man was droning. "For a year the Allies had been bringing up their forces from the West. For a year those Germans on the eastern heights had been digging in. There had been little battles along this front, but the flatness of Picardy smothers a bit of rifle fire, and that morning of the First there was scarcely a sound. *Bleu!* All at once the British cannon let go; for thirty miles from here to the horizon it was like an earthquake. That was no ordinary barrage, *monsieur*. The big guns spoke in one continuous roar—all day—all night—a bombardment that lasted eight days. For eight days the British poured a tempest of steel at those eastern heights where you see the German line. Woods, hills, villages on that ridge were blown to atoms. Trenches were swept away as if by a giant broom. Ah, that was a terrible bombardment that began the Battle of the Somme."

"You saw it?" Bill Shepherd wondered.

"And have been half deaf ever since," the old man nodded. "My farm was on this highroad where we stand, and I watched it from here. For eight days I watched that bombardment, and then the curtain of fire was raised and the Allied advance began. Guns. Tanks. Lorries. Men. All those hundreds of regiments you see out there came streaming across those meadows like lines of ants. Can you picture that



wonderful charge, *monsieur*? Look at them out there!"

THE old man pivoted and stretched a bony finger. "Observe those columns moving east. In places it was so clear I could see the British and French officers trotting at the heads of their assault troops. They carried those little villages you see below. They took the woods with running bayonet assaults, and swept the German outposts before them. *Non*, they walked right up to that bridge where you see the German line. And then—?"

The old man paused to shake his head, petting his beard with thin yellow fingers, his gaze wandering the farther slopes.

"And what then, *grandpère*?" Bill Shepherd asked.

"*Mon dieu*!" the old one rasped. "When the Allied charge reached that German line, that whole ridge burst into one sheet of solid flame. The slopes of this countryside are chalk, do you see?—and for a year those Boche invaders had been digging in like beavers. Those slopes they honey-combed with tunnels that go underground like coal mines. That whole ridge was an underground fortress.

"Our Maginot Line of today is nothing in comparison, for it was dug in a time of peace, and the Germans dug those tunnels under fire in our country at a time of war. They had passages fifty feet underground. Their cannon were hidden in the hillside. Out there you can still behold their famous *Wunderwerke*—like an underground Gibraltar with deep corridors and concrete-walled galleries and cellars where the men were hidden. Ah, Fritz was snug down there, and save for those that went mad from the noise, that British barrage scarcely bothered the Boche at all.

"*Eh Bien*," the old man continued after a head-shake, "our guns had smashed the German trenches, but they had not crushed the fortifications in those slopes. The Boches came out of their concrete holes like a million fiends out of Hell, and can you see how those armies on the lower fields were butchered? Can you see them

flung back?—attacking again?—flung back once more?

"For days that battle continued. For weeks. Picardy, *monsieur*, became an ocean of smoke and flame. The Allied armies were waves dashing day after day against that eastern ridge. The German lines were gray rocks."

A fat bumblebee buzzed past Bill Shepherd's ankles, and there was a smell faintly flavored with clover in the air, but Bill Shepherd was not aware of a summer landscape.

"The killed," the old man whispered, "piled up like autumn leaves. Do you see that hill to the northward marked by the bronze statue of a caribou?—that is where an entire regiment from Newfoundland was wiped out in three hours.

"Off there toward Auchonvillers and Montauban the bodies lay so thick you could walk across them all the way to Belgium. Thousands of British. Thousands of French. Thousands of Germans. *Le bon dieu* alone could count the slain in that massacre.

"The battle went on and on. For weeks. For months. A terrible stench smothered the air. Those meadows out there were deserts. The smoke of the guns made a fog across the sun, their flames set fire to the nights, their roaring shook this Silent Land.

"The worst fighting of all was in this sector, here, called the Red Zone, between those villages you see yonder—Contalmaison and Thiepval. Five deep the slain were lying in those woods—do you see those woods at the end of that wagon-road down there?"

CONTALMAISON; Thiepval! Bill Shepherd came back into the present with an exclamation. The Château de Feu was located half way between Contalmaison and Thiepval!

He followed the old man's pointing finger with his eye, fixed a stare on a dark patch of timber visible several miles beyond the rooftops of a distant village. Woods were noticeable in a landscape

where most of the timber had been swept away—such thickets as there were did not obtrude on the prairie-like vista—he discerned that that distant acreage of greenery must be second-growth.

So that was the Forêt de Feu!

He thought of Hugh somewhere out there among those silent multitudes, and with another mental recoil he was reminded of the office of Bertrand et Frer and the cryptic letter that had brought him out here from Paris. He could not help grimacing. *Ugly local reputation! Sinister occurrences!* Well, he could understand that real estate agent's letter now. One or two unexplained deaths! More like it if that agent had said one or two hundred thousand unexplained deaths! The whole countryside of Picardy was nothing but a vast graveyard. Centered in the heart of this No Man's Land of World War cemeteries and battlefield monuments, the *château* in that unrehabilitated forest must be something like one tomb in a necropolis.

He drew a sharp breath and tugged on his hat. If he wanted to reach the place before dark, he'd better get a move on. Twilight had come stealthily, coloring the air to burgundy, hazing the farther meadows. There was a hint of rain in the stillness. Blue-black clouds had overcast the east, their upper crests red-tinted.

"*Grandpère*, I've got to be going. Can I give you a lift?"

"A thousand thanks, *monsieur*, but my cottage is just over the hill. You are wondering about the traffic? But this is a holiday, *monsieur*. The countryfolk have gone to celebrate. There is a fair at Guillemont."

He could hardly explain a feeling of relief; save for this old man, he had detected no sign of life in that sweeping vista, and he was somehow glad to learn that it was a holiday which had gathered the population elsewhere.

"Then I'll be driving on." He nodded. "It's almost dark, and I'll have to hurry. Tell me, *grandpère*. That wagon-road across the meadows, there—will that take me to the Forêt de Feu? I'm on my way to the Château de Feu."

And then came the words that were to whisper through his memory as he drove through the night-black woods where the dead man lay in the poppies behind him.

"The Forêt de Feu!" The old Frenchman had rounded, aghast, his eyes grown to lakes of fright. "But I would not go into those woods at night, *monsieur*! For a million francs—for ten million, I would not go! Because the Forêt de Feu is in the Red Zone, *monsieur*—and the dead have not died in the Red Zone. The World War is not yet over, *monsieur*. The Battle of the Somme is still going on, and the soldiers who died in the Red Zone are still fighting it, and their front line is in the Forêt de Feu!"

## CHAPTER V

### BATTLEGROUND

THERE had been a rumble of thunder then. The light ebbed westward, and the sky in the east was dark. Bill Shepherd was aware of a sudden breeze against his face, a cool drop in the temperature. Poppies at the roadside were rustling.

"What do you mean by that, *grandpère*? The Battle of the Somme is still going on! The dead are still fighting it in the Forêt de Feu!"

Even as he spoke, then, the words had sounded ridiculous—there on that open highroad, his car parked close at hand.

"You can see those armies out there," the old man was pointing. "Armies of those killed in the Battle of the Somme. Armies of the dead, you will say. In their graves, you will say, and that battle was twenty-three years ago, and now all is quiet on the Western Front."

The old man shook his gauzy head. "But all is not so quiet on this front, *monsieur*. If you go out there among those monuments you will see the inscriptions in the stone—*These Dead Shall Never Die! C'est ça*, and that is the truth, *monsieur*—they have not died.

"Will you believe if I say those soldiers out there do not stay in their graves? Will you believe if I say they leave their graves

after dark and come to life across those battlefields? What if I tell you I have seen them, then—soldiers without arms or legs—officers torn to pieces—faceless horsemen flitting through the trees—those World War dead who rise at night to fight again. What if I tell you I have seen them, *monsieur*, still fighting the Battle of the Somme—!”

The old man was crazy, of course.

Bill murmured a kindly, “Yes, yes, *grandpère*, I’d like to hear more, but I’ve got to be going!” and started for his car. But the ancient gave a windy cry, and hooked him by the arm.

“*Monsieur* does not believe? *Monsieur* will not listen? But you are a stranger here, *monsieur*. You do not know the Forêt de Feu. That *château* where you are going is in the very heart of the Forêt de Feu. And those woods are in the heart of the Red Zone. The blood has never dried here in the Red Zone, I tell you. There was too much of it—too much blood!—and the dead—!”

Bill Shepherd said flatly, “Please, *grandpère*, I really haven’t time to listen to your ghost stories—”

“Ghosts?” the old man cried. “Ghosts, you call them? Perhaps they are ghosts, indeed—the ghosts of the soldiers who were slain. None the less, I have seen them. It is said they come out of the poppies, *monsieur*—the poppies that have sprung up out of the soldiers’ bones—the poppies that have in their veins the soldiers’ blood! If you do not believe me, ask the inn keeper at Contalmaison. Ask the blacksmith in the valley. Ask Père Anselm, the curé in Thiepval Village—would a priest tell a lie?—*non*, but ask old Mother Landru at the very *château* where you say you are going!”

“Mother Landru?” Half way to the car, Bill Shepherd wheeled in dismay.

The old man nodded fiercely. “The soldiers leave their graves, I tell you. It is said the poppies breathe for them by day so they may rise and walk by night. I am not the only one who has seen them. Those others have seen them. And we who live

here, on still nights we have heard the call of bugles—the echo of bugles where no bugles have been blown. We have heard gunfire, *monsieur*, where no guns have been since the War. We have seen the soldiers in the dark out there—the Poilus—the British Tommies—the Boches!”

SURE. A fog-wreathed hollow of any old battleground could be the gathering of a thousand spirits. Echo of some vagrant huntsman’s horn became a ghostly taps. Thunderclaps at night made spectral artillery; swamp-lights shone as flickers in the hands of phantom signalmen; a wandering herd of cows created apparitional cavalry.

Bill Shepherd growled, “I must ask Madame Landru about these myths.”

“Myths!” the old man glared. “Villagers found dead on the edge of those cursed woods out there—are they myths? A girl discovered with a bullet in her throat in that timber where the fighting was thickest—is that a myth? Is it a myth to find a child blown to pieces in a shellhole of twenty years ago?”

Something tightened in Bill Shepherd’s throat. That letter from the Agency Honnêteau, Carpentier et Jacques Gonjon had hinted at witchery like this. He thought aloud, “I suppose for the next fifty years they’ll keep finding the remains of refugees killed around here during the War.”

“The ones of whom I speak were not killed during the War,” came the wheezy voice. “But last year they were killed. And the girl this spring. And the child only last month.”

“Last month?” That was too recent for comfort.

“You can see it in the papers, *monsieur*. It happened not a mile from the Forêt de Feu. Some called it murder—a child killed in a crater where no feet but hers had walked. The police came and went, after scouring the fields; they did not know the answer. But we of this countryside know. We have seen the dead soldiers; heard the midnight guns. She was killed in the battle that is still going on—by the dead who

have their front line in the Forêt de Feu—”

A black wing of cloud had extended across the eastern ridge, and the dusk was darkening. Bill Shepherd could barely discern the brown ribbon of the wagon-road that crossed the meadows below and dwindled in the direction of the woods. A drop of rain splashed on his wrist, and he turned to ask the old man a question; was startled to find himself at the roadside alone.

Rounding with in-pulled breath, he saw the graybeard some distance up the road, his back bowed under the wagon-pole, moving off in the dusk. He hurried to the car and busily put up the top. Then, stowed behind the wheel, he felt better.

He sent the Hisso charging down the highway, and when he came to the intersection of the dirt road, he turned deliberately off the macadam and took the wagon-track across the open fields. Apparently the road was little used, for the ruts were weedy, the car bumped and jounced and loose stones rattled under the fenders.

It skirted the village that he judged was Contalmaison, and sloped down into a valley shrubbed with willow. The car passed several new cottages that looked, however, as if they had been deserted; clattered over a plank bridge; curved around several granite monuments, and then began passing the fields of crosses. The road dipped along over the meadows, and the little white markers went by in a blur.

There would be a cemetery, then a field of weed or poppies, a coppice of young trees, another cemetery.

Bill Shepherd tried to keep his eye on the road-ruts, but the burial plots intruded on his consciousness at every turn.

The date had stopped here—he could read it on these monuments, 1916. He had driven back into the Past, to another Time.

NINE miles were gone on the dashboard meter when dark woods loomed suddenly ahead, and flanking the dirt road where it entered the woods he saw another

regiment of crosses—Canadians. He slowed the car, wondering if his brother's grave could be among them. The evening queerly lightened.

There were five sharp thunder-explosions in the sky; a dash of rain struck the windshield; water fell in an opalescent cloudburst. Lightning played across the sky, and it was as if the whole landscape came into action; seen through sheets of rain all those far-flung battle lines were on the move, company after company advancing over the fields, sweeping down the slopes converging on the woods ahead.

The illusion lasted only for that recurrence of twilight; as abruptly as it had broken, the cloudburst was over; rain dissolved into a drizzle and the deluged evening blotted into night.

Bill Shepherd snapped on his headlamps as he turned the Hisso into the road through the dripping, black trees, and he had not gone a mile on that woodland road before he regretted his decision.

This forest had known a blight. Masked by the greenery of saplings and aspen, its ruin had not been discernible from a distance; now Bill Shepherd found himself in a fire-blackened wilderness, an Aeldema of dead and shattered trees, thickets of fallen timber as dismal as a Georgia swamp. The undergrowth was a jungle in which charred and leafless trunks thrust out the stubs of amputated limbs.

Felled oaks lay along the roadside like prostrate giants. Everywhere the trees were down. There was a smell of earth and leaf-mold and rotting wood, as the road wound and struggled through that desolation of mangled timber. The headlights discovered in the underbrush an inconceivable litter of rubbish—wagon wheels, sandbags, scraps of twisted steel and punctured sheet-iron, wire stanchions, bits of charred harness, lengths of chain, snarls of barbed wire, bent iron stakes.

In a grove of shattered pine the junk of a rusted Howitzer stood like the bones of a dinosaur.

The old man's ghost story had not seemed too fantastic on that road in the

Forêt de Feu, and Bill Shepherd had been hunting for a place to turn around when he came on that peasant in the poppy bed—that dead man strangled by a murderer who had left no visible track.

## CHAPTER VI

### GIRL IN THE DARK

THE drizzle thinned into mist, and the road, as he drove in panic, grew worse. Underbrush and charred trees seemed to drift in weaving cobwebs of vapor; the road was befogged; and the car-lights dimmed, their yellow rays diffused by the sluggish steam.

Deliberately he slowed the car; forced his lungs to breathe normally. That dead man back there in the poppies couldn't hurt him; and whoever had killed that peasant would have hiked for cover long ago. Was he going to let an afternoon among War memorials and a crack-potted old man play on his nerves? He steadied his fingers and lit a cigarette and drew a sedative inhale of smoke.

These woods had belonged to his father, and his mother used to come here on European holidays. This was a private road. His road. He waved the cigarette.

As for that dead man, as soon as he reached the *château* he'd telephone the nearest *gendarmerie*. Murder would out. The killer's tracks, naturally, had been obliterated by that cloudburst, and the murderer had been smart—knowing the legend of the haunted poppies, he'd laid his victim out in a poppy bed, figuring to terrify any passersby.

Bill Shepherd felt better, bluffing himself into his normal frame of mind. The bluff became easier in proportion to the mileage between his car and that body back there. He turned on the car radio; should have thought of it before. The lighted dial brought him into the present and changed his mood. Give him a torch singer from Paris, and all the haunts would be dispelled.

But Paris was slurred, unintelligible with interference. Too much static for GBS.

Holland and Belgium were off the air, and DXR Germany didn't come in. As he twiddled at the dial, the radio went dead. But he drove on, whistling tunelessly. Somehow, fiddling with the radio had given him back his confidence.

What a setting for a story all this would make. That dusty lawyer. This abandoned forest. Murdered peasant. Haunted countryside. Now if he were writing this thing, he would come pretty soon to a big limousine stuck in the mud. The plot needed a beautiful frightened girl.

Rounding a bend in the wagon-track, Bill Shepherd jammed the brakes in staring surprise.

There was the girl!

SHE stood in the ruts directly in the path of his headlamps, and her car was tilted in a ditch at the roadside. The car, an antiquated Citroën coupé, wasn't exactly a limousine, and the girl wasn't exactly beautiful or frightened; but, posed there in the mist with the night behind her and the mangled forest close around, she was certainly picturesque.

Her eyes were shiny black under the brim of a rain-soaked Leghorn hat, and Bill Shepherd saw pale determination in a tight-lipped face. She was young. A dark cape clung to her shoulders; her dress was moulded damply to her knees; her slim legs were notable, shapely in black silk. Her shoes were ankle-deep in the mire, and there was a blunt-nosed Mauser automatic in her hand. She aimed the gun at the Hisso's windshield, and Bill Shepherd snapped off the engine as he heard her cry of command.

"Get out!" The order was given in French.

He thought, "I'll be damned!" and got out.

"Come toward me. Advance with the hands in the air."

Arms uplifted, he moved toward her.

"Stand in front of your car-lights where I can see your face."

He obeyed, nerves tingling under the aim of the gun. Yet, oddly enough, he



wasn't afraid of the girl. He had a vague feeling he'd seen her before. But she wasn't the woman he had seen that morning leaving the office of old Bertrand.

"Now," she said in a level voice, her dark eyes aimed with the same disconcerting directness of the gun, "who are you?"

"Funny," he told her in English, "I've been wondering that, myself."

A fierce little V came between her brows; then her firm lips spoke slowly, handling English with a husky accent. "Do not jest with me, *monsieur*. What are you doing in these woods? I demand your identity."

"Who am I? I wish I knew. I've spent years trying to find out."

"Don't be childish, please," the girl commanded sharply. "I am in deadly earnest."

"So am I," Bill Shepherd heard himself saying. "Shepherd's the name. William Shepherd. Call me Bill."

"What are you doing here?"

"Haven't you heard of me? Your failure to recognize my name and cry, 'Oh, where do you get your plots?' just proves how unknown I am. Well, I'm a writer. Author of *Footprints In The Dark* and *The Spider In The Easter Lily*." He paused because mention of footprints reminded him of the poppy bed where they should have been. He pulled a breath, looking at the girl. "Anyway, that's what I used to do for a living, so save your time if you're after a generous pocketbook. She who steals my purse steals trash."

The girl said angrily, "I warn you, *monsieur*, I will shoot if—"

"It's in my right hand inner pocket, *mademoiselle*, but it isn't worth taking."

Under the dripping hatbrim her eyes went narrow. "I give you one more chance to explain who you are!"

He sighed, "Very well, I'll begin at the beginning. William Shepherd. Hundred and eighty pounds. White. American. Thirty-one. Unmarried. Does that tell you everything?"

"It does not tell me what you are doing in these woods."

"That's a long story, and I wasn't sure you'd be interested. It begins back in the States where I made my living writing stories. It's nice work if you can get it, as the saying goes, but one morning I woke up to find I was fed up with it."

He grinned at the blankness on her face, and was amused at an impulse to tell her something of the truth about himself. Talk relieved a tightness in his stomach, and the girl was becoming confused.

"Fed up means being sick of everything. To use a hackneyed term—tired of it all. A sense of personal futility, a feeling that nothing you've been up to was quite worthwhile. Do you understand?"

"I do not. Keep up the hands. Higher."

"I'll try to be lucid. My father was an unexpected genius who invented a gadget for coal mines and suddenly became an industrialist worth ten million dollars. My mother was—grand. My older brother, Hugh, signed up with the Canadians just after the *Lusitania*—believed in Democracy, good sportsmanship and Belgium's rights, and got blown to bits somewhere around here because of it."

Bill Shepherd shifted muddy feet, and eased his numbling shoulders, holding the girl's eyes with his own mocking gaze.

"That's the family tree. Good American oak. People who had faith in things and believed in what they were doing."

HE FROWNED at the ground, then, looking up, saw the girl's grip had tightened on the pistol. He went on hastily: "As for me, I tried to write the Great American Novel, but it all turned into a lot of words. I found I'd written hundreds of such words, so many blanks on paper. The only thing left for me to write was mystery stories."

"I want to know what you are doing here," the girl panted.

"I'm trying to tell you. I wrote a lot of mystery novels, and then got fed up. I wanted to see life, you might say. If words didn't mean anything, what did? I wanted to do something that meant something—do it seriously, zestfully, importantly. Any-

way—I went broke. That's why I'm here in these woods. My father left me a French *château*. My Paris lawyer told me this morning the *château* isn't even saleable. He also hinted that this forest has an evil reputation, and an old man I met this afternoon on the road told me it's full of ghosts. He didn't say the ghost would be a charming girl waiting to meet me with a Mauser pistol to ask me what business I had in my own woods. I'm on my way to the Château de Feu."

"Château de Feu!" the girl breathed, watching him.

"And since this is my own land until the government confiscates it, I'm inclined to ask what *you* are doing here?"

Grabbing out, he caught her hand on the gun-butt, twisted, flung her around against the fender of his car, pinned her body with his hip, and levered her wrist upward until the pistol-muzzle touched the underside of her chin.

"Stand quiet!" he snapped, savagely authoritative. "Stand still, or that gun will blast your pretty head off. It's your turn, now, and begin at the beginning. Who are *you*?"

In the grip of his fingers her hand seemed tiny, but it required a bit of muscle to force her wrist. Tears welling to her eyes might have called for gentlemanly deference under other circumstances. She whispered, "Gabrielle. Gabrielle Gervais."

"Good," he nodded down at her. "I like the name Gabrielle. I hope I can like the French girl who answers to it. Hadn't you better relax now, and let go of that gun before it shoots somebody. Nice girls don't carry big guns," he mocked. "Or maybe it's just an old French custom."

She panted, "Please, *m'sieur*. I—I only wanted a ride."

"They thumb them in my country."

"I was not going to shoot you, *m'sieur*."

"You're the one I'm worrying about."

"*Monsieur*, you are hurting—"

"There!" The weapon dropped from her wrenched fingers, went *sluff* in the mud at his shoes. He stooped with a sigh, picked it up, stared at its calibre and stowed it

into his side pocket. "You see this is private property, *mademoiselle*. No hunting allowed, at least from now on. Cigarette?"

She took one, staring ruefully at the mud where the gun had splashed.

Her eyes refused to look at him across the flaring match; he was only aware of dark lashes curled over hot-flushed cheeks and trembling disappointment on her mouth. She leaned back against the fender, rubbing her wrenched wrist, smoking, panting a little, blinking wet lashes.

"I told you, *m'sieur*. I—I only wanted a ride." Her chin puckered. "And I was lost, *m'sieur*. My car—you see it is off the road. In the mud. It is late at night and I—I was frightened."

Bill Shepherd grinned approval. The technique now called for an appeal to his masculine valor. Girl on lonely road in forest late at night. Lost and frightened. Didn't mean any harm with that 9-mm. automatic. Just a nice girl who had driven off the road and wanted a ride. If this ran true to form her next sentence would tell him she had no place to spend the night. This was Plot B, Angle 15-C. The follow-up on that would be an appeal to sex.

"I—I lost the main highroad to Guillemont—and I—I came through these woods on the wrong turning. In the rainstorm I went into that miserable ditch. *Oui*, I have been sitting there for an hour waiting for someone to come along. In the storm I did not dare walk off alone." She swallowed a sob. "You see the condition of my car, *m'sieur*."

NO FRAUD about that. The Citroën was badly mired. All the king's horses would have a job hauling it out of that bog. She said wistfully, "I was so happy to hear your motor coming, *m'sieur*. But then. I did not dare stop a strange car at night. I thought—I thought if I just showed the gun—why, the driver would not just go right by—and afterward I could explain—"

"You could explain you had no place to go for the night."

"How did you know that, *m'sieur*?"

"Your uncle turned you out of the house—"

"My uncle? *Non, non*, my uncles were killed in the War, *m'sieur*. It was my father—he—" She faced him in white alarm. "My father did not send you after me, *m'sieur*?"

He scowled. "Not exactly. But why did Papa Gervais—did I get the name?—turn you out? Did he say, 'Never darken my door again?'"

"He did not turn me out," the girl said fiercely. She stared off into the guttering boscage, pushed back a strand of hair from her cheek, faced him with a sigh of decision. "I suppose I must tell you, then. I was to be married this morning. It was all arranged. The cathedral at Amiens. The guests. The—the bridal veil. Hundreds of gifts. The wedding breakfast—"

"Ah." It almost made him uncomfortable. "Plot B, Angle 15. The wicked Duke. Handsome, dissipated, but very rich. You did not love him."

She looked at him sharply. Quickly rearranged an expression of appeal. "*M'sieur* the American understands, I see, something of the conventionalities of France. My father is most conventional, *m'sieur*. Most. He insisted I marry this man. *Non*, Philippe has not a title, but he is—how do you say?—stuffy. Horses. That is Philippe. All he ever thinks of. So it was not that I did not love Philippe—I could not have even become used to him—it was that Philippe did not love me. All he ever loved was horses."

"I see. A sportsman."

"*Non, m'sieur. Un boucher.* A dealer in the *Halles Centrales*. Steaks. Roasts for the butcher shops. Horse-meat, *m'sieur*."

Bill Shepherd swallowed. "Ate his own nags, I suppose."

"So. But a man the most respectable. Terribly respectable. Rich. There is no better business in France. Only—"

He sighed for her, "There was someone else—"

"You mean—it was that I was in love with some other man?" She shook her

head plaintively. "*Pas du tout!* Not that. Only I wanted some man to love me—not just marry me because it was time he married and we had known each other since childhood and my father was highly respectable." Her eyes looked up into his. "You understand?"

"Oh, sure."

"You believe?"

"Every word."

She held out a begging hand. "Then you will give me back my gun?"

"As soon as you tell me the truth."

Exasperation made her scowl. "But I have told you everything."

He said flatly, "Not quite. For instance, you said you ran away from a wedding this morning in Amiens. You drove all day and got lost. But you are only within half a day's drive of Amiens. Also your car has a license plate with a Paris number. Next, you didn't ask me for a ride when you stopped me, you demanded my name and future intentions. And lastly, do French girls running away from bridegrooms, even horsy ones, carry nine-millimeter automatics in their handbags?"

She threw down the cigarette, and faced him. Her manner changed. Her mouth was firm again. Her eyes were defiant. She shrugged, "*Eh bien*. Take me to the police."

He shook his head, thoughtfully looking toward her car.

Alarm in her voice was real. "You are not going to leave me—"

"No. It's going to rain again. I'd hardly leave you stuck in these woods; the wolf might come along. You were going to spend the night at grandmother's house—"

"I told you I had no place to spend the night."

He decided, "I can take you with me to the Château de Feu. You can telephone a taxi from there."

"*M'sieur*,"—she was smoothing her dress at the hips as she picked her way through puddles for the car—"m'sieur is too kind."

"Not at all, *mademoiselle*." He unlimbered in the low leather seat, kicked the gears, twisted the wheel and eased the car

to a purring start. A dead man on the road. A forest accursed. A haunted house ahead. A mysterious girl. Where did the plot go from here?

## CHAPTER VII

### THE FORGOTTEN OF GOD

HE COULD feel the girl's eyes on his profile, covertly studying, but when he switched his glance to catch her at it she was frowning at one mud-caked ankle, wriggling her foot in the shoe. The car slid in a greasy turn and splashed through wet grass, and he pulled it out of a stall just in time. Rain slashed in another cloudburst through the trees. Water trickled through leaks in the windshield cowl and spurted up between the floorboards. His elbow, negligent on the door-sill, was soaked.

He was wet and uncomfortable, and when he cranked up the window the car filled with steam and dampness and a smell of gasoline and cigarette smoke.

He was uneasy again. He drove in nervous caution, juggling the car in ruts of paste, listening to the violent rain beating the hood and roof and windshield, the splash of water coming down; straining his eyes to help the half-blinded headlights find the swamped wagon-track.

He knew he ought to be thinking fast, but he didn't quite know what he could do about anything, and for the next several minutes it wanted all his attention to keep the car floundering on its way. On a turn where the tires clawed furiously to keep going, he saw something loom up among black brushwood; something that looked like a tank left there to rot, and he would have stopped to examine it if the car wouldn't have sunk to the doors.

The road here seemed to be turning into quicksand; he raced the engine to get on. What a road this must have been during the War.

He could imagine troops moving up on a night like this. Not just one night, but night after night, night after night. Drowning in mud. Drowning in rain. Drowning

under heavy packs. Drowning under terrors of shellfire. 10,000 men. 30,000 men. 100,000 men. Would he ever get those death-lists out of his mind?

He said aloud: "It makes me feel small."

The girl's voice asked, "What is that?"

He kept his eyes on the road ahead, annoyed that she was there. "You wouldn't understand." Angrily: "You're living on velvet, babe. I'm living on velvet. A whole lot of smart young people like us are living on velvet these days. When you think of all the men who died on some rotten road out here—died right here in these woods, suffering the tortures of the damned!—so that people like you and me could motor out here tonight and cut silly capers in comparative comfort—" he broke off for loss of words.

She said in a low voice, "You are a strange American, *m'sieur*."

He said: "Not so strange that I won't wring your neck if you try to snatch that gun out of my pocket. I don't mean to scare you. Self-preservation is the first law of life. What I can't understand is what induced all these soldiers to throw their lives away as they did. What nullified their instinct for self-preservation and induced them to come out here and die in droves like herds of butchered cattle?"

"They died for France," the girl said.

He snapped, "What did the Germans die for? The British? The Americans? What? For the Kaiser? For King and Country? For Democracy? Don't you see those are just a lot of words?"

"They are ideals," the girl said quietly. "I think the thousands who gave their lives in the World War did it because they thought it would make a better world for humanity to live in."

"Who's humanity?" he gestured impatiently. "Humanity, dear lady, is you and I. Well, do we thank those fellows who bled to death out here for us? We give them two minutes of silence every year on Armistice Day—is that gratitude? But today we're falling for the same old stock words and blah. Shouting the same empty phrases. Sharpening our weapons to make

the same old mistakes. I don't wonder the peasants around here think these dead are turning over in their graves."

The girl beside him murmured, "You are funny. You are not quite sure what it is, but underneath you are angry about something."

Queer girl. She had something there: he *was* angry about something. Only, now that she spoke of it, he knew. Or thought he did.

He was talking to keep his mind off that corpse with the finger-printed throat. Queer how one corpse could be more frightening than a million. Millions blurred into impersonal mathematics—like the Chinese. You could only grasp little problems, like the problem of telephoning the police, and what to do with a French girl, and how to pay your taxes.

For the rest, you just kept jockeying a nervous wheel, watching a shiny road, breathing in a fetid compound of gasoline and cigarette smoke.

"And here we are!" he muttered as a dim gleam of lights developed in the mists ahead. "Welcome to the Château de Feu!"

HE FOUND himself turning the car up a muddy driveway hedged with thick undergrowth and the tall stumps of burnt trees. The car passed through broken gateposts guarded by two headless stone lions, and waded in gluey mire around a weed-grown terrace. He glimpsed the remains of what had once been a formal garden—overturned urns and ruptured statuary and a rubbish-filled fountain where the marble water nymph lay overthrown on her pedestal—and then, without realizing he had reached his destination, the car was under a shadowy portecochère.

He cut the engine, and climbed out. The place looked worse than he had pictured it.

Looming dark walls overgrown with vines, rank vines that clambered up the masonry like camouflage, weaving their arms around cornices and ledges, eating their way between the granite facing-

blocks, climbing to the roof like jungle parasites, covering the windows. His eye followed the roof-line to the silhouette of a Norman tower; he made out dark bastions and a crumbled wing; but the building was wrapped in ivy and night, formless as a background in a dream, and the only light was a leak of yellow coming through a vine-screened lower window overlooking the drive.

Of course there was a recessed arch and a great door studded with iron bolts, and he knew there would be a knocker shaped like an iron fist clutching an iron ball. He let his flashlight play around the entry before knocking. A bicycle propped against a pillar under the portecochère was a surprise. He hadn't expected—and he was a little sorry to find somebody home. The bike looked new, and gave contrast to a scene of ruin and old desolation.

Listening to the echoes of the knocker, Bill Shepherd thought, "Wuthering Heights. Wuthering Heights as Edgar Allen Poe might have written it."

The girl climbed out of the car and stood in the entryway with him as he waited for an answer to the knocker. The mist changed suddenly to a sheeting down-pour. Water blew in under the portecochère, drenching their shoes. The door took so long in opening that, when it did creak inward, Bill Shepherd was sure the man who opened it had first gone somewhere to make up in costume.

Or maybe it wasn't a man at all. Maybe it . . .

Bill Shepherd experienced a creep down his spine. The figure, dim in the door-frame, was too much like someone in masquerade. It was gaunt and tall and stooped, and it had a deep-furrowed sad gray face and great sad eyes that peered from under a forelock of salty gray hair. It wore a nightcap with a tassel that dangled over one ear, and a musty moth-eaten night-robe that fell to the ankles. Its feet, in wooden shoes stuffed with straw, were like great clumpy hoofs, and, holding aloft a smudged oil lamp and peering out at Bill Shepherd, it was easily recognizable as a



midnight version of a Walt Disney horse.

The melancholy eyes looked out at Bill Shepherd; and the man shook his head as if to say he would like to help, but he was too poor and the house was beyond the aid of a vacuum cleaner.

Bill Shepherd mustered his French. "You are Archambaud?"

"I am Archambaud."

"Then I suppose I won't have to spend the night on this doorstep in the rain. This is Mademoiselle Gervais. I am William Shepherd, and before we go any farther, has the place got a telephone?"

But Archambaud seemed unable to answer. Elevating the oil lamp, he stared at Bill Shepherd with eyes widened to saucers; then he wheeled back from the doorway, whinnying, "Blanche! Blanche—!"

Thrusting the girl over the threshold ahead of him, Bill Shepherd pushed in through the door. He had an impression of a vast, shadow-cornered room. The traditional staircase going up into darkness at the left. The traditional fireplace smoldering against a shadowed wall. The traditional stranger warming himself by the hearth.

The traditional stranger—with pipe, knickers and wet shoes—was obviously the story-book Englishman who had lost his way. Doubtless the owner of the bicycle. Everything was running true to form. The Englishman stood up, politely raising his brows. A dog barked viciously in a back room somewhere, and the in-gust of wind

and rain fluttered the lamp-flame in Archambaud's hand and brightened the hearth-coals and made shadows creep and lengthen on the walls.

And now other shadows.

A woman's figure had formed in the glooms at the head of the staircase. This was in character, too. Dickens had written about her. Madame Defarge. Her knitting was in her hand as her felt slippers padded down the steps; in lamp light she was seen as a dowdy Amazon, six feet at least, with a combative bosom, capable jaw, faint moustache on upper lip, a head of hair like a bird's nest, and Bertrand's promised goiter—a growth that bulged from the side of her throat like a summer squash. She was waving her knitting, emitting hoarse bursts of indignant French.

"No, no, no! There is no more room for travelers. Sacred stove! Do they think this a hotel? Tell them this is not an inn, Archambaud! Tell them to go away! Are we at fault because of the eternal rain? Send them to the village! Send them—!"

Then, half way down the staircase, she saw Bill Shepherd; stopped short in her angry descent; dropped her knitting; screamed.

"Mother of heaven! The dead! The dead are calling upon us! The Forgotten of God!"

Doing an about face on the stairs, she fell deliberately over backwards, and came somersaulting down the steps, bumpety-bump!

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(ADV.)

COMPLETE  
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"The pain," Lolás said, "comes later"

## Señor Sleight-of-Hand

In the charming Republic of Paraguaso they found it expedient to retire dictators by shotgun, to discuss business matters with the assistance of a rope. There was, however, a certain Scot who had an empty sleeve and an interesting change in method

By RICHARD BLAKER

I

**I**T WOULD have seemed, fifty years ago, that the Republic of Paraguaso recognized but one obligation on the part of its history towards humanity—that it should repeat itself. During its most lively phase, covering a period of thirty-

six months, it saw the rise of forty-two and the fall (one way and another) of forty-one presidents. The discrepancy between the number of rises and the number of falls is accountable by the fact that the forty-second of those presidents is still president today; he is Esteban d'Aveiro, who assumed office fifty-five years ago.

Even on technically legal grounds his