

***MARIA  
THOMPSON  
DAVISS***



***THE DAREDEVIL***

**Maria Thompson Daviess**

# **The Daredevil**

EAN 8596547360230

DigiCat, 2022

Contact: [DigiCat@okpublishing.info](mailto:DigiCat@okpublishing.info)



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## CHAPTER I

SPARKLING WAVES OVER HIGH EXPLOSIVES

## CHAPTER II

VIVE LA FRANCE

## CHAPTER III

THAT MR. G. SLADE OF DETROIT

## CHAPTER IV

THE IMPOSSIBLE UNCLE ROBERT

## CHAPTER V

"HERE'S MY BOY, GOVERNOR"

## CHAPTER VI

"WE BOTH NEED YOU"

## CHAPTER VII

THE GIRL BUNCH

## CHAPTER VIII

IN THE DRESS OF MAGNIFICENCE

## CHAPTER IX

"O'ER THE LAND OF THE FREE—"

## CHAPTER X

VITRIOL AND THE HOODOO

## CHAPTER XI

BUSINESS AND PIE

## CHAPTER XII

THE BEAUTIFUL MADAM WHITWORTH

## CHAPTER XIII

BROTHERS BY BLOODSHED

CHAPTER XIV

TO BEAR MEN AND TO SAVE THEM

CHAPTER XV

“BEHOLD, I AM A SPY!”

CHAPTER XVI

“IMMEDIATELY I COME TO YOU!”

CHAPTER XVII

THE TALL TIMBERS OF OLD HARPETH

CHAPTER XVIII

THE CAMP HEAVEN

CHAPTER XIX

ALL IS LOST

CHAPTER XX

“YOU ARE—MYSELF!”

# CHAPTER I

[Table of Contents](#)

## SPARKLING WAVES OVER HIGH EXPLOSIVES

[Table of Contents](#)

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Was there ever a woman who did not very greatly desire for herself, at long moments, the doublet and hose of a man, perhaps also his sword, as well as his attitude in the viewing of life? I think not. To a very small number of those ladies of great curiosity it has been granted that they climb to those ramparts of the life of a man; but it was needful that they be stout of limb and sturdy of heart to sustain themselves upon that eminence and not be dashed below upon the rocks of a strange land. I, Roberta, Marquise de Grez and Bye, have obtained glimpses into a far country and this is what I bring on returning, not as a spy, but, shall I say, laden with spices and forbidden fruit?

And for me it has been a very fine dash into the wilds of a land of strangeness, and I do not know that I have yet found myself completely returned unto my estate of a woman.

I first began to realize that I was set out upon a great journey when I stood at the rail of the very large ship and watched it plow its way through the waves which they told us with their splendor hid cruel mines. I felt the future might be like unto those great waves, and it might be that it would break in sparkling crests over high explosives. I found them!

I had seen a fear of those explosives of life come in my dying father's eyes, and here I stood at his command out on the ocean in quest of a woman's fate in a strange country.

"Get back to America, Bob, and go straight to your Uncle Robert at Hayesville in the Harpeth Valley. He cut me loose because he didn't understand, when I married your mother out of the French opera in Paris. When I named you Roberta for him he returned the letter I sent but with a notice of a thousand dollars in Monroe and Company for you. I didn't tell him when your mother died. God, I've been bitter! But these German bullets have cut the life out of me and I see more plainly. Get the money and take Nannette and the kiddie on the first boat. There's starvation and—maybe worse in Paris for you. Take—the money—and—get—to—brother Robert. God of America—take—them and—guide—"

And that was all. I held him in my arms for a long time, while old Nannette and small Pierre wept beside me, and then I laid him upon his pillow and straightened the little tricolor that the good Sister of the old gray convent in which he lay had given me to place in his hand when he had begged for it. My mother's country had meant my mother to him and he had given his life for her and France in the trenches of the Vosges. And thus at his bidding I was on the very high seas of adventure. From this thought of him I was very suddenly recalled by old Nannette who came upon the deck from below.

"*Le bon Dieu,*" she sighed, as she settled herself in her steamer chair and took out the lace knitting. "Is it not of a goodness that I have tied in my stocking the necessary francs that we may land in that America, where all is of such

a good fortune? And also by my skill we have one hundred and fifty francs above that need which must be almost an hundred of their huge and wasteful dollars. All is well with us." And as she spoke she pulled up the collar of Pierre's soft blue serge blouse around his pale thin face and eased the cushion behind his crooked small back.

"Is—is that all which remains of the fifteen hundred dollars we found to be in that bank, Nannette?" I asked of her with a great uncertainty. My mother's fortune, descended from her father, the Marquis de Grez and Bye, and the income of my father from his government post, had made life easy to live in that old house by the Quay, where so many from the Faubourg St. Germaine came to hear her sing after her fortune and children took her from the Opera—and to go for the summers in the gray old Chateau de Grez—but of the investment of francs or dollars and cents I had no knowledge, in spite of my claims to be an American girl of much progress. My mother had laughed and very greatly adored my assumption of an extreme American manner, copied as nearly as possible after that of my father, and had failed to teach to me even that thrift which is a part of the dot of every French girl from the Faubourg St. Germaine to the Boulevard St. Michel. But even in my ignorance the information of Nannette as to the smallness of our fortune gave to me an alarm.

"What will you, Mademoiselle? It was necessary that I purchase the raiment needful to the young Marquis de Grez according to his state, and for the Marquise his sister also. It was not to be contemplated that we should travel except in apartments of the very best in the ship. Is not gold enough

in America even for sending in great sums for relief of suffering? Have I not seen it given in the streets of Paris? Is it not there for us? Do you make me reproaches?" And Nannette began to weep into the fine lawn of her nurse's handkerchief.

"No, no, Nannette; I know it was of a necessity to us to have the clothes, and of course we had to travel in the first class. Do not have distress. If we need more money in America I will obtain it." I made that answer with a gesture of soothing upon her old shoulders which I could never remember as not bent in an attitude of hovering over Pierre or me.

"*Eh bien!*" she answered with a perfect satisfaction at my assumption of all the responsibilities of our three existences.

And as I leaned against the deck rail and looked out into a future as limitless as that water ahead of us into which the great ship was plowing, I made a remark to myself that had in it all the wisdom of those who are ignorant.

"The best of life is not to know what will happen next."

"Ah, that was so extraordinary coming from a woman that you must pardon me for listening and making exclamation," came an answer in a nice voice near at my elbow. The words were spoken in as perfect English as I had learned from my father, but in them I observed to be an intonation that my French ear detected as Parisian. "Also, Mademoiselle, are you young women of the new era to be without that very delightful but often danger-creating quality of curiosity?" As I turned I looked with startled eyes into the grave face of a man less than forty years, whose

sad eyes were for the moment lighting with a great tenderness which I did not understand.

“I believe the quality which will be most required of the women of the era which is mine, is—is courage and then more courage, Monsieur,” I made answer to him as if I had been discussing some question with him in my father’s smoking room at the Chateau de Grez, as I often came in to do with my father and his friends after the death of my mother when the evenings seemed too long alone. They had liked that I so came at times, and the old Count de Breaux once had remarked that feminine sympathy was the flux with which men made solid their minds into a unanimous purpose. He had been speaking of that war a few weeks after Louvaine and I had risen and had stood very tall and very haughty before him and my father.

“The women of France are to come after this carnage to mold a nation from what remains to them, Monsieur,” I had said to him as I looked straight into his face. “Is not the courage of women a war supply upon which to rely?”

“God! what are the young women—such women as she—going to do in the years that come after the deluge, Henri of America?” he had made a muttering question to my father as his old eyes smouldered over me in the fire-light.

From the memory of the smoking room at the Chateau de Grez my mind suddenly returned to the rail of the ship and the Frenchman beside me, who was looking into my face with the same kindly question as to my future that had been in the eyes of my old godfather and which had stirred my father’s heart to its American depths and made him send me back to his own country.

“Ah, yes, that courage is a good weapon with which to adventure in this America of the Grizzled Bear, Mademoiselle,” I found the strange man saying to me with a nice amusement as well as interest.

“My father had shot seven grizzlies before his twenty-first birthday. We have the skins, four of them, in the great hall of the Chateau de Grez—or—or we did have them before—before—” My voice faltered and I could not continue speaking for the tears that rose in my throat and eyes.

Quickly the man at my side turned his broad shoulders so that he should shield me from the laughing and exclaiming groups of people upon the deck near us.

“Before Ypres, Mademoiselle?” he asked with tears also in the depths of his voice.

“Yes,” I answered. “And I am now going into the great America with my crippled brother and his nurse—alone. It is the land of my father and I have his courage—I *must* have also that of a French woman. I have it, Monsieur,” and as I spoke I drew myself to my full, broad-shouldered height, which was almost equal to that of the man beside me.

“Mademoiselle, I salute the courage born of an American who fought before the guns of the Marne and of a French woman who sent him there!” And as he spoke thus he removed from his head his silk deck cap and held it at his shoulder in a way that I knew was a salute from a French officer to the memory of a brother. “And also may I be permitted to present myself, as it is a sad necessity that you travel without one from whom I might request the introduction?” he asked of me with a beautiful reverence.

After a search in his pocket for a few seconds he at last discovered a case of leather and presented to me a card. As he handed it to me his color rose up under his black eyes and grave trouble looked from between their long black lashes. I glanced down at the card and read:

Capitaine, le Count Armond de Lasselles,  
Paris,  
France.  
44th Chasseurs de le Republique Francaise.

“Monsieur le Count, I know, I know why it is that you go to America!” I made exclamation as I clasped to my breast my hands and my eyes shone with excitement. “I have read it in *Le Matin* just the day before yesterday. You go to buy grain against the winter of starvation in the Republique. No man is so great a financier as you and so brave a soldier, with your wound not healed from the trenches in the Vosges. Monsieur, I salute you!” and I bent my head and held out my hand to him.

“We’re to expect nimble wits as well as courage of you young—shall I say *American* women?” he laughed as he bent over my hand. “Now shall I not be led for introduction to the small brother and the old nurse?” he asked with much friendly interest in his kind eyes.

It was a very wonderful thing to observe the wee Pierre listen to the narration of Capitaine, the Count de Lasselles, concerning the actions of a small boy who had run out of a night of shot and shell into the heart of his regiment and who had now lived five months in the trenches with them. Pierre’s small face is all of France and in his heart under his

bent chest burns a soul all of France. It is as if in her death, at his birth, my beautiful mother had stamped her race upon him with the greater emphasis.

“Is it that the small Gaston is a daredevil like is my Bob?” he questioned as we all made a laughter at the story of the Count de Lasselles concerning the sortie of the small idol from the trenches in the dead of one peaceful night to return with a very wide thick flannel shirt of one of the *Boches*, which he had caught hanging upon a temporary laundry line back of the German trenches.

At that English “daredevil” word I was in my mind again back in the old Chateau de Grez and into my own childhood.

“You young daredevil, you, hold tight to that vine until I get a grip on your wrist, or you’ll dash us both on the rocks below,” was the exact sentence with which my father bestowed my title upon me as he hung by his heels out of a window of the old vine-covered Chateau de Grez.

“It is one large mistake that my *jeune fille* is born what you call a boy in heart. *Helas!*” sobbed my beautiful young French mother as she regarded us from the garden below.

“If you were a boy I’d thrash you within an inch of your life, but as you are a girl I suppose it is permissible for me to admire your pluck, Mademoiselle Roberta,” said my father as he landed me in the music room by his side while an exchange of excited sentences went on between my mother and old Nannette in the garden below. “What were you doing out on that ledge, anyway? It is more than a hundred feet to the ground and the rocks.”

“I was making the hunt through Yellowstone Park that you have related to me, father, and I prefer that you give

me a boy's punishment. If I have a boy's what you call 'pluck,' I should have a boy's what you call 'thrashing.' Monsieur, I make that demand. I am the Marquise de Grez and Bye, and it may be that as you are an American you do not understand fully the honor of the house of Grez." I can remember that as I spoke I drew my ten-year old body up to its full height, which must have been over that of twelve years, and looked my father straight in the face with a glance of extreme hauteur as near as was possible to that of the portrait of the old Marquis de Grez, who died fighting on the field of Flanders.

"*Eh, la la*, what is it I have produced for you, Henri of America? It is not a proper *jeune fille*, nor do I know what punishment to impose upon her; but with you I must laugh," with which my beautiful mother from the doorway threw herself into the arms of her young American husband and her laughter of silver mingled with his deep laugh of a great joy.

"Don't worry, Celeste; Bob is just a clear throw-back to her great-grandmother, Nancy Donaldson, who shot two Indians and a bear in defense of her kiddies one afternoon while my maternal grandsire was in the stockades presiding over the council in which was laid down the first broad draft for the formation of the Commonwealth of Harpeth. I'm sorry, dear, that she is so vigorously American that she has to climb the Rocky Mountains even here in the garden spot of France. Just now she is French enough to be dealing with me in the terms of that jolly old boy of Flanders fame in the hall downstairs; but cheer up, sweetheart, she's a wild, daredevil American and I'm going to send her back to the

plains as soon as she speaks her native tongue with less French accent. Then the rest of us can be happily French forever after.”

“I will speak as you do, my father, from this moment forth,” I answered him with something that was wild and fierce and free rising in my child’s heart. “I will not be a *grande dame* of France. I am a woman of America. I speak only United States.” And I clung to my father’s arm as he drew me to him and embraced both my laughing mother and me, before I was delivered to old Nannette who, with affectionate French grumblings, led me away to the nursery for repairs.

The scene had become fixed in my memory, for from it had sprung a friendship of a great closeness with my wonderful American father whom love had chained in France. When he rode the great hunter that had come across to him from a friend in Kentucky I demanded to cling behind him or to sit the saddle in front of him, even at times running at his side as long as my breath held out, to rise on his stirrup, like the great terrifying Scotchmen do in battles, and cling as Kentuck made flight over wall or fence. My very slim and strong hands could not be kept from the steering wheel of his long blue racing car, and I could bring down a hare out of the field with any gun he possessed as unerringly as could he. I lived his life with him hour by hour, learned to think as he thought, to speak his easy transatlantic speech, and did equal trencher duty with him at all times, so that muscle and brawn were packed on my tall, broad woman’s body with the same compactness as it was packed upon his, by the time I had reached my twenty-

first birthday. By that time he and I had been alone together for eight long years, for my mother had left us with tiny, misshapen Pierre as a heart burden but with only each other to be companions.

The efforts of some of my mother's distant relatives and friends to make me into the traditional young French Marquise had resulted in giving to me a very beautiful *grande dame* manner to use when I stood in need of it, which I took a care was not too often. Because I had been born to a woman's estate I considered I must manage well beautiful skirts and lacy fans, but no oftener than was necessary, I decided. I went for the most of my days habited in English knickerbockers under short corduroy skirts, worn with a many-pocketed hunting blouse. On the night of my presentation at the salon of my distant relative, the old Countess de Rochampierre, I had to apologize to a young Russian attaché for searching with desperation for the bit of lace called a handkerchief, among the laces and ruffles of my evening gown in the regions where I had been accustomed to find sensible pockets.

"And is it possible that Mademoiselle Americaine hunts as well as she makes the dance?" was his delighted answer to my explanation, which led into a half-hour description of a raw morning in the field just three days before in England, where my father and I had gone over for a week's hunting with Lord Gordon Leigh at Leigholm.

"And then some," I returned answer with delight at his sympathy in my narration of the sport. I liked very well the American slang that my father's friends were always glad to

teach to me, and that gave to him both amusement and delight when I used it in his presence.

Also I liked well that young Russian and he came many times to the Chateau de Grez and Bye before he left to join his regiment of Russian Cossacks in the Carpathians.

And this time it was from the Carpathians that I returned to the ship deck to find wee Pierre laughing again over the very small dog that brought into the French trenches a very large and stupid sheep from the flock back of the German trenches.

“And your medal of honor, Monsieur le Capitaine; is it permitted that I lay for a little moment just one finger upon it?” Pierre asked of him as the great soldier stood tall above the steamer chair and gave to the little Frenchman the salute of an officer.

Nannette sobbed into her lace and I turned my head away as the tall man bent and laid the frail little hand against his decoration which he wore almost entirely hidden under the pocket of his tweed Norfolk of English manufacture. Only French eyes like wee Pierre’s could have seen it pinned there hidden over his heart. I think he wore it to give him a large courage for his mission that meant bread or starvation to so many of his people.

“Ah, Monsieur le Capitaine,” I said to him with a softness of tears in my throat, “I would that there was some little thing that I might do to serve France. I do so long to go into those awful trenches with that red cross on my arm, as it is not permitted to me to carry a gun, which I can use much better than many men now handling them with bullets against the enemy; but it is necessary that I obey the

commands of my soldier father and take to a safety the small Pierre.” And as we spoke he walked beside me to the prow of the large ship so that to us was a view of the heavens of blue beyond which lay our America.

“My child, there is a great service which you can render France,” he answered me as we stopped to watch the great white waves flung aside from the ship. “France needs friends in America, great powerful friends who will help her in contracting for food and all other munitions. A beautiful woman can do much in winning those friends. You go to your uncle, who is one of those in power in a State in that fruitful valley of the Mississippi from which I hope that my lieutenant, Count de Bourdon, whom I sent on that mission, will get many mules to carry food to the hungry boys in the trenches when mud is too deep for gasoline. Make of him and everyone your friend and through you the friend of our struggling country. Tell them of France, laugh with them for the joy to come when France, all France, with Alsace and beautiful Lorraine, is free; and make them weep with you for her struggles. Who knows but that through you may come some wonderful strength added to your old country from the new, whose blood runs in your veins as well?”

“All of that I will do, *mon Capitaine*. I so enlist myself.” And as I spoke I drew myself up unto the greatest height possible to me. “I will be of the army that feeds, rather than of that which kills.”

“*Mon Dieu*, child, what is possible to you to do has no limit. Also, I say to you, watch and be on your guard for aught that may harm France. In America are spies. I have been warned. Also there are those who practice deceptions

in contracts. It is for the purpose to so guard that I come to America.”

“I also will so guard,” I made answer to my Capitaine, the Count de Lasselles, as we again came in our walk to the side of wee Pierre and old Nannette.

# CHAPTER II

[Table of Contents](#)

## VIVE LA FRANCE

[Table of Contents](#)

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

And after that first day there were many hours that the Capitaine, the Count de Lasselles, spent with little Pierre and the good Nannette, as she sat knitting always with the sun on the water reddening her round cheeks, while I had much pleasure with many friends who came to me upon the ship.

A very fine young man who was named William Raines, from the State of Saint Louis, instructed me in several beautiful dances, but I do not think he was held in the esteem which he deserved by another of his American brothers by the name of Peter Scudder, whose home was in the town of Philadelphia.

“Dancing with Scudder must be like going to your grandmother’s funeral over the old State Road in a rockaway,” was the comment that Mr. William Raines made upon his friend Mr.

Peter Scudder, and what Mr. Scudder said of him was of the same unkindness.

“Raines’ dancing is extremely like Saint Louis: delightfully rapid but crude,” was his comment.

I should have been regretful of the unkindness between those two very nice Americans but for a beautiful good to

France that was brought about by the desire of each to please me more than the other.

The many ladies upon the ship had been of exceeding kindness to me because of the loveliness of small Pierre's dark face and the pity of his crooked back. Old Nannette was of a very great popularity with all of those ladies and she spent many hours in recounting the glories of the old Chateau de Grez and Bye and the family which had inhabited it since the fourteenth century. So it came about that many friends were made for France among them.

Now that Mr. William Raines had a very nice idea to invite in my honor all of the ladies who were friends to me, and many distinguished gentlemen of politics and of universities and other large affairs, who were returning from business in Europe to more business in America, to be present while a young boy of France, who was among those in the steerage going to the freedom of America with his mother who had been widowed at Ypres, sang in a very lovely voice many French folk songs and songs of war to all present. And at that singing many tears flowed and so much money was put into the hands of the boy that a future for the very sad little French family was assured in America. And I also wept. I was taken into the embrace of all of those kind American women and assured of so much care and affection in that land of my father, that I felt of a very great richness in spite of the small sum of money in the heel of Nannette's rough stocking. And as I received all of these beautiful attentions I perceived the eyes of my Capitaine, the Count de Lasselles, fixed upon me with a deep gratitude and pride. It was all of a great pleasure to me except that I did not like very well to

be so distinguished by a young man, which made the French *grande dame* in me to shrink.

“*Mais, vive la France,*” I murmured to myself and was happy again.

But, alas! At the joy of all this entertainment there was one sadness. It was of my dear friend, Mr. Peter Scudder. There was no pleasure, but great seriousness, in his face during the whole afternoon.

“Don’t mind him; poor Pete’s chewing a grouch,” was what his good friend Mr. William Raines answered to my lament over his sadness. And that sadness lasted for three days, up unto the day before we came to a sight of the Lady of Liberty of America. Then his face found a great radiance and I perceived that he was full of much business. I found him with a notebook, in deep consultation with my Capitaine, the Count de Lasselles, and then in earnest consultation with many of the other gentlemen. I had much wonder; but at the dinner that night, which was the last before we made the landing to America, I discovered all of his good actions. While we were at the last of the coffee, Mr. Peter Scudder arose and made a bow to the capitaine of the ship, beside whom I sat, which salutation did not in any way include me, and then turned to the direction of my Capitaine, the Count de Lasselles.

“Sir,” he said in that very nice voice which it is said is of Philadelphia, “I have the honor to ask you if you will take charge of a fund of five thousand dollars, which has been given by the passengers of this boat, to be sent immediately to a field hospital of France, preferably the nearest in need to the battlefield of the Marne.” And with no

more of a speech than that he seated himself and did not so much as make a glance in my direction when he mentioned the battlefield on which my father had died. I think that Mr. Peter Scudder is a very great gentleman and I sat very still and white, with my head held high and tears rising from the depths of France in my heart.

“My honored friends,” answered my Capitaine, the Count de Lasselles, as he rose from his place at the foot of the table and stood tall and slim in the manner of a great soldier, “it is impossible that I say to you my gratitude for this expression of your friendship for my country. So many dollars will bring life and an end of suffering to many hundreds of my brave boys, but the good will and sympathy it represents from America to France will do still more. The fund shall go to the place you request and I now beg to offer to you a toast that will be of an understanding to you.” And at that moment he raised his glass of champagne and said:

“To the destiny of those born of American and French blood commingled!”

All those present arose to their feet and drank that toast with loving looking at me, and I did not know what I should do until that good old gray boat capitaine patted me upon the shoulder and said across his empty glass:

“God bless and keep you, child!”

“I thank everybody,” I answered as I went into the embrace of my very large lady friend from the State of Cincinnati, and then into the embrace of the other ladies.

“I’ve been knitting all day for two months but I’m going to begin to sit up at night,” sobbed the lady from a queer

Keokuk name as I took her into my embrace on account of her extreme smallness.

It was at a very late hour, just before retiring, that I ascended to the deck with my Capitaine to view the effect of a very young moon on the waves of the ocean.

“Is it that you think now your soldier of France has done your command well, *mon Capitaine*?” I asked of him.

“Most extremely well, and entirely in the mode of a woman. Those two young men have made of themselves very noble competitors for your favor, but remember that it is of a truth that only a ‘daredevil’ would bring together such high explosives. I salute you!” he made answer to me with a laugh which ended in a sigh. “Child, little child,” he continued as he bent over my hand to kiss it as he did each night before he conducted me to the head of the stairs leading down into my cabin, “above all take unto yourself all that is possible of joy in the present, for we do not know what the supply will be for the future. Perhaps it will be like the harvests of France—burned up in a world-conflagration.”

“Ah, but, *mon Capitaine*, will you not dance with me once to-night for a joy. It will be our last on the ship before we land to-morrow. You have never danced with me and to-morrow you are lost from me into the wilds of that English Canada.” And as I spoke I held out my arms to him and began to hum the music of that remarkable Chin-Chin fox dance that I had been dancing below with Mr. William Raines and which the band had just begun to play again. Of course, I knew that I must be very lovely in that young moonlight in one of the frocks that Nannette had purchased from her very talented cousin, the *couturière* on Rue Leopold, and I