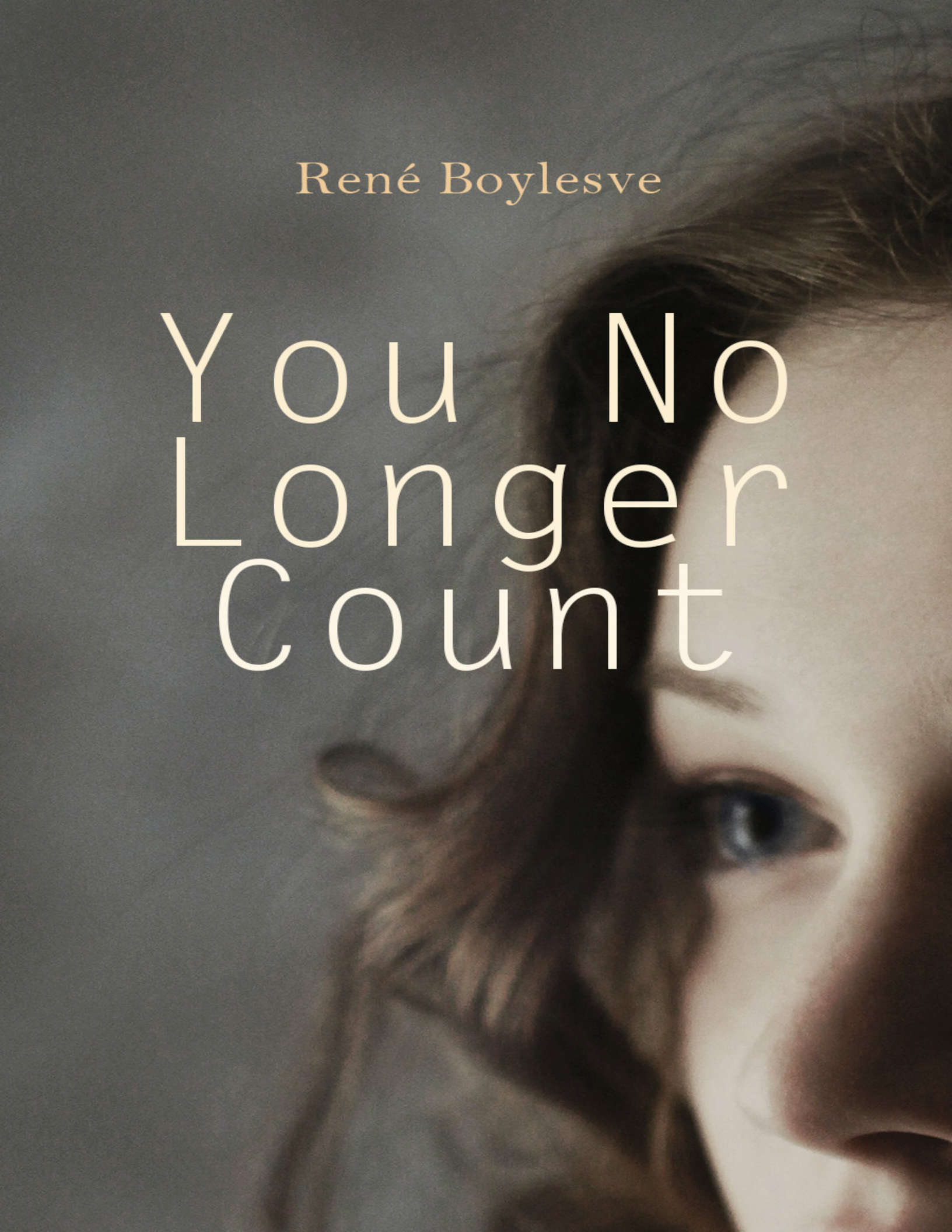


René Boylesve

You No
Longer
Count



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Historical Romance

e-artnow, 2022

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CHAPTER I

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From the swoon into which the sudden, agonizing shock had thrown her, her soul escaped, shook itself free, as the mind shakes off a nightmare. There is first a sensation of relief from discomfort, then a cheering sense of safety, and one slips contentedly into a half-slumber. Then it all begins again, for one no longer believes that it answers to any reality.

Was she still asleep? Was it memory, was it imagination that unrolled before her vision pictures of the past which yet her musings had never till then evoked, and which suddenly presented themselves with annoying vividness? There were whisperings, murmuring voices in the next room. She was aware of them, yet to the unwonted sounds she paid no attention; the gentle, persistent pressure of an invisible hand turned back her thoughts to days gone by.

A hushed step upon the carpet, a finger questioning her pulse, no more disturbed her than the familiar cry of the huckster in the street. She did not wonder: "What, am I ill? Are they anxious about me? Why am I in bed, in broad daylight, I so young, so unused to illness of any kind?" She was recalling a certain time, days that seemed far remote, a period of her life that seemed to have been acted before her eyes, like a play in the theatre.

A summer month of one of the previous years. She saw again the last days in her suburban home, just outside of Paris, the sloping garden and the vista through the leafage

over far-distant hills, splendid and ethereal. Every one was getting ready for the summer holiday; some of the men were going to the training-camps. What a world of talk! What discussions with friends who had been invited to the country for an afternoon of farewells! They were a world by themselves—young, alert, fond of pleasure, and of all things beautiful and adventurous, care-free, and charming. The oldest of the men was M. de la Villaumer, whose hair was beginning to turn gray, but who enjoyed himself only among kindly faces. Several were artists—musicians or painters. They loved the beautiful things of life and that life of the intellect which easily adapts itself to the beautiful. Love was king in their circle, a love rather kindly than passionate, whose ravages they had learned how to conceal. Yet many admirable couples were found among them. Odette Jacquelin and her husband were always cited as the most enamoured pair of the group. After them came Clotilde and George Avvogade, who cooed like turtle-doves, but were lovers only "for a curtain-raiser," it used to be said. Rose Misson, whom they called "good Rose," Simone de Prans, Germaine Le Gault, were all women who adored their husbands and asked for no other happiness, having no idea of anything else than happiness.

Why, they used to ask, was Jean Jacquelin an officer of reserves? What was the sense of that biennial war-game for a chap who had nothing military in him, whether by tradition, education, or belief? The old father had made a point of it, because he held to the ineradicable prejudices of his time. As for Jean himself, he made light of it; he was a young fellow well on the way to make a fortune and give

Odette all the luxuries that in their circle were considered not superfluities, but things indispensable. It never occurred to him that any other purpose could seriously occupy a man's mind. Without entering into the thousand and one interests of certain of his more cultivated friends who were given to reasoning and theorizing, he simply found that the uniform of a sublieutenant was becoming, and that, when he was obliged to wear it, it was simply an opportunity to make himself fit; physical fatigue was nothing to him; he might be inclined to think the Grand Manœuvres a superannuated exercise; he might even smile at them and amuse himself by enumerating the blunders of such and such a commander; but something always kept him from ever making light of the thing itself. For that matter, being a reserve officer was perhaps one of the many whims of society, but it was what is called decent; in certain circles it was done. So he let them talk and harangue, opposing no arguments but continuing to be a reserve officer, carrying through his period of instruction when he was called.

This time the young wife had gone with him as far as Tours, to be with him a few hours longer and after that to receive his letters more promptly. How long the time had seemed, all alone in the Hôtel de l'Univers! And yet she had a pretty room! She had amused herself with piquing public curiosity on the Rue Nationale, with her little walking-suit of the latest cut, and her simple canoe hat—quite the "Parisienne on a holiday"—and the elegance of her manners, at once independent and circumspect, as were all her ways. It was generally agreed that she was pretty. Who was not asking questions about her in the hotel, at the

restaurant? It had amused her to see a family of tourists inventing pretexts for changing places at their small table, this one in order to face her, that one in order that the grown-up son might not face her. And how they had stared at her!

Telegrams had come from the sublieutenant. "Be at Pont-de-Piles to-morrow, darling," or "Ligueil, such a day for lunch," or "Loches, Hôtel de France, after breaking up." And she had sometimes waited a long while in wayside inns or beside dusty highways.

Conversations at table began to come back to her. Every one had been talking of the manœuvres, discussing the names of generals, the communes that were being occupied. The presence of the President of the Republic was an event in the countryside. There had been old men who would consent to speak of nothing nearer than 1870; others, of fewer years, would recall the magnificent condition of the reconstituted army at the time of Gambetta's death, or at the period of the Schnaebelle affair, when the country was so near to seeing it in action. A politician of the neighborhood—not more stupid, after all, than most of his contemporaries—rubicund, his eyes bloodshot at the end of dinner, had fallen foul of all these memories, regrets, would-be warlike emotions, and turned them upside down like eggs in a frying-pan. According to him, war was the scourge of bygone ages. France, the nation of progress, still consented to carry on a semblance of it, by way of facilitating necessary transitions, but it was a mere play of protocols, a final concession to the past. War was destructive; modern society was interested wholly in

production; to believe in war was to turn back the clock of history. For that matter, every well-informed person was aware that scientific means of destruction had become such that a fratricidal conflict had been rendered impossible, impos-si-ble! One must be an idiot not to perceive that everything would be reduced to fragments in the twinkling of an eye. The manœuvres! ah, you made him laugh with your manœuvres! The manœuvres were no more like war than a toy pistol was like a German mortar. War, should it ever break out, would not last the time it would take to concentrate your army corps; the first of two adversaries who should be half a day ahead would bring the other to cry mercy.

"Well, say," some one had interrupted, "it wouldn't be a bad plan, then, to do one's best to get that half-day's advance?"

"Useless! Count your population, consider your aspirations. Think of the finances. Finances! There is not a country of great armaments that could maintain war for six weeks, nor one that could even endure three years' preparation for war.... Ask the great banks, which have the world in leading-strings, emperors and kings as well as peoples; don't deceive yourselves; war is impossible, impos-si-ble! We are witnessing, with your manœuvres, the final deeds of a prehistoric age.... Turn your eyes to the future, gentlemen, and all this bedizened and vociferous gang will seem to you like children's toys!"

"But Germany—the militant party—the Pangermanists?"

"Germany is a pacific nation, industrial and commercial, which uses its cannon as an advertising dodge. What we

lack—don't you know?—is precisely business sense. And Germany has business sense. The military party? A drop of water in a lake. The Pangermanists? Advertising men in the pay of the national industry. In the first place, the Emperor, as every one says who has seen him near at hand, is a secret friend of France ... and I will add, the most republican of us all. Socialism, that's his enemy! ... The army that we need is not a rabble of soldiers, but a group of men bent upon keeping the peace. Humanity is on the march—it can never be repeated too often—toward a future of liberty, equality, fraternity. Ah, you must reckon with economic rivalry; that is the law of life."

"Precisely so."

Memory, quickened no doubt by her feverish condition, brought back to the young wife with extraordinary precision, even to the least of them, these utterances overheard at her solitary little table. True, she had amused herself with repeating them to the sublieutenant, her husband—she even recalled the moment—he was splashing in his bath, soaping himself, on his return from the manœuvres. He had laughed with all his heart, for when Jean had come back from the manœuvres he was another man from what he had been when going to them. Only a few days of presence with the corps, among his military comrades, had transformed him or, more correctly, had restored him to his normal disposition; or, in any case, had made him victor over the indolence with which he usually replied to the fine talkers of Paris.

As for Odette, she had attached not the slightest importance to any of these ideas, by whomever enunciated.

Brought up in the one religion of happiness, she held that happiness through love was the sole boon to be asked of fate. What was the use of arguing? Why think about calamity? Did not certain of her friends, those most reputed for intelligence, insist that it was the honor of civilized man not even to think of acts of barbarism, that man raised himself in dignity as he neglected to prepare himself to make use of arms? Among many other sayings the oft-repeated, if somewhat cynical, pronouncement of M. de la Villaumer came back to her: "We are not in a condition to make war. We are unaware how far we are not in a condition to make war, because we do not in the least know what war is. If war is made upon us, as there is reason to fear—as well the deluge."

And yet, that day, on coming out of his bath, Jean had become so wrought up in talking of the army that he had almost made his wife afraid! She had thrown her arms around him as he wrapped himself in his bathrobe, saying:

"Don't talk so, Jean! Oh, imagine, if even you were to be so much as disfigured by an ugly wound! Your lovely eyes, my darling! Your beautiful teeth!—No, that would drive me wild!"

And because he had laughed, laughed heartily, so as completely to close his lovely eyes, she had at once thought of something else.

Without ever thinking of going even slightly into subjects of this sort, she had been buoyed up by a great credulity, born of optimism; not, indeed, as to war, which interested her not the least, but as to Jean, who alone was of consequence, and who, as a "reserve officer," she was sure

could not be called to take part in a campaign. It was an artless idea, rooted in her mind by the pressure of her exuberant happiness. For nothing in the world would she have tried to get at the root of it, lest the result should prove uncomfortable. It was the same self-indulgent, mental indolence which, for example, had withheld her from asking herself the meaning of words that dropped from her husband's lips:

"Well, here I am, attached to the covering troops. You and I will not be able to go into Touraine." Well, they would not be able to go into Touraine; they would go somewhere else.

Then memory carried her on to the beginning of last season, at the seashore. The weather had been so fine! Jean had been so lucky as to get his vacation from his commercial house by the 15th of July; they had gone to Surville. The Hotel de Normandie was already well filled, the Casino was crowded, sports were humming, the Little Theatre was exhibiting Parisian vedettes, a row of autos was sending vile smells up to the terrace where every one sat of afternoons imbibing soft drinks and roasting in the sun to the music of the gypsy orchestra; elegant young men were displaying khaki costumes, martingales, and broad-brimmed hats. In the evening every one had danced the tango in the hall. The great stir of the watering-place had begun—futile doings without number, comings and goings, from bar to bar, from casino to casino, from luncheon to luncheon.

"Oh, say, are you coming? Look here, Jean! Aren't you tiresome, always reading despatches! One would say that you were expecting something to happen. What concern is it of yours?"

Every evening, on their way to the great hall of the Casino through the gallery that looked out upon the sea, whether going to the theatre or the music-hall, or simply intending to sit down and drink their coffee or their camomile, they had found a crowd of, men in tuxedos standing before the frame that hung on the right of the door, on which despatches from Paris and quotations of the Bourse were posted. Odette could still hear the reproaches she had addressed to her husband as he returned with unwonted seriousness from reading them.

"Well, what about it all?" she had asked. Jean had kept back some of the more sensational news, but one evening he had added:

"There is an ultimatum to Serbia."

"What of that?"

Nothing more had been said. But Jean had risen twice from his chair to speak to men whom he knew, conferring with them in the lobby, then returning to his wife.

"Oh, nothing will happen yet," he had said.

This had gone on for several evenings. It had become necessary to explain some things. Then Odette herself had become anxious; she would go with her husband to read the despatches; she would go to them by herself in the daytime. But the number of readers was increasing, and the silence, or the few words that would escape from the group, troubled her; she would go down to the beach to read the despatches at the *Figaro* kiosk. Threats of war? ... European war? ... War? ... No, surely that was not likely. The idea was finding extreme difficulty in penetrating people's skulls. Despatch was succeeding despatch, twice a day, now

reassuring, now disturbing; but whenever one contained matter for alarm, it was always better founded than that of the previous day.

Odette had at last asked her husband:

"Well, if by any chance there should be war, would that affect you—yourself?"

"Don't be in a hurry, my darling; war has not yet been declared."

"But—but—if it should be?"

"Well, if it should be, I am a reserve officer."

"What is the reserve? Is it when there are no more active soldiers?"

He had kissed her, laughing. Not long before a relative of one of the most influential bankers in Paris had declared, at a neighboring table, that "All was arranged!" But the next morning a rumor had been spread at the Casino that the news was so discouraging it had not been posted. Jean had gone to ascertain. The rumor had been confirmed. Then he had said to his wife: "It is time to take precautions. Listen, my darling, I shall go to Paris this evening. I will set my business in order, I will see La Villaumer, who knows everything, and Avvogade, who lunches with the President of the Council. I shall learn what can be learned, and I shall try to return by night."

Once again she could hear all these words, could see again his slightest actions, could imagine La Villaumer, so far—seeing, and Clotilde Avvogade, surrounded by her flowers in her almost too delicious apartment, making a face when she heard her husband talking of disagreeable things. She lived over again the sad night that she had passed

alone, sleepless, and the bat that had flown into her room like a little devil, and the faces next morning at the Casino, on the beach, everywhere! And the departures, the almost empty hotel, ever since that evening when she had been expecting her husband—the evening when he did not come!

He did not come because he had found in Paris an order to "join immediately for a period of instruction." He had telegraphed to her: "Don't leave; all will be well; will write."

A period of instruction! So suddenly decided upon! What did that mean? Was it war? She had asked the people around her. Some had seemed stunned by her question; others had said: "A period of instruction? Nothing is more usual."

"As a matter of fact, they are mobilizing," some one had remarked. A gentleman had said: "No, madame, mobilization cannot be other than general. It may be that certain officers have been summoned individually, but that is merely a measure of precaution; the situation is evidently strained."

"But why should he be called and not others? He is only an officer of reserves."

"That depends upon the locality of his depot, no doubt. Do you know where it is?"

"I know that he formerly belonged to the Eleventh Corps, but I think he has been passed over to Nancy."

"Covering troops. Ah—ah!"

"That is it precisely, sir; he is attached to the covering troops."

"Oh, very well! Oh, very well!"

She had found another woman in the same case as herself, or nearly so. But the husband of this one, who also had been individually called, was a captain in active service, and in garrison at Pont-à-Mousson.

"That one," Odette had said to herself; "it is all over with him."

The difference had seemed to be to her own advantage, and her courage had risen correspondingly. Jean was only a sublieutenant; he belonged only to the reserves. She was absorbed in compassion for the other woman, so different in character from herself, bravely prepared for the war and ready to sacrifice everything; who had said: "I regret that my boys are not grown; they would be so many more defenders of the country."

Odette had been as ill prepared as possible for such an utterance. Everything about it surprised her; she could not understand it in the least.

A lady had arrived from Paris, the wife of a deputy. She had said to any who would listen:

"I may as well tell you; mobilization will be ordered tomorrow."

The weather had been ideally fine, though there had been a suggestion of thunderstorms in the west. Children were playing on the beach; the sea, under a cloudless sky, was calm even to torpor. One could see Havre stretched along in the sunlight, like a greyhound panting with heat; in the distance were noble passenger-ships, and tiny sails apparently motionless. Never had the sky, the sea, the land, appeared so much to long for peace; never, perhaps, had the joy of existence been more imperious. Whatever might

be the subjects of alarm, everything cried aloud that to believe in coming misfortune was impossible.

The next day, Saturday, August 1, Odette, distressed by vague talk that gave no definite information, had gone to the post with a letter to her dear Jean. She had addressed it to Paris, since she had no knowledge where to reach him. It was about four o'clock. She had seen a group forming before the mayor's office, and the town drummer arriving, with a long retinue of street urchins at his heels. The drummer was a tall youth, lean and wan, grave with a gravity not usual in a town drummer who has to announce that a little, long-haired, bright-gray dog is lost. The crowd had gathered around him with frantic eagerness, while he executed his preliminary performance. Then, drawing a paper from his pocket, he had unfolded it and read at the top of his voice, without the slightest change of countenance:

"General mobilization is declared! The first day of mobilization is Sunday, August 2. No man may set out without first consulting the bill which will be immediately posted." And the drummer had beaten the ban.

With a single impulse, as if under orders, the crowd, mainly composed of young men, had raised their hats, crying: "*Vive la France!*" One lad had said: "*Vive la guerre!*" And the drummer had departed to repeat his message at another crossroads.

It had seemed a perfectly simple event, something almost usual, at the junction of these four streets of the little town. A deed done; the pattering of dispersing feet; silence! And this simple act, repeated hundreds of

thousands of times at this same hour, was the most tragic alarm-cry in the history of man, reverberating at the same moment of time over all the terrestrial globe. Little noise, almost no words, and all these men, raising their hats to pronounce a word suddenly become sacred, had made the sacrifice of their lives. Imagination loses itself in picturing the multitude of points upon this earth on which a like gift of self had just been made. For if the man who goes hopes to be spared, he who learns that he is called to go, for the moment gives himself, body and soul.

Almost instantaneously the church-bells had broken out with the tocsin, as if the town had been on fire. Every church; then, on the hills, throughout the countryside, the same signal of distress spread like an epidemic. It had been too recent to be utterly terrifying; many heard it and did not think. No one realized the tragedy to which these humble little bells were sorrowfully calling the world. It is the salvation of men that they always limit their thoughts to the most immediate duty. The thought of a pair of shoes, of the place where one's *livret* is hidden, of saying good-bye to this one or that one, checks the vertigo which the enormity of the event might well produce.

At first Odette had felt oppressed and wept like a nervous child who hears a sudden alarm. She had been unable, for her tears, to see the letter-box into which she dropped that letter to Jean which no longer signified anything and would doubtless never reach him to whom it was addressed. And all around her, at the doors, in the streets, on the beach, at the hotel, women had been weeping.

Odette had gone up to her room. She had said to her maid:

"What about you, Amelia?"

"Me? Mine must join on the second day. I thought of asking Madame if I might take this evening's train; tomorrow there will be no room for civilians. That way I might kiss him good-by——"

"Go, Amelia."

She had seated herself at the window that looked out upon the flower-garden, the deserted tennis-courts, the sea. She was alone. There was nothing for her to do but think and wait.

Everything around her had seemed stunned, congealed. It was as if there was no longer any one anywhere. The smoke of three great transatlantics in the Havre roadstead—sole perceptible movement—was rising straight up in the motionless air. A few fair-weather clouds on the horizon were turning a fleecy rose color. One or two fishing-smacks, all sails spread, were idling as on a lake. In ordinary times one would have said: "What a glorious sunset we shall have!" And Odette thought: "The men in those boats, at this moment, *do not know!*"

An involuntary change had instantaneously taken place in her mind. She had transported herself to a time like that which still reigned in the boats, a time when "*They did not know!*" A time when there was nothing unusual in the world, when life, smiling, had sung to her, when the hope of a yet lovelier life had lulled thought to sleep. That time—already so far distant—was only an hour ago. And everything had been changed—changed as nothing had ever been changed