

# CAPTAIN TOM.

A NOVEL

BY ST. GEORGE RATHBORNE.

Author of "Doctor Jack," "Doctor Jack's Wife," etc.

## CHAPTER VI. (Continued).

The girl suddenly starts and listens. "I hear voices—they come! An *error*, Monsieur Tom, and remember I may be near when least you expect it. You will see strange things. The good Father above protect you and save poor, unhappy France!"

She is gone as suddenly as she appeared; these words have been breathed into the ears of the American rather than spoken, and he is left there alone.

Not for long; already he has caught the sounds that frightened away his good angel and it is evident that the speakers approach, so he once more lies in his chair as though bereft of his senses, his head resting on his left shoulder.

They enter the room. A man's voice sounds among the others, and its full, rich tones arouse a warm feeling in the heart of the American.

It is Mickey McCray. The latter is a man of considerable education, and as smart as he is witty. He has looked up to Captain Tom as his saviour, and would lay down his life if need be for the American. Like his employer, Mickey is a rolling stone, a soldier of fortune, ready to float with the wind, but when once set in his way, impossible to move.

The manner of their meeting was singular, and may be briefly mentioned. Strange things occur in Paris every day, and none may wonder that an impulsive Irishman like Mickey McCray usually found himself in a scrape with each revolving twenty-four hours.

Months before, when the siege was only talked about as a mere possibility, Captain Tom found himself one of a crowd of thousands pressing around the Tour de St. Jacques in the Rue de Rivoli, and going upward. From mouth to mouth word went that a crazy man had gone to the top of the tower to leap off as the result of a foolish bet. The excitable French temperament showed itself, and there was as great a commotion in the neighbourhood as though the ghost of Bonaparte had appeared.

Then a man was seen on top of the tower. It was from this place history tells us the signal for the massacre of the Huguenots was given nearly three hundred years before. This figure advanced to the edge above and then seemed appalled at the sea of faces below. A thousand tongues shouted out to him, arms were waved to keep him from his mad purpose. Then several gendarmes made their appearance on the high tower of St. Jacques, and the madman was in custody.

Captain Tom, urged by curiosity, fought a way in to see the prisoner, as he suspected he was a foreigner, an Irishman, and when he heard Mickey McCray's story he was tempted to laugh, only that the poor fellow looked so downcast in the hands of the officers.

It was only a wager. A companion had made a bet that he could have two thousand persons gathered around the tower in the time it took Mickey to mount the stairs, giving five seconds to a step. He had circulated this startling report, and won the wager, but afraid of the fury of the crowd, he had fled, leaving the victim of his practical joke in the toils.

Captain Tom took to the Irishman on sight.

He recognized a kindred spirit, and following to the police headquarters had interceded for the now alarmed Mickey. By some secret power the American got him off with only a warning never to attempt such a last affair, for the authorities seemed determined to believe that his wager was really a make a jump from the Tour de St. Jacques, trusting to the good luck that hovers over fools and Irishmen to save his life.

From that hour Mickey McCray had been the devoted friend of the American. There is nothing under the sun he would not attempt if Captain Tom expressed a wish.

Why he is in the service of the fair Alsatian, the spy of Von Moltke, the reader can doubtless guess with little trouble. It has not been done without a deep purpose, and the American now seems in a fair way to reap the full benefit of his strategy.

Three persons enter the apartment. They are Linda, the Irishman, and a nun. As the German spy has so great an influence over the Lady Superior, the lay sisters and nuns are ready to obey her slightest request.

"You see," says the fair Alsatian, "it is as I told you. He appears to be dead, but in truth he only sleeps."

Mickey takes up one of the American's arms and lets it drop; it falls heavily.

"Beggonia, if I could gabber French like a parrot I'd be after giving ye my opinion of this business, ballack—murder," dancing like a dervish in a Constantinople mosque.

"What ails you?" demands Linda, saying the man suspiciously, as though she fears that he may have taken leave of his senses.

"Sure it's my belief a rat bit me toe, or else I stepped on a darned tack," roars McCray, all the while perfectly aware of the fact that it has been the foot of Captain Tom that has so suddenly descended upon his own with a grinding emphasis.

The effect is gained. Stopped in the middle of his tirade, Mickey does not again attempt to free his mind, and the disclo-

sure of his own relations with the American is for the time being at least rendered obscure.

The nun has not a word to say; perhaps she is under a vow of eternal silence, and though ready to hear and do whatever there is a position to order may command, she must never again allow her voice to be heard.

She is as large and strong as Mickey himself, and is apparently used to lifting burdens, which would explain why Linda has brought her to this place. At a word from the Alsatian, whose stay in Paris is limited to 24 hours, unless she wishes to die, these two raise up the seemingly senseless form of Captain Tom.

Linda leads the way, light in hand, her sombre garments causing her to look like some strange priestess. The lamp-light

falls upon her handsome face, and a close observer would notice the various emotions that play by turns there. Evidently she has deeper interests in this game than any one suspects.

Even as they wind their way along there comes a crash that makes the solid walls quiver, a shell has struck the convent, its tower of gray stone has been hurled down a wreck, but the voices from the cloister instead of ceasing in deadly fear appear to grow louder.

Linda Dubois smiles grimly. These shells cannot fall too often or work deadly destruction upon fair Paris too rapidly to suit her humour. She hates the city, hates all in it, but one, and he is now seemingly helpless and in her power.

Under the orders of the imperious woman, Mickey and the nun deposit their burden on the stones. Then they raise a large flag in the corner of the collar, which act reveals a flight of steep steps.

In going down Mickey carries the burden alone, and is not surprised to have a whipper waited in at his ear:

"Say little, but notice" everything. Above all, stand by to aid me."

He presses the arm of Captain Tom to prove that he understands, then with the help of the nun the American is carried along a corridor cut in the rocks, until Linda finally gives the word, and he is laid down.

Watching his chance, Captain Tom takes a glimpse above. What he sees is well calculated to make a less venturesome man shiver. The walls of the cavern are covered with thousands of skulls and bones from the arms and legs of human beings. An inscription is over all. He reads even with that one glance what many travellers have seen.—"Tombeaux de la Revolution."

## CHAPTER VII.

THE CONSPIRACY OF THE CATACOMBS.

They have brought him to the Catacombs of Paris, in whose great caverns it is calculated the bones of some three million human beings have accumulated. At periods like the Revolution deaths occurred with such alarming frequency, a thousand or two a day, that even the churchyards were full, and some wise statesman conceived the idea of emptying them and removing the burial grounds outside the city. So the bones of the hundreds of thousands were collected and carried on funeral cars amid religious ceremonies to the great caverns which had once been stone quarries, but were henceforth to become the Parisian catacombs.

These underlie about a tenth of the city, and in some places houses have been known to sink into the caverns. At all times they are esteemed gloomy places, and have been the refuge of more than one desperate gang of thieves, whose ultimate destiny must be the galley at Toulon.

Captain Tom recognizes the place. He has been in the Tombs of the Revolution before. It does not surprise him very much to learn that the secret cabal of foreign spies have their rendezvous here; really, a more fitting place could hardly be selected.

There is one main entrance to the catacombs, with some 80 odd steps, but a score or two minor entrances afford ingress. At times these have, for various reasons, been closed up by the police authorities, and thus far during the siege the people have been kept out of the caverns.

Should the Prussian shells continue to fall as they have been doing this night in the Latin Quarter the distracted populace will demand that the catacombs be opened, in order that they may seek refuge there from the storm of iron hail rattling about them.

When they have deposited Captain Tom upon the cold rock they stand there listening.

Sounds from above are but faintly heard in this underground place—even the heavy discharges of cannon a few miles away seem to be but a vibration of the earth, very delicate.

They are out alone in this city of the dead. Another light flashes into view, persons advance towards them. Linda holds the lamp, and eagerly she makes signals.

They are returned. The fair Alsatian breathes a sigh of relief, and then, as if seized by a singular impulse, she bends down and looks in the face of the man lying there. Captain Tom's nerves are wrought up to a high pitch by the exciting events that have already occurred, and these impending, but he has proved himself a cool commander, and does not flinch under her close observation, even with the lamp held near his eyes.

Men advance, and the American hears the deep guttural German. It would be fatal to a person to speak it upon the boulevards or in the pensions and cafes chantants of Paris at this time, when everything German is hated so bitterly, because the guns of Von Moltke are knocking at the gates of the proud capital.

They come up, and although Captain Tom knows the risk he takes he cannot resist partly opening his eyes and peeping at

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