

**ON THE FIELD OF
HONOR (AU CHAMP
D'HONNEUR)**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649389117

On the field of honor (Au champ d'honneur) by Hugues Le Roux

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Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

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HUGUES LE ROUX

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(Au Champ d'Honneur)

BY
HUGUES LE ROUX

TRANSLATED BY
MRS. JOHN VAN VORST



BOSTON AND NEW YORK
HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY
The Riverside Press Cambridge
1918

UNIV. OF
CALIFORNIA

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Published January 1918

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ON THE FIELD OF HONOR

I

PARIS, *August 1, 1914.*

I HAVE known it since this morning: the mobilization has been decided. Robert, my lieutenant, is to leave for the front.

This has not come as a surprise. Last year he took a certain initiative which met with success. He found his own regiment quartered too far from the frontier. In case there was to be war, he wanted, from the start, to be on the firing-line. I did what I could to further this wish of his. The answer I received was: "This is not an especial favor. The reports we have received recommend this officer particularly highly."

I was glad of this.

The apartment where my dear son lives is situated directly opposite my own; the

Seine and the beautiful gardens of the Tuileries lie between us. I speed across them now.

His concierge is putting a few stitches in a pair of red trousers — my boy's trousers. This morning, as usual, he had already left the house by seven o'clock for his factory in the suburbs of Paris, in order to turn over to his chiefs his especial duties.

I shall go to his office in the old quarter of the Temple and wait for him.

Learning of my presence there the President of the Board of Directors says to me: "Your son is universally admired and loved among us here. We were so happy, three weeks ago, when we heard that he had become engaged. He seemed radiant with joy: a joy that must now be postponed."

A quarter to eleven.

The engineers returning from the factory tell me that Robert has gone back to Paris. He will not come now to his office; my best chance of finding him will be at his flat.

So here I wait in his salon in the Rue de Rivoli. Like his bedroom it is scarcely more than a chapel dedicated to the memory of his mother, for whom he has just taken off mourning. The portraits of his fiancée are here together with ours. His canteen is open on the divan; lying about are the shoes and clothes he has worn during the manœuvres. I continue to wait. I am impatient for his presence to put an end to the silence which reigns in these two rooms.

At last, here he is.

He says: "Well, this time it's a sure thing."

"My poor child!"

He knows it: that I am not grieving at what he must do. Ever since he has reached the age of reason we have talked together of the war, as one speaks of a beautiful dream. But how can I help thinking of his recent happiness, the joy he was about to realize, and which is now vanishing!

He understands and he smiles.

How well I know that smile! I saw it on

his face, ten years ago, the night his brother died. I had asked him not to sleep in the same room, which, since their earliest childhood, he and his brother had shared.

He answered me then: "I must become accustomed to it. The sooner the better."

To-day he says: "If this had happened last year, when I was leaving for the manoeuvres, I would have been glad beyond words. But now . . . ! It was hard for a moment, but that's past — everything is all right; only I can't help regretting that I must leave without seeing 'her' again."

His mobilization billet will not in any case be delivered to him before this evening. And yet, I can scarcely persuade him to do what he most desires.

Presently we are rolling along in the August sunlight upon the road which leads to a far-away country place. In spite of the sun's glare I have the impression that the way has been swept by a tempest. Already there are no more men to be seen anywhere. The women, standing in little groups, talk together before the doors of