

**THE LOVE OF AN  
UNKNOWN SOLDIER,  
FOUND IN A DUG OUT**

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The love of an unknown soldier, found in a dug out by John Lane

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## AN EXPLANATION

THE publication of documents as intimate as those printed in this little volume requires some explanation and apology, but I venture to think that my reasons will be found sufficient.

The MS. was submitted to me by a young officer of the R.F.A., home from the front on leave, who had just read "The MS. in the Red Box," which circumstance he admitted had decided him to consult me. He explained that he had brought with him from France a bundle of papers which he had found in one of the dug-outs of an abandoned gun position. To use his own words: "The position was in a hell of a mess." It had been badly knocked about by enemy bombardments and had obviously been rendered untenable. He discovered the papers se-



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creted in a dark corner, wedged in between a post and the wall of one of the bunks. At first he thought they might be papers of military importance, for the care with which they had been hidden showed that they had been considered valuable. This fact alone aroused his curiosity. When he had time to examine them carefully, he discovered that he was prying into the intimate secret of a brother officer, who was in all probability dead. There was no indication of the writer's name or of his unit, and the name of the girl whom he had loved was never recorded, so the people most intimately concerned were left entirely anonymous. His first impulse was to respect the dead man's privacy and destroy the papers, but on second thoughts he recognised that they were the sacred property of the woman who had inspired such adoration and courage.

On thinking the matter over, he began to feel more and more strongly that they ought to be given back to that woman, but the dif-

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ficulty of doing so seemed insuperable. Many divisions had been in that area, and it would be impossible to trace the batteries of the various brigades which had occupied those gun pits. It was under these circumstances that he told me the story, hoping that the mystery surrounding these letters might in some such way be solved as the unknown author of "The MS. in the Red Box" was eventually discovered. On reading the tattered MS. I was from the first impressed with its literary value, but as I read on I became more and more deeply absorbed in its poignant human importance, especially in its importance to some particular American girl, who, all unknowingly, had quickened the last days of this unknown soldier's life with romance. I felt that she must be discovered, and that the only chance of doing so was by publishing the documents.

Somewhere in France, where she is carrying on her work of mercy, this little book may stray into her hands. If it does, she will

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certainly recognise herself, and remember those days of kindness which meant so much to a young British officer on leave in Paris. Should this happen, I want her to know that the original papers, which were meant for her only and rescued by chance from a crumbling dug-out, are awaiting her in my office and will be handed over as soon as she presents herself.

Meanwhile I ask her pardon for this necessary means of making known to the world the romance which she kindled in the heart of her lost soldier, which he himself had not the courage to tell her.

JOHN LANE.

*London,*  
*September, 1918.*