

pride will not permit me to keep it any longer. Let me add that it has not pinched out, as you may have inferred from what I said at the ball. It is a bonanza."

"I regret that I cannot accept it," he replied. "A captain's pay is quite sufficient for a — bachelor."

Marie gave him a mocking glance. "Really now, Captain Hardy, you do not expect me to believe you will long remain unmarried?"

He tried his best to conceal how her frivolity tortured him. "You may not believe it, Miss Dupont. Yet it is true."

"It is not," she contradicted. "When we were abroad, *Père* and I went to Monte Carlo. I fancy the gambling spirit infected me. Let us settle the ownership of the mine with a wager. If you do not marry this year, I agree to keep it. But if you marry within that time, you will accept it back from me on your wedding day."

"It is not fair for me to bet on a certainty; but if you insist, I agree to the wager," said Hardy.

"Then be prepared to take the mine a week from today," she bantered.

He tore his gaze away from the lovely face whose gay smile appeared so heartlessly mocking.

"You — cannot realize — how this —"

She handed him another sealed envelope.

"Here is the order detailing you to special service with the General Staff for the winter.