

**The Boy Scouts in Front of
Warsaw;
Or,
In the Wake of War**

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Chapter I

The Disappearance

It was the fifth of August. Warsaw the brilliant, Warsaw the Beautiful, the best beloved of her adoring people, had fallen. Torn by bombs, wrecked by great shells, devastated by hordes of alien invaders, she lay in ruins.

Her people, despairing, seemed for the greater part to have vanished in the two days since the fatal third of August when the city was taken.

Many of the wealthiest of her citizens had taken refuge in the lower part of the city, leaving their magnificent palaces and residences situated in the newer part to the flood of invading soldiers, who went with unerring directness to the parts containing the greatest comfort and luxury.

Warsaw is built in the midst of a beautiful plain mostly on the left bank of the river Vistula. All the main part of the city lies close to the river, and the streets are so twisted and crooked that it is almost impossible to picture them. They wriggle here and there like snakes of streets. The houses, of course, are very old, and with their heavy barred doors and solid shutters, look very strange and inhospitable.

People, in a way, become like their surroundings. Here in these twisted, narrow streets are to be found the narrow, twisted souls of the worst element in Poland; but the worst of them love their country as perhaps no other people do. To the last man and to the

frailest woman, they are loyal to Poland. For them, it is Poland first, last and always.

In these low and twisted streets, the devastation was greatest and the people had scurried like rats to cover. A week before they had swarmed the streets and crowded the buildings. Now by some miracle they had gone, utterly disappeared. The houses were deserted, the streets empty. The destruction had been greatest in these crowded places, but many of the beautiful public buildings and state departments in the new part were also in ruins, as well as a number of matchless palaces.

The people from the upper part of the city who had taken refuge in the holes along the river front, were for the most part a strange appearing lot. Some of them carried great bundles which they guarded with jealous care. Others, empty handed, sat and shivered through the summer night-chills that blew from the river. Scores of little children clung to their mother's hands, or wandered trembling and screaming from group to group, seeking their own people.

There was a general gathering of types. Nobles mixed with the poorest, meanest and most criminal classes, and mingled with their common sorrow. For the most part a dumbness, a silence prevailed. The shock of the national disaster had bereft the people of their powers of expression.

Since 1770, Poland had been torn and racked by foes on every hand. Prussia, Austria and Russia envied her wealth, courage, and her fertile plains. Little by little her enemies had pressed across her shrinking borders, wet with the blood of her patriot sons. Little by little she had lost her cherished land until the day of doom August third, 1915.

Sitting, hiding in their desolated city, the people of Poland knew that theirs was a country no longer on the map. Russia, Austria and Prussia at least had met. There was no longer any Poland. For generations there had been no Polish language; it was forbidden by her oppressors. Now the country itself was swallowed up. No longer on the changing map of the world had she any place.

But in the hearts of her people Poland lives. With the most perfect loyalty and love in the world, they say, "We are Poland. We live and die for her."

A gray haze hung over Warsaw. The streets, after the roar of great guns, the bursting of shells, and the cries of thousands of people rushing blindly to safety, seemed silent and deserted. The hated enemy held the town, and the people of Warsaw, most hapless city of all history, cowered beneath the iron hand of the enemy.

As is usual in the fearful lull after such a victory, the town was filled with dangers of the most horrible sort. Murder, crime of every kind, lawlessness in every guise, stalked through the streets or lurked down the narrow, dark and twisted alleys. The unfortunate citizens who had not retreated in time hid, when they could, in all sorts of strange places. They gathered in trembling, whispering groups, into garrets and cellars; even the vaults in the catacombs, the old burial place of the dead, were opened by desperate fugitives, and became hiding places for the living.

The soldiers were in possession of all the uninjured residences in the more modern portion of the city, where they reveled in the comforts of modern baths, lights and heat. But the lower part of the city, lying along the left bank of the river Vistula, was filled with a strange mixture of terrified people. In all the throngs, huddled in

streets and alleys, storehouses and ware-rooms, there was perhaps no stranger group than the one gathered in a dark corner of a great building where machinery of some sort had been manufactured.

This had, strangely enough, escaped destruction and stood unharmed in a street where everything bore the scars of shells or bombs.

The engines were stopped; the great wheels motionless; the broad belts sagged hopelessly. Even the machinery seemed to feel the terrible blow and mourned the fallen city.

The persons huddled in the shadow of a vast wheel, however, gave little heed to their strange surroundings. They seemed crushed by a frightful grief more personal even than the taking of Warsaw would cause in the most loyal heart.

In the center of the group a boy of fourteen or fifteen years stood talking excitedly. He was tall, dark as an Italian, and dressed with the greatest richness. Two rings set with great jewels flashed on his hand and while he spoke, he tapped his polished boot with a small cane in the end of which was set a huge, sparkling red stone. He spoke with great rapidity, in the pure Russian of the Court, and addressed himself to an elderly man who sat drooping in an attitude of hopeless sorrow.

Near them sat a plainly dressed woman who buried her stained face in her apron, and wept the hard sobs of those who can scarcely weep more. A young girl clung to her, silent but with beautiful dark eyes wild with terror and loss. On the floor lay a wounded soldier, bearing in perfect silence the frightful pain of a shattered shoulder. His only bandage was a piece of cloth wound tightly around his coat, but not a groan escaped his pale lips. At the

window, gazing down into the wrecked street, stood a tall boy of perhaps fifteen years. His face was bloodless; his strong mouth was set in a straight line; the hand resting on the window sill was clenched until the knuckles shone white through the tanned skin. Desperation, horror, and grief struggled equally in his face. His left arm encircled a boy nearly his own size. He, like the woman, sobbed brokenly, and the taller boy patted him as he listened to the rapid words of the boy who was talking.

Suddenly the elderly man spoke.

"You must pardon me, Ivanovich," he said in a trembling voice. "I do not seem to comprehend. Will you kindly repeat your account?"

A flash of anger passed over the face of the young nobleman; then he spoke courteously.

"Certainly, Professor! It was thus. You remember, don't you, that I came to your house as usual, five days ago, for my lessons in English? And you know the sudden bombardment, so close to the city, was so terrible that you would not let me go home? Good! Then you understand all, up to this morning. You know we had watched all night with the doors barricaded, and we decided it was too unsafe to remain longer in the direct path of those brutal soldiers. So we prepared to come here, to one of my father's buildings where there is a chute and an underground storeroom where we could be safe.

"You send me for this cloak and when I returned, what did I find in the room where I had left everyone of the household gathered ready for the flight? The room was empty. I had been upstairs perhaps ten minutes because I could not find my cloak, and there

was the room empty. Sir, I was furious at you for leaving me. I am in your charge; I am a Prince; yet you left me—"

The tall boy turned from the window and spoke.

"Never mind that, Ivan," he said. "Just cut that all out and hustle to the part you haven't told." Although he spoke English, while Ivan told his story in Russian, the boys understood each other perfectly for with a frown and quick glance, the boy Ivan nodded and continued.

"I stood for a while and listened but heard nothing. Then I went through the other rooms on the floor, and all were empty. I decided to get to the warehouse alone if I could, and crept to the door. I drew back hastily. A horrible old woman squatted on the step. She was watching over two great sacks full, no doubt, of valuables stolen from your house and others. As I looked, two men came up. Criminals, they looked, and I scarcely breathed. Presently they went away, the men throwing the sacks over their shoulders, and the woman dragging a jeweled Icon in her hand.

"I heard footsteps behind me, and there you were coming down the stairs. You had that package in your hands, and you said, 'Just think, I nearly forgot my book, Ivan; my great book on the history of Warsaw, now so nearly finished.'

"You asked where the others were, and you said they had thought it wise to go in two parties. You said they had told you to be very careful of something; you couldn't very well remember just what, but it made you remember your book in your and you hurried to save it. So we hurried out, and managed to escape the soldiers, and get here and then everyone cried out, 'Where are the children?'"

"When I went to get my book," said the Professor, with a groan, "they were sitting quiet as mice by the stove, holding each other's hands. How could they have gone off?"

The woman looked up. "They could not go," she said. "I myself slid the great latch on the door; they could not lift it. I have seen Elinor try to do so. The little stranger was much too small. The Germans have them, I am sure of it." She bowed her head with fresh sobs.

"There were no Germans about," said Ivan. "No soldiers of any sort; no one at all save the three of whom I spoke and they certainly did not take them away."

"Certainly not!" said Professor Morris, frowning. "They must have gone out and wandered off while I was after my book, although I distinctly told Elinor not to stir from her seat. I have always endeavored to teach my children absolute obedience. I am surprised at Elinor. She understood. She is six years of age, and she said, "Yes, father." This is a terrible thing; but they will be found. I will report at once to the military authorities. I am convinced that they are safe. Someone will take them in just as we took in the strange child whom we found at the door. That child, as you know, is a noble, yet she was lost. These are war times. People are glad to return lost children. They do not want them. Now if I had forgotten my book, it might have been burned; three years of effort in this city wasted and lost forever! I will hide the manuscript in the underground room you told of, Ivan, then we will go to the proper authorities, and get the children."

"Bah!" said the soldier with the broken shoulder suddenly. "Go where thou wilt these days there is no authority save the authority of brute might. Will that help thee?"

"We must find them," said the Professor brokenly. The seriousness of the affair was beginning to dawn on him. "It will certainly be simple. We will advertise."

The girl at his side smiled. "Advertise?" she said. "Why, father, there are no papers left to advertise in."

"Ivan," said the tall boy at the window, "did you hear what the three people at the door were talking about? What did they say? The people you said looked like thieves."

"Yes, they talked," said Ivan, "but it did not seem to mean much. I didn't get much from it anyway."

"Try to think what they said," said the boy. He passed a hand carefully across the bright fairness of his hair where a dark red streak stained it. "Can't you remember anything they said?"

Ivan stood thinking, the jeweled cane still tapping his boot. "Yes," he said, "when the men came up, they said, 'What have you?' The woman laughed—evilly, and said, 'All the wine we can drink, and all the bread we can eat, and all the fire we burn for years and years.'"

"The man who had spoken said 'Jewels,' and rubbed his hands. 'That is indeed good! Jewels fit for a king!'"

The woman said, "Jewels now, thou fool! Where can one sell jewels these days when one cannot cross the border, and when the world cracks? No one wants jewels!"

"Then what?' said the man.

"Oh, stupid!' said the woman. 'Pick up my sacks carefully and be off."

"Then the other man who had already picked up the larger sack, laughed. 'Better than rubies,' he said. 'You are always wise, my woman!'"

"And then the other man picked up the other sack and he laughed too, and the woman held hand to them and whined, 'Please give me some money for these poor little refugees are starving!'

"At that they all roared, and hurried on."

Ivan paused. "That was all they said," he added. "It doesn't help, does it?"

The girl Evelyn leaned forward. "Say it again, Ivan," she said excitedly. "Say just what the woman said."

Ivan, repeated the words.

Evelyn whispered them after him. Then a wild cry broke from her lips. She turned to her father who sat holding the package containing the fatal manuscript. She seized his arm and shook him. So great was her emotion that she could not say the words she wanted.

"Father, father, don't you see it now!" she cried. "Oh, oh, father! Oh, what shall we do? Oh, my darling little sister!" she gasped, and the tall boy ran forward and seized her hands.

"Control yourself, Evelyn," he cried. "I never saw you act like this. Tell me what it is."

She looked at him quite speechless. The agony of all that she had witnessed, the terror of the past week, the fright of losing her precious little sister scarcely more than a baby, the blindness of her father, all had combined to send her into state scarcely better than insanity. With a desperate effort to control, herself, she looked into her brother's eyes.

"You see, don't you, Warren?" she begged. "You can't seem to be able say it. Say you see it too, Warren!"

Then as if she had found some way of giving him her message of doom, she drooped against brother's strong shoulder and fainted quietly away. Warren laid her down, and the governess rushed to her.

"Is she dead?" asked Warren.

"Certainly not," said the woman; "she has fainted."

"What did she try to tell you?" cried Ivan. "Was it something I said?"

"Yes, you told her," said Warren, "and she read it right. I know she is right."

"Well, well, what is it?" demanded the Professor. "This is fearfully upsetting, fearfully upsetting!"

Warren bent tenderly above his sister. She was regaining consciousness.

"It is about as bad as it can be," he said hesitatingly. "The remark about refugees told the whole thing. Our little sister was in one of those sacks, gagged or unconscious. They have been stolen to be used and brought up as beggars."

A deep silence followed. The governess covered her eyes. The wounded soldier slowly shook his head. Professor Morris, Ivan and Jack stood with bulging eyes staring at Warren, trying to make themselves understand his speech. Ivan, who knew more of the ways of the half barbaric people of Poland and Russia, nodded his head understandingly. Jack stood with open mouth. The Professor ruffled his hair, though deeply, and laughed.

"Now what would they do that for!" he asked sarcastically. "That sort of thing is not done nowadays."

"Not in the best families," said Warren coldly. "But it is done, I'll bet."

"Oh, yes, it's done," said Ivan, "all the time. I know my father talked a lot about it just before the commencement of the war. He was going to try to stamp out a lot of that sort of thing, especially what affected the women and children. Yes, it is done, Professor."

"Not now," said the Professor stubbornly. "There was recorded a case of that sort in 1793, and even later in the early sixties. Later, there are no records at all bearing on the subject. And if no records, surely there are no instances requiring the attention of thinking people."

"It would be most natural to record any instance of the sort, however small and trifling. In my researches I would have run across the facts. There is no mention of it whatever."

"I know it happens anyhow," said Ivan, sticking to his point.

"Ivan, you forget that I am in a position to know," said the Professor. "My researches have led me, thanks to the presentations of your father and many others, into secret records never before opened to outsiders of any race. I regret the stand you take with me. I am unused to contradiction."

"Pardon me," said Ivan wearily. He looked at Warren. In the minds of both boys there was a feeling that the mystery was solved. There was no longer any need to discuss it. A little search around the house would show if the children were there; after that it meant that Evelyn was right.

"Well, Ivan's right," said Warren doggedly. "It doesn't matter what you have found in your researches, father; you have had those dry old records to prove everything to you. I have heard the people tell stories that would make your hair curl. They not only steal children, but sometimes they cripple them, just as they did hundreds of years ago in England. Why do you suppose boys like Ivan here are watched every second? Sometimes they take them for revenge, but when they are gone, they are gone. You can't go out with a wad of bills and stick it under the park fence, and go back and find your child on the front stoop like you can at home."

Chapter II

The Search Begun

"Impossible!" said the Professor. "Impossible, Warren! It surprises me that you should harbor such wild and impracticable ideas."

"It makes sound sense, dad," said Warren sadly. "Europe has been full of beggars from the beginning of time. And soon, after the war is over, there will be thousands of sightseers flooding the continent. What could be more practical from the standpoint of such people as the ones described by Ivan than to secure two beautiful little children like our Elinor and the strange child that wandered to our doors? They would indeed mean 'drink and money and fire.'" He stopped and for a moment looked reproachfully at his father. "Oh, father, father," he cried, "see what your dreadful forgetfulness has done! How will you ever forgive yourself when you think of the misery and suffering you have brought on your darling! I can scarcely forgive you."

Professor Morris sat with bowed head.

"My son," he said brokenly, "I can not forgive myself. I do not know what to do. I confess I did indeed leave the children. I thought of my book. I thought they were safe—and my book—Warren, surely you do not blame me for getting my book?" He spoke tenderly, even lovingly, and clasped the bulky parcel to his breast.

"No, I do not blame you for anything, father, knowing you as well as I do. It is a terrible thing, but we will find her, our precious

darling, if we spend our lives hunting." He turned to his sister and brother. "Won't we?" he said.

They did not reply, but gazed at him with looks that were more than promises.

"Well," he continued, "I guess my boyhood is over now. My work is cut out for me. Come on, Ivan, come Jack, let's get going!"

"What do you think you are going to do, Ivanovich?" asked the wounded soldier. Like all his class, generations of submission made him ignore as much as possible all save the one noble. All his attention was given to Ivan, the young Prince.

"Be careful, Ivanovich," he urged. "It is not possible for you to go forth in the clothes you wear. There is danger lurking abroad for the high born."

Ivan shrugged his fearless shoulders. "They would not dare to harm me," he answered.

"He's right. Those clothes won't do," said Warren decidedly. "We don't know where we are going, nor whom we may meet. Where can we find something rough for you to wear?"

"Down below are the workmen's extra blouses," said the soldier. "When I worked here, the room was kept locked, but you might perhaps force the door. There are blouses and rough shoes there. But I tremble; I tremble!" He suddenly lapsed into Polish. "Let these Americans go, Prince," he begged. "Harm never come to them. They go always as though they wore a charm. Poland shall yet rise, my Prince. From these ashes she shall arise more beautiful than ever. She will need you then."

Ivan listened with flashing eyes. "I shall be here," he said simply. "I shall be here, I shall answer when she calls, but in the meantime shall it be said that in Poland, even in her darkest hour, children were stolen for such evil purposes? Never, never!" He turned to Warren. "For a year now," he said, "we have been organizing these Boy Scouts that you have so many of in America. Let us pass the word to them. If little Elinor and the stranger are to be found, surely they will find them. My rank has always hampered me, but even then I know that boys will go where no others can penetrate. What do you think?"

"It's the dandiest idea I ever heard!" exclaimed Warren, his face lighting. "We will have to depend on passing the word to them as we find them here and there, but it's the only thing to do, so let's go to it."

"First the workman's clothes," said Ivan.

"Assuredly!" exclaimed the Professor. "Let us disguise ourselves and go forth. I know that we will find the dear children playing near the corner."

"Father, you must stay here," said Warren, determination in his voice.

"Of course not; of course not!" said the Professor. "Do you expect me to sit idly here while my youngest child needs my protection?"

A smile as sad as tears crossed Evelyn's pale face. "You must stay here, father," she said. "You would certainly get lost, and then we would have to hunt for you. It has happened so before, you know."

"That was very different," said the Professor. "A man uses all his powers of concentration at times, and if it has happened that I have

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