

JOAN OF ARC

THE WARRIOR MAID

A HISTORICAL NOVEL

BY

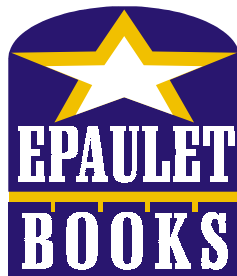
LUCY FOSTER MADISON

WITH

ILLUSTRATIONS AND DECORATIONS

BY

FRANK E. SCHOONOVER



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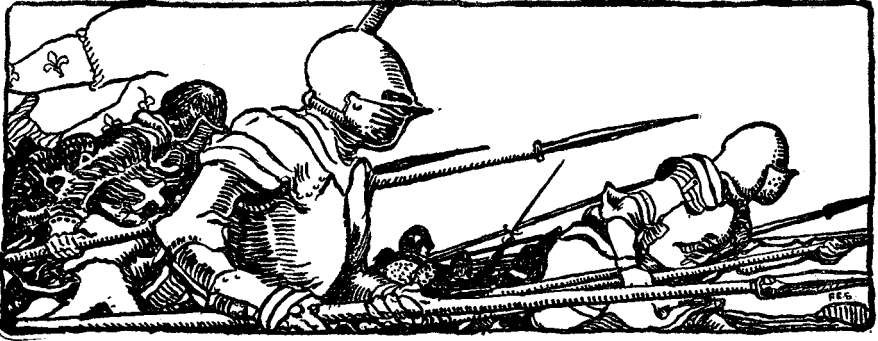
ISBN -10: 1-58776-114-9

ISBN -13: 978-1-58776-114-0

Library of Congress Catalogue Number 2001-

Vivisphere Publishing
www.vivisphere.com





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CHAPTER I

A CHILDREN'S FESTIVAL

*"There is a fountain in the forest called
The Fountain of the Fairies. An ancient oak,
The goodliest of the forest, grows beside."*

SOUTHEY. *"Joan of Arc," Book II.*

"**W**HO-OO-EE!" The gleeful shout came from the lips of a little girl who stood, with her hands cupped about her lips, on the edge of a streamlet which divided the village of Domremy into two parts.

She was a slight little maiden, of some twelve summers, and as she gave the call she danced about in the warm sunshine as though unable to keep still from the mere joy of being. Her hair was very dark and very abundant. Her eyes were wonderful for their blueness and the steadfastness of their gaze. Her face, though comely, was remarkable not so much

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for its beauty as for the happiness of its expression. She stood still listening for a moment after sending forth her call, and then, as the Sabbath quiet remained unbroken, she sent forth the cry again in a clear, sweet voice that penetrated into the farthest reaches of the village:

“Who-oo-ee!”

This time the shout was caught up instantly, and answered by many voices. The village wakened suddenly into life, as there poured forth from the cottages a goodly number of boys and girls who came running toward the little maid eagerly. She shook a finger at them reprovingly.

“Oh, but you are late,” she cried. “Here it is ten of the clock, and we were to start at nine. The day will be half gone before we get to the Tree. I was afraid that you had gone off without me.”

“Gone without you, Jeanne D’Arc,” exclaimed one of the girls. “Why, we couldn’t have any sport without you. I had to wait for my mother to fix my basket—that is the reason that I was late.”

“And I! And I!” chimed several other children in a chorus.

“Why didn’t you pack them yourselves?” demanded Jeanne, who seemed to be a leader among them. “I did mine, and Jean’s and Pierrelot’s too.”

“But where are the boys?” asked a lad. “They are not here.”

“They ran back to get more nuts,” answered the little girl. “Jean said that we must be sure to have plenty. There! They are coming now. Let’s get into line, and be ready to start as soon as they get here.”

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Gleefully the children formed a line, and then took up their march toward the great wood which stretched in primeval abundance half a league to the westward of Domremy.

In all France there was not a more delicate, tranquil landscape than that of this broad valley of the Meuse, which extended in unbroken reaches between low hills, softly undulating, crowned with oaks, maples and birches. The trees were leafless now, and there were still ridges of snow to be seen among the hills, but already there were monitions of Spring in the air. The buds were swelling, springing grass carpeted the fields, and there was no longer ice in the river, which rippled its apple-green waters in the sunshine.

Along the valley the banks of the Meuse were dotted with many hamlets, villages and towns, and among them was Domremy, which nestled upon its western side in the county of Champagne. It was the greyest of the grey hamlets in this borderland. It consisted of a castle, a monastery, and a score of cottages which were grouped about a small church, but it was well favoured by Nature in that the meadow lands which lay around it were rich and fertile beyond those of most villages, and the vineyards which covered the southern slopes of the hills were famous all over the countryside.

It was the first fine day of March, 1424, and "Laetare Sunday." "Laetare Sunday" the fourth Sunday in Lent was called, because during the mass of the day was chanted the passage beginning, "Laetare, Jerusalem"; but the children called it "The Day of the Fountains," for upon this day the annual "Well Dressing" of the Spring which lay at the edge of the forest was observed, and the Fairy Tree was decorated.

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In short, upon this day the children of the valley held high festival.

So, merrily they marched toward the wood; the boys carrying baskets of lunch, for they were to picnic, and the girls bearing garlands that were to be used for the decoration. It was a joyous party, for it was Spring; and all young things rejoice in Spring. There was a sweetness of leaf mold in the air that came to the senses with the penetrating quality of incense. A tender mist lay on the hills, and over all spread the radiant sky. The happy children laughed, and sang, and jested as they went, for the mild air animated them with a gentle intoxication.

And the little maid called Jeanne D'Arc was the blithest of them all. Hither and thither she darted, lightly as thistle down, seeming literally to bubble over with happiness. All at once she stooped, and plucked a long blade of grass, holding it up for inspection.

"See, Mengette," she cried addressing a girl near her. "How long the grass is! And how warm the sun is! Oh, is not God good to give us so fine day for our pleasure?"

"He is good; yes," assented the girl addressed as Mengette. Then as the little maid darted away she turned to the girl by her side: "Jeanne is so religious," she commented with a shrug of her shoulders. "She cannot even play without speaking of God. I wish that she were not so good. And you wish it too, do you not, Hauviette?"

"Wish that Jeanne D'Arc would not be so good?" exclaimed Hauviette, who was a staunch friend of Jeanne's. "Why, she would not be Jeanne D'Arc if she were not good."

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"I do not mean for her not to be good exactly," demurred the first girl. "I meant that I wished she were not so pious."

"Mengette, if the Curé should hear you," breathed the second girl in shocked tones. "He would make you say many Ave Marias."

"And who is to tell him what I say?" demanded Mengette, an expression of anxiety flitting across her face.

"Not I, Mengette, but I fear some of the others hearing such words may speak of them to the good Curé."

"But the others speak as I do," protested Mengette. "There is not one of them who does not think that Jeanne D'Arc is too pious."

"Attend," cried one of the lads at this moment using the peasant's expression to attract attention. "Let's see who shall be first to reach the tree. He who does so shall hang the first wreath."

A gleeful shout went up at the words, and there followed a quick dash for the tree, which began before the speaker had made an end of what he was saying. Among the others Jeanne D'Arc threw up her head, laughing merrily, and darted forward. So fleet and light of foot was she that she soon distanced her companions. Easily could she have gained the goal had there not come a cry from Mengette, who at this instant stumbled and fell prone upon the grass. Like a flash Jeanne turned, and, seeing that Mengette had risen, and was standing bent over as though in pain, ran back to her.

"Are you hurt, Mengette?" she asked anxiously. "'Tis pity that you fell. Where is the pain?"

"In my knee," sobbed Mengette. "And now I shall have

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to lag behind; for walk fast I cannot. Do you run on, Jeanne. You were like to win the race, so fleet of foot were you. In truth, it seemed as though you were flying. Myself, I will reach the tree when I can."

"Nenni," replied Jeanne, using the strong peasant negative. "I will walk with you. 'Tis not far now, but the way would seem long to you should you traverse it alone when in pain. There! lean on me."

With a sigh of relief that she was not to be left by herself Mengette leaned heavily on the arm of her friend, though the latter was younger and smaller than she. She thought naught of this. It seemed natural to her playmates to lean upon Jeanne D'Arc. So, slowly, with much groaning on Mengette's part, the two friends came presently to the Fairy Tree, where the rest of the party were already assembled.

On the border of the Bois Chesnu (the woods of oaks), stood an ancient beech tree overhanging the highroad. "In Spring," said the peasants of the valley, "the tree is as fair as lily flowers, the leaves and branches sweep the ground." It had many names, but was usually spoken of as l'Arbre-des-Fees. Once upon a time, when the lords and ladies of Bourlemont dwelt at the castle which stood before the village, it had been called "The Ladies' Tree." For then the high born dames and their cavaliers feasted and danced about it with each renewal of Spring. But the castle had long been deserted, so the children had come to claim the tree for their own.

They called it The Fairy Tree, because it was believed that in the olden time the fairies used it for a trysting place. So now, with bursts of song and laughter, the girls hung their

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garlands upon its ancient branches, then joining hands the lads and the lassies formed a ring, and circled around the tree, singing gayly.

It was a pretty sight: pastoral and innocent,—one that would have delighted the heart of a Corot. The singing children dancing about the tree, the red homespun frocks of the girls and the blue smocks of the boys making pleasing bits of color against the dark forest stretching behind them, and the distant village nestled on the banks of the apple-green river. Perhaps the festival was a survival of paganism; perchance a remnant of the tree worship of the ancient Celts interwoven with a traditional holiday; but the Church recognized it. On Ascension Eve the priest came there, and chanted the Gospel of Saint John to exorcise the spirits, so that neither fairies nor anything evil could harm the little ones of his flock.

After the ceremony of hanging the wreaths was completed a cloth was spread upon the grass, and the contents of the lunch baskets placed thereon. There were nuts, hard boiled eggs, and little rolls of a curious form, which the housewives had kneaded on purpose. In the midst of the preparations there came the clamor of bells drifting from the linked villages of Domremy and Greux, chiming the midday angelus.

Instantly little Jeanne, who was among the girls busied about the lunch arose and, turning toward the church of her own village, joined her palms, bending her forehead to them. Mengette, who had taken no part in getting the lunch ready because of her lamed knee, and who sat in the shade of the beech upon the grass, leaned over and poked Pierre, one of Jeanne's brothers, in the side.

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"Do as your sister does, Pierrelot," she cried, pointing toward the reverent little maiden.

"Myself, I am not so devout," he made answer. "Neither Jean, Jacquemin, nor I feel as Jeanne does, but such things are to her liking. My mother grieves that I am so slack in the matter. But Jeanne loves the church. She is a good sister."

"And a good friend also, Pierrelot," nodded the girl emphatically, remembering how Jeanne had come back to her while the rest of the party had gone on. "She might have been first at the tree, and so have won the right to hang her wreath first. Instead, she came back to help me."

"Jeanne," called Hauviette suddenly, as the angelus ceased to chime, and the devout little maid turned again toward her companions, "do you not wish that we could have our 'Well dressing' upon Thursday instead of 'Laetare Sunday'? 'Tis said that then the fairies hold their tryst."

"Pouf!" ejaculated Pierre, or Pierrelot, as he was usually called. "You would not find them an you did come. There are no fairies now. My godfather Jean says that there have been no fairies at Domremy for twenty or thirty years. So what would be the use of coming here Thursday?"

"But my godmother says that one of the lords of the castle became a fairy's knight, and kept his tryst with her here under this very tree at eventide; so there must be fairies," spoke Hauviette with timid persistency. "What do you think, Jeanne?"

"They come no more," replied the little maid gravely. "Godmother Beatrix and the Curé both say that they do not.

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They came in the olden time, but for their sins they come no longer."

"Perchance they hold their meetings further back in the wood," suggested another girl. "That may be the reason that they are not seen."

"I shall see," cried one of the boys rising, and starting toward the forest that extended its dark reaches behind them. "If there be fairies there, I, Colin, shall find them."

"Do not go, Colin," exclaimed Jeanne in alarm. "You know that there is danger both from wolves and wild boars."

Few dared enter the wood, so thick it was, and the wolves it harbored were the terror of the countryside. So greatly were they feared, and such was the desire to be rid of the menace, that there was a reward given by the mayors of the villages for every head of a wolf, or a wolf cub, brought to them. So now a protesting chorus arose from the children as Colin, with a scornful "Pouf!" threw his shoulders back, and swaggered into the wood.

"'Tis time for the 'Well dressing,'" declared Jean, another one of Jeanne's brothers. "Let Colin look for the fairies if he will. Let us go to the Spring. 'Tis what we came for."

"And so say I," chimed in another boy.

"And I. And I," came from others. As this seemed to be the desire of all there was an immediate stir and bustle. The remnants of the lunch were hastily gathered up, and put in baskets; some of the wreaths were taken from the tree, and then the line of march was formed. Just as they were ready to start, however, there came a shrill shout from the forest:

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“A wolf! A wolf!” cried the voice of Colin. “Help! Help!”

Stock still stood the frightened children. Again the cry came. At once there was a stir in the line, and a babel of excited voices broke forth as Jeanne D’Arc was seen running pell-mell into the forest in the direction from which the voice of her playmate came.

Colin was standing in the midst of a blackthorn thicket when she reached him. There was no sign of wolf, or animal of any kind, and he burst into a peal of laughter as the little girl glanced about in amazement. As the sound of his mirth reached the waiting children they too, knowing from it that naught was amiss, ran into the wood. The mischievous boy doubled up, and rocked to and fro in glee.

“Oh, but you were well fooled,” he cried. “Look at Jeanne’s face. You were afraid. All but her, and what could she have done to help me an there had been a wolf?”

“She could have done all that you deserve to have done, Colin,” retorted Pierre, who was a manly little lad. “Shame upon you for crying out when there was naught to cry for. ’Twould serve you right should a real wolf set upon you. Your mother shall know how you sought to frighten us.”

“’Twas but in sport,” muttered Colin, somewhat crestfallen. He had thought that the jest would be treated as great fun, and now here they stood regarding him reproachfully. “’Twas but in sport,” he said again, but there was no answering smile on any of the faces around him. The matter was of too serious a nature to admit of jesting.

For a brief time only did the children stand about the boy,

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and then with one accord, though no word was spoken, they formed their line again, and started for the Spring. Colin followed after shamedfacedly.

At first the march was a silent one, for the incident had thrown a damper upon their spirits, but soon it was forgotten, and once more their voices rose in song and mirth. The boys and girls who were at the head of the party went rapidly, and suddenly caught sight of a streamlet of pure water springing from a wooded hole in a wooded hill, by the side of a wooden bench which formed a resting place about the middle of the slope. The streamlet at first spread into a basin which it had excavated for itself; and then, falling in a small cascade, flowed across the path where a carpet of cress had grown, and disappeared in the reeds and grasses. All about the margin of the Spring were gooseberry bushes intertwining their branches of greyish green, and these gave it the name of Gooseberry Spring.

It was believed that the water had miraculous healing powers, so the children in turn knelt by the side of the basin, and drank deeply of the limpid water. For one drink from this wonderful Spring, it was said, was an insurance against fever for a whole year. The garlands which had been carried from the Fairy Tree were now spread around the "Well," a ring was formed, and the children danced and sang as they had done about the tree. The sun was setting before the games were ended, and the rustic festival was over. Then, tired but happy, the little folk set their faces toward home.

On the outskirts of the village Jeanne and her brothers met Jacques D'Arc, their father, who was driving his flocks and

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herds from the commune for the night. He was a peasant of sturdy appearance, an upright man, unusually strict and careful of the behaviour of his children. Jeanne's firm chin and wistful mouth were inherited from this parent. Now as they ran to help him in his task he greeted them briefly:

"There is company," he told them. "Your Gossip¹ Beatrix has come, Jeanne, and two soldiers of France who have escaped from the Burgundians. By our Lady, this being upon the highroad has its drawbacks! 'Tis getting so that no day passes without some wayfarer stopping for bite and bed. The house is overrun."

"But you like it, father," reminded Jeanne, slipping her hand into his. "For do not the wayfarers bring you news of all that happens beyond the mountains?"

"That is well enough," admitted Jacques grumblingly. "But even so, no man likes his house always full. There! let the matter rest. We must hasten with the cattle. The night grows apace."

"And mother will have need of me to help her," cried Jeanne, quickening her steps. "With so much company there will be much work to be done."

¹ Gossip—A name usually given to godmothers.