

ANNIE VIVANTI

THE OUTRAGE

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BOOK I

CHAPTER I

Chérie was ready first. She flung her striped bath-robe over her shoulders and picked up Amour who was wriggling and barking at her pink heels.

"*Au revoir dans l'eau*," she said to little Mireille and to the German nursery governess, Frieda.

"Oh, Frieda, *vite, vite, dégrafez-moi*," cried Mireille, backing towards the hard-faced young woman and indicating a jumble of knotted tapes hanging down behind her.

"Speak English, please, both. This is our English day," said Frieda, standing in her petticoat-bodice in front of the mirror and removing what the girls called her "Wurst" from the top of her head. In the glass she caught sight of Chérie making for the door and called her back sharply. "Mademoiselle Chérie, you go not in the street without your stockings and your hat."

"Nonsense, Frieda! In Westende every one goes to bathe like this," and Chérie waved a bare shapely limb and flicked her pink

toes at Amour, who barked wildly at them.

"I do not care how every one goes. You go not," said Frieda Rothenstein, hanging her sleek brown Wurst carefully on the mirror-stand.

"Then what have we come here for?" sulked Chérie, dropping Amour and giving him a soft kick with her bare foot.

"We have come here," quoth Frieda, "not for marching our undressed legs about the streets, but for the enjoyment both of the summer-freshness and of the out-view." Whereupon Mireille gave a sudden shriek of laughter and Amour bounded round her and barked.

Chérie crossed the room to the chair on which her walking clothes had been hastily flung. "Won't sand-shoes do?"

"No. Sand-shoes and stockings," said Frieda. "And hat," she added, glancing down at the comely bent head with its cascade of waving red-brown locks.

Chérie hurriedly drew on her black stockings, glancing up occasionally to smile at Mireille; and nothing could be sweeter than those shining eyes seen through the veil of falling hair. Now she was ready, her flapping *bergère* hat crushed down on her careless curls, Amour hoisted under her arm again, and with a nod of commiseration to Mireille she ran down the narrow wooden staircase of Villa Esther, Madame Guillaume's *appartements meublés* and was down in the rue des Moulins with her smiling face to the sea.

The street was a short one, half of it not yet built over, leading

from a new aeroplane-shed at the back to the wide asphalted promenade on the sea-front. Chérie met some other bathers—a couple of men striding along in their bathing suits, their bronzed limbs bare, a damp towel round their necks, their wet hair plastered to their cheeks. They barely glanced at the picturesque little figure in the brief red bathing-skirt and flapping hat, for all along the sands—from Nieuport, twenty minutes to the right, to Ostend half an hour to the left—there were hundreds of just such charming school-girl figures darting about in the sunlight, while all the fast and loose "daughters of joy" from Brussels, Namur, and Spa, added their more poignant note of provocativeness to the blue and gold beauty of the summer scene.

Chérie passed the bicycle shop and waved a friendly hand to Cyrille Wibon, who was kneeling before his racing Petrolette and washing its shining nose with the tenderness of a nurse and the pride of a father.

"Remember! the two bicycles at eleven, on the sands," cried Chérie in Flemish, and Cyrille lifted a quick forefinger to his black hair, and nodded. Chérie ran on, crossed the wide promenade, and skipped down the shallow flight of steps leading to the sands, those vast sweeping sands of Westende that begin and end in the wide, wild dunes. She dropped Amour, who rolled over, righted himself, dug a few rapid holes with his hind paws in the sand and then trotted off to lead his own wicked dog's life with certain hated enemies of his—a supercilious leveret, a scatter-brained Irish terrier, and a certain mean and

shivering black-and-tan, whose tastes and history would not bear investigation.

Chérie plunged through the quarter of a mile of dry, soft sand, into which her feet sank at every step, and as she reached the smoother surface that the outgoing tide left hard and level, she flung off her bath-robe and her hat, her sand-shoes and her stockings; then she ran out into the water.

Lithe and light she ran, skipping over the first shallow waves and on until the water lapped her knees and the red skirt bulged out all round her like a balloon—on she ran with little chilly gasps of delight, raising her white arms above her head as the water rose and encircled her with its cool, strong embrace. The sun cast a net of dancing diamonds on the blue satin sea, and the girl felt the joy of life bound within her like some wild, living thing. She joined her finger-tips and dived into the dancing waters; then she emerged, pushing her wet hair from her eyes with her wet hand. She swam on and on toward the azure horizon, and dreamed of thus swimming on for ever and losing herself in the blue beauty of the world.

An aeroplane passed above her with its angry whirr returning from Blankenberghe to Nieuport, and she turned on her back and floated, looking up at it and waving her small gleaming hand. She thought the plane dipped suddenly as if it would fall upon her, and she watched it, holding her breath for the pilot's safety till it was almost out of sight. Then she turned and trod water awhile and blinked at the distant shore for a sight of Mireille.

Yes, surely, there was the skimpy figure of Frieda, and beside it ran and hopped the still skimpier figure of Mireille, whose thin legs had only scampered through ten Aprils and whose treble voice cut the distance with the shrill note of exceeding youth.

"Chéreee!... Chéreeee!... Come back. Come back and fetch me!"

So Chérie, with a sigh, turned and swam slowly landward.

Mireille came running out to meet her with little splashes and jumps and shrieks, while Frieda stopped behind in a few inches of water and went through a series of hygienic rites, first wetting her forehead, then her chest, then her forehead again, and finally sitting down solemnly in the water until she had counted a hundred. This concluded her bath, and she went home to dress.

When, an hour later, she came down to the sands again neatly clothed in her Reformkleid, with the Wurst reinstated high and dry on the top of her otherwise damp head, she saw her two charges lying flat and motionless in the sand, the broiling sunshine burning down on their upturned faces and closed eyes. They were pretending to be dead; and indeed, thought Frieda, as she saw them lying, so small and still on the immensity of the sands, they looked like drowned morsels of humanity tossed up by the sea.

Before Frieda could reach them, Cyrille, the bicycle teacher, passed her—the monkey-man, as the girls called him—pedalling along on one machine and guiding the other towards the two small recumbent figures. They jumped up when they heard him,

and by the time Frieda reached the spot, Mireille was being hoisted on to a very rusty old machine, while Chérie, a slim, scarlet figure, with auburn locks afloat and white limbs gleaming, was skimming along in the distance on the smooth resilient sands.

"I do not approve," panted Frieda, running alongside of the swaying Mireille, while the monkey-man trotted behind and held the saddle,— "I do not approve of this bicycle-riding in bathing costume."

"Oh, Frieda," gasped Mireille, "do stop scolding, you make me wobble—" and with a sudden swerve the bicycle described a semicircle and ran swiftly down into the sea.

Mireille was very angry with Frieda and with the bicycle and with the monkey-man, who grinned with his very white teeth in his very dark face, and hoisted her up again. Frieda soon tired of following them, and sat down near an empty boat to read *Der Trompeter von Säkkingen*.

Säkkingen! As Frieda's eyes skimmed the neatly printed pages and lingered on the woodcut of a church tower and a bridge, her soul went back to the little town on the Rhine. For Frieda, like the famous trumpeter, came from Säkkingen; her feet, in square German shoes, had tottered and run and clattered and tripped at divers ages over its famous covered bridge; she had leaned out of the small flower-filled windows, and sent her girlish dreams floating down the sleepy waters of the Rhine; she had passed Victor von Sheffel's small squat monument every morning on her way to school, and every evening on her way home she had

looked up at the shuttered windows of the house that had been his. Säkkingen!—with its clean white streets and its blue-and-white Kaffee-Halle in the Square and its bakeries redolent of fresh *Kuchen* and *Schnecken*.... Frieda raised eyes of rancour to the dancing North Sea, to the smooth Belgian sands, to the distant silhouettes of Chérie, Mireille, and the monkey-man, even to the bounding Amour and his companions of iniquity. She hated it all. She hated them all. They were all selfish and vulgar and flippant, with no poetry in their souls, and no religion, and bad cooking.... Frieda shook her head bitterly: "*Das Land das meine Sprache spricht ...*" she murmured in nostalgic tones, and sighed. Then she took up her book again and read what Hidigeigei, tom-cat and philosopher, had to say about love and the Springtime.

Warum küssen sich die Menschen?
Warum meistens nur die Jungen?
Warum diese meist im Frühjahr?...

That evening Mireille opened the door to the postman and took two letters from him. Then she went to the sitting-room where Frieda and Chérie sat at their needlework; hiding one of the letters behind her back she read out the superscription of the other with irritating slowness:

"Mademoiselle—Chérie—Brandès—Villa—Esther—"

"Oh, give it to me!" cried Chérie, extending an impatient hand.

"It is from Loulou," said Mireille, giving up the letter and still

holding the other one behind her back.

"You may not call your mother Loulou," snapped Frieda. "I have never heard of such a thing."

"She likes it," said Mireille. "Besides, Chérie calls her Loulou."

"Chérie is her sister-in-law, not her daughter," said Frieda; then catching sight of the other letter in Mireille's hand: "Who is that for?"

"Hochwohlgeborenes Fräulein—Frieda Rothenstein—" read Mireille, and Frieda rose quickly and pulled the letter out of her hand. "Oh, Frieda, you rude thing! Who is your letter from? It's on our letter-paper, and is not from Loulou, and it is not from my father. Who calls you all that twiddly-twaddly *hochwohlgeboren* nonsense?"

Nobody answered. Both Fräulein and Chérie were reading their letters with intent eyes. Mireille continued her monologue. "I believe it is from Fritz. Fancy! Fritz, who is only papa's servant, writing to you! Do you answer him? Fancy a *hochwohlgeboren* getting letters from a man-servant!"

Frieda did not deign to reply, nor did she raise her eyes from the letter in her hand; yet as Mireille could see, it was only one line long. Just four or five words. But Frieda sat staring at them as if they had turned her to stone.

Now Chérie had finished reading the hastily scrawled page in her hand and raised a face full of consternation.

"Frieda! Mireille! Do you know what has happened? We are

to go home tomorrow."

"Tomorrow!" exclaimed Mireille. "Why, papa said we were to stay here two months, and we only arrived four days ago."

"Well, your mother writes that we are to go home at once. Do you hear, Frieda?" But Frieda did not answer nor raise her eyes.

"But why—why?" cried Mireille. "Doesn't Loulou know we have arranged to have your birthday party here, with Lucile and Jeannette and Cri-cri all coming on purpose?"

"Yes, she knows," said Chérie, turning her sweet, perplexed eyes from Mireille's disconcerted face to the impassive countenance of Frieda, "but she says there is going to be war."

"War? What has that got to do with us?" exclaimed Mireille in injured tones. "It really is too bad. Just as I had made up my mind that tomorrow I would swim with both feet off the ground!..."

CHAPTER II

The next day's sun rose hot and angry. It was the 30th of July. By ten o'clock Frieda had packed everything. Amour had been put into his picnic-basket and his humped-up back coaxed and patted and finally forcibly pressed down, and the lid shut over him. Then they awaited the carriage ordered by telephone from Ostend the night before.

But no carriage arrived. At eleven Chérie ran across to the telephone-office and spoke in her sternest tones to the livery stable in Ostend.

"*Eh bien?* Is this carriage coming? We ordered it for ten o'clock."

"No, Madame, it is not coming," replied a gruff voice from the other end.

"Not coming?"

"No, Madame." Then in lower, almost confidential tones, "It has been requisitioned."

"What is that? Then send another one," said Chérie. But Ostend had cut off the communication and Chérie returned crestfallen and wondering to the glum Frieda and the doleful Mireille sitting on the trunks in Madame Guillaume's narrow hall.

"No carriage," she said.

"What?" exclaimed Frieda.

"Why not?" asked Mireille.

"I don't know; something is being done to it," Chérie said vaguely. "I did not understand. Perhaps it is being re—re—covered, or something."

At noon Madame Guillaume found a porter for them who wheeled the luggage on a hand-cart to the Westende tramway station. And the tramway carried them and their luggage and Amour in his basket to Ostend, where another man with a hand-cart was found to wheel the luggage and the basket to the railway station.

They noticed at once that Ostend wore a strange and novel air. Crowds filled the town, crowds that were not the customary sauntering demi-mondaines and lounging viveurs. No; the streets were full of hurrying people, of soldiers on foot and on horseback; long lines of motor-cars, motor-cycles, carts and wagons blocked the roadways, and behind them came peasants leading strings of unharnessed horses. Down the rue Albert came, marching rapidly, a little band of Gardes Civiques in their long coats and incongruous bowler-hats with straps under their chins. Groups of officers, who had arrived a few days before for the international tennis tournament, were assembled on the Avenue Leopold and talked together in low, eager tones.

"What is the matter with everybody?" asked Mireille, as they hurried through the Place St. Joseph and across the bridge after the man with the luggage, who was already vanishing into the crowded station.

As if in answer to her question a couple of newspaper boys came rushing past with shrill cries. "*Supplément ... supplément de l'Indépendance' ..., Mobilization Générale....*"

"Frieda, is there really going to be war?" asked Chérie, looking anxiously at Frieda's sulky profile.

"Yes, I believe so," said Frieda. "Between Russia and Germany."

"Oh well; that is far away," said young Chérie, with a little laugh of relief, and she ran to rescue the picnic-basket from the porter's roughly swinging hand.

"Amour is whining," whispered Mireille, as they stood in the crush waiting to pass the ticket-collector on the quai.

"Oh! he mustn't," said Chérie. "Officially he is sandwiches."

So Mireille thumped the basket with her small gloved hand and murmured, "*Couche-toi, tais-toi, vilian scélérat.*" And the official sandwiches subsided in the basket and were silent.

They never had such a journey. The train was crowded to suffocation; the whole world seemed to be going to Brussels; every few minutes their train stopped to let other even more crowded trains dash past them towards the capital.

"I have never seen so many soldiers," said Mireille. "I did not think there were so many in the world."

Frieda Rothenstein smiled disdainfully with the corners of her mouth turned down. "There are a few more than this in my country," she said.

"What? In Germany? But not such beautiful ones,"

cried Mireille, hanging out of the window and waving her handkerchief as many others did to a little company of Lancers cantering past on the winding road with lances fixed and pennants fluttering.

Frieda glanced at them superciliously. "You should see our Uhlans," she said. And added under her breath, "Who knows? Perhaps one day you may."

But the girls were not listening. The train was running into Brussels at last. The journey had taken five hours instead of two.

An hour later they still sat in the motionless train in the Brussels station.

"At this rate we shall never reach Bomal," said Chérie drearily, as they watched train after train packed with soldiers leave the station before theirs in the direction of Liège. Here all the world seemed to be rushing out of Brussels towards the eastern frontier.

But all things end; and finally their train started too, panting and puffing out of the Gare du Nord towards Louvain, Tirlemont, and Liège.

It was utterly dark by the time they reached Liège; and when they left the Gare Guillemin the soft summer night had swathed the valley of the Ourthe with tenebrous draperies. Little Mireille fell asleep with a pale smudgy face resting against Frieda's arm. Chérie lay back in her corner dozing and dreaming of Westende's blue sea; but Frieda's eyes were wide open staring out into the darkness as the train rumbled in and out of the tunnels, clattered over bridges following the gleaming blackness of the river.

Where the Ourthe meets its younger brother the Aisne, the train slowed down, trembled, hissed, and stopped.

"Bomal," announced the guard.

"Here we are! Mireille, wake up!" cried Chérie, looking out of the window. Then she put Mireille's *bergère* hat very crookedly on the child's towzled head, while Frieda hurriedly collected the books, the tennis-rackets and the parasols.

"Ah! there he is," and Chérie waved her hand out of the window to a tall figure on the platform. "Claude! Claude! *Nous voici*."

Claude Brandès, a handsome man, fifteen years older than his sister Chérie, opened the carriage door with an exclamation of relief. "Thank goodness you are here," he said, lifting his dazed, weary little daughter in his arms as if she were a baby and hoisting her on to his shoulder. "Are you all right? Have you got everything? Come along!" And he started down the platform, Chérie and Frieda trotting quickly after him. "Mademoiselle," he said, turning to Frieda, "give the check for your trunks to Fritz."

"*Oui, Monsieur le Docteur*," she replied, fumbling for it in her hand-bag. Then she looked round for the man-servant, whom she had as yet not caught sight of. Fritz Hollander ("Hollander by name and Hollander by nationality," he always said of himself when making new acquaintances) stepped out of the shadow and took the paper from Frieda's hand. She murmured a greeting to him, but he did not reply nor did he seem to notice her questioning glance. He turned on his heel, and his massive figure

was soon swallowed up in the shadows at the end of the station.

The little party had just reached the exit and the train, with a parting whistle, was curving away into the darkness, when Mireille suddenly raised her face from her father's shoulder and gave a shriek. "Amour! We have forgotten Amour!"

It was true. Amour, cramped and disgusted in his creaky luncheon basket, was travelling away in the darkness to the heart of the Ardennes.

After the first moment of dismay everybody was cross with everybody else.

"It's all his own fault," said Chérie, who was tired and hungry. "He might have barked. He knew perfectly well that we were getting out."

"Haven't we taught him to pretend he is sandwiches when we're travelling?" sobbed Mireille indignantly. "How can you be so unjust?"

"Never mind, Mirette," said her father; "don't cry. We will telegraph to Marché to have him stopped and sent back. You will see him turn up safe and tail-wagging in the morning."

And the telegram was sent.

As they walked through the silent, sleeping village of Bomal Chérie inquired, "Why is Loulou not here? She might have come in the motor."

Her brother hesitated a moment. "I have sent away the car," he said.

"Sent it away? What for?" exclaimed Chérie.

"I have ... I have lent it," said Dr. Brandès.

"To whom?" inquired Mireille, trotting beside her father and hanging on to his arm.

He gave a little laugh. "To the King," he said.

"Oh!" cried Mireille. "Not much of a car to lend to a king! Surely he has better ones himself."

"We all give what we have in time of war," said her father. "Come, I will carry you, my little bird," he said, and lifted her up again.

"What is the matter? Why are you so affectionate?" asked Mireille, nestling comfortably in his arms and patting his broad back with her small hand.

Chérie laughed and looked up adoringly at her big brother. "Is he not always affectionate?" she asked.

"Not so dreadfully," replied Mireille, in her matter-of-fact tones; and then they all three laughed.

Frieda, hurrying behind them in the dark with the books, the parasols, and the tennis-rackets, hated them for their laughter.

Louise Brandès, a slim white figure in the moonlight, awaited them at the door. She kissed Mireille and Chérie and greeted Frieda kindly; then she made them all drink hot milk and sent them to bed.

"But I want to tell papa about how I can almost swim and nearly ride a bicycle," said Mireille, sidling up to her father.

"You shall tell him tomorrow, my darling," said Louise.

But the morrow was not as they dreamed it.

When early next morning Frieda and the girls came down to the breakfast-room they found Louise, still in her white dress of the evening before, sitting on the sofa with red eyes and a pale face. In answer to their anxious questioning she told them that Claude had been called away. Two officers had come for him close upon midnight; he had scarcely had time to pack a few things. He had taken his surgical outfit; then they had hurried him away with short words and anxious faces.

"But where—where has he gone to?" asked Chérie.

"I don't know," said her sister-in-law, and the tears gathered in her dark eyes. "They said something about his being sent to a field ambulance, or to ... to the Dépôt Central...."

"What is that?" asked Mireille; but as nobody knew, nobody answered.

Mariette the maid brought in the breakfast, followed by her mother, Marie the cook; and they both had red eyes and were weeping. Marie said that her two sons had come to the house at dawn to bid her and Mariette good-bye; the eldest, Toinot, belonged to the 9th line regiment and had been sent off to Stavelot; and Charles, the youngest, had volunteered and was being sent off heaven knows where.

"Of course there is nothing to cry about," added Marie, with large round tears rolling down her ruddy face. "There is no danger for our country. But still—to see one's boys—going away like that—s-s-singing the B-b-brabançonne—" she broke into sobs.

"Of course, my good Marie," echoed Louise, "there is nothing to cry about...."

And then they all wept bitterly. Even Frieda, with her face in her handkerchief, sobbed—on general principles, and also because Weltschmerz gnawed at her treacherous, sentimental German heart.

At breakfast every one felt a little better. As nearly all the men had left Bomal or were about to leave, it was a comfort to reflect that Fritz Hollander, the doctor's confidential servant, being a Dutchman, was not obliged to go. True, he was a somewhat sulky, taciturn person, but he had been with them two years and, as Loulou remarked while she poured out the coffee, one felt that one could trust him.

"I always trust people who are silent and look straight at you when you speak," said the wise Louise, who was twenty-eight years old, and admired Georges Ohnet.

"I don't like Fritz," remarked Mireille. "I hate the shape of his head—and especially his ears," she added.

"Don't be silly," said Chérie.

Frieda, who was just dipping a fresh roll into her coffee, looked up. "He has the ears God gave him," she remarked, with pinched and somewhat tremulous lips.

Every one looked at her wonderingly, and she flushed scarlet as she bent her head and dipped her roll into her cup again.

After breakfast Louise went to rest for a few hours; Frieda said she had some letters to write, and the two girls went out to

call on their friends and make plans as to what they would do on Chérie's birthday, the 4th of August.

They went to Madame Doré's house in the Place du Marché and found their friends Cécile and Jeannette busy with their boy-scout brother, André; they were sewing a band with S.M. on it, on the right sleeve of his green shirt.

"What is S.M.?" inquired Mireille.

"That means Service Militaire," replied André proudly.

"Fancy!" exclaimed Mireille. "And you only fifteen!"

André passed his left hand carelessly over his fair hair. "Oh yes," he said, with very superior nonchalance. "There are four thousand of us. We shall have to take care of you women," he glanced with raised eyebrows at the small, admiring Mireille, "now that the other men have gone."

"Keep your arm quiet," said Cécile, "or I shall prick you."

"Where is your father?" asked Chérie. "Has he left, too?"

"Yes," said André. "He has been called out for duty in the Garde Civique. He is stationed on the Chaussée de Louvain, not far from Brussels."

"Isn't it all exciting?" cried Jeannette, jumping up and down.

"But against whom are we going to fight?" asked Mireille.

"We don't know yet," declared André. "Perhaps against the French; perhaps against the Germans."

"Perhaps against nobody," said Cécile, biting off the thread and patting the neatly-sewn armlet on her brother's sleeve.

"Perhaps against nobody," echoed André, with a boyish touch

of ruefulness. "Nobody will dare to invade our land."

"Come, let us go into the garden," said Jeannette.

Thus it was in Belgium on the eve of her impending doom. Doubtless in high places—in the Palais de la Nation and the Place Royale—there were hearts filled with racking anxiety and feverish excitement; but throughout the country there was merely a sense of resolute expectancy, of not altogether unpleasant excitement. Every one knew that the sacrosanct rights of the land would be respected, but it was just as good, they said, to be ready for every event.

Nobody on that summer evening, from the remotest corner of Belgian Luxembourg to the farthest homestead in Flanders, as they watched that last July sun go down over the peaceful fields of grain, dreamed that the Grey Wolves of War were already snarling at the gates, straining to be let loose and overrun the world, panting to get to their work of slaughter and destruction. No one dreamed that four days later massacre and outrage and frenzied ferocity would rage through the shuddering valleys of the Ardennes.

Thus while Chérie and Cécile, Jeannette and Mireille ran out into their sunshiny garden, at that same hour, far away in the Wilhelmstrasse a man with a grey beard stood on a balcony and spoke to a surging crowd—promising blood to the wolves.

Thus while the four fair girls planned what they would do on the 4th of August, on that balcony in Berlin their fate and the fate of Europe was being pronounced.

"We shall invite Lucile, Cri-cri, and Verveine," said Chérie.

"We shall dash those aside who stand in our way," said the man on the balcony.

"We shall dance," said Mireille.

"We shall grind our heel upon their necks," said von Bethmann-Hollweg.

And the Grey Wolves roared.

CHAPTER III

Chérie's Diary

This is August the 1st. In three days I shall be eighteen. At eighteen one is grown up; one pins up one's hair, and one may use perfume on one's handkerchief and think of whom one is going to love.

The weather is very hot.

Cécile tells me that she saw Florian Audet ride past this morning; he was at the head of his company of Lancers, and looked very straight and handsome and stern; like Lohengrin, she said. I do not suppose he will remember my birthday with all this excitement about manœuvres and mobilizing.

There is no news at all about Amour. We are very unhappy about him.

Later.—Claude has written to say that he is ordered to Mons and that there may be an invasion, and that whatever happens we are all to be brave. We were not at all frightened until we read that; but now of course we are terrified out of our wits. Every time the bell rings we think it is the enemy and we scream. (Motto—to remember. It is better never to tell any one to be brave because it makes them frightened.)

August 2nd.—It is very hot again today. We wished we were

in Westende. How nice it was there, bicycling on the sand in one's bathing dress! One day I rode all the way to the Yser and back. The Yser is a pretty blue canal and a man with a boat ferries you across for ten centimes to Nieuport. Of course that day I did not want to go to Nieuport because I was in my bathing dress, besides, I had no pocket and therefore no money.

I do not seem to write very important things in this diary; my brother Claude gave it me and said I was not to fill it with futile nonsense. But nothing really important ever happens.

There is no news of Amour.

Germany has declared war upon Russia; of course that is important, but I do not write about it as it is more for newspapers than for a diary. Louise says Germany is quite in the wrong, but as we are neutral we are not to say so.

Later.—We are going out for an excursion this afternoon as it is Sunday. We are going with Frieda to Roche-à-Frêne, to ramble about in the rocks, and Fritz is to follow us with a hamper of sandwiches, milk and fruit. Loulou is coming too. It was Mireille who suggested it. She said she thought we had been quite miserable enough. Mireille is very intelligent and also pretty, except that her hair does not curl.

Evening, late.—As nothing important has happened today—except one thing—I will write in this diary about the excursion.

(The important thing is that I saw Florian, and that he says he will come to my birthday party.) But now about the excursion. We were almost cheerful after being so wretched and frightened

and unhappy all the morning about the war.

Even Loulou said that it was difficult to think that anything dreadful would happen with such a bright sun shining and the sky so blue. Frieda was sulky and silent, and kept dropping behind to be near Fritz. Loulou said that perhaps if Germany does not behave properly all the Germans will be sent away from Belgium. That means that Frieda would have to go. We should not be sorry if she did. She is so changed of late. When we speak to her she does not answer; when we laugh or say anything funny she looks at us with round, staring eyes that Mireille says are like those of a crazy cat that stalks about in the evening. I suggested that perhaps Frieda is in love, as I am told that it is love that makes those evening cats so crazy. It would be quite romantic and interesting if Frieda were in love. Perhaps if Fritz Hollander were not just a servant—Frieda is more of a *demoiselle de compagnie*—I should say that she might be in love with him. But he never looks at her except to scowl.

Today on our excursion I saw him do a funny thing. We came upon a spring of water hidden among the rocks, and while the others went on I stayed behind and clambered about, picking ferns. Fritz had also left the road, and was coming along behind us. As he caught sight of the water he stopped. He took a little notebook from his pocket, tore out a sheet, and having looked round as if he feared some one might be watching him, he scribbled something on the paper. Then he hurried back to the road and stuck the paper on the trunk of a tree. I thought it must

be a love-letter or some message, so I slipped down the rocks and went to look at it. There were only two words written on the scrap of paper: "*Trinkwasser—rechts.*"

I found that very strange. We never thought he knew German. I wondered why he did it and was going to ask him, but when he saw me he looked so cross that I did not dare. Later on, as we rambled about in the wood we came upon another piece of paper stuck on a tree. "*Trinkwasser—links,*" was written on it. I told Loulou what I had seen, and she went straight to Fritz and asked him what it meant. He said he had done it for Frieda, so that she should know where to find water.

"She is a thirsty soul," he added, and he laughed, showing a lot of small, rabbity teeth. I do not think I have ever seen Fritz laugh all the time he has been with us; he does not look very nice when he does.

But—as Frieda says of his ears—I suppose he has the laugh God gave him.

The walk about Roche-à-Frêne was fantastic and beautiful.

After eating our sandwiches we lay on the grass and looked at the sky.

Perhaps I dozed, for suddenly I thought I was in Westende the day that the aeroplane passed above me as I swam far out in the sea. I heard the angry whirr of the engine, but this time it seemed to sound much louder than any I had ever heard.

I opened my eyes and there it was, above us, flying very high and looking for all the world like a beetle. It was all white except

for a panel of sky-blue painted across the centre of each wing. I noticed that its wings were not straight as all the others I have seen, but sweeping backwards like those of a bird. I called out to the others, and Mireille said—

"How lovely it is! Like a white beetle with blue under its wings!"

Then an extraordinary thing happened. Fritz, who had been sitting some distance off looking at a paper, leaped to his feet as if he had been shot. He is short-sighted, and his glasses dropped off his nose into the grass.

"My glasses, my glasses!" he cried out, as if he were quite off his head. And Frieda actually ran to look for them, just as if she were his servant. "What did she say?" Fritz was crying; "like a beetle? white? with blue under its wings?" Frieda kept looking up and saying, "*Ja! ja! ja!*" and Fritz was calling for his glasses. They both seemed demented. The scarab-like aeroplane whirled out of sight.

Loulou had got up and was very pale. She made us go home at once and never spoke all the way.

It was when we were passing through Suzaine that we met Florian. He was on horseback. I did not think he looked like Lohengrin, but more like Charles le Téméraire, or the Cid, el Campeador.

He told us—and his horse kept prancing and dancing about while he spoke—that his regiment was encamped on the banks of the Meuse awaiting orders. They might be sent to the frontier

at any moment. But, unless that happened, he said he would make a point of coming to see us on the 4th—even if he could only get an hour's leave. I reminded him that he had never missed coming to see us on that day since the very first birthday I had in Claude's house, when I was eight years old and my father and mother had just died in Namur.

Loulou always tells me that I was like a little wild thing, shrinking and trembling and weeping in my black dress, and afraid of everybody. On that particular birthday I wept so much that my brother Claude had the idea of sending for Florian—who is his godson—and asking him to try and make friends with me. I remember Florian coming into the room—this very room that I am writing in now—a boy of fourteen with short curly hair and very clear steely-blue eyes. A little like André but better-looking. He was what Loulou calls "*tres-crâne*." "*Bonjour*," he said to me in his firm, clear voice. "My name is Florian. I hate girls." I thought that rather a funny thing to say, so I stopped crying and gave a little laugh. "Girls," Florian continued, looking at me with disapproval, "are always either moping or giggling."

I stopped giggling at once; and I also left off moping so as not to be hated by Florian.

All these thoughts passed through my head as I watched him bending down and talking to Loulou very quickly and earnestly, while his horse was dancing about sideways all over the road. He certainly looked like a very young Charles le Téméraire or like the knight who went to waken la Belle au Bois dormant.

August 3rd.—We are very happy. Amour is safe! He is in the care of the station-master at Marché and André is going very early tomorrow morning to fetch him. André says that fetching dogs is not exactly a Service Militaire, but it is in the line of a Scout's work to sally forth in subservience to ladies' wishes, and obey their behests. He said he would wear Mireille's colours, and she gave him the crumpled Scotch ribbon from the bottom of her plait.

We have invited Lucile, Jeannette, Cécile and Cri-cri, to come tomorrow evening. It will not be a real birthday party with dancing as it was last year, because everything is uncomfortable and unsettled owing to the Germans behaving so badly. However neutral one may be, one cannot help being very disgusted with them. Even Frieda had a hang-dog air today when Loulou read out loud that the Germans had actually sent a note to our King proposing that he should let them march through our country to get at France! Of course our King has said No. And we all went out to the Place de l'Église to cheer for him this afternoon. It was André who came to tell us that all Bomal was going.

It was beautiful and every one was very enthusiastic. The Bourgmestre made a speech; then we sang la Brabançonne and the dear old Curé invoked a blessing on our land and on our King. We all waved handkerchiefs and some people wept. Marie and Mariette came too, but Frieda hid in the house, being ashamed of her country, as she may well be.

Fritz was there, and Mariette remarked that he seemed to be

the only young man left in Bomal. It is true. All the others have either been called to military service or have gone as volunteers. The Square today was full of girls and children and quite old people.

I felt rather pleased that Fritz belongs to us. "A man in the house gives one a sense of security," said Loulou the other day. I reminded her of it as we were coming home, but she seemed worried and unhappy. "Since your brother has left," she said, "Fritz is very much changed. He does not behave like a servant; he never asks for my orders. Yesterday at Roche-à-Frêne he was like a lunatic. And so was Frieda." Poor Loulou looked very white as she said this, and added that she wished Claude would come back.

There is certainly something curious about Fritz. This evening he brought us the paper and stood looking at us while we opened it. I read over Loulou's shoulder that the Germans had marched into the Grand-duchy of Luxembourg and taken possession of the railways as if the place belonged to them. When I raised my eyes I saw Fritz staring at us and he had his hands in his pockets. He took them out when Loulou looked up and spoke to him.

She said, "Fritz, this is dreadful news"; and he said, "Yes, madam," and smiled that curious rabbit smile of his.

"Tell me," said Loulou, "did the master say anything to you when you saw him to the train the other night?"

"Yes, madam," said Fritz.

"What—what did he say?" asked Loulou very anxiously.

Fritz waited a long time before he answered. "The master said"—and he smiled that horrible smile again,— "the master said I was to protect you in case *those dogs* came here. That's what he said—those dogs! Those dogs—" he repeated, glaring at Loulou and at me until we felt quite strange and sick.

Little Mireille had just come into the room, and she asked somewhat anxiously, "What dogs are you talking about?"

Fritz wheeled round on her with a savage look. "German dogs," said he. "And they bite."

Nobody spoke for a moment. Then Loulou sighed. "Who would have conceived it possible a month ago!" she murmured. "Why, even ten days ago, no one dreamed of war."

Fritz took a step forward. "Some of us have been dreaming of war," he said—and there was something in his tone that made Loulou look up at him with startled eyes,— "dreaming of war, not for the past ten days, but for the past ten years." He rolled his eyes at us; then he turned on his heel and strode out of the room.

Loulou has written a long letter to Claude. But will it reach him?

CHAPTER IV

Mireille's Diary

This is an important day, August the 4th—Chérie's birthday. Loulou has given her a gold watch and a sky-blue chiffon scarf; and I gave her a box of chocolates—almost full!—and a rubber face that makes grimaces according to how you squeeze it, and also a money-box in the shape of an elephant that bobs its head when you put money in it and keeps on bobbing for quite a long time afterwards; Cécile and Jeannette sent roses, Lucile and Cri-cri a box of fondants, and Verveine Mellot, from whom we never expected anything, sent a parasol. We had not invited Verveine for tonight because she lives so far away, quite out of the village; but we shall do so now because of the parasol.

We nearly had no party at all, Maman and Chérie being worried about the Germans. But I cried, and they hate to see me cry, so they said that just those five girls whom we see every day were not really a party at all and they might come.

The great event of today has been that Amour has arrived in his basket, with 14 francs to pay on him; we were very glad, and Chérie said it was just like receiving a new dog as a birthday present. André was not able to bring Amour himself because he had been sent on some other Service Militaire in a great hurry on

his motorcycle. The one drawback about Amour has been that he took the rubber face in his mouth and would not drop it and hid with it. We found it afterwards under the bed, but most of the colours had been licked off and Mariette says it is permanently distorted.

Mariette and Marie are going away today. They are taking only a few things and are going to Liège, where they say they will feel safer. Marie said we ought to go too, and Maman answered that if things went on like this we certainly should. Maman has cried a good deal today; and Frieda is shamming sick and has locked herself in her room. We have not seen Fritz since last night. Altogether everything is very fearful and exciting. Dinner is going to be like a picnic with nothing much to eat; but there are cakes and sweets and little curly sandwiches, all beautifully arranged with flowers, on the long table for this evening; and we shall drink orangeade and grenadine. We were to have had ices as well, but the pâtissier has joined the army and his wife has too many children and is so miserable that she will not make ices. She told us that her husband and other soldiers were digging ditches all round Belgium to prevent the Germans from coming in.

Now I am going to dress. I shall wear pink, and Chérie will be all in white like a bride. She will have her hair up for the first time, done all in curls and whirligigs, to look like that cake Frieda calls *Kugelhopf*.

Maman is going to make herself pretty too. She has promised not to think of war or of the Germans until tomorrow morning

because, as Chérie said, one is eighteen only once in one's life. Now I come to think of it, one is also eleven only once in one's life. I shall remember to say that when my next birthday comes....

While Mireille sat in the little study writing her diary with exceeding care, her head very much on one side and the tip of her tongue moving slowly from one side of her half-open mouth to the other, the door was opened and Fritz looked into the room. He shut the door again, and having listened for a moment on the landing to the soft-murmuring voices of Louise and Chérie, he went upstairs to the second floor and turned the handle of Frieda's door. It was locked.

"Open the door," he said.

Frieda obeyed. It was not the first time that she opened her door to Fritz.

"How loud you speak," she murmured, locking and bolting the door again, "they may hear you."

"I don't care if they do," said Fritz, sitting down and lighting a cigarette. "For two years I have played the servant. Tomorrow I shall be the master."

"Tomorrow!" gasped Frieda. "Is it—as near as all that?"

"Nearer, perhaps," murmured Fritz looking out of the window at the crimsoning western sky. The round red August sun had set, but the day still lingered, as if loth to end. Where the sky was lightest it bore on its breast the colourless crescent of the moon, like a pale wound by which the day must die.

"Nearer, perhaps," repeated Fritz. "Be ready to leave."

That day the storm had already broken over Europe. The Grey Wolves were pouring into Belgium from the south-east. At Dohain, at Francorchamps, at Stavelot the grey line rolled in, wave on wave, and in their wake came violence and death.

But the guns were not speaking yet. In the village of Bomal, a bare twenty miles away, nobody knew of it; and Louise, fastening a rose in Chérie's shining tresses said, "We will think of the war tomorrow."

Chérie kissed her and smiled. She smiled somewhat wistfully, and gazed at her own lovely reflection in the mirror. The hot blue day had faded into a gentle blue evening and Florian Audet had not kept his promise. Perhaps, thought Chérie, his regiment has received orders to leave their encampment on the Meuse; perhaps he has been sent to the frontier, but still—and she sighed—she would have loved to have seen him and bidden him good-bye....

But now little Mireille in her pink frock, looking like a blossom blown from a peach-tree, came running in to call her. The door-bell had rung and there was no one to answer it, since Marie and Mariette had gone and Frieda was locked in her room and Fritz had vanished. So the two ran lightly downstairs and opened the door to Lucile and Cri-cri, radiant in pale blue muslin; and soon Cécile and Jeannette and Verveine arrived too, and they all tripped into the drawing-room with light skirts swinging and buoyant curls afloat.

Verveine sat at the piano and the others danced and sang.

Sur le pont
D'Avignon
On y danse
On y danse,
Sur le pont
D'Avignon
On y danse
Tout en rond!

The laughing treble voices could be heard through the windows, thrown wide open to the mild evening air, and a young soldier on horseback galloping through the quiet village heard the song before he pulled up at Dr. Brandès's door. It was Florian Audet keeping his promise.

He slipped his bridle over the little iron gate and rang the bell. Louise herself came down and opened the door to him.

"Ah, Florian! How glad Chérie will be!" she exclaimed. Then, as the light from the hall beat full on his set face, "Why, how pale you are!" she cried.

"I must speak to you," said Florian drawing her into the doctor's surgery and shutting the door.

Louise felt her heart drop like a stone within her. "Is there worse news?"

"The worst possible," said Florian. Then his eyes wandered over the pretty, helpless figure before him. "Why are you dressed up like this?" he asked harshly.

"Why, Florian ..." stammered Louise, "it is Chérie's birthday

... and...."

Sur le pont
D'Avignon
On y danse
On y danse,

sang the girlish voices upstairs.

Florian turned away with a groan. "What shall I do?" he muttered. "What will be the end of it?" Turning he saw Louise's stricken eyes gazing at him, and he took her hand. "Marraine," he said, "you will be very brave—it is best that I should tell you—"

"Yes, Florian," said Louise, and the colour ebbed slowly from her face, leaving it as white as milk.

"The country is invaded at all points. There has been fighting at Verviers...."

"At Verviers!" gasped Louise, and her large eyes were like inkblots in her colourless face.

"Yes, and at Fleron."

There was silence. Then Louise spoke. "What—what will happen to us? What does it mean ... to our country?"

"It means ruin and butchery," muttered Florian through his clenched teeth; "it means violence, carnage, and devastation." Then he walked up and down the room. "We are holding Visé," he muttered, "we are holding it against Von Emmich's hell-hounds. And when we cannot hold it any longer we will blow up the bridge on the Meuse."

Louise had sunk into a chair. For a few moments neither spoke. Then Louise looked up.

"Will they—is it likely that they will come here?"

"They may," said Florian gravely, and as he looked at her and thought of her alone in the house with Chérie and Mireille a spasm crossed his face and tightened his lips.

"Will you be with us?" asked Louise, gazing at his stalwart figure and strong clenched hands. "How long can you stay here?"

"Forty minutes," replied Florian bitterly.

Again there was silence. Then he said, "What about that Dutchman—Claude's servant? Where is he?"

"Fritz?" said Louise, trembling. Then she told him what had taken place the night before, and also the events at Roche-à-Frêne. Florian listened to her with grim face. Then he strode up and down the room again in silence.

"Well," he said at last, "you have promised to be brave. You must listen to what I tell you and obey me."

He gave her brief, precise instructions. They were to pack their few most valuable possessions at once, and leave for Bomal early next morning for Brussels, via Marché and Namur—not Liège. "Remember," he added, "not Liège." If no trains were available they must hire a carriage, or a cart, or anything they could get. If no vehicle could be found, then they must go on foot to Huy and thence to Namur. "Do you understand?"

Yes, Louise understood.

Why not start now,—this evening? he suggested. They could

go through the wood to Tervagne—

Through the wood to Tervagne!... in the dark! Louise looked so terrified that he did not insist. Besides, he reflected, there might be Uhlans scouting in the woods tonight. No. They must leave at dawn. At three or four o'clock in the morning. Was that understood?

Yes, it was understood.

"And—and—" asked Louise, "what are we to do with Frieda?"

"Don't trust her. But take her with you if she wants to go. Otherwise leave her alone. Keep your doors locked."

"Yes."

"And have you got money?"

Yes, they had plenty of money.

"And now," said Florian, looking at his watch, which told him that twenty of the forty minutes had passed, "I should like to see Chérie."

"I will call her," said Louise; then, at the door she turned to question him with her fear-stricken eyes, "Shall I tell them—shall I tell the children of the danger that threatens us?"

"Yes, you must tell them," said Florian. "And send them to their homes at once."

"Oh, what will Mireille do?" gasped Louise. "What if she were to cry? What if she were to fall ill with fear?"

"Little Mireille is braver than we are," he said, smiling and putting his arm around her drooping shoulders. "Courage, *petite marraine*" and he bent over her with fraternal tenderness and

kissed her cheek.

He was left alone for a few moments; he heard the singing overhead stop suddenly. Light fluttering footsteps came running down the stairs; the door opened and Chérie stood on the threshold.

He caught his breath. Was this vision of beauty in the floating silken draperies his little friend Chérie? How had she been transformed without his noticing it from the awkward little school-girl he had known into this enchanting flower-like loveliness? She noticed his wonder and stood still, smiling and drawing a diaphanous scarf that floated mistily about her somewhat closer over her pearly shoulders. Her limpid eyes gazed up at him with blue and heavenly innocence.

A shudder passed through the man as he looked at her—a shudder of prescient horror. Were not the wolves on the way already? Were not the blood-drunken hordes already tearing and slashing their way towards this virginal flower? Must he leave her to the mercy of their foul and furious lust?

Again the fearful shudder passed through him. And still those limpid, childish eyes gazed up at him and smiled.

"Chérie!" he said. "Chérie!" and with his hand he raised the delicate face to his, and gazed into the azure wonder of her eyes.

She did not speak. Nor did her lashes flutter. She let him look deeply into the translucent profundity of her soul.

"Chérie!" he said again. And no other word was spoken or needed.

The forty minutes had passed. There was a hurried leave-taking, a few eager words of warning and admonition; then Florian had run downstairs, spurs clinking, and swung himself into his saddle.

As he turned the prancing horse's head to the north he looked up at the windows. Yes; they were all there, waving their hands, clustered together, the blonde heads and the brown, the blue eyes and the dark eyes following him.

"Remember," he cried to Louise, "remember—at dawn tomorrow! You will leave tomorrow at dawn." And even as he spoke the unspeakable shudder thrilled him again. Was it a foreboding of what the morrow might bring? Was it a vision of what the tragic and sanguinary dawn had in store for those he was leaving, alone in their defenceless beauty and youth?...

At the end of the street he turned again and saw that Chérie had run out on to the terrace and stood white as a lily in the moonlight, gazing after him.

He raised his hand high in the air in token of salute. Then he rode away. He rode away into the night—away towards the thunderous guns of Liège, the blood-drenched fields of Visé. And he carried with him that vision of delicate loveliness. He had spoken no word of love to her nor had his lips dared to touch hers. Her ethereal purity had strangely awed and enthralled him. It seemed to him that the halo of her virginal youth was around her like an armour of snow.

Thus he left her, fragile and sweet—white as a lily in a moonlit

garden.

He left her and rode away into the night.

CHAPTER V

The young girls in their muslin frocks and satin shoes sped homeward like a flight of startled butterflies. Did they dream it, or was there really, as they ran over the bridge, a booming, rumbling sound like distant thunder? They stopped and listened. Yes.... There it was again, the deep booming noise reverberating through the starlit night.

"*Jésus, Marie, St. Joseph, ayez pitié de nous,*" whispered Jeannette, and the others repeated the invocation. Then they ran over the bridge and reached their homes.

Louise, Chérie, and Mireille were left alone in the deserted house.

Frieda's room, when they went upstairs to look for her, was empty. Her clothes were gone. There were only a few of her books—"Deutscher Dichterschatz," "Der Trompeter von Säckingen," and Freiligrath's "Ausgewählte Lieder"—lying on the table; and the plaster bust of Mozart was still in its place on the mantelpiece.

"She must have slipped out while we were talking with Florian," said Chérie, turning a pale face to Loulou, who gazed in stupefaction round the vacant room.

"She was a snake," said Mireille, slipping her hand through her mother's arm and keeping very close to her. "And so was Fritz."

At the mention of Fritz, Louise shivered. "I do not suppose

Fritz has come back," she said, dropping her voice and glancing through the open window at the darkened outbuilding across the courtyard. "He is surely not in his room."

There was a moment's silence, and they all looked at those lightless windows over the garage. The thought of Fritz lurking there, waiting perhaps in the dark to do some fiendish work, was very disquieting.

"We must go and look," said Chérie. So holding each other very close and carrying a lantern high above their heads they went across the quiet courtyard up the creaky wooden stairs to Fritz's room.

Fritz was not there. But his trunk was in its place and all his belongings were scattered about.

"It looks as if he intended to come back," said Chérie; and they trembled at the thought. Then they went downstairs across the yard and into the house again. They were careful to slam the heavy front door which thus locked itself; but when they tried to push the bolt they found it had been taken away. It was at this moment that the distant booming sound fell also on their ears.

"What was that?" asked Mireille.

Chérie put her arm round the child. "Nothing," she said. "Let us go up and pack our things." And as Louise still stood like a statue staring at the door with the lantern in her hand she cried, "Loulou, go up to your room and collect what you will take with you in the morning."

And Loulou slowly, walking like a somnambulist, obeyed.

How difficult to choose, from all the things we live among, just what we can take away in our two hands! How these inanimate things grow round the heart and become through the years an integral part of one's life!

What? Must one take only money and a few jewels, and not this picture? Not these letters? Not this precious gift from one who is dead? Not the massive silver that has been ours for generations? Not the veil one was married in? Not the little torn prayer-book of one's first communion? Not one's father's campaign-medals, or the packet of documents that prove who we are and what is ours?

What! And the bird-cage with the fluffy canaries asleep in it? Are they to be left to die? And the dog—

"Of course we must take Amour," said Chérie.

"Of course," said Loulou, going through the rooms like a wandering spirit, picking things up and putting them down in a bewildered manner.

A clock struck eleven. Mireille, still in her pink frock, had clambered upon her mother's bed and was nearly asleep.

Boom! Again that low, long sound, rumbling and grumbling and dying away.

"It is nearer," breathed Louise. And even while she said it the sound was repeated, and it was nearer indeed and deeper, and the windows shook. Mireille sat up with wide, shining eyes.

"Is that a thunderstorm?... Or the Germans?"

"It is our guns firing to keep the Germans away," said Louise,

bending over her and kissing her. "Try to sleep for an hour, my darling."

Mireille lay back with her silken hair tossed on the pillow.

"Are the Germans trying to come here?" she asked.

There was silence. Then Chérie said, "I don't think so," and Louise added, "Of course not."

"But—might they want to come?" insisted Mireille, blinking to keep her eyes open.

"Why should they come here?" said her mother. "What would they want in this little out-of-the-way village?"

"What indeed?" said Chérie.

Mireille shut her eyes and thought about the Germans. She knew a great deal about them. Frieda had taught her—with the aid of a weekly paper from Munich called *Fliegende Blätter*—all the characteristics of the nation. The Germans, Mireille had gathered, were divided into two categories—Professors and Lieutenants. The Professors were old men, bald and funny; the Lieutenants were young men, aristocratic and beautiful. The Professors were so absent-minded that they never knew where they were, and the Lieutenants were so fascinating that girls fainted away and went into consumption for love of them. Frieda admitted that there were a few other Germans—poets, who were mostly dead; and housewives, who made jam; and waiters, who were sent to England. But obviously the Germans that had got into Belgium this evening were the Lieutenants and the Professors. Mireille nestled into her pillow and went to sleep. She

dreamed that they had arrived and were very amiable and much impressed by her pink dress.

She was awakened by a deafening roar, a noise of splintering wood and falling glass. With a cry of terror she started up; then a flash blinded her, another roar filled the air, and it seemed as if the world were crashing to pieces.

"Mireille!" Her mother's arms were around her and Chérie had rushed in from her room with an ashen face.

"Loulou, let us go at once—let us go to the Bourgmestre or to the Curé! We cannot stay here alone!"

"Yes ... let us go ..." stammered Louise. "But who will carry our things?"

"What things? We take no things. We are fugitives, Loulou! Fugitives!... Quickly—quickly. Take your money and your jewels—nothing else."

"Quickly, quickly," echoed the whimpering Mireille.

"If we are fugitives," sobbed Louise, looking down at her floating chiffon gown, "we cannot go out into the world dressed like this."

"We cannot stop to change our clothes ... we must take our cloaks and dark dresses with us," cried Chérie. "Only make haste, make haste!"

But Louise seemed paralysed with fear. "They will come, they will come," she gasped, gazing at the shattered window; the throbbing darkness beyond seemed to mutter the words Florian had spoken: "Outrage, violence, and slaughter ... outrage,

violence, and slaughter...."

Suddenly a sheaf of flame rose up into the sky, illuminating the room in which they stood with a fantastic yellow glare. Then a terrific explosion shook the foundations of the house.

Louise catching Mireille in her arms stumbled down the stairs followed by Chérie. They knew not where they were going. Another explosion roared and shattered the coloured staircase window above them to atoms, driving them gasping and panic-stricken into the entrance-room.

Did hours or moments pass? They never knew.

Now there were voices, loud hoarse voices, in the street; short guttural commands and a clatter of hoofs, a clanking of sabres and spurred heels.

"Let me look—let me look out of the window," gasped Chérie, tearing herself free from Louise's convulsive grasp. She stumbled to the window, then turned a haggard face: "They are here."

Mireille shrieked, but her piping voice was drowned by the noise outside.

"They will murder us," sobbed Louise.

"Don't cry! don't cry," wailed Chérie. "The gate is open but the door is locked. They may not be able to get in." But even as she spoke she knew the fallacy of that hope.

"Wait," she whispered. "They are trying the door." Louise had followed her to the window, clutching at the curtains lest she should fall. "Look, some one is trying to open the door...."

Louise bent forward and looked out. "It is Fritz...." she shrieked, and staggered back. "Fritz! He has opened the door to them!"

Now there was the tramp of many feet on the stairs, and loud voices and the clanking of spurs and sword.

As if the imminence of their fate had suddenly invested her with new strength and dignity, Louise stood up, tall and tragic, between the two trembling girls. She crossed herself slowly and devoutly; slowly and devoutly she traced the sign of the cross on Chérie's forehead and on Mireille's. Then with arms entwined they stood motionless. They were ready to die.

The door was kicked open; military figures in grey uniforms thronged the passage and crowded noisily forward.

They stopped as they caught sight of the three entwined figures, and there was an instant's silence; then an officer—a lean man with a grizzled moustache—stepped forward into the room.

Those behind him drew up stiff and straight on the threshold, evidently awaiting orders.

"*Tiens, tiens, tiens!*" said the officer, looking the three feminine figures up and down, from glossy head to dainty feet, and his grey eyes twinkled. "A charming tableau. You have made yourselves beautiful to receive us?" His French was perfect; his tone, though slightly contemptuous, was neither rude nor unkind; his eyes were intelligent and humorous. He did not look like a hell-hound. He did not evoke the idea of violence, outrage, and slaughter.

In a sudden reaction from the supreme tension of terror a wave of faintness overwhelmed Louise. Her soul seemed to melt away. With a mighty throb of thankfulness and relief she felt the reflux blood stream to her heart once more.

The man had turned to the soldiers behind him—two seemed to be junior officers, the other six were men—and gave them a short, sharp order in German. They drew themselves up and saluted. The two younger officers stepped forward and stood beside him.

One of them—a tall young man with very light eyes—held a paper in his hand, and at the request of his superior officer read it aloud. The older man while he listened seemed to be surveying the apartment, looking round first at one door, then at the other, then at the upper floors.

Chérie and Mireille were amazed. They who had learnt German with Frieda understood what was being read.

It was a brief, precise description of the house and its occupants. This was the house of Claude Leopold Brandès, doctor, and reserve officer, age thirty-eight, married. His wife, his child—a daughter—and his sister lived with him. There were twelve rooms, three attics, a basement; kitchen, scullery, wash-house, harness-room, stable. There was a landaulet, a small motor-car, and two horses; all requisitioned.

"Das ist alles, Herr Kapitän."

"No other adult males?" asked the Herr Kapitän.

No. Nothing but these women.

Where had the man Brandès gone to?

He had left on the night of July 31st.

For the frontier?

No, for the capital, it was believed. "But," added the young officer casting a fleeting glance at the three women, "that will be easy to ascertain."

"Any one of ours here?" asked the older man.

"Yes. A certain Fritz Müller, of Löhrbach."

Chérie quivered and tightened her grasp on Louise's hand.

"Where is this Fritz Müller?" asked the captain, looking about him.

"Downstairs," answered the lieutenant. "He was the man who opened the door for us."

"Well, put him in charge of the billets and see that he provides for twenty men," said the captain. "Now, as for us—" he took the paper from the other's hand. He turned it round and looked at the plan of the house roughly drawn on the back of the sheet. "Let me see ... three rooms on this floor ... four on the next ... Glotz?" to the other and youngest officer standing silent and erect before him. "Come with me, Glotz. And bring an orderly with you." Then he glanced at Louise and Chérie. "Von Wedel"—the light-eyed officer stood at attention—"you stay here." The captain turned on his heel and marched up the stairs, followed by the second lieutenant whom he had called Glotz and two of the soldiers. The other four stood in the hall drawn up in a row, stiff and motionless as automatons.

Von Wedel shut the door in their faces; then he turned his gaze on the three women left in his charge. He moved slowly, deliberately towards them and they backed away from him, still holding each other's hands and looking up at him with starry, startled eyes. He was very tall and broad, and towered above them. He gazed at them a long time, his very light eyes roving from Louise to Chérie, from Chérie to Mireille and back to Chérie again.

"Well, turtle-doves," he said, at last, and laughed, "did you expect us?" The three pairs of startled eyes still looked up at him. "Is it really in our honour that you put on all this finery?"

He moved a step nearer, and again all three drew back. "Well, why don't you answer?"

Louise stepped a little in front of the other two as if to shield them; then she spoke in low and quavering tones—

"Monsieur.... I hope ... that you and your friends ... will be good enough to leave this house very soon.... We are alone here—"

"Permit us then to keep you company," said Von Wedel, and added, in a tone of amiable interrogation, "Your husband is not here?"

"No," said Louise, and at the thought of Claude her underlip trembled; she looked like a child who is about to cry.

"Too bad," said Von Wedel, putting one foot in its muddy boot on a chair and leaning forward with his elbow resting on his upraised knee. "Too bad. Well; we must await his return."

"But," stammered Louise, "he will not return tonight."

"Won't he?" His insolent light eyes that had been fixed on Chérie during this conversation now wandered with effrontery over the charming trepidant figure of Louise. "Why, what an ungallant husband to be sure! And may I ask where he has gone to?" He tossed the question at her carelessly while he drew a gold coroneted cigarette-case from his pocket and took from it the solitary cigarette it contained. "Your man told me he had been ordered to Namur."

"No—to Mons," said Louise.

"Ah yes, Mons. Interesting town"—he tapped one end of his cigarette on the palm of his hand, "fine old Cathedral of St. Waudru ... four railway lines ... yes. Did he go alone?"

Mireille pinched her mother's arm.

"Don't say," she whispered.

The officer heard it and laughed. He took hold of the child's arm and drew her gently away from her mother's side. "*Na! sieh doch einmal!*" he said. "Are we not sly? Are we not knowing? Are we not diplomatic? Eh?" Holding her by her small arm he backed her away across the room, then giving her a little push he left her and turned his attention to the other two again. Louise had turned deathly pale, but Mireille, unharmed and undaunted, signalled to her from the other end of the room, signifying defiance by shrugging her shoulders and sticking her tongue out at the spruce, straight back of the enemy.

He now stared at Chérie again, and under his insistent insolent gaze she trembled like an aspen leaf.

"Why do you tremble?" he asked. "Are you afraid of me?"

"Yes," murmured the girl, drooping her head.

He laughed. "Why? I'm not a wild beast, am I? Do I look like a wild beast?" And he moved a step nearer.

Louise stepped in front of Chérie. "My sister-in-law is very young," she said, "and is not used to the attention of strangers."

"My good woman," replied Von Wedel with easy insolence, "go and find some cigarettes for me." And as Louise stared at him with an air of dazed stupefaction he spoke a little louder. "Cigarettes, I said. Surely in your husband's study you will find some. Preferably Turkish. Quick, my good soul. *Eins, zwei, drei*—go."

After a moment's hesitation Louise turned and left the room; Mireille ran after her. Chérie darted forward to follow them, but Von Wedel took one long stride and caught her by the arm. "*Halt, halt!*" he said, laughing. "You stay here, my little turtle-dove, and talk to me."

The girl flushed and paled and trembled. "What a shy dove!" he said, bending over her. "What is your name?"

"Chérie," she murmured almost inaudibly.

"What? '*Chérie*'?" he laughed. "Did you say that to me? The same to you, Herzchen!" He sat down on a corner of the table quite close to her. "Now tell me what you are afraid of. And whom you are afraid of.... Is it of Captain Fischer? Or of me? Or of the soldiers?"

"Of everybody," stammered Chérie.

"Why, we are such good people," he said, blowing the cigarette-smoke in a long whiff before him, then throwing the cigarette on the carpet and stamping it out with his foot. "We would not hurt a cat—nor a dog," he added, catching sight of Amour, who came hopping down the stairs limping and yelping, "let alone such an adorable little angel as you."

The dog came whining piteously and crouched at Chérie's feet; she bent down and lifted him up in her arms. He was evidently hurt. Von Wedel said "Good dog!" and attempted to pat him, but Amour gave a long, low growl and the officer quickly withdrew his hand.

Louise reappeared bringing boxes of cigars and cigarettes, which she placed on the table. Mireille, who followed her, caught sight of Amour in Chérie's arms and heard him whine.

"What have you done to him?" she said, turning fiercely on Von Wedel.

He laughed. "Well, well, what a little vixen!" he said. Then he added, "You can take the dog away. I don't like dogs." Chérie moved at once towards the staircase, but he stopped her again. "No, no; give the dog to the vixen. You stay here."

Chérie obeyed, shrinking away from him to Louise's side, while Mireille ran upstairs with Amour and took him to Chérie's room. She kissed him on his rough black head and patted his poor paws and put him down on a cushion in a corner. Then she ran down again to see what was going on. Amour left alone whined and howled in hideous long-drawn tones of indignation and

suffering. When a few minutes later Captain Fischer, followed by Lieutenant Glotz and the two soldiers on his round of inspection, came downstairs, he stopped on the landing.

"What is that noise? Who is crying?" he asked.

"The dog, sir," said Glotz, "whom you kicked downstairs before."

"Hideous sound!" said Captain Fischer; "stop it."

And one of the soldiers went in and stopped it.

Captain Fischer went downstairs, followed by Glotz. When they entered the room Von Wedel turned away from Chérie and stood at attention.

Outside the boom of the cannon had ceased, but there were loud bursts of firing in the distance, sudden volleys which ceased as abruptly as they began. The three officers seemed to pay no heed to these sounds; they stood speaking together, the captain issuing brief orders, Von Wedel asking a question or two, and Glotz saying "*Ja, Herr Kapitän—ja, Herr Leutnant*" at brief intervals, like a mechanical toy. Glotz was round-faced and solemn. He never once looked at Louise, Chérie, or Mireille, who stood in a corner of the room watching the men with anxious eyes.

"What are they saying?" asked Louise in an undertone.

Chérie listened. So far as she could understand they were making arrangements as to where they should sleep.

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