

DUMAS ALEXANDRE

THE WAR OF
WOMEN.
VOLUME 2

Александр Дюма

The War of Women. Volume 2

«Public Domain»

Дюма А.

The War of Women. Volume 2 / А. Дюма — «Public Domain»,

Содержание

THE VICOMTESSE DE CAMBES	5
I	5
II	11
III	16
IV	22
V	25
VI	32
VII	36
VIII	39
IX	41
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	43

Alexandre Dumas

The War of Women / Volume 2

THE VICOMTESSE DE CAMBES

I

Two days later they came in sight of Bordeaux, and it became necessary to decide at once how they should enter the city. The dukes, with their army, were no more than ten leagues away, so that they were at liberty to choose between a peaceable and a forcible entry. The important question to be decided was whether it was better to have immediate possession of Bordeaux at all hazards, or to comply with the wishes of the Parliament. Madame la Princesse summoned her council of war, which consisted of Madame de Tourville, Claire, Lenet, and her maids of honor. Madame de Tourville knew her arch antagonist so well that she had persistently opposed his admission to the council, upon the ground that the war was a war of women, in which men were to be used only to do the fighting. But Madame la Princesse declared that as Lenet was saddled upon her by her husband, she could not exclude him from the deliberative chamber, where, after all, his presence would amount to nothing, as it was agreed beforehand that he might talk all he chose, but that they would not listen to him.

Madame de Tourville's precautions were by no means uncalled-for; she had employed the two days that had just passed in bringing Madame la Princesse around to the bellicose ideas which she was only too anxious to adopt, and she feared that Lenet would destroy the whole structure that she had erected with such infinite pains.

When the council was assembled, Madame de Tourville set forth her plan. She proposed that the dukes should come up secretly with their army, that they should procure, by force or by persuasion, a goodly number of boats, and go down the river into Bordeaux, shouting: "Vive Condé! Down with Mazarin!"

In this way Madame la Princesse's entry would assume the proportions of a veritable triumph, and Madame de Tourville, by a détour, would accomplish her famous project of taking forcible possession of Bordeaux, and thus inspiring the queen with a wholesome terror of an army whose opening move resulted so brilliantly.

Lenet nodded approval of everything, interrupting Madame de Tourville with admiring exclamations. When she had completed the exposition of her plan, he said: —

"Magnificent, madame! be good enough now to sum up your conclusions."

"That I can do very easily, in two words," said the good woman, triumphantly, warming up at the sound of her own voice. "Amid the hail-storm of bullets, the clanging of bells, and the cries, whether of rage or affection, of the people, a handful of weak women will be seen, intrepidly fulfilling their noble mission; a child in its mother's arms will appeal to the Parliament for protection. This touching spectacle cannot fail to move the most savage hearts. Thus we shall conquer, partly by force, partly by the justice of our cause; and that, I think, is Madame la Princesse's object."

The summing up aroused even more enthusiasm than the original speech. Madame la Princesse applauded; Claire, whose desire to be sent with a flag of truce to Île Saint-Georges became more and more earnest, applauded; the captain of the guards, whose business it was to thirst for battle, applauded; and Lenet did more than applaud; he took Madame de Tourville's hand, and pressed it with no less respect than emotion.

"Madame," he cried, "even if I had not known how great is your prudence, and how thoroughly you are acquainted, both by intuition and study, with the great civil and military question which

engages our attention, I should assuredly be convinced of it now, and should prostrate myself before the most useful adviser that her Highness could hope to find."

"Is she not?" said the princess; "isn't it a fine scheme, Lenet? I agree with her entirely. Come, Vialas, give Monsieur le Duc d'Enghien the little sword I had made for him, and his helmet and coat of mail."

"Yes! do so, Vialas. But a single word first, by your leave, madame," said Lenet; while Madame de Tourville, who was all swollen up with pride, began to lose confidence, in view of her vivid remembrance of the subtle arguments with which Lenet was accustomed to combat her plans.

"Well," said the princess, "what is it now?"

"Nothing, madame, nothing at all; for no plan could be proposed more in harmony with the character of an august princess like yourself, and it could only emanate from your household."

These words caused Madame de Tourville to puff out anew, and brought back the smile to the lips of Madame la Princesse, who was beginning to frown.

"But, madame," pursued Lenet, watching the effect of this terrible *but* upon the face of his sworn foe, "while I adopt, I will not say simply without repugnance, but with enthusiasm, this plan, which seems to me the only available one, I will venture to propose a slight modification."

Madame de Tourville stiffened up, and prepared for defence. Madame la Princesse's smile disappeared.

Lenet bowed and made a motion with his hand as if asking permission to continue.

"My heart is filled with a joy I cannot express," he said, "in anticipation of the clanging of the bells, and the joyous acclamations of the people. But I haven't the confidence I would like to have in the hail-storm of bullets to which Madame has referred."

Madame de Tourville assumed a martial air. Lenet bowed even lower than before, and continued, lowering his voice a half-tone: —

"Assuredly it would be a grand spectacle to see a woman and her child walking calmly along in the midst of a tempest which would terrify most men. But I should fear that one of those same bullets, following a blind impulse, as brutal, unintelligent things are wont to do, might give Monsieur de Mazarin the advantage over us, and spoil our plan, which is so magnificent in other respects. I am of the opinion, expressed so eloquently by Madame de Tourville, that the young prince and his august mother should open up the way to the Parliament-house for us, — but by petition, not by arms. I think, in short, that it will be much better to move in that way the most savage hearts, than to conquer by other means the most valiant. I think that the former of these methods presents infinitely more chances of success, and that the object of Madame la Princesse is, before all else, to gain admission to Bordeaux. Now, I say that nothing is less sure than our success in gaining admission to Bordeaux, if we take the chances of a battle."

"You see," said Madame de Tourville, sourly, "that monsieur proposes, as usual, to demolish my plan, bit by bit, and quietly substitute a plan of his own therefor."

"I!" cried Lenet, while the princess reassured Madame de Tourville with a smile and a glance, — "I, the most enthusiastic of your admirers! no, a thousand times no! But I say that an officer in his Majesty's service named Dalvimar has arrived in the city from Blaye, whose mission is to arouse the officials and the people against her Highness. And I say that if Monsieur de Mazarin can put an end to the war at a single blow he will do it; that is why I fear Madame de Tourville's hail-storm of bullets, the more intelligent ones even more perhaps than the brutal, unreasoning ones."

This last argument seemed to make Madame la Princesse reflect.

"You always know everything, Monsieur Lenet," retorted Madame de Tourville, in a voice trembling with wrath.

"A good hot action would be a fine thing, however," said the captain of the guards, drawing himself up and marking time with his foot as if he were on the parade ground; he was an old soldier, whose sole reliance was upon force, and who would have shone in action.

Lenet trod upon his foot, looking at him the while with a most amiable smile.

"Yes, captain," said he; "but do you not think also that Monsieur le Duc d'Enghien is necessary to our cause, and that with him dead or a prisoner we are deprived of the real generalissimo of our armies?"

The captain of the guards, who knew that to bestow this pompous title of generalissimo upon a prince of seven years made himself, in reality, the commander-in-chief of the army, realized what a fool he had made of himself, and warmly supported Lenet's opinion.

Meanwhile Madame de Tourville had gone to the princess's side and was talking with her in an undertone. Lenet saw that the battle was not yet won; indeed, the next moment her Highness turned to him and said, testily: —

"It is very strange that you should be so bent upon demolishing what was so well constructed."

"Your Highness is in error," said Lenet. "I have never been persistent in offering such advice as I have had the honor to give you, and, if I demolish, it is with the intention of rebuilding. If, notwithstanding the arguments I have had the honor to submit to you, your Highness still desires to seek death with your son, you are at liberty to do so, and we will face death at your side; that is a very simple thing to do, and the first footman in your retinue, or the meanest scoundrel in the city will do as much. But if we wish to succeed, despite Mazarin, despite the queen, despite the Parliament, despite Mademoiselle Nanon de Lartigues, despite all the disadvantages inseparable from the feeble state to which we are reduced, this, in my opinion, is what we must do."

"Monsieur," cried Madame de Tourville, impetuously, catching Lenet's last sentence on the rebound, "there is no such thing as weakness, where we have on the one hand the name of Condé, and on the other two thousand of the men of Rocroy, Nordlingen, and Lens; and if we are weak under such circumstances, why, we are lost in any event, and no plan of yours, however magnificent it may be, will save us."

"I have read, madame," rejoined Lenet, calmly, enjoying in anticipation the effect of what he was about to say upon the princess, who was listening attentively in spite of herself, — "I have read that, in the reign of Tiberius, the widow of one of the most illustrious Romans, the noble-hearted Agrippina, who had been bereft of her husband Germanicus by persecution, a princess who could at will arouse to frenzy a whole army devoted to the memory of their dead general, preferred to enter Brundisium alone, to traverse Puglia and Campania clad in mourning, holding a child by each hand, pale-cheeked, eyes red with tears and bent upon the ground, while the children sobbed and gazed imploringly around; whereat all who saw — and from Brundisium to Rome there were above two million people — burst into tears, broke forth in threats and imprecations, and her cause was won, not at Rome alone, but before all Italy; not only in the judgment of her contemporaries, but in that of posterity; for she met with no shadow of resistance to her tears and lamentations, while lances would have been met with pikes, and swords with swords. To my mind there is a very strong resemblance between her Highness and Agrippina, between Monsieur le Prince and Germanicus, between Piso, the persecuting minister and poisoner, and Monsieur de Mazarin. With this strong resemblance between the personages concerned, the situation being almost identical, I ask that the same line of conduct be adopted; for, in my opinion, it is impossible that what succeeded so perfectly at one time could fail at another."

An approving smile played about Madame la Princesse's lips, and assured Lenet that his discourse had turned the tide of battle in his favor. Madame de Tourville took refuge in a corner of the room, veiling herself like an antique statue. Madame de Cambes, who had found a friend in Lenet, repaid him for his support in another matter, by nodding her head approvingly; the captain of the guards wept like a military tribune, and the little Duc d'Enghien cried: —

"Mamma, will you hold my hand, and dress me in mourning?"

"Yes, my son," the princess replied. "You know, Lenet, that it has always been my intention to present myself to the people of Bordeaux dressed in black."

"Especially," said Madame de Cambes, "as black is so wondrously becoming to your Highness,"

"Hush! little one," said the princess; "Madame de Tourville will cry it loud enough, without your saying it, even in a whisper."

The programme for the entry into Bordeaux was arranged according to Lenet's suggestions. The ladies of the escort were ordered to make their preparations. The young prince was dressed in a suit of white, trimmed with black and silver lace, and wore a hat with black and white plumes.

The princess herself was arrayed with an affectation of the greatest simplicity. In order to resemble Agrippina, by whom she was determined to take pattern in every respect, she wore plain black with no jewels of any sort.

Lenet, as the architect of the fête, exerted himself to the utmost to make it magnificent. The house in which he lived, in a small town some two leagues from Bordeaux, was constantly filled with partisans of Madame la Princesse, who were anxious to know, before she entered the city, what sort of entry would be most agreeable to her. Lenet, like a modern theatrical manager, suggested flowers, acclamations, and the ringing of bells; and, wishing to afford some satisfaction to the bellicose Madame de Tourville, he proposed that the princess should receive an artillery salute.

On the following day, May 31st, at the invitation of the Parliament, the princess set out for the city. One Lavie, *avocat-général* of Parliament, and a zealous partisan of Monsieur de Mazarin, had ordered the gates closed the night before, to prevent the entrance of the princess if she should present herself. But, on the other hand, the partisans of the Condés were not idle, and early in the morning the people, at their instigation, assembled in crowds amid shouts of, "Vive Madame la Princesse! Vive Monsieur le Duc d'Enghien!" and cut down the gates with axes; so that there was, finally, no opposition to this famous entry, which assumed the character of a triumph. Interested observers could estimate from these two occurrences the relative power of the leaders of the two factions which divided the city, for Lavie was acting directly under the advice of the Duc d'Épernon, while the leaders of the people were advised by Lenet.

The princess had no sooner passed through the gate than the scene which had been long in preparation was enacted upon a gigantic scale. A salute was fired by the vessels in the harbor, and the guns of the city replied. Flowers fell in showers from the windows, and were stretched in festoons across the street, so that the pavements were strewn with them and the air laden with their perfume. Loud acclamations arose from the lips of thirty thousand zealots of all ages and both sexes, whose enthusiasm increased with the interest inspired by Madame la Princesse and her son, and with their hatred for Mazarin.

However, the Duc d'Enghien was the cleverest actor in all the cast. Madame la Princesse gave up leading him by the hand, either because she feared to weary him, or so that he might not be buried under the roses; he was carried by his gentleman-in-waiting, so that his hands were free, and he sent kisses to right and left, and waved his plumed hat gracefully to the spectators.

The good people of Bordeaux are easily excited; the women soon reached a condition of frenzied adoration for the lovely child who wept so charmingly, and the old magistrates were moved to tears by the words of the little orator, who said: "Messieurs, take my father's place, for Monsieur le Cardinal has taken him away from me."

In vain did the partisans of the minister attempt to make some opposition; fists, stones, and even halberds enjoined discretion upon them, and they had no choice but to leave the triumphant rebels a clear field.

Meanwhile Madame de Cambes, with pale and serious face, drew the attention of many in the crowd as she walked along behind Madame la Princesse. As she reflected upon the glorious success of the day, she could not avoid the fear that it might bring forgetfulness of the resolution of the preceding day. She was walking along, as we have said, hustled and crowded by the adoring people, inundated with flowers and respectful caresses, shuddering with the fear of being taken up and carried in triumph, a fate with which some voices began to threaten Madame la Princesse, the

Duc d'Enghien, and their suite, when Lenet noticed her embarrassment, and gave her his hand to assist her in reaching a carriage.

"Ah! Monsieur Lenet, you are very fortunate," she said to him, replying to her own thought. "You succeed always in enforcing your opinion, and your advice is always followed. To be sure," she added, "it is always good, and the best results –"

"It seems to me, madame," rejoined Lenet, "that you have no reason to complain, as the only suggestion you have made has been adopted."

"How so?"

"Wasn't it agreed that you should try to take Île Saint-Georges?"

"Yes, but when shall I be allowed to open my campaign?"

"To-morrow, if you promise to fail."

"Never fear; I am only too likely to fulfil your wishes in that regard."

"So much the better."

"I do not fully understand you."

"We need to have Île Saint-Georges make a stubborn resistance, in order to induce the Bordelais to call for our two dukes and their army, who, I am free to say, although my opinion on that point comes dangerously near coinciding with Madame de Tourville's, seem to me eminently necessary under present circumstances."

"Unquestionably," said Claire; "but although I am not as learned in the art of war as Madame de Tourville, I had the impression that a place is not usually attacked until it has been summoned to surrender."

"What you say is perfectly true."

"Then you will send a flag of truce to Île Saint-Georges?"

"Most certainly!"

"Very well! I ask leave to carry the flag of truce."

Lenet's eyes dilated in surprise.

"You!" he said; "you! Why, have all our ladies become Amazons?"

"Gratify my whim, dear Monsieur Lenet."

"To be sure. The worst that can happen to us would be your taking Saint-Georges."

"It's agreed, then?"

"Yes."

"But promise me one thing."

"What is that?"

"That no one shall know the name or sex or rank of the flag of truce, unless her mission is successful."

"Agreed," said Lenet, giving Madame de Cambes his hand.

"When shall I start?"

"When you choose."

"To-morrow."

"To-morrow let it be."

"Good. See, Madame la Princesse and her son are just about going up on Monsieur le Président Lalasne's terrace. I leave my part in the triumph to Madame de Tourville. Pray excuse my absence to her Highness on the ground of indisposition. Bid the coachman drive me to the apartments assigned me. I will make my preparations, and reflect upon how I can best accomplish my mission, which naturally causes me some uneasiness, as it is the first of the kind I have ever undertaken, and everything in this world, they say, depends on one's beginning."

"*Peste!*" said Lenet. "I no longer wonder that Monsieur de La Rochefoucauld was upon the point of deserting Madame de Longueville for you; you are certainly her equal in many respects, and her superior in others."

"Possibly," said Claire. "I do not put the compliment aside altogether; but if you have any influence over Monsieur de La Rochefoucauld, dear Monsieur Lenet, I beg you to exert it to strengthen his devotion to his first flame, for his love terrifies me."

"We will do our best," said Lenet, with a smile. "This evening I will give you your instructions."

"You consent, then, to let me take Saint-Georges for you?"

"I must, since you wish it."

"And what about the dukes and the army?"

"I have in my pocket another means of bringing them hither."

Having given the address of Madame de Cambes to the coachman, Lenet smilingly took leave of her and returned to the princess.

II

On the day following Madame la Princesse's entry into Bordeaux, there was a grand dinner-party at Île Saint-Georges, Canolles having invited the principal officers of the garrison and the other governors of fortresses throughout the province.

At two o'clock in the afternoon, the hour appointed for the beginning of the repast, Canolles found himself surrounded by a dozen or more gentlemen, the majority of whom he then saw for the first time. As they described the great event of the preceding day, making sport of the ladies in Madame la Princesse's retinue, they bore but little resemblance to men about to enter upon what might be an obstinate conflict, and to whom the most momentous interests of the kingdom were intrusted.

Canolles, magnificent in his gold-laced coat, and with radiant face, set the example of gayety and animation. As dinner was about to be served, he said: —

"Messieurs, I beg your pardon, but there is still one guest missing."

"Who is it?" the young men asked, exchanging glances.

"The governor of Vayres, to whom I sent an invitation, although I do not know him, and who, just because I do not know him, is entitled to some indulgence. I beg, therefore, that you will pardon a delay of half an hour."

"The governor of Vayres!" exclaimed an old officer, accustomed to military regularity, and from whom the suggestion of delay brought forth a sigh, — "the governor of Vayres, if I mistake not, is the Marquis de Bernay; but he doesn't administer the government in person; he has a lieutenant."

"In that case," said Canolles, "if he doesn't come, his lieutenant will come in his place. He is himself undoubtedly at court, the fountain-head of favors."

"But, baron," said one of the guests, "it doesn't seem to me that he need be at court to secure promotion, for I know a certain commandant who has no reason to complain. *Dame!* captain, lieutenant-colonel, and governor, all within three months! That's a very pretty little road to travel, you must confess."

"And I do confess it," said Canolles, blushing, "and as I know not to whom to attribute such a succession of favors, I must, in good sooth, agree that there is some good genius in my household to bring me such prosperity."

"We have no question as to Monsieur le Gouverneur's good genius," said the lieutenant who received Canolles upon his arrival; "it is his merit."

"I do not deny the merit, far from it," said another officer; "I am the first to bear witness to it. But I will take the liberty of adding to it the patronage of a certain lady, the cleverest, most generous, most lovable of her sex, — after the queen, of course."

"No insinuations, count," rejoined Canolles, smiling at the last speaker; "if you have any secrets of your own, keep them for your own sake; if they concern your friends, keep them for your friends' sake."

"I confess," said an officer, "that when I heard a suggestion of delay, I supposed that our forgiveness was to be sought in favor of some gorgeous toilet. But I see that I was mistaken."

"Pray, do we dine without ladies?" asked another.

"*Dame!* unless I invite Madame la Princesse and her suite," said Canolles, "I hardly see whom we could have; besides, we must not forget, messieurs, that our dinner-party is a serious function; if we choose to talk business we shall bore nobody but ourselves."

"Well said, commandant, although the women do seem to be engaged in a veritable crusade against our authority at this moment; witness what Monsieur le Cardinal said in my presence to Don Luis de Haro."

"What did he say?" Canolles asked.

"You are very fortunate! Spanish women think of nothing but money, flirting, and lovers, while the women of France refuse to take a lover now until they have sounded him on political questions; so that," he added, despairingly, "lovers pass their time discussing affairs of State."

"For that reason," said Canolles, "the present war is called the 'war of women,' a very flattering title for us."

At that moment, just as the half-hour's reprieve expired, the door opened, and a servant announced that Monsieur le Gouverneur was served.

Canolles requested his guests to follow him; but as the procession was about to start, another announcement was heard in the reception-room.

"Monsieur le Gouverneur de Vayres!"

"Ah!" said Canolles; "it's very kind of him."

He stepped forward to meet the colleague in whom he expected to find a stranger, but started back in amazement.

"Richon!" he cried; "Richon, governor of Vayres!"

"Myself, my dear baron," returned Richon, affably, but with his customary serious expression.

"Ah! so much the better! so much the better!" said Canolles, cordially pressing his hand. "Messieurs," he added, "you do not know him, but I do; and I say, emphatically, that it would be impossible to intrust an important appointment to a more honorable man."

Richon looked proudly about upon the guests, and as he detected no other expression in the looks which were bent upon him than polite surprise tempered with much good-will, he said: —

"My dear baron, now that you have answered for me so handsomely, present me, I beg you, to those of your guests whom I haven't the honor of knowing."

As he spoke he glanced significantly at three or four gentlemen to whom he was an entire stranger.

Thereupon ensued an interchange of civilities in the courtly manner characteristic of the time. Before half an hour had passed Richon was on the friendliest terms with all the young officers, and might have asked any one of them for his sword or his purse. His sponsors were his well-known gallantry, his spotless reputation, and the noble spirit written in his eyes.

"*Pardieu!* messieurs," said the governor of Braunes, "there's no denying that, although he's a churchman, Monsieur de Mazarin has a keen eye for fighting-men, and has been managing matters well in that direction for some time. He scents war, and selects for governors, Canolles here, and Richon at Vayres."

"Is there to be fighting?" inquired Richon, carelessly.

"Is there to be fighting!" rejoined a young man fresh from the court. "You ask if there is to be fighting, Monsieur Richon?"

"Yes."

"Well! I ask you what condition your bastions are in?"

"They are almost new, monsieur; for in the three days I have been at the fort I have done more repairing and renovating than had been done in three years."

"Good! it won't be long before they will be tested," rejoined the young man.

"So much the better," said Richon. "What do fighting-men long for? War."

"The king can sleep soundly now," said Canolles, "for he holds the Bordelais in check by means of the two rivers."

"The person who put me where I am can count upon my devotion," said Richon.

"How long do you say you have been at Vayres, monsieur?"

"Three days. How long have you been at Saint-Georges, Canolles?"

"A week. Did you have a reception like mine, Richon? Mine was magnificent, and even yet I haven't thanked these gentlemen sufficiently. There were bells ringing and drums beating, and

acclamations. Cannon were the only thing missing, but I have been promised some within a few days, and that consoles me."

"My reception, my dear Canolles, was as modest as yours was splendid. I was ordered to introduce a hundred men into the place, a hundred men of the Turenne regiment, and I was in a quandary how I was to do it, when my commission, signed by Monsieur d'Épernon, arrived at Saint-Pierre, where I then was. I set out at once, handed my commission to the lieutenant, and took possession of the place without drum or trumpet. At present I am there."

Canolles, who smiled at the beginning, was conscious of an indefinable presentiment of evil from the tone in which these last words were uttered.

"And you are settled there?" he asked Richon.

"I am putting things in order," Richon replied tranquilly.

"How many men have you?"

"In the first place, the hundred men of the Turenne regiment, old soldiers of Rocroy, who can be depended upon; also a company I am forming in the town; as fast as recruits come in, I take them in hand, tradesmen, workingmen, youths, about two hundred in all; lastly, I am expecting a reinforcement of a hundred or a hundred and fifty men, levied by an officer of the province."

"Captain Ramblay?" inquired one of the guests.

"No, Captain Cauvignac."

"I don't know him," said several voices.

"I do," said Canolles.

"Is he a stanch royalist?"

"I should not dare to say. I have every reason to think, however, that Captain Cauvignac is a creature of Monsieur le Duc d'Épernon and very devoted to him."

"That answers the question; any man who is devoted to the duke is devoted to his Majesty."

"He's a sort of scout sent on ahead to beat up the country for the king," said the old officer, who was making up for the time lost in waiting. "I have heard of him in that connection."

"Is his Majesty on his way hither?" asked Richon, with his customary tranquil manner.

"He should be at least as far as Blois," replied the young man just from the court.

"Are you sure of it?"

"Quite sure. His army will be commanded by Maréchal de la Meilleraie, who is to effect a junction in this neighborhood with Monsieur le Duc d'Épernon."

"At Saint-Georges, perhaps?"

"Rather at Vayres," said Richon. "Monsieur de la Meilleraie comes from Bretagne, and Vayres is on his road."

"The man who happens to be where the two armies come together will have to look well to his bastions," said the governor of Braunes. "Monsieur de la Meilleraie has thirty guns, and Monsieur d'Épernon twenty-five."

"They will make a fine show," said Canolles; "unfortunately, we shall not see it."

"True," said Richon, "unless some one of us declares for the princes."

"But Canolles is sure to come in for a volley from somebody. If he declares for the princes he'll have Monsieur de la Meilleraie and Monsieur d'Épernon about his ears; if he remains true to his Majesty he'll taste the fire of the Bordelais."

"Oh! as to the latter," said Canolles, "I don't consider them very terrible, and I confess that I am a little ashamed to have no worthier antagonist. Unfortunately, I am for his Majesty body and soul, and I must be content with a tradesmen's war."

"They'll give you that, never fear," said Richon.

"Have you any basis for conjecture on that subject?" queried Canolles.

"I have something better than that," said Richon. "I have certain knowledge. The council of citizens has decided to take Île Saint-Georges first of all."

"Good," said Canolles, "let them come; I am ready for them."

The conversation had reached this stage and the dessert had just been served, when they heard drums beating at the entrance of the fortress.

"What does that mean?" said Canolles.

"*Pardieu!*" exclaimed the young officer who had brought the news from court, "it would be curious if they should attack you at this moment; an assault and escalade would be a delightful after-dinner diversion!"

"Deuce take me! it looks very much like it," said the old officer; "these wretched cads never fail to disturb you at your meals. I was at the outposts at Charenton at the time of the war in Paris, and we could never breakfast or dine in peace."

Canolles rang; the orderly on duty in the antechamber entered.

"What is going on?" Canolles asked.

"I don't know yet, Monsieur le Gouverneur; some messenger from the king or from the city, no doubt."

"Inquire, and let me know."

The soldier hastened from the room.

"Let us return to the table, messieurs," said Canolles to his guests, most of whom had left their seats. "It will be time enough to leave the table when we hear the cannon."

All the guests resumed their seats with smiling faces. Richon alone, over whose features a cloud had passed, still seemed restless, and kept his eyes fixed upon the door, awaiting the soldier's return. But an officer with drawn sword appeared in his stead.

"Monsieur le Gouverneur," said he, "a flag of truce."

"A flag of truce from whom?"

"From the princes."

"Coming from where?"

"From Bordeaux."

"From Bordeaux!" all the guests save Richon repeated in chorus.

"Oho! so war is really declared, is it," said the old officer, "that they send flags of truce?"

Canolles reflected a moment, and during that moment his features assumed as grave an expression as the circumstances demanded.

"Messieurs," said he, "duty before everything. I shall probably find myself confronted with a question not easy to solve in connection with this message from my Bordeaux friends, and I cannot say when I shall be able to join you again –"

"No! no!" cried the guests as one man. "Allow us to take our leave, commandant; this incident is notice to us to return to our respective posts, and we must separate at once."

"It was not for me to suggest it, messieurs," said Canolles, "but as the suggestion comes from you I am bound to say that it would be the more prudent course. Bring out the horses or carriages of these gentlemen."

As hurried in their movements as if they were already on the battlefield, the guests having been ferried ashore, vaulted into the saddle, or entered their carriages and rode rapidly away, followed by their escorts, in the direction of their respective residences.

Richon was the last to take his leave.

"Baron," said he, "I did not want to leave you as the others did, as we have known each other longer than you have known any of them. Adieu; give me your hand, and good luck to you!"

Canolles gave him his hand.

"Richon," said he, looking earnestly into his face, "I know you; you have something on your mind; you do not tell it to me, for it probably is not your secret. However, you are moved, – and when a man of your temperament is moved, it's for no small matter."

"Are we not about to part?" said Richon.

"Yes, and so were we about to part when we took leave of each other at Biscarros's inn, but you were calm then."

Richon smiled sadly.

"Baron," said he, "I have a presentiment that we shall never meet again!"

Canolles shuddered at the profoundly melancholy inflection in the partisan's ordinarily firm voice.

"Ah, well!" said he, "if we do not meet again, Richon, it will be because one of us has died the death of a brave man; and in that case the one who dies will be sure, at all events, of surviving in the heart of a friend! Embrace me, Richon; you wished me good luck; I wish you good courage!"

The two men embraced warmly, and for some seconds their noble hearts beat against each other.

When they parted, Richon wiped away a tear, the first, perhaps, that ever dimmed his proud glance; then, as if he feared that Canolles might see the tear, he hurried from the room, ashamed, no doubt, to have exhibited such a sign of weakness to a man whose courage was so well known to him.

III

The dining-hall was left untenanted, save by Canolles and the officer who announced the flag of truce, and who was still standing beside the door.

"What are Monsieur le Gouverneur's orders?" he said, after a brief pause.

Canolles, who was deep in thought, started at the voice, raised his head, and shook off his preoccupation.

"Where is the flag of truce?" he asked.

"In the armory, monsieur."

"By whom is he accompanied?"

"By two of the Bordeaux militia."

"What is he?"

"A young man, so far as I can judge; he wears a broad-brimmed hat, and is wrapped in a great cloak."

"In what terms did he announce himself?"

"As the bearer of letters from Madame la Princesse and the Parliament of Bordeaux."

"Request him to wait a moment," said Canolles, "and I will be at his service."

The officer left the room to perform his errand, and Canolles was preparing to follow him, when a door opened, and Nanon, pale and trembling, but with an affectionate smile upon her lips, made her appearance.

"A flag of truce, my dear," she said, grasping the young man's hand. "What does it mean?"

"It means, dear Nanon, that the good people of Bordeaux propose either to frighten me or seduce me."

"What have you decided?"

"To receive him."

"Is there no way to avoid it?"

"Impossible. It is one of the customs which must be followed."

"Oh! *mon Dieu!*"

"What's the matter, Nanon?"

"I'm afraid –"

"Of what?"

"Didn't you say that the mission of this flag of truce was to frighten you or seduce you?"

"Of course; a flag of truce is good for nothing else. Are you afraid he'll frighten me?"

"Oh, no! but he may perhaps seduce you –"

"You insult me, Nanon."

"Alas! my dear, I only say what I am afraid of –"

"You distrust me to that extent? For what do you take me, pray?"

"For what you are, Canolles; a noble heart, but easily moved."

"Well, well!" laughed Canolles; "in God's name, who is this flag of truce? Can it be Dan Cupid in person?"

"Perhaps."

"Why, have you seen him?"

"I haven't seen him, but I heard his voice. It's a very soft voice for a flag of truce."

"You are mad, Nanon! let me do my duty. It was you who made me governor."

"To defend me, my dear."

"Well, do you think me dastard enough to betray you? Really, Nanon, you insult me by placing so little confidence in me!"

"You are determined, then, to see this young man?"

"I must, and I shall take it very ill of you if you make any further objection to my fulfilling my duty in that respect."

"You are free to do as you please, my dear," said Nanon, sadly. "One other word – "

"Say it."

"Where shall you receive him?"

"In my cabinet."

"Canolles, one favor – "

"What is it?"

"Receive him in your bedroom instead of your cabinet."

"What have you in your head?"

"Don't you understand?"

"No."

"My room opens into yours."

"And you will listen?"

"Behind your bed-curtains, if you will allow me." "Nanon!"

"Let me be near you, dear. I have faith in my star; I shall bring you luck."

"But, Nanon, suppose this flag of truce – "

"Well?"

"Should have some State secret to tell me?"

"Can you not intrust a State secret to her who has intrusted her life and her fortune to you?"

"Very well! listen to us, Nanon, if you insist upon it; but don't detain me any longer; the messenger is waiting for me."

"Go, Canolles, go; but, first, accept my loving thanks for your kindness to me!"

And the young woman would have kissed her lover's hand.

"Foolish girl!" said Canolles, pressing her to his heart and kissing her on the forehead; "so you will be – "

"Behind the curtains of your bed. There I can see and hear."

"Whatever else you do, don't laugh, Nanon, for these are serious matters."

"Have no fear," said Nanon. "I won't laugh."

Canolles ordered the messenger to be introduced, and passed into his own apartment, a room of great size, furnished under Charles IX. in a style of severe simplicity. Two candelabra were burning upon the chimney-piece, but their feeble glimmer was quite inadequate to light the immense apartment; the alcove at the farther end was entirely in shadow.

"Are you there, Nanon?" Canolles asked.

A stifled "Yes" reached his ears.

At that moment he heard steps in the corridor. The sentinel presented arms; the messenger entered and followed his introducer with his eyes, until he was, or thought he was, alone with Canolles. Then he removed his hat and threw back his cloak; immediately a mass of blond locks fell down over a pair of shapely shoulders, the graceful, willowy form of a woman appeared under the gold baldric, and Canolles, by the sad, sweet expression of her face, recognized the Vicomtesse de Cambes.

"I told you that I would seek you," she said, "and I keep my word; here I am."

Canolles clasped his hands and fell upon a chair in speechless amazement, and an agony of fear.

"You! you!" he muttered. "*Mon Dieu!* why are you here; what seek you here?"

"I have come to ask you, monsieur, if you still remember me."

Canolles heaved a heart-breaking sigh, and put his hands before his eyes, seeking to banish the ravishing but fatal apparition.

Everything was made clear to him in an instant; Nanon's alarm, her pallor, her trembling, and, above all, her desire to be present at the interview. Nanon, with the keen eyes of jealousy, had detected a woman in the flag of truce.

"I have come to ask you," continued Claire, "if you are ready to carry out the engagement you entered into with me in the little room at Jaulnay, – to send your resignation to the queen, and enter the service of the princes."

"Oh! silence! silence!" cried Canolles.

Claire shuddered at the accent of utter dismay in the commandant's voice, and glanced uneasily about the room.

"Are we not alone here?" she asked.

"We are, madame; but may not some one hear us through the walls?"

"I thought that the walls of Fort Saint-Georges were more solid than that," said Claire with a smile.

Canolles made no reply.

"I have come to ask you," Claire resumed, "how it happens that I have heard nothing of you during the eight or ten days you have been here, – so that I should still know nothing as to who is governor of Île Saint-Georges, had not chance, or public rumor, informed me that it is the man who swore to me, barely twelve days since, that his disgrace was the best of good fortune, since it enabled him to devote his arm, his courage, his life, to the party to which I belong."

Nanon could not repress a movement, which made Canolles jump and Madame de Cambes turn her head.

"Pray, what was that?" she demanded.

"Nothing," Canolles replied; "one of the regular noises of this old room. There is no end to the dismal creaking and groaning here."

"If it is anything else," said Claire, laying her hand upon Canolles' arm, "be frank with me, baron, for you must realize the importance of this interview between us, when I decided to come myself to seek you."

Canolles wiped the perspiration from his brow, and tried to smile.

"Say on," said he.

"I reminded you a moment since of your promise, and asked you if you were ready to keep it."

"Alas, madame," said Canolles, "it has become impossible."

"Why so?"

"Because since that time many unforeseen events have happened, many ties which I thought broken forever have been formed anew; for the punishment which I knew I had merited, the queen has substituted a recompense of which I am unworthy; to-day I am united to her Majesty's party by – gratitude."

A sigh floated out upon the air. Poor Nanon doubtless was expecting a different word from the one that ended the sentence.

"Say by ambition, Monsieur de Canolles, and I can understand it. You are nobly born; at twenty-eight you are made lieutenant-colonel, and governor of a fortress; it's all very fine, I know; but it is no more than the fitting reward of your merit, and Monsieur de Mazarin is not the only one who appreciates it."

"Madame," said Canolles, "not another word, I beg."

"Pardon, monsieur," returned Claire, "but on this occasion it is not the Vicomtesse de Cambes who speaks to you, but the envoy of Madame la Princesse, who is intrusted with a mission to you, – a mission which she must now fulfil."

"Speak, madame," said Canolles, with a sigh which was much like a groan.

"Very well! Madame la Princesse, being aware of the sentiments which you expressed, in the first place at Chantilly, and afterwards at Jaulnay, and being anxious to know to what party you really belong, determined to send you a flag of truce to make an attempt to secure the fortress; this attempt, which another messenger might have made with much less ceremony, perhaps, I undertook to make,

thinking that I should have more chance of success, knowing, as I do, your secret thoughts on the subject."

"Thanks, madame," said Canolles, tearing his hair; for, during the short pauses in the dialogue, he could hear Nanon's heavy breathing.

"This is what I have to propose to you, monsieur, in the name of Madame la Princesse, let me add; for if it had been in my own name," continued Claire, with her charming smile, "I should have reversed the order of the propositions."

"I am listening," said Canolles, in a dull voice.

"I propose that you surrender Île Saint-Georges on one of the three conditions which I submit to your choice. The first is this, – and pray remember that it does not come from me: the sum of two hundred thousand livres – "

"Oh, madame, go no further," said Canolles, trying to break off the interview at that point. "I have been intrusted by the queen with the post of commandant at Île Saint-Georges, and I will defend it to the death."

"Remember the past, monsieur," said Claire, sadly; "that is not what you said to me at our last interview, when you proposed to abandon everything to follow me, when you had the pen already in your hand to offer your resignation to the persons for whom you propose to sacrifice your life to-day."

"I might have had that purpose, madame, when I was free to choose my own road; but to-day I am no longer free – "

"You are no longer free!" cried Claire, turning pale as death; "how am I to understand that? What do you mean?"

"I mean that I am in honor bound."

"Very well! then listen to my second proposition."

"To what end?" said Canolles; "have I not told you often enough, madame, that my resolution is immovable? So do not tempt me; you would do so to no purpose."

"Forgive me, monsieur," said Claire, "but I, too, am intrusted with a mission, and I must go through with it to the end."

"Go on," murmured Canolles; "but you are very cruel."

"Resign your command, and we will work upon your successor more effectively than upon you. In a year, in two years, you can take service under Monsieur le Prince with the rank of brigadier."

Canolles sadly shook his head.

"Alas! madame," said he, "why do you ask nothing of me but impossibilities?"

"Do you make that answer to me?" said Claire. "Upon my soul, monsieur, I do not understand you. Weren't you on the point of signing your resignation once? Did you not say to her who was beside you at that time, listening to you with such delight, that you did it freely and from the bottom of your heart? Why, I pray to know, will you not do here, when I ask you, when I beg you to do it, the very thing that you proposed to do at Jaulnay?"

Every word entered poor Nanon's heart like a dagger-thrust, and Canolles seemed to share her agony.

"That which at that time was an act of trifling importance would to-day be treachery, infamous treachery!" said Canolles, gloomily. "I will never surrender Île Saint-Georges, I will never resign my post!"

"Stay, stay," said Claire in her sweetest voice, but looking about uneasily all the while; for Canolles' resistance, and, above all, the constraint under which he was evidently laboring seemed very strange to her. "Listen now to my last proposition, with which I would have liked to begin, for I knew, and I said beforehand, that you would refuse the first two. Material advantages, and I am very happy to have divined it, are not the things which tempt a heart like yours. You must needs have other hopes than those of ambition and of fortune; noble instincts require noble rewards. Listen – "

"In Heaven's name, madame," Canolles broke in, "have pity on me!"

And he made as if he would withdraw.

Claire thought that his resolution was shaken, and, confident that what she was about to say would complete her victory, she detained him, and continued: —

"If, instead of a mere mercenary recompense, you were offered a pure and honorable recompense; if your resignation were to be purchased, — and you can resign without blame, for, as hostilities have not begun, it would be neither defection nor treachery, but a matter of choice, pure and simple, — if, I say, your resignation were to be purchased by an alliance; if a woman, to whom you have said that you loved her, whom you have sworn always to love, and who, notwithstanding your oaths, has never responded directly to your passion, if that woman should come to you and say: 'Monsieur de Canolles, I am free, I am wealthy, I love you; be my husband, let us go hence together, — go wherever you choose, away from all these civil commotions, away from France,' — tell me, monsieur, would you not then accept?"

Canolles, despite Claire's blushes, despite her fascinating hesitation, despite the memory of the lovely little château de Cambes, which he could have seen from his window, had not the darkness come down from heaven during the scene we have been describing, — Canolles remained firm and immovable in his determination; for he could see in the distance, a white spot in the deep shadow, the pale, tear-stained face of Nanon, trembling with agony, peering out from behind the Gothic curtains.

"Answer me, in Heaven's name!" exclaimed the viscountess, "for I am at a loss to understand your silence. Am I mistaken? Are you not Monsieur le Baron de Canolles? Are you not the same man who told me at Chantilly that you loved me, and who repeated it at Jaulnay, — who swore that you loved me alone in all the world, and that you were ready to sacrifice every other love to me? Answer! answer! in Heaven's name, answer!"

A moan came from behind the curtains, this time so distinct and unmistakable that Madame de Cambes could no longer doubt that a third person was present at the interview; her frightened eyes followed the direction taken by Canolles' eyes, and he could not look away so quickly that the viscountess did not catch a glimpse of that pale, immovable face, that form like the form of a ghost, which followed, with breathless interest, every word that was uttered.

The two women exchanged a glance of flame through the darkness, and each of them uttered a shriek.

Nanon disappeared.

Madame de Cambes hastily seized her hat and cloak, and said, turning to Canolles: —

"Monsieur, I understand now what you mean by duty and gratitude. I understand what duty it is that you refuse to abandon or betray; I understand, in short, that there are affections utterly impervious to all seduction, and I leave you to those affections and to that duty and gratitude. Adieu, monsieur, adieu!"

She started toward the door, nor did Canolles, attempt to detain her; but a painful memory stopped her. "Once more, monsieur," said she, "in the name of the friendship that I owe you for the service you were pleased to render me, in the name of the friendship that you owe me for the service I rendered you, in the name of all those who love you and whom you love — and I except not one — do not engage in this struggle; to-morrow, day after to-morrow, perhaps, you will be attacked at Saint-Georges; do not cause me the bitter pain of knowing that you are either conquered or dead."

At the words the young man started and came to himself.

"Madame," said he, "I thank you on my knees for the assurance you give me of your friendship, which is more precious to me than I can tell you. Oh! let them come and attack me! *Mon Dieu!* let them come on! I look for the enemy with more ardor than will ever impel him to come to me. I feel the need of fighting, I feel the need of danger to raise me in my own esteem; let the struggle come, and the danger that attends it, aye, death itself! death will be welcome since I know that I shall die rich in your friendship, strong in your compassion, and honored by your esteem."

"Adieu, monsieur," said Claire, walking toward the door.

Canolles followed her. In the middle of the dark corridor he seized her hand, and said, in so low a tone that he himself could hardly hear the words he uttered: —

"Claire, I love you more than I have ever loved you; but it is my misfortune that I can prove my love only by dying far away from you."

A little ironical laugh was Claire's only reply; but no sooner was she out of the château than a pitiful sob burst from her throat, and she wrung her hands, crying: —

"Ah! my God, he doesn't love me! he doesn't love me! And I, poor miserable wretch that I am, do love him!"

IV

Upon leaving Madame de Cambes, Canolles returned to his apartment. Nanon was standing like a statue in the centre of the room. Canolles walked toward her with a sad smile; as he drew nearer she bent her knee; he held out his hand, and she fell at his feet.

"Forgive me," said she; "forgive me, Canolles! It was I who brought you here, I who procured this difficult and dangerous post to be given you; if you are killed I shall be the cause of your death. I am a selfish creature, and I thought of naught but my own happiness. Leave me now; go!"

Canolles gently raised her.

"Leave you!" said he; "never, Nanon, never; you are sacred in my sight; I have sworn to protect you, defend you, save you, and I will save you, or may I die!"

"Do you say that from the bottom of your heart, Canolles, without hesitation or regret?"

"Yes," said Canolles, with a smile.

"Thanks, my noble, honorable friend, thanks. This life of mine, to which I used to attach so much value, I would sacrifice for you to-day without a murmur, for not until to-day did I know what you have done for me. They offered you money, – are not my treasures yours? They offered you love, – was there ever in the world a woman who would love you as I love you? They offered you promotion? Look you, you are to be attacked; very good! let us buy soldiers, let us heap up arms and ammunition; let us double our forces and defend ourselves; I will fight for my love, you for your honor. You will whip them, my gallant Canolles; you will force the queen to say that she has no more gallant officer than you; and then I will look to your promotion; and when you are rich, laden with glory and honor, you can desert me, if you choose; I shall have my memories to console me."

As she spoke Nanon gazed at Canolles, and she awaited such a response as women always expect to their exaggerated words, – a response, that is to say, as absurd and hyperbolical as the words themselves. But Canolles sadly hung his head.

"Nanon," said he, "so long as I remain at Île Saint-Georges, you shall never suffer injury, never submit to insult. Set your mind at ease on that score, for you have nothing to fear."

"Thanks," said she, "although that is not all I ask. Alas! I am lost," she muttered inaudibly; "he loves me no longer."

Canolles detected the glance of flame which shone in her eyes like a lightning-flash, and the frightful momentary pallor which told of such bitter suffering.

"I must be generous to the end," he said to himself, "or be an infamous villain. – Come, Nanon, come, my dear, throw your cloak over your shoulders, take your man's hat, and let us take a breath of the night air; it will do you good. I may be attacked at any moment, and I must make my nightly round of inspection."

Nanon's heart leaped for joy; she arrayed herself as her lover bade her, and followed him.

Canolles was no make-believe officer. He entered the service when he was little more than a child, and had made a real study of his profession. So it was that he made his inspection not simply as commandant, but as engineer. The officers, when they saw that he came in the guise of a favorite, supposed that he was a mere ornamental governor. But when they were questioned by him, one after another, as to the provisions for attack and defence, they were compelled to recognize in this apparently frivolous young man an experienced captain, and even the oldest among them addressed him with respect. The only things with which they could find fault were the mildness of his voice when giving orders, and the extreme courtesy with which he questioned them; they feared that this last might be the mask of weakness. However, as every one realized the imminence of the danger, the governor's orders were executed with such celerity and accuracy that the chief conceived as favorable an opinion of his soldiers as they had formed of him. A company of pioneers had arrived during the day. Canolles ordered the construction of works, which were instantly begun. Vainly did Nanon try

to take him back to the fort, in order to spare him the fatigue of a night passed in this way; Canolles continued his round, and gently dismissed her, insisting that she should return within the walls. Then, having sent out three or four scouts, whom the lieutenant recommended as the most intelligent of all those at his disposal, he stretched himself out upon a block of stone, whence he could watch the progress of the work.

But while his eyes mechanically followed the movement of mattocks and pickaxes, Canolles's mind wandered away from the material things which surrounded him, to pass in review, not only the events of the day, but all the extraordinary adventures of which he had been the hero since the day he first saw Madame de Cambes. But, strangely enough, his mind went back no farther than that day; it seemed to him as if his real life had begun at that time; that until then he had lived in another world, – a world of inferior instincts, of incomplete sensations. But from that hour there had been a light in his life which gave a different aspect to everything, and in the brightness of that new light, Nanon, poor Nanon, was pitilessly sacrificed to another passion, violent from its very birth, like every passion which takes possession of the whole life into which it enters.

After much painful meditation, mingled with thrills of heavenly rapture at the thought that he was beloved by Madame de Cambes, Canolles confessed to himself that it was duty alone which impelled him to act the part of a man of honor, and that his friendship for Nanon counted for nothing in his determination.

Poor Nanon! Canolles called his feeling for her friendship, and in love friendship is very near indifference.

Nanon also was keeping vigil, for she could not make up her mind to retire. Standing at a window, wrapped in a black cloak to avoid being seen, she followed, not the sad, veiled moon peering out through the clouds, not the tall poplars waving gracefully in the night wind, not the majestic Garonne, which seemed like a rebellious vassal gathering its strength to war against its master, rather than a faithful servant bearing its tribute to the ocean, – but the slow, painful struggle in her lover's mind; in that dark form outlined against the stone, in that motionless shadow lying beneath a lantern, she saw the living phantom of her past happiness. She, once so active and so proud and clever, had lost all her cleverness and pride and energy; it seemed as if her faculties, sharpened by her misery, became doubly acute and far-seeing; she felt another love springing into life in her lover's heart, as God, sitting aloft in the vast firmament, feels the blade of grass growing in the earth.

Not until dawn did Canolles return to his room. Nanon took her leave when she saw him coming, so that he had no idea that she had watched all night. He dressed himself with care, mustered the garrison anew, inspected by daylight the different batteries, especially those which commanded the left bank of the Garonne, ordered the little harbor to be closed by chains, stationed a number of boats provided with falconets and blunder-busses, reviewed his men, encouraged them with a few earnest, heartfelt words, and returned to his apartment once more, about ten o'clock.

Nanon was awaiting him with a smile upon her lips.

She was no longer the haughty, imperious Nanon, whose slightest caprice made Monsieur d'Épernon himself tremble; but a timid mistress, a shrinking slave, who had ceased to demand love for herself, but simply craved permission to love.

The day passed without other incident than the different developments of the drama which was being enacted in the hearts of the two young people. The scouts sent out by Canolles returned one after another. No one of them brought any definite news; but there was great excitement in Bordeaux, and it was evident that something was in preparation there.

Madame de Cambes, upon returning to the city, although she did not divulge the details of the interview, which lay hidden in the inmost recesses of her heart, made known its result to Lenet. The Bordelais loudly demanded that Île Saint-Georges should be taken. The people volunteered in crowds for the expedition.

The leaders could hold them back only by alleging the absence of an experienced officer to take charge of the enterprise, and of regular troops to carry it through. Lenet seized the opportunity to whisper the names of the two dukes and offer the services of their army; the suggestion was received with enthusiasm, and the very men who had voted to close the gates a few days before, were loudest in demanding their presence.

Lenet hastened to make known the good news to the princess, who at once assembled her council.

Claire feigned fatigue in order to avoid taking part in any decision adverse to Canolles, and withdrew to her chamber to weep at her ease.

There she could hear the shouts and threats of the mob. Every shout, every threat was directed against Canolles.

Soon the drum began to beat, the companies assembled; the sheriffs distributed weapons to the people, who demanded pikes and arquebuses; the cannon were taken from the arsenal, powder was distributed, and two hundred boats were in readiness to ascend the Garonne with the evening tide, while three thousand men were to march up the left bank and attack by land.

The river army was to be commanded by Espagnet, councillor of Parliament, a brave and judicious man; and the land forces by Monsieur de La Rochefoucauld, who had entered the city with about two thousand gentlemen. Monsieur le Duc de Bouillon, with a thousand more, was to arrive two days later, and Monsieur de La Rochefoucauld hastened the attack as much as possible, so that his colleague should not be present.

V

On the second day following that on which Madame de Cambes presented herself in the guise of a flag of truce at Île Saint-Georges, as Canolles was making his round upon the ramparts about two in the afternoon, he was informed that a messenger with a letter for him desired to speak with him.

The messenger was at once introduced, and handed his missive to Canolles.

Evidently there was nothing official about the document; it was a small letter, longer than it was wide, written in a fine, slightly tremulous hand, upon perfumed bluish paper of fine quality.

Canolles felt his heart beat faster at the mere sight of the letter.

"Who gave it to you?" he asked.

"A man of fifty-five to sixty years of age."

"Grizzly moustache and royale?"

"Yes."

"Slightly bent?"

"Yes."

"Military bearing?"

"Yes."

"That's all."

Canolles gave the man a louis, and motioned to him to withdraw at once.

Then, with wildly beating heart, he concealed himself in the corner of a bastion, where he could read the letter at his ease.

It contained only these two lines: —

"You are to be attacked. If you are no longer worthy of me, show yourself at least worthy of yourself."

The letter was not signed, but Canolles recognized Madame de Cambes as he had recognized Pompée; he looked to see if anybody was looking at him, and blushing like a child over his first love, he put the paper to his lips, kissed it ardently, and placed it upon his heart.

Then he mounted the crown of the bastion, whence he could follow the course of the Garonne well-nigh a league, and could see the whole extent of the surrounding plain.

Nothing was to be seen upon land or water.

"The day will pass like this," he muttered; "they won't come by daylight; they have probably halted to rest on the way, and will begin the attack this evening."

He heard a light step behind him, and turned. It was his lieutenant.

"Well, Monsieur de Vibrac, what news?" said Canolles.

"They say, commandant, that the princes' flag will float over Île Saint-Georges to-morrow."

"Who says that?"

"Two of our scouts who have just come in, and have seen the preparations the citizens are making."

"What answer did you make when they said that?"

"I answered, commandant, that it was all the same to me so long as I wasn't alive to see it."

"Ah! you stole my answer, monsieur."

"Bravo, commandant! we asked nothing better; and the men will fight like lions when they know that that is your answer."

"Let them fight like men, that's all I ask. What do they say as to the manner of the attack?"

"General, they are preparing a surprise for us," said De Vibrac, with a laugh.

"*Peste!* what sort of a surprise? this is the second warning I have received. Who leads the assailants?"

"Monsieur de La Rochefoucauld the land forces, Espagnet, councillor of Parliament, the naval forces."

"Very good!" said Canolles; "I have a little advice to give him."

"Whom?"

"The councillor."

"What is it?"

"To re-enforce the urban militia with some good, well-disciplined regiment, who can show the tradesmen how to receive a well-sustained fire."

"He hasn't waited for your advice, commandant; I think he must have been more or less of a soldier before he became a man of the law, for he has enlisted the services of the Navailles regiment for this expedition."

"The Navailles regiment?"

"Yes."

"My old regiment?"

"The same. It has gone over, it seems, bag and baggage, to the princes."

"Who is in command?"

"Baron de Ravailly."

"Indeed?"

"Do you know him?"

"Yes – a fine fellow, and brave as his sword. In that case it will be warmer than I supposed, and we shall have some fun."

"What are your orders, commandant?"

"That the posts be doubled to-night; that the troops retire fully dressed, with loaded muskets within reach. One half will stand guard, while the other half sleeps. Those who are on guard will keep out of sight behind the embankment. One moment – Have you informed anybody of the news brought by the scouts?"

"Nobody."

"Good; keep it secret for some little time yet. Select ten or twelve of your worst soldiers; you should have some fishermen, or poachers?"

"We have only too many of them, commandant."

"Well, as I was saying, select ten of them, and give them leave of absence till to-morrow morning. Let them go and throw their lines in the Garonne, and set their snares in the fields. To-night Espagnet and Monsieur de La Rochefoucauld will take them and question them."

"I don't understand –"

"Don't you understand that it is most essential that the assailants should believe that we are entirely unprepared for them? These men, who know nothing, will take their oaths with an air of sincerity, which will carry conviction because it will not be assumed, that we are sound asleep in our beds."

"Ah! excellent!"

"Let the enemy approach, let him disembark, let him plant his ladders."

"But when shall we fire on him?"

"When I give the word. If a single shot is fired from our ranks before I order it, the man who fires it shall die, my word for it!"

"The deuce!"

"Civil war is war twice over. It is important, therefore, that it be not carried on like a hunting party. Let Messieurs les Bordelais laugh, and laugh yourselves if it amuses you; but don't laugh until I give the word."

The lieutenant retired to transmit Canolles' commands to the other officers, who looked at one another in amazement. There were two men in the governor, – the courteous gentleman, and the implacable soldier.

Canolles returned to take supper with Nanon; but the supper was put ahead two hours, as he had determined not to leave the ramparts from dusk till dawn. He found Nanon running through a pile of letters.

"You can defend the place with confidence, dear Canolles," said she, "for it won't be long before you are re-enforced. The king is coming, Monsieur de La Meilleraie is coming with his army, and Monsieur d'Épernon is coming with fifteen thousand men."

"But, meanwhile, they have a week or ten days before them. Nanon," added Canolles, with a smile, "Île Saint-Georges is not impregnable."

"Oh! while you are in command I have no fear."

"Yes; but just because I am in command I may be killed. Nanon, what would you do in that case? Have you thought about it?"

"Yes," replied Nanon, smiling back at him.

"Very good! have your boxes ready. A boatman will be waiting at a certain spot; if you have to take to the water, four of my people who are good swimmers will be at hand, with orders not to leave you, and they will take you ashore."

"All precautions are useless, Canolles; if you are killed I shall need nothing."

Supper was announced. Ten times, while they sat at table, Canolles rose and went to the window, which looked upon the river, and before the end of the repast he left the table altogether; night was beginning to fall.

Nanon would have followed him.

"Nanon," said he, "go to your room, and give me your word that you will not leave it. If I knew that you were outside, exposed to the slightest danger, I would not answer for myself. Nanon, my honor is at stake; do not trifle with my honor."

Nanon offered Canolles her carmine lips, more brilliant in hue from the pallor of her cheeks, and went to her room, saying: —

"I obey you, Canolles; I choose that enemies and friends alike should know the man I love; go!"

Canolles left the room. He could not withhold his admiration from this strong nature, so quick to comply with his wishes, so responsive to his will. He had hardly reached his post ere the night came down, threatening and awe-inspiring, as it always is when it conceals in its dark depths a bloody secret.

Canolles took up his position at the end of the esplanade, which overlooked the course of the stream and both its banks. There was no moon; a veil of dark clouds overhung the earth. There was no danger of being seen, but it was almost impossible to see.

About midnight, however, it seemed to him that he could distinguish dark masses moving upon the left bank, and gigantic shapes gliding along the surface of the stream. But there was no other noise than the moaning of the night wind among the branches.

The masses ceased to move, the shapes became stationary at some distance. Canolles thought that he must have been mistaken, but he redoubled his watchfulness; his eager eyes pierced the darkness, his ear was awake to the slightest sound.

The clock on the fortress struck three, and the slow, mournful reverberation died away in the darkness.

Canolles was beginning to think that the warning he had received was a hoax, and he was on the point of retiring, when Lieutenant de Vibrac, who stood beside him, suddenly placed one hand upon his shoulder and pointed with the other toward the river.

"Yes, yes," said Canolles, "there they are; we have no time to lose. Go and wake the men who are off duty, and station them behind the wall. You told them, didn't you, that I would kill the first man who fired?"

"Yes."

"Well, tell them again."

By the first streaks of dawn long boats laden with men, who were laughing and talking in low tones, could be seen approaching the island, and there was a very pronounced eminence on the bank, which did not exist the night before. It was a battery of six guns which Monsieur de La Rochefoucauld had set up during the night, and the men in the boats had delayed their arrival because the battery was not ready to begin operations.

Canolles asked if the weapons were loaded, and upon being answered in the affirmative, bade the troops reserve their fire.

The boats came nearer and nearer, and there was soon light enough for Canolles to distinguish the cross-belts and peculiar hats worn by the Navailles regiment, to which, as we know, he formerly belonged. In the prow of one of the foremost boats was Baron de Ravailly, who had succeeded him in command of his company, and at the stern the lieutenant, who was his foster brother, a great favorite among his comrades because of his joyous nature, and his inexhaustible store of jokes.

"You will see," said he, "that they won't stir, and Monsieur de La Rochefoucauld will have to wake them up with his cannon. *Peste!* how they sleep at Saint-Georges; I'll surely come here when I'm ill."

"Dear old Canolles plays his rôle of governor like a paterfamilias," said Ravailly; "he's afraid his men will take cold if he makes them mount guard at night."

"Upon my soul," said another, "there's not a sentinel to be seen!"

"*Holà!*" cried the lieutenant, stepping ashore, "wake up, up there, and lend us a hand to come up."

Shouts of laughter arose along the whole line at this last pleasantry, and while three or four boats pulled toward the harbor, the rest of the force disembarked.

"I see how it is," said Ravailly; "Canolles prefers to have it appear that he was taken by surprise in order not to get into trouble at court. Let us return him courtesy for courtesy, messieurs, and kill no one. Once in the fort, mercy for all, except for the women, who may not ask it, *sarpejeu!* Don't forget that this is a war between friends, boys; I 'll run through the first man who unsheathes his sword."

The merriment broke out afresh at this command, which was given with true French gayety, and the soldiers joined in with the officers.

"Ah! my friends," said the lieutenant, "it does one good to laugh, but we mustn't let it interfere with what we have to do. Ladders and grappling-hooks!"

The soldiers thereupon drew forth long ladders from the boats, and advanced toward the wall.

At that, Canolles rose with his cane in his hand, and his hat on his head, like a man who was taking the fresh morning air for pleasure, and approached the parapet, which reached only to his waist.

It was light enough for him to be recognized.

"Ah! good-morning, Navailles," he said to the regiment; "good-morning, Ravailly; good-morning, Remonenq."

"Look, it's Canolles!" exclaimed the young officers; "are you awake at last, baron?"

"Why, yes! what would you have? we live like the King of Yvetot here, – early to bed, and late to rise; but what the devil are you doing at this time of night?"

"*Pardieu!*" said Ravailly, "I should think that you might see. We are here to besiege you, that's all."

"Well, why are you here to besiege me?"

"To take your old fort."

Canolles began to laugh.

"Come," said Ravailly, "you surrender, don't you?"

"But I must know first to whom I am surrendering. How happens it that Navailles is serving against the king?"

"Faith, my dear fellow, because we have turned rebels. On thinking it over we concluded that Mazarin was a downright rascal, unworthy to be served by gallant gentlemen; so we went over to the princes. And you?"

"My dear fellow, I am an enthusiastic Éperonist."

"Pshaw! leave your people there and come with us."

"Impossible – Ho! hands off the drawbridge chains down there! You know that those things are to be looked at from a distance, and it brings bad luck to touch them. Ravailly, bid them not touch the chains, or I'll fire on them," continued Canolles, frowning; "and I warn you, Ravailly, that I have some excellent marksmen."

"Bah! you are joking!" rejoined the captain. "Let yourself be taken; you are not in force."

"I am not joking. Down with the ladders! Ravailly, beware, I beg you, for it's the king's house you are besieging!"

"Saint-Georges the king's house!"

"*Pardieu!* look up and you will see the flag on the crown of the embankment. Come, push your boats off into the water, and put the ladders aboard, or I fire. If you want to talk, come alone or with Remonenq, and we will breakfast together, and talk as we eat. I have an excellent cook at Île Saint-Georges."

Ravailly began to laugh, and encouraged his men with a glance. Meanwhile another company was preparing to land.

Canolles saw that the decisive moment had arrived; and, assuming the firm attitude and serious demeanor befitting a man burdened with so heavy a responsibility as his, he cried: —

"Halt there, Ravailly! A truce to jesting, Remonenq! not another word or step, or I fire, as truly as the king's flag is above, and as your arms are raised against the lilies of France."

Suiting the action to the threat, he overturned with his strong arm the first ladder that showed its head over the stones of the rampart.

Five or six men, more eager than their fellows, were already on the ladder, and were overturned with it. They fell, and a great shout of laughter arose from besiegers and besieged alike; one would have said they were schoolboys at play.

At that moment a signal was given to indicate that the besiegers had passed the chains drawn across the mouth of the harbor.

Ravailly and Remonenq at once seized a ladder and prepared to go down into the moat, shouting:

—

"This way, Navailles! Escalade! escalade! up! up!"

"My poor Ravailly," cried Canolles, "I beseech you to stop where you are."

But at the same instant the shore battery, which had kept silent hitherto, flashed and roared, and a cannon-ball ploughed up the dirt all around Canolles.

"Go to!" said Canolles, extending his cane, "if you will have it so! Fire, my lads, fire all along the line!"

Thereupon, although not a man could be seen, a row of muskets appeared, pointing down at the parapet, a girdle of flame enveloped the crown of the wall, while the detonation of two huge pieces of artillery answered Monsieur de La Rochefoucauld's battery.

Half a score of men fell; but their fall, instead of discouraging their comrades, inspired them with fresh ardor. The shore battery replied to the battery on the rampart; a cannon-ball struck down the royal standard, and another killed one of Canolles' lieutenants, named D'Elboin.

Canolles looked around and saw that his men had reloaded their weapons.

"Fire!" he cried, and the order was executed as promptly as before.

Ten minutes later not a single pane of glass was left on the island. The stones trembled and burst in pieces; the cannon-balls knocked holes in the walls, and were flattened on the great flags; a dense smoke overhung the fort, and the air was filled with shrieks and threats and groans.

Canolles saw that Monsieur de La Rochefoucauld's artillery was doing the greatest amount of damage. "Vibrac," said he, "do you look out for Ravailly, and see that he doesn't gain an inch of ground in my absence. I am going to our battery."

He ran to the two pieces which were returning Monsieur de La Rochefoucauld's fire, and himself attended to loading and sighting them; in an instant three of the six guns on shore were dismounted, and fifty men were stretched on the ground. The others, who were not anticipating such a resistance, began to scatter and fly.

Monsieur de La Rochefoucauld, trying to rally them, was struck by a fragment of stone, which knocked his sword out of his hands.

Canolles, content with this result, left the captain of the battery to do the rest, and ran back to repel the assault, which was continued by the Navailles regiment, supported by Espagnet's men.

Vibrac had maintained his ground, but had received a bullet in his shoulder.

Canolles, by his mere presence, redoubled the courage of his troops, who welcomed him with joyful shouts.

"Pray pardon me," he cried to Ravailly, "for leaving you for a moment, my dear friend; I did it, as you may see, to dismount Monsieur de La Rochefoucauld's guns; but be of good cheer, here I am again."

As the captain, who was too excited to reply to the jest, – indeed, it may be that he failed to hear it amid the terrific uproar of artillery and musketry, – led his men to the assault for the third time, Canolles drew a pistol from his belt, and taking aim at his former comrade, now his enemy, fired.

The ball was guided by a firm hand and sure eye; it broke Ravailly's arm.

"Thanks, Canolles!" he cried, for he saw who fired the shot. "Thanks, I will pay you for that."

Notwithstanding his force of will, the young captain was forced to halt, and his sword fell from his hands. Remonenq ran to him and caught him in his arms.

"Will you come into the fort and have your wound dressed, Ravailly?" cried Canolles. "I have a surgeon who's as skilful in his line as my cook in his."

"No; I return to Bordeaux. But expect me again at any moment, for I will come, I promise you. The next time, however, I will select my own hour."

"Retreat! retreat!" cried Remonenq. "They are running over yonder. Au revoir, Canolles; you have the first game."

Remonenq spoke the truth; the artillery had done tremendous execution among the forces on shore, which had lost a hundred men or more. The naval contingent had fared little better. The greatest loss was sustained by the Navailles regiment, which, in order to uphold the honor of the uniform, had insisted upon marching ahead of D'Espagnet's citizen soldiers.

Canolles raised his pistol.

"Cease firing!" said he; "we will let them retreat unmolested; we have no ammunition to waste."

Indeed, it would have been a waste of powder to continue the fire. The assailants retired in hot haste, taking their wounded with them, but leaving the dead behind.

Canolles mustered his men and found that he had four killed and sixteen wounded. Personally he had not received a scratch.

"*Dame!*" he exclaimed, as he was receiving Nanon's joyful caresses ten minutes later, "they were not slow, my dear, to make me earn my governor's commission. What absurd butchery! I have killed a hundred and fifty men at least, and broken the arm of one of my best friends, to prevent his being killed outright."

"Yes," said Nanon, "but you are safe and sound, aren't you?"

"Thank God! surely you brought me luck, Nanon. But look out for the second bout! The Bordelais are obstinate; and, more than that, Ravailly and Remonenq promised to come again."

"Oh, well," said Nanon, "the same man will be in command at Saint-Georges, with the same troops to sustain him. Let them come, and the second time they will have a warmer reception than before, for between now and then you will have time to strengthen your defences, won't you?"

"My dear," said Canolles, confidentially, "one doesn't get to know a place all at once. Mine is not impregnable, I have discovered that already; and if my name were La Rochefoucauld, I would have Île Saint-Georges to-morrow morning. By the way, D'Elboin will not breakfast with us."

"Why not?"

"Because he was cut in two by a cannon-ball."

VI

The return of the attacking party to Bordeaux presented a doleful spectacle. The worthy tradesmen had left home triumphantly on the previous day, relying upon their numbers and upon the ability of their leaders; in fact, their minds were entirely at ease as to the result of the expedition, from sheer force of habit, which sometimes answers all the purposes of confidence to men who are in danger. For who was there among them who had not in his young days haunted the woods and fields of Île Saint-Georges? Where could you find a Bordelais who had not handled the oar, the fowling-piece, or the fisherman's net in the neighborhood which they were about to revisit as soldiers.

Thus the defeat was doubly depressing to the honest fellows; the locality shamed them no less than the enemy. So it was that they returned with hanging heads, and listened resignedly to the lamentation and wailing of the women, who ascertained the losses sustained by the vanquished forces, by counting them after the manner of the savages of America.

The great city was filled with mourning and consternation. The soldiers returned to their homes to describe the disaster, each in his own way. The chiefs betook themselves to the apartments occupied by the princess at the house of the president.

Madame de Condé was at her window awaiting the return of the volunteers. Sprung as she was from a family of warriors, wife of one of the greatest conquerors in the world, and brought up to look with scorn upon the rusty armor and absurd headgear of the militia, she could not restrain a feeling of uneasiness as she thought that those same citizens, her partisans, had gone out to contend against a force of old, well-disciplined soldiers. But there were three considerations from which she derived some comfort: in the first place, Monsieur de La Rochefoucauld was in command; in the second place the Navailles regiment had the right of the line; in the third place, the name of Condé was inscribed upon the banners.

But every one of these considerations, which gave the princess ground for hope, was the source of bitter grief to Madame de Cambes; even so did everything that grieved the illustrious dame become a source of triumph to the viscountess.

The Duc de La Rochefoucauld was the first to make his appearance, covered with dust and blood; the sleeve of his black doublet was torn open, and there were spots of blood upon his shirt.

"Is this true that I hear?" cried the princess, darting to meet him.

"What do you hear, madame?" he asked, coolly.

"That you were repulsed."

"You have not heard the whole, madame; to put it frankly, we have been beaten."

"Beaten!" cried the princess, turning pale; "beaten! it isn't possible!"

"Beaten!" murmured the viscountess; "beaten by Monsieur de Canolles!"

"How did it happen, I pray to know?" demanded Madame de Condé, in a freezing tone eloquent of her bitter indignation.

"It happened, madame, as all miscalculations happen, in play, in love, in war; we attacked those who were more clever or stronger than ourselves."

"Pray is this Monsieur de Canolles such a gallant fellow?" queried the princess.

Madame de Cambes' heart throbbed with delight.

"Oh! *mon Dieu!*" replied La Rochefoucauld with a shrug, "not more so than another! But as he had fresh soldiers, stout walls, and was on the lookout for us, having probably received warning of our attack, he had the advantage of our good Bordelais. Ah! madame, let me remark parenthetically that they are sorry soldiers! They ran away at the second volley."

"And Navailles?" cried Claire, heedless of the imprudence of such a demonstration.

"Madame," replied La Rochefoucauld, "the only difference between Navailles and the militia is that the militia ran away, and Navailles fell back."

"The only thing we lack now is to lose Vayres!"

"I don't say that we shall not," retorted La Rochefoucauld, coolly.

"Beaten!" exclaimed the princess, tapping the floor with her foot; "beaten by upstarts, commanded by a Monsieur de Canolles! the very name is absurd."

Claire blushed to the whites of her eyes.

"You think the name absurd, madame," rejoined the duke, "but Monsieur de Mazarin thinks it sublime. And I should almost venture to say," he added with a swift, keen glance at Claire, "that he's not alone in his opinion. Names are like colors, madame," he continued with his bilious smile; "there's no accounting for tastes concerning them."

"Do you think Richon is the man to allow himself to be whipped?"

"Why not? I have allowed myself to be whipped! We must wait until the vein of bad luck is exhausted; war is a game; one day or another we shall have our revenge."

"This wouldn't have happened," said Madame de Tourville, "if my plan had been adopted."

"That's very true," said the princess; "they are never willing to do what we suggest, on the ground that we are women and know nothing about war. The men have their own way and get beaten."

"*Mon Dieu*, yes, madame; but that happens to the greatest generals. Paulus Æmilius was beaten at Cannae, Pompey at Pharsalia, and Attila at Chalons. There are none but Alexander and yourself, Madame de Tourville, who have never been beaten. Let us hear your plan."

"My plan, Monsieur le Duc," said Madame de Tourville in her primmest manner, "was to lay siege to the fortress in regular form. They wouldn't listen to me, but preferred a *coup de main*. You see the result."

"Answer madame, Monsieur Lenet," said the duke; "for my own part I do not feel sufficiently strong in strategy to maintain the conflict."

"Madame," said Lenet, whose lips thus far had opened only to smile, "there was this to be said against your idea of a regular siege, that the Bordelais are not soldiers but citizens; they must have supper under their own roof and sleep in their own bed. Now, a regular siege requires those concerned in it to dispense with a multitude of conveniences to which our worthy burghers are accustomed. So they went out to besiege Île Saint-Georges as amateurs; do not blame them for having failed to-day; they will travel the four leagues and recommence the struggle as often as need be."

"You think that they will begin again?" the princess inquired.

"Oh! as to that, madame," said Lenet, "I am quite sure of it; they are too fond of their island to leave it in the king's hands."

"And they will take it?"

"Most assuredly, some day or other."

"Very good! on the day that they take it," cried Madame la Princesse, "I propose that this insolent Monsieur de Canolles shall be shot unless he surrenders at discretion."

Claire felt a deathly shudder run through her veins.

"Shot!" echoed the duke; "*peste!* if that's according to your Highness's ideas of war, I congratulate myself most sincerely that I am numbered among your friends."

"Let him surrender, then."

"I would like to know what your Highness would say if Richon were to surrender."

"We're not talking of Richon, Monsieur le Duc; Richon is not in question now. Bring me a citizen, a sheriff, a councillor, – somebody to whom I can talk and assure myself that this cup is not without bitterness to those who have put it to my lips."

"Luckily enough," said Lenet, "Monsieur d'Espagnet is even now at the door, soliciting the honor of an audience of your Highness."

"Admit him," said the princess.

Throughout this scene Claire's heart had beaten at times as if it would burst, and again had felt as if it would never beat again. She said to herself that the Bordelais would make Canolles pay dear for his triumph.

But it was much worse when Espagnet, by his protestations surpassed Lenet's confident anticipations.

"Madame," said he to the princess, "I beg that your Highness will have no fear; instead of four thousand men we will send eight thousand; instead of six pieces of cannon, we will take along twelve; instead of one hundred men, we will lose two, three, four hundred, if need be, but we will take Saint-Georges!"

"Bravo! monsieur," cried the duke; "spoken like a man! You know that I am with you, whether as your leader or as a volunteer, as often as you undertake this task. But bear in mind, I beg, that at the rate of five hundred men lost for each of four expeditions like this one, our army will be reduced one-fifth."

"Monsieur le Duc," rejoined Espagnet, "we have thirty thousand men in condition to bear arms at Bordeaux; we will drag all the cannon from the arsenal to the fortress, if necessary; we will discharge enough ammunition to reduce a mountain of granite to powder; I will myself cross the river at the head of the sappers, and we will take Saint-Georges; we have just sworn a solemn oath to do it."

"I doubt whether you will take Saint-Georges so long as Monsieur de Canolles is alive," said Claire in an almost inaudible voice.

"Then we will kill him, or have him killed, and take Saint-Georges afterward," rejoined Espagnet.

Madame de Cambes stifled the cry of dismay that came to her lips.

"Do you desire to take Saint-Georges?"

"Do we desire it!" cried the princess; "I should say as much; we desire little else."

"Very well!" said Madame de Cambes, "let me have my way, and I will put the place in your hands."

"Bah!" exclaimed the princess; "you promised much the same thing once before and failed."

"I promised your Highness to make an attempt to win over Monsieur de Canolles. That attempt failed because I found Monsieur de Canolles inflexible."

"Do you expect to find him more easy to approach after his triumph?"

"No; for that reason I did not say this time that I would turn over the governor to you, but the place itself."

"How so?"

"By admitting your soldiers into the very heart of the fortress."

"Are you a fairy, madame, that you undertake such a task?" La Rochefoucauld asked her.

"No, monsieur, I am a landowner," said the viscountess.

"Madame is pleased to jest," retorted the duke.

"Not at all, not at all," said Lenet. "I can imagine a world of meaning in the three words just uttered by Madame de Cambes."

"Then that is all I require," said the viscountess; "Monsieur Lenet's approval means everything to me. I say again that Saint-Georges is as good as taken, if I may be allowed to say four words in private to Monsieur Lenet."

"Madame," chimed in Madame de Tourville, "I too can take Saint-Georges, if I can have my way."

"Let Madame de Tourville first set forth her plan so that we can all hear," said Lenet, checking the effort Madame de Cambes was making to lead him into a corner; "then you shall whisper yours to me."

"Say on, madame," said the princess.

"I would start at night with twenty boats carrying two hundred musketeers; another party, equal in number, would creep along the right bank; four or five hundred more would ascend the left bank; meanwhile ten or twelve hundred Bordelais – "

"Bear in mind, madame," interposed La Rochefoucauld, "that you already have ten or twelve hundred men engaged."

"I will take Saint-Georges with a single company," said Claire; "give me Navailles, and I will answer for the result."

"'Tis worth considering," said the princess, while Monsieur de La Rochefoucauld, with his most contemptuous smile, gazed pityingly at these women who presumed to discuss military questions which embarrassed the boldest and most enterprising men.

"I will listen to you now, madame," said Lenet. "Come this way."

He led Claire to a window recess, where she whispered her secret in his ear.

Lenet emitted a joyful exclamation.

"Indeed, madame," said he, turning to the princess, "if you will give Madame de Cambes *carte blanche*, Saint-Georges is ours."

"When?" the princess demanded.

"When you please."

"Madame is a great captain!" sneered La Rochefoucauld.

"You may judge for yourself, Monsieur le Duc," said Lenet, "when you enter Saint-Georges in triumph, without firing a single shot."

"When that time comes I will approve."

"If it's as certain as you say," said the princess, "let everything be prepared for to-morrow."

"On such day and at such hour as your Highness pleases," said Claire. "I will await your commands in my apartment."

With that she bowed and withdrew; the princess, who had passed in an instant from wrath to hope, did the same, followed by Madame de Tourville. Espagnet, having renewed his protestations, took his departure, and the duke was left alone with Lenet.

VII

"My dear Monsieur Lenet," said the duke, "as the women seem to have taken charge of the war, I think it would be a good plan for the men to do a little intriguing. I have heard of a certain Captain Cauvignac, whom you commissioned to raise a company, and who is represented to me as an exceedingly clever sort of fellow. I sent for him; is there any way for me to see him?"

"He is waiting, monseigneur," said Lenet.

"Let him come in, then."

Lenet pulled a bell-cord, and a servant appeared.

"Send Captain Cauvignac hither," said Lenet.

An instant after, our old acquaintance appeared in the doorway; but, prudent as always, there he halted.

"Come hither, captain," said the duke; "I am Monsieur le Duc de La Rochefoucauld."

"I know you perfectly well, monseigneur," said Cauvignac.

"Ah! so much the better, then. You received a commission to raise a company?"

"It is raised."

"How many men have you at your disposal?"

"A hundred and fifty."

"Well armed and equipped?"

"Well armed, poorly equipped. I looked out for the weapons first of all, as the most essential thing. As to their equipment, as I am a very disinterested youth, and as I am moved principally by my affection for Messieurs les Princes, I came rather short of money, Monsieur Lenet having given me but ten thousand livres."

"You have enrolled a hundred and fifty men with ten thousand livres?"

"Yes, monseigneur."

"That's a marvellous achievement."

"I have methods known to myself alone, monseigneur, to which I have resorted."

"Where are your men?"

"They are here; you will see a fine company, monseigneur, especially in respect to their morals, – all men of rank; not a single nobody among them."

Monsieur de La Rochefoucauld walked to the window, and saw in the street a hundred and fifty individuals of all ages, sizes, and conditions, drawn up in two lines, and kept in place by Ferguzon, Barrabas, Carrotel, and their two colleagues, arrayed in their most magnificent attire. The rank and file resembled a party of bandits much more nearly than a company of soldiers.

As Cauvignac had said, they were very much out at elbows, but remarkably well armed.

"Have you received any orders concerning the place where your men are to be stationed?" the duke inquired.

"I have been ordered to lead them to Vayres, and I am simply awaiting the ratification of that order by Monsieur le Duc to turn over my company to Monsieur Richon, who is expecting its arrival."

"But do not you remain at Vayres with them?"

"My principles, monseigneur, forbid my ever doing such a foolish thing as to shut myself up within four walls, when I am at liberty to go where I please. I was born to lead the life of the patriarchs."

"Very good; go where you choose; but despatch your men to Vayres as soon as possible."

"Then they are really to form part of the garrison of that place?"

"Yes."

"Under Monsieur Richon's orders?"

"Yes."

"But, monseigneur, what are my men to do in the fort, where there are already about three hundred men?"

"You are very inquisitive."

"Oh! it's not mere curiosity that makes me ask, monseigneur; it is fear."

"What are you afraid of?"

"That they will be condemned to inaction, which would be a great pity; any man makes a mistake who allows a good weapon to rust."

"Don't be alarmed, captain, they won't rust; in a week they will have a chance to fight."

"In that case they may be killed!"

"It's very likely, – unless, in addition to your secret method of recruiting soldiers, you have a secret method of making them invulnerable."

"Oh! it's not that; but before they are killed I would like to have them paid for."

"Didn't you tell me that you had received ten thousand livres?"

"Yes, on account. Ask Monsieur Lenet; he is a man of method, and I am sure he will remember our agreement."

The duke turned to Lenet.

"It is true, Monsieur le Duc," said the straightforward counsellor; "we gave Monsieur Cauvignac ten thousand livres by way of advance for the first outlay; but we promised him a hundred crowns per man."

"In that case," said the duke, "we owe the captain thirty-five thousand francs?"

"Just so, monseigneur."

"They will be given you."

"Might it not be done now, Monsieur le Duc?"

"No, impossible."

"Why so?"

"Because you are one of us, and strangers must be settled with first of all. You understand that only those people we fear have to be coaxed."

"An excellent maxim!" said Cauvignac; "in all bargains, however, it is customary to fix a time for payment."

"Very well, let us say a week," said the duke.

"A week it is," said Cauvignac.

"But suppose that when the week has elapsed we have not paid?" suggested Lenet.

"In that case I resume control of my men."

"That is no more than fair," the duke agreed.

"And I can do what I choose with them?"

"Of course, as they belong to you."

"But – " Lenet began.

"Nonsense!" said the duke in a low tone, – "when we have them safely shut up in Vayres!"

"I don't like this sort of bargain," said Lenet, shaking his head.

"They are very common in Normandy," said Cauvignac; "they are called conditional sales."

"Is it agreed?" asked the duke.

"It is," Cauvignac replied.

"When will your men start?"

"At once, if you so order."

"I do so order."

"Then they are off, monseigneur."

The captain went down into the street and said two words in Ferguzon's ear, and the Cauvignac company, followed by all the idlers whom its strange appearance had attracted, marched away toward the harbor, where the three boats were waiting which were to transport it up the Dordogne to Vayres,

while its commander, faithful to the principle of freedom of action just enunciated by him to Monsieur de La Rochefoucauld, stood watching his men affectionately as they moved away.

Meanwhile the viscountess in her own apartments was sobbing and praying.

"Alas!" she moaned, "I could not save his honor unimpaired, but I will at least save the appearance of honor. He must not be conquered by force; for I know him so well that I know that he would die in defence of the place; it must be made to seem to him that he is overcome by treason. Then, when he knows what I have done for him, and, above all, my object in doing it, beaten as he is, he will bless me still."

Consoled by this hope, she rose, wrote a few words which she hid in her breast, and returned to Madame la Princesse, who had sent to ask her to go with her to look to the needs of the wounded and carry consolation and material assistance to the widows and orphans.

Madame la Princesse called together all who had taken part in the expedition. In her own name and that of the Duc d'Enghien, she praised the exploits of those who had distinguished themselves; talked a long time with Ravailly, who, although he carried his arm in a sling, declared his readiness to begin again the next morning; laid her hand upon Espagnet's shoulder, and told him that she looked upon him and his gallant Bordelais as the firmest supporters of her party; in fine, she succeeded so well in inflaming their minds that the most disheartened swore that they would have their revenge, and would have started for Île Saint-Georges on the instant.

"No, not at this moment," said the princess; "take to-day and to-night for rest, and day after to-morrow you shall be in possession there forever."

This assurance was welcomed by noisy demonstrations of warlike ardor. Every shout sank deep into the heart of the viscountess, for they were like so many daggers threatening her lover's existence.

"You hear what I have agreed, Claire," said the princess; "it is for you to see that I do not break my word to these good people."

"Never fear, madame," was the reply. "I will perform what I have promised."

That same evening a messenger set out in hot haste for Saint-Georges.

VIII

The next day, while Canolles was making his morning round, Vibrac approached him and handed him a note and a key which had been brought to the fortress during the night by a strange man, who left them with the lieutenant of the guard, saying that there was no reply.

Canolles started as he recognized the handwriting of Madame de Cambes, and his hand trembled as he broke the seal.

This is what the letter contained: —

"In my last note I gave you warning that Saint-Georges would be attacked during the night; in this, I warn you that Saint-Georges will be taken to-morrow; as a man, as an officer of the king, you run no other risk than that of being made prisoner; but Mademoiselle de Lartigues is in a very different situation, and the hatred which is entertained for her is so great that I would not answer for her life if she should fall into the hands of the Bordelais. Therefore persuade her to fly; I will furnish you with the means of flight.

"At the head of your bed, behind a curtain upon which are embroidered the arms of the lords of Cambes, to whom Île Saint-Georges formerly belonged, — Monsieur le Vicomte de Cambes, my late husband, presented it to the king, — you will find a door to which this is the key. It is one of the entrances to an extensive underground passage which passes beneath the bed of the river, and comes out at the manor of Cambes. Persuade Mademoiselle Nanon de Lartigues to fly through that passage — and, if you love her, fly with her.

"I answer for her safety upon my honor.

"Adieu. We are quits.

"VICOMTESSE DE CAMBES."

Canolles read and re-read the letter, shivering with fear at every word, growing paler with every reading; he felt that a mysterious power, which he could not fathom, enveloped him, and directed his actions. Might not this same underground passage, from his bedroom to the Château de Cambes, which was to serve to assure Nanon's safety, serve equally well, if the secret were generally known, to deliver Saint-Georges to the enemy?

Vibrac followed, upon the governor's expressive features, the emotions which were reflected there.

"Bad news, commandant?" he asked.

"Yes, it seems that we are to be attacked again to-night."

"The fanatics!" said Vibrac. "I should have supposed we had given them a sufficient dressing-down, and were not likely to hear of them again for a week at least."

"I have no need to enjoin the strictest watchfulness upon you," said Canolles.

"Have no fear, commandant. Probably they will try to surprise us, as they did before?"

"I have no idea; but let us be ready for anything, and take the same precautions that we took before. Finish my round of inspection for me; I must go to my room; I have some orders to give."

Vibrac touched his hat and strode away with the soldierly indifference to danger often exhibited by those whose profession brings them face to face with it at every step.

Canolles went to his room, taking every possible precaution not to be seen by Nanon; and having made sure that he was alone, locked himself in.

At the head of his bed were the arms of the lords of Cambes, upon a tapestry hanging surrounded by a band of gold.

Canolles raised the band, which was not attached to the tapestry, and disclosed the crack of a door. With the aid of the key which accompanied the viscountess's letter, he opened the door, and found himself confronted by the gaping orifice of a subterranean passage.

For a moment Canolles was struck dumb, and stood motionless, with the sweat pouring from his brow. This mysterious opening into the bowels of the earth terrified him in spite of himself.

He lighted a candle and prepared to inspect it.

First, he descended twenty steep stairs, then kept on down a gentler slope farther and farther into the depths.

Soon he heard a dull, rumbling noise, which alarmed him at first, because he could not think to what cause to attribute it; but as he went forward he recognized it as the roar of the river flowing above his head.

The water had forced its way through the arch in divers places at one time or another, but the crevices had evidently been detected in time and filled with a sort of cement, which became harder in course of time than the stones it bound together.

For about ten minutes Canolles heard the water rolling over his head; then the noise gradually died away until it was hardly more than a murmur. At last even the murmuring ceased, to be succeeded by perfect silence; and after walking a hundred feet or more in the silence, Canolles reached a staircase similar to the one by which he had descended, and closed at the top by a massive door which the united strength of ten men could not have moved, and which was rendered fire-proof by a thick iron plate.

"Now I understand," said Canolles; "she will await Nanon at this door and help her to escape."

He retraced his steps beneath the river-bed, ascended the staircase, re-entered his room, replaced the gold band, and betook himself deep in thought to Nanon's apartments.

IX

Nanon was, as usual, surrounded by maps, letters, and books. In her own way the poor woman was carrying on the war in the king's interest. As soon as she saw Canolles, she gave him her hand joyfully.

"The king is coming," said she, "and in a week we shall be out of danger."

"He is always coming," returned Canolles, with a sad smile; "unfortunately, he never arrives."

"Ah! but this time my information is reliable, my dear baron, and he will surely be here within the week."

"Let him make what haste he may, Nanon, he will arrive too late for us."

"What do you say?"

"I say that instead of wearing yourself out over these maps and papers, you would do better to be thinking of means of escape."

"Of escape? Why so?"

"Because I have bad news, Nanon. A new expedition is preparing, and this time I may be forced to yield."

"Very well, my dear; didn't we agree that I should share your fate and your fortune, whatever they may be?"

"No that cannot be; I shall be too weak, if I have to fear for you. Did they not propose at Agen to burn you at the stake? Did they not try to throw you into the river? Nanon, in pity for me, do not insist upon remaining, for your presence would surely make me do some cowardly thing."

"*Mon Dieu*, Canolles, you frighten me."

"Nanon, I implore you to give me your word that you will do what I bid you, if we are attacked."

"Why should I make such a promise?"

"To give me the strength to do my duty. Nanon, if you do not promise to obey me blindly, I swear that I will take the first opportunity to seek my own death."

"Whatever you wish, Canolles; I swear it by our love!"

"Thank God! Dear Nanon, my mind is much more at ease now. Get together your most valuable jewels. Where is your money?"

"In a small iron-bound chest."

"Have it all ready. You must take it with you."

"Oh! Canolles, you know that the real treasure of my heart is neither gold nor jewels. Canolles, is this all a mere pretext to send me away from you?"

"Nanon, you deem me a man of honor, do you not? Very good; upon my honor, what I now do is inspired solely by my dread of the danger that threatens you."

"You seriously believe that I am in danger?"

"I believe that Île Saint-Georges will be taken to-morrow."

"How, pray?"

"That I cannot say, but I believe it."

"And suppose I consent to fly?"

"I will do everything in my power to preserve my life, Nanon, I swear."

"Do you command, my dear, and I will obey," said Nanon, giving her hand to Canolles, regardless, in the intensity of her gaze, of two great tears which were rolling down her cheeks.

Canolles pressed her hand and left the room. Had he remained a moment longer, he would have wiped away those two pearls with his lips; but he placed his hand on the viscountess's letter, and that gave him strength to tear himself away.

It was a cruel day. The positive, definite threat, "To-morrow Île Saint-Georges will be taken," rang incessantly in Canolles' ears. How? – by what means? What ground had the viscountess for

speaking with such conviction? Was he to be attacked by water or by land? From what quarter was this invisible yet indubitable disaster to burst upon him? He was well-nigh mad.

So long as the daylight lasted, Canolles burned his eyes out in the glaring sunshine, looking everywhere for the enemy. After dark he strained his eyes trying to peer into the depths of the forest, scanning the sky-line of the plain, and the windings of the river; all to no purpose, he could see nothing.

When night had fallen altogether, he spied a light in one wing of the Château de Cambes; it was the first time he had detected the slightest sign of life there while he had been at Île Saint-Georges.

"Ah!" said he, with a long-drawn sigh, "there are Nanon's saviors at their post."

What a strange, mysterious problem is that of the workings of the human heart! Canolles no longer loved Nanon, Canolles adored Madame de Cambes, and yet, at the moment of separation from her whom he no longer loved, he felt as if his heart would break; it was only when he was far away from her, or when he was about to leave her, that Canolles felt the full force of the singular sentiment with which he regarded that charming person.

Every man in the garrison was on duty upon the ramparts. Canolles grew weary of gazing, and questioning the silence of the night. Never was darkness more absolutely dumb, or apparently more solitary. Not the slightest sound disturbed the perfect calmness, which seemed like that of the desert.

Suddenly it occurred to Canolles that it might be that the enemy proposed to make their way into the fort by the underground passage he had explored. It seemed highly improbable, for in that case they would have been unlikely to give him warning; but he resolved none the less to guard the passage. He ordered a barrel of powder to be prepared with a slow-match, selected the bravest man among his sergeants, rolled the barrel down upon the last step of the subterranean staircase, lighted a torch, and placed it in the sergeant's hand. Two other men were stationed near him.

"If more than six men appear in this passage," he said to the sergeant, "call upon them to withdraw; if they refuse, set fire to the match and give the barrel a roll; as the passage slopes down, it will burst in the midst of them."

The sergeant took the torch; the two soldiers stood motionless behind him, in its reddish glare, with the barrel of powder at their feet.

Canolles ascended the stairs with his mind at rest, in that direction at least; but as he stepped into his room he saw Nanon, who had seen him come down from the ramparts and return indoors, and had followed him in quest of news. She stared in open-mouthed dismay, at this yawning orifice of which she had no knowledge.

"Oh! *mon Dieu!*" said she, "what is that door?"

"The door of the passage through which you are to fly, dear Nanon."

"You promised me that you wouldn't require me to leave you except in case you were attacked."

"And I renew my promise."

"Everything about the island seems to be quiet, my dear."

"Everything seems quiet within, too, does it not? And yet there are a barrel of powder, a man, and a torch within twenty feet of us. If the man should put the torch to the powder, in one second not one stone would be left upon another in the whole fort. That is how quiet everything is, Nanon."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

Текст предоставлен ООО «ЛитРес».

Прочитайте эту книгу целиком, [купив полную легальную версию](#) на ЛитРес.

Безопасно оплатить книгу можно банковской картой Visa, MasterCard, Maestro, со счета мобильного телефона, с платежного терминала, в салоне МТС или Связной, через PayPal, WebMoney, Яндекс.Деньги, QIWI Кошелек, бонусными картами или другим удобным Вам способом.