

Chambers Robert William

The Maids of Paradise



Robert Chambers

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PREFACE

As far as the writer knows, no treasure-trains were actually sent to the port of Lorient from the arsenal at Brest. The treasures remained at Brest.

Concerning the German armored cruiser *Augusta*, the following are the facts: About the middle of December she forced the blockade at Wilhelmshafen and ran for Ireland, where, owing to the complaisance of the British authorities, she was permitted to coal.

From there she steamed towards Brest, capturing a French merchant craft off that port, another near Rochefort, and finally a third. That ended her active career during the war; a French frigate chased her into the port of Vigo and kept her there.

To conclude, certain localities and certain characters have been sufficiently disguised to render recognition improbable. This is proper because “The Lizard” is possibly alive to-day, as are also the mayor of Paradise, Sylvia Elven, Jacqueline, and Speed, the latter having barely escaped death in the *Virginus* expedition. The original of Buckhurst now lives in New York, and remains a type whose rarity is its only recommendation.

Those who believe they recognize the Countess de Vassart are doubtless in error. Mornac, long dead, is safe in his disguise; Tric-Trac was executed on the Place de la Roquette, and celebrated in doggerel by an unspeakable ballad writer. There remains Scarlett; dead or alive, I wish him well.

Robert W. Chambers.

Ormond, Florida, *Feb. 7, 1902.*

PART FIRST THE MAIDS OF PARADISE

I AT THE TELEGRAPH

On the third day of August, 1870, I left Paris in search of John Buckhurst.

On the 4th of August I lost all traces of Mr. Buckhurst near the frontier, in the village of Morsbronn. The remainder of the day I spent in acquiring that “general information” so dear to the officials in Paris whose flimsy systems of intelligence had already begun to break down.

On August 5th, about eight o’clock in the morning, the military telegraph instrument in the operator’s room over the temporary barracks of the Third Hussars clicked out the call for urgency, not the usual military signal, but a secret sequence understood only by certain officers of the Imperial Military Police. The operator on duty therefore stepped into my room and waited while I took his place at the wire.

I had been using the code-book that morning, preparing despatches for Paris, and now, at the first series of significant clicks, I dropped my left middle finger on the key and repeated the signal to Paris, using the required variations. Then I rose, locked the door, and returned to the table.

“Who is this?” came over the wire in the secret code; and I answered at once: “Inspector of Foreign Division, Imperial Military Police, on duty at Morsbronn, Alsace.”

After considerable delay the next message arrived in the Morse code: “Is that you, Scarlett?”

And I replied: “Yes. Who are you? Why do you not use the code? Repeat the code signal and your number.”

The signal was repeated, then came the message: “This is the Tuileries. You have my authority to use the Morse code for the sake of brevity. Do you understand? I am Jarras. The Empress is here.” Instantly reassured by the message from Colonel Jarras, head of the bureau to which I was attached, I answered that I understood. Then the telegrams began to fly, all in the Morse code:

Jarras. “Have you caught Buckhurst?”

I. “No.”

Jarras. “How did he get away?”

I. “There’s confusion enough on the frontier to cover the escape of a hundred thieves.”

Jarras. “Your reply alarms the Empress. State briefly the present position of the First Corps.”

I. “The First Corps still occupies the heights in a straight line about seven kilometres long; the plateau is covered with vineyards. Two small rivers are in front of us; the Vosges are behind us; the right flank pivots on Morsbronn, the left on Neewiller; the centre covers Wörth. We have had forty-eight hours’ heavy rain.”

Jarras. “Where are the Germans?”

I. “Precise information not obtainable at headquarters of the First Corps.”

Jarras. “Does the Marshal not know where the Germans are?”

I. “Marshal MacMahon does not know definitely.”

Jarras. “Does the Marshal not employ his cavalry? Where are they?”

I. “Septeuil’s cavalry of the second division lie between Elsasshausen and the Grosserwald; Michel’s brigade of heavy cavalry camps at Eberbach; the second division of cavalry of the reserve, General Vicomte de Bonnemain, should arrive to-night and go into bivouac between Reichshofen and the Grosserwald.”

There was a long pause; I lighted a cigar and waited. After a while the instrument began again:

Jarras. “The Empress desires to know where the château called La Trappe is.”

I. “La Trappe is about four kilometres from Morsbronn, near the hamlet of Trois-Feuilles.”

Jarras. “It is understood that Madame de Vassart’s group of socialists are about to leave La Trappe for Paradise, in Morbihan. It is possible that Buckhurst has taken refuge among them. Therefore you will proceed to La Trappe. Do you understand?”

I. “Perfectly.”

Jarras. “If Buckhurst is found you will bring him to Paris at once. Shoot him if he resists arrest. If the community at La Trappe has not been warned of a possible visit from us, you will find and arrest the following individuals:

“Claude Tavernier, late professor of law, Paris School of Law;

“Achille Bazard, ex-instructor in mathematics, Fontainebleau Artillery School;

“Dr. Leo Delmont, ex-interne, Charity Hospital, Paris;

“Mlle. Sylvia Elven, lately of the Odéon;

“The Countess de Vassart, well known for her eccentricities.

“You will affix the government seals to the house as usual; you will then escort the people named to the nearest point on the Belgian frontier. The Countess de Vassart usually dresses like a common peasant. Look out that she does not slip through your fingers. Repeat your instructions.” I repeated them from my memoranda.

There was a pause, then click! click! the instrument gave the code signal that the matter was ended, and I repeated the signal, opened my code-book, and began to translate the instructions into cipher for safety’s sake.

When I had finished and had carefully destroyed my first pencilled memoranda, the steady bumping of artillery passing through the street under the windows drew my attention.

It proved to be the expected batteries of the reserve going into park, between the two brigades of Raoult’s division of infantry. I telegraphed the news to the observatory on the Col du Pigeonnier, then walked back to the window and looked out.

It had begun to rain again; down the solitary street of Morsbronn the artillery rolled, jolting; cannoneers, wrapped in their wet, gray overcoats, limbers, caissons, and horses plastered with mud. The slim cannon, with canvas-wrapped breeches uptilted, dripped from their depressed muzzles, like lank monsters slaving and discouraged.

A battery of Montigny mitrailleuses passed, grotesque, hump-backed little engines of destruction. To me there was always something repulsive in the shape of these stunted cannon, these malicious metal cripples with their heavy bodies and sinister, filthy mouths.

Before the drenched artillery had rattled out of Morsbronn the rain once more fell in floods, pouring a perpendicular torrent from the transparent, gray heavens, and the roar of the downpour on slate roofs and ancient gables drowned the pounding of the passing cannon.

Where the Vosges mountains towered in obscurity a curtain of rain joined earth and sky. The rivers ran yellow, brimful, foaming at the fords. The semaphore on the mountain of the Pigeonnier was not visible; but across the bridge, where the Gunstett highway spanned the Sauer, gray masses of the Niederwald loomed through the rain.

Somewhere in that spectral forest Prussian cavalry were hidden, watching the heights where our drenched divisions lay. Behind that forest a German army was massing, fresh from the combat in the north, where the tragedy of Wissembourg had been enacted only the day before, in the presence of the entire French army – the awful spectacle of a single division of seven thousand men suddenly enveloped and crushed by seventy thousand Germans.

The rain fell steadily but less heavily. I went back to my instrument and called up the station on the Col du Pigeonnier, asking for information, but got no reply, the storm doubtless interfering.

Officers of the Third Hussars were continually tramping up and down the muddy stairway, laughing, joking, swearing at the rain, or shouting for their horses, when the trumpets sounded in the street below.

I watched the departing squadron, splashing away down the street, which was now running water like a river; then I changed my civilian clothes for a hussar uniform, sent a trooper to find me a horse, and sat down by the window to stare at the downpour and think how best I might carry out my instructions to a successful finish.

The colony at La Trappe was, as far as I could judge, a product of conditions which had, a hundred years before, culminated in the French Revolution. Now, in 1870, but under different circumstances, all France was once more disintegrating socially. Opposition to the Empire, to the dynasty, to the government, had been seething for years; now the separate crystals which formed on the edges of the boiling under-currents began to grow into masses which, adhering to other masses, interfered with the healthy functions of national life.

Until recently, however, while among the dissatisfied there existed a certain tendency towards cohesion, and while, moreover, adhesive forces mutually impelled separate groups of malcontents to closer union, the government found nothing alarming in the menaces of individuals or of isolated groups. The Emperor always counted on such opposition in Paris; the palace of the Tuileries was practically a besieged place, menaced always by the faubourgs – a castle before which lay eternally the sullen, unorganized multitude over which the municipal police kept watch.

That opposition, hatred, and treason existed never worried the government, but that this opposition should remain unorganized occupied the authorities constantly.

Groups of individuals who proclaimed themselves devotees of social theories interested us only when the groups grew large or exhibited tendencies to unite with similar groups.

Clubs formed to discuss social questions were usually watched by the police; violent organizations were not observed very closely, but clubs founded upon moderate principles were always closely surveyed.

In the faubourgs, where every street had its bawling orator, and where the red flag was waved when the community had become sufficiently drunk, the government was quietly content to ignore proceedings, wisely understanding that the mouths of street orators were the safety-valves of the faubourgs, and that through them the ebullitions of the under-world escaped with nothing more serious than a few vinous shrieks. There were, however, certain secret and semi-secret organizations which caused the government concern. First among these came the International Society of Workingmen, with all its affiliations – the “Internationale,” as it was called. In its wake trailed minor societies, some mild and harmless, some dangerous and secret, some violent, advocating openly the destruction of all existing conditions. Small groups of anarchists had already attracted groups of moderate socialistic tendencies to them, and had absorbed them or tainted them with doctrines dangerous to the state.

In time these groups began to adhere even more closely to the large bodies of the people; a party was born, small at first, embodying conflicting communistic principles.

The government watched it. Presently it split, as do all parties; yet here the paradox was revealed of a small party splitting into two larger halves. To one of these halves adhered the Red Republicans, the government opposition of the Extreme Left, the Opportunists, the Anarchists, certain Socialists, the so-called Communards, and finally the vast mass of the sullen, teeming faubourgs. It became a party closely affiliated with the Internationale, a colossal, restless, unorganized menace, harmless only because unorganized.

And the police were expected to keep it harmless. The other remaining half of the original party began to dwindle almost immediately, until it became only a group. *With one exception*, all those whom the police and the government regarded as inclined to violence left the group. There remained, *with this one exception*, a nucleus of earnest, thoughtful people whose creed was in part the creed of

the Internationale, the creed of universal brotherhood, equality before the law, purity of individual living as an example and an incentive to a national purity.

To this inoffensive group came one day a young widow, the Countess de Vassart, placing at their disposal her great wealth, asking only to be received among them as a comrade.

Her history, as known to the police, was peculiar and rather sad: at sixteen she had been betrothed to an elderly, bull-necked colonel of cavalry, the notorious Count de Vassart, who needed what money she might bring him to maintain his reputation as the most brilliantly dissolute old rake in Paris.

At sixteen, Éline de Trécourt was a thin, red-haired girl, with rather large, grayish eyes. Speed and I saw her once, sitting in her carriage before the Ministry of War a year after her marriage. There had been bad news from Mexico, and there were many handsome equipages standing at the gates of the war office, where lists of killed and wounded were posted every day.

I noticed her particularly because of her reputed wealth and the evil reputation of her husband, who, it was said, was so open in his contempt for her that the very afternoon of their marriage he was seen publicly driving on the Champs-Élysées with a pretty and popular actress of the Odéon.

As I passed, glancing up at her, the sadness of her face impressed me, and I remember wondering how much the death of her husband had to do with it – for his name had appeared in the evening papers under the heading, “Killed in Action.”

It was several years later before the police began to take an interest in the Comtesse Éline de Vassart. She had withdrawn entirely from society, had founded a non-sectarian free school in Passy, was interested in certain charities and refuges for young working-girls, when on a visit to England, she met Karl Marx, then a fugitive and under sentence of death.

From that moment social questions occupied her, and her doings interested the police, especially when she returned to Paris and took her place once more in Royalist circles, where every baby was bred from the cradle to renounce the Tuileries, the Emperor, and all his works.

Serious, tender-hearted, charitable, and intensely interested in all social reforms, she shocked the conservative society of the noble faubourg, aroused the distrust of the government, offended the Tuileries, and finally committed the mistake of receiving at her own house that notorious group of malcontents headed by Henri Rochefort, whose revolutionary newspaper, *La Marseillaise*, doubtless needed pecuniary support.

Her dossier – for, alas! the young girl already had a dossier – was interesting, particularly in its summing-up of her personal character:

“To the naive ignorance of a convent pensionnaire, she adds an innocence of mind, a purity of conduct, and a credulity which render her an easy prey to the adroit, who play upon her sympathies. She is dangerous only as a source of revenue for dangerous men.”

It was from her salon that young Victor Noir went to his death at Auteuil on the 10th of January; and possibly the shock of the murder and the almost universal conviction that justice under the Empire was hopeless drove the young Countess to seek a refuge in the country where, at her house of La Trappe, she could quietly devote her life to helping the desperately wretched, and where she could, in security, hold council with those who also had chosen to give their lives to the noblest of all works – charity and the propaganda of universal brotherhood.

And here, at La Trappe, the young aristocrat first donned the robe of democracy, dedicated her life and fortune to the cause, and worked with her own delicate hands for every morsel of bread that passed her lips.

Now this was all very well while it lasted, for her father, the choleric old Comte de Trécourt, had died rich, and the young girl's charities were doubled, and there was nobody to stay her hand or draw the generous purse-strings; nobody to advise her or to stop her. On the contrary, there were plenty of people standing around with outstretched, itching, and sometimes dirty hands, ready to snatch at the last centime.

Who was there to administer her affairs, who among the generous, impetuous, ill-balanced friends that surrounded her? Not the noble-minded geographer, Elisée Réclus; not the fiery citizen-count, Rochefort; not the handsome, cultivated Gustave Flourens, already “fey” with the doom to which he had been born; not that kindly visionary, the Vicomte de Coursay-Delmont, now discarding his ancient title to be known only among his grateful, penniless patients as Doctor Delmont; and surely not Professor Tavernier, nor yet that militant hermit, the young Chevalier de Gray, calling himself plain Monsieur Bazard, who chose democracy instead of the brilliant career to which Grammont had destined him, and whose sensitive and perhaps diseased mind had never recovered from the shock of the murder of his comrade, Victor Noir.

But the simple life at La Trappe, the negative protest against the Empire and all existing social conditions, the purity of motive, the serene and inspired self-abnegation, could not save the colony at La Trappe nor the young châtelaine from the claws of those who prey upon the innocence of the generous.

And so came to this ideal community one John Buckhurst, a stranger, quiet, suave, deadly pale, a finely moulded man, with delicately fashioned hands and feet, and two eyes so colorless that in some lights they appeared to be almost sightless.

In a month from that time he was the power that moved that community even in its most insignificant machinery. With marvellous skill he constructed out of that simple republic of protestants an absolute despotism. And he was the despot.

The avowed object of the society was the advancement of universal brotherhood, of liberty and equality, the annihilation of those arbitrary barriers called national frontiers – in short, a society for the encouragement of the millennium, which, however, appeared to be coy.

And before the eyes of his brother dreamers John Buckhurst quietly cancelled the entire programme at one stroke, and nobody understood that it was cancelled when, in a community founded upon equality and fraternity, he raised another edifice to crown it, a sort of working model as an example to the world, but *limited*. And down went democracy without a sound.

This working model was a superior community which was established at the Breton home of the Countess de Vassart, a large stone house in the hamlet of Paradise, in Morbihan.

An intimation from the Tuileries interrupted a meeting of the council at the house in Paradise; an arrest was threatened – that of Professor Réclus – and the indignant young Countess was requested to retire to her château of La Trappe. She obeyed, but invited her guests to accompany her. Among those who accepted was Buckhurst.

About this time the government began to take a serious interest in John Buckhurst. On the secret staff of the Imperial Military Police were always certain foreigners – among others, myself and a young man named James Speed; and Colonel Jarras had already decided to employ us in watching Buckhurst, when war came on France like a bolt from the blue, giving the men of the Secret Service all they could attend to.

In the shameful indecision and confusion attending the first few days after the declaration of war against Prussia, Buckhurst slipped through our fingers, and I, for one, did not expect to hear of him again. But I did not begin to know John Buckhurst, for, within three days after he had avoided an encounter with us, Buckhurst was believed to have committed one of the most celebrated crimes of the century.

The secret history of that unhappy war will never be fully written. Prince Bismarck has let the only remaining cat out of the bag; the other cats are dead. Nor will all the strange secrets of the Tuileries ever be brought to light, fortunately.

Still, at this time, there is no reason why it should not be generally known that the crown jewels of France were menaced from the very first by a conspiracy so alarming and apparently so irresistible that the Emperor himself believed, even in the beginning of the fatal campaign, that it might be necessary to send the crown jewels of France to the Bank of England for safety.

On the 19th of July, the day that war was declared, certain of the crown jewels, kept temporarily at the palace of the Tuileries, were sent under heavy guards to the Bank of France. Every precaution was taken; yet the great diamond crucifix of Louis XI. was missing when the guard under Captain Siebert turned over the treasures to the governor of the Bank of France.

Instantly absolute secrecy was ordered, which I, for one, believed to be a great mistake. Yet the Emperor desired it, doubtless for the same reasons which always led him to suppress any affair which might give the public an idea that the opposition to the government was worthy of the government's attention.

So the news of the robbery never became public property, but from one end of France to the other the gendarmerie, the police, local, municipal, and secret, were stirred up to activity.

Within forty-eight hours, an individual answering Buckhurst's description had sold a single enormous diamond for two hundred and fifty thousand francs to a dealer in Strasbourg, a Jew named Fishel Cohen, who, counting on the excitement produced by the war and the topsy-turvy condition of the city, supposed that such a transaction would create no interest.

Mr. Cohen was wrong; an hour after he had recorded the transaction at the Strasbourg Diamond Exchange he and the diamond were on their way to Paris, in charge of a detective. A few hours later the stone was identified at the Tuileries as having been taken from the famous crucifix of Louis XI.

From Fishel Cohen's agonized description of the man who had sold him the diamond, Colonel Jarras believed he recognized John Buckhurst. But how on earth Buckhurst had obtained access to the jewels, or how he had managed to spirit away the cross from the very centre of the Tuileries, could only be explained through the theory of accomplices among the trusted intimates of the imperial entourage. And if there existed such a conspiracy, who was involved?

It is violating no secret now to admit that every soul in the Tuileries, from highest to lowest, was watched. Even the governor of the Bank of France did not escape the attentions of the secret police. For it was certain that somebody in the imperial confidence had betrayed that confidence in a shocking manner, and nobody could know how far the conspiracy had spread, or who was involved in the most daring and shameless robbery that had been perpetrated in France since Cardinal de Rohan and his gang stole the celebrated necklace of Marie Antoinette.

Nor was it at all certain that the remaining jewels of the French crown were safe in Paris. The precautions taken to insure their safety, and the result of those precautions, are matters of history, but nobody outside of a small, strangely assorted company of people could know what actually happened to the crown jewels of France in 1870, or what pieces, if any, are still missing.

My chase after Buckhurst began as soon as Colonel Jarras could summon me; and as Buckhurst had last been heard of in Strasbourg, I went after him on a train loaded with red-legged, uproarious soldiers, who sang all day:

“Have you seen Bismarck
Drinking in the gay café,
With that other brother spark —
Monsieur Badinguet?”

and had drunk themselves into a shameful frenzy long before the train thundered into Avricourt.

I tracked Buckhurst to Morsbronn, where I lost all traces of him; and now here I was with my orders concerning the unfortunate people at La Trappe, staring out at the dismal weather and wondering where my wild-goose chase would end.

I went to the door and called for the military telegraph operator, whose instrument I had been permitted to monopolize. He came, a pleasant, jaunty young fellow, munching a crust of dry bread and brushing the crumbs from his scarlet trousers.

“In case I want to communicate with you I’ll signal the tower on the Col du Pigeonnier,” I said. “Come up to the loft overhead.”

The loft in the house which had now been turned into a cavalry barracks was just above my room, a large attic under the dripping gables, black with the stains of centuries, littered with broken furniture, discarded clothing, and the odds and ends cherished by the thrifty Alsatian peasant, who never throws away anything from the day of his birth to the day of his death. And, given a long line of forefathers equally thrifty, and an ancient high-gabled house where his ancestors first began collecting discarded refuse, the attic of necessity was a marvel of litter and decay, among which generations of pigeons had built nests and raised countless broods of squealing squabs.

Into this attic we climbed, edged our way toward a high window out of which the leaded panes had long since tumbled earthward, and finally stood together, looking out over the mountains of the Alsatian frontier.

The rain had ceased; behind the Col du Pigeonnier sunshine fell through a rift in the watery clouds. It touched the rushing river, shining on foaming fords where our cavalry pickets were riding in the valley mist.

Somewhere up in the vineyards behind us an infantry band was playing; away among the wet hills to the left the strumming vibrations of wet drums marked the arrival of a regiment from goodness knows where; and presently we saw them, their gray overcoats and red trousers soaked almost black with rain, rifles en bandoulière, trudging patiently up the muddy slope above the town. Something in the plodding steps of those wet little soldiers touched me. Bravely their soaked drums battered away, bravely they dragged their clumsy feet after them, brightly and gayly the breaking sun touched their crimson forage-caps and bayonets and the swords of mounted officers; but to me they were only a pathetic troop of perplexed peasants, dragged out of the bosom of France to be huddled and herded in a strange pasture, where death watched them from the forest yonder, marking them for slaughter with near-sighted Teutonic eyes.

A column of white cloud suddenly capped the rocks on the vineyard above. Bang! and something came whistling with a curious, bird-like cry over the village of Morsbronn, flying far out across the valley: and among the pines of the Prussian forest a point of flame flashed, a distant explosion echoed.

Down in the street below us an old man came tottering from his little shop, peering sideways up into the sky.

“Il pleut, berger,” called out the operator beside me, in a bantering voice.

“It will rain – bullets,” said the old man, simply, and returned to his shop to drag out a chair on the doorsill and sit and listen to the shots which our cavalry outposts were exchanging with the Prussian scouts.

“Poor old chap,” said the operator; “it will be hard for him. He was with the Grand Emperor at Jena.”

“You speak as though our army was already on the run,” I said.

“Yes,” he replied, indifferently, “we’ll soon be on the run.”

After a moment I said: “I’m going to ride to La Trappe. I wish you would send those messages to Paris.”

“All right,” he said.

Half an hour later I rode out of Morsbronn, clad in the uniform of the Third Hussars, a disguise supposed to convey the idea to those at La Trappe that the army and not the police were responsible for their expulsion.

The warm August sunshine slanted in my face as I galloped away up the vineyard road and out on to the long plateau where, on every hillock, a hussar picket sat his wiry horse, carbine poised, gazing steadily toward the east.

Over the sombre Prussian forests mist hung; away to the north the sun glittered on the steel helmets and armor of the heavy cavalry, just arriving. And on the Col du Pigeonnier I saw tiny specks move, flags signalling the arrival of the Vicomte de Bonnemain with the “grosse cavalerie,” the splendid cuirassier regiments destined in a few hours to join the cuirassiers of Waterloo, riding into that bright Valhalla where all good soldiers shall hear the last trumpet call, “Dismount!”

With a lingering glance at the rivers which separated us from German soil, I turned my horse and galloped away into the hills.

A moist, fern-bordered wood road attracted me; I reasoned that it must lead, by a short cut, across the hills to the military highway which passed between Trois-Feuilles and La Trappe. So I took it, and presently came into four cross-roads unknown to me.

This grassy carrefour was occupied by a flock of turkeys, busily engaged in catching grasshoppers; their keeper, a prettily shaped peasant girl, looked up at me as I drew bridle, then quietly resumed the book she had been reading.

“My child,” said I, “if you are as intelligent as you are beautiful, you will not be tending other people’s turkeys this time next year.”

“Merci, beau sabreur!” said the turkey-girl, raising her blue eyes. Then the lashes veiled them; she bent her head a little, turning it so that the curve of her cheeks gave to her profile that delicate contour which is so suggestive of innocence when the ears are small and the neck white.

“My child,” said I, “will you kindly direct me, with appropriate gestures, to the military highway which passes the Château de la Trappe?”

II

THE GOVERNMENT INTERFERES

“There is a short cut across that meadow,” said the young girl, raising a rounded, sun-tinted arm, bare to the shoulder.

“You are very kind,” said I, looking at her steadily.

“And, after that, you will come to a thicket of white birches.”

“Thank you, mademoiselle.”

“And after that,” she said, idly following with her blue eyes the contour of her own lovely arm, “you must turn to the left, and there you will cross a hill. You can see it from where we stand – ”

She glanced at me over her outstretched arm. “You are not listening,” she said.

I shifted a troubled gaze to the meadow which stretched out all glittering with moist grasses and tufts of rain-drenched wild flowers.

The girl’s arm slowly fell to her side, she looked up at me again, I felt her eyes on me for a moment, then she turned her head toward the meadow.

A deadened report shook the summer air – the sound of a cannon fired very far away, perhaps on the citadel of Strasbourg. It was so distant, so indistinct, that here in this peaceful country it lingered only as a vibration; the humming of the clover bees was louder.

Without turning my head I said: “It is difficult to believe that there is war anywhere in the world – is it not, mademoiselle?”

“Not if one knows the world,” she said, indifferently.

“Do you know it, my child?”

“Sufficiently,” she said.

She had opened again the book which she had been reading when I first noticed her. From my saddle I saw that it was Molière. I examined her, in detail, from the tips of her small wooden shoes to the scarlet velvet-banded skirt, then slowly upward, noting the laced bodice of velvet, the bright hair under the butterfly coiffe of Alsace, the delicate outline of nose and brow and throat. The ensemble was theatrical.

“Why do you tend turkeys?” I asked.

“Because it pleases me,” she replied, raising her eyebrows in faint displeasure.

“For that same reason you read Monsieur Molière?” I suggested.

“Doubtless, monsieur.”

“Who are you?”

“Is a passport required in France?” she replied, languidly.

“Are you what you pretend to be, an Alsatian turkey tender?”

“Parbleu! There are my turkeys, monsieur.”

“Of course, and there is your peasant dress and there are your wooden shoes, and there also, mademoiselle, are your soft hands and your accented speech and your plays of Molière.”

“You are very wise for a hussar,” she said.

“Perhaps,” said I, “but I have asked you a question which remains parried.”

She balanced the hazel rod across her shoulders with a faintly malicious smile.

“One might almost believe that you are not a hussar, but an officer of the Imperial Police,” she said.

“If you think that,” said I, “you should answer my question the sooner – unless you come from La Trappe. Do you?”

“Sometimes.”

“Oh! And what do you do at the Château de la Trappe?”

“I tend poultry – sometimes,” she replied.

“And at other times?”

“I do other things, monsieur.”

“What things?”

“What things? Mon Dieu, I read a little, as you perceive, monsieur.”

“Who are you?” I demanded.

“Oh, a mere nobody in such learned company,” she said, shaking her head with a mock humility that annoyed me intensely.

“Very well,” said I, conscious every moment of her pleasure in my discomfiture; “under the circumstances I am going to ask you to accept my escort to La Trappe; for I think you are Mademoiselle Elven, recently of the Odéon theatre.”

At this her eyes widened and the smile on her face became less genuine. “Indeed, I shall not go with you,” she said.

“I’m afraid I’ll have to insist,” said I.

She still balanced her hazel rod across her shoulders, a smile curving her mouth.

“Monsieur,” she said, “do you ride through the world pressing every peasant girl you meet with such ardent entreaties? Truly, your fashion of wooing is not slow, but everybody knows that hussars are headlong gentlemen – ‘Nothing is sacred from a hussar,’” she hummed, deliberately, in a parody which made me writhe in my saddle.

“Mademoiselle,” said I, taking off my forage-cap, “your ridicule is not the most disagreeable incident that I expect to meet with to-day. I am attempting to do my duty, and I must ask you to do yours.”

“By taking a walk with you, beau monsieur?”

“I’m afraid so.”

“And if I refuse?”

“Then,” said I, amiably, “I shall be obliged to set you on my horse.” And I dismounted and went toward her.

“Set me on – on that horse?” she repeated, with a disturbed smile.

“Will you come on foot, then?”

“No, I will not!” she said, with a click of her teeth.

I looked at my watch – it lacked five minutes to one.

“In five minutes we are going to start,” said I, cheerfully, and stood waiting, twisting the gilt hilt-tassels of my sabre with nervous fingers.

After a silence she said, very seriously, “Monsieur, would you dare use violence toward me?”

“Oh, I shall not be very violent,” I replied, laughing. I held the opened watch in my hand so that she could see the dial if she chose.

“It is one o’clock,” I said, closing the hunting-case with a snap.

She looked me steadily in the eyes.

“Will you come with me to La Trappe?”

She did not stir.

I stepped toward her; she gave me a breathless, defiant stare; then in an instant I caught her up and swung her high into my saddle, before either she or I knew exactly what had happened.

Fury flashed up in her eyes and was gone, leaving them almost blank blue. As for me, amazed at what I had done, I stood at her stirrup, breathing very fast, with jaws set and chin squared.

She was clever enough not to try to dismount, woman enough not to make an awkward struggle or do anything ungraceful. In her face I read an immense astonishment; fascination seemed to rivet her eyes on me, following my every movement as I shortened one stirrup for her, tightened the girths, and laid the bridle in her half-opened hand.

Then, in silence, I led the horse forward through the open gate out into the wet meadow.

Wading knee-deep through soaking foliage, I piloted my horse with its mute burden across the fields; and, after a few minutes a violent desire to laugh seized me and persisted, but I bit my lip and called up a few remaining sentiments of decency.

As for my turkey-girl, she sat stiffly in the saddle, with a firmness and determination that proved her to be a stranger to horses. I scarcely dared look at her, so fearful was I of laughing.

As we emerged from the meadow I heard the cannon sounding again at a great distance, and this perhaps sobered me, for presently all desire of laughter left me, and I turned into the road which led through the birch thicket, anxious to accomplish my mission and have done with it as soon as might be.

“Are we near La Trappe?” I asked, respectfully.

Had she pouted, or sulked, or burst into reproaches, I should have cared little – in fact, an outburst might have relieved me.

But she answered me so sweetly, and, too, with such composure, that my heart smote me for what I had done to her and what I was still to do.

“Would you rather walk?” I asked, looking up at her.

“No, thank you,” she said, serenely.

So we went on. The spectacle of a cavalryman in full uniform leading a cavalry horse on which was seated an Alsatian girl in bright peasant costume appeared to astonish the few people we passed. One of these foot-farers, a priest who was travelling in our direction, raised his pallid visage to meet my eyes. Then he stole a glance at the girl in the saddle, and I saw a tint of faded color settle under his transparent skin.

The turkey-girl saluted the priest with a bright smile.

“Fortune of war, father,” she said, gayly. “Behold! Alsace in chains.”

“Is she a prisoner?” said the priest, turning directly on me. Of all the masks called faces, never had I set eyes on such a deathly one, nor on such pale eyes, all silvery surface without depth enough for a spark of light to make them seem alive.

“What do you mean by a prisoner, father?” I asked.

“I mean a prisoner,” he said, doggedly.

“When the church cross-examines the government, the towers of Notre Dame shake,” I said, pleasantly. “I mean no discourtesy, father; it is a proverb in Paris.”

“There is another proverb,” observed the turkey-girl, placidly. “Once a little inhabitant of hell stole the key to paradise. His punishment was dreadful. They locked him in.”

I looked up at her, perplexed and irritated, conscious that she was ridiculing me, but unable to comprehend just how. And my irritation increased when the priest said, calmly, “Can I aid you, my child?”

She shook her head with a cool smile.

“I am quite safe under the escort of an officer of the Imperial – ”

“Wait!” I said, hastily, but she continued, “of the Imperial Military Police.”

Above all things I had not wanted it known that the Imperial Police were moving in this affair at La Trappe, and now this little fool had babbled to a strange priest – of all people in the world!

“What have the police to do with this harmless child?” demanded the priest, turning on me so suddenly that I involuntarily took a step backward.

“Is this the confessional, father?” I replied, sharply. “Go your way in peace, and leave to the police what alone concerns the police.”

“Render unto Cæsar,” said the girl, quietly. “Good-bye, father.”

Turning to look again at the priest, I was amazed to find him close to me, too close for a man with such eyes in his head, for a man who moved so swiftly and softly, and, in spite of me, a nervous movement of my hand left me with my fingers on the butt of my pistol.

“What the devil is all this?” I blurted out. “Stand aside, father. Do you think the Holy Inquisition is back in France? Stand aside then! I salute your cloth!”

And I passed on ahead, one hand on the horse’s neck, the other touching the visor of my scarlet forage-cap. Once I looked back. The priest was standing where I had passed him.

We met a dozen people in all, I think, some of them peasants, one or two of the better class – a country doctor and a notary among them. None appeared to know my turkey-girl, nor did she even glance at them; moreover, all answered my inquiries civilly enough, directing me to La Trappe, and professing ignorance as to its inhabitants.

“Why do all the people I meet carry bundles?” I demanded of the notary.

“Mon Dieu, monsieur, they are too near the frontier to take risks,” he replied, blinking through his silver-rimmed spectacles at my turkey-girl.

“You mean to say they are running away from their village of Trois-Feuilles?” I asked.

“Exactly,” he said. “War is a rude guest for poor folk.”

Disgusted with the cowardice of the hamlet of Trois-Feuilles, I passed on without noticing the man’s sneer. In a moment, however, he repassed me swiftly, going in the same direction as were we, toward La Trappe.

“Wait a bit!” I called out. “What is your business in that direction, monsieur the notary?”

He looked around, muttered indistinctly about having forgotten something, and started on ahead of us, but at a sharp “Stop!” from me he halted quickly enough.

“Your road lies the other way,” I observed, and, as he began to protest, I cut him short.

“You change your direction too quickly to suit me,” I said. “Come, my friend the weather-cock, turn your nose east and follow it or I may ask you some questions that might frighten you.”

And so I left him also staring after us, and I had half a mind to go back and examine his portfolio to see what a snipe-faced notary might be carrying about with him.

When I looked up at my turkey-girl, she was sitting more easily in the saddle, head bent thoughtfully.

“You see, mademoiselle, I take no chances of not finding my friends at home,” I said.

“What friends, monsieur?”

“My friends at La Trappe.”

“Oh! And ... you think that the notary we passed might have desired to prepare them for your visit, monsieur?”

“Possibly. The notary of Trois-Feuilles and the Château de la Trappe may not be unknown to each other. Perhaps even mademoiselle the turkey-girl may number the learned Trappists among her friends.”

“Perhaps,” she said.

Walking on along the muddy road beside her, arm resting on my horse’s neck, I thought over again of the chances of catching Buckhurst, and they seemed slim, especially as after my visit the house at La Trappe would be vacant and the colony scattered, or at least out of French jurisdiction, and probably settled across the Belgian frontier.

Of course, if the government ordered the expulsion of these people, the people must go; but I for one found the order a foolish one, because it removed a bait that might attract Buckhurst back where we stood a chance of trapping him.

But in a foreign country he could visit his friends freely, and whatever movement he might ultimately contemplate against the French government could easily be directed from that paradise of anarchists, Belgium, without the necessity of his exposing himself to any considerable danger.

I was sorry that affairs had taken this turn.

A little breeze began blowing; the scarlet skirt of my turkey-girl fluttered above her wooden shoes, and on her head the silk bow quivered like a butterfly on a golden blossom.

“They say when the Lord fashioned the first maid of Alsace half the angels cried themselves ill with jealousy,” said I, looking up at her.

“And the other half, monsieur?”

“The sterner half started for Alsace in a body. They were controlled with difficulty, mademoiselle. That is why St. Peter was given a key to lock them in, not to lock us poor devils out.”

After a silence she said, musing: “It is a curious thing, but you speak as though you had seen better days.”

“No,” I said, “I have never seen better days. I am slowly rising in the world. Last year I was a lieutenant; I am now inspector.”

“I meant,” she said, scornfully, “that you had been well-born – a gentleman.”

“Are gentlemen scarce in the Imperial Military Police?”

“It is not a profession that honors a man.”

“Of all people in the world,” said I, “the police would be the most gratified to believe that this violent world needs no police.”

“Monsieur, there is another remedy for violence.”

“And what may that remedy be, mademoiselle?”

“Non-resistance – absolute non-resistance,” said the girl, earnestly, bending her pretty head toward me.

“That is not human nature,” I said, laughing.

“Is the justification of human nature our aim in this world?”

“Nor is it possible for mankind to submit to violence,” I added.

“I believe otherwise,” she said, gravely.

As we mounted the hill along a sandy road, bordered with pines and with cool, green thickets of broom and gorse, I looked up at her and said: “In spite of your theories, mademoiselle, you yourself refused to accompany me.”

“But I did not resist your violence,” she replied, smiling.

After a moment’s silence I said: “For a disciple of a stern and colorless creed, you are very human. I am sorry that you believe it necessary to reform the world.”

She said, thoughtfully: “There is nothing joyless in my creed – above all, nothing stern. If it be fanaticism to desire for all the world that liberty of thought and speech and deed which I, for one, have assumed, then I am, perhaps, a fanatic. If it be fanaticism to detest violence and to deplore all resistance to violence, I am a very guilty woman, monsieur, and deserve ill of the Emperor’s Military Police.”

This she said with that faintly ironical smile hovering sometimes in her eyes, sometimes on her lips, so that it was hard to face her and feel quite comfortable.

I began, finally, an elaborate and logical argument, forgetting that women reason only with their hearts, and she listened courteously. To meet her eyes when I was speaking interrupted my train of thought, and often I was constrained to look out across the hills at the heavy, solid flanks of the mountains, which seemed to steady my logic and bring rebellious thought and wandering wisdom to obedience.

I explained my theory of the acceptance of three things – human nature, the past, and the present. Given these, the solution of future problems must be a different solution from that which she proposed.

At moments the solemn absurdity of it all came over me – the turkey-girl, with her golden head bent, her butterfly coiffe a-flutter, discussing ethics with an irresponsible fly-by-night, who happened at that period of his career to carry a commission in the Imperial Police.

The lazy roadside butterflies flew up in clouds before the slow-stepping horse; the hill rabbits, rising to their hindquarters, wrinkled their whiskered noses at us; from every thicket speckled hedge-

birds peered at us as we went our way solemnly deciding those eternal questions already ancient when the Talmud branded woman with the name of Lilith.

At length, as we reached the summit of the sandy hill, “There is La Trappe, monsieur,” said my turkey-girl, and once more stretched out her lovely arm.

There appeared to be nothing mysterious about the house or its surroundings; indeed, a sunnier and more peaceful spot would be hard to find in that land of hills, ravines, and rocky woodlands, outposts of those cloudy summits soaring skyward in the south.

The house itself was visible through gates of wrought iron, swinging wide between pillars of stone, where an avenue stretched away under trees to a granite terrace, glittering in the sun. And under the terrace a quiet pool lay reflecting tier on tier of stone steps which mounted to the bright esplanade above.

There was no porter at the gate to welcome me or to warn me back; the wet road lay straight in front, barred only by sunbeams.

“May we enter?” I asked, politely.

She did not answer, and I led the horse down that silent avenue of trees towards the terrace and the glassy pool which mirrored the steps of stone.

Masses of scarlet geraniums, beds of living coals, glowed above the terrace. As we drew nearer, the water caught the blaze of color, reflecting the splendor in subdued tints of smothered flame. And always, in the pool, I saw the terrace steps, reversed, leading down into depths of sombre fire.

“And here we dismount,” said I, and offered my aid.

She laid her hands on my shoulders; I swung her to the ground, where her sabots clicked and her silver neck-chains jingled in the silence.

I looked around. How intensely still was everything – the leaves, the water! The silent blue peaks on the horizon seemed to be watching me; the trees around me were so motionless that they also appeared to be listening with every leaf.

This quarter of the world was too noiseless for me; there might have been a bird-note, a breeze to whisper, a minute stirring of unseen life – but there was not.

“Is that house empty?” I asked, turning brusquely on my companion.

“The Countess de Vassart will give you your answer,” she replied.

“Kindly announce me, then,” I said, grimly, and together we mounted the broad flight of steps to the esplanade, above which rose the gray mansion of La Trappe.

III

LA TRAPPE

There was a small company of people gathered at a table which stood in the cool shadows of the château's eastern wing. Towards these people my companion directed her steps; I saw her bend close to the ear of a young girl who had already turned to look at me. At the same instant a heavily built, handsome man pushed back his chair and stood up, regarding me steadily through his spectacles, one hand grasping the back of the seat from which he had risen.

Presently the young girl to whom my companion of the morning had whispered rose gracefully and came toward me.

Slender, yet with that charming outline of body which youth wears as a promise, she moved across the terrace in her flowing robe of crape, and welcomed me with a gesture and a pleasant word, which I scarcely heard, so stupidly I stood, silenced by the absolute loveliness of the girl. Did I say loveliness? No, not that, but something newer, something far more fresh, far sweeter, that made mere physical beauty a thing less vital than the colorless shadow of a crystal.

She was not only beautiful, she was Beauty itself, incarnate, alive, soul and body. Later I noticed that she was badly sun-burned under the eyes, that her delicate nose was adorned by an adorable freckle, and that she had red hair... Could this be the Countess de Vassart? What a change!

I stepped forward to meet her, and took off my forage-cap.

"Is it true, monsieur, that you have come to arrest us?" she asked, in a low voice.

"Yes, madame," I replied, already knowing that she was the Countess. She hesitated; then:

"Will you tell me your name? I am Madame de Vassart."

Cap in hand I followed her to the table, where the company had already risen. The young Countess presented me with undisturbed simplicity; I bowed to my turkey-girl, who proved, after all, to be the actress from the Odéon, Sylvia Elven; then I solemnly shook hands with Dr. Leo Delmont, Professor Claude Tavernier, and Monsieur Bazard, ex-instructor at the Fontainebleau Artillery School, whom I immediately recognized as the snipe-faced notary I had met on the road.

"Well, sir," exclaimed Dr. Delmont, in his deep, hearty voice, "if this peaceful little community is come under your government's suspicion, I can only say, Heaven help France!"

"Is not that what we all say in these times, doctor?" I asked.

"When I say 'Heaven help France!' I do not mean *Vive l'Empereur!*!" retorted the big doctor, dryly.

Professor Tavernier, a little, gray-headed savant with used-up eyes, asked me mildly if he might know why they all were to be expelled from France. I did not reply.

"Is thought no longer free in France?" asked Dr. Delmont, in his heavy voice.

"Thought is free in France," I replied, "but its expression is sometimes inadvisable, doctor."

"And the Emperor is to be the judge of when it is advisable to express one's thoughts?" inquired Professor Tavernier.

"The Emperor," I said, "is generous, broad-minded, and wonderfully tolerant. Only those whose attitude incites to disorder are held in check."

"According to the holy Code Napoléon," observed Professor Tavernier, with a shrug.

"The code kills the body, Napoleon the soul," said Dr. Delmont, gravely.

"It was otherwise with Victor Noir," suggested Mademoiselle Elven.

"Yes," added Delmont, "he asked for justice and they gave him ... Pierre!"

"I think we are becoming discourteous to our guest, gentlemen," said the young Countess, gently.

I bowed to her. After a moment I said: "Doctor, if you do truly believe in that universal brotherhood which apparently even tolerates within its boundaries a poor devil of the Imperial Police,

if your creed really means peace and not violence, suffering and patience, not provocation and revolt, demonstrate to the government by the example of your submission to its decrees that the theories you entertain are not the chimeras of generous but unbalanced minds.”

“We never had the faintest idea of resisting,” said Monsieur Bazard, the notary, otherwise the Chevalier de Grey, a lank, hollow-eyed young fellow, already marked heavily with the ravages of pulmonary disease. But the fierce glitter in his eyes gave the lie to his words.

“Yesterday, Madame la Comtesse,” I said, turning to the Countess de Vassart, “the Emperor could easily afford to regard with equanimity the movement in which you are associated. To-day that is no longer possible.”

The young Countess gave me a bewildered look.

“Is it true,” she asked, “that the Emperor does not know we have severed all connection with the Internationale?”

“If that is so,” said I, “why does Monsieur Bazard return across the fields to warn you of my coming? And why do you harbor John Buckhurst at La Trappe? Do you not know he is wanted by the police?”

“But we do not know why,” said Dr. Delmont, bending forward and pouring himself a glass of red wine. This he drank slowly, eating a bit of black bread with it.

“Monsieur Scarlett,” said Mademoiselle Elven, suddenly, “why does the government want John Buckhurst?”

“That, mademoiselle, is the affair of the government and of John Buckhurst,” I said.

“Pardon,” interrupted Delmont, heavily, “it is the affair of every honest man and woman – where a Bonaparte is concerned.”

“I do not understand you, doctor,” I said.

“Then I will put it brutally,” he replied. “We free people fear a family a prince of which is a common murderer.”

I did not answer; the world has long since judged the slayer of Victor Noir.

After a troubled silence the Countess asked me if I would not share their repast, and I thanked her and took some bread and grapes and a glass of red wine.

The sun had stolen into the corner where we had been sitting, and the Countess suggested that we move down to the lawn under the trees; so Dr. Delmont and Professor Tavernier lifted the table and bore it down the terrace steps, while I carried the chairs to the lawn.

It made me uncomfortable to play the rôle I was playing among these misguided but harmless people; that I showed it in my face is certain, for the Countess looked up at me and said, smilingly: “You must not look at us so sorrowfully, Monsieur Scarlett. It is we who pity you.”

And I replied, “Madame, you are generous,” and took my place among them and ate and drank with them in silence, listening to the breeze in the elms.

Mademoiselle Elven, in her peasant’s dress, rested her pretty arm across her chair and sighed.

“It is all very well not to resist violence,” she said, “but it seems to me that the world is going to run over us some day. Is there any harm in stepping out of the way, Dr. Delmont?”

The Countess laughed outright.

“Not at all,” she said. “But we must not attempt to box the world’s ears as we run. Must we, doctor?”

Turning her lovely, sun-burned face to me, she continued: “Is it not charming here? The quiet is absolute. It is always still. We are absurdly contented here; we have no servants, you see, and we all plough and harrow and sow and reap – not many acres, because we need little. It is one kind of life, quite harmless and passionless, monsieur. I have been raking hay this morning. It is so strange that the Emperor should be troubled by the silence of these quiet fields – ”

The distress in her eyes lasted only a moment; she turned and looked out across the green meadows, smiling to herself.

“At first when I came here from Paris,” she said, “I was at a loss to know what to do with all this land. I owe much happiness to Dr. Delmont, who suggested that the estate, except what we needed, might be loaned free to the people around us. It was an admirable thought; we have no longer any poor among us – ”

She stopped short and gave me a quick glance. “Please understand me, Monsieur Scarlett. I make no merit of giving what I cannot use. That would be absurd.”

“The world knows, madame, that you have given all you have,” I said.

“Then why is your miserable government sending her into exile?” broke in Monsieur Bazard, harshly.

“I will tell you,” I said, surprised at his tone and manner. “The colony at La Trappe is the head and centre of a party which abhors war, which refuses resistance, which aims, peacefully perhaps, at political and social annihilation. In time of peace this colony is not a menace; in time of war it is worse than a menace, monsieur.”

I turned to Dr. Delmont.

“With the German armies massing behind the forest borders yonder, it is unsafe for the government to leave you here at La Trappe, doctor. You are *too neutral*.”

“You mean that the government fears treason?” demanded the doctor, growing red.

“Yes,” I said, “if you insist.”

The Countess had turned to me in amazement.

“Treason!” she repeated, in an unsteady voice. “Is it treason for a small community to live quietly here in the Alsatian hills, harming nobody, asking nothing save freedom of thought? Is it treason for a woman of the world to renounce the world? Is it treason for her to live an unostentatious life and use her fortune to aid others to live? Treason! Monsieur, the word has an ugly ring to me. I am a soldier’s daughter!”

There was something touchingly illogical in the last words – this young apostle of peace naïvely displaying her credentials as though the mere word “soldier” covered everything.

“Your government insults us all,” said Bazard, between his teeth.

Mademoiselle Elven leaned forward, her blue eyes shining angrily.

“Because I have learned that the boundaries of nations are not the frontiers of human hearts, am I a traitor? Because I know no country but the world, no speech but the universal speech that one reads in a brother’s eyes, because I know no barriers, no boundaries, no limits to human brotherhood, am I a traitor?”

She made an exquisite gesture with half-open arms; all the poetry of the Théâtre Français was in it.

“Look at me! I had all that life could give, save freedom, and that I have now – freedom in thought, in speech, in action, freedom to love as friends love, freedom to love as lovers love. Ah, more! freedom from caste, from hate and envy and all suspicion, freedom to give, freedom to receive, freedom in life and in death! Am I a traitor? What do I betray? Shame on your Emperor!”

The young Countess, too, had risen in her earnestness and had laid one slender, sun-tanned hand upon the table.

“War?” she said. “What is this war to us? The Emperor? What is he to us? We who have set a watch on the world’s outer ramparts, guarding the white banner of universal brotherhood! What is this war to us!”

“Are you not a native of France?” I asked, bluntly.

“I am a native of the world, monsieur.”

“Do you mean to say that you care nothing for your own birthland?” I demanded, sharply.

“I love the world – all of it – every inch – and if France is part of the world, so is this Prussia that we are teaching our poor peasants to hate.”

“Madame,” said I, “the women of France to-day think differently. Our Creator did not make love of country a trite virtue, but a passion, and set it in our bodies along with our other passions. If in you it is absent, that concerns pathology, not the police!”

I did not mean to wound her – I was intensely in earnest; I wanted her to show just a single glimmer of sympathy for her own country. It seemed as though I could not endure to look at such a woman and know that the primal passion, born with those who had at least wept for their natal Eden, was meaningless to her.

She had turned a trifle pale; now she sank back into her chair, looking at me with those troubled gray eyes in which Heaven itself had set truth and loyalty.

I said: “I do not believe that you care nothing for France. Train and curb and crush your own heart as you will, you cannot drive out that splendid earth-born humanity which is part of us – else we had all been born in heaven!”

“Come,” said Bazard, in a rage-choked voice, “let it end here, Monsieur Scarlett. If the government sends you here as a spy and an official, pray remember that you are not also sent as a missionary.”

My ears began to burn. “That is true,” I said, looking at the Countess, whose face had become expressionless. “I ask your pardon for what I have said and ... for what I am about to do.”

There was a silence. Then, in a low voice, I placed them under formal arrest, one by one, touching each lightly on the shoulder as prescribed by the code. And when I came to the Countess, she rose, without embarrassment. I moved my lips and stretched out my arm, barely touching her. I heard Bazard draw a deep breath. She was my prisoner.

“I must ask you to prepare for a journey,” I said. “You have your own horses, of course?”

Without answering, Dr. Delmont walked away towards the stables; Professor Tavernier followed him, head bent.

“We shall want very little,” said the Countess, calmly, to Mademoiselle Elven. “Will you pack up what we need? And you, Monsieur Bazard, will you be good enough to go to Trois-Feuilles and hire old Brauer’s carriage?” Turning to me she said: “I must ask for a little delay; I have no longer a carriage of my own. We keep two horses to plough and draw grain; they can be harnessed to the farm-wagon for our effects.”

Monsieur Bazard’s hectic visage flushed, he gave me a crazy stare, and, for a moment, I fancied there was murder in his bright eyes. Doubtless, however, devotion to his creed of non-resistance conquered the impulse, and he walked quickly away across the meadows, his skeleton hands clinched under his loose sleeves.

Mademoiselle Elven also departed tip-tap! up the terrace in her coquettish wooden shoes, leaving me alone with the Countess under the trees.

“Madame,” said I, “before I affix the government seals to the doors of your house I must ask you to conduct me to the roof of the east wing.”

She bent her head in acquiescence; I followed her up the terrace into a stone hall where the dark Flemish pictures stared back at me and my spurred heels jingled in the silence. Up, up, and still up, winding around a Gothic spiral, then through a passage under the battlements and out across the slates, with wind and setting sun in my face and the sighing tree-tops far below.

Without glancing at me the Countess walked to the edge of the leads and looked down along the sheer declivity of the stone facade. Slender, exquisite, she stood there, a lonely shape against the sky, and I saw the sun glowing on her burnished red-gold hair, and her sun-burned hands, half unclosed, hanging at her side.

South, north, and west the mountains towered, purple as the bloom on October grapes; the white arm of the semaphore on the Pigeonnier was tinted with rose color; green velvet clothed the world, under a silver veil.

In the north a spark of white fire began to flicker on the crest of Mount Tonnerre. It was the mirror of a heliograph flashing out across leagues of gray-green hills to the rocky pulpit of the Pigeonnier.

I unslung my glasses and levelled them. The shining arm of the semaphore fell to a horizontal position and remained rigid; down came the signal flags, up went a red globe and two cones. Another string of flags blossomed along the bellying halliards; the white star flashed twice on Mount Tonnerre and went out.

Instantly I drew a flag from my pouch, tied it to the point of my sabre, and stepped out along the projecting snout of a gargoyle. Below, under my feet, the tree-tops rustled in the wind.

I had been flagging the Pigeonnier vigorously for ten minutes without result, when suddenly a dark dot appeared on the tower beneath the semaphore, then another. My glasses brought out two officers, one with a flag; and, still watching them through the binoculars, I signalled slowly, using my free hand: "This is La Trappe. Telegraph to Morsbronn that the inspector of Imperial Police requires a peloton of mounted gendarmes at once."

Then I sat down on the sun-warmed slates and waited, amusing myself by watching the ever-changing display of signal flags on the distant observatory.

It may have been half a minute before I saw two officers advance to the railing of the tower and signal: "Attention, La Trappe!"

Pencil and pad on my knee, I managed to use my field-glasses and jot down the message:

"Peloton of mounted gendarmes goes to you as soon as possible. Repeat."

I repeated, then raised my glasses. Another message came by flag: "Attention, La Trappe. Uhlans reported near the village of Trois-Feuilles; have you seen them?"

Prussian Uhlans! Here in the rear of our entire army! Nonsense! And I signalled a vigorous:

"No. Have you?"

To which came the disturbing reply: "Be on your guard. We are ordered to display the semaphore at danger. Report is credited at headquarters. Repeat."

I repeated. Raising my glasses again, I could plainly see a young officer, an unlighted cigar between his teeth, jotting down our correspondence, while the other officer who had flagged me furled up his flags and laid them aside, yawning and stretching himself to his full height.

So distinctly did my powerful binoculars bring the station into range that I could even see the younger officer light a match, which the wind extinguished, light another, and presently blow a tiny cloud of smoke from his cigar.

The Countess de Vassart had come up to where I was standing on the gargoyle, balanced over the gulf below. Very cautiously I began to step backward, for there was not room to turn around.

"Would you care to look at the Pigeonnier, madame?" I asked, glancing at her over my shoulder.

"I beg you will be careful," she said. "It is a useless risk to stand out there."

I had never known the dread of great heights which many people feel, and I laughed and stepped backward, expecting to land on the parapet behind me. But the point of my scabbard struck against the battlements, forcing me outward; I stumbled, staggered, and swayed a moment, striving desperately to recover my balance; I felt my gloved fingers slipping along the smooth face of the parapet, my knees gave way with horror; then my fingers clutched something – an arm – and I swung back, slap against the parapet, hanging to that arm with all my weight. A terrible effort and I planted my boots on the leads and looked up with sick eyes into the eyes of the Countess.

"Can you stand it?" I groaned, clutching her arm with my other hand.

"Yes – don't be afraid," she said, calmly. "Draw me toward you; I cannot draw you over."

"Press your knees against the battlements," I gasped.

She bent one knee and wedged it into a niche.

"Don't be afraid; you are not hurting me," she said, with a ghastly smile.

I raised one hand and caught her shoulder, then, drawn forward, I seized the parapet in both arms, and vaulted to the slate roof.

A fog seemed to blot my eyes; I shook from hair to heel and laid my head against the solid stone, while the blank, throbbing seconds past. The Countess stood there, shocked and breathless. I saw her sleeve in rags, and the snowy skin all bruised beneath.

I tried to thank her; we both were badly shaken, and I do not know that she even heard me. Her burnished hair had sagged to her white neck; she twisted it up with unsteady fingers and turned away. I followed slowly, back through the dim galleries, and presently she seemed to remember my presence and waited for me as I felt my way along the passage.

"Every little shadow is a yawning gulf," I said. "My nerve is gone, madame. The banging of my own sabre scares me."

I strove to speak lightly, but my voice trembled, and so did hers when she said: "High places always terrify me; something below seems to draw me. Did you ever have that dreadful impulse to sway forward into a precipice?"

There was a subtle change in her voice and manner, something almost friendly in her gray eyes as she looked curiously at me when we came into the half-light of an inner gallery.

What irony lurks in blind chance that I should owe this woman my life – this woman whose home I had come to confiscate, whose friends I had arrested, who herself was now my prisoner, destined to the shame of exile!

Perhaps she divined my thoughts – I do not know – but she turned her troubled eyes to the arched window, where a painted saint imbedded in golden glass knelt and beat his breast with two heavy stones.

"Madame," I said, slowly, "your courage and your goodness to me have made my task a heavy one. Can I lighten it for you in any manner?"

She turned towards me, almost timidly. "Could I go to Morsbronn before – before I cross the frontier? I have a house there; there are a few things I would like to take – "

She stopped short, seeing, doubtless, the pain of refusal in my face. "But, after all, it does not matter. I suppose your orders are formal?"

"Yes, madame."

"Then it is a matter of honor?"

"A soldier is always on his honor; a soldier's daughter will understand that."

"I understand," she said.

After a moment she smiled and moved forward, saying:

"How the world tosses us – flinging strangers into each other's arms, parting brothers, leading enemies across each other's paths! One has a glimpse of kindly eyes – and never meets them again. Often and often I have seen a good face in the lamp-lit street that I could call out to, 'Be friends with me!' Then it is gone – and I am gone – Oh, it is curiously sad, Monsieur Scarlett!"

"Does your creed teach you to care for everybody, madame?"

"Yes – I try to. Some attract me so strongly – some I pity so. I think that if people only knew that there was no such thing as a stranger in the world, the world might be a paradise in time."

"It might be, some day, if all the world were as good as you, madame."

"Oh, I am only a perplexed woman," she said, laughing. "I do so long for the freedom of all the world, absolute individual liberty and no law but that best of all laws – the law of the unselfish."

We had stopped, by a mutual impulse, at the head of the stone stairway.

"Why do you shelter such a man as John Buckhurst?" I asked, abruptly.

She raised her eyes to me with perfect composure.

"Why do you ask?"

"Because I have come here from Paris to arrest him."

She bent her head thoughtfully and laid the tips of her fingers on the sculptured balustrade.

"To me," she said, "there's no such thing as a political crime."

"It is not for a political crime that we want John Buckhurst," I said, watching her. "It is for a civil outrage."

Her face was like marble; her hands tightened on the fretted carving.

"What crime is he charged with?" she asked, without moving.

"He is charged with being a common thief," I said.

Now there was color enough in her face, and to spare, for the blood-stained neck and cheek, and even the bare shoulder under the torn crape burned pink.

"It is brutal to make such a charge!" she said. "It is shameful! – " her voice quivered. "It is not true! Monsieur, give me your word of honor that the government means what it says and nothing more!"

"Madame," I said, "I give my word of honor that no political crime is charged against that man."

"Will you pledge me your honor that if he answers satisfactorily to that false charge of theft, the government will let him go free?"

"I will take it upon myself to do so," said I. "But what in Heaven's name is this man to you, madame? He is a militant anarchist, whose creed is not yours, whose propaganda teaches merciless violence, whose programme is terror. He is well known in the faubourgs; Belleville is his, and in the Château Rouge he has pointed across the river to the rich quarters, calling it the promised land! Yet here, at La Trappe, where your creed is peace and non-resistance, he is welcomed and harbored, he is deferred to, he is made executive head of a free commune which he has turned into a despotism ... for his own ends!"

She was gazing at me with dilated eyes, hands holding tight to the balustrade.

"Did you not know that?" I asked, astonished.

"No," she said.

"You are not aware that John Buckhurst is the soul and centre of the Belleville Reds?"

"It is – it is false!" she stammered.

"No, madame, it is true. He wears a smug mask here; he has deceived you all."

She stood there, breathing rapidly, her head high.

"John Buckhurst will answer for himself," she said, steadily.

"When, madame?"

For answer she stepped across the hall and laid one hand against the blank stone wall. Then, reaching upward, she drew from between the ponderous blocks little strips of steel, colored like mortar, dropping them to the stone floor, where they rang out. When she had flung away the last one, she stepped back and set her frail shoulder to the wall; instantly a mass of stone swung silently on an unseen pivot, a yellow light streamed out, and there was a tiny chamber, illuminated by a lamp, and a man just rising from his chair.

IV PRISONERS

Instantly I recognized in him the insolent priest who had confronted me on my way to La Trappe that morning. I knew him, although now he was wearing neither robe nor shovel-hat, nor those square shoes too large to buckle closely over his flat insteps.

And he knew me.

He appeared admirably cool and composed, glancing at the Countess for an instant with an interrogative expression; then he acknowledged my presence by bowing almost humorously.

"This is Monsieur Scarlett, of the Imperial Military Police," said the Countess, in a clear voice, ending with that slightly rising inflection which demands an answer.

"Mr. Buckhurst," I said, "I am an Inspector of Military Police, and I cannot begin to tell you what a pleasure this meeting is to me."

"I have no doubt of that, monsieur," said Buckhurst, in his smooth, almost caressing tones. "It, however, inconveniences me a great deal to cross the frontier to-day, even in your company, otherwise I should have surrendered with my confrères."

"But there is no question of *your* crossing the frontier, Mr. Buckhurst," I said.

His colorless eyes sought mine, then dropped. They were almost stone white in the lamp-light – white as his delicately chiselled face and hands.

"Are we not to be exiled?" he asked.

"*You* are not," I said.

"Am I not under arrest?"

I stepped forward and placed him formally under arrest, touching him slightly on the shoulder. He did not move a muscle, yet, beneath the thin cloth of his coat I could divine a frame of iron.

"Your creed is one of non-resistance to violence," I said – "is it not?"

"Yes," he replied. I saw that gray ring around the pale pupil of his eyes contracting, little by little.

"You have not asked me why I arrest you," I suggested, "and, monsieur, I must ask you to step back from that table – quick! – don't move! – not one finger!"

For a second he looked into the barrel of my pistol with concentrated composure, then glanced at the table-drawer which he had jerked open. A revolver lay shining among the litter of glass tubes and papers in the drawer.

The Countess, too, saw the revolver and turned an astonished face to my prisoner.

"Who brought you here?" asked Buckhurst, quietly of me.

"I did," said the Countess, her voice almost breaking. "Tell this man and his government that you are ready to face every charge against your honor! There is a dreadful mistake; they – they think you are –"

"A thief," I interposed, with a smile. "The government only asks you to prove that you are not."

Slowly Buckhurst turned his eyes on the Countess; the faintest glimmer of white teeth showed for an instant between the gray lines that were his lips.

"So *you* brought this man here?" he said. "Oh, I am glad to know it."

"Then you cannot be that same John Buckhurst who stands in the tribune of the Château Rouge and promises all Paris to his chosen people," I remarked, smiling.

"No," he said, slowly, "I cannot be that man, nor can I –"

"Stop! Stand back from that table!" I cried.

"I beg your pardon," he said, coolly.

"Madame," said I, without taking my eyes from him, "in a community dedicated to peace, a revolver is an anachronism. So I think – if you move I will shoot you, Mr. Buckhurst! – so I think I had better take it, table-drawer and all –"

“Stop!” said Buckhurst.

“Oh no, I can’t stop now,” said I, cheerfully, “and if you attempt to upset that lamp you will make a sad mistake. Now walk to the door! Turn your back! Go slowly! – halt!”

With the table-drawer under one arm and my pistol-hand swinging, I followed Buckhurst out into the hall.

Daylight dazzled me; it must have affected Buckhurst, too, for he reached out to the stone balustrade and guided himself down the steps, five paces in front of me.

Under the trees on the lawn, beside the driveway, I saw Dr. Delmont standing, big, bushy head bent thoughtfully, hands clasped behind his back.

Near him, Tavernier and Bazard were lifting a few boxes into a farm-wagon. The carriage from Trois-Feuilles was also there, a stumpy Alsatian peasant on the box. But there were yet no signs of the escort of gendarmes which had been promised me.

As Buckhurst appeared, walking all alone ahead of me, Dr. Delmont looked up with a bitter laugh. “So they found you, too? Well, Buckhurst, this is too bad. They might have given you one more day on your experiments.”

“What experiments?” I asked, glancing at the bottles and retorts in the table-drawer.

“Nitrogen for exhausted soil,” said the Countess, quietly.

I set the table-drawer on the grass, rested my pistol on my hip, and looked around at my prisoners, who now were looking intently at me.

“Gentlemen,” said I, “let me warn you not to claim comradeship with Mr. Buckhurst. And I will show you one reason why.”

I picked up from the table-drawer a little stick about five inches long and held it up.

“What is that, doctor? You don’t know? Oh, you think it might be some sample of fertilizer containing concentrated nitrogen? You are mistaken, it is not nitrogen, but nitro-glycerine.”

Buckhurst’s face changed slightly.

“Is it not, Mr. Buckhurst?” I asked.

He was silent.

“Would you permit me to throw this bit of stuff at your feet?” And I made a gesture.

The superb nerve of the man was something to remember. He did not move, but over his face there crept a dreadful pallor, which even the others noticed, and they shrank away from him, shocked and amazed.

“Here, gentlemen,” I continued, “is a box with a German label – ‘Oberlohe, Hanover.’ The silicious earth with which nitro-glycerine is mixed to make dynamite comes from Oberlohe, in Hanover.”

I laid my pistol on the table, struck a match, and deliberately lighted my stick of dynamite. It burned quietly with a brilliant flame, and I laid it on the grass and let it burn out like a lump of Greek fire.

“Messieurs,” I said, cocking and uncocking my pistol, “it is not because this man is a dangerous, political criminal and a maker of explosives that the government has sent me here to arrest him ... or kill him. It is because he is a common thief... a thief who steals crucifixes... like this one – ”

I brushed aside a pile of papers in the drawer and drew out a big gold crucifix, marvellously chiselled from a lump of the solid metal... “A thief,” I continued, “who strips the diamonds from crucifixes... as this has been stripped... and who sells a single stone to a Jew in Strasbourg, named Fishel Cohen... now in prison to confront our friend Buckhurst.”

In the dead silence I heard Dr. Delmont’s heavy breathing. Tavernier gave a dry sob and covered his face with his thin hands. The young Countess stood motionless, frightfully white, staring at Buckhurst, who had folded his arms.

Sylvia Elven touched her, but the Countess shook her off and walked straight to Buckhurst.

“Look at me,” she said. “I have promised you my friendship, my faith and trust and support. And now I say to you, I believe in you. Tell them where that crucifix came from.”

Buckhurst looked at me, long enough to see that the end of his rope had come. Then he slowly turned his deadly eyes on the girl before him.

Scarlet to the roots of her hair, she stood there, utterly stunned. The white edges of Buckhurst’s teeth began to show again; for an instant I thought he meant to strike her. Then the sudden double beat of horses’ hoofs broke out along the avenue below, and, through the red sunset I saw a dozen horsemen come scampering up the drive toward us.

“They’ve sent me lancers instead of gendarmes for your escort,” I remarked to Dr. Delmont; at the same moment I stepped out into the driveway to signal the riders, raising my hand.

Instantly a pistol flashed – then another and another, and a dozen harsh voices shouted: “Hourra! Hourra! Preussen!”

“Mille tonnerre!” roared Delmont; “the Prussians are here!”

“Look out! Stand back there! Get the women back!” I cried, as an Uhlan wheeled his horse straight through a bed of geraniums and fired his horse-pistol at me.

Delmont dragged the young Countess to the shelter of an elm; Sylvia Elven and Tavernier followed; Buckhurst ran to the carriage and leaped in.

“No resistance!” bellowed Delmont, as Bazard snatched up the pistol I had taken from Buckhurst. But the invalid had already fired at a horseman, and had gone down under the merciless hoofs with a lance through his face.

My first impulse was to shoot Buckhurst, and I started for him.

Then, in front of me, a horse galloped into the table and fell with a crash, hurling his rider at my feet. I can see him yet sprawling there on the lawn, a lank, red-faced fellow, his helmet smashed in, and his spurred boots sticking fast in the sod.

Helter-skelter through the trees came the rest of the Uhlans, shouting their hoarse “Hourra! Hourra! Preussen!” – white-and-black pennons streaming from their lance-heads, pistols flashing in the early dusk.

I ran past Bazard’s trampled body and fired at an Uhlan who had seized the horses which were attached to the carriage where Buckhurst sat. The Uhlan’s horse reared and plunged, carrying him away at a frightful pace, and I do not know whether I hit him or not, but he dropped his pistol, and I picked it up and fired at another cavalryman who shouted and put his horse straight at me.

Again I ran around the wagon, through a clump of syringa bushes, and up the stone steps to the terrace, and after me galloped one of those incomparable cossack riders – an Uhlan, lance in rest, setting his wiry little horse to the stone steps with a loud “Hourra!”

It was too steep a grade for the gallant horse. I flung my pistol in the animal’s face and the poor brute reared straight up and fell backward, rolling over and over with his unfortunate rider, and falling with a tremendous splash into the pool below.

“In God’s name stop that!” roared Delmont, from below. “Give up, Scarlett! They mean us no harm!”

I could see the good doctor on the lawn, waving his handkerchief frantically at me; in a group behind stood the Countess and Sylvia; Tavernier was kneeling beside Bazard’s body; two Uhlans were raising their stunned comrade from the wreck of the table; other Uhlans cantered toward the foot of the terrace above which I stood.

“Come down, hussar!” called an officer. “We respect your uniform.”

“Will you parley?” I asked, listening intently for the gallop of my promised gendarmes. If I could only gain time and save Buckhurst. He was there in the carriage; I had seen him spring into it when the Germans burst in among the trees.

“Foulez-vous vous rendre? Oui ou non?” shouted the officer, in his terrible French.

“Eh bien... non!” I cried, and ran for the château.

I heard the Uhlans dismount and run clattering and jingling up the stone steps. As I gained the doorway they shot at me, but I only fled the faster, springing up the stairway. Here I stood, sabre in hand, ready to stop the first man.

Up the stairs rushed three Uhlans, sabres shining in the dim light from the window behind me; I laid my forefinger flat on the blade of my sabre and shortened my arm for a thrust – then there came a blinding flash, a roar, and I was down, trying to rise, until a clinched fist struck me in the face and I fell flat on my back.

Without any emotion whatever I saw an Uhlan raise his sabre to finish me; also I saw a yellow-and-black sleeve interposed between death and myself.

“No butchery!” growled the big officer who had summoned me from the lawn. “Cursed pig, you’d sabre your own grandmother! Lift him, Sepp! You, there, Loisel! – lift him up. Is he gone?”

“He is alive, Herr Rittmeister,” said a soldier, “but his back is broken.”

“It isn’t,” I said.

“Herr Je!” muttered the Rittmeister; “an eel, and a Frenchman, and nine long lives! Here, you hussar, what’s the matter with you?”

“One of them shot me; I thought it was to be sabres,” said I, weakly.

“And why the devil wasn’t it sabres!” roared the officer, turning on his men. “One to three – and six more below! Sepp, you disgust me. Carry him out!”

I groaned as they lifted me. “Easy there!” growled the officer, “don’t pull him that way. Now, young hell-cat, set your teeth; you have eight more lives yet.”

They got me out to the terrace, and carried me to the lawn. One of the men brought a cup of water from the pool.

“Herr Rittmeister,” I said, faintly, “I had a prisoner here; he should be in the carriage. Is he?”

The officer walked briskly over to the carriage. “Nobody here but two women and a scared peasant!” he called out.

As I lay still staring up into the sky, I heard the Rittmeister addressing Dr. Delmont in angry tones. “By every law of civilized war I ought to hang you and your friend there! Civilians who fire on troops are treated that way. But I won’t. Your foolish companion lies yonder with a lance through his mouth. He’s dead; I say nothing. For you, I have no respect. But I have for that hell-cat who did his duty. You civilians – you go to the devil!”

“Are not your prisoners sacred from insult?” asked the doctor, angrily.

“Prisoners! *My* prisoners! You compliment yourself! Loisel! Send those impudent civilians into the house! I won’t look at them! They make me sick!”

The astonished doctor attempted to take his stand by me, offering his services, but the troopers hustled him and poor Tavernier off up the terrace steps.

“The two ladies in the carriage, Herr Rittmeister?” said a cavalryman, coming up at salute.

“What? Ladies? Oh yes.” Then he muttered in his mustache: “Always around – always everywhere. They can’t stay there. I want that carriage. Sepp!”

“At orders, Herr Rittmeister!”

“Carry that gentleman to the carriage. Place Schwartz and Ruppert in the wagon yonder. Get straw – you, Brauer, bring straw – and toss in those boxes, if there is room. Where’s Hofman?”

“In the pool, Herr Rittmeister.”

“Take him out,” said the officer, soberly. “Uhlans don’t abandon their dead.”

Two soldiers lifted me again and bore me away in the darkness. I was perfectly conscious.

And all the while I was listening for the gallop of my gendarmes, not that I cared very much, now that Buckhurst was gone.

“Herr Rittmeister,” I said, as they laid me in the carriage, “ask the Countess de Vassart if she will let me say good-bye to her.”

“With pleasure,” said the officer, promptly. “Madame, here is a polite young gentleman who desires to make his adieux. Permit me, madame – he is here in the dark. Sepp! fall back! Loisel, advance ten paces! Halt!”

“Is it you, Monsieur Scarlett?” came an unsteady voice, from the darkness.

“Yes, madame. Can you forgive me?”

“Forgive you? My poor friend, I have nothing to forgive. Are you badly hurt, Monsieur Scarlett?”

“I don’t know,” I muttered.

Suddenly the chapel bell of La Trappe rang out a startling peal; the Prussian captain shouted: “Stop that bell! Shoot every civilian in the house!” But the Uhlans, who rushed up the terrace, found the great doors bolted and the lower windows screened with steel shutters.

On the battlements of the south wing a red radiance grew brighter; somebody had thrown wood into the iron basket of the ancient beacon, and set fire to it.

“That teaches me a lesson!” bawled the enraged Rittmeister, shaking his fist up at the brightening alarm signal.

He vaulted into his saddle, wheeled his horse and rode up to the peasant, Brauer, who, frightened to the verge of stupidity, sat on the carriage-box.

“Do you know the wood-road that leads to Gunstett through the foot-hills?” he demanded, controlling his fury with a strong effort.

The blank face of the peasant was answer enough; the Rittmeister glared around; his eyes fell on the Countess.

“You know this country, madame?”

“Yes, monsieur.”

“Will you set us on our way through the Gunstett hill-road?”

“No.”

The chapel bell was clanging wildly; the beacon shot up in a whirling column of sparks and red smoke.

“Put that woman into the carriage!” bellowed the officer. “I’m cursed if I leave her to set the whole country yapping at our heels! Loisel, put her in beside the prisoner! Madame, it is useless to resist. Hark! What’s that sound of galloping?”

I listened. I heard nothing save the clamor of the chapel bell.

An Uhlan laid a heavy hand on the shoulder of the listening Countess; she tried to draw back, but he pushed her brutally into the carriage, and she stumbled and fell into the cushions beside me.

“Uhlans, into your saddles!” cried the Rittmeister, sharply. “Two men to the wagon! – a man on the box there! Here you, Jacques Bonhomme, drive carefully or I’ll hang you higher than the Strasbourg clock. Are the wounded in the straw? Sepp, take the riderless horses. Peloton, attention! Draw sabres! March! Trot!”

Fever had already begun to turn my head; the jolting of the carriage brought me to my senses at times; at times, too, I could hear the two wounded Uhlans groaning in the wagon behind me, the tramping of the cavalry ahead, the dull rattle of lance butts in the leather stirrup-boots.

If I could only have fainted, but I could not, and the agony grew so intense that I bit my lip through to choke the scream that strained my throat.

Once the carriage stopped; in the darkness I heard somebody whisper: “There go the French riders!” And I fancied I heard a far echo of hoof-strokes along the road to La Trappe. It might have been the fancy of an intermittent delirium; it may have been my delayed gendarmes – I never knew. And the carriage presently moved on more smoothly, as though we were now on one of those even military high-roads which traverse France from Luxembourg to the sea.

Which way we were going I did not know, I did not care. Absurdly mingled with sick fancies came flashes of reason, when I could see the sky frosted with silver, and little, bluish stars peeping

down. At times I recognized the mounted men around me as Prussian Uhlans, and weakly wondered by what deviltry they had got into France, and what malignant spell they cast over the land that the very stones did not rise up and smite them from their yellow-and-black saddles.

Once – it was, I think, very near daybreak – I came out of a dream in which I was swimming through oceans of water, drinking as I swam. The carriage had stopped; I could not see the lancers, but presently I heard them all talking in loud, angry voices. There appeared to be some houses near by; I heard a dog barking, a great outcry of pigs and feathered fowls, the noise of a scuffle, a trampling of heavy boots, a shot!

Then the terrible voice of the Rittmeister: “Hang that man to his barn gate! Pig of an assassin, I’ll teach you to murder German soldiers!”

A woman began to scream without ceasing.

“Burn that house!” bellowed the Rittmeister.

Through the prolonged screaming I heard the crash of window-glass; presently a dull red light grew out of the gloom, brighter and brighter. The screaming never ceased.

“Uhlans! Mount!” came the steady voice of the Rittmeister; the carriage started. Almost at the word the darkness turned to flame; against the raging furnace of a house on fire I saw the figure of a man, inky black, hanging from the high cross-bar of the cow-yard gate, and past him filed the shadowy horsemen, lances slanting backward from their stirrups.

The last I remember was seeing the dead man’s naked feet – for they hanged him in his night-shirt – and the last I heard was that awful screaming from the red shadows that flickered across the fields of uncut wheat.

For presently my madness began again, and again I was bathed to the mouth in cold, sweet waters, and I drank as I swam lazily in the sunshine.

My next lucid interval came from pain almost unendurable. We were fording a river in bright starlight; the carriage bumped across the stones, water washed and slopped over the carriage floor. To right and left, Prussian lancers were riding, and I saw the water boiling under their horses and their long lances aslant the stars.

But there were more horsemen now, scores and scores of them, trampling through the shallow river. And beyond I could see a line of cannon, wallowing through the water, shadowy artillerymen clinging to forge and caisson, mounted men astride straining teams, tall officers on either flank, sitting their horses motionless in mid-stream.

The carriage stopped.

“Are you suffering?” came a low voice, close to my ear.

“Madame, could I have a little of that water?” I muttered.

Very gently she laid me back. I was entirely without power to move below my waist, or to support my body.

She filled my cap with river water and held it while I drank. After I had my fill she bathed my face, passing her wet hands through my hair and over my eyes. The carriage moved on.

After a while she whispered.

“Are you awake?”

“Yes, madame.”

“See the dawn – how red it is on the hills! There are vineyards there on the heights... and a castle... and soldiers moving out across the river meadows.”

The rising sun was shining in my eyes as we came to a halt before a small stone bridge over which a column of cavalry was passing – Prussian hussars, by their crimson dolmans and little, flat busbies.

Our Uhlan escort grouped themselves about us to watch the hussars defile at a trot, and I saw the Rittmeister rigidly saluting their standards as they bobbed past above a thicket of sabres.

“What are these Uhlans doing?” broke in a nasal voice behind us; an officer, followed by two orderlies and a trumpeter, came galloping up through the mud.

“Who’s that – a dead Frenchman?” demanded the officer, leaning over the edge of the carriage to give me a near-sighted stare. Then he saw the Countess, stared at her, and touched the golden peak of his helmet.

“At your service, madame,” he said. “Is this officer dead?”

“Dying, general,” said the Rittmeister, at salute.

“Then he will not require these men. Herr Rittmeister, I take your Uhlans for my escort. Madame, you have my sympathy; can I be of service?”

He spoke perfect French. The Countess looked up at him in a bewildered way. “You cannot mean to abandon this dying man here?” she asked.

There was a silence, broken brusquely by the Rittmeister. “That Frenchman did his duty!”

“Did he?” said the general, staring at the Countess.

“Very well; I want that carriage, but I won’t take it. Give the driver a white flag, and have him drive into the French lines. Herr Rittmeister, give your orders! Madame, your most devoted!” And he wheeled his beautiful horse and trotted off down the road, while the Rittmeister hastily tied a handkerchief to a stick and tossed it up to the speechless peasant on the box.

“Morsbronn is the nearest French post!” he said, in French. Then he bent from his horse and looked down at me.

“You did your duty!” he snapped, and, barely saluting the Countess, touched spurs to his mount and disappeared, followed at a gallop by his mud-splashed Uhlans.

V THE IMMORTALS

When I became conscious again I was lying on a table. Two men were leaning over me; a third came up, holding a basin. There was an odor of carbolic in the air.

The man with the basin made a horrid grimace when he caught my eye; his face was a curious golden yellow, his eyes jet black, and at first I took him for a fever phantom.

Then my bewildered eyes fastened on his scarlet fez, pulled down over his left ear, the sky-blue Zouave jacket, with its bright-yellow arabesques, the canvas breeches, leggings laced close over the thin shins and ankles of an Arab. And I knew him for a soldier of African riflemen, one of those brave children of the desert whom we called “Turcos,” and whose faith in the greatness of France has never faltered since the first blue battalion of Africa was formed under the eagles of the First Empire.

“Hallo, Mustapha!” I said, faintly; “what are they doing to me now?”

The Turco’s golden-bronze visage relaxed; he saluted me.

“Macache sabir,” he said; “they picked a bullet from your spine, my inspector.”

An officer in the uniform of a staff-surgeon came around the table where I was lying.

“Bon!” he exclaimed, eying me sharply through his gold-rimmed glasses. “Can you feel your hind-legs now, young man?”

I could feel them all too intensely, and I said so.

The surgeon began to turn down his shirt-sleeves and button his cuffs, saying, “You’re lucky to have a pain in your legs.” Turning to the Turco, he added, “Lift him!” And the giant rifleman picked me up and laid me in a long chair by the window.

“Your case is one of those amusing cases,” continued the surgeon, buckling on his sword and revolver; “very amusing, I assure you. As for the bullet, I could have turned it out with a straw, only it rested there *exactly* where it stopped the use of those long legs of yours! – a fine example of temporary reflex paralysis, and no hemorrhage to speak of – nothing to swear about, young man. By-the-way, you ought to go to bed for a few days.”

He clasped his short baldric over his smartly buttoned tunic. The room was shaking with the discharges of cannon.

“A millimetre farther and that bullet would have cracked your spine. Remember that and keep off your feet. Ouf! The cannon are tuning up!” as a terrible discharge shattered the glass in the window-panes beside me.

“Where am I, doctor?” I asked.

“Parbleu, in Morsbronn! Can’t you hear the orchestra, zim-bam-zim! The Prussians are playing their Wagner music for us. Here, swallow this. How do you feel now?”

“Sleepy. Did you say a day or two, doctor?”

“I said a week or two – perhaps longer. I’ll look in this evening if I’m not up to my chin in amputations. Take these every hour if in pain. Go to sleep, my son.”

With a paternal tap on my head, he drew on his scarlet, gold-banded cap, tightened the check strap, and walked out of the room. Down-stairs I heard him cursing because his horse had been shot. I never saw him again.

Dozing feverishly, hearing the cannon through troubled slumber, I awoke toward noon quite free from any considerable pain, but thirsty and restless, and numbed to the hips. Alarmed, I strove to move my feet, and succeeded. Then, freed from the haunting terror of paralysis, I fell to pinching my legs with satisfaction, my eyes roving about in search of water.

The room where I lay was in disorder; it appeared to be completely furnished with well-made old pieces, long out of date, but not old enough to be desirable. Chairs, sofas, tables were all fashioned in that poor design which marked the early period of the Consulate; the mirror was a fine sheet of

glass imbedded in Pompeian and Egyptian designs; the clock, which had stopped, was a meaningless lump of gilt and marble, supported on gilt sphinxes. Over the bed hung a tarnished canopy brodered with a coronet, which, from the strawberry leaves and the pearls raised above them, I took to be the coronet of a count of English origin.

The room appeared to be very old, and I knew the house must have stood for centuries somewhere along the single street of Morsbronn, though I could not remember seeing any building in the village which, judging from the exterior, seemed likely to contain such a room as this.

The nearer and heavier cannon-shots had ceased, but the window-sashes hummed with the steady thunder of a battle going on somewhere among the mountains. Knowing the Alsatian frontier fairly well, I understood that a battle among the mountains must mean that our First Corps had been attacked, and that we were on the defensive on French soil.

The booming of the guns was unbroken, as steady and sustained as the eternal roar of a cataract. At moments I believed that I could distinguish the staccato crashes of platoon firing, but could not be certain in the swelling din.

As I lay there on my long, cushioned chair, burning with that insatiable thirst which, to thoroughly appreciate, one must be wounded, the door opened and a Turco soldier came into the room and advanced toward me on tip-toe.

He wore full uniform, was fully equipped, crimson chechia, snowy gaiters, and terrible sabre-bayonet.

I beckoned him, and the tall, bronzed fellow came up, smiling, showing his snowy, pointed teeth under a crisp beard.

"Water, Mustapha," I motioned with stiffened lips, and the good fellow unslung his blue water-bottle and set it to my burning mouth.

"Merci, mon brave!" I said. "May you dwell in Paradise with Ali, the fourth Caliph, the Lion of God!"

The Turco stared, muttered the Tekbir in a low voice, bent and kissed my hands.

"Were you once an officer of our African battalions?" he asked, in the Arab tongue.

"Sous-officier of spahi cavalry," I said, smiling. "And you are a Kabyle mountaineer from Constantine, I see."

"It is true as I recite the fatha," cried the great fellow, beaming on me. "We Kabyles love our officers and bear witness to the unity of God, too. I am a marabout, my inspector, Third Turcos, and I am anxious to have a Prussian ask me who were my seven ancestors."

The music of his long-forgotten tongue refreshed me; old scenes and memories of the camp at Oran, the never-to-be-forgotten cavalry with the scarlet cloaks, rushed on me thick and fast; incidents, trivial matters of the bazaars, faces of comrades dead, came to me in flashes. My eyes grew moist, my throat swelled, I whimpered:

"It is all very well, mon enfant, but I'm here with a hole in me stuffed full of lint, and you have your two good arms and as many legs with which to explain to the Prussians who your seven ancestors may be. Give me a drink, in God's name!"

Again he held up the blue water-bottle, saying, gravely: "We both worship the same God, my inspector, call Him what we will."

After a moment I said: "Is it a battle or a bousculade? But I need not ask; the cannon tell me enough. Are they storming the heights, Mustapha?"

"Macache comprendre," said the soldier, dropping into patois. "There is much noise, but we Turcos are here in Morsbronn, and we have seen nothing but sparrows."

I listened for a moment; the sound of the cannonade appeared to be steadily receding westward.

"It seems to me like retreat!" I said, sharply.

"Ritrite? Quis qui ci, ritrite?"

I looked at the simple fellow with tears in my eyes.

“You would not understand if I told you,” said I. “Are you detailed to look after me?”

He said he was, and I informed him that I needed nobody; that it was much more important for everybody that he should rejoin his battalion in the street below, where even now I could hear the Algerian bugles blowing a silvery sonnerie – “Garde à vous!”

“I am Salah Ben-Ahmed, a marabout of the Third Turcos,” he said, proudly, “and I have yet to explain to these Prussians who my seven ancestors were. Have I my inspector’s permission to go?”

He was fairly trembling as the imperative clangor of the bugles rang through the street; his fine nostrils quivered, his eyes glittered like a cobra’s.

“Go, Salah Ben-Ahmed, the marabout,” said I, laughing.

The soldier stiffened to attention; his bronzed hand flew to his scarlet fez, and, “Salute! O my inspector!” he cried, sonorously, and was gone at a bound.

That breathless unrest which always seizes me when men are at one another’s throats set me wriggling and twitching, and peering from the window, through which I could not see because of the blinds. Command after command was ringing out in the street below. “Forward!” shouted a resonant voice, and “Forward! forward! forward!” echoed the voices of the captains, distant and more distant, then drowned in the rolling of kettle-drums and the silvery clang of Moorish cymbals.

The band music of the Algerian infantry died away in the distant tumult of the guns; faintly, at moments, I could still hear the shrill whistle of their flutes, the tinkle of the silver chimes on their *toug*; then a blank, filled with the hollow roar of battle, then a clear note from their reeds, a tinkle, an echoing chime – and nothing, save the immense monotone of the cannonade.

I had been lying there motionless for an hour, my head on my hand, snivelling, when there came a knock at the door, and I hastily buttoned my blood-stained shirt to the throat, threw a tunic over my shoulders, and cried, “Come in!”

A trick of memory and perhaps of physical weakness had driven from my mind all recollection of the Countess de Vassart since I had come to my senses under the surgeon’s probe. But at the touch of her fingers on the door outside, I knew her – I was certain that it could be nobody but my Countess, who had turned aside in her gentle pilgrimage to lift this Lazarus from the waysides of a hostile world.

She entered noiselessly, bearing a bowl of broth and some bread; but when she saw me sitting there with eyes and nose all red and swollen from snivelling she set the bowl on a table and hurried to my side.

“What is it? Is the pain so dreadful?” she whispered.

“No – oh no. I’m only a fool, and quite hungry, madame.”

She brought the broth and bread and a glass of the most exquisite wine I ever tasted – a wine that seemed to brighten the whole room with its liquid sunshine.

“Do you know where you are?” she asked, gravely.

“Oh yes – in Morsbronn.”

“And in whose house, monsieur?”

“I don’t know – ” I glanced instinctively at the tarnished coronet on the canopy above the bed. “Do you know, Madame la Comtesse?”

“I ought to,” she said, faintly amused. “I was born in this room. It was to this house that I desired to come before – my exile.”

Her eyes softened as they rested first on one familiar object, then on another.

“The house has always been in our family,” she said. “It was once one of those fortified farms in the times when every hamlet was a petty kingdom – like the King of Yvetôt’s domain. Doubtless the ancient Trécourts also wore cotton night-caps for their coronets.”

“I remember now,” said I, “a stone turret wedged in between two houses. Is this it?”

“Yes, it is all that is left of the farm. My ancestors built this crazy old row of houses for their tenants.”

After a silence I said, “I wish I could look out of the window.”

She hesitated. "I don't suppose it could harm you?"

"It will harm me if I don't," said I.

She went to the window and folded up the varnished blinds.

"How dreadful the cannonade is growing," she said. "Wait! don't think of moving! I will push you close to the window, where you can see."

The tower in which my room was built projected from the rambling row of houses, so that my narrow window commanded a view of almost the entire length of the street. This street comprised all there was of Morsbronn; it lay between a double rank of houses constructed of plaster and beams, and surmounted by high-pointed gables and slated or tiled roofs, so fantastic that they resembled steeples.

Down the street I could see the house that I had left twenty-four hours before, never dreaming what my journey to La Trappe held in store for me. One or two dismounted soldiers of the Third Hussars sat in the doorway, listening to the cannon; but, except for these listless troopers, a few nervous sparrows, and here and there a skulking peasant, slinking off with a load of household furniture on his back, the street was deserted.

Everywhere shutters had been put up, blinds closed, curtains drawn. Not a shred of smoke curled from the chimneys of these deserted houses; the heavy gables cast sinister shadows over closed doors and gates barred and locked, and it made me think of an unseaworthy ship, prepared for a storm, so bare and battened down was this long, dreary commune, lying there in the August sun.

Beside the window, close to my face, was a small, square loop-hole, doubtless once used for arquebus fire. It tired me to lean on the window, so I contented myself with lying back and turning my head, and I could see quite as well through the loop-hole as from the window.

Lying there, watching the slow shadows crawling out over the sidewalk, I had been for some minutes thinking of my friend Mr. Buckhurst, when I heard the young Countess stirring in the room behind me.

"You are not going to be a cripple?" she said, as I turned my head.

"Oh no, indeed!" said I.

"Nor die?" she added, seriously.

"How could a man die with an angel straight from heaven to guard him! Pardon, I am only grateful, not impertinent." I looked at her humbly, and she looked at me without the slightest expression. Oh, it was all very well for the Countess de Vassart to tuck up her skirts and rake hay, and live with a lot of half-crazy apostles, and throw her fortune to the proletariat and her reputation to the dogs. She could do it; she was Éline Cyprienne de Trécourt, Countess de Vassart; and if her relatives didn't like her views, that was their affair; and if the Faubourg Saint-Germain emitted moans, that concerned the noble faubourg and not James Scarlett, a policeman attached to a division of paid mercenaries.

Oh yes, it was all very well for the Countess de Vassart to play at democracy with her unbalanced friends, but it was also well for Americans to remember that she was French, and that this was France, and that in France a countess was a countess until she was buried in the family vault, whether she had chosen to live as a countess or as Doll Dairymaid.

The young girl looked at me curiously, studying me with those exquisite gray eyes of hers. Pensive, distraite, she sat there, the delicate contour of her head outlined against the sunny window, which quivered with the slow boom! boom! of the cannonade.

"Are you English, Monsieur Scarlett?" she asked, quietly.

"American, madame."

"And yet you take service under an emperor."

"I have taken harder service than that."

"Of necessity?"

"Yes, madame."

She was silent.

“Would it amuse you to hear what I have been?” I said, smiling.

“That is not the word,” she said, quietly. “To hear of hardship helps one to understand the world.”

The cannonade had been growing so loud again that it was with difficulty that we could make ourselves audible to each other. The jar of the discharges began to dislodge bits of glass and little triangular pieces of plaster, and the solid walls of the tower shook till even the mirror began to sway and the tarnished gilt sconces to quiver in their sockets.

“I wish you were not in Morsbronn,” I said.

“I feel safer here in my own house than I should at La Trappe,” she replied.

She was probably thinking of the dead Uhlan and of poor Bazard; perhaps of the wretched exposure of Buckhurst – the man she had trusted and who had proved to be a swindler, and a murderous one at that.

Suddenly a shell fell into the court-yard opposite, bursting immediately in a cloud of gravel which rained against our turret like hail.

Stunned for an instant, the Countess stood there motionless, her face turned towards the window. I struggled to sit upright.

She looked calmly at me; the color came back into her face, and in spite of my remonstrance she walked to the window, closed the heavy outside shutters and the blinds. As she was fastening them I heard the whizzing quaver of another shell, the racket of its explosion, the crash of plaster.

“Where is the safest place for us to stay?” she asked. Her voice was perfectly steady.

“In the cellar. I beg you to go at once.”

Bang! a shell blew up in a shower of slates and knocked a chimney into a heap of bricks.

“Do you insist on staying by that loop-hole?” she asked, without a quiver in her voice.

“Yes, I do,” said I. “Will you go to the cellar?”

“No,” she said, shortly.

I saw her walk toward the rear of the room, hesitate, sink down by the edge of the bed and lay her face in the pillow.

Two shells burst with deafening reports in the street; the young Countess covered her face with both hands. Shell after shell came howling, whistling, whizzing into the village; the two hussars had disappeared, but a company of Turcos came up on a run and began to dig a trench across the street a hundred yards west of our turret.

How they made the picks and shovels fly! Shells tore through the air over them, bursting on impact with roof and chimney; the Turcos tucked up their blue sleeves, spat on their hands, and dug away like terriers, while their officers, smoking the eternal cigarette, coolly examined the distant landscape through their field-glasses.

Shells rained fast on Morsbronn; nearer and nearer bellowed the guns; the plaster ceiling above my head cracked and fell in thin flakes, filling the room with an acrid, smarting dust. Again and again metal fragments from shells rang out on the heavy walls of our turret; a roof opposite sank in; flames flickered up through clouds of dust; a heavy yellow smoke, swarming with sparks, rolled past my window.

Down the street a dull sound grew into a steady roar; the Turcos dropped pick and shovel and seized their rifles.

“Garde! Garde à vous!” rang their startled bugles; the tumult increased to a swelling uproar, shouting, cheering, the crash of shutters and of glass, and —

“The Prussians!” bellowed the captain. “Turcos – charge!”

His voice was lost; a yelling mass of soldiery burst into view; spiked helmets and bayonets glittering through the smoke, the Turcos were whirled about like brilliant butterflies in a tornado; the fusillade swelled to a stupefying din, exploding in one terrible crash; and, wrapped in lightning, the Prussian onset passed.

From the stairs below came the sound of a voiceless struggle, the trample and panting and clicking of steel, till of a sudden a voice burst out into a dreadful screaming. A shot followed – silence – another shot – then the stairs outside shook under the rush of mounting men.

As the door burst open I felt a touch on my arm; the Countess de Vassart stood erect and pale, one slender, protecting hand resting lightly on my shoulder; a lieutenant of Prussian infantry confronted us; straight, heavy sword drawn, rigid, uncompromising, in his faultless gray-and-black uniform, with its tight, silver waist-sash.

“I do not have you thrown into the street,” he said to me, in excellent French, “because there has been no firing from the windows in this village. Otherwise – other measures. Be at ease, madame, I shall not harm your invalid.”

He glanced at me out of his near-sighted eyes, dropped the point of his sword to the stone floor, and slowly caressed his small, blond mustache.

“How many troops passed through here yesterday morning?” he asked.

I was silent.

“There was artillery, was there not?”

I only looked at him.

“Do you hear?” he repeated, sharply. “You are a prisoner, and I am questioning you.”

“You have that useless privilege,” I observed.

“If you are insolent I will have you shot!” he retorted, staring haughtily at me.

I glanced out of the window.

There was a pause; the hand of the Countess de Vassart trembled on my shoulder.

Under the window strident Prussian bugles were blowing a harsh summons; the young officer stepped to the loop-hole and looked out, then hastily removed his helmet and thrust his blond head through the smoky aperture. “March those prisoners in below!” he shouted down.

Then he withdrew his head, put on his polished helmet of black leather, faced with the glittering Prussian eagle, and tightened the gold-scaled cheek-guard.

A moment later came a trample of feet on the landing outside, the door was flung open, and three prisoners were brutally pushed into the room.

I tried to turn and look at them; they stood in the dusk near the bed, but I could only make out that one was a Turco, his jacket in rags, his canvas breeches covered with mud.

Again the lieutenant came to the loop-hole and glanced out, then shook his head, motioning the soldiers back.

“It is too high and the arc of fire too limited,” he said, shortly. “Detail four men to hold the stairs, ten men and a sergeant in the room below, and you’d better take your prisoners down there. Bayonet that Turco tiger if he shows his teeth again. March!”

As the prisoners filed out I turned once more and thought I recognized Salah Ben-Ahmed in the dishevelled Turco, but could not be certain, so disfigured and tattered the soldier appeared.

“Here, you hussar prisoner!” cried the lieutenant, pointing at me with his white-gloved finger, “turn your head and busy yourself with what concerns you. And you, madame,” he added, pompously, “see that you give us no trouble and stay in this room until you have permission to leave.”

“Are – are you speaking to me, monsieur?” asked the Countess, amazed. Then she rose, exasperated.

“Your insolence disgraces your uniform,” she said. “Go to your French prisoners and learn the rudiments of courtesy!”

The officer reddened to his colorless eyebrows; his little, near-sighted eyes became stupid and fixed; he smoothed the blond down on his upper lip with hesitating fingers.

Suddenly he turned and marched out, slamming the door violently behind him.

At this impudence the eyes of the Countess began to sparkle, and an angry flush mounted to her cheeks.

“Madame,” said I, “he is only a German boy, unbalanced by his own importance and his first battle. But he will never forget this lesson; let him digest it in his own manner.”

And he did, for presently there came a polite knock at the door, and the lieutenant reappeared, bowing rigidly, one hand on his sword-hilt, the other holding his helmet by the gilt spike.

“Lieutenant von Eberbach present to apologize,” he said, jerkily, red as a beet. “Begg permission to take a half-dozen of wine; men very thirsty.”

“Lieutenant von Eberbach may take the wine,” said the Countess, calmly.

“Rudeness without excuse!” muttered the boy; “beg the graciously well-born lady not to judge my regiment or my country by it. Can Lieutenant von Eberbach make amends?”

“The Lieutenant has made them,” said the Countess. “The merciful treatment of French prisoners will prove his sincerity.”

The lad made another rigid bow and got himself out of the door with more or less dignity, and the Countess drew a chair beside my sofa-chair and sat down, eyes still bright with the cinders of a wrath I had never suspected in her.

Together we looked down into the street.

Under the window the flat, high-pitched drums began to rattle; deep voices shouted; the whole street undulated with masses of gray-and-black uniforms, moving forward through the smoke. A superb regimental band began to play; the troops broke out into heavy cheering.

“Vorwärts! Vorwärts!” came the steady commands. The band passed with a dull flash of instruments; a thousand brass helmet-spikes pricked the smoke; the tread of the Prussian infantry shook the earth.

“The invasion has begun,” I said.

Her face was expressionless, save for the brightness of her eyes.

And now another band sounded, playing “I Had a Comrade!” and the whole street began to ring with the noble marching-song of the coming regiment.

“Bavarian infantry,” I whispered, as the light-blue columns wheeled around the curve and came swinging up the street; for I could see the yellow crown on the collars of their tunics, and the heavy leather helmets, surmounted by chenille rolls.

Behind them trotted a squadron of Uhlans on their dainty horses, under a canopy of little black-and-white flags fluttering from the points of their lances.

“Uhlans,” I murmured. I heard the faint click of her teeth closing tightly.

Hussars in crimson tunics, armed with curious weapons, half carbine, half pistol, followed the Uhlans, filling the smoky street with a flood of gorgeous color.

Suddenly a company of Saxon pioneers arrived on the double-quick, halted, fell out, and began to break down the locked doors of the houses on either side of the street. At the same time Prussian infantry came hurrying past, dragging behind them dozens of vehicles, long hay-wagons, gardeners’ carts, heavy wheelbarrows, even a dingy private carriage, with tarnished lamps, rocking crazily on rusty springs.

The soldiers wheeled these wagons into a double line, forming a complete chain across the street, where the Turcos had commenced to dig their ditch and breastworks – a barricade high enough to check a charge, and cunningly arranged, too, for the wooden abatis could not be seen from the eastern end of the street, where a charge of French infantry or cavalry must enter Morsbronn if it entered at all.

We watched the building of the barricade, fascinated. Soldiers entered the houses on either side of the street, only to reappear at the windows and thrust out helmeted heads. More soldiers came, running heavily – the road swarmed with them; some threw themselves flat under the wagons, some knelt, thrusting their needle-guns through the wheel-spokes; others remained standing, rifles resting over the rails of the long, skeleton hay-wagons.

“Something is going to happen,” I said, as a group of smartly uniformed officers appeared on the roof of the opposite house and hastily scrambled to the ridge-pole.

Something was surely going to happen; the officers were using their field-glasses and pointing excitedly across the roof-tops; the windows of every house as far as I could see were black with helmets; a regiment in column came up on the double, halted, disintegrated, melting away behind walls, into yards, doorways, gardens.

A colonel of infantry, splendidly mounted, drew bridle under our loop-hole and looked up at the officers on the roof across the way.

“Attention, you up there!” he shouted. “Is it infantry?”

“No!” bawled an officer, hollowed hand to his cheek. “It’s their brigade of heavy cavalry coming like an earthquake!”

“The cuirassiers!” I cried, electrified. “It’s Michel’s cuirassiers, madame! And – oh, the barricade!” I groaned, twisting my fingers in helpless rage. “They’ll be caught in a trap; they’ll die like flies in that street.”

“This is horrible!” muttered the girl. “Don’t they know the street is blocked? Can’t they find out before they ride into this ravine below us? Will they all be killed here under our windows?”

She sprang to her feet, stood a moment, then stepped swiftly forward into the angle of the tower.

“Look there!” she cried, in terror.

“Push my chair – quick!” I said. She dragged it forward.

An old house across the street, which had been on fire, had collapsed into a mere mound of slate, charred beams, and plaster. Through the brown heat which quivered above the ruins I could see out into the country. And what I saw was a line of hills, crowned with smoke, a rolling stretch of meadow below, set here and there with shot-torn trees and hop-poles; and over this uneven ground two regiments of French cuirassiers and two squadrons of lancers moving slowly forward as though on parade.

Above them, around them, clouds of smoke puffed up suddenly and floated away – the shells from Prussian batteries on the heights. Long, rippling crashes broke out, belting the fields with smoky breastworks, where a Prussian infantry regiment, knee-deep in smoke, was firing on the advancing cavalry.

The cuirassiers moved on slowly, the sun a blinding sheet of fire on their armor; now and then a horse tossed his beautiful head, now and then a steel helmet turned, flashing.

Grief-stricken, I groaned aloud: “Madame, there rides the finest cavalry in the world! – to annihilation.”

How could I know that they were coming deliberately to sacrifice themselves? – that they rode with death heavy on their souls, knowing well there was no hope, understanding that they were to die to save the fragments of a beaten army?

Yet something of this I suspected, for already I saw the long, dark Prussian lines overlapping the French flank; I heard the French mitrailleuses rattling through the cannon’s thunder, and I saw an entire French division, which I did not then know to be Lartigue’s, falling back across the hills.

And straight into the entire Prussian army rode the “grosse cavallerie” and the lancers.

“They are doomed, like their fathers,” I muttered – “sons of the cuirassiers of Waterloo. See what men can do for France!”

The young Countess started and stood up very straight.

“Look, madame!” I said, harshly – “look on the men of France! You say you do not understand the narrow love of country! Look!”

“It is too pitiful, too horrible,” she said, hoarsely. “How the horses fall in that meadow!”

“They will fall thicker than that in this street!”

“See!” she cried; “they have begun to gallop! They are coming! Oh, I cannot look! – I – I cannot!”

Far away, a thin cry sounded above the cannon din; the doomed cuirassiers were cheering. It was the first charge they had ever made; nobody had ever seen cavalry of their arm on any battlefield of Europe since Waterloo.

Suddenly their long, straight blades shot into the air, the cuirassiers broke into a furious gallop, and that mass of steel-clad men burst straight down the first slope of the plateau, through the Prussian infantry, then wheeled and descended like a torrent on Morsbronn.

In the first ranks galloped the giants of the Eighth Cuirassiers, Colonel Guiot de la Rochere at their head; the Ninth Cuirassiers thundered behind them; then came the lancers under a torrent of red-and-white pennons. Nothing stopped them, neither hedges nor ditches nor fallen trees.

Their huge horses bounded forward, manes in the wind, tails streaming, iron hoofs battering the shaking earth; the steel-clad riders, sabres pointed to the front, leaned forward in their saddles.

Now among the thicket of hop-vines long lines of black arose; there was a flash, a belt of smoke, another flash – then the metallic rattle of bullets on steel breastplates. Entire ranks of cuirassiers went down in the smoke of the Prussian rifles, the sinister clash and crash of falling armor filled the air. Sheets of lead poured into them; the rattle of empty scabbards on stirrups, the metallic ringing of bullets on helmet and cuirass, the rifle-shots, the roar of the shells exploding swelled into a very hell of sound. And, above the infernal fracas rose the heavy cheering of the doomed riders.

Into the deep, narrow street wheeled the horsemen, choking road and sidewalk with their galloping squadrons, a solid cataract of impetuous horses, a flashing torrent of armored men – and then! Crash! the first squadron dashed headlong against the barricade of wagons and went down.

Into them tore the squadron behind, unable to stop their maddened horses, and into these thundered squadron after squadron, unconscious of the dead wall ahead.

In the terrible tumult and confusion, screaming horses and shrieking men were piled in heaps, a human whirlpool formed at the barricade, hurling bodily from its centre horses and riders. Men galloped headlong into each other, riders struggled knee to knee, pushing, shouting, colliding.

Posted behind the upper and lower windows of the houses, the Prussians shot into them, so close that the flames from the rifles set the jackets of the cuirassiers on fire: a German captain opened the shutters of a window and fired his pistol at a cuirassier, who replied with a sabre thrust through the window, transfixing the German's throat.

Then a horrible butchery of men and horses began; the fusillade became so violent and the scene so sickening that a Prussian lieutenant went crazy in the house opposite, and flung himself from the window into the mass of writhing horsemen. Tall cuirassiers, in impotent fury, began slashing at the walls of the houses, breaking their heavy sabres to splinters against the stones; their powerful horses, white with foam, reared, fell back, crushing their riders beneath them.

In front of the barricade a huge fellow reined in his horse and turned, white-gloved hand raised, red epaulets tossing.

"Halt! Halt!" he shouted. "Stop the lancers!" And a trumpeter, disengaging himself from the frantic chaos, set his long, silver trumpet to his lips and blew the "Halt!"

A bullet rolled the trumpeter under his horse's feet; a volley riddled the other's horse, and the agonized animal reared and cleared the bristling abatis with a single bound, his rider dropping dead among the hay-wagons.

Then into this awful struggle galloped the two squadrons of the lancers. For a moment the street swam under their fluttering red-and-white lance-pennons, then a volley swept them – another – another – and down they went.

Herds of riderless horses tore through the street; the road undulated with crushed, quivering creatures crawling about. Against the doorway of a house opposite a noble horse in agony leaned with shaking knees, head raised, lips shrinking back over his teeth.

Bewildered, stupefied, exhausted, the cuirassiers sat in their saddles, staring up at the windows where the Prussians stood and fired. Now and then one would start as from a nightmare, turn his

jaded horse, and go limping away down the street. The road was filled with horsemen, wandering helplessly about under the rain of bullets. One, a mere boy, rode up to a door, leaned from his horse and began to knock for admittance; another dismounted and sat down on a doorstep, head buried in his hands, regardless of the bullets which tore the woodwork around him.

The street was still crowded with entrapped cuirassiers, huddled in groups or riding up and down the walls mechanically seeking shelter. A few of these, dismounted, were wearily attempting to drag a heavy cart away from the barricade; the Prussians shot them, one at a time, but others came to help, and a few lancers aided them, and at length they managed to drag a hay-wagon aside, giving a narrow passage to the open country beyond. Instantly the Prussian infantry swarmed out of the houses and into the street, shouting, "Prisoners!" pushing, striking, and dragging the exhausted cuirassiers from their saddles. But contact with the enemy, hand to hand, seemed to revive the fury of the armored riders. The débris of the regiments closed up, long, straight sabres glittered, trembling horses plunged forward, broke into a stiff gallop, and passed through the infantry, through the rent in the barricade, and staggered away across the fields, buried in the smoke of a thousand rifles.

So rode the "Cuirassiers of Morsbronn," the flower of an empire's chivalry, the elect of France. So rode the gentlemen of the Sixth Lancers to shiver their slender spears against stone walls – for the honor of France.

Death led them. Death rode with them knee to knee. Death alone halted them. But their shining souls galloped on into that vast Valhalla where their ancestors of Waterloo stood waiting, and the celestial trumpets pealed a last "Dismount!"

VI THE GAME BEGINS

The room in the turret was now swimming in smoke and lime dust; I could scarcely see the gray figure of the Countess through the powder-mist which drifted in through shutters and loop-hole, dimming the fading daylight.

In the street a dense pall of pungent vapor hung over roof and pavement, motionless in the calm August air; two houses were burning slowly, smothered in smoke; through a ruddy fog I saw the dead lying in mounds, the wounded moving feebly, the Prussian soldiery tossing straw into the hay-carts that had served their deadly purpose.

But oh, the dreadful murmur that filled the heavy air, the tremulous, ceaseless plaint which comes from strong, muscular creatures, tenacious of life, who are dying and who die hard.

Helmeted figures swarmed through the smoke; wagon after wagon, loaded deep with dead cavalymen, was drawn away by heavy teams of horses now arriving from the regimental transport train, which had come up and halted just at the entrance to the village.

And now wagon-loads of French wounded began to pass, jolting over crushed helmets, rifles, cuirasses, and the carcasses of dead horses.

A covey of Uhlans entered the shambles, picking their way across the wreckage of the battle, a slim, wiry, fastidious company, dainty as spurred gamecocks, with their helmet-cords swinging like wattles and their schapskas tilted rakishly.

Then the sad cortège of prisoners formed in the smoke, the wounded leaning on their silent comrades, bandaged heads hanging, the others erect, defiant, supporting the crippled or standing with arms folded and helmeted heads held high.

And at last they started, between two files of mounted Uhlans – Turcos, line infantrymen, gendarmes, lancers, and, towering head and shoulders above the others, the superb cuirassiers.

A German general and his smartly uniformed staff came clattering up the slippery street and halted to watch the prisoners defile. And, as the first of the captive cuirassiers came abreast of the staff, the general stiffened in his saddle and raised his hand to his helmet, saying to his officers, loud enough for me to hear:

“Salute the brave, gentlemen!”

And the silent, calm-eyed cuirassiers passed on, heads erect, uniforms in shreds, their battered armor foul with smoke and mud, spurs broken, scabbards empty.

Troops of captured horses, conducted by Uhlans, followed the prisoners, then wagons piled high with rifles, sabres, and saddles, then a company of Uhlans cantering away with the shot-torn guidons of the cuirassiers.

Last of all came the wounded in their straw-wadded wagons, escorted by infantry; I heard them coming before I saw them, and, sickened, I closed my ears with my hands; yet even then the deep, monotonous groaning seemed to fill the room and vibrate through the falling shadows long after the last cart had creaked out of sight and hearing into the gathering haze of evening.

The deadened booming of cannon still came steadily from the west, and it needed no messenger to tell me that the First Corps had been hurled back into Alsace, and that MacMahon’s army was in full retreat; that now the Rhine was open and the passage of the Vosges was clear, and Strasbourg must stand siege and Belfort and Toul must man their battlements for a struggle that meant victory, or an Alsace doomed and a Lorraine lost to France forever.

The room had grown very dark, the loop-hole admitting but little of the smoky evening sunset. Some soldiers in the hallway outside finally lighted torches; red reflections danced over the torn ceiling and plaster-covered floor, illuminating a corner where the Countess was sitting by the bedside,

her head lying on the covers. How long she had been there I did not know, but when I spoke she raised her head and answered quietly.

In the torch-light her face was ghastly, her eyes red and dim as she came over to me and looked out into the darkness.

The woman was shaken terribly, shaken to the very soul. She had not seen all that I had seen; she had flinched before the spectacle of a butchery too awful to look upon, but she had seen enough, and she had heard enough to support or to confound theories formed through a young girl's brief, passionless, eventless life.

Under the window soldiers began shooting the crippled horses; the heavy flash and bang of rifles set her trembling again.

Until the firing ceased she stood as though stupefied, scarcely breathing, her splendid hair glistening like molten copper in the red torches' glare.

A soldier came into the room and dragged the bedclothes from the bed, trailing them across the floor behind him as he departed. An officer holding a lantern peered through the door, his eye-glasses shining, his boots in his hand.

He evidently had intended to get into the bed, but when his gaze fell upon us he withdrew in his stockinged feet.

On the stairs soldiers were eating hunches of stale bread and knocking the necks from wine bottles with their bayonets. One lumpish fellow came to the door and offered me part of a sausage which he was devouring, a kindly act that touched me, and I wondered whether the other prisoners might find among their Uhlan guards the same humanity that moved this half-famished yokel to offer me the food he was gnawing.

Soldiers began to come and go in the room; some carried off chairs for officers below some took the pillows from the bed, one bore away a desk on his broad shoulders.

The Countess never moved or spoke.

The evening had grown chilly; I was cold to my knees.

A soldier offered to build me a fire in the great stone fireplace behind me, and when I assented he calmly smashed a chair to kindling-wood, wrenched off the heavy posts of the bed, and started a fire which lit up the wrecked room with its crimson glare.

The Countess rose and looked around. The soldier pushed my long chair to the blaze, tore down the canopy over the bed and flung it over me, stolidly ignoring my protests. Then he clumped out with his muddy boots and shut the door behind him.

For a long while I lay there, full in the heat of the fire, half dozing, then sleeping, then suddenly alert, only to look about me to see the Countess with eyes closed, motionless in her arm-chair, only to hear the muffled thunder of the guns in the dark.

Once again, having slept, I roused, listening. The crackle of the flames was all I heard; the cannon were silent. A few moments later a clock in the hallway struck nine times. At the same instant a deadened cannon-shot echoed the clamor of the clock. It was the last shot of the battle. And when the dull reverberations had died away Alsace was a lost province, MacMahon's army was in full retreat, leaving on the three battle-fields of Wörth, Reichshoffen, and Fröschweiler sixteen thousand dead, wounded, and missing soldiers of France.

All night long I heard cavalry traversing Morsbronn in an unbroken column, the steady trample of their horses never ceasing for an instant. At moments, from the outskirts of the village, the sinister sound of cheering came from the vanguard of the German Sixth Corps, just arriving to learn of the awful disaster to France. Too late to take any part in the battle, these tired soldiers stood cheering by regiments as the cavalry rode past in pursuit of the shattered army, and their cheering swelled to a terrific roar toward morning, when the Prince Royal of Prussia appeared with his staff, and the soldiers in Morsbronn rushed out into the street bellowing, "Hoch soll er leben! Er soll leben – Hoch!"

About seven o'clock that morning a gaunt, leather-faced Prussian officer, immaculate in his sombre uniform, entered the room without knocking. The young Countess turned in the depths of her chair; he bowed to her slightly, unfolded a printed sheet of paper which bore the arms of Prussia, hesitated, then said, looking directly at me:

"Morsbronn is now German territory and will continue to be governed by military law, proclaimed under the state of siege, until the country is properly pacified.

"Honest inhabitants will not be disturbed. Citizens are invited to return to their homes and peacefully continue their legitimate avocations, subject to and under the guarantee of the Prussian military government.

"Monsieur, I have the honor to hand you a copy of regulations. I am the provost marshal; all complaints should be brought to me."

I took the printed sheet and looked at the Prussian coat of arms.

"A list of the inhabitants of Morsbronn will be made to-day. You will have the goodness to declare yourself – and you also, madame. There being other buildings better fitted, no soldiers will be quartered in this house."

The officer evidently mistook me for the owner of the house and not a prisoner. A blanket hid my hussar trousers and boots; he could only see my ragged shirt.

"And now, madame," he continued, "as monsieur appears to need the services of a physician, I shall send him a French doctor, brought in this morning from the Château de la Trappe. I wish him to get well; I wish the inhabitants of my district to return to their homes and resume the interrupted régimes which have made this province of Alsace so valuable to France. I wish Morsbronn to prosper; I wish it well. This is the German policy.

"But, monsieur, let me speak plainly. I tolerate no treachery. The law is iron and will be applied with rigor. An inhabitant of my district who deceives me, or who commits an offence against the troops under my command, or who in any manner holds, or attempts to hold, communication with the enemy, will be shot without court-martial."

He turned his grim, inflexible face to the Countess and bowed, then he bowed to me, swung squarely on his heel, and walked to the door.

"Admit the French doctor," he said to the soldier on guard, and marched out, his curved sabre banging behind his spurred heels.

"It must be Dr. Delmont!" I said, looking at the Countess as there came a low knock at the door.

"I am very thankful!" she said, her voice almost breaking. She rose unsteadily from her chair; somebody entered the room behind me and I turned, calling out, "Welcome, doctor!"

"Thank you," replied the calm voice of John Buckhurst at my elbow.

The Countess shrank aside as Buckhurst coolly passed before her, turned his slim back to the embers of the fire, and fixed his eyes on me – those pale, slow eyes, passionless as death.

Here was a type of criminal I had never until recently known. Small of hand and foot – too small even for such a slender man – clean shaven, colorless in hair, skin, lips, he challenged instant attention by the very monotony of his bloodless symmetry. There was nothing of positive evil in his face, nothing of impulse, good or bad, nothing even superficially human. His spotless linen, his neat sack-coat and trousers of gray seemed part of him – like a loose outer skin. There was in his ensemble nothing to disturb the negative harmony, save perhaps an abnormal flatness of the instep and hands.

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