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"'LOOK THERE!' SHE CRIED, IN TERROR" [See p. 81]

THE MAIDS OF PARADISE

A Novel

By

Robert W. Chambers

Author of "Cardigan" "The Conspirators" "Maid-at-Arms" etc.

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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 *Virginius* 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*.

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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 Neehwiller; 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 slavering 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.

"'ACROSS THAT MEADOW,' SAID THE YOUNG GIRL"

"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 sunburned 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-fous fous 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.

"TO RIGHT AND LEFT, PRUSSIAN LANCERS WERE RIDING"

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 broidered 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 comprendir," 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.

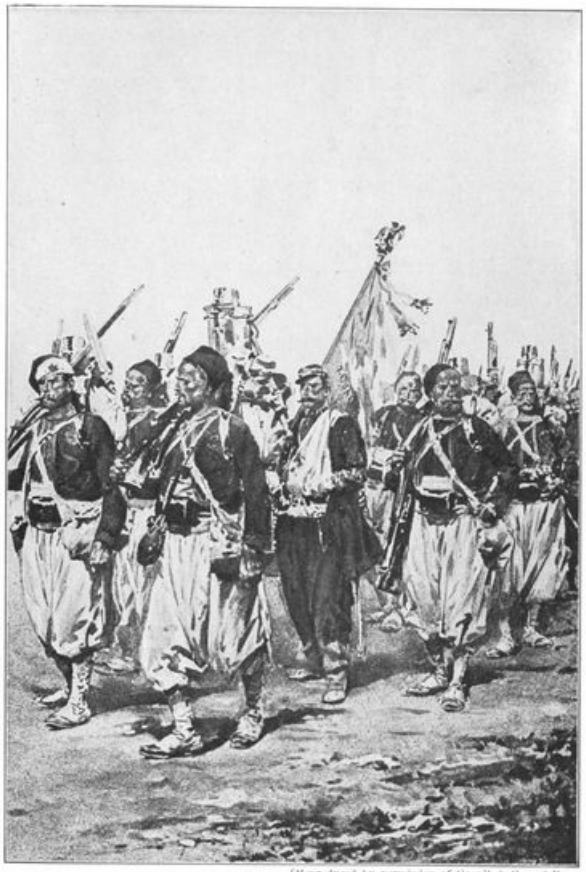
“I feel safer here in my own house than I should at La Trappe,” she replied.

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.



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“A COMPANY OF TURCOS CAME UP”

“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. "Begs 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 battle-field 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"

"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 cavalrymen, 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.

"My friend," he observed, in English, "do you think you will know me again when you have finished your scrutiny?"

The Countess, face averted, passed behind my chair.

"Wait," said Buckhurst; and turning directly to me, he added: "You were mistaken for a hussar at La Trappe; you were mistaken here for a hussar as long as the squad holding this house remained in Morsbronn. A few moments ago the provost mistook you for a civilian." He looked across at the Countess, who already stood with her hand on the door-knob.

"If you disturb me," he said, "I have only to tell the provost the truth. Members of the Imperial Police caught without proper uniform inside German lines are shot, séance tenante."

The Countess stood perfectly still a moment, then came straight to me.

"Is that true?" she asked.

"Yes," I said.

She still leaned forward, looking down into my face. Then she turned to Buckhurst.

"Do you want money?" she asked.

"I want a chair—and your attention for the present," he replied, and seated himself.

The printed copy of the rules handed me by the provost marshal lay on the floor. Buckhurst picked up the sheet, glanced at the Prussian eagle, and thoughtfully began rolling the paper into a grotesque shape.

"Sit down, madame," he said, without raising his eyes from the bit of paper which he had now fashioned into a cocked hat.

After a moment's silent hesitation the Countess drew a small gilt chair beside my sofa-chair and sat down, and again that

brave, unconscious gesture of protection left her steady hand lying lightly on my arm.

Buckhurst noted the gesture. And all at once I divined that whatever plan he had come to execute had been suddenly changed. He looked down at the paper in his hands, gave it a thoughtful twist, and, drawing the ends out, produced a miniature paper boat.

"We are all in one like that," he observed, holding it up without apparent interest. He glanced at the young Countess; her face was expressionless.

"Madame," said Buckhurst, in his peculiarly soft and persuasive voice, "I am not here to betray this gentleman; I am not here even to justify myself. I came here to make reparation, to ask your forgiveness, madame, for the wrong I have done you, and to deliver myself, if necessary, into the hands of the proper French authorities in expiation of my misguided zeal."

The Countess was looking at him now; he fumbled with the paper boat, gave it an unconscious twist, and produced a tiny paper box.

"The cause," he said, gently, "to which I have devoted my life must not suffer through the mistake of a fanatic; for in the cause of universal brotherhood I am, perhaps, a fanatic, and to aid that cause I have gravely compromised myself. I came here to expiate that folly and to throw myself upon your mercy, madame."

"I do not exactly understand," said I, "how you can expiate a crime here."

"I can at least make restitution," he said, turning the paper box over and over between his flat fingers.

"Have you brought me the diamonds which belong to the state?" I inquired, amused.

"Yes," he said, and to my astonishment he drew a small leather pouch from his pocket and laid it on my blanket-covered knees. "How many diamonds were there?" he asked.

"One hundred and three," I replied, incredulously, and opened the leather pouch. Inside was a bag of chamois-skin. This I stretched wide and emptied.

Scores of little balls of tissue-paper rolled out on the blanket over my knees; I opened one; it contained a diamond; I opened another, another, and another; diamonds lay blazing on my blanket, a whole handful, glittering in undimmed splendor.

"Count them," murmured Buckhurst, fashioning the paper box into a fly-trap with a lid.

With a quick movement I swept them into my hands, then one by one dropped the stones while I counted aloud one hundred and two diamonds. The one hundred and third jewel was, of course, safely in Paris.

When I had a second time finished the enumeration I leaned back in my chair, utterly at a loss to account for this man or for what he had done. As far as I could see there was no logic in it, nothing demonstrated, nothing proven. To me—and I am not either suspicious or obstinate by nature—Buckhurst was still an unrepentant thief and a dangerous one.

I could see in him absolutely nothing of the fanatic, of the generous, feather-headed devotee, nothing of the hasty disciple or the impulsive martyr. In my eyes he continued to be the passionless master-criminal, the cold, slow-eyed source of hidden evil, the designer of an intricate and viewless intrigue against the state.

His head remained bent over the paper toy in his hands. Was his hair gray with age or excesses, or was it only colorless like the rest of his exterior?

"Restitution is not expiation," he said, sadly, without looking up. "I loved the cause; I love it still; I practised deception, and I am here to ask this gentle lady to forgive me for an unworthy yet unselfish use of her money and her hospitality. If she can pardon me I welcome whatever punishment may be meted out."

The Countess dropped her elbow on the arm of my chair and rested her face in her hand.

"Swept away by my passion for the cause of universal brotherhood," said Buckhurst, in his low, caressing voice, "I ventured to spend this generous lady's money to carry the propaganda into the more violent centres of socialism—into the clubs in Montmartre and Belleville. There I urged non-resistance; I pleaded moderation and patience. What I said helped a little, I think—"

He hesitated, twisting his fly-box into a paper creature with four legs.

“I was eager; people listened. I thought that if I had a little more money I might carry on this work.... I could not come to you, madame—”

“Why not?” said the Countess, looking at him quickly. “I have never refused you money!”

“No,” he said, “you never refused me. But I knew that La Trappe was mortgaged, that even this house in Morsbronn was loaded with debt. I knew, madame, that in all the world you had left but one small roof to cover you—the house in Morbihan, on Point Paradise. I knew that if I asked for money you would sell Paradise,... and I could not ask so much,... I could not bring myself to ask that sacrifice.”

“And so you stole the crucifix of Louis XI.,” I suggested, pleasantly.

He did not look at me, but the Countess did.

“Bon,” I thought, watching Buckhurst’s deft fingers; “he means to be taken back into grace. I wonder exactly why? And ... is it worth this fortune in diamonds to him to be pardoned by a penniless girl whom he and his gang have already stripped?”

“Could you forgive me, madame?” murmured Buckhurst.

“Would you explain that stick of dynamite first?” I interposed.

The Countess turned and looked directly at Buckhurst. He sat with humble head bowed, nimbly constructing a paper bird.

“That was not dynamite; it was concentrated phosphorus,” he said, without resentment. “Naturally it burned when you lighted it, but if you had not burned it I could easily have shown Madame la Comtesse what it really was.”

“I also,” said I, “if I had thrown it at your feet, Mr. Buckhurst.”

“Do you not believe me?” he asked, meekly, looking up at the Countess.

“Mr. Buckhurst,” said the young Countess, turning to me, “has aided me for a long time in experiments. We hoped to find some cheap method of restoring nitrogen and phosphorus to the worn-out soil which our poor peasants till. Why should you doubt that he speaks the truth? At least he is guiltless of any connection with the party which advocated violence.”

I looked at Buckhurst. He was engaged in constructing a multi-pointed paper star. What else was he busy with? Perhaps I might learn if I ceased to manifest distrust.

“Does concentrated phosphorus burn like dynamite?” I asked, as if with newly aroused interest.

“Did you not know it?” he said, warily.

But was he deceived by my manner? Was that the way for me to learn anything?

There was perhaps another way. Clearly this extraordinary man depended upon his persuasive eloquence for his living, for the very shoes on his little, flat feet, as do all such chevaliers of industry. If he would only begin to argue, if I could only induce him to try his eloquence on me, and if I could convince him that I myself was but an ignorant, self-centred, bullet-headed gendarme, doing my duty only because of perspective advancement, ready perhaps to take bribes—perhaps even weakly, covetously, credulous—well, perhaps I might possibly learn why he desired to cling to this poor young lady, whose life had evidently gone dreadfully to smash, to land her among such a coterie of thieves and lunatics.

“Mr. Buckhurst,” I said, pompously, “in bringing these diamonds to me you have certainly done all in your power to repair an injury which concerned all France.

“As I am situated, of course I cannot now ask you to accompany me to Paris, where doubtless the proper authorities would gladly admit extenuating circumstances, and credit you with a sincere repentance. But I put you on your honor to surrender at the first opportunity.”

It was as stupidly trite a speech as I could think of.

Buckhurst glanced up at me. Was he taking my measure anew, judging me from my bray?

“I could easily aid you to leave Morsbronn,” he said, stealthily.

“O-ho,” thought I, “so you’re a German agent, too, as I suspected.” But I said, aloud, simulating astonishment: “Do you mean to say, Mr. Buckhurst, that you would deliberately risk death to aid a police officer to bring you before a military

tribunal in Paris?"

"I do not desire to pose as a hero or a martyr," he said, quietly, "but I regret what I have done, and I will do what an honest man can do to make the fullest reparation—even if it means my death."

I gazed at him in admiration—real admiration—because the gross bathos he had just uttered betrayed a weakness—vanity. Now I began to understand him; vanity must also lead him to undervalue men. True, with the faintest approach to eloquence he could no doubt hold the "Clubs" of Belleville spellbound; with self-effacing adroitness to cover stealthy persuasion, he had probably found little difficulty in dominating this inexperienced girl, who, touched to the soul with pity for human woe, had flung herself and her fortune to the howling proletariat.

But that he should so serenely undervalue me at my first bray was more than I hoped for. So I brayed again, the good, old, sentimental bray, for which all Gallic lungs are so marvellously fashioned:

"Monsieur, such sentiments honor you. I am only a rough soldier of the Imperial Police, but I am profoundly moved to find among the leaders of the proletariat such delicate and chivalrous emotions—" I hesitated. Was I buttering the sop too thickly?

Buckhurst, eyes bent on the floor, began picking to pieces his paper toy. Presently he looked up, not at me, but at the Countess, who sat with hands clasped earnestly watching him.

"If—if the state pardons me, can ... you?" he murmured.

She looked at him with intense earnestness. I saw he was sailing on the wrong tack.

"I have nothing to pardon," she said, gravely. "But I must tell you the truth, Mr. Buckhurst, I cannot forget what you have done. It was something—the one thing that I cannot understand—that I can never understand—something so absolutely alien to me that it—somehow—leaves me stunned. Don't ask me to forget it.... I cannot. I do not mean to be harsh and cruel, or to condemn you. Even if you had taken the jewels from me, and had asked my forgiveness, I would have given it freely. But I could not be as I was, a comrade to you."

There was a silence. The Countess, looking perfectly miserable, still gazed at Buckhurst. He dropped his gray, symmetrical head, yet I felt that he was listening to every minute sound in the room.

"You must not care what I say," she said. "I am only an unhappy woman, unused to the liberty I have given myself, not yet habituated to the charity of those blameless hearts which forgive everything! I am a novice, groping my way into a new and vast world, a limitless, generous, forgiving commune, where love alone dominates.... And if I had lived among my brothers long enough to be purged of those traditions which I have drawn from generations, I might now be noble enough and wise enough to say I do forgive and forget that you—"

"That you were once a thief," I ended, with the genial officiousness of the hopelessly fat-minded.

In the stillness I heard Buckhurst draw in his breath—once. Some day he would try to kill me for that; in the mean time my crass stupidity was no longer a question in his mind. I had hurt the Countess, too, with what she must have believed a fool's needless brutality. But it had to be so if I played at Jaques Bonhomme.

So I put the finishing whine to it—"Our Lord died between two thieves"—and relapsed into virtuous contemplation of my finger-tips.

"Madame," said Buckhurst, in a low voice, "your contempt of me is part of my penalty. I must endure it. I shall not complain. But I shall try to live a life that will at least show you my deep sincerity."

"I do not doubt it," said the Countess, earnestly. "Don't think that I mean to turn away from you or to push you away. There is nothing of the Pharisee in me. I would gladly trust you with what I have. I will consult you and advise with you, Mr. Buckhurst—"

"And ... despise me."

The unhappy Countess looked at me. It goes hard with a woman when her guide and mentor falls.

"If you return to Paradise, in Morbihan,... as we had planned, may I go," he asked, humbly, "only as an obscure worker in the cause? I beg, madame, that you will not cast me off."

So he wanted to go to Morbihan—to the village of Paradise? Why?

The Countess said: “I welcome all who care for the cause. You will never hear an unkind word from me if you desire to resume the work in Paradise. Dr. Delmont will be there; Monsieur Tavernier also, I hope; and they are older and wiser than I, and they have reached that lofty serenity which is far above my troubled mind. Ask them what you have asked of me; they are equipped to answer you.”

It was time for another discord from me, so I said: “Madame, you have seen a thousand men lay down their lives for France. Has it not shaken your allegiance to that ghost of patriotism which you call the ’Internationale’?”

Here was food for thought, or rather fodder for asses—the Police Oracle turned missionary under the nose of the most cunning criminal in France and the vainest. Of course Buckhurst’s contempt for me at once passed all bounds, and, secure in that contempt, he felt it scarcely worth while to use his favorite weapon—persuasion. Still, if the occasion should require it, he was quite ready, I knew, to loose his eloquence on the Countess, and on me too.

The Countess turned her troubled eyes to me.

“What I have seen, what I have thought since yesterday has distressed me dreadfully,” she said. “I have tried to include all the world in a broader pity, a broader, higher, and less selfish love than the jealous, single-minded love for one country—”

“The mother-land,” I said, and Buckhurst looked up, adding, “The world is the true mother-land.”

Whereupon I appeared profoundly impressed at such a novel and epigrammatic view.

“There is much to be argued on both sides,” said the young Countess, “but I am utterly unfitted to struggle with this new code of ethics. If it had been different—if I had been born among the poor, in misery!—But you see I come a pilgrim among the proletariat, clothed in conservatism, cloaked with tradition, and if at heart I burn with sorrow for the miserable, and if I gladly give what I have to help, I cannot with a single gesture throw off those inherited garments, though they tortured my body like the garment of Nessus.”

I did not smile or respect her less for the stilted phrases, the pathetic poverty of metaphor. Profoundly troubled, struggling with a reserve the borders of which she strove so bravely to cross, her distress touched me the more because I knew it aroused the uneasy contempt of Buckhurst. Yet I could not spare her.

“You saw the cuirassiers die in the street below,” I repeated, with the obstinacy of a limited intellect.

“Yes—and my heart went out to them,” she replied, with an emphasis that pleased me and startled Buckhurst.

Buckhurst began to speak, but I cut him short.

“Then, madame, if your heart went out to the soldiers of France, it went out to France, too!”

“Yes—to France,” she repeated, and I saw her lip begin to quiver.

“Wherein does love for France conflict with our creed, madame?” asked Buckhurst, gently. “It is only hate that we abjure.”

She turned her gray eyes on him. “I will tell you: in that dreadful moment when the cavalry of France cheered Death in his own awful presence, I loved them and their country—*my* country!—as I had never loved in all my life.... And I hated, too! I hated the men who butchered them—more!—I hated the country where the men came from; I hated race and country and the blows they dealt, and the evil they wrought on France—*my France*! That is the truth; and I realize it!”

There was a silence; Buckhurst slowly unrolled the wrinkled paper he had been fingering.

“And now?” he asked, simply.

“Now?” she repeated. “I don’t know—truly, I do not know.” She turned to me sorrowfully. “I had long since thought that my heart was clean of hate, and now I don’t know.” And, to Buckhurst, again: “Our creed teaches us that war is vile—a savage betrayal of humanity by a few dominant minds; a dishonorable ingratitude to God and country. But from that window I saw men die for honor of France with God’s name on their lips. I saw one superb cuirassier, trapped down there in the street, sit still on his horse, while they shot at him from every window, and I heard him call up to a Prussian officer who had just fired at him: ‘My friend, you waste powder; the heart of France is cuirassed by a million more like me!’” A rich flush touched her face; her gray eyes grew brighter.

“Is there a Frenchwoman alive whose blood would not stir at such a scene?” she said. “They shot him through his armor, his breastplate was riddled, he clung to his horse, always looking up at the riflemen, and I heard the bullets drumming on

his helmet and his cuirass like hailstones on a tin roof, and I could not look away. And all the while he was saying, quietly: 'It is quite useless, friends; France lives! You waste your powder!' and I could not look away or close my eyes —"

She bent her head, shivering, and her interlocked fingers whitened.

"I only know this," she said: "I will give all I have—I will give my poor self to help the advent of that world-wide brotherhood which must efface national frontiers and end all war in this sad world. But if you ask me, in the presence of war, to look on with impartiality, to watch my own country battling for breath, to stop my ears when a wounded mother-land is calling, to answer the supreme cry of France with a passionless cry, 'Repent!' I cannot do it—I will not! I was not born to!"

Deeply moved, she had risen, confronting Buckhurst, whose stone-cold eyes were fixed on her.

"You say I hold you unworthy," she said. "Others may hold me, too, unworthy because I have not reached that impartial equipoise whence, impassive, I can balance my native land against its sins and watch blind justice deal with it all unconcerned.

"In theory I have done it—oh, it is simple to teach one's soul in theory! But when my eyes saw my own land blacken and shrivel like a green leaf in the fire, and when with my own eyes I saw the best, the noblest, the crown of my country's chivalry fall rolling in the mud of Morsbronn under the feet of Prussia, every drop of blood in my body was French—hot and red and French! And it is now; and it will always be—as it has always been, though I did not understand."

After a silence Buckhurst said: "All that may be, madame, yet not impair your creed."

"What!" she said, "does not hatred of the stranger impair my creed?"

"It will die out and give place to reason."

"When? When I attain the lofty, dispassionate level I have never attained? That will not be while this war endures."

"Who knows?" said Buckhurst, gently.

"I know!" replied the Countess, the pale flames in her cheeks deepening again.

"And yet," observed Buckhurst, patiently, "you are going to Paradise to work for the Internationale."

"I shall try to do my work and love France," she said, steadily. "I cannot believe that one renders the other impossible."

"Yet," said I, "if you teach the nation non-resistance, what would become of the armies of France?"

"I shall not teach non-resistance until we are at peace," she said—"until there is not a German soldier left in France. After that I shall teach acquiescence and personal liberty."

I looked at her very seriously; logic had no dwelling-place within her tender and unhappy heart.

And what a hunting-ground was that heart for men like Buckhurst! I could begin to read that mouse-colored gentleman now, to follow, after a fashion, the intricate policy which his insolent mind was shaping—shaping in stealthy contempt for me and for this young girl. Thus far I could divine the thoughts of Mr. Buckhurst, but there were other matters to account for. Why did he choose to spare my life when a word would have sent me before the peloton of execution? Why had he brought to me the fortune in diamonds which he had stolen? Why did he eat humble-pie before a young girl from whom he and his companions had wrung the last penny? Why did he desire to go to Morbihan and be received among the elect in the Breton village of Paradise?

I said, abruptly: "So you are not going to denounce me to the Prussian provost?"

He lifted his well-shaped head and gazed at the Countess with an admirable pathos which seemed a mute appeal for protection from brutality.

"That question is a needless one," said the Countess, quietly. "It was a cruel one, also, Monsieur Scarlett."

"I did not mean it as an offensive question," said I. "I was merely reciting a fact, most creditable to Mr. Buckhurst. Mon Dieu, madame, I am an officer of Imperial Police, and I have lived to hear blunt questions and blunter answers. And if it be true that Monsieur Buckhurst desires to atone for—for what has happened, then it is perfectly proper for me, even as a prisoner myself, to speak plainly."

I meant this time to thoroughly convince Buckhurst of my ability to gabble platitude. My desire that he should view me as

a typical gendarme was intense.

So I coughed solemnly behind my hand, knit my eyebrows, and laid one finger alongside of my nose.

"Is it not my duty, as a guardian of national interests, to point out to Mr. Buckhurst his honest errors? Certainly it is, madame, and this is the proper time."

Turning pompously to Buckhurst, I fancied I could almost detect a sneer on that inexpressive mask he wore—at least I hoped I could, and I said, heavily:

"Monsieur, for a number of years there has passed under our eyes here in France certain strange phenomena. Thousands of Frenchmen have, so to speak, separated themselves from the rest of the nation.

"All the sentiments that the nation honors itself by professing these other Frenchmen rebuke—the love of country, public spirit, accord between citizens, social repose, and respect for communal law and order—these other Frenchmen regard as the hallucinations of a nation of dupes.

"Separated by such unfortunate ideas from the nation within whose boundaries they live, they continue to abuse, even to threaten, the society and the country which gives them shelter.

"France is only a name to them; they were born there, they live there, they derive their nourishment from her without gratitude. But France is nothing to them; *their mother-land is the Internationale*!"

I was certain now that the shadow of a sneer had settled in the corners of Buckhurst's thin lips.

"I do not speak of anarchists or of terrorists," I continued, nodding as though profoundly impressed by my own sagacity. "I speak of socialists—that dangerous society to which the cry of Karl Marx was addressed with the warning, 'Socialists! Unite!'

"The government has reason to fear socialism, not anarchy, for it will never happen in France, where the passion for individual property is so general, that a doctrine of brutal destruction could have the slightest chance of success.

"But wait, here is the point, Monsieur Buckhurst. Formerly the name of 'terrorist' was a shock to the entire civilized world; it evoked the spectres of a year that the world can never forget. And so our modern reformers, modestly desiring to evade the inconveniences of such memories among the people, call themselves the 'Internationale.' Listen to them; they are adroit, they blame and rebuke violence, they condemn anarchy, they would not lay their hands on public or individual property—no, indeed!

"Ah, madame, but you should hear them in their own clubs, where the ladies and gentlemen of the gutters, the barriers, and the abattoirs discuss 'individual property,' 'the tyranny of capital,' and similar subjects which no doubt they are peculiarly fitted to discuss.

"Believe me, madame, the little coterie which you represent is already the dupe and victim of this terrible Internationale. Their leaders work their will through you; a vast conspiracy against all social peace is spread through your honest works of mercy. The time is coming when the whole world will rise to combat this Internationale; and when the mask is dragged from its benignant visage, there, grinning behind, will appear the same old 'Spectre Rouge,' torch in one hand, gun in the other, squatting behind a barricade of paving-blocks."

I wagged my head dolefully.

"I could not have rested had I not warned Mr. Buckhurst of this," I said, sentimentally.

Which was fairly well done, considering that I was figuratively lamenting over the innocence of the most accomplished scoundrel that ever sat in the supreme council of the Internationale.

Buckhurst looked thoughtfully at the floor.

"If I thought," he murmured—"if I believed for one instant—"

"Believe me, my dear sir," I said, "that you are playing into the hands of the wickedest villains on earth!"

"Your earnestness almost converts me," he said, lifting his stealthy eyes.

The Countess appeared weary and perplexed.

"At all events," she said, "we must do nothing to embarrass France now; we must do nothing until this frightful war is

ended.”

After a silence Buckhurst said, “But you will go to Paradise, madame?”

“Yes,” replied the Countess, listlessly.

Now, what in Heaven’s name attracted that rogue to Paradise?

VII

A STRUGGLE FORESHADOWED

I took my breakfast by the window, watching the German soldiery cleaning up Morsbronn. For that wonderful Teutonic administrative mania was already manifesting itself while ruined houses still smoked; method replaced chaos, order marched on the heels of the Prussian rear-guard, which enveloped Morsbronn in a whirlwind of Uhlans, and left it a silent, blackened landmark in the August sunshine.

Soldiers in canvas fatigue-dress, wearing soft, round, visorless caps, were removing the débris of the fatal barricade; soldiers with shovel and hoe filled in the trenches and raked the long, winding street clean of all litter; soldiers with trowel and mortar were perched on shot-torn houses, mending chimneys and slated roofs so that their officers might enjoy immunity from rain and wind and defective flues.

In the court-yards and stables I could see cavalrymen in stable-jackets, whitewashing walls and out-buildings and ill-smelling stalls, while others dug shovelfuls of slaked lime from wheelbarrows and spread it through stable-yards and dirty alleys. Everywhere quiet, method, order, prompt precision reigned; I even noticed a big, red-fisted artilleryman tying up tall, blue larkspurs, dahlias, and phlox in a trampled garden, and he touched the ragged masses of bloom with a tenderness peculiar to a flower-loving and sentimental people, whose ultimate ambition is a quart of beer, a radish, and a green leaf overhead.

At the corners of the walls and blind alleys, placards in French and German were posted, embodying regulations governing the village under Prussian military rule. The few inhabitants of Morsbronn who had remained in cellars during the bombardment shuffled up to read these notices, or to loiter stupidly, gaping at the Prussian eagles surmounting the posters.

A soldier came in and started the fire in my fireplace. When he went out I drew my code-book from my breeches-pocket and tossed it into the fire. After it followed my commission, my memoranda, and every scrap of writing. The diamonds I placed in the bosom of my flannel shirt.

Toward one o'clock I heard the shrill piping of a goat-herd, and I saw him, a pallid boy, clumping along in his wooden shoes behind his two nanny-goats, while the German soldiers, peasants themselves, looked after him with curious sympathy.

A little later a small herd of cattle passed, driven to pasture by a stolid Alsatian, who replied to the soldiers' questions in German patois and shrugged his heavy shoulders like a Frenchman.

A cock crowed occasionally from some near dunghill; once I saw a cat serenely following the course of a stucco wall, calm, perfectly self-composed, ignoring the blandishments of the German soldiers, who called, "Komm mitz! mitz!" and held out bits of sausage and black bread.

A German ambulance surgeon arrived to see me in the afternoon. The Countess was busy somewhere with Buckhurst, who had come with news for her, and the German surgeon's sharp double rap at the door did not bring her, so I called out, "Entrez donc!" and he stalked in, removing his fatigue-cap, which action distinguished him from his brother officers.

He was a tall, well-built man, perfectly uniformed in his double-breasted frocked tunic, blue-eyed, blond-bearded, and immaculate of hand and face, a fine type of man and a credit to any army.

After a brief examination he sat down and resumed a very bad cigar, which had been smouldering between his carefully kept fingers.

"Do you know," he said, admiringly, "that I have never before seen just such a wound. The spinal column is not even grazed, and if, as I understand from you, you suffered temporarily from complete paralysis of the body below your waist, the case is not only interesting but even remarkable."

"Is the superficial lesion at all serious?" I asked.

"Not at all. As far as I can see the blow from the bullet temporarily paralyzed the spinal cord. There is no fracture, no depression. I do not see why you should not walk if you desire to."

"When? Now?"

"Try it," he said, briefly.

I tried. Apart from a certain muscular weakness and a great fatigue, I found it quite possible to stand, even to move a few steps. Then I sat down again, and was glad to do so.

The doctor was looking at my legs rather grimly, and it suddenly flashed on me that I had dropped my blanket and he had noticed my hussar's trousers.

"So," he said, "you are a military prisoner? I understood from the provost marshal that you were a civilian."

As he spoke Buckhurst appeared at the door, and then sauntered in, quietly greeting the surgeon, who looked around at the sound of his footsteps on the stone floor. There was no longer a vestige of doubt in my mind that Buckhurst was a German agent, or at least that the Germans *believed* him to be in their pay. And doubtless he was in their pay, but to whom he was faithful nobody could know with any certainty.

"How is our patient, doctor?" he asked.

"Convalescent," replied the doctor, shortly, as though not exactly relishing the easy familiarity of this pale-eyed gentleman in gray.

"Can he travel to-day?" inquired Buckhurst, without apparent interest.

"Before he travels," said the officer, "it might be well to find out why he wears part of a hussar uniform."

"I've explained that to the provost," observed Buckhurst, examining his well-kept finger-nails. "And I have a pass for him also—if he is in a fit condition to travel."

The officer gave him a glance full of frank dislike, adjusted his sabre, pulled on his white gloves, and, bowing very slightly to me, marched straight out of the room and down the stairs without taking any notice of Buckhurst. The latter looked after the officer, then his indifferent eyes returned to me. Presently he sat down and produced a small slip of paper, which he very carefully twisted into a cocked hat.

"I suppose you doubt my loyalty to France," he said, intent on his bit of paper.

Then, logically continuing my rôle of the morning, I began to upbraid him for a traitor and swear that I would not owe my salvation to him, and all the while he was calmly transforming his paper from one toy into another between deft, flat fingers.

"You are unjust and a trifle stupid," he said. "I am paid by Prussia for information which I never give. But I have the entre of their lines. I do it for the sake of the Internationale. The Internationale has a few people in its service ... *And it pays them well*."

He looked squarely at me as he said this. I almost trembled with delight: the man undervalued me, he had taken me at my own figure, and now, holding me in absolute contempt, he was going to begin on me.

"Scarlett," he said, "what does the government pay you?"

I began to protest in a torrent of patriotism and sentimentality. He watched me impassively while I called Heaven to witness and proclaimed my loyalty to France, ending through sheer breathlessness in a maundering, tearful apotheosis where mixed metaphors jostled each other—the government, the Emperor, and the French flag, consecrated in blood—and finally, calling his attention to the fact that twenty centuries had once looked down on this same banner, I collapsed in my chair and gave him his chance.

He took it. With subtle flattery he recognized in me a powerful arm of a corrupt Empire, which Empire he likened to the old man who rode Sindbad the Sailor. He admitted my noble loyalty to France, pointing out, however, that devotion to the Empire was not devotion to France, but the contrary. Skilfully he pictured the unprepared armies of the Empire, huddled along the frontier, seized and rent to fragments, one by one; adroitly he painted the inevitable ending, the armies that remained cut off and beaten in detail.

And as I listened I freely admitted to myself that I had undervalued him; that he was no crude Belleville orator, no sentimental bathos-peddling reformer, no sansculotte with brains ablaze, squalling for indiscriminate slaughter and pillage; he was a cool student in crime, taking no chances that he was not forced to take, a calm, adroit, methodical observer, who had established a theory and was carefully engaged in proving it.

“Scarlett,” he said, in English, “let us come to the point. I am a mercenary American; you are an American mercenary, paid by the French government. You care nothing for that government or for the country; you would drop both to-day if your pay ceased. You and I are outsiders; we are in the world to watch our chances. And our chance is here.”

He unfolded the creased bit of paper and spread it out on his knees, smoothing it thoughtfully.

“What do I care for the Internationale?” he asked, blandly. “I am high in its councils; Karl Marx knows less about the Internationale than do I. As for Prussia and France—bah!—it’s a dog-fight to me, and I lack even the interest to bet on the German bull-dog.

“You will know me better some day, and when you do you will know that I am a man who has determined to get rich if I have to set half of France against the other half and sack every bank in the Empire.

“And now the time is coming when the richest city in Europe will be put to the sack. You don’t believe it? Yet you shall live to see Paris besieged, and you shall live to see Paris surrender, and you shall live to see the Internationale rise up from nowhere, seize the government by the throat, and choke it to death under the red flag of universal—ahem!... license”—the faintest sneer came into his pallid face—“and every city of France shall be a commune, and we shall pass from city to city, leisurely, under the law—*our* laws, which we will make—and I pity the man among us who cannot place his millions in the banks of England and America!”

He began to worry the creased bit of paper again, stealthy eyes on the floor.

“The revolt is as certain as death itself,” he said. “The Society of the Internationale honeycombs Europe—your police archives show you that—and I tell you that, of the two hundred thousand soldiers of the national guard in Paris to-day, ninety per cent. are ours—*ours*, soul and body. You don’t believe it? Wait!

“Yet, for a moment, suppose I am right? Where are the government forces? Who can stop us from working our will? Not the fragments of beaten and exhausted armies! Not the thousands of prisoners which you will see sent into captivity across the Rhine! What has the government to lean on—a government discredited, impotent, beaten! What in the world can prevent a change, an uprising, a revolution? Why, even if there were no such thing as the Internationale and its secret Central Committee—to which I have the honor to belong”—and here his sneer was frightful—“I tell you that before a conquering German army had recrossed the Rhine this land of chattering apes would be tearing one another for very want of a universal scape-goat.

“But that is exactly where we come into the affair. We find the popular scape-goat and point him out—the government, my friend. And all we have to do is to let the mob loose, stand back, and count profits.”

He leaned forward in his chair, idly twisting his crumpled bit of paper in one hand.

“I am not fool enough to believe that our reign will last,” he said. “It may last a month, two months, perhaps three. Then we leaders will be at one another’s throats—and the game is up! It’s always so—mob rule can’t last—it never has lasted and never will. But the prudent man will make hay before the brief sunshine is ended; I expect to economize a little, and set aside enough—well, enough to make it pay, you see.”

He looked up at me quietly.

“I am perfectly willing to tell you this, even if you used your approaching liberty to alarm the entire country, from the Emperor to the most obscure scullion in the Tuileries. Nothing can stop us now, nothing in the world can prevent our brief reign. Because these things are certain, the armies of France will be beaten—they are already beaten. Paris will hold out; Paris will fall; and with Paris down goes France! And as sure as the sun shall rise on a conquered people, so sure shall rise that red spectre we call the Internationale.”

The man astonished me. He put into words a prophecy which had haunted me from the day that war was declared—a prophetic fear which had haunted men higher up in the service of the Empire—thinking men who knew what war meant to a country whose government was as rotten as its army was unprepared, whose political chiefs were as vain, incompetent, ignorant, and weak as were the chiefs of its brave army—an army riddled with politics, weakened by intrigue and neglect—an army used ignobly, perverted, cheated, lied to, betrayed, abandoned.

That, for once, Buckhurst spoke the truth as he foresaw it, I did not question. That he was right in his infernal calculations, I was fearsomely persuaded. And now the game had advanced, and I must display what cards I had, or pretended to have.

“Are you trying to bribe me?” I blurted out, weakly.

“Bribe you,” he repeated, in contempt. “No. If the prospect does not please you, I have only to say a word to the provost marshal.”

“Wouldn’t that injure your prospects with the Countess?” I said, with fat-brained cunning. “You cannot betray me and hope for her friendship.”

He glanced up at me, measured my mental capacity, then nodded.

“I can’t force you that way,” he admitted.

“He’s bound to get to Paradise. Why?” I wondered, and said, aloud:

“What do you want of me?”

“I want immunity from the secret police, Mr. Scarlett.”

“Where?”

“Wherever I may be.”

“In Morbihan?”

“Yes.”

“In Paradise?”

“Yes.”

I was silent for a moment, then, looking him in the eye, “What do I gain?”

Ah, the cat was out now. Buckhurst did not move, but I saw the muscles of his face relax, and he drew a deep, noiseless breath.

“Well,” he said, coolly, “you may keep those diamonds, for one thing.”

Presently I said, “And for the next thing?”

“You are high-priced, Mr. Scarlett,” he observed.

“Oh, very,” I said, with that offensive, swaggering menace in my voice which is peculiar to the weak criminal the world over.

So I asserted myself and scowled at him and told him I was no fool and taunted him with my importance to his schemes and said I was not born yesterday, and that if Paris was to be divided I knew what part I wanted and meant to stand no nonsense from him or anybody.

All of which justified the opinion he had already formed of me, and justified something else, too—his faith in his own eloquence, logic, and powers of persuasion. Not that I meant to make his mistake and undervalue him; he was an intelligent, capable, remarkable criminal—with the one failing—an overconfident contempt of *all* men.

“There is one thing I want to ask you,” said I. “Why do you desire to go to Paradise?”

He did not answer me at once, and I studied his passionless profile as he gazed out of the window.

“Well,” he said, slowly, “I shall not tell you.”

“Why not?” I demanded.

“—But I’ll say this,” he continued. “I want you to come to Paradise with me and that fool of a woman. I want you to report to your government that you are watching the house in Paradise, and that you are hoping to catch me there.”

“How can I do that?” I asked. “As soon as the government catches the Countess de Vassart she will be sent across the frontier.”

“Not if you inform your government that you desire to use her and the others as a bait to draw me to Paradise.”

“Oh, that’s it, is it?” I asked, thoughtfully.

“Yes,” said Buckhurst, “that’s it.”

“And you do not desire to inform me why you are going to stay in Paradise?”

“Don’t you think you’ll be clever enough to find out?” he asked, with a sneer.

I did think so; more than that, I let him see that I thought so, and he was contented with my conceit.

“One thing more,” I said, blustering a little, “I want to know whether you mean any harm to that innocent girl?”

“Who? The Countess? What do you mean? Harm her? Do you think I waste my thoughts on that little fool? She is not a factor in anything—except that just now I’m using her and mean to use her house in Paradise.”

“Haven’t you stripped her of every cent she has?” I asked. “What do you want of her now?” And I added something about respect due to women.

“Oh yes, of course,” he said, with a vague glance at the street below. “You need not worry; nobody’s going to hurt her —” He suddenly shifted his eyes to me. “You haven’t taken a fancy to her, have you?” he asked, in faint disgust.

I saw that he thought me weak enough for any sentiment, even a noble one.

“If you think it pays,” he muttered, “marry her and beat her, for all I care; but don’t play loose with me, my friend; as a plain matter of business it won’t pay you.”

“Is that a threat?” I asked, in the bullying tone of a born coward.

“No, not a threat, a plain matter of profit and loss, a simple business proposition. For, suppose you betray me—and, by a miracle, live to boast of it? What is your reward? A colonelcy in the Military Police with a few thousand francs salary, and, in your old age, a pension which might permit you to eat meat twice a week. Against that, balance what I offer—free play in a helpless city, and no one to hinder you from salting away as many millions as you can carry off!”

Presently I said, weakly, “And what, once more, is the service you ask of me?”

“I ask you to notify the government that you are watching Paradise, that you do not arrest the Countess and Dr. Delmont because you desire to use them as a bait to catch me.”

“Is that all?”

“That is all. We will start for Paris together; I shall leave you before we get there. But I’ll see you later in Paradise.”

“You refuse to tell me why you wish to stay at the house in Paradise?”

“Yes,... I refuse. And, by-the-way, the Countess is to think that I have presented myself in Paris and that the government has pardoned me.”

“You are willing to believe that I will not have you arrested?”

“I don’t ask you to promise. If you are fool enough to try it—try it! But I’m not going to give you the chance in Paris—only in Paradise.”

“You don’t require my word of honor?”

“Word of—what? Well—no;... it’s a form I can dispense with.”

“But how can you protect yourself?”

“If all the protection I had was a ’word of honor,’ I’d be in a different business, my friend.”

“And you are willing to risk me, and you are perfectly capable of taking care of yourself?”

“I think so,” he said, quietly.

“Trusting to my common-sense as a business man not to be fool enough to cut my own throat by cutting yours?” I persisted.

“Exactly, and trusting to a few other circumstances, the details of which I beg permission to keep to myself,” he said, with a faint sneer.

He rose and walked to the window; at the same moment I heard the sound of wheels below.

“I believe that is our carriage,” he said. “Are you ready to start, Mr. Scarlett?”

“Now?” I exclaimed.

“Why not? I’m not in the habit of dawdling over anything. Come, sir, there is nothing very serious the matter with you, is there?”

I said nothing; he knew, of course, the exact state of the wound I had received, that the superficial injury was of no account, that the shock had left me sound as a silver franc though a trifle weak in the hips and knees.

“Is the Countess de Vassart to go with us?” I asked, trying to find a reason for these events which were succeeding one another too quickly to suit me.

He gave me an absent-minded nod; a moment later the Countess entered. She had mended her black crêpe gown where I tore it when I hung in the shadow of death under the battlements of La Trappe. She wore black gloves, a trifle shabby, and carried a worn satchel in her hands.

Buckhurst aided me to rise, the Countess threw my hussar jacket over my shoulders and buttoned it; I felt the touch of her cool, little fingers on my hot, unshaved throat.

“I congratulate you on your convalescence,” she said, in a low voice. “Lean on me, monsieur.”

My head swam; hips and knees were without strength; she aided me down the stairway and out into the pale sunshine, where stood the same mud-splashed, rusty vehicle which had brought us hither from La Trappe.

The Countess had only a satchel and a valise; Buckhurst’s luggage comprised a long, flat, steel-bound box, a satchel, and a parcel. I had nothing. My baggage, which I had left in Morsbronn, had without doubt been confiscated long since; my field-glasses, sabre, and revolver were gone; I had only what clothes I was wearing—a dirty, ragged, gray-blue flannel shirt, my muddy jacket, scarlet riding-breeches, and officer’s boots. But in one of the hip-pockets of my breeches I carried a fortune in diamonds.

As I stood beside the carriage, wondering how I was going to get in, I felt an arm slip under my neck and another slide gently under my knees, and Buckhurst lifted me. Beneath the loose, gray coat-sleeves his bent arms were rigid as steel; his supple frame straightened; he moved a step forward and laid me on the shabby cushions.

The Countess looked at me, turned and glanced up at her smoke-blackened house, where a dozen Prussian soldiers leaned from the lower windows smoking their long porcelain pipes and the provost marshal stood in the doorway, helmeted, spurred, immaculate from golden cheek-guard to the glittering tip of his silver scabbard. An Uhlan, dismounted, stood on guard below the steps, his lance at a “present,” the black-and-white swallow-tailed pennon drooping from the steel point.

The Countess bent her pretty head under its small black hat; the provost’s white-gloved hand flew to his helmet peak.

“Fear nothing, madame,” he said, pompously. “Your house and its contents are safe until you return. This village is now German soil.”

The Countess looked at him steadily, gravely.

“I thank you, monsieur, but frontiers are not changed in a day.”

But she was mistaken. Alsace henceforth must be written Elsass, and the devastated province called Lothringen was never again to be written Lorraine.

The Countess stepped into the carriage and took her place beside me; Buckhurst followed, seating himself opposite us, and the Alsatian driver mounted to the box.

“Your safe-conduct carries you to the French outposts at Saverne,” said the provost, dryly. “If there are no longer French outposts at Saverne, you may demand a visé for your pass and continue south to Strasbourg.”

Buckhurst half turned towards the driver. “Allez,” he said, quietly, and the two gaunt horses moved on.

There was a chill in the white sunshine—the first touch of autumn. Not a trace of the summer’s balm remained in the air; every tree on the mountain outlines stood out sharp-cut in the crystalline light; the swift little streams that followed the road ran clear above autumn-brown pebbles and golden sands.

Distant beachwoods were turning yellow; yellow gorse lay like patches of sunshine on the foot-hills; oceans of yellow grain belted the terraced vineyards. Here and there long, velvety, black strips cut the green and gold, the trail of fire which had scarred the grain belts; here and there pillars of smoke floated, dominating blue woodlands, where the flames of exploding shells had set the forest afire.

Already from the plateau I could see a streak of silver reflecting the intense blue sky—the Rhine, upon whose westward cliffs France had mounted guard but yesterday.

And now the Rhine was lost, and the vast granite bastions of the Vosges looked out upon a sea of German forests. Above the Col du Pigeonnier the semaphore still glistened, but its signals now travelled eastward, and strange flags fluttered on its invisible halliards. And every bridge was guarded by helmeted men who halted us, and every tunnel was barred by mounted Uhlans who crossed their lances to the ominous shout: "Wer da? On ne basse bas!" The Vosges were literally crawling with armed men!

Driving slowly along the base of the hills, I had glimpses of rocky defiles which pierced the mountain wall; and through every defile poured infantry and artillery in unbroken columns, and over every mountain pass streamed endless files of horsemen. Railroad tunnels were choked with slowly moving trains piled high with artillery; viaducts glistened with helmets all moving westward; every hillock, every crag, every height had its group of tiny dark dots or its solitary Uhlan.

Very far away I heard cannon—so far away that the hum of the cannonade was no louder than the panting of our horses on the white hill-road, and I could hear it only when the carriage stopped at intervals.

"Do we take the railroad at Saverne?" I asked at last. "Is there a railroad there?"

"EVERY BRIDGE WAS GUARDED"

Buckhurst looked up at me. "It is rather strange that a French officer should not know the railroads in his own country," he said.

I was silent. I was not the only officer whose shame was his ignorance of the country he had sworn to defend. Long before the war broke out, every German regimental officer, commissioned and non-commissioned, carried a better map of France than could be found in France itself. And the French government had issued to us a few wretched charts of Germany, badly printed, full of gross errors, one or two maps to a regiment, and a few scattered about among the corps headquarters—among officers who did not even know the general topography of their own side of the Rhine.

"Is there a railroad at Saverne?" I repeated, sullenly.

"You will take a train at Strasbourg," replied Buckhurst.

"And then?"

"And then you go to Avricourt," he said. "I suppose at least you know where that is?"

"It is on the route to Paris," said I, keeping my temper. "Are we going direct to Paris?"

"Madame de Vassart desires to go there," he said, glancing at her with a sort of sneaking deference which he now assumed in her presence.

“It is true,” said the Countess, turning to me. “I wish to rest for a little while before I go to Point Paradise. I am curiously tired of poverty, Monsieur Scarlett,” she added, and held out her shabby gloves with a gesture of despair; “I am reduced to very little—I have scarcely anything left,... and I am weak enough to long for the scent of the winter violets on the boulevards.”

With a faint smile she touched the bright hair above her brow, where the wind had flung a gleaming tendril over her black veil.

As I looked at her, I marvelled that she had found it possible to forsake all that was fair and lovely in life, to dare ignore caste, to deliberately face ridicule and insult and the scornful anger of her own kind, for the sake of the filthy scum festering in the sinkholes of the world.

There are brave priests who go among lepers, there are brave missionaries who dispute with the devil over the souls of half-apes in the Dark Continent. Under the Cross they do the duty they were bred to.

But she was bred to other things. Her lungs were never made to breathe the polluted atmosphere of the proletariat, yelping and slavering in their kennels; her strait young soul was never born for communion with the crooked souls of social pariahs, with the stunted and warped intelligence of fanatics, with the crippled but fierce minds which dominated the Internationale.

Not that such contact could ever taint her; but it might break her heart one day.

“You will think me very weak and cowardly to seek shelter and comfort at such a time,” she said, raising her gray eyes to me. “But I feel as though all my strength had slipped away from me. I mean to go back to my work; I only need a few days of quiet among familiar scenes—pleasant scenes that I knew when I was young. I think that if I could only see a single care-free face—only one among all those who—who once seemed to love me—”

She turned her head quickly and stared out at the tall pines which fringed the dusty road.

Buckhurst blinked at her.

It was late in the afternoon when the last Prussian outpost hailed us. I had been asleep for hours, but was awakened by the clatter of horses, and I opened my eyes to see a dozen Uhlans come cantering up and surround our carriage.

After a long discussion with Buckhurst and a rigid scrutiny of our permit to pass the lines, the slim officer in command viséd the order. One of the troopers tied a white handkerchief to his lance-tip, wheeled his wiry horse, and, followed by a trumpeter, trotted off ahead of us. Our carriage creaked after them, slowly moving to the summit of a hill over which the road rose.

Presently, very far away on the gray-green hill-side, I saw a bit of white move. The Uhlan flourished his lance from which the handkerchief fluttered; the trumpeter set his trumpet to his lips and blew the parley.

One minute, two, three, ten passed. Then, distant galloping sounded along the road, nearer, nearer; three horsemen suddenly wheeled into view ahead—French dragoons, advancing at a solid gallop. The Uhlan with the flag spurred forward to meet them, saluted, wheeled his horse, and came back.

Paid mercenary that I was, my heart began to beat very fast at sight of those French troopers with their steel helmets bound with leopard-hide and their horsehair plumes whipping the breeze, and their sun-bronzed, alert faces and pleasant eyes. I had had enough of the supercilious, near-sighted eyes of the Teuton.

As for the young Countess, she sat there smiling, while the clumsy dragoons came rattling up, beaming at my red riding-breeches, and all saluting the Countess with a cheerful yet respectful swagger that touched me deeply as I noted the lines of hunger in their lean jaws.

And now the brief ceremony was over and our rusty vehicle moved off down the hill, while the Uhlans turned bridle and clattered off, scattering showers of muddy gravel in the rising wind.

The remains of our luncheon lay in a basket under our seat—plenty of bread and beef, and nearly a quart of red wine.

“Call the escort—they are starving,” I said to Buckhurst.

“I think not,” he said, coolly. “I may eat again.”

“Call the escort!” I repeated, sharply.

Buckhurst looked up at me in silence, then glanced warily at the Countess.

A few moments later the gaunt dragoons were munching dry bread as they rode, passing the bottle from saddle to saddle.

We were ascending another hill; the Countess, anxious to stretch her limbs, had descended to the road, and now walked ahead, one hand holding her hat, which the ever-freshening wind threatened.

Buckhurst bent towards me and said: “My friend, your suggestion that we deprive ourselves to feed those cavalrymen was a trifle peremptory in tone. I am wondering how much your tone will change when we reach Paris.”

“You will see,” said I.

“Oh, of course I’ll see,” he said,... “and so will you.”

“I thought you had means to protect yourself,” I observed.

“I have. Besides, I think you would rather keep those diamonds than give them up for the pleasure of playing me false.”

I laughed in a mean manner, which reassured him. “Look here,” said I, “if I were to make trouble for you in Paris I’d be the most besotted fool in France, and you know it.”

He nodded.

And so I should have been. For there was something vastly more important to do than to arrest John Buckhurst for theft; and before I suffered a hair of his sleek, gray head to come to harm I’d have hung myself for a hopeless idiot. Oh no; my friend John Buckhurst had such colossal irons in the fire that I knew it would take many more men as strong as he to lift them out again. And I meant to know what those irons were for, and who were the gentlemen to aid him lift them. So not only must Buckhurst remain free as a lively black cricket in a bog, but he must not be frightened if I could help it.

And to that end I leered at him knowingly, and presently bestowed a fatuous wink upon him.

It was unpleasant for me to do this, for it implied that I was his creature; and, in spite of the remorseless requirements of my profession, I have an inborn hatred of falsehood in any shape. To lie in the line of duty is one of the disagreeable necessities of certain professions; and mine is not the only one nor the least respectable. The art of war is to deceive; strategy is the art of demonstrating falsehood plausibly; there is nothing respectable in the military profession except the manual—which is now losing importance in the eyes of advanced theorists. All men are liars—a few are unselfish ones.

“You have given me your word of honor,” said Buckhurst.

“Have I?” I had not, and he knew it. I hoped I might not be forced to.

“Haven’t you?” asked Buckhurst.

“You sneered at my word of honor,” I said, with all the spite of a coward; “now you don’t get it.”

He no longer wanted it, but all he said was: “Don’t take unnecessary offence; you’re smart enough to know when you’re well off.”

I dozed towards sunset, waking when the Countess stepped back into the carriage and seated herself by my side. Then, after a little, I slept again. And it was nearly dark when I was awakened by the startling whistle of a locomotive. The carriage appeared to be moving slowly between tall rows of poplars and telegraph-poles; a battery of artillery was clanking along just ahead. In the dark southern sky a luminous haze hung.

“The lights of Strasbourg,” whispered the Countess, as I sat up, rubbing my hot eyes.

I looked for Buckhurst; his place was empty.

“Mr. Buckhurst left us at the railroad crossing,” she said.

“Left us!”

“Yes! He boarded a train loaded with wounded.... He had business to transact in Colmar before he presented himself to the authorities in Paris.... And we are to go by way of Avricourt.”

So Buckhurst had already begun to execute his programme. But the abrupt, infernal precision of the man jarred me

unpleasantly.

In the dark I felt cautiously for my diamonds; they were safe in my left hip-pocket.

The wind had died out, and a fine rain began to filter down through a mist which lay over the flat plain as we entered the suburbs of Strasbourg.

Again and again we were halted by sentinels, then permitted to proceed in the darkness, along deserted avenues lighted by gas-jets burning in tall bronze lamp-posts through a halo of iridescent fog.

We passed deserted suburban villas, blank stretches of stucco walls enclosing gardens, patches of cabbages, thickets of hop-poles to which the drenched vines clung fantastically, and scores of abandoned houses, shutters locked, blinds drawn.

High to the east the ramparts of the city loomed, set at regular distances with electric lights; from the invisible citadel rockets were rising, spraying the fog with jewelled flakes, crumbling to golden powder in the starless void above.

Presently our carriage stopped before a tremendous mass of masonry pierced by an iron, arched gate, through which double files of farm-wagons were rolling, escorted by customs guards and marines.

"No room! no room!" shouted the soldiers. "This is the Porte de Pierre. Go to the Porte de Saverne!"

So we passed on beneath the bastions, skirting the ramparts to the Porte de Saverne, where, after a harangue, the gate guards admitted us, and we entered Strasbourg in the midst of a crush of vehicles. At the railroad station hundreds of cars choked the tracks; loaded freight trains stalled in the confusion, trains piled with ammunition and provisions, trains crowded with horses and cattle and sheep, filling the air with melancholy plaints; locomotives backing and whistling, locomotives blowing off deafening blasts of steam; gongs sounding, bells ringing, station-masters' trumpets blowing; and, above all, the immense clamor of human voices.

The Countess and our Alsatian driver helped me to the platform, I looked around with dread at the throng, being too weak to battle for a foothold; but the brave Alsatian elbowed a path for me, and the Countess warded off the plunging human cattle, and at length I found myself beside the cars where line-soldiers stood guard at every ten paces and gendarmes stalked about, shoving the frantic people into double files.

"Last train for Paris!" bawled an official in gilt and blue; and to the anxious question of the Countess he shook his head, saying, "There is no room, madame; it is utterly impossible—pardon, I cannot discuss anything now; the Prussians are signalled at Ostwald, and their shells may fall here at any moment."

"If that is so," I said, "this lady cannot stay here!"

"I can't help that!" he shouted, starting off down the platform.

I caught the sleeve of a captain of gendarmerie who was running to enter a first-class compartment.

"Eh—what do you want, monsieur?" he snapped, in surprise. Then, as I made him a sign, he regarded me with amazement. I had given the distress signal of the secret police.

"Try to make room for this lady in your compartment," I said.

"Willingly, monsieur. Hasten, madame; the train is already moving!" and he tore open the compartment door and swung the Countess to the car platform.

I suppose she thought I was to follow, for when the officer slammed the compartment door she stepped to the window and tried to open it.

"Quick!" she cried to the guard, who had just locked the door; "help that officer in! He is wounded—can't you see he is wounded?"

The train was gliding along the asphalt platform; I hobbled beside the locked compartment, where she stood at the window.

"Will you unlock that door?" said the Countess to the guard. "I wish to leave the train!"

The cars were rolling a little faster than I could move along.

The Countess leaned from the open window; through the driving rain her face in the lamp-light was pitifully white. I made a last effort and caught up with her car.

“A safe journey, madame,” I stammered, catching at the hand she held out and brushing the shabby-gloved fingers with my lips.

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“SISTERS OF CHARITY WERE GIVING FIRST AID”

“I shall never forgive this wanton self-sacrifice,” she said, unsteadily. Then the car rolled silently past me, swifter, swifter, and her white face faded from my sight. Yet still I stood there, bareheaded, in the rain, while the twin red lamps on the rear car grew smaller and smaller, until they, too, were shut out in the closing curtains of the fog.

As I turned away into the lighted station a hospital train from the north glided into the yard and stopped. Soldiers immediately started carrying out the wounded and placing them in rows on mattresses ranged along the walls of the passenger depot; sisters of charity, hovering over the mutilated creatures, were already giving first aid to the injured; policemen kept the crowd from trampling the dead and dying; gendarmes began to clear the platforms, calling out sharply, “No more trains to-night! Move on! This platform is for government officials only!”

Through the scrambling mob a file of wounded tottered, escorted by police; women were forced back and pushed out into the street, only to be again menaced by galloping military ambulances arriving, accompanied by hussars. The confusion grew into a tumult; men struggled and elbowed for a passage to the platforms, women sobbed and cried; through the uproar the treble wail of terrified children broke out.

Jostled, shoved, pulled this way and that, I felt that I was destined to go down under the people’s feet, and I don’t know what would have become of me had not a violent push sent me against the door of the telegraph office. The door gave way, and I fell on my knees, staggered to my feet, and crept out once more to the platform.

The station-master passed, a haggard gentleman in rumpled uniform and gilt cap; and as he left the office by the outer door the heavy explosion of a rampart cannon shook the station.

“Can you get me to Paris?” I asked.

“Quick, then,” he muttered; “this way—lean on me, monsieur! I am trying to send another train out—but Heaven alone

knows! Quick, this way!”

The glare of a locomotive’s headlight dazzled me; I made towards it, clinging to the arm of the station-master; the ground under my feet rocked with the shock of the siege-guns. Suddenly a shell fell and burst in the yard outside; there was a cry, a rush of trainmen, a gendarme shouting; then the piercing alarm notes of locomotives, squealing like terrified leviathans.

The train drawn up along the platform gave a jerk and immediately moved out towards the open country, compartment doors swinging wide, trainmen and guards running alongside, followed by a mob of frenzied passengers, who leaped into empty compartments, flinging satchels and rugs to the four winds. Crash! A shell fell through the sloping roof of the platform and blew up. Through the white cloud and brilliant glare I saw a porter, wheeling boxes and trunks, fall, buried under an avalanche of baggage, and a sister of charity throw up her arms as though to shield her face from the fragments.

A car, doors swinging wide, glided past me; I caught the rail and fell forward into a compartment. The cushions of the seats were afire, and a policeman was hammering out the sparks with naked fists.

I was too weak to aid him. Presently he hurled the last burning cushion from the open door and leaped out into the train-yard, where red and green lamps glowed and the brilliant flare of bursting shells lighted the fog. By this time the train was moving swiftly; the car windows shook with the thunder from the ramparts under which we were passing; then came inky darkness—a tunnel—then a rush of mist and wind from the open door as we swept out into the country.

Passengers clinging to the platforms now made their way into the compartment where I lay almost senseless, and soon the little place was crowded, and somebody slammed the door.

Then the flying locomotive, far ahead, shrieked, and the train leaped, rushing forward into the unknown. Blackness, stupefying blackness, outside; inside, unseen, the huddled passengers, breathing heavily with sudden stifled sobs, or the choked, indrawn breath of terror; but not a word, not a quaver of human voices; peril strangled speech as our black train flew onward through the night.

VIII

A MAN TO LET

The train which bore me out of the arc of the Prussian fire at Strasbourg passed in between the fortifications of Paris the next morning about eleven o'clock. Ten minutes later I was in a closed cab on my way to the headquarters of the Imperial Military Police, temporarily housed in the Luxembourg Palace.

The day was magnificent; sunshine flooded the boulevards, and a few chestnut-trees in the squares had already begun to blossom for the second time in the season; there seemed to be no prophecy of autumn in sky or sunlight.

The city, as I saw it from the open window of my cab, appeared to be in a perfectly normal condition. There were, perhaps, a few more national-guard soldiers on the streets, a few more brightly colored posters, notices, and placards on the dead walls, but the life of the city itself had not changed at all; the usual crowds filled the boulevards, the usual street cries sounded, the same middle-aged gentlemen sat in front of the cafés reading the same daily papers, the same waiters served them the same drinks; rows of cabs were drawn up where cabs are always to be found, and the same policemen dawdled in gossip with the same flower-girls. I caught the scent of early winter violets in the fresh Parisian breeze.

Was this the city that Buckhurst looked upon as already doomed?

On the marble bridge gardeners were closing up the morning flower-market; blue-bloused men with jointed hose sprinkled the asphalt in front of the Palais de Justice; students strolled under the trees from the School of Medicine to the Sorbonne; the Luxembourg fountain tossed its sparkling sheets of spray among the lotus.

All this I saw, yet a sinister foreboding oppressed me, and I could not shake it off even in this bright city where September was promising only a new lease of summer and the white spikes of chestnut blossoms hummed with eager bees.

Physically I felt well enough; the cramped sleep in the dark compartment, far from exhausting me, had not only rested me, but had also brought me an appetite which I meant to satisfy as soon as might be. As for my back, it was simply uncomfortable, but all effects of the shock had disappeared—unless this heavy mental depression was due to it.

My cab was now entering the Palace of the Luxembourg by the great arch facing the Rue de Tournon; the line sentinels halted us; I left the cab, crossed the parade in front of the guard-house, turned to the right, and climbed the stairs straight to my own quarters, which were in the west wing of the palace, and consisted of a bedroom, a working cabinet, and a dressing-room.

But I did not enter my door or even glance at it; I continued straight on, down the corridor to a door, on the ground-glass panes of which was printed in red lettering:

HEADQUARTERS
IMPERIAL MILITARY POLICE
SAFE DEPOSIT

The sentinel interrogated me for form's sake, although he knew me; I entered, passed rapidly along the face of the steel cage behind which some officers sat on high stools, writing, and presented myself at the guichet marked, "Foreign Division."

There was no military clerk in attendance there, and, to my surprise, the guichet was closed.

However, a very elegant officer strolled up to the guichet as I laid my bag of diamonds on the glass shelf, languidly unlocked the steel window-gate, and picked up the bag of jewels.

The officer was Mornac, the Emperor's alter ego, or âme damnée, who had taken over the entire department the very day I left Paris for the frontier. Officially, I could not recognize him until I presented myself to Colonel Jarras with my report; so I saluted his uniform, standing at attention in my filthy clothes, awaiting the usual question and receipt.

"Name and number?" inquired Mornac, indolently.

I gave both.

"You desire to declare?"

I enumerated the diamonds, and designated them as those lately stolen from the crucifix of Louis XI.

Mornac handed me a printed certificate of deposit, opened a compartment in the safe, and tossed in the bag without sealing it. And, as I stood waiting, he lighted a scented cigarette, glanced over at me, puffed once or twice, and finally dismissed me with a discourteous nod.

I went, because he was Mornac; I thought that I was entitled to a bureau receipt, but could scarcely demand one from the chief of the entire department who had taken over the bureau solely in order to reform it, root and branch. Doubtless his curt dismissal of me without the customary receipt and his failure to seal the bag were two of his reforms.

I limped off past the glittering steel cage, thankful that the jewels were safe, turned into the corridor, and hastened back to my own rooms.

To tear off my rags, bathe, shave, and dress in a light suit of civilian clothes took me longer than usual, for I was a trifle lame.

Bath and clean clothes ought to have cheered me; but the contrary was the case, and I sat down to a breakfast brought by a palace servant, and ate it gloomily, thinking of Buckhurst, and the Countess, and of Morsbronn, and of the muddy dead lying under the rifle smoke below my turret window.

I thought, too, of that astonishing conspiracy which had formed under the very shadow of the imperial throne, and through which already the crucifix and diamonds of Louis XI. had been so nearly lost to France.

Who besides Buckhurst was involved? How far had Colonel Jarras gone in the investigation during my absence? How close to the imperial throne had the conspiracy burrowed?

Pondering, I slowly retraced my steps through the bedroom and dressing-room, and out into the tiled hallway, where, at the end of the dim corridor, the door of Colonel Jarras's bureau stood partly open.

Jarras was sitting at his desk as I entered, and he gave me a leaden-eyed stare as I closed the door behind me and stood at attention.

For a moment he said nothing, but presently he partly turned his ponderous body towards me and motioned me to a chair.

As I sat down I glanced around and saw my old comrade, Speed, sitting in a dark corner, chewing a cigarette and watching me in alert silence.

"You are present to report?" suggested Colonel Jarras, heavily.

I bowed, glancing across at Speed, who shrugged his shoulders and looked at the floor with an ominous smile.

Mystified, I began my report, but was immediately stopped by Jarras with a peevish gesture: "All right, all right; keep all that for the Chief of Department. Your report doesn't concern me."

"Doesn't concern you!" I repeated; "are you not chief of this bureau, Colonel Jarras?"

"No," snapped Jarras; "and there's no bureau now—at least no bureau for the Foreign Division."

Speed leaned forward and said: "Scarlett, my friend, the Foreign Division of the Imperial Military Police is not in favor just now. It appears the Foreign Division is suspected."

"Suspected? Of what?"

"Treason, I suppose," said Speed, serenely.

I felt my face begin to burn, but the astonishing news left me speechless.

"I said," observed Speed, "that the Foreign Division is suspected; that is not exactly the case; it is not suspected, simply because it has been abolished."

"Who the devil did that?" I asked, savagely.

"Mornac."

Mornac! The Emperor's shadow! Then truly enough it was all up with the Foreign Division. But the shame of it!—the

disgrace of as faithful a body of police, mercenaries though they were, as ever worked for any cause, good or bad.

"So it's the old whine of treason again, is it?" I said, while the blood beat in my temples. "Oh, very well, doubtless Monsieur Mornac knows his business. Are we transferred, Speed, or just kicked out into the street?"

"Kicked out," replied Speed, rubbing his slim, bony hands together.

"And you, sir?" I asked, turning to Jarras, who sat with his fat, round head buried in his shoulders, staring at the discolored blotter on his desk.

The old Corsican straightened as though stung: "Since when, monsieur, have subordinates assumed the right to question their superiors?"

I asked his pardon in a low voice, although I was no longer his subordinate. He had been a good and loyal chief to us all; the least I could do now was to show him respect in his bitter humiliation.

I think he felt our attitude and that it comforted him, but all he said was: "It is a heavy blow. The Emperor knows best."

As we sat there in silence, a soldier came to summon Colonel Jarras, and he went away, leaning on his ivory-headed cane, head bowed over the string of medals on his breast.

When he had gone, Speed came over and shut the door, then shook hands with me.

"He's gone to see Mornac; it will be our turn next. Look out for Mornac, or he'll catch you tripping in your report. Did you find Buckhurst?"

"Look here," I said, angrily, "how can Mornac catch me tripping? I'm not under his orders."

"You are until you're discharged. You see, they've taken it into their heads, since the crucifix robbery, to suspect everybody and anybody short of the Emperor. Mornac came smelling around here the day you left. He's at the bottom of all this—a nice business to cast suspicion on our division because we're foreigners. Gad, he looks like a pickpocket himself—he's got the oblique trick of the eyes and the restless finger movement."

"Perhaps he is," I said.

Speed looked at me sharply.

"If I were in the service now I'd arrest Mornac—if I dared."

"You might as well arrest the Emperor," I said, wearily.

"That's it," observed Speed, throwing away his chewed cigarette. "Nobody dare touch Mornac; nobody dare even watch him. But if there's a leak somewhere, it's far more probable that Mornac did the dirty work than that there's a traitor in our division."

Presently he added: "Did you catch Buckhurst?"

"I don't want to talk about it," I said, disgusted.

"—Because," continued Speed, "if you've got him, it may save us. Have you?"

How I wished that I had Buckhurst safely handcuffed beside me!

"If you've got him," persisted Speed, "we'll shake him like a rat until he squeals. And if he names Mornac—"

"Do you think that Mornac would give him or us the chance?" I said. "Rubbish! He'd do the shaking *in camera*; and it would only be a hand-shaking if Buckhurst is really his creature. And he's rid himself of our division, anyhow. Wait!" I added, sharply; "perhaps that is the excuse! Perhaps that is the very reason that he's abolished the foreign division! We may have been getting too close to the root of this matter; I had already caught Buckhurst—"

"You had?" cried Speed, eagerly.

"But I'm not going to talk about it now," I added, sullenly. "My troubles are coming; I've a story to tell that won't please Mornac, and I have an idea that he means mischief to me."

Speed looked curiously at me, and I went on:

"I used my own judgment—supposing that Jarras was my chief. I knew he'd let me take my own way—but I don't know what Mornac will say."

However, I was soon to know what Mornac had to say, for a soldier appeared to summon us both, and we followed to the temporary bureau which looked out to the east over the lovely Luxembourg gardens.

Jarras passed us as we entered; his heavy head was bent, and I do not suppose that he saw either us or our salutes, for he shuffled off down the dark passage, tapping his slow way like a blind man; and Speed and I entered, saluting Mornac.

The personage whom we saluted was a symmetrical, highly colored gentleman, with black mustache and Oriental eyes. His skin was too smooth—there was not a line or a wrinkle visible on hand or face, nothing but plump flesh pressing the golden collar of his light-blue tunic and the half-dozen gold rings on his carefully kept, restless fingers. His light, curved sabre hung by its silver chain from a nail on a wall behind him; beside it, suspended by the neck cord, was his astrakhan-trimmed dolman of palest turquoise-blue, and over that hung his scarlet cap.

As he raised his heavy-lidded, insolent eyes to me, I thought I had never before appreciated the utter falseness of his visage as I did at that moment. Instantly I decided that he meant evil to me; and I instinctively glanced at Speed, standing beside me at attention, his clear blue eyes alert, his lank limbs and lean head fairly tremulous with comprehension.

At a careless nod from Mornac I muttered the formal "I have to report, sir—" and began mumbling a perfunctory account of my movements since leaving Paris. He listened, idly contemplating a silver penknife which he alternately snapped open and closed, the click of the spring punctuating my remarks.

I told the truth as far as I went, which brought me to my capture by Uhlans and the natural escape of my prisoner, Buckhurst. I merely added that I had secured the diamonds and had managed to reach Paris via Strasbourg.

"Is that all?" inquired Mornac, listlessly.

"All I have to report, sir."

"Permit me to be the judge of how much you have to report," said Mornac. "Continue."

I was silent.

"Do you prefer that I draw out information by questions?" asked Mornac, looking up at me.

I was already in his net; I ought not to have placed myself in the position of concealing anything, yet I distrusted him and wished to avoid giving him a chance to misunderstand me. But now it was too late; if the error could be wiped out at all, the only way to erase it was by telling him everything and giving him his chance to misinterpret me if he desired it.

He listened very quietly while I told of my encounter with Buckhurst in Morsbronn, of our journey to Saverne, to Strasbourg, and finally my own arrival in Paris.

"Where is Buckhurst?" he asked.

"I do not know," I replied, doggedly.

"That is to say that you had him in your power within the French lines yet did not secure him?"

"Yes."

"Your orders were to arrest him?"

"Yes."

"And shoot him if he resisted?"

"Yes."

"But you let him go?"

"There was something more important to do than to arrest Buckhurst. I meant to find out what he had on hand in Paradise."

"So you disobeyed orders?"

"If you care to so interpret my action."

"Why did you not arrest the Countess de Vassart?"

"I did; the Uhlans made me prisoner as I reported to you."

“I mean, why did you not arrest her after you left Morsbronn?”

“That would have prevented Buckhurst from going to Paradise.”

“Your orders were to arrest the Countess?”

“Yes.”

“Did you obey those orders?”

“No,” I said, between my teeth.

“Why?”

“I had every reason to believe that an important conspiracy was being ripened somewhere near Paradise. I had every reason to believe that the robbery of the crown jewels might furnish funds for the plotters.

“The arrest of one man could not break up the conspiracy; I desired to trap the leaders; and to that end I deliberately liberated this man Buckhurst as a stool-pigeon. If my judgment has been at fault, I accept the blame.”

Mornac’s silver penknife closed. Presently he opened the blade again and tested the edge on his plump forefinger.

“I beg to call your attention to the fact,” I continued, “that a word from Buckhurst to the provost at Morsbronn would have sent me before the squad of execution. In a way, I bought my freedom. But,” I added, slowly, “I should never have bought it if the bargain by which I saved my own skin had been a betrayal of France. Nobody wants to die; but in my profession we discount that. No man in my division is a physical coward. I purchased my freedom not only without detriment to France, but, on the contrary, to the advantage of France.”

“At the expense of your honor,” observed Mornac.

My ears were burning; I advanced a pace and looked Mornac straight between the eyes; but his eyes did not meet mine—they were fixed on his silver penknife.

“I did the best I could do in the line of duty,” I said. “You ask me why I did not break my word and arrest Buckhurst after we left the German lines. And I answer you that I had given my word not to arrest him, in pursuance of my plan to use him further.”

Mornac examined his carefully kept finger-tips in detail.

“You say he bribed you?”

“I said that he attempted to do so,” I replied, sharply.

“With the diamonds?”

“Yes.”

“You have them?”

“I deposited them as usual.”

“Bring them.”

Angry as I was, I saluted, wheeled, and hastened off to the safe deposit. The jewel-bag was delivered when I presented my printed slip; I picked it up and marched back, savagely biting my mustache and striving to control my increasing exasperation. Never before had I endured insolence from a superior officer.

Mornac was questioning Speed as I entered, and that young man, who has much self-control to learn, was already beginning to answer with disrespectful impatience, but my advent suspended matters, and Mornac took the bag of jewels from my hands and examined it. He seemed to be in no hurry to empty it; he lolled in his chair with an absent-minded expression like the expression of a cat who pretends to forget the mouse between her paws. Danger was written all over him; I squared my shoulders and studied him, braced for a shock.

The shock came almost immediately, for, without a word, he suddenly emptied the jewel-bag on the desk before him. The bag contained little pebbles wrapped in tissue-paper.

I heard Speed catch his breath sharply; I stared stupidly at the pebbles. Mornac made a careless, sweeping gesture, spreading the pebbles out before us with his restless, ringed fingers.

“Suppose you explain this farce?” he suggested, unmoved.

“Suppose *you* explain it!” I stammered.

He raised his delicately arched eyebrows. “What do you mean?”

“I mean that an hour ago that bag contained the diamonds from the crucifix of Louis XI! I mean that I handed them over to you on my arrival at this bureau!”

“Doubtless you can prove what you say,” he observed, and his silver penknife snapped shut like the click of a trap, and he lay back in his padded chair and slipped the knife into his pocket.

I looked at Speed; his sandy hair fairly bristled, but his face was drawn and tense. I looked at Mornac; his heavy, black eyes met mine steadily.

“It seems to me,” he said, “that it was high time we abolished the Foreign Division, Imperial Military Police.”

“I refuse to be discharged!” I said, hoarsely. “It is your word against mine; I demand an investigation!”

“Certainly,” he replied, almost wearily, and touched a bell. “Bring that witness,” he added to the soldier who appeared in answer to the silvery summons.

“I mean an official inquiry,” I said—“a court-martial. It is my right where my honor is questioned.”

“It is my right, when you question my honor, to throw you into Mont Valérien, neck and heels,” he said, showing his teeth under his silky, black mustache.

Almost stunned by his change of tone, I stood like a stone. Somebody entered the room behind me, passed me; there was an odor of violets in the air, a faint rustle of silk, and I saw Mornac rise and bow to his guest and conduct her to a chair.

His guest was the young Countess de Vassart.

She looked up at me brightly, gave me a pretty nod of recognition, then turned expectantly to Mornac, who was still standing at her elbow, saying, “Then it is no longer a question of my exile, monsieur?”

“No, madame; there has been a mistake. The government has no reason to suspect your loyalty.” He turned directly on me. “Madame, do you know this officer?”

“Yes,” said the Countess, smiling.

“Did you see him receive a small sack of diamonds in Morsbronn?”

The Countess gave me a quick glance of surprise. “Yes,” she said, wonderingly.

“Thank you, madame; that is sufficient,” he replied; and before I could understand what he was about he had conducted the Countess to the next room and had closed the door behind him.

“Quick!” muttered Speed at my elbow; “let’s back out of this trap. There’s no use; he’s one of them, and he means to ruin you.”

“I won’t go!” I said, in a cold fury; “I’ll choke the truth out of him, I tell you.”

“Man! Man! He’s the Emperor’s shadow! You’re done for; come on while there’s time. I tell you there’s no hope for you here.”

“Hope! What do I care?” I said, harshly. “Why, Speed, that man is a common thief.”

“What of it?” whispered Speed. “Doesn’t everybody know that the conspiracy runs close to the throne? What do you care? Come on, I tell you; I’ve had enough of this rotten government. So have you. And we’ve both seen enough to ruin us. Come on!”

“But he’s got those diamonds! Do you think I can stand that?”

“I think you’ve got to,” muttered Speed, savagely. “Do you want to rot in Cayenne? If you do, stay here and bawl for a court-martial!”

“But the government—”

“Let the government go to the devil! It’s going fast enough, anyhow. Come, don’t let Mornac find us here when he

returns. He may be coming now—quick, Scarlett! We've got to cut for it!"

"Speed," I said, unsteadily, "it's enough to make an honest man strike hands with Buckhurst in earnest."

Speed took my arm with a cautious glance at the door of the next room, and urged me toward the corridor.

"The government has kicked us out into the street," he muttered; "be satisfied that the government didn't kick us into Biribi. And it will yet if you don't come."

"Come? Where? I haven't any money, and now they've got my honor—"

"Rubbish!" he whispered, fairly dragging me into the hallway. "Here! No—don't go to your rooms. Leave everything—get clear of this rat-pit, I tell you."

He half pushed, half dragged me to the parade; then, dropping my arm, he struck a jaunty pace through the archway, not even glancing at the sentinels. I kept pace with him, scarcely knowing what I did.

In the Rue de Seine I halted suddenly, crying out that I must go back, but he seized me with a growl of "Idiot! come on!" and fairly shoved me through the colonnades of the Institute, along the quay, down the river-wall, to a dock where presently a swift river-boat swung in for passengers. And when the bateau mouche shot out again into mid-stream, Speed and I stood silently on deck, watching the silver-gray façades of Paris fly past above us under the blue sky.

We sat far forward, quite alone, and separated from the few passengers by the pilot-house and jointed funnel. And there, carelessly lounging, with one of his lank legs crossed over the other and a cigar between his teeth, my comrade coolly recounted to me the infamous history of the past week:

"Jarras put his honest, old, square-toed foot in it by accident; I don't know how he managed to do it, but this is certain: he suddenly found himself on a perfectly plain trail which could only end at Mornac's threshold.

"Then he did a stupid thing—he called Mornac in and asked him, in perfect faith, to clear up the affair, never for a moment suspecting that Mornac was the man.

"That occurred the day you started to catch Buckhurst. And on that day, too, I had found out something; and like a fool I told Jarras."

Speed chewed his cigar and laughed.

"In twenty-four hours Jarras was relieved of his command; I was requested not to leave the Luxembourg—in other words, I was under arrest, and Mornac took over the entire department and abolished the Foreign Division 'for the good of the service,' as the *Official* had it next day.

"Then somebody—Mornac probably—let loose a swarm of those shadowy lies called rumors—you know how that is done!—and people began to mutter, and the cafés began to talk of treason among the foreign police. Of course Rochefort took it up; of course the *Official* printed a half-hearted denial which was far worse than an avowal. Then the division was abolished, and the illustrated papers made filthy caricatures of us, and drew pictures of Mornac, sabre in hand, decapitating a nest full of American rattlesnakes and British cobras, and Rochefort printed a terrible elaboration of the fable of the farmer and the frozen serpent."

"Oh, that's enough," I said, sick with rage and disgust. "Let them look out for their own country now. I pity the Empress; I pity the Emperor. I don't know what Mornac means to do, but I know that the Internationale boa-constrictor is big enough to swallow government, dynasty, and Empire, and it is going to try."

"I am certain of one thing," said Speed, staring out over the sun-lit water with narrowing eyes. "I know that Mornac is using Buckhurst."

"Perhaps it is Buckhurst who is using Mornac," I suggested.

"I think both those gentlemen have the same view in end—to feather their respective nests under cover of a general smash," said Speed. "It would not do for Mornac to desert the Empire under any circumstances. But he can employ Buckhurst to squeeze it dry and then strike an attitude as its faithful defender in adversity."

"But why does Buckhurst desire to go to Paradise?" I asked.

The boat swung into a dock near the Point du Jour; a few passengers left, a few came aboard; the boat darted on again under the high viaduct of masonry, past bastions on which long siege cannon glistened in the sunshine, past lines of fresh

earthworks, past grassy embankments on which soldiers moved to the rumble of drums.

"I know something about Paradise," said Speed, in a low voice.

I waited; Speed chewed his cigar grimly.

"Look here, Scarlett," he said. "Do you know what has become of the crown jewels of France?"

"No," I said.

"Well, I'll tell you. You know, of course, that the government is anxious; you know that Paris is preparing to stand siege if the Prussians double up Bazaine and the army of Châlons in the north. But you don't know what a pitiable fright the authorities are in. Why, Scarlett, they are scared almost to the verge of idiocy."

"They've passed that verge," I observed.

"Yes, they have. They have had a terrible panic over the safety of the crown jewels—they were nervous enough before the robbery. And this is what they've done in secret:

"The crown jewels, the bars of gold of the reserve, the great pictures from the Louvre, the antiques of value, including the Venus of Milo, have been packed in cases and loaded on trains under heavy guard.

"Twelve of these trains have already left Paris for the war-port of Lorient. The others are to follow, one every twenty-four hours at midnight.

"Whether these treasures are to be locked up in Lorient, or whether they are to be buried in the sand-dunes along the coast, I don't know. But I know this: a swift cruiser—the *Fer-de-Lance*—is lying off Paradise, between the light-house and the Ile de Groix, with steam up night and day, ready to receive the treasures of the government at the first alarm and run for the French possessions in Cochin-China.

"And now, perhaps, you may guess why Buckhurst is so anxious to hang around Paradise."

Of course I was startled. Speed's muttered information gave me the keys to many doors. And behind each door were millions and millions and millions of francs' worth of plunder.

Our eyes met in mute interrogation; Speed smiled.

"Of course," said I, with dry lips, "Buckhurst is devil enough to attempt anything."

"Especially if backed by Mornac," said Speed.

Suddenly the professional aspect of the case burst on me like a shower of glorious sunshine.

"Oh, for the chance!" I said, brokenly. "Speed! Think of it! Think how completely we have the thing in hand!"

"Yes," he said, with a shrug, "only we have just been kicked out of the service in disgrace, and we are now going to be fully occupied in running away from the police."

That was true enough; I had scarcely had time to realize our position as escaped suspects of the department. And with the recognition of my plight came a rush of hopeless rage, of bitter regret, and soul-sickening disappointment.

So this was the end of my career—a fugitive, disgraced, probably already hunted. This was my reward for faithful service—penniless, almost friendless, liable to arrest and imprisonment with no hope of justice from Emperor or court-martial—a banned, ruined, proscribed outcast, in blind flight.

"I've thought of the possibility of this," observed Speed, quietly. "We've got to make a living somehow. In fact, I'm to let—and so are you."

I looked at him, too miserable to speak.

"I had an inkling of it," he said. A shrewd twinkle came into his clear, Yankee eyes; he chewed his wrecked cigar and folded his lank arms.

"So," he continued, tranquilly, blinking at the sparkling river, "I drew out all my money—and yours, too."

"Mine!" I stammered. "How could you?"

"Forged an order," he admitted. "Can you forgive me, Scarlett?"

“Forgive you! Bless your generous heart!” I muttered, as he handed me a sealed packet.

“Not at all,” he said, laughing; “a crime in time saves nine—eh, Scarlett? Pocket it; it’s all there. Now listen. I have made arrangements of another kind. Do you remember an application for license from the manager of a travelling American show—a Yankee circus?”

“Byram’s Imperial American Circus?” I said.

“That’s it. They went through Normandy last summer. Well, Byram’s agent is going to meet us at Saint-Cloud. We’re engaged; I’m to do ballooning—you know I worked one of the military balloons before Petersburg. You are to do sensational riding. You were riding-master in the Spahis—were you not?”

I looked at him, almost laughing. Suddenly the instinct of my vagabond days returned like a sweet wind from the wilds, smiting me full in the face.

“I tamed three lions for my regiment at Constantine,” I said.

“Good lad! Then you can play with Byram’s lions, too. Oh, what the devil!” he cried, recklessly; “it’s all in a lifetime. Quand même, and who cares? We’ve life before us and an honest living in view, and Byram has packed two of his men back to England and I’ve tinkered up their passports to suit us. So we’re reasonably secure.”

“Will you tell me, Speed, why you were wise enough to do all this while I was gone?” I asked, in astonishment.

“Because,” said Speed, deliberately, “I distrusted Mornac from the hour he entered the department.”

A splendid officer of police was spoiled when Mornac entered the department.

Presently the deck guard began to shout: “Saint-Cloud! Saint-Cloud!” and the little boat glided up alongside the floating pier. Speed rose; I followed him across the gang-plank; and, side by side, we climbed the embankment.

“Do you mean to say that Byram is going travelling about with his circus in spite of the war?” I whispered.

“Yes, indeed. We start south from Chartres to-morrow.”

Presently I said: “Do you suppose we will go to Lorient or—Paradise?”

“We will if I have anything to say about it,” replied Speed, throwing away his ragged cigar.

And I walked silently beside him, thinking of the young Countess and of Buckhurst.

PART SECOND

IX

THE ROAD TO PARADISE

On the 3d of November Byram's American Circus, travelling slowly overland toward the Spanish frontier, drew up for an hour's rest at Quimperlé. I, however, as usual, prepared to ride forward to select a proper place for our night encampment, and to procure the necessary license.

The dusty procession halted in the town square, which was crowded, and as I turned in my saddle I saw Byram stand up on the red-and-gold band-wagon and toss an armful of circulars and bills into the throng.

The white bits of paper fluttered wide and disappeared in the sea of white Breton head-dresses; there was a rhythmic clatter of wooden shoes, an undulation of snowy coiffes, then a low murmur as the people slowly read the circulars aloud, their musical monotone accompanying the strident nasal voice of Byram, who stood on the tarnished band-wagon shouting his crowd around him.

"Mossoors et madams! Ecooty see voo play! J'ai l'honnoor de vous presenter le ploo magnifique cirque—" And the invariable réclame continued to the stereotyped finis; the clown bobbed up behind Byram and made his usual grimaces, and the band played "The Cork Leg."

The Bretons looked on in solemn astonishment: my comrade, Speed, languidly stood up on the elephant and informed the people that our circus was travelling to Lorient to fill a pressing engagement, and if we disappointed the good people of Lorient a riot would doubtless result, therefore it was not possible to give any performance before we reached Lorient—and the admission was only ten sous.

Our clown then picked up the tatters of his threadbare comic speech. Speed, munching a stale sandwich, came strolling over to where I stood sponging out my horse's mouth with cool water.

"We'll ride into Paradise in full regalia, I suppose," he observed, munching away reflectively; "it's the cheapest réclame."

I dashed a bucket of water over my horse's legs. "You'd better look out for your elephant; those drunken Bretons are irritating him," I said. "Mahouts are born, not made."

Speed turned; the elephant was squealing and thrusting out a prehensile trunk among the people. There would be trouble if any fool gave him tobacco.

"Hi!" cried Speed, "tobah! Let the mem-log alone! Ai! he's snatched a coiffe! Drop it, Djebe! C'hast buhan! Don't be afraid, mesdames; the elephant is not ugly! Chomit oll en ho trankilite!"

The elephant appeared to understand the mixture of Hindu, French, and Breton—or perhaps it was the sight of the steel ankus that Speed flourished in his quality of mahout. The crowd pressed forward again, reassured by the "Chomit oll en ho trankilite!"

Speed swallowed the last crumb of his sandwich, wiped his hands on his handkerchief, and shoved them into his shabby pockets; the ankus dangled from his wrist.

We were in seedy circumstances; an endless chain of bad luck had followed us from Chartres—bad weather, torrents of rain, flooded roads, damaging delays on railways already overcrowded with troops and war material, and, above all, we encountered everywhere that ominous apathy which burdened the whole land, even those provinces most remote from the seat of war. The blockade of Paris had paralyzed France.

The fortune that Byram had made in the previous year was already gone; we no longer travelled by rail; we no longer slept at inns; we could barely pay for the food for our animals.

As for the employés, the list had been cut down below the margin of safety, yet for a month no salaries had been paid.

As I stood there in the public square of Quimperlé, passing the cooling sponge over my horse's nose, old Byram came out of the hotel on the corner, edged his way through the stolid crowd that surrounded us gaunt mountebanks, and shuffled up to me.

“I guess we ain’t goin’ to push through to-night, Scarlett,” he observed, wiping his sweating forehead on the sleeve of his linen duster.

“No, governor, it’s too far,” I said.

“We’ll be all right, anyway,” added Speed; “there’s a change in the moon and this warm weather ought to hold, governor.”

“I dunno,” said Byram, with an abstracted glance at the crowd around the elephant.

“Cheer up, governor,” I said, “we ought at least to pay expenses to the Spanish frontier. Once out of France we’ll find your luck again for you.”

“Mebbe,” he said, almost wearily.

I glanced at Speed. This was the closest approach to a whine that we had heard from Byram. But the man had changed within a few days; his thin hair, brushed across his large, alert ears, was dusty and unkempt; hollows had formed under his shrewd eyes; his black broadcloth suit was as soiled as his linen, his boots shabby, his silk hat suitable only for the stage property of our clown.

“Don’t ride too far,” said Byram, as I set foot to stirrup, “them band-wagon teams is most done up, an’ that there camuel gits meaner every minute.”

I wheeled my horse out into the road to Paradise, cursing the “camuel,” the bane of our wearied caravan.

“Got enough cash for the license?” asked Byram, uneasily.

“Plenty, governor; don’t worry. Speed, don’t let him mope. We’ll be in Lorient this time to-morrow,” I called back, with a swagger of assumed cheerfulness.

Speed stepped swiftly across the square and laid his hand on my stirrup.

“What are you going to do if you see Buckhurst?”

“Nothing.”

“Or the Countess?”

“I don’t know.”

“I suppose you will go out of your way to find her if she’s in Paradise?”

“Yes.”

“And tell her the truth about Buckhurst?”

“I expect to.”

After a moment’s silence he said: “Don’t do anything until I see you to-night, will you?”

“All right,” I replied, and set my horse at a gallop over the old stone bridge.

The highway to the sea which winds down through acres of yellow gorse and waving broom to the cliffs of Paradise is a breezy road, swept by the sweet winds that blow across Brittany from the Côte d’Or to the Pyrenees.

It is a land of sea-winds; and when in the still noontide of midsummer the winds are at play far out at sea, their traces remain in the furrowed wheat, in the incline of solitary trees, in the breezy trend of the cliff-clover and the blackthorn and the league-wide sweep of the moorlands.

And through this land whose inland perfume always savored the unseen sea I rode down to Paradise.

It was not until I had galloped through the golden forest of Kerselec that I came in sight of the ocean, although among the sunbeams and the dropping showers of yellow beech-leaves I fancied I could hear the sound of the surf.

And now I rode slowly, in full sight of the sea where it lay, an immense gray band across the world, touching a looming horizon, and in throat and nostril the salt stung sweetly, and the whole world seemed younger for the breath of the sea.

From the purple mystery of the horizon to the landward cliffs the ocean appeared motionless; it was only when I had advanced almost to the cliffs that I saw the movement of waves—that I perceived the contrast between inland inertia and

the restless repose of the sea, stirring ceaselessly since creation.

The same little sparkling river I had crossed in Quimperlé I now saw again, spreading out a wide, flat current which broke into waves where it tumbled seaward across the bar; I heard the white-winged gulls mewing, the thunderous monotone of the surf, and a bell in some unseen chapel ringing sweetly.

I passed a stone house, another; then the white road curved under the trees and I rode straight into the heart of Paradise, my horse's hoofs awaking echoes in the silent, stone-paved square.

Never had I so suddenly entered a place so peaceful, so quiet in the afternoon sun—yet the silence was not absolute, it was thrilling with exquisite sound, lost echoes of the river running along its quay of stone, half-heard harmonies of the ocean where white surf seethed over the sands beyond the headland.

There was a fountain, too, dripping melodiously under the trees; I heard the breathless humming of a spinning-wheel from one of the low houses of gray stone which enclosed the square, and a young girl singing, and the drone of bees in a bed of resida.

So this was Paradise! Truly the name did not seem amiss here, under the still vault of blue above; Paradise means peace to so many of us—surcease of care and sound and the brazen trample of nations—not the quiet of palace corridors or the tremendous silence of a cathedral, but the noiselessness of pleasant sounds, moving shadows of trees, wordless quietude, simplicity.

A young girl with a face like the Madonna stole across the square in her felt shoes.

"Can you tell me where the mayor lives?" I asked, looking down at her from my horse.

She raised her white-coiffed head with an innocent smile: "Eman' barz ar sal o leina."

"Don't you speak French?" I asked, appalled.

"Ho! ia; oui, monsieur, s'il faut bien. The mayor is at breakfast in his kitchen yonder."

"Thank you, my child."

I turned my horse across the shady square to a stone house banked up with bed on bed of scarlet geraniums. The windows were open; a fat man with very small eyes sat inside eating an omelet.

He watched me dismount without apparent curiosity, and when I had tied my horse and walked in at the open door he looked at me over the rim of a glass of cider, and slowly finished his draught without blinking. Then he said, "Bonjour."

I told him that I wanted a license for the circus to camp for one night; that I also desired permission to pitch camp somewhere in the vicinity. He made out the license, stamped it, handed it to me, and I paid him the usual fee.

"I've heard of circuses," he said; "they're like those shows at country fairs, I suppose."

"Yes—in a way. We have animals."

"What kind?"

"Lions, tigers—"

"I've seen them."

"—a camel, an elephant—"

"Alive?"

"Certainly."

"Ma doué!" he said, with slow emotion, "have you a live elephant?"

I admitted that fact.

Presently I said, "I hope the people of Paradise will come to the circus when we get to Lorient."

"Eh? Not they," said the mayor, wagging his head. "Do you think we have any money here in Paradise? And then," he added, cunningly, "we can all see your elephant when your company arrives. Why should we pay to see him again? War does not make millionaires out of the poor."

I looked miserably around. It was quite true that people like these had no money to spend on strolling players. But we had to live somehow, and our animals could not exist on air, even well-salted air.

"How much will it cost to have your town-crier announce the coming of the circus?" I inquired.

"That will cost ten sous if he drums and reads the announcement from here to the château."

I gave the mayor ten copper pennies.

"What château?" I asked.

"Dame, the château, monsieur."

"Oh," said I, "where the Countess lives?"

"The Countess? Yes, of course. Who else?"

"Is the Countess there?"

"Oui, dame, and others not to my taste."

I asked no more questions, but the mayor did, and when he found it might take some time to pump me, he invited me to share his omelet and cider and afterwards to sit in the sun among his geraniums and satisfy his curiosity concerning the life of a strolling player.

I was glad of something to eat. After I had unsaddled my horse and led him to the mayor's stable and had paid for hay and grain, I returned to sit in the mayor's garden and sniff longingly at his tobacco smoke and answer his impertinent questions as good-naturedly as they were intended.

But even the mayor of Paradise grew tired of asking questions in time; the bees droned among the flowers, the low murmur of the sea stole in on our ears, the river softly lapped the quay. The mayor slept.

He was fat, very fat; his short, velvet jacket hung heavy with six rows of enormous silver buttons, his little, round hat was tilted over his nose. A silver buckle decorated it in front; behind, two little velvet ribbons fluttered in futile conflict with the rising sea-breeze.

Men in embroidered knee-breeches, with bare feet thrust into straw-filled sabots, sat sunning on the quay under the purple fig-trees; one ragged fellow in soiled velvet bolero and embossed leggings lay in the sun, chin on fists, wooden shoes crossed behind him, watching the water with the eyes of a poacher.

This mild, balmy November weather, this afterglow of summer which in my own country we call Indian summer, had started new blossoms among the climbing tea-roses, lovely orange-tinted blossoms, and some of a clear lemon color, and their fragrance filled the air. Nowhere do roses blow as they blow near the sea, nowhere have I breathed such perfume as I breathed that drowsy afternoon in Paradise, where in every door-yard thickets of clove-scented pinks carpeted the ground and tall spikes of snowy phlox glimmered silver-white in the demi-light.

Where on earth could a more peaceful scene be found than in this sea-lulled land, here in the subdued light under aged, spreading oaks, where moss crept over the pavements and covered the little fountain as though it had been the stony brink of a limpid forest spring?

The mayor woke up toward five o'clock and stared at me with owlish gravity as though daring me to say that he had been asleep.

"Um—ah—ma fois oui!" he muttered, blowing his nose loudly in a purple silk bandanna. Then he shrugged his shoulders and added: "C'est la vie, monsieur. Que voulez-vous?"

And it was one kind of life after all—a blessed release from the fever of that fierce farandole which we of the outer world call "life."

The mayor scratched his ear, yawned, stretched one leg, then the other, and glanced at me.

"Paris still holds out?" he asked, with another yawn.

"Oh yes," I replied.

"And the war—is it still going badly for us?"

"There is always hope," I answered.

“Hope,” he grumbled; “oh yes, we know what hope is—we of the coast live on it when there’s no bread; but hope never yet filled my belly for me.”

“Has the war touched you here in Paradise?” I asked.

“Touched us? Ho! Say it has crushed us and I’ll strike palms with you. Why, not a keel has passed out of the port since August. Where is the fishing-fleet? Where are the sardine sloops that ought to have sailed from Algiers? Where are the Icelanders?”

“Well, where are they?” I suggested.

“Where? Ask the semaphore yonder. Where are our salt schooners for the Welsh coast? I don’t know. They have not sailed, that’s all I know. You do well to come with your circus and your elephant! You can peddle diamonds in the poor-house, too, if it suits your taste.”

“Have the German cruisers frightened all your craft from the sea?” I asked, astonished.

“Yes, partly. Then there’s an ugly French cruiser lying off Groix, yonder, and her black stacks are dribbling smoke all day and all night. We have orders to keep off and use Lorient when we want a port.”

“Do you know why the cruiser warns your fishing-boats from this coast?” I inquired.

“No,” he said, shortly.

“Do you know the name of the cruiser?”

“She's a new one, the *Fer-de-Lance*. And if I were not a patriot and a Breton I’d say: ‘May Sainte-Anne rot her where she lies; she’s brought a curse on the coast from Lorient to the Saint-Julien Light!—and the ghosts of the Icelanders will work her evil yet.’”

The mayor’s round, hairless face was red; he thumped the arm of his chair with pudgy fists and wagged his head.

“We have not seen the end of this,” he said—“oh no! There’s a curse coming on Paradise—the cruiser brought it, and it’s coming. Hé! did a Bannalec man not hear the were-wolf in Kerselec forest a week since? Pst! Not a word, monsieur. But old Kloark, of Roscoff, heard it too—oui dame!—and he knows the howl of the Loup-Garou! Besides, did I not with my own eyes see a black cormorant fly inland from the sea? And, by Sainte-Éline of Paradise! the gulls squeal when there’s no storm brewing and the lançons prick the dark with flames along the coast till you’d swear the witches of Ker-Is were lighting death-candles from Paradise to Pont-Aven.”

“Do you believe in witches, monsieur the mayor?” I asked, gravely.

He gave me a shrewd glance. “Not at all—not even in bed and the light out,” he said, with a fat swagger. “*I* believe in magic? Ho! foi non! But many do. Oui dame! Many do.”

“Here in Paradise?”

“Parbleu! Men of parts, too, monsieur. Now there’s Terrec, who has the evil eye—not that I believe it, but, damn him, he’d better not try any tricks on me!

“Others stick twigs of aubépine in their pastures; the apothecary is a man of science, yet every year he makes a bonfire of dried gorse and drives his cattle through the smoke. It may keep off witches and lightning—or it may not. I myself do not do such things.”

“Still you believe the cruiser out at sea yonder is going to bring you evil?”

“She has brought it. But it’s all the same to me. I am mayor, and exempt, and I have cider and tobacco and boudin for a few months yet.”

He caressed his little, selfish chin, which hung between his mottled jowls, peered cunningly at me, and opened his mouth to say something, but at that moment we both caught sight of a peasant running and waving a packet of blue papers in the air. “Monsieur the mayor! Monsieur the mayor!” he called, while still far away.

“Cré cochon de malheur!” muttered the mayor, turning pale. “He’s got a telegram!”

The man came clattering across the square in his wooden shoes.

“A telegram,” repeated the mayor, wiping the sudden sweat from his forehead. “I never get telegrams. I don’t want

telegrams!”

He turned to me, almost bursting with suppressed prophecy.

“It has come—the evil that the black cruiser brings us! You laughed! Tenez, monsieur; there’s your bad luck in these blue morsels of paper!”

And he snatched the telegram from the breathless messenger, reading it with dilating eyes.

For a long while he sat there studying the telegram, his fat forefinger following the scrawl, a crease deepening above his eyebrows, and all the while his lips moved in noiseless repetition of the words he spelled with difficulty and his labored breathing grew louder.

When at length the magistrate had mastered the contents of his telegram, he looked up with a stupid stare.

“I want my drummer. Where’s the town-crier?” he demanded, as though dazed.

“He has gone to Lorient, m’sieu the mayor,” ventured the messenger.

“To get drunk. I remember. Imbecile! Why did he go to-day? Are there not six other days in this cursed week? Who is there to drum? Nobody. Nobody knows how in Paradise. Seigneur, Dieu! the ignorance of this town!”

“M’sieu the mayor,” ventured the messenger, “there’s Jacqueline.”

“Ho! Vrai. The Lizard’s young one! She can drum, they say. She stole my drum once. Why did she steal it but to drum upon it?”

“The little witch can drum them awake in Ker-Is,” muttered the messenger.

The mayor rose, looked around the square, frowned. Then he raised his voice in a bellow: “Jacqueline! Jacqueline! *Thou* Jacqueline!”

A far voice answered, faintly breaking across the square from the bridge: “She is on the rocks with her sea-rake!”

The mayor thrust the blue telegram into his pocket and waddled out of his garden, across the square, and up the path to the cliffs.

Uninvited, I went with him.

X

THE TOWN-CRIER

The bell in the unseen chapel ceased ringing as we came out on the cliffs of Paradise, where, on the horizon, the sun hung low, belted with a single ribbon of violet cloud.

Over acres of foaming shoals the crimson light flickered and spread, painting the eastern cliffs with sombre fire. The ebb-tide, red as blood, tumbled seaward across the bar, leaving every ledge a glowing cinder under the widening conflagration in the west.

The mayor carried his silver-buttoned jacket over his arm; the air had grown sultry. As we walked our gigantic shadows strode away before us across the kindling stubble, seeming to lengthen at every stride.

Below the cliffs, on a crescent of flat sand, from which sluggish, rosy rivulets crawled seaward, a man stood looking out across the water. And the mayor stopped and called down to him: "Ohé, the Lizard! What do you see on the ocean—you below?"

"I see six war-ships speeding fast in column," replied the man, without looking up.

The mayor hastily shaded his eyes with one fat hand, muttering: "All poachers have eyes like sea-hawks. There is a smudge of smoke to the north. Holy Virgin, what eyes the rascal has!"

As for me, strain my eyes as I would, I saw nothing save the faintest stain of smoke on the horizon.

"Hé, Lizard! Are they German, your six war-ships?" bawled the mayor. His voice had suddenly become tremulous.

"They are French," replied the poacher, tranquilly.

"Then Sainte-Éline keep them from the rocks!" sang out the mayor. "Ohé, Lizard, I want somebody to drum and read a proclamation. Where's Jacqueline?"

At that instant a young girl, a mere child, appeared on the beach, dragging a sea-rake over the ground behind her. She was a lithe creature, bare-limbed and ragged, with the sea-tan on throat and knee. The blue tatters of her skirt hung heavy with brine; the creamy skin on her arms glittered with wet spray, and her hair was wet, too, clustering across her cheeks in damp elf-locks.

The mayor glanced at her with that stolid contempt which Finistère Bretons cherish toward those women who show their hair—an immodesty unpardonable in the eyes of most Bretons.

The girl caught sight of the mayor and gave him a laughing greeting which he returned with a shrug.

"If you want a town-crier," she called up, in a deliciously fresh voice, scarcely tinged with the accent, "I'll cry your edicts and I'll drum for you, too!"

"Can your daughter beat the drum?" asked the mayor of the poacher, ignoring the girl's eager face upturned.

"Yes," said the poacher, indifferently, "and she can also beat the devil with two sticks."

The girl threw her rake into a boat and leaped upon the rocks at the base of the cliff.

"Jacqueline! Don't come up that way!" bawled the mayor, horrified. "Hey! Robert! Ohé! Lizard! Stop her or she'll break her neck!"

The poacher looked up at his daughter then shrugged his shoulders and squatted down on his ragged haunches, restless eyes searching the level ocean, as sea-birds search.

Breathless, hot, and laughing, the girl pulled herself up over the edge of the cliff. I held out my hand to aid her, but she pushed it away, crying, "Thank you all the same, but here I am!"

"Spawn of the Lizard," I heard the mayor mutter to himself, "like a snake you wriggle where honest folk fall to destruction!" But he spoke condescendingly to the bright-eyed, breathless child. "I'll pay six sous if you'll drum for me."

"I'll do it for love," she said, saucily—"for the love of drumming, not for your beaux yeux, m'sieu le maire."

The mayor looked at her angrily, but, probably remembering he was at her mercy, suppressed his wrath and held out the telegram. “Can you read that, my child?”

The girl, still breathing rapidly from her scramble, rested her hands on her hips and, head on one side, studied the blue sheets of the telegram over the mayor’s outstretched arm.

“Yes, I can read it. Why not? Can’t you?”

“Read? I the mayor of Paradise!” repeated the outraged magistrate. “What do you mean, lizard of lizards! gorse cat!”

“Now if you are going to say such things I won’t drum for you,” said the child, glancing at me out of her sea-blue eyes and giving a shake to her elf-locks.

“Yes, you will!” bawled the angry mayor. “Shame on your manners, Jacqueline Garenne! Shame on your hair hanging where all the world can see it! Shame on your bare legs—”

“Not at all,” said the child, unabashed. “God made my legs, m’sieu the mayor, and my hair, too. If my coiffe does not cover my hair, neither does the small Paris hat of the Countess de Vassart cover her hair. Complain of the Countess to m’sieu the curé, then I will listen to you.”

The mayor glared at her, but she tossed her head and laughed.

“Ho fois! Everybody knows what you are,” sniffed the mayor—“and nobody cares, either,” he muttered, waddling past me, telegram in hand.

The child, quite unconcerned, fell into step beside me, saying, confidentially: “When I was little I used to cry when they talked to me like that. But I don’t now; I’ve made up my mind that they are no better than I.”

“I don’t know why anybody should abuse you,” I said, loudly enough for the mayor to hear. But that functionary waddled on, puffing, muttering, stopping every now and then in the narrow cliff-path to strike flint to tinder or to refill the tiny bowl of his pipe, which a dozen puffs always exhausted.

“Oh, they all abuse us,” said the child, serenely. “You see, you are a stranger and don’t understand; but you will if you live here.”

“Why is everybody unkind to you?” I asked, after a moment.

“Why? Oh, because I am what I am and my father is the Lizard.”

“A poacher?”

“Ah,” she said, looking up at me with delicious malice, “what is a poacher, monsieur?”

“Sometimes he’s a fine fellow gone wrong,” I said, laughing. “So I don’t believe any ill of your father, or of you, either. Will you drum for me, Jacqueline?”

“For you, monsieur? Why, yes. What am I to read for you?”

I gave her a hand-bill; at the first glance her eyes sparkled, the color deepened under her coat of amber tan; she caught her breath and read rapidly to the end.

“Oh, how beautiful,” she said, softly. “Am I to read this in the square?”

“I will give you a franc to read it, Jacqueline.”

“No, no—only—oh, do let me come in and see the heavenly wonders! Would you, monsieur? I—I cannot pay—but would—*could* you let me come in? I will read your notice, anyway,” she added, with a quaver in her voice.

The flushed face, the eager, upturned eyes, deep blue as the sea, the little hands clutching the show-bill, which fairly quivered between the tanned fingers—all these touched and amused me. The child was mad with excitement.

What she anticipated, Heaven only knows. Shabby and tarnished as we were, the language of our hand-bills made up in gaudiness for the dingy reality.

“Come whenever you like, Jacqueline,” I said. “Ask for me at the gate.”

“And who are you, monsieur?”

“My name is Scarlett.”

“Scarlett,” she whispered, as though naming a sacred thing.

The mayor, who had toddled some distance ahead of us, now halted in the square, looking back at us through the red evening light.

“Jacqueline, the drum is in my house. I’ll lend you a pair of sabots, too. Come, hasten little idler!”

We entered the mayor’s garden, where the flowers were glowing in the lustre of the setting sun. I sat down in a chair; Jacqueline waited, hands resting on her hips, small, shapely toes restlessly brushing the grass.

“Truly this coming wonder-show will be a peep into paradise,” she murmured. “Can all be true—really true as it is printed here in this bill—I wonder—”

Before she had time to speculate further, the mayor reappeared with drum and drum-sticks in one hand and a pair of sabots in the other. He flung the sabots on the grass, and Jacqueline, quite docile now, slipped both bare feet into them.

“You may keep them,” said the mayor, puffing out his mottled cheeks benevolently; “decency must be maintained in Paradise, even if it beggars me.”

“Thank you,” said Jacqueline, sweetly, slinging the drum across her hip and tightening the cords. She clicked the ebony sticks, touched the tightly drawn parchment, sounding it with delicate fingers, then looked up at the mayor for further orders.

“Go, my child,” said the mayor, amiably, and Jacqueline marched through the garden out into the square by the fountain, drum-sticks clutched in one tanned fist, the scrolls of paper in the other.

In the centre of the square she stood a moment, looking around, then raised the drum-sticks; there came a click, a flash of metal, and the quiet square echoed with the startling outcrash. Back from roof and wall bounded the echoes; the stony pavement rang with the racket. Already a knot of people had gathered around her; others came swiftly to windows and doorsteps; the loungers left their stone benches by the river, the maids of Paradise flocked from the bridge. Even Robert the Lizard drew in his dripping line to listen. The drum-roll ceased.

“*Attention! Men of Finistère!* By order of the governor of Lorient, all men between the ages of twenty and forty, otherwise not exempt, are ordered to report at the navy-yard barracks, war-port of Lorient, on the 5th of November of the present year, to join the army of the Loire.

“Whosoever is absent at roll-call will be liable to the punishment provided for such delinquents under the laws governing the state of siege now declared in Morbihan and Finistère. *Citizens, to arms!*

“The enemy is on the march! Though Metz has fallen through treachery, Paris holds firm! Let the provinces rise and hurl the invader from the soil of the mother-land!

“*Bretons!* France calls! Answer with your ancient battle-cry, ‘Sainte-Anne! Sainte-Anne!’ The eyes of the world are on Armorica! *To arms!*”

The girl’s voice ceased; a dead silence reigned in the square. The men looked at one another stupidly; a woman began to whimper.

“The curse is on Paradise!” cried a hoarse voice.

The drummer was already drawing another paper from her ragged pocket, and again in the same clear, emotionless voice, but slightly drawling her words, she read:

“To the good people of Paradise! The manager of the famous American travelling circus, lately returned from a tour of the northern provinces, with camels, elephants, lions, and a magnificent company of artists, announces a stupendous exhibition to be held in Lorient at greatly reduced prices, thus enabling the intelligent and appreciative people of Paradise to honor the Republican Circus, recently known as the Imperial Circus, with their benevolent and discerning patronage! Long live France! Long live the Republic! Long live the Circus!”

A resounding roll of the drum ended the announcements; the girl slung the drum over her shoulder, turned to the right, and passed over the stone bridge, sabots clicking. Presently from the hamlet of Alincourt over the stream came the dull roll of the drum again and the faint, clear voice:

“Attention! Men of Finistère! By order of the governor of Lorient, all men—” The wind changed and her voice died away among the trees.

The maids of Paradise were weeping now by the fountain; the men gathered near, and their slow, hushed voices scarcely rose above the ripple of the stream where Robert the Lizard fished in silence.

It was after sunset before Jacqueline finished her rounds. She had read her proclamation in Alincourt hamlet, she had read it in Sainte-Ysole, her drum had aroused the inert loungers on the breakwater at Trinité-on-Sea. Now, with her drum on her shoulder and her sabots swinging in her left hand, she came down the cliffs beside the Chapel of Our Lady of Paradise, excited and expectant.

Of the first proclamation which she had read she apparently understood little. When she announced the great disaster at Metz in the north, and when her passionless young voice proclaimed the levée en masse—the call to arms for the men of the coast from Sainte-Ysole to Trinité Beacon—she scarcely seemed to realize what it meant, although all around her women turned away sobbing, or clung, deathly white, to sons and husbands.

But there was certainly something in the other proclamation which thrilled her and set her heart galloping as she loitered on the cliff.

I walked across to the Quimperlé road and met her, dancing along with her drum; and she promptly confided her longings and desires to me as we stood together for an instant on the high-road. The circus! Once, it appeared, she had seen—very far off—a glittering creature turning on a trapeze. It was at the fair near Bannalec, and it was so long ago that she scarcely remembered anything except that somebody had pulled her away while she stood enchanted, and the flashing light of fairyland had been forever shut from her eyes.

At times, when the maids of Paradise were sociable at the well in the square, she had listened to stories of the splendid circus which came once to Lorient. And now it was coming again!

We stood in the middle of the high-road looking through the dust haze, she doubtless dreaming of the splendors to come, I very, very tired. The curtain of golden dust reddened in the west; the afterglow lit up the sky once more with brilliant little clouds suspended from mid-zenith. The moorland wind rose and tossed her elf-locks in her eyes and whipped her skirt till the rags fluttered above her smooth, bare knees.

Suddenly, straight out of the flaming gates of the sunset, the miracle was wrought. Celestial shapes in gold and purple rose up in the gilded dust, chariots of silver, milk-white horses plumed with fire.

Breathless, she shrank back among the weeds, one hand pressed to her throbbing throat. But the vision grew as she stared; there was heavenly music, too, and the clank of metal chains, and the smothered pounding of hoofs. Then she caught sight of something through the dust that filled her with a delicious terror, and she cried out. For there, uptowering in the haze, came trudging a great, gray creature, a fearsome, swaying thing in crimson trappings, flapping huge ears. It shuffled past, swinging a dusty trunk; the sparkling horsemen cantered by, tin armor blazing in the fading glory; the chariots dragged after, and the closed dens of beasts rolled behind in single file, followed by the band-wagon, where Heaven-inspired musicians played frantically and a white-faced clown balanced his hat on a stick and shrieked.

So the circus passed into Paradise; and I turned and followed in the wake of dust, stale odors, and clamorous discord, sick at heart of wandering over a world I had not found too kind.

And at my heels stole Jacqueline.

XI

IN CAMP

We went into camp under the landward glacis of the cliffs, in a field of clover which was to be ploughed under in a few days. We all were there except Kelly Eyre, who had gone to telegraph the governor of Lorient for permission to enter the port with the circus. Another messenger also left camp on private business for me.

It was part of my duty to ration the hay for the elephant and the thrice-accursed camel. The latter had just bitten Mr. Grigg, our clown—not severely—and Speed and Horan the "Strong Man" were hobbling the brute as I finished feeding my lions and came up to assist the others.

"Watch that darn elephant, too, Mr. Grigg," said Byram, looking up from a plate of fried ham that Miss Crystal, our "Trapeze Lady," had just cooked for him over our gypsy fires of driftwood.

"Look at that elephant! Look at him!" continued Byram, with a trace of animation lighting up his careworn face—"look at him now chuckin' hay over his back. Scrape it up, Mr. Scarlett; hay's thirty a ton in this war-starved country."

As I started to clean up the precious hay, the elephant gave a curious grunt and swung his trunk toward me.

"There's somethin' paltry about that elephant," said Byram, in a complaining voice, rising, with plate of ham in one hand, fork in the other. "He's gittin' as mean as that crafty camuel. Make him move, Mr. Speed, or he'll put his foot on the trombone."

"Hô Djebe! Mâil!" said Speed, sharply.

The elephant obediently shuffled forward; Byram sat down again, and wearily cut himself a bit of fried ham; and presently we were all sitting around the long camp-table in the glare of two smoky petroleum torches, eating our bread and ham and potatoes and drinking Breton cider, a jug of which Mr. Horan had purchased for a few coppers.

Some among us were too tired to eat, many too tired for conversation, yet, from habit we fell into small talk concerning the circus, the animals, the prospects of better days.

The ladies of the company, whatever quarrels they indulged in among themselves, stood loyally by Byram in his anxiety and need. Miss Crystal and Miss Delany displayed edifying optimism; Mrs. Horan refrained from nagging; Mrs. Grigg, a pretty little creature, who was one of the best equestriennes I ever saw, declared that we were living too well and that a little dieting wouldn't hurt anybody.

McCadger, our band-master, came over from the other fire to say that the men had finished grooming the horses, and would I inspect the picket-line, as Kelly Eyre was still absent.

When I returned, the ladies had retired to their blankets under their shelter-tent; poor little Grigg lay asleep at the table, his tired, ugly head resting among the unwashed tin plates; Speed sprawled in his chair, smoking a short pipe; Byram sat all hunched up, his head sunk, eyes vacantly following the movements of two men who were washing dishes in the flickering torch-light.

He looked up at me, saying: "I guess Mr. Speed is right. Them lions o' yourn is fed too much horse-meat. Overeatin' is overheatin'; we've got to give 'em beef or they'll be clawin' you. Yes, sir, they're all het up. Hear 'em growl!"

"That's a fable, governor," I said, smiling and dropping into a chair. "I've heard that theory before, but it isn't true."

"The trouble with your lions is that you play with them too much and they're losing respect for you," said Speed, drowsily.

"The trouble with my lions," said I, "is that they were born in captivity. Give me a wild lion, caught on his native heath, and I'll know what to expect from him when I tame him. But no man on earth can tell what a lion born in captivity will do."

The hard cider had cheered Byram a little; he drew a cherished cigar from his vest-pocket, offered it to me, and when I considerately refused, he carefully set it alight with a splinter from the fire. Its odor was indescribable.

"Luck's a curious phenomena, ain't it, Mr. Scarlett?" he said.

I agreed with him.

"Luck," continued Byram, waving his cigar toward the four quarters of the globe, "is the rich man's slave an' the poor man's tyrant. It's also a see-saw. When the devil plays in luck the cherubim git spanked—or words to that effec'—not meanin' no profanity."

"It's about like that, governor," admitted Speed, lazily.

Byram leaned back and sucked meditatively at his cigar. The new moon was just rising over the elephant's hindquarters, and the poetry of the incident appeared to move the manager profoundly. He turned and surveyed the dim bivouac, the two silent tents, the monstrous, shadowy bulk of the elephant, rocking monotonously against the sky. "Kind of Silurian an' solemn, ain't it," he murmured, "the moon shinin' onto the rump of that primeval pachyderm. It's like the dark ages of the behemoth an' the cony. I tell you, gentlemen, when them fearsome an' gigantic mamuels was aboundin' in the dawn of creation, the public missed the greatest show on earth—by a few million years!"

We nodded sleepily but gravely.

Byram appeared to have recovered something of his buoyancy and native optimism.

"Gentlemen," he said, "let's kinder saunter over to the inn and have a night-cap with Kelly Eyre."

This unusual and expensive suggestion startled us wide awake, but we were only too glad to acquiesce in anything which tended to raise his spirits or ours. Dog tired but smiling we rose; Byram, in his shirt-sleeves and suspenders, wearing his silk hat on the back of his head, led the way, fanning his perspiring face with a red-and-yellow bandanna.

"Luck," said Byram, waving his cigar toward the new moon, "is bound to turn one way or t'other—like my camuel. Sometimes, resemblin' the camuel, luck will turn on you. Look out it don't bite you. I once made up a piece about luck:

"'Don't buck
Bad luck
Or you'll get stuck—'

I disremember the rest, but it went on to say a few other words to that effec'."

The lighted door of the inn hung ajar as we crossed the star-lit square; Byram entered and stood a moment in the doorway, stroking his chin. "Bong joor the company!" he said, lifting his battered hat.

The few Bretons in the wine-room returned his civility; he glanced about and his eye fell on Kelly Eyre, Speed's assistant balloonist, seated by the window with Horan.

"Well, gents," said Byram, hopefully, "an' what aire the prospects of smilin' fortune when rosy-fingered dawn has came again to kiss us back to life?"

"Rotten," said Eyre, pushing a telegram across the oak table.

Byram's face fell; he picked up the telegram and fumbled in his coat for his spectacles with unsteady hand.

"Let me read it, governor," said Speed, and took the blue paper from Byram's unresisting, stubby fingers.

"O-ho!" he muttered, scanning the message; "well—well, it's not so bad as all that—" He turned abruptly on Kelly Eyre—"What the devil are you scaring the governor for?"

"Well, he's got to be told—I didn't mean to worry him," said Eyre, stammering, ashamed of his thoughtlessness.

"Now see here, governor," said Speed, "let's all have a drink first. Hé ma belle!"—to the big Breton girl knitting in the corner—"four little swallows of eau-de-vie, if you please! Ah, thank you, I knew you were from Bannalec, where all the girls are as clever as they are pretty! Come, governor, touch glasses! There is no circus but the circus, and Byram is it's prophet! Drink, gentlemen!"

But his forced gayety was ominous; we scarcely tasted the liqueur. Byram wiped his brow and squared his bent shoulders. Speed, elbows on the table, sat musing and twirling his half-empty glass.

"Well, sir?" said Byram, in a low voice.

"Well, governor? Oh—er—the telegram?" asked Speed, like a man fighting for time.

“Yes, the telegram,” said Byram, patiently.

“Well, you see they have just heard of the terrible smash-up in the north, governor. Metz has surrendered with Bazaine’s entire army. And they’re naturally frightened at Lorient.... And I rather fear that the Germans are on their way toward the coast.... And ... well ... they won’t let us pass the Lorient fortifications.”

“Won’t let us in?” cried Byram, hoarsely.

“I’m afraid not, governor.”

Byram stared at us. We had counted on Lorient to pull us through as far as the frontier.

“Now don’t take it so hard, governor,” said Kelly Eyre; “I was frightened myself, at first, but I’m ashamed of it now. We’ll pull through, anyhow.”

“Certainly,” said Speed, cheerily, “we’ll just lay up here for a few days and economize. Why can’t we try one performance here, Scarlett?”

“We can,” said I. “We’ll drum up the whole district from Pontivy to Auray and from Penmarch Point to Plouharnel! Why should the Breton peasantry not come? Don’t they walk miles to the Pardons?”

A gray pallor settled on Byram’s sunken face; with it came a certain dignity which sorrow sometimes brings even to men like him.

“Young gentlemen,” he said, “I’m obliged to you. These here reverses come to everybody, I guess. The Lord knows best; but if He’ll just lemme run my show a leetle longer, I’ll pay my debts an’ say, ‘Thy will be done, amen!’”

“We all must learn to say that, anyway,” said Speed.

“Mebbe,” muttered Byram, “but I must pay my debts.”

After a painful silence he rose, steadying himself with his hand on Eyre’s broad shoulder, and shambled out across the square, muttering something about his elephant and his camuel.

Speed paid the insignificant bill, emptied his glass, and nodded at me.

“It’s all up,” he said, soberly.

“Let’s come back to camp and talk it over,” I said.

Together we traversed the square under the stars, and entered the field of clover. In the dim, smoky camp all lights were out except one oil-drenched torch stuck in the ground between the two tents. Byram had gone to rest, so had Kelly Eyre. But my lions were awake, moving noiselessly to and fro, eyes shining in the dusk; and the elephant, a shapeless pile of shadow against the sky, stood watching us with little, evil eyes.

Speed had some cigarettes, and he laid the pink package on the table. I lighted one when he did.

“Do you really think there’s a chance?” he asked, presently.

“I don’t know,” I said.

“Well, we can try.”

“Oh yes.”

Speed dropped his elbows on the table. “Poor old governor,” he said.

Then he began to talk of our own prospects, which were certainly obscure if not alarming; but he soon gave up speculation as futile, and grew reminiscent, recalling our first acquaintance as discharged soldiers from the African battalions, our hand-to-mouth existence as gentlemen farmers in Algiers, our bankruptcy and desperate struggle in Marseilles, first as dock-workmen, then as government horse-buyers for the cavalry, then as employés of the Hippodrome in Paris, where I finally settled down as bareback rider, lion-tamer, and instructor in the haute-école; and he accepted a salary as aid to Monsieur Gaston Tissandier, the scientist, who was experimenting with balloons at Saint-Cloud.

He spoke, too, of our enlistment in the Imperial Police, and the hopes we had of advancement, which not only brought no response from me, but left us both brooding sullenly on our wrongs, crouched there over the rough camp-table under the stars.

“Oh, hell!” muttered Speed, “I’m going to bed.”

But he did not move. Presently he said, “How did you ever come to handle wild animals?”

“I’ve always been fond of animals; I broke colts at home; I had bear cubs and other things. Then, in Algiers, the regiment caught a couple of lions and kept them in a cage, and—well, I found I could do what I liked with them.”

“They’re afraid of your eyes, aren’t they?”

“I don’t know—perhaps it’s that; I can’t explain it—or, rather, I could partly explain it by saying that I am not afraid of them. But I never trust them.”

“You drag them all around the cage! You shove them about like sacks of meal!”

“Yes,... but I don’t trust them.”

“It seems to me,” said Speed, “that your lions are getting rather impudent these days. They’re not very much afraid of you now.”

“Nor I of them,” I said, wearily; “I’m much more anxious about you when you go sailing about in that patched balloon of yours. Are you never nervous?”

“Nervous? When?”

“When you’re up there?”

“Rubbish.”

“Suppose the patches give way?”

“I never think of that,” he said, leaning on the table with a yawn. “Oh, Lord, how tired I am!... but I shall not be able to sleep. I’m actually too tired to sleep. Have you got a pack of cards, Scarlett? or a decent cigar, or a glass of anything, or anything to show me more amusing than that nightmare of an elephant? Oh, I’m sick of the whole business—sick! sick! The stench of the tan-bark never leaves my nostrils except when the odor of fried ham or of that devilish camel replaces it.

“I’m too old to enjoy a gypsy drama when it’s acted by myself; I’m tired of trudging through the world with my entire estate in my pocket. I want a home, Scarlett. Lord, how I envy people with homes!”

He had been indulging in this outburst with his back partly turned toward me. I did not say anything, and, after a moment, he looked at me over his shoulder to see how I took it.

“I’d like to have a home, too,” I said.

“I suppose homes are not meant for men like you and me,” he said. “Lord, how I would appreciate one, though—anything with a bit of grass in the yard and a shovelful of dirt—enough to grow some damn flower, you know.... Did you smell the posies in the square to-night?... Something of that kind,... anything, Scarlett—anything that can be called a home!... But you can’t understand.”

“Oh yes, I can,” I said.

He went on muttering, half to himself: “We’re of the same breed—pariahs; fortunately, pariahs don’t last long,... like the wild creatures who never die natural deaths,... old age is one of the curses they can safely discount,... and so can we, Scarlett, so can we.... For you’ll be mauled by a lion or kicked into glory by a horse or an ox or an ass,... and I’ll fall off a balloon,... or the camel will give me tetanus, or the elephant will get me in one way or another,... or something....”

Again he twisted around to look at me. “Funny, isn’t it?”

“Rather funny,” I said, listlessly.

He leaned over, pulled another cigarette from the pink packet, broke a match from the card, and lighted it.

“I feel better,” he observed.

I expressed sleepy gratification.

“Oh yes, I’m much better. This isn’t a bad life, is it?”

“Oh no!” I said, sarcastically.

“No, it’s all right, and we’ve got to pull the poor old governor through and give a jolly good show here and start the whole country toward the tent door! Eh?”

“Certainly. Don’t let me detain you.”

“I’ll tell you what,” he said, “if we only had that poor little girl, Miss Claridge, we’d catch these Bretons. That’s what took the coast-folk all over Europe, so Grigg says.”

Miss Claridge had performed in a large glass tank as the “Leaping Mermaid.” It took like wildfire according to our fellow-performers. We had never seen her; she was killed by diving into her tank when the circus was at Antwerp in April.

“Can’t we get up something like that?” I suggested, hopelessly.

“Who would do it? Miss Claridge’s fish-tights are in the prop-box; who’s to wear them?”

He began to say something else, but stopped suddenly, eyes fixed. We were seated nearly opposite each other, and I turned around, following the direction of his eyes.

Jacqueline stood behind me in the smoky light of the torch—Jacqueline, bare of arm and knee, with her sea-blue eyes very wide and the witch-locks clustering around the dim oval of her face. After a moment’s absolute silence she said: “I came from Paradise. Don’t you remember?”

“From Paradise?” said Speed, smiling; “I thought it might be from elf-land.”

And I said: “Of course I remember you, Jacqueline. And I have an idea you ought to be in bed.”

There was another silence.

“Won’t you sit down?” asked Speed.

“Thank you,” said Jacqueline, gravely.

She seated herself on a sack of sawdust, clasping her slender hands between her knees, and looked earnestly at the elephant.

“He won’t harm you,” I assured her.

“If you think I am afraid of *that*,” she said, “you are mistaken, Monsieur Scarlett.”

“I don’t think you are afraid of anything,” observed Speed, smiling; “but I know you are capable of astonishment.”

“How do you know that?” demanded the girl.

“Because I saw you with your drum on the high-road when we came past Paradise. Your eyes were similar to saucers, and your mouth was not closed, Mademoiselle Jacqueline.”

“Oh—pour ça—yes, I was astonished,” she said. Then, with a quick, upward glance: “Were you riding, in armor, on a horse?”

“No,” said Speed; “I was on that elephant’s head.”

This appeared to make a certain impression on Jacqueline. She became shyer of speech for a while, until he asked her, jestingly, why she did not join the circus.

“It is what I wish,” she said, under her breath.

“And ride white horses?”

“Will you take me?” she cried, passionately, springing to her feet.

Amazed at her earnestness, I tried to explain that such an idea was out of the question. She listened anxiously at first, then her eyes fell and she stood there in the torch-light, head hanging.

“Don’t you know,” said Speed, kindly, “that it takes years of practice to do what circus people do? And the life is not gay, Jacqueline; it is hard for all of us. We know what hunger means; we know sickness and want and cold. Believe me, you are happier in Paradise than we are in the circus.”

“It may be,” she said, quietly.

“Of course it is,” he insisted.

“But,” she flashed out, “I would rather be unhappy in the circus than happy in Paradise!”

He protested, smiling, but she would have her way.

“I once saw a man, in spangles, turning, turning, and ever turning upon a rod. He was very far away, and that was very long ago—at the fair in Bannalec. But I have not forgotten! No, monsieur! In our net-shed I also have fixed a bar of wood, and on it I turn, turn continually. I am not ignorant of twisting. I can place my legs over my neck and cross my feet under my chin. Also I can stand on both hands, and I can throw scores of handsprings—which I do every morning upon the beach—I, Jacqueline!”

She was excited; she stretched out both bare arms as though preparing to demonstrate her ability then and there.

“I should like to see a circus,” she said. “Then I should know what to do. That I can swing higher than any girl in Paradise has been demonstrated often,” she went on, earnestly. “I can swim farther, I can dive deeper, I can run faster, with bare feet or with sabots, than anybody, man or woman, from the Beacon to Our Lady’s Chapel! At bowls the men will not allow me because I have beaten them all, monsieur, even the mayor, which he never forgave. As for the farandole, I tire last of all—and it is the biniou who cries out for mercy!”

She laughed and pushed back her hair, standing straight up in the yellow radiance like a moor-sprite. There was something almost unearthly in her lithe young body and fearless sea-blue eyes, sparkling from the shock of curls.

“So you can dive and swim?” asked Speed, with a glance at me.

“Like the salmon in the Läita, monsieur.”

“Under water?”

“Parbleu!”

After a pause I asked her age.

“Fifteen, M’sieu Scarlett.”

“You don’t look thirteen, Jacqueline.”

“I think I should grow faster if we were not so poor,” she said, innocently.

“You mean that you don’t get enough to eat?”

“Not always, m’sieu. But that is so with everybody except the wealthy.”

“Suppose we try her,” said Speed, after a silence. “You and I can scrape up a little money for her if worst comes to worst.”

“How about her father?”

“You can see him. What is he?”

“A poacher, I understand.”

“Oh, then it’s easy enough. Give him a few francs. He’ll take the child’s salary, anyway, if this thing turns out well.”

“Jacqueline,” I said, “we can’t afford to pay you much money, you know.”

“Money?" repeated the child, vacantly. “*Money!* If I had my arms full—so!—I would throw it into the world—so!”—she glanced at Speed—“reserving enough for a new skirt, monsieur, of which I stand in some necessity.”

The quaint seriousness, the resolute fearlessness of this little maid of Paradise touched us both, I think, as she stood there restlessly, balancing on her slim bare feet, finger-tips poised on her hips.

“Won’t you take me?” she asked, sweetly.

“I’ll tell you what I’ll do, Jacqueline,” said I. “Very early in the morning I’ll go down to your house and see your father. Then, if he makes no objection, I’ll get you to put on a pretty swimming-suit, all made out of silver scales, and you can show me, there in the sea, how you can dive and swim and play at mermaid. Does that please you?”

She looked earnestly at me, then at Speed.

“Is it a promise?” she asked, in a quivering voice.

“Yes, Jacqueline.”

“Then I thank you, M’sieu Scarlett,... and you, m’sieur, who ride the elephant so splendidly.... And I will be waiting for you when you come.... We live in the house below the Saint-Julien Light.... My father is pilot of the port.... Anybody will tell you.” ...

“I will not forget,” said I.

She bade us good-night very prettily, stepped back out of the circle of torch-light, and vanished—there is no other word for it.

“Gracious,” said Speed, “wasn’t that rather sudden? Or is that the child yonder? No, it’s a bush. Well, Scarlett, there’s an uncanny young one for you—no, not uncanny, but a spirit in its most delicate sense. I’ve an idea she’s going to find poor Byram’s lost luck for him.”

“Or break her neck,” I observed.

Speed was quiet for a long while.

“By-the-way,” he said, at last, “are you going to tell the Countess about that fellow Buckhurst?”

“I sent a note to her before I fed my lions,” I replied.

“Are you going to see her?”

“If she desires it.”

“Who took the note, Scarlett?”

“Jacqueline’s father,... that Lizard fellow.”

“Well, don’t let’s stir up Buckhurst now,” said Speed. “Let’s do what we can for the governor first.”

“Of course,” said I. “And I’m going to bed. Good-night.”

“Good-night,” said Speed, thoughtfully. “I’ll join you in a moment.”

When I was ready for bed and stood at the tent door, peering out into the darkness, I saw Speed curled up on a blanket between the elephant’s forefeet, sound asleep.

XII

JACQUELINE

The stars were still shining when I awoke in my blanket, lighted a candle, and stepped into the wooden tub of salt-water outside the tent.

I shaved by candle-light, dressed in my worn riding-breeches and jacket, then, candle in hand, began groping about among the faded bits of finery and tarnished properties until I found the silver-scaled swimming-tights once worn by the girl of whom we had heard so much.

She was very young when she leaped to her death in Antwerp—a slim slip of a creature, they said—so I thought it likely that her suit might fit Jacqueline.

The stars had begun to fade when I stepped out through the dew-soaked clover, carrying in one hand a satchel containing the swimming-suit, in the other a gun-case, in which, carefully oiled and doubly cased in flannel, reposed my only luxury —my breech-loading shot-gun.

The silence, intensified by the double thunder of the breakers on the sands, was suddenly pierced by a far cock-crow; vague gray figures passed across the square as I traversed it; a cow-bell tinkled near by, and I smelt the fresh-blown wind from the downs.

Presently, as I turned into the cliff-path, I saw a sober little Breton cow plodding patiently along ahead; beside her moved a fresh-faced maid of Paradise in snowy collarette and white-winged head-dress, knitting as she walked, fair head bent.

As I passed her she glanced up with tear-dimmed eyes, murmuring the customary salutation: “Bonjour d’ac’h, m’sieu!” And I replied in the best patois I could command: “Bonjour d’ec’h a laran, na œled Ket! Why do you cry, mademoiselle?”

“Cry, m’sieu? They are taking the men of Paradise to the war. France must know how cruel she is to take our men from us.”

We had reached the green crest of the plateau; the girl tethered her diminutive cow, sat down on a half-imbedded stone, and continued her knitting, crying softly all the while.

I asked her to direct me to the house where Robert, the Lizard, lived; she pointed with her needles to a large stone house looming up in the gray light, built on the rocks just under the beacon. It was white with sea-slime and crusted salt, yet heavily and solidly built as a fort, and doubtless very old, judging from the traces of sculptured work over portal and windows.

I had scarcely expected to find the ragged Lizard and more ragged Jacqueline housed in such an anciently respectable structure, and I said so to the girl beside me.

“The house is bare as the bones of Sainte-Anne,” she said. “There is nothing within—not even crumbs enough for the cliff-rats, they say.”

So I went away across the foggy, soaking moorland, carrying my gun and satchel in their cases, descended the grassy cleft, entered a cattle-path, and picked my way across the wet, black rocks toward the abode of the poacher.

The Lizard was standing on his doorsill when I came up; he returned my greeting sullenly, his keen eyes of a sea-bird roving over me from head to foot. A rumpled and sulky yellow cat, evidently just awake, sat on the doorstep beside him and yawned at intervals. The pair looked as though they had made a night of it.

“You took my letter last night?” I asked.

“Yes.”

“Was there an answer for me?”

“Yes.”

“Couldn’t you have come to the camp and told me?”

“I could, but I had other matters to concern me,” he replied. “Here’s your letter,” and he fished it out of his tattered pocket.

I was angry enough, but I did not wish to anger him at that moment. So I took the letter and read it—a formal line saying the Countess de Vassart would expect me at five that afternoon.

“You are not noted for your courtesy, are you?” I inquired, smiling.

Something resembling a grin touched his sea-scarred visage.

“Oh, I knew you’d come for your answer,” he said, coolly.

“Look here, Lizard,” I said, “I intend to be friends with you, and I mean to make you look on me as a friend. It’s to my advantage and to yours.”

“To mine?” he inquired, sneeringly, amused.

“And this is the first thing I want,” I continued; and without further preface I unfolded our plans concerning Jacqueline.

“Entendu,” he said, drawling the word, “is that all?”

“Do you consent?”

“Is that all?” he repeated, with Breton obstinacy.

“No, not all. I want you to be my messenger in time of need. I want you to be absolutely faithful to me.”

“Is that all?” he drawled again.

“Yes, that is all.”

“And what is there in this, to my advantage, m’sieu?”

“This, for one thing,” I said, carelessly, picking up my gun-case. I slowly drew out the barrels of Damascus, then the rose-wood stock and fore-end, assembling them lovingly; for it was the finest weapon I had ever seen, and it was breaking my heart to give it away.

The poacher’s eyes began to glitter as I fitted the double bolts and locked breech and barrel with the extension rib. Then I snapped on the fore-end; and there lay the gun in my hands, a fowling-piece fit for an emperor.

“Give it?” muttered the poacher, huskily.

“Take it, my friend the Lizard,” I replied, smiling down the wrench in my heart.

There was a silence; then the poacher stepped forward, and, looking me square in the eye, flung out his hand. I struck my open palm smartly against his, in the Breton fashion; then we clasped hands.

“You mean honestly by the little one?”

“Yes,” I said; “strike palms by Sainte Thekla of Ycône!”

We struck palms heavily.

“She is a child,” he said; “there is no vice in her; yet I’ve seen them nearly finished at her age in Paris.” And he swore terribly as he said it.

We dropped hands in silence; then, “Is this gun mine?” he demanded, hoarsely.

“Yes.”

“Strike!” he cried; “take my friendship if you want it, on this condition—what I am is my own concern, not yours. Don’t interfere, m’sieu; it would be useless. I should never betray you, but I might kill you. Don’t interfere. But if you care for the good-will of a man like me, take it; and when you desire a service from me, tell me, and I’ll not fail you, by Sainte-Éline of Paradise!”

“Strike palms,” said I, gravely; and we struck palms thrice.

He turned on his heel, kicking off his sabots on the doorsill. “Break bread with me; I ask it,” he said, gruffly, and stalked

before me into the house.

The room was massive and of noble proportion, but there was scarcely anything in it—a stained table, a settle, a little pile of rags on the stone floor—no, not rags, but Jacqueline's clothes!—and there at the end of the great chamber, built into the wall, was the ancient Breton bed with its Gothic carving and sliding panels of black oak, carved like the lattice-work in a chapel screen.

Outside dawn was breaking through a silver shoal of clouds; already its slender tentacles of light were probing the shadows behind the lattice where Jacqueline lay sleeping.

From the ashes on the hearth a spiral of smoke curled. The yellow cat walked in and sat down, contemplating the ashes.

Slowly a saffron light filled the room; Jacqueline awoke in the dim bed.

She pushed the panels aside and peered out, her sea-blue eyes heavy with slumber.

"Ma doué!" she murmured; "it is M'sieu Scarlett! Aie! Aie! Am I a countess to sleep so late? Bonjour, m'sieu! Bonjour, pa-pa!" She caught sight of the yellow cat, "Et bien le bonjour, Ange Pitou!"

She swathed herself in a blanket and sat up, looking at me sleepily.

"You came to see me swim," she said.

"And I've brought you a fish's silver skin to swim in," I replied, pointing at the satchel.

She cast a swift glance at her father, who, with the gun on his knees, sat as though hypnotized by the beauty of its workmanship. Her bright eyes fell on the gun; she understood in a flash.

"Then you'll take me?"

"If you swim as well as I hope you can."

"Turn your back!" she cried.

I wheeled about and sat down on the settle beside the poacher. There came a light thud of small, bare feet on the stone floor, then silence. The poacher looked up.

"She's gone to the ocean," he said; "she has the mania for baths—like you English." And he fell to rubbing the gunstock with dirty thumb.

The saffron light in the room was turning pink when Jacqueline reappeared on the threshold in her ragged skirt and stained velvet bodice half laced, with the broken points hanging, carrying an armful of driftwood.

Without a word she went to work; the driftwood caught fire from the ashes, flaming up in exquisite colors, now rosy, now delicate green, now violet; the copper pot, swinging from the crane, began to steam, then to simmer.

"Papa!"

"De quoi!" growled the poacher.

"Were you out last night?"

"Dame, I've just come in."

"Is there anything?"

The poacher gave me an oblique and evil glance, then coolly answered: "Three pheasant, two partridges, and a sea-trout in the net-shed. All are drawn."

So swiftly she worked that the pink light had scarcely deepened to crimson when the poacher, laying the gun tenderly in the blankets of Jacqueline's tumbled bed, came striding back to the table where a sea-trout smoked on a cracked platter, and a bowl of bread and milk stood before each place.

We ate silently. Ange Pitou, the yellow cat, came around with tail inflated. There were fishbones enough to gratify any cat, and Ange Pitou made short work of them.

The poacher bolted his food, sombre eyes brooding or stealing across the room to the bed where his gun lay. Jacqueline, to my amazement, ate as daintily as a linnet, yet with a fresh, hearty unconsciousness that left nothing in her bowl or wooden spoon.

“Schist?” inquired the poacher, lifting his tired eyes to me. I nodded. So he brought a jug of cold, sweet cider, and we all drank long and deeply, each in turn slinging the jug over the crooked elbow.

The poacher rose, wiped his mouth with the back of his hand, and made straight for his new gun.

“You two,” he said, with a wave of his arm, “you settle it among yourselves. Jacqueline, is it true that Le Bihan saw woodcock dropping into the fen last night?”

“He says so.”

“He is not a liar—usually,” observed the poacher. He touched his beret to me, flung the fowling-piece over his shoulder, picked up a canvas bag in which I heard cartridges rattling, stepped into his sabots, and walked away. In a few moments the hysterical yelps of a dog, pleased at the prospect of a hunt, broke out from the net-shed.

Jacqueline placed the few dishes in a pan of hot water, wiped her fingers, daintily, and picked up Ange Pitou, who promptly acknowledged the courtesy by bursting into a crackling purring.

“Show me the swimming-suit,” she said, shyly.

I drew it out of the satchel and laid it across my knees.

“Oh, it has a little tail behind—like a fish!” she cried, enchanted. “I shall look like the silver grilse of Quimperlé!”

“Do you think you can swim in those scales?” I asked.

“Swim? I—Jacqueline? Attendez un peu—you shall see!”

She laughed an excited, confident little laugh and hugged Ange Pitou, who closed his eyes in ecstasy sheathing and unsheathing his sharp claws.

“It is almost sunrise,” I said.

“It lacks many minutes to sunrise,” she replied. “Ask Ange Pitou. At sunrise he leaves me; nothing can hold him; he does not bite or scratch, he just pushes and pulls until my arms are tired. Then he goes. It is always so.”

“Why does he do that?”

“Ask him. I have often asked, but he never tells me—do you, my friend? I think he’s a moor-sprite—perhaps a devil. Do devils hate all kinds of water?”

“No, only holy water,” I replied.

“Well, then, he’s something else. Look! Look! He is beginning! See him push to get free, see him drive his furry head into my hands. The sun is coming up out of the sea! It will soon be here.”

She opened her arms; the cat sprang to the doorstep and vanished.

Jacqueline looked at the swimming-suit, then at me. “Will you go down to the beach, M’sieu Scarlett?”

But I had not traversed half the strip of rock and hard sand before something flew past—a slim, glittering shape which suddenly doubled up, straightened again, and fell headlong into the thundering surf.

The waves hurled her from crest to crest, clothing her limbs in froth; the singing foam rolled her over and over, stranding her on bubbling sands, until the swell found her again, lifted her, and tossed her seaward into the wide, white arms of the breakers.

Back to land she drifted and scrambled up on the beach, a slender, drenched figure, glistening and flashing with every movement.

Dainty of limb as a cat in wet grass, she shook the spray from her fingers and scrubbed each palm with sand, then sprang again headlong into the surf; there was a flash, a spatter, and she vanished.

After a long, long while, far out on the water she rose, floating.

Now the red sun, pushing above the ocean’s leaden rim, flung its crimson net across the water. String after string of white-breasted sea-ducks beat to windward from the cove, whirling out to sea; the gray gulls flapped low above the shoal and settled in rows along the outer bar, tossing their sun-tipped wings; the black cormorant on the cliff craned its hideous neck, scanning the ocean with restless, brilliant eyes.

Tossed back once more upon the beach like an opalescent shell, Jacqueline, ankle-deep in foam, looked out across the flaming waters, her drenched hair dripping.

From the gorse on cliff and headland, one by one the larks shot skyward like amber rockets, trailing a shower of melody till the whole sky rained song. The crested vanneaux, passing out to sea, responded plaintively, flapping their bronze-green wings.

The girl twisted her hair and wrung it till the last salt drop had fallen. Sitting there in the sands, idle fingers cracking the pods of gilded sea-weed, she glanced up at me and laughed contentedly. Presently she rose and walked out to a high ledge, motioning me to follow. Far below, the sun-lit water shimmered in a shallow basin of silver sand.

"Look!" she cried, flinging her arms above her head, and dropped into space, falling like a star, down, down into the shallow sea. Far below I saw a streak of living light shoot through the water—on, on, closer to the surface now, and at last she fairly sprang into the air, quivering like a gaffed salmon, then fell back to float and clear her blue eyes from her tangled hair.

She gave me a glance full of malice as she landed, knowing quite well that she had not only won, but had given me a shock with her long dive into scarce three feet of water.

Presently she climbed to the sun-warmed hillock of sand and sat down beside me to dry her hair.

A langouste, in his flaming scarlet coat of mail, passed through a glassy pool among the rocks, treading sedately on pointed claws; the lançons tunnelled the oozing beach under her pink feet, like streams of living quicksilver; the big, blue sea-crabs sidled off the reef, sheering down sideways into limpid depths. Landward the curlew walked in twos and threes, swinging their long sickle bills; the sea-swallows drove by like gray snow-squalls, melting away against the sky; a vitreous living creature, blazing with purest sapphire light, floated past under water.

Ange Pitou, coveting a warm sun-bath in the sand, came wandering along pretending not to see us; but Jacqueline dragged him into her arms for a hug, which lasted until Ange Pitou broke loose, tail hoisted but ears deaf to further flattery.

So Jacqueline chased Ange Pitou back across the sand and up the rocky path, pursuing her pet from pillar to post with flying feet that fell as noiselessly as the velvet pads of Ange Pitou.

"Come to the net-shed, if you please!" she called back to me, pointing to a crazy wooden structure built above the house.

As I entered the net-shed the child was dragging a pile of sea-nets to the middle of the floor.

"In case I fall," she said, coolly.

"Better let me arrange them, then," I said, glancing up at the improvised trapeze which dangled under the roof-beams.

She thanked me, seized a long rope, and went up, hand over hand. I piled the soft nets into a mattress, but decided to stand near, not liking the arrangements.

Meanwhile Jacqueline was swinging, head downward, from her trapeze. Her cheeks flamed as she twisted and wriggled through a complicated manœuvre, which ended by landing her seated on the bar of the trapeze a trifle out of breath. With both hands resting on the ropes, she started herself swinging, faster, faster, then pretended to drop off backward, only to catch herself with her heels, substitute heels for hands, and hang. Doubling back on her own body, she glided to her perch beneath the roof, shook her damp hair back, set the trapeze flying, and curled up on the bar, resting as fearlessly and securely as a bullfinch in a tree-top.

Above her the red-and-black wasps buzzed and crawled and explored the sun-scorched beams. Spiders watched her from their silken hammocks, and the tiny cliff-mice scuttled from beam to beam. Through the open door the sunshine poured a flood of gold over the floor where the bronzed nets were spread. Mending was necessary; she mentioned it, and set herself swinging again, crossing her feet.

"You think you could drop from there into a tank of water?" I asked.

"How deep?"

"Say four feet."

She nodded, swinging tranquilly.

“Have you any fear at all, Jacqueline?”

“No.”

“You would try whatever I asked you to try?”

“If I thought I could,” she replied, naïvely.

“But that is not it. I am to be your master. You must have absolute confidence in me and obey orders instantly.”

“Like a soldier?”

“Exactly.”

“Bien.”

“Then hang by your hands!”

Quick as a flash she hung above me.

“You trust me, Jacqueline?”

“Yes.”

“Then drop!”

Down she flashed like a falling meteor. I caught her with that quick trick known to all acrobats, which left her standing on my knee.

“Jump!”

She sprang lightly to the heap of nets, lost her balance, stumbled, and sat down very suddenly. Then she threw back her head and laughed; peal on peal of deliciously childish laughter rang through the ancient net-shed, until, overhead, the passing gulls echoed her mirth with querulous mewing, and the sea-hawk, towering to the zenith, wheeled and squealed.

XIII

FRIENDS

At seven o'clock that morning the men in the circus camp awoke, worried, fatigued, vaguely resentful, unusually profane. Horan was openly mutinous, and announced his instant departure.

By eight o'clock a miraculous change had taken place; the camp was alive with scurrying people, galvanized into hopeful activity by my possibly unwarranted optimism and a few judiciously veiled threats.

Clothed with temporary authority by Byram, I took the bit between my teeth and ordered the instant erection of the main tents, the construction of the ring, barriers, and benches, and the immediate renovating of the portable tank in which poor little Miss Claridge had met her doom.

I detailed Kelly Eyre to Quimperlé with orders for ten thousand crimson hand-bills; I sent McCadger, with Dawley, the bass-drummer, and Irwin, the cornettist, to plaster our posters from Pont Aven to Belle Isle, and I gave them three days to get back, and promised them a hundred dollars apiece if they succeeded in sticking our bills on the fortifications of Lorient and Quimper, with or without permission.

I sent Grigg and three exempt Bretons to beat up the country from Gestel and Rosporden to Pontivy, clear across to Quiberon, and as far east as St. Gildas Point.

By the standing-stones of Carnac, I swore that I'd have all Finistère in that tent. "Governor," said I, "we are going to feature Jacqueline all over Brittany, and, if the ladies object, it can't be helped! By-the-way, *do* they object?"

The ladies did object, otherwise they would not have been human ladies; but the battle was sharp and decisive, for I was desperate.

"It simply amounts to this," I said: "Jacqueline pulls us through or the governor and I land in jail. As for you, Heaven knows what will happen to you! Penal settlement, probably."

And I called Speed and pointed at Jacqueline, sitting on her satchel, watching the proceedings with amiable curiosity.

"Speed, take that child and rehearse her. Begin as soon as the tent is stretched and you can rig the flying trapeze. Use the net, of course. Horan rehearsed Miss Claridge; he'll stand by. Miss Crystal, your good-will and advice I depend upon. Will you help me?"

"With all my heart," said Miss Crystal.

That impulsive reply broke the sullen deadlock.

Pretty little Mrs. Grigg went over and shook the child's hand very cordially and talked broken French to her; Miss Delany volunteered to give her some "Christian clothes"; Mrs. Horan burst into tears, complaining that everybody was conspiring to injure her and her husband, but a few moments later she brought Jacqueline some toast, tea, and fried eggs, an attention shyly appreciated by the puzzled child, who never before had made such a stir in the world.

"Don't stuff her," said Speed, as Mrs. Horan enthusiastically trotted past bearing more toast. "Here, Scarlett, the ladies are spoiling her. Can I take her for the first lesson?"

Byram, who had shambled up, nodded. I was glad to see him reassert his authority. Speed took the child by the hand, and together they entered the big white tent, which now loomed up like a mammoth mushroom against the blue sky.

"Governor," I said, "we're all a bit demoralized; a few of us are mutinous. For Heaven's sake, let the men see you are game. This child has got to win out for us. Don't worry, don't object; back me up and let me put this thing through."

The old man shoved his hands into his trousers-pockets and looked at me with heavy, hopeless eyes.

"Now here's the sketch for the hand-bill," I said, cheerfully, taking a pencilled memorandum from my pocket. And I read:

``THE PATRIOTIC ANTI-PRUSSIAN REPUBLICAN CIRCUS,
MORE STUPENDOUS, MORE GIGANTIC, MORE
OVERPOWERING THAN EVER!

GLITTERING, MARVELLOUS, SOUL-COMPELLING!"

"What's 'soul-compelling'?" asked Byram.

"Anything you please, governor," I said, and read on rapidly until I came to the paragraph concerning Jacqueline:

``THE WONDER OF EARTH AND HEAVEN!
THE UNUTTERABLY BEAUTIFUL FLYING
MERMAID! CAUGHT ON THE
COAST OF BRITTANY!
WHAT IS SHE?
FISH? BIRD? HUMAN? DIVINE?
WHO KNOWS?
THE SCIENTISTS OF FRANCE DO NOT KNOW!!
THE SCIENTISTS OF THE WORLD
ARE CONFOUNDED!
IS SHE
A LOST SOUL
FROM THE SUNKEN CITY OF KER-YS?
50,000 FRANCS REWARD FOR THE BRETON WHO CAN
PROVE THAT SHE DID NOT COME STRAIGHT FROM
PARADISE!!!"

"That's a damn good bill," said Byram, suddenly.

He was so seldom profane that I stared at him, worried lest his misfortunes had unbalanced him. But a faint, healthy color was already replacing the pallor in his loose cheeks, a glint of animation came into his sunken eyes. He lifted his battered silk hat, replaced it at an angle almost defiant, and scowled at Horan, who passed us sullenly, driving the camel tentwards with awful profanity.

"Don't talk such langwidge in my presence, Mr. Horan," he said, sharply; "a camuel is a camuel, but remember: 'kind hearts is more than cornets,' an' it's easier for that there camuel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a cussin' cuss to cuss his way into Kingdom Come!"

Horan, who had betrayed unmistakable symptoms of insubordination that morning, quailed under the flowing rebuke. He was a man of muscular strength and meagre intellect; words hit him like trip-hammers.

"Certainly, governor," he stammered, and spoke to the camel politely, guiding that enraged and squealing quadruped to his manger with a forced smile.

With mallet, hammer, saw, and screw-driver I worked until noon, maturing my plans all the while. These plans would take the last penny in the treasury and leave us in debt several thousand francs. But it was win or go to smash now, and personally I have always preferred a tremendous smash to a slow and oozy fizzle.

A big pot of fragrant soup was served to the company at luncheon; and it amused me to see Jacqueline troop into the tent with the others and sit down with her bit of bread and her bowl of broth.

She was flushed and excited, and she talked to her instructor, Speed, all the while, chattering like a linnet between mouthfuls of bread and broth.

"How is she getting on?" I called across to Speed.

"The child is simply startling," he said, in English. "She is not afraid of anything. She and Miss Crystal have been doing that hair-raising 'flying swing' *without rehearsal!*"

Jacqueline, hearing us talking in English, turned and stared at me, then smiled and looked up sweetly at Speed.

"You seem to be popular with your pupil," I said, laughing.

"She's a fine girl—a fine, fearless, straight-up-and-down girl," he said, with enthusiasm.

Everybody appeared to like her, though how much that liking might be modified if prosperity returned I was unable to judge.

Now all our fortunes depended on her. She was not a ballon d'essai; she was literally the whole show; and if she duplicated the sensational success of poor little Miss Claridge, we had nothing to fear. But her troubles would then begin. At present, however, we were waiting for her to pull us out of the hole before we fell upon her and rent her

professionally. And I use that "we" not only professionally, but with an attempt at chivalry.

Byram's buoyancy had returned in a measure. He sat in his shirt-sleeves at the head of the table, vigorously sopping his tartine in his soup, and, mouth full, leaned forward, chewing and listening to the conversation around him.

Everybody knew it was life or death now, that each one must drop petty jealousies and work for the common salvation. An artificial and almost feverish animation reigned, which I adroitly fed with alarming allusions to the rigor of the French law toward foreigners and other malefactors who ran into debt to French subjects on the sacred soil of France. And, having lived so long in France and in the French possessions, I was regarded as an oracle of authority by these ambulant professional people who were already deadly homesick, and who, in eighteen months of Europe, had amassed scarcely a dozen French phrases among them all.

"I'll say one thing," observed Byram, with dignity; "if ever I git out of this darn continong with my circus, I'll recooperate in the undulatin' medders an' j'yful vales of the United States. Hereafter that country will continue to remain good enough for me."

All applauded—all except Jacqueline, who looked around in astonishment at the proceedings, and only smiled when Speed explained in French.

"Ask maddermoselle if she'll go home with us?" prompted Byram. "Tell her there's millions in it."

Speed put the question; Jacqueline listened gravely, hesitated, then whispered to Speed, who reddened a trifle and laughed.

Everybody waited for a moment. "What does she say?" inquired Byram.

"Oh, nothing; she talked nonsense."

But Jacqueline's dignity and serene face certainly contradicted Speed's words.

Presently Byram arose, flourishing his napkin. "Time's up!" he said, with decision, and we all trooped off to our appointed labors.

Now that I had stirred up this beehive and set it swarming again, I had no inclination to turn drone. Yet I remembered my note to the Countess de Vassart and her reply. So about four o'clock I made the best toilet I could in my only other suit of clothes, and walked out of the bustling camp into the square, where the mossy fountain splashed under the oaks and the children of Paradise were playing. Hands joined, they danced in a ring, singing:

"*Barzig ha barzig a Goneri*
Ari e mab roue gand daou pe dri"—

"Little minstrel-bard of Conéri
The son of the King has come with two or three—
Nay, with a whole bright flock of paroquets,
Crimson, silver, and violet."

And the children, in their white coiffes and tiny wooden shoes, moved round and round the circle, in the middle of which a little lad and a little lass of Paradise stood motionless, hand clasping hand.

The couplet ended, the two children in the middle sprang forward and dragged a third child out of the circle. Then the song began again, the reduced circle dancing around the three children in the middle.

"—The son of the King has come with two or three—
Nay, with a whole bright flock of paroquets,
Crimson, silver, and violet."

It was something like a game I had played long ago—in the age of fable—and I lingered, touched with homesickness.

The three children in the middle took a fourth comrade from the circle, crying, "Will you go to the moon or will you go to the stars?"

"The moon," lisped the little maid, and she was led over to the fountain.

"The stars," said the first prisoner, and was conducted to the stone bridge.

Soon a small company was clustered on the bridge, another band at the fountain. Then, as there were no more to dance in a circle, the lad and lassie who had stood in the middle to choose candidates for the moon and stars clasped hands and danced gayly across the square to the group of expectant children at the fountain, crying:

"Baradoz! Baradoz!"
(Paradise! Paradise!)

and the whole band charged on the little group on the bridge, shouting and laughing, while the unfortunate tenants of the supposed infernal regions fled in every direction, screaming:

"Pater noster
Dibi doub!
Dibi doub!
Dibi doub!"

Their shouts and laughter still came faintly from the tree-shaded square as I crossed the bridge and walked out into the moorland toward the sea, where I could see the sun gilding the headland and the spouting-rocks of Point Paradise.

Over the turning tide cormorants were flying, now wheeling like hawks, now beating seaward in a duck-like flight. I passed little, lonely pools on the moor, from which snipe rose with a startling squak! squak! and darted away inland as though tempest blown.

Presently a blue-gray mass in mid-ocean caught my eye. It was the island of Groix, and between it and Point Paradise lay an ugly, naked, black shape, motionless, oozing smoke from two stubby funnels—the cruiser *Fer-de-Lance*! So solidly inert lay the iron-clad that it did not seem as if she had ever moved or ever could move; she looked like an imbedded ledge cropping up out of the sea.

Far across the hilly moorland the white semaphore glistened like a gull's wing—too far for me to see the balls and cones hoisted or the bright signals glimmering along the halyards as I followed a trodden path winding south through the gorse. Then a dip in the moorland hid the semaphore and at the same moment brought a house into full view—a large, solid structure of dark stone, heavily Romanesque, walled in by an ancient buttressed barrier, above which I could see the tree-tops of a fruit-garden.

The Château de Trécourt was a fine example of the so called "fortified farm"; it had its moat, too, and crumbling wing-walls, pierced by loop-holes and over-hung with miniature battlements. A walled and loop-holed passageway connected the house with another stone enclosure in which stood stable, granary, cattle-house, and sheepfold, all of stone, though the roofs of these buildings were either turfed or thatched. And over them the weather-vane, a golden Dorado, swam in the sunshine.

One thing I noticed as I crossed the unused moat on a permanent bridge: the youthful Countess no longer denied herself the services of servants, for I saw a cloaked shepherd and his two wolf-like and tailless sheep-dogs watching the flock scattered over the downs; and there were at least half a dozen farm servants pottering about from stable to granary, and a toothless porter to answer the gate-bell and pilot me past the tiny loop-holed lodge-turret to the house. There was also a man, lying belly down in the bracken, watching me; and as I walked into the court I tried to remember where I had seen his face before.

The entire front of the house was covered with those splendid orange-tinted tea-roses that I had noticed in Paradise; thicket on thicket of clove-scented pinks choked the flower-beds; and a broad mat of deep-tinted pansies lay on the lawn, spread out for all the world like a glorious Eastern rug.

There was a soft whirring in the air like the sound of a humming-bird close by; it came from a spinning-wheel, and grew louder as a servant admitted me into the house and guided me to a sunny room facing the fruit garden.

The spinner at the wheel was singing in an undertone—singing a Breton "gwerz," centuries old, retained in memory from generation to generation:

"Woe to the Maids of Paradise,

Yvonne!
Twice have the Saxons landed; twice!
Yvonne!
Yet must Paradise see them thrice!
Yvonne! Yvonne! Marivonik."

Old as were the words, the melody was older—so old and quaint and sweet that it seemed a berceuse fashioned to soothe the drowsing centuries, lest the memories of ancient wrongs awake and rouse the very dead from their Gothic tombs.

All the sad history of the Breton race was written in every minor note; all the mystery, the gentleness, the faith of the lost people of Armorica.

And now the singer was intoning the "Gwerz Ar Baradoz"—the "Complaint of Paradise"—a slow, thrilling miséréré, scarcely dominating the velvet whir of the spinning-wheel.

Suddenly the melody ceased, and a young Bretonne girl appeared in the doorway, courtesying to me and saying in perfect English: "How do you do, Mr. Scarlett; and how do you like my spinning songs, if you please?"

The girl was Mademoiselle Sylvia Elven, the marvellously clever actress from the Odéon, the same young woman who had played the Alsacienne at La Trappe, as perfectly in voice and costume as she now played the Bretonne.

"You need not be astonished at all," she said, calmly, "if you will only reflect that my name is Elven, which is also the name of a Breton town. Naturally, I am a Bretonne from Elven, and my own name is Duhamel—Sylvenne Duhamel. I thought I ought to tell you, so that you would not think me too clever and try to carry me off on your horse again."

I laughed uncertainly; clever women who talk cleverly always disturb me. Besides, somehow, I felt she was not speaking the truth, yet I could not imagine why she should lie to me.

"You were more fluent to the helpless turkey-girl," she suggested, maliciously.

I had absolutely nothing to say, which appeared to gratify her, for she dimpled and smiled under her snowy-winged coiffe, from which a thick gold strand of hair curled on her forehead—a sad bit of coquetry in a Bretonne from Elven, if she told the truth.

"I only came to renew an old and deeply valued friendship," she said, with mock sentimentality; "I am going back to my flax now."

However, she did not move.

"And, by-the-way," she said, languidly, "is there in your intellectual circus company a young gentleman whose name is Eyre?"

"Kelly Eyre? Yes," I said, sulkily.

"Ah."

She strolled out of the room, hesitated, then turned in the doorway with a charming smile.

"The Countess will return from her gallop at five."

She waited as though expecting an answer, but I only bowed.

"Would you take a message to Mistaire Kelly Eyre for me?" she asked, sweetly.

I said that I would.

"Then please say that: '*On Sunday the book-stores are closed in Paris.*'"

"Is that what I am to say?"

"Exactly that."

"Very well, mademoiselle."

"Of course, if he asks who told you—you may say that it was a Bretonne at Point Paradise."

"Nothing else?"

“Nothing, monsieur.”

She courtesied and vanished.

“Little minx,” I thought, “what mischief are you preparing now?” and I rested my elbow on the window-sill and gazed out into the garden, where apricot-trees and fig-trees lined the winding walks between beds of old-fashioned herbs, anise, basil, caraway, mint, sage, and saffron.

Sunlight lay warm on wall and gravel-path; scarlet apples hung aloft on a few young trees; a pair of trim, wary magpies explored the fig-trees, sometimes quarrelling, sometimes making common cause against the shy wild-birds that twittered everywhere among the vines.

I fancied, after a few moments, that I heard the distant thudding of a horse’s hoofs; soon I was sure of it, and rose to my feet expectantly, just as a flushed young girl in a riding-habit entered the room and gave me her gloved hand.

Her fresh, breezy beauty astonished me; could this laughing, gray-eyed girl with her silky, copper-tinted hair be the same slender, grave young Countess whom I had known in Alsace—this incarnation of all that is wholesome and sweet and winning in woman? What had become of her mission and the soiled brethren of the proletariat? What had happened?

I looked at her earnestly, scarcely understanding that she was saying she was glad I had come, that she had waited for me, that she had wanted to see me, that she had wished to tell me how deeply our tragic experience at La Trappe and in Morsbronn had impressed her. She said she had sent a letter to me in Paris which was returned, *opened*, with a strange note from Monsieur Mornac. She had waited for some word from me, here in Paradise, since September; “waited impatiently,” she added, and a slight frown bent her straight brows for a moment—a moment only.

“But come out to my garden,” she said, smiling, and stripping off her little buff gauntlets. “There we will have tea a l’Anglaise, and sunshine, and a long, long, satisfying talk; at least I will,” she added, laughing and coloring up; “for truly, Monsieur Scarlett, I do not believe I have given you one second to open your lips.”

Heaven knows I was perfectly content to watch her lips and listen to the music of her happy, breathless voice without breaking the spell with my own.

She led the way along a path under the apricots to a seat against a sunny wall, a wall built of massive granite, deeply thatched with fungus and lichens, where, palpitating in the hot sun, the tiny lizards lay glittering, and the scarlet-banded nettle-butterflies flitted and hovered and settled to sun themselves, wings a-droop.

Here in the sunshine the tea-rose perfume, mingling with the incense of the sea, mounted to my head like the first flush of wine to a man long fasting; or was it the enchantment of her youth and loveliness—the subtle influence of physical vigor and spiritual innocence on a tired, unstrung man?

“First of all,” she said, impulsively, “I know your life—all of it in minute particular. Are you astonished?”

“No, madame,” I replied; “Mornac showed you my dossier.”

“That is true,” she said, with a troubled look of surprise.

I smiled. “As for Mornac,” I began, but she interrupted me.

“Ah, Mornac! Do you suppose I believed him? Had I not proof on proof of your loyalty, your honor, your courtesy, your chivalry—”

“Madame, your generosity—and, I fear, your pity—overpraises.”

“No, it does not! I know what you are. Mornac cannot make white black! I know what you have been. Mornac could not read you into infamy, even with your dossier under my own eyes!”

“In my dossier you read a sorry history, madame.”

“In your dossier I read the tragedy of a gentleman.”

“Do you know,” said I, “that I am now a performer in a third-rate travelling circus?”

“I think that is very sad,” she said, sweetly.

“Sad? Oh no. It is better than the disciplinary battalions of Africa.”

Which was simply acknowledging that I had served a term in prison.

The color faded in her face. “I thought you were pardoned.”

“I was—from prison, not from the battalion of Biribi.”

“I only know,” she said, “that they say you were not guilty; that they say you faced utter ruin, even the possibility of death, for the sake of another man whose name even the police—even Monsieur de Mornac—could never learn. Was there such a man?”

I hesitated. “Madame, there is such a man; *I* am the man who *was*.”

“With no hope?”

“Hope? With every hope,” I said, smiling. “My name is not my own, but it must serve me to my end, and I shall wear it threadbare and leave it to no one.”

“Is there no hope?” she asked, quietly.

“None for the man who *was*. Much for James Scarlett, tamer of lions and general mountebank,” I said, laughing down the rising tide of bitterness. Why had she stirred those dark waters? I had drowned myself in them long since. Under them lay the corpse of a man I had forgotten—my dead self.

“No hope?” she repeated.

Suddenly the ghost of all I had lost rose before me with her words—rose at last after all these years, towering, terrible, free once more to fill the days with loathing and my nights with hell eternal,... after all these years!

Overwhelmed, I fought down the spectre in silence. Kith and kin were not all in the world; love of woman was not all; a chance for a home, a wife, children, were not all; a name was not all. Raising my head, a trifle faint with the struggle and the cost of the struggle, I saw the distress in her eyes and strove to smile.

“There is every hope,” I said, “save the hopes of youth—the hope of a woman’s love, and of that happiness which comes through love. I am a man past thirty, madame—thirty-five, I believe my dossier makes it. It has taken me fifteen years to bury my youth. Let us talk of Mornac.”

“Yes, we will talk of Mornac,” she said, gently.

So with infinite pains I went back and traced for her the career of Buckhurst, sparing her nothing; I led up to my own appearance on the scene, reviewed briefly what we both knew, then disclosed to her in its most trivial detail the conference between Buckhurst and myself in which his cynical avowal was revealed in all its native hideousness.

She sat motionless, her face like cold marble, as I carefully gathered the threads of the plot and gently twitched that one which galvanized the mask of Mornac.

“Mornac!” she stammered, aghast.

I showed her why Buckhurst desired to come to Paradise; I showed her why Mornac had initiated her into the mysteries of my dossier, taking that infernal precaution, although he had every reason to believe he had me practically in prison, with the keys in his own pocket.

“Had it not been for my comrade, Speed,” I said, “I should be in one of Mornac’s fortress cells. He overshot the mark when he left us together and stepped into his cabinet to spread my dossier before you. He counted on an innocent man going through hell itself to prove his innocence; he counted on me, and left Speed out of his calculations. He had your testimony, he had my dossier, he had the order for my arrest in his pocket.... And then I stepped out of sight! I, the honest fool, with my knowledge of his infamy, of Buckhurst’s complicity and purposes—I was gone.

“And now mark the irony of the whole thing: he had, criminally, destroyed the only bureau that could ever have caught me. But he did his best during the few weeks that were left him before the battle of Sedan. After that it was too late; it was too late when the first Uhlan appeared before the gates of Paris. And now Mornac, shorn of authority, is shut up in a city surrounded by a wall of German steel, through which not one single living creature has penetrated for two months.”

I looked at her steadily. “Eliminate Mornac as a trapped rat; cancel him as a dead rat since the ship of Empire went down at Sedan. I do not know what has taken place in Paris—save what all now know that the Empire is ended, the Republic proclaimed, and the Imperial police a memory. Then let us strike out Mornac and turn to Buckhurst. Madame, I am here to serve you.”

The dazed horror in her face which had marked my revelations of Buckhurst's villanies gave place to a mantling flush of pure anger. Shame crimsoned her neck, too; shame for her credulous innocence, her belief in this rogue who had betrayed her, only to receive pardon for the purpose of baser and more murderous betrayal.

I said nothing for a long time, content to leave her to her own thoughts. The bitter draught she was draining could not harm her, could not but act as the most wholesome of tonics.

Hers was not a weak character to sink, embittered, under the weight of knowledge—knowledge of evil, that all must learn to carry lightly through life; I had once thought her weak, but I had revised that opinion and substituted the words "pure in thought, inherently loyal, essentially unsuspicious."

"Tell me about Buckhurst," I said, quietly. "I can help you, I think."

The quick tears of humiliation glimmered for a second in her angry eyes; then pride fell from her, like a stately mantle which a princess puts aside, tired and content to rest.

This was a phase I had never before seen—a lovely, natural young girl, perplexed, troubled, deeply wounded, ready to be guided, ready for reproof, perhaps even for that sympathy without which reproof is almost valueless.

She told me that Buckhurst came to her house here in Paradise early in September; that while in Paris, pondering on what I had said, she had determined to withdraw herself absolutely from all organized socialistic associations during the war; that she believed she could do the greatest good by living a natural and cheerful life, by maintaining the position that birth and fortune had given her, and by using that position and fortune for the benefit of those less fortunate.

This she had told Buckhurst, and the rascal appeared to agree with her so thoroughly that, when Dr. Delmont and Professor Tavernier arrived, they also applauded the choice she made of Buckhurst as distributer of money, food, and clothing to the provincial hospitals, now crowded to suffocation with the wreck of battle.

Then a strange thing occurred. Dr. Delmont and Professor Tavernier disappeared without any explanation. They had started for St. Nazaire with a sum of money—twenty thousand francs, locked in the private strong-box of the Countess—to be distributed among the soldiers of Chanzy; and they had never returned.

In the light of what she had learned from me, she feared that Buckhurst had won them over; perhaps not—she could not bear to suspect evil of such men.

But she now believed that Buckhurst had used every penny he had handled for his own purposes; that not one hospital had received what she had sent.

"I am no longer wealthy," she said, anxiously, looking up at me. "I did find time in Paris to have matters straightened; I sold La Trappe and paid everything. It left me with this house in Paradise, and with means to maintain it and still have a few thousand francs to give every year. Now it is nearly gone—I don't know where. I am dreadfully unhappy; I have such a horror of treachery that I cannot even understand it, but this ignoble man, Buckhurst, is assuredly a heartless rascal."

"But," I said, patiently, "you have not yet told me where he is."

"I don't know," she said. "A week ago a dreadful creature came here to see Buckhurst; they went across the moor toward the semaphore and stood for a long while looking at the cruiser which is anchored off Groix. Then Buckhurst came back and prepared for a journey. He said he was going to Tours to confer with the Red Cross. I don't know where he went. He took all the money for the general Red Cross fund."

"When did he say he would return?"

"He said in two weeks. He has another week yet."

"Is he usually prompt?"

"Always so—to the minute."

"That is good news," I said, gayly. "But tell me one thing: do you trust Mademoiselle Elven?"

"Yes, indeed!—indeed!" she cried, horrified.

"Very well," said I, smiling. "Only for the sake of caution—extra, and even perhaps useless caution—say nothing of this matter to her, nor to any living soul save me."

“I promise,” she said, faintly.

“One thing more: this conspiracy against the state no longer concerns me—officially. Both Speed and I did all we could to warn the Emperor and the Empress; we sent letters through the police in London, we used the English secret-service to get our letters into the Emperor’s hand, we tried every known method of denouncing Mornac. It was useless; every letter must have gone through Mornac’s hands before it reached the throne. We did all we dared do; we were in disguise and in hiding under assumed names; we could not do more.

“Now that Mornac is not even a pawn in the game—as, indeed, I begin to believe he never really was, but has been from the first a dupe of Buckhurst—it is the duty of every honest man to watch Buckhurst and warn the authorities that he possibly has designs on the crown jewels of France, which that cruiser yonder is all ready to bear away to Saïgon.

“How he proposes to attempt such a robbery I can’t imagine. I don’t want to denounce him to General Chanzy or Aurelles de Palladine, because the conspiracy is too widely spread and too dangerous to be defeated by the capture of one man, even though he be the head of it.

“What I want is to entrap the entire band; and that can only be done by watching Buckhurst, not arresting him.

“Therefore, madame, I have written and despatched a telegram to General Aurelles de Palladine, offering my services and the services of Mr. Speed to the Republic without compensation. In the event of acceptance, I shall send to London for two men who will do what is to be done, leaving me free to amuse the public with my lions. Meanwhile, as long as we stay in Paradise we both are your devoted servants, and we beg the privilege of serving you.”

During all this time the young Countess had never moved her eyes from my face—perhaps I was flattered—perhaps for that reason I talked on and on, pouring out wisdom from a somewhat attenuated supply.

And I now rose to take my leave, bowing my very best bow; but she sat still, looking up quietly at me.

“You ask the privilege of serving me,” she said. “You could serve me best by giving me your friendship.”

“You have my devotion, madame,” I said.

“I did not ask it. I asked your friendship—in all frankness and equality.”

“Do you desire the friendship of a circus performer?” I asked, smiling.

“I desire it, not only for what you are, but for what you have been—have always been, let them say what they will!”

I was silent.

“Have you never given women your friendship?” she asked.

“Not in fifteen years—nor asked theirs.”

“Will you not ask mine?”

I tried to speak steadily, but my voice was uncertain; I sat down, crushed under a flood of memories, hopes accursed, ambitions damned and consigned to oblivion.

“You are very kind,” I said. “You are the Countess de Vassart. A man is what he makes himself. I have made myself—with both eyes open; and I am now an acrobat and a tamer of beasts. I understand your goodness, your impulse to help those less fortunate than yourself. I also understand that I have placed myself where I am, and that, having done so deliberately, I cannot meet as friends and equals those who might have been my equals if not friends. Besides that, I am a native of a paradox—a Republic which, though caste-bound, knows no caste abroad. I might, therefore, have been your friend if you had chosen to waive the traditions of your continent and accept the traditions of mine. But now, madame, I must beg permission to make my adieux.”

She sprang up and caught both my hands in her ungloved hands. “Won’t you take my friendship—and give me yours—my friend?”

“Yes,” I said, slowly. The blood beat in my temples, almost blinding me; my heart hammered in my throat till I shivered.

As in a dream I bent forward; she abandoned her hands to me; and I touched a woman’s hands with my lips for the first time in fifteen years.

“In all devotion and loyalty—and gratitude,” I said.

“And in friendship—say it!”

“In friendship.”

“Now you may go—if you desire to. When will you come again?”

“When may I?”

“When you will.”

XIV

THE PATH OF THE LIZARD

About nine o'clock the next morning an incident occurred which might have terminated my career in one way, and did, ultimately, end it in another.

I had been exercising my lions and putting them through their paces, and had noticed no unusual insubordination among them, when suddenly, Timour Melek, a big Algerian lion, flew at me without the slightest provocation or warning.

Fortunately I had a training-chair in my hand, on which Timour had just been sitting, and I had time to thrust it into his face. Thrice with incredible swiftness he struck the iron-chair, right, left, and right, as a cat strikes, then seized it in his teeth. At the same moment I brought my loaded whip heavily across his nose.

"Down, Timour Melek! Down! down! down!" I said, steadily, accompanying each word with a blow of the whip across the nose.

The brute had only hurt himself when he struck the chair, and now, under the blows raining on his sensitive nose, he doubtless remembered similar episodes in his early training, and shrank back, nearly deafening me with his roars. I followed, punishing him, and he fled towards the low iron grating which separated the training-cage from the night-quarters.

This I am now inclined to believe was a mistake of judgment on my part. I should have driven him into a corner and thoroughly cowed him, using the training-chair if necessary, and trusting to my two assistants with their irons, who had already closed up on either side of the cage.

I was not in perfect trim that morning. Not that I felt nervous in the least, nor had I any lack of self-confidence, but I was not myself. I had never in my life entered a lion-cage feeling as I did that morning—an indifference which almost amounted to laziness, an apathy which came close to melancholy.

The lions knew I was not myself—they had been aware of it as soon as I set foot in their cage; and I knew it. But my strange apathy only increased as I went about my business, perfectly aware all the time that, with lions born in captivity, the unexpected is always to be expected.

Timour Melek was now close to the low iron door between the partitions; the other lions had become unusually excited, bounding at a heavy gallop around the cage, or clinging to the bars like enormous cats.

Then, as I faced Timour, ready to force him backward through the door into the night-quarters, something in the blank glare of his eyes seemed to fascinate me. I had an absurd sensation that he was slipping away from me—escaping; that I no longer dominated him nor had authority. It was not panic, nor even fear; it was a faint paralysis—temporary, fortunately; for at that instant instinct saved me; I struck the lion a terrific blow across the nose and whirled around, chair uplifted, just in time to receive the charge of Empress Khatoun, consort of Timour.

She struck the iron-bound chair, doubling it up like crumpled paper, hurling me headlong, not to the floor of the cage, but straight through the sliding-bars which Speed had just flung open with a shout. As for me, I landed violently on my back in the sawdust, the breath knocked clean out of me.

When I could catch my breath again I realized that there was no time to waste. Speed looked at me angrily, but I jerked open the grating, flung another chair into the cage, leaped in, and, singling out Empress Khatoun, I sailed into her with passionless thoroughness, punishing her to a stand-still, while the other lions, Aicha, Marghouz, Timour, and Genghis Khan snarled and watched me steadily.

As I emerged from the cage Speed asked me whether I was hurt, and I gasped out that I was not.

"What went wrong?" he persisted.

"Timour and that young lioness—no, *I* went wrong; the lions knew it at once; something failed me, I don't know what; upon my soul, Speed, I don't know what happened."

"You lost your nerve?"

“No, not that. Timour began looking at me in a peculiar way—he certainly dominated me for an instant—for a tenth of a second; and then Khatoun flew at me before I could control Timour—”

I hesitated.

“Speed, it was one of those seconds that come to us, when the faintest shadow of indecision settles matters. Engineers are subject to it at the throttle, pilots at the helm, captains in battle—”

“Men in love,” added Speed.

I looked at him, not comprehending.

“By-the-way,” said Speed, “Leo Grammont, the greatest lion-tamer who ever lived, once told me that a man in love with a woman could not control lions; that when a man falls in love he loses that intangible, mysterious quality—call it mesmerism or whatever you like—the occult force that dominates beasts. And he said that the lions knew it, that they perceived it sometimes even before the man himself was aware that he was in love.”

I looked him over in astonishment.

“What’s the matter with you?” he asked, amused.

“What's the matter with *you*?” I demanded. “If you mean to intimate that I have fallen in love you are certainly an astonishing ass!”

“Don’t talk that way,” he said, good-humoredly. “I didn’t dream of such a thing, or of offending you, Scarlett.”

It struck me at the same moment that my irritable and unwarranted retort was utterly unlike me.

“I beg your pardon,” I said. “I don’t know exactly what is the matter with me to-day. First I quarrel with poor old Timour Melek, then I insult you. I’ve discovered that I have nerves; I never before knew it.”

“Cold flap-jacks and cider would have destroyed Hercules himself in time,” observed Speed, following with his eyes the movements of a lithe young girl, who was busy with the hoisting apparatus of the flying trapeze. The girl was Jacqueline, dressed in a mended gown of Miss Delany’s.

“At times,” muttered Speed, partly to himself, “that little witch frightens me. There is no risk she dares not take; even Horan gets nervous; and when that bull-necked numbskull is scared there’s reason for it.”

We walked out into the main tent, where simultaneous rehearsals were everywhere in progress; and I picked up the ring-master’s whip and sent it curling after “Briza,” a harmless, fat, white mare on which pretty Mrs. Grigg was sitting expectantly. Round and round the ring she cantered, now astride two horses, now guiding a “spike,” practising assiduously her acrobatics. At intervals, far up in the rigging overhead, I caught glimpses of Miss Crystal swinging on her trapeze, watching the ring below.

Byram came in to rehearse the opening processional and to rebuke his dearest foe, the unspeakable “camuel,” bestridden by Mrs. Horan as Fatima, Queen of the Desert. Speed followed, squatted on the head of the elephant, ankus on thigh, shouting, “Hôut! Mäil! Djebé Noain! Mäil the hezar! Mäil!” he thundered, triumphantly, saluting Byram with lifted ankus as the elephant ambled past in a cloud of dust.

“Clear the ring!” cried Byram.

Miss Delany, who was outlining Jacqueline with juggler’s knives, began to pull her stock of cutlery from the soft pine backing; elephant, camel, horses trampled out; Miss Crystal caught a dangling rope and slid earthward, and I turned and walked towards the outer door with Byram.

As I looked back for an instant I saw Jacqueline, in her glittering diving-skin, calmly step out of her discarded skirt and walk towards the sunken tank in the middle of the ring, which three workmen were uncovering.

She was to rehearse her perilous leap for the first time to-day, and I told Speed frankly that I was too nervous to be present, and so left him staring across the dusky tent at the slim child in spangles.

I had an appointment to meet Robert the Lizard at noon, and I was rather curious to find out how much his promises were worth when the novelty of his new gun had grown stale. So I started towards the cliffs, nibbling a crust of bread for luncheon, though the incident of the morning had left me small appetite for food.

The poacher was sunning himself on his doorsill when I came into view over the black basalt rocks. To my surprise, he

touched his cap as I approached, and rose civilly, replying to my greeting with a brief, “Salute, m’sieu!”

“You are prompt to the minute,” I said, pleasantly.

“You also,” he observed. “We are quits, m’sieu—so far.”

I told him of the progress that Jacqueline was making; he listened in silence, and whether or not he was interested I could not determine.

There was a pause; I looked out across the sun-lit ocean, taking time to arrange the order of the few questions which I had to ask.

“Come to the point, m’sieu,” he said, dryly. “We have struck palms.”

Spite of my training, spite of the caution which experience brings to the most unsuspicious of us, I had a curious confidence in this tattered rascal’s loyalty to a promise. And apparently without reason, too, for there was something wrong with his eyes—or else with the way he used them. They were wonderful, vivid blue eyes, well set and well shaped, but he never looked at anybody directly except in moments of excitement or fury. At such moments his eyes appeared to be lighted up from behind.

“Lizard,” I said, “you are a poacher.”

His placid visage turned stormy.

“None of that, m’sieu,” he retorted; “remember the bargain! Concern yourself with your own affairs!”

“Wait,” I said. “I’m not trying to reform you. For my purposes it is a poacher I want—else I might have gone to another.”

“That sounds more reasonable,” he admitted, guardedly.

“I want to ask this,” I continued: “are you a poacher from necessity, or from that pure love of the chase which is born in even worse men than you and I?”

“I poach because I love it. There are no poachers from necessity; there is always the sea, which furnishes work for all who care to steer a sloop, or draw a seine, or wield a sea-rake. I am a pilot.”

“But the war?”

“At least the war could not keep me from the sardine grounds.”

“So you poach from choice?”

“Yes. It is in me. I am sorry, but what shall I do? *It's in me*.”

“And you can’t resist?”

He laughed grimly. “Go and call in the hounds from the stag’s throat!”

Presently I said:

“You have been in jail?”

“Yes,” he replied, indifferently.

“For poaching?”

“Eur e’harvik rous,” he said in Breton, and I could not make out whether he meant that he had been in jail for the sake of a woman or of a “little red doe.” The Breton language bristles with double meanings, symbols, and allegories. The word for doe in Breton is *karvez*; or for a doe which never had a fawn, it is *heiez*; for a fawn the word is *karvik*.

I mentioned these facts to him, but he only looked dangerous and remained silent.

“Lizard,” I said, “give me your confidence as I give you mine. I will tell you now that I was once in the police—”

He started.

“And that I expect to enter that corps again. And I want your aid.”

“My aid? For the police?” His laugh was simply horrible. “I? The Lizard? Continue, m’sieu.”

“I will tell you why. Yesterday, on a visit to Point Paradise, I saw a man lying belly down in the bracken; but I didn’t let

him know I saw him. I have served in the police; I think I recognize that man. He is known in Belleville as Tric-Trac. He came here, I believe, to see a man called Buckhurst. Can you find this Tric-Trac for me? Do you, perhaps, know him?"

"Yes," said the Lizard, "I knew him in prison."

"You have seen him here?"

"Yes, but I will not betray him."

"Why?"

"Because he is a poor, hunted devil of a poacher like me!" cried the Lizard, angrily. "He must live; there's enough land in Finistère for us both."

"How long has he been here in Paradise?"

"For two months."

"And he told you he lived by poaching?"

"Yes."

"He lies."

The Lizard looked at me intently.

"He has played you; he is a thief, and he has come here to rob. He is a filou—a town rat. Can he bend a hedge-snare? Can he line a string of dead-falls? Can he even snare enough game to keep himself from starving? He a woodsman? *He* a poacher of the bracken? You are simple, my friend."

The veins in the poacher's neck began to swell and a dull color flooded his face.

"Prove that he has played me," he said.

"Prove it yourself."

"How?"

"By watching him. He came here to meet a man named Buckhurst."

"I have seen that man Buckhurst, too. What is he doing here?" asked the Lizard.

"That is what I want you to find out and help me to find out!" I said. "Voilà! Now you know what I want of you."

The sombre visage of the poacher twitched.

"I take it," said I, "that you would not make a comrade of a petty pickpocket."

The poacher uttered an oath and shook his fist at me. "Bon sang!" he snarled, "I am an honest man if I am a poacher!"

"That's the reason I trusted you," said I, good-humoredly. "Take your fists down, my friend, and think out a plan which will permit me to observe this Monsieur Tric-Trac at my leisure, without I myself being observed."

"That is easy," he said. "I take him food to-day."

"Then I was right," said I, laughing. "He is a Belleville rat, who cannot feed himself where there are no pockets to pick. Does he know a languste from a linnet? Not he, my friend!"

The Lizard sat still, head bent, knees drawn up, apparently buried in thought. There is no injury one can do a Breton of his class like the injury of deceiving and mocking.

If Tric-Trac, a man of the city, had come here to profit by the ignorance of a Breton—and perhaps laugh at his stupidity!

But I let the ferment work in the dark blood of the Lizard, leaving him to his own sombre logic, undisturbed.

Presently the Lizard raised his head and fixed his bright, intelligent eyes on me.

"M'sieu," he said, in a curiously gentle voice, "we men of Paradise are called out for the army. I must go, or go to jail. How can I remain here and help you trap these filous?"

"I have telegraphed to General Chanzy," I said, frankly. "If he accepts—or if General Aurelles de Palladine is favorable—I shall make you exempt under authority from Tours. I mean to keep you in my service, anyway," I added.

“You mean that—that I need not go to Lorient—to this war?”

“I hope so, my friend.”

He looked at me, astonished. “If you can do that, m’sieu, you can do anything.”

“In the meanwhile,” I said, dryly, “I want another look at Tric-Trac.”

“I could show you Tric-Trac in an hour—but to go to him direct would excite his suspicion. Besides, there are two gendarmes in Paradise to conduct the conscripts to Lorient; there are also several gardes-champêtre. But I can get you there, in the open moorland, too, under everybody’s noses! Shall I?” he said, with an eager ferocity that startled me.

“You are not to injure him, no matter what he does or says,” I said, sharply. “I want to watch him, not to frighten him away. I want to see what he and Buckhurst are doing. Do you understand?”

“Yes.”

“Then strike palms!”

We struck vigorously.

“Now I am ready to start,” I said, pleasantly.

“And now I am ready to tell you something,” he said, with the fierce light burning behind his blue eyes. “If you were already in the police I would not help you—no, not even to trap this filou who has mocked me! If you again enter the police I will desert you!”

He licked his dry lips.

“Do you know what a blood-feud is?”

“Yes,” I said.

“Then understand that a man in a high place has wronged me—and that he is of the police—the Imperial Military police!”

“Who?”

“You will know when I pass my fagot-knife into his throat,” he snarled—“not before.”

The Lizard picked up his fishing-rod, slung a canvas bag over his stained velveteen jacket, gathered together a few coils of hair-wire, a pot of twig-lime, and other odds and ends, which he tucked into his broad-flapped coat-pocket. “Allons,” he said, briefly, and we started.

The canvas bag on his back bulged, perhaps with provisions, although the steel point of a murderous salmon-gaff protruded from the mouth of the sack and curved over his shoulder.

The village square in Paradise was nearly deserted. The children had raced away to follow the newly arrived gendarmes as closely as they dared, and the women were in-doors hanging about their men, whom the government summoned to Lorient.

There were, however, a few people in the square, and these the Lizard was very careful to greet. Thus we passed the mayor, waddling across the bridge, puffing with official importance over the arrival of the gendarmes. He bowed to me; the Lizard saluted him with, “Times are hard on the fat!” to which the mayor replied morosely, and bade him go to the devil.

“Au revoir, donc,” retorted the Lizard, unabashed. The mayor bawled after him a threat of arrest unless he reported next day in the square.

At that the poacher halted. “Don’t you wish you might get me!” he said, tauntingly, probably presuming on my conditional promise.

“Do you refuse to report?” demanded the mayor, also halting.

“Et ta sœur!” replied the poacher; “is she reporting at the caserne?”

The mayor replied angrily, and a typical Breton quarrel began, which ended in the mayor biting his thumb-nail at the Lizard and wishing him “St. Hubert’s luck”—an insult tantamount to a curse.

Now St. Hubert was a mighty hunter, and his luck was proverbially marvellous. But as everything goes by contrary in Brittany, to wish a Breton hunter good luck was the very worst thing you could do him. Bad luck was certain to follow—if not that very day, certainly, inexorably, *some* day.

With wrath in his eyes the Lizard exhausted his profanity, stretching out his arm after the retreating mayor, who waddled away, gesticulating, without turning his head.

"Come back! Toad! Sourd! V-Snake! Bat of the gorse!" shouted the Lizard. "Do you think I'm afraid of your spells, fat owl of Faöuet? Evil-eyed eel! The luck of Ker-Ys to you and yours! Ho fois! Do you think I am frightened—I, Robert the Lizard? Your wife is a camel and your daughter a cow!" The mayor was unmarried, but it didn't matter. And, moreover, as that official was now out of ear-shot, the Lizard turned anxiously to me.

"Don't tell me you are superstitious enough to care what the mayor said," I laughed.

"Dame, m'sieu, we shall have no luck to-day. To-morrow it doesn't matter—but if we go to-day, bad luck must come to us."

"To-day? Nonsense!"

"If not, then another day."

"Rubbish! Come on."

"Do you think we could take precautions?" he asked, furtively.

"Take all you like," I said; "rack your brains for an antidote to neutralize the bad luck, only come on, you great gaby!"

I knew many of the Finistère legends; out of the corner of my eye I watched this stalwart rascal, cowed by gross superstition, peeping about for some favorable sign to counteract the luck of St. Hubert.

First he looked up at the crows, and counted them as they passed overhead cawing ominously—one—two—three—four—five! Five is danger! But wait, more were coming: one—two—three—four—five—six—seven—! A loss! Well, that was not as bad as some things. But hark! More crows coming: one—two—three! Death!

"Jesû!" he faltered, ducking his head instinctively. "I'll look elsewhere for signs."

The signs were all wrong that morning; first we met an ancient crone with a great pack of fagots on her bent back, and I was sure he could have strangled her cheerfully, because there are few worse omens for a hunter of game or of men. Then he examined the first mushroom he found, but under the pink-and-pearl cap we saw no insects crawling. The veil, too, was rent, showing the poisonous, fluted gills; and the toadstool blackened when he cut it with the blade of his fagot-knife.

He tried once more, however, and searched through the gorse until he found a heavy lizard, green as an emerald. He teased it till it snapped at the silver franc in my hand; its teeth should have vanished, but when he held out his finger the creature bit into it till the blood spurted.

Still I refused to turn back. What should he do? Then into his mind crept a Pouldu superstition. It was a charm against evil, including lightning, black-rot, rheumatism, and "douleurs" of other varieties.

The charm was simple. We needed only to build a little fire of gorse, and walk through the smoke once or twice. So we built the fire and walked through the smoke, the Lizard coughing and cursing until I feared he might overdo it by smothering us both. Then stamping out the last spark—for he was a woodsman always—we tramped on in better humor with destiny.

"You think that turned the curse backward, m'sieu?" he asked.

"There is not the faintest doubt of that," I said.

Far away towards Sainte-Ysole we saw the blue woods which were our goal. However, we had no intention of going there as the bee flies, partly because Tric-Trac might see us, partly because the Lizard wished any prowling passer-by to observe that he was occupied with his illegitimate profession. For my part, I very much preferred a brush with a garde-champêtre or a summons to explain why no shots were found in the Lizard's pheasants, rather than have anybody ask us why we were walking so fast towards Sainte-Ysole woods.

Therefore we promptly selected a hedge for operations, choosing a high, thick one, which separated two fields of wheat

stubble.

Kneeling under the hedge, he broke a hole in it just large enough for a partridge to worry through. Then he bent his twig, fastened the hair-wire into a running noose, adjusted it, and stood up. This manœuvre he repeated at various hedges or in thickets where he "lined" his trail with peeled twigs on every bush.

Once he paused to reset a hare-trap with a turnip, picked up in a neighboring field; once he limed a young sapling and fixed a bit of a mirror in the branches, but not a bird alighted, although the blackthorns were full of fluttering wings. And all the while we had been twisting and doubling and edging nearer and nearer to the Sainte-Ysole woods, until we were already within their cool shadow, and I heard the tinkle of a stream among leafy depths.

Now we had no fear; we were hidden from the eyes of the dry, staring plain, and the Lizard laughed to himself as he fastened a grasshopper to his hook and flung it into the broad, dark water of the pool at his feet.

Slowly he fished up stream, but, although he seemed to be intent on his sport, there was something in the bend of his head that suggested he might be listening for other sounds than the complex melodies of mossy waterfalls.

His poacher's eyes began to glisten and shimmer in the forest dusk like the eyes of wild things that hunt at night. As he noiselessly turned, his nostrils spread with a tremor, as a good dog's nose quivers at the point.

Presently he beckoned me, stepped into the moss, and crawled without a sound straight through the holly thicket.

"Watch here," he whispered. "Count a hundred when I disappear, then creep on your stomach to the edge of that bank. In the bed of the stream, close under you, you will see and hear your friend Tric-Trac."

Before I had counted fifty I heard the Lizard cry out, "Bonjour, Tric-Trac!" but I counted on, obeying the Lizard's orders as I should wish mine to be obeyed. I heard a startled exclamation in reply to the Lizard's greeting, then a purely Parisian string of profanity, which terminated as I counted one hundred and crept forward to the mossy edge of the bank, under the yellow beech leaves.

Below me stood the Lizard, intently watching a figure crouched on hands and knees before a small, iron-bound box.

The person addressed as Tric-Trac promptly tried to hide the box by sitting down on it. He was a young man, with wide ears and unhealthy spots on his face. His hair, which was oily and thick, he wore neatly plastered into two pointed love-locks. This not only adorned and distinguished him, but it lent a casual and detached air to his ears, which stood at right angles to the plane of his face. I knew that engaging countenance. It was the same old Tric-Trac.

"Zut, alors!" repeated Tric-Trac, venomously, as the poacher smiled again; "can't you give the company notice when you come in?"

"Did you expect me to ring the tocsin?" asked the Lizard.

"Flute!" snarled Tric-Trac. "Like a mud-rat, you creep with no sound—c'est pas polite, nom d'un nom!"

He began nervously brushing the pine-needles from his skin-tight trousers, with dirty hands.

"What's that box?" asked the Lizard, abruptly.

"Box? Where?" A vacant expression came into Tric-Trac's face, and he looked all around him except at the box upon which he was sitting.

"Box?" he repeated, with that hopeless effrontery which never deserts criminals of his class, even under the guillotine. "I don't see any box."

"You're sitting on it," observed the Lizard.

"*That* box? Oh! You mean *that* box? Oh!" He peeped at it between his meagre legs, then turned a nimble eye on the poacher.

"What's in it?" demanded the poacher, sullenly.

"Don't know," replied Tric-Trac, with brisk interest. "I found it."

"*Found* it!" repeated the Lizard, scornfully.

"Certainly, my friend; how do you suppose I came by it?"

"You stole it!"

They faced each other for a moment.

“Supposition that you are correct; what of it?” said the young ruffian, calmly.

The Lizard was silent.

“Did you bring me anything to chew on?” inquired Tric-Trac, sniffing at the poacher’s sack.

“Bread, cheese, three pheasants, cider—more than I eat in a week,” said the Lizard, quietly. “It will cost forty sous.”

He opened his sack and slowly displayed the provisions.

I looked hard at the iron-bound box.

On one end was painted the Geneva cross. Dr. Delmont and Professor Tavernier had disappeared carrying red-cross funds. Was that their box?

“I said it costs forty sous—two silver francs,” repeated the Lizard, doggedly.

“Forty sous? That’s robbery!” sniffed the young ruffian, now using that half-whining, half-sneering form of discourse peculiar alike to the vicious chevalier of Paris and his confrère of the provincial centres. Accent and slang alone distinguish between them; the argot, however, is practically the same.

Tric-Trac fished a few coins from his pocket, counted carefully, and handed them, one by one, to the poacher.

The poacher coolly tossed the food on the ground, and, as Tric-Trac rose to pick it up, seized the box.

“Drop that!” said Tric-Trac, quickly.

“What’s in it?”

“Nothing! Drop it, I tell you.”

“Where’s the key?”

“There’s no key—it’s a machine.”

“What’s in it?”

“Now I’ve been trying to find out for two weeks,” sneered Tric-Trac, “and I don’t know yet. Drop it!”

“I’m going to open it all the same,” said the Lizard, coolly, lifting the lid.

A sudden silence followed; then the Lizard swore vigorously. There was another box within the light, iron-edged casket, a keyless cube of shining steel, with a knob on the top, and a needle which revolved around a dial on which were engraved the hours and minutes. And emblazoned above the dial was the coat of arms of the Countess de Vassart.

When Tric-Trac had satisfied himself concerning the situation, he returned to devour his food.

“Flute! Zut! Mince!” he observed; “you and your bad manners, they sicken me—tiens!”

The Lizard, flat on his stomach, lay with the massive steel box under his chin, patiently turning the needle from figure to figure.

“Wonderful! wonderful!” sneered Tric-Trac. “Continue, my friend, to put out your eyes with your fingers!”

The Lizard continued to turn the needle backward and forward around the face of the dial. Once, when he twirled it impatiently, a tiny chime rang out from within the box, but the steel lid did not open.

“It’s the Angelus,” said Tric-Trac, with a grimace. “Let us pray, my friend, for a cold-chisel—when my friend Buckhurst returns.”

Still the Lizard lay, unmoved, turning the needle round and round.

Tric-Trac having devoured the cheese, bread, and an entire pheasant, made a bundle of the remaining food, emptied the cider-jug, wiped his beardless face with his cap, and announced that he would be pleased to “broil” a cigarette.

“Do you want the gendarmes to scent tobacco?” said the Lizard.

“Are the ’Flics’ out already?” asked Tric-Trac, astonished.

“They’re in Paradise, setting the whole Department by the ears. But they can’t look sideways at me; I’m going to be

exempt."

"It strikes me," observed Tric-Trac, "that you take great precautions for your own skin."

"I do," said the Lizard.

"What about me?"

The poacher looked around at the young ruffian. Those muscles in the human face which draw back the upper lip are not the muscles used for laughter. Animals employ them when they snarl. And now the Lizard laughed that way; his upper lip shrank from the edge of his yellow teeth, and he regarded Tric-Trac with oblique and burning eyes.

"What about me?" repeated Tric-Trac, in an offended tone. "Am I to live in fear of the Flics?"

The Lizard laughed again, and Tric-Trac, disgusted, stood up, settled his cap over his wide ears, humming a song as he loosened his trousers-belt:

"Si vous t'nez à vot' squelette
Ne fait' pas comme Bibi!
Claquer plutôt dans vot' lit
Que de claquer à la Roquette!"—

"Who are you gaping at?" he added, abruptly. "Bon; c'est ma geule. Et après? Drop that box!"

"Come," replied the Lizard, coldly, placing the box on the moss, "you'd better not quarrel with me."

"Oh, that's a threat, is it?" sneered Tric-Trac. He walked over to the steel box, lifted it, placed it in the iron-edged case, and sat down on the case.

"I want you to comprehend," he added, "that you have pushed your nose into an affair that does not concern you. The next time you come here to sell your snared pheasants, come like a man, nom de Dieu! and not like a cat of the Glacière!—or I'll find a way to stop your curiosity."

The dull-red color surged into the poacher's face and heavy neck; for a moment he stood as though stunned. Then he dragged out his knife.

Tric-Trac sat looking at him insolently, one hand thrust into the bosom of his greasy coat.

"I've got a toy under my cravate that says 'Papa!' six times—pop! pop! pop! pop! pop! pop! Papa!" he continued, calmly; "so there's no use in your turning red and swelling the veins in your neck. Go to the devil! Do you think I can't live without you? Go to the devil with your traps and partridges and fish-hooks—and that fagot-knife in your fist—and if you try to throw it at me you'll make a sad mistake!"

The Lizard's half-raised hand dropped as Tric-Trac, with a movement like lightning, turned a revolver full on him, talking all the while in his drawling whine.

"C'est çà! Now you are reasonable. Get out of this forest, my friend—or stay and join us. Eh! That astonishes you? Why? Idiot, we want men like you. We want men who have nothing to lose and—millions to gain! Ah, you are amazed! Yes, millions—I say it. I, Tric-Trac of the Glacière, who have done my time in Noumea, too! Yes, millions."

The young ruffian laughed and slowly passed his tongue over his thin lips. The Lizard slowly returned his knife to its sheath, looked all around, then deliberately sat down on the moss cross-legged. I could have hugged him.

"A million? Where?" he asked, vacantly.

"Parbleu! Naturally you ask where," chuckled Tric-Trac. "Tiens! A supposition that it's in this box!"

"The box is too small," said the Lizard, patiently.

Tric-Trac roared. "Listen to him! Listen to the child!" he cried, delighted. "Too small to hold gold enough for you? Very well—but is *a ship big enough*?"

"A big ship is."

Tric-Trac wriggled in convulsions of laughter.

"Oh, listen! He wants a big ship! Well—say a ship as big as that ugly, black iron-clad sticking up out of the sea yonder,

like a Usine-de-gaz!"

"I think that ship would be big enough," said the poacher, seriously.

Tric-Trac did not laugh; his little eyes narrowed, and he looked steadily at the poacher.

"Do you mean what I mean?" he asked, deliberately.

"Well," said the Lizard, "what do you mean?"

"I mean that France is busy stitching on a new flag."

"Black?"

"Red—*first*."

"Oh-h!" mused the poacher. "When does France hoist that new red flag?"

"When Paris falls."

The poacher rested his chin on his doubled fist and leaned forward across his gathered knees. "I see," he drawled.

"Under the commune there can be no more poverty," said Tric-Trac; "you comprehend that."

"Exactly."

"And no more aristocrats."

"Exactly."

"Well," said Tric-Trac, his head on one side, "how does that programme strike you?"

"It is impossible, your programme," said the poacher, rising to his feet impatiently.

"You think so? Wait a few days! Wait, my friend," cried Tric-Trac, eagerly; "and say!—come back here next Monday! There will be a few of us here—a few friends. And keep your mouth shut tight. Here! Wait. Look here, friend, don't let a little pleasantry stand between comrades. Your fagot-knife against my little flute that sings pa-pa!—that leaves matters balanced, eh?"

The young ruffian had followed the Lizard and caught him by his stained velvet coat.

"Voyons," he persisted, "do you think the commune is going to let a comrade starve for lack of Badinguet's lozenges? Here, take a few of these!" and the rascal thrust out a dirty palm full of twenty-franc gold pieces.

"What are these for?" muttered the Lizard, sullenly.

"For your beaux yeux, imbecile!" cried Tric-Trac, gayly. "Come back when you want more. My comrade, Citizen Buckhurst, will be glad to see you next Monday. Adieu, my friend. Don't chatter to the Flics!"

He picked up his box and the packet of provisions, dropped his revolver into the side-pocket of his jacket, cocked his greasy cap, blew a kiss to the Lizard, and started off straight into the forest. After a dozen steps he hesitated, turned, and looked back at the poacher for a moment in silence. Then he made a friendly grimace.

"You are not a fool," he said, "so you won't follow me. Come again Monday. It will really be worth while, dear friend." Then, as on an impulse, he came all the way back, caught the Lizard by the sleeve, raised his meagre body on tip-toe, and whispered.

The Lizard turned perfectly white; Tric-Trac trotted away into the woods, hugging his box and smirking.

The Lizard and I walked back together. By the time we reached Paradise bridge I understood him better, and he understood me. And when we arrived at the circus tent, and when Speed came up, handing me a telegram from Chanzy refusing my services, the Lizard turned to me like an obedient hound to take my orders—now that I was not to re-enter the Military Police.

I ordered him to disobey the orders from Lorient and from the mayor of Paradise; to take to the woods as though to avoid the conscription; to join Buckhurst's franc-company of ruffians, and to keep me fully informed.

"And, Lizard," I said, "you may be caught and hanged for it by the police, or stabbed by Tric-Trac."

"Bien," he said, coolly.

“But it is a brave thing you do; a soldierly thing!”

He was silent.

“It is for France,” I said.

He shrugged his shoulders.

“And we’ll catch this Tric-Trac red-handed,” I suggested.

“Ah—yes!” His eyes glowed as though lighted up from behind. “And another who is high in the police, and a friend of this Tric-Trac!”

“Was it that man’s name he whispered to you when you turned so white?” I said, suddenly.

The Lizard turned his glowing eyes on me.

“Was the man’s name—Mornac?” I asked, at a hopeless venture.

The Lizard shivered; I needed no reply, not even his hoarse, “Are you the devil, that you know all things?”

I looked at him wonderingly. What wrong could Mornac have done a ragged outcast here on the Breton coast? And where was Mornac? Had he left Paris in time to avoid the Prussian trap? Was he here in this country, rubbing elbows with Buckhurst?

“Did Tric-Trac tell you that Mornac was at the head of that band?” I demanded.

“Why do you ask me?” stammered the Lizard; “you know everything—even when it is scarcely whispered!”

The superstitious astonishment of the man, his utter collapse and his evident fear of me, did not suit me. Treachery comes through that kind of fear; I meant to rule him in another and safer manner. I meant to be absolutely honest with him.

It was difficult to persuade him that I had only guessed the name whispered; that, naturally, I should think of Mornac as a high officer of police, and particularly so since I knew him to be a villain, and had also divined his relations with Buckhurst.

I drew from the poacher that Tric-Trac had named Mornac as head of the communistic plot in Brittany; that Mornac was coming to Paradise very soon, and that then something gay might be looked for.

And that night I took Speed into my confidence and finally Kelly Eyre, our balloonist.

And we talked the matter over until long after midnight.

XV

FOREWARNED

The lions had now begun to give me a great deal of trouble. Timour Melek, the old villain, sat on his chair, snarling and striking at me, but still going through his paces; Empress Khatoun was a perfect devil of viciousness, and refused to jump her hoops; even poor little Aïcha, my pet, fed by me soon after her foster-mother, a big Newfoundland, had weaned her, turned sullen in the pyramid scene. I roped her and trimmed her claws; it was high time.

Oh, they knew, and I knew, that matters had gone wrong with me; that I had, for a time, at least, lost the intangible something which I once possessed—that occult right to dominate.

It worried me; it angered me. Anger in authority, which is a weakness, is quickly discovered by beasts.

Speed's absurd superstition continued to recur to me at inopportune moments; in my brain his voice was ceaselessly sounding—"A man in love, a man in love, a man in love"—until a flash of temper sent my lions scurrying and snarling into a pack, where they huddled and growled, staring at me with yellow, mutinous eyes.

Yet, strangely, the greater the risk, and the plainer to me that my lions were slipping out of my control, the more my apathy increased, until even Byram began to warn me.

Still I never felt the slightest physical fear; on the contrary, as my irritation increased my disdain grew. It seemed a monstrous bit of insolence on the part of these overgrown cats to meditate an attack on me. Even though I began to feel that it was only a question of time when the moment must arrive, even though I gradually became certain that the first false move on my part would precipitate an attack, the knowledge left me almost indifferent.

That morning, as I left the training-cage—where, among others, Kelly Eyre stood looking on—I suddenly remembered Sylvia Elven and her message to Eyre, which I had never delivered.

We strolled towards the stables together; he was a pleasant, clean-cut, fresh-faced young fellow, a man I had never known very well, but one whom I was inclined to respect and trust.

"My son," said I, politely, "do you think you have arrived at an age sufficiently mature to warrant my delivering to you a message from a pretty girl?"

"There's no harm in attempting it, my venerable friend," he replied, laughing.

"This is the message," I said: "*On Sunday the book-stores are closed in Paris.*"

"Who gave you that message, Scarlett?" he stammered.

I looked at him curiously, brutally; a red, hot blush had covered his face from neck to hair.

"In case you asked, I was to inform you," said I, "that a Bretonne at Point Paradise sent the message."

"A Bretonne!" he repeated, as though scared.

"A Bretonne!"

"But I don't know any!"

I shrugged my shoulders discreetly.

"Are you certain she was a Bretonne?" he asked. His nervousness surprised me.

"Does she not say so?" I replied.

"I know—I know—but that message—there is only one woman who could have sent it—" He hesitated, red as a pippin.

He was so young, so manly, so unspoiled, and so red, that on an impulse I said: "Kelly, it was Mademoiselle Elven who sent you the message."

His face expressed troubled astonishment.

"Is that her name?" he asked.

"Well—it's one of them, anyway," I replied, beginning to feel troubled in my turn. "See here, Kelly, it's not my business, but you won't mind if I speak plainly, will you? The times are queer—you understand. Everybody is suspicious; everybody is under suspicion in these days. And I want to say that the young lady who sent that curious message to you is as clever as twenty men like you and me."

He was silent.

"If it is a love affair, I'll stop now—not a question, you understand. If it is not—well, as an older and more battered and world-worn man, I'm going to make a suggestion to you—with your permission."

"Make it," he said, quietly.

"Then I will. Don't talk to Mademoiselle Elven. You, Speed, and I know something about a certain conspiracy; we are going to know more before we inform the captain of that cruiser out there beyond Point Paradise. I know Mademoiselle Elven—slightly. I am afraid of her—and I have not yet decided why. Don't talk to her."

"But—I don't know her," he said; "or, at least I don't know her by that name."

After a moment I said: "Is the person in question the companion of the Countess de Vassart?"

"If she is I do not know it," he replied.

"Was she once an actress?"

"It would astonish me to believe it!" he said.

"Then who do you believe sent you that message, Kelly?"

His cheeks began to burn again, and he gave me an uncomfortable look. A silence, and he sat down in my dressing-room, his boyish head buried in his hands. After a glance at him I began changing my training-suit for riding-clothes, whistling the while softly to myself. As I buttoned a fresh collar he looked up.

"Mr. Scarlett, you are well-born and—you are here in the circus with the rest of us. You know what we are—you know that two or three of us have seen better days,... that something has gone wrong with us to bring us here,... but we never speak of it,... and never ask questions.... But I should like to tell you about myself;... you are a gentleman, you know,... and I was not born to anything in particular.... I was a clerk in the consul's office in Paris when Monsieur Tissandier took a fancy to me, and I entered his balloon ateliers to learn to assist him."

He hesitated. I tied my necktie very carefully before a bit of broken mirror.

"Then the government began to make much of us,... you remember? We started experiments for the army.... I was intensely interested, and ... there was not much talk about secrecy then,... and my salary was large, and I was received at the Tuileries. My head was turned;... life was easy, brilliant. I made an invention—a little electric screw which steered a balloon ... sometimes..." He laughed, a mirthless laugh, and looked at me. All the color had gone from his face.

"There was a woman—" I turned partly towards him.

"We met first at the British Embassy,... then elsewhere,... everywhere.... We skated together at the club in the Bois at that celebrated fête,... you know?—the Emperor was there—"

"I know," I said.

He looked at me dreamily, passed his hand over his face, and went on:

"Somehow we always talked about military balloons. And that evening ... she was so interested in my work ... I brought some little sketches I had made—"

"I understand," I said.

He looked at me miserably. "She was to return the sketches to me at Calman's—the fashionable book-store,... next day.... I never thought that the next day was to be Sunday.... The book-stores of Paris are not open on Sunday—*but the War Office is*."

I began to put on my coat.

"And the sketches were asked for?" I suggested—"and you naturally told what had become of them?"

"I refused to name her."

“Of course; men of our sort can’t do that.”

“I am not of your sort—you know it.”

“Oh yes, you are, my friend—and the same kind of fool, too. There’s only one kind of man in this world.”

He looked at me listlessly.

“So they sent you to a fortress?” I asked.

“To New Caledonia,... four years.... I was only twenty, Scarlett,... and ruined.... I joined Byram in Antwerp and risked the tour through France.”

After a moment’s thought I said: “In your opinion, what nation profited by your sketches? Italy? Spain? Prussia? Bavaria? England?... Perhaps Russia?”

“Do you mean that this woman was a foreign spy?”

“Perhaps. Perhaps she was only careless, or capricious,... or inconstant.... You never saw her again?”

“I was under arrest on Sunday. I do not know.... I like to believe that she went to the book-store on Monday,... that she made an innocent mistake,... but I never knew, Scarlett,... I never knew.”

“Suppose you ask her?” I said.

He reddened furiously.

“I cannot.... If she did me a wrong, I cannot reproach her; if she was innocent—look at me, Scarlett!—a ragged, ruined mountebank in a travelling circus,... and she is—”

“An honest woman that a man might care for?”

“That is ... my belief.”

“If she is,” I said, “go and ask her about those drawings.”

“But if she is not,... I cannot tell *you*!” he flashed out.

“Let us shake hands, Kelly,” I said,... “and be very good friends. Will you?”

He gave me his hand rather shyly.

“We will never speak of her again,” I said,... “unless you desire it. You have had a terrible lesson in caution; I need say no more. Only remember that I have trusted you with a secret concerning Buckhurst’s conspiracy.”

His firm hand tightened on mine, then he walked away, steadily, head high. And I went out to saddle my horse for a canter across the moor to Point Paradise.

It was a gray day, with a hint of winter in the air, and a wind that set the gorse rustling like tissue-paper. Up aloft the sun glimmered, a white spot in a silvery smother; pale lights lay on moorland and water; the sea tumbled over the bar, boiling like a flood of liquid lead from which the spindrift curled and blew into a haze that buried the island of Groix and turned the anchored iron-clad to a phantom.

A day for a gallop, if ever there was such a day!—a day to wash out care from a troubled mind and cleanse it in the whipping, reeking, wet east wind—a day for a fox! And I rose in my saddle and shouted aloud as a red fox shot out of the gorse and galloped away across the endless moorland, with the feathers of a mallard still sticking to his whiskers.

Oh, what a gallop, with risk enough, too; for I did not know the coast moors; and the deep clefts from the cliffs cut far inland, so that eye and ear and bridle-hand were tense and ready to catch danger ere it ingulfed us in some sea-churned crevice hidden by the bracken. And how the gray gulls squealed, high whirling over us, and the wild ducks in the sedge rose with clapping wings, craning their necks, only to swing overhead in circles, whimpering, and drop, with pendent legs and wings aslant, back into the bog from which we startled them.

A ride into an endless gray land, sweet with sea-scents, rank with the perfume of salty green things; a ride into a land of gushing winds, wet as spray, strong and caressing, too, and full of mischief; winds that set miles of sedge rippling; sudden winds, that turned still pools to geysers and set the yellow gorse flowers flying; winds that rushed up with a sea-roar like the sound in shells, then, sudden, died away, to leave the furrowed clover motionless and the tall reeds still as death.

So, by strange ways and eccentric circles, like the aërial paths of homing sea-birds, I came at last to the spot I had set out for, consciously; yet it surprised me to find I had come there.

Before I crossed the little bridge I scented the big orange-tinted tea-roses and the pinks. Leaves on apricots were falling; the fig-tree was bare of verdure, and the wind chased the big, bronzed leaves across the beds of herbs, piling them into heaps at the base of the granite wall.

A boy took my horse; a servant in full Breton costume admitted me; the velvet humming of Sylvia Elven's spinning-wheel filled the silence, like the whirring of a great, soft moth imprisoned in a room:

"Woe to the Maids of Paradise,
Yvonne!
Twice have the Saxons landed—twice!
Yvonne!
Yet shall Paradise see them thrice!
Yvonne! Yvonne! Marivonik!

"Fair is their hair and blue their eyes,
Yvonne!
Body o' me! their words are lies,
Yvonne!
Maids of Paradise, oh, be wise!
Yvonne! Yvonne! Marivonik!"

The door swung open noiselessly; the whir of the wheel and the sound of the song filled the room for an instant, then was shut out as the Countess de Vassart closed the door and came forward to greet me.

In her pretty, soft gown, with a tint of blue ribbon at the neck and shoulders, she seemed scarcely older than a school-girl, so radiant, so sweet and fresh she stood there, giving me her little hand to touch in friendship.

"It was so good of you to come," she said; "I know you made it a duty and gave up a glorious gallop to be amiable to me. Did you?"

I tried to say something, but her loveliness confused me.

Somebody brought tea—I don't know who; all I could see clearly was her gray eyes meeting mine—the light from the leaded window touching her glorious, ruddy hair.

As for the tea, I took whatever she offered; doubtless I drank it, but I don't remember. Nor do I remember what she said at first, for somehow I began thinking about my lions, and the thought obsessed me even while striving to listen to her, even in the tingling maze of other thoughts which kept me dumb under the exquisite spell of this intimacy with her.

The delicate odor of ripened herbs stole into the room from the garden; far away, through the whispering whir of the spinning-wheel, I heard the sea.

"Do you like Sylvia's song?" she asked, turning her head to listen. "It is a very old song—a very, very old one—centuries old. It's all about the English, how they came to harry our coasts in those days—and it has almost a hundred verses!" Something of the Bretonne came into her eyes for a moment, that shadow of sadness, that patient fatalism in which, too, there is something of distrust. The next instant her eyes cleared and she smiled.

"The Trécourts suffered much from the English raiders. I am a Trécourt, you know. That song was made about us—about a young girl, Yvonne de Trécourt, who was carried away by the English. She was foolish; she had a lover among the Saxons,... and she set a signal for him, and they came and sacked the town, and carried her away, and that was what she got for her folly."

She bent her head thoughtfully; the sound of the sea grew louder in the room; a yellow light stole out of the west and touched the window-panes, slowly deepening to orange; against it the fruit trees stood, a leafless tracery of fragile branches.

"It is the winter awaking, very far away," she said, under her breath.

Something in the hollow monotone of the sea made me think again of the low grumble of restless lions. The sound was hateful. Why should it steal in here—why haunt me even in this one spot in all the world where a world-tired man had found a moment's peace in a woman's eyes.

"Are you troubled?" she asked, then colored at her own question, as though deeming the impulse to speak unwarranted.

"No, not troubled. Happiness is often edged with a shadow. I am content to be here."

She bent her head and looked at the heavy rose lying in solitary splendor on the table. The polished wood reflected it in subdued tints of saffron.

"It is a strange friendship," I said.

"Ours?... yes."

I said, musing: "To me it is like magic. I scarce dare speak, scarce breathe, lest the spell break."

She was silent.

"—Lest the spell break—and this house, this room, fade away, leaving me alone, staring at the world once more."

"If there is a spell, you have cast it," she said, laughing at my sober face. "A wizard ought to be able to make his spells endure."

Then her face grew graver. "You must forget the past," she said; "you must forget all that was cruel and false and unhappy,... will you not?"

"Yes, madame."

"I, too," she said, "have much to forget and much to hope for; and you taught me how to forget and how to hope."

"I, madame?"

"Yes,... at La Trappe, at Morsbronn, and here. Look at me. Have I not changed?"

"Yes," I said, fascinated.

"I know I have," she said, as though speaking to herself. "Life means more now. Somehow my childhood seems to have returned, with all its hope of the world and all its confidence in the world, and its certainty that all will be right. Years have fallen from my shoulders like a released burden that was crushing me to my knees. I have awakened from a dream that was not life at all,... a dream in which I, alone, staggered through darkness, bearing the world on my shoulders—the world doubly weighted with the sorrows of mankind,... a dream that lasted years, but...*you* awoke me."

She leaned forward and lifted the rose, touching her face with it.

"It was so simple, after all—this secret of the world's malady. You read it for me. I know now what is written on the eternal tablets—to live one's own life as it is given, in honor, charity, without malice; to seek happiness where it is offered; to share it when possible; to uplift. But, most of all, to be happy and accept happiness as a heavenly gift that is to be shared with as many as possible. And this I have learned since ... I knew you."

The light in the room had grown dimmer; I leaned forward to see her face.

"Am I not right?" she asked.

"I think so.... I am learning from you."

"But you taught this creed to me!" she cried.

"No, you are teaching it to me. And the first lesson was a gift,... your friendship."

"Freely given, gladly given," she said, quickly. "And yours I have in return,... and will keep always—always—"

She crushed the rose against her mouth, looking at me with inscrutable gray eyes, as I had seen her look at me once at La Trappe, once in Morsbronn.

I picked up my gloves and riding-crop; as I rose she stood up in the dusk, looking straight at me.

I said something about Sylvia Elven and my compliments to her, something else about the happiness I felt at coming to the château again, something about her own goodness to me—Heaven knows what!—and she gave me her hand and I

held it a moment.

“Will you come again?” she asked.

I stammered a promise and made my way blindly to the door which a servant threw open, flung myself astride my horse, and galloped out into the waste of moorland, seeing nothing, hearing nothing save the low roar of the sea, like the growl of restless lions.

XVI

A RESTLESS MAN

When I came into camp, late that afternoon, I found Byram and Speed groping about among a mass of newspapers and letters, the first mail we circus people had received for nearly two months.

There were letters for all who were accustomed to look for letters from families, relatives, or friends at home. I never received letters—I had received none of that kind in nearly a score of years, yet that curious habit of expectancy had not perished in me, and I found myself standing with the others while Byram distributed the letters, one by one, until the last home-stamped envelope had been given out, and all around me the happy circus-folk were reading in homesick contentment. I know of no lonelier man than he who lingers empty-handed among those who pore over the home mail.

But there were newspapers enough and to spare—French, English, American; and I sat down by my lion's cage and attempted to form some opinion of the state of affairs in France. And, as far as I could read between the lines, this is what I gathered, partly from my own knowledge of past events, partly from the foreign papers, particularly the English:

When, on the 3d of September, the humiliating news arrived that the Emperor was a prisoner and his army annihilated, the government, for the first time in its existence, acted with promptness and decision in a matter of importance. Secret orders were sent by couriers to the Bank of France, to the Louvre, and to the Invalides; and, that same night, train after train rushed out of Paris loaded with the battle-flags from the Invalides, the most important pictures and antique sculptures from the Louvre, the greater part of the gold and silver from the Bank of France, and, last but by no means least, the crown and jewels of France.

This Speed and I already knew.

These trains were despatched to Brest, and at the same time a telegram was directed to the admiral commanding the French iron-clad fleet in the Baltic to send an armored cruiser to Brest with all haste possible, there to await further orders, but to be fully prepared in any event to take on board certain goods designated in cipher. This we knew in a general way, though Speed understood that Lorient was to be the port of departure.

The plan was a good one and apparently simple; and there seemed to be no doubt that jewels, battle-flags, pictures, and coin were already beyond danger from the German armies, now plodding cautiously southward toward the capital, which was slowly recovering from its revolutionary convulsions and preparing for a siege.

The plan, then, was simple; but, for an equally simple reason, it miscarried in the following manner. Early in August, while the French armies from the Rhine to the Meuse were being punished with frightful regularity and precision, the French Mediterranean squadron had sailed up and down that interesting expanse of water, apparently in patriotic imitation of the historic

"King of France and twenty thousand men."

For, it now appeared, the French admiral was afraid that the Spanish navy might aid the German ships in harassing the French transports, which at that time were frantically engaged in ferrying a sea-sick Algerian army across the Mediterranean to the mother country.

Of course there was no ground for the admiral's suspicions. The German war-ships stayed in their own harbors, the Spaniards made no offensive alliance with Prussia, and at length the French admiral sailed triumphantly away with his battleships and cruisers.

On the 7th of August the squadron of four battleships, two armored corvettes, and a despatch-boat steamed out of Brest, picking up on its way northward three more iron-clad frigates, and several cruisers and despatch-boats; and on the 11th of August, 1870, the squadron anchored off Heligoland, from whence Admiral Fourichon proclaimed the blockade of the German coast.

It must have been an imposing sight! There lay the great iron-clads, the *Magnanime*, the *Héroine*, the *Provence*, the *Valeureuse*, the *Revanche*, the *Invincible*, the *Couronne*! There lay the cruisers, the *Atalante*, the *Renaud*, the *Cosmao*, the *Decrès*! There, too, lay the single-screw despatch-boats *Reine-Hortense*, *Renard*, and *Dayot*. And upon their

armored decks, three by three, stalked the French admirals. Yet, without cynicism, it may be said that the admirals of France fought better, in 1870, on dry land than they did on the ocean.

However, the German ships stayed peacefully inside their fortified ports, and the three French admirals pranced peacefully up and down outside, until the God of battles intervened and trouble naturally ensued.

On the 6th of September all the seas of Europe were set clashing under a cyclone that rose to a howling hurricane. The British iron-clad *Captain* foundered off Finistère; the French fleet in the Baltic was scattered to the four winds.

In the midst of the tempest a French despatch-boat, the *Hirondelle*, staggered into sight, signalling the flag-ship. Then the French admiral for the first time learned the heart-breaking news of Sedan, and as the tempest-tortured battle-ship drove seaward the signals went up: "Make for Brest!" The blockade of the German coast was at an end.

On the 4th of September the treasure-laden trains had left Paris for Brest. On the 5th the *Hirondelle* steamed out towards the fleet with the news from Sedan and the orders for the detachment of a cruiser to receive the crown jewels. On the 6th the news and the orders were signalled to the flag-ship; but the God of battles unchained a tempest which countermanded the order and hurled the iron-clads into outer darkness.

Some of the ships crept into English ports, burning their last lumps of coal, some drifted into Dunkerque; but the flag-ship disappeared for nine long days, at last to reappear off Cherbourg, a stricken thing with a stricken crew and an admiral broken-hearted.

So, for days and days, the treasure-laden trains must have stood helpless in the station at Brest, awaiting the cruiser that did not come.

On the 17th of September the French Channel squadron, of seven heavy iron-clads, unexpectedly steamed into Lorient harbor and dropped anchor amid thundering salutes from the forts; and the next day one of the treasure-trains came flying into Lorient, to the unspeakable relief of the authorities in the beleaguered capital.

Speed and I already knew the secret orders sent. The treasures, including the crown diamonds, were to be stored in the citadel, and an armored cruiser was to lie off the arsenal with banked fires, ready to receive the treasures at the first signal and steam to the French fortified port of Saïgon in Cochin China, by a course already determined.

Why on earth those orders had been changed so that the cruiser was to lie off Groix I could not imagine, unless some plot had been discovered in Lorient which had made it advisable to shift the location of the treasures for the third time.

Pondering there at the tent door, amid my heap of musty newspapers, I looked out into the late, gray afternoon and saw the maids of Paradise passing and repassing across the bridge with a clicking of wooden shoes and white head-dresses glimmering in the dusk of the trees.

The town had filled within a day or two; the Paradise coiffe was not the only coiffe to be seen in the square; there was the delicate-winged head-dress of Faöuet, the beautiful coiffes of Rosporden, Sainte-Anne d'Auray, and Pont Aven; there, too, flashed the scarlet skirts of Bannalec and the gorgeous embroidered bodices of the interior; there were the men of Quimperlé in velvet, the men of Penmarch, the men of Faöuet with their dark, Spanish-like faces and their sombreros, and their short yellow jackets and leggings. All in holiday costume, too, for the maids were stiff in silver and lace, and the men wore carved sabots and embroidered gilets.

"Governor," I called out to Byram, "the town is filling fast. It's like a Pardon in Morbihan; we'll pack the old tent to the nigger's-heaven!"

"It's a fact," he said, pushing his glasses up over his forehead and fanning his face with his silk hat. "We're going to open to a lot of money, Mr. Scarlett, and ... I ain't goin' to forgit them that stood by me, neither."

He placed a heavy hand on my shoulder, and, stooping, peered into my face.

"Air you sick, m' friend?" he asked.

"I, governor? Why, no."

"Ain't been bit by that there paltry camuel nor nothin', hev ye?"

"No; do I look ill?"

"Peaked—kind o' peaked. White, with dark succles under your eyes. Air you nervous?"

“About the lions? Oh no. Don’t worry about me, governor.”

He sighed, adjusted his spectacles, and blew his nose.

“Mr. Speed—he’s worriting, too; he says that Empress Khatoun means to hev ye one o’ these days.”

“You tell Mr. Speed to worry over his own affairs—that child, Jacqueline, for instance. I suppose she made her jump without trouble to-day? I was too nervous to stay and watch her.”

“M’ friend,” said Byram, in solemn ecstasy, “I take off my hat to that there kid!” And he did so with a flourish. “You orter seen her; she hung on that flying trap, jest as easy an’ sassy! We was all half crazy. Speed he grew blue around the gills; Miss Crystal, a-swingin’ there in the riggin’ by her knees, kept a swallerin’ an’ lickin’ her lips, she was that scared.

“‘Ready?’ she calls out in a sort o’ quaver.

“‘Ready!’ sez little Jacqueline, cool as ice, swingin’ by her knees. ‘Go!’ sez Miss Crystal, an’ the kid let go, an’ Miss Crystal grabbed her by the ankles. ‘Ready?’ calls up Speed, beside the tank.

“‘Ready!’ sez the kid, smilin’. ‘Drop!’ cries Speed. An’ Jacqueline shot down like a blazing star—whir! swish! splash! All over! An’ that there nervy kid a floatin’ an’ a sportin’ like a minnie-fish at t’other end o’ the tank! Oh, gosh, but it was grand! It was jest—”

Speech failed; he walked away, waving his arms, his rusty silk hat on the back of his head.

A few moments later drums began to roll from the square. Speed, passing, called out to me that the conscripts were leaving for Lorient; so I walked down to the bridge, where the crowd had gathered and where a tall gendarme stood, his blue-and-white uniform distinct in the early evening light. The mayor was there, too, dressed in his best, waddling excitedly about, and buttonholing at intervals a young lieutenant of infantry, who appeared to be extremely bored.

There were the conscripts of the Garde Mobile, an anxious peasant rabble, awkward, resigned, docile as cattle. Here stood a farmer, reeking of his barnyard; here two woodsmen from the forest, belted and lean; but the majority were men of the sea, heavy-limbed, sun-scorched fellows, with little, keen eyes always half closed, and big, helpless fists hanging. Some carried their packets slung from hip to shoulder, some tied their parcels to the muzzles of their obsolete muskets. A number wore the boatman’s smock, others the farmer’s blouse of linen, but the greater number were clad in the blue-wool jersey and cloth béret of the sailor.

Husbands, sons, lovers, looked silently at the women. The men uttered no protest, no reproach; the women wept very quietly. In their hearts that strange mysticism of the race predominated—the hopeless acceptance of a destiny which has, for centuries, left its imprint in the sad eyes of the Breton. Generations of martyrdom leave a cowed and spiritually fatigued race which breeds stoics.

Like great white blossoms, the spotless head-dresses of the maids of Paradise swayed and bowed above the crowd.

A little old woman stood beside a sailor, saying to anybody who would listen to her: “My son—they are taking my son. Why should they take my son?”

Another said: “They are taking mine, too, but he cannot fight on land. He knows the sea; he is not afraid at sea. Can nobody help us? He cannot fight on land; he does not know how!”

A woman carrying a sleeping baby stood beside the drummers at the fountain. Five children dragged at her skirts and peered up at the mayor, who shrugged his shoulders and shook his fat head.

“What can I do? He must march with the others, your man,” said the mayor, again and again. But the woman with the baby never ceased her eternal question: “What can we live on if you take him? I do not mean to complain too much, but we have nothing. What can we live on, m’sieu the mayor?”

But now the drummers had stepped out into the centre of the square and were drawing their drum-sticks from the brass sockets in their baldricks.

“Good-bye! Good-bye!” sobbed the maids of Paradise, giving both hands to their lovers. “We will pray for you!”

“Pray for us,” said the men, holding their sweethearts’ hands.

“Attention!” cried the officer, a slim, hectic lieutenant from Lorient.

The mayor handed him the rolls, and the lieutenant, facing the shuffling single rank, began to call off:

“Roux of Bannalec?”

“Here, monsieur—”

“Don’t say, ‘Here, monsieur!’ Say, ‘Present!’ Now, Roux?”

“Present, monsieur—”

“Idiot! Kedrec?”

“Present!”

“That’s right! Penmarch?”

“Present!”

“Rhuis of Sainte-Yssel?”

“Present!”

“Hervé of Paradise Beacon?”

“Present!”

“Laenec?”

“Present!”

“Duhamel?”

“Present!”

The officer moistened his lips, turned the page, and continued:

“Carnac of Alincourt?”

There was a silence, then a voice cried, “Crippled!”

“Mark him off, lieutenant,” said the mayor, pompously; “he’s our little hunchback.”

“Shall I mark you in his place?” asked the lieutenant, with a smile that turned the mayor’s blood to water. “No? You would make a fine figure for a forlorn hope.”

A man burst out laughing, but he was half crazed with grief, and his acrid mirth found no response. Then the roll-call was resumed:

“Gestel?”

“Present!”

“Garenne!”

There was another silence.

“Robert Garenne!” repeated the officer, sharply. “Monsieur the mayor has informed me that you are liable for military duty. If you are present, answer to your name or take the consequences!”

The poacher, who had been lounging on the bridge, slouched slowly forward and touched his cap.

“I am organizing a franc corps,” he said, with a deadly sidelong glance at the mayor, who now stood beside the lieutenant.

“You can explain that at Lorient,” replied the lieutenant. “Fall in there!”

“But I—”

“Fall in!” repeated the lieutenant.

The poacher’s visage became inflamed. He hesitated, looking around for an avenue of escape. Then he caught my disgusted eye.

“For the last time,” said the lieutenant, coolly drawing his revolver, “I order you to fall in!”

The poacher backed into the straggling rank, glaring.

“Now,” said the lieutenant, “you may go to your house and get your packet. If we have left when you return, follow and report at the arsenal in Lorient. Fall out! March!”

The poacher backed out to the rear of the rank, turned on his heel, and strode away towards the coast, clinched fists swinging by his side.

There were not many names on the roll, and the call was quickly finished. And now the infantry drummers raised their sticks high in the air, there was a sharp click, a crash, and the square echoed.

“March!” cried the officer; and, drummers ahead, the long single rank shuffled into fours, and the column started, enveloped in a throng of women and children.

“Good-bye!” sobbed the women. “We will pray!”

“Good-bye! Pray!”

The crowd pressed on into the dusk. Far up the darkening road the white coiffes of the women glimmered; the drum-roll softened to a distant humming.

The children, who did not understand, had gathered around a hunchback, the exempt cripple of the roll-call.

“Ho! Fois!” I heard him say to the crowd of wondering little ones, “if I were not exempt I’d teach these Prussians to dance the farandole to my biniou! Oui, dame! And perhaps I’ll do it yet, spite of the crooked back I was not born with—as everybody knows! Oui, dame! Everybody knows I was born as straight as the next man!”

The children gaped, listening to the distant drumming, now almost inaudible.

The cripple rose, lighted a lantern, and walked slowly out toward the cliffs, carrying himself with that uncanny dignity peculiar to hunchbacks. And as he walked he sang, in his thin, sharp voice, the air of “The Three Captains”:

“J’ai eu dans son cœur la plac’ la plus belle,
La plac’ la plus belle.
J’ai passé trois ans, trois ans avec elle,
Trois ans avec elle.
J’ai eu trois enfants qui sont capitaines,
Qui sont capitaines.
L’un est à Bordeaux, l’autre à la Rochelle,
L’autre à la Rochelle.
Le troisième ici, caressent les belles,
Caressent les belles.’

Far out across the shadowy cliffs I heard his lingering, strident chant, and caught the spark of his lantern; then silence and darkness fell over the deserted square; the awed children, fingers interlocked, crept homeward through the dusk; there was no sound save the rippling wash of the river along the quay of stone.

Tired, a trifle sad, thinking perhaps of those home letters which had come to all save me, I leaned against the river wall, staring at the darkness; and over me came creeping that apathy which I had already learned to recognize and even welcome as a mental anæsthetic which set that dark sentinel, care, a-drowsing.

What did I care, after all? Life had stopped for me years before; there was left only a shell in which that unseen little trickster, the heart, kept tap-tapping away against a tired body. Was that what we call life? The sorry parody!

A shape slunk near me through the dusk, furtive, uncertain. “Lizard,” I said, indifferently. He came up, my gun on his ragged shoulder.

“You go with your class?” I asked.

“No, I go to the forest,” he said, hoarsely. “You shall hear from me.”

I nodded.

“Are you content?” he demanded, lingering.

The creature wanted sympathy, though he did not know it. I gave him my hand and told him he was a brave man; and he went away, noiselessly, leaving me musing by the river wall.

After a long while—or it may only have been a few minutes—the square began to fill again with the first groups of women, children, and old men who had escorted the departing conscripts a little way on their march to Lorient. Back they came, the maids of Paradise silent, tearful, pitifully acquiescent; the women of Bannalec, Faöuet, Rosporden, Quimperlé chattering excitedly about the scene they had witnessed. The square began to fill; lanterns were lighted around the fountain; the two big lamps with their brass reflectors in front of the mayor’s house illuminated the pavement and the thin tree-foliage with a yellow radiance.

The chatter grew louder as new groups in all sorts of gay head-dresses arrived; laughter began to be heard; presently the squealing of the biniou pipes broke out from the bowling-green, where, high on a bench supported by a plank laid across two cider barrels, the hunchback sat, skirling the farandole. Ah, what a world entire was this lost little hamlet of Paradise, where merrymakers trod on the mourners’ heels, where the scream of the biniou drowned the floating note of the passing bell, where Misery drew the curtains of her bed and lay sleepless, listening to Gayety dancing breathless to the patter of a coquette’s wooden shoes!

Long tables were improvised in the square, piled up with bread, sardines, puddings, hams, and cakes. Casks of cider, propped on skids, dotted the outskirts of the bowling-green, where the mayor, enthroned in his own arm-chair, majestically gave his orders in a voice thickened by pork, onions, and gravy.

Truly enough, half of Finistère and Morbihan was gathering at Paradise for a fête. The slow Breton imagination had been fired by our circus bills and posters; ancient Armorica was stirring in her slumber, roused to consciousness by the Yankee bill-poster.

At the inn all rooms were taken; every house had become an inn; barns, stables, granaries had their guests; fishermen’s huts on coast and cliff were bright with coiffes and embroidered jerseys.

In their misfortune, the lonely women of Paradise recognized in this influx a godsend—a few francs to gain with which to face those coming wintry months while their men were absent. And they opened their tiny houses to those who asked a lodging.

The crowds which had earlier in the evening gathered to gape at our big tent were now noisiest in the square, where the endless drone of the pipes intoned the farandole.

A few of our circus folk had come down to enjoy the picturesque spectacle. Speed, standing with Jacqueline beside me, began to laugh and beat time to the wild music. A pretty maid of Bannalec, white coiffe and scarlet skirts a-flutter, called out with the broad freedom of the chastest of nations: “There is the lover I could pray for—if he can dance the farandole!”

“I’ll show you whether I can dance the farandole, ma belle!” cried Speed, and caught her hand, but she snatched her brown fingers away and danced off, laughing: “He who loves must follow, follow, follow the farandole!”

Speed started to follow, but Jacqueline laid a timid hand on his arm.

“I dance, M’sieu Speed,” she said, her face flushing under her elf-locks.

“You blessed child,” he cried, “you shall dance till you drop to your knees on the bowling-green!” And, hand clasping hand, they swung out into the farandole. For an instant only I caught a glimpse of Jacqueline’s blissful face, and her eyes like blue stars burning; then they darkened into silhouettes against the yellow glare of the lanterns and vanished.

Byram rambled up for a moment, to comment on the quaint scene from a showman’s point of view. “It would fill the tent in old Noo York, but it’s n. g. in this here country, where everybody’s either a coryphee or a clown or a pantaloon! Camuels ain’t no rara avises in the Sairy, an’ no niggers go to burnt-cork shows. Phylosophy is the thing, Mr. Scarlett! Ruminate! Ruminate!”

I promised to do so, and the old man rambled away, coat and vest on his arm, silk hat cocked over his left eye, the lamp-light shining on the buckles of his suspenders. Dear old governor!—dear, vulgar incarnation of those fast vanishing pioneers who invented civilization, finding none; who, self-taught, unashamed taught their children the only truths they knew, that the nation was worthy of all good, all devotion, and all knowledge that her sons could bring her to her glory that she might one day fulfil her destiny as greatest among the great on earth.

The whining Breton bagpipe droned in my ears; the dancers flew past; laughter and cries arose from the tables in the square where the curate of St. Julien stood, forefinger wagging, soundly rating an intoxicated but apologetic Breton in the costume of Faöuet.

I was tired—tired of it all; weary of costumes and strange customs, weary of strange tongues, of tinsel and mummers, and tarnished finery; sick of the sawdust and the rank stench of beasts—and the vagabond life—and the hopeless end of it all—the shabby end of a useless life—a death at last amid strangers! Soldiers in red breeches, peasants in embroidered jackets, strolling mountebanks all tinselled and rouged—they were all one to me.... I wanted my own land.... I wanted my own people.... I wanted to go home ... home!—and die, when my time came, under the skies I knew as a child,... under that familiar moon which once silvered my nursery windows....

I turned away across the bridge out into the dark road. Long before I came to the smoky, silent camp I heard the monotonous roaring of my lions, pacing their shadowy dens.

XVII

THE CIRCUS

A little after sunrise on the day set for our first performance, Speed sauntered into my dressing-room in excellent humor, saying that not only had the village of Paradise already filled up with the peasantry of Finistère and Morbihan, but every outlying hamlet from St. Julien to Pont Aven was overflowing; that many had even camped last night along the roadside; in short, that the country was unmistakably aroused to the importance of the Anti-Prussian Republican circus and the Flying Mermaid of Ker-Ys.

I listened to him almost indifferently, saying that I was very glad for the governor's sake, and continued to wash a deep scratch on my left arm, using salt water to allay the irritation left by Aïcha's closely pared claws—the vixen.

But the scratch had not poisoned me; I was in fine physical condition; rehearsals had kept us all in trim; our animals, too, were in good shape; and the machinery started without a creak when, an hour later, Byram himself opened the box-office at the tent-door and began to sell tickets to an immense crowd for the first performance, which was set for two o'clock that afternoon.

I had had an unpleasant hour's work with the lions, during which Marghouz, a beast hitherto lazy and docile, had attempted to creep behind me. Again I had betrayed irritation; again the lions saw it, understood it, and remembered. Aïcha tore my sleeve; when I dragged Timour Melek's huge jaws apart he endured the operation patiently, but as soon as I gave the signal to retire he sprang snarling to the floor, mane on end, and held his ground, just long enough to defy me. Poor devils! Who but I knew that they were right and I was wrong! Who but I understood what lack of freedom meant to the strong—meant to caged creatures, unrighteously deprived of liberty! Though born in captivity, wild things change nothing; they sleep by day, walk by night, follow as well as they can the instincts which a caged life cannot crush in them, nor a miserable, artificial existence obliterate.

They are right to resist.

I mentioned something of this to Speed as I was putting on my coat to go out, but he only scowled at me, saying: "Your usefulness as a lion-tamer is ended, my friend; you are a fool to enter that cage again, and I'm going to tell Byram."

"Don't spoil the governor's pleasure now," I said, irritably; "the old man is out there selling tickets with both hands, while little Griggs counts receipts in a stage whisper. Let him alone, Speed; I'm going to give it up soon, anyway—not now—not while the governor has a chance to make a little money; but soon—very soon. You are right; I can't control anything now—not even myself. I must give up my lions, after all."

"When?" said Speed.

"Soon—I don't know. I'm tired—really tired. I want to go home."

"Home! Have you one?" he asked, with a faint sneer of surprise.

"Yes; a rather extensive lodging, bounded east and west by two oceans, north by the lakes, south by the gulf. Landlord's a relation—my Uncle Sam."

"Are you really going home, Scarlett?" he asked, curiously.

"I have nothing to keep me here, have I?"

"Not unless you choose to settle down and ... marry."

I looked at him; presently my face began to redden; and, "What do you mean?" I asked, angrily.

He replied, in a very mild voice, that he did not mean anything that might irritate me.

I said, "Speed, don't mind my temper; I can't seem to help it any more; something has changed me, something has gone wrong."

"Perhaps something has gone right," he mused, looking up at the flying trapeze, where Jacqueline swung dangling above the tank, watching us with sea-blue eyes.

After a moment's thought I said: "Speed, what the devil do you mean by that remark?"

"Now you're angry again," he said, wearily.

"No, I'm not. Tell me what you mean."

"Oh, what do you imagine I mean?" he retorted. "Do you think I'm blind? Do you suppose I've watched you all these years and don't know you? Am I an ass, Scarlett? Be fair; am I?"

"No; not an ass," I said.

"Then let me alone—unless you want plain speaking instead of a bray."

"I do want it."

"Which?"

"You know; go on."

"Am I to tell you the truth?"

"As you interpret it—yes."

"Very well, my friend; then, at your respectful request, I beg to inform you that you are in love with Madame de Vassart—and have been for months."

I did not pretend surprise; I knew he was going to say it. Yet it enraged me that he should think it and say it.

"You are wrong," I said, steadily.

"No, Scarlett; I am right."

"You are wrong," I repeated.

"Don't say that again," he retorted. "If you do not know it, you ought to. Don't be unfair; don't be cowardly. Face it, man! By Heaven, you've got to face it some time—here, yonder, abroad, on the ocean, at home—no matter where, you've got to face it some day and tell yourself the truth!"

His words hurt me for a moment; then, as I listened, that strange apathy once more began to creep over me. Was it really the truth he had told me? Was it? Well—and then? What meaning had it to me?... Of what help was it?... of what portent?... of what use?... What door did it unlock? Surely not the door I had closed upon myself so many years ago!

Something of my thoughts he may have divined as I stood brooding in the sunny tent, staring listlessly at my own shadow on the floor, for he laid his hand on my shoulder and said: "Surely, Scarlett, if happiness can be reborn in Paradise, it can be reborn here. I know you; I have known you for many years. And in all that time you have never fallen below my ideal!"

"What are you saying, Speed?" I asked, rousing from my lethargy to shake his hand from my shoulder.

"The truth. In all these years of intimacy, familiarity has never bred contempt in me; I am not your equal in anything; it does not hurt me to say so. I have watched you as a younger brother watches, lovingly, jealous yet proud of you, alert for a failing or a weakness which I never found—or, if I thought I found a flaw in you, knowing that it was but part of a character too strong, too generous for me to criticise."

"Speed," I said, astonished, "are you talking about me—about *me*—a mountebank—and a failure at that? You know I'm a failure—a nobody—" I hesitated, touched by his kindness. "Your loyalty to me is all I have. I wish it were true that I am such a man as you believe me to be."

"It is true," he said, almost sullenly. "If it were not, no man would say it of you—though a woman might. Listen to me, Scarlett. I tell you that a man shipwrecked on the world's outer rocks—if he does not perish—makes the better pilot afterwards."

"But ... I perished, Speed."

"It is not true," he said, violently; "but you will if you don't steer a truer course than you have. Scarlett, answer me!"

"Answer you? What?"

"Are you in love?"

“Yes,” I said.

He waited, looked up at me, then dropped his hands in his pockets and turned away toward the interior of the tent where Jacqueline, having descended from the rigging, stood, drawing her slim fingers across the surface of the water in the tank.

I walked out through the tent door, threading my way among the curious crowds gathered not only at the box-office, but even around the great tent as far as I could see. Byram hailed me with jovial abandon, perspiring in his shirt-sleeves, silk hat on the back of his head; little Grigg made one of his most admired grimaces and shook the heavy money-box at me; Horan waved his hat above his head and pointed at the throng with a huge thumb. I smiled at them all and walked on.

Cloud and sunshine alternated on that capricious November morning; the sea-wind was warm; the tincture of winter had gone. On that day, however, I saw wavering strings of wild ducks flying south; and the little hedge-birds of different kinds were already flocking amiably together in twittering bands that filled the leafless blackthorns on the cliffs;—true prophets, all, of that distant cold, gathering somewhere in the violet north.

I walked fast across the moors, as though I had a destination. And I had; yet when I understood it I sheered off, only to turn again and stare fascinated in the direction of the object that frightened me.

There it rose against the seaward cliffs, the little tower of Trécourt farm, sea-smitten and crusted, wind-worn, stained, gray as the lichened rocks scattered across the moorland. Over it the white gulls pitched and tossed in a windy sky; beyond crawled the ancient and wrinkled sea.

“It is a strange thing,” I said aloud, “to find love at the world’s edge.” I looked blindly across the gray waste. “But I have found it too late.”

The wind blew furiously; I heard the gulls squealing in the sky, the far thunder of the surf.

Then, looking seaward again, for the first time I noticed that the black cruiser was gone, that nothing now lay between the cliffs and the hazy headland of Groix save a sheet of lonely water spreading league on league to meet a flat, gray sky.

Why had the cruiser sailed? As I stood there, brooding, to my numbed ears the moor-winds bore a sound coming from a great distance—the sound of cannon—little, soft reports, all but inaudible in the wind and the humming undertone of the breakers. Yet I knew the sound, and turned my unquiet eyes to the sea, where nothing moved save the far crests of waves.

For a while I stood listening, searching the sea, until a voice hailed me, and I turned to find Kelly Eyre almost at my elbow.

“There is a man in the village haranguing the people,” he said, abruptly. “We thought you ought to know.”

“A man haranguing the people,” I repeated. “What of it?”

“Speed thinks the man is Buckhurst.”

“What!” I cried.

“There’s something else, too,” he said, soberly, and drew a telegram from his pocket.

I seized it, and studied the fluttering sheet:

“The governor of Lorient, on complaint of the mayor of Paradise, forbids the American exhibition, and orders the individual Byram to travel immediately to Lorient with his so-called circus, where a British steamship will transport the personnel, baggage, and animals to British territory. The mayor of Paradise will see that this order of expulsion is promptly executed.

“(Signed) Breteuil.
“Chief of Police.”

“Where did you get that telegram?” I asked.

“It’s a copy; the mayor came with it. Byram does not know about it.”

“Don’t let him know it!” I said, quickly; “this thing will kill him, I believe. Where is that fool of a mayor? Come on, Kelly! Stay close beside me.” And I set off at a swinging pace, down the hollow, out across the left bank of the little river, straight to the bridge, which we reached almost on a run.

“Look there!” cried my companion, as we came in sight of the square.

The square was packed with Breton peasants; near the fountain two cider barrels had been placed, a plank thrown across

them, and on this plank stood a man holding a red flag.

The man was John Buckhurst.

When I came nearer I could see that he wore a red scarf across his breast; a little nearer and I could hear his passionless voice sounding; nearer still, I could distinguish every clear-cut word:

"Men of the sea, men of that ancient Armorica which, for a thousand years, has suffered serfdom, I come to you bearing no sword. You need none; you are free under this red flag I raise above you."

He lifted the banner, shaking out the red folds.

"Yet if I come to you bearing no sword, I come with something better, something more powerful, something so resistless that, using it as your battle-cry, the world is yours!

"I come bearing the watchword of world-brotherhood—Peace, Love, Equality! I bear it from your battle-driven brothers, scourged to the battlements of Paris by the demons of a wicked government! I bear it from the devastated towns of the provinces, from your homeless brothers of Alsace and Lorraine.

"Peace, Love, Equality! All this is yours for the asking. The commune will be proclaimed throughout France; Paris is aroused, Lyons is ready, Bordeaux watches, Marseilles waits!

"You call your village Paradise—yet you starve here. Let this little Breton village be a paradise in truth—a shrine for future happy pilgrims who shall say: 'Here first were sewn the seeds of the world's liberty! Here first bloomed the perfect flower of universal brotherhood!"

He bent his sleek, gray head meekly, pausing as though in profound meditation. Suddenly he raised his head; his tone changed; a faint ring of defiance sounded under the smooth flow of words.

He began with a blasphemous comparison, alluding to the money-changers in the temple—a subtle appeal to righteous violence.

"It rests with us to cleanse the broad temple of our country and drive from it the thieves and traitors who enslave us! How can we do it? They are strong; we are weak. Ah, but *are* they truly strong? You say they have armies? Armies are composed of men. These men are your brothers, whipped forth to die—for what? For the pleasure of a few aristocrats. Who was it dragged your husbands and sons away from your arms, leaving you to starve? The governor of Lorient. Who is he? An aristocrat, paid to scourge your husbands and children to battle—paid, perhaps, by Prussia to betray them, too!"

A low murmur rose from the people. Buckhurst swept the throng with colorless eyes.

"Under the commune we will have peace. Why? Because there can be no hunger, no distress, no homeless ones where the wealth of all is distributed equally. We will have no wars, because there will be nothing to fight for. We will have no aristocrats where all must labor for the common good; where all land is equally divided; where love, equality, and brotherhood are the only laws—"

"Where's the mayor?" I whispered to Eyre.

"In his house; Speed is with him."

"Come on, then," I said, pushing my way around the outskirts of the crowd to the mayor's house.

The door was shut and the blinds drawn, but a knock brought Speed to the door, revolver in hand.

"Oh," he said, grimly, "it's time you arrived. Come in."

The mayor was lying in his arm-chair, frightened, sulky, obstinate, his fat form swathed in a red sash.

"O-ho!" I said, sharply, "so you already wear the colors of the revolution, do you?"

"Dame, they tied it over my waistcoat," he said, "and there are no gendarmes to help me arrest them—"

"Never mind that just now," I interrupted; "what I want to know is why you wrote the governor of Lorient to expel our circus."

"That's my own affair," he snapped; "besides, who said I wrote?"

"Idiot," I said, "somebody paid you to do it. Who was it?"

The mayor, hunched up in his chair, shut his mouth obstinately.

"Somebody paid you," I repeated; "you would never have complained of us unless somebody paid you, because our circus is bringing money into your village. Come, my friend, that was easy to guess. Now let me guess again that Buckhurst paid you to complain of us."

The mayor looked slyly at me out of the corner of his mottled eyes, but he remained mute.

"Very well," said I; "when the troops from Lorient hear of this revolution in Paradise, they'll come and chase these communards into the sea. And after that they'll stand you up against a convenient wall and give you thirty seconds for absolution—"

"Stop!" burst out the mayor, struggling to his feet. "What am I to do? This gentleman, Monsieur Buckhurst, will slay me if I disobey him! Besides," he added, with cowardly cunning, "they are going to do the same thing in Lorient, too—and everywhere—in Paris, in Bordeaux, in Marseilles—even in Quimperlé! And when all these cities are flying the red flag it won't be comfortable for cities that fly the tricolor." He began to bluster. "I'm mayor of Paradise, and I won't be bullied! You get out of here with your circus and your foolish elephants! I haven't any gendarmes just now to drive you out, but you had better start, all the same—before night."

"Oh," I said, "before night? Why before night?"

"Wait and see then," he muttered. "Anyway, get out of my house—d' ye hear?"

"We are going to give that performance at two o'clock this afternoon," I said. "After that, another to-morrow at the same hour, and on every day at the same hour, as long as it pays. Do you understand?"

"Perfectly," sneered the mayor.

"And," I continued, "if the governor of Lorient sends gendarmes to conduct us to the steamship in Lorient harbor, they'll take with them somebody besides the circus folk."

"You mean me?" he inquired.

"I do."

"What do I care?" he bawled in a fury. "You had better go to Lorient, I tell you. What do you know about the commune? What do you know about universal brotherhood? Everybody's everybody's brother, whether you like it or not! I'm your brother, and if it doesn't suit you you may go to the devil!"

Watching the infuriated magistrate, I said in English to Speed: "This is interesting. Buckhurst has learned we are here, and has paid this fellow heavily to have us expelled. What sense do you make of all this?—for I can make none."

"Nor can I," muttered Speed; "there's a link gone; we'll find it soon, I fancy. Without that link there's no logic in this matter."

"Look here," I said, sharply, to the mayor, who had waddled toward the door, which was guarded by Kelly Eyre.

"Well, I'm looking," he snarled.

Then I patiently pointed out to him his folly, and he listened with ill-grace, obstinate, mute, dull cunning gleaming from his half-closed eyes.

Then I asked him what he would do if the cruiser began dropping shells into Paradise; he deliberately winked at me and thrust his tongue into his cheek.

"So you know that the cruiser has gone?" I asked.

He grinned.

"Do you suppose Buckhurst's men hold the semaphore? If they do, they sent that cruiser on a fool's errand," whispered Speed.

Here was a nice plot! I stepped to the window. Outside in the square Buckhurst was still speaking to a spellbound, gaping throng. A few men cheered him. They were strangers in Paradise.

"What's he doing it for?" I asked, utterly at a loss to account for proceedings which seemed to me the acme of folly. "He must know that the commune cannot be started here in Brittany! Speed, what is that man up to?"

Behind us the mayor was angrily demanding that we leave his house; and after a while we did so, skirting the crowd once more to where, in a cleared space near the fountain, Buckhurst stood, red flag in hand, ranging a dozen peasants in line. The peasants were not Paradise men; they wore the costumes of the interior, and somebody had already armed them with scythes, rusty boarding-pikes, stable-forks, and one or two flintlock muskets. An evil-looking crew, if ever I saw one; wild-eyed, long-haired, bare of knee and ankle, loutish faces turned toward the slim, gray, pale-faced orator who confronted them, flag in hand. They were the scum of Morbihan.

He told them that they were his guard of honor, the glory of their race—a sacred battalion whose names should shine high on the imperishable battlements of freedom.

Around them the calm-eyed peasants stared at them stupidly; women gazed fascinated when Buckhurst, raising his flag, pointed in silence to the mayor's house, where that official stood in his doorway, observing the scene:

"Forward!" said Buckhurst, and the grotesque escort started with a clatter of heavy sabots and a rattle of scythes. The crowd fell back to give them way, then closed in behind like a herd of sheep, following to the mayor's house, where Buckhurst set his sentinels and then entered, closing the door behind him.

"Well!" muttered Speed, in amazement.

After a long silence, Kelly Eyre looked at his watch. "It's time we were in the tent," he observed, dryly; and we turned away without a word. At the bridge we stopped and looked back. The red flag was flying from the mayor's house.

"Speed," I said, "there's one thing certain: Byram can't stay if there's going to be fighting here. I heard guns at sea this morning; I don't know what that may indicate. And here's this idiotic revolution started in Paradise! That means the troops from Lorient, and a wretched lot of bushwhacking and guerrilla work. Those Faöuet Bretons that Buckhurst has recruited are a bad lot; there is going to be trouble, I tell you."

Eyre suggested that we arm our circus people, and Speed promised to attend to it and to post them at the tent doors, ready to resist any interference with the performance on the part of Buckhurst's recruits.

It was already nearly one o'clock as we threaded our way through the crowds at the entrance, where our band was playing gayly and thousands of white head-dresses fluttered in the sparkling sunshine that poured intermittently from a sky where great white clouds were sailing seaward.

"Walk right up, messoors! Entry done, mesdames, see voo play!" shouted Byram, waving a handful of red and blue tickets. "Animals all on view before the performance begins! Walk right into the corridor of livin' marvels and defunct curiosities! Bring the little ones to see the elephant an' the camuel—the fleet ship of the Sairy! Don't miss nothing! Don't fail to contemplate le ploo magnifique spectacle in all Europe! Don't let nobody say you died an' never saw the only Flyin' Mermaid! An' don't forget the prize—ten thousand francs to the man, woman, or che-ild who can prove that this here Flyin' Mermaid ain't a fictious bein' straight from Paradise!"

Speed and I made our way slowly through the crush to the stables, then around to the dressing-rooms, where little Grigg, in his spotted clown's costume, was putting the last touches of vermilion to his white cheeks, and Horan, draped in a mangy leopard-skin to imitate Hercules, sat on his two-thousand-pound dumbbell, curling his shiny black mustache with Mrs. Grigg's iron.

"Jacqueline's dressed," cried Miss Crystal, parting the curtain of her dressing-room, just enough to show her pretty, excited eyes and nose.

"All right; I won't be long," replied Speed, who was to act as ring-master. And he turned and looked at me as I raised the canvas flap which screened my dressing-room.

"I think," I said, "that we had better ride over to Trécourt after the show—not that there's any immediate danger—"

"There is no immediate danger," said Speed, "because she is here."

My face began to burn; I looked at him miserably. "How do you know?"

"She is there in the tent. I saw her."

He came up and held his hand on my shoulder. "I'm sorry I told you," he said.

"Why?" I asked. "She knows what I am. Is there any reason why she should not be amused? I promise you she shall be!"

"Then why do you speak so bitterly? Don't misconstrue her presence. Don't be a contemptible fool. If I have read her

face—and I have never spoken to her, as you know—I tell you, Scarlett, that young girl is going through an ordeal! Do women of that kind come to shows like this to be amused?"

"What do you mean?" I said, angrily.

"I mean that she *could* not keep away! And I tell you to be careful with your lions, to spare her any recklessness on your part, to finish as soon as you can, and get out of that cursed cage. If you don't you're a coward, and a selfish one at that!"

His words were like a blow in the face; I stared at him, too confused even for anger.

"Oh, you fool, you fool!" he said, in a low voice. "She cares for you; can't you understand?"

And he turned on his heel, leaving me speechless.

I do not remember dressing. When I came out into the passageway Byram beckoned me, and pointed at a crack in the canvas through which one could see the interior of the amphitheatre. A mellow light flooded the great tent; spots of sunshine fell on the fresh tan-bark, where long, luminous, dusty beams slanted from the ridge-pole athwart the golden gloom.

Tier on tier the wooden benches rose, packed with women in brilliant holiday dress, with men gorgeous in silver and velvet, with children decked in lace and gilt chains. The air was filled with the starched rustle of white coiffes and stiff collarettes; a low, incessant clatter of sabots sounded from gallery to arena; gusts of breathless whispering passed like capricious breezes blowing, then died out in the hush which fell as our band-master, McCadger, raised his wand and the band burst into "Dixie."

At that the great canvas flaps over the stable entrance slowly parted and the scarlet-draped head of Djebe, the elephant, appeared. On he came, amid a rising roar of approval, Speed in gorgeous robes perched on high, ankus raised. After him came the camel, all over tassels and gold net, bestridden by Kelly Eyre, wearing a costume seldom seen anywhere, and never in the Sahara. White horses, piebald horses, and cream-colored horses pranced in the camel's wake, dragging assorted chariots tenanted by gentlemen in togas; pretty little Mrs. Grigg, in habit and scarlet jacket, followed on Briza, the white mare; Horan came next, driving more horses; the dens of ferocious beasts creaked after, guarded by a phalanx of stalwart stablemen in plumes and armor; then Miss Crystal, driving zebras to a gilt chariot; then more men in togas, leading monkeys mounted on ponies; and finally Mrs. Horan seated on a huge egg drawn by ostriches.

Once only they circled the sawdust ring; then the band stopped, the last of the procession disappeared, the clown came shrieking and tumbling out into the arena with his "Here we are again!"

And the show was on.

I stood in the shadow of the stable-tent, dressed in my frock-coat, white stock, white cords, and hunting-boots, sullen, imbittered, red with a false shame that better men than I have weakened under, almost desperate in my humiliation, almost ready to end it all there among those tawny, restless brutes pacing behind the bars at my elbow, watching me stealthily with luminous eyes.

She knew what I was—but that she could come to see with her own eyes I could not understand, I could not forgive. Speed's senseless words rang in my ears—"She cares for you!" But I knew they were meaningless, I knew she could not care for me. What fools' paradise would he have me enter? What did he know of this woman whom I knew and understood—whom I honored for her tenderness and pity to all who suffered—who I knew counted me as one among a multitude of unhappy failures whom her kindness and sympathy might aid.

Because she had, in her gracious ignorance, given me a young girl's impulsive friendship, was I to mistake her? What could Speed know of her—of her creed, her ideals, her calm, passionless desire to help where help was needed—anywhere—in the palace, in the faubourgs, in the wretched chaumières, in the slums? It was all one to her—to this young girl whose tender heart, bruised by her own sad life, opened to all on whom the evil days had dawned.

And yet she had come here—and that was cruel; and she was not cruel. Could she know that I had a shred of pride left—one little, ragged thread of pride left in me—that she should come to see me do my mountebank tricks to the applause of a greasy throng?

No, she had not thought of that, else she would have stayed away; for she was kind, above all else—generous and kind.

Speed passed me in ring-master's dress; there came the hollow thud of hoofs as Mrs. Grigg galloped into the ring on her white mare, gauze skirts fluttering, whip raised; and, "Hoop-la!" squealed the clown as his pretty little wife went

careering around and around the tan-bark, leaping through paper-hoops, over hurdles, while the band played frantically and the Bretons shouted in an ecstasy of excitement.

Then Grigg mounted his little trick donkey; roars of laughter greeted his discomfiture when Tim, the donkey, pitched him headlong and cantered off with a hee-haw of triumph.

Miss Delany tripped past me in her sky-blue tights to hold the audience spellbound with her jugglery, and spin plates and throw glittering knives until the satiated people turned to welcome Horan and his "cogged" dumbbells and clubs.

"Have you seen her?" whispered Speed, coming up to me, long whip trailing.

I shook my head.

He looked at me in disgust. "Here's something for you," he said, shortly, and thrust an envelope into my hand.

In the envelope was a little card on which was written: "I ask you to be careful, for a friend's sake." On the other side of the card was engraved her name.

I raised my head and looked at Speed, who began to laugh nervously. "That's better," he said; "you don't look like a surly brute any more."

"Where is she?" I said, steadying my voice, which my leaping heart almost stifled.

He drew me by the elbow and looked toward the right of the amphitheatre. Following the direction of his eyes, I saw her leaning forward, pale-faced, grave, small, gloved hands interlocked. Beside her sat Sylvia Elven, apparently amused at the antics of the clown.

Shame filled me. Not the false shame I had felt—that vanished—but shame that I could have misunderstood the presence of this brave friend of mine, this brave, generous, tender-hearted girl, who had given me her friendship, who was true enough to care what might happen to me—and brave enough to say so.

"I will be careful," I said to Speed, in a low voice. "If it were not for Byram I would not go on to-day—but that is a matter of honor. Oh, Speed," I broke out, "is she not worth dying for?"

"Why not live for her?" he observed, dryly.

"I will—don't misunderstand me—I know she could never even think of me—as I do—of her—yes, as I dare to, Speed. I dare to love her with all this wretched heart and soul of mine! It's all right—I think I am crazy to talk like this—but you are kind, Speed—you will forget what I said—you have forgotten it already—bless your heart—"

"No, I haven't," he retorted, obstinately. "You must win her—you must! Shame on you for a coward if you do not speak that word which means life to you both!"

"Speed!" I began, angrily.

"Oh, go to the devil!" he snapped, and walked off to where Jacqueline stood glittering, her slim limbs striking fire from every silver scale.

"All ready, little sweetheart!" he cried, reassuringly, as she raised her blue eyes to his and shook her elf-locks around her flushed face. "It's our turn now; they're uncovering the tank, and Miss Crystal is on her trapeze. Are you nervous?"

"Not when you are by me," said Jacqueline.

"I'll be there," he said, smiling. "You will see me when you are ready. Look! There's the governor! It's your call! Quick, my child!"

"Good-bye," said Jacqueline, catching his hand in both of hers, and she was off and in the middle of the ring before I could get to a place of vantage to watch.

Up into the rigging she swung, higher, higher, hanging like a brilliant fly in all that net-work of wire and rope, turning, twisting, climbing, dropping to her knees, until the people's cheers rose to a sustained shriek.

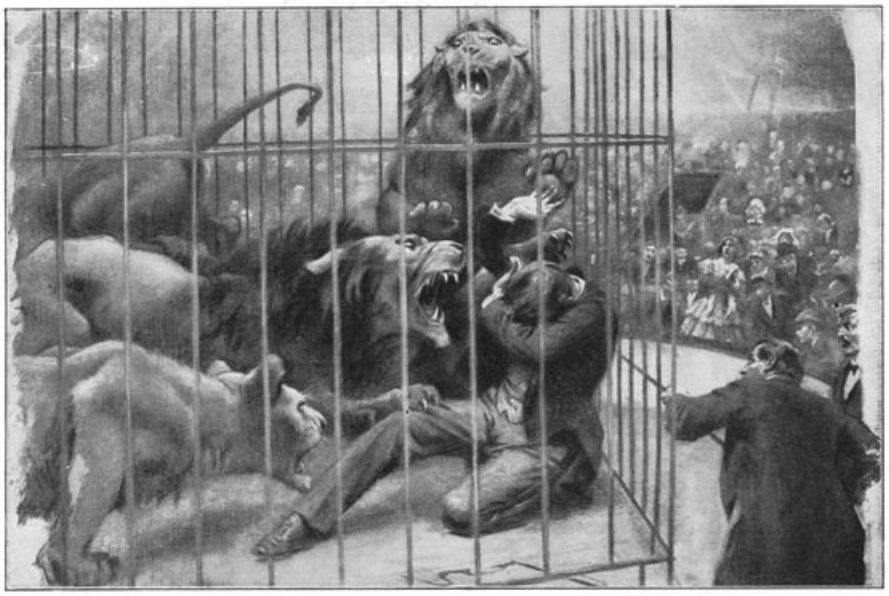
"Ready!" quavered Miss Crystal, hanging from her own trapeze across the gulf.

It was the first signal. Jacqueline set her trapeze swinging and hung by her knees, face downward.

"Ready!" called Miss Crystal again, as Jacqueline's trapeze swung higher and higher.

“Ready!” said Jacqueline, calmly.

“Go!”



“I WAS ON MY KNEES”

Like a meteor the child flashed across the space between the two trapezes; Miss Crystal caught her by her ankles.

“Ready?” called Speed, from the ground below. He had turned quite pale. I saw Jacqueline, hanging head down, smile at him from her dizzy height.

“Ready,” she said, calmly.

“Go!”

Down, down, like a falling star, flashed Jacqueline into the shallow pool, then shot to the surface, shimmering like a leaping mullet, where she played and dived and darted, while the people screamed themselves hoarse, and Speed came out, ghastly and trembling, colliding with me like a blind man.

“I wish I had never let her do it; I wish I had never brought her here—never seen her,” he stammered. “She’ll miss it some day—like Miss Claridge—and it will be murder—and I’ll have done it! Anybody but that child, Scarlett, anybody else—but I can’t bear to have her die that way—the pretty little thing!”

He let go of my arm and stood back as my lion-cages came rolling out, drawn by four horses.

“It’s your turn,” he said, in a dazed way. “Look out for that lioness.”

As I walked out into the arena I saw only one face. She tried to smile, and so did I; but a terrible, helpless sensation was already creeping over me—the knowledge that I was causing her distress—the knowledge that I was no longer sure of myself—that, with my love for her, my authority over these caged things had gone, never to return. I knew it, I recognized it, and admitted it now. Speed’s words rang true—horribly true.

I entered the cage, afraid.

Almost instantly I was the centre of a snarling mass of lions; I saw nothing; my whip rose and fell mechanically. I stood like one stunned, while the tawny forms leaped right and left.

Suddenly I heard a keeper say, “Look out for Empress Khatoun, sir!” And a moment later a cry, “Look out, sir!”

Something went wrong with another lion, too, for the people were standing up and shouting, and the sleeve of my coat hung from the elbow, showing my bare shoulder. I staggered up against the bars of the sliding door as a lioness struck me heavily and I returned the blow. I remember saying, aloud: “I must keep my feet; I must not fall!” Then daylight grew red, and I was on my knees, with the foul breath of a lion in my face. A hot iron bar shot across the cage. The roaring of beasts and people died out in my ears; then, with a shock, my soul seemed to be dashed out of me into a terrific darkness.

PART THIRD

XVIII

A GUEST-CHAMBER

A light was shining in my eyes and I was talking excitedly; that and the odor of brandy I remember—and something else, a steady roaring in my ears; then darkness, out of which came a voice, empty, meaningless, finally soundless.

After a while I realized that I was in pain; that, at intervals, somebody forced morsels of ice between my lips; that the darkness around me had turned grayer.

Time played tricks on me; centuries passed steadily, year following year—long years they were, too, with endless spring-tides, summers, autumns, winters, each with full complement of months, and every month crowded with days. Space, illimitable space, surrounded me—skyless, starless space. And through its terrific silence I heard a clock ticking seconds of time.

Years and years later a yellow star rose and stood still before my open eyes; and after a long while I saw it was the flame of a candle: and somebody spoke my name.

"I know you, Speed," I said, drowsily.

"You are all right, Scarlett?"

"Yes,... all right."

"Does the candle-light pain you?"

"No;... do they contract?"

"A little.... Yes, I am sure the pupils of your eyes are contracting. Don't talk."

"No;... then it was concussion of the brain?"

"Yes;... the shock is passing.... Don't talk."

Time moved on again; space slowly contracted into a symmetrical shape, set with little points of light; sleep and fatigue alternated with glimmers of reason, which finally grew into a faint but steady intelligence. And, very delicately, memory stirred in a slumbering brain.

Reason and memory were mine again, frail toys for a stricken man, so frail I dared not, for a time, use them for my amusement—and one of them was broken, too—memory!—broken short at the moment when full in my face I had felt the hot, fetid breath of a lion.

"Speed!"

"Yes; I am here."

"What time is it?"

I heard the click of his hunting-case. "Eleven o'clock."

"What day?"

"Saturday."

"When—" I hesitated. I was afraid.

"Well?" he asked, quietly.

"When was I hurt? Many days ago—many weeks?"

"You were hurt at half-past three this afternoon."

I tried to comprehend; I could not, and after a while I gave up my feeble grasp on time.

"What is that roaring sound?" I asked. "Not drums? Not my lions?"

"It is the sea."

“So near?”

“Very near.”

I turned my head on the white pillow. “Where is this bed? Where is this room?”

“Shall I tell you?”

I was silent, struggling with memory.

“Tell me,” I said. “Whose bed is this?”

“It is hers.”

The candle-flame glimmered before my wide-open eyes once more, and—

“Oh, you are all right,” he muttered, then leaned heavily against the bedside, dropping his arms on the coverlet.

“It was a close call—a close call!” he said, hoarsely. “We thought it was ended.... They were all over you—Empress dragged you; but they all crowded in too close—they blocked each other, you see;... and we used the irons.... Your left arm lay close to the cage door and ... we got you away from them, and ... it’s all right now—it’s all right—”

He broke down, head buried in his arms. I moved my left hand across the sheets so that it rested on his elbow. He lay there, gulping for a while; I could not see him very clearly, for the muscles that controlled my eyes were still slightly paralyzed from the shock of the blow that Empress Khatoun had dealt me.

“It’s all very well,” he stammered, with a trace of resentment in his quavering voice—“it’s all very well for people who are used to the filthy beasts; but I tell you, Scarlett, it sickened me. I’m no coward, as men go, but I was afraid—I was terrified!”

“Yet you dragged me out,” I said.

“Who told you that? How could you know—”

“It was not necessary to tell me. You said, ‘*We* got you away’; but I know it was you, Speed, because it was like you. Look at me! Am I well enough to dress?”

He raised a haggard face to mine. “You know best,” he said. “They tore your coat off, and one of them ripped your riding-boot from top to sole; but the blow Empress struck you is your only hurt, and she all but missed you at that. Had she hit you fairly—but, oh, hell! Do you want to get up?”

I said I would in a moment,... and that is all I remember that night, all I remember clearly, though it seems to me that once I heard drums beating in the distance; and perhaps I did.

Dawn was breaking when I awoke. Speed, partly dressed, lay beside me, sleeping heavily. I looked around at the pretty boudoir where I lay, at the silken curtains of the bed, at the clouds of cupids on the painted ceiling, flying through a haze of vermilion flecked with gold.

Raising one hand, I touched with tentative fingers my tightly bandaged head, then turned over on my side.

There were my torn clothes, filthy and smeared with sawdust, flung over a delicate, gilded chair; there sprawled my battered boots, soiling the polished, inlaid floor; a candle lay in a pool of hardened wax on a golden rococo table, and I saw where the smouldering wick had blistered the glazed top. And this was her room! Vandalism unspeakable! I turned on my snoring comrade.

“Idiot, get up!” I cried, hitting him feebly.

He was very angry when he found out why I had awakened him; perhaps the sight of my bandaged head restrained him from violence.

“Look here,” he said, “I’ve been up all night, and you might as well know it. If you hit me again—” He hesitated, stared around, yawned, and rubbed his eyes.

“You’re right,” he said, “I must get up.”

He stumbled to the floor, bathed, grumbling all the while, and then, to my surprise, walked over to a flat trunk which stood under the window and which I recognized as mine.

“I’ll borrow some underwear,” he remarked, viciously.

“What’s my trunk doing here?” I demanded.

“Madame de Vassart had them bring it.”

“Had *who* bring it?”

“Horan and McCadger—before they left.”

“Before they left? Have they gone?”

“I forgot,” he said, soberly; “you don’t know what’s been going on.”

He began to dress, raising his head now and then to gaze out across the ocean towards Groix, where the cruiser once lay at anchor.

“Of course you don’t know that the circus has gone,” he remarked.

“Gone!” I echoed, astonished.

“Gone to Lorient.”

He came and sat down on the edge of the gilded bedstead, buttoning his collar thoughtfully.

“Buckhurst is in town again with a raft of picturesque ruffians,” he said. “They marched in last night, drums beating, colors unfurled—the red rag, you know—and the first thing they did was to order Byram to decamp.”

He began to tie his cravat, with a meditative glance at the gilded mirror.

“I was here with you. Kelly Eyre came for me—Madame de Vassart took my place to watch you—”

A sudden heart-beat choked me.

“—So I,” he continued, “posted off to the tent, to find a rabble of communist soldiers stealing my balloon-car, ropes, bag, and all. I tell you I did what I could, but they said the balloon was contraband of war, and a military necessity; and they took it, the thieving whelps! Then I saw how matters were going to end, and I told the governor that he’d better go to Lorient as fast as he could travel before they stole the buttons off his shirt.

“Scarlett, it was a weird sight. I never saw tents struck so quickly. Kelly Eyre, Horan, and I harnessed up; Grigg stood guard over the props with a horse-pistol. The ladies worked like Trojans, loading the wagons; Byram raged up and down under the bayonets of those bandits, cursing them as only a man who never swears can curse, invoking the Stars and Stripes, metaphorically placing himself, his company, his money-box, and his camuel under the shadow of the broad eagle of the United States.

“Oh, those were gay times, Scarlett. And we frightened them, too, because nobody attempted to touch anything.”

Speed laughed grimly, and began to pace the floor, casting sharp glances at me.

“Byram’s people, elephant and all, struck the road a little after three o’clock this morning, in good order, not a tent-peg nor a frying-pan missing. They ought to be in Lorient by early afternoon.”

“Gone!” I repeated, blankly.

“Gone. Curious how it hurt me to say good-bye. They’re good people—good, kindly folk. I’ve grown to care for them in these few months ... I may go back to them ... some day ... if they want a balloonist ... or any kind of a thing.”

“You stayed to take care of me?” I said.

“Partly.... You need care, especially when you don’t need it.” He began to laugh. “It’s only when you’re well that I worry.”

I lay looking at him, striving to realize the change that had occurred in so brief a time—trying to understand the abrupt severing of ties and conditions to which, already, I had become accustomed—perhaps attached.

“They all sent their love to you,” he said. “They knew you were out of danger—I told them there was no fracture, only a slight concussion. Byram came to look at you; he brought your back salary—all of it. I’ve got it.”

“Byram came here?”

“Yes. He stood over there beside you, snivelling into his red bandanna. And Miss Crystal and Jacqueline stood here.... Jacqueline kissed you.”

After a moment I said: “Has Jacqueline gone with them?”

“Yes.”

There was another pause, longer this time.

“Of course,” I said, “Byram knows that my usefulness as a lion-tamer is at an end.”

“Of course,” said Speed, simply.

I sighed.

“He wants you for the horses,” added Speed. “But you can do better than that.”

“I don’t know,... perhaps.”

“Besides, they sail to-day from Lorient. The governor made money yesterday—enough to start again. Poor Byram! He’s frantic to get back to America; and, oh, Scarlett, how that good old man can swear!”

“Help me to sit up in bed,” I said; “there—that’s it! Just wedge those pillows behind my shoulders.”

“All right?”

“Of course. I’m going to dress. Speed, did you say that little Jacqueline went with Byram?”

He looked at me miserably.

“Yes,” he said.

I was silent.

“Yes,” he repeated, “she went, lugging her pet cat in her arms. She would go; the life has fascinated her. I begged her not to—I felt I was disloyal to Byram, too, but what could I do? I tell you, Scarlett, I wish I had never seen her, never persuaded her to try that foolish dive. She’ll miss some day—like the other one.”

“It’s my fault more than yours,” I said. “Couldn’t you persuade her to give it up?”

“I offered to educate her, to send her to school, to work for her,” he said. “She only looked at me out of those sea-blue eyes—you know how the little witch can look you through and through—and then—and then she walked away into the torch-glare, clasping her cat to her breast, and I saw her strike a fool of a soldier who pretended to stop her! Scarlett, she was a strange child—proud and dainty, too, with all her rags—you remember—a strange, sweet child—almost a woman, at times, and—I thought her loyal—”

He walked to the window and stared moodily at the sea.

“Meanwhile,” I said, quietly, “I am going to get up.”

He gave me a look which I interpreted as, “Get up and be damned!” I complied—in part.

“Oh, help me into these things, will you?” I said, at length; and instantly he was at my side, gentle and patient, lacing my shoes, because it made my head ache to bend over, buttoning collar and cravat, and slipping my coat on while I leaned against the tumbled bed.

“Well!” I said, with a grimace, and stood up, shakily.

“Well,” he echoed, “here we are again, as poor little Grigg says.”

“With our salaries in our pockets and our possessions on our backs.”

“And no prospects,” he added, gayly.

“Not a blessed one, unless we count a prospect of trouble with Buckhurst.”

“He won’t trouble us unless we interfere with him,” observed Speed, drumming nervously on the window.

“But I’m going to,” I said, surprised.

“Going to interfere?” he asked, wheeling to scowl at me.

“Certainly.”

“Why? We’re not in government employ. What do we care about this row? If these Frenchmen are tired of battering the Germans they’ll batter each other, and we can’t help it, can we?”

“We can help Buckhurst’s annoying Madame de Vassart.”

“Only by getting her to leave the country,” said Speed. “She will understand that, too.” He paused, rubbing his nose reflectively. “Scarlett, what do you suppose Buckhurst is up to?”

“I haven’t an idea,” I replied. “All I know is that, in all probability, he came here to attempt to rob the treasure-trains—and that was your theory, too, you remember?”

And I continued, reminding Speed that Buckhurst had collected his ruffianly franc company in the forest; that the day the cruiser sailed he had appeared in Paradise to proclaim the commune; that doubtless he had signalled, from the semaphore, orders for the cruiser’s departure; that a few hours later his red battalion had marched into Paradise.

“Yes, that’s all logical,” said Speed, “but how could Buckhurst know the secret-code signals which the cruiser must have received before she sailed? To hoist them on the semaphore, he must have had a code-book.”

I thought a moment. “Suppose Mornac is with him?”

Speed fairly jumped. “That’s it! That’s the link we were hunting for! It’s Mornac—it must be Mornac! He is the only man; he had access to everything. And now that his Emperor is a prisoner and his Empress a fugitive, the miserable hound has nothing to lose by the anarchy he once hoped to profit by. Tell me, Scarlett, does the tail wag the dog, after all? And which is the dog, Buckhurst or Mornac?”

“I once thought it was Buckhurst,” I said.

“So did I, but—I don’t know now. I don’t know what to do, either. I don’t know anything!”

I began to walk about the room, carefully, for my knees were weak, though I had no headache.

“It’s a shame for a pair of hulking brutes like you and me to desecrate this bedroom,” I muttered. “Mud on the floor—look at it! Sawdust and candle-wax over everything! What’s that—all that on the lounge? Has a dog or a cat been rolling over it? It’s plastered with tan-colored hairs!”

“Lion’s hairs from your coat,” he observed, grimly.

I looked at them for a moment rather soberly. They glistened like gold in the early sunshine.

Speed opened his mouth to say something, but closed it abruptly as a very faint tapping sounded on our door.

I opened it; Sylvia Elven stood in the hallway.

“Oh,” she said, in ungracious astonishment, “then you are not on the grave’s awful verge,... are you?”

“I hope you didn’t expect to discover me there?” I replied, laughing.

“Expect it? Indeed I did, monsieur,... or I shouldn’t be here at sunrise, scratching at your door for news of you. This,” she said, petulantly, “is enough to vex any saint!”

“Any other saint,” I corrected, gravely. “I admit it, mademoiselle, I am a nuisance; so is my comrade. We have only to express our deep gratitude and go.”

“Go? Do you think we will let you go, with all those bandits roaming the moors outside our windows? And you call that gratitude?”

“Does Madame de Vassart desire us to stay?” I asked, trying not to speak too eagerly.

Sylvia Elven gave me a scornful glance.

“Must we implore you, monsieur, to protect us? We will, if you wish it. I know I’m ill-humored, but it’s scarcely daybreak, and we’ve sat up all night on your account—Madame de Vassart would not allow me to go to bed—and if I am brusque with you, remember I was obliged to sleep in a chair—and I hope you feel that you have put me to very great inconvenience.”

“I feel that way ... about Madame de Vassart,” I said, laughing at the pretty, pouting mouth and sleepy eyes of this

amusingly exasperated young girl, who resembled a rumpled Dresden shepherdess more than anything else. I added that we would be glad to stay until the communist free-rifles took themselves off. For which she thanked me with an exaggerated courtesy and retired, furiously conscious that she had not only slept in her clothes, but that she looked it.

"That was Madame de Vassart's companion, wasn't it?" asked Speed.

"Yes, Sylvia Elven ... I don't know what she is—I know what she was—no, I don't, either. I only know what Jarras says she was."

Speed raised his eyebrows. "And what was that?"

"Actress, at the Odéon."

"Never heard of her being at the Odéon," he said.

"You heard of her as one of that group at La Trappe?"

"Yes."

"Well, when I was looking for Buckhurst in Morsbronn, Jarras telegraphed me descriptions of the people I was to arrest at La Trappe, and he mentioned her as Mademoiselle Sylvia Elven, lately of the Odéon."

"That was a mistake," said Speed. "What he meant to say was that she was lately a resident of the Odeonsplatz. He knew that. It must have been a telegraphic error."

"How do you know?" I asked, surprised.

"Because I furnished Jarras with the data. It's in her dossier."

"Odeon—Odeonsplatz," I muttered, trying to understand. "What is the Odeonsplatz? A square in some German city, isn't it?"

"It's a square in the capital of Bavaria—Munich."

"But—but she isn't a German, is she? *Is she*?" I repeated, staring at Speed, who was looking keenly at me, with eyes partly closed.

There was a long silence.

"Well, upon my soul!" I said, slowly, emphasizing every word with a noiseless blow on the table.

"Didn't you know it? Wait! Hold on," he said, "let's go slowly—let's go very slowly. She is partly German by birth. That proves nothing. Granted that Jarras suspected her, not as a social agitator, but as a German agent. Granted he did not tell you what he suspected, but merely ordered her arrest with the others—perhaps under cover of Buckhurst's arrest—you know what a secret man, the Emperor was—how, if he wanted a man, he'd never chase him, but run in the opposite direction and head him off half-way around the world. So, granted all this, I say, what's to prove Jarras was right?"

"Does her dossier prove it? You have read it."

"Well, her dossier was rather incomplete. We knew that she went about a good deal in Paris—went to the Tuileries, too. She was married once. Didn't you know even *that*?"

"Married!" I exclaimed.

"To a Russian brute—I've forgotten his name, but I've seen him—one of the kind with high cheek-bones and black eyes. She got her divorce in England; that's on record, and we have it in her dossier. Then, going back still further, we know that her father was a Bavarian, a petty noble of some sort—baron, I believe. Her mother's name was Elven, a Breton peasant; it was a mésalliance—trouble of all sorts—I forget, but I believe her uncle brought her up. Her uncle was military attaché of the German embassy to Paris.... You see how she slipped into society—and you know what society under the Empire was."

"Speed," I said, "why on earth didn't you tell me all this before?"

"My dear fellow, I supposed Jarras had told you; or that, if you didn't know it, it did not concern us at all."

"But it does concern—a person I know," I said, quickly, thinking of poor Kelly Eyre. "And it explains a lot of things—or, rather, places them under a new light."

“What light?”

“Well, for one thing, she has consistently lied to me. For another, I believe her to be hand-in-glove with Karl Marx and the French leaders—not Buckhurst, but the real leaders of the social revolt; *not as a genuine disciple, but as a German agent*, with orders to foment disorder of any kind which might tend to embarrass and weaken the French government in this crisis.”

“You’re inclined to believe that?” he asked, much interested.

“Yes, I am. France is full of German agents; the Tuileries was not exempt—you know it as well as I. Paris swarmed with spies of every kind, high and low in the social scale. The embassies were nests of spies; every salon a breeding spot of intrigue; the foreign governments employed the grande dame as well as the grisette. Do you remember the military-balloon scandal?”

“Indistinctly.... Some poor devil gave a woman government papers.”

“Technically they were government papers, but he considered them his own. Well, the woman who received those papers is down-stairs.”

He gave a short whistle of astonishment.

“You are sure, Scarlett?”

“Perfectly certain.”

“Then, if you are certain, that settles the question of Mademoiselle Elven’s present occupation.”

I rose and began to move around the room restlessly.

“But, after all,” I said, “that concerns us no longer.”

“How can it concern two Americans out of a job?” he observed, with a shrug. “The whole fabric of French politics is rotten to the foundation. It’s tottering; a shake will bring it down. Let it tumble. I tell you this nation needs the purification of fire. Our own country has just gone through it; France can do it, too. She’s got to, or she’s lost!”

He looked at me earnestly. “I love the country,” he said; “it’s fed me and harbored me. But I wouldn’t lift a finger to put a single patch on this makeshift of a government; I wouldn’t stave off the crash if I could. And it’s coming! You and I have seen something of the rottenness of the underpinning which props up empires. You and I, Scarlett, have learned a few of the shameful secrets which even an enemy to France would not drag out into the daylight.”

I had never seen him so deeply moved.

“Is there hope—is there a glimmer of hope to incite anybody while these conditions endure?” he continued, bitterly.

“No. France must suffer, France must stand alone in terrible humiliation, France must offer the self-sacrifice of fire and mount the altar herself!

“Then, and only then, shall the nation, purified, reborn, rise and live, and build again, setting a beacon of civilized freedom high as the beacon we Americans are raising,... slowly yet surely raising, to the glory of God, Scarlett—to the glory of God. No other dedication can be justified in this world.”

XIX

TRÉCOURT GARDEN

About nine o'clock we were summoned by a Breton maid to the pretty breakfast-room below, and I was ashamed to go with my shabby clothes, bandaged head, and face the color of clay.

The young countess was not present; Sylvia Elven offered us a supercilious welcome to a breakfast the counterpart of which I had not seen in years—one of those American breakfasts which even we, since the Paris Exposition, are beginning to discard for the simpler French breakfast of coffee and rolls.

"This is all in your honor," observed Sylvia, turning up her nose at the array of poached eggs, fragrant sausages, crisp potatoes, piles of buttered toast, muffins, marmalade, and fruit.

"It was very kind of you to think of it," said Speed.

"It is Madame de Vassart's idea, not mine," she observed, looking across the table at me. "Will the gentleman with nine lives have coffee or chocolate?"

The fruit consisted of grapes and those winy Breton cider-apples from Bannalec. We began with these in decorous silence.

Speed ventured a few comments on the cultivation of fruit, of which he knew nothing; neither he nor his subject was encouraged.

Presently, however, Sylvia glanced up at him with a malicious smile, saying: "I notice that you have been in the foreign division of the Imperial Military Police, monsieur."

"Why do you think so?" asked Speed, calmly.

"When you seated yourself in your chair," said Sylvia, "you made a gesture with your left hand as though to unhook the sabre—which was not there."

Speed laughed. "But why the police? I might have been in the cavalry, mademoiselle; for that matter, I might have been an officer in any arm of the service. They all carry swords or sabres."

"But only the military police and the gendarmerie wear aiguilettes," she replied. "When you bend over your plate your fingers are ever unconsciously searching for those swinging, gold-tipped cords—to keep them out of your coffee-cup, monsieur."

The muscles in Speed's lean, bronzed cheeks tightened; he looked at her keenly.

"Might I not have been in the gendarmerie?" he asked. "How do you know I was not?"

"Does the gendarmerie wear the sabre-tache?"

"No, mademoiselle, but—"

"Do the military police?"

"No—that is, the foreign division did, when it existed."

"You are sitting, monsieur," she said, placidly, "with your left foot so far under the table that it quite inadvertently presses my shoe-tip."

Speed withdrew his leg with a jerk, asking pardon.

"It is a habit perfectly pardonable in a man who is careful that his spur shall not scratch or tear a patent-leather sabre-tache," she said.

I had absolutely nothing to say; we both laughed feebly, I believe.

I saw temptation struggling with Speed's caution; I, too, was almost willing to drop a hint that might change her amusement to speculation, if not to alarm.

So this was the woman for whose caprice Kelly Eyre had wrecked his prospects! Clever—oh, certainly clever. But she had made the inevitable slip that such clever people always make sooner or later. And in a bantering message to her victim she had completed the chain against herself—a chain of which I might have been left in absolute ignorance. Impulse probably did it—reasonless and perhaps malicious caprice—the instinct of a pretty woman to stir up memory in a discarded and long-forgotten victim—just to note the effect—just to see if there still remains one nerve, one pulse-beat to respond.

"Will the pensive gentleman with nine lives have a little more nourishment to sustain him?" she asked.

Looking up from my empty plate, I declined politely; and we followed her signal to rise.

"There is a Mr. Kelly Eyre," she said to Speed, "connected with your circus. Has he gone with the others?"

"Yes, mademoiselle."

"Really?" she mused, amiably. "I knew him as a student in Paris, when he was very young—and I was younger. I should have liked to have seen him—once more."

"Did you not see him?" I asked, abruptly.

Her back was toward me; very deliberately she turned her pretty head and looked at me over her shoulder, studying my face a moment.

"Yes, I saw him. I should have liked to have seen him—once more," she said, as though she had first calculated the effect on me of a different reply.

She led the way into that small room overlooking the garden where I had been twice received by Madame de Vassart. Here she took leave of us, abandoning us to our own designs. Mine was to find a large arm-chair and sit down in it, and give Speed a few instructions. Speed's was to prowl around Paradise for information, and, if possible, telegraph to Lorient for troops to catch Buckhurst red-handed.

He left me turning over the leaves of the "Chanson de Roland," saying that he would return in a little while with any news he might pick up, and that he would do his best to catch Buckhurst in the foolish trap which that gentleman had set for others.

Tiring of the poem, I turned my eyes toward the garden, where, in the sunshine, heaps of crisped leaves lay drifted along the base of the wall or scattered between the rows of herbs which were still ripely green. The apricots had lost their leaves, so had the grapevines and the fig-trees; but the peach-trees were in foliage; pansies and perpetual roses bloomed amid sere and seedy thickets of larkspurs, phlox, and dead delphinium.

On the wall a cat sat, sunning her sleek flanks. Something about the animal seemed familiar to me, and after a while I made up my mind that this was Ange Pitou, Jacqueline's pet, abandoned by her mistress and now a feline derelict. Speed must have been mistaken when he told me that Jacqueline had taken her cat; or possibly the home-haunting instinct had brought the creature back, abandoning her mistress to her fortunes.

If I had been in my own house I should have offered Ange Pitou hospitality; as it was, I walked out into the sunny garden and made courteous advances which were ignored. I watched the cat for a few moments, then sat down on the bench. The inertia which follows recovery from a shock, however light, left me with the lazy acquiescence of a convalescent, willing to let the world drift for an hour or two, contented to relax, apathetic, comfortable.

Seaward the gulls sailed like white feathers floating; the rocky ramparts of Groix rose clear-cut against a horizon where no haze curtained the sea; the breakers had receded from the coast on a heavy ebb-tide, and I saw them in frothy outline, noiselessly churning the shallows beyond the outer bar.

And then my reverie ended abruptly; a step on the gravel walk brought me to my feet.... There she stood, lovely in a fresh morning-gown deeply belted with turquoise-shells, her ruddy hair glistening, coiled low on a neck of snow.

For the first time she showed embarrassment in her greeting, scarcely touching my hand, speaking with a new constraint in a voice which grew colder as she hesitated.

"We were frightened; we are so glad that you were not badly hurt. I thought you might find it comfortable here—of course I could not know that you were not seriously injured."

"That is fortunate for me," I said, pleasantly, "for I am afraid you would not have offered this shelter if you had known

how little injured I really was."

"Yes, I should have offered it—had I reason to believe you would have accepted. I have felt that perhaps you might think what I have done was unwarranted."

"I think you did the most graciously unselfish thing a woman could do," I said, quickly. "You offered your best; and the man who took it cannot—dare not—express his gratitude."

The emotion in my voice warned me to cease; the faintest color tinted her cheeks, and she looked at me with beautiful, grave eyes that slowly grew inscrutable, leaving me standing diffident and silent before her.

The breeze shifted, bringing with it the hollow sea-thunder. She turned her head and glanced out across the ocean, hands behind her, fingers linked.

"I have come here into your garden uninvited," I said.

"Shall we sit here—a moment?" she suggested, without turning.

Presently she seated herself in one corner of the bench; her gaze wandered over the partly blighted garden, then once more centred on the seaward skyline.

The color of her hands, her neck, fascinated me. That flesh texture of snow and roses, firmly and delicately modelled, which sometimes is seen with red hair, I had seen once before in a picture by a Spanish master, but never, until now, in real life.

And she was life incarnate in her wholesome beauty—a beauty of which I had perceived only the sad shadow at La Trappe—a sweet, healthy, exquisite woman, moulded, fashioned, colored by a greater Master than the Spanish painter dreaming of perfection centuries ago.

In the sun a fragrance grew—the subtle incense from her gown—perhaps from her hair.

"Autumn is already gone; we are close to winter," she said, under her breath. "See, there is nothing left—scarcely a blossom—a rose or two; but the first frost will scatter the petals. Look at the pinks; look at the dead leaves. Ah, tristesse, tristesse! The life of summer is too short; the life of flowers is too short; so are our lives, Monsieur Scarlett. Do you believe it?"

"Yes—now."

She was very still for a while, her head bent toward the sea. Then, without turning: "Have you not always believed it?"

"No, madame."

"Then ... why do you believe it ... now?"

"Because, since we have become friends, life seems pitiably short for such a friendship."

She smiled without moving.

"That is a ... very beautiful ... compliment, monsieur."

"It owes its beauty to its truth, madame."

"And that reply is illogical," she said, turning to look at me with brilliant eyes and a gay smile which emphasized the sensitive mouth's faint droop. "Illogical, because truth is not always beautiful. As example: you were very near to death yesterday. That is the truth, but it is not beautiful at all."

"Ah, madame, it is you who are illogical," I said, laughing.

"I?" she cried. "Prove it!"

But I would not, spite of her challenge and bright mockery.

In that flash all of our comradeship returned, bringing with it something new, which I dared not think was intimacy.

Yet constraint fell away like a curtain between us, and though she dominated, and I was afraid lest I overstep limits which I myself had set, the charm of her careless confidence, her pretty, undissembled caprices, her pleasure in a delicately intimate badinage, gave me something of a self-reliance, a freedom that I had not known in a woman's presence for many years.

“We brought you here because we thought it was good for you,” she said, reverting maliciously to the theme that had at first embarrassed her. “We were perfectly certain that you have always been unfit to take care of yourself. Now we have the proofs.”

“Mademoiselle Elven said that you harbored us only because you were afraid of those bandits who have arrived in Paradise,” I observed.

“Afraid!” she said, scornfully. “Oh, you are making fun of me now. Indeed, when Mr. Buckhurst came last night I had my men conduct him to the outer gate!”

“Did he come last night?” I asked, troubled.

“Yes.” She shrugged her pretty shoulders.

“Alone?”

“That unspeakable creature, Mornac, was with him. I had no idea he was here; had you?”

I was silent. Did Mornac mean trouble for me? Yet how could he, shorn now of all authority?

The thought seemed to occur to her, too, and she looked up quickly, asking if I had anything to fear.

“Only for you,” I said.

“For me? Why? I am not afraid of such men. I have servants on whom I can call to disembarrass me of such people.” She hesitated; the memory of her deception, of what she had suffered at Buckhurst’s hands, brought a glint of anger into her beautiful eyes.

“My innocence shames me,” she said. “I merited what I received in such company. It was you who saved me from myself.”

“A noble mind thinks nobly,” I said. “Theirs is the shame, not yours, that you could not understand treachery—that you never can understand it. As for me, I was an accident, which warned you in time that all the world was not as good and true as you desired to believe it.”

She sat looking at me curiously. “I wonder,” she said, “why it is that you do not know your own value?”

“My value—to whom?”

“To ... everybody—to the world—to people.”

“Am I of any value to you, madame?”

The pulsing moments passed and she did not answer, and I bit my lip and waited. At last she said, coolly: “A man must appraise himself. If he chooses, he is valuable. But values are comparative, and depend on individual taste.... Yes, you are of some value to me,... or I should not be here with you,... or I should not find it my pleasure to be here—or I should not trust you, come to you with my petty troubles, ask your experience to help me, perhaps protect me.”

She bent her head with adorable diffidence. “Monsieur Scarlett, I have never before had a friend who thought first of me and last of himself.”

I leaned on the back of the bench, resting my bandaged forehead on my hand.

She looked up after a moment, and her face grew serious.

“Are you suffering?” she asked. “Your face is white as my sleeve.”

“I feel curiously tired,” I said, smiling.

“Then you must have some tea, and I will brew it myself. You shall not object! No—it is useless, because I am determined. And you shall lie down in the little tea-room, where I found you that day when you first came to Trécourt.”

“I shall be very happy to do anything—if you are there.”

“Even drink tea when you abhor it? Then I certainly ought to reward you with my presence at the rite.... Are you dizzy? You are terribly pale.... Would you lean on my arm?”

I was not dizzy, but I did so; and if such deceit is not pardonable, there is no justice in this world or in the next.

The tea was hot and harmless; I lay thinking while she sat in the sunny window-corner, nibbling biscuit and marmalade, and watching me gravely.

"My appetite is dreadful in these days," she said; "age increases it; I have just had my chocolate, yet here am I, eating like a school-girl.... I have a strange idea that I am exceedingly young,... that I am just beginning to live. That tired, thin, shabby girl you saw at La Trappe was certainly not I.... And long before that, before I knew you, there was another impersonal, half—awakened creature, who watched the world surging and receding around her, who grew tired even of violets and bonbons, tired of the companionship of the indifferent, hurt by the intimacy of the unfriendly; and I cannot believe that she was I.... Can you?"

"I can believe it; I once saw you then," I said.

She looked up quickly. "Where?"

"In Paris."

"When?"

"The day that they received the news from Mexico. You sat in your carriage before the gates of the war office."

"I remember," she said, staring at me. Then a slight shudder passed over her.

Presently she said: "Did you recognize me afterward at La Trappe?"

"Yes,... you had grown more beautiful."

She colored and bent her head.

"You remembered me all that time?... But why didn't you—didn't you—" She laughed nervously. "Why didn't we know each other in those years? Truly, Monsieur Scarlett, I needed a friend then, if ever;... a friend who thought first of me and last of himself."

I did not answer.

"Fancy," she continued, "your passing me so long ago,... and I totally unconscious, sitting there in my carriage,... never dreaming of this friendship which I ... care for so much!... Do you remember at La Trappe what I told you, there on the staircase?—how sometimes the impulse used to come to me when I saw a kindly face in the street to cry out, 'Be friends with me!' Do you remember?... It is strange that I did not feel that impulse when you passed me that day in Paris—feel it even though I did not see you—for I sorely needed kindness then, kindness and wisdom; and both passed by, at my elbow,... and I did not know." She bent her head, smiling with an effort. "You should have thrown yourself astride the horse and galloped away with me.... They did those things once, Monsieur Scarlett—on this very spot, too, in the days of the Saxon pirates."

The whirring monotone of the spinning-wheel suddenly filled the house; Sylvia was singing at her wheel:

"Woe to the maids of Paradise!
Yvonne!
Twice have the Saxons landed; twice!
Yvonne!
Yet shall Paradise see them thrice,
Yvonne! Yvonne! Marivonik!"

"The prophecy of that Breton spinning song is being fulfilled," I said. "For the third time we Saxons have come to Paradise, you see."

"But this time our Saxons are not very formidable," she said, raising her beautiful gray eyes; "and the gwerz says, 'Woe to the maids of Paradise!' Do you intend to bring woe upon us maids of Paradise—do you come to carry us off, monsieur?"

"If you will go with—me," I said, smiling.

"All of us?"

"Only one, madame."

She started to speak, then her eyes fell. She laughed uncertainly. “Which one among us, if you please—mizilour skler ha brillant deuz ar fidelite?”

“Met na varwin Ket Kontant, ma na varwan fidel,” I said, slowly, as the words of the song came back to me. “I shall choose only the fairest and loveliest, madame. You know it is always that way in the story.” My voice was not perfectly steady, nor was hers when she smiled and wished me happiness and a long life with the maid of Paradise I had chosen, even though I took her by force.

Then constraint crept in between us, and I was grimly weighing the friendship this woman had given me—weighing it in the balance against a single hope.

Once she looked across at me with questioning eyes in which I thought I read dawning disappointment. It almost terrified me.... I could not lose her confidence,... I could not, and go through life without it.... But I could live a hopeless life to its end with that confidence.... And I must do so,... and be content.

“I suppose,” said I, thinking aloud, “that I had better go to England.”

“When?” she asked, without raising her head.

“In a day or two. I can find employment there, I think.”

“Is it necessary that you find employment ... so soon?”

“Yes,” I said, with a meaningless laugh, “I fear it is.”

“What will you do?”

“Oh, the army—horses—something of that kind. Riding-master, perhaps—perhaps Scotland Yard. I may not be able to pick and choose.... If I ever save enough money for the voyage, perhaps you would let me come, once in a long while, to pay my respects, madame?”

“Yes,... come, if you wish.”

She said no more, nor did I. Presently Sylvia appeared with a peasant woman, and the young countess went away, followed by the housekeeper with her keys at her girdle.

I rose and walked to the window; then, nerveless and depressed, I went out into the garden again to smoke a cigar.

The cat had disappeared; I traversed the garden, passed through the side wicket, and found myself on the cliffs. Almost immediately I was aware of a young girl, a child, seated on the rocks, her chin propped on her hands, the sea-wind blowing her curly elf-locks across her cheeks and eyes. A bundle tied in a handkerchief lay beside her; a cat dozed in her lap, its sleek fur stirring in the wind.

“Jacqueline!” I said, gently.

She raised her head; the movement awakened the cat, who stood up in her lap, stretching and yawning vigorously.

“I thought you were to sail from Lorient to-day?”

The cat stopped purring from her knees; the child rose, pushing back her hair from her eyes with both hands.

“Where is Speed?” she asked, drowsily.

“Did you want to see him, Jacqueline?”

“That is why I returned.”

“To see Speed?”

“Parbleu.”

“And you are going to let the others sail without you?”

“Yes.”

“And give up the circus forever, Jacqueline?”

“Y-es.”

“Just because you want to see Speed?”

“Only for that.”

She stood rubbing her eyes with her small fists, as though just awakened.

“Oui,” she said, without emotion, “c’est comme ça, m’sieu. Where the heart is, happiness lies. I left the others at the city gate; I said, ‘Voyons, let us be reasonable, gentlemen. I am happy in your circus; I am happy with Speed; I can be contented without your circus, but I cannot be contented without Speed. Voilà!’... and then I went.”

“You walked back all the way from Lorient?”

“Bien sûr! I have no carriage—I, Jacqueline.” She stretched her slim figure, raised her arms slowly, and yawned. “Pardon,” she murmured, “I have slept in the gorse—badly.”

“Come into the garden,” I said; “we can talk while you rest.”

She thanked me tranquilly, picked up her bundle, and followed me with a slight limp. The cat, tail up, came behind.

The young countess was standing at the window as we approached in solemn single file along the path, and when she caught sight of us she opened the door and stepped out on the tiny porch.

“Why, this is our little Jacqueline,” she said, quickly. “They have taken your father for the conscription, have they not, my child? And now you are homeless!”

“I think so, madame.”

“Then you will stay with me until he returns, won’t you, little one?”

There was a moment’s pause; Jacqueline made a grave gesture. “This is my cat, madame—Ange Pitou.”

The countess stared at the cat, then broke out into the prettiest peal of laughter. “Of course you must bring your cat! My invitation is also for Ange Pitou, you understand.”

“Then we thank you, and permit ourselves to accept, madame,” said Jacqueline. “We are very glad because we are quite hungry, and we have thorns from the gorse in our feet—” She broke off with a joyous little cry: “There is Speed!” And Speed, entering the garden hurriedly, stopped short in his tracks.

The child ran to him and threw both arms around his neck. “Oh, Speed! Speed!” she stammered, over and over again. “I was too lonely; I will do what you wish; I will be instructed in the graces of education—truly I will. I am glad to come back—and I am so tired, Speed. I will never go away from you again.... Oh, Speed, I am contented!... Do you love me?”

“Dearly, little sweetheart,” he said, huskily, trying to steady his voice. “There! Madame the countess is waiting. All will be well now.” He turned, smiling, toward the young countess, and lifted his hat, then stepped back and fixed me with a blank look of dismay, which said perfectly plainly that he had unpleasant news to communicate. The countess, I think, saw that look, too, for she gave me an almost imperceptible nod and took Jacqueline’s hand in hers.

“If there are thorns in your feet we must find them,” she said, sweetly. “Will you come, Jacqueline?”

“Yes, madame,” said the child, with an adoring smile at Speed, who bent and kissed her upturned face as she passed.

They went into the house, the countess holding Jacqueline’s thorn-scratched hand, the cat following, perfectly self-possessed, to the porch, where she halted and sat down, surveying the landscape with dignified indifference.

“Well,” said I, turning to Speed, “what new deviltry is going on in Paradise now?”

“Preparations for train-wrecking, I should say,” he replied, bluntly. “They are tinkering with the trestle. Buckhurst’s ragamuffins have just seized the railroad station at Rose-Sainte-Anne, where the main line crosses, you know, near the ravine at Lammerin. I was sure there was something extraordinary going to happen, so I went down to the river, hailed Jeanne Rolland, the passeuse, and had her ferry me over to Bois-Gilbert. Then I made for the telegraph, gave the operator ten francs to let me work the keys, and called up the arsenal at Lorient. But it was no use, Scarlett, the governor of Lorient can’t spare a soldier—not a single gendarme. It seems that Uhlans have been signalled north of Quimper, and Lorient is frantic, and the garrison is preparing to stand siege.”

“You mean,” I said, indignantly, “that they’re not going to try to catch Buckhurst and Mornac?”

“That’s what I mean; they’re scared as rabbits over these rumors of Uhlans in the west and north.”

“Well,” said I, disgusted, “it appears to me that Buckhurst is going to get off scot-free this time—and Mornac, too! Did

you know that Mornac was here?"

"Know it? I saw him an hour ago, marshalling a new company of malcontents in the square—a bad lot, Scarlett—deserters from Chanzy's army, from Bourbaki, from Garibaldi—a hundred or more line soldiers, dragoons without horses, francs-tireurs, Garibaldians, even a Turco, from Heaven knows where—bad soldiers who disgrace France—marauders, cowardly, skulking mobiles—a sweet lot, Scarlett, to be let loose in Madame de Vassart's vicinity."

"I think so, too," I said, seriously.

"And I earnestly agree with you," muttered Speed. "That's all *I* have to report, except that your friend, Robert the Lizard, is out yonder flat on his belly under a gorse-bush, and he wants to see you."

"The Lizard!" I exclaimed. "Come on, Speed. Where is he?"

"Yonder, clothed in somebody's line uniform. He's one of them. Scarlett, do you trust him? He has a rifle."

"Yes, yes," I said, impatiently. "Come on, man! It's all right; the fellow is watching Buckhurst for me." And I gave Speed a nervous push toward the moors. We started, Speed ostentatiously placing his revolver in his side-pocket so that he could shoot through his coat if necessary. I walked beside him, closely scanning the stretch of open moor for a sign of life, knowing all the while that it is easier to catch moon-beams in a net than to find a poacher in the bracken. But Speed had marked him down as he might mark a squatting quail, and suddenly we flushed him, rifle clapped to his shoulder.

"None of that, my friend," growled Speed; but the poacher at sight of me had already lowered the weapon.

I greeted him frankly, offering my hand; he took it, then his hard fist fell away and he touched his cap.

"I have done what you wanted," he said, sullenly. "I have the company's rolls—here they are." He dragged from his baggy trousers pockets a mass of filthy papers, closely covered with smeared writing. "Here is the money, too," he said, fishing in the other pocket; and, to my astonishment, he produced a flattened, soiled mass of bank-notes. "Count it," he added, calmly.

"What money is that?" I asked, taking it reluctantly.

"Didn't you warn me to get that box—the steel box that Tric-Trac sat down on when he saw me?"

"Is that money from the box?" I exclaimed.

"Yes, m'sieu. I could not bring the box, and there had been enough blood shed over it already. Besides, when Buckhurst broke it open there was only a bit of iron for the scrap-heap left."

I touched Speed's arm to call his attention; the poacher shrugged his shoulders and continued: "Tric-Trac made no ceremony with me; he told me that he and Buckhurst had settled this Dr. Delmont, and the other—the professor—Tavernier."

"Murdered them?" muttered Speed.

"Dame!—the coup du Père François is murder, I suppose."

Speed turned to me. "That's the argot for strangling," he said, grimly.

"Go on," I motioned to the poacher. "How did you get the money?"

"Oh, pour ça—in my turn I turned sonneur," he replied, with a savage smile.

A *sonneur*, in thieves' slang, is a creature of the footpad type who, tripping his victim flat, seizes him by the shoulders and beats his head against the pavement until he renders him unconscious—if he doesn't kill him.

"It was pay-day," continued the Lizard. "Buckhurst opened the box and I heard him—he hammered it open with a cold chisel. I was standing guard on the forest's edge; I crept back, hearing the hammering and the little bell ringing the Angelus of Tric-Trac. It was close to dusk; by the time he got into the box it was dark in the woods, and it was easy to jump on his back and strike—not very hard, m'sieu—but, I tell you, Buckhurst lay for two days with eyes like a sick owl's! He knew one of his own men had done it. He never said a word, but I know he thinks it was Tric-Trac.... And when he is ready—bon soir, Tric-Trac!"

He drew his right hand across his corded throat with a horridly suggestive motion. Speed watched him narrowly.

I asked the poacher why Buckhurst had come to Paradise, and why his banditti had seized the railroad at Rose-Sainte-

Anne.

“Ah,” cried the Lizard, with a ferocious leer, “that is the kernel under the limpet’s tent! And I have uncovered it—I, Robert Garenne, bon sang de Jésu!”

He stretched out his powerful arm toward the sea. “Where is that cruiser, m’sieu? Gone? Yes, but who sent her off? Buckhurst, with his new signal-book! Where? In chase of a sea-swallow, or a frigate (bird). Who knows? Listen, messieurs! We are to wreck the train for Brest to-night. Do you comprehend?”

“Where?” I asked, quietly.

“Just where the trestle at Lammerin crosses the ravine below the house of Josephine Tanguy.”

Speed looked around at me. “It’s the treasure-train from Lorient. They’re probably sending the crown diamonds back to Brest in view of the Uhlans being seen near Quimper.”

“On a false order?”

“I believe so. I believe that Buckhurst sent the cruiser to Brest, and now he’s started the treasure-trains back to Brest in a panic.”

“That is the truth,” said the Lizard; “Tric-Trac told me. They have the code-book of Mornac.” His eyes began to light up with that terrible anger as the name of his blood enemy fell from his lips; his nose twitched; his upper lip wrinkled into a snarl.

I thought quietly for a moment, then asked the poacher whether there was a guard at the semaphore of Saint-Yssel.

“Yes, the soldier Rolland, who says he understands the telegraph—a sot from Morlaix.” He hesitated and looked across the open moor toward Paradise. “I must go,” he muttered; “I am on guard yonder.”

I offered him my hand again; he took it, looking me sincerely in the eyes.

“Let your private wrongs wait a little longer,” I said. “I think we can catch Buckhurst and Mornac alive. Do you promise?”

“Y-es,” he replied.

“Strike, then, like a Breton!”

We struck palms heavily. Then he turned to Speed and motioned him to retire.

Speed walked slowly toward a half-buried bowlder and sat down out of ear-shot.

“For your sake,” said the poacher, clutching my hand in a tightening grip—“for your sake I have let Mornac go—let him pass me at arm’s-length, and did not strike. You have dealt openly by me—and justly. No man can say I betrayed friendship. But I swear to you that if you miss him this time, I shall not miss—I, Robert the Lizard!”

“You mean to kill Mornac?” I asked.

His eyes blazed.

“Ami," he said, “I once spoke of ‘*a little red deer*,’ and you half understood me, for you are wise in strange ways, as I am.”

“I remember,” I said.

His strong fingers closed tighter on my hand. “Woman—or doe—it’s all one now; and I am out of prison—the prison *he* sent me to! Do you understand that he wronged me—me, the soldier Garenne, in garrison at Vincennes; he, the officer, the aristocrat?”

He choked, crushing my hand in a spasmodic grip. “Ami, the little red deer was beautiful—to me. He took her—the doe—a silly maid of Paradise—and I was in irons, m’sieu, for three years.”

He glared at vacancy, tears falling from his staring eyes.

“Your wife?” I asked, quietly.

“Yes, ami.”

He dropped my numbed fingers and rubbed his eyes with the back of his big hand.

“Then Jacqueline is not your little daughter?” I asked, gravely.

“Hers—not mine. That has been the most terrible of all for me—since she died—died so young, too, m’sieu—and all alone—in Paris. If he had not done that—if he had been kind to her. And she was only a child, ami, yet he left her.”

All the ferocity in his eyes was gone; he raised a vacant, grief-lined visage to meet mine, and stood stupidly, heavy hands hanging.

Then, shoulders sloping, he shambled off into the thicket, trailing his battered rifle.

When he was very far away I motioned to Speed.

“I think,” said I, “that we had better try to do something at the semaphore if we are going to stop that train in time.”

XX

THE SEMAPHORE

The telegraph station at the semaphore was a little, square, stone hut, roofed with slate, perched high on the cliffs. A sun-scorched, wooden signal-tower rose in front of it; behind it a line of telegraph poles stretched away into perspective across the moors. Beyond the horizon somewhere lay the war-port of Lorient, with its arsenal, armed redoubts, and heavy bastions; beyond that was war.

While we plodded on, hip deep, through gorse and thorn and heath, we cautiously watched a spot of red moving to and fro in front of the station; and as we drew nearer we could see the sentry very distinctly, rifle slung muzzle down, slouching his beat in the sunshine.

He was a slovenly specimen, doubtless a deserter from one of the three provincial armies now forming for the hopeless dash at Belfort and the German eastern communications.

When Speed and I emerged from the golden gorse into plain view the sentinel stopped in his tracks, shoved his big, red hands into his trousers pockets, and regarded us sulkily.

"What are you going to do with this gentleman?" whispered Speed.

"Reason with him, first," I said; "a louis is worth a dozen kicks."

The soldier left his post as we started toward him, and advanced, blinking in the strong sunshine, meeting us half-way.

"Now, bourgeois," he said, shaking his unkempt head, "this won't do, you know. Orders are to keep off. And," he added, in a bantering tone, "I'm here to enforce them. Allons! En route, mes amis!"

"Are you the soldier Rolland?" I asked.

He admitted that he was with prompt profanity, adding that if we didn't like his name we had only to tell him so and he would arrange the matter.

I told him that we approved not only his name but his personal appearance; indeed, so great was our admiration for him that we had come clear across the Saint-Yssel moor expressly to pay our compliments to him in the shape of a hundred-franc note. I drew it from the soiled roll the Lizard had intrusted to me, and displayed it for the sentinel's inspection.

"Is that for me?" he demanded, unconvinced, plainly suspicious of being ridiculed.

"Under certain conditions," I said, "these five louis are for you."

The soldier winked. "I know what you want; you want to go in yonder and use the telegraph. What the devil," he burst out, "do all you bourgeois want with that telegraph in there?"

"Has anybody else asked to use it?" I inquired, disturbed.

"Anybody else?" he mimicked. "Well, I think so; there's somebody in there now—here, give your hundred francs or I tell you nothing, you understand!"

I handed him the soiled note. He scanned it with the inborn distrust of the true malefactor, turned it over and over, and finally, pronouncing it "en règle," shoved it cheerfully into the lining of his red forage cap.

"A hundred more if you answer my questions truthfully," I said, amiably.

"'Cré cochon!" he blurted out; "fire at will, comrade! I'll sell you the whole cursed semaphore for a hundred more! What can I do for you, captain?"

"Who is in that hut?"

"A lady—she comes often—she gives ten francs each time. Zut!—what is ten francs when a gentleman gives a hundred! She pays me for my complaisance—bon! Place aux dames! You pay me better—bon! I'm yours, gentlemen. War is war, but money pulls the trigger!"

The miserable creature cocked his forage-cap with a toothless smirk and twisted his scant mustache.

“Who is this lady who pays you ten francs?” I asked.

“I do not know her name—but,” he added, with an offensive leer, “she’s worth looking over by gentlemen like you. Do you want to see her? She’s in there click-clicking away on the key with her pretty little fingers—bon sang! A morsel for a king, gentlemen.”

“Wait here,” I said, disgusted, and walked toward the stone station. The treacherous cur came running after me. “There’s a side door,” he whispered; “step in there behind the partition and take a look at her. She’ll be done directly: she never stays more than fifteen minutes. Then you can use the telegraph at your pleasure, captain.”

The side door was partly open; I stepped in noiselessly and found myself in a small, dusky closet, partitioned from the telegraph office. Immediately the rapid clicking of the Morse instrument came to my ears, and mechanically I read the message by the sound as it rattled on under the fingers of an expert:

“—Must have already found out that the signals were not authorized by the government. Before the *Fer-de-Lance* returns to her station the German cruiser ought to intercept her off Groix. Did you arrange for this?”

There was a moment’s silence, then back came rattling the reply in the Morse code, but in German:

“Yes, all is arranged. The *Augusta* took a French merchant vessel off Pont Aven yesterday. The *Augusta* ought to pass Groix this evening. You are to burn three white lights from Point Paradise if a landing-party is needed. It rests with you entirely.”

Another silence, then the operator in the next room began:

“You say that Lorient is alarmed by rumors of Uhlans, and therefore sends the treasure-train back to Brest. The train, you assure me, carries the diamonds of the crown, bar-silver, gold, the Venus of Milo, and ten battle-flags from the Invalides. Am I correct?”

“Yes.”

“The insurgents here, under an individual in our pay, one John Buckhurst, are preparing to wreck the train at the Lammerin trestle.

“If the *Augusta* can reach Point Paradise to-night, a landing-party could easily scatter these insurgents, seize the treasures, and re-embark in safety.

“There is, you declare, nothing to fear from Lorient; the only thing, then, to be dreaded is the appearance of the *Fer-de-Lance* off Groix. She is not now in sight; I will notify you if she appears. If she does not come I will burn three white lights in triangle on Paradise headland.”

A short pause, then:

“Are there any Prussian cavalry near enough to help us?”

And the answer:

“Prussian dragoons are scouting toward Bannalec. I will send a messenger to them if I can. This is all. Be careful. Good-bye.”

“Good-bye,” clicked the instrument in the next room. There was a rustle of skirts, a tap of small shoes on the stone floor. I leaned forward and looked through the little partition window; Sylvia Elven stood by the table, quietly drawing on her gloves. Her face was flushed and thoughtful.

Slowly she walked toward the door, hesitated, turned, hurried back to the instrument, and set the switch. Then, without seating herself, she leaned over and gave the station call, three *S's*.

“I forgot to say that the two Yankee officers of military police, Scarlett and Speed, are a harmless pair. You have nothing to fear from them. Good-bye.”

And the reply:

“Watch them all the same. Be careful, madame, they are Yankees. Good-bye.”

When she had gone, closing the outer door behind her, I sprang to the key, switched on, rattled out the three S’s and got my man, probably before he had taken three steps from his table.

“I forgot to say,” I telegraphed, using a light, rapid touch to imitate Sylvia’s—“I forgot to say that, in case the treasure-train is held back to-night, the Augusta must run for the English Channel.”

“What’s that?” came back the jerky reply.

I repeated.

“Donnerwetter!” rattled the wires. “The entire French iron-clad fleet is looking for her.”

“And I hope they catch her,” I telegraphed.

“Are you crazy?” came the frantic reply. “Who are you?”

“A Yankee, idiot!” I replied. “Run for your life, you hopeless ass!”

There was, of course, no reply, though I sent a few jocular remarks flying after what must have been the most horrified German spy south of Metz.

Then, at a venture, I set the switch on the arsenal line, got a quick reply, and succeeded in alarming them sufficiently, I think, for in a few moments I was telegraphing directly to the governor of Lorient, and the wires grew hot with an interchange of observations, which resulted in my running to the locker, tumbling out all the signal bunting, cones, and balls, sorting five flags, two red cones, and a ball, and hastening out to the semaphore.

Speed and the soldier Rolland saw me set the cones, hoist away, break out the flags on the halyards, and finally drop the white arm of the semaphore.

I had set the signal for the *Fer-de-Lance* to land in force and wipe Buckhurst and his grotesque crew from the face of the earth.

“Rolland,” I said, “here is another hundred francs. Watch that halyard and guard it. To-night you will string seven of those little lamps on this other halyard, light them, hoist them, and then go up that tower and light the three red lamps on the left.”

“’Tendu,” he said, promptly.

“If you do it I will give you two hundred francs to-morrow. Is it a bargain?”

The soldier broke out into a torrent of promises which I cut short.

“That lady will never come here again, I think. If she does, she must not touch those halyards. Do you hear? If she offers you money, remember I will double it. But, Rolland, if you lie to *me* I will have you killed as the Bretons kill pigs; you understand how that is done?”

He said that he understood, and followed us, fawning and whining his cowardly promises of fidelity until we ordered the wretch back to the post which he had already twice betrayed, and would certainly betray again if the opportunity offered.

Walking fast over the springy heath, I told Speed briefly what I had done—that the treasure-train would not now leave Lorient, that as soon as the *Fer-de-Lance* came in sight of the semaphore Buckhurst’s game must come to an end.

Far ahead of us we saw the flutter of a light dress on the moor; Sylvia Elven, the spy, was going home; and from the distance, across the yellow-flowered gorse, her gay song floated back to us:

“Those who die for a maid
Are paid;
Those who die for a creed
God-speed;
Those who die for their own dear land
Shall stand forever on God’s right hand!—”

“A spy!” muttered Speed.

“I think,” said I, “that she had better leave Paradise at once. Oh, the little fool, to risk all for a caprice—for a word to the poor fellow she ruined! Vanity does it every time, Speed.”

“I don’t understand what you mean,” he said.

“No, and I can’t explain,” I replied, thinking of Kelly Eyre. “But Sylvia Elven is running a fearful risk here. Mornac knows her record. Buckhurst would betray her in a moment if he thought it might save his own skin. She ought to leave before the *Fer-de-Lance* sights the semaphore and reads the signal to land in force.”

“Then you’ll have to tell her,” he said, gloomily.

“I suppose so,” I replied, not at all pleased. For the prospect of humiliating her, of proving to this woman that I was not as stupid as she believed me, gave me no pleasure. Rather was I sorry for her, sorry for the truly pitiable condition in which she must now find herself.

As we reached the gates of Trécourt, dusty and tired from our moorland tramp, I turned and looked back. My signal was still set; the white arm of the semaphore glistened like silver against a brilliant sky of sapphire. Seaward I could see no sign of the *Fer-de-Lance*.

“The guns I heard at sea must have been fired from the German cruiser *Augusta*,” I suggested to Speed. “She’s been hovering off the coast, catching French merchant craft. I wish to goodness the *Fer-de-Lance* would come in and give her a drubbing.”

“Oh, rubbish!” he said. “What the deuce do we care?”

“It’s human to take sides in this war, isn’t it?” I insisted.

“Considering the fashion in which France has treated us individually, it seems to me that we may as well take the German side,” he said.

“Are you going to?” I asked.

He hesitated. “Oh, hang it all, no! There’s something about France that holds us poor devils—I don’t know what. Barring England, she’s the only human nation in the whole snarling pack. Here’s to her—damn her impudence! If she wants me she can have me—empire, kingdom, or republic. Vive anything—as long as it’s French!”

I was laughing when we entered the court; Jacqueline, her big, furry cat in her arms, came to the door and greeted Speed with:

“You have been away a very long time, and the thorns are all out of my arms and my legs, and I have been desiring to see you. Come into the house and read—shall we?”

Speed turned to me with an explanatory smile. “I’ve been reading the ’Idyls’ aloud to her in English,” he said, rather shyly. “She seems to like them; it’s the noble music that attracts her; she can’t understand ten words.”

“I can understand nearly twenty,” she said, flushing painfully.

Speed, who had no thought of hurting her, colored up, too.

“You don’t comprehend, little one,” he said, quickly. “It was in praise, not in blame, that I spoke.”

“I knew it—I am silly,” she said, with quick tears trembling in her eyes. “You know I adore you, Speed. Forgive me.”

She turned away into the house, saying that she would get the book.

“Look here, Speed,” I said, troubled, “Jacqueline is very much like the traditional maid of romance, which I never believed existed—all unspoiled, frankly human, innocently daring, utterly ignorant of convention. She’s only a child now, but another year or two will bring something else to her.”

“Don’t you suppose I’ve thought of that?” he said, frowning.

“I hope you have.”

“Well, I have. When I find enough to do to keep soul and body friendly I’m going to send her to school, if that old ruffian, her father, allows it.”

“I think he will,” I said, gravely; “but after that?”

“After what?”

“After she’s educated and—unhappy?”

“She isn’t any too happy now,” he retorted.

“Granted. But after you have spent all your money on her, what then?”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean that you’ll have no child to deal with, but a woman in full bloom, a woman fairly aquiver with life and intelligence, a high-strung, sensitive, fine-grained creature, whose educated ignorance will not be educated innocence, remember that! And I tell you, Speed, it’s the heaviest responsibility a man can assume.”

“I know it,” he replied.

“Then it’s all right, if you do know it,” I said, cheerfully. “All I can say is, I am thankful she isn’t to spend her life in the circus.”

“Or meet death there,” he added. “It’s not to our credit that she escapes it.”

Jacqueline came dancing back to the porch, cat under one arm, book under the other, so frankly happy, so charmingly grateful for Speed’s society, that the tragedy of the lonely child touched me very deeply. I strove to discover any trace of the bar sinister in her, but could not, though now I understood, from her parentage, how it was possible for a poacher’s child to have such finely sculptured hands and feet. Perhaps her dark, silky lashes and hair were Mornac’s, but if this was so, I trusted that there the aristocratic blood had spent its force in the frail body of this child of chance.

I went into the house, leaving them seated on the porch, heads together, while in a low monotone Speed read the deathless “Morte d’Arthur.”

Daylight was waning.

Out of the west a clear, greenish sky, tinged with saffron tints, promised a sea-wind. But the mild land-breeze was still blowing and the ebb-tide flowing as I entered the corridor and glanced at the corner where the spinning-wheel stood. Sylvia sat beside it, reading in the Lutheran Bible by the failing light.

She raised her dreamy eyes as I passed; I had never seen her piquantly expressive face so grave.

“May I speak to you alone a moment, after dinner?” I asked.

“If you wish,” she replied.

I bowed and started on, but she called me back.

“Did you know that Monsieur Eyre is here?”

“Kelly Eyre?”

“Oui, monsieur. He returns with an order from the governor of Lorient for the balloon.”

I was astonished, and asked where Eyre had gone.

“He is in your room,” she said, “loading your revolver. I hope you will not permit him to go alone to Paradise.”

“I’ll see about that,” I muttered, and hurried up the stairs and down the hallway to my bedchamber.

He sprang to the door as I entered, giving me both hands in boyish greeting, saying how delighted they all were to know that my injury had proved so slight.

“That balloon robbery worried me,” he continued. “I knew that Speed depended on his balloon for a living; so as soon as we entered Lorient I went to our consul, and he and I made such a row that the governor of Lorient gave me an order for the balloon. Here it is, Mr. Scarlett.”

His heightened color and excitement, his nervous impetuosity, were not characteristic of this quiet and rather indifferent young countryman of mine.

I looked at him keenly but pleasantly.

“You are going to load my revolver, and go over to Paradise and take that balloon from these bandits?” I asked, smiling.

“An order is all right, but it is the more formal when backed by a bullet,” he said.

“Do you mean to tell me that you were preparing to go over into that hornet’s nest alone?”

He shrugged his shoulders with a reckless laugh.

“Give me my revolver,” I said, coldly.

His face fell. “Let me take it, Mr. Scarlett,” he pleaded; but I refused, and made him hand me the weapon.

“Now,” I said, sternly, “I want to know what the devil you mean by attempting suicide? Do you suppose that those ruffians care a straw for you and your order? Kelly, what’s the matter with you? Is life as unattractive as all that?”

His flushed and sullen face darkened.

“If you want to risk your life,” I said, “you have plenty of chances in your profession. Did you ever hear of an aged aëronaut? Kelly, go back to America and break your neck like a gentleman.”

He darted a menacing glance at me, but there was nothing of irony in my sober visage.

“You appear here,” I said, “after the others have sailed from Lorient. Why? To do Speed this generous favor? Yes—and to do yourself the pleasure of ending an embittered life under the eyes of the woman who ruined you.”

The boy flinched as though I had struck him in the face. For a moment I expected a blow; his hands clinched convulsively, and he focussed me with blazing eyes.

“Don’t,” I said, quietly. “I am trying to be your friend; I am trying to save you from yourself, Kelly. Don’t throw away your life—as I have done. Life is a good thing, Kelly, a good thing. Can we not be friends though I tell you the truth?”

The color throbbed and throbbed in his face. There was a chair near him; he groped for it, and sat down heavily.

“Life is a good thing,” I said again, “but, Kelly, truth is better. And I must tell you the—well, something of the truth—as much as you need know ... now. My friend, *she is not worth it*.”

“Do you think that makes any difference?” he said, harshly. “Let me alone, Scarlett. I know!... *I know*, I tell you!”

“Do you mean to tell me that you know she deliberately betrayed you?” I demanded.

“Yes, I know it—I tell you I know it!”

“And ... you love her?”

“Yes.” He dropped his haggard face on his arms a moment, then sat bolt upright. “Truth is better than life,” he said, slowly. “I lied to you and to myself when I came back. I did come to get Speed’s balloon, but I came ... for her sake,... to be near her,... to see her once more before I—”

“Yes, I understand, Kelly.”

He winced and leaned wearily back.

“You are right,” he said; “I wanted to end it,... I am tired.”

I sat thinking for a moment; the light in the room faded to a glimmer on the panes.

“Kelly,” I said, “there remains another way to risk your neck, and, I think, a nobler way. There is in this house a woman who is running a terrible risk—a German spy whose operations have been discovered. This woman believes that she has in her pay the communist leader of the revolt, a man called Buckhurst. She is in error. And she must leave this house to-night.”

Eyre’s face had paled. He bent forward, clasped hands between his knees, eyes fastened on me.

“There will be trouble here to-night—or, in all probability, within the next twenty-four hours. I expect to see Buckhurst a prisoner. And when that happens it will go hard with Mademoiselle Elven, for he will turn on her to save himself.... And you know what that means;... a blank wall, Kelly, and a firing-squad. There is but one sex for spies.”

A deadly fear was stamped on his bloodless face. I saw it, tense and quivering, in the gray light of the window.

“She must leave to-night, Kelly. She must try to cross into Spain. Will you help her?”

He nodded, striving to say “yes.”

“You know your own risk?”

“Yes.”

“Her company is death for you both if you are taken.”

He stood up very straight. In what strange forms comes happiness to man!

XXI

LIKE HER ANCESTORS

A sense of insecurity, of impending trouble, seemed to weigh upon us all that evening—a physical depression, which the sea-wind brought with its flying scud, wetting the window-panes like fine rain.

At intervals from across the moors came the deadened rolling of insurgent drums, and in the sky a ruddy reflection of a fire brightened and waned as the fog thickened or blew inland—an ominous sign of disorder, possibly even a reflection from that unseen war raging somewhere beyond the obscured horizon.

It may have been this indefinable foreboding that drew our little company into a temporary intimacy; it may have been the immense loneliness of the sea, thundering in thickening darkness, that stilled our voices to whispers.

Eyre, ill at ease, walked from window to window, looking at the luminous tints on the ragged edges of the clouds; Sylvia, over her heavy embroidery, lifted her head gravely at moments, to glance after him when he halted listless, preoccupied, staring at Speed and Jacqueline, who were drawing pictures of Arthur and his knights by the lamp-lit table.

I leaned in the embrasure of the southern window, gazing at my lighted lanterns, which dangled from the halyards at Saint-Yssel. The soldier Rolland had so far kept his word—three red lamps glimmered through a driving mist; the white lanterns hung above, faintly shining.

Full in the firelight of the room sat the young Countess, lost in reverie, hands clasping the gilt arms of her chair. At her feet dozed Ange Pitou.

The dignity of a parvenu cat admitted for the first time to unknown luxury is a lesson. I said this to the young Countess, who smiled dreamily, watching the play of color over the drift-wood fire. A ship's plank was burning there, tufted with golden-green flames. Presently a blaze of purest carmine threw a deeper light into the room.

"I wonder," she said, "what people sailed in that ship—and when? Did they perish on this coast when their ship perished? A drift-wood fire is beautiful, but a little sad, too." She looked up pensively over her shoulder. "Will you bring a chair to the fire?" she asked. "We are burning part of a great ship—for our pleasure, monsieur. Tell me what ship it was; tell me a story to amuse me—not a melancholy one, if you please."

I drew a chair to the blaze; the drift-wood burned gold and violet, with scarcely a whisper of its velvet flames.

"I am afraid my story is not going to be very cheerful," I said, "and I am also afraid that I must ask you to listen to it."

She met my eyes with composure, leaned a little toward me, and waited.

And so, sitting there in the tinted glare, I told her of the death of Delmont and of Tavernier, and of Buckhurst's share in the miserable work.

I spoke in a whisper scarcely louder than the rustle of the flames, watching the horror growing in her face.

I told her that the money she had intrusted to them for the Red Cross was in my possession, and would be forwarded at the first chance; that I hoped to bring Buckhurst to justice that very night.

"Madame, I am paining you," I said; "but I am going to cause you even greater unhappiness."

"Tell me what is necessary," she said, forming the words with tightened lips.

"Then I must tell you that it is necessary for Mademoiselle Elven to leave Trécourt to-night."

She looked at me as though she had not heard.

"It is absolutely necessary," I repeated. "She must go secretly. She must leave her effects; she must go in peasant's dress, on foot."

"Why?"

"It is better that I do not tell you, madame."

"Tell me. It is my right to know."

“Not now; later, if you insist.”

The young Countess passed one hand over her eyes as though dazed.

“Does Sylvia know this?” she asked, in a shocked voice.

“Not yet.”

“And you are going to tell her?”

“Yes, madame.”

“This is dreadful,” she muttered.... “If I did not know you,... if I did not trust you so perfectly,... trust you with all my heart!... Oh, are you certain she must go? It frightens me; it is so strange! I have grown fond of her.... And now you say that she must go. I cannot understand—I cannot.”

“No, you cannot understand,” I repeated, gently; “but she can. It is a serious matter for Mademoiselle Elven; it could not easily be more serious. It is even perhaps a question of life or death, madame.”

“In Heaven’s name, help her, then!” she said, scarcely controlling the alarm that brought a pitiful break in her voice.

“I am trying to,” I said. “And now I must consult Mademoiselle Elven. Will you help me?”

“What can I do?” she asked, piteously.

“Stand by that window. Look, madame, can you see the lights on the semaphore?”

“Yes.”

“Count them aloud.”

She counted the white lights for me, then the red ones.

“Now,” I said, “if those lights change in number or color or position, come instantly to me. I shall be with Mademoiselle Elven in the little tea-room. But,” I added, “I do not expect any change in the lights; it is only a precaution.”

I left her in the shadow of the curtains, and passed through the room to Sylvia’s side. She looked up quietly from her embroidery frame, then, dropping the tinted silks and needles on the cloth, rose and walked beside me past Eyre, who stood up as we came abreast of him.

Sylvia paused. “Monsieur Eyre,” she said, “I have a question to ask you ... some day,” and passed on with a smile and a slight inclination of her head, leaving Eyre looking after her with heavy eyes.

When we entered the little tea-room she passed on to the lounge and seated herself on the padded arm; I turned, closed the door, and walked straight toward her.

She glanced up at me curiously; something in my face appeared to sober her, for the amused smile on her lips faded before I spoke.

“What is it?” she asked.

“I am sorry to tell you,” I said—“sorry from my heart. You are not very friendly to me, and that makes it harder for me to say what I have to say.”

She was watching me intently out of her pretty, intelligent eyes.

“What do you mean?” she asked, guardedly.

“I mean that you cannot stay here,” I said. “And you know why.”

The color flooded her face, and she stood up, confronting me, exasperated, defiant.

“Will you explain this insult?” she asked, hotly.

“Yes. You are a German spy,” I said, under my breath.

There was no color in her face now—nothing but a glitter in her blue eyes and a glint from the small, white teeth biting her lower lip.

“French troops will land here to-night or to-morrow,” I went on, calmly. “You will see how dangerous your situation is

certain to become when Buckhurst is taken, and when it is understood *what use you have made of the semaphore*."

She winced, then straightened and bent her steady gaze on me. Her courage was admirable.

"I thank you for telling me," she said, simply. "Have I a chance to reach the Spanish frontier?"

"I think you have," I replied. "Kelly Eyre is going with you when—"

"He? No, no, he must not! Does he know what I am?" she broke in, impetuously.

"Yes, mademoiselle; and he knows what happens to spies."

"Did he offer to go?" she asked, incredulously.

"Mademoiselle, he insists."

Her lip began to tremble. She turned toward the window, where the sea-fog flew past in the rising wind, and stared out across the immeasurable blackness of the ocean.

Without turning her head she said: "Does he know that it may mean his death?"

"He has suffered worse for your sake!" I said, bitterly.

"What?" she flashed out, confronting me in an instant.

"You must know that," I said—"three years of hell—prison—utter ruin! Do you dare deny you have been ignorant of this?"

For a space she stood there, struck speechless; then, "Call him!" she cried. "Call him, I tell you! Bring him here—I want him here—here before us both!" She sprang to the door, but I blocked her way.

"I will not have Madame de Vassart know what you did to him!" I said. "If you want Kelly Eyre, I will call him." And I stepped into the hallway.

Eyre, passing the long stone corridor, looked up as I beckoned; and when he entered the tea-room, Sylvia, white as a ghost, met him face to face.

"Monsieur," she said, harshly, "why did you not come to that book-store?"

He was silent. His face was answer enough—a terrible answer.

"Monsieur Eyre, speak to me! Is it true? Did they—did you not know that I made an error—that I *did* go on Monday at the same hour?"

His haggard face lighted up; she saw it, and caught his hands in hers.

"Did you think I knew?" she stammered. "Did you think I could do that? They told me at the *usine* that you had gone away—I thought you had forgotten—that you did not care—"

"Care!" he groaned, and bowed his head, crushing her hands over his face.

Then she broke down, breathless with terror and grief.

"I was not a spy then—truly I was not, Kelly. There was no harm in me—I only—only asked for the sketches because—because—I cared for you. I have them now; no soul save myself has ever seen them—even afterward, when I drifted into intrigue at the Embassy—when everybody knew that Bismarck meant to force war—everybody except the French people—I never showed those little sketches! They were—were mine! Kelly, they were all I had left when you went away—to a fortress!—and I did not know!—I did not know!"

"Hush!" he groaned. "It is all right—it is all right now."

"Do you believe me?"

"Yes, yes. Don't cry—don't be unhappy—now."

She raised her head and fumbled in her corsage with shaking fingers, and drew from her bosom a packet of papers.

"Here are the sketches," she sobbed; "they have cost you dear! Now leave me—hate me! Let them come and take me—I do not want to live any more. Oh, what punishment on earth!"

Her suffering was unendurable to the man who had suffered through her; he turned on me, quivering in every limb.

"We must start," he said, hoarsely. "Give me your revolver."

I drew it from my hip-pocket and passed it to him.

"Scarlett," he began, "if we don't reach—"

A quick rapping at the door silenced him; the young Countess stood in the hallway, bright-eyed, but composed, asking for me.

"The red and the white lights are gone," she said. "There are four green lights on the tower and four blue lights on the halyards."

I turned to Eyre. "This is interesting," I said, grimly. "I set signals for the *Fer-de-Lance* to land in force. Somebody has changed them. You had better get ready to go."

Sylvia had shrunk away from Eyre. The Countess looked at her blankly, then at me.

"Madame," I said, "there is little enough of happiness in the world—so little that when it comes it should be welcomed, even by those who may not share in it."

And I bent nearer and whispered the truth.

Then I went to Sylvia, who stood there tremulous, pallid.

"You serve your country at a greater risk than do the soldiers of your King," I said. "There is no courage like that which discounts a sordid, unhonored death. You have my respect, mademoiselle."

"Sylvia!" murmured the young Countess, incredulously; "you a spy?—here—under my roof?"

Sylvia unconsciously stretched out one hand toward her.

Eyre stepped to her side, with an angry glance at Madame de Vassart.

"I—I love you, madame," whispered Sylvia. "I only place my own country first. Can you forgive me?"

The Countess stood as though stunned; Eyre passed her slowly, supporting Sylvia to the door.

"Madame," I said, "will you speak to her? Your countries, not your hearts, are at war. She did her duty."

"A spy!" repeated the Countess, in a dull voice. "A spy! And she brings this—this shame on me!"

Sylvia turned, standing unsteadily. For a long time they looked at each other in silence, their eyes wet with tears. Then Eyre lifted Sylvia's hand and kissed it, and led her away, closing the door behind.

The Countess still stood in the centre of the room, transfixed, rigid, staring through her tears at the closed door. With a deep-drawn breath she straightened her shoulders; her head drooped; she covered her face with clasped hands.

Standing there, did she remember those who, one by one, had betrayed her? Those who first whispered to her that love of country was a narrow creed; those who taught her to abhor violence, and then failed at the test—Bazard, firing to kill, going down to death under the merciless lance of an Uhlan; Buckhurst, guilty of every crime that attracted him; and now Sylvia, her friend, false to the salt she had eaten, false to the roof above her, false, utterly false to all save the land of her nativity.

And she, Éline de Trécourt, a soldier's daughter and a Frenchwoman, had been used as a shield by those who were striking her own mother-land—the country she once had denied; the country whose frontiers she knew not in her zeal for limitless brotherhood; the blackened, wasted country she had seen at Strasbourg; the land for which the cuirassiers of Morsbronn had died!

"What have I done?" she cried, brokenly—"what have I done that this shame should come upon me?"

"You have done nothing," I said, "neither for good nor evil in this crisis. But Sylvia has; Sylvia the spy. That a man should give up his life for a friend is good; that a woman offer hers for her country is better. What has it cost her? The friendship of the woman she worships—you, madame! It has cost her that already, and the price may include her life and the life of the man she loves. She has done her duty; the sacrifice is still burning; I pray it may spare her and spare him."

I walked to the door and laid my hand on the brass knob.

“The world is merciless to failures,” I said. “Yet even a successful spy is scarcely tolerated among the Philistines; a captured spy is a horror for friends to forget and for enemies to destroy in righteous indignation. Madame, I know, for I have served your country in Algiers as a spy,... not from patriotism, for I am an alien, but because I was fitted for it in my line of duty. Had I been caught I should have looked for nothing but contempt from France; from the Kabyle, for neither admiration nor mercy. I tell you this that you may understand my respect for this woman, whose motives are worthy of it.”

The Countess looked at me scornfully. “It is well,” she said, “for those who understand and tolerate treachery to condone it. It is well that the accused be judged by their peers. We of Trécourt know only one tongue. But that is the language of truth, monsieur. All else is foreign.”

“Where did the nobility learn this tongue—to our exclusion?” I asked, bluntly.

“When our forefathers faced the tribunals!” she flashed out. “Did you ever hear of a spy among us? Did you ever hear of a lie among us?”

“You have been taught history by your peers, madame,” I said, with a bow; “I have been taught history by mine.”

“The sorry romance!” she said, bitterly. “It has brought me to this!”

“It has brought others to their senses,” I said, sharply.

“To their knees, you mean!”

“Yes—to their knees at last.”

“To the guillotine—yes!”

“No, madame, to pray for their native land—too late!”

“I think,” she said, “that we are not fitted to understand each other.”

“It remains,” I said, “for me to thank you for your kindness to us all, and for your generosity to me in my time of need.... It is quite useless for me to dream of repaying it.... I shall never forget it.... I ask leave to make my adieux, madame.”

She flushed to her temples, but did not answer.

As I stood looking at her, a vivid flare of light flashed through the window behind me, crimsoning the walls, playing over the ceiling with an infernal radiance. At the same instant the gate outside crashed open, a hubbub of voices swelled into a roar; then the outer doors were flung back and a score of men sprang into the hallway, soldiers with the red torch-light dancing on rifle-barrels and bayonets.

And before them, revolver swinging in his slender hand, strode Buckhurst, a red sash tied across his breast, his colorless eyes like diamonds.

Speed and Jacqueline came hurrying through the hall to where I stood; Buckhurst’s smile was awful as his eyes flashed from Speed to me.

Behind him, close to his shoulder, the torch-light fell on Mornac’s smooth, false face, stretched now into a ferocious grimace; behind him crowded the soldiers of the commune, rifles slung, craning their unshaven faces to catch a glimpse of us.

“Demi-battalion, halt!” shouted an officer, and flung up his naked sabre.

“Halt,” repeated Buckhurst, quietly.

Madame de Vassart’s servants had come running from kitchen and stable at the first alarm, and now stood huddled in the court-yard, bewildered, cowed by the bayonets which had checked them.

“Buckhurst,” I said, “what the devil do you mean by this foolery?” and I started for him, shouldering my way among his grotesque escort.

For an instant I looked into his deadly eyes; then he silently motioned me back; a dozen bayonets were levelled, forcing me to retire, inch by inch, until I felt Speed’s grip on my arm.

“That fellow means mischief,” he whispered. “Have you a pistol?”

“I gave mine to Eyre,” I said, under my breath. “If he means us harm, don’t resist or they may take revenge on the

Countess. Speed, keep her in the room there! Don't let her come out."

But the Countess de Vassart was already in the hall, facing Buckhurst with perfect composure.

Twice she ordered him to leave; he looked up from his whispered consultation with Mornac and coolly motioned her to be silent.

Once she spoke to Mornac, quietly demanding a reason for the outrage, and Mornac silenced her with a brutal gesture.

"Madame," I said, "it is I they want. I beg you to retire."

"You are my guest," she said. "My place is here."

"Your place is where I please to put you!" broke in Mornac; and to Buckhurst: "I tell you she's as guilty as the others. Let me attend to this and make a clean sweep!"

"Citizen Mornac will endeavor to restrain his zeal," observed Buckhurst, with a sneer. And then, as I looked at this slender, pallid man, I understood who was the dominant power behind the curtain; and so did Speed, for I felt him press my elbow significantly.

He turned and addressed us, suavely, bowing with a horrid, mock deference to the Countess:

"In the name of the commune! The ci-devant Countess de Vassart is accused of sheltering the individual Scarlett, late inspector of Imperial Police; the individual Speed, ex-inspector of Imperial Gendarmes; the individual Eyre, under general suspicion; the woman called Sylvia Elven, a German spy. As war-delegate of the commune, I am here to accuse!"

There was a silence, then a low, angry murmur from the soldiers, which grew louder until Buckhurst turned on them. He did not utter a word, but the sullen roar died out, a bayonet rattled, then all was still in the dancing torch-light.

"I accuse," continued Buckhurst, in a passionless voice, "the individual Scarlett of treachery to the commune; of using the telegraph for treacherous ends; of hoisting signals with the purpose of attracting government troops to destroy us. I accuse the individual Speed of aiding his companion in using the telegraph to stop the government train, thus depriving the commune of the funds which rightfully belong to it—the treasures wrung from wretched peasants by the aristocrats of an accursed monarchy and a thrice-accursed empire!"

A roaring cheer burst from the excited soldiers, drowning the voice of Buckhurst.

"Silence!" shouted Mornac, savagely. And as the angry voices were stilled, one by one, above the banging of rifle-stocks and the rattle of bayonets, Buckhurst's calm voice rose in a sinister monotone.

"I accuse the woman Sylvia Elven of communication with Prussian agents; of attempted corruption of soldiers under my command. I accuse the citoyenne Éline Trécourt, lately known as the Countess de Vassart, of aiding, encouraging, and abetting these enemies of France!"

He waited until the short, fierce yell of approval had died away. Then:

"Call the soldier Rolland!" he said.

My heart began to hammer in my throat. "I believe it's going hard with us," I muttered to Speed.

"Listen," he motioned.

I listened to the wretched creature Rolland while he told what had happened at the semaphore. In his eagerness he pushed close to where I stood, menacing me with every gesture, cursing and lashing himself into a rage, ignoring all pretence of respect and discipline for his own superiors.

"What are you waiting for?" he shouted, insolently, turning on Buckhurst. "I tell the truth; and if this man can afford to pay hundreds of francs for a telegram, he must be rich enough to pluck, I tell you!"

"You say he bribed you?" asked Buckhurst, gently.

"Yes; I've said it twenty times, haven't I?"

"And you took the bribes?"

"Parbleu!"

“And you thought if you admitted it and denounced the man who bribed you that you would help divide a few millions with us, you rogue?” suggested Buckhurst, admiringly.

The wretch laughed outright.

“And you believe that you deserve well of the commune?” smiled Buckhurst.

The soldier grinned and opened his mouth to answer, and Buckhurst shot him through the face; and, as he fell, shot him again, standing wreathed in the smoke of his own weapon.

The deafening racket of the revolver, the smoke, the spectacle of the dusty, inert thing on the floor over which Buckhurst stood and shot, seemed to stun us all.

“I think,” said Buckhurst, in a pleasantly persuasive voice, “that there will be no more bribery in this battalion.” He deliberately opened the smoking weapon; the spent shells dropped one by one from the cylinder, clinking on the stone floor.

“No—no more bribery,” he mused, touching the dead man with the carefully polished toe of his shoe. “Because,” he added, reloading his revolver, “I do not like it.”

He turned quietly to Mornac and ordered the corpse to be buried, and Mornac, plainly unnerved at the murderous act of his superior, repeated the order, cursing his men to cover the quaver in his voice.

“As for you,” observed Buckhurst, glancing up at us where we stood speechless together, “you will be judged and sentenced when this drum-head court decides. Go into that room!”

The Countess did not move.

Speed touched her arm; she looked up quietly, smiled, and stepped across the threshold. Speed followed; Jacqueline slipped in beside him, and then I turned on Buckhurst, who had just ordered his soldiers to surround the house outside.

“As a matter of fact,” I said, when the last armed ruffian had departed, “I am the only person in this house who has interfered with your affairs. The others have done nothing to harm you.”

“The court will decide that,” he replied, balancing his revolver in his palm.

I eyed him for an instant. “Do you mean harm to this unfortunate woman?” I asked.

“My friend,” he replied, in a low voice, “you have very stupidly upset plans that have cost me months to perfect. You have, by stopping that train, robbed me of something less than twenty millions of francs. I have my labor for my pains; I have this mob of fools on my hands; I may lose my life through this whim of yours; and if I don’t, I have it all to begin again. And you ask me what I am going to do!”

His eyes glittered.

“If I strike her I strike you. Ask yourself whether or not I will strike.”

All the blood seemed to leave my heart; I straightened up with an effort.

“There are some murders,” I said, “that even you must recoil at.”

“I don’t think you appreciate me,” he replied, with a deathly smile.

He motioned toward the door with levelled weapon. I turned and entered the tea-room, and he locked the door from the outside.

The Countess, seated on the sofa, looked up as I appeared. She was terribly pale, but she smiled as my heavy eyes met hers.

“Is it to be farce or tragedy, monsieur?” she asked, without a tremor in her clear voice.

I could not have uttered a word to save my life. Speed, pacing the room, turned to read my face; and I think he read it, for he stopped short in his tracks. Jacqueline, watching him with blue, inscrutable eyes, turned sharply toward the window and peered out into the darkness.

Beyond the wall of the garden the fog, made luminous by the torches of the insurgents, surrounded the house with a circle of bright, ruddy vapor.

Speed came slowly across the room with me.

“Do they mean to shoot us?” he asked, bluntly.

“Messieurs,” said the Countess, with a faint smile, “your whispers are no compliment to my race. Pray honor me by plain speaking. Are we to die?”

We stood absolutely speechless before her.

“Ah, Monsieur Scarlett,” she said, gravely, “do you also fail me ... at the end?... You, too—even you?... Must I tell you that we of Trécourt fear nothing in this world?”

She made a little gesture, exquisitely imperious.

I stepped toward her; she waited for me to seat myself beside her.

“Are we to die?” she asked.

“Yes, madame.”

“Thank you,” she said, softly.

I looked up. My head was swimming so that I could scarcely see her, scarcely perceive the deep, steady tenderness in her clear eyes.

“Do you not understand?” she asked. “You are my friend. I wished to know my fate from you.”

“Madame,” I said, hoarsely, “how can you call me friend when you know to what I have brought you?”

“You have brought me to know myself,” she said, simply. “Why should I not be grateful? Why do you look at me so sadly, Monsieur Scarlett? Truly, you must know that my life has been long enough to prove its uselessness.”

“It is not true!” I cried, stung by remorse for all I had said. “Such women as you are the hope of France! Such women as you are the hope of the world! Ah, that you should consider the bitterness and folly of such a man as I am—that you should consider and listen to the sorry wisdom of a homeless mountebank—a wandering fool—a preacher of empty platitudes, who has brought you to this with his cursed meddling!”

“You taught me truth,” she said, calmly; “you make the last days of my life the only ones worth living. I said to you but an hour since—when I was angry—that we were unfitted to comprehend each other. It is not true. We are fitted for that. I had rather die with you than live without the friendship which I believe—which I know—is mine. Monsieur Scarlett, it is not love. If it were, I could not say this to you—even in death’s presence. It is something better; something untroubled, confident, serene.... You see it is not love.... And perhaps it has no name.... For I have never before known such happiness, such peace, as I know now, here with you, talking of our death. If we could live,... you would go away.... I should be alone.... And I have been alone all my life,... and I am tired. You see I have nothing to regret in a death that brings me to you again.... Do you regret life?”

“Not now,” I said.

“You are kind to say so. I do believe—yes, I know that you truly care for me.... Do you?”

“Yes.”

“Then it will not be hard.... Perhaps not even very painful.”

The key turning in the door startled us. Buckhurst entered, and through the hallway I saw his dishevelled soldiers running, flinging open doors, tearing, trampling, pillaging, wrecking everything in their path.

“Your business will be attended to in the garden at dawn,” he observed, blinking about the room, for the bright lamp-light dazzled him.

Speed, who had been standing by the window with Jacqueline, wheeled sharply, took a few steps into the room, then sank into a chair, clasping his lank hands between his knees.

The Countess did not even glance up as the sentence was pronounced; she looked at me and laid her left hand on mine, smiling, as though waiting for the moment to resume an interrupted conversation.

“Do you hear?” demanded Buckhurst, raising his voice.

There was no answer for a moment; then Jacqueline stepped from the window and said: “Am I free to go?”

“You!” said Buckhurst, contemptuously; “who in hell are you?”

“I am Jacqueline.”

“Really,” sneered Buckhurst.

He went away, slamming and locking the door; and I heard Mornac complaining that the signals had gone out on the semaphore and that there was more treachery abroad.

“Get me a horse!” said Buckhurst. “There are plenty of them in the stables. Mornac, you stay here; I’ll ride over to the semaphore. Gut this house and fire it after you’ve finished that business in the garden to-morrow morning.”

“Where are you going?” demanded Mornac’s angry voice. “Do you expect me to stay here while you start for Paris?”

“You have your orders,” said Buckhurst, menacingly.

“Oh, have I? What are they? To stay here when the country is roused—stay here and perhaps be shelled by that damned cruiser out there—”

His voice was stifled as though a hand had clutched his throat; there came the swift sound of a struggle, the banging of scabbards and spurs, the scuffle of heavy boots.

“Are you mad?” burst out Mornac’s strangled voice.

“Are you?” breathed Buckhurst. “Silence, you fool. Do you obey orders or not?”

Their voices receded. Speed sprang to the door to listen, then ran back to the window.

“Scarlett,” he whispered, “there are the lights of a vessel at anchor off Groix.”

I was beside him in an instant. “It’s the cruiser,” I said. “Oh, Speed, for a chance to signal!”

We looked at each other desperately.

“We could set the room afire,” he said; “they might land to see what had happened.”

“And find us all shot.”

Jacqueline, standing beside Speed, said, quietly: “I could swim it. Wait. Raise the window a little.”

“You cannot dive from that cliff!” I said.

She cautiously unlocked the window and peered out into the dark garden.

“The cliff falls sheer from the wall yonder,” she whispered. “I shall try to drop. I learned much in the circus. I am not afraid, Speed. I shall drop into the sea.”

“To your death,” I said.

“Possibly, m’sieu. It is a good death, however. I am not afraid.”

“Close the window,” muttered Speed. “They’d shoot her from the wall, anyway.”

Again the child gravely asked permission to try.

“No,” said Speed, harshly, and turned away. But in that instant Jacqueline flung open the window and vaulted into the garden. Before I could realize what had happened she was only a glimmering spot in the darkness. Then Speed and I followed her, running swiftly toward the foot of the garden, but we were too late; a slim, white shape rose from the top of the wall and leaped blindly out through the ruddy torch glare into the blackness beyond.

We heard a soldier’s startled cry, a commotion, curses, and astonished exclamations from the other side of the wall.

“It was something, I tell you!” roared a soldier. “Something that jumped over the cliff!”

“It was an owl, idiot!” retorted his comrade.

“I tell you I saw it!” protested the other, in a shaking voice.

“Then you saw a witch of Ker-Ys,” bawled another. “Look out for your skin in the first battle. It’s death to see such things.”

I looked at Speed. He stood wide-eyed, staring at vacancy.

"Could she do it?" I asked, horrified.

"God knows," he whispered.

Soldiers were beginning to clamber up the garden wall from the outside; torches were raised to investigate. As we shrank back into the shadow of the shrubbery I stumbled over something soft—Jacqueline's clothes, lying in a circle as she had stepped out of them.

Speed took them. I followed him, creeping back to the window, where we entered in time to avoid discovery by a wretch who had succeeded in mounting the wall, torch in hand.

One or two soldiers climbed over and dropped into the garden, prowling around, prodding the bushes with their bayonets, even coming to press their dirty faces and hands against our window.

"They're all here!" sang out one. "It was an owl, I tell you!" And he menaced us with his rifle in pantomime and retired, calling his companions to follow.

"Where is Jacqueline?" asked the Countess, looking anxiously at the little blue skirt on Speed's knees. "Have they harmed that child?"

I told her.

A beautiful light grew in her eyes as she listened. "Did I not warn you that we Bretons know how to die?" she said.

I looked dully at Speed, who sat by the window, brooding over the little woollen skirt on his knees, stroking it, touching the torn hem, and at last folding it with unaccustomed and shaky hands.

There were noises outside our door, loud voices, hammering, the sound of furniture being dragged over stone floors, and I scarcely noticed it when our door was opened again.

Then somebody called out our names; a file of half-drunken soldiers grounded arms in the passageway with a bang that brought us to our feet, as Mornac, flushed with wine, entered unsteadily, drawn sword in hand.

"I'm damned if I stay here any longer," he broke out, angrily. "I'll see whether my rascals can't shoot straight by torch-light. Here, you! Scarlett, I mean! And you, Speed; and you, too, madame; patter your prayers, for you'll get no priest. Lieutenant, withdraw the guard at the wall. Here, captain, march the battalion back to Paradise and take the servants!"

A second later the drums began to beat, but Mornac, furious, silenced them.

"They can hear you at sea!" he shouted. "Do you want a boat-load of marines at your heels? Strike out those torches! Four will do for the garden. March!"

The shuffling tread of the insurgent infantry echoed across the gravel court-yard; torches behind the walls were extinguished; blackness enveloped the cliffs.

"Well," broke out Speed, hoarsely, "good-bye, Scarlett."

He held out his hand.

"Good-bye," I said, stunned.

I dropped my hand as two soldiers placed themselves on either side of him.

"Well, good-bye," he repeated, aimlessly; and then, remembering, he went to the Countess and offered his hand.

"I am so sorry for you," she said, with a pallid smile. "You have much to live for. But you must not feel lonely, monsieur; you will be with us—we shall be close to you."

She turned to me, and her hands fell to her side.

"Are you contented?" she asked.

"Yes," I answered.

"I, too," she said, sweetly, and offered her hands.

I held them very tightly. "You say," I whispered, "that it is not—love. But you do not speak for me. I love you."

A bright blush spread over brow and neck.

“So—it was love—after all,” she said, under her breath. “God be with us to-day—I love you.”

“March!” cried Mornac, as two soldiers took station beside me.

“I beg you will be gentle with this lady,” I said, angrily, as two more soldiers pushed up beside the young Countess and laid their hands on her shoulders.

“Who the devil are you giving orders to?” shouted Mornac, savagely. “March!”

Speed passed out first; I followed; the Countess came behind me.

“Courage,” I stammered, looking back at her as we stumbled out into the torch-lit garden.

She smiled adorably. Her forefathers had mounted the guillotine smiling.

Mornac pointed to the garden wall near the bench where we had sat together. A soldier dressed like a Turco lifted a torch and set it in the flower-bed under the wall, illuminating the spot where we were to stand. As this soldier turned to come back I saw his face.

“Salah Ben-Ahmed!” I cried, hoarsely. “Do Marabouts do this butcher’s work?”

The Turco stared at me as though stunned.

“Salah Ben-Ahmed is a disgraced soldier!” I said, in a ringing voice.

“It’s a lie!” he shouted, in Arabic—“it’s a lie, O my inspector! Speak! Have these men tricked me? Are you not Prussians?”

“Silence! Silence!” bawled Mornac. “Turco, fall in! Fall in, I say! What! You menace me?” he snarled, cocking his revolver.

Then a man darted out of the red shadows of the torch-light and fell upon Mornac with a knife, and dragged him down and rolled on him, stabbing him through and through, while the mutilated wretch screamed and screamed until his soul struggled out through the flame-shot darkness and fled to its last dreadful abode.

The Lizard rose, shaking his fagot knife; they fell upon him, clubbing and stabbing with stock and bayonet, but he swung his smeared and sticky blade, clearing a circle around him. And I think he could have cut his way free had not Tric-Trac shot him in the back of the head.

Then a frightful tumult broke loose. Three of the torches were knocked to the ground and trampled out as the insurgents, doubly drunken with wine and the taste of blood, seized me and tried to force me against the wall; but the Turco, with his shrill, wolf-like battle yelp, attacked them, sabre-bayonet in hand. Speed, too, had wrested a rifle from a half-stupefied ruffian, and now stood at bay before the Countess; I saw him wielding his heavy weapon like a flail; then in the darkness Tric-Trac shot at me, so close that the powder-flame scorched my leg. He dropped his rifle to spring for my throat, knocking me flat, and, crouching on me, strove to strangle me; and I heard him whining with eagerness while I twisted and writhed to free my windpipe from his thin fingers.

At last I tore him from my body and struggled to my feet. He, too, was on his legs with a bound, running, doubling, dodging; and at his heels I saw a dozen sailors, broadaxes glittering, chasing him from tree to shrub.

“Speed!" I shouted—“the sailors from the *Fer-de-Lance*!”

The curtains of the house were on fire; through the hallway poured the insurgent soldiery, stampeding in frantic flight across the court out into the moors; and the marines, swarming along the cliffs, shot at them as they ran, and laughed savagely when a man fell into the gorse, kicking like a wounded rabbit.

Speed marked their flight, advancing coolly, pistol flashing; the Turco, Ben-Ahmed, dark arms naked to the shoulder, bounded behind the frightened wretches, cornering, hunting them through flower-beds and bushes, stealthily, keenly, now creeping among the shadows, now springing like a panther on his prey, until his blue jacket reeked and his elbows dripped.

I had picked up a rifle with a broken bayonet; the Countess, clasping my left arm, stood swaying in the rifle-smoke, eyes closed; and, when a horrid screeching arose from the depths of the garden where they were destroying Tric-Trac, she fell to shuddering, hiding her face on my shoulder.

Suddenly Speed appeared, carrying a drenched little figure, partly wrapped in a sailor's pea-jacket, slim limbs drooping, blue with cold.

"Put out that fire in there," he said, hoarsely; "we must get her into bed. Hurry, for God's sake, Scarlett! There's nobody in the house!"

"Jacqueline! Jacqueline! brave little Bretonne," murmured the Countess, bending forward and gathering the unconscious child into her strong, young arms.

Through the dim dawn, through smoke and fading torch-light, we carried Jacqueline into the house, now lighted up with an infernal red from the burning dining-room.

"The house is stone; we can keep the flames to one room if we work hard," I said. A sailor stood by the door wiping the stained blade of his broadaxe, and I called on him to aid us.

A fresh company of sailors passed on the double, rifles trailing, their officer shouting encouragement, And as we came in view of the semaphore, I saw the signal tower on fire from base to top.

The gray moorland was all flickering with flashes where the bulk of the insurgent infantry began firing in retreat; the marines' fusillade broke out from Paradise village; rifle after rifle cracked along the river-bank. Suddenly the deep report of a cannon came echoing landward from the sea; a shell, with lighted fuse trailing sparks, flew over us with a rushing whistle and exploded on the moors.

All this I saw from the house where I stood with Speed and a sailor, buried in smoke, chopping out blazing woodwork, tearing the burning curtains from the windows. The marines fired steadily from the windows above us.

"They want the Red Terror!" laughed the sailors. "They shall have it!"

"Hunt them out! Hunt them out!" cried an officer, briskly. "Fire!" rang out a voice, and the volley broke crashing, followed by the clear, penetrating boatswain's whistle sounding the assault.

Blackened, scorched, almost suffocated, I staggered back to the tea-room, where the Countess stood clasping Jacqueline, huddled in a blanket, and smoothing the child's wet curls away from a face as white as death.

Together we carried her back through the smoking hallway, up the stairs to my bedroom, and laid her in the bed.

The child opened her eyes as we drew the blankets.

"Where is Speed?" she asked, dreamily.

A moment later he came in, and she turned her head languidly and smiled.

"Jacqueline! Jacqueline!" he whispered, bending close above her.

"Do you love me, Speed?"

"Ah, Jacqueline," he stammered, "more than you can understand."

Suddenly a step sounded on the stairs, a rifle-stock grounded, clanging, and a sonorous voice rang out:

"Salute, O my brother of the toug! The enemies of France are dead!"

And in the silence around him Salah Ben-Ahmed the Marabout recited the fatha, bearing witness to the eternal unity of God.

Late that night the light cavalry from Lorient rode into Paradise. At dawn the colonel, established in the mayory, from whence its foolish occupant had fled, sent for Speed and me, and when we reported he drew from his heavy dolman our commissions, restoring us to rank and pay in the regiment *de marche* which he commanded.

At sunrise I had bade good-bye to the sweetest woman on earth; at noon we were miles to the westward, riding like demons on Buckhurst's heavy trail.

I am not sure that we ever saw him again, though once, weeks later, Speed and I and a dozen hussars gave chase to a mounted man near St. Brieuc, and that man might have been Buckhurst. He led us a magnificent chase straight to the coast, where we rode plump into a covey of Prussian hussars, who were standing on their saddles, hacking away at the telegraph-wires with their heavy, curved sabres.

That was our first and last sight of the enemy in either Prussian or communistic guise, though in the long, terrible days and nights of that winter of ’71, when three French armies froze, and the white death, not the Prussians, ended all for France, rumors of insurrection came to us from the starving capital, and we heard of the red flag flying on the Hôtel-de-Ville, and the rising of the carbineers under Flourens; and some spoke of the leader of the insurrection and called him John Buckhurst.

That Buckhurst could have penetrated Paris neither Speed nor I believed; but, as all now know, we were wrong, though the testimony concerning his death[A] at the hands of his terrible colleague, Mortier, was not in evidence until a young ruffian, known as “The Mouse,” confessed before he expiated his crimes on Sartory Plain in 1872.

Thus, for three blank, bitter months, freezing and starving, the 1st Regiment *de marche* of Lorient Hussars stood guard at Brest over the diamonds of the crown of France.

[A]This affair is dealt with in *Ashes of Empire*.

XXII

THE SECRET

The news of the collapse of the army of the East found our wretchedly clothed and half-starved hussars still patrolling the environs of Brest from Belair to the Pont Tournant, and from the banks of the Elorn clear around the ramparts to Lannion Bay, where the ice-sheathed iron-clads lay with banked fires off the Port Militaire, and the goulet guard-boats patrolled the Port de Commerce from the Passe de l'Ouest to the hook on the Digue and clear around to Cap Espagnol.

All Brest, from the battlements of the Château of St. Martin, in Belair, was on watch, so wrought up was the governor over the attempt on the treasure-train. For three months our troopers scarcely left their saddles, except to be taken to the hospital in Recouvrance.

The rigor of the constant alert wore us to shadows; rockets from the goulet, the tocsin, the warning boom of a gun from the castle, found us spurring our jaded horses through ice and snow to scour the landward banlieue and purge it of a dreaded revolt. The names of Marx, of Flourens, of Buckhurst, were constantly repeated; news of troubles at Bordeaux, rumors of the red flag at Marseilles, only served to increase the rigid system of patrol, which brought death to those in the trenches as well as to our sleet-soaked videttes.

Suddenly the nightmare ended with a telegram. Paris had surrendered.

Immediately the craze to go beset us all; our improvised squadrons became clamoring mobs of peasants, wild to go home. Deserters left us every night; they shot some in full flight; some were shot after drum-head séances in which Speed and I voted in vain for acquittal. But affairs grew worse; our men neglected their horses; bands of fugitives robbed the suburbs, roving about, pillaging, murdering, even burning the wretched hovels where nothing save the four walls remained even for the miserable inmates.

Our hussars were sent on patrol again, but they deserted with horses and arms in scores, until, when we rode into the Rue du Bois d'Amour, scarce a squadron clattered into the smoky gateway, and the infantry of the line across the street jeered and cursed us from their barracks.

On the last day of February our regiment was disbanded, and the officers ordered to hold themselves in readiness to recruit the débris of a dragoon regiment, one squadron of which at once took possession of our miserable barracks.

On the first day of March, by papers from London, we learned that the war was at an end, and that the preliminary treaty of Sunday, the 26th, had been signed at Versailles.

The same mail brought to me an astonishing offer from Cairo, to assist in the reorganization and accept a commission in the Egyptian military police. Speed and I, shivering in our ragged uniforms by the barrack stove, discussed the matter over a loaf of bread and a few sardines, until we fell asleep in our greasy chairs and dreamed of hot sunshine, and of palms, and of a crimson sunset against which a colossal basking monster, half woman, half lion, crouched, wallowing to her stone breasts in a hot sea of sand.

When I awoke in the black morning hours I knew that I should go. All the roaming instinct in me was roused. I, a nomad, had stayed too long in one stale place; I must be moving on. A feverish longing seized me; inertia became unbearable; the restless sea called me louder and louder, thundering on the breakwater; the gulls, wheeling above the arsenal at dawn, screamed a challenge.

Leave of absence, and permission to travel pending acceptance of my resignation, I asked for and obtained before the stable trumpets awoke my comrade from his heavy slumber by the barrack stove.

I made my packet—not much—a few threadbare garments folded around her letters, one to mark each miserable day that had passed since I spurred my horse out of Trécourt on the track of the wickedest man I ever knew.

Speed awoke with the trumpets, and stared at me where I knelt before the stove in my civilian clothes, strapping up my little packet.

"Oh," he said, briefly, "I knew you were going."

"So did I," I replied. "Will you ride to Trécourt with me? I have two weeks' permission for you."

He had no clothing but the uniform he wore, and no baggage except a razor, a shirt, a tooth-brush, and a bundle of letters, all written on Madame de Vassart's crested paper, but not signed by her.

We bolted our breakfast of soup and black bread, and bawled for our horses, almost crazed with impatience, now that the moment had come at last.

"Good-bye!" shouted the shivering dragoon officers, wistfully, as we wheeled our horses and spurred, clattering, towards the black gates. "Good-bye and good luck! We drink to those you love, comrades!"

"And they shall drink to you! Good-bye! Good-bye!" we cried, till the salt sea-wind tore the words from our teeth and bowed our heads as we galloped through the suburbs and out into the icy high-road, where, above us, the telegraph-wires sang their whirring dirge, and the wind in the gorse whistled, and the distant forest sounded and resounded with the gale's wailing.

On, on, hammering the flinty road with steel-shod hoofs, racing with the racing clouds, thundering across the pontoon, where benumbed soldiers huddled to stare, then bounding forward through the narrow lanes of hamlets, where pinched faces peered out at us from hovels, and gaunt dogs fled from us into the frozen hedge.

Far ahead we caught sight of the smoke of a locomotive.

"Landerneau!" gasped Speed. "Ride hard, Scarlett!"

The station-master saw us and halted the moving train at a frantic signal from Speed, whose uniform was to be reckoned with by all station-masters, and ten minutes later we stood swaying in a cattle-car, huddled close to our horses to keep warm, while the locomotive tore eastward, whistling frantically, and an ocean of black smoke poured past, swarming with sparks. Crossing the Aune trestle with a ripping roar, the train rushed through Châteaulin, south, then east, then south.

Toward noon, Speed, clinging to the stall-bars, called out to me that he could see Quimper, and in a few moments we rolled into the station, dropped two cars, and steamed out again into the beautiful Breton country, where the winter wheat was green as new grass and the gorse glimmered, and the clear streams rushed seaward between their thickets of golden willows and green briers, already flushing with the promise of new buds.

Rosporden we passed at full speed; scarcely a patch of melting snow remained at Bannalec; and when we steamed slowly into Quimperlé, the Laïta ran crystal-clear as a summer stream, and I saw the faint blue of violets on the southern slope of the beech-woods.

Some gendarmes aided us to disembark our horses, and a sub-officer respectfully offered us hospitality at the barracks across the square; but we were in our saddles the moment our horses' hoofs struck the pavement, galloping for Paradise, with a sweet, keen wind blowing, hinting already of the sea.

This was that same road which led me into Paradise on that autumn day which seemed years and years ago. The forests were leafless but beautiful; the blackthorns already promised their scented snow to follow the last melting drift which still glimmered among the trees in deep woodland gullies. A violet here and there looked up at us with blue eyes; in sheltered spots, fresh, reddish sprouts pricked the moist earth, here a whorl of delicate green, there a tender spike, guarding some imprisoned loveliness; buds on the beeches were brightening under a new varnish; naked thickets, no longer dead gray, softened into harmonies of pink and gold and palest purple.

Once, halting at a bridge, above the quick music of the stream we heard an English robin singing all alone.

"I never longed for spring as I do now," broke out Speed. "The horror of this black winter has scarred me forever—the deathly whiteness, month after month; the freezing filth of that ghastly city; the sea, all slime and ice!"

"Gallop," I said, shuddering. "I can smell the moors of Paradise already. The winds will cleanse us."

We spoke no more; and at last the road turned to the east, down among the trees, and we were traversing the square of Paradise village, where white-capped women turned to look after us, and children stared at us from their playground around the fountain, and the sleek magpies fluttered out of our path as we galloped over the bridge and breasted the sweet, strong moor wind, spicy with bay and gorse.

Speed flung out his arm, pointing. "The circus camp was there," he said. "They have ploughed the clover under."

A moment later I saw the tower of Trécourt, touched with a ray of sunshine, and the sea beyond, glittering under a clearing sky.

As we dismounted in the court-yard the sun flashed out from the fringes of a huge, snowy cloud.

“There is Jacqueline!” cried Speed, tossing his bridle to me in his excitement, and left me planted there until a servant came from the stable.

Then I followed, every nerve quivering, almost dreading to set foot within, lest happiness awake me and I find myself in the freezing barracks once more, my brief dream ended.

In the hallway a curious blindness came over me. I heard Jacqueline call my name, and I felt her hands in mine, but scarcely saw her; then she slipped away from me, and I found myself seated in the little tea-room, listening to the dull, double beat of my own heart, trembling at distant sounds in the house—waiting, endlessly waiting.

After a while a glimmer of common-sense returned to me. I squared my shoulders and breathed deeply, then rose and walked to the window.

The twigs on the peach-trees had turned wine-color; around the roots of the larkspurs delicate little palmated leaves clustered; crocus spikes pricked the grass everywhere, and the tall, polished shoots of the peonies glistened, glowing crimson in the sun. A heavy cat sunned its sleek flanks on the wall, brilliant eyes half closed, tail tucked under. Ange Pitou had grown very fat in three months.

A step at the door, and I wheeled, trembling. But it was only a Breton maid, who bore some letters on a salver of silver.

“For me?” I asked.

“If you please,” she said, demurely.

Two letters, and I knew the writing on one. The first I read standing:

“Buffalo, N. Y., *Feb*. 3, 1871.

“Mr. Scarlett, Dear Sir and Friend,—Trusting you’re well I am pleased to admit the same, the blind Goddess having smiled on me and the circus since we quit that damn terra firma for a more peeceful climb.

“We are enjoying winter quarters near to the majestic phenomena of Niagara, fodder is cheap and vittles bountiful.

“Would be pleased to have you entertain idees of joining us, and the same to Mr. Speed—you can take the horses. I have a lion man from Jersey City. We open in Charleston S. C. next week no more of La continong for me, *savvy voo*! home is good enough for me. That little Jacqueline left me I got a girl and am training her but she ain’t Jacqueline. Annimals are well Mrs. Grigg sends her love and is joined by all especially the ladies and others too numerous to mention. Hoping to hear from you soon about the horses I remain yours truly and courteously,

H. Byram Esq."

The second letter I opened carelessly, smiling a little:

“New York, *Feb*. 1, 1871.

“Dear Mr. Scarlett,—We were married yesterday. We have life before us, but are not afraid. I shall never forget you; my wife can never forget the woman you love. We have both passed through hell—but *we have passed through alive*. And we pray for the happiness of you and yours.

“Kelly Eyre."

Sobered, I laid this letter beside the first, turned thoughtfully away into the room, then stood stock-still.

The Countess de Vassart stood in the doorway, a smile trembling on her lips. In her gray eyes I read hope; and I took her hands in mine. She stood silent with bent head, exquisite in her silent shyness; and I told her I loved her, and that I asked for her love; that I had found employment in Egypt, and that it was sufficient to justify my asking her to wed me.

“As for my name,” I said, “you know that is not the name I bear; yet, knowing that, you have given me your love. You read my dossier in Paris; you know *why* I am alone, without kin, without a family, without a home. Yet you believe that I am not tainted with dishonor. And I am not. Listen, this is what happened; this is why I gave up all; and ... this is my name!” ...

And I bent my head and whispered the truth for the first time in my life to any living creature.

When I had ended I stood still, waiting, head still bowed beside hers.

She laid her hand on my hot face and slowly drew it close beside hers.

“What shall I promise you?” she whispered.

“Yourself, Éline.”

“Take me.... Is that all?”

“Your love.”

She turned in my arms and clasped her hands behind my head, pressing her mouth to mine.

THE END

[End of *The Maids of Paradise* by Robert W. Chambers]