ROBERT W. CHAMBERS

The Girl Philippa

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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE GIRL PHILIPPA ***



" 'Anywhere alone with you in the world would be a sufficient purpose in life for me' "

"'Anywhere alone with you in the world would be a sufficient purpose in life for me'"

The
GIRL PHILIPPA

BY

ROBERT W. CHAMBERS

ILLUSTRATED BY
FRANK CRAIG

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TO MY SON
BOBBY

BOB AT SIXTEEN

You can tell a better tale than I;
Trap and wing you shoot a better score;
You can cast a surer, lighter fly,
Catch as can, you'd put me on the floor;
Should I hoist a sail beneath the sky
Yours the race, away and back to shore.

You have mastered all my woodland lore,
In the saddle you can give me spades;
You have slain your first and mighty boar
In the classic Croyden Forest shades;
You have heard the Northern rivers roar,
You have seen the Southern Everglades.

You have creeled your Highland yellow trout
Where the Scottish moorlands call us back;
You have left me puzzled and in

doubt
Over tropic specimens I lack—
Sphinxes that I know not, huge and stout;
Butterflies, un-named, in blue and black.

Well, we've had a jolly run, my son,
Through a sunny world has lain our trail
Trodden side by side with rod and gun
Under azure skies where white clouds sail;
—Send our journey is not nearly done!
Send the light has not begun to fail.

Envoi

Yet, that day you tread the trail alone,
With no slower comrade to escort
On the path of spring with blossoms sown,
You may deem me not so bad a sort,
Smile and think, as one who would condone,
"He was sure a perfectly good sport."

R. W. C.
Broadalbin; 1916.

DOG-DAYS (1914)

The mad dog of Europe
Yelped in the dog-days' heat;
To his sick legs he staggered up
Swaying on twitching feet;
Snarled when he saw the offered cup,
And started down the street.

All hell has set his brain aflame;
All Europe shrieks with dread;
All mothers call on Mary's name,
Praying by shrine and bed,
"For Jesus' sake!"—Yet all the same
Each sees her son lie dead.

"On Guard!" the Western bugles blow;
"Boom!" from the Western main;
The Brabant flail has struck its blow;
The mad dog howls with pain
But lurches on, uncertain, slow,
Growling amid his slain.

They beat and kick his dusty hide,
He bleeds from every vein;
On his red trail the Cossacks ride
Across the reeking plain
While gun-shots rip his bloody sides
From Courland to Champagne.

Under the weary moons and suns
With phantom eyes aglow,
Dog-trotting still the spectre runs
Yelping at every blow
'Til through its ribs the flashing guns
And stars begin to show.

The moon shines through its riven wrack;
On the bleached skull the suns
Have baked the crusted blood all black,
But still the spectre runs,
Jogging along its hell-ward track
Lined with the tombs of Huns.

Back to the grave from whence it came
To foul the world with red;
Back to its bed of ancient shame
In the Hunnish tomb it fled
Where God's own name is but a

name
And souls that lived lie dead.

THE GIRL PHILIPPA

FOREWORD

On the twenty-eighth of June, 1914, the Archduke Francis Ferdinand, heir to the Austrian throne, was murdered by a Serb in Serajevo, the capital of Bosnia. The murder was the most momentous crime ever committed in the world, for it altered the geography and the political and social history of that planet, and changed the entire face of the civilized and uncivilized globe. Generations unborn were to feel the consequences of that murder.

Incidentally, it vitally affected the life and career of the girl Philippa.

Before the press of the United States received the news, Sir Cecil Spring-Rice, the British Ambassador, had been notified of the tragedy, and a few minutes later he was in secret conference with the President.

The British Ambassador knew what he wanted, which was more than the administration knew, and

at this hasty and secret conference he bluntly informed the President that, in his opinion, war before midsummer had now become inevitable; that there was every probability of England being drawn into a world-wide conflict; and that, therefore, an immediate decision was necessary concerning certain pending negotiations.

The truth of this became apparent to the President. The State Department's ominous information concerning a certain Asiatic Empire, the amazing knowledge in regard to the secret military and political activities of Germany in the United States, the crass stupidity of a Congress which was no better than an uneducated nation deserved, the intellectual tatterdemalions in whose care certain vitally important departments had been confided—a momentary vision of what all this might signify flickered fitfully in the presidential brain.

And, before Sir Cecil left, it was understood that certain secret negotiations should be immediately resumed and concluded as soon as possible—among other matters the question of the Harkness shell.

About the middle of July the two governments had arrived at an understanding concerning the Harkness shell. The basis of this transaction involved the following principles, proposed and mutually accepted:

1st. The Government of the United States agreed to disclose to the British Government, and to no

other government, the secret of the Harkness shell, known to ordnance experts as "the candle shell."

2nd. The British Government agreed to disclose to the United States Government, and to no other government, the secrets of its new submarine seaplane, known as "the flying fish," the inventor of which was one Pillsbury, a Yankee, who had offered it in vain to his own country before selling it to England.

3rd. Both Governments solemnly engaged not to employ either of these devices against each other in the event of war.

4th. The British Government further pledged itself to restrain from violence a certain warlike and Asiatic nation until the Government of the United States could discover some method of placating that nation.

But other and even more important negotiations, based upon the principle that the United States should insure its people and its wealth by maintaining an army and a navy commensurate with its population, its importance, and its international obligations, fell through owing to presidential indifference, congressional ignorance, the historic imbecility of a political party, and the smug vanity of a vast and half-educated nation, among whose employees were numbered several of the most perfect demagogues that the purlieus of politics had ever germinated.

This, then, was the condition of affairs in the United States when, on the nineteenth of July, the British Ambassador was informed that through the treachery of certain employees the plans and formula for the Harkness shell had been abstracted.

But the British Embassy had learned of this catastrophe through certain occult channels even before it was reported to the United States Government; and five hours after the information had reached Sir Cecil Spring-Rice, two young men stepped aboard the Antwerp liner *Zeeduyne* a few seconds before the gangway was pulled up.

With the first turn of the steamer's screws the wheel of fate also began to revolve, spinning out the web of destiny so swiftly that already its meshes had fallen over an obscure little town thousands of miles distant, and its net already held a victim so obscure that few except the French Government had ever heard of the girl Philippa.

The two young men who had come aboard at the last moment were nice-looking young men. They carried tennis bats, among other frivolous hand luggage, and it was rumored very quickly on board that they were two celebrated New Zealand tennis champions on their way to the international tournament at Ostend.

It was the Captain who first seemed interested in the rumor and who appeared to know all about the famous New Zealand players, Halkett and Gray.

And this was odd, because when Halkett and Gray came aboard their names did not figure on the passenger list, no stateroom had been engaged for them, and the Captain of the *Zeeduyne* had never before laid eyes on either of them.

But he may have heard of them, for that morning the British Embassy had called him on the telephone, had talked for twenty minutes to him, and had arranged for him to hold his steamer if necessary. But it had been necessary for the Captain to hold the *Zeeduyne* for ten minutes only.

The voyage of the *Zeeduyne* was calm, agreeable, and superficially uneventful. There was much dancing aboard. Halkett and Gray danced well. They had come aboard knowing nobody; in a day or two they seemed to have met everybody. Which urbanity is not at all characteristic of Englishmen. New Zealanders, it seemed, were quite different.

The ocean being on its best behavior nearly everybody appeared triumphantly on deck. There were, however, several passengers who maintained exclusiveness in their staterooms; and among these were two German gentlemen who preferred the stateroom they shared in common. However, they took the air sometimes, and always rather late at night.

Evidently they were commercial gentlemen, for they sent several wireless messages to Cologne during the voyage, using a code of their own which

seemed to concern perfumes and cosmetics and, in particular, a toilet soap known as Calypso soap.

In return they received several wireless messages, also apparently in some commercial code, and all mentioning perfumes and Calypso soap.

And a copy of every code message which they dispatched or received was sent to the Captain of the *Zeeduyne*, and that affable and weather-reddened Belgian always handed these copies to the tennis champions of New Zealand, who spent considerable time poring over them in the only spot on the steamer which was absolutely safe from intrusion—the Captain's private quarters.

Then, in their turn, as the steamer drew nearer to the Belgian coast, they sent a number of wireless messages in private code. Some of these messages were directed to the British Consul at Maastricht, some to the British Ambassador at Brussels, some to private individuals in Antwerp.

But these details did not interfere with the young men's social activities on board, or with their popularity. Wherever Halkett and Gray walked, they walked surrounded by maidens and pursued by approving glances of relatives and parents.

But the two German gentlemen who kept their cabin by day and prowled sometimes by night were like Mr. Kipling's cat; when they walked they walked by their wild lone. Only the chaste moon was supposed to notice them. But always either Halkett

or Gray was watching them, sometimes dressed in the jaunty uniform of a deck steward, or in the clothing of a common sailor, or in the gorgeous raiment of a ship's officer. The two Germans never noticed them as they walked in the dark by their wild lone.

And always while one of the young men watched on deck, the other ransacked the stateroom and luggage of the gentlemen from Germany—but ransacked in vain.

As the *Zeeduyne* steamed into the Scheldt, several thousand miles away, in the city of Washington, the French Ambassador telegraphed in cipher to his Government that the secret plans and formula for the Harkness shell, which had been acquired by England from the United States Government, had been stolen on the eve of delivery to the British Ambassador; that French secret agents were to inspect the arrival of all Dutch, Belgian, and German steamers; that all agents in the French service resident or stationed near the north or northeastern frontier of France were to watch the arrival of all strangers from Holland or Belgium, and, if possible, follow and observe any individual who might be likely to have been involved in such a robbery.

Immediately, from the Military Intelligence Department in Paris orders were telegraphed and letters sent to thousands of individuals of every

description and station in life, to be on the alert.

Among others who received such letters was a denationalized individual named Wildresse, who kept a cabaret in the little town of Ausone.

The cabaret was called the Café de Biribi. Wildresse insisted that the name had been his own choice. But it was at the request of the Government that his cabaret bore the ominous title as an ever-present reminder to Wildresse that his personal liberty and the liberty of his worthless son and heir depended on his good behavior and his alacrity in furnishing the French Government with whatever information it demanded.

The letter sent to Monsieur Wildresse read as follows:

MONSIEUR:

Undescribed individuals carrying important document stolen from the United States Government may appear in your vicinity.

Observe diligently, but with discretion, the arrival of any strangers at your café. If suspicions warrant, lay a complaint before local police authorities. Use every caution. The fugitives probably are German, but may be American. Inform the girl Philippa of what is required. And remember that Biribi is preferable to Noumea.

When Wildresse received this letter he went into the bedroom of the girl Philippa, who was standing before her looking glass busily rouging her cheeks

and painting her lips. She wore no corset, her immature figure requiring none.

"If they come our way, Philippa," growled Wildresse, "play the baby—do you hear? Eyes wide and artless, virginal candor alternating with indifference. In other words, be yourself."

"That is not difficult," said the girl Philippa, powdering her nose. "When I lose my innocence then it will mean real acting."

Wildresse glared at her out of his little black eyes.

"*When* you lose it, eh?" he repeated. "Well, when you do, I'll break your neck. Do you understand that?"

The girl continued to powder her nose.

"Who would marry me?" she remarked indifferently. "Also, now it is too late for me to become a religieuse like—"

"You'll carry on the business!" he growled. "That's what you'll do—with Jacques, when the Sbirs de Biribi let him loose. As for marrying, you can think it over when you are thirty. You'll have a dot by that time, if the damned Government lets me alone. And a woman with a dot need not worry about marriage."

The girl was now busy with her beautiful chestnut hair; Wildresse's pock-marked features softened.

"*Allons*," he said in his harsh voice, "lilies grow

prettiest on dunghills. Also, you are like me—serious, not silly. I have no fears. Besides, you are where I have my eye on you."

"If I am what I am it is because I prefer it, not on account of your eye," she said listlessly.

"Is that so!" he roared. "All the same, continue to prefer virtue and good conduct, and I'll continue to use my two eyes, nom de Dieu! And if any strangers who look like Germans come into the café—any strangers at all, no matter what they look like—keep your eyes on them, do you hear?"

"I hear," said the girl Philippa.

The web of fate had settled over her at last.

About that time the steamer *Zeeduyne* was docking at Antwerp.

Two hours later two German gentlemen in a hurry registered at the Hôtel St. Antoine in the Place Verte, and were informed that they were expected immediately in room 23.

A page conducted them to the corridor and indicated the room; they thanked him and sent him back for their luggage which he had, it seemed, neglected to bring from the lobby.

Then both German gentlemen went to the door of room 23, knocked, and were admitted; and the door was rather violently closed and locked.

The next instant there came a crash, a heavy fall, dull sounds of feet scuffling behind the locked

door, a series of jarring, creaking noises, then silence.

A chambermaid came into the corridor to listen, but the silence was profound, and presently she went away.

When the boy came back with the hand luggage and knocked at 23, Halkett opened the door a little way and, tipping the lad with a five-franc piece, bade him leave the luggage outside the door for the present.

Later, Gray cautiously opened the door and drew in the luggage.

Ten minutes later both young men came leisurely out of the room, locking the door on the outside. They each carried hand luggage. Halkett lighted a cigarette.

At the desk Gray requested that the gentlemen in No. 23 should not be disturbed that night, as they were lying down and in need of repose. Which was true.

Then both young men departed in a cab. At the railroad station, however, an unusually generous stranger offered Gray a motor cycle for nothing. So he strapped his bag to it, nodded a smiling adieu to Halkett, and departed.

Halkett bought a ticket to Maastricht, Holland, which he had no idea of using, and presently came out of the station and walked eastward rather rapidly. A man who also had bought a ticket for

Maastricht rose from his seat in the waiting room and walked stealthily after him, making a signal to another man.

This second man immediately stepped into a station telephone booth and called up room 23 at the Hôtel St. Antoine, where two German gentlemen, badly battered, were now conferring with a third German gentleman who had paid no attention to instructions from the hotel office but had gone to room 23, knocked until out of patience, and had then summoned the *maître d'hôtel*, who unlocked the door with a master-key.

Which operation revealed two Teutons flat on their backs, very carefully tied up with rope and artistically gagged.

This unbattered gentleman now conversed over the telephone with the man at the railroad station.

A few moments later he and the two battered ones left the hotel hastily in a taxicab, joined the man at the railroad station, and drove rapidly eastward.

And before forty-eight hours had elapsed, each one of these four men operating in pairs, had attempted to kill the young man named Halkett. Twice he got away. The third time two of them succeeded in locating him in the little town of Diekirch, a town which Halkett was becoming more and more anxious to leave, as he finally began to realize what a

hornet's nest he and his friend Gray had succeeded in stirring up.

And all the while the invisible net of destiny in which he now found himself entangled was every minute enmeshing in its widening spread new people whose fate was to be linked with his, and who had never even heard of him. Among them was the girl Philippa.

PROLOGUE

A narrow-gauge railroad track runs through the woods from Diekirch, connecting the two main lines; and on the deserted wooden platform beside this track stood Halkett, his suitcase in one hand, the other hand in his side pocket, awaiting the shuttle train with an impatience born of deepest anxiety.

The young man's anxiety was presently justified, for, as he sauntered to and fro, uneasily scanning the track and the unbroken woods around him, always keeping his right hand in his coat pocket, two men crept out from behind separate trees in the forest directly behind the platform, and he turned around only in time to obtain a foreshortened and disquieting view of the muzzle of a revolver.

"Hands up—" began the man behind the weapon; but as he was in the very act of saying it, a

jet of ammonia entered his mouth through the second button of Halkett's waistcoat, and he reeled backward off the platform, his revolver exploding toward the sky, and fell into the grass, jerking and kicking about like an unhealthy cat in a spasm.

Already Halkett and the other man had clinched; the former raining blows on the latter's Teutonic countenance, which proceeding so dazed, diverted, and bewildered him that he could not seem to find the revolver bulging in his side pocket.

It was an automatic, and Halkett finally got hold of it and hurled it into the woods.

Then he continued the terrible beating which he was administering.

"Get out!" he said in German to the battered man, still battering him. "Get out, or I'll kill you!"

He hit him another cracking blow, turned and wrested the other pistol from the writhing man on the grass, whirled around, and went at the battered one again.

"I've had enough of this!" he breathed, heavily. "I tell you I'll kill you if you bother me again! I could do it now—but it's too much like murder if you're not in uniform!"

The man on the grass had managed to evade suffocation; he got up now and staggered off toward the woods, and Halkett drove his companion after him at the point of his own revolver.

"Keep clear of me!" he said. "If you do any more

telephoning or telegraphing it will end in murder. I've had just about enough, and if any more of your friends continue to push this matter after I enter France, just as surely as I warn you now, I'll defend my own life by taking theirs. You can telephone that to them if you want to!"

As he stood on the edge of the wooden platform, revolver lifted, facing the woods where his two assailants had already disappeared, the toy-like whistle of an approaching train broke the hot, July stillness.

Before it stopped, he hurled the remaining revolver into the woods across the track, then, as the train drew up and a guard descended to open a compartment door for him, he cast a last keen glance at the forest behind him.

Nothing stirred there, not even a leaf.

But before the train had been under way five minutes a bullet shattered the glass of the window beside which he had been seated; and he spent the remainder of the journey flat on his back smoking cigarettes and wondering whether he was going to win through to the French frontier, to Paris, to Calais, to London, or whether they'd get him at last and, what was of infinitely greater importance, a long, thin envelope which he carried stitched inside his undershirt.

That was really what mattered, not what might become of a stray Englishman. He knew it; he

realized it without any illusion whatever. It was the contents of this envelope that mattered, not his life.

Yet, so far, he had managed to avoid taking life in defense of his envelope. In fact, he traveled unarmed. Now, if matters continued during his journey through France as they had begun and continued while he was crossing Holland and the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, he would be obliged to take life or lose his own.

And yet, if he did kill somebody, that meant arrest and investigation by the police of France. And such an investigation might be fatal to the success of his undertaking—quite as fatal, in fact, as though he himself were killed.

The main thing was to get that envelope and its contents to London.

His instructions were not to mail it, but to take it in person, or to send it, if necessary, by another messenger through other channels.

One thing became more and more evident to him; the time had now arrived when certain people unknown to him by sight had decided to kill him as the only way out of the affair.

Would they actually go so far as to kill him in France, with the chance of the French police seizing that envelope before they could seize it and clear out with it to Berlin? Would they hazard the risk of France obtaining cognizance of a matter which so vitally concerned Germany, rather than permit that

information to reach England?

Halkett lay on his back and smoked and did not know.

But he was slowly coming to the conclusion that one thing was now imperative: the envelope must not be found upon his person if he were killed.

But what on earth to do with it until it could be safely transferred to the proper person he had not the slightest idea.

That evening, as he changed trains at the frontier, in the lamp-lit dimness of the station platform he was fired at twice, and not hit.

A loud outcry naturally ensued; a stampede of passengers who tried to escape, a rush of others who desired to see what had happened—much hubbub and confusion, much shouting in several languages.

But nobody could be found who had fired two shots from a revolver, and nobody admitted that they had been shot at.

And so, as nobody had been hit, the gendarmes, guards, and railway officials were in a quandary.

And the train rolled out of the station with Halkett aboard, a prey to deepest anxiety concerning his long thin envelope.

CHAPTER I

Somebody at Warner's elbow spoke to him in French. He turned his head leisurely: a well-dressed young fellow, evidently an Englishman, was striving to maintain a place beside him in the noisy, market day crowd.

"Pardon, Monsieur, are you English?"

"American," replied Warner briefly, and without enthusiasm.

"My name is Halkett," said the other, with a quick smile. "I'm English, and I'm in trouble. Could you spare me a moment?"

To Warner the man did not look the typical British dead-beat, nor had he any of the earmarks and mannerisms of the Continental beach-comber. Yet he was, probably, some species or other of that wearisome and itinerant genus.

"I'm listening," said the young American resignedly. "Continue your story."

"There's such a row going on here—couldn't we find a quieter place?"

"I can hear you perfectly well, I tell you!"

Halkett said:

"If I try to talk to you here I'll be overheard, and that won't do. I'm very sorry to inconvenience you, but really I'm in a fix. What a noise these people are making! Do you mind coming somewhere else?"

"Say what you desire to say here," returned Warner bluntly. "And perhaps it might save time if you begin with the last chapter; I think I can guess

the rest of the story."

The features of the American expressed boredom to the point of unfriendly indifference. The Englishman looked at him, perplexed for a moment, then his sun-bronzed face lighted up with another quick smile.

"You're quite mistaken," he said. "I don't expect the classic remittance from England, and I don't require the celebrated twenty-franc loan until it arrives. You take me for that sort, I see, but I'm not. I don't need money. May I tell you what I do need—rather desperately?"

"Yes, if you choose."

"I need a friend."

"Money is easier to pick up," remarked Warner drily.

"I know that. May I ask my favor of you all the same?"

"Go ahead."

"Thanks, I will. But can't we get out of this crowd? What is going on in this town anyway?"

"Market day. It's like this once a month in Ausone. Otherwise the town is as dead as any other French provincial town."

Shoulder to shoulder they threaded their way through the crowded market square, amid the clatter of sabots, the lowing of cattle, the incessant bleating of sheep. Ducks quacked from crates in wagons, geese craned white necks and hissed above the heads

of the moving throngs; hogs squealed and grunted; fowls hanging by their legs from the red fists of sturdy peasant women squawked and flapped.

Cheap-Jack shows of all sorts encumbered the square and adjacent streets and alleys—gingerbread booths, shooting ranges, photograph galleries, moving-picture shows, theaters for ten sous. Through the lowing, bleating, and cockcrowing, the drumming and squeaking of Punch and Judy, and the brassy dissonance of half a dozen bands, mournful and incessant strains from several merry-go-rounds continued audible.

But the steady clatter of sabots on stony pavements, and the ceaseless undertone of voices, swelling, subsiding, dominated the uproar, softening the complaint of kine and feathered fowl to a softly cheerful harmony suggestive of summer breezes and green fields.

On the dusty Boulevard d'Athos—the typical solitary promenade of such provincial towns—there were, as usual, very few people—the inevitable nurses here and there, wheeling prams; a discouraged, red-trousered and sou-less soldier or two sprawling on benches under the chestnut trees; rarely a passing pedestrian, more often a prowling dog.

At the head of the Boulevard d'Athos, where the rue d'Auros crosses, Warner halted under the shade of the chestnuts, for the July sun was very hot. His

unconvinced grey eyes now rested inquiringly on the young Englishman who had called himself Halkett. He said:

"What species of trouble are you in?"

Halkett shook his head.

"I can't tell you what the trouble is; I may only ask you to help me a bit—" The quick smile characteristic of him glimmered in his eyes again—a winning smile, hinting of latent recklessness. "I have my nerve with me, you see—as you Americans have it," he added. "You're thinking something of that sort, I fancy."

Warner smiled too, rather faintly, but remained silent.

"This is what I want you to do," continued Halkett. "I've a long thin envelope in my pocket. I'd like to have you take it from me and slip it into your breast pocket and then button your coat. Is that too much to ask?"

"*What!*"

"That's all I want you to do. Then if you wouldn't mind giving me your name and address? And that is really all I ask."

Said the American, amused and surprised:

"That airy request of yours requires a trifle more explanation than you seem inclined to offer."

"I know it does. I can't offer it. Only—you won't get into trouble if you keep that envelope buttoned tightly under your coat until I come for it again."

"But I'm not going to do that!"

"Why?"

"Why the devil should I? I don't propose to wander about France carrying papers concerning which I know nothing—to oblige a young man about whom I know even less."

"I quite see that," admitted Halkett seriously. "I shouldn't feel inclined to do such a thing either."

"Can't you tell me what is the nature of these papers?—Or something—some explanation——"

"I'm sorry."

"And why do you propose to trust me with them?" continued Warner, curiously. "How do you know I am honest? How do you know I won't examine your packet as soon as you clear out?"

Halkett looked up with his quick and winning smile:

"I'll take that risk."

"Why? You don't know me."

"I had a good look at you in the market square before I spoke to you."

"Oh. You think you are a psychologist?"

"Of sorts. It's a part of my business in life."

"Suppose," said Warner, smiling, "you explain a little more clearly to me exactly what is your actual business in life."

"Very glad to. I write."

"Books?"

"No; just—stories."

"Fiction?"

"As one might say, facts rather than fiction."

"You are a realist?" suggested Warner with slight irony.

"I try to be. But do you know, there is more romance in realism than in fairy tales?"

Warner, considerably diverted, nodded:

"I know. You belong to the modern school, I take it."

"Very modern. So modern, in fact, that my work concerns tomorrow rather than today."

Warner nodded again:

"I see. You are a futurist—opportunist. There are a lot of clever men working on those lines in England.... Still—" he glanced amusedly at Halkett "—that scarcely explains your rather unusual request. Why should I take charge of an envelope for *you*?"

"My dear fellow, I can't answer that.... Still—I may say this much; I'm hard put to it—rather bewildered—had a rotten time of it in the Grand Duchy and in Belgium—so to speak—"

"What do you mean by a rotten time?"

"Rows."

"I don't understand. You'll have to be more explicit."

"Well—it had to do with this envelope I carry. Some chaps of sorts wanted to get it away from me. Do you see? ... I had a lively time, and I rather expect to have another before I get home—if I ever

get there."

Warner looked at him out of clear, sophisticated eyes:

"See here, my ingenuous British friend," he said, "play square with me, if you play at all."

"I shan't play otherwise."

"Very well, then; why are you afraid to carry that envelope?"

"Because," said Halkett, coolly, "if I'm knocked on the head and that envelope is found in my clothing and is stolen, the loss of my life would be the lesser loss to my friends."

"Is anybody trying to *kill* you?"

Halkett shrugged his shoulders; but there seemed to be neither swagger nor bravado in his careless gesture of assent. He said:

"Listen; here's my case in brief. I saw you in the crowd yonder, and I made up my mind concerning you. I have to think quickly sometimes; I took a good look at you and—" He waved one hand. "You look like a soldier. I don't know whether you are or not. But I am ready to trust you. That's all."

"Do you mean to say that you are in any real personal danger?"

"Yes. But that doesn't count. I can look out for myself. What worries me is this envelope. Couldn't you take charge of it? I'd be very grateful."

"How long do you expect me to carry it about?"

"I don't know. I don't know whether anything is

likely to happen to me today in this town—or tomorrow on the train—or in Paris—I have no means of knowing. I merely want to get to Paris, if I can, and send a friend back here for that envelope."

"I thought you were to return for it yourself."

"Maybe. Maybe I'll send you a letter by a friend—just a line for him to give you, saying it's all right."

"Mr. Halkett, you have rather a disconcerting way of expressing unlimited confidence in me—"

"Yes, I trust you."

"But *why*?"

"You look right."

"That's no reason!"

"My dear chap, I'm in a corner, and instinct rules, not reason! You see, I—I'm rather afraid they may get me before I can clear out."

"*Who'll* get you?" demanded Warner impatiently.

"That's the worst of it; I don't know these fellows by sight. The same chaps never try it on twice."

Warner said quietly:

"What is this very dramatic mess you're in? Can't you give me a hint?"

"I'm sorry."

"Shall I give *you* a hint?"

"If you like."

"Are the *police* after you?"

"No."

"You're sure of that?"

"Quite sure. I don't blame you for asking. It looks

that way. But it isn't."

"But you are being followed across Europe by people who want this envelope of yours?"

"Oh, yes."

"You expect personal violence from them?"

Halkett nodded and gazed absently down the almost deserted boulevard.

"Then why don't you appeal to the police—if your conscience is clear?" demanded Warner bluntly.

Halkett's quick smile broke out.

"My dear chap," he said, "I'd do so if I were in England. I can't, as matters stand. The French police are no use to me."

"Why don't you go to your consulate?"

"I did. The Consul is away on his vacation. And I didn't like the looks of the vice-consul."

"What?"

"No. I didn't like his name, either."

"What do you mean?"

"His name is Schmidt. I—didn't care for it."

Warner laughed, and Halkett looked up quickly, smiling.

"I'm queer. I admit it. But you ought to have come to some conclusion concerning me by this time. Do you think me a rotter, or a criminal, or a lunatic, or a fugitive from justice? Or will you chance it that I'm all right, and will you stand by me?"

Warner laughed again:

"I'll take a chance on you," he said. "Give me

your envelope, you amazing Britisher!"

CHAPTER II

Halkett cast a rapid glance around him; apparently he saw nothing to disturb him. Then he whipped out from his pocket a long, very thin envelope and passed it to Warner, who immediately slipped it into the breast pocket of his coat.

"That's very decent of you," said Halkett in a low voice. His attractive face had grown serious and a trifle pale. "I shan't forget this," he said.

Warner laughed.

"You're a very convincing Englishman," he said. "I can't believe you're not all right."

"I'm right enough. But you are *all* white. What is your name?"

"I had better write it out for you."

"No. If things go wrong with me, I don't want your name and address discovered in my pockets. Tell it to me; I'll remember."

Warner looked at him rather gravely for a moment, then:

"James Warner is my name. I'm a painter. My present address is La Pêche d'Or at Saïs."

"By any chance," asked Halkett, "are you the military painter, James Warner, whose pictures we

know very well in England?"

"I don't know how well my pictures are known in England. I usually paint military subjects."

"I *knew* you were right!" exclaimed Halkett. "Any man who paints the way you paint *must* be right! Fancy my actually knowing the man who did 'Lights Out' and 'The Last Salute'!"

Warner laughed, coloring a little.

"Did you really like those pictures?"

"Everybody liked them. I fancy every officer in our army owns a colored print of one or more of your pictures. And to think I should run across you in this God-forsaken French town! And to think it should be *you* who is willing to stand by me at this pinch! Well—I judged you rightly, you see."

Warner smiled, then his features altered.

"Listen, Halkett," he said, dropping instinctively the last trace of formality with a man who, honest or otherwise, was plainly of his own caste. "I have tried to size you up and I can't. You say you are a writer, but you look to me more like a soldier. Anyway, I've concluded that you're straight. And, that being my conviction, can't I do more for you than carry an envelope about for you?"

"That's very decent of you, Warner. No, thanks, there is nothing else you could do."

"I thought you said you are likely to get into a row?"

"I am. But I don't know when or where. Besides,

I wouldn't drag you into anything like that."

"Where are you stopping in Ausone?"

"At the Boule d'Argent. I got in only an hour before I met you."

"Do you still believe you are being followed?"

"I have been followed so far. Maybe I've lost them. I hope so."

Warner said:

"I came into town to buy canvases and colors. That's how I happen to be in Ausone. It's only an hour's drive to Saïs. Why don't you come back with me? Saïs is a pretty hamlet. Few people have ever heard of it. The Golden Peach is an excellent inn. Why don't you run down and lie snug for a while? It's the last place on earth anybody would think of looking for a man who's done—what I suppose *you've* done."

Halkett, who had been listening with a detached smile, jerked his head around and looked at Warner.

"What do you suppose I've done?" he asked coolly.

"I think you're a British officer who has been abroad after military information—and that you've got it—in this envelope."

Halkett's expressionless face and fixed eyes did not alter. But he said quietly:

"You are about the only American in France who might have been likely to think that. Isn't it the devil's own luck that I should pick *you* for my friend

in need?"

Warner shrugged:

"You need not answer that implied question of mine, Halkett. My theory concerning you suits me. Anyway, I believe you *are* in trouble. And I think you'd better come back to Saïs with me."

"Thinking what you think, do you still mean to stand by me?"

"Certainly. I don't *know* what's in your damned envelope, do I? Very well; I don't wish to know. Shall we stroll back to the Boule d'Argent?"

"Right-o! What a devilish decent chap you are, Warner!"

"Oh, no; I'm a gambler by disposition. This business amuses me!"

"Are you stopping at the Boule d'Argent, too?" asked Halkett after a moment.

"I lunched there and left my stack of *toiles* and my sack of colors there. Also, I have a dogcart and a horse in the stables."

They turned away together, side by side, crossed the boulevard, traversed the deserted square in front of the beautiful old church of Sainte Cassilda, and entered the stony rue d'Auros, which led directly into the market square.

The ancient town of Ausone certainly seemed to be very much *en fête*, and the rue d'Auros—the main business thoroughfare—was crowded with townspeople, country folk, and soldiers on leave,

clustering not only all over the sidewalks, but in the middle of the streets and squares, filling the terraces of the cafés and the courts of the two hotels, the Boule d'Argent and the Hôtel des Voyageurs.

Sunlight filtered through the double rank of chestnut trees in full leaf; the shade was even denser and cooler by the stone bridge where, between stone walls, the little stony river flowed, crystal clear. Here women and young girls, in holiday attire, sat on the benches, knitting or chatting with their friends; children played along the stone embankment, where beds of brilliant flowers bloomed; the red trousers of soldiers and the glittering brass helmets of firemen added a gayety to the color and movement.

"They're a jolly people, these French," remarked Halkett.

"They're very agreeable to live among."

"You've lived in France for some time?"

"Yes," said Warner. "My headquarters are in Paris, but every summer I take a class of American art students—girls—to Saïs for outdoor instruction. I've half a dozen there now, plugging away at *Plein Air*."

"Do you like to teach?"

"Well, not particularly. It interferes with my own work. But I have to do it. Painting pictures doesn't keep the kettle boiling."

"I see."

"I don't really mind it. Saïs is a charming place;

I've known it for years. Besides, a friend of mine lives there—an American woman, Madame de Moidrey. Her sister, Miss Brooks, is one of the young girls in my class. So it makes it agreeable; and Madame de Moidrey is very hospitable."

Halkett smiled.

"Painters," he said, "have, proverbially, a pretty good time in life."

"Soldiers do, too; don't they?"

Halkett's smile became fixed.

"I've heard so. The main thing about a profession is to choose one which will take you out of doors."

"Yours does. You can sit under a tree and write your stories, can't you?"

The Englishman laughed:

"Of course I can. That's the beauty of realism; all you have to do is to walk about outdoors and jot down a faithful description of everything you see."

They had reached the little stone *quai* under the chestnut and lime trees; the cool ripple of the river mingled with the laughter of young girls and the gay voices of children at play made a fresh and cheerful sound in the July sunshine.

They leaned against the mossy river wall and looked out under the trees across the square which surged with people. Flags fluttered from booths and white tents; the blare of bands, the tumult of wooden shoes, the noises of domestic creatures, and human voices all mingled with the unceasing music from the

merry-go-rounds.

Across the esplanade there was a crowd around the Café de Biribi—people constantly passing to and fro—and strains of lively music leaked out from within.

After a moment Warner suggested that they go over and have something light and cool to drink.

"I've never been in there," he remarked, as they started, "but I've always intended to go. It's kept by a rascal named Wildresse—a sporting man, fight promoter, and an ex-gambler. You've heard of the Cabaret Wildresse in Paris, haven't you?"

"I think I have," replied Halkett. "It was an all night place on the Grand Boulevard, wasn't it?"

"Yes; opposite the Grand Hôtel. This is the same proprietor. He's an American—a shady sort of sport—and he certainly must have been a pretty bad lot, because the police made him leave Paris six years ago—what for, I don't know—but they fired him out, and he started his cabaret business here in Ausone. You hear of it everywhere. People come even from Nancy and Liége and Louvain to dance, and dine here—certain sorts of people, I mean. The cuisine is celebrated. There are cockfights and other illegal attractions."

The Cabaret Biribi formed the corner of the square. It was a detached stucco structure surrounded by green trees and pretty shrubbery; and in the rear the grounds ran down to the river, where

a dozen rowboats were moored along that still, glassy reach of water which extends for several miles south of Ausone between meadows and pleasantly wooded banks.

They found the Cabaret Biribi crowded when they went in; a lively young person was capering on the little stage at the end of the dancing floor, and singing while capering; soldiers and civilians, with their own or other people's sweethearts, sat at the zinc tables, consuming light beer and wine and syrups; a rather agreeable stringed orchestra played intermittently.

Waiters scurried about with miraculously balanced trays on high; old man Wildresse roamed furtively in the background, his gorilla arms behind his back, his blunt fingers interlocked, keeping a sly and ratty eye on waiters and guests, and sometimes on the young woman cashier who lounged listlessly upon her high chair behind the wire cage, one rather lank leg crossed over the other, and her foot swinging in idle time to the music.

The moment that Warner and Halkett appeared in the doorway, looking about them to find a table, Wildresse crossed the floor and said to his cashier in a whisper:

"It's one of those men. Schmidt's description might fit either. If they don't make eyes at you and ask you to dance and drink with them, come over and join them anyway. And I want you to pump

them dry. Do you hear?"

"Yes, I hear."

Warner looked across the room at her again when he and Halkett were seated. She had considerable paint on her cheeks, and her lips seemed too red to be natural. Otherwise she was tragically young, thin, excepting her throat and cheeks—a grey-eyed, listless young thing with a mass of chestnut hair crowning her delicately shaped head.

She made change languidly for waiter and guest; acknowledged the salutes of those entering and leaving without more than a politely detached interest; smiled at the jests of facetious customers with mechanical civility when importuned; and, when momentarily idle, swung her long, slim foot in time to the music and rested her painted cheek on one hand.

Her indifferent grey eyes, sweeping the hall, presently rested on Warner; and remained on him with a sort of idle insolence until his own shifted.

Halkett was saying:

"You know that girl—the cashier, I mean—is extraordinarily pretty. Have you noticed her, Warner?"

Warner turned again:

"I've been looking at her. She's rather thickly tinted, isn't she?"

"Yes. But in spite of the paint. She has a

charmingly shaped head. Some day she'll have a figure."

"Oh, yes; figures and maturity come late to that type.... If you'll notice, Halkett, those hands of hers are really exquisite. So are her features—the nose is delicate, the eyes beautifully drawn—she's all in good drawing—even her mouth, which is a little too full. As an amateur, don't you agree with me?"

"Very much so. She's a distinct type."

"Yes—there's a certain appeal about her.... It's odd, isn't it—the inexplicable something about some women that attracts. It doesn't depend on beauty at all."

Halkett sipped his Moselle wine.

"No, it doesn't depend on beauty, on intelligence, on character, or on morals. It's in spite of them—in defiance, sometimes. Now, take that thin girl over there; her lips and cheeks are painted; she has the indifferent, disenchanted, detached glance of the too early wise. The chances are that she isn't respectable. And in spite of all that, Warner—well—look at her."

"I see. A man could paint a troubling portrait of her—a sermon on canvas."

"Just as she sits there," nodded Halkett.

"Just as she sits there, chin on palm, one lank leg crossed over the other, and her slim foot dangling.... And the average painter would make her seem all wrong, Halkett; and I might, too, except for those

clear grey eyes and their childish indifference to the devil's world outside their ken." He inspected her for a moment more, then: "Yes, in spite of rouge and other obvious elementals, I should paint her as she really is, Halkett; and no man in his heart would dare doubt her after I'd finished."

"That's not realism," remarked Halkett, laughing.

"It's the vital essence of it. You know I'm something of a gambler. Well, if I painted that girl as she sits there now, in this noisy, messy, crowded cabaret, with the artificial tint on lip and cheek—if I painted her just as she appears to us, and in all the insolently youthful relaxation of her attitude—I'd be gambling all the while with myself that the soul inside her is as clean as a flame; and I'd paint that conviction into her portrait with every brush stroke! What do you think of that view of her?"

"As you Americans say, you're some poet," observed Halkett, laughingly.

"A poet is an advanced psychologist. He begins where scientific deduction ends."

"That's what makes your military pictures so convincing," said Halkett, with his quick smile. "It's not only the correctness of details and the spirited drawing and color, but you *do* see into the very souls of the men you paint, and their innermost characters are there, revealed in the supreme crisis of the moment." He smiled quietly. "I'll believe it if *you* say that young girl over there is quite all right."

"I'd paint her that way, anyhow."

The singing on the stage had ceased from troubling, and the stringed orchestra was playing one of the latest and most inane of dance steps. A clumsy *piou-piou* got up with his fresh-cheeked partner; other couples rose from the sloppy tables, and in another moment the dancing floor was uncomfortably crowded.

It was a noisy place; a group of summer touring students from Louvain, across the border, were singing "La Brabançonne"—a very patriotic and commendable attempt, but it scarcely harmonized with the dance music. Perspiring waiters rushed hither and thither, their trays piled high; the dancers trotted and spun around and galloped about over the waxed floor; the young girl behind her wire wicket swung her narrow foot to and fro and gazed imperturbably out across the tumult.

"Philippa!" cried one of the Louvain students, hammering on the table with his beer glass. "Come out from behind your *guichet* and dance with me!"

The girl's grey eyes turned superciliously toward the speaker, but she neither answered nor moved her head.

The young man blew a kiss toward her and attempted to climb upon the zinc table, but old man Wildresse, who was prowling near, tapped him on the shoulder.

"Pas de bêtise!" he growled. "Soyez sage! Restez

tranquille, nom de Dieu!"

"I merely desired the honor of dancing with your charming cashier—"

"Allons! Assez! It's sufficient to ask her, isn't it? A woman dances with whom she chooses."

And, grumbling, he walked on with his heavy sidling step, hands clasped behind him, his big, hard, smoothly shaven face lowered and partly turned, as though eternally listening for somebody just at his heels. Always sidling nearer to the table where Warner and Halkett were seated, he paused, presently, and looked down at them, shot a glance across at the girl, Philippa, caught her eye, nodded significantly. Then, addressing Warner and his new friend:

"Well, gentlemen," he said in English, "are you amusing yourselves in the Café Biribi?"

"Sufficiently," nodded Warner.

Wildresse peeped stealthily over his shoulder, as though expecting to surprise a listener. Then his very small black eyes stole toward Halkett, and he furtively examined him.

"*Jour de fête*," he remarked in his harshly resonant voice. "Grand doings in town tonight. Do you gentlemen dine here this evening?"

"I think not," said Warner.

"I am sorry. It will be gay. There are dance partners to be had for a polite bow. You should see my little *caissière* yonder!" He made a grunting sound

and kissed his blunt fingers to the ceiling. "M-m-m!" he growled. "*She* can dance! But I don't permit her to dance very often. Only a special client now and then ——"

"May we consider ourselves special clients?" inquired Warner, amused.

"Oh, I don't say yes and I don't say no." He jerked his round, shaven head. "It all depends on *her*. She dances with whom she pleases. And if the Emperor of China asked her, nevertheless she should be free to please herself."

"She's very pretty," said Halkett.

"Others have said so before you in the Cabaret de Biribi."

"Why do you call your cabaret the Café Biribi?" asked Warner.

"Eh? By God, I call it Biribi because I'm not ashamed of the name."

Halkett looked up into his wicked black eyes, and Wildresse wagged his finger at him.

"Supposition," he said, "that your son is a good boy—a little lively, but a good boy—and he comes of age and he goes with his class for two years—three years now, and to hell with it!

"Bon! Supposition, also, that his sergeant is a tyrant, his captain an ass, his colonel an imbecile! Bon! Given a little natural ardor—a trifle of animal spirits, and the lad is up before the council—bang!—and he gets his in the battalions of Biribi!"

His voice had become a sort of ominous growl.

"As for me," he said heavily, "I mock at their council and their blockhead colonel! I accept their challenge; I do not conceal that my son is serving in a disciplinary battalion; I salute all the battalions of Biribi—where there are better men in the ranks than there are in many a regiment of the line, by God! And I honor those battalions by naming my cabaret 'Biribi.' The Government gets no change out of me!"

The man asserted too much, swaggered too obviously; and Halkett, not suspicious but always cautious, kept his inquiring eyes fixed on him.

Warner said with a smile:

"You have the courage of your convictions, Monsieur Wildresse."

"As for that," growled Wildresse, casting another stealthy glance behind him, "I've got courage. Courage? Who hasn't? Everybody's got courage. It's brains the world lacks. Excuse me, gentlemen—affairs of business—and if you want to dance with my little cashier, there is no harm in asking her." And he shuffled away, his heavy head bent sideways, his hands tightly clasped behind him.

"There's an evil type," remarked Halkett. "What a brute it is!"

Warner said:

"With his cropped head and his smooth, pasty face, and those unpleasant black eyes of his, he looks like an ex-convict. It doesn't astonish me that he has

a son serving in the disciplinary battalions of Africa."

"Does it astonish you that he is the employer of that girl behind the counter?" asked Halkett.

Warner turned to look at her again:

"It's interesting, isn't it? She seems to be another breed."

"Yes. Now, what do you make of her?"

Warner hesitated, then looked up with a laugh.

"Halkett," he said, "I'm going over to ask her to dance."

"All right; I'll hold the table," said the Englishman, amused. And Warner rose, skirted the dancers, and walked around to the cashier's desk, aware all the while that the girl's indifferent grey eyes were following his movements.

CHAPTER III

Warner tucked his walking stick and straw hat under one arm and, sauntering over to the cashier's desk, made a very nice and thoroughly Continental bow to the girl behind it.

Her impartial and uninterested gaze rested on him; after a moment she inclined her head, leisurely and in silence.

He said in French:

"Would Mademoiselle do me the honor of

dancing this dance with me?"

She replied in a sweet but indifferent voice:

"Monsieur is too amiable. But he sees that I am *caissière* of the establishment."

"Yet even the fixed stars of heaven dance sometimes to the music of the spheres."

She smiled slightly:

"When one is merely a fixture *de cabaret*, one dances only to the music of the *Sbires*! You must ask Monsieur Wildresse if I may dance with you."

"He suggested that I ask you."

"Very well, if it's a matter of business——"

Warner laughed.

"Don't you ever dance for pleasure?" he asked in English.

She replied in English:

"Is it your theory that it would give me pleasure to dance with you?"

"It is," he said, still laughing. "But by demonstration alone are theories proven."

The girl hesitated, her grey eyes resting on him. Then she turned her head, drew a pencil from her chestnut hair, rapped with it on the counter. A head waiter came speeding to her.

"Aristide, I'm going to dance," she said in the same sweetly indifferent voice. "Have the goodness to sit in my chair until I return or Mélanie arrives."

She slid to the floor from her high seat, came out, through the wire gate, and began to unpin her

cambric apron.

The closer view revealed to him her thinness in her black gown. She was not so tall as he had thought her, and she was younger; but he had been right about her cheeks and lips. Both were outrageously painted.

She handed her daintily embroidered apron to the waiter, laid one hand lightly on Warner's arm; he led her to the edge of the dancing floor, clasped her waist and swung her with him out into the noisy whirl beyond.

Thin, almost immature in her angular slenderness, the girl in motion became enchantingly graceful. Supple as a sapling in the summer wind, her hand rested feather-light in his; her long, narrow feet seemed like shadows close above the floor, never touching it.

The orchestra ceased playing after a few minutes, but old man Wildresse, who had been watching them, growled, "Go on!" and the music recommenced amid plaudits and shouts of general approval.

Once, as they passed the students' table, Warner heard the voice of old Wildresse in menacing dispute with the student who had first shouted out an invitation to Philippa.

"She dances with whom she chooses!" roared Wildresse. "Do you understand, Monsieur? By God, if the Grand Turk himself asked her she should not

dance with him unless she wished to!"

Warner said to her jestingly:

"Did the Grand Turk ever ask you, Philippa?"

The girl did not smile.

"Perhaps I am dancing with him now. One never knows—in a cabaret."

When the music ceased she was breathing only a trifle faster, and her cheeks under the paint glowed softly pink.

"Could you join us?" he asked. "Is it permitted?"

"I'd like to.... Yes."

So he took her back to the table, where Halkett rose and paid his respects gracefully; and they seated themselves and ordered a grenadine for her.

Old Wildresse, sidling by, paused with a non-committal grunt:

"Eh bien? On s'amuse? Dis, petit galopin!"

"I'm thirsty," said the girl Philippa.

"And your *caisse*?"

"Tell them to find Mélanie," she retorted indifferently.

"Bon! A *jour de fête*, too! How long are you going to be?" But as she glanced up he winked at her.

She shrugged her shoulders, leaned forward, chose a straw, and plunged it into the crimson depths of her iced grenadine.

Old Wildresse looked at her a moment, then he also shrugged his shoulders and went shuffling away, always apparently distrustful of that invisible

something just behind his back.

Halkett said:

"Mr. Warner and I have been discussing an imaginary portrait of you."

"What?" The clear, grey eyes turned questioningly to him, to Warner.

The latter nodded:

"I happen to be a painter. Mr. Halkett and I have agreed that it would be an interesting experiment to paint your portrait—*as you really are*."

The girl seemed slightly puzzled.

"As I really am?" she repeated. "But, Messieurs, am I not what you see before you?"

The music began again; the Louvain student, a little tipsy but very decorous, arose, bowed to the girl Philippa, bowed to Halkett and to Warner, and asked for the honor of a dance with her.

"Merci, Monsieur—another time, perhaps," she replied indifferently.

The boy seemed disposed to linger, but he was not quarrelsome, and finally Halkett got up and led him away.

From moment to moment Warner, glancing across during his tête-à-tête with the girl Philippa, could see the Louvain student continually shaking hands with Halkett who seemed horribly bored.

A little later still the entire Louvain delegation insisted on entertaining Halkett with beer and song; and the resigned but polite Englishman, now seated

at their table, was being taught to sing "La Brabançonne," between draughts of Belgian beer.

The girl Philippa played with the stem of her glass and stirred the ice in it with her broken wheat straw. The healthy color in her face had now faded to an indoor pallor again under the rouge.

"So you are a painter," she said, her grey eyes fixed absently on her glass. "Are you a distinguished painter, Monsieur?"

He laughed:

"You'll have to ask others that question, Philippa."

"Why? Don't you know whether you are distinguished?"

"I've had some success," he admitted, amused.

She thought a moment, then leaned forward toward the Louvain table.

"Mr. Halkett," she called in English. "Is Mr. Warner a distinguished American painter?"

Halkett laughed.

"One of the most celebrated American painters of the day!"

The Louvain students, understanding, rose as a man, waved their glasses, and cheered for Warner, the "*grand peintre Américain*." Which embarrassed and annoyed him so that his face grew brighter than the paint on Philippa's lips.

"I'm sorry," she said, noticing his annoyance. "I did not mean to make you conspicuous."

Everybody in the café was now looking at him; on every side he gazed into amused and smiling faces, saw glasses lifted, heard the cries of easily aroused Gallic enthusiasm.

"Vive le grand peintre Américain! Vive l'Amérique du Nord!"

"This is tiresome!" exclaimed Philippa. "Let us walk down to the river and sit in one of our boats. I should really like to talk to you sensibly—unless you are too much annoyed with me."

She beckoned a waiter to bring her apron; and she put it on.

"When you are ready, Monsieur," she said serenely.

So they rose; Warner paid the bill, and, with a whimsical smile at Halkett, walked out beside Philippa through one of the rear doors, and immediately found himself in brightest sunshine, amid green trees and flower beds.

Here, under the pitiless sky, the girl's face became ghastly under its rouged mask—the more shocking, perhaps, because her natural skin, if pale, appeared to be smooth and clear; and the tragic youth of her seemed to appeal to all out of doors from the senseless abuse it was enduring.

To see her there in the freshness of the open breeze, sunshine and shadow dappling the green under foot, the blue overhead untroubled by a cloud, gave Warner a slightly sick sensation.

"The air is pleasant," she remarked, unconscious of the effect she had on him.

He nodded. They walked down the grassy slope to the river bank, where rows of boats lay moored. A few were already in use out on the calm stream; young men in their shirt sleeves splashed valiantly at the oars; young women looked on under sunshades of flamboyant tints.

There was a white punt there called the *Lys*. Philippa stepped into it, drew a key from her apron pocket, unlocked the padlock. Then, lifting the pole from the grass, she turned and invited Warner with a gesture.

He had not bargained for this; but he tossed the chain aboard, stepped in, and offered to take the pole.

But Philippa evidently desired to do the punting herself; so he sat back, watching her sometimes and sometimes looking at the foliage, where they glided swiftly along under overhanging branches and through still, glimmering reaches of green water, set with scented rushes where dragon flies glittered and midges danced in clouds, and the slim green frogs floated like water sprites, partly submerged, looking at them out of golden goblin eyes that never blinked.

"The town is *en fête*," remarked Philippa presently. "Why should I not be too?"

Warner laughed:

"Do you call this a *fête*?"

"For me, yes." ... After a moment, turning from her pole: "Do you not find it agreeable?"

"Certainly. What little river is this?"

"The Récollette."

"It flows by Saïs, too. I did not recognize it for the same. The Récollette is swifter and shallower below Saïs."

"You know Saïs, then?"

"I live there in summer."

"Oh. And in winter?"

"Paris."

An unconscious sigh of relief escaped her, that it was not necessary to play the spy with this man. It was the other man who interested Wildresse.

The girl poled on in silence for a while, then deftly guided the *Lys* into the cool green shadow of a huge oak which overhung the water, the lower branches touching it.

"The sun is warm," she observed, driving in the pole and tying the white punt so that it could swing with the current.

She came and seated herself by Warner, smiled frankly.

"Do you know," she said, "I've never before done this for pleasure."

"What haven't you done for pleasure?" he inquired, perplexed.

"This—what I am doing."

"You mean you never before went out punting

with a customer?"

"Not for the pleasure of it—only for business reasons."

He hesitated to understand, refused to, because, for all her careless freedom and her paint, he could not believe her to be merely a *fille de cabaret*.

"Business reasons," he repeated. "What is your business?"

"Cashier, of course."

"Well, does your business ever take you boating with customers? Is it part of your business to dance with a customer and drink grenadine with him?"

"Yes, but you wouldn't understand——" And suddenly she comprehended his misunderstanding of her and blushed deeply.

"I am not a *cocotte*. Did you think I meant that?"

"I know you are not. I didn't know what you meant."

There was a silence; the color in her cheeks cooled under the rouge.

"It happened this way," she said quietly. "I didn't want to make it a matter of business with you. Even in the beginning I didn't.... You please me.... After all, the town is *en fête*.... After all, a girl has a right to please herself once in her life.... And business is a very lonely thing for the young.... Why shouldn't I amuse myself for an hour with a client who pleases me?"

"Are you doing it?"

"Yes. I never before knew a distinguished painter—only noisy boys from the schools, whose hair is uncut, whose conversation is *blague*, and whose trousers are too baggy to suit me. They smoke soldier's tobacco, and their subjects of discussion are not always *convenable*."

He said, curiously:

"As for that, you must hear much that is not *convenable* in the cabaret."

"Oh, yes. I don't notice it when it is not addressed to me.... Please tell me what you paint—if I am permitted to ask."

"Soldiers."

"Only soldiers?"

"Portraits, sometimes, and landscapes out of doors—anything that appeals to me. Do pictures interest you?"

"I used to go to the Louvre and the Luxembourg when I was a child. It was interesting. Did you say that you would like to make a portrait of me?"

"I said that if I ever did make a portrait of you I'd paint you *as you really are*."

Her perplexed gaze had the disconcerting directness of a child's.

"I don't understand," she said.

"Shall I explain?"

"If you would be so kind."

"You won't be offended?"

She regarded him silently; her brows became

slightly contracted.

"Such a man as you would not willingly offend, I think."

"No, of course not. I didn't mean that sort of thing. But you might not like what I have to say."

"If I merit what you say about me, it doesn't matter whether I like it or not, does it? Tell me."

He laughed:

"Well, then, if I were going to paint you, I'd first ask you to wash your cheeks."

She sat silent, humiliated, the painful color deepening and waning under the rouge.

"And," he continued pleasantly, "after your face had been well scrubbed, I'd paint you in your black gown, cuffs and apron of a *caissière*, just as I first saw you there behind the desk, one foot swinging, and your cheek resting on your hand.

"But behind your eyes, which looked out so tranquilly across the tumult of the cabaret, I'd paint a soul as clean as a flame.... I'm wondering whether I'd make any mistake in painting you that way, Philippa?"

The girl Philippa had fixed her grey eyes on him with fascinated but troubled intensity. They remained so for a while after he had finished speaking.

Presently, and partly to herself, she said:

"*Pour ça*—no. So far. But it has never before occurred to me that I look like a *cocotte*."

She turned, and, resting one arm on the gunwale, gazed down into the limpid green water.

"Have you a fresh handkerchief?" she asked, not turning toward him.

"Yes—but——"

"Please! I must wash my face."

She bent swiftly, dipped both hands into the water, and scrubbed her lips and cheeks. Then, extending her arm behind her for the handkerchief, she dried her skin, sat up again, and faced him with childish resignation. A few freckles had become visible; her lips were no longer vivid, and there now remained only the faintest tint of color under her clear, cool skin.

"You see," she said, "I'm not attractive unless I help nature. One naturally desires to be thought attractive."

"On the contrary, you are exceedingly attractive!"

"Are you sincere?"

"Perfectly."

"But I have several freckles near my nose. And I am pale."

"You are entirely attractive," he repeated, laughing.

"With my freckles! You are joking. Also, I have no pink in my cheeks now." She shrugged. "However—if you like me this way——" She shrugged again, as though that settled everything.

Another punt passed them; she looked after it absently. Presently she said, still watching the receding boat:

"Do you think you'll ever come again to the Café Biribi?"

"I'll come expressly to see you, Philippa," he replied.

To his surprise the girl blushed vividly and looked away from him; and he hastily took a different tone, somewhat astonished that such a girl should not have learned long ago how to take the irresponsible badinage of men. Certainly she must have had plenty of opportunity for such schooling.

"When I'm in Ausone again," he said seriously, "I'll bring with me a canvas and brushes. And if Monsieur Wildresse doesn't mind I'll make a little study of you. Shall I, Philippa?"

"Would you care to?"

"Very much. Do you think Monsieur Wildresse would permit it?"

"I do what I choose."

"Oh!"

She misunderstood his amused exclamation, and she flushed up.

"My conduct has been good—so far," she explained. "Everybody knows it. The *prix de la rosière* is not yet beyond me. If a girl determines to behave otherwise, who can stop her, and what? Not her parents—if she has any; not bolts and keys. No; it is

understood between Monsieur Wildresse and me that I do what I choose. And, Monsieur, so far I have not chosen—indiscreetly——" She looked up calmly. "——In spite of my painted cheeks which annoyed you——"

"I didn't mean——"

"I understand. You think that it is more *comme il faut* to exhibit one's freckles to the world than to paint them out."

"It's a thousand times better! If you only knew how pretty you are—just as you are now—with your soft, girlish skin and your chestnut hair and your enchanting grey eyes——"

"Monsieur——"

The girl's rising color and her low-voiced exclamation warned him again that detached and quite impersonal praises from him were not understood.

"Philippa," he explained with bored but smiling reassurance, "I'm merely telling you what a really pretty girl you are; I'm not paying court to you. Didn't you understand?"

The grey eyes were lifted frankly to his; questioned him in silence.

"In America a man may say as much to a girl and mean nothing more—important," he explained. "I'm not trying to make love to you, Philippa. Were you afraid I was?"

She said slowly:

"I was not exactly—*afraid*."

"I don't do that sort of thing," he continued pleasantly. "I don't make love to anybody. I'm too busy a man. Also, I would not offend you by talking to you about love."

She looked down at her folded hands. Since she had been with him nothing had seemed very real to her, nothing very clear, except that for the first time in her brief life she was interested in a man on whom she was supposed to be spying.

The Gallic and partly morbid traditions she had picked up in such a girlhood as had been hers were now making for her an important personal episode out of their encounter, and were lending a fictitious and perhaps a touching value to every word he uttered.

But more important and most significant of anything to her was her own natural inclination for him. For her he already possessed immortal distinction; he was her first man.

She was remembering that she had gone to him after exchanging a glance with Wildresse, when he had first asked her to dance. But she had needed no further persuasion to sit with him at his table; she had even forgotten her miserable rôle when she asked him to go out to the river with her. The significance of all this, according to her Gallic tradition, was now confronting her, emphasizing the fact that she was still with him.

As she sat there, her hands clasped in her lap, the sunlit reality of it all seemed brightly confused as in a dream—a vivid dream which casts a deeper enchantment over slumber, holding the sleeper fascinated under the tense concentration of the happy spell. Subconsciously she seemed to be aware that, according to tradition, this conduct of hers must be merely preliminary to something further; that, in sequence, other episodes were preparing—were becoming inevitable. And she thought of what he had said about making love.

Folding and unfolding her hands, and looking down at them rather fixedly, she said:

"Apropos of love—I have never been angry because men told me they were in love with me.... Men love; it is natural; they cannot help it. So, if you had said so, I should not have been angry. No, not at all, Monsieur."

"Philippa," he said smilingly, "when a girl and a man happen to be alone together, love isn't the only entertaining subject for conversation, is it?"

"It's the subject I've always had to listen to from men. Perhaps that is why I thought—when you spoke so amiably of my—my——"

"Beauty," added Warner frankly, "—because it *is* beauty, Philippa. But I meant only to express the pleasure that it gave to a painter—yes, and to a man who can admire without offense, and say so quite as honestly."

The girl slowly raised her eyes.

"You speak very pleasantly to me," she said. "Are other American men like you?"

"You ought to know. Aren't you American?"

"I don't know what I am."

"Why, I thought—your name was Philippa Wildresse."

"I am called that."

"Then Monsieur Wildresse isn't a relation?"

"No. I wear his name for lack of any other.... He found me somewhere, he says.... In Paris, I believe.... That is all he will tell me."

"Evidently," said Warner in his pleasant, sympathetic voice, "you have had an education somewhere."

"He sent me to school in England until I was sixteen.... After that I became cashier for him."

"He gave you his name, and he supports you.... Is he kind to you?"

"He has never struck me."

"Does he protect you?"

"He uses me in business.... I am too valuable to misuse."

The girl looked down at her folded hands. And even Warner divined what ultimate chances she stood in the Cabaret de Biribi.

"When I'm in Ausone again, I'll come to see you," he said pleasantly. "—Not to make love to you, Philippa," he added with a smile, "but just because

we have become such good friends out here in the *Lys*."

"Yes," she said, "friends. I shall be glad to see you. I shall always try to understand you—whatever you say to me."

"That's as it should be!" he exclaimed heartily. "Give me your hand on it, Philippa."

She laid her hand in his gravely. They exchanged a slight pressure. Then he glanced at his watch, rose, and picked up the pole.

"I've got to drive to Saïs in time for dinner," he remarked. "I'm sorry, because I'd like to stay out here with you."

"I'm sorry, too," she said.

The next moment the punt shot out into the sunny stream.

CHAPTER IV

Warner and the girl Philippa reëntered the Cabaret de Biribi together the uproar had become almost deafening. Confetti was thrown at them immediately, and they advanced all a-flutter with brilliant tatters.

The orchestra was playing, almost everybody was dancing, groups at tables along the edge of the floor sang, clinked glasses, and threw confetti without discrimination. The whole place—tables,

floor, chandeliers, and people—streamed with multi-colored paper ribbons. Waiters swept it in heaps from the dancing floor.

Philippa entered the cashier's enclosure and dismissed the woman in charge. Seated once more on her high chair she opened her reticule and produced a small mirror. Then she leaned far over her counter toward Warner.

"Is it permitted me to powder my nose?" she whispered with childlike seriousness; but she laughed when he did, and, still laughing, made him a gay little gesture of adieu with her powder puff.

He stood looking at her for a moment, where she sat on her high chair behind the cage, intently occupied with her mirror, oblivious to the tumult around her. Then, the smile still lingering on his features, he turned to look for his new acquaintance, Halkett.

Old man Wildresse sidled up to the cashier's desk, opened the wicket, and went inside. Philippa, still using her tiny mirror, was examining a freckle very seriously.

"Eh, bien?" he growled. "Rien?"

"Nothing!"

"Drop that glass and talk!" he said harshly.

She turned and looked at him.

"I tell you it was silly to suspect such a man!" she said impatiently. "In my heart I feel humiliated

that you should have set me to spy on him——"

"What's that!"

"No, I've had enough! I don't like the rôle; I never liked it! Are there no police in France——"

"Little idiot!" he said. "Will you hold your tongue?"

"It is a disgusting *métier*——"

"Damnation! Hold your tongue!" he repeated. "We've got to do what the Government tells us to do, haven't we?"

"Not I! Never again——"

"Yes, you will! Do you hear? Yes, you will, or I'll twist your neck! Now, I'm going to keep my eye on that other gentleman. Granted that the man you pumped is all right, I'm not so sure about the other, who seems to be an Englishman. I'm going over to stand near him. By and by I'll address him. And if I wink at you, leave your *caisse* with Mélanie, come over, and sit at their table again——"

"No!"

"Yes, you will!"

"No!"

"Yes, you will. And you'll also contrive it so the Englishman asks you to dance. Do you hear what I say? And you'll find out where he comes from, and when he arrived in Ausone, and where he is going, and whatever else you can worm out of him!" He glared at her. "Disobey if you dare," he added.

She was silent.

After a moment he continued in a softer voice:

"Do you want to see me in prison and my son in New Caledonia? Very well, then; do what the Government tells you to do."

"I—I've done enough—filthy work——" she stammered. "Why must I? I have never done anything wrong——"

"Did you hear what I said? Do you want to see Jacques in Noumea?"

"No," she said sullenly.

"Then do what I tell you, or, by God, they'll ship him there and me too!"

And he clasped his hands behind his back, peered sideways at her, shrugged, and went shuffling out of the enclosure.

Groups at various tables were singing and shouting; the floor seethed with sweating dancers. On the edge of this vortex the girl Philippa, from her high chair, looked darkly across the tumult toward the table where Halkett sat.

Something seemed to be happening there; she could see Wildresse gesticulating vigorously; she saw Warner making his way toward his friend, who was seated alone at a table, a lighted cigarette balanced between his fingers and one arm thrown carelessly around the back of the chair on which he sat.

He was looking coolly but steadily at three men who occupied the table next to him; Wildresse now stood between the two tables, and his emphatic

gesticulations were apparently directed toward these three men; but in the uproar, and although he also appeared to be shouting, what he was saying remained inaudible.

Warner went over and seated himself beside Halkett; and now he could distinguish the harsh voice of the Patron raised in irritation:

"No politics! I'll not suffer political disputes in my cabaret!" he bawled. "Quarrels arise from such controversies. I'll have no quarrels in my place. Now, Messieurs, *un peu de complaisance*!"

One of the men he was exhorting leaned wide in his seat and looked insolently across at Halkett.

"It was the Englishman's fault," he retorted threateningly. "I and my friends here had been speaking of the assassination of the Archduke Francis Ferdinand in Serajevo. We were conversing peaceably and privately among ourselves, when that Englishman laughed at us——"

"You are mistaken," said Halkett quietly.

"Did you not laugh?" cried the second of the men at the next table.

"Yes, but not at what you were saying. I'm sorry if you thought so——"

The man half rose in his chair, exclaiming:

"Why shouldn't I think it natural for an Englishman to laugh at the murder of an Austrian arch-duke——"

"Stop that discussion!" cried Wildresse, angrily

jerking his heavy head from Halkett to the three men at the other table. "Let it rest where it is, I tell you! The English gentleman says he did not laugh at what you were saying. Nom de Dieu! Nobody well brought up laughs at murder!" And to Halkett and Warner: "Be amiable enough, gentlemen, to carry this misunderstanding no further. I've had sufficient trouble with the police in my time."

Warner laid one hand lightly on Halkett's arm.

"All right," he said to Wildresse; "no trouble shall originate with us." And, to Halkett, in a lowered voice: "Have you an idea that those men over there are trying to force a quarrel?"

"Of course."

"Have you ever seen them before?"

"Not one of them."

Warner's lips scarcely moved as he said:

"Is it the matter of the envelope?"

"I think so. And, Warner, I don't intend to drag you into any——"

"Wait. Are you armed?"

Halkett shook his head.

"That's no good," he said. "I can't afford to do anything conspicuous. If I'm involved with the authorities I'm done for, and I might just as well be knocked on the head." After a moment he added: "I think perhaps you'd better say good-by to me now, Warner——"

"Why?"

"Because, if they manage to force a quarrel, I don't mean to have you involved——"

"Do you really expect me to run away?" asked Warner, laughing.

Halkett looked up at him with a faint smile:

"I'm under very heavy obligations to you already ——"

"You are coming to Saïs with me."

"Thanks so much, but——"

"Come on, Halkett. I'm not going to leave you here."

"My dear chap, I'll wriggle out somehow. I've done it before. After all, they may not mean mischief."

Warner turned and looked across at the three men. Two were whispering together; the third, arms folded, was staring truculently at Halkett out of his light blue eyes.

Warner turned his head and said quietly to Halkett:

"I take two of them to be South Germans or Austrians. The other might be Alsatian. Do any of these possible nationalities worry you?"

"Exactly," said Halkett coolly.

"In other words, any trouble you may expect is likely to come from Germans?"

"That's about it."

Warner lighted a cigarette.

"Shall we try a quiet getaway?" he asked.

"No; I'll look out for myself. Clear out, Warner, there's a good fellow——"

"Don't ask me to do a thing that you wouldn't do," retorted Warner sharply. "Come on; I'm going to drive you to Saïs."

Halkett flushed.

"I shan't forget how decent you've been," he said. They summoned the waiter, paid the reckoning, rose, and walked leisurely toward the door.

At the *caissière's* desk they turned aside to say good-night to Philippa.

The girl looked up from her accounts, pencil poised, gazing at Warner.

"*Au revoir*, Philippa," he said, smilingly.

The girl's serious features relaxed; she nodded to him gayly, turned, still smiling, to include Halkett. And instantly a swift change altered her face; she half rose from her chair, arm outstretched.

"What is that man doing behind you!" she cried out—too late to avert what she saw coming. For the man close behind Halkett had dexterously passed a silk handkerchief across his throat from behind and had jerked him backward; and, like lightning, two other men appeared on either side of him, tore his coat wide, and thrust their hands into his breast pockets.

Warner pivoted on his heel and swung hard on the man with the silk handkerchief, driving him head-on into the table behind, which fell with a

crash of glassware. Halkett, off his balance, fell on top of the table, dragging with him one of the men whose hand had become entangled in his breast pocket.

The people who had been seated at the table were hurled right and left among the neighboring tables; a howl of anger and protest burst from the crowd; there came a shout of "*Cochon*!"—a rush to see what had happened; people mounted on chairs, waiters arrived, running. Out of the mêlée Halkett wriggled and rose, coughing, his features still crimson from partial strangulation. Warner caught his arm in a grip of iron and whisked him out of the door. The next instant they were engulfed in the crowds thronging the market square.

Warner, thoroughly aroused and excited, still maintained his grip on Halkett's arm.

"Did you ever see anything like it?" he said in a low voice. "It came like a bolt from the sky. That was the *Coup du Père François*. Did they get anything from you?"

Halkett spoke with difficulty, pressing his throat with his fingers and trying to smile.

"What they got," he said, "was meant for them to get—time-tables and a ticket to Paris. I don't intend to travel that way——" A fit of coughing shook him. "——For a moment I thought they'd actually broken my neck. What did you do to that fellow with his noose?"

"He fell on the table behind you. Everybody was piled up with the crockery. You wriggled out like a lizard." He turned cautiously and looked back over his shoulder. "Do you think we have been followed?"

"I can't see that we are."

They entered the rue d'Auros and turned into the Hôtel Boule d'Argent. Warner sent a chasseur to the stables for his horse and dogcart; Halkett hastened to collect his luggage.

In a few minutes the horse and cart came rattling out of the mews; luggage, canvases, and the sack of colors were placed in the boot; Warner mounted, taking reins and whip; Halkett sprang up beside him, and the groom freed the horse's head.

Into the almost deserted Boulevard d'Athos they went at a lively clip, circled the lovely church of Sainte Cassilda at the head of it, and trotted out into the broad highroad which swings cast to the river Récollette, and follows that pretty little stream almost due south to the hills and cliffs and woods and meadows of Saïs.

The sun hung low above the fields, reddening the roadside bushes and painting the tall ranks of poplars with vivid streaks of gold and rose.

Just outside the remains of the old town wall they passed through a suburban hamlet. That, except for a farm or two more, included the last houses this side of Saïs.

For a little while neither of the young men

spoke; Halkett's cough had ceased, but now and then he fidgeted with his collar as though to ease it from the bruised throat. Warner drove, looking straight between his horse's ears, as though intently preoccupied with his navigation.

After a while Halkett said:

"The envelope is safe, I take it:"

"Oh, yes. They never noticed me until I hit one of them."

"I'm so grateful," said Halkett, "that it's quite useless for me to try to say so——"

"Listen! I'm enjoying it. I'm grateful to *you*, Halkett, for giving me the opportunity. I needed touching up." He laughed in sheer exhilaration. "We stodgy professional people ought to be stirred out of our ruts, A little mix-up like that with a prospect of others is exactly what I needed."

Halkett smiled rather dryly.

"Oh," he said. "If it strikes you that way, I shall feel much relieved."

"Relieve yourself of all embarrassment," returned Warner gayly. "If our acquaintance entails further scraps with those gentlemen, I shall be merely the more grateful to you."

They both laughed; Warner swung his long whip like a fly rod and caught the loop cleverly on his whip-stock.

Halkett, still laughing, said:

"You don't look as though you enjoyed a cabaret

fight. You look far too respectable."

"Oh, I am respectable, I suppose. But I'm not very aged yet, and my student days are still rather near."

The road curved out now along the Récollette where it still flowed a placid stream between green meadows and through charming bits of woodland. In the glass of the flood the sunset sky was mirrored; swallows cut the still, golden surface; slowly spreading circles of rising fish starred it at intervals.

"So you don't go armed?" remarked Warner thoughtfully.

"No."

The American pointed with the butt of his whip to the dashboard where the blue-black butts of two automatics appeared from slung holsters.

"Why the artillery?" inquired Halkett.

"I drive my neighbor, Madame de Moidrey, sometimes; and in summer it is often dark before we return. It's a lovely country; also, the quarrymen at the cement works are a rough lot. So I let my pretty neighbor take no chances with me."

"Quite right," nodded Halkett. "When quarrymen get drunk it's no joke. What quarry is it?"

"The Esser Company. It's a German cement concern, I believe."

"German?"

"I believe so."

"Where is this quarry?"

"In the hills back of the Récollette. They run barges to Ausone. Just below their canal the Récollette becomes unnavigable, and the shallows and rapids continue for several miles below Saïs. That is the reason, I suppose, that the country around Saïs remains primitive and undeveloped, lacking as it does railroad and water transportation."

"I wonder," said Halkett thoughtfully, "whether I might see the quarry and cement works. It must be interesting."

Warner shrugged:

"If that sort of thing interests you, I'll take you over. It's a messy place full of stone crushers and derricks and broken rock and pits full of green water. Still, if you want to see it——"

"Thanks, I should like to."

Warner glanced at him; a slight grin touched his lips.

"You seem to be interested in a great many kinds of business," he said, "—literature, military science, cement works, cabaret life——"

Halkett laughed outright; but the next moment he turned like a flash in his seat, and Warner also cast a quick glance behind him.

"A car coming!" he said, driving to the right. "What's the matter, Halkett? You don't think it's after us?"

"I think it is."

"What?"

"I know damned well it is!" said Halkett between his teeth. "Shall I jump and swim for it? Pull in a moment, Warner——"

"Wait! Do you see that gate in the hedge? Get out and open it. Quick, Halkett! I know what to do ——"

Halkett leaped, dragged open the gate; Warner swung his horse and drove through and out into a swampy meadow set with wild flowers and bushes and slender saplings.

The wheels of the cart cut through the spongy sod and sank almost to the hubs, but Warner used his whip and Halkett, taking the horse by the head, ran forward beside the swaying cart. Right across their path flowed a deep, narrow stream, partly invisible between reeds and tufts of swamp weed; Warner turned the vehicle with difficulty, urged his nervous horse across a cattle bridge which had been fashioned out of a few loose planks, and drove up on firmer ground among tall ferns and willow bushes.

"Pull up those planks!" he shouted back to Halkett, guiding his horse with difficulty; and Halkett ran back, lifted the mossy, half rotted planks, and threw them up among the bushes.

A grey touring car which had halted on the highway outside the hedge had now turned after them through the gate; and already the driver was having a bad time of it in the swampy meadow.

As Halkett lifted the last plank that spanned the

brook, one of three men in the tonneau of the car stood up and fired a revolver at him; and another of the men, seated beside him, also fired deliberately, resting his elbow on the side of the stalled car to steady his aim, and supporting the revolver with his left hand under the barrel.

Halkett ran back to where the cart stood, partly concealed among the ferns and bushes; Warner, holding whip and reins in one hand, passed him an automatic revolver and drew out the other weapon for his own use.

"This is rottenly ungrateful of me," said the Englishman. "I've certainly involved you now!"

"It's all right; I'm enjoying it! Now, Halkett, their car is badly mired. There is another gate to that hedge a few hundred yards below. If you'll just lay those planks in the cart, we'll drive along the hard ground here and make another bridge below."

Halkett picked up the wet and muddy planks, one by one, and placed them crossways in the cart. Then, at a nod from Warner, he climbed up and the cart started slowly south, winding cautiously in and out among the bushes.

When they had driven a little distance, the men in the car across the brook caught sight of them; the driver left his wheel and sprang out; and from either door of the tonneau the three other men followed, revolvers lifted. There was no shouting; not a word spoken; not a sound except the hard, dry crack of the

pistols.

"I don't know," said Warner coolly, "whether this horse will stand our fire, but if they cross the stream we'll have to begin shooting.... We'd better begin now anyway, I think." He drew rein, turned in his seat, and fired two shots in quick succession. The horse started, and, instantly checked, stood trembling but behaving well enough.

Another shot from Halkett brought the running men to a halt. Warner drove on immediately; three of the men started to follow on a run, but half a dozen rapid shots brought them to a dead stop again. And again the dogcart jolted slowly forward.

One of the men made a furious gesture, turned, and ran back to the mud-stalled car; two of the others followed to aid him to extricate the machine; the fourth man, skulking along the stream, continued to advance as the dogcart drove on.

Warner, driving carefully, shoved with his foot a box of clips toward the dashboard; Halkett reloaded both automatics. Presently the cart turned east, descending the hard slope toward the stream again; and the man who had followed them along the swampy brook immediately opened fire.

Halkett and Warner sprang out; the former shouldered the planks and ran forward; the latter, holding his nervous horse by the head, fired at the man among the reeds as he advanced toward the stream.

It seemed odd that so many bullets could fly and hit nothing; Halkett heard them whining over his head; the horse heard them too and threatened to become unmanageable. Far up the stream the three other men were laboring frantically to disengage the grey automobile; the man across the creek, routed out of the reeds by the stream of bullets directed at him, was running now to get out of range. Evidently his automatic was empty, for it merely swung in his hand as he ran.

But what occupied Warner was the course the man was taking, straight for the lower gate in the hedge.

"Jump in!" he called to Halkett. "We can't wait for the other planks!" The Englishman swung up beside him; the whip whistled and the horse, now thoroughly frightened, bounded forward down the slope and took the improvised bridge at a single leap. For one moment it looked like a general smash, but the cart stood it, and, after a perilous second, righted itself.

Straight at the closed gate drove Warner, whipping his horse into a dead run; crashed through the flimsy pickets, slashed mercilessly with his whip at the man who pluckily stripped off his coat and strove to make the horse swerve into the hedge, as a toreador waves his cloak at a charging bull.

Halkett could have shot the man; but he merely turned his weapon on him as they dashed out into

the highroad once more, and tore away due south through the rose and golden glory of the sunset.

The horse ran a flat mile before Warner chose to ease him down; the summer wind whistled in their ears; the last glow faded from the purpling zenith; the crimson streak on the river surface, which had run parallel on their left like level and jagged lightning, glimmered to a pallid ochre tint; and the flying mist of trees and bushes which had fled past like an endless rush of phantoms now took shape and substance once more above the rising veil of river mist.

Warner's tense features were flushed with excitement. As he gradually eased in his horse he was smiling.

"Well, what do you know about this performance of ours, Halkett?" he inquired rather breathlessly. "Can you beat it in the movies?"

"I'm wondering what I've let you in for," said the Englishman very seriously.

"I'll tell you," laughed Warner; "you've let me in for a last glimpse of my youth—the days when everything went and every chance for mischief was gratefully seized—the days when I was a subject of the only real democracy on earth—the Latin Quarter—the days that dawn no more, Halkett. This is the last gleam from their afterglow. *Nosce tempus*! But the sun has set at last, Halkett, and the last haymaker is going home."

"It would not have been very amusing if one of those bullets had knocked you off your seat," remarked Halkett.

"But they didn't, old chap!" returned Warner heartily. "It was a good mix-up—exciting, harmless, and beneficial. I feel years younger. Respectability is a good, warm coat for the winter of life; but one feels its weight in Indian summer."

Halkett smiled but shook his head:

"No good hunting trouble. You've only to turn around any time to find it sniffing in your tracks."

"You don't understand. For years I've worked very steadily, very seriously. I've painted, studied, read; I've made a living by selling some pictures, by royalties on the reproduction of pictures, by teaching a summer class of girls. After a while, you know, one goes stale with respectability. I went out to the East and saw the Balkan fighting. It helped some. I made some sketches last year in Mexico. That helped.

"But there's an exhilaration about lawbreaking—or in aiding and abetting a lawbreaker—that has the rest beaten to a batter. Today's misdeeds mean a new lease of life to me, Halkett."

The Englishman laughed. He was still cradling the two automatics on his knees; now, with a careless glance behind him, he leaned forward and replaced them in their respective holsters.

"For a rather celebrated and weighty member of the social structure," he remarked, "there is a good

deal of the boy left in you."

"When that dies in a man," returned Warner lightly, "creative and constructive work end. The child who built with blocks, the youth who built airier castles, is truly dead. And so is the man he has become."

"Do you think so?"

"I know it. The same intellectual and physical restlessness drives one to create and construct, which, as a boy, drove one into active and constructive mischief. When the day dawns wherein creating no longer appeals to me, then I am old indeed, Halkett, and the overcoat of respectability will suit me the year round.... I'm very glad that I have found it oppressive this July day. By the way, what day does it happen to be?"

Halkett said:

"It happens to be the last day of July. I have an idea that several billion other people are destined to remember these last few days of July, 1914, as long as they live."

"Why?" inquired the American curiously.

"Because, within these last few days, Austria has declared war on Servia, Russia has already ordered partial mobilization, Germany has sent her an ultimatum, and will back it up tomorrow."

"What! How do you know?"

"You don't mean to ask me that, do you?" said Halkett pleasantly.

"No, of course not——" Warner gazed straight ahead of him as he drove; his altered features had become gravely expressionless. After a moment he said:

"I can't comprehend it. Servia had agreed to everything demanded—except that one item which she offered to arbitrate. I can't understand it."

Halkett said calmly:

"It is not difficult to understand. A telegram has been suppressed—the only telegram which could now prevent war." He removed his straw hat, took from the lining a strip of semi-transparent paper, and read aloud the minute handwriting:

"The German government has published several telegrams which the Emperor of Russia exchanged with Emperor William. Among these telegrams, nevertheless, is one which was not published—a dispatch from His Russian Majesty, dated July 29, 1914, containing a proposition to submit the Austro-Servian conflict to The Hague Tribunal.

"This has an appearance of a desire in Germany to pass over in silence the attempt to prevent the approaching collision. In view of this, the Minister of Foreign Affairs is authorized to publish the telegram mentioned, of which this is the text:

"'Thanks for your conciliatory and friendly telegram. Inasmuch as the official message presented today by your ambassador to my minister was conveyed in a very different tone, I beg you to explain this divergency. It would be right to give over the Austro-Servian problem to The Hague Conference. I trust in your wisdom and friendship.'"

"Where did you get that?" asked Warner bluntly.

"This morning at the Boule d'Argent. A friend was kind enough to leave it for me in a note," he added blandly.

"Do you believe it to be authentic?"

"Unfortunately, I can not question its truth."

"You think that the German government——"

"Without any doubt at all, Warner. For her The Day is about to dawn at last. Her Joshua has halted the course of the sun long enough to suit himself. It is scheduled to rise tomorrow."

"Do you mean war?"

"I do."

"Where?"

"Well, here, in France—to mention one place."

"In *France*!"

"Surely, *surely*!"

"Invasion?"

"Exactly."

"From which way?"

Halkett shrugged:

"Does anybody now believe it will come by way of the Barrier Forts? The human race never has been partial to cross-country traveling; only ants prefer it."

"You think it will come by the flank—through Belgium?"

"Ask yourself, Warner. Is there an easier way for it to come?"

"But the treaties?"

"*Nulla salus bello; necessitas no habet legem.*"

"Nothing dishonorable is ever necessary."

"Ah! If nations could only agree upon the definition of that word 'honor'! There'd be fewer wars, my friend."

"You think, if France follows Russia's example and mobilizes, that Germany will strike through

Belgium?"

"I'm sure of it."

"What about England, then?" asked Warner bluntly.

But Halkett remained silent; and he did not repeat the question.

"After all," he said, presently, "this entire business is incredible. Diplomacy will find a way out of it." And, after a moment's silence: "You don't think so?"

"No."

Presently Halkett turned and looked back through the gathering dusk.

"I wonder," he said, "whether they'll get their car out tonight?"

"They'll have to go back to Ausone for aid," said Warner.

"Do you still mean to put me up at Saïs?"

"Certainly. You don't expect your friends back there to assault the inn, do you?"

"No," said Halkett, laughing. "They don't do things that way just yet."

Warner snapped his whip, caught the curling lash, let it free, twirled it, and, snapped it again, whistling cheerfully a gay air from his student days —a tune he had not thought of before in years.

"I believe," he said, frankly hopeful, "that you and I are going to have another little party with those fellows before this matter is ended."

"I'm sure of it," said Halkett quietly.

A few moments later Warner, still whistling his joyous air, pointed toward a cluster of tiny lights far ahead in the dark valley.

"Saïs," he said; and resumed his song blithely:

"Gai, gai, mariez-vous!
C'est un usage
Fort sage.
Gai, gai, mariez-vous,
Le mariage est si doux!—"

"Like a bird it is!" he added ironically.

"By the way, you're *not* married, are you?" inquired Halkett uneasily.

"Oh, Lord! No! Why the unmerited suspicion?"

"Nothing much. I just thought that after getting you into this scrape I shouldn't dare face your wife."

Then they both laughed heartily. They were already on excellent terms. Already acquaintance was becoming an unembarrassed friendship.

Warner flourished his whip and continued to laugh:

"I have no serious use for women. To me the normal and healthy woman is as naïve as the domestic and blameless cat, whose first ambition is for a mate, whose second is to be permanently and agreeably protected, and whose ultimate aim is to

acquire a warm basket by the fireside and fill it full of kittens! ... No; I'm not married. Don't worry, Halkett."

He whistled another bar of his lively song:

"Women? Ha! By the way, I've a bunch of them here in Saïs, all painting away like the devil and all, no doubt laying plans for that fireside basket. It's the only thing a woman ever really thinks about, no matter what else she pretends to be busy with. I suppose it's natural; also, it's natural for some men to shy wide of such things. I'm one of those men. So, Halkett, as long as you live, you need never be afraid of offending any wife of mine!"

"Your sentiments," said Halkett, mockingly serious, "merely reveal another bond between us. I thank God frequently that I am a bachelor."

"Good," said Warner with emphasis. And he chanted gayly, as he drove, "Gai, gai, marions-nous —" in a very agreeable baritone voice, while the lights of Saïs grew nearer and brighter among the trees below.

"I never saw a girl worth the loss of my liberty," he remarked. "Did you, Halkett? And," he continued, "to be tied up to a mentally deficient appendage with only inferior intellectual resources, and no business or professional occupation—to be tied fast to something that sits about to be entertained, and that does nothing except nourish itself and clothe itself, and have babies!—It's unthinkable, isn't it?"

"It's pretty awful.... Of course if a woman came along who combined looks and intellect and professional self-sufficiency——"

"You don't find them combined. Take a slant at my class. That's the only sort who even pretend to anything except vacuous idleness. There are no Portias, Halkett. There never were. If there were, I'd take a chance myself, I think. But a man who marries the young girl of today has on his hands an utterly useless incubus. No wonder he sometimes makes experiments elsewhere. No wonder he becomes a rainbow chaser. But he's like a caged squirrel in a wheel; the more he runs around looking for consolation the less progress he makes.

"No, Halkett, this whole marriage business is a pitiable fizzle. Until both parties to a marriage contract are financially independent, intellectually self-sufficient, and properly equipped to earn their own livings by a business or a trade or a profession—and until, if a mistake has been made, escape from an ignoble partnership is made legally easy—marriage will remain the sickly, sentimental, pious fraud which a combination of ignorance, superstition, custom, and orthodoxy have made it.

"I'm rather eloquent on marriage, don't you think so?"

"Superbly!" said Halkett, laughing. "But, do you know, Warner, your very eloquence betrays the fact that you have thought as much about it as the

unfortunate sex you have so eloquently indicted."

"What's that?" demanded Warner wrathfully.

"I'm sorry to say it, but you are exactly the sort of man to fall with a tremendous flop."

"If ever I fall——"

"You fell temporarily this afternoon."

"With that painted, grey-eyed——"

"Certainly, with the girl Philippa. Come, old chap, you were out with her a long while! What did you two talk about? Love?"

"No, you idiot——"

"You didn't even mention the word 'love'? Be honest, old chap!"

Warner began to speak, checked himself.

"Didn't you or she even mention the subject?" persisted Halkett with malicious delight.

But Warner was too angry to speak, and the Englishman's laughter rang out boyishly under the stars. To look at them one would scarcely believe they had been a target for bullets within the hour.

"You don't suppose," began Warner, "that——"

"No, no!" cried Halkett. "—Not with that girl. I'm merely proving my point. You're too eloquent concerning women not to have spent a good deal of time in speculating about them. You even speculated concerning Philippa. The man who mourns the scarcity of Portias wouldn't be likely to care for one if he met her. You're just the man to fall in love with everything you denounce in a girl. And I have no

doubt I shall live to witness that sorrowful spectacle."

Warner had to laugh.

"You are rather a terrifying psychologist," he said. "You almost make me believe I have a streak of romance in me."

"Oh, we all have that, Warner. We call it by other names—cleverness, logic, astuteness, intelligence—but we all have it in us, and it is revealed in every man who marries a woman for love.... Believe me, no normal man ever lived who was not, at some brief moment in his life, in love with some woman. Maybe he ignored it and it never came again; maybe he strangled it and went on about more serious business; maybe it died a natural but early death. But once, before he died, he must have had a faint, brief glimpse of it. And that was the naissance of the latent germ of romance in him—ephemeral, perhaps, but inevitably to be born before it died."

Warner waved his whip and snapped it maliciously:

"So you have been in love, have you?"

"Why? Because I, also, am suspiciously eloquent?"

"That's the reason—according to you."

Halkett smiled slightly.

"Perhaps I have been," he said.... "Hello! Is this your inn?" as they drew up before the lighted windows of a two-story building standing close to

the left-hand edge of the highway, under the stars.

"Here we are at the Golden Peach," nodded Warner, as the door opened and a smiling peasant lad came out with a: "Bon soir, Monsieur Warner! Bon soir, messieurs!" And he took the horse's head while they descended.

That night, lying awake on his bed in the Inn of the Golden Peach, Halkett heard the heavy rush of a southbound automobile passing under his window with the speed of an express train.

And he wondered whether the spongy morass by the little brook still held the long, grey touring car imprisoned.

He got up, went to his window and leaned out. Far away down the road the tail lamps of the machine twinkled, dwindled to sparks, and were engulfed in the invisible.

"More trouble south of me," he thought. But he returned to his bed and lay there, tranquil in the knowledge that when he started south alone on the morrow the envelope would not be on his person.

After a while he rose again, walked to the door connecting his room with Warner's, and opened it cautiously.

"I'm awake," said Warner in a low voice.

"Did you hear that car?"

"Yes. Was it the one that chased us?"

"I only guess so. Listen, Warner! When I go south

tomorrow, what are you going to do with that envelope until I send a man back for it?"

"I've thought it all out, old chap. I shall take one of my new canvases, lay the envelope on it, cover envelope and canvas with a quarter of an inch of Chinese White, and when the enamel is dry I shall paint on it. By the way, did you do your telephoning to your satisfaction?"

"Entirely, thank you."

"You got your man?"

"I did," said Halkett. "He's on his way here now. Good night. I'll sleep like a fox, old chap!"

"Good night," said Warner cheerily, enamored with his invention for the safety of the envelope, as well as with the entire adventure.

That night, while they both slept, far away southward, on a lonely road in the Vosges, the car which had rushed by under their windows was now drawn up on the edge of the road.

Four men sat in it, waiting.

Just as dawn broke, what they awaited came up out of the south—a far, faint rattle announced it, growing rapidly louder; and a motor cyclist, riding without lights, shot out of the grey obscurity, trailing a comet's tail of dust.

Head-on he came, like a streak, caught sight suddenly of the motionless car and of four men standing up in it, ducked and flattened out over his handlebars as four revolvers poured forth streams of

fire.

Motor cycle and rider swerved into the ditch with a crash; the latter, swaying wide in his saddle, was hurled a hundred feet further through the air, landing among the wild flowers on the bank above.

He was the man to whom Halkett had telephoned.

He seemed to be very young—an Englishman—with blood on his fair hair, and his blue eyes partly open.

They searched him thoroughly; and when they could find nothing more they lifted him between two of them; two others carried the wrecked motor cycle out across the fields toward the slope of a wooded mountain.

After ten minutes or so, two of the men returned to the car, drew a couple of short, intrenching spades from the tool box, and went away again across the fields toward the misty woods.

A throstle in a thorn bush had been singing all the while.

CHAPTER V

Halkett had not slept well; all night long in the garden under his window the nightingales had been very noisy. When he slept, sinister dreams had

assailed him; cocks crowed at sunrise, cowbells tinkled, outside his drawn blinds a refreshed and garrulous world was awakening; and the happy tumult awoke him, too.

He was bathed, shaved, and dressed, and downstairs before Warner awoke at all; and he began to rove about the place which, by daylight, did not look at all like what he had imagined it to be the night before.

The Inn of the Golden Peach was one of those cream-tinted stucco houses built into and around a series of haphazard garden walls which inclosed flower and fruit gardens, cow-barns and stables. Its roof and wall copings were covered with red tiles, weather-faded to a salmon tint; two incredible climbing rosebushes nearly covered the front with delicate, salmon-pink blossoms, and, in the rear, flowers bloomed along stone-edged borders—masses of white clove pinks, rockets, poppies, heliotrope, reseda, portulaca, and pansies—a careless riot of color, apparently, yet set with that instinctive good taste which seldom fails in France and is common alike to aristocrat and peasant.

Beyond the strawberry beds were fruit trees, peach, cherry, plum, and apricot—the cherries hanging ripe and deeply crimson among dark green leaves, the apricots already golden, peaches and plums delicately painted with a bloom which promised approaching maturity.

Everywhere the grass grew thick and intensely green, though it was not very neatly kept; water ran out of a stone trough and made a dancing little rivulet over a bed of artificially set stones among which grew ferns. Beyond stood a trellised summerhouse, with iron tables and chairs painted green.

On the edge of the watering trough, Halkett seated himself in the sun. An immaculate tiger cat sat on the garden walk a few paces away, polishing her countenance with the velvet side of one forepaw, and occasionally polishing the paw with a delicate pink tongue.

Once or twice she looked at Halkett without any apparent interest; now and then she glanced up with more interest at the side of the house where, under the kitchen door, in a big basket-cage, a jay hopped about, making a scuffling noise among his cracked maize and rye straw.

However, the cat proved entirely susceptible to flattery, responded graciously to polite advances, and presently relapsed into a purring doze on his knee.

It was very still in the garden, too early even for butterflies to be abroad. The kitchen door remained closed; smoke had just begun to rise from one chimney.

In the peaceful silence nothing stirred; there was no breeze, no sound save the trickle of water among fern fronds.

Then, from nowhere apparently, into this golden tranquillity came a nun—no, not a nun, but one of those Grey Daughters of St. Vincent de Paul, who have "for their monastery the houses of the sick, for a cell a hired room, for a cloister the city streets, for a veil modesty."

In her white *cornette*, or pointed coiffe, with its starched wings, her snowy collarette, wide sleeves, grey apron, and grey-blue habit, she became instantly the medieval incarnation which vitalized the old garden and the ancient wall, so that the centuries they had witnessed were born again there where their spirit had returned, clothed in the costume which they had known so well.

The *soeur de charité* had not seen Halkett; she passed lightly, swiftly, along the flowering borders with scissors and ozier basket, bending here to gather the white clove pinks, kneeling there to snip off pansies.

And it was only when the grey cat leaped from Halkett's knees and advanced toward the Sister of Charity with a little mew of recognition that she turned, still kneeling, caught sight of Halkett, and remained looking at him, one delicate white hand resting on the purring cat.

Halkett was on his feet, his hat under his arm, now, and he bade her good-morning with that pleasant deference which marks such men immediately for what they are.

She smiled faintly from the transparent shadow of her white *cornette*.

"Flowers are all so lovely," she said, "it is never easy for me to choose. They are for my school, you know?"—with a slight rising inflection. But evidently this young man did not know, so she added, "I am Sister Eila," and smiled again, when it was apparent that he had never heard of Sister Eila.

"I am English," he said, "—traveling through France on business. I arrived last night to visit my friend, Mr. Warner. My name is Halkett."

She nodded and snipped a few more pansies.

"May I help you, Sister? If you don't mind telling me what flowers you desire——"

"Merci, Monsieur. Pansies, if you please. The children see odd little faces in their petals, and it amuses them."

Down on his knees beside the border, the grey cat seated between them, Halkett picked pansies and laid them in rows in her ozier basket.

"Of course," he said, "your school is a charity school."

"For the poor, of course. My children are those of the quarrymen."

"You do not teach them alone?"

"Oh, no. Sister Félicité teaches with me. And then, of course, we are together when, during the vacation, hospital service is required of us."

"Is there a quarry hospital?"

"Yes, Monsieur. It is more like an ambulance where first aid is given. The hospital at Ausone takes our sick." Still kneeling, she looked up at the slender fruit trees beyond, and the sunlight fell full on the most exquisite young face that Halkett had ever seen. Whether it was her unexpected beauty that gave him a little shock, or the sudden idea that in her features there was a haunting resemblance to somebody he had seen, perhaps met, he did not know.

Sometimes in the first glimpse of a face we recognize the living substance of her to whom we have aspired, and of whom we have dreamed. But she has never existed except in the heart which created her until we unconsciously endow another with all we dreamed she was.

He went on gathering flowers to fill her basket.

"I wonder," she said musingly, "whether any of those apricots are ripe. One of my children is convalescent, and she really needs a little fresh fruit."

So Halkett rose, threaded his way through the flowers, and looked carefully among the branches for a ripe apricot. He found two, and Sister Eila laid them together in the corner of her basket, which was now full.

He walked with her to the garden door, which was set solidly under an arch in the wall. There she looked up, smiling, as she said in English:

"Is not our country of Saïs very lovely, Mr. Halkett?"

"Yes, indeed, it is," he replied, also smiling in his surprise. "But, Sister Eila, you are English, are you not?"

"Irish—but brought up in France." ... Her face grew graver; she said very quietly: "Is it true there is any danger of war? The children are talking; it is evident that the quarrymen must be discussing such things among themselves. I thought I'd ask you——"

"I'm afraid," he said, "that there is some slight chance of war, Sister."

"Here in France?"

"Yes—here."

"It is Germany, of course?"

"Yes, the menace comes from—" he cast a quick glance toward the east, "—from over there.... Perhaps diplomacy may regulate the affair. It is always best to hope."

"Yes, it is best always—to hope," she said serenely.... "Thank you, Mr. Halkett. Mr. Warner is a friend of mine. Perhaps you may have time to visit our school with him."

"I'll come," said Halkett.

She smiled and nodded; he opened the heavy green door for her, and Sister Eila went out of the golden world of legend, leaving the flowers and young trees very still behind her.

CHAPTER VI

Warner discovered him there in the garden, seated once more on the stone trough, the grey cat dozing on his knees.

"Hello, old chap!" he said cheerfully. "Did you sleep?"

Halkett gave him a pleasant, absent-minded glance:

"Not very well, thanks."

"Nor I. Those damn nightingales kept me awake. Has your man arrived?"

"Not yet. I don't quite understand why."

Warner sauntered up and caressed the cat.

"Well, Ariadne, how goes it with you?" he inquired, gently rubbing her dainty ears, an attention enthusiastically appreciated, judging by the increased purring.

"Ariadne, eh?" inquired Halkett.

"Yes—her lover forsook her—although she doesn't seem to mind as much as the original lady did. No doubt she knows there's a Bacchus somewhere on his way to console her."

The other nodded in his pleasant, absent-minded fashion. After a moment he said:

"I've been talking to a Sister of Charity here in the garden."

"Sister Félicité?"

"No; Sister Eila."

"Isn't she the prettiest thing!" exclaimed Warner. "And she's as good as she is beautiful. We're excellent friends, Sister Eila and I. I'll take you over to her school after breakfast."

"It's the Grey Sisterhood, isn't it?"

"St. Vincent de Paul's Filles de la Charité; not the Grey Nuns, you know."

"I supposed not. Of course these nuns are not cloistered."

"They are not even nuns. They don't take perpetual vows."

Halkett looked up quickly.

"What!" he demanded.

"No. The vows of these Sisters of Charity are simple vows. They renew them annually. Still, it is a strict order. Their novitiate is five years' probation."

"Oh! I supposed——" He remained silent, his thoughtful gaze fixed on space.

"Yes, our brave gentle Sisters of Charity remain probationers for five years, and then every year they renew their vows of chastity, poverty, and obedience. The annual vows are taken some time in March, I believe. They have no cloister, you know, other than a room in some poor street near the school or hospital where they work. Did you ever hear the wonderful story of their Order?"

"No."

So Warner sketched for him the stainless history

of a true saint, and of the Filles de St. Vincent de Paul through the centuries of their existence; and Halkett listened unstirring, his handsome head bent, his hand resting motionless on Ariadne's head.

A few minutes later a fresh-faced peasant girl, in scarlet bodice and velvet-slashed black skirts, came out into the garden bearing a tray with newly baked rolls, new butter, and café-au-lait for two. She placed it on the iron table in the little summerhouse, curtseyed to the two young men, exchanged a gay greeting with Warner, and trotted off again in her *chaussons*—the feminine, wholesome, and admirable symbol of all that is fascinating in the daughters of France.

Halkett placed Ariadne on the grass, rose, and followed Warner to the arbor; Ariadne tagged after them, making gentle but pleased remarks. There was an extra saucer, which Warner filled with milk and set before the cat.

"You know," he said to Halkett, "I like to eat by myself—or with some man. So I have my meals served out here, or in the tap room when it rains. The Harem feeds itself in the dining-room——"

"The *what*?"

"My class, I mean. An irreverent friend of mine in Paris dubbed it 'the Harem,' and the title stuck—partly, I suppose, because of its outrageous absurdity, partly because it's a terse and convenient title."

"*They* don't call it that, do they?"

"I should say not! And I hope they don't know that others do. Anyway, the Harem dawdles over its meals and talks art talk at the long table where Madame Arlon—the Patronne—presides. You'll have to meet them."

"Do you criticise your—Harem—this morning?" inquired Halkett, laughing.

"Yes; I give them their daily pabulum. Do you want to come about with me and see how it's done? After the distribution of pap I usually pitch my own umbrella somewhere away from their vicinity and make an hour's sketch. After that I paint seriously for the remainder of the day. But I'll take you over to Sister Eila's school this morning if you like." He fished out a black caporal cigarette and scratched a match.

Halkett, his cigarette already lighted, lounged sideways on the green iron chair, his preoccupied gaze fixed on Ariadne.

"Annual vows," he said, "mean, of course, that a Sister renews such vows voluntarily every year; does it not, Warner?"

"Yes."

"They usually do renew their vows, I suppose."

"Almost always, I believe."

"But—a Sister of Charity *could* return to the—the world, if she so desired?"

"It could be done, but it seldom is, I understand.

The order is an admirable one; a very wonderful order, Halkett. They are careful about admitting their novices, but what they regard as qualifications might not be so considered in a cloistered order like the Ursalines. The novitiate is five years, I believe; except for the head of the order in Paris, no grades and no ranks exist; all Sisters are alike and on the same level." He smiled. "If anything could ever convert me to Catholicism, I think it might be this order and the man who founded it, Saint Vincent de Paul, wisest and best of all who have ever tried to follow Christ."

Ariadne had evidently centered her gentle affections upon the new Englishman; she trotted at his heels as he sauntered about in the garden; she showed off for his benefit, playfully patting a grasshopper into flight, frisking up trees only to cling for a moment, ears flattened, and slide back to earth again; leaping high after lazy white butterflies which hovered over the heliotrope, but always returning to tag after Halkett where he roamed about, a burnt-out cigarette between his fingers, his eyes dreaming, lost in speculations beyond the ken of any cat.

The Harem came trooping into the garden, presently, shepherded by Warner. They all carried full field kit—folding easels, stools, and umbrellas slung upon their several and feminine backs; a pair of clamped canvases in one hand, color-box in the

other.

Halkett was presented to them all. There was Miss Alameda Golden, from California, large, brightly colored, and breezy; there was Miss Mary Davis, mouse-tinted, low-voiced, who originated in Brooklyn; there was Miss Jane Post, of Chicago, restlessly intense and intellectually curious concerning all mundane phenomena, from the origin of café-au-lait to the origin of species; and there was Miss Nancy Lane, of New York, a dark-eyed opportunist and an observer of man—sometimes individually, always collectively. And there was Miss Peggy Brooks, cosmopolitan, sister of Madame de Moidrey who lived in a big house among the hills across the meadows—the Château des Oiseaux, prettily named because the protection and encouragement of little birds had been the immemorial custom of its lordly proprietors.

And so the Harem, fully equipped to wrestle with the giant, Art, filed out of the quiet garden and across the meadows by the little river Récollette, where were haystacks, freshly erected and fragrant, which very unusual subject they had unanimously chosen for their morning's crime.

To perpetrate it upon canvas they pitched their white umbrellas, tripod easels, and sketching stools; then each maiden, taking a determined grip upon her charcoal, squinted, so to speak, in chorus at the hapless haystacks. And the giant, Art, trembled in the

seclusion of the *ewigkeit*.

Warner regarded them gloomily; Halkett, who had disinterred a pipe from his pockets, stood silently beside him, loading it.

"They'll paint this morning, and after luncheon," said Warner. "After dinner they all get into an omnibus and drive to Ausone to remain overnight, and spend tomorrow in street sketching. I insist on their doing this once every month. When they return with their sketches, I give them a general criticism."

"Will these young ladies ever really amount to anything?" inquired Halkett.

"Probably never. Europe, the British Isles, and the United States are dotted all over with similar and feminine groups attempting haystacks. The sum-total of physical energy thus expended must be enormous —like the horsepower represented by Niagara. But it creates no ripple upon the intellectual serenity of the thinking world. God alone knows why women paint haystacks. I do my best to switch them toward other phenomena."

The rural postman on his bicycle, wearing *képi* and blue blouse, came pedaling along the highway. When he saw Warner he saluted and got off his wheel.

"Letters, Grandin?"

"Two, Monsieur Warner."

Warner took them.

"Eh, bien?" he inquired, lowering his voice; "et la

guerre?"

"Monsieur Warner, the affair is becoming very serious."

"What is the talk in Ausone?"

"People are calm—too calm. A little noise, now, a little gesticulation, and the affair would seem less ominous to me—like the Algeciras matter and the Schnaeble incident before that—Monsieur may remember?"

"I know. It is like the hush before a tempest. The world is too still, the sunlight too perfect."

"There seems to me," said the little postman, "a curious unreality about yesterday and today—something in the cloudless peace overhead that troubles men."

Being no more and no less poet than are all French peasants, this analysis sufficed him. He touched his képi; the young men lifted their hats, and the postman pedaled away down the spotless military road.

Warner glanced at the envelope in his hand; Halkett looked at it, too. It was addressed in red ink.

"It's for me, old chap," said the Englishman.

The other glanced up, surprised.

"Are you sure?"

"Quite—if you don't mind trusting me."

Warner laughed and handed him the letter.

"It's addressed very plainly to me," he said. "You've got your nerve with you, Halkett."

"I have to keep it about me, old chap."

"No doubt. And still I don't see——"

"It's very simple. I sent two telephone messages last night. One letter should have arrived. It has not! The man who wrote this letter must have gone miles last night on a motor cycle to mail it so that your little postman should hand it to me this morning ——"

"Intriguer!" interrupted Warner, still laughing. "He handed it to *me*! I see you're going to get me in Dutch before I'm rid of you."

"I don't comprehend your Yankee slang," retorted Halkett with a slight grin, "so if you don't mind I'll sit here on the grass and read my letter. Go on and criticize your Harem. But before you go, lend me a pencil. They stole even my pencil in the Cabaret de Biribi."

Warner, amused, handed him a pencil and a pad, and strolled away toward the industrious Harem to see what they might be perpetrating.

Halkett seated himself on the grass where, if he chose to glance up, he had a clear view all about him. Then he opened his letter.

It was rather an odd sort of letter. It began:

DEAR GREEN:

A red wagon, red seat, orange rumble, red mudguards, blue steering-wheel, red bumpers, blue

wheels, red engines, red varnish, red open body, red machinery, red all over, in fact, except where it isn't —is for sale.

So much of this somewhat extraordinary letter Halkett very carefully and slowly perused; then, still studying this first paragraph intently, he wrote down on his pad the following letters in the following sequence, numbering each letter underneath:

```
R O Y G B I V S W A
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0
```

The letters represented, up to and including the letter V, the colors of the solar spectrum in their proper sequence: red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, and violet. The letter S, which followed the letter V, stood for *schwarz*, which in German means black. The letter W stood for weiss, white; the letter A for *argent*. Every letter, therefore, represented some color or metallic luster; and these, in turn, represented numbers.

And now Halkett took the opening salutation in the first paragraph of his letter—"Dear Green." The color green being numbered 4, he found that the fourth letter in the word "dear" was the letter R. This he wrote down on his pad.

Then he took the next few words: "A red wagon, red seat, orange rumble, red——" etc.

The first and only letter in the word "A" he wrote down. The next word after "wagon" was "red." The color red indicated the figure 1. So he next wrote down the first letter of the word "wagon," which is W.

Then came the word "seat." The word "orange" followed it. The color orange indicated number 2 in the spectrum sequence. So he found that in the word "seat" the letter E was the second letter. This he wrote.

Very carefully and methodically he proceeded in this manner with the first paragraph of the letter, as far as the words "all over," but not including them or any of the words in the first paragraph which followed them.

He had, therefore, for his first paragraph, this sequence of letters:

RAWERUSEWEVOM.

Beginning with the last letter, M, he wrote the letters again, reversing their sequence; and he had:

MOVEWESUREWAR.

These, with commas, he easily separated into four words: "Move," "we," "sure," and "war." Then, again reversing the sequence of the words, he had two distinct sentences of two words each before him:

WAR SURE! WE MOVE!

Always working with the numbered color key

before him, taking his letter paragraph by paragraph, he had as a final remainder the following series of letters:

EDIHUOYERADELIARTTIAWDROWOTDEECORPSIALAC

Reversing these, checking off the separate words, and then reversing the entire sequence of words, he had as the complete translation of his letter, including the first paragraph, the following information and admonition:

"War sure. We move. Hide. You are trailed. Wait word to proceed Calais."

"War sure!" That was easily understood. "We move." That meant England was already mobilizing on land and sea. And the remainder became plain enough; he must stay very quietly where he was until further instructions arrived.

He read through his notes and his letter once more, then twisted letter, envelope, and penciled memoranda into a paper spiral, set fire to it with a match, and leisurely lighted his pipe with it.

When the flame of the burning paper scorched his fingers, he laid it carefully on the grass, where it was presently consumed. The charred remnants he ground to dust under his heel as he got up and brushed a spear or two of hay from his clothing.

Then he looked at the Harem, all busily committing felony with brush and colors; and, as he gazed upon them, he politely stifled a yawn.

CHAPTER VII

Warner, conscientious but not hopeful, circulated among the easels of the Harem. Halkett strolled at his heels.

Stopping in front of Alameda Golden's large canvas, which was all splashed with primary and aggressive colors, he gazed, uncomforted, upon what she had wrought there. After a few moments he said very patiently:

"You should not use a larger canvas than I have recommended to the class. Mere size is not necessarily a synonym for distinction, nor does artistic strength depend upon the muscular application of crude paint. A considerable majority of our countrymen comprehend only what is large, gaudy, and garrulous. Bulk and noise only can command their attention. On the other hand, only what is weak, vague, and incoherent appeals to the precious—the incapables and eccentrics among us. But there is a sane and healthy majority: enroll yourself there, Miss Golden!

"Be honest, reticent, and modest. If you have anything to say in paint, say it without self-consciousness, frankly, but not aggressively. Behave on canvas as you would bear yourself in the world at large, with freedom but with dignity, with sincerity

governed by that intelligent consideration for truth which permits realism and idealism, both of which are founded upon fact."

Miss Golden pouted:

"But I *see* haystacks this way!" she insisted. "I see them in large and brilliant impressions. To me nothing looks like what it is. Haystacks appear this way to my eyes!"

"My dear child, then paint them that way. But the popular impression will persist that you have painted the battle of Trafalgar."

Miss Golden wriggled on her camp chair.

"Everything," she explained, "is one monstrous, gaudy, and brutal impression to me. I see a million colors in everything and very little shape to anything. I see only cosmic vigor; and I paint it with a punch. Can't you see all those colors in those haystacks? To me they resemble gigantic explosions of glorious color. And really, Mr. Warner, if I am to be true to myself, I must paint them as I see them."

Warner, horribly discouraged, talked sanely to her for a while, then with a pleasant nod he passed to the next easel, remarking to Halkett under his breath:

"It's a case for a pathologist, not for a painter."

And so for an hour he prowled about among the Harem, ministering to neurotics, inspiring the sluggish, calming despair, gently discouraging self-complacency.

"Always," he said, "we must remain students, because there is no such thing as mastery in any art. If ever we believe we have attained mastery, then our progress ceases; and we do not even remain where we are; we retrograde—and swiftly, too.

"The life work of the so-called 'master' is passed only in solving newer problems. There is no end to the problems, there is an end only to our lives.

"Look at the matter in that way, not as a race toward an attainable goal, nor as an eternally hopeless effort in a treadmill; but as a sane and sure and intelligent progress from one wonder-chamber to a chamber still more wonderful—locked rooms which contain miracles, and which open only when we find the various keys which fit their locks....

"That is all for this morning, young ladies."

He lifted his hat, turned, and strolled away across the meadow, Halkett at his side.

"Some lecture!" he commented with a faint grin.

"It's sound," said Halkett.

"I do the best I can with them. One might suppose I know how to paint, by the way I pitch into those poor girls. Yet, I myself never pick up a brush and face my canvas but terror seizes me, and my own ignorance of all I ought to know scares me almost to death. It's not modesty; I can paint as well as many, better than many. But, oh, the long, long way there is to travel! The stars are very far away, Halkett."

He pitched his easel, secured a canvas, took a freshly-set palette and brushes from his color-box, and, still standing, went rapidly about his business, which was to sketch in an impression of what lay before him.

Halkett, watching him over his shoulder, saw the little river begin to glimmer on the canvas, saw a tender golden light grow and spread, bathing distant hills; saw the pale azure of an arching sky faintly tinting with reflections the delicate green of herbage still powdered with the morning dew.

"This is merely a note," remarked Warner, painting away leisurely but steadily. "Some day I may pose my models somewhere outdoors under similar weather conditions; and you may see dragoons in their saddles, carbines poised, the sunlight enveloping horses and men—or perhaps a line of infantry advancing in open order with shrapnel exploding in their faces.... Death in the summer sunshine is the most terrifying of tragedies.... I remember once after Lule Burgas—— Never mind, I shan't spoil the peaceful beauty of such a morning.

"War? War *here*!—In this still meadow, bathed in the heavenly fragrance of midsummer! ... Well, Halkett, the government of any nation which *attacks* another nation is criminal, and all the arguments of church and state and diplomacy cannot change that hellish fact.

"There is only one right in any combat, only one side in any war. And no reasoning under the sun can invest an aggressor with that right.

"He who first draws and strikes forestalls God's verdict."

Halkett said:

"How about your own wars?"

"Halkett, the United States is the only nation which ever entered a war from purely sentimental reasons. It was so in the Revolution; it was so in 1812, in the War of Secession, in Mexico, in the Cuban War.

"All our wars have been undertaken in response to armed aggression; all were begun and carried on in defense of purely sentimental principles. I do not say it because I am a Yankee, but our record is pretty clean, so far, in a world which, since our birth, has accused us of ruthless materialism."

He continued to paint for a while in silence; and when his color notes were sufficiently complete for his purpose, and when the Harem had filed before the canvas and had adoringly inspected it, Warner packed up his kit, and, taking the wet canvas, walked with Halkett back to the Golden Peach.

There Halkett was made acquainted with Madame Arlon, the stout, smiling proprietress of the inn, who sturdily refused to believe that war was possible, and who explained why to Halkett with animation while Warner went indoors to deposit his

sketches in his studio.

He returned presently, saying that he would take Halkett to Sister Eila's school across the fields; so the two young men lighted their pipes and strolled away together through the sunshine.

Eastward, far afield, the gay aprons and sunbonnets of the Harem still dotted the distance with flecks of color; beyond, the Récollette glimmered, and beyond that hazy hills rolled away southward toward the Vosges country.

Halkett looked soberly into the misty east.

"It won't come from that direction," he said, half to himself.

Warner glanced up, understood, and sauntered on in silence.

"By the way," remarked the Englishman, "I shall stay here tonight."

"I'm very glad," returned Warner cordially.

"So am I, Warner. Ours is an agreeable—acquaintance."

"It amounts to a little more than that, doesn't it?"

"Yes. It's a friendship, I hope."

"I hope so."

After a moment he added laughingly:

"I've fixed up your bally envelope for you."

"How?"

"Covered it with a thick, glossy layer of Chinese white. I put in a dryer. In a day or two I shall make a pretty little picture on it. And nobody on earth could

suspect that embedded under the paint and varnish of my canvas your celebrated document reposes."

They took a highway to the left, narrow and tree-shaded.

"When do you get the newspapers here?" inquired Halkett.

"After lunch, usually. The *Petit Journal d'Ausone* arrives then. Nobody bothers with any Paris papers. But I think I shall subscribe, now.... There's the school, just ahead."

It was a modern and very plain two-storied building of stone and white stucco, covered with new red tiles. A few youthful vines were beginning to climb gratefully toward the lower window sills; young linden trees shaded it. A hum, like the low, incessant murmur of a hive, warned them as they approached that the children were reciting in unison; and they halted at the open door.

Inside the big, clean room, the furniture of which was a stove and a score or more of desks, two dozen little girls, neatly but very poorly dressed, stood beside their desks reciting. On a larger desk stood a glass full of flowers which Halkett recognized; and beside this desk, slenderly erect, he saw Sister Eila, facing the children, her white hands linked behind her back.

Seated behind the same desk was another Sister —a buxom one with the bright, clear coloring of a healthy peasant—more brilliant, even, for the white

wimple, collarette, and wide-winged headdress which seemed to accent the almost riotous tint of physical health.

The childish singsong presently ceased; Sister Eila turned pensively, took a step or two, lifted her eyes, and beheld Halkett and Warner at the doorway.

"Oh!" she exclaimed. "Please come in, Messieurs. I have been wondering whether Mr. Warner would bring you before luncheon.... Sister Félicité, this is Monsieur Halkett, who so amiably aided me to gather my bouquet this morning."

Sister Félicité became all animation and vigor; she was cordial to Halkett, greeted Warner with the smiling confidence of long acquaintance.

It lacked only a few minutes to noon, and so lessons were suspended, and the children put through one or two drills for Halkett's benefit.

Out in the kitchen a good, nourishing broth was simmering for them, and Sister Eila slipped away during the brief exhibition to prepare twenty-four bowls and spoons and tartines for these ever-hungry little children of the poor, orphaned for the most part, or deserted, or having parents too poor to feed them.

At noon Sister Félicité dismissed the school; and the little girls formed in line very demurely and filed off to the kitchen.

"What a delicious odor!" exclaimed Halkett, nose in the air.

Sister Félicité sniffed the soup.

"We do our best," she said. "The poor little things fatten here, God be praised." And, to Warner, in her vigorous, alert manner: "What is all this talk concerning war? The children prattle about it. They must have heard such gossip among the quarry people."

Warner said:

"It begins to look rather serious, Sister."

"Is it Germany again?"

"I fear so."

Sister Félicité's pink cheeks flushed:

"Is it the noisy boaster who rules those Germans who would bring the sword upon us again? Is there not enough of barbaric glory in his Empire for him and his that he should invade the civilized world to seek for more? It is a vile thing for any man, be he ruler or subject, to add one featherweight to the crushing burden of the world's misery!"

"To declare war is the heaviest of all responsibilities," admitted Warner.

"Is it already declared?"

"No. That is to say, Austria has declared war against Servia, Russia is mobilizing, and Germany has warned her."

"Is that an excuse for anybody to attack France?"

"Russia is mobilizing, Sister," he repeated meaningly.

"What then?"

"France must follow."

"And then?"

Warner shrugged his shoulders.

Sister Eila came out, nodding to Sister Félicité, who usually presided at the lunch hour: and the latter went away with Warner toward the kitchen, still plying the American with questions. Sister Eila bent her head, inhaled the perfume of the flowers on her desk, and then looked up at Halkett.

"Don't you ever lunch?" he asked.

"Yes; I tasted the soup. You lunch at one at the inn."

"I suppose so. What a charming country this is—this little hamlet of Saïs! Such exquisite peace and stillness I have seldom known."

Sister Eila's eyes grew vague; she looked out through the sunny doorway across the fields towards a range of low hills. The quarries were there.

"It is a tranquil country," she said pensively, "but there is misery, too. Life in the quarries is hard, and wages are not high."

"Mr. Warner tells me they are a hard lot, these quarrymen."

"There is intemperance among the quarrymen, and among the cement workers, too: and there is roughness and violence—and crime, sometimes. But it is a very hard *métier*, Mr. Halkett, and the lime dust blinds and sears and incites a raging thirst. God knows there is some excuse for the drunkenness

there. We who are untempted must remain gentle in our judgments."

"I could not imagine Sister Eila judging anybody harshly."

Sister Eila looked up and laughed:

"Oh, Mr. Halkett, I have confessed to impatience too many times to believe that I could ever acquire patience. Only today I scolded our children because they tore down a poster which had been pasted on the public wall at the crossroad. I said to them very severely, 'It is a sin to destroy what others have paid for to advertise their merchandise.'"

"That was a terrible scolding," admitted Halkett, laughing.

"I'll show you the poster," volunteered Sister Eila, going over to her desk. Raising the lid, she picked up and displayed an advertisement.

CHAPTER VIII

Halkett looked curiously at this specimen of a poster which was already very familiar to him. The dead walls of northern and eastern France and Belgium had been plastered with such advertisements for the last year or two, extolling the Savon de Calypso. But what had recently interested Halkett in these soap advertisements was that posters, apparently exactly

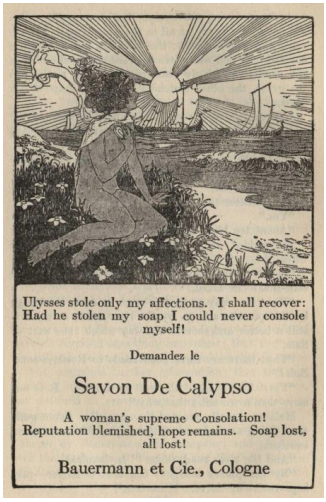
similar, appeared to differ considerably in detail when examined minutely.

The picture in this advertisement represented, as always, the nymph, Calypso, seated upon the grass, looking out over the sea where the sun shone in a cloudless sky upon a fleet of Grecian ships which were sailing away across the blue waves of the Ægean.

Where details varied was in the number of ships in the fleet, the number and grouping of sails, sea birds flying, of waves, and of clouds—when there were any of the latter—the number of little white or blue or pink blossoms in the grass, the height of the sun above the horizon line and the number and size of its rays.

There was always at least one ship—never more than a dozen; he had counted twenty white blossoms on some posters; varying numbers on others, of white, of blue, or of pink, but never less than three of any one color. Sometimes there were no sea birds.

As for the sun, sometimes it hung well above the ocean, often its yellow circle dipped into it, and then again only the rays spread fanlike above the horizon line.



Savon de Calypso poster

And concerning the nymph, her pose and costume did not seem to vary at all in the various poster specimens which he had seen; the wind was always blowing her red hair and white, transparent scarf; she always sat gazing laughingly seaward, one hand resting on the grass, the other clutching a cake of soap to her bosom.

Still examining the sheet of paper, he counted the white flowers scattered over the grass around the seated nymph. There were *ten* of them.

"Sister Eila," he said carelessly, "how many kilometers is it to the next town south of us? I mean by the military road."

"To Rosières-sous-Bois?"

"Yes."

"About ten kilometers by the military road."

He nodded and counted the ships. There were three.

"Is there more than one road which runs to Rosières-sous-Bois?" he asked.

"Yes. One may go by this road, or cross the bridge by the quarries and go by the river road, or there is still a better and shorter highway which runs west of Saïs."

"Then there are *three* main roads to Rosières-sous-Bois?"

"Yes. The road to the west is shorter. It is not more than seven miles that way."

Halkett casually counted the sea gulls. Seven gulls were flying around one of the ships; thirteen around another.

"And the river road, Sister?" he inquired.

"By the quarry bridge? Oh, that is longer—perhaps twelve or thirteen kilometers."

"I see.... Rosières-sous-Bois is not a garrison town?"

"No. There are only a few gendarmes there."

Halkett examined the picture attentively. The sun appeared to be about three hours high above the horizon.

"The nearest military post must be about three hours' journey from here," he ventured.

Sister Eila thought a moment, then nodded:

"Yes, about three hours. You mean the fort above the Pass of the Falcons? That is the nearest."

He counted the rays of the sun. There were three long ones and two short ones.

"I suppose there are three or four battalions garrisoned there," he remarked.

"Three, I think. And a company of engineers and one company of Alpine chasseurs."

All the time, with a detached air, the young Englishman was examining the colored poster, searching it minutely for variations from other posters of the same sort which he had recently investigated.

There remained in his mind little or no doubt that the number and position of the groups of pointed wavelets signified something important; that the number of sails set on the ships, which varied in every poster, contained further information; that the sky, cloudless in some posters, dotted with clouds in others, was destined to convey topographical particulars to somebody.

These colored advertisements of a soap made in Cologne by Bauermann and Company, and plastered over the landscape of Northern and Eastern Belgium and France, concealed a wealth of secret information for anybody who possessed the key to the messages so clearly and craftily expressed in pictograph and cipher code.

The sinister significance of the sheet in his hand

was becoming more apparent every minute. He had made a study of these posters—was just beginning to find them interesting, when he had been ordered to America. Now, all his interest in them returned.

Sister Eila had seated herself at her desk, and, while he was still examining the poster, she continued serenely to correct the pile of inky copybooks.

He watched her for a while, where she bent above the scrawled pages, her pen poised, her lovely face framed in the snowy wimple under the pale shadow of her wide-winged coiffe.

"Sister Eila?"

She turned her head tranquilly.

"You are English, you tell me?"

"Irish." She smiled.

"It's the same. Tell me, have you had enough experience in your world of duty and of unhappiness to know an honest man when you encounter him?"

Sister Eila laid aside her pen and turned toward him.

"I don't think I understand," she said.

"I mean, could you make up your mind about—well—about such a man as I am—merely by inspecting me and hearing me speak?"

Sister Eila laughed:

"I think I could very easily."

"Have you already done so?"

"Why, yes, I suppose so."

"Do you think I am honest enough to be trusted?"

Sister Eila laughed again, deliciously.

"Yes, I think so," she said.

He remained silent and his face, already grave, grew more serious. Sister Eila's smile faded as she watched him. It was becoming very plain to her that here was a man in trouble.

Silent there together in the cool stillness of the schoolroom, they heard the distant clatter of little feet, the vigorous voice of command from Sister Félicité; and a moment later a double file of chattering children passed in the sunshine outside the window, led toward their noonday playground by Sister Félicité accompanied by Warner.

"What is on your mind, Mr. Halkett?" asked Sister Eila, still watching him.

"If I tell you," he said, "will you ask me no more than I offer to tell you?"

She flushed:

"Naturally, Monsieur——"

"You don't quite understand, Sister. What I have to say I wish you to write down for me in the form of a letter of information to the French Government."

"You wish *me* to write it?"

"Please. And that is what I mean. Naturally, you might ask me why I do not write it myself.... Don't ask me, Sister.... If you really do trust me."

He turned, met her gaze, saw two clear, sweet

eyes unspoiled and unsaddened by the wisdom she had learned in dark and wretched places; saw in them only a little wonder, a faintly questioning surprise.

"What is your answer, Sister?" he asked.

"My answer is—I—I *do* trust you.... What am I to write?"

She took a few loose leaves of paper from the desk, and sat looking at him, pen lifted.

He said:

"Write to the chief of the general staff at the Ministry of War in Paris."

And when she had properly addressed the personage in question, he dictated his letter very slowly in English; and Sister Eila, her expressionless young face bent above the letter paper, translated into French as he dictated, and wrote down the exact meaning of every word he uttered:

"Information has come to me that the advertisements of Bauermann and Company, of Cologne, Prussia, which are posted everywhere throughout Belgium and Northern and Eastern France, conceal military and topographical details concerning the vicinity where these advertisements are displayed.

"Such information could be of use only to a prowling spy or an invading enemy.

"Therefore, acting upon the incomplete information offered me, I deem it my duty to bring

this matter to the notice of the Government.

"It would appear that:

"1st. Secret information is contained in the details of the picture which embellishes this advertisement, a sample of which I inclose herewith.

"2nd. These details vary in every poster. Presumably their number, color, groupings, and general distribution constitute a secret code which is calculated to convey information to the enemies of France.

"3rd. In the sample which is inclosed with this letter, the number of ships probably represents the number of highways leading from Saïs to Rosières-sous-Bois; the sea gulls flying above two of the ships give the distance in kilometers; the ten white flowers give the distance by the military road.

"The sun, in the picture, appears to be about three hours high above the horizon; and it is *three hours'* journey from here to the nearest French fortified post, the Pass of the Falcons in the Vosges.

"The rays of the sun are five in number, three long ones and two short ones; and there are *three battalions* of the line guarding the fort at the pass, and *two companies*, one of engineers, one of Alpine infantry.

"My informant, who desires to remain anonymous, further declares it to be his belief that an exhaustive study of this and similar posters would reveal perfectly clear messages in every detail of

color, drawing, and letter-press; and that it is his firm conviction that these posters, representing a German firm which manufactures soap, have been placed throughout Belgium and France for the convenience of an invading army.

"Immediate removal of these advertisements seems advisable in the opinion of my informant.

"(Signed), SISTER EILA,

"Of the Daughters of St. Vincent de Paul at Saïs."

When she had finished the letter and had unhesitatingly signed it, she lifted her clear eyes to him in silence. Her breath came a trifle unevenly; the tint of excitement grew and waned in her cheeks.

"At least," he said, "you will understand that I am a friend to France."

"Yes, that is evident."

"Will you direct and seal the packet and give it to the postman?"

"Yes."

"And, Sister Eila, if they send gendarmes or other officials to question you?"

She looked straight into his eyes, deeply, so that her gaze seemed to plunge into the depths of his very soul.

Then, lifting the cross from the rosary at her girdle, she slipped out of her chair and knelt down

beside her desk, her young head bent low over the crucifix which she held between the palms of her joined hands.

Halkett, head also lowered, stood motionless.

After a few moments she rose lightly from her knees.

"It is a vow, now," she said. "I have bound myself to silence concerning the source of my information —" her untroubled eyes rested again on his —"because I believe in you, Monsieur."

He started to speak, but seemed to find no word to utter. A bright color mounted to his brow; he turned abruptly from the desk and stepped toward the open door.

And the instant he appeared there, framed by the doorway, a shot rang out, knocking a cloud of stucco and plaster from the wall beside him.

CHAPTER IX

He shrank back flat against the wall, edged along it, and slipped swiftly inside the house. A thick veil of lime dust hung across the open doorway, gilded by the sunlight. Crumbs of plaster and mortar still fell to the schoolroom floor.

Through the heated silence of early afternoon he could hear the distant cries of the children from their

playground; there was no other sound; nothing stirred; nobody came.

If Warner had noticed the shot at all, no doubt he supposed it to be the premature report of some piece. To the gaunt, furtive Vosges poacher no close season exists. If it did exist, he would cease to.

Halkett slowly turned his head and saw Sister Eila behind him. She had risen from her chair at the desk; now she came slowly forward, her deep, grey eyes fixed on him. But before she could take another step he laid his hand firmly on her wide, blue sleeve and forced her back into the room.

"Keep away from that door," he said quietly.

"Did somebody try to kill you?" she asked. Her voice was curious, but perfectly calm.

"I think so.... Don't show yourself near that door. They might not be able to distinguish their target at such a range."

"They? Who are 'they'?"

"Whoever fired.... I must ask you again to please keep out of range of that doorway——"

"The shot came from the river willows across the fields, did it not?" she interrupted.

"I'm very sure of it. You need not feel any anxiety for the children, Sister; I am going. There'll be no more shots."

"There is a door at the back by the kitchen yard, Mr. Halkett. They will not see you if you leave that way."

He stood thinking for a while; then:

"On your account, and on the children's, I'll have to show myself again when I leave the house, so that there'll be no mistake about my identity. Don't move until after I have gone some distance along the road. And please say to Mr. Warner that I've returned to the inn for luncheon——"

"There is a door in the rear! You must not show yourself——"

"Indeed, I must. Otherwise, they might mistake you or Sister Félicité or one of the children for me ——"

"Mr. Halkett!" He had already started.

"Yes?" he replied, halting and glancing back; and found her already at his elbow.

"Why were you shot at?" she asked. "I desire to know."

He looked her straight in the eyes:

"I can't tell you why, Sister."

"You say you are English, and that you are a friend to France. If that is true, then tell me who shot at you! Do you know?"

"In a general way, I suppose I do know."

"Do you not trust a French Sister of Charity sufficiently to tell her?"

"What man would not trust a daughter of St. Vincent de Paul?" he said pleasantly.

"Then tell me. Perhaps I already guess. Has it to do with your knowledge of German advertisements?"

He was silent.

"You are evidently a British agent." Her deep, grey eyes grew more earnest. "You are *more*!" she said, clasping her hands with sudden conviction. "I suspected it the first time I saw you——"

"Please do not say to anybody what it is that you suspect——"

"You are a British officer!" she exclaimed.

"Sister Eila; you could do me much harm by mentioning to others this belief of yours, or anything concerning this affair. And—do you remember that you once said you trusted me?"

"I said it—yes."

"Do you still have confidence in me?"

Their eyes met steadily.

"Yes," she said. "I believe you to be a friend to France, and to me." A slight flush edged the snowy wimple which framed the lovely oval of her face.

"I *am* your friend; and I am a friend to France—I say as much as that to you. I say it because of what you are, and because—you are *you*. But ask me no more, Sister. For men of my profession there are confessionals as secret and as absolute in authority as those which shrive the soul."

He hesitated, his eyes shifted from her to the fresh flowers on the desk, which they had both gathered; he reached over and drew a white blossom from the glass.

"May I take it with me?"

She bent her head in silence.

Then he turned to go through the deadly doorway, carrying his flower in his hand; but, as he walked out into the sunshine, Sister Eila stepped swiftly in front of him, turned on the doorstep, screening him with extended arms.

"This is the best way," she said. "They ought to see quite clearly that I am a Sister of Charity, and they won't fire at me——"

But he tried to push her aside and spring past her:

"Stand clear of me, for God's sake!" he said.

"Wait——"

"Sister! Are you insane?"

"*You* must be, Mr. Halkett——"

"Keep away, I tell you——"

"Please don't be rough with me——"

He tried to avoid her, but her strong, young hands had caught both his wrists.

"They won't shoot at a Sister of Charity!" she repeated. "—And I shall not permit them to murder you! Be reasonable! I am not afraid."

She held on to his wrists, keeping always between him and the distant glimmer of the river:

"I shall walk to the road with you this way; don't try to shake me off; I am strong, I warn you!" She was even laughing now. "Please do not wriggle! Only schoolboys wriggle. Do you suppose I am *afraid*? Since when, Monsieur, have Sisters of Charity taken

cover from the enemies of France?"

"This is shameful for me——"

"You behave, as I have said, like a very bad schoolboy, Mr. Halkett——"

He tried vainly to place himself between her and the river, but could not disengage her grasp without hurting her. Then, over his shoulder, he saw three men come out of the river willows.

"You shall not take this risk——" he insisted.

"Please listen——"

"I take no risk worth mentioning. It was you who would have walked out to face their fire—with that smile on your lips and a flower in your hand! Did you think that a Grey Sister would permit that? Soyez convenable, Monsieur. They will not fire while I am walking beside you." She looked over her shoulder. One of the men by the willows was raising a rifle.

They reached the highway at the same moment, and the roadside bank sheltered them. Here she released his arm.

"I beg you to be a little reasonable," she said. "You must leave Saïs at once. Promise me, Mr. Halkett——"

"I cannot."

"Why?"

"Sister, if I am really a soldier, as you suppose me to be, perhaps I have—*orders*—to remain at Saïs."

"Have you?" she asked frankly.

He turned and looked at her:

"Yes, little comrade."

"That is really serious."

"It must not cause you any anxiety. I shall 'wriggle'—as you say—out of this mess when the time comes. I may start tonight."

"For London? Do you wriggle as far as that?"

He said gravely:

"You know more about me now from my own lips than I would admit, even prompted by a firing squad. I trusted you even before you faced death for me on that doorstep a moment ago. *Did you see that man come out of the willows and level his rifle at us?*"

She said tranquilly:

"We daughters of St. Vincent de Paul never heed such things."

"I know you don't; I know what are your traditions. Many a Sister of your Order has fallen under rifle and shell fire on the battlefields of the world; many have died of the pest in hospitals; many have succumbed to exposure. The history of modern war is the history of the Grey Sisters. What you have just done, as a matter of course, is already part of that history. And so—" he looked down at her crucifix and rosary—"and so, Sister, and comrade, I shall tell you what it would not be possible for me to admit to any other living soul in France. Yes; I *am* a British officer on special and secret duty. I left the United States two weeks ago. Trouble began in

Holland. I am now on my way to London. Orders came today halting me at Saïs. Enemies of France are annoying me—people who are becoming more desperate and more determined as the hours pass and the moment approaches swiftly when they can no longer hope to interfere with me. That moment will come when war is declared. It will be declared. I shall be very glad to arrive in England. Now I have told you almost everything, Sister Eila. My honor is in your keeping; my devotion is for my own country, for France—and for you."

"I have made one vow of silence," she said simply. "I shall make another—never to breathe one word of this."

"You need not. Just say to me that you will not speak."

Her lovely face became as solemn as a child's:

"I shall not speak, Mr. Halkett."

"That settles it," he said. "If it lay with me, I'd trust you with every secret in our War Office!" He checked himself, hesitated, then: "Sister Eila, if anything happens to me, go to Mr. Warner and ask him for *that envelope*. There are sure to be British soldiers in France before very long. Give that envelope to some British officer."

After a moment she laughed:

"Englishmen are odd—odd! They are just boys. They are delightful. I shall do what you ask.... And there is your inn.... Am I tired? *I*? Vous plaisantez,

Monsieur! But, Mr. Halkett, what would be the object in your walking back with me? I should only have to walk back here again with you! It would continue *ad infinitum*."

They both laughed.

"When trouble finally comes, and if I am hit, I pray I may lie in your ward," he said gayly.

Her smile faded:

"I shall pray so, too," she said.

"I'd feel like a little boy safe in his own nursery," he added, still smiling.

"I am—happy—to have you think of me in that way." Her smile glimmered anew in her eyes. "I should be a devoted nurse." She made him a friendly little signal of adieu and turned away.

Hat in hand, he stood looking after the grey-blue figure under the snowy headdress.

At the turn of the road she looked back, saw him, still standing there; and again, from the distance, she made him a pretty gesture of caution and of farewell. Then the grassy bank hid her from view.

At the Inn of the Golden Peach, Warner's Harem was already lunching. Through the open windows of the dining-room came a discreet clatter of tableware and crockery, and a breezy, cheery tumult like the chatter in an aviary.

Halkett, not fancying it, went around the house

to the quiet garden. Here he wandered to and fro among the trees or stood about aimlessly, looking down at the flower beds where, kneeling beside Sister Eila, he had aided her to fill her ozier basket.

Later Warner found him seated under the arbor with Ariadne on his knee; and a few moments afterward the maid, Linette, served their luncheon.

Neither of the young men was very communicative, but after the dishes and cloth had been removed, and when Halkett, musing over his cigarette and coffee, still exhibited no initiative toward conversation, Warner broke the silence:

"What about that shot?" he asked bluntly.

"What shot?"

"Don't you want to talk about it?"

Halkett glanced up, amused:

"Well, I suppose there was no hiding that bullet hole and the plaster dust from Sister Félicité."

"Of course not. The bullet ripped out the lathing. Who was it fired at the school? Or was it at you they let go?"

"Didn't you ask Sister Eila?"

"I did. She absolutely refused to discuss it, and referred us both to you. It was no accident, was it?"

"No."

"Somebody tried to get *you*?"

"It rather looked that way."

"Our friends in the grey car, of course!" concluded Warner.

"Not necessarily. *They* have other friends who might be equally attentive to me. I don't know who shot at me. There were three of them over by the river."

"Well, Halkett, don't you think you had better remain indoors for a while?"

"I'd better, I suppose." He laughed. "Honestly, I'm sick of being shot at. One of these days they'll hit me, if they're not very careful."

But Warner did not smile.

"Do you promise to stay indoors?" he insisted.

"I'll see. Perhaps."

"Don't you think it advisable for you to carry some sort of a firearm—one of my automatics, for example?"

"Thanks, old fellow. I think I'll do that, if you can spare a section of your artillery for a day or two."

Warner promptly fished an automatic out of his hip pocket, and Halkett took it and examined it.

"So I'm to do the Wild West business after all," he said gayly. "Right you are, old chap. I know how it's done; I've read about it in your novels. You wait till your enemy takes a drop, then you get the drop!" He laughed at his British joke. And, having no hip pocket, he stowed away the lumpy bluish weapon in a side pocket of his coat.

"Now, don't let me interfere with your daily routine," he continued. "I shall do very well here in the arbor while you lead your Harem toward the

Olympian heights."

"Sometimes I feel like pushing 'em off those cliffs," muttered Warner. "All right; I fancy you'll be snug enough in the garden, here with Ariadne, till I return. We shall have the whole house to ourselves after dinner. The Harem migrates to Ausone for overnight to do street sketches tomorrow, and returns the next morning for a general criticism. So if you'll amuse yourself——"

"I shall be quite comfortable, thanks. If anybody climbs the wall to pot me, we'll turn loose on 'em, this time—won't we, old girl?"—caressing Ariadne, who had returned to his knee.

Half an hour afterward Warner went away in the wake of the Harem; and at the end of the second hour he gave them a final criticism before they started for Ausone.

Much good it did them; but they adored it; they even adored his sarcasms. For the Harem truly worshiped this young man—a fact of which he remained uncomfortably conscious, timidly aware that warier men than he had been landed by maidens less adept than they.

So it was with his usual sense of deep relief that he saluted the Harem, picked up his own kit and canvases, and wandered at hazard through a little poplar grove and out of it on the other edge.

A wild meadow, deep with tasseled grasses and field flowers, stretched away before him, where

swallows sailed and soared and skimmed—where blue lupin, *bouton d'or*, meadowsweet, and slender, silvery stems crowned with queen's lace grew tall, and the heliotrope perfume of hidden hawkweed scented every fitful little wind.

But what immediately fixed his attention was a distant figure wading waist-deep amid the grasses—a slim, brilliant shape, which became oddly familiar as it drew nearer, moving forward with light and boyish grace, stirring within him vaguely agreeable recollections.

Then, in spite of her peasant's dress, he recognized her; and he walked swiftly forward to meet her. The figure out there in the sunshine saw him coming and lifted one arm in distant recognition and salute.

They met in mid-meadow, Warner and the girl Philippa.

Her short skirt and low peasant bodice had faded to a rose-geranium tint; her white chemisette, laced with black, was open wide below the throat. Black velvet straps crossed it on the shoulders and around the cuffs. Her hair was tied with a big black silk bow.

"How in the world did you come to be here?" he asked, not yet releasing the eager, warm little hands so frankly clasped between both of his.

Philippa laughed with sheerest happiness:

"Figurez-vous, Monsieur. I have been punting

since early morning; and when I found myself so near to Saïs I was ready to drop with heat and fatigue: 'Mais, n'importe! Allons!' I said to myself. 'Courage, little one! Very soon you shall see Mr. Warner painting a noble picture by the river!' Et puis ——" She tightened her clasp on his hands with an adorable laugh, "Nous voici enfin ensemble—tous les deux—vous et moi! Et je suis bien content et bien fatiguée."

"But, Philippa—how in the world do you propose to get back to Ausone tonight?"

She shrugged, looked up as though protesting to the very skies:

"I have this instant arrived, and his first inquiry is concerning my departure! That is not a very friendly welcome."

"Philippa, I *am* glad to see you——"

"It is time you said so——"

"I thought you understood——"

The girl laughed:

"I understand how glad I am to see *you*!" She looked about her in the sunshine, and touched a tall blossom of queen's lace with outstretched fingers.

"How heavenly beautiful is this world of God!" she said with that charming lack of self-consciousness which the skies of France seem to germinate even in aliens. "I am very glad to see you," she repeated abruptly, "and I am awaiting the expression of your sentiments."

"Of course I am glad to see you, Philippa——"

"That makes me quite happy." She smiled on him and then looked curiously at his painting kit. "If you will choose your picture," she added, "I shall sit beside you and watch you at your painting. It will be agreeable. We can converse."

So he chose a ferny spot at the wood's edge, pitched his field easel and camp stool, and opened his color box; and Philippa seated herself cross-legged on the short grass beside him, gathering both slim ankles into her hands.

While he was fussing with his canvas, she sang to herself blithely, radiantly contented, rocking herself to and fro to the rhythm of her song:

"'Hussar en vedette,
What do you see?
The sun has set
And a voice is calling me
Across the Récollette,
Where the scented rushes fret
In the May wind's breath—
Et garde à vous, Hussar!
'Tis the voice of Death!

'Hussar en vedette,
What do you see?
The moon has set
And a white shape beckons me

Across the Récollette,
Where the scented rushes fret
In the night wind's breath—
Et garde à vous, Hussar!
'Tis the shape of Death!'"

Singing away with the serene unconsciousness of a bird, rocking her lithe young body, and watching his every movement out of wide grey eyes, Philippa assisted at the artistic preparations with great content, missing nothing.

"To squeeze color from tubes must be amusing," she remarked. "I like to squeeze out tooth paste."

"I am very sure," said Warner, "that you accomplish more charming results with your tooth paste than I do with my colors."

The girl laughed, showing her snowy teeth:

"Do you find them pretty, Monsieur?"

"Quite perfect, and therefore in keeping with the remainder of you, Philippa."

"He really seems to mean it," she said, addressing a grasshopper which had alighted on her knee. And to Warner: "Is my face sufficiently scrubbed to suit you?"

He glanced down at her:

"You have kept your word, haven't you?"

"Ma foi! My word is my word.... Listen; I came to Saïs to see you; and partly because I have something

to show you. It concerns your friend, I think."

"Mr. Halkett?"

"Yes. After the fight in our cabaret there was much excitement, but when you had disappeared, and before the agents de police and the gendarmes arrived, I found on the floor under the overturned table a portfolio. In that portfolio was part of an unfinished letter. It is written in German. I could not read it; but, studying it, I recognized Mr. Halkett's name written several times. So I said nothing to anybody, but I have brought it. Here it is."

She drew from her bosom a small leather pocketbook.

"Before you examine it," she continued, "I ought to tell you what really happened at the cabaret. Those men who attacked Mr. Halkett were in the employment of Monsieur Wildresse."

"What!" exclaimed Warner.

"It is true. I was furious when I noticed them creeping up behind him. I realized instantly what they meant to do, and I cried out—too late. You ought to be told about this. Therefore, I came here to tell you.

"And I desire to tell you more. The three men who were seated across the hall, and who attempted to pick a quarrel with Mr. Halkett, were 'provocative agents'—Germans.

"The *patron* knew them and interfered. Besides, he had his own ideas and his own ends to serve just

then.

"But I saw those three German agents whisper to a fourth—a stranger. And that man came and seated himself with three other men directly behind Mr. Halkett, where he stood while you were talking to me——"

"Philippa," he interrupted with blunt impatience, "I don't understand all this that you are saying to me. Give me that letter if it concerns Mr. Halkett."

The girl colored painfully.

"Please don't speak rudely to me," she said. "I am trying to behave honestly——"

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean to speak roughly. Please continue."

"Yes; it is better you should know what happened before you read this letter. Well, then, the men who attacked Mr. Halkett naturally got away; the patron attended to that. Naturally, also, he desired to have people believe that the German agents were responsible for the fight, and they were, therefore, detained by Monsieur Wildresse and were asked for an explanation. Then they declared that Mr. Halkett was a British spy, and that they were Belgian police agents with full authority to arrest him in France. Which was a lie, of course, but it served its purpose by increasing the tumult."

"Did they say that they were Belgians?"

"Yes. I heard them. They lied. There was much confusion and shouting—everybody crowding

around and disputing. The three Germans pushed their way toward the door; nobody knew whether or not to stop them." She shrugged. "They were gone before people could make up their minds. And, as usual, the police came in too late. Now you know all there is to tell about what happened after you left the cabaret."

Warner laid aside his brushes, looked curiously at the portfolio which she held out to him, hesitated, then opened it and drew out three pages of a letter in German, but written in English script. Evidently it was an unfinished fragment of a letter. He translated it rather freely and without any great difficulty:

—were followed from New York by this man, Halkett, and a companion of his named Gray. Disembarking at Antwerp and going immediately to room No. 23 in the Hôtel St. Antoine, according to instructions, we walked directly into a trap, prepared for us, no doubt, by a wireless message sent from the steamer by the individual, Halkett. Schmidt was knocked flat on his back and lay unconscious; me they hurled violently on the bed; my face was covered with a pillow, my legs and arms held as in a vise, while they ripped my clothing from me and then literally tore it to shreds in their search for the papers I carried.

In the lining of my vest they found the information and drawings which we had been at

such pains and danger to secure from the Yankee War Department. And now the Yankee Government will find out who has been robbing it.

Unless we can overtake these individuals, Halkett and Gray, the loss to us must be irreparable, as we dared not study the plans and formula on board ship, nor even venture to trust in the security of our stateroom, believing that British agents might be on board and watching. God knows they were.

I regret deeply that we did not suspect Halkett and Gray.

Also, the ship's officers, crew, stewards, wireless operator—all evidently were our enemies and in willing collusion with these two Englishmen.

Gray, on his motor cycle, left Antwerp for Brussels. We shall watch him and prevent his meeting Halkett in France. We fear they have divided the papers between them.

Our orders are to use our own discretion. Therefore, I repeat that Gray shall not live to meet Halkett.

As for Halkett, he undoubtedly has some of the papers on his person. We missed him in Holland by accident; we unfortunately failed in the city of Luxembourg, because he was too crafty to cross the viaduct, but slept that night in a water mill under the walls in the lower city.

We traced him to Diekirch, but missed him again, twice, although Schmidt, who was posted

further along on the narrow-gauge line, fired at him as a last resort. For, as you point out, it is better that France should come into possession of the Harkness shell than that the British Admiralty should control it. The very existence of our fleet is now at stake. France is slow to accept foreign inventions; but England is quick as lightning.

So, if necessary, we shall take extreme measures in regard to Halkett and Gray, and stand the chances that we may secure their papers and get back to Berlin before the French police interfere.

And if we fail to get away, well, at least England shall not profit by the Harkness shell.

Meier and Hoffman are following Gray; we are now leaving for Ausone, and hope to find Halkett somewhere in that vicinity.

I am writing this with difficulty, as the road is not what it ought to be, and the wind is disconcerting. Esser is acting as chauffeur——

And there the letter ended.

CHAPTER X

Philippa was plaiting grass stems when he finished his examination of the letter. And while she deftly

braided *boutons d'or* among the green blades, she continued under her breath the song of the Vidette, casting an occasional side glance upward at him, where he sat on his camp stool studying the written fragments.

At length, seeing that he had finished, she tossed aside the flowering rope of grass, set her elbows on her knees, her rounded chin on her hands, and regarded him inquiringly, as though, for the moment, she had done with childish things.

"It is a letter which urgently concerns Mr. Halkett," he nodded coolly. "Shall I give it to him?"

"Please."

He pocketed the portfolio, hesitated, glanced at his watch, then, with an absent-minded air, began to pack up his painting kit. As he unhooked his *toile* he looked around at her.

"Philippa," he said, "if you are going to punt back to Ausone, isn't it nearly time you started?"

"Aren't you going to paint any more?" she asked, smiling.

"No. I think I had better find Mr. Halkett and show him this letter."

"But—I have come all the way from Ausone to pay you a visit!" explained the girl in hurt surprise. "Didn't you want to see me?"

"Certainly I want to see you," he replied smilingly. "But to punt up stream to Ausone this afternoon is going to take you quite a long while

——"

"As for that," she remarked, "it need not concern us. I am not going back to Ausone."

"Not going back!"

"Listen, please. Monsieur Wildresse and I have had a disagreement——"

"Nonsense!"

"No, a serious disagreement. I am not going back to Ausone. Shall I tell you all about it?"

"Yes, but listen to me, Philippa. You can't run away from your home merely because you have had a disagreement with your Patron and guardian."

"Shall I tell you why we disagreed?"

"If you choose. But that doesn't justify you in running away from your home."

The girl shook her head:

"You don't yet understand. In our café the French Government compels us to spy on certain strangers and to report whatever we can discover. Always it disgusted me to do such a thing. Now I shall not be obliged to do it any more, because I am never going back to the Cabaret de Biribi."

"Do you mean to say that you and Monsieur Wildresse are in the secret service of your Government?" he asked, astonished.

"That is too dignified an explanation. I have been an informer since I was seventeen."

"A—a *paid* informer?"

"I don't know whether the Government pays

Monsieur Wildresse."

"But he doesn't do such things for the pleasure of doing them."

"Pleasure? It is an abominable profession! It is unclean."

"Then why do you do it?" he demanded, amazed.

"I am not perfectly sure why. I know that the Patron is afraid of the Government. That, I suppose, is why we have been obliged to take orders from them."

"Afraid? Why?"

"It's partly on Jacques' account—his son's. If we do what they ask of us they say that they won't send him to New Caledonia. But I believe it is all *blague*." She looked up at Warner out of her troubled grey eyes. "Espionage—that has been my *metier* since I was taken out of school—to listen in the cabaret, to learn to keep my eyes open, to relate to the Patron whatever I saw or heard concerning any client the Government desired him to watch.... Do you think that is a very pleasant life for a young girl?"

His face became expressionless.

"Not very," he said. "Go on."

She said thoughtfully:

"It is a horrible profession, Mr. Warner. Why should I continue it? Are there no police? Why should I, Philippa Wildresse, do their dirty work? Can you explain? *Alors*, I have asked myself that many, many times. Today, at last, I have answered

my own question: I shall never again play the spy for anybody! C'est fini! Voilà!"

Warner remained silent.

"Why, it is revolting!" she exclaimed. "Figurez-vous, Monsieur! I was even signaled to spy upon *you*! Can you conceive such a thing?"

"On *me*?" he repeated, bewildered and angry.

"Certainly. That is why I danced with you. I am permitted to dance only with clients under observation."

Her unflattering candor sent a flush to his face. His latent vanity had been rather rudely surprised.

"Afterward," she continued, "I knew you could not be the man they wanted——"

"What man did they want?"

"Somebody who had stolen documents in America, I believe. But I was sure that you were honest."

"Why?"

Philippa lifted her grey eyes:

"Because you were honest with *me*."

"How, honest?"

"You did not make love to me. Dishonest men always regard women as a pastime. To make advances is the first thing I expect from them. I am never disappointed. All men are more or less dishonest—excepting you."

"This is a sorry school you have been brought up in," he said grimly.

"Do you mean that I have had my schooling by observing life?"

"Yes—a life in a cabaret full of *rastaoqueres* and *cocottes*—a rather limited and sordid outlook, Philippa. The world lies outside."

"Still—it is life. Even a *cocotte* is part of life."

"So is disease. But it isn't *all* there is in life."

"Nor is life in a cabaret all corruption. A cabaret is merely the world in miniature; all types pass in and out; they come and go as souls are born and go: the door opens and closes; one sees a new face, one loses it. It is much like birth and death."

She made an unconsciously graceful gesture toward the white clouds overhead.

"A cabaret," she went on seriously, "is a republic governed by the patron, audited by the *caissière*, policed by waiters. Everybody goes there—even you, Monsieur. All languages are spoken there, all questions discussed, all theories aired, all passions ventilated. Every trait of human nature is to be observed there; the germ of every comedy; the motive of every tragedy.... Yet, as you say, it is a saddening school.... Wisdom is too early acquired there. One learns too quickly and too completely in such a school. Such an education means precocity. It foreshadows the early death of youth, Monsieur.... If I remain there, all that is still young in me will die, now, very quickly."

"You poor child!"

She shrugged her shoulders.

"Therefore," she said, "I am leaving. Now do you understand?"

He sat looking at her, wondering uneasily at her intelligence and her ability to express herself. Here was a maturity of mind unexpected in this girl. So far it had not visibly altered the youth of her, nor impaired her sweetness and honesty.

In spite of the appalling surroundings amid which she had matured, her mind and heart still remained young.

Biting a tasselled grass stem reflectively, she sat thinking for a few moments, then she reverted to the subject of Wildresse and his son.

"I am convinced that it is all *blague*," she repeated, "—this threat of Noumea. Unless Jacques misbehaves very seriously in Biribi, nobody can send him to La Nouvelle. Besides, if his father chooses to oblige the Government, what does it matter about me? No; I have had enough of degradation. An hour on the river with you was enough to settle it."

"But what do you intend to do, Philippa?" he inquired.

She looked up at him with her winning smile:

"I came to ask *you* that. Please tell me what I am to do."

"You must not ask *me*——"

"Of course. You are the first man who ever pleased me. You please me more and more. Why

should I not come to you in my perplexity and say, 'What am I to do, my friend?'"

He reddened at that; found nothing to answer. The sudden and grotesque responsibility which this young girl was so lightly placing upon his shoulders might have amused if it had not disconcerted him. But it did not disconcert her.

"What am I to do, Mr. Warner?" she repeated with a smile of perfect confidence.

"Why, *I* don't know, Philippa. What *can* you do down here at Saïs?"

"Tell *me*!" she insisted with undisturbed serenity.

"You couldn't very well remain here. You will have to go back to Ausone and consider this matter more seriously——"

"Ah, ça—non! I shall *not* go back!"

"What do you propose to *do*?"

She bit her grass stem:

"I don't know. I have my trunk in the punt——"

"What!"

"Certainly, I brought my effects! I have some money—not very much. I shall go to the inn and remain there until you have decided what it is best for me to do."

The situation began to strike him as sufficiently ludicrous—the tragic mask is always on the verge of a grin—but he did not feel like smiling.

For a few minutes he occupied himself with collecting, strapping, and slinging his kit; and when

he was ready to go, he looked down at the girl Philippa, where she was seated watching him out of her trustful grey eyes.

"I can employ you as a model," he said, "until Monsieur Wildresse sends for you. What do you think of the idea?"


"'I can employ you as a model,' he said"

"'I can employ you as a model,' he said"

"As a—a *model,* Monsieur?" she stammered.

"Yes. You could pose for me, if you like."

A delicate scarlet flush slowly mounted to her hair.

Perplexed, he watched her.

"Don't you like the idea?" And suddenly he divined what was troubling her. "Not that sort of model," he said, amused. "You shall wear your

clothes, Philippa."

"Oh.... Yes, I should like it, I think."

"It's about the only excuse which would enable you to remain at the inn until you have come to some conclusion regarding your future," he explained.

"A painter may always have his models? It is expected, is it not?"

"Oh, yes, *that* is always understood. But nobody would understand your coming to live at the Golden Peach merely because you and I happened to be good friends," he added laughingly.

"I understand," she said in a grave voice. "I am to be your model, not your friend."

He nodded carelessly, looking away from her. After a moment, he lighted a cigarette. It relieved him considerably to recollect that the Harem had gone to Ausone.

"Now," he said, "if you are ready to walk back to the inn with me, I'll explain you to Madame Arlon, the *patronne*."

"And my punt?" she inquired, rising from the grass.

"Oh, Lord! I forgot."

"My trunk is in it."

"Where is your punt?"

She pointed across the meadow to where the river sparkled:

"It is my own punt; the *Lys*. I took nothing from

Monsieur Wildresse that did not belong to me. It will be agreeable for us to have a punt here, will it not?"

"Very," he said uneasily.

They turned eastward across the blossoming meadow, over which already the swallows were soaring in their late afternoon flight. A *vanneau* or two rose from moist spots, protesting, and flapping away on greenish-bronze wings; a *bécassine* went off like a badly-balanced arrow, and his flat, raucous, "squack! squack!" rang through the sunny silence. Higher, higher his twisting flight carried him toward the sky, where he dwindled to a speck and vanished; but out of the intense blue zenith his distant cry still rang long after he had disappeared from the range of human vision.

CHAPTER XI

When Warner and the girl Philippa arrived at the Golden Peach, they found that Madame Arlon, profiting by the prospective temporary absence of the Harem, had gone to visit relatives near Nancy for a day or two. But Linette smilingly took charge of Philippa and her luggage.

Warner, entering the southern end of the walled garden, discovered Halkett at the other extremity, still seated under the latticed arbor. A letter lay spread upon the table beside his elbow. Over this letter, with pencil and paper, he pored as though he were working out a problem in hieroglyphics.

But when Warner appeared, the Englishman leisurely folded and pocketed the papers on which he had been working, nodded pleasantly, and handed to Warner a copy of the *Petit Journal d'Ausone*.

"It came after you left," he said. "There's nothing really new in it—Germany's ultimatum to Russia, that's about all.... I am feeling rather anxious about a friend of mine, Reginald Gray. He was to have arrived here last night or early this morning on his motor cycle. No word has come from him *personally*, and it is now nearly night again."

Warner seated himself, glanced over the inky little provincial newspaper, then laid it aside. There was in its columns nothing definite concerning the threatened rupture of the peace of Europe.

"Halkett," he said almost solemnly, "this crime with which they say our civilization is menaced can never be consummated. There will be no World War, because the world dares not acquiesce in such an outrage. The eleventh hour has struck, I know; but salvation exists only because there is a twelfth hour on the dial; otherwise the preordained end of everything would be hell."

Halkett smiled slightly.

"I've just had another letter," he said. "I'm likely to remain here for a few days more.... Which means only one thing."

"What does it mean?"

"War."

Warner smiled incredulously.

"Anyway, there will be one compensation for the general smash if you remain here," he said gayly.

"You're very good to take it that way.... You and I—and to hell with the Deluge!" But his face sobered while the jest was spoken; he leaned rather wearily on the iron table and rested his forehead in one hand. "I wish I knew what has happened to Reginald Gray," he repeated.

"What is it that worries you about your friend Gray?"

"His cap was picked up on the highway five miles southeast of Saïs."

"How could you know that?"

"I have just learned it by telephone, through a certain source of information."

"Did you learn anything more?"

"*There was a little blood on the road.*"

Warner remained silent.

"Also," continued Halkett thoughtfully, "a motor cycle had skidded up the bank.... But no signs of a serious accident could be discovered—merely the ragged swathe cut through soft earth and rank vegetation.... If Gray met with an accident, he must have mended his machine, remounted, and continued his course—wherever he was going—unless somebody picked up him and his wheel and took them away.... I can't understand this affair. It bothers me."

"The chances are that your friend Gray had a rather bad spill," suggested Warner, "and no doubt you'll hear from him, or about him, before morning."

"I ought to, certainly." He filled and lighted his pipe; Warner rose and began to pace the garden path rather nervously. Presently he came back to where the Englishman sat brooding over his pipe and nursing Ariadne.

"Halkett," he said abruptly, "you remember that girl Philippa in the Café Biribi?"

The Englishman looked up inquiringly.

"Well, she is here."

"At the inn?"

"Yes. I met her down in the big river meadow this afternoon, and she calmly informed me that she had left home for good."

"Run away?"

"Run away. Taken the key of the fields. Beat it for keeps. How does that strike you?"

"Any particular reason?" inquired Halkett indifferently.

"Why, yes. The child has been used by the secret police to spy on people in the Café Biribi."

Halkett's eyes opened at that.

Warner went on:

"That old rascal, Wildresse, it seems, is nothing but a paid informer. He forced this girl Philippa to engage in the same filthy business. She even admitted that old Wildresse had set her on *me*! No doubt he had decided to watch you himself. And do you know what I think?"

Halkett was very wide-awake now. He said:

"I believe I do know what you are thinking. And I believe you are pretty nearly right."

"That the assault on you was merely a local matter instigated by Wildresse?"

"It wouldn't surprise me."

"I think it was, too. Some of his thugs did it. He had made up his mind about you. But somebody must have tipped him off to watch you."

"Probably."

"I am sure of it. The three German-appearing men who tried to pick a quarrel with you over the Archduke's murder were not the men who tried to frisk you for your papers. They were 'provocative agents' in the pay of a foreign government—hired opportunists who were expected to pick something of value out of any confusion attending a general row fomented by themselves."

"Who told you that?"

"Philippa."

Halkett, now thoroughly interested, looked keenly at Warner through the thin haze of his pipe.

"These three agents," continued Warner, "were certainly in close communication with the men who have been following you. And at least one of those men was seated at the table directly behind you when Wildresse's thugs tried to frisk you for documents. So you see that Wildresse, prodded by the French secret police, and these provocative agents, prodded by the people who are following you, who, in turn, are spurred by the German Government, were all playing at cross purposes, but with you as a common objective. A fine nest of intrigue I led you into when I took you to the Cabaret de Biribi! I'm terribly sorry, Halkett. But I believe that some good has come out of that mess—a fragment of a letter, written in German, which Philippa gave me in the meadow this afternoon.

"She found it under the wrecked table behind you. Nobody has seen it except myself and Philippa; and the child cannot read much German. But, studying it and seeing your name in the letter, she was clever enough to bring it to me. Here it is." He laid it on the table under the Englishman's eyes.

While Halkett remained absorbed in his translation, Warner paced the garden, deeply occupied with his own uneasy cogitations. After a little while Halkett spoke to him in an altered voice, and he turned and came swiftly back to the arbor.

The Englishman, looking up, said gravely:

"Concerning myself, there seems to remain now nothing worth concealing from you.... Perhaps you had better know the truth. I happen to be an officer temporarily serving with the Intelligence Department; I had just been assigned to duty in New York when the Harkness shell was stolen. The general alarm went out. Gray, a brother officer, and I chanced to stumble on evidence which sent us aboard an Antwerp steamer. Our birds were aboard. We pulled every string available, and, passing over the details of the affair, he and I managed to recover the drawings, specifications, and formula which had been stolen. Some of these papers are in that envelope.

"Every German agent in Europe knows we have them. My Government, for some reason or other, instructs me to remain here for the present. As Gray

and I are known, doubtless somebody will appear and take the drawings out of our hands, because the chances are that I'd be murdered before I reached Calais. That is the situation, Warner."

"Has Gray any of the drawings?"

"He has."

"I understand."

"And that is why I am worrying about Gray. They'd not hesitate to kill him if they thought there was a chance that he had any of the papers."

Warner said:

"They couldn't have killed him. A crime on the public highway cannot remain undiscovered very long."

Halkett sat thoughtfully stroking Ariadne. Presently he looked up with a slight smile.

"Well, what are you going to do with the girl Philippa?" he inquired.

"Now, what do you think of a situation like this?" demanded Warner, half laughing, half vexed. "I told her to go home. She positively refuses. You can't blame the child. The dirty business there has disgusted her. This seems to be a final revolt. But—what would *you* do if a young girl wished herself on *you*?"

"I haven't the faintest idea," said Halkett, intensely amused.

Warner reddened.

"I haven't either," he said. "All I can think of is to

use her as a model—give her a small salary until she finds something to do."

"Are you going to use her for a model?"

"I suppose so, until somebody comes after her to take her back."

"Suppose nobody comes?" suggested Halkett mischievously.

"Well, I'm not going to adopt her, that's certain," insisted the other. "Poor little thing!" he added. "—Her instincts seem to be decent. Who could blame a young girl for sickening of such a life and cutting away on her own hook? That's a rotten joint, that Cabaret de Biribi. And as for that old villain, Wildresse, it wouldn't surprise me at all if he were playing the dirty game from both ends—German and French. Informers are often traitors."

"Very frequently."

"Spies also have that reputation, I believe—except in romantic fiction," said Warner.

"They usually deserve it," returned Halkett. "Generally speaking, they are a scum recruited from low pubs and brothels. Rarely does any reputable person enter that profession except in line of military duty or in time of war.

"Servants, waiters, chauffeurs, those are the most respectable classes of secret agents. But the demi-monde and their hangers-on furnish the majority of those popularly supposed to represent people of position who play the rôle of international spy. They

are a rummy lot, Warner.

"It is very, very seldom in Occidental drawing-rooms that such practices prevail. A woman of position very rarely becomes a paid agent of that sort. Diplomats and attachés who are pumped and victimized are usually the dupes of socially disreputable people. Society in England and in Western Europe rarely entertains such a favorite of fiction as a paid Government spy; nor are such people very often recruited from its ranks. East of the Danube it is different."

They sat for a while smoking, Halkett lavishing endearments upon Ariadne who never failed to respond, Warner musing on what Halkett had said and wondering exactly what duties the Military Intelligence Department of any Government might include.

No doubt, like the Government, it employs spies, and, like the Government, never admits the fact.

For among all outcasts so vitally necessary to autocracy and militarism, the spy is the most pitiable: in time of peace no authority admits employing him; in time of war, his fate, if taken, is as certain as that his own Government will disown him. Eternally repudiated, whether of respectable or disreputable antecedents, honest or otherwise, patriotic or mercenary, the world has only one opinion to express concerning spies, although it often cackles over their adventures and snivels over their

fate.

Perhaps Halkett was musing on these things, for presently he took his pipe from his mouth and said:

"To my knowledge, we British never employ spies in America. Your Government, I know, never employs them anywhere in time of peace. All other Governments do. Europe swarms with them. If I were in Germany today, I'd be considered a spy. They'd follow me about and lock me up on the first excuse—or without any excuse at all. And if we chanced to be at war with Germany, and I were caught, they'd certainly shoot me because I have recovered stolen property."

"They'd execute you because you are not in uniform?"

"Certainly. I'd not stand a ghost of a chance. So I shall be rather glad that I'm in France when war comes."

"You are so certain it is coming?"

"Absolutely, my dear fellow. Probably it will be declared tomorrow."

"I cannot believe it, Halkett."

"I can scarcely believe it myself. But—I know it is coming. And it is coming from the north."

"Through *Belgium*?"

"Exactly."

"And the treaty?"

"I have already told you how Germany regards such agreements. She'll kill that treaty with just as

much emotion as she'd experience in assassinating a fly. It's a rotten outlook, Warner. The eleventh hour has passed."

They smoked for a while in silence, then:

"Where is your little protégée?" asked Halkett, making an effort to shake off his depression.

"Linette is making her comfortable. When Madame Arlon returns from Nancy I shall tell her to look out for the child. She's in her room, unpacking, I suppose."

"Did she even bring her boxes?" asked the Englishman, greatly amused.

"Yes, she did. And I don't know what on earth she intends to do for a living when I go back to Paris. I'm sorry for her, but she can't expect me to travel about France with her——"

He checked himself abruptly; Halkett also looked up.

The girl Philippa had entered the further end of the garden.

She came slowly forward through the rosy evening light, straight and slim in her girlish gown of white, unrelieved except by a touch or two of black, and by the coppery splendor of her hair.

She halted in the path a little way from the arbor, evidently aware that somebody was within.

"Are you there, Monsieur Warner?" she asked in her sweet, childish voice.

He got up with a glance of resignation at

Halkett, and went to meet her. Halkett, from the arbor, noticed the expression of her face when Warner appeared, and he continued to observe the girl with curious attention.

She had instinctively laid her hands in Warner's, detaining him naïvely, and looking up into his face with an honesty too transparent to mistake.

"I miss you very much," she said, "even for a few minutes. I hastened my toilet to rejoin you."

"That is very sweet of you, Philippa——" He didn't know what else to say; felt the embarrassment warm on his face—chagrin, shyness, something of both, perhaps—and a rather helpless feeling that he was acquiescing in an understanding which already was making him very uneasy.

"Come in to the arbor," he said. "Mr. Halkett is there."

She slipped her arm through his. Halkett saw both their faces as they approached, and, watching Warner for a moment, he felt inclined to laugh. But in this young girl's eyes there was something that checked his amusement. A man does not laugh at the happy and serious eyes of childhood.

So he rose and paid his respects to Philippa with pleasant formality; she seated herself between the two men.

The last pink rays of the sun fell across the little iron table, flooding the garden with an enchanted light: already the evening perfume of clove pinks had

become exquisitely apparent; a belated bumblebee blundered out of the reseda and, rising high in the calm air, steered his bullet flight into the west. Ariadne, on the table, stretched herself, yawned, and looked about her, now thoroughly awake for the rest of the night.

"*Minette!*" murmured Philippa, caressing her and laying her cheek against the soft fur.

"You are sunburned," remarked Halkett.

"And badly freckled, Monsieur——" She looked mischievously at Warner, laughed at their secret agreement concerning cosmetics, then turned again to Halkett:

"You have heard, I suppose, of the happy understanding between Mr. Warner and me?"

"I think so," said Halkett, subduing an inclination to laugh.

"The future, for me, is entirely secure," continued Philippa happily. "I am permitted to assist Mr. Warner in his art. It is a very wonderful future, Mr. Halkett, destined for me without doubt by God." She added, half to herself: "And a lifetime on my knees would be too short a time to thank Him in."

Both men became silent and constrained, Warner feeling more helpless than ever in the face of such tranquil confidence; Halkett remembering what Warner had once said about the soul of Philippa—but still pleasantly and gently inclined to skepticism concerning this *fille de cabaret*.

Philippa, leaning forward on the table between them, joined her slender hands and looked at Warner.

"It is pleasant to be accepted as a friend by such men as you are," she said thoughtfully.... "I have met other gentlemen of your station in life, now and then. But their attitude toward me has been different from yours.... I once supposed that, in a cabaret, all men resembled each other where women were concerned. I have been very happily mistaken."

Warner said:

"A man scarcely expects to see more than one sort of woman in a cabaret."

"Yet, you were not astonished to see me, were you?"

"Yes," he said, "I was astonished."

"You did not seem to be."

Warner glanced at Halkett:

"Do you remember what I once said about Philippa's soul?"

The Englishman smiled at Philippa:

"As soon as Mr. Warner saw you he said to me that your soul was as clean as a flame.... I was slower to understand you."

The girl turned swiftly to Warner:

"What a heavenly thing for a man to say about a woman! And my lips painted scarlet—and I a *caissière de cabaret*——" Her voice broke childishly; she sprang to her feet and stood looking through the

starting tears at the last level rays of the sun.

Standing so, unstirring till the tears dried, she presently turned and resumed her chair; and, after a few moments' silence, she dropped her elbows on the table again and clasped her hands under her chin.

She said, not looking at either of the men:

"I have thought of becoming a nun. But it is too late. Cloisters make awkward inquiries and search records; no Sisterhood of any order I ever heard of would admit to a novitiate any girl who has served five years where I have served.... And so—until I saw you—I did not know what was to become of me——"

She lifted her grey eyes to Warner. They were starry with recent tears. Her chin rested on her clasped hands, her enchanted gaze on him.

Halkett was first to move and make an effort:

"Yes, it was perhaps time to cut away," he muttered. "Anything we can do—very glad, I'm sure."

"Certainly," said Warner. "There are a lot of agreeable young women in my class who will be interested to know you when they return from Ausone day after tomorrow——"

Philippa turned swiftly toward him:

"I do not wish any woman to know what I have been! You wouldn't *tell* them, would you?"

"No, of course not—if you feel that way," he said. "Only I—it occurred to me—some protection—some countenance—understanding—from other women——"

"I desire none. I want only your friendship."

"But how am I going to explain you——"

"You are a painter. I am your model. Is not that sufficient explanation?"

"Yes—if you desire to be so regarded—permanently——"

"I do. My privacy will then remain my own. I permit nobody to invade it—excepting you."

"Very well, if you feel that way.... Only, you are—attractive, Philippa—and I am rather afraid you might not be understood——"

She shrugged her shoulders:

"For five years I have not been understood. Do you know that men have even thrown dice for me, so certain were they that they understood me? I am accustomed to it. But I am not accustomed to women—I mean to your kind. I distrust them; possibly I am afraid of them. Anyway, their interest in me would be unwelcome. It is your friendship I want. Nothing else matters."

"You are wrong, Philippa. Other things do matter. No woman can go it alone, disdainful of other women's opinions."

"I have always been alone."

Warner said patiently:

"I should not do anything without first consulting you."

"I feel very sure that you would not." She smiled at him trustfully, her cheek on her linked fingers;

then her gaze grew absent. The last sun ray lingered on her hair, turning it to fiery bronze. Under it her grey eyes gazed absently into the future, filled now, for her, with iridescent castles and peopled with vaguely splendid images—magic scenes that young and lonely hearts evoke out of the very emptiness of their isolation.

And in the center of the phantom pageant always appeared Warner, her friend, endowed with all the mystery and omniscience with which a young girl's heart invests the man who first awakens it to irregularity—who first interferes with the long monotony of its virgin rhythm.

Halkett, a little keener of the two—a little more sensitive, if more reticent—said pleasantly:

"Perhaps you might prefer to dine out here with us, Philippa. The Ha—the class, I mean—banquets and carouses in the dining-room, when it is here."

"Of course I wish to dine with you! I said so to Linette before I came out here. It is all arranged."

Halkett laughed. At the same moment, Linette came out with the tray.

A bright afterglow still lingered in the zenith when their leisurely dinner had ended; and in the garden the mellow light was beginning to make objects exquisitely indistinct.

Halkett, smoking in silence, was evidently thinking about his friend Gray, for, when Linette

came to remove the cloth and coffee cups, and to say that some gentlemen on motor cycles were at the garden gate inquiring for Mr. Halkett, the young Englishman rose with a quick sigh of relief and walked swiftly to the heavy, green door under the arch in the garden wall.

As he laid his hand on the latch, he turned toward Warner:

"I'll bring Gray in directly," he called back; and opened the door and stepped out into the dusk.

At the same instant Warner rose to his feet, listening; then he ran for the green door. As he reached it, the heavy little door burst open; Halkett sprang inside, slid the big iron bolt into place, turned and warned the American aside with upflung hand.

"Keep Philippa out of range of the door!" he called across the garden, drawing his automatic at the same time and springing backward. "Don't stand in a line with that green door——"

A volley of pistol shots cut him short.

CHAPTER XII

The green door in the garden wall had been perforated by a dozen bullets from outside before the first heavy crash came, almost shaking it from its hinges.

Warner had already whipped out his own automatic; Halkett pushed him aside across a flower bed.

"Keep out of this!" he said. "It's my affair——"

"I'm damned if it is!" retorted Warner. "I'll settle that question once for all!" And he leveled his automatic and sent a stream of lead through the green door in the wall.

No more blows fell on it, but all over it, from top to bottom, white splinters flew while bullets poured through it from outside.

"You are wrong to involve yourself," insisted Halkett, raising his voice to dominate the racket of the automatics. "They want only me."

"So do I, Halkett. And I've got you and mean to keep you. Blood is the thicker, you know."

Philippa came from the arbor, carrying the badly frightened cat with difficulty.

"Is it really war?" she asked calmly, while Ariadne alternately cowered and struggled.

"Just a little private war," said Halkett. "And you had better go into the house at once——"

"You and I should go, also," added Warner, "if there are more than two men out there."

"I saw at least half a dozen beyond the wall. You are quite right, Warner; we couldn't hope to hold this garden. But I dislike to go into a strange house and invite assault on other people's property—just to save my own hide——"

"Keep out of range!" interrupted Warner sharply, taking him by the arm and following Philippa around the garden toward the rear of the house.

The back door was iron, armed with thick steel bolts; the neighborhood of the quarry rendering such defenses advisable. Warner shot all three bolts, then passed rapidly through the kitchen to the front door and secured it, while Halkett went to the telephone. The nearest gendarmes were at Ausone.

Linette, the chambermaid and waitress, and Magda, the cook, had followed Halkett and Philippa from the pantry through the kitchen to the front hallway. They had heard the noisy fusillade in the garden. Curiosity seemed to be their ruling emotion, but even that was under control.

"Is it the Prussians, Messieurs?" asked Linette calmly. "Has the war really begun?" Her face, and Magda's too, seemed a trifle colorless in the failing evening light, but her voice was steady.

"Magda," said Warner, "the men outside our garden who fired at Mr. Halkett are certainly Germans. He and I mean to keep them out of this house if they attempt to enter it. So you and Linette had better go very quietly to the cellar and remain there, because there may be some more firing——"

"I? The cellar! When Prussians are outside!" exclaimed Magda. "Ma foi! I think Linette and I can be of better use than hiding in the cellar. Linette! Set water to boil in both kettles! I have my dishes to

wash. The Prussians had better not interfere with me when I have dishes to wash!"

"Keep away from the windows," added Warner to Linette. "There are iron bars on all the lower windows, aren't there?"

"Yes, Monsieur Warner. If the front door holds, they cannot get in."

Halkett, at the telephone, called back through the dim hallway to Warner:

"Somebody has cut the telephone wire. I can't do anything with the instrument!"

Philippa, still clasping Ariadne, had betrayed no sign of fear or excitement.

"If somebody would tell me what to do," she began—but Warner quickly drew her into the office of the inn, which was really the inner café and bar.

"Stay here," he said. "Those men outside might open fire on us at any moment. Don't go near a window. Do you promise?"

The girl seated herself obediently and began to stroke the cat, her eyes serenely fixed on Warner.

Halkett had gone to the floor above to lurk by one of the windows giving on the garden. When Warner came up with a box of cartridge clips, the Englishman, filling his pockets, remarked quietly:

"They're over the wall already, and dodging about among the fruit trees—four of them. There were two others. Perhaps you had better keep an eye on the front door, if you really insist on being mixed

up with this mess I'm in."

"Do you suppose those fellows will be silly enough to attack the house?" asked the American incredulously.

Halkett nodded:

"They are desperate, you see. I can understand why. They know that war is likely to be declared within the next few hours. If they don't get me now they won't stand much chance later. That's why I'm prepared for anything on their part."

Warner walked swiftly back toward the front, cutting the cords of the latticed window blinds in every room, so that they fell full length.

"No lights in the house!" he called down over the banisters; "and keep away from the windows, everybody! Philippa, do you hear me?"

"I understand; I shall tell them to light no candles," came the untroubled voice of Philippa.

"Are *you* all right down there?"

"Yes, *I* am. But the cat is still quite frightened, poor darling."

In spite of his anxiety, Warner laughed as he reloaded.

Outdoors there still remained sufficient light to see by. Flat against the wall, pistol in hand, he cautiously reconnoitered the dusky roadway in front of the house, then, leaning further out, he ventured to look down between lattice and sill at the doorstep below. A mound of dry hay had been piled against

the door.

"Get out of there!" he shouted, catching a glimpse of two shadowy figures skulking toward the doorway arch.

His reply was a red flash which split the dusk, another, and another; the window glass above him flew into splinters under the shower of bullets; the persiennes jerked and danced.

But the men who stood pouring bullets in his direction had been obliged to drop double armfuls of faggots. One of these men, still firing as he ran, took cover behind a poplar tree across the road; the other man flattened himself against the wall of the house, so far under the door arch that no shot could reach him from an upper window unless the marksman exposed himself.

Standing so, he lighted a chemical match and tossed it, flaring, on the heap of hay piled high against the door; and almost at the same instant a boilerful of hot water splashed through the bars of the lower window beside him, scalding and soaking him; and he bounded out into the road with a yell of astonishment and pain.

The hay, instantly on fire, sent a cloud of white thick smoke billowing along the façade of the house, then burst into flame; but Linette and Magda dashed water on it from the lower windows, and the red blaze leaped and died.

Then, from the rear of the house, the dry rattle

of Halkett's automatic broke out, and the pattering racket of pistol shots redoubled when other automatics crackled from the garden. Thick as hailstones pelting a tin roof the bullets clanged on the iron rear door, filling the house with deafening dissonance.

Halkett, peering out through his lattice into the dusk, ceased firing. A few moments longer the door reëchoed the bullets' impact; then all sound ceased, the silence still vibrating metallic undertones.

Prowling from window to window, Warner, pistol lifted, peered warily from the shelter of the lowered lattice blinds.

One man still crouched behind the poplar tree; the other, he thought, was lying in the long grass of the roadside ditch.

"Are you all right, Halkett?" he called back through the stinging fumes of the smokeless powder which filled the hallway.

"Quite fit, thanks. How is it with you?"

"Still gayly on the job. I didn't hit anybody. I didn't try to."

"Nor I. Did you ever see such obstinacy and determination? Very German, isn't it?"

"Perfectly.... They're keeping rather too quiet to suit me. What do you suppose they're up to?"

But neither he nor the Englishman could discover any movement or hear any sound around the house. And it had now become too dark to see

anything very clearly.

Philippa appeared mounting the stairs, looking for Ariadne who had scrambled out of her arms during the fusillade.

Warner nodded to her from where he was standing guard. She came up quietly behind him, stood for a moment with both hands around his left arm—a silent figure in the dusk, friendly as a well-bred dog, and as winningly unconscious of self. Her cheek, resting lightly against her hands, where they clasped his arm, pressed a trifle closer before she went away.

And while he stood there, perplexedly conscious of this youthful affection, and listening to every slightest sound, suddenly he heard her voice, startled, calling out to him from a bedroom on the east side of the house.

As he entered the room, running, a man outside on a garden ladder kicked in the window panes, drew back his heavy foot, sent it crashing again through the wooden frame, and lurched forward across the sill, only to be held there, fighting, in the grasp of Philippa.

Behind them another man on the ladder was already struggling to fling his leg over the sill; the head and shoulders of a third appeared just behind him, menacing with uplifted pistol any interference.

Already Philippa had been dragged headlong half-way through the shattered window, and the man

whom she had seized was endeavoring to fling her down in the flower bed below, when Warner, leaping forward, hit him heavily in the face and caught the girl's shoulders, jerking her back into the room as her assailant's grasp on her waist relaxed.

The man with the pistol had not been able to use it; he staggered, his weapon fell, and he clung with both hands to the rungs as Philippa's assaulter went tumbling down the ladder, carrying with him the man directly behind him. And the next moment Warner had upset the ladder, sprung back, and pulled Philippa with him down on the floor.

A hurricane of bullets swept through the shattered window above them; Halkett, from his latticed vantage, was firing, too.

The girl lay panting beside him, silent, her head across his arm.

"Are you hurt?" he whispered.

"Are *you*?"

"No; answer me!" he repeated impatiently.

"He was—very rough. I don't think I am hurt," she breathed.

"You plucky little thing!"

She pressed her cheek against his arm.

"Are you contented with me?" she whispered.

The shots had ceased. After a long interval of quiet, Warner ventured to creep to the window and look through a corner of the ragged lattice blind. Little by little he raised himself to his knees, peered

out and finally over.

The ladder lay there just below in the garden path; the men were gone. And, even as he looked, the staccato noise of departing motor cycles broke out like a startling volley of rifle fire in the night.

For an hour he stood on guard there, with the girl Philippa crouching beside him on the floor. From time to time he called cautiously:

"All well here!"

And the Englishman from the front windows always answered:

"All well here!"

Finally:

"Halkett!" he called. "I believe they've cut away for good!"

Halkett presently appeared in the hallway, coming from the front of the house, as Philippa rose to her knees and stood up, a trifle dazed.

"Warner," he whispered, "a dozen horsemen have just ridden up in front of our house. They look like French gendarmes to me, but it's so dark outside that I am not quite certain. Will you take a look at them?"

Warner ran to the front and gazed out. The road below was filled with mounted gendarmes, their white aiguillettes plainly visible in the dark.

Two had already descended from their horses, and while one held an electric torch the other was busily nailing a big placard to the front door of the inn. His hammer strokes rang out sharply in the

darkness.

It took only a moment for him to complete his business; the electric torch shifted, flashed upward, was extinguished.

"Mount!" came the quick order from the shadowy peloton of horsemen; up on their high saddles popped the two troopers; there came a trample of hoofs, the dull clank of sabres, and away they galloped into the darkness.

Warner turned slowly, looked hard at Halkett, who merely nodded in reply to the silent question.

Philippa slipped downstairs in front of them and began to unlatch the door, as Linette and Magda appeared from the kitchen carrying lighted candles.

Then, when the front door had swung open, the little group gathered in front of it and read on the placard, by flickering candlelight, the decree of the Government of Republican France.

It was the order for general mobilization.

The nation was already at war.

CHAPTER XIII

A pale streak of daybreak along the eastern hills, a blackbird piping, then that intense stillness which heralds the sun.

In mid-heaven the last star-drops melted,

washed out in the grey silver of the sky; a light breeze sighed through the trees, and, sighing, died.

Then, above earth, a sudden misty glory of gold and rose; and through it, as through a veil, the sword-edge of the celestial scimitar curved up, glittering.

Thus dawned the year of war on Saïs.

But the awakening world of summer did not seem to comprehend; the yellow-haired lad who drove his cows to pasture halted to read the placard on the door of the inn, then, whistling his dog to heel, ran forward after his slowly moving herd.

The miller of Saïs drove by on his way to the mill, drew rein to read the placard, looked up at the bullet-shattered window above, then jogged on, his furrowed features unaltered, his aged eyes fixed on his horse's ears.

One or two washerwomen on the way to the meadow pool stood gracefully regarding the poster, flat baskets of clothes balanced on their heads; then moved on through the golden sunrise, still graceful, unhurried, exchanging leisurely comments on life and death as they walked.

In the kitchen of the Golden Peach, Magda was astir, and presently Linette appeared, very sleepy. As they went about the routine business to which they had been bred, they too exchanged tranquil views concerning emperors and kings and the mortality of all flesh. Also they took counsel together regarding

the return of Madame Arlon, the ultimate necessity of summoning a glazier from Ausone, the damage done in the garden by the ladder.

The door of Philippa's bedroom remained closed; Warner's door also. But Halkett, his hands in his pockets, was out at sunrise, pacing the road in front of the inn, sometimes looking up at the shot-riddled windows, or at the placard on the front door, or along the road at the telephone wires which appeared to be intact as far as he could see.

But somewhere they had been cut, and communication still remained interrupted.

Deeply worried over the non-appearance of Gray, the cutting of the telephone wires now became a matter of serious concern to him. He scarcely knew how to act in his sudden isolation, and, though his instructions held him at Saïs until further orders, the decree for general mobilization would have started him off for Paris except for one thing. That was the continued absence of Gray and the possibility that something alarming had happened to him.

He could not take his envelope and start for England until he had met Gray or some authorized messenger from Gray. He had not explained this to Warner.

But the truth was that what plans he carried were useless without the interlocking plans carried by Gray. All the eggs had not been trusted to a single basket. And, vice versa, the information carried by

Gray was of no practical account until supplemented by the contents of the long, thin envelope.

Gray's papers and his, taken together, were of vital importance to England or to any enemy of England; separate they could be of no use to anybody, enemy or ally.

The determined attack on him the night before proved that others besides himself understood this. And it also made him realize the more clearly that since he had parted from Gray in Antwerp, the latter had been as open to such attacks as had he. The question now was: had they caught Gray? If so, it must have occurred within the last thirty-six hours, because he had talked over the telephone to Gray the evening of his own arrival at Saïs.

But since that conversation, which ended with the understanding that Gray should set out on his motor cycle for Saïs, not a word had he heard concerning his colleague, except that his cap had been found on the road south of Saïs, and that the condition of the roadside bank, and a few drops of blood, gave evidence of an accident—if, indeed, it had been an accident.

Nor had Halkett any idea who it was that had called him up on the telephone to tell him this.

As he stood there, looking down the road, terribly perplexed and filled with keenest apprehensions concerning his colleague, far away through the vista of poplars and telephone poles

something white glimmered in the sunlit road.

It was the white cornette of a Sister of Charity; after a few minutes Halkett recognized the advancing figure and walked forward to meet her.

The color of early morning freshened her youthful cheeks, framed by the snowy wimple. She extended a friendly hand to him in salutation, as he came up and uncovered.

"At such an hour, Monsieur, only birds and Sisters of Charity are supposed to be on the wing. Is it curiosity that has awakened you to see how the sun really looks when it rises?"

But as she spoke she detected the deep anxiety which his smile masked, and her own face became responsively serious.

"Have you had bad news?" she asked gently.

"Worse—I have had no news at all. Are you going to the inn?"

"Yes."

"May I help you gather your flowers?" he asked.

"Thank you—if you care to."

They walked on in silence, skirted the garden wall westward, then north to the bullet-splintered green door.

Immediately she noticed the scars of the fusillade, gazed at them curiously for a moment, then laid a questioning forefinger across a bullet hole.

And while she stood so, he told her in a few words what had occurred the night before—told her

everything, including the posting of the notice ordering a general mobilization.

She listened, her finger still resting over the shot hole, her calm face raised to his. And, when he ended:

"Then it is war already," she said quietly.

"War has not been declared.... Yes, it is virtually war. Why not say so?"

She nodded; he pushed open the heavy little door, and Sister Eila bent her white-coiffed head and stepped lightly into the garden.

For a while she moved slowly along the flower-bordered paths, as though uncertain what to choose from among the perfumed thickets, then, setting her ozier basket on the edge of the walk, she knelt down before the white clove pinks; and Halkett dropped on his knees beside her.

They worked there together, exchanging scarcely a word, slowly filling the basket which lay between them.

Ariadne came up with a cheery mew of greeting, and after marching around and rubbing herself against Halkett, mounted to his shoulders and settled down, purring like a teakettle beside his ear.

When the basket was filled, Sister Eila stood up and straightened her shoulders, and Halkett rose too, the cat still perched on his shoulder.

He lifted the flower-heaped basket and set it in the shade of the arbor; Sister Eila seated herself and

Halkett sat down on the stone steps at her feet.

After a silence, made resonant with Ariadne's loudly cadenced purring, Sister Eila clasped her hands in her lap and looked steadily down at the heap of flowers in the green ozier basket.

"What is going to happen?" she asked in a low voice. "If there is to be a war, it will come here, I suppose."

"I am afraid so."

"Yes; Saïs cannot escape."

"The Vosges are too near," he nodded. "So is Ausone. So is the Rhine, for that matter." He glanced up at her from where he sat caressing Ariadne. "Belgium also is too near, Sister Eila."

"You believe *they* will arrive that way?"

"I feel very certain of it. And this means that England moves."

"Where?"

"To the firing line."

"With France?"

"Yes, Sister."

She said quietly:

"That is as it should be, Mr. Halkett. The two great wardens of European liberty should stand together in its defense."

"They've got to stand for *each other*," he said, "—whatever else they stand for."

"Alsace—Lorraine—I think this is to be a very holy war—for France," she murmured to herself.

He said nothing. He was not very clear concerning the exact amount of holiness involved, but he knew that war had now become a necessity to England, if she meant to retain the autocracy of the seas.

"We're bound to go in," he remarked, stroking Ariadne; "there's nothing else left for us to do. And if they don't give us an excuse by invading Belgium, we'll go in anyway. That's the meaning of all this! It has only one real meaning. The 'Day' they've been drinking to so long is—Today! This entire matter has got to be settled once and for all. And that's the truth, Sister Eila."

He sat for a while silent, gazing out across the quiet garden. Then, again:

"As for Saïs, if there is an invasion of France, it must pass this way: if the Vosges are to be defended, Saïs will see war."

"That will be very sad for us," she said. "It seems as though there were already enough violence and misery in the quarries—enough of wretchedness and poverty. If the quarrymen are called to the colors with their classes, and if the quarries and cement works close, I don't know what is to become of our school."

"You said that it is a free school."

"Yes, but the children live elsewhere, and are clothed and fed elsewhere. Except at noontime, we do not feed them. If we had money to provide beds

and food, the school is large enough to shelter the children. However, I suppose we shall hear from the rue de Bac—the mother house, you know?"

She rose, picked up her basket of flowers, and Halkett also stood up.

"Good-by," she said. "Thank you for helping.... I —I suppose you do not remain very long in Saïs?"

"I don't know how long."

She inclined her young head gravely.

They walked together to the green door in the wall, and again her eyes became riveted on the bullet marks.

"Perhaps," she said, "you will have time to—to come to the school again before you leave Saïs? ... Unless you think it dangerous——"

He looked up, then away from her.

"I'll come—to the school."

"Then—it is au revoir, I hope."

He stood uncovered, holding open the door, and, as she passed in front of him, he took from her basket a white clove pink. She saw what he did, and halted instinctively to give him his choice. Suddenly, without any reason, her cheeks flushed brightly; she bent her head and stepped quickly through the archway, leaving him standing there with the dull color deepening in his sun-tanned face.

Warner discovered him still standing where she had left him, the white blossom hanging from his clenched fist.

"Well," he said, "how did you sleep after that villainous business of last night?"

"Thanks, I slept," replied Halkett, rousing himself.

They went into the arbor together, and presently Linette came out of the house carrying their coffee.

"Where is your little friend Philippa?" inquired the Englishman with an effort.

"In bed, I fancy. Linette has just taken up her café-au-lait. I think the child is feeling the reaction."

"No wonder. Plucky little thing!"

"Yes. But what on earth am I going to do with her, Halkett? Ought I to wait until that old scoundrel Wildresse comes here or telephones? Ought I to try to persuade her to go back to that cabaret? Ought I to telephone that she is safe here?"

"The wires are cut."

"I know. Somebody will fix them, though. Do you think I'd better try to persuade Philippa to let me drive her over to Ausone in the trap? If I'm to keep her, I ought to have an interview with Wildresse, or she and I will get into trouble."

"Oh, Lord!" said Halkett. "That's your affair. Listen, Warner, I'm so worried about Gray I can't think of anything else. Something serious certainly has happened to him. And until those wires are repaired, I shan't know what to do. Is there any other way we can communicate with Ausone?"

"None that I know of, unless somebody goes over

to Ausone. I can do that if you like. I can drive over in the trap. Of course the telephone people already know that there's a break on the line, and no doubt they're out now looking for it. We'll be in communication with Ausone by noon, I expect."

For a little while they exchanged views concerning the attack of the previous night, and Halkett was of the opinion that the order for mobilization would now restrain any further violence on the part of those who had been following him, if, indeed, it did not entirely clear them out of France. And he expressed a desire for the envelope.

So Warner went into the house, lifted the partly hardened skin of white lead from the canvas, disinterred the envelope, wiped it clean, and brought it out to Halkett. The Englishman put it into his breast pocket.

"It was perfectly safe where it was," remarked the other. "It's an invitation to murder where it is now."

"Yes, but it's no good to anybody unless Gray turns up. I wish I knew what had become of that man. I think I'll try the telephone again——"

He rose and walked swiftly toward the house, Ariadne trotting at his heels. Even as he approached, he heard the telephone bell ringing, and hastened his steps toward the house.

But as he entered, the girl Philippa stepped into the hallway, and he caught a glimpse of a slim,

barefooted figure, holding with one hand the folds of a shabby chamber robe around her, and with the other the receiver.

"What?" she cried in answer to a question. "Yes, I am Philippa.... Oh! It's *you*. I thought so.... What do you desire of me?"

What Wildresse desired of the girl Philippa intimately concerned Halkett. He coolly remained to listen.

"No!" she said in her clear, emotionless voice. "I shall not come back! ... Very well; if the Government agents want me, they can find me here.... You may threaten me with arrest by the Government if you choose, but I know that you are more afraid of the Government than I am.... *Why* shouldn't I say it! Yes, I know quite well that we are going to have war.... You say that the Germans are already across the Duchy? Skirmishing before Longwy? Very well; why don't you inform *one* of your Governments? ... No, I won't keep quiet! No, no, *no*! ... What you say does not frighten me.... I refuse to return! ... Because I am now in an honest business for myself.... Yes, it is an honest business. I am permitted to pose for an artist of great distinction.... What you *say* does not frighten me; but what you *are* does cause me some apprehension. And knowing as much as I do know about you, I seriously advise you to leave France.... No, I haven't said such a thing to anybody else, but I am likely to, so you had better hasten to leave for

America. Yes, I will tell you why, if you wish. It is because there are always two millstones when anything is to be crushed. War is now beginning to bring those two stones together. The mill wheel already is turning! When the two millstones meet, the little meal worm that has remained between them so long in safety is going to be crushed.... Oh, yes, you *do* know what I mean! You also know whom I mean. Very well, then, if you don't I'll tell you this much: *double wages* never are paid by a *single* master. I learned that yesterday when you gave me the *wrong* paper to forward to Paris with the others. Fortunately for you, I read it. I then burnt it to ashes and took my clothes and my punt and my departure! I might have continued to endure what you had accustomed me to. But *two* masters! Faugh! The horror of it! ... Fear? If you really think *that* of me, then you have never really known me. It was disgust and shame that drove me toward liberty.... Yes, this that I say is final.... You *dare* not interfere! ... Then I'll say this: if you do not leave France now, *at once*, in this moment of her peril, I *will* tell what I know to the first soldier of France who crosses my path! ... I am not afraid of you, I tell you.... Believe me, you are well rid of me.... I warn you, in God's name, to let me alone!"

She hung up the receiver, turned, and mounted the stairs with flying feet, but at the top landing Halkett's quiet voice halted her.

"I was listening, Philippa. What that man says or does may cost me dear. What did he want of you?"

"Mr. Halkett," leaning swiftly toward him over the handrail above—"he is the most ignoble of creatures! And after five years I learned only yesterday that he sells his filthy secrets in *two* markets!—Three, perhaps; *I* don't know how many! And I no longer care! It ceases to interest *me*!"

"Wait! It interests *me*!"

"But I can't say any more to you than I have——"

"Why not?"

"I don't know. *Can* I? You know better than I. But I don't wish to betray anybody, even such a man as—as——"

"Wildresse?"

"Yes."

"Is he also betraying France?"

"I—I don't know. I suppose it is that. I haven't yet tried to comprehend it——"

"What was the paper you started to forward, then read, and finally burned?"

"It was a letter directed to a Mr. Esser. He is a German."

"The head of the Esser Cement Works?"

"Yes."

"What was in the letter?"

"A list of the guns in the Ausone Fort and a plan of the emplacements on tissue paper.... Perhaps I am stupid, but I could guess what a German wanted with

a plan of a French fort! It was enough for me! I took my punt and my effects and I departed!"

"You burnt the letter?"

"In my candle. Also, I wrote on a piece of paper, 'You damned traitor!' and I pinned it on his door. Then I went out by the garden door with my leather trunk on my head!"

"Come down when you are dressed," said Halkett, and walked back through the hallway to the garden.

"Warner," he said, "this old spider, Wildresse, is certainly a bad lot. I'd have him arrested by French gendarmes if I were certain that England is going in. But I dare not chance it until I'm sure. Perhaps I dare not chance it at all, because if he has had anything to do with Gray's disappearance, as I am beginning to suspect, it would not do to have the French authorities examine my papers."

"Why?"

"Because—if they have already seized Gray's papers, they will secure military information which perhaps my Government might not care to have even an ally possess. I don't know whether Gray is living or dead; I don't know who has Gray's papers at this instant. That's the trouble. And I'm hanged if I know what to do! I'm stumped, and that's the devilish truth!"

He took a few quick, uncertain steps along the flower beds, turned, came back to the arbor where

Warner was seated:

"It's a mess!" he said. "Even if agents employed by Wildresse have robbed Gray—murdered him, perhaps, to do it—I don't know what Wildresse means to do with Gray's papers."

"What!"

Halkett nodded:

"Yes, he's *that* kind! Pleasant, isn't it? If he has Gray's papers, it may be France that will pay him for them; it may be that Germany has already bought and paid for them. In either case, carrying the papers I carry, I hesitate to ask for his arrest. Do you understand?"

"Very clearly. If there is any way you can think of to get hold of this scoundrel, I'll be glad to help. Shall we drive over to Ausone and try?"

"You're very kind, Warner. I don't know; I want to think it over——" He turned and walked back to the house, entered the hallway, unhooked the telephone, and finally was given a connection—not the one he had asked for.

A voice said curtly:

"During mobilization no private messages are transmitted." Click! And the connection was severed. Again and again he made the attempt; no further attention was paid to his ringing. Finally he hung up the receiver and started to go out through the front doorway.

As he crossed the threshold, a young man in

tweeds rode up on a bicycle, stepped off, and, lifting his cap to Halkett, said politely:

"Monsieur Halkett, if you please? Is he still residing here at the Golden Peach?"

Halkett's right hand dropped carelessly into the side pocket of his coat. When he had cocked his automatic, he said pleasantly:

"I am Mr. Halkett."

The young man said smilingly, in perfect English:

"Do you expect a friend, Mr. Halkett?"

"Perhaps."

"Possibly you expect a Mr. Reginald Gray?"

"Possibly."

"He has been injured."

"Really?"

"Yes, rather seriously. He lost control of his motor cycle two nights ago. He was on his way to join you here."

"Indeed?"

"So he told me before he became unconscious."

"Is he still unconscious?"

"No, but he is too weak to move."

"Where is he?"

"At my house, in Bois d'Avril. I was motoring that evening, and I found him in the road, insensible. So I lifted him into my car, slung his motor cycle on behind, and went top speed for home. He's in my own house in Bois d'Avril. The physician thinks he

will recover."

"What is your telephone number?" asked Halkett bluntly.

The young man gave it, adding that the transmission of private messages had, unfortunately, been suspended during mobilization. Which Halkett knew to be true.

"Very well," he said, "I shall go to Bois d'Avril at once——"

"It is not necessary; I have a message for you, and some papers from Mr. Gray."

"Really?"

The young man smiled, drew from his inner pocket a long, thin envelope, and handed it to Halkett. The latter held it in his hand, looking steadily into the stranger's pleasant face for a full minute, then he coolly opened the envelope.

Inside were the missing papers concerning the Harkness shell, complete.

There could be no doubt concerning their identity; he recognized them at a glance. A deep sigh of relief escaped him.

He said:

"There's no use trying to thank you——"

"It's quite all right," interrupted the young man smilingly. "If you don't mind offering me a drink—the road over was rather dusty——"

"Leave your wheel there and come in!" exclaimed Halkett cordially, stepping aside in the

doorway.

The young man laid his bicycle against the steps, turned with a smile, and entered the doorway.

As he passed, he turned like lightning and struck Halkett full between the eyes with his clenched fist.

CHAPTER XIV

The terrific impact of the blow sent Halkett reeling across the threshold. Partly stunned, he caught at the banisters, groping instinctively for the pistol. And already he had contrived to drag it clear of his side pocket when another blow sent him staggering back against the stair rail; the pistol flew out of his hand and went spinning down the hallway over the polished floor.

As Halkett crashed into the banisters and fell full length, Philippa, in her red skirt and bodice, appeared on the stairs above.

The young man, who had dropped on his knees beside Halkett, and who had already torn open his coat, caught sight of the girl as she flew past him down the stairs; and he leaped to his feet to intercept her.

On the newel-post stood a tall, wrought-iron lamp. As he blocked her way she hesitated an instant, then threw all her weight against the heavy

metal standard, pushing with both hands; and the iron lamp swayed forward and fell.

As the young man leaped clear of the falling fixture, Philippa vaulted the stair rail into the hallway below. He saw instantly what she was after; both sprang forward to snatch the pistol.

As she stooped for it and seized it, he caught her arm; and she twisted around on him, beating his head and breast with her free hand while he strove desperately to master the outstretched arm which still clutched Halkett's pistol.

To and fro they swayed over the slippery floor of the hallway, until he forced back her arm to the breaking point. Then the pistol clattered to the floor.

Instantly she kicked it under a tall secretary, where the register was kept. Holding her at arm's length with one hand, he managed to drag the heavy piece of furniture on its casters away from the wall far enough to uncover the pistol.

As he stooped for the weapon, she tore herself free, kicked it away from beneath his fingers, which already touched it, and, wrenching a framed engraving from the wall behind her, hurled it at him with both hands.

He leaped nimbly aside to avoid it, but another picture followed, and then a mantel clock and two vases went smashing against the secretary behind which he had taken shelter. And suddenly she seized the secretary itself, and with one supreme effort

tipped it over toward him, driving him again from cover and from the vicinity of the weapon they both were fighting to secure.

As the big oak secretary fell, and the glass doors crashed into splinters, she stooped, snatched Halkett's pistol from the floor, and crept forward along the base of the staircase. But the young man had whipped out a revolver of his own, and was now standing astride of Halkett's body, panting, speechless, but menacing her with gesture and weapon.

She shrank aside and crouched low under the staircase, resting there, disheveled, bleeding, half naked, struggling for breath, but watching his every movement out of brilliant, implacable eyes.

Every time he ventured to bend down over Halkett, or make the slightest motion toward the fallen man's breast pockets, Philippa stopped his operations with leveled pistol, forcing him to spring to his feet again.

Suddenly, behind him in the doorway, appeared Magda and Linette, coming from the meadow across the road, carrying between them a basket of freshly washed linen. Like a flash he turned on them and drove them back and out of doors at the point of his weapon, then whirled about, aimed full at Philippa, slammed and bolted the front door behind him, and, covering her with his revolver, ran forward to the foot of the stairs, where his victim still lay

unconscious. Catching the senseless man by the sleeve, he strove desperately to rip the coat from the inert body, while keeping his revolver pointed at Philippa's hiding place under the stairs.

As he stood there, tugging furiously at the fallen man's coat, into the rear of the hallway ran Warner, his automatic lifted. Both men fired at the same instant, and the intruder dropped Halkett's arm. Then he ran for the stairway. Up the stairs he leaped, shooting back at Warner as he mounted to the landing above; and the American sped after him, followed by Philippa, as far as the foot of the stairway.

Here Warner hesitated for a few moments, then he began cautiously to negotiate the stairway, creeping step by step with infinite precaution.

When at last he had disappeared on the landing above, Philippa, listening breathlessly below, heard Halkett stir and then groan.

As she turned, the Englishman lifted himself on one elbow, fumbled instinctively in his breast pockets, and drew out two envelopes.

"Take them to Sister Eila!—Hurry, Philippa——" He passed a shaking hand across his eyes, swayed to a sitting posture, caught at the stair rail, and dragged himself to his feet.

"Give me that pistol," he muttered. She handed it to him; he groped in his pockets for a few moments, found a clip, reloaded, and, reeling slightly, walked

with her aid as far as the front door. Philippa opened it for him.

"Where is this man?" he asked vaguely.

"Mr. Warner followed him upstairs."

He pressed his hand over his battered head, nodded, extended the two envelopes to her.

"Sister Eila," he repeated.

Philippa took the papers; he straightened his shoulders with a visible effort; then, steadying himself by the handrail, he started to ascend the stairs.

The girl watched him mount slowly to the landing above, saw him disappear, stood listening a moment longer.

Magda and Linette came stealing into the hallway; Philippa pointed to the telephone.

"Call the gendarmes at Ausone!" she whispered. "I must go to——"

A shot from above cut her short. All three women stood gazing up at the landing in startled silence.

"Quick—the telephone! The gendarmerie!" cried Philippa.

Magda ran to the box; and at the same instant a man climbed over the stair well, dropped to the hallway below, swung around on Magda, pushed her violently from the telephone, and, seizing the receiver, ripped it out by the roots.

Philippa had already turned and slipped through

the doorway, both envelopes tightly clutched in her hand. Directly in her path stood the intruder's bicycle; and she seized the handles, righted it, and leaped into the saddle before he could reach the front door.

He ran up the road behind her for a little distance, but she had already found her balance and was increasing her speed over the smooth, white highway. Then the young man halted, carefully leveled his revolver, steadied his aim with his left elbow, and, standing in mid-road, he deliberately directed a stream of lead after the crouching fugitive.

The last bullet from his magazine sent her veering widely from her path; the machine sheered in a half-circle, staggered, slid down into the grassy ditch, flinging the girl off sideways among the weeds.

Philippa got up slowly, as though dazed or hurt. The young man hurried forward, reloading his weapon as he ran, but a shot from behind warned him away from the trail of the limping girl, who was now trying to escape on foot.

Whirling in his tracks, he stood for a second glaring at Halkett and Warner, who were advancing, shooting as they came on; then, with a savage glance at Philippa, he fired at her once more, turned, mounted the roadside bank in a single leap, and ran swiftly along the hedge, evidently looking for an opening into the field beyond.

When he found one, he wriggled through and

was off like a hare, across the fields and headed for the river, before Halkett and Warner could discover his avenue of escape. Checked for a few moments, they ranged the thorny hedge up and down, like baffled beagles. They had overrun the trail.

Warner was already within speaking distance of Philippa when the girl hailed him.

"Are you hurt?" he called across to her, where she stood knee-deep among the roadside weeds, trying to draw together the points of her torn bodice, to cover her throat and shoulders.

"The tire burst. I have a few scratches!"

"Did he get the papers?" shouted Halkett.

She drew both envelopes from her bosom, and shook them high with a gesture of defiance. Then, replacing them, she made a funnel of her hands and called out to them:

"He crawled under the hedge by that third telephone pole behind you! You have come too far this way! No—the *other* pole! Wait a moment, Mr. Warner——"

Still calling out her directions in her clear, calm voice, she started to limp down the road toward them; and Warner glanced back at her for a moment; then he suddenly flung up his arm and shouted:

"Philippa! Look out for that car behind you!"

The girl turned, saw the automobile coming, stepped aside into the ditch as a cloud of white dust obscured her.

Before she realized that the car had stopped, three men had jumped out into the ditch and caught hold of her.

Warner heard her cry out; started to run toward her; saw her flung struggling into the car; saw Wildresse rise and strike her with his great fist and knock her headlong across the back seat, where she lay, her disheveled head hanging down over the rear of the tonneau. Then the car started. As she hung there, blood dripping from her mouth, she reached blindly toward her breast, drew out the envelopes, and dropped them in the wake of the moving car.

They fluttered along behind it for a moment, drawn into the dusty suction, then they were whirled away right and left into the roadside ditches.

Evidently nobody in the car except Philippa knew what she had done, for the car, at top speed, dashed on toward the north.

Halkett ran up and found Warner gazing vacantly after the receding machine, pistol leveled, but not daring to shoot. Then they both saw Wildresse jerk the half senseless girl upright, saw him strike her again with the flat of his huge hand so heavily that she crumpled and dropped back into the corner of the seat.

"God!" whispered Halkett at Warner's elbow. "Did you see that?"

Warner, as white as death, made no reply. The ear had vanished, but he still stood there staring at

the distant cloud of dust settling slowly in the highway. Presently Halkett walked forward, picked up the two envelopes, pocketed them, and returned swiftly to where the American still stood, his grim features set, the red stain from his bitten lip streaking his chin.

"Warner?"

"Yes?" he answered steadily.

"We'd better start after that man at once."

"Certainly."

Halkett said:

"Have your horse hooked up as soon as you can.... I think——" His voice trembled, but he controlled it. "I am horribly afraid for that child.... He would cut her throat if he dared."

Warner turned a ghastly visage to his companion:

"Why do you say that?"

"Because she knows enough about him to send him before a firing squad," said Halkett. "That's the trouble, Warner."

They turned and walked rapidly toward the inn.

Warner spoke presently in an altered voice, but with the mechanical precision of a man afraid of emotion and any wavering of self-control.

"I'm going to Ausone at once to find her.... Wherever I find her I shall take her.... It makes no difference to me who objects. She is going to have her chance in life.... I shall see to that."

Halkett drew a deep breath:

"Did you ever hear of such a plucky battle as she gave that rascal after he got me? I never shall forget what she has done."

They entered the front door of the inn, almost running; Warner continued on toward the garden and the stable beyond; Halkett halted at the telephone, gazed grimly at the ruined instrument, realized that he was again isolated, and called impatiently to Linette who, with Magda, was gathering up and sweeping aside the debris of the wrecked furniture.

"Linette," he said, "would you do something to help me?"

"Willingly, Monsieur."

"Go to the school; say to Sister Eila that I am in real need of her. Ask her if she could come here at once, because I cannot go to her."

The girl nodded, turned, and went out rapidly by the front way. Halkett hastened upstairs to his room.

When again he returned, the dogcart had just driven up, and Warner sat waiting in silence, reins and whip in hand.

But Halkett had a letter to write before he could start; and it was slow work, because the letter must be written in a cipher, the key to which was the solar spectrum and the three metallic symbols.

He had scarcely completed his letter when Sister

Eila and Linette entered the hallway together.

The Sister of Charity caught sight of him through the doorway as he rose from his seat in the empty dining-room; and she instantly went to him.

He thanked Linette, closed the door, and turned to Sister Eila.

"There's nobody else I can trust," he said. "Will you help me?"

"You know I will."

He drew the two envelopes from his breast pocket and handed them to her in silence. Then he laid on the table the letter which he had just, written.

"I am obliged to go to Ausone," he said. "It will take me several hours, I suppose, to go, attend to my business, and return. Could you remain here at the inn until I can get back?"

"Yes. Sister Félicité is with the children."

"Then this is what you must know and prepare for. If, while I am away, a man should come here and ask for me, you will show him this letter lying on the table, and you will say to him that I left it here for a man whom I have been expecting. You will stand here and watch him while he is reading this letter. If he really *can* read it, then he will ask for pen and ink, and he will *change the punctuation* of what I have written on the envelope: '*Ibis, redibis non, morieris in bello.*' As I have punctuated it, it means: 'Thou shalt go, thou shalt not return, thou shalt die in battle.'

"So if he *can* read what is *inside* the envelope, he will erase the comma after the word *non*, and insert a comma after the word *redibis*. And the translation will then read: 'Thou shalt go, thou shalt return, thou shalt *not* die in battle.' Is all this quite clear to you, Sister?"

"Perfectly."

"Then, if a man comes here and asks for me, and if you see that he really has understood the letter which is written in cipher, then, after he has repunctuated what I have written, give him the other two envelopes which I have entrusted to you.

"Will you do this for—France, Sister Eila?"

"Yes"—she lifted her grave young eyes—"for France."

Through the open dining-room window Sister Eila watched his departure, smiling her adieux as the two men turned toward her and uncovered.

Then she seated herself by the window sill and rested her cheek on her palm, gazing out at the blue sky with vague, enraptured eyes that saw a vision of beatitude perhaps, perhaps the glimmering aura of an earthly martyrdom, in the summer sunshine.

And possibly a vision less holy invaded her tranquil trance, for she suddenly straightened her young shoulders, picked up the crucifix at her girdle, and gazed upon it rather fixedly.

The color slowly cooled in her cheeks till they were as white as the spotless wimple that framed

them in its snowy oval.

After a while rosary and crucifix fell between her relaxing hands, and she looked up at the blue foothills of the Vosges with bluer eyes.

The next moment she sprang to her feet, startled. Over the sparkling hills came sailing through the summer sky a gigantic bird—the most enormous winged creature she had ever beheld. A moment later the high clatter of the aëroplane became audible.

CHAPTER XV

Wheeling in spirals now above the river meadow, the great, man-made bird of prey turned and turned, hanging aloft in the sky like a giant hawk, sweeping in vast circles through the blinding blue, as though searching every clump and tussock in the fields below for some hidden enemy or victim.

Louder and louder came the rattling clatter from the sky, nearer swooped the great plane on wide-stretched wings, until, close to the earth, it seemed to sheer the very grass blades in the meadow, and the deafening racket of its engines echoed and reëchoed, filling the world with outrageous and earsplitting noise.

Sister Eila had gone to the front door; Magda

and Linette stood behind her. And they saw the aëroplane alight in the meadow and a hooded figure, masked in glass and leather, step out, turn its goblin head toward the inn, then start rapidly toward them across the fields.

He was a tall thin man, and as he crossed the highroad and came toward them, he lifted the glass and leather mask and drew it back above his closely-fitting hood.

When he saluted Sister Eila's habit, he came to a full halt and his heels clicked together. Then he spoke in French, pleasantly, perfectly:

"Mr. Halkett, if you please, Sister. Is he still residing here?"

"Monsieur Halkett has left."

"Oh, I am sorry. Was not Monsieur Halkett expecting a messenger?"

"Have you a message for Monsieur Halkett?"

The airman twisted his pointed, blond mustache:

"I expected that Monsieur Halkett would have a packet for me. Did he leave none?"

"He left a letter," said Sister Eila.

He bowed ceremoniously:

"Would you be kind enough?"

"Will you not enter?"

"I thank you. If I may be permitted to remain here——" He had kept continually glancing up and down the road while speaking; and it was evident that he preferred to remain where he could watch

the highway both ways.

So Sister Eila brought the letter to him, and he bowed again with tight-waisted ceremony, pocketed it, and asked again for the packet.

"Wait, if you please," she said. "The letter was to be read in my presence."

"A thousand pardons! I had not understood——"

He drew the sheets of paper from the unsealed envelope, glanced sharply up and down the highroad, then unfolded the letter.

Sister Eila's eyes were fixed on his face, but his features exhibited no emotion whatever.

Every few moments he looked up and down the road, then bent his pleasantly expressionless face again over the sheets in his gloved hands.

Presently he looked up with a smile:

"I have read it and I understand it. Would you be kind enough to give me the packet which Monsieur Halkett writes that he has left for me?"

"Please read first what is written on the envelope of this letter," said Sister Eila very calmly.

He turned over the envelope, read the inscription in Latin, smiled as he read it.

"Rather an ominous message, is it not, Sister?"

"Do you think so?"

He glanced sharply to right and left, then, still smiling, he read aloud:

"Thou shalt go, thou shalt *not* return, thou shalt die in battle——"

He turned his head with a jerk and gazed down the road as though suddenly startled; at the same instant Sister Eila snatched the letter from his fingers, sprang inside the house, and slammed the door.

As she bolted it, he threw his weight against it for a moment, then turned and ran for the meadow where the aëroplane stood.

From a window Sister Eila saw him climb aboard; saw the machine move, run over the ground like a great beetle, and rise from the grass, pointing upward and eastward as it took wing and soared low over the river.

And down the highway, pell-mell, galloped a dozen gendarmes in a storm of dust and flying pebbles, wheeled in front of the inn, put their superb horses to the ditch and the cattle gate beyond, and, clearing both, went tearing away across the fields after the rising aëroplane.

Over the river bank they galloped, straight into the water, their big, powerful horses wading, thrashing, swimming across; then they were up the opposite bank and over and away, racing after the ascending aëroplane.

From it was coming a redoubled rattle now; machine and machine gun were both spitting fiercely as the winged thing fought upward toward the blue zone of safety.

The gendarmes drew bridle now and began to

shoot upward from their saddles, then spurred on across the fields, taking ditches and hedges as they came, until the strange chase was hidden by a distant rise of ground and the quarry alone remained visible, high winging, still rising, still pointed eastward toward the Rhine.

Then, far away across the hills, a heavier shot set the August air vibrating—another, another, others following.

Faster and faster cracked the high-angle guns on the Barrier Forts, strewing the sky with shrapnel; the aëroplane soared and soared, leaving behind it a wake dotted with clots of fleece which hung for a while quite motionless against the intense blue, then slowly dissolved and vanished in mid-air.

From the Ausone Fort the gunners could hear, far to the southeast, the sky-cannon banging away on the Barrier Forts; and the telescopes on their signal towers swung toward the sky line above the foothills of the Vosges.

But in the town below the fortressed hill no echo of the cannonade penetrated. Ausone, except in the neighborhood of the railroad and the office of the *Petit Journal d'Ausone*, lay still and almost deserted in the August sunshine: a few children played under the trees by the bridge; a few women sat knitting along the river quay; one or two old men nodded, half asleep, fishing the deeper pools below the bridge; the

market square remained empty except for a stray dog, tongue lolling, padding stolidly up the street about his business.

But before the office of the *Petit Journal d'Ausone* a crowd stood, covering the sidewalks and overflowing beyond the middle of the street. Young men and old, women and young girls, were clustered there quietly watching the bulletin boards.

There was no excitement apparent, no loud talking, no gesticulation: voices were calm, tones were low; there was almost no movement in the crowd except when people joined the throng or silently departed.

On one of these bulletin boards was nailed the order for general mobilization; on the other a terse paragraph announced that on Sunday, August 2, German soldiers had entered the city of Luxembourg, crossed the Grand Duchy, and were already skirmishing with Belgian cavalry around Liége and with French troops before Longwy. In other terms, the Teutonic invasion had begun; German troops were already on French soil; for Longwy is the most northern of the Republic's fortifications.

Another paragraph reported that King Albert of Belgium had appealed to England, and that Sir Edward Grey, in the House of Commons, had prepared his country for an immediate ultimatum to Germany.

Still a third paragraph informed the populace of

Ausone that the British battle fleet had mobilized and sailed, and that the Empire's land forces were already preparing to cross the Channel.

And Germany had not yet declared war on either France or Belgium, nor had England declared war on Germany, nor had Austria, as yet, formally declared war on Russia, although Germany had.

But there seemed to be no doubt, no confusion in the minds of the inhabitants of Ausone, concerning what was happening, what had already happened, and what Fate still concealed behind a veil already growing transparent enough to see through—already lighted by the infernal flashes of German rifle fire before Longwy.

Everybody in Ausone knew; everybody in France understood. A great stillness settled over the Republic, as though the entire land had paused to kneel a moment before the long day of work began.

There was no effervescence, no voice raised, no raucous shout from boulevard orators of the psychological moment, no attitudes, no complaints.

Only, amid the vast silence, as the nation rose serenely from its knees, millions of flashing eyes were turned toward Alsace and Lorraine—eyes dimmed for an instant, then instantly clear again—clear and steady as the sound and logical minds controlling them.

There was no *sonnerie* from the portcullis, no salvo from parapet or bastion, no fanfare blared at

midday in square or stony street. No bands of *voyous* went yelling through boulevards, no seething crowds choked the cafés or formed a sinister maelstrom around embassies or government offices.

Down at the Gare de Chalons another crowd had gathered to watch the young men of Ausone depart. They came alone, or two by two, or in groups—sticks, bundles, suitcases, valises swinging—with serious, unruffled features intent upon the business of the long, long business day that was beginning for them at last.

Some were accompanied by parents, some by wives and children, some by sweethearts: many had said good-by at home and were walking to the station with brother or friend, saluting acquaintances en route.

But the mobilizing youths were undemonstrative, chary of gesture—shy, serious young fellows preoccupied with the business on hand, conscious that their term of service had equipped them for it—and in their bearing was that modesty and self-respect which discounts self-consciousness and self-assertion.

For there was no longer any excuse for France to be either noisy or dramatic when she went about her business—no reason for posturing, for epigrams, for attitudes, or for the loud laugh and the louder boast to bolster faith with mutual and riotous reassurance in the face of an unknown business venture

concerning the conduct of which the entire nation was excited, ignorant, and unprepared.

The Republic had been both instructed and prepared for the matter of the business on hand. And was going quietly about it.

In Ausone itself there were few signs of war visible; the exodus of the young men, the crowd before the bulletins, and the throng at the station, and perhaps more mounted officers and gendarmes than usual riding faster than is customary in the peaceful streets of a provincial town.

But on the roads around the fortified hill dominating the rolling green landscape in the heart of which Ausone nestled, cavalry patrols were riding, infantry details tramped through the white dust, military wagons and motor vans passed under dragoon escort; bridges over the Récollette were guarded by line soldiers and gendarmes, while sappers and miners and engineers were busy at every bridge, culvert, and railway cut.

Above the fort slim tentacles of wireless apparatus spread a tracery against the sky, and a signal tower swam high against the blue. From it sparkled blinding flashes in code. Officers up there were talking business to the Barrier Forts, and the heliographs along the Vosges brilliantly discussed the new business deal with other forts far to the south and east, relaying reports, rumors, and quotations as far as Paris, where the directors' meeting was being

held; and even as far as London, where stockholders and directors were gathered to add up profit and loss, and balance policy against ethics, and reconcile both with necessity.

In London a King, a Prime Minister, and a First Lord of the Admiralty were listening to a Sirdar who was laying down the law by wireless to a President and his Premier.

In St. Petersburg an Emperor was whispering to a priest while the priest consulted the stars. Signs being favorable, they changed the city's name to Petrograd, which imperial inspiration dealt a violent slap on the Kaiser's wrist.

Led westward by a Grand Duke, marching Russia bent several million reverent heads, awed by this stroke of autocratic genius, and somebody named a brand of caviar after the Czar of all the Russias. Which holy tribute, however, built no strategic railroads in the West.

Meanwhile, the spinning world swung on around its orbit; tides rose and ebbed; the twin sentinels of the skies relieved each other as usual, and a few billion stars waited patiently for eternity.

Ausone, lying in the sun, was waiting, too, amid its still trees and ripening fields.

In the summer world around, no hint of impending change disturbed the calm serenity of that August afternoon—no sense of waiting, no prophecy

of gathering storms. But in men's hearts reigned the breathless stillness which heralds tempests.

Silently as a kestrel's shadow gliding over the grass, an ominous shade sped over sunny France, darkening the light in millions of smiling eyes, subduing speech, stilling all pulses, cautioning a nation's ardent heart and conjuring its ears to listen and its lips to silence.

And, as France sat silent, listening, hand lightly resting on her hilt, came the far cry from beyond the Vosges—the voices of her lost children.

Now she had risen to her feet, loosening the blade in its scabbard. But she had not yet drawn it; she still stood listening to the distant shots from Longwy in the north, to the noise of the western winds blowing across the channel; and always she heard, from the east, the lost voices of her best beloved, calling, calling her from beyond the Vosges.

As they approached Ausone, driving full speed, Warner and Halkett encountered the Saïs omnibus returning, and drew rein.

In it was the Harem, much annoyed because not permitted to sketch in the Ausone streets.

They had seen nothing of any touring car containing several men and a young girl. That did not interest them. What preoccupied their minds was that they had been sketching in the streets of Ausone, and had been politely requested to desist by

several unappreciative policemen. So they had collectively shaken the dust of Ausone from their several and indignant feet, and were now en route to Saïs to paint hay stacks.

Requesting to know whether they might still be permitted to paint haystacks at Saïs, Warner offered them no encouragement, pointing out that Saïs was in the zone of future military operations.

In the face of such an outrageous condition of affairs, there is no doubt that Art shrieked as loudly as did Freedom when her popular hero fell. Anyway, her devotees now protested in chorus; but Warner advised them to pack their trunks and go to Paris while the going was good; and the Saïs omnibus rolled away with the Harem still volubly denouncing a government which dared to interfere with Haystack Art on any pretext whatever.

As Warner drove forward Halkett said:

"The chances are that the military will requisition that omnibus before evening. It wouldn't surprise me if they stopped us at the entrance to Ausone and took your horse and cart."

And it happened as he had feared; red-legged soldiers halted them at the town entrance; a polite but resolute young officer refused to argue the matter, but insisted that they descend, accept an official voucher for the temporary loan of their horse and cart, and continue their journey on foot.

As yet, however, punts, rowboats, and skiffs

were not subject to requisition by the authorities. Halkett noticed a skiff tied to the shore near a small house on the river bank; so they climbed a stile, crossed the newly mown hayfield, and found an old man fishing from his doorstep in the rear of the house.

For thirty francs they bought the boat outright; the old man shuffled into the house and returned with the home-made oars; Warner took them; Halkett pushed off and sprang in; and they pulled away up the river, breasting a glassy current over which swallows darted and played and dipped, starring the calm surface with a hundred spreading circles.

Rushes swayed inshore where meadows bordered the Récollette, and dragon flies with turquoise bodies sailed glittering into the breeze. Trees swept the surface of the water with tender leaves still untarnished by the ripening world of waning summer; and in shady coves the cattle stood to their knees in the crystal flood, staring with moony eyes at the passing skiff.

Presently Warner sent the skiff inshore, and when it lay floating in the shadow of the trees under the right bank of the stream, he rested on his oars.

"The café garden is just ahead, around that next turn," he said. "If you'll take the oars, I'll get out on the bank and look over the situation."

"Don't you want me?"

"I don't know; I'll see what things look like first. Do you mind?"

"I'll wait if you say so. But there's a rough crowd hanging about that café, as you know."

"I know it," said Warner grimly.

"Are you armed?"

"I certainly am, Halkett. But I don't count on any trouble, because Wildresse can't afford to make any. If there's a row in that cabaret at such a time as this, the police will make short work of it. I think I'll have no difficulty in finding my little friend Philippa and in taking her out of that miserable place."

Halkett said:

"Don't forget yourself and beat up Wildresse for what we saw him do to Philippa. You can attend to that later: the idea now is to take the child back to Saïs."

"I'll try to remember," said Warner with a somber glance at his friend. Then he handed him the oars and, making his way to the stern, leaped lightly to the grassy bank.

CHAPTER XVI

Warner entered a paved lane leading up the slope, between two high, stucco walls. It bore the name, "Impasse d'Alcyon," painted under the rusty bracket

of a gas lamp projecting from the wall. A few chickens and a pig moved aside to let him pass.

The Impasse d'Alcyon emerged upon the market square of Ausone to the left of the Cabaret de Biribi; and, as Warner came out into the sunny, deserted square, the first thing he caught sight of was a written notice nailed up over the doorway of the Cabaret de Biribi:

AVIS IMPORTANT

The town of Ausone is proclaimed to be in a state of siege. Place and town will remain under government of the military authorities, aided by the municipality. Both are within jurisdiction of military headquarters in charge of the secteur which includes place, town, and environs of Ausone.

BY ORDER OF THE MAYOR.

The Cabaret de Biribi will remain closed until further notice. For the convenience of the public, the Café Biribi, adjoining, will remain open between the hours of seven A.M. and nine P.M. until further notice.

The café, separated from the cabaret by a clipped privet hedge, formed the southeastern angle of the square.

Under its orange and white awning the tables on the terrace were crowded with people lingering over

after-luncheon coffee and cognac—quiet, serious, solid citizens, accustomed to their déjeuner at that time and place, whose habits of long standing had not so far been altered in the sudden and general upheaval in the accustomed order of things.

Waiters came and went as usual; men consulted the files of provincial and Paris papers; one or two were playing dominoes inside the café.

Warner, pausing at the entrance to the terrace, summoned a waiter.

"The cabaret is closed, then?" he asked.

"Since last night, Monsieur."

"By the police?"

"Yes, Monsieur."

"Why?"

The waiter said respectfully:

"It is usual in time of war to close places of amusement. Besides, music and dancing are in questionable taste at such a time as this."

"Certainly. Where is Monsieur Wildresse?"

"The Patron is absent."

"Where can I find him?"

The waiter shrugged:

"The Patron went away this morning. I do not know where. He has not yet returned."

"Are you quite certain?"

"Perhaps Monsieur had better ask the *caissière*. Maybe the Patron has returned."

So Warner entered the café. In the cool, subdued

light of the interior, he saw the cashier behind her counter—a fresh-faced, plump, dark-eyed country girl, who returned his salute with a smile that showed her white teeth.

"Monsieur Wildresse?" he inquired. "May I see him for a moment?"

"The Patron is absent, Monsieur."

"When do you expect him to return?"

"We do not know. Sometimes he goes to Paris and remains a week or two."

"Do you suppose he has gone to Paris?"

"We do not know. He never tells us where he is going."

Warner thought hard for a moment, then:

"It seems that the cabaret is closed," he said.

"Locked up, Monsieur."

"I wonder if you could tell me where I might find the *caissière* of the cabaret—Mademoiselle Philippa?"

The girl shook her head:

"I think she went to Paris."

"When?"

"The other day. We understood that she had gone to Paris."

"No," said Warner, "she did not go to Paris. Has she not returned to Ausone?"

The *caissière* rapped with her pencil and a waiter hastened to the desk.

"Pierre, didn't you say something about

Mademoiselle Philippa this morning?"

"I said that I thought I saw her. It was somebody who resembled her, no doubt."

Warner wheeled around:

"When?"

"It was before noon, some time——"

"Where?"

"Monsieur, they were putting up and locking the shutters of the cabaret, and on the top floor somebody inside was lowering the lateen shades and drawing the blue curtains.

"I thought I saw Mademoiselle Philippa—I thought I saw her face for a moment behind one of the windows in the Patron's apartment."

"And what do you think about it now?"

"*Ma foi*, Monsieur, if Mademoiselle Philippa has gone to Paris, I could not have seen her at the window."

"But you saw somebody there?"

"I thought I did."

"Could we go to the cabaret and inquire?"

"It is locked up. There is nobody now within."

"How do you know?"

"They locked and padlocked it from the outside. They even removed the geraniums and the three cats. The place is empty, Monsieur. I know, because I helped remove the cats and the potted plants. Everybody and everything was transferred last night to the café. And at noon today the police put seals on

the doors."

Warner forced a smile:

"That, of course, settles it. I'm sorry. I wanted to see the Patron and Mademoiselle Philippa. Another time will do."

He thanked the waiter, lifted his hat to the *caissière*, turned, and walked over to a table by the opposite wall, where he ordered coffee and cognac and a newspaper, as though he had just lunched.

When his coffee was brought, he opened the paper and leaned back against the padded leather seat, pretending to read, but studying the room and everybody in it.

It was a café typical of almost any half dead provincial town in France—large, rather dimly lighted, shabbily furnished with marble-topped tables ranged around the walls and two ancient billiard tables occupying the center of the room.

In the corner near the door was the cashier's cage and desk; on the same side of the room, in the further corner, a swinging leather door, much battered, gave exit and entrance to the waiters as they went to or arrived from kitchen and cellar.

And one thing occurred to him immediately: the same kitchen, and perhaps the same cellar, had supplied both cabaret and café. Therefore, there must still be some passage of communication between the cabaret—which had been locked and sealed by the authorities—and the café which the

police had decreed must remain open for the convenience of the public.

Deeply perturbed by what the waiter had said concerning the glimpse he had caught of somebody resembling Philippa, and made doubly anxious by Halkett's sinister remark in regard to the girl's knowledge of secrets which might send Wildresse before a platoon of execution, he studied the gloomy room from behind his newspaper, trying to come to some conclusion.

He did not believe that Wildresse and his companions had dared drive into Ausone by daylight with Philippa in the tonneau, either unconscious or resisting them.

If they had brought her to Ausone at all, they must have carried her by boat, landed at the foot of the cabaret garden, and smuggled the child into the house through the rear door giving on the river garden.

If they had brought her to Ausone at all, then, she must be at that moment somewhere within the walls of the double building forming the Café and Cabaret de Biribi. Otherwise, the grey touring car had never entered Ausone.

To make certain on that point he presently paid his reckoning, bowed to the cashier, and went leisurely out into the deserted square.

First of all he sauntered back to the town entrance, where the red-legged soldiers had taken

over his cart and horse. Having been obliged to give particulars concerning himself, the soldiers were perfectly friendly. Inquiry they readily answered; such a touring car as he described had been halted and requisitioned by the guard about two hours before his own horse was stopped and appropriated. There were only two people in the car, both men.

"Friends of yours, Monsieur?" inquired the polite lieutenant in charge.

"Business acquaintances——"

Warner hesitated, then asked for the names of the two men and their addresses. The officer on duty very obligingly looked up the information in his leather-covered book. It appeared that the men were Adolf Meier and Josef Hoffman, *commis voyageurs*, of Paris, and that they had gone for lodging to the Boule d'Argent in Ausone.

Warner thanked the boyish officer; the officer was happy to have been of service to an American and an artist.

But when Warner turned back into the town, he went directly to the railroad station instead of to the hotel. There he presently discovered and consulted the *chef de gare* and the ticket agent; and he learned definitely that Monsieur Wildresse, who was perfectly well known to both of them by sight, had not taken any train there.

Travelers who board trains at provincial railway stations cannot escape official observation.

Therefore, what the station master and ticket agent told him was sufficient for him.

He went slowly back along the river quay, crossed diagonally in front of the deserted cabaret, entered the Impasse d'Alcyon, and traversed it to the river bank, where Halkett sat under the big willow tree, smoking his pipe and letting the rowboat float by the chain which he held in his hands.

"Halkett," he said, "they're in Ausone or near it. I'm convinced of that. Their car came in with only two men in it. The military confiscated it. The men's names are Adolf Meier and Josef Hoffman, and they inscribed themselves as commercial travelers from Paris. Do you happen to know them?"

"Perfectly."

"What are they; spies?"

"They are—clumsy ones."

"By any chance are they any of the gentlemen who have been following you?"

"Exactly. Both have had several shots at me."

"That is interesting. The address they left with the military authorities is the Boule d'Argent.

"What I have found out is this: the Cabaret de Biribi has been closed and sealed up by the police; the café remains open. A waiter in the café thought he saw Philippa at the window of her apartment over the cabaret just before noon today.

"But Wildresse, they all say, went away this morning and has not returned. And they have no

idea when to expect him.

"Now, my theory is this: Wildresse and his ruffians, realizing that their own necks are in danger, went to Saïs to see Philippa, either to bully her into silence or persuade her to return to duty. When they saw her by the roadside they changed their plans and took a chance. I don't believe they saw us. We were on our knees in the grass under the shadow of the hedge. After they caught her they never looked around. I don't believe any of them noticed us at all. Before the car reached Ausone they must have stopped in some deserted place, found a boat somewhere, sent the car on ahead to Ausone with only two men in it, and then Wildresse and the other two men must have dragged or carried Philippa across the fields to the river and forced her into the boat. That was the only way they could have ventured to enter Ausone. They must have gone by boat to the garden behind the cabaret, where nobody could see what was going on, and there they probably let themselves into the house by the rear entrance.

"That's my theory, Halkett. I believe Philippa is there. I believe Wildresse is there. And I feel very sure that those two choice scoundrels of his at the Boule d'Argent will join him wherever he is. So I think we had better tie up our boat and go to the Boule d'Argent and find these fellows, Meier and Hoffman, and never let them out of our sight."

"I think so, too," said Halkett quietly.

He knelt down on the grass, passed the boat chain around the base of the willow tree, linked and padlocked it, sprang to his feet, and walked quickly after Warner, who had already started to enter the Impasse d'Alcyon.

"You're a little flustered, old chap," he said, as he rejoined Warner in the narrow alley. "Don't walk so fast; we ought not to attract attention."

"I'm horribly nervous," admitted the other, slackening his pace.

"We'll have to keep pretty cool about this affair. It won't do to scare those scoundrels."

"Why?"

"Because if they really have her locked up in that cabaret. I'm afraid to guess what they might do to her if they thought their own skins were in danger."

"I know it," said Warner hoarsely. "I'm worried sick, I tell you! Wildresse has the worst face I ever looked at. There is only one word to characterize that countenance of his—bestial!"

"He's a bad lot and he looks it. The military authorities would make short work of him if Philippa should ever hint at what she has found out about his rather complicated business affairs. That's what I am afraid of—that he may take some terrible precaution in order to anticipate any danger from her——"

"What?"

"He is capable of doing anything to prevent her from speaking. Keeping her locked up is the precaution that I dread least. What I'm afraid of is that he may kill her."

Warner turned a bloodless visage to his comrade:

"That's what I'm afraid of, too," he said steadily enough. "I think we had better notify the police at once——"

"It won't do, old chap!"

"Why? On your account?"

"No, no! My papers are safe enough now. But I tell you, Warner, French temper is on a hair trigger, in spite of all this gravity and silence. The very word 'spy' would be the match to the magazine."

"But what of it?"

"Suppose Wildresse denies his treachery and makes a counter-accusation against Philippa?"

"What? How can he?"

"Suppose he declares that she betrayed him? Suppose already he has arranged documents to prove it? Suppose he had long ago taken such a precaution against any chance of her denouncing him? He is an old rat, grown grey in the business. He must have been perfectly aware that Philippa is honest—that it even went against her to do the dirty work that her own Government required of her. He must have known that if she ever discovered his double treachery, she would at least desert him, perhaps

denounce him. No, no, Warner; that crafty old sewer rat left nothing to chance.

"If that girl now has an opportunity and the desire to denounce him, you can be absolutely certain that long ago he has foreseen and prepared himself for just such an event!"

"Do you believe that?"

Halkett smiled:

"I am certain of it."

"Why?"

"What does a young girl know about treachery? How many papers has Philippa ignorantly and innocently signed which might exculpate Wildresse and send *her* before a peloton of execution in the first *caserne* available? *That's* the way such rats as he protect themselves!

"No, Warner. It's a filthy business at best, and I admit, sadly enough, that I know more about it than you ever could know.

"Listen, old chap! It's no good stirring up the police until Philippa is outside French territory. Then, and then only, may we dare to let loose the police on this nest of rats in Ausone!"

"Very well," said Warner quietly. "I'll act as you think best, only I'll——" He stopped to regain control of himself. And when he had himself in hand again: "Only—it will be a—a bad mistake if Wildresse—if—if any harm comes to that child."

"Oh, in that event," said Halkett quietly, "we

need not scruple to kill him where we find him."

Warner said unsteadily:

"I shall not hesitate a second——" But Halkett suddenly checked him with a touch on his elbow, and drew him back behind the wall of the Impasse d'Alcyon, from which alley they were on the point of emerging into the town.

Two men were crossing the almost empty market square toward the Café Biribi, moving without haste over the sunny pavement.

"Hoffman and Meier," whispered Halkett. "There go our promising young rodents straight toward the old rat's nest! It won't do for them to catch sight of me.... Wait a moment! There they go—into the Café Biribi! Follow them—they don't know you. Keep your eye on them.

"I'll stroll over to the quay and dangle my legs on the river wall. If you need me, come out on the café terrace and beckon."

"Would it do to hand over that pair to the police? They are German spies, are they not?"

"They are. But at present they are likely to be useful. If Wildresse is in the café or the cabaret, they are sure to reveal the fact to us. Better go in and keep your eye on them. If you want me, I shall be smoking my pipe on the river wall across the street."

He nodded and strolled over toward the little tree-shaded quay, filling his pipe as he sauntered along. Warner continued on to the café, entered,

seated himself against the shabby wall, picked up an illustrated journal, ordered bitters, and composed himself to enjoy the preprandial hour sacred to all Frenchmen.

Without looking he was aware that the two men, Meier and Hoffman, seated at a table near the cashier's desk, had noted his arrival and were steadily inspecting him.

But he did not look in their direction; he turned the pages of the illustrated paper, leisurely, until the waiter brought his Amer Picon and a chilled carafe. Then he measured out his water with the unstudied deliberation of an habitué, stirred the brown liquid, sipped it, and, turning to another page of his paper, let his eyes rest absently on the two men opposite.

By that time neither of them was even looking at him. They were drinking beer; their heads were close together and they had turned so that they were facing each other on the padded leather wall settee.

It was impossible to hear what they were saying; they spoke rapidly and in tones so low that only the vibration of their voices was audible in the still room.

Guarded but vigorous gesticulations marked the progress of their conference; now and then both became mute while the waiter replenished their glasses with beer and added another little saucer to the growing pile on the marble table.

For an hour Warner dawdled over the café

papers and his glass of bitters. The men opposite still faced each other on the leather settee, still conversed with repressed animation, still guzzled beer. Once or twice they had looked up and across the room at him and had taken a swift, comprehensive survey of the few other people in the café, but the movement had been wholly instinctive and mechanical. Evidently they felt entirely secure.

The plump, dark-eyed *caissière* had caught Warner's eye once or twice. Evidently she remembered him, and her quick smile became almost an invitation to conversation.

It was what he wanted and he hesitated only because he was not sure how the men opposite might regard his approach toward their vicinity.

But he did it very well; and both men, looking up sharply, seemed presently to realize that it was merely a flirtation, and that the young man lounging before the cashier's counter, smiling, and being smiled upon, could safely be ignored.

"To be the prettiest girl in Ausone," Warner was saying, "must be a very great comfort to that girl. Don't you think so, Mademoiselle?"

"To be the most virtuous, Monsieur, would be far more comforting."

"Have you then *both* prizes, Mademoiselle? I was sure of it!"

"Prizes, Monsieur?"

"The golden apple and the *prix de la sagesse*?"

She laughed and blushed, detaching from her corsage a rosebud.

"Accept, Monsieur, the prize for eloquence and for impudence!" And she extended the rosebud to Warner.

He took it, lifted it to his lips, looking smilingly at her, and listening with all the concentration he could summon to the murmuring conversation at the neighboring table.

Only a word or two he could catch—perhaps merely a guess at—"Patron," and "nine o'clock," and "cellar"—at least he imagined he could distinguish these words. And all the time he was up to his ears in a breezy flirtation with a girl very willing, very adept, and perfectly capable of appreciating her own desirability as well as the good points of any casual suitor whom Heaven might strand upon her little, isolated island for an hour or two.

Being French, she was clever and amusing and sufficiently grateful to the gods for this bit of masculine flotsam which had drifted her way.

"There are boats," she said, "and the evening will be beautiful." Having made this clear to him, she smiled and let matters shape their course.

"What pleasure is a boat and a beautiful night to me," he said, "if nobody shares both with me?"

"Alas, Monsieur, have you no pretty little friend who could explain to you the planets on a summer night?"

"Alas, Mademoiselle!"

"What a pity.... Because I have studied astronomy a little. And I recommend it to you as a diversion. They are so high, so unattainable, the stars! It is well for a young man to learn what is attainable, and then to address himself to its pursuit. What do you think, Monsieur?"

"That I should very much like to study astronomy if in all the world there could be discovered anybody amiable enough to teach me."

"How pathetic! If I only had time——"

"Have you no time at all?"

"It wouldn't do, *mon ami*."

"Why?"

"Because I should be seen going to a rendezvous with you."

"Isn't there any way into the cabaret garden except through the cabaret?" he asked.

She shook her head, laughing at him out of her brown eyes.

He waited a moment to control his voice, but there was a tremor in it when he said:

"Is there no way through the cellar?"

She noticed the tremor and liked it. In the lightest and airiest of flirtations the ardent and unsteady note in a man's voice appeals to any woman to continue and finish his subjugation.

"As for the cellar," she said, "it is true that one can get into the cabaret garden that way. But,

Monsieur, do you imagine that a dark, damp, ghostly and pitch-black cellar appeals to any woman?"

"Is the cellar so frightful a place, Mademoiselle?"

"Figure it to yourself!—Some twenty stone steps from the pantry yonder"—She nodded her head toward the battered swinging door of leather.—"And then more steps, down, down, down!—Into darkness and dampness where there are only wine casks and kegs and bottles and mushrooms and rats and ghosts ——"

"What of it—if, as you say, the stars are shining on the river——"

"Merci! A girl must certainly be in love to venture through that cellar! And a man, too!"

"Try me. I'll go!"

The girl laughed:

"You! Are you, then, in love already?"

"I should like to prove it. Where is that terrible cellar?"

"Behind the door, there." She waved her hand airily. "Try it. Show me how much you are in love! Perhaps then I'll believe you."

"Will the waiters interfere if I go into the cellar?"

"See how you try to avoid the test!"

"Try me!"

"Very well. The washroom is there. If you choose to wash your hands, you are at liberty to do so. And then if you can't slip down into the cellar while the waiters are looking the other way, all I can say is

that you are not in love!"

He looked at her smilingly, scarcely trusting himself to speak for a moment, for the face of Philippa rose unbidden before his eyes and a shaft of fear pierced him.

"You are wrong," he said steadily enough. "I am in love.... Very honestly, very innocently.... It just occurred to me. I didn't know how deeply I felt.... I really am in love—as one loves what is fearless, faithful, and devoted."

"A dog is all that, Monsieur."

"Occasionally a human being is, also. Sometimes even a woman."

Her smile became a little troubled.

"Monsieur, are you, then, in love with some woman who possesses these commendable virtues?"

"No. I am in love with her virtues, Mademoiselle."

"Oh! Then she might even be your sister!"

"Exactly. That is the quality of my affection for her."

The pretty *caissière* laughed:

"You were beginning to make me sad," she said. "I—I am really willing to teach you astronomy, if you truly desire a knowledge of the stars."

"I do, ardently."

"But I am sincerely afraid of the cellar," she murmured. "It is ten o'clock before I am released from duty, and the knowledge that it is ten o'clock at

night makes that cellar doubly dark and terrible. I—I don't want to give you a rendezvous down there; and I certainly don't propose to traverse the cellar alone. Monsieur, what on earth am I to do?"

"To study the stars on the river, and to reach a rendezvous without being noticed, makes it necessary for you to slip out through the cellar, does it not?"

"Alas!"

"Haven't you the courage?"

"I don't—know."

"Yes, you have."

"Have I?" She laughed.

"Certainly. I'll go to the washroom now, and get into the cellar somehow, and make myself acquainted with it.... I suppose I ought to have a candle——"

She said:

"When I walk home alone at night I have a little electric torch with me. Shall I lend it to you?"

She opened the desk drawer, drew it out concealed under her handkerchief, and he managed to transfer it to his pocket. It clinked against the loaded automatic pistol; nobody noticed the sound.

But for a moment he thought the two men, Meier and Hoffman, had noticed it, because they both got up and came over directly toward him.

However, they merely wished to pay their reckoning with a hundred-franc note, and Warner

moved aside while they crowded before the pretty cashier's desk, offering hasty pleasantries and ponderous gallantries, while she dimpled at them and made change.

Then, after tipping the waiter, they went out into the late afternoon sunshine.

Warner, looking after them, could see that they were crossing the square toward the Boule d'Argent; and he knew that Halkett must have seen them and that he would manage to keep them in view.

Now was his time to investigate the cellar, and he said so to the brown-eyed girl behind the cage, who had been inspecting him rather pensively.

"I ought not to do this," said the pretty *caissière*.

"Of course not. Otherwise we should not find each other agreeable."

She smiled, looking at him a little more seriously and more attentively.

"It is odd, is it not," she said under her breath, "how two people from the opposite ends of the earth chance to meet and—and find each other—agreeable?"

"It is delightful," he admitted smilingly.

"I don't even know your name," she remarked, playing with her pencil.

"James."

"Tchames?"—with a pretty attempt to imitate his English.

"Jim is easier."

"Djeem?"

"Perfect!"

"Djeem," she repeated, looking musingly at the tall, well-built American. "C'est drôle, ce nom là! Djeem? It is pleasant, too.... My name is Jeanne." She shrugged her youthful shoulders. "Nothing extraordinary, you see.... Still, I shall try to please you, Monsieur Djeem."

"I dare not hope to please you——"

She laughed:

"You *do* please me. Do you suppose, otherwise, I should dare enter that frightful cellar?"

Under cover of her desk, she deftly detached a key from the bunch at her belt, covered it with her hand, palm down, and let it rest on the counter before him.

"Do you promise to keep away from the wine bins?" she asked lightly.

"I promise solemnly," he said, and took the key.

"Very well. Then you may go and look at this dreadful cellar at once. And when you behold it, ask yourself how great a goose a girl must be who ventures into it at ten o'clock at night merely because a young man desires to take a lesson in astronomy on the river Récollette."

CHAPTER XVII

He had little difficulty in gaining the cellar from the washroom. Both doors opened out of the pantry passage; he had only to watch the moving figures silhouetted through the pantry doorway, and when they were out of sight for the moment, he stepped out, unlocked the cellar door, closed it gently behind him, flashed his electric torch, and started down the broad stone steps.

It was one of the big, old-time cellars not unusual in provincial towns, but built, probably, a century before the café and cabaret had been erected on its solid stone foundations.

Two rows of squatty stone pillars supported the low arches of the roof; casks, kegs, bins, empty bottles, broken bottles, and row after row of unsealed wine bottles lined the alleyways leading in every direction through the darkness.

On either side of the main central corridor stood wine casks of every shape and size, some very ancient, to judge from the carving and quality of the wood, some more or less modern, some of today. Almost all were hoisted on skids with bung and bung starter in place and old-time jugs and measures of

pewter or glass at hand; a few lay empty amid the cellar debris, where the salts born of darkness and dampness dimly glimmered on wall and pavement, and a rustling in unseen straw betrayed the lurking place of rats.

Warner, playing his flashlight, walked swiftly forward, traversing the three principal alleys in succession. The third round included the little dark runways twisting in and out among the bins, turning sudden angles into obscurity, or curving back in a blind circle to the point of entrance.

And as he stood resting for a moment, trying to get his bearings and shifting his electric torch over the labyrinth within which he had become involved, a slight but distinct sound broke the silence around him.

It came from the cellar steps: somebody had opened the door above.

Instantly he extinguished his torch; the blackness walled him in, closing on him so swiftly that he seemed to feel a palpable pressure upon his body.

Listening, every nerve on edge, he heard footsteps falling cautiously upon the stone stairway; a white radiance spread and grew brighter at the far end of the vaulted place; and in a moment more the blinding star of an electric torch dazzled his eyes, where he stood looking out between the cracks of the piled-up boxes which made of the alley in which he

had halted a rampart and an impasse.

Two men were advancing, shining the way before them, turning their heads from side to side with curiosity, but without apparently any suspicion.

They seemed to know the place and to be entirely familiar with every alley, for, just before they passed the runway where he crouched behind the boxes, they turned aside, played their light over the dusty banks of bottles, chose one, coolly knocked off its neck, and leisurely drained it between them.

Then, exchanging a few comments in voices too low to be understood, they resumed their course, passed the entrance to the alley where Warner lay hidden, and continued on a few paces.

He could see them as black shapes against the flare of light; saw them halt a few paces from where he stood, saw them reach up and take hold of a huge tun which blocked their progress.

Their torch was shining full upon it; he could follow minutely everything they were doing.

One of the men stretched his arms out horizontally and grasped the edges of the immense cask. Then he threw his full weight to the right; the cask swung easily outward, leaving a passageway wide enough for a man. And there, full in the blaze of brilliant light, was a door, scarcely ten feet away from where he was standing.

The man who had turned the cask went to the door, slid aside a panel, reached in and unbolted it,

and had already opened the door when a big bulk loomed up in front of him; a gross, vibrant voice set the hollow echoes growling under the arches of stone and mortar; Wildresse barred their way.

He stood there, the torchlight falling full on his round, partly bald and smoothly shaven head; his wicked little ratty eyes were two points of black, his wicked mouth was twisted with profanity.

"Sacré tas de bougres!" he roared. "I told you to come at nine o'clock, didn't I? What are you doing here, then? You, Asticot, you are supposed to have more sense than Squelette, there! Why do you interrupt me before the hour I set?"

The man addressed as Asticot—a heavy, bench-legged young man with two *favoris* pasted over his large wide ears—shuffled his shoes most uncomfortably.

Squelette, tall, frightfully thin, with his long, furrowed neck of an unclean bird swathed in a red handkerchief, stood sullen and motionless while the glare of his torch streamed over Wildresse.

"Nom de Dieu!" shouted the latter. "Aim at my belly and keep that light out of my face, you stupid ass!"

Squelette sulkily shifted his torch; Asticot said in the nasal, whining voice of the outer boulevards:

"*Voyons, mon vieux*, you have been at it for six hours, and the Skeleton here and I thought you might require our services——"

"Is that so!" snarled Wildresse. "Also, they may require your services in La Roquette!"

"They do," remarked Squelette naïvely.

"You don't have to tell me that!" retorted Wildresse. "You'll sneeze for them, too, some day!" He turned savagely on Asticot: "I *don't* want you now! I'm busy! Do you understand?"

"I understand," replied the Maggot. "All the same, if I may be so bold—what's the use of chattering if there's a job to finish? If there's work to do, do it, and talk afterward. That's my idea."

Wildresse glared at him:

"Really! Very commendable. Such notions of industry ought to be encouraged in the young. But the trouble with you, Asticot, is that you haven't anything inside that sucked-out orange you think is a head.

"Whatever mental work is to be done, I shall do. Do you comprehend me, imbecile? And I don't trouble to consult your convenience, either. Is that clear? Now, take your friend, the Skeleton, and take your torch and yourself out of this cellar. Get out, or I'll bash your face in!—You dirty little bandy-legged, blood-lapping cockroach——"

His big, pock-pitted, hairless face became frightful in its concentrated ferocity; both men made simultaneous and involuntary movements to the rear.

"You'll come at nine o'clock, do you hear!" he

roared. "And you'll bring a sack with you and enough weight to keep it sunk! You, Maggot; you, Skeleton, do you understand? Very well, clear out!"

The young ruffians made no response; Asticot turned and made his way through the narrow passage; the Skeleton shuffled on his heels, shining his torch ahead.

Halfway down the central corridor they helped themselves to two more bottles of Bordeaux, pocketing them in silence, and continued on their course.

Listening, Warner could hear them ascending the stone stairs, could hear the door click above as they left the cellar. But his eyes remained fixed on Wildresse, who still stood in the door, darkly outlined against the dull gaslight burning somewhere in the room behind him.

Once or twice he looked at the great cask which the two *voyous* had not troubled to close into its place behind them. And Wildresse did not bother to go out and swing the cask back into place, but, as soon as he caught the sound of the closing cellar door, stepped back and shut his own door.

He must either have forgotten, or carelessly neglected, to close the open panel in it, for the lighted square remained visible, illuminating the narrow passage after Warner heard him bolt the door on the inside.

His retreating footsteps, also, were audible for

some distance before the sound of them died away; and Warner knew then that the door belonged to the cabaret, and that behind its bolted shutters and its police seals Wildresse had been lurking since his return from Saïs.

There was no need to use his torch as he crept out of his ambush and entered the narrow lane behind the big cask.

With infinite precautions, he thrust his arm through the open panel, felt around until he found the two bolts, slid them noiselessly back.

The door swung open, inward. He went in softly.

The place appeared to be a lumber room littered with odds and ends. Beyond was a passage in which a gas jet burned; at the end of it a stairway leading up.

The floor creaked in spite of him, but the stairs were carpeted. They led up to a large butler's pantry; and, through the sliding door, he peered out into the dim interior of the empty cabaret.

Through cracks in the closed shutters rays from the setting sun pierced the gloom, making objects vaguely distinct—tables and chairs piled one upon the other around the dancing floor, the gaudy decorations pendent from the ceiling, the shrouded music stands, the cashier's desk where he had first set eyes on the girl Philippa——

With the memory his heart almost ceased, then leaped with the resurgence of his fear for her; he

looked around him until he discovered a leather swinging door, and when he opened it a wide hallway lay before him and a stairway rose beyond.

Over the thick carpet he hastened, then up the stairs, cautiously, listening at every step.

Somewhere above, coming apparently from behind a closed door, he heard the heavy vibration of a voice, and knew whose it was.

Guided by it along the upper passageway, he passed the open doors of several bedrooms, card rooms, private dining-rooms, all empty and the furniture covered with sheets, until he came to a closed door.

Behind it, the heavy voice of Wildresse sounded menacingly; he waited until it rose to a roar, then tried the door under cover of the noise within. It was locked, and he stood close to it, listening, striving to think out the best way.

Behind the locked door Wildresse was shouting now, and Warner heard every word:

"By God!" he roared in English. "You had better not try to lie to me! Do you want your neck twisted?"

There was no reply.

"I ask you again, what did you do with that paper I gave you by mistake?" he repeated.

Suddenly Warner's heart stood still, as Philippa's voice came to him, low but distinct:

"I burned it!"

"You burned it? You lie!"

"I never lie," came the subdued voice. "I burned it."

"You slut! How dared you touch it at all?"

"You handed it to me," she said wearily.

"And you knew it was a mistake, you treacherous cat! My God! Have I nourished you for this, you little snake, that you turn your poisonous teeth on me?"

"Perhaps.... But not on my country."

"Your country! You miserable foundling, did you suppose yourself French?"

"France is the only country I have known. I refuse to betray her."

"France!" he shouted. "France! A hell of a country to snivel about! You can't tell me anything about France—the dirty kennel full of mongrels that it is! France? To hell with France!

"What has she done for me? What has she done to me? Chased me out of Paris; forced my only son into her filthy army; hunted us both without mercy—finally hunted my son into the Battalions of Biribi—me into this damned pigpen of Ausone! That's what France has done to me and mine!—Blackmailed me into playing the *mouchard* for her—forcing me to play spy for her by threatening to hunt me into La Nouvelle!

"By God! I break even, though! I sell her every chance I get; and what I sell to her she has to pay for, too—believe me, she pays for it a hundred times

over!"

There came a silence, then Wildresse's voice again, rumbling, threatening:

"Who was that *type* you went to visit in Saïs at the Golden Peach?"

No answer.

"Do you hear, you little fool?"

"I hear you," she said in a tired voice.

"You won't tell?"

"No."

"Why? Is he your lover?"

"No."

"Oh, you merely got your wages, eh?"

No answer.

"In other words, you're launched, eh? You aspire to turn *cocotte*, eh?"

"I am employed by him quite honestly——"

"Very touching. Such a nice young man, isn't he? And how much did you tell him about me, eh?"

No reply.

"Did you inform him that I was a very bad character?" he sneered. "Did you tell him what a hard time you had? Did you explain to him that a pious Christian really could not live any longer with such a man as I am? *Did* you? And that is the way you feel, isn't it?—That you are too good for the business in which I have taken the trouble to educate you?"

"To be compelled to seek information for my Government has made me very unhappy," she said.

"But to betray that Government—that is not in me to do. I had rather die.... I think, anyway, that I had rather not—live—any longer."

"Is that so? Is that all the spirit you have? What are you, anyway—a worm? Have you no anger in you against the country which has kicked you and me out of Paris into this filthy kennel called Ausone? Have you no resentment toward the Government that has attempted to beggar us both—the Government which bullies us, threatens us, blackmails us, forbids us entry into the capital, keeps us tied up here like dogs to watch and bark at strangers and whine away our lives on starvation wages, when we could make our fortunes in Paris?"

"I don't know what you did."

"What of it? Suppose I broke a few of their damned laws! Is that a reason to kick me from place to place and finally tie me up here?"

"I—don't know."

"Oh, 'don't know'!" he mimicked her. "You ungrateful slut, if you had any gratitude in your treacherous little body, you'd stick to me now! You'd rejoice at my vengeance! You'd laugh to know that I am paying back in her own coin the country which insulted me! That's what you'd do, instead of sniveling around about 'treachery' and 'betraying France.'

"And, by God!—now that war has come, you'll see your beloved France torn into pieces by the

Bosches! That's what you'll see—France ripped into tatters!

"Yes, and that sight will repay me for all that has been done to me—that revenge I shall have—soon!—just as soon as they sweep up that stable litter of Belgians over there!

"*Then* we'll see! Then perhaps I'll get my recognition from the Bosches!

"What do I care for France or for them, either? I'm of no nation; I'm nothing; I'm for *myself*! The Bosches were the kinder to me, and they get what I don't need, *voilà tout*!"

There came a long pause, and then Wildresse's heavy tones once more:

"I'll give you your chance. Yes, in spite of your treachery and your ingratitude, I'll give you your chance!

"You have a brain—such as it is. It's a woman's brain, of course, but it can figure out on which side the bread is buttered.

"Listen: I ought to twist your neck. You've tried to put mine into the *lunette*. You could have sent me up against a dead wall if you had given that paper you burned to the *flics*. No, you didn't. You enjoyed a crisis of nerves and you burned it. I *know* you burned it, because I admit that you tell the truth.

"Bon! Now, therefore, I do not instantly twist your neck. No! On the contrary, I reason with you. I do not turn you over to the *sergots*. I *could*! Why?

Voyons, let us be reasonable! I was not hatched yesterday. No! Do you suppose I have trusted you all these years without having taken any little precautions? *Tiens*, you are beginning to look at me, eh?

"Well, then, listen: if in future you have any curiosity concerning *lunettes* and dead walls, let me inform you that you are qualified to embellish either.

"*Tiens*! You seem startled. It never occurred to you to ask why I have had certain papers written out by you, or why I have had you affix your pretty signature to so many little documents which you could not read because the ink was invisible.

"No. You have never thought about such matters, have you? But, all the same, I have all I require to make you sneeze into the basket, or to play blindman's buff between a dead wall and a squad of execution.

"And *now*!—Now that you know enough to hold your tongue, will you hold it in future and be honest and loyal to the hand that picked you out of the gutter and that has fed you ever since?"

There was a silence.

"*Will* you?" he repeated.

"*No!*"

A bull-like roar burst from Wildresse:

"I'll twist your neck for you, and I'll do it now!" he bellowed. "I'll snap that white neck of yours——"

CHAPTER XVIII

The next instant Warner struck the door such a blow with his doubled fist that the jarring sound silenced the roar of rage that had burst from Wildresse at Philippa's answer, and checked the heavy scuffle of his great feet, too.

Already Warner had drawn back, pistol lifted, gathered together to throw his full weight against the door and hold it the moment it was opened from inside.

The sudden stillness which followed his blow lasted but a few seconds; heavy steps approached the door, halted; approached irresolutely, stopped short. Then ensued another period of quiet; and Warner, listening, could hear the breathing of Wildresse on the other side of the door.

Minute after minute passed; Wildresse, still as a tiger, never stirred, and even his suppressed breathing became inaudible after a while.

Warner, pistol in hand, ready to throw himself against the door the instant it moved on the crack, bent over and placed his ear close against the paneling. After a while he detected the sound of footsteps cautiously retreating, and realized that Wildresse did not intend to open the door.

He knocked again loudly: the steps continued to

recede; somewhere another door was unbolted and opened; and the stealthy, retreating footsteps continued on beyond earshot.

Again he knocked heavily with the butt of his pistol; waited, listened, then drew back and fairly hurled himself against the door. It scarcely even creaked; he might as well have attempted to push over the retaining wall of the corridor itself.

"Philippa!" he called. "Philippa!"

A low cry answered him; he heard her stir suddenly.

But as he grasped the door knob and shook it in his excitement and impatience, over his shoulder he caught a glimpse of a gross, hairless face slyly peering around the further corner of the corridor. It disappeared immediately.

"Open the door, Philippa!" he cried. "Open quick!"

"Warner, *mon ami*, I can't! He took the key——" she called through to him. "Oh, Warner! What am I to do?"

"All right! Wait there!" He turned and ran for the further end of the corridor, sprang around the corner without hesitating, sped forward, now fiercely intent on the destruction of Wildresse. But the Patron had fled. He ran forward, turned another corner in the dim light of locked shutters, but found no trace of the bulky quarry he hunted, heard nothing, halted, breathing fast and hard, trying to establish his

bearings.

A stair well plunged downward into shadowy depths just ahead; he stole forward and looked over; carpeted steps vanished into the darkness below.

Doors, all locked, faced him everywhere; he ran along them, trying each as he passed; came to an angle of solid wall, stepped around it, pistol extended; and it was a miracle he was not startled into pulling trigger when a door was torn open in his very face, and a figure, dark against the fiery sunset framed by a window, sprang forward.

"Warner, *mon ami*! *Me voici*!" she cried joyously, flinging both arms around his neck; but he stood white and trembling with the nearness of her destruction at his hands, holding the shaking pistol wide from her body and unable to utter a word.

And as he stood there, one arm around her thin body, somewhere below and behind him a door burst open and there came a muffled rush of feet up the stairway from the darkness below.

He pushed her violently away from him, but before he could turn and spring to the stairhead, three men leaped into the passage, their weapons spitting red flashes through the dusky corridor; and he jumped backward dragging Philippa with him into the room behind them, slammed the door, and bolted, chained, and locked it.

Outside, Asticot, Squelette, and Hoffman stood close to the door and poured bullets through it at

close range. The stream of lead tore the papered plaster wall, opposite to tatters; but the door was as massive as the one he had tried to force with his shoulder; two great bars of metal bolted it, a heavy chain further secured it, and the key remained in the lock.

But steel-jacketed bullets still pierced the wood, stripping splinters from the inside and mangling the opposite wall until the gay wall paper hung in strips, and the whole room swam in a haze of drifting white dust.

Edging along, his body flattened against the north wall of the empty room, and drawing Philippa after him, he cautiously approached the door which he had tried to force; and heard Wildresse whispering to somebody outside. No wonder he had not been able to force it; the bolts and chains that held it were exactly like those which secured the other door.

He placed his lips close to Philippa's ear:

"Where are we?" he breathed; and bent his head to the child's bruised mouth, which was still swollen and cut from the blow dealt her by Wildresse that morning in the car.

"We are in the Patron's private office, where he used to lock himself in," she whispered. "They've taken out the desk and chairs. His bedroom is next; mine is the next beyond that."

He looked anxiously toward the window and

saw tree tops and glimpses of rolling country sparkling in the lilac-tinted haze of approaching twilight.

"Where does that window face?" he whispered, softly.

"On the garden and river."

"How far a drop is it?"

"Too far, *mon ami*. The stone terrace is below."

"Is it thirty feet?"

"I don't know. The roof and chimneys are above us. We are in the top story of the house."

"There are only two stories above the cellar, as I remember."

"Two, yes."

Still holding himself and her flat against the wall, he turned his head cautiously from side to side, searching the empty room. There was absolutely nothing there except bare floor and walls, and, in the fireplace, a huge iron grate weighted with cannel coal.

Outside, from the two corridors the firing had ceased; but he could distinguish the low vibration of heavy voices, carefully subdued, catch the sound of stealthy movements on the carpeted floor close to both doors. Lifting his pistol he fired through one door, wheeled, and fired through the other. When the deafening racket in the room had ceased, he bent toward her and whispered:

"Philippa, will you obey me?"

"Yes, mon ami."

"Flatten yourself closer against the wall and don't stir."

The girl spread out both arms, palms against the wall, and shrank closer against it with her slim body.

Warner dropped cautiously to the floor, crept across it, dragging himself by his hands, grasped the sill of the window, drew his head up with infinite precaution, and looked out and finally down.

Below lay the flagstones and potted flowers of the garden terrace, not more than twenty-five feet, he thought. Beyond these, the grass sloped down to the Récollette, where rowboats still floated under the trees.

Reconnoitering, he could not discover a soul in sight, and, satisfied, he crept back to where Philippa stood.

As he looked up at her, a faint smile touched the girl's bruised lips, and her steady grey eyes seemed to say: "*Me voici, mon ami, toujours à vos ordres!*"

"We must try to leave by the window," he whispered. "Both doors are guarded. And this man means murder—for you, anyway——"

"Yes.... It does not matter much now.... Since I have seen you again."

"You dear child—you dear, brave little thing!"

"Oh, *mon ami*—if you truly are content with me ——"

"Little comrade, you have been very wonderful

and very true! Halkett has recovered his papers.... Can you imagine how I felt when that murderous brute struck you!"

"It was nothing—I don't care, now——" She looked at his face, extended one finger along the wall, and touched his arm, trying to smile with her disfigured lips.

He looked at her very intently for a moment, unsmiling. Then:

"Little comrade! Listen attentively."

"Yes, Warner."

"It's too far for us to drop. It is twenty feet, anyway, and probably more. You would break your legs on the stones.... How many of your clothes can you spare to make a rope?"

"My—*clothing*?"

"Yes. You see there is not a thing in this room, not even a shred of carpet. I can spare my coat, waistcoat, shirt, tie, two handkerchiefs, collar, belt—and both shoe laces. I have a heavy, sharp pocketknife with a four-inch blade, which will cut cloth into strips. Help me all you can, Philippa. We shall need every inch of cloth and linen we can spare.... And I think we had better hurry about it, because I don't know what they are planning to do outside those two doors."

She hesitated an instant, then:

"If you wish it.... Will you please turn your head?"

"Of course, you dear child! What can you spare?"

"I can spare my chemisette and underskirt and petticoat, and my velvet hairband and my shoe laces.... And a handkerchief and my stockings.... It leaves me my red velvet bodice, which I can lace tightly, my red velvet skirt, and my shoes.... Will it be enough to give you?"

"I hope so; we must try." He turned, stripped to his undershirt and trousers, opened the long-bladed knife, and began to cut out strips from the materials.

Presently she was ready to contribute to the projected rope, and together they ventured to seat themselves noiselessly at the base of the wall and begin serious work on the business before them.

The sound of linen or of cotton being ripped would certainly have set on the alert the men outside and directed a murderously inclined gentleman or two to the garden.

So they parted the stuffs with every precaution to avoid any noise, using the knife constantly, and easing the various fabrics apart little by little.

Warner was confident that Wildresse, knowing the utter nakedness of the room in which they were locked, and knowing that death or broken bones must result from a drop into the terrace flowerpots, was not concerning himself to guard that quarter. Working steadily, easing, parting, picking out or cutting threads, ripping and tearing with greatest caution, the growing dusk in the room began to

impede their operations. But he dared not use his electric torch, lest they be seen from outside.

Already the girl's slender fingers were flying as she picked up strip after strip of fabric and twisted them into the quadruple braid, bending closer over her task as the light became dimmer and dimmer.

Her bare feet in her laceless shoes were extended and crossed in front of her; the slender neck and shoulders and arms were exquisite in the delicate loveliness of immaturity; she worked swiftly, intensely absorbed, unconscious, unembarrassed in her preoccupation.

Now and then she lifted the braided cord and, stretching it, tested it with all her youthful strength. Once she handed it to him and he threw his full strength into the test, nodded, passed it back to her, and went on with his cutting and ripping.

Before the cord was finished, a tremendous crash shook the door on the left; and Warner, seated flat on the floor, fired two shots through the panels.

Then they both went on with their cutting, ripping, knotting, and braiding. The fumes from the cartridges set them coughing, but the smoke filtered out of the open window very soon.

It was dark when the cord was ready—some eighteen feet of it, as far as Warner could judge by measuring it across his outstretched arms.

Everything was in it except his leather belt, and this he buckled around Philippa's body.

There seemed to be no way he could test the cord except, inch by inch, using main strength; and, looking at the slender girl beside him, he concluded that it was going to hold her anyway.

The only light left in the room came from the stars; by this he crept across to the fireplace, lifted the heavy, iron grate with difficulty, set it at the foot of the window, fastened one end of the cord to it, turned and beckoned to Philippa.

She came creeping through the dusk on hands and knees; he pushed the pistol into one hip pocket, the electric torch into the other, fastened the rope to his leather belt which she wore, motioned her to mount the sill.

"But—*you*?" she whispered.

"Listen! I shall follow. If *I* fall, try to find Halkett in the square and tell him."

"Warner—I am afraid!"

"I won't let you fall——"

"For *you*, I mean!"

"Don't be afraid. I could almost drop it without any cord to help me. Now! Are you ready?"

"If you wish it."

"Then sit this way—there! Now, turn and take hold of the sill with both hands—*that* way! ... Now, you may let go——"

Her full weight on the cord frightened him; he braced his knees and paid out the rope which crushed and threatened to cut his hands in two.

Down, down into the dusk below he lowered her; his arms and back and ribs seemed turned to steel, so terrible was the fear that he might let her drop.

There remained yet a coil or two of rope when the cord in his staggering hands suddenly slackened. A shaft of fright pierced him; he bent shakily over the sill and looked down. She had not fallen; she stood on the terrace, unknotting the rope from her leather belt.

A moment later he drew it up, the belt dangling at the end. With trembling and benumbed hands he tested the knot tied to the grate; then, twisting the cord around both hands, he let himself over the sill, clung there, and lowered the window, hesitated, let his full weight hang, heard the iron grate drag and catch, then, blindly, twisting the cord around his left leg, he let himself down foot by foot, believing every moment that the cord would part or that the iron grate would be dragged up and over the sill, carry away the sash, and crush him.

And the next instant his feet touched the stone flagging and he turned to find Philippa at his side.

"Be silent," she breathed close to his ear. "A boat has just landed."

"Where?"

"At the foot of the garden. Two men are getting out!"

He knew that the rope would be discovered; he

seized it and tried to break it loose. It held as though it had been woven of wire.

"There is a way into the cellar," whispered Philippa. "Can you lift this grating? It is only a drop of a foot or two!"

He bent down beside her in the shadows, felt the bars of the narrow grating overgrown with herbage, pulled upward and lifted it easily from its grassy bed. Philippa placed her hand flat on the dewy turf, and vaulted down into darkness. He balanced himself on the edge of the hole, turned and pulled the grating toward him, and dropped. The grating fell with a soft thud on the damp and grassy rim of the manhole. Philippa caught his hand.

"I know my way! Come!" she breathed, and he followed into the pitchy darkness.

How far they had progressed he had no idea, when she halted and drew him close to her.

"I've lost my way; I thought I could find the main corridor. Have you a match?"

"I have a flashlight."

He pulled it from his pocket and drew his pistol also. Then he snapped on the light.

For a moment the girl stood dazzled and perplexed, evidently unfamiliar with what she was gazing at, bewildered.

But Warner knew. There, in front of him, stood the great tun, swung open like a gate, and between it and the next cask ran the secret alley blocked by the

door from which Wildresse had driven Asticot and Squelette.

"I know the way now!" he said. "But we'll have to pass through the café——"

He sprang back with the words on his lips as the door opened violently and Wildresse lurched out, followed by Asticot and another man.

But the glare of the torch in their eyes checked them and they recoiled, stumbling over each other in the narrow doorway.

Step by step Warner backed away, keeping Philippa behind him and focussing the blinding light on the men huddled in the doorway.

"Who are you?" demanded Wildresse hoarsely. "What are you doing in my cellar?"

He made a motion toward his breast pocket; Asticot was quicker, and he fired full at the flashlight which Warner was holding wide of himself and Philippa.

The bullet struck the light; startling darkness buried them, instantly all a-flicker again with pistol flashes.

"The grating again! Can you find it, Philippa?" he whispered.

She turned her head as she retreated, caught a glimpse of the faint spot of starlight behind, took his hand and drew him around.

Evidently Wildresse dared not use any light; his friends were shooting wildly and at hazard for

general results; the racket in the vaulted place was deafening; but the flashes from their own pistols must have obscured their vision, for if they could have distinguished the far, pale spot of light under the manhole, they evidently did not see the dim figures crouching there.

Warner reached up, grasped the iron bars, lifted them, swung them open. Then he dragged himself up and over, and, flat on the grass, held down his arms for Philippa.

Beside him, panting on the grass, she lay flat under the dim luster of the stars, while they searched the dusk for any sign of the two men who had landed from the rowboat.

And all at once the girl's eyes fell upon a ladder leaning against the house, and she silently touched Warner on the arm.

It became plain enough now; the rope was gone; the men had mounted to the room, found it empty, had unbolted both doors, and started Wildresse and his crew toward the cellar—the only egress to the street—where lay their only chance of successful pursuit.

Bending low above the grass, gliding close to the shrubs and bushes, Warner, with Philippa's hand clasped in his, stole down the slope and into the shadow of the shoreward trees.

A boat, with both oars in it, lay there, pulled up into the sedge; the girl stepped in; Warner pushed off

and followed her, shipped the oars, swung the boat, and bent to his work.

"You are taking the wrong way!" whispered Philippa.

"Halkett is waiting on the quay."

Already they had rounded the bank in sight of the ancient arch of the bridge; the quay wall rose above them in the starlight. At the foot of the narrow flight of steps he checked the boat; Philippa took the oars, and he sprang out and ran up the stone incline.

"Halkett!" he called sharply.

A figure seated on the wall turned its head, jumped to the pavement, and came striding swiftly.

"Have you discovered her whereabouts? Good heavens! Where are your clothes, Warner?"

"I've found Philippa. She's waiting below in a boat——"

They ran down the steps while they were speaking, and Philippa cried:

"Is it you, Halkett? I am happy again!" And stretched out her slender bare arm to him, excited, trembling a little from the nervous reaction which now suddenly filled her eyes and set her disfigured mouth quivering.

"Awf'lly glad," said Halkett heartily, clasping her offered hand in his firm cool grip; and if he was astonished at her negligee he did not betray it, but took the oars with decision and sent the boat shooting out into mid-current.

"Philippa," he said, pulling downstream with powerful strokes through the darkness, "I don't know what has happened; Warner got you out of the mess, whatever it was; but what I do know is that you behaved like a brick and I shall never forget it! A soldier's thanks, little comrade, for what you did!"

"I—I am—happy——" she faltered; and her voice failed her. She slid from the stern down against Warner's knees, and buried her face in her bare arms against them.

"Do you think you could spare her your coat, old fellow?" asked Warner in a low voice.

"Of course!" Halkett stripped off his coat and passed it over; then he gave his waistcoat to Warner.

"Lucky it's a warm night," he said cheerfully, while Warner spread the coat over Philippa, where she lay exhausted, tremulous, and close to tears. The girl who had never whimpered when fear, timidity, and indecision meant instant disaster, now lay huddled against his knees, shaking in every limb, crushing back the tears that burned her eyes and her throat, striving to master the nerves that clamored for relief.

Warner bent over her, close, touching her disheveled hair:

"It's all right now," he whispered. "I shall not let you go again until you want to.... It's all right now, Philippa. I'll stand your friend always—as long as you need me—as long as you—want me.... Don't

worry about a home; I'll see to it. You are going to have your chance."

One of her crossed hands groped blindly for his, closed over it convulsively, and her breath grew hot with tears.

"It's a long way to Tipperary," remarked Halkett cheerily. "Tell me about it when you're ready, old chap."

CHAPTER XIX

About seven o'clock the next morning Halkett knocked at Warner's door, awakening him.

"The cavalry are passing, if you'd care to see them," he said.

Warner got out of bed, found his slippers and a bathrobe, and opened the door. Halkett, fully dressed in the field uniform of a British officer, came in.

"Hello!" exclaimed the American in surprise. "What does this mean?"

"It means that we've gone in, old chap."

"England!"

"Yes, we're in it! And I'm off." He made a gesture for silence. "Hark! Do you hear that?"

Warner listened: from the distance came a confused, metallic sound, growing more and more distinct, filling the room with a faint ringing, jarring

harmony.

"Come to the window; it's worth seeing," said Halkett.

It was worth seeing. Through the still morning sunshine, from the southward came an immense sound wave; the rustle and clash of steel, the clink-clank of iron-shod hoofs.

Leaning from the window, Warner looked down the road. A high column of white dust stretched away into perspective as far as he could see. Under it, emerging from it, rode the French heavy cavalry, the morning sun a blinding sheet of fire on their armor.

On they came at a leisurely walk, helmets and breastplates blazing silvery fire under a perpendicular forest of lances canopied by the white dust.

They were terribly conspicuous; a cloudless sky exposed every detail of their uniforms—the gold epaulets of their officers, the crimson epaulets and breeches of the troopers, the orange-red whalebone plumes that flew like the manes of horses from the trumpeters' helmets.

On they came, riding at ease, accompanied by dust and by a vast and confused volume of assorted noises—the tintinnabulation of their armor, the subdued clash of sabers, the rattle and clash of equipments, the solidly melodious trample of thousands of horses.

But Warner looked down at them with anxious eyes and lips compressed.

"Good God!" he said under his breath to Halkett. "Are they going into battle dressed that way? I thought they had learned something since 1870!"

"War has caught France unprepared in that particular matter," said Halkett gravely.

"I didn't know it. I understood that Detaille had designed their campaign dress. It's a dreadful thing, Halkett, to send men into fire dressed in that way!"

"It is. But look, Warner. Is there anything more magnificent when in mass formation than a brigade of French cuirassiers?"

As they rode clanging under the windows of the inn, officers and troopers looked up curiously at the man in his bathrobe, in friendly surprise at the young man in the British field uniform; but when the upturned, sunburned faces caught sight of the next window beyond, a quick, gay smile flashed out, and dark blue sleeves shot up in laughing greeting and salute.

"It's Philippa," whispered Halkett. "Look!"

Warner turned: Philippa, wearing the scarlet and black peasant dress of a lost province, sat sideways on her window sill, knitting while she watched the passing cavalry below.

The velvet straps and silk laces of her bodice accented a full chemisette of finest lawn; a delicate little apron of the same was relieved by the scarlet

skirt; the dainty, butterfly headdress of black silk crowned her hair, which hung in two heavy braids.

And, as the cavalry column passed, every big cuirassier, looking up from the shadow of his steel helmet, saw Alsace itself embodied in this slender girl who sat knitting and looking down upon France militant out of quiet, proud eyes.

There was no fanfare, no shouting, no boasting, nothing theatrical. The troopers looked up from their saddles and rode by, still looking; the girl knitted quietly, her steady eyes gazing gravely over the needles. And it was as though Alsace herself were speaking a silent language from those clear, grey eyes:

"I am waiting; I have been waiting for you more than forty years. Take what time you need, but come. You will always find me waiting."

Every officer understood it; every giant rider comprehended, as the squadrons trampled past through a thickening veil of dust which grew denser, dulling the sparkle of metal and subduing the raw, fierce colors to pastel tints.

The brigade passed up the valley leisurely, without halting; dust hung along the road for many minutes after the last cuirassier had walked his big horse out of view.

Philippa, who had been seated on the window sill with her back toward Warner's window, left her perch; and Warner turned back into his room to

bathe and dress.

"How long have you been up?" he asked Halkett, who had dropped on a chair by the window.

"Since sunrise. Madame Arlon is back. She behaved very nicely about the damage. She doesn't wish me to pay for it, but I shall. Did you know that your Harem left in a body for Paris yesterday afternoon?"

"Very sensible of 'em," said Warner with a sigh of relief. "How about you, Halkett?"

"I don't know yet. I'm expecting orders at any moment now."

"How do you know that your country has gone into this war?"

"I learned it last night at the Boule d'Argent. The news had just come over the wire.

"That precious pair, Meier and Hoffman, whom I had followed to the Boule d'Argent, were seated there in the café reading the newspapers when the telegram was posted up.

"They got up from their chairs with the other guests who had clustered around the bulletin to read what had been posted up. I watched their faces from behind my newspaper, and you should have seen their expressions—utter and blank astonishment, Warner! Certainly Germany never believed until the last moment that we had any real intention of going in."

"I didn't, either, to tell the truth."

Halkett smiled:

"It was inevitable from the very beginning. The hour that Austria flung her brutal ultimatum into the face of Servia, every British officer knew that we were going in. It took our politicians a little longer to realize it, that's all."

Warner finished dressing, and they went downstairs together and across the grass to the arbor in the garden, where Philippa sat knitting and talking under her breath to Ariadne, who gazed at her, brilliant-eyed, purring.

The girl had her back toward them and they made no sound as they advanced across the turf which bordered the flowers.

"She's talking to the cat; listen!" murmured Halkett.

"—And after many, many years," they heard Philippa saying, "the sad and patient mother of the two lost children sent out for her five million servants. 'Go,' she said, 'and search diligently for my little daughters who were stolen by the fierce old giant, Bosche. And when you come to where they are imprisoned, you shall know the place, because there is no place on earth so beautiful, no mountains so tender a blue, no fields so green and so full of flowers, no rivers so lovely and clear.

"'Also, you shall recognize my little children when you discover them, because they dress as I am dressed today, in red and black and wearing the

black butterfly. So when you see them behind the bars of their prison, you shall call to them by name—you shall call out, Alsace! Lorraine! Be of good courage! Your mother has sent us here to find you and deliver you from the prison of the Giant Bosche!

"'Then you shall draw your broad, bright bayonets and fix them; and you who are mounted shall unsling your long, pointed lances; and you who feed the great steel monsters that roll along on wheels, shall make ready the monsters' food; and others of you who put on wings and who mount clattering to the clouds, shall wing yourselves and mount; and you others who look out over oceans from the tops of tall, steel masts shall signal for all the anchors to be lifted.

"'Thus you shall prepare to encounter the Giant Bosche, who will come thundering and trampling and flaming across the horizon, with his black banners like storm clouds, and advancing amid a roaring iron rain.

"'Thus you shall meet him and hold him, and turn him, and drive him, drive him, drive him, back, back, back, into the fierce, dark, shaggy places from whence he crept out into the sun and stole away my little children.

"'And when that is done, you shall bring me back my children who were lost, and you shall be their servants as well as mine, dwelling with us as one family forever, in happiness and honor, dedicating

ourselves to generous and noble deeds as long as the world shall last!' ...

"That, *minette*, is the fairy story which I promised you if you would be a good cat and wait patiently for breakfast. And you have done so, and now I have kept my promise——"

She lifted her eyes from her knitting, turned her head over her shoulder, and saw Warner and Halkett gravely listening.

"Oh," she said, blushing. "Did you hear the story I have been telling to Ariadne?" She held out her hand to Warner and then to Halkett, inspecting the latter critically, much interested in his uniform.

"You saw our cuirassiers?" she asked, as they seated themselves at the table. "So did I. Also, they saw me. I wished them to see me because I was dressed in this dress. We understood each other, the 'grosse cavalerie' and I."

"We saw what was going on," said Halkett. "I should say that about two thousand suitors have been added to your list this morning, Philippa."

She turned shy and a little grave at that, but seeing Warner laughing, laughed too.

"If I were a great lady," she said, "you might be right. Only from the saddle could any man dare hope for a smile from me now."

Linette, with the bright color of excitement still brilliant in her cheeks, brought out the breakfast tray.

"On the quarry road, across the river," she said, "our *fantassins* are marching north—thousands of them, messieurs!—and the dust is like a high white wall against the hills!"

So they hastened with their coffee and rolls; Warner fetched the garden ladder and set it against the east wall, and all three mounted and seated themselves on the coping.

What Linette had reported was true: across the Récollette a wall of white dust ran north and south as far as they could see. Under it an undulating column tramped, glimmering, sparkling, flowing northward—an endless streak of dusty crimson where the red trousers of the line were startlingly visible through the haze.

Watching the stirring spectacle from a seat on the wall beside Philippa, Warner turned to her presently:

"Do you feel all right this morning?"

"Yes, thank you."

"Your lip is still a trifle swollen."

"I feel quite well." She looked up at him out of her honest grey eyes. "It is the happiest morning of my life," she said in a low voice.

"Why?"

"For two reasons: I am to remain with you, that is one reason; I have lived to see what I am looking at yonder, that is the other reason."

"You have lived to help what is going on

yonder," remarked Halkett.

She turned, the question in her eyes; and he answered seriously:

"We British are your allies, now."

"Since when, Monsieur?"

"Since yesterday. So what you did for me when you saved my papers, you did for a friend to France."

Her sudden emotion left her silent; she bent her head and looked down at her knitting, and leisurely resumed it, sitting so, her legs hanging down from the wall, the sun striking her silver shoe buckles.

"Do you hear, Philippa?" asked Warner, smiling. "You have added reason to be proud of the wound on your lip."

She flashed a look at him, laughed shyly, and became very busy with her knitting and with watching the passing column across the river.

Halkett had unslung his field glasses to inspect them at closer range. The dusty *fantassins* were swinging along at a smart route step, rifles slung, red képis askew, their bulky luggage piled on their backs and flopping on their thighs—the same careless, untidy, slipshod infantry with the same active, tireless, reckless, rakish allure.

Their smartly mounted officers, smartly booted or gaitered, wearing the smart tunics and gold-laced caps of their arm of the service, seemed merely to accent the gayly dowdy, ill-fitting uniforms of the little *fantassins*.

No British officer could, on his soul and conscience, subscribe to such flapping, misfitting, fag-ends of military accouterments; and as Halkett watched them a singularly wooden expression came over his pleasant, youthful features; and Warner, glancing sideways at him, knew why.

"They're very picturesque if a painter handles them properly," he remarked, amused. "You know what De Neuville did for them."

Philippa, not comprehending, continued to knit and to gaze out of her lovely grey eyes upon her beloved *fantassins*.

Ariadne, seeing her three friends aloft, presently mounted to the top of the wall beside them, and sat gravely blinking into space through slitted eyes.

A glazier had come across the fields from some neighboring hamlet, bringing with him under his ragged arm some panes of glass and a bag of implements.

He was in a hurry, because he was expecting that his class would be called to the colors, but the spectacle of the passing infantry across the river so fascinated him that he made but a slow job of it.

Toward noon a mounted gendarme, who seemed to know him personally, shouted, as he rode by, that his class had been called. The little glazier nodded, smeared the last strip of putty under the last window pane to be replaced, climbed down from the sill, lifted his hat to the three people on the wall—

possibly including Ariadne in his politeness—and trotted away across the fields to tie up a few possessions in a large red handkerchief, and then trot away toward Chalons, where France needed even the humblest and most obscure of the children she had nourished through many years for such an hour as was sounding now.

Philippa, looking after him, was unconsciously stirred to express her thoughts aloud:

"There must be *something* I can do," she said.

"You have been among the very first to do something," rejoined Warner.

"Oh, *that*? That was nothing." She pursed up her lips and stared absently at the troops across the Récollette. "I can knit socks, of course.... I don't know what else to do.... If anybody wants me I am here."

"*I* want you, Philippa," said Warner.

"*Mon ami*, Warner——" She gave him a swift, adorable smile and laid her hand lightly on his arm for an instant.

Such candid gratitude for friendship he had never read in any eyes before; the quick response of this friendless girl touched him sharply.

"Of course I want you," he repeated. "Never forget, Philippa, that where I am you are welcome—not tolerated—*wanted*!"

She continued to knit, looking down steadily. Halkett lowered his field glasses and glanced at her, then with an odd look at Warner leveled the glasses

again and resumed his study of the distant column.

After a few minutes' silence the girl raised her eyes, and Warner caught the glint of unshed tears in them.

"It is only happiness," she said in a low voice. "I am not accustomed to it."

He did not know what to say, for the grey eyes were stirring him very deeply, and her attitude and their new relationship touched him and confused him, too.

The responsibility which he had assumed so impulsively, so lightly yet warmly, began to wear a more serious aspect to him.

Every few moments some new vein of purest metal was unconsciously revealed in her by her own transparent honesty. He began to understand that she had not only right instincts, but that her mind was right, in spite of what she had been since released from school—that her intelligence was of a healthy order, that she thought right, and that, untaught or taught otherwise, her conclusions were as direct and sane as a child's.

"I think, Philippa, we ought to have a business talk this morning," he said pleasantly.

"To discuss our affairs," she nodded contentedly. "I have my little account book in my trunk. Shall I get it for you?"

He smiled:

"I didn't intend to examine your financial

situation——"

"Oh, but we had better be very clear about it! You see, I have just *so* much saved—I shall show you exactly!—and then we can compute exactly what economies it will be necessary for me to make in order to maintain myself until we can find employment for me——"

"But, Philippa—" he tried to maintain his gravity —"you need not have any concern in that regard. First of all, you are on a salary as my model——"

"Please! I did not wish to be paid for aiding you ——"

"But it is a matter of business!"

"I thought—I am happy in being permitted to return a little of your kindness to me—I do not want anything from you——"

"Kindness!"

"You have let me find a refuge with you——"

"Dear child, I offer you employment until something more suitable offers. Didn't you understand?"

"Yes, but I did not expect or wish you to pay me —except with friendship. It is different between us and others, is it not?—I mean you are my *friend*.... I could not take money from you.... Let it be only friendship between us. Will you? I have enough to last until I can find employment. Only let me be with you. That is quite enough for me, Warner."

Halkett, who had been gazing fixedly through

his glasses, remarked that the column across the river had now passed.

It was true; the wall of dust still obscured the blue foothills of the Vosges, but the last *fantassin* had trotted beyond their view and the last military wagon had rolled out of sight.

Halkett descended from the ladder and went through the house and down the road in the direction of the schoolhouse, a smart, well-groomed, well-set-up figure in his light-colored service uniform and cap.

Philippa gathered her knitting into one hand, placed the other in Warner's, and descended the ladder face foremost, with the lithe, sure-footed grace of Ariadne, who had preceded them.

"Come to my room," she said, confidently taking possession of Warner's arm; "I want to show you my account book."

Madame Arlon, who was coming through the hallway, overheard her, gazed at her unsmilingly, glanced at Warner, whose arm the girl still retained.

Philippa looked up frankly, bidding the stout, florid landlady a smiling good morning, and Madame Arlon took the girl's hands rather firmly into her own, considered her, looked up at Warner in silence.

Perhaps she arrived at some silent and sudden conclusion concerning them both, for her tightened lips relaxed and she smiled at them and patted Philippa's hands and went about her affairs, still

evidently amused over something or other. She remarked to Magda in the kitchen that all Americans were mad but harmless; which distinguished them from Europeans, who were merely mad.

Upstairs in her bedroom, Philippa was down on her knees rummaging in her little trunk and chattering away as gay as a linnet to Warner, who stood beside her looking on.

And at first the pathos of the affair did not strike him. The girl's happy torrent of loquacity, almost childish in its eagerness and inconsequential repetition of details concerning the little souvenirs which she held up for his inspection, amused him, and he felt that she was very, very young.

All the flimsy odds and ends which girlhood cherishes—things utterly valueless except for the memories evoked by disinterring and handling them, these Philippa resurrected from the confused heap of clothing in her trunk—here a thin gold circlet set with a tiny, tarnished turquoise, pledge of some schoolmate's deathless adoration—there an inky and battered schoolbook with girls' names written inside in the immature chirography of extreme youth and sentiment. And there were bits of inexpensive lace and faded ribbons, and a blotting pad full of frail and faded flower-ghosts, and home-made sachets from which hue and odor had long since exhaled, and links from a silver chain and a few bright locks of hair in envelopes.

And every separate one of these Philippa, on her knees, held up for Warner to admire while she sketched for him the most minute details of the circumstances connected.

Never doubting his interest and sympathy, she freed her long-caged heart with all the involuntary ecstasy of an escaped bird pouring out to the clouds the suppressed confidences of many years.

Names, incidents, circumstances almost forgotten even in her brief solitary life, were now uttered almost unbidden from her ardent lips; the bright or faded bits of ribbon were held aloft, identified with a little laugh or sigh, tossed aside, and another relic uncovered and held out to him.

On her knees before these innocent records of the past, the girl was showing him everything she knew about herself—showing him herself, too, and her warm, eager heart of a child.

He was no longer merely amused; he stood listening in silence to her happy, disjointed phrases, evoked by flashes of memory equally disconnected.

The happiness connected with her girlish souvenirs faded, however, when they represented the period following her removal from school.

And yet, for all the loneliness and unhappiness—for all the instinctive mental revolt, all the perplexity and impatience of these latter years—their souvenirs she handled tenderly, describing each with that gentleness and consideration born of intimate

personal association.

And at last she discovered her account book, strapped with rubber bands, and she rose from the floor, drew the only chair up for Warner, and seated herself on her bed, laying the book open across his knees.

Here, under his eyes, columns of accurately kept figures told the story. Here everything had been minutely set down—her meager salary, her few expenses, her rigid economies, her savings during the years of her employment by Wildresse—a record of self-denial, of rigid honesty, of childlike perseverance.

As he slowly turned the clearly written pages on his knees, Philippa, leaning against his shoulder, her fresh young face close to his, pointed out and explained with her forefinger tracing the written figures.

After he had examined her accounts, she unstrapped her thin little pass book for him. It was in order and balanced to the end of July.

He closed the books, rested his clasped hands on them, and sat thinking. His preoccupied expression left her silent, too—or perhaps it was the slight reaction from her joyous indulgence in loquacity. Reticence always follows—and always this aftermath of silence is tinged with sadness.

He was thinking, almost in consternation, how lightly he had assumed responsibility for a young

soul in the making. All of her was still in the making; the girl was merely beginning to develop in mind and spirit; and in body her development had not ended.

Her circumstances aside—whatever her origin, whatever her class or position might have been—he suddenly realized that for him the responsibility was too great.

Whatever her origin, in her were the elements and instincts of all things upright. Whatever her place in the social scale, her intelligence could not be questioned. And, if her recent years had been passed amid sordid and impossible surroundings and influences, these had not corrupted her. In her there was no hint of depravity, nothing unwholesome, nothing spoiled.

Life and endeavor and the right to hope still lay before her; a theoretical future opened uncontaminated; opportunity alone was her problem; and his. And he realized his responsibility and was perplexed and troubled.

"Philippa," he said, looking up at her where she sat on the iron bed, her cheek resting on her clasped hands, "I am not very aged yet. Do you realize that?"

"Aged?" she repeated, puzzled.

He laughed and so did she.

"I mean," he said, "that if you and I go about together in this rather suspicious world, nobody is likely to understand how very harmless and

delightful our friendship is."

She nodded.

"Not that I care," he said, "except on your account. A girl has only one real asset, as assets and liabilities are now figured out by what we call civilization. It won't do to have any suspicion attach to this solitary asset of yours. There must never be any question of your moral solvency through your friendship for me or mine for you. Do you follow me?"

"Yes."

"Very well. It remains for us to find out how to remain friends without hurting you and your prospects in a world, which, as I have explained, is first of all an incredulous world, and after that the most pitiless of planets. Do you still follow what I say?"

"Yes."

"Then have you any suggestions?"

"No, Warner."

"What would you prefer to do to support yourself?"

"Anything that permitted me to remain near you."

"I know, Philippa; but I mean, leaving me out of consideration, what do you prefer to do?"

"I like everything—respectable."

"But what in particular?"

"I don't know; I like to keep accounts; I like to

oversee and manage a household.... I conducted all the departments of the Café and Cabaret de Biribi—I was manager, housekeeper, general director; I hired and discharged servants, looked after all marketing, all the linen and tableware, kept all accounts and paid all wages.

"I know how to do such things and I like to do them. It was only the other—the secret service—which sickened me. Of course it would have been a great happiness to me if I had been employed in quiet, respectable, and cultivated surroundings, and not in a public place where anybody may enter and misbehave."

"I understand," he said thoughtfully. "If it is necessary, then, you are competent to do your duty as housekeeper in a private house."

"I don't know; I should think so."

"And there is nothing else you prefer?"

Philippa shook her head. Then she picked up her knitting again, settling herself on the edge of the bed, feet crossed, fingers flying, delicate face bent gravely over her work. And all at once it seemed to Warner that her peasant dress was not convincing; that this gay costume of her province which she wore was only a charming masquerade—the pretty caprice of a young girl born to finer linen and a purple more costly—the ephemeral and wayward whim which once had been responsible for the Little Trianon, and irresponsible to everything else except the traditions

of a caste.

"*Who* are you, Philippa?" he asked curiously.

"I?" Her lifted eyes were level with his, very sweet and clear, and the bright needles ceased clicking.

"Don't you know who you are?" he repeated, watching her.

"A foundling.... I told you once."

"Is that all you know?"

"Yes."

"Does *he* know more than that?"

"He says he does not."

"You have no clew to your parentage?"

"None."

Her gaze became preoccupied, wandered from his, grew vaguely wistful.

"Out of the gutter," she said, without any bitterness in her emotionless voice. "—Of which circumstance he has frequently reminded me." With an unconscious movement she extended one exquisitely fashioned hand and gazed at it absently; looked down at the slim foot, where on the delicately arched instep a peasant's silver buckle glimmered.

Then, resting her grey eyes on him:

"If it really was the gutter, it is odd," she said, half to herself, "because always that second self which lives within me goes freshly bathed and clean and clothed in silk."

"Your second self?"

"My *real* self—my only comrade. You know, don't you? When one grows up alone there grows up with one an inner comrade—the truer self.... Otherwise the solitude of life must become intolerable."

"Yes, I understand."

"All lonely children have such a comrade, I suppose. Absolute self-isolation seems unendurable—actually impossible for a human being."

She resumed her knitting, meditatively, as a youthful princess might pick up her embroidery.

"As for the gutter," she said, "—out of the common earth we came, and we return to it.... Christ wandered, too, in very humble places."

CHAPTER XX

About noon a British soldier in uniform and mounted on a motor cycle came whizzing up to the Golden Peach.

Warner was in his room writing to his bankers in Paris; Philippa, in her room, was mending underwear; Halkett, who had walked to the school only to learn that Sister Eila had gone to the quarries, came out of the garden, where he had been sitting in silence with Ariadne.

The cyclist, a fresh-faced young fellow, saluted

his uniform; Halkett took the dispatches, read them, turned on his heel and went upstairs to make his adieux. First he knocked on Philippa's door, and when the girl appeared he took his leave of her with a new and oddly stiff deference which seemed akin to shyness.

"I am so sorry you are going," she said.

"Thanks, so much. I shan't ever forget my debt to you. I hope you'll be all right now."

"I shall be all right with Mr. Warner, always. I do hope we shall see you again."

"If I come out of this——" He checked himself, embarrassed, then he added hurriedly: "I'll look you up, if I may. I shan't forget you."

His vigorous handclasp almost wrung a cry from her, but she managed to smile, and he went on down the corridor and knocked at Warner's door.

"Well, old chap, good-by and good luck!"

"What! Have your orders arrived?" exclaimed Warner.

"Just now. I've a motor cyclist below. He takes me behind him to Ausone. From there I go by rail."

"I'm glad for your sake, Halkett; I'm sorry for my own. It's been a jolly friendship."

"Yes, considering all the trouble I've put you to ——"

"I tell you I liked it! Didn't I make that plain? I was in a rut; I was turning into an old fluff before you came cannoning into me, bringing a lively

breeze with you. I've never enjoyed anything half as much!"

"It's kind of you to take it so. You've been very good to me, Warner. I shan't forget you—or the little lady yonder. I'm sure this doesn't mean the end of our friendship."

"Not if it lies with us, Halkett. I hope you'll come through. Good luck, old fellow."

"Thanks! Good luck and good-by."

Their gripped hands parted; Halkett turned, walked toward the stairs, halted:

"I'll send for my luggage," he said.

"I'll look out for it."

"Thanks. And be civil to Ariadne. She's a friendly old thing!"

"I'll cherish her," said Warner, smiling.

So they parted. He took leave of Madame Arlon and reckoned with her in British gold; Magda and Linette were made happy with his generosity.

Out on the roadside they saw him swing up behind the soldier cyclist. A moment later there was only a trail of dust hanging along an empty road.

But Halkett had not yet done with Saïs. At the school he dismounted and ascended the steps.

The schoolroom was empty, the place very still. From a distance came the voices of children. It was the hour of their noonday recreation.

He entered the quiet schoolroom. On the desk stood a vase of white clove pinks. He took one,

inhaled its fragrance, touched it to his lips, turned to the door, and suddenly flushed to the roots of his hair.

Sister Eila, on the doorstep, turned her head and looked steadily at the soldier cyclist for a moment. But a moment was enough.

Yet, still looking away from Halkett, she said in her serene young voice:

"Your uniform tells me your errand, Monsieur Halkett. You have come for your papers."

"If I may trouble you——" His voice and manner were stiff and constrained.

She let her eyes rest on him for a moment:

"A British uniform is pleasant to see in France," she said. "One moment——" She stepped past him and entered the schoolroom. "I shall bring you your papers."

He walked slowly out to the road, holding in his hands, which were clasped behind him, the clove pink. Standing so, he looked across the fields to the river willows, from whence the shot had come. Slowly, clear-cut and in full sunshine, the scenes of that day passed through his mind. And after they had passed he turned and walked back to the schoolroom.

Sister Eila was seated at her desk, the papers lying before her.

He took them, buttoned them inside his tunic. She sat looking across the dim room, her elbow on

the desk, her chin resting on her palm.

"There is no use trying to thank you," he said with an effort—and stopped.

After a silence:

"You are going into battle," she said.

"I hope so."

"Yes—I hope so.... God protect you, Mr. Halkett."

He could not seem to find his voice.

Perhaps the silence became unendurable to her; she fumbled for her rosary, lifted it, and took the metal crucifix between both hands.

"Good-by," he said.

"Good-by." Her eyes did not leave the crucifix.

He stood motionless, crushing his forage cap in his hands. The white flower broke from its stem and fell to the floor. He bent and picked it up, looked at it, looked at her, turned and went his way.

The crucifix in her tightening hand grew indistinct, blurring under her steady gaze. In her ears still sounded the retreating racket of the motor cycle; the echoes lingered, grew fainter, died out in the golden gloom of the room.

Sister Eila extended her arms in front of her and laid her colorless face between them. The room grew very still.

CHAPTER XXI

A line regiment came swinging along from the south, its band silent, but the fanfare of its field music tremendously noisy—bass drums, snare drums, hunting horns and bugles—route step, springy and slouchy, officers at ease in their saddles: but, through the clinging aura of the dust, faces transfigured, and in every eye a depth of light like that which shines from the fixed gaze of prophets.

Rifles slung, equipments flapping, the interminable files trudged by under the hanging dust, an endless, undulating blur of red and blue, an immense shuffling sound, almost melodious, and here and there a handsome, dusty horse pacing amid the steady torrent.

They occupied only half of the wide, military road; now and then a military automobile came screaming past them with a flash of crimson and gold in the tonneau, leaving on the retina a brilliant, glimmering impression that faded gradually.

On the road across the Récollette, wagons, motor trucks, and field artillery had been passing for hours; the barrier of dust had grown much loftier, hanging suspended and unchanging against the hills, completely obscuring them except for a blue summit here and there.

Fewer troops passed on this side of the river. A regiment of dragoon lancers rode by about one o'clock—slender, nervous, high-strung officers, with

the horse-hair blowing around their shoulders from their silver helmets; the sturdy, bronzed young troopers riding with their lances swung slanting from the arm loops—and all with that still, fixed, enraptured expression of the eyes, as though under the spell of inward meditation, making their youthful features dreamy.

In some village through which they had passed, people had hung wreaths of leaves and flowers around their horses' necks. They still hung there, wilting in the sun; some, unraveled and trailing, shed dying blossoms at every step.

From the garden wall where she sat knitting beside Ariadne, Philippa plucked and tossed rose after rose down into the ranks of the passing horsemen.

There was no pleasantry, no jesting, scarcely a smile on the girl's lips or on theirs, but as each trooper caught the flung rose he turned his helmeted head and saluted, and rode on with the fresh flower touching his dusty lips.

And so they passed, squadron crowding on squadron, the solid trampling thunder shaking the earth. Not a trumpet note, not a whistle signal, not a voice, not a gilded sleeve upflung, not a slim saber lifted—only the steady, slanting torrent of lances and the running glitter of slung carbines, and a great flowing blaze of light from acres of helmets moving through the haze, as in a vision of pomp and

pageantry of ancient days and brave.

Warner came across the fields swinging his walking stick reflectively as the last peloton rode by.

Philippa looked down at him from her perch on the wall, and, unsmiling, dropped him a rose.

"Thank you, pretty maiden," he said, looking up while he drew the blossom through his lapel. "I have something to talk over with you. Shall I go around and climb up to you, or will you come down and walk to the river with me?"

"Either will be a pleasure for me. I desire only to be with you," she said. So frank were her grey eyes that again the dull, inward warning of his increasing responsibility to her and for her left him silent and disconcerted.

In his knowledge of her undisguised affection, and of the glamour with which he realized she had already innocently invested him, he began to comprehend the power over her which circumstances had thrust upon him.

It was too serious a burden for such a man as he, involved too deep a responsibility; and he meant to shift it.

"Come and walk with me, then," he said, "—or we'll take the punt, if you like."

She nodded brightly, rolled up her knitting, looked around at the ladder in the garden behind her, glanced down at him, which was the shorter

way.

"If I jump could you catch me?"

"I suppose I could, but——"

"Look out, then! Garde à vous!"

He managed to catch her and ease her to the ground, and, as always, she took possession of his arm with both of hers clasped closely around it, as though he meditated flight.

"While you are absent," she said, "my thoughts are occupied only with you. When I have you by me"—her clasp tightened a little—"such wonderful ideas come to inspire me—you can't imagine! I aspire to be worthy of such a friendship; I feel that it is in me to be good and wise and lofty of mind, and to think and believe generously.... Do you understand me? ... Petty sorrows vanish—the smaller and selfish desires and aspirations disappear. Into my spirit comes a delicious exultation, as though being with you cleansed my heart and filled my mind with ardent and noble thoughts.... I don't know whether you understand. Do you?"

"I understand that you are a very generous friend, who believes that her new friend is everything with which her youthful heart invests him."

"And you are!"

"I've got to try to be, now," he said, laughingly. "There is no unhappiness like that of a broken idol."

"Do I regard you as an idol?"

"Not me, but what your charming fancy pretends is me. I dread the day you find me out."

"You are laughing at me," she said happily, walking beside him with her light, springy step. "You may make fun of me; you may say what you will. *I* know."

"I think *I* do, too. And this is what I know, Philippa; you have within you some very rare and delicate and splendid qualities. Also, you are very young, and you need a guide——"

"*You!*"

"No."

"What! Of course it's you I need to guide me ——"

"Listen. You need a woman—older than yourself ——"

"Please!—Warner, my friend——"

"I want you to listen, Philippa."

"Yes."

They walked over the clover in silence for a few moments, then, glancing at her, he unconsciously tried his power:

"You like and trust me, don't you?"

The girl lifted her grey eyes, and he looked straight ahead of him while the flush lasted in his face.

He said:

"Because I like and respect you, and because you are my friend, I am ambitious for you. I want you to

have your chance. *I* can't give it to you, rightly. No man could do that very successfully or very prudently.

"While you remain in my employment, of course, we shall see each other constantly; when, eventually, you secure other employment, we can, at intervals, meet. But, Philippa, I don't want that sort of chance for you."

"I don't understand."

"I know you don't. Let me tell you what I have done without consulting you. If it meets with your approval, the problem of your immediate future is in a fair way of being solved."

They had reached the bank of the little river: the punt was drawn up among the rushes; they seated themselves without pushing off.

"Over beyond the woods, yonder," he continued, nodding his head, "is the Château des Oiseaux—a big, old-fashioned country house. A friend of many years lives there with her younger sister—Madame de Moidrey, the widow of a French officer. When she was Ethra Brooks, a little American girl, we were playmates. Her sister, Peggy, attends my painting class. After Mr. Halkett left, I walked across to the Château des Oiseaux, and I lunched there with Madame de Moidrey."

He hesitated: the girl looked up out of clear eyes that read him.

"Yes; I want you to walk over to the Château

with me," he said. "Madame de Moidrey has asked me to bring you.... And if she likes you, and you like her, she might desire to have you remain as her companion."

The girl remained silent, expressionless. He went on, slowly:

"It would not be like securing employment among strangers. Madame de Moidrey knows that we are *friends*.... And, Philippa, you are very young to go into employment among strangers. Not that you cannot take care of yourself. But it is not a happy experience. Besides, a personal and sympathetic interest will be wanting—in the beginning at least. And that will mean loneliness for you——"

"It will mean it anyway if I am to leave you."

"But I shall see you at the Château——"

"For a little while yet. Then you will be going back to Paris. And then—what shall I do?"

The candid tragedy in her eyes appalled him.

"Dear child," he said, "your duties with Madame de Moidrey will keep you too busy to think about anybody in particular. You will find in her a friend; you will find happiness there, I am very certain——"

"If you wish it, I will go. But when you leave, happiness departs."

"Philippa, that is nonsense——"

"No... And I had supposed, if I earned my living, that you would permit me to live with you—or near you somewhere.... Just to know you were living near

me—even if I did not see you every evening—would rest me.... I had hoped for that, *mon ami*."

"Philippa, dear, it would not do. That is too Bohemian to be anything safer than merely agreeable. But the surroundings and duties you are going to have with Madame de Moidrey are exactly what you need and what I could have desired for any friend of mine in your circumstances."

The girl's head began to droop, where she was seated on the stern seat of the boat.

He said:

"The influences of such a house, of such a home, of such people, are far better for you than to saunter out and face the world, depending for companionship upon a man not yet too old to arouse that fussy world's suspicion and perhaps resentment. You must have a better purpose in life."

She remained silent for a few moments, then, not lifting her head, and her slim hands nervously plaiting her scarlet skirt:

"Anywhere alone with you in the world would be a sufficient purpose in life for me.... No matter how I earned my bread—if, when toil ended with evening, you were the reward—and—consolation ——" A single tear fell, glittering; she turned her head sharply and kept it turned.

Deeply touched, even stirred, yet perfectly incredulous of himself, he sat watching her, not knowing how best to meet such childish loyalty, such

blindly obstinate devotion.

Out of what had such a depth of feeling been born? Out of gratitude for a pleasant and kindly word or two—an exaggerated sense of obligation for a few services rendered—services that for sheer and loyal courage could not match what she had done for Halkett?

And she seemed to be so sane, so clear-thinking, so competent in most things! This girlish and passionate attachment to him did not conform to other traits which made up her character and made of her an individual, specific and distinct.

He said:

"If you were my daughter, and I were in straitened circumstances and unable to be with you, I should advise you as I have."

Without turning, she answered:

"I am too old and you are too young for us to think of each other in that way.... I am not a child.... I am unhappy without you. But I care enough for you to obey you."

"And I care enough for you, Philippa, to remain in Saïs as long as you think you want me," he said.

"What!"

She turned, her glimmering eyes radiant, stretching out both hands to him.

"You are so good—so good!" she stammered. "The Château will frighten me; I shall be lonely. The world is a very large place to be alone in.... You are

so good!—Stay in Saïs a little while yet—just a little while.... I won't keep you very long from Paris—only let me know you a little longer.... I couldn't bear it—so soon—the only happiness I have ever known—to end—so soon——"

"You dear child, if I thought you really needed me——"

"No, I won't let you be more generous than that! Just a few days, please. And a promise to let me see you again—something to remember—to wait for ——"

"Surely, surely, little comrade. You don't suppose I am going to let you slip away out of my life, do you? And I don't understand why you are in such a sudden panic about my going away——"

"But you *are* going soon!—You were."

"How did you know?"

"Madame Arlon told me that you had already given congé. I didn't care; I thought I was to go with you. But now that you wish me to go to the Château —it—it frightens me."

He rose, stood looking at her for a moment, turned and paced the river bank once or twice, then came back to where she was seated.

"Come up to the Château now," he said. "I give you this promise, anyway; as long as you think you want me and need me in the world, you have only to say so, Philippa. And if I cannot come to you, then you shall come to me."

He hadn't quite analyzed what he was saying before he said it; he felt a little confused and uncertain, even now, as to how deeply his promise involved him. But even while he was speaking, a subtle undercurrent of approval seemed to reassure him that he was not all wrong, not too rash in what he promised. Or perhaps it was the very rashness of the impulse that something obscure within him was approving.

As for the girl, she stood up, tremulous, deep-eyed, trying to smile, trying to speak but failing, and only taking his arm into her possession again and clasping it closely with a childishly unconscious and instinctive sense of possession.

When she found her voice at last, she laughed and pressed her cheek impulsively against his shoulder.

"Tiens!" she said. "Your Château and its chatelaine have no terrors now for me, Monsieur.... Did you tell her who I am, and what I have been, and all that you know about me?"

"Yes, I did."

She dropped his arm, but kept step close beside him.

"You know," she said, "it is odd—perhaps it is effrontery—I don't know—but I, Philippa Wildresse—for want of another name—perhaps lacking the right to any name at all—am tranquil and serene at heart in the crisis so swiftly approaching."

"What crisis, Philippa?"

"My interview with a lady of the world, Monsieur—Madame la Comtesse de Moidrey. The *caissière de cabaret* should feel very humble and afraid. Is it effrontery? What is it that does not disturb me in the slightest?"

"Perhaps it is that other comrade of many years, Philippa—your other and inner self."

"It must be. For she could not hesitate to look anybody in the face—that wonderful and other self—wonderful as a bright dream, Monsieur.... Which is all she is, I know."

"You are wrong, Philippa: she is even more real than you. And some day you shall be part of her. You are growing so every hour. And when that finally happens, then this—all this—will become unreal."

"Not *you*."

"We shall see.... Here are the gates of the Château des Oiseaux. It is you who enter, Philippa; but it shall be your inner and real self who shall go out through the gates one day—God willing."

The girl smiled at him:

"They have but one soul between them," she said. "And that is yours and God's, I hope."

CHAPTER XXII

Madame de Moidrey, strolling with Warner on the south terrace of the Château des Oiseaux, glanced sideways at intervals through the open French windows, where, at the piano inside, Philippa sat playing, and singing in a subdued voice ancient folk songs of the lost provinces.

Peggy Brooks, enchanted, urged her to more active research through the neglected files of a memory still vivid; Philippa's voice was uncultivated, unplaced, but as fresh and carelessly sweet as a blackbird's in May. Some of these old ballads she had picked up from schoolmates, many from the Cabaret de Biribi, where clients were provincial and usually sentimental, and where some of the ancient songs were sung almost every day.

Madame de Moidrey had not immediately referred to Philippa when, with Warner, she had strolled out to the terrace, leaving the two younger girls together at the piano.

They had spoken of the sudden and unexpected menace of war, of the initial movements of troops along the Saïs Valley that morning; the serious chances of a German invasion, the practical certainty that in any event military operations were destined to embrace the country around them. Warner seemed very confident concerning the Barrier Forts, but he spoke of Montmedy and of Mézières with more reserve, and of Ausone not at all.

They promenaded for a few minutes longer in

silence, each preoccupied with anxious speculations regarding a future which began already to loom heavy as a thundercloud charged with unloosed lightnings.

From moment to moment the handsome woman beside him glanced through the open windows of the music room, where her younger sister and the girl Philippa were still busily interested in working out accompaniments to the old-time songs.

Philippa sang "J'ai perdu ma beauté":

"I have lost my beauty—
Fate has bereft me,
Fortune has left me,
None owes me duty.

I have lost my lover;
I shall not recover.
Our Lady of Lorraine,
Pity my pain!"

They paused to listen to this naïve melody of other days, then strolled on.

Madame de Moidrey said:

"She is very interesting, your little friend from Ausone."

"I am glad you think so."

"Oh, yes, there is no doubt about her being

clever and intelligent.... I wonder where she acquired her aplomb."

"Would you call it that?"

Madame de Moidrey smiled:

"No, it is a gentler quality—not devoid of sweetness. I think we may label it a becoming self-possession.... Anyway, it is a quality and not a trait—if that pleases you."

"She has quality."

"She has a candor which is almost disturbingly transparent. When I was a girl I saw Gilbert's comedy, 'The Palace of Truth.' And actually, I believe that your little friend, Philippa, could have entered that terrible house of unconscious self-revelation without any need of worrying."

"You couldn't praise her more sincerely if you think that," he said. "She offers virgin soil for anybody who will take any trouble with her."

"Oh," said Madame de Moidrey, laughing, "I thought I was to engage her to aid me and amuse *me*; but it seems that *I* have been engaged to educate her in the subtler refinements of civilized existence!"

"Don't you want to?" asked Warner, bluntly.

"Dear friend of many more years than I choose to own to, have I not enough to occupy me without adopting a wandering *caissière de cabaret*?"

"Is that the way you feel?" he said, reddening.

"Don't be cross! No; it isn't the way I feel. I do need a companion. Perhaps your friend Philippa is

not exactly the companion I might have dreamed about or aspired to——"

"If you look at it in that way——"

"Jim! Don't be rude, either! I desire two things; I want a companion and I wish to oblige you. You know perfectly well I do.... Besides, the girl is interesting. You didn't expect me to sentimentalize over her, did you? You may do that if you like. As for me, I shall consider engaging her if she cares to come to me."

"She will be very glad to," he said, coolly.

Madame de Moidrey cast a swift side glance at him, full of curiosity and repressed amusement.

"Men," she said, "are the real sentimentalists in this matter-of-fact world, not women. Merely show a man a pretty specimen of the opposite sex in the conventional attitude of distress, and it unbalances his intellect immediately."

"Do you imagine that my youthful friend Philippa has unbalanced my intellect?" he asked impatiently.

"Not entirely. Not completely——"

"Nonsense!"

"What a bad-mannered creature you are, Jim! But fortunately you're something else, too. For example, you have been nice about this very unusual and somewhat perilously attractive young girl. Few men would have been so. Don't argue! I have known a few men in my time. And I pay you a compliment."

She stopped and leaned back against a weatherworn vase of stone which crowned the terrace parapet.

"Listen, Jim; for a woman to take into her house a young girl with this girl's unknown antecedents and perfectly well-known past performances ought not to be a matter of romantic impulse, or of sympathy alone. What you tell me about her, what I myself have already seen of her, are sufficient to inspire the interest which all romance arouses, and the sympathy which all lonely youth inspires. But these are not enough.

"Choice of companionship is a matter for serious consideration. You can't make a companion of the intellectually inferior, of one who possesses merely the lesser instincts, of any lesser nature, whether cultivated to its full extent or otherwise. You know that. We shun what is not congenial."

He looked at her very intently, the dull red still flushing his face; and she surveyed him critically, amiably, amused at his attitude, which was the epitome of everything masculine.

"What are you going to do about her?" he inquired at last.

"Offer to engage her."

"As what?"

"A companion."

"Oh. Then you *do* appreciate her?"

Madame de Moidrey threw back her pretty head

and laughed with delicious abandon.

"Perhaps I don't appreciate her as deeply as you do, Jim, but I shall humbly endeavor to do so. Now, suppose, when you go back to the Golden Peach, you send Philippa's effects up here, and in the meanwhile I'll begin my duty of finishing Philippa's education—for which duty, I understand, I'm engaged by you ——"

"Ethra, you are a trump! And I don't really mind your guying me——"

"Indeed, I'm not guying you, dear friend! I'm revealing to you the actual inwardness of this entire and remarkable performance of yours. And if you don't know that you are engaging me to finish this young girl's education while you're making up your mind about your sentiments concerning her, then it's time you did."

"That is utterly——"

"Please! And it's all the truer because you don't believe it! ... Jim, the girl really *is* a pathetic figure—simple, sweet, intelligent, and touchingly honest.... And I'll say another thing.... God knows what mother bore her, what parents are responsible for this young thing—with her delicate features and slender body. But it was not from a pair of unhappy nobodies she inherited her mind, which seems to seek instinctively what is fine and right amid the sordid complexities of the only world she has ever known.

"As for her heart, Jim, it is the heart of a child—

with one heavenly and exaggerated idol completely filling it. *You!* ... And I tell you very plainly that, if I were a man, the knowledge of this would frighten me a little, and make me rather more serious than many men are inclined to be."

He bit his lip and looked out across the southern valley, where already the August haze was growing bluer, blurring the low-hanging sun.

She laid a friendly, intimate, half humorous hand on his arm:

"In all right-thinking men the boy can never die. No experience born of pain, no cynicism, no incredulity acquired through disappointment, can kill the boy in any man until it has first slain his soul. Otherwise, chivalry in the world had long since become extinct.

"You have done what you could do for Philippa. I am really glad to help you, Jim. But from now on, be very careful and very sure of yourself. Because now your real responsibility begins."

He had not thought of it in that way. And now he did not care to.

To sympathize, to protect, to admire—these were born of impulse and reason, which, in turn, had their origin in unconscious condescension.

To applaud the admirable, to express a warm concern for virtue in difficulties, meant merely sincere recognition, not the intimacy of that equality of mind and circumstance which existed per se

between himself and such a woman as Madame de Moidrey.

The very word "protection" implies condescension, conscious or unconscious. We may love what we protect; we never, honestly, place it on a pedestal, or even on a mathematical level with ourselves. It can't be done.

And so, in a vague sort of way, Warner remained incredulous of the impossible with which Madame de Moidrey had smilingly menaced him.

Only, of course, she was quite right; he must not thoughtlessly arouse the woman in the girl Philippa.

But there is nothing in the world that ought more thoroughly to arouse the best qualities of manhood in a man than the innocent adoration of a young girl. For if he could really believe himself to be even a shadow of what she believes he is, the world might really become the most agreeable of residential planets.

As Warner and Madame de Moidrey entered the music room through the open French windows, Philippa turned from the piano and her soft voice died out in the quaint refrain she had been accompanying.

She rose instinctively, which was more than Peggy did, having no reverence for age in her own sister—and Madame de Moidrey came forward and took the girl's slender hands in hers.

"Have you concluded to remain with me?" she

asked, smilingly.

"I did not understand that you had asked me," said the girl gravely.

"I do ask you."

Philippa looked at Warner, then lifted her grey eyes to the elder woman.

"You are very kind, Madame. I—it will be a great happiness to me if you accept my services."

The Countess de Moidrey regarded her, still retaining her hands, still smiling.

"You have a very sweet way of making the acceptance mine and not yours," she said. "Let us accept each other, Philippa. Will you?"

"You are most kind, Madame——"

"Can kindness win you?"

"Madame, it has already."

The American widow of the recent Count de Moidrey felt a curious sensation of uncertainty in the quiet self-possession of this young girl—in her serenity, in her modulated voice and undisturbed manner.

An odd idea persisted that the graciousness was not entirely on her own part; that there was something even more subtle than graciousness on the part of this girl, whose delicate hands lay, cool and smooth, within her own.

It was not manner, for there was none on Philippa's part; not reticence, for that argues a conscious effort or a still more conscious lack of

effort. Perhaps, through the transparent simplicity of the girl, the older woman's intuition caught a glimpse of finer traditions than she herself had been born to—sensed the far, faint ring of finer and more ancient metal.

And after a moment she felt that courtesy, deference, and propinquity alone held Philippa's grave grey eyes; that the soul which looked fearlessly and calmly out of them at her could not be lightly flattered or lightly won; and that, released from their conventional duty, those clear eyes of grey would seek their earthly idol as logically as the magnetic needle swings to its magnet.

Very subtly, as she stood there, the sympathy of the older woman widened to include respect. And, unconsciously, she turned and looked at Warner with the amused and slightly malicious smile of a woman who detects in a man the characteristic obtuseness from which her own and feminine instinct has rescued her just in time to prevent mistakes.

Then, turning to Philippa, she said:

"Our family of *three* is a very small one, dear, but I think it is going to be a happy one.... What was that song that you and Peggy were trying when we came in?"

"It is called 'Noblesse Oblige,' Madame. It is a very ancient song."

"It is as old as the world," said the Countess. "Peggy, will you try the accompaniment? And will

you sing it, Philippa?"

"If you wish it, Madame."

The Countess de Moidrey stepped aside and seated herself; the grey eyes left her to seek and find their magnet; and, having found it, smiled.

As for the magnet himself, he stood there deep in perplexity and trouble, beginning slowly to realize how profoundly his mind and affections had already become involved in the fate of a very young girl, and in the problems of life which must now begin to threaten and confront her.

"Namur, Liége—
Le dur siége
Noblesse oblige

sang Philippa—

"Namurois, Liégeois,
La lois des Bois
Exige
Noblesse—noblesse oblige—"'

The Countess de Moidrey rested her face on her hand, looking curiously at the young girl from whose lips the old phrase fell so naturally, so confidently, with such effortless and inborn understanding—

noblesse—noblesse oblige.

CHAPTER XXIII

Philippa's trunk had gone to the Château des Oiseaux, and the Inn of the Golden Peach knew her no longer.

Warner, who usually adored the prospect of a month all alone after his class had left for the season, found to his surprise that he was experiencing a slight sense of loneliness.

The inn, the garden, seemed to him uncommonly still; and at first he thought he missed the gallinaceous chatter of the Harem, then he was very sure that he regretted Halkett acutely.

Ariadne, sitting in the sun by the deserted summer-house in the garden, always greeted him with a plaintive little mew which, somehow or other, sounded to him pointedly reproachful.

The cat evidently missed Halkett, perhaps Philippa. Warner remembered that he had been requested to be polite and agreeable to Ariadne, and, whenever he recollected these obligations, he dutifully hoisted the animal to his shoulder and promenaded her. For which, no doubt, the cat was grateful, but as she was also beginning to shed her coat in preparation for a brand-new set of winter

furs, Warner found the intimacy with Ariadne slightly trying.

There were no other guests at the inn. Now and then during the next three or four days officers stopped their automobiles for a few moments' refreshment, or to replenish their gasoline tanks. But early one morning a big motor truck, driven by a little, red-legged, boyish *pioupiou*, and guarded by three others, equally youthful, took away the entire supply of gasoline and ordered Madame Arlon to remove the sign advertising it.

They drove away through the early autumn sunshine, singing the "Adoro," not the one best known, but that version attributed to the Scottish Queen, and they looked and sang like three little choir boys masquerading in the uniforms of their fathers.

Warner had been sketching in the meadow across the road that day, feeling restless and unaccountably depressed. It was one of those still, hazy mornings in early August, when the world seems too quiet and the sky too perfect for inaction or repose.

He had pitched his easel near the river, perhaps because it remained busy; and where, if any troops or military trains passed along the quarry road, he could see them. Also, from there he could look down over the road hedge and see the motor cycles whiz by and military automobiles with a streak of

crimson, turquoise and silver uniforms in the tonneau.

But none came. Two or three gendarmes, with white and yellow trappings, passed toward Ausone at a gallop while he sat there, but across the river nothing stirred save a kestrel soaring.

According to the *Petit Journal d'Ausone* of the day before, war had already burst over eastern Belgium full blast and the famous forts so long celebrated as impregnable were beginning to crumble away under an avalanche of gigantic shells.

As he sat there under the calm sky, painting leisurely, relighting his pipe at intervals, he tried to realize that such things as bombardments and sieges and battles were going on to the north of where he was—not so very far north, either. But he could not seem to grasp it as an actual fact. For the monstrous and imbecile actuality of such a war seemed still to remain outside his comprehension; his intelligence had not yet accepted it—not encompassed and digested the fact—and he could not get rid of the hopefully haunting feeling that presently somebody or something somewhere or other would stop all this amazing insanity, and that the diplomats would begin again where they had left off only a few days ago.

It was the illimitable proportions of the calamity —the magnitude of the catastrophe—the cataclysmic menace of it that still left his mind slightly stunned,

as it had paralyzed the minds of every civilized human being, and suspended for a space the power of thought in the world.

As yet, all these enormous, impossible threats of governments and emperors seemed to be some gigantic, fantastic, and grotesque hoax which the sovereigns and chancelleries of Europe were playing in concert to frighten a humdrum world out of its five dull wits.

And yet, under the incredulity, and the mental obscurity and inertia, deep within the dazed hearts of men a measured and terrible pulse had already begun to throb steadily, with an unchanging and dreadful rhythm. It was the clairvoyant prophecy of the world's subconscious self stirring, thrilling to that red future already breaking, and warning all mankind that the day of wrath had dawned at last.

But to Warner the most unreal part of it all was not the dusty *fantassins* in column, slouching forward toward the north—not the clinking, jingling cuirassiers on their big battle horses, not the dragoons riding with rapt, exalted faces under forests of tall lances, not the clanking artillery, the heavy military wagons and motor trucks, nor the galloping gendarmes which passed the inn every hour or two.

What had become suddenly unreal to him was the green and sunlit serenity of the world itself—the breeze ruffling the clover, poppies glowing deep in fields of golden wheat and barley, the melody of the

flowing river, the quiet blue overhead, the tenderness of leaf and blossom, and the blessed stillness of the world.

Relighting his pipe, he looked at the swallows soaring and sailing high above the Récollette; noticed butterflies hovering and flitting everywhere; heard the golden splashing of the river, the sigh of leaves and rushes. The word "war" still remained a word to him, but in the sunshine and the silence he began to divine the immobility of menace—something unseen and evil which was quietly waiting.

Ariadne had come across from the garden, ostensibly to hunt meadow mice, really for company.

Sniffing and snooping around his color box, she got one dainty whisker in the ultramarine, and had enough of art. So she went off, much annoyed, to sit by herself in the grass and do some scrubbing. After a while the fixed persistency with which she stared across the meadow attracted his attention and he, also, turned and looked that way.

As he saw nothing in particular to stare at, he presently resumed his sketching and his troubled thoughts. The latter concerned the girl Philippa. Not since he had taken her to the Château had he seen her. And that was four days ago.

He didn't know exactly why he had not strolled over. Possibly a vague idea that he had better not interfere to distract the girl's attention from her first lessons in the refinements of existence had kept him away from her vicinity.

He didn't even know that he had missed her; he knew only that for some occult reason or other he had felt rather lonely lately.

He painted away steadily, pausing to relight his pipe now and then, and all the while Ariadne, never stirring, stared persistently across the landscape, neglecting her uncleansed whisker.

Suddenly, with a little mew of recognition and

greeting, she trotted forward through the grass; and the next moment two soft hands fell lightly upon Warner's shoulders from behind.

"Philippa!" he exclaimed, enchanted.

"Oh, Jim!" she cried joyously, abandoning both hands to him as he sprang to his feet and faced her.

She was so eager, so pretty in her unfeigned delight, as though it had been four years instead of four days since they had seen each other; and he seemed to feel something of this, also, for he held her hands closely and laughed without any apparent reason for mirth—unless the sheer contentment of contact and possession be a reason.

"Are you well and happy, Philippa?"

"Yes, I am happy enough up there. But, oh, how dreadfully I have missed you, Jim—may I call you Jim?—I do to myself——"

"Of course!"

"I *think* of you that way—so it came very naturally to my lips—if you really don't mind? And besides, I am so happy to be with you.... Peggy Brooks and I were looking over maps in the library—you know, the *Petit Journal* says that the Prussians are firing enormous shells into Liége—and so Peggy and I were down on our knees over the maps of Belgium. Oh, dear! You know, it isn't so very far from us here if you take a ruler and measure by scale.... And it seemed to sober us both—we had been laughing, I don't remember exactly what about

—but studying the map made us both serious, and Peggy went upstairs to talk it over with the Countess, and I felt that I couldn't stand being away from you for a single minute longer!"

"You dear child!"

"So I asked Peggy to ask Madame de Moidrey if I might pay you a little visit, and she said, 'Of course.' So I came as fast as I could——" She laughed and made a sweeping gesture with both arms outflung: "And here I am! Are you contented?"

She stooped and stroked Ariadne, looking up to smile at him.

"Careful of her whisker; there is blue paint on it," he warned Philippa; but the girl wiped off the ultramarine with a green leaf and took the cat to her heart, covering her with caresses and murmuring endearments.

"Jim, dear, what do *you* think?" she asked presently.

"About what?"

"About the war?"

He said gravely:

"I don't quite understand how those magnificent Belgian forts are being knocked to pieces—if what the paper says is true. I supposed them to be among the strongest fortifications in the world."

"Madame de Moidrey says they are. Her husband, the late Count Victor, was an artillery officer. And she told Peggy and me that the Count de

Moidrey had always said they were the very strongest forts in the world."

"*Something's* gone wrong; that is evident," said Warner. "But not with *you*, Philippa," he added, smiling at her. "I never saw you looking as well; and that's a tremendously fetching frock you're wearing."

It was a white outing gown of serge, and the girl wore white stockings and tennis shoes, and a soft white hat—a boyish headgear which became her enchantingly.

"Peggy gave it to me," she said. "It is very American, isn't it?"

"It's adorable on *you*. Do you like Peggy Brooks?"

"Yes."

"And Madame de Moidrey?"

"Yes, I do—rather."

"Not entirely?"

"Jim——"

"What?"

"Yes, I—yes, I do like her.... But I don't do much to earn my wages. And that troubles me."

"Your salary?"

Philippa laughed:

"Wages, salary—what does it matter what you call them, when both merely mean pay for work performed.... I should like to do something for Madame de Moidrey in return. But she has many servants and a maid and a housekeeper. I thought I was to read to her, write letters for her, amuse her.

But she sometimes reads to me and she and Peggy are teaching me to play tennis——" Philippa held out one narrow foot for his inspection. "And yesterday she ordered a horse for me, as well as for herself and her sister, and I wore one of Peggy's riding habits—knee breeches and boots, Jim; and they set me on a horse! *That* is the way I am earning my wages at the Château des Oiseaux!"

"Why complain?" he asked, much amused.

"Because I am unable to return such favors——"

"Don't worry; whatever they do for you brings its own recompense."

"How?"

"Has it never occurred to you that your society is agreeable, interesting, amusing, and desirable?"

"No," she said, honestly surprised.

"Well, it is! People like you. You yourself amply recompense anybody for anything done for you, by accepting the attentions offered."

"Do *you* think of me in that way?"

He hadn't quite understood until then that he did feel that way about her, but he felt it now so strongly that it seemed as though he had always been of that mind.

"I've always thought so," he said. "There is never a dull moment with you, Philippa. No wonder people seek you and like you and pet you!"

Philippa blushed and tried to smile, then for a moment she buried her flushed face in Ariadne's

fluffy fur until her cheeks cooled.

"If," she said, "I had a home and an income, however tiny, I should not feel at all embarrassed by courtesies from others, because I should, in my turn, offer the best I possessed. But, Jim—a homeless girl—with all that I have been—endured!—I don't know—but I should feel more comfortable if I could be of some service in return for all that these very kind Americans offer me."

She placed Ariadne on the grass, turned and looked down at the river.

"There is my punt," she said. "Isn't it curious to remember that you and I first became friends in that boat? It seems to have happened very long ago, when I was a child.... You made me wash my face; do you remember?"

"I do," he replied gayly. "You looked like a schoolgirl made up for the part of Jezebel."

She blushed and hung her head. Presently her lowered eyes were raised to him in a distressed, questioning way, and he came over to her and put his hands on her shoulders.

"I never thought ill of you, Philippa—never doubted you were anything except what you really are."

She looked up into his eyes:

"I don't know what I really am. But I am beginning to understand that I can be whatever you desire. Also, I am beginning to understand how

generous you have been to me in your thoughts. Both you and Mr. Halkett had every reason to think lightly of the *caissière* of the Cabaret de Biribi, with her painted lips and cheeks and her easy manners ——" She shrugged. "And perhaps, but for the grace of God and you, I should have become what I appeared to be.... Let us sit in the punt. Shall we?"

They went down to the river together, Ariadne marching at their heels with tail erect, and the girl stepped aboard and seated herself in the stern which, afloat, swung in the limpid eddy among the tall, green rushes.

When Warner also was seated, at her feet, she drew from the pocket of her white serge jacket a letter, and, leaning over him, opened and displayed it.

The letter was written in French on common writing paper, in a perfectly legible but uneducated hand.

MADEMOISELLE [it began],

You are watched and your present whereabouts is known. You are warned to keep your mouth shut. Any treachery, even any slight indiscretion on your part, will be fully revenged by those you betray.

The wages of a traitor are death. Be advised in time. Return to your duty while there is yet time and your present ingratitude will be forgiven.

Make up your mind at once. There is no time to waste. *What is to happen shall happen! It is coming very fast. It is almost upon us*.

The safety which you suppose that the present condition of affairs guarantees you is but momentary. Peril threatens you; certain punishment awaits you. Documents in possession of those whom you threaten to betray are sufficient to condemn you now.

And more than that: we hold over you the power of life and death; and shall hold it, *no matter what happens in Ausone*!

Either way we can destroy you.

Return to us, therefore; accept forgiveness while there is yet time. You know who has caused this to be written. Therefore, enough!

Return and find security; remain to betray us and you shall be shot!

When Warner finished reading this outrageous missive, he looked up into Philippa's undisturbed face, and she smiled.

"When did you receive this?" he demanded.

"It came in the noon mail yesterday."

"Of course it's from Wildresse."

"Of course," she said simply. "What do you think of it?"

"I think very little of it," he replied. "Threatened people are good insurance risks. If he could have

harmed you, he'd not have troubled to write you about his amiable designs on you.... It's a pity—a great pity, Philippa—that we dare not call in the police."

"If I have written, innocently, the things he says I have written and signed, it might go hard with me if he were arrested," she said.

"I know it. It can't be done—at any rate, it can't be done yet. If there were anywhere you could go—any frontier that might be a barrier of safety for you! But all Europe seems to be involved—all neutral frontiers violated—even the Grand Duchy has become a German thoroughfare.... Let me think it over, Philippa. I don't know how dangerous to you that miserable rascal can become.... But Halkett was right: as long as you are in France, it won't do to denounce Wildresse."

"You understand, Jim, that I am not alarmed," she said gently, watching his anxious and clouded features. "I know that. I think I have reason to bear testimony concerning your courage——"

"I did not mean it in that way——"

"I understand, dear. Those who amount to anything never have to say so. I know you are not afraid.... Shall I keep that letter for you?"

She handed it to him. He pocketed it and sat for a while in silence, his brooding eyes on the blue distance.

Finally, with an effort, his face cleared, and he

said cheerfully:

"It is the strangeness and unreality of these last few days which depresses everybody. As a matter of fact, the war has lent a certain almost dignified terror to the attitude and the petty operations of a very vile and squalid band of malefactors in a small, provincial town.

"These fellows are nothing but cheap dealers in blackmail; and the last thing they'd do would be to invoke the law, of which they stand in logical and perpetual fear.

"No, no! All this hint of political and military vengeance—all this innuendo concerning a squad of execution, is utter rot.

"If they've dabbled in the bartering of military information, they'll keep clear of anything resembling military authority. No; I'm not worried on that point.... But I think, if Madame de Moidrey cares to ask me, that I should like to be a guest at the Château des Oiseaux for the next few days."

"Jim!" she exclaimed, radiant.

"Do you want me?" he asked, pretending astonishment.

And so it happened that after luncheon Warner locked up his room and studio in the pretty hostelry of the Golden Peach, gave orders for his trunk to be sent to the Château, and started across the fields toward the wooded heights, from whence had come

over the telephone an amused voice inviting him to be the guest of the Countess de Moidrey.

When he arrived, Madame de Moidrey was sewing alone on the southern terrace, and she looked up laughingly and extended her hand.

"So you're in the web at last," she said. "I predicted it, didn't I?"

"Nonsense, Ethra. I came because Philippa has received a threatening letter from that scoundrel, Wildresse."

"I know. The child has told me. Is it worth worrying over?"

"Not at all," said Warmer contemptuously. "That sort of thing is the last resort of a badly frightened coward. Only I thought, considering the general uncertainty, that perhaps you and Peggy might not be displeased to have a rather muscular man in the house."

"As a matter of fact, Jim, I had thought of asking you. Really, I had. Only—" she laughed—"I was afraid you might think I was encouraging you in something else——"

"See here, Ethra! You don't honestly suppose that there is anything sentimental in my relations with Philippa, do you?"

"Isn't there?"

"No," he said impatiently.

Madame de Moidrey resumed her sewing, the smile still edging her pleasant lips:

"She *is* very young yet, in many things; all the enchanting candor and sweetness of a child are hers still, together with a poise and quiet dignity almost bewildering at moments.... Jim, your little, nameless protégée is simply fascinating!"

He spoke quietly:

"I'm only too thankful you find her so."

"I do. Philippa is adorable. And nobody can make me believe that there is not good blood there. Why, speaking merely of externals, every feature, every contour, every delicate line of her body is labeled 'race.' There is never any accident in such a result of breeding. In mind and body the child has bred true to her race and stock—that is absurdly plain and perfectly evident to anybody who looks at her, sees her move, hears her voice, and follows the natural workings of her mind."

"Yes," said Warner, "Halkett and I decided that she had been born to fine linen and fine thoughts. Who in the world can the child be, Ethra?"

Madame de Moidrey shook her head over her sewing:

"I've found myself wondering again and again what the tragedy could have been. The man, Wildresse, may have lied to her. If some day he could be forced to tell what he knows——"

"I have thought of that.... I don't know, Ethra.... Sometimes it is better to leave a child in untroubled ignorance. What do you think?"

"Perhaps.... But, Jim, there is no peasant ancestry in that child, I am sure, whatever else there may be."

"Just rascally aristocracy?"

The Countess de Moidrey laughed. She had married for love; she could afford to.

"I am Yankee enough," she said, "to be sensitive to that subtle and indescribable something which always characterizes the old French aristocracy. One is always aware of it; it is never absent; it clings always as the perfume clings to an ancient cabinet of sandalwood and ivory.

"And, Jim, it seems to me that it clings, faintly, to the child Philippa.... It's an odd thing to say. Perhaps if I had been born to the title, I might not have detected it. What is familiar from birth is rarely noticed. But my unspoiled, nervous, and Yankee nose seems to detect it in this young girl.... And my Yankee nose, being born republican, is a very, very keen one, and makes exceedingly few mistakes."

"You intend, then, to keep her as a companion for the present?"

"If she will stay. I don't quite know whether she wants to. I don't entirely understand her. She does not seem unhappy; she is sweet, considerate, agreeable, and perfectly willing to do anything asked of her. She is never exacting; she asks nothing even of the servants. It's her attitude toward them which shows her quality. They feel it—they all are aware of

it. My maid adores her and is forever hanging around to aid her in a hundred little offices, which Philippa accepts because it gives pleasure to my maid, and for that reason alone.

"I tell you, Jim, if anybody thinks Philippa complex, it is a mistake. Her heart and mind are virginal, whatever her experience may have been; she is as simple and unspoiled as the children of that tall young King yonder, Albert of Belgium—God bless him! And that is the truth concerning Philippa—upon whom a suspicious world is going to place no value whatever because no rivets, ecclesiastical or legal, have irrevocably fastened to her the name she bears in ignorance of her own."

Peggy Brooks, a dark-haired, fresh-faced girl, came out on the terrace, nodded a familiar greeting to Warner, and looked around in search of Philippa.

Her sister said in a low voice:

"Peggy is quite mad about her. They get along wonderfully. I wonder where the child is? She expected you."

"Ethra," said Peggy, "I've given her one of my new afternoon gowns. I *made* her take it, on a promise to let her pay me out of her salary. Mathilde is fussing over her still, I suppose." And to Warner: "I'm painting a head of her. She sits as still as a statue, but it's hopeless, Jim; the girl's too exquisite to paint——"

"I mean to try it some day," said Warner. "The

way to paint her, Peggy, is to try to treat her as the great English masters of portraiture treated their grand ladies—-with that thoroughbred loveliness and grace—just a dash of enchanting blue sky behind her, and the sun-gilded foliage of stately trees against it, and her scarf blowing free——" He laughed. "Oh, I know how it *ought* to be done. We shall see what we shall see, some day——"

He ceased and turned his head. Philippa stepped out upon the terrace—the living incarnation of his own description.

Even Peggy caught her breath as the girl came forward.

"You beautiful thing!" she exclaimed. "You do belong in a golden frame in some great English castle!"

Philippa, perplexed but smiling, acknowledged Madame de Moidrey's presence and Peggy's, then turned to Warner with hand extended, as though she had not taken a similar leave of him an hour or two before.

"Everybody is so generous! Do you admire my new gown? Peggy gave it to me. Never have I possessed such a ravishing gown. That is why I am late; I stood at my mirror and looked and looked ——"

She turned swiftly to Peggy: "Dear, I am too happy to know how to say so! And if Madame de Moidrey is contented with me——"

"You are too lovely for words, Philippa," said the Countess. "If Mr. Warner paints you that way, I shall wish to have the picture for myself."

"Aha!" exclaimed Warner. "A commission!"

"Certainly," said the Countess. "You may begin as soon as Philippa is ready."

"Very well," said he. "If I paint the picture, you promise to hang it in the Château as a memento of Philippa, do you?"

"I do."

"Then there'll be no charge for this important major operation. Philippa, will you take ether tomorrow morning?"

The girl laughed and nodded, looking up at him from where she was seated beside the Countess, examining the sewing.

"Could I not do this for you, Madame?" she said.

"But I like to sew, Philippa."

The girl smiled, then a slight sigh escaped her. The Countess looked up at her, and Philippa smiled again, saying:

"There seems to be nothing within my power to do for you, Madame."

"There *is* something," said Madame de Moidrey under her breath.

"What, if you please?"

"I want you to like me, Philippa.... And if some day you could learn to love me, that would be the rarest gift that could be offered me."

The girl's grey eyes widened in utter surprise; suddenly they sparkled with tears, and she bent her head swiftly and touched the elder woman's hands with her own.

"Madame," she whispered, "you overwhelm me with your kindness.... If only I could express my gratitude——"

She checked herself as Maurice, the head gardener, appeared, hat in hand, deep anxiety stamped on his seamed and sunburnt features.

"Pardon, Madame la Comtesse—there is a great fire somewhere in the north. I thought Madame should be told——"

"A fire? What is it? The forest, Maurice?"

"Oh, it is very far away, Madame. Perhaps it is a forest on fire.... But there is a sound, too. One may see and hear from the northern terrace when the wind sets in."

"Is it as far away as Ausone?"

"Farther, Madame."

The Countess glanced at Warner, rose, retaining Philippa's hand.

"Thank you, Maurice," she said over her shoulder, and, passing her arm through Philippa's, she entered the house, followed by Warner and Peggy.

"What do you suppose alarms old Maurice?" whispered Peggy.

But Warner, vastly troubled, made no answer.

CHAPTER XXIV

Below the carved stone balustrade of the north terrace acres and acres of tree tops—oak, beech, birch, and fir—spread away on every side. This was the Forêt des Oiseaux.

Beyond the dense green surface of the tree tops, which was so compact that it resembled a wide and gently rolling plateau, the country stretched away toward Ausone. Here and there some distant farmhouse window sparkled in the sun; set amid banks of velvet green the Récollette glittered like severed fragments of a silver thread.

Bathed in a mauve haze the Ausone Fort stood out on its conical, tree-clad hill; beyond it other hillocks rose, lilac-tinted silhouettes against the horizon.

Turquoise, palest violet, tender green and gold, the country lay revealed under the August sky, peaceful, glimmering, silent.

And across this dainty harmony of color was smeared a somber, discordant smudge, staining the delicate haze of amethyst, defiling the pure sky—a wide, high area of dirty smoke, leaning from the perpendicular toward the east, spilling its dun-colored vapor downward over the pale aquarelle of

hill and river and valley.

"The Alcyon Forest is afire!" exclaimed the Countess in a low voice.

"It is much farther away," said Warner.

A sudden breeze sprang up, blowing in their faces over the swaying tree tops.

"Listen!" said Philippa, touching her lips with one finger.

From an infinite distance the wind carried with it a deadened thumping sound, now regular as the dulled rolling of drums, now softly irregular, with intervals of stillness, then again spasmodic, muffled, almost inaudible.

"Are they threshing anywhere near us?" asked the Countess of her sister. "What is that pumping sound?" She turned to Warner, who made no reply.

"Do you know what it is, Jim?" demanded Peggy Brooks uneasily.

"I'm not absolutely sure.... I'll be back in a moment——" He turned and went swiftly into the house.

Philippa, leaning on the balustrade beside the Countess, said very quietly:

"I know what that sound is. I have heard it before from the outer boulevard in Ausone, when the grand maneuvers were going on."

The Countess said:

"I was afraid it was that."

"Drums?" asked Peggy Brooks.

"Cannon," said Philippa.

Warner came back with his field glasses.

Studying the horizon, he spoke at intervals in his pleasant, undisturbed voice:

"They have cleared the Ausone Fort; the flag, the semaphore, the signal tower—all are gone; there is nothing to be seen there except trees.... It looks like any hill now; nothing is stirring on it.... This glass brings the smoke much nearer, but it is impossible to guess what is on fire.... I don't think it's a forest.... I'm afraid it is a village."

He offered the glass to the others; each took a turn and made out nothing new until Philippa, gazing above the discoloring stain of smoke, spoke to Warner in a low voice and handed him the glasses.

For a few moments he stood rigid, his field glasses poised at an angle; then, still watching at the same angle, he said:

"You are perfectly right, Philippa; two aëroplanes are soaring between the smoke and the Ausone Fort."

One by one the others searched for the distant sky craft and discovered them.

They were still at it when tea was served, and, by that time, the deadened drumming sound had become unmistakable, increasing in volume with every lightest puff of wind, and, when the breeze died out, still filling the ears with its steady thudding.

Also, the dirty smoke-smear had spread, polluting the tender northern sky, and new centers of infection had appeared here and there amid the green landscape—dark spots of smoke which, at first, appeared insignificant and motionless, which were bigger in ten minutes, which in half an hour had become volumes. Yet their actual growing process was not perceptible, so gradually the looming spots assumed the threatening proportions of gloom.

Warner, his teacup on his knees, bracketed the field glasses on the aëroplanes once more, and was startled at their nearness.

Almost at the same instant a dry crack, like the breaking of a stick, sounded, coming from the direction of the distant fort—another, another, others following in quicker succession. And, watching, he saw below the aëroplanes a dotted line of tiny white spots, growing in length for a while, then maintaining its length as the rearward dots vanished and new dots of cottony white were added to the other end.

Higher and higher rose the aëroplanes above the white wake of exploding shells, bearing eastward now, sheering widely, as a pair of soaring hawks sweep swiftly into vaster circles as they mount into the dazzling blue.

"The fort is using its sky-guns," remarked Warner.

They all took turns watching the fleecy clots of

smoke appear, linger, dissolve in mid-air. Long after the aëroplanes had disappeared in the sky, the high-angle guns continued their distant, rattling fusillade.

"What do you think is happening out there?" asked the Countess. "You have seen war, Jim. Have you an idea what the smoke and cannonade mean? Is a German army coming?"

Warner said:

"They are shelling villages to the north of us—perhaps trenches, too. I don't know what troops we have there.

"Probably their cavalry screen has come into contact with ours, and I should say that we are retiring. But you can't tell yet."

"It's the *invasion*, then," said the Countess calmly.

"It's a raid, anyway."

"A raid on Ausone?"

"Probably. The railroad there is always important—much more so than the Ausone Fort. I'm afraid that fort doesn't amount to very much as fortifications are classed now."

The spectacle from the north terrace had become very disquieting. All the horizon was now obscured by smoke, and its dirty shadow dulled the distance and invaded the middle distance, hanging from west to east like a sooty veil suspended across land and sky. There was, however, nothing else to see, not a glimmer of flame, nothing stirring on the hill where, unseen, the Ausone Fort crouched above the green

valley of the Récollette. But the deadened mutter of the cannonade continued unbroken along the horizon, never ceasing now, not even when the light wind changed.

Peggy's curiosity was satisfied; she had taken jealous possession of Philippa, with a side glance at Warner out of brown eyes not entirely devoid of malice, and the two were in the billiard room, which opened from the northern terrace, for the purpose of Philippa's education in the game of French billiards.

The Countess set her teacup aside and picked up her sewing.

"I don't intend to be driven out of my home," she remarked.

He lighted a cigarette and looked curiously into the north.

"Whether it's to be the wretched story of 1870 again or not," she went on, "I shall not be frightened away from this house.

"This is my home. I came here a bride; my dear husband died under this roof; all I care for in the world, all I hold most dear, most intimate, is here, Jim. I shall not go."

He said gravely:

"I hope the necessity may never arise, Ethra."

"It will not. Are the Germans really barbarians? What object could they have in injuring this old house? What good would it do them or their country to disturb us here? If they come, we can't defend

ourselves. What is there for us to do except to submit? But I shall not go away and leave this place to the mercies of their filthy soldiery."

Warner said nothing. There were many contingencies overlooked by this determined lady—circumstances which might mean ruin to the house—if, for instance, a retreating army chose to defend the Château. But he remained silent, not caring to trouble her with the possibilities of eventualities.

"I had rather you stayed, if you don't mind, Jim," she said, sewing away serenely.

"Certainly."

The steady thud of the cannonade had now assumed a more substantial rumbling sound.

Now and then separate shocks were audible, as though great pieces, occasionally, were discharged singly, dominating the duller monotone of lesser caliber.

He kept his eyes pretty constantly on the horizon line of smoke, evidently expectant of some new development, now and then fancying that it had become visible, as the calm sky became suffused with the delicate pastel hues of early evening, and the first bat zigzagged among the potted orange trees on the terrace.

And presently, in the early dusk, it became visible—first merely as a dull tint reddening the distant smoke, then as a faint, ruddy line of light, shifting, twinkling, sinking, flaring palely, then more

redly as the summer dusk deepened and possessed the silent world around them.

From northwest to southeast ran the flicker of the guns, with now and then a wider flare and a deeper accent dominating the measured monotone.

Five fires were burning, also: two from hamlets or nearer groups of buildings belonging to some big farm; the other three conflagrations were farther distant, and much greater, as though three considerable villages and their environs were in flames.

Philippa and Peggy came to the long, open windows from moment to moment, standing there, cue in hand, to look out at the reddening sky.

It was still not too dusky to see fairly well, and the lamps had not yet been lighted in the house, excepting the luster over the billiard table, when a footman appeared on the terrace, dignified, correct, unruffled:

"The driveway and circle, Madame la Comtesse, are full of cavalry. Their officers are dismounting; the troopers have gone into our stables and garage."

The Countess rose quietly, and Warner stood up in silence.

"What cavalry is it?"

"Ours, Madame. They have taken out the three automobiles and all the horses."

"Thank you." And, to Warner: "Would you mind coming with me, Jim?"

They entered the billiard room and traversed the house to the southern terrace.

Drive and circle were swarming with the pale blue dolmans of hussars moving in and out of the fan-shaped glare of electric torches, some mounted, their lances held perpendicularly in the stirrup boots, others afoot, leading up horses from the Château stables, pushing the three automobiles along the garage drive, dragging vehicles of every description by hand—hay wagons, farm wagons, long unused and old-fashioned family carriages with the De Moidrey crest on their panels.

Several officers in turquoise and silver, standing on the terrace, surveyed the proceedings below, one of them turning the brilliant light of his breast torch upon one spot after another and scarcely raising his voice as he directed operations.

There was very little noise, no confusion; everybody seemed to know what was to be done.

As the Countess de Moidrey and Warner came out upon the terrace, the officers heard them, turned, saluted, and one of them, a slim, handsome youth most beautifully molded into his uniform, came forward, crimson cap in hand, bowing with a grace indescribable.

"Madame de Moidrey," he said, "we very deeply regret the military necessity which temporarily deprives you of your cars and horses, but the Government requires us to ask them of you and to

offer you a receipt——"

"The Government is welcome, Monsieur," she said earnestly. "If the Government will accept what I have to offer as a gift, it will honor me sufficiently without offering any receipt or promise of indemnification."

"Countess," said the youthful soldier, bowing, "it is the answer any soldier of France might expect from one who bears the name of De Moidrey. Nevertheless, Madame, I am required to leave in your possession a receipt for what you so graciously permit me to requisition.... Permit me, Madame——" He drew from his dispatch pouch the papers, already filled in, signed and stamped, and presented them with a bow.

And, smilingly, Madame de Moidrey tore them across, again and again, and dropped the fragments upon the terrace.

"Monsieur," she said, "may I not offer you the hospitality of the house—some little refreshment for you and for your men?"

"Madame, we are overwhelmed, but our orders permit us no time."

Warner said quietly:

"If you could spare a moment, Captain, there is something I should like you to see from the north terrace." And to the Countess: "May I take him? I think he ought to see what we have seen."

Madame de Moidrey said:

"By all means, Jim."

And the two young men went swiftly through the house and out on the north terrace.

"Ha!" exclaimed the officer, as the rumble of the cannonade struck his ears, and he looked out on the dark circle of the horizon, all sparkling and lighted up with the ruddy flicker and flare of the guns.

"A raid?" asked Warner quietly.

"I don't know. Villages are afire yonder. Have you seen anything that might be of importance to us, Monsieur?"

"Two aëroplanes. The Ausone fort fired at them with sky-guns. They went east."

"Biplanes?"

"Monoplanes, I think. I am not sure."

"Square-tipped ailerons? Could you see?"

"They were shaped exactly like kestrels."

"Ah! Taubes! Many thanks, Monsieur." He stared out across the darkness. "Yes, it's warming up out there. Well, sir, I must go. And thank you again for your kindness——" He fumbled in his dolman, produced his cardcase. "May I be permitted to present my cards to Madame de Moidrey? Thank you —if you would be so amiable——"

They retraced their steps through the house, encountering Peggy Brooks in the hallway, who received a most ceremonious bow from the youthful hussar, and who acknowledged it with an enchanting inclination of her pretty head.

Within a few feet of the front terrace, the young officer suddenly halted.

"Monsieur," he said, very red, "it would seem, perhaps, more courteous for me to leave my cards for all the ladies of the household. Would it not—under such unusual and unfortunate circumstances as those of this evening?"

Warner looked at him gravely; he was very young, very ceremonious, very much flushed. Was it possible that Peggy Brooks had bowled over this young gentleman with her first smile?

"I think," said Warner, very seriously, "that it might be considered obligatory for an officer who takes away all the horses and motor cars to leave his card for every lady in the family. There are," he added, "three."

Afterward, when the officer had taken his leave, and his escort of hussars had trotted away with the horses, wagons, and automobiles, Warner, much amused, related to the Countess the incident of the cards; and he distributed them at dinner, reading the name engraved on his own with some curiosity.

"Well, Peggy," he said, "you did murderous work with your smile this evening."

She answered calmly:

"I hope so. He was exceedingly nice looking."

"Le Vicomte d'Aurès," nodded Warner, "Captain of Cavalry! Very polite, that youngster; very prolific

of visiting cards. You should have seen him blush, Peggy."

"I did. I repeat that he is a nice boy, and I hope he comes back and steals something else."

Philippa laughed; the Countess smiled indulgently upon her younger sister, and gave the signal to rise.

"The family comes from the West, I think," she remarked to Warner, as she took his arm. "Goodness, Jim, what a nuisance!—Not a horse in the stable, not a car to move about in. It looks to me as though we were marooned here.... But I am very happy to think that I could do even a little for our Government. I wish I could do more."

"You may have plenty of chances, Ethra," he said.

They walked through to the north terrace and stood for a while watching the conflagrations on the horizon.

The vast, slightly curved line of flickering points of fire no longer twinkled and played through the darkness, and the muttering of the cannonade had ceased. Only the three incendiary foci reddened the sky, their illuminated vapors billowing up and spreading away for leagues to the eastward.

There was a mist this night, delicately veiling the tops of the forest trees, and the perfume of lilies from the gardens saturated the night air.

Usually, when foggy conditions prevailed over

the valley of the Récollette, the lights of Ausone were visible as a pinkish tinge in the sky. But this night no such tint was apparent; no signal lamps sparkled from the fort, not a light glimmered in the vast black void beyond, where miles and miles of darkness stretched away unlighted even by the wastes of star-set firmament above.

Ethra de Moidrey shrugged her pretty shoulders and turned back toward the billiard room, whither Peggy Brooks had already repaired for practice.

Philippa, remaining beside Warner, stood watching them through the lighted windows.

She was wearing her first evening gown—one of Peggy's gifts—a dainty affair of palest blue; and her full, smooth cheeks and throat accented the slim immaturity of her arms and shoulders.

She looked up, smiled faintly, and moved nearer with that unconscious instinct of youth for seeking contact where confidence and trust is placed. Her slim fingers, touching his, nestled into his hand with an eloquence unmistakable of innocent possession satisfied.

"You *are* only a very little girl yet, aren't you, Philippa?" he said, smiling, but touched by the youth of her and her frail shoulder resting lightly against his own.

"I know I am, Jim. I seem to be growing younger under the warm shelter of your kindness—under the security of this roof and the quiet sense of protection

everywhere.

"It is as though I had been arrested in development since I left school—as though youth and growth had stopped and only my mind had continued growing older and older and more tired during these last six years—dull, bewildering, ignoble years—lonely, endless years that dragged their days after them like a chain, heavier, heavier ____"

She pressed a little closer to his shoulder:

"I had *nobody*. Do you understand? I seem to know right from wrong, but I don't know how I know it. Yet, I am old in some things—old and wearied with a knowledge which still, however, remains personally incomprehensible to me. It's just a vast accumulation of unhappy facts concerning life as it is lived by many.... I always knew there were such people as you—as these dear and gentle friends of yours; I never saw them—never saw even any young girls after I left school—only the women, young and old, who came to the cabaret, or who came and went through the Ausone streets, or who sat knitting and gossiping under the trees on the quay."

She laid her cheek against his shoulder with a little sigh.

"You are very wonderful to me," she murmured, partly to herself.

The night air had become a little fresher: he thought that she should have some sort of wrap, so

they entered the billiard room together, where Peggy, awaiting her shot, slipped one arm around Philippa's waist, detaining her to caress her and whisper nonsense.

"You beautiful child, I want you to stay with me and not go star-gazing with that large and sunburnt man. You'll stay, won't you, darling? And we'll go to the library presently and find a pretty red and gold book full of armorial designs and snobbish information; and we'll search very patiently through those expensively illuminated pages until we find a worthy family called D'Aurès——"

"Oh, Peggy!" said Philippa. "Would you really take so much trouble?"

"Rather!" said Peggy coolly. "I mean to write him some day and find out how he is treating my pet Minerva runabout which he had the audacity to appropriate without thanking me."

Philippa laughed rather shyly, not entirely comprehending the balance between badinage and sincerity in Peggy's threat, but realizing that any freedom she permitted herself was her prerogative.

Warner, lingering at the other door, caught Peggy's eye.

"You can't have her, Jim!" she said with emphasis, and drew her closer.

So Warner went on to find a wrap for her, and entered the music room.

The next moment he halted, rigid, astounded.

Peering through the windows into the room were the dirty countenances of Asticot and Squelette, their battered noses flattened white on the glass, their ratty eyes fixed on him.

CHAPTER XXV

That the precious pair believed Warner to be paralyzed with terror was evident.

As long as he remained motionless they glared at him, their faces and spread fingers flattened against the windowpane. Then, the next instant, he was after them at one bound, jerking open the glass door, out across the terrace where the two young ruffians, evidently surprised and confused by his headlong behavior, parted company, Squelette digging up gravel in his headlong flight down the drive, Asticot darting across the lawn where, beyond the stables, a hospitable tangle of shrubbery seemed to promise easy escape.

But Asticot was awfully wrong; in the darkness he rushed full speed into an elastic barrier of mesh wire which supported the hedge of sweet peas separating garage and stables; and as he rebounded, Warner caught him and coolly began to beat him up.

The beating was deliberate, methodical, and merciless; the blows fell with smart cracks upon the

features of Asticot, right, left, sometimes hoisting him off his large, flat feet, sometimes driving him dizzily earthward; but another blow and a savage jerk always brought him up to be swung on again, battered, knocked flying, and finally smashed into merciful insensibility.

Asticot was in a dreadful mess as he lay there on the grass. Vignier, the chauffeur, and a stable lad, Henri, had appeared with a lantern at the *débâcle* of Monsieur Asticot.

Warner, breathing rapidly, waited a few moments to recover his breath.

"Take him into the harness room and lay him on a blanket," he managed to say. "Keep your eyes on him, Vignier, until I return. There's another of them, but I'm afraid he's cleared out."

As a matter of fact, Squelette had cleared out. He must have scaled the wall somewhere, for the gates were locked, and the old lodge keeper was evidently asleep.

The lad, Henri, came up, armed with a stable fork, and followed by the head gardener, Maurice, shouldering a fowling piece and marshaling in his wake half a dozen others—grooms, under-gardeners, and a lad or two employed about the place.

They beat the shrubbery for an hour; then Warner left them to explore the wooded strip along the base of the wall with their flashlights and lanterns, and went back to the stable where lay

Asticot, badly in need of bandages and protracted repose.

Vignier met Warner at the stable door.

"Has he come to?" inquired the latter, who had begun to feel a little worried.

"Monsieur Warner, that *voyou* is a most frightful wreck. Out of neither eye is he able to perceive me; what he wears upon his shoulders does not, to me, resemble a head at all."

"He *is* conscious, then?"

"Entirely. He lies upon his blanket and inquires for you at intervals."

"What?"

"It is true. 'Oh, my mother!' he whimpers. 'What a horrible beating I have had from that American! Oh, my sister, I am battered into a *boudin*! Ou est-il, donc, ce Monsieur sans remords? I have need of conversing with him. I wish to behold him who has brought me to this pitiable ditch of misery! I do not desire another beating! It is I, Asticot, who informs you!' And that, Monsieur Warner, is what this *voyou affreux* continues to repeat in the harness room where I have locked him in. Would Monsieur care to inspect the swine?"

Warner nodded and entered the stable; Vignier fitted a key to the harness room and opened the door.

A lantern burned there brightly. Under it squatted Asticot on his blanket. Neither eye was

entirely closed, for there was a ratty glitter under the puffed lids, and he lost no time in whining out that he did not desire to be beaten any more by "that gentleman there"—pointing a shaking finger straight at Warner.

"Vignier," said Warner, "bring me a chair, close the door, and then go and find something to bandage this rascal. Bring a tub and hot water, also!"

And when the chair was fetched and the door closed, Warner seated himself and surveyed the battered ruffian with grim satisfaction.

"You murderous young sewer rat," he said calmly, "out with the whole business, now! Do you hear? I meant to catch one of you and find out for myself what you're up to. Now, tell me, and tell me quick, and don't lie, or I'll start in on you again——"

He half rose from his chair, and Asticot shrieked.

"What were you doing here?" snapped out Warner.

"M-m'sieu'—it was but a peaceful reconnoissance in search of—of information——" stuttered Asticot in terror.

"What information?—You rat!"

"M-m-m'sieu'—I swear to you on the cross of my mother——"

"Stop that! Go on! Go on faster! What information?"

"T-t-to f-find out if *l-la fille*, Philippa, had taken refuge with M-madame la Comtesse——"

"Who wants that information?"

"I s-swear to you——"

"Quick! *Who* wants it!"

"Monsieur Wildresse——"

"Why?"

"*Je n'en sais rien*——"

"You lying Apache! *Why*?"

"M'sieu', he pays us, the Squelette and me, to do his jobs for him, but he has never made confidants of us. I swear it. I don't know why he desires to seize the girl, Philippa!"

"He *does* mean to seize her, then?"

"Alas——"

"*Does* he?"

Asticot's entire body jerked from sheer fright.

"Yes—yes, he does! God knows it is not in me to lie to M'sieu'. God knows I do not ever desire another beating such as M'sieu' has been pleased to bestow upon me. I affirm it—I, Asticot—that I am the devoted servant of M'sieu' and will most thankfully betray anybody to him——"

"Be quiet!"

"M'sieu' does not believe me! Yet, I speak only truth. I will diligently serve M'sieu' if he permits——"

"Serve *me*? Why?"

"Mon Dieu, M'sieu', have I not been most horribly beaten by M'sieu'? I, Asticot, who am not unacquainted with the *Boxe* and the *Savate*—I have been rendered insensible! With weapons? No!

Without weapons! Yes, with the empty hands of M'sieu'. Why should I not admire? Why should I not experience gratitude that I am alive? Am I an imbecile to court further destruction? *Non, alors*; I am not crazy. God forbid I should ever again experience the hand of M'sieu' upon my coat collar! And if——"

"You listen to *me*!" interrupted Warner. "Vermin of your sort that Wildresse hires for a few francs stand no chance when military law is proclaimed. Either side would push you against a wall on sight. Do you understand?"

"Mon Dieu, M'sieu'——"

"There are just two safe places for you: Biribi or prison. Which do you prefer?"

"I? Oh, my God! I have served in the Battalion de Biribi! Not *that*, M'sieu'——"

"All right; La Nouvelle——"

Asticot emitted a muffled shriek, huddled his ragged knees within his arms, and sat rocking and whimpering and blubbering with fright under the lantern until an impatient gesture from Warner startled him dumb.

"Like all your kind, you don't like to be hurt, do you?" inquired Warner, disgusted. "Yet, for twenty francs—for ten—yes, for *five*—you could be hired to do murder; couldn't you?"

"I—I would b-be happy to do it for nothing to oblige M'sieu'——"

"I haven't a doubt of it. The only thing you understand is fear.... Where is Wildresse?"

"M'sieu' doubtless knows."

"Never mind what I know. Answer!"

"Le vieux——"

"*Who?*"

"Le Père Wildresse—he has taken to the woods ——"

"Where?"

"Le forêt d'Ausone."

"Why?"

"It is because of the girl Philippa. It is evident to Squelette and to me that he fears her. Why? I tell you frankly I do not know. If I knew——"

"Go on!"

Asticot turned his battered visage toward Warner. A leer stretched his swollen mouth.

"If we knew what he is afraid of, Squelette and I, we would make him sing!" he said coolly.

"Blackmail him?"

"Naturally."

"I understand. And if you ever had a chance to get behind my back with a thoroughly trustworthy knife—eh, Asticot?"

"No," said the ruffian naïvely, "I should be afraid to do that." He squinted silently at Warner out of his puffy eyes for a few moments, then, shaking his head: "No," he repeated; "never again. I should make of the job only a bungle; I should be too horribly

afraid."

Warner got up from his chair.

"Tomorrow," he said, "I shall go with you to the Forest of Ausone and you shall find the Père Wildresse for me and I shall have a little chat with him."

"Do you mean to slay him, M'sieu'? It would be safer, I think. I could do it for you, if you wish, when his back is turned. When one is annoyed by anybody, it saves much trouble to knock him on the head at once. If I could once get him down," he added cheerfully, "I would take him by both ears and beat his head on the ground until his coco cracked."

"Really?"

"Certainly. Supposition that an individual bores M'sieu'. What to do? M'sieu' reflects; M'sieu' rubs his head in perplexity—crac! There is his devoted friend, Asticot! Why had you not before thought of your humble friend and grateful? Asticot! To be sure! A word to him and the job is done, discreetly, without any *tapage*. And M'sieu', contented, I trust, with his honest and devoted Asticot, may remember in his bounty that times are hard and that one must eat and drink—yes, even poor Asticot among the rest."

"Yes, Asticot. But after you're dead such necessities won't trouble you."

"M-m'sieu'!"

"I've got my eye on you. Do you know what that means?"

Stammering and stuttering, the ruffian admitted that he did know.

"Very well. They'll bring you a tin tub full of hot water, some clothing which I bestow upon you, some salves and bandages. Afterward, they'll give you some straw to sleep on, and then they'll lock the door. What I'll do with you or to you I don't know yet. But I'll know by morning."

Vignier knocked at the door. Behind him came a stableboy with a tub.

"Take care of that rat," said Warner briefly; and went out into the night.

His hands were slightly discolored, and one had bled at the knuckles. He went directly to the room, changed his linen, made a careful toilet with a grimace of retrospective disgust, then adjusting and brushing out his crumpled attire, took a look at himself in the glass and discovered no incriminating evidence of his recent pugilistic activity.

But when he went downstairs he discovered that the family had retired; lights flickered low in the west drawing-room, a lamp remained burning in the staircase hall, but the remainder of the house was dark.

As he stood at the drawing-room door, undecided whether to carry the hallway lamp to the library and find a book, or to return to his room and bed, a slight noise on the stairway attracted his attention.

Philippa, in boudoir robe and slippers, her chestnut hair in two braids, sat on the carpeted stairs looking down at him through the spindles.

"What on earth are you doing there?" he demanded, smiling up at her.

"You have been away over two hours!"

"I know it: I'm so sorry——"

"You said you were going to find a wrap for me. You didn't return."

"I'm sorry, Philippa. I was detained at the garage —a matter which had to be arranged with Vignier.... You should go back to bed."

"I was in bed."

"Why did you get up?"

"I wished to find out whether you had come in."

"But, Philippa," he protested laughingly, "you don't feel that you have to sit up for me, do you?—As though we were ma——" He checked himself abruptly, and she caught him up where he had stopped.

"Yes, I do feel that way!" she said emphatically. "When the only man a girl has in the whole world goes out and doesn't return, is it not natural for that girl to sit up until he does return?"

"Yes," he said, rather hastily, "I suppose it is. Speak low, or people can hear you. You see I'm all right, so now you had better go to bed——"

"Jim! I don't want to go to bed."

"Why not?" he demanded in a guarded voice.

"I am lonely."

"Nonsense, Philippa! You can't be lonely with real friends so near. Don't sit up any longer."

She sighed, gathered her silken knees into her arms, and shrugged her shoulders like a spoiled child.

"I am lonely," she insisted. "I miss Ariadne."

"We'll go and call on her tomorrow——"

"I want her now. I've a mind to put on a cloak and some shoes and go down to the inn and get her."

"Come!" he said. "You don't want the servants to hear you and see you sitting on the stairs when the household is in bed and asleep."

"Is there any indiscretion in my sitting on the stairs?"

"Oh, no, I suppose not!"

"Very well. Let me sit here, then. Besides, I never have time enough to talk to you——"

"You have all day!"

"The day is not long enough. Even day and night together would be too short. Even the years are going to be too brief for me, Jim! How can I live long enough with you to make up for the years without you!" she explained a trifle excitedly; but she subsided as he made a quick gesture of caution.

"It won't do to sit there and converse so frankly," he said. "Nobody overhearing you would understand either you or me."

The girl nodded. One heavy braid fell across her

shoulder, and she took the curling, burnished ends between her fingers and began to rebraid them absently. After a moment she sighed, bent her head and looked down at him between the spindles.

"I am sorry I have annoyed you," she whispered.

"You didn't."

"Oh, I did! It wouldn't do to have people think—what—couldn't be true.... But, Jim, can't you forgive a girl who is entirely alone in the world, clinging to every moment of companionship with her closest friend? And can't you understand her being afraid that something might happen to him—to take him away—and the most blessed friendship that—that she ever even dreamed of in—in the dreadful solitude which was her youth?"

"You dear child—of course I understand.... I never have enough of you, either. Your interest and friendship and loyalty are no warmer than are mine for you.... But you mustn't become morbid; nothing is going to alter our regard for each other; nothing is going to happen to either you or me." He laughed. "So you really need not sit up nights for me, if I happen to be out."

She laughed too, framed her cheeks in her hands, and looked down at him with smiling, humorous eyes which grew subtly tender.

"You do care for me, Jim?"

"Why should I deny it?"

"Why should *I*? I don't. I know I care for you

more than everything else in the world——

"Philippa!"

"Yes, Jim?"

"You know—people happening to overhear you might not understand——"

"I don't care! It's the truth!" She rose, bent over the banister to look down at him, discovered that he was not annoyed, smiled adorably.

"Good night! I shall sleep happily!" she whispered, gathering her boudoir robe around her.

At the top of the stairs she turned, leaned over, kissed the palm of one slim hand to him, and disappeared with a subdued and faintly mischievous laugh, leaving in his eyes of an artist a piquant, fleeting, and charming picture.

But upon his mind the impression she left began to develop more slowly—the impression of a young girl—"clean as a flame," as he had once said of her—a lovely and delicate personality absolutely in keeping with the silken boudoir gown she wore—in keeping with the carven and stately beauty of her environment in this ancient house.

Philippa not only fitted into the very atmosphere of such a place; it seemed as though she must have been born in it, so perfectly was she a harmonious part of it, so naturally and without emphasis.

Centuries had coördinated, reconciled, and made a mellow ensemble of everything within this house—the walls, the wainscot, mantels, lusters, pictures and

frames, furniture and dimmed upholstery.

In the golden demi-light of these halls Philippa moved as though she had known no other—and in the sunlight of music room or terrace she belonged as unquestioned as the sunlight itself; and in lamplit spaces where soft shadows framed her, there also she belonged as certainly as the high, dim portraits of great ladies and brave gentlemen peering down at her through their delicate veils of dust.

Thinking of these things beside the open window of his bedroom, he looked out into the south and east and saw in the sky the silvery pencilings of searchlights on the Barrier Forts, shifting, sweeping in wide arcs, or tremblingly concentrated upon the clouds.

There was no sound in the fragrant darkness, not a breath of air, not a leaf stirring.

His inclination was not to sleep, but to think about Philippa; and he sat there, a burned-out cigarette between his fingers, his eyes fixed so persistently on the darkness that after a while he became conscious of what his concentration was delicately evoking there—her face, and the grey eyes of her, shadowy, tender, clear as a child's.

CHAPTER XXVI

Warner awoke with a start; somebody was knocking on his door. As he sat up in bed, the solid thudding of the cannonade filled the room—still very far away, but deeper and with a heavier undertone which set the windows slightly vibrating.

The knocking on his door sounded again insistently.

"All right!" he called, throwing on a bathrobe and finding his slippers.

The rising sun had not yet freed itself from the mist that lay over hill and plain; wide, rosy beams spread to the zenith and a faint glow tinged the morning fog, but the foreground of woods and fields was still dusky and vague, and his room full of shadows.

He tied the belt of his robe and opened the door. In the semi-obscurity of the corridor stood Philippa, hair disordered, wrapped in her chamber robe.

"Jim," she said, "the telephone in the lower hall has been ringing like mad. It awoke me. I lay and listened to it, but nobody seemed to hear it, so I went down. It's a Sister of Charity—Sister Eila—who desires to speak to you."

"I'll go at once—thank you, Philippa——"

"And, Jim?" She was trotting along beside him in her bare feet and bedroom slippers as he started for the stairs. "When you have talked to her, I think you ought to see what is happening on the Ausone road."

"*What* is happening?" he demanded, descending

the stairs.

She kept pace with him, one hand following the stair rail:

"There are so many people and carts and sheep and cattle, all going south. And just now two batteries of artillery went the other way toward Ausone. They were going at a very fast trot—with gendarmes galloping ahead to warn the people to make room——"

"When did you see this?"

"Now, out of that window as I stood knocking at your door."

"All right," he said briefly, picking up the telephone. "Are you there, Sister Eila? Yes; it is Warner speaking."

"Mr. Warner, where can I communicate with Captain Halkett?"

"I don't know, Sister."

"Could you find out?"

"I haven't any idea. He has not written me since he left."

"He left no address with you?"

"None. I don't imagine he knew where he could be found. Is it anything important?"

"Yes. I don't know what to do. There is an Englishman—a soldier—who has been hurt and who says he must send word to Captain Halkett. Could you come to the school?"

"Of course. When?"

"Just as soon as you can. I am so sorry to awaken you at such an hour——"

"It's quite all right, Sister. I'll dress and go at once.... And tell me, are there a lot of people passing southward by the school?"

"Oh, yes, Mr. Warner, ever since dawn. Everyone is leaving Ausone and the villages along the Récollette.... I must not use the telephone any longer. I had permission to use it only because the business was of a military nature. Come as soon as you can ——"

The connection was abruptly broken—probably by some officer in control.

Warner rose; Philippa had vanished. He walked out to the music room, opened the long windows, and stepped through them to the south terrace.

The muffled roll of the cannonade filled his ears. Except for that dominating and unbroken monotone, the sunrise world was very still, and mist still veiled the glitter in the east.

But below in the valley of the Récollette, the road lay perfectly distinct in the clear, untinted and transparent light of early dawn.

Along it people and vehicles swarmed, moving south—an unending stream of humanity in pairs, in family groups, their arms filled with packages, parcels, bundles tied up in sheets, and bedquilts.

Peasant carts piled with dingy household effects bumped and jolted along; farm wagons full of

bedding, on which huddled entire families clasping in their arms cheap wooden clocks, earthen bowls, birdcages, flowerpots, perhaps a kitten or a puppy; and there was every type of vehicle to be seen—the *charrette à bras*, the *tombereau* dragged by hand, dilapidated cabriolets, wheelbarrows, even baby carriages full of pots and pans.

Here and there some horse, useless for military purposes, strained under a swaying load, led by the head; sometimes a bullock was harnessed with a donkey.

Companies of sheep dotted the highway here and there, piloted by boys and wise-looking, shaggy dogs; there were dusty herds of cattle, too, inclined to leisurely straying but goaded continually into an unwilling trot by the young girls who conducted them. On the river, too, boats were passing south, piled with bedding and with children, the mother or father of the brood doing the rowing or poling.

The quarry road on the other side of the river was too dusty and too far away to permit a distinct view of what was passing there. Without the help of his field glasses, Warner merely conjectured that cavalry were moving northward through the dust that hung along the river bank.

But the spectacle on the Ausone road below was ominous enough. The northern countryside was in flight; towns and villages were emptying themselves southward; and the exodus had merely begun.

He went back to his room, shaved, bathed, dressed in knickerbockers and Norfolk, and, scribbling a note for Madame de Moidrey, pinned it to his door as he closed it behind him.

On his way through the lower hall, somebody called him softly, and he saw Philippa in the music room, carrying a tray.

"Did you think I was going to let you go out without your breakfast?" she asked, smiling. "I have prepared coffee for us both, you see."

He thanked her, took the tray, and carried it out to the terrace.

There, as the sun rose above the bank of mist and flashed out over miles of dewy country, they had their breakfast together—a new-laid egg, a bowl of café-au-lait, new butter and fresh rolls.

"May I go with you?" asked the girl.

"Why—yes, if you care to——"

She said seriously:

"I don't quite like to have you go alone on that road, with so much confusion and the air heavy with the cannonade——"

His quick laughter checked her.

"You funny, absurd, sweet little thing!" he said, still laughing. "Do you expect to spend the remainder of your life in seeing that I don't get into mischief?"

"If you'll let me," she said with a faint smile.

"Very well, Philippa; come along!" He held out his hand, laughing; the girl clasped it, a half

humorous, half reproachful expression in her grey eyes.

"I don't mind your laughing, as long as you let me be with you," she said.

"Why, Philippa!" he said gayly. "What possesses you to be afraid that anything is likely to happen to me?"

"I don't know what it is," she replied seriously. "I seem to be afraid of losing you. Let me be with you —if it does not annoy you."

"You dear child, of course it doesn't annoy me. Only I don't want you to become morbid over the very nicest and frankest of friendships."

They were passing the garage now; he dropped her hand, asked her to wait for him a moment, turned into the service drive, went toward the stable. A sleepy groom responded to the bell, unlocked the doors, and fetched the key to the harness room.

Warner said to the groom:

"Give that fellow in there his breakfast and turn him loose. Tell him I'll kill him if I ever again catch him hanging around here."

The groom grinned and touched his cap, and Warner turned on his heel and rejoined Philippa.

They had to awaken the old lodge keeper, who pulled the chain from where he lay in bed.

Through the wicket and across the road they went, over a stile, and out across country where the fields flashed with dew and the last shreds of mist

drifted high among the trees of the woods which they skirted.

Philippa wore her peasant dress—scarlet waist and skirt with the full, fine chemisette; and on her chestnut hair the close little bonnet of black velvet—called *bonnet à quartiers* or *bonnet de béguin*—an enchanting little headdress which became her so wonderfully that Warner found himself glancing at her again and again, wondering whether the girl's beauty was growing day by day, or whether he had never been properly awake to it.

Her own unconsciousness of herself was the bewitching part of her—nothing of that sort spoiled the free carriage of her slender, flexible body, of the lovely head carried daintily, of the grey eyes so clear, so intelligent, so candid, so sweet under the black lashes that fringed them.

"Very wonderful," he said aloud, unthinking.

"What?" asked Philippa.

He reddened and laughed:

"You—for purposes of a painter," he said. "I think, if you don't mind, I shall start a portrait of you when we return. I promised Madame de Moidrey, you know."

Philippa smiled:

"Do you really suppose she will hang it in that beautiful house of hers—there among all those wonderful and stately portraits? Wouldn't that be too much honor—to be placed with such great ladies

——"

"The dead De Moidreys in their frames need not worry, Philippa. If I paint you as you are, the honor of your presence will be entirely theirs."

"Are you laughing at me?"

He looked up sharply; the girl's face was serious and rather pale.

They were traversing a corner of a woodland where young birches clustered, slim and silvery under their canopy of green which as yet had not changed to royal gold.

He picked up her hand as they emerged into the sunlight of a field, raised it, and touched his lips to the delicate fingers.

It was his answer; and the girl realized instantly what the old-fashioned salute of respect conveyed; and her fingers clung to his hand.

"Jim," she said unsteadily, "if you knew—if you only could realize what you have done for me—what you are doing for me every moment I am with you—by your kindness, your gentleness, your generous belief in me—what miracles you accomplish by the very tones of your voice when you speak to me—by your good, kind smile of encouragement—by your quiet patience with me——"

Her voice broke childishly, and she bent her head and took possession of his arm, holding to it tightly and in silence.

Surprised and moved by her emotion, he found

nothing to say for a moment—did not seem to know quite how to respond to the impulsive gratitude so sincerely exaggerated, so prettily expressed.

Finally he said:

"Philippa, I have nothing to teach you—much to learn from you. Whoever you are, you need no patronage from anybody, no allowances, no concessions, no excuses. For I never knew a cleaner, braver, sweeter character than is yours, Philippa—nor a soul more modest, more simple and sincere. What does it matter how you come by it—whether God gave it, or whether what you are has been evolved by race—by generations of gentle breeding?

"We don't know; and *I*, for one, don't care—except for any satisfaction or consolation it might afford you to know who you really are.

"But, for me, I have learned enough to satisfy myself. And I have never known a lovelier character than is yours, Philippa; nor a nobler one."

She continued walking beside him, clinging very tightly to one of his arms, her head lowered under its velvet bonnet.

When she looked up at last, her eyes were wet with tears; she smiled and, loosening her clasp, stretched out her hand for his handkerchief.

"The second time I have borrowed from you," she managed to say. "Do you remember—in the boat?"

He laughed, greatly relieved that the tense

constraint was broken—that the tension of his own emotion was relaxed. For he had become intensely serious with the girl—how serious and how deeply in earnest he now began to realize. And whether his own ardent tribute to her had awakened him, while offering it, to all that he was praising, or whether he had already discovered by cooler research all that he now found admirable in her, he did not know.

They came to a hedge; she returned his handkerchief, placed her hand in his, mounted the stile with lithe grace, and he climbed up beside her.

Below them ran the Ausone road, grey with hanging dust; and through the floating cloud tramped the fugitives from the north—old men, old women, girls, little children, struggling onward under their burdens, trudging doggedly, silently southward.

Philippa uttered an exclamation of pity as a man passed wheeling a crippled child in a wheelbarrow, guiding it carefully along beside a herd of cattle which seemed very difficult to manage.

For a few minutes they stood there, watching the sad procession defiling at their feet, then Warner jumped down to the high, grassy bank, lifted Philippa to the ground—which was not necessary, although he seemed to think so, and the girl thanked him very sweetly—and then they went forward along the hedge of *aubépine* until, around the curve of the road just ahead, he caught sight of the school.

"We can enter by the rear and keep out of that crowd," he said to Philippa. "You don't know Sister Eila, do you?"

"No."

"Nor Sister Félicité?"

"No, Jim. Are they nuns?"

"Sisters of Saint Vincent de Paul. Here is the garden gate. We can go through the kitchen."

But before they had traversed the little vegetable garden, Sister Eila came to the kitchen door.

Warner said:

"Sister Eila, I am so glad that you are to know my friend, Mademoiselle Philippa Wildresse, who, as I am, is a guest of Madame de Moidrey at the Château."

Sister Eila came forward, her clear eyes on Philippa, took the girl's offered hand in both of hers, stood silent for a moment, then turned to Warner.

"It was most kind of you to bring her, Mr. Warner. I hope that we shall become friends—" turning to Philippa—"if you also wish it."

Philippa's grey eyes looked steadily at Sister Eila.

"Yes, I do," she said in a low voice.

Sister Félicité appeared from the schoolroom, greeting and presentation were made, and then the elder Sister took Philippa away to the schoolroom where recitations were in progress; and Sister Eila led Warner through the kitchen, up the uncarpeted

stairs, and into a room where, on an iron bed, a man lay.

He was young, fair-haired, and very pallid under his bandage, and the eyes he turned on Warner as he entered were the eyes of a sick man.

Sister Eila seated herself on a stool which stood beside the bed; Warner drew up the only other chair and sat down.

The young man turned his hollow eyes from Warner and looked questioningly at Sister Eila.

"Yes," she said, "this is Mr. Warner, an American, who is Mr. Halkett's friend. You may trust him; Mr. Halkett trusted him."

Warner said with a smile, and leaning toward the sick man:

"Is there anything I can do for you? Halkett and I became the very best of friends. I should be very glad of the opportunity to do anything for his friends —" he hesitated, smiled again—"or for any British officer."

"I'm Gray," said the man on the bed, in a weak voice.

"I think Halkett was expecting somebody named Gray the first night he spent at the Saïs inn. Was it you?"

"Yes."

"I think he telephoned you."

"Yes. You are Mr. Warner?"

"I am."

"Halkett spoke of you—your kindness."

"Oh, it was nothing——"

"I know what it was," said Gray quietly. "How much did Halkett tell you?"

"About what?"

"About me."

"Very little, Mr. Gray. I understood that you were to come to Saïs on a motor cycle, carrying with you a very important paper. Halkett waited day after day. He seemed to be under a very great strain. All he said to me was that something serious must have happened to you, because the paper you carried was necessary to supplement the one he carried."

"And Halkett has gone!"

"Yes. But somehow or other he got possession of the paper you had in your charge—or a copy of it."

Gray's youthful face quivered with excitement.

"How did he get it?" he asked.

"A messenger came. Halkett was alone. The messenger pretended to come from you, and he gained Halkett's confidence by giving him the paper you carried, or a copy of it.

"The moment Halkett was off his guard, the fellow knocked him insensible, and would have robbed him of both papers if a young girl—a Miss Wildresse—had not tackled the fellow, and held him off with magnificent pluck until I came in and found what was going on. Then the fellow cleared out—got clean away, I regret to say. That is how the thing

happened. I'm very glad to be able to reassure you, Mr. Gray."

"Thanks, awfully. It's been hell not to know. You see, I was hurt; the beggars got me. I've been lying in a cottage down the road a bit—I don't know where. I was badly knocked out—knocked silly, you know—fever and all that.... I woke up the other day. Couldn't get the people to stir—tried to make 'em hunt up Halkett. They were just stupid—kind, but stupid. Finally one of their kiddies, who comes to school here, told Sister Eila that there was a sick *Anglais* in his daddy's cottage—" He looked up at her as he spoke and she smiled. "—And Sister Eila, being all kinds of an angel of mercy, came all the way there to investigate.... And she wheeled me back here in a *charette*! What do you think of that, Mr. Warner?"

"He was in *such* a state, poor boy!" said Sister Eila. "Just think, Mr. Warner! They had not even washed him when they put on their dreadful poultices—good, kind, ignorant folk that they are! So of course I insisted on bringing him here where Sister Félicité and I could give him proper attention."

Gray smiled tremulously:

"I've been bathed, cleansed, patched, mended, beautifully bandaged, fed, and spoiled! I don't know what you think of the Grey Sisters, but I know what I think."

"There's no difference of opinion in the world

concerning them," said Warner, and Sister Eila smiled and blushed and held up an admonitory finger:

"It is I who am being spoiled, gentlemen." Then, very seriously to Warner: "Have you seen the pitiable procession which has been passing along the Ausone road since before dawn? Is it not heartbreaking, Mr. Warner? What is happening in the north, that all these poor people come hurrying southward? I thought the cannonade was from our own forts."

Gray looked up at him curiously.

"I don't yet know what is happening north of Ausone," said Warner quietly. "There were three fires burning last night. I think they were villages in flames. But it was far to the north. The Ausone Fort was not engaged—except when an aëroplane came within range. Then they used their high-angle guns."

There was a silence. Listening, Warner could hear the cannonade distinctly above the shuffle of feet and the childish singsong of recitation in the schoolroom underneath.

Presently, glancing up, he caught Sister Eila's eye, rose, and followed her to the window.

"I don't know what to do," she said. "Sister Félicité is going to try to keep the children here, but a gendarme came day before yesterday, saying that the school might be required for a military hospital, and that the children were to remain at home. I have telephoned to Ausone; I have telegraphed to the rue

de Bac; I have done all I could do. But I am directed, from the rue de Bac, to prepare for field service, at the front. And from Ausone they telephone Sister Félicité that she may keep the children until the last moment, but that, when needed, she must turn over our school to the military authorities. And so, Mr. Warner, what am I to do with that poor boy over there? Because, if I go away, Sister Félicité cannot properly attend to him and care for the children, too."

Warner stood thinking for a moment. Then:

"Could you get me permission to use your telephone?" he asked.

"Only for military purposes. It is the rule now."

Warner walked over to Gray:

"You are a British officer, I take it."

"Yes."

"Captain?"

"Yes."

Sister Eila, listening, understood and took Warner to the telephone. For a few moments he heard her soft voice in conversation with the military operator, then she beckoned him and he gave the number he desired and waited.

Presently he got the Château des Oiseaux, and after a few moments Madame de Moidrey came to the telephone.

"Ethra," he said, "would you care to be hospitable to a British officer who has been injured?"

"Certainly! Where is he?"

"At Sister Eila's school. Is there anything left to harness up and send for him?"

"Yes; there is a donkey and a basket wagon. I'll have a groom take it over at once. Is the officer badly hurt?"

"I don't know. I think he merely needs bandaging and feeding. He's the comrade of my friend, Captain Halkett. Gray is his name, and he's a captain or something or other. May I tell him that you will receive him?"

"Of course, Jim. You need not have asked; you could have brought him here immediately."

The military operator cut in:

"A thousand thanks to Madame la Comtesse for her kindness to our allies, the English! Madame, I regret, very much that I must switch off——" click!

Warner smiled and turned to Sister Eila:

"Madame de Moidrey takes him!"

"I am so thankful! I will go up and make him ready."

"What is the matter with him?"

"Think of it! He was coming on his motor cycle full speed toward Saïs through the night, when right ahead he saw a car drawn up beside the road, and four men standing in it with pistols aimed at him. Only one bullet hit him, making a deep furrow over his temple. He remembers losing control of the motor cycle, of being hurled through the air. Then,

evidently some time afterward, he found himself struggling under a thin covering of dirt and sticks and lumps of sod—fighting for air, pushing, creeping, crawling out of the hasty and shallow grave where they had flung him beside his ruined motor cycle. He thinks that the frame of the motor cycle kept him from being suffocated by the sod and earth piled over him.

"It was early morning; a peasant was breaking ground in another field not far away, and Mr. Gray managed to crawl near enough to make the man hear. That is all he remembers until he regained consciousness once more in the man's cottage."

"Good heavens, what a ghastly experience!" muttered Warner.

"It is dreadful. If they knew that his heart still beat, it was inhuman of them to do such a thing as that. But perhaps they considered him dead. He may have appeared so. I have had to bandage both arms and both knees where he was hurled over the ground when he fell. He has a fracture of the left wrist which is doing nicely, and two broken ribs are mending without trouble. As for the scar on his temple, it is nearly closed now. I think all will be well with him. Now, I shall go and prepare him for his little journey."

At the foot of the stairs she paused, turned slowly to Warner, and he thought her lovely face had become somewhat pale.

"I think you said over the telephone that you have had no word from Mr. Halkett?"

"Not a word, Sister Eila."

"Thank you."

CHAPTER XXVII

The journey back along the Ausone road was a slow and stifling one. Warner, walking on the left, led the donkey by the head; Philippa moved beside the basket cart on the right. In the cart sat the wounded Englishman, his bandaged head lying on Sister Eila's shoulder.

Through the heavy, suffocating cloud of dust, group after group of fugitives loomed up ahead, coming toward them, parting right and left to let the basket cart and the little, plodding donkey pass through. Sheep were driven aside for them; cattle swung out into the roadside ditches on either hand, halting there with stupid heads turned toward them while the basket cart took right of way.

Once, from the toiling procession behind them, distant shouts arose, and the ground began to quiver and shake; and Warner called out a sharp warning to Philippa and drew the donkey cart out among the dusty weeds of the ditch, while everywhere ahead of them people, cattle, vehicles, were being hurriedly

turned out and crowded aside along the grassy roadside gullies.

Louder grew the clamour behind; heavier the jarring of the ground; a mounted gendarme—a *maréchal de logis*—appeared, alternately cantering and galloping his superb horse, and sweeping the crowds aside with vigorous gestures of his white-gloved hand.

Behind him trotted six more gendarmes, sabers sheathed, their single rank stretching the entire width of the road from ditch to ditch. And behind these, in a writhing storm of dust and flying gravel, came the field artillery on a swift, swinging trot, drivers erect in their saddles, képis strapped tight, sun-scorched faces sweating under masks of dust.

Tan-colored limbers, guns, caissons drawn by powerful, dust-whitened teams, rushed past thudding and clanking, escorted by galloping pelotons of artillerymen armed with saber and carbine, flanked by smart officers flashing all over cherry red and gold.

Battery after battery, with forges and wagons, passed; a fanion with trumpeters sped by; a squadron of remount cavalry in clearer blue jackets followed, then came two squadrons of galloping dragoon lancers, their steel helmets covered with brown holland slips, and the pennons streaming wildly from their lance heads. A gendarme or two galloped in the rear, mere ghosts in the driving dust. And the flying

column had passed.

Sister Eila, covering Gray's mouth and nose with her grey-blue sleeve, bowed her head and closed her eyes while the storm of dust and pebbles lasted; then Warner nodded to Philippa, and between them they led out the donkey cart once more and pushed slowly ahead into the oncoming torrent of vehicles—cattle, men, women, and children.

It was nearly noon when they arrived at the Château des Oiseaux. A footman aided him to carry Gray upstairs to the room prepared for him.

"Are you all right?" asked Warner doubtfully.

Gray opened his haggard eyes.

"All right, thanks.... May I have a little water, if it's not too much trouble——"

Sister Eila entered the room with a carafe and some lemons; and Warner withdrew.

In the hallway below he encountered Madame de Moidrey and Peggy Brooks in earnest consultation with the village physician—an old man crippled from 1870, and wearing the Legion and an empty sleeve.

Warner shook hands with Dr. Senlis and told him what he knew of Gray's condition. Sister Eila came down presently and everybody greeted her with a warmth which unmistakably revealed her status in Saïs.

Presently she went upstairs again with Dr. Senlis. Later the Countess went up. Peggy and Philippa had gone out to the south terrace where the

reverberation of the cannonade was now continually shaking the windows, and where, beyond, Ausone, a dark band of smoke stretched like a rampart across the northern sky.

As Warner stood thinking, listening to the dull shock of the concussions rolling in toward them on the wind from the north, the footman, Vilmar, approached him.

"Pardon, Monsieur Warner, but there is a frightful *type* hanging about whom it seems impossible to drive away——"

"What!" said Warner angrily.

"Monsieur, I have hustled him from the terrace several times; I have summoned aid from my fellow domestics; the chauffeur, Vignier, chases him with frequency into the shrubbery; Maurice and the lad, Henri, pursue him with horsewhips——"

"Is it that *voyou* who is all over bandages?" demanded Warner incredulously.

"It is, Monsieur——"

Out of sheer contempt for the creature and for all his species, Warner had ordered him to be fed and turned loose. And here he was, back again, hanging around!

"Where is he?"

"He dodged into the shrubbery across the lawn."

The effontery of Asticot amazed Warner. With an impatient gesture he turned on his heel to traverse the lawn. And at the same moment Asticot

emerged from the bushes bordering it.

His bruised and ratty eyes blinked nervously; his battered *casquette de marlou* was in his hand; his knees, and his teeth also, seemed inclined to smite together. Plainly, he was terrified; and when Warner walked swiftly toward him across the lawn, the creature uttered a sort of stifled squeak.

"Asticot," said Warner, in pleasant, even tones, "I told the servants to feed you and turn you loose. Also, I left word that I'd kill you the next time I caught you hanging around here. Did they give you that message?"

"M-m'sieu'——"

"Did they?"

"Alas!"

"Then why are you still prowling in this vicinity? Do you *want* to be killed?"

A suppressed howl escaped the bandaged ruffian.

"I do not desire to go away from M'sieu'! No! I desire to remain under his powerful protection——"

"What!"

"I desire to serve M'sieu'—to dedicate my life to the service of M'sieu', my patron, powerful and terrible. I have need to render him homage—I, Asticot, grateful and affectionate——" He blubbered sentimentally, squirming like a kicked and abject dog.

Warner, astonished, stared at the writhing

ruffian for a few moments, then he burst into a laugh.

"Why, you Parisian sewer rat," he said, "do you imagine that I could have any use for *you*?"

"M'sieu'! I ask as wages only a crust, a pallet of straw in some corner, and a few pennies which will enable me to 'fry a cigarette' when I am lonely——"

"I don't want you!" repeated Warner, disgusted, but much amused. "Why do you imagine that I have any employment to offer a cutthroat?"

"There is le Père Wildresse," replied Asticot, naïvely.

"Do you imagine I expect to hire somebody to murder him?"

"M'sieu'—it is but natural."

Warner's laughter died out and his expression altered.

"Come, Asticot, cut away," he said quietly, "or I shall become angry!"

"M'sieu'! Don't drive me away!" he whined. "I know how to wash brushes in black soap——"

"What!"

"Also, I have learned how to stretch *toiles* and make *chassis*. I have served in Biribi. My lieutenant amused himself by painting pictures of camels and palms and the setting sun, very red and as full of rays as a porcupine——"

"I don't *want* you, Asticot! It is noon, now. I shall tell them at the stables to give you a crust and a

bowl of soup. After you have sufficiently stuffed yourself, go quietly away wherever you belong, and don't come back——"

"M'sieu'! I entertain a deep affection for M'sieu'——"

"Go to the devil!" said Warner wearily, and walked back to the house. Here he gave the footman culinary instructions to transmit to the kitchen-maid, who, in turn, should see that something to eat was sent to the stables for Asticot.

Then he walked through the house to the northern terrace, where Philippa and Peggy sat sewing and looking out across the valley toward the smoky panorama in the north. His field glasses lay on the parapet, and he picked them up and adjusted them to his vision.

"Isly is burning, and Rosales, and the great farm of Le Pigeonnier," remarked Peggy.

"Who says so?"

"Mathilde. The postman told her. He heard it in Ausone from the soldiers. That is where the fighting is, at Isly. The trains leaving Ausone are loaded with soldiers going north. It appears that matters are progressing very well for us."

Warner said nothing. With two French towns burning on the horizon, the great farm of Le Pigeonnier on fire, and the cannonade steadily becoming more distinct, he was not at all certain that everything promised well for Ausone and Saïs and

the valley of the Récollette.

Through his glasses he could see the beautiful spire of Sainte Cassilda in Ausone. Beyond, where the wooded, conical hill rose from the rolling plain as though it were an enormous artificial mound, nothing of the fort was visible.

But farther away, beyond the river, he could see trains crawling across the landscape—see smoke trailing from locomotives; farther still only the green and gold of woods and grain fields stretched away, growing vaguer and dimmer until the wall of smoke obscured them and blotted the earth from view.

Madame de Moidrey appeared at the doorway behind them.

"They have just telephoned from Ausone to ask whether we can take in wounded, if necessary," she said calmly. "They are to send material for fifty beds this evening. Sister Eila and Dr. Senlis have offered to remain for the present. I think everybody will have to help."

Philippa, who had risen, came toward her.

"I don't mind where I sleep," she said, "if I can only be of any use——"

"You are not going to be disturbed, dear—not at present, anyway." And to Peggy: "I have told them to open the east wing and air the gallery and the rooms on both the upper floors. There is room for two hundred beds in the east wing. Vignier has gone to turn on the water, and I shall have the parquet and

windows thoroughly cleaned and the stair carpets taken out of storage and laid down."

"Is there anything I can do?" asked Warner.

"Nothing for any of us to do so far. When the beds arrive, I shall have them set up and ready, that's all. Peggy, if the servants require any further instructions, tell them what to do. Sister Eila is inspecting the east wing and I must return to Mr. Gray."

"How is Gray?" asked Warner.

"Very much afraid that he is making us extra trouble. He is so patient, so considerate—really a most charming man.

"I have an idea that the cannonade is making him very restless. He tries not to show it. He lies there very quietly, asking for nothing, most grateful for the slightest attention. I have been giving him the medicine Dr. Senlis prescribed and reading the paper to him between doses."

"Couldn't I do that?" began Peggy, but Madame de Moidrey shook her pretty head hastily and went away to inspect her Englishman, for whom luncheon was being prepared on a tray.

Luncheon was served on the terrace for the others. It was a rather silent affair: they ate with the distant rumble of cannon in their ears and their eyes turning ever toward the north where that impenetrable wall of smoke masked the horizon from east to west.

"I think I shall go over to Ausone," remarked Warner.

Philippa looked up in silence.

"Why?" inquired Peggy.

"Because," he replied, "I have a couple of dozen pictures and sketches in storage at the Boule d'Argent, and I think I might as well get them and ship them to my Paris studio."

"Do you really suppose there is any danger that ——"

"No," he interrupted, smilingly, "but you know how finicky and panicky a painter is. I think I'll take a stroll after luncheon and bring back my canvases —" he turned to Philippa—"if I may take your punt for the purpose?"

"Certainly. I'll pole you up to Ausone——"

"You will do nothing of the sort, thank you!" he retorted, laughing.

"Is there any danger?" asked Peggy.

"Not the slightest. But I had rather that Philippa remained here."

Peggy passed her arm around Philippa's shoulders.

"He doesn't want you, darling, but I do! Remain where you're appreciated and I'll take you up presently to see that exceedingly nice-looking Englishman."

Philippa's smile was a little forced; she looked up at Warner every now and then, curiously,

questioningly, even reproachfully.

When he had pretended long enough not to be aware of it, he turned and looked at her and laughed. And after Peggy had risen and entered the house, he said:

"Philippa, I don't care to have you any nearer that wall of smoke out yonder than you are at present. That's the only reason I don't want you to go to Ausone in the punt with me."

"You know," she said, "that I might just as well be where you are all the time."

"Why?"

"Is it necessary for me to tell you that if anything happens to you it might as well happen to me at the same time?"

"Nonsense, Philippa——"

"You know it is so," she said quietly.

He looked at the smoke, glanced at her, rose and walked to the door, and, turning abruptly, came back to where she was seated.

"That won't do," he said bluntly. "Nobody should be as vital to you as that. Life and happiness are beginning for you. Both must be independent of circumstances and individuals. Everything already lies before you, Philippa—youth, attainment, the serenity and the happiness of opportunity heretofore denied you. Fulfillment does not depend on others; the interest in living and the reason for living depends on personal faith, resolution, and endeavor,

not on what accidents affect other lives around you. Life should be lived thoroughly and completely to the end, industriously, vigorously, and with a courage for enjoyment never faltering. Your life is *yours*. Live it! Find in it the sheer happiness of living. No matter what befalls others, no matter who these others may be, it is your business in life to go on living, to go on discovering reasons for living, to go on desiring to live, and to find in living the highest happiness in the world—the satisfaction of a duty thoroughly accomplished!"

He was smiling and rather flushed when he ended his emphatic sermon. The girl beside him had listened with drooping head, but her grey eyes were raised to his from time to time.

And now that he had finished expounding his strenuous and masculine logic, she turned away and leaned on the parapet looking down at the tops of the forest trees below.

He came over and rested on the stone balustrade beside her.

"Am I not right?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Then you understand that, whatever may happen to anybody else, life always presents the same noble challenge to you?"

"Yes.... A bird, shot through the breast, must go on fighting for breath as long as its heart beats.... I should do the same—if anything happened to you."

The hot color suddenly burnt his face. He made no comment—found none to make. Her transparent candor had silenced him utterly; and he found himself troubled, mute, and profoundly moved by her innocent avowal of devotion.

She looked around at him after a while.

"That is what you meant, isn't it?"

He shook his head slightly. He could scarcely presume to criticize her or instruct her concerning the mysteries of her own heart. Those intimate, shadowy, and virginal depths were exempt from the rule of reason. Neither logic nor motive was in control there; instinct alone reigned.

No, he had nothing more to say to her; nothing definite to say to himself. A haunting and troubled perplexity possessed his mind; and a deeper, duller, and obscure wonder that the young heart in her, and the youthful faith that filled it, had been so quietly, so fearlessly surrendered to his keeping.

He had always supposed that his experience, his years, his clear thinking and humorously incredulous mind rendered him safe from any emotional sentiment not directly connected with his profession.

The fact that women were inclined to like him had made him unconsciously wary, even amiably skeptical. Outside of a few friendships he had never known more than a passing fancy for any woman—a sentiment always partly humorous, an emotion always more or less amused. His preferences were as

light as the jests he made of them, his interest as ephemeral as it was superficial—aside from his several friendships with women, or where women were intimately concerned with his work.

The swiftness with which acquaintance had become friendship between Philippa and himself had disturbed and puzzled him. That, like a witch-flower, it had opened over night into full blossom, he seemed to realize, even admitted to himself. But already it seemed to have become as important, as established, as older friendships. And more than that, day by day its responsibilities seemed to multiply and grow heavier and more serious.

He thought of these things as he leaned on the stone balustrade there beside Philippa. What she might be thinking of remained to him a mystery impenetrable, for she had passed one arm through his and her cheek rested lightly against his shoulder, and her grey eyes, brooding, seemed lost in the depths of the distant smoke.

And all the while she was saying in her sweet, serene way:

"You will let me go with you, won't you? It would be very agreeable on the river this afternoon. Such a pleasure you could not sensibly deny me. Besides, the punt is mine, Jim. I don't let anybody charter it unless captain and crew are included. I am, naturally, the captain. Ariadne is the crew. If you desire to engage a passage to Ausone——"

"Philippa, you little tyrant, do you mean to refuse me the *Lys*?"

"Come down to the river and look her over," she said, drawing him away from the balustrade. "And on the way you may get the pole from the garage."

He was inclined to demur, but she had her way; and ten minutes later they were walking across the fields, he with the pole across his shoulder, she moving lightly and happily beside him, her hair in two braids and the velvet strings of the bonnet fluttering under her rounded chin.

The Ausone road lay white and deserted; the last fugitive from the north had passed. Nor were there any more skiffs or laden boats on the river, nor any signs of life on the quarry road. All was still and sunny and silent; the Récollette slipped along, clear and silvery, between green banks; to the east the calm blue hills stretched away vague with haze; swallows soared and dipped, starring the glass of the stream as though rising fish were breaking its serene surface. But the still air and cobalt sky were heavy with the cannonade, making the stillness of the sun-drenched world almost uncanny.

CHAPTER XXVIII

Philippa, curled up in the punt, had fashioned for

herself a chaplet of river lilies. The white blossoms wreathing the black velvet *bonnet à quartiers*, and a huge bouquet of the lovely flowers which she carried in her hand gave a bridal aspect to the affair, heightened presently when she began to festoon the gunwales with lilies and scented rushes from the sedge, as they slipped along inshore to avoid the stronger current of midstream.

The air vibrated and hummed with the unbroken rolling of the bombardment; there was not a cloud in the calm sky; no birds sang and few, except the darting swallows of the Récollette, were on the wing at all; but everywhere dragon flies glittered, level-winged, poised in mid-air, or darted and hovered among the reeds with a faint, fairy-like clash of gauzy wings.

The sound of the cannonade grew so much more distinct as they drew near the environs of Ausone that, to Warner, the increase in volume and the jar of concussion seemed scarcely due alone to their approach. Rather it appeared as though the distant reverberations were very gradually rolling toward them; and before they had poled within sight of the outskirts of the town Warner said to Philippa:

"It sounds to me as though the whole business were miles nearer than the mere distance we have come. And that is not an encouraging suggestion, either."

"Could it be the wind which is carrying it toward

us?"

"There is very little wind in those tree tops up there." He shrugged, poled ahead, not apprehensive, yet conscious that Philippa had no business in a town from the vicinity of which such ominous sounds could be heard so distinctly.

Few people were moving on the Ausone road, merely a belated group or two trudging southward. Except for a distant cavalry patrol riding slowly along the quarry road across the river, the country appeared to be empty of military movement. As they advanced upstream, one fact became apparent; the fugitives who had passed through Saïs that morning had not come from the scattered hamlets and cottages along the Récollette. They could see women washing linen along the river banks and hanging out the wash on clotheslines. Old men and children fished tranquilly from the sterns of skiffs pulled up among the rushes; cattle stood knee-deep in the limpid stream under the fringe of trees; a farmer who had cut his wheat and barley had already begun threshing. It was evident that the exodus from the north was not, so far, affecting Ausone.

When their punt glided past the great willow tree where the Impasse d'Alcyon terminated at the river bank, Warner, swinging his pole level, pointed in silence and looked at Philippa. She smiled interrogatively in response.

"That's where Halkett and I landed when we

came to find you," he said.

Then she comprehended and the smile faded from her lips.

Around the bend lay the tree-shaded lawn of the Café Biribi. They gazed at it fixedly and in silence, as they shot swiftly past. There was no sign of life there; the beds of cannas and geraniums lay all ablaze in the sun; the windows of the building were closed, the blinds lowered; every gayly-painted rowboat had been pulled up on the landing and turned keel upward. A solitary swan sailed along close inshore, probing the shallows with his brilliant scarlet beak.

Then, as they left the deserted scene of their first meeting, and as the pretty stone bridge of the Place d'Ausone came into sight beyond, spanning the river in a single, silver-grey arch, Warner looked up along the steep and mossy quay wall, and saw, above him, a line sentinel, fully equipped, lounging on the parapet, watching them. Two others paced the bridge.

"Halte là! Au large!" called out the sentinel. "The Pont d'Ausone is mined."

Leaning on his pole and holding the punt against the current, Warner called out:

"Is it permitted to land, soldier?"

"It is not forbidden," replied the soldier. "But you must not approach the bridge any nearer. There are wires under water."

"I have business in Ausone at the Boule

d'Argent!" explained Warner. "Is it all right for us to go there?"

"If you remain there with Madame over night you must inscribe yourself with the police and stay indoors after nine without lights," replied the sentinel. It was evident that he took the chaplet of river lilies for a bridal wreath, and that the young bride's beauty dazzled him. He was very young, and he blushed when Philippa looked up laughingly and thanked him as she put off her white chaplet.

Warner tied the skiff to a rusty ring; Philippa sprang ashore; and they mounted the stone steps, arm in arm together. As they passed the sentinel she drew a lily from her bouquet.

"*Bonne chance*, soldier of France!" she murmured, dropping the white blossom into his sunburnt hand; and clasping Warner's arm she passed lightly on into the square, hugging her bouquet to her breast.

The aspect of the town, from the quay wall above, seemed to have changed very little. Except on fête days the Place d'Ausone, or market square, was never animated. A few people moved about it now, as usual; a few men sat sipping their bitters on the terrace of the Café Biribi; children played under the trees by the river wall; old women knitted; a few aged anglers, forbidden the bridge, dozed on the quay parapets, while their brilliant scarlet quills trailed in the pools below.

True, there were no idle soldiers to be seen

strolling in couples or dawdling on benches. A patrol of *chasseurs à cheval*, in their pale blue jackets and black "tresses," walked their wiry horses across the square. Also, near the horse fountain, three anti-aircraft guns stood in the sunshine, their lean muzzles tilted high, the cannoniers lying on their blankets around them, and a single sentinel on guard, pacing the Place with his piece shouldered. At the further end of the rue d'Auros, where it enters the boulevard by the Church of Sainte Cassilda, cavalry were moving; and more sky artillery was visible in front of the church plaza. Otherwise the presence of troops was not noticeable in Ausone town.

Nor were Philippa and Warner particularly noticed or remarked, the girl's provincial costume being a familiar sight in the region from Saïs to Dreslin. In fact, Warner's knickers and Norfolk excited the only attention, and every now and then some man passing, and taking him for English, lifted his hat in cordial salutation to a comrade of an allied nation.

But for all the absence of animation and excitement in the Ausone streets, the deepening thunder of the cannonade began to preoccupy Warner; and finally he inquired what it signified of a passing line soldier, who stopped courteously and saluted.

"C'est le fort d'Ausone qui donne, Monsieur," he

explained, bowing slightly to Philippa as he spoke.

"What!" exclaimed Warner. "Is the Ausone fort firing?"

"Since two hours, Monsieur. It would appear that affairs are warming up out there."

"What does that mean?"

"*Dame*—they must see something to fire at," replied the soldier, laughing. "As for us here in the town, we know nothing. We others—we never know anything that happens until it is happening to us."

"From the Château at Saïs," said Warner, "one can see three towns on fire in the north."

"It is more than we soldiers can see from here, Monsieur. Yet we know it must be so, because people from Isly, from Rosales, from Dreslin, have been passing through from the north. They must have passed through Saïs."

"Thousands," nodded Warner.

The soldier saluted; Warner lifted his cap, and he and Philippa entered the Boule d'Argent, where, in a little, lace-curtained dining-room to the left, they seated themselves by the street window and ordered tea and sugar-buns.

The *gérant*, who knew Warner, came up and made a most serious and elaborate bow to Philippa and to the American.

"Ah, Monsieur Warner!" he said. "*Voyez-vous* the Bosches have begun at last! But, God willing, it shall not be 1870 again!"

"It won't be; don't worry, François. The Republic knows how to confront what is coming!"

"Yes. I hope we have learned something. All Frenchmen will do what is possible. As for me, I expect that my class will be called. I shall do my best, Monsieur Warner.... It is a great happiness to know that the English are with us. We must stand by those poor Belgians. Have you heard the news, Monsieur?"

"Nothing since noon."

"Ah! The Bosches are ruining everything with their artillery. Liége, Namur, are crumbling; Louvain has been swept by shells. The great cupola forts are in ruins; everything is on fire; they are shooting the people in their houses, in the streets—the dead lie everywhere—women, children, in the ditches, in the fields, on the highroads. Ah, Monsieur Warner, c'est triste, allez!"

"Where did you hear such things, François?"

"It is already common talk. The noon bulletins of the *Petit Journal* confirm it. They say that our fort is shelling the Uhlans of Guillaume now. They say that the forest of Ausone crawls with them."

A waiter brought their tea; the *gérant* bowed himself out and sent a porter to the lumber room to collect and cord up Warner's canvases.

While Philippa poured their tea, the cups began to rattle in the saucers, and the windows shivered and trembled in the increasing thunder. Twice his

cup slopped over; and he was just lifting it to his lips when suddenly the very floor seemed to jump under them and a tremendous shock rocked the room.

"A big gun in the fort," said Warner, coolly forcing a smile. "I think, Philippa, as soon as you have finished——"

A terrific salvo cut him short. Somewhere he could hear a crashing avalanche of broken glass, prolonged into a tinkling cascade; then came a second's silence, then another splitting roar from the end of the street.

The waiter came in hurriedly, very pale.

"An aëroplane, Monsieur! They are firing at it from the boulevard——"

His words were obliterated in the rush and clatter of horses outside.

Dragoons were galloping up the stony rue d'Auros, squadron on squadron, and behind them rattled three high-angle guns harnessed to teams driven by dragoons.

"Attention there!" shouted an officer, reining in and halting a peloton of horsemen. "Fire at will from your saddles!"

Warner sprang to the window; the street and the market square was full of halted cavalry firing skyward. They had several high-angle guns there too; the ear-splitting detonations became continuous; and all the time the solid earth was shaking under terrible detonations from the fort's cupolas, where

the big cannon were concealed.

From everywhere came the treble clink and tinkle of broken glass; people in the hotel were running to the windows and running away from them; the building itself seemed to sway slightly; dust hung in the air, greying everything.

Warner drew Philippa to him and said calmly, but close to her ear:

"The thing to do is to get out of this at the first opportunity. I had no idea that anything would happen as near——"

His voice was blotted out in a loud report, shouts, a woman screaming, the rumble and tumbling roar of bricks. Another shattering report almost deafened him; the air was filled with whizzing, whining noises; the entire front of a shop diagonally across the street caved in with a crystalline crash of glass, and the cornice above it lurched outward, swayed, crumpled, and descended in a pouring avalanche of bricks and mortar.

Somebody in the hotel lobby shouted:

"An aëroplane is directly over us. They are dropping bombs!"

"Go to the cellar!" cried another.

An officer of gendarmerie came in, followed by a trooper.

"Stay where you are!" he said. "It's safer."

Another explosion sounded, but farther away this time.

"Their Taube is steering toward the fort," continued the same quiet-voiced officer who had spoken. "Don't go out into the streets!"

The uproar in the square had become terrific; high-angle guns poured streams of fire into the sky; dragoons sitting their restless horses fired upward from their saddles; an engine escorted by brass-helmeted pompiers arrived and a stream of water was turned on the debris of the shop across the street, where already pale flames flickered and played over the dusty ruins.

"Somebody has been killed," whispered Philippa in Warner's ear.

He nodded, watching the Red Cross bearers as they hastened up with their stretchers, where the firemen were uncovering something from beneath the heap of smoking debris.

A staff officer, attended by a hussar lancer, and followed by two mounted gendarmes, rode into the street just as the dragoons, forming to whistle signal in column of fours, rode out of the street at a gallop.

There came another clatter of hoofs; an open carriage escorted by six *gendarmes-à-cheval* rolled through the rue d'Auros. In it was a white-haired gentleman wearing a top hat and a tri-colored sash.

"The mayor," nodded Warner, as carriage and escort passed rapidly in the direction of the Hôtel de Ville.

The sky-guns had ceased firing, now; three of

them were limbered up and dragged away toward the Boulevard d'Athos by dragoons. More Red Cross brassards appeared in the street, more stretchers. Two double-decked motor ambulances drew up; others, following, continued on toward the Place and the railroad station. Then three grey military automobiles full of officers came whizzing through the rue d'Auros with terrific blasts of warning; and sped on, succeeded by others filled with infantry soldiers, until a steady stream of motor cars of every description was rushing past the windows, omnibus motors, trucks, hotel busses, furniture vans, private cars, of every make and varying capacities, all loaded with red-capped *fantassins* and bristling with rifles.

Warner opened the window and leaned far out, one arm around Philippa.

Eastward, on the Plaza Sainte Cassilda, masses of lancer cavalry were defiling at a trot, dragoons, hussars, and *chasseurs-à-cheval*, and the rue d'Auros was filled with onrushing motor cars as far as he could see. Westward, parallel with the stream of automobiles, field artillery was crossing the Place d'Ausone, battery after battery, the drivers whipping and spurring in their saddles, the horses breaking from trot to gallop.

"Something unexpectedly serious is happening," said Warner, trying to make his voice audible in the din from the fort. "Look into those alleys and lanes and cross streets! Do you see the people hurrying out

of their houses? I must have been crazy to bring you here!"

"I can't hear you, Jim——" Her lips formed the words; he pointed across the street into the alleyways and mews; she nodded comprehension.

"Until these automobiles pass we can't cross—can't get across!" He found himself almost shouting; and he emphasized his meaning with pantomime and gesticulation.

She nodded, undisturbed. Now and then, when soldiers in automobiles looked up at them, she tossed white flowers from her bouquet into the tonneau and nodded a gay response to the quick salutes. One lily remained; she drew it through the laces that held her scarlet and black bodice, then, resting her hand on Warner's shoulder, looked gravely down at the rushing column underneath.

The tremendous concussions from the fort had loosened plaster and broken window glass everywhere in the hotel; a smarting mist drifted through the open window; the room behind them was obscured as by a fog, and every shock from the guns added to the thickening dust veil.

The *gérant*, François, ghastly pale but polite, came presently to inform Warner by signs that a chimney had fallen in on the lumber room and that at present it was not possible for the porter to enter and find the canvases stored there.

Warner understood, catching a word or two here

and there, and shrugged his indifference to what might become of his sketches.

"All I want," he shouted into the *gérant's* ear, "is to get this young lady out of Ausone!"

François nodded, pointed toward the cross streets which were now swarming with people preparing for flight. There came a sudden lull in the cannonade, and almost at the same time the last motor filled with soldiers sped through the street below.

Instantly the street, now occupied only by firemen and Red Cross soldiers, was filled with citizens. Groups formed, surged hither and thither, mingled with other groups and became a swaying crowd. Already hand-carts and wheelbarrows appeared, piled with bedding and household furniture; the open carriage of the mayor repassed, was halted, and the aged magistrate stood up and addressed the people; but Warner could not make out what he was saying, and in a moment or two the carriage continued toward the Boulevard d'Athos, escorted by gendarmes.

"It's plain enough that the Germans are pretty close," said Warner carelessly. "If you're ready, Philippa, I think we'd better get back to Saïs."

"And your beautiful pictures! Oh, Jim, I can't bear to have them left here——"

"Which do you imagine I consider the more valuable, Philippa, you or those daubs of mine?

Come, dear; let's clear out if we can before that fort begins to converse again with Germans."

He paid his reckoning at the desk, where *patron*, *gerant*, *caissière*, and staff had gathered in calm consultation concerning eventualities. Nobody seemed excited; everybody was polite, even smiling; servants were already busy with dusters, brooms, and pans; the porter carried down luggage for departing guests.

"Monsieur Warner, are you leaving us?" inquired François smilingly. "Perhaps it is better; they say that the Germans are now in range of the fort. Saïs is likely to be more peaceful than Ausone tonight. If the Bosches don't bombard us, I think your pictures will be quite safe with us."

He bowed them to the door; Philippa, clinging to Warner's arm, went out into the stony street, which was now crowded with hurrying people, all preparing for flight.

As they set foot on the pavement, a frightful detonation shook the town, another, another; and on the heels of the thunderous shock the first German shell fell in Ausone, plunged through the roof and exploded in the transept of the Church of Sainte Cassilda, blowing the altar and choir stalls to dust and splinters.

Before Philippa and Warner could make their way to the river, three more shells came plunging into the town, one exploding with a deafening din in

the empty market, another stripping a shop open from roof to basement and literally disemboweling it, and a third blowing up the eastern end of the rue d'Auros, where its whistling fragments tore right and left through a huddled group of women and children.

Then, as they ran toward the quay, the soldiers on guard there came hastening toward them, warning them back. For a few moments the Place d'Ausone streamed with terrified people in confused and purposeless flight, forced back from the river by line soldiers who kept shouting something which Warner could not understand.

But in another moment he understood, for the old stone bridge across the Récollette split in two, vomiting great masses of stone into the air, and the earth rocked with the roar of dynamite.

Half stunned, balked, hesitating, Warner stood in the market place with his arm around Philippa, looking about him for a chance; while shell after shell fell into the town, and the racket of their detonations resounded from the railroad station to the boulevard.

"The river," he said; "it's the best way out of this, I think!"

She nodded, clasped his arm, and they started once more toward the quay.

Below the parapet their punt, still tied fast, lay tossing and rocking on the agitated river. Down the stone stairs they ran; Philippa sprang on board, and

the next moment Warner cast off and drove the punt swiftly out into the current of midstream.

Then, directly ahead of them, parallel to the Impasse d'Alcyon, a shell fell with the whistling screech of a steamer's siren; there came a deadened roar; a geyser of water and gravel rose in mid-river, hurling rocks, planks from the landing, and splintered rowboats in every direction.

Great limbs from the willow trees hurtled earthward, a muddy maelstrom of foam whirled their punt, caught it on a comb of seething water, flung it from wave to wave.

Warner, beaten from his balance, had fallen to his knees. As the plunging punt swept downstream, he continued to use his pole mechanically. Around them debris still rained into the discolored river, branches, fragments of sod; the surface of the water was covered with floating boards, sticks, green leaves, uprooted reeds and rushes; a mangled and bloody swan floated near, its snowy neck and head under water.

Philippa crouched on the bottom of the punt, deadly pale, her hands over her ears, her grey eyes riveted on Warner.

When his voice was under control, he said:

"Are you all right, dear?"

She read his lips, nodded, tried to smile, fell to trembling with both hands still convulsively crushed over her ears.

Current and pole had already swept the punt out past the *banlieu*, past the suburban cottages, past the farms and the cattle and the clotheslines where the wash hung drying.

Behind them lay the town, amid a hell of exploding shells; the hills and woods reëchoed the infernal crash; and, high overhead, above the dreadful diapason of the guns, rose the crazy treble hooting of incoming projectiles, dominating the awful roar on earth with a yelling bedlam in the sky.

Again and again he looked aloft, fearfully attempting to trace and trail and forestall some whistling screech growing louder and louder and nearer and nearer, until the shattering crash of the explosion in the town behind them relaxed the nerve-breaking tension.

Farther out in the green countryside he no longer looked up and back. Philippa still lay huddled at his feet, looking up out of grey eyes that quivered and winced sometimes, but always opened again, steady and clear with faith.

On the Ausone road fugitives from every farm and hamlet were afoot again, but he could not see them very distinctly through the dust that hung there. Also clouds now obscured the declining sun; the world had turned grey around them; and the Récollette flowed away ahead with scarcely a glimmer on its tarnished flood, save where a dull and leaden sparkle came and went along the water weeds

inshore.

It was as though the subtle poison of war itself had polluted material things, killing out brightness and health and life, staining sky and water and earth with its hell-distilled essence.

Then a more concretely sinister omen took shape, floating under the trees in a deep, still cove—a dead cavalry horse, saddled and bridled, stranded there, barely awash; and a hooded crow already walking busily about over the level gravel of the shoal.

As they neared Saïs, the quarry road across the river became visible. Dust eddied and drifted there, and he could distinguish the slanted lances of cavalry in rapid motion and catch the muffled roar of hoofs.

They were galloping north, a dusty, interminable column enveloped in an endless grey cloud of their own making in the thickening evening mist already hanging palely over land and water.

There was scarcely a tint of color left in the east, and that vague hue died out under clotted clouds as he looked.

And after a while he was aware of a vague rumor in the air, which seemed to come from the east—a vibration, low, indefinite, almost inaudible, yet always there to challenge his attention.

The Vosges lay beyond; and the Barrier Forts.

Duller and duller grew the twilight. He drove the punt forward into dusky reaches shrouded in

mist, where not a ripple glimmered, and the trees and river reeds stood motionless in the fog.

There were no stars, no lights ashore. On his left he could hear the unbroken trample of cavalry riding north; far beyond, the air was heavily unsteady with the dull rumor beyond the hills; behind him the shriller tumult had died away and the deadened booming of the guns sounded like the heavy thunder of surf on sand.

Philippa had risen to a sitting position, and now she was lying back comfortably extended among the cushions.

They exchanged a few words; her voice was calm, cheerful, untroubled. She offered to take the punt pole; said that at first she had felt more bewildered and dazed than frightened; explained that real fear had first possessed her when the dead and bloody swan floated past, and that then she had been horribly afraid of the sky noises—the shrieking, hooting, whistling approach of the unseen.

He had been under fire in the Balkans; Lule Bourgas had blunted for him the keener edge of terror. And now, still thoroughly stirred, only the excitement of the past hour remained and stimulated him.

"It's war all around us now," he said, driving his punting pole steadily and straining his keen eyes into the shadows beyond. "There are stirring days ahead for France in this region, I fear; the Barrier Forts are

far away and there is nothing in the north to hold the deluge breaking over Luxembourg into Belgium.

"A great war is beginning, Philippa; the greatest that the earth has ever faced.... I never supposed that I should live to see such a war—the greatest of all wars—the last *great* war, I think.

"If I were anything except a useless painter, I'd go into it.... I don't know what good I'd be to anybody. But if anybody wants me——"

"We both can offer ourselves," said Philippa.

"Dear child! I'd like to catch *you* wandering into this sort of——"

"I shall volunteer if you do!"

"You shall *not*! You'll go to Paris with Madame de Moidrey—that's what you'll do!"

"Jim, that is absurd. If I'm wanted I shall volunteer for hospital service, anyway. And if you offer yourself I shall wait until I find out where you are to be sent, and then I shall beg them to take me at the nearest field ambulance."

"No good, Philippa. They do that sort of thing in romances, but in real life a course of hospital training is required of volunteers."

"I can scrub floors and sew and cook," she said serenely. "Do they not need such people?"

"There's no use discussing it," he said. "Only trained women will be wanted—tolerated; and I suppose only trained men. The amateur nurse and warrior were utterly and definitely discredited in

South Africa. There'll be no more of that. There's no room for us, Philippa; the firing line would reject me with derision, and the base hospital would politely bow you out." He laughed rather mirthlessly. "There remains for us," he said, "the admirable, but somewhat monotonous thinking-rôles of respectable citizens—items in the world-wide chorus which marches harmlessly hither and thither during the impending drama, and forms pleasing backgrounds for the principals when they take their curtain calls."

She felt the undertone of slight bitterness in his voice; understood it, perhaps, for, when the punt was turned and driven gently ashore among the foggy rushes, she retained the supporting arm he offered, clung to it almost caressingly.

"I know you," she murmured, as they mounted the grassy bank together; "you have no need to tell me what you are—dearest, noblest, best among men."

He answered almost impatiently:

"I don't want you to think that of me! You must not believe it, Philippa. Keep your head clear, and your judgment independent of that warm, sweet heart of yours. I'm a most ordinary sort of man, little distinguished, not in any way remarkable——"

"Don't!" she said. "You only hurt me, not yourself. Of what use is it saying such things to a girl when the whole world would be a solitary place if you were not in it—if your living mind did not make

the earth a real and living place to me!

"I tell you that, to me, life itself—the reality of the living world—depends on you. If you die, all dies. Without you there is nothing—absolutely nothing!—Not even myself!"

Calm, passionless, clear, her voice serenely pronounced and emphasized her childish creed. And, impatient, restless, disturbed at first, yet in this young girl's exaggerated and obstinate devotion he found no reason for mirth, no occasion for the suppressed amusement of experience.

He said:

"I can try to be what you think me, Philippa. Yours is a very tender heart, and noble. Perhaps your heart may gradually lend me a little of its own quality, so that the glamour with which you invest me shall not be all unreal."

There was a short silence, then Philippa laughed. It was a sweet, happy, confused little laugh. She made an effort to explain it.

"The greatest thing in the world," she said—"the *only* thing!"

"What, Philippa?"

"Our friendship."

It was still early evening as they entered the house together and traversed the hall to the north terrace.

The Countess de Moidrey, a book on her lap, was seated by a lighted lamp in the billiard room,

gazing out of the open windows, through which the thunder of the cannonade, wave after wave, came rolling in from the north.

"Madame—" began the girl timidly.

"Philippa!" she exclaimed, rising.

The girl came forward shyly, the unuttered words of explanation still parting her lips; and the Countess de Moidrey drew her into her arms.

"My darling," she whispered unsteadily, "my darling child!"

Suddenly Philippa's eyes filled and her lips quivered; she turned her face away, stood silent for a moment, then slowly she laid her cheek on the elder woman's breast, and a faint sigh escaped her.

Madame de Moidrey looked at Warner over the chestnut head in its velvet bonnet, which lay close and warm against her breast.

"Jim," she said, "they told me where you had taken this child. Can you imagine what my state of mind has been since that horrible uproar began over there in Ausone?"

"I must have been a lunatic to take her," he admitted; but Philippa's protesting voice interrupted, unruffled, childishly sweet.

"The fault was mine, Madame. I was very willful; I made him take me. I'll try not to be willful any more——"

"Darling! He ought to have known better. Do you understand how far you have crept into all our

hearts? It was as though a child of my own were out there among the cannon——" She bent and kissed the girl's flushed cheek. "I'm not inclined to forgive Mr. Warner, but I shall if you want me to. Now, run up stairs, darling, and speak to Peggy. She's still sitting at her bedroom window, I fancy, watching those dreadful flashes out there, and perfectly miserable over you——"

"Oh!" cried Philippa, lifting her head. "You all are so sweet to me—so dear! I shall hasten immediately——" She stooped swiftly and touched her lips to the hands that held and caressed her, then turned and mounted the stairs with flying feet.

Warner gazed rather blankly at Madame de Moidrey.

"I must have been crazy to risk taking her. But, Ethra, I hadn't any reason to suppose there was any danger."

"Were you in Ausone when the fort began firing? Didn't you know enough to come home?"

"Yes; I didn't realize it was the Fort d'Ausone. We were at tea in the Boule d'Argent when the Taube appeared. Then everything was in a mess, Ethra. I know a number of people have been killed. We saw a shop blown up across the street. After that the cupola guns on the fort opened and the town shook; and before we could cross the rue d'Auros to find our punt, where we had left it tied under the river wall, the big German shells began to fall all over the town.

It was certainly a rotten deal——"

"Jim, I am furious at you for taking that child into such a place. I wish you to understand now, from this moment, that I love her dearly. She is adorable; and she's mine. You can't take her about with you without ceremony, anywhere and everywhere. Anyway, it's sheer madness to go roaming around the country in such times as these. Hereafter, you will please ask my permission and obtain my sanction when you are contemplating any further harebrained performances."

Warner took his rebuke very humbly, kissed the pretty hand that, figuratively, had chastised him, and went away to dress, considerably subdued.

"By the way," he asked, when halfway up the stairs, "how is that man, Reginald Gray?"

"I think he is better, Jim. Sister Eila is with him. Poor child, she has been superintending the placing of the cot beds which have arrived, and she is really very tired. If you are going to stop in and speak to Mr. Gray, please say to Sister Eila that I shall relieve her in a few moments."

He met Peggy with Philippa in the upper hall.

"You brute!" remarked Peggy, turning up her nose; and Philippa laughed and closed the girl's lips with her soft hand.

"You may chase me about and kick me, too," said Warner, contritely. "Anyway, I'm not to go anywhere with Philippa any more, it seems——"

"What!" exclaimed Philippa, then smiled and flushed as Peggy said scornfully:

"You couldn't keep away from her if you tried. But hereafter you'll include me on your charming excursions in quest of annihilation!" And she tightened her arm around Philippa's waist and swung her with her toward the further end of the hall.

Very conscious of his temporary unpopularity, he went in to see how Gray was feeling, and found him sitting up in bed and Sister Eila preparing his dose for him.

So Warner gave the Sister of Charity the message from Madame de Moidrey, and offered to sit beside Gray until the Countess arrived.

When Sister Eila had retired, Gray said, rather wistfully:

"I shan't know how to thank these people for taking me in. It's really a beastly imposition——"

"Nonsense, my dear fellow. They like it. All women adore a hero. How do you feel, anyway?"

"Much fitter, thanks. I don't know what medicine they're giving me, but it is evidently what I needed.... And do you know that the Countess de Moidrey has been kind enough to visit me and read to me, and even write a letter to Halkett for me? I sent it to London. They'll get into touch with him there." His sunken eyes rested on the window through which, far away over Ausone Fort, the flicker and flare of the guns lighted up the misty darkness, throwing a

wavering red glare over the clouds.

Boom—boom—rumble—rumble—boom! came the dull thundering out of the north. Every window was shaking and humming.

"A devil of a row," remarked Gray, restlessly.

"You've heard that the German shells are already falling on Ausone, haven't you?"

"No. Are they?"

Warner drew a brief picture of what he had seen that afternoon in Ausone, and the Englishman listened, intensely interested.

"And I don't know," he ended, "what is to prevent the Germans from battering the Ausone Fort to pieces if they have silenced those big Belgian fortresses around Namur. In that case, we'll have their charming Uhlans here in another forty-eight hours——"

He checked himself as Madame de Moidrey knocked and entered, followed by a maid with Gray's dinner on a tray.

"Thank you, Jim; you may go and dress now. Mr. Gray, you are to dine a little earlier, if you don't mind—Suzanne, place the tray on this tabouret. Now, shall I help you, Mr. Gray?"

"Thanks, so much; but I am detaining you from dinner——"

"No, indeed. Let me help you a little——" arranging a napkin for him and uncovering his cup of fragrant broth.

Warner and the maid, Suzanne, lingered, looking on, thinking they might be needed.

But realizing presently that neither the Countess nor her patient was paying the slightest attention to them, they looked at each other very gravely and quietly walked out.

That night at dinner Sister Eila was absent.

Certain prescribed devotions made Sister Eila's attendance at any meal an uncertainty. The private chapel in the east wing had now become a retreat for her at intervals during the day; the kitchen knew her when Gray's broth was to be prepared; she gently directed the servants who had been setting up the hospital cots in the east wing, and she showed them how to equip the beds, how to place the tables, how to garnish the basins of running water with necessaries, where to pile towels, where to assemble the hospital stores which had arrived with the cots in cases and kegs and boxes.

Besides this she had not forgotten to give Gray his medicine and to change his bandages.

It had been a busy day for Sister Eila.

And now, in the little chapel whither she had crept on tired feet to her devotions, she had fallen asleep on her knees, the rosary still clinging to her fingers, her white-bonneted head resting against the pillar beside which she had knelt.

Warner, wandering at hazard after dinner, discovered her there and thought it best to awaken her.

As he touched her sleeve, she murmured drowsily:

"I have need of prayer, Mr. Halkett.... Let me

pray—for us—both——"

For a long while Warner stood motionless, not daring to stir. Then, moving cautiously, he left her there asleep on her knees, her white cheek against the pillar, the wooden prayer beads hanging from her half-closed hand.

CHAPTER XXIX

The first streak of tarnished silver in the east aroused the sleeping batteries beyond Ausone. Warner, already dressed and out of doors, felt the dim world around him begin to shake again, as one by one the distant guns awoke and spoke to the ruined fort of doom. There was not a soul astir in the Château or about the grounds. Over shrubbery and woods thin films of night mist drooped, sagging like dew-laden spiders' webs; in the demi-light the great house loomed spectral and huge amid its phantom trees, and the wet lawns spread away and vanished under the pallid pall that bathed them.

Warner had slept badly. What might be transpiring in the north had haunted his troubled slumber, had broken it continually, and finally had driven him from his hot and tumbled pillows to dress and go out into the dark obscurity.

To see for himself, to try to form some

conclusion concerning the approaching situation of the people in the Château des Oiseaux, was his object.

The first grey tint in the east woke up the guns; from the northern terrace he could see the fog all rosy over Ausone; pale flashes leaped and sparkled far beyond as the deep waves of sound came rolling and tumbling toward him, breaking in thunderous waves across the misty darkness.

Now and then a heavier concussion set the ground shaking, and a redder glare lighted the north and played shakily over the clouds. Ausone was still replying.

On the other side of the Récollette there was a hill terraced to the summit with vineyards. From its western slope he knew that part of Ausone town was visible, and from there he believed that with his field glasses he could see for himself how much of the town was really on fire; how near to it and to the fort were those paler flashes reflected on the clouds which ringed the northern sky.

Nobody was astir in the house as he left it; nobody in the roadway.

At the lodge he rapped on the dark window until the old man peered out at him through the diamond panes, yawning and blinking under his Yvetot nightcap, a candle trembling in his hand.

Outside the wall he crossed the road, climbed the hedge stile and struck across a field of stubble.

Over the darker eastern hills a wet sky lowered; the Récollette ran black under its ghostly cerements of vapor; lapwings were calling somewhere from the foggy sky, and their mournful and faint complaint seemed to harmonize sadly with the vague grey world around him.

A trodden path twisted through the grass down to the reedy shore where the punt lay. Peering about for it, his foot struck the pole, where it lay partly buried in the weeds; he picked it up and went down among the rushes. But until he laid his hand on the boat he did not notice the man asleep there. And not until the man sat up with a frightful yawn, rubbing his sleep-swollen lids, did he recognize Asticot.

"What the devil——" he began, but Asticot stumbled to his large, flat feet with a suppressed yelp of apprehension, as Warner's dreaded grasp fell on his collar.

"*Mon Dieu*," moaned the young ruffian, "may I not even sleep without offending M'sieu'——"

Warner shook him, not roughly.

"Now answer me once and for all! *Why* are you hanging around Saïs?"

The tiny, mousy eyes of Asticot became fixed; a grin of terror stiffened the pasty features.

"Why do I still find you in Saïs?" repeated Warner. "Tell me the truth!"

"I—I am too f-frightened to tell you——"

"Get over your fright. Listen, Asticot, I'm not

going to hurt you. But you've got to answer me. Come, compose yourself——" He relaxed his grasp on the coat collar and stepped aside. "Come, Asticot; tell me why I find you here in Saïs?"

"M'sieu'——"

"Yes, go on. Just tell me the truth. I'm not going to beat you."

"M'sieu' will not believe me—God knows I do not know how to explain it to myself—but since that frightful beating bestowed upon me I do not know how to get along without the protection of M'sieu'——"

"What do you mean?"

"I am *afraid*! I do not know why. I desire to be taken under the patronage of him I fear. C'est plus fort que moi. *Tenez*, M'sieu', like a dog owned by nobody I once ran about at random, and not afraid, until caught and nearly killed by M'sieu'. And now I desire to be his. It is natural for me to follow him—even though I remain afraid of him, even risking his anger and another beating——"

"Asticot!"

"M'sieu'?"

"Do you nourish any agreeable dreams that you may one day live to insert your knife in my back?"

The sheer astonishment in the young ruffian's visage was sufficient answer for Warner. He realized then that this yellow mongrel would never again try to bite—that he might collapse and succumb under

violence, but never again would he twist and try to mangle the hand of punishment which once had broken him so mercilessly.

"Get into the punt, anyway," said Warner, much perplexed.

Asticot turned and crept into the stern.

"Sit down!"

The young man squatted obediently. Warner shoved off, sprang aboard, and sent the punt shooting out across the misty water.

"So you don't want to murder me any more?" he asked humorously.

"No," said Asticot, with sullen but profound conviction.

"What's become of your delightful friend, Squelette?"

Asticot looked up, bared every tooth.

"*Figurez-vous*, M'sieu', a dragoon patrol caught him yesterday stealing a goose from a farm. Me, I hid in a willow tree. It's the Battalion of Biribi for Squelette—his class having been called a year ago—and he over the Belgian line with his fingers to his nose! Hé—hé!" laughed Asticot, writhing in the enjoyment of the prospect before his recent comrade. "Me, I have done my time in Biribi!—And the scars of it—God!—hot irons on the brain!—And the heart a cinder! Biribi! Is there a priest's hell like it?" He spat fiercely into the river.

"And Squelette, who always mocked me for the

time I did in Biribi! *Tenez*, M'sieu', now they've caught him and he'll do a tour for himself in that dear Biribi! Hè—hè! C'est bien fait! Chacun à son tour! As for me——" His voice suddenly relapsed into a whine. "I shall now be well protected by M'sieu' and I shall be diligent and grateful in his service, ready always with brush and black soap or with knife and noose——"

"Thanks," said Warner dryly. "You may stick to the bowl of black soap until your class is summoned."

Asticot looked at him earnestly.

"If I have to go with my class, will M'sieu' speak a word for me that it shall be the line and not Biribi again?"

"Yes, if you behave yourself."

"A—a certificate of honest employment?—A few kind words that I have diligently labored in the service of M'sieu'?"

"Yes, I'll do that."

Asticot squirmed with delight. And Warner, poling steadily up stream, saw him making his toilet in the grey light, dipping his fists into the water, scrubbing his battered features, carefully combing out *favoris* and *rouflaquette* and greasing both from the contents of a knotted bandana handkerchief which he drew from the capacious pocket of the coat which the charity of Warner had bestowed upon him.

He was as merry as a washer-raccoon over his

ablutions; all care for the future had fled, and an animal-like confidence in this terrible young patron of his reigned undisturbed in the primitive brain of Asticot.

There was now only one impelling force in life for him—the instinctive necessity of running rather close to Warner's heels, wherever that might lead him. Anxiety for personal comfort and well-being he dismissed; he would eat when his master thought best; he would find shelter and warmth and clothing when and where it pleased the man after whom he tagged. He was safe, he was comfortable. That dominating physical strength which had nearly destroyed him, coupled with that awesome intellectual power which now held him in dumb subjection, would in future look out for him and his needs. Tant mieux! Let his master do the worrying.

Carefully combing out his *favoris* with a broken comb and greasing them with perfumed pomade flat over his sunken cheekbones, he fairly wriggled with his new sense of security and bodily comfort.

Now and then he scratched his large, outstanding ears, trying to realize his good fortune; now and then, combing his *rouflaquette* with tenderness and pride, he lifted his mean, nasal voice in song:

"Depuis que j'suis dans c'tte p—n
d'Afrique

A faire l'chameau avec une bosse su' l'dos,
Mon vieux frangin, j'suis sec comme un coup d'trique,
J'ai b'entôt p'us que d'la peau su'les os!
Et v'là l'Bat. d'Af. qui passe,
Ohé! ceux d'la classe!—"

Combing away and plastering his lovelocks by the help of a fragment of mirror, Asticot whined out his dreadful ballads of Africa, throwing all the soul he possessed into the tragic recital and sniffling sentimentally through his nose:

A Biribi c'est là qu'on marche,
Faut pas flancher;
Quand l'chaouch crie: 'En avant! Marche!'
I'faut marcher,
Et quand on veut fair' des épates,
C'est peau d'zébi:
On vous fiche les fers au quat' pattes
A Biribi!

A Biribi c'est là qu'on crève
De soif et d' faim,
C'est là qu'i' faut marner sans trêve
Jusqu' à la fin! ...

Le soir on pense à la famille
Sous le gourbi....
On pleure encor' quand on roupille
A Biribi!"

He was still chanting when the punt glided in among the rushes of the eastern bank. He followed Warner to the land, aided him to beach the punt, then trotted docilely at heel as the American struck out across the quarry road and mounted the retaining wall of the vineyard-clad hill.

Up they climbed among the vines; and Asticot with a leer, but keeping his mousy eyes on Warner, ventured to detach a ripe bunch here and there and breakfast as he trotted along.

The thunder of the cannon had become very distinct; daylight came slowly under the heavy blanket of grey clouds; the foggy sky was still stained with rose over Ausone; red flashes leaped from the fort; the paler glare of the German guns played constantly across the north.

And now, coming out on the hill's crest among the vines, Warner caught sight of Ausone town far below, beyond the Château forest. Here and there houses kindled red as coals in a grate; the sluice and wheel of a mill by the Récollette seemed to be on fire; beyond it haystacks were burning and smothering all the east in smoke.

"*Mazette*," remarked Asticot, with his mouth full of stolen grapes. "It appears to Bibi that their church of Sainte Cassilda is frying the stone saints inside!"

And then, adjusting his field glasses, Warner discovered what the mouse-eyes of Asticot had detected: Sainte Cassilda the beautiful was merely a hollow shell within which raged a sea of fire crimsoning the gaping doors and windows, glowing scarlet through cracks and fissures in the exquisitely carved façade, mounting through the ruined roof in a whirl of rosy vapors that curled and twisted and glittered with swarming golden sparks.

Another fire burned in the ruins of what had been the Chalons railway station; the Café and Cabaret de Biribi were level wastes of stones and steaming bricks, over which fire played and smoke whirled upward; the market was a long heap of live coals; even trees were afire by the river, and Warner could see flames here and there among the bushes and whole thickets burning fiercely along the river and beyond, where the Bois d'Ausone touches it with a fringe of splendid oaks.

As day broke, a watery light illuminated the still landscape. Smoke hung heavy over Ausone Fort; the great cupola guns flashed redly through it; a wide, high bank of vapor towered above Ausone, stretching away to the west and north. Whole rows of burning houses in Ausone glowed and glimmered, marking the courses of streets; the Hôtel de Ville seemed to be

intact, but the Boulevard d'Athos was plainly on fire; and, over the rue d'Auros, an infernal light flickered as flame and smoke alternately lighted the street or blotted it from view.

"The town is done for," said Warner calmly. "The fort is still replying, but very slowly. It looks rather bad to me. It looks like the end."

Asticot scratched one large ear and furtively helped himself to another bunch of grapes. Warner seated himself on the ground and raised his field glasses. Asticot squatted on his haunches, his little, mousy eyes fixed wistfully on the burning town. Looting ought to be good in Ausone—dangerous, of course, but profitable. A heaven-sent opportunity for honest pillage was passing. Asticot sighed and licked his lips.

After a while, and imbued now with the impudent confidence of a tolerated mongrel, he ventured to rise and nose around a bit, keeping, however, his new master carefully in sight.

The sour little wine grapes had allayed his thirst and hunger; he prowled at random around the summit of the hill, surveying the river valley and the hills beyond. By chance he presently kicked up a big hare, which cleared out at full speed, doubling and twisting before the shower of stones hurled after it by Asticot. He ran after it a little way among the vines, hoping that a chance missile might have bowled over the toothsome game. Craning his neck,

he peeped discreetly down the hillside, reconnoitering; then suddenly ducked; squatted for a moment as though frozen to a statue, and, dropping on his belly, he crawled back to Warner, who still sat there with his field glasses bracketed on Ausone.

"M'sieu'!"

Warner turned at the weird whisper, lowering his glasses.

"Las Bosches!" whispered Asticot.

"Where?" demanded Warner incredulously.

"Riding up this very hill where we are sitting! I saw them—six of them on their horses!"

"They must be French!"

"No, Bosches! Uhlans!"

"Did they see you?"

"No."

Along the upper retaining wall of the vineyard a line of low bushes grew in patches, left there, no doubt, so that the roots might make firmer the steep bank of earth and dry-laid stone.

Warner rose, and, stooping low, ran toward this thatch of cover, followed by Asticot.

Under the bushes they crept, stretched themselves flat, and lay listening.

They had not long to wait; straight through the rows of vines toward the crest of the hill rode an Uhlan, walking his big, hard-breathing horse to the very verge of the northern slope.

His lance, with pennon furled, slanted low from

the arm loop; he sat his high saddle like a statue, and looked out across the valley toward the burning town beyond.

He was so near that Warner could see the grey uniform in detail—the ulanka piped with dark crimson, shoulder straps bearing the number 2, collar with the eagle-button insignia of the Guard. A grey helmet-slip covered the mortar board and leather body of the schapska; boots and belt were of russet leather.

Another Uhlan rode up, showing the star of an oberleutnant on the *pattes-d'épaules*.

Four others followed, picking their way among the vines, cautiously yet leisurely. At the stirrups of the oberleutnant strode a man on foot—a big, shambling, bald-headed man wearing a smock and carrying a felt hat in his huge hand. And when he turned to wipe his hairless face on his sleeve, Asticot clutched Warner's arm convulsively.

The man was Wildresse.

The officer of Uhlans sat very straight in his saddle, his field glasses sometimes focussed on the burning town, sometimes sweeping the landscape to the north and west, sometimes deliberately studying the valley below.

Presently he lowered his glasses and turned partly around to look down at Wildresse, who was standing among the vines by his stirrup.

"Wohin führt diese Weg?" he demanded with a

nod toward the quarry road below.

"Nach Drieux, Excellenz!"

"Zeigen Sie mir die Richtung nach Dreslin mit der Hand!"

Wildresse raised his arm and pointed, tracing the quarry road north and west.

"Also! Wie tief ist dieser Fluss? Ist eine Brücke?"

The harsh, deep rumble of Wildresse's voice, the mincing, nasal tones of the Prussian, the snort of horses receded as the Uhlans rode slowly over toward the right—evidently a precaution to escape observation from the valley below.

For a while they sat their big horses there, looking out over the valley; then, at a signal from the ober-leutnant, they turned their mounts and rode slowly off down the eastern slope of the vineyard, taking with them the double traitor, Wildresse.

Asticot's eyes were like two minute black sparks; he was shivering now from head to foot as he lay there; and it became very evident to Warner that this young ruffian had had no knowledge of that sort of villainy on the part of Wildresse.

"Ah, le cochon!" hissed Asticot, grasping two fistfuls of earth in his astonishment and fury. "Is he selling France then to the Bosches?"

"Didn't you know it?" inquired Warner coldly.

"I? Nom de Dieu! For what do you take me then? Whatever I am, I am not *that*! Ah, le sale bougre de Wildresse! Ah! Les salauds de saligauds de Bosches!

Ah, Wildresse!—Fumier, viande à corbeau, caserne à puces, gadou', morceau d'chausett's russes—que j'te dis que j't'engeule et que j't'abomine, vermine malade, canard boiteux——"

Ashy white, his mouth twisted with rage, Asticot lay shivering and cursing the treachery of his late employer, Wildresse. And Warner understood that, low as this creature was, ignorant, treacherous, fierce, ruthless, and cowardly, the treason of Wildresse had amazed and horrified and enraged him.

"It's the last depths of filth," stammered Asticot. "Ah, non, nom de Dieu! One does not do *that*!—Whatever else one does! I'll have his skin for this. It becomes necessary to me that I have his skin! Minc' de Marseillaise! Viv' la république! En avant l'armée! Gare au coup d'scion, eh, vache d'apache! Les coutcaur sont faits pour les chiens, mince de purée! C'est vrai qu' Squelette c'est un copain à moi—but if he is in this—he and the père Wildresse, et bon!—Faut leur-z-y casser la geule——"

"That's enough!" interrupted Warner, who for a moment had been struck dumb by the frightful fluency of an invective he never dreamed existed, even in the awful argot of *voyous* like Asticot.

He rose. Pale and still trembling, Asticot stumbled to his feet, his pasty face twisted with unuttered maledictions.

Moving cautiously to the eastern edge of the

vineyard, they saw, far below them, six Uhlans riding slowly eastward toward the Bois de Saïs, and a gross figure on foot shuffling ahead and evidently acting as pilot toward the wilder uplands of the rolling country beyond.

Warner watched them through his glasses until they disappeared in the woods, then he turned, looked at the burning town in the north for a few moments, closed his field glasses and slung them, and, nodding to Asticot, descended the western slope toward the river.

There were no people visible anywhere, either on the quarry road or across the river. The fugitives from Ausone must have gone west toward Dreslin.

Asticot crawled into the punt; Warner shoved off and poled for midstream, where he let the current carry him down toward Saïs.

"Asticot?"

"M'sieu'?"

"That was only one small scouting party of Uhlans. Perhaps there are more of them along the river."

Asticot began to curse again, but Warner stopped him.

"Curb that charmingly fluent flow of classic eloquence," he said. "It may sound well on the outer boulevards, but I don't care for it."

The *voyou* gulped, swallowed a weird oath, and shivered.

"Asticot, that man Wildresse ought to be apprehended and shot. Have you any idea where his hiding place is?"

"In the Bois d'Ausone. It *was* there. Animals travel."

"Could you find the place?"

Asticot shrugged and rubbed his pock-marked nose. The forest of Ausone was too near the cannon to suit him, and he said so without hesitation.

"Very well," said Warner. "When we meet any of our soldiers or gendarmes you can explain where Wildresse has been hiding. He won't come out, I suppose, until the occupation of Ausone by the Germans reassures him. He ought to be caught and executed."

"If the cannon would only stop their ugly noises I'd go myself," muttered Asticot. "*Tenez, M'sieu'*, it would be a pleasure for me to bleed that treacherous hog——"

"I don't doubt it," said Warner pleasantly, "but, odd as it may appear to you, Asticot, I have a personal prejudice against murder. It's weak-minded of me, I know. But if you have no objection, we'll let military law catch Wildresse and deal with him if it can."

Asticot looked at him curiously:

"Is it then distasteful to M'sieu' that I bleed this *espèce de* pig for him?"

"I'm afraid it is."

"You do not desire me to settle the business of this *limace*?"

"No."

"For what purpose is an enemy?" inquired the *voyou*. "For revenge. And of what use is revenge if you do not use it on your enemy?"

"You can't understand me, can you, Asticot?"

"No," said Asticot naïvely, "I can't."

CHAPTER XXX

It was still very early as Warner walked up to the Golden Peach, but Magda and Linette were astir and a delicious aroma of coffee floated through the hallway.

Warner surveyed his most recent acquisition with a humorous and slightly disgusted air. As it appeared impossible to get rid of Asticot, there seemed nothing to do but to feed him.

So he called out Linette and asked her to give some breakfast to the young *voyou*; and Linette showed Asticot into the bar and served breakfast with a scorn and aloofness which fascinated Asticot and also awed him.

None of the leering impudence, none of the easy effrontery of the outer boulevards, aided Asticot to assert himself or helped him toward any attempt at

playfulness toward this wholesome, capable, business-like young woman.

She served him with a detached and supercilious air, placed cover and food with all the nonchalance of serving a house cat with its morning milk. And Asticot dared not even look at her until her back was turned; then only did he venture to lift his mousy eyes to study the contemptuous girl who had provided him with what he spoke of as the "*quoi d'boulotter*."

As for Warner, he had sauntered into the kitchen, where Madame Arlon greeted him heartily, and was prettily confused and flattered when he seated himself and insisted on having breakfast with her.

Over their café-au-lait they discussed the menace of invasion very quietly, and the stout, cheery landlady told him that she had concluded to keep the inn open in any event.

"What else is there for me to do?" she asked. "To leave my house is to invite robbery; perhaps even destruction, if the Prussians arrive. I had rather remain and protect my property if I can. At any rate, it will not be for long, God willing!"

"I do not believe it will last very long, this headlong rush of the Germans into France," he said thoughtfully. "It seems to me as though they had the start of us, but nothing more serious. I'm very much afraid we are going to see them here in the

Récollette Valley before they are driven back across the frontier."

Linette's cheeks grew very red.

"I had even rather serve that frightful *voyou* in there than be forced to set food before a Prussian," she said in a low voice.

"Wait a bit longer," said Warner. "—A little patience, perhaps a little more humiliation, but, sooner or later, surely, surely the liberation of the Vosges—the return of her lost children to France, the driving out of German oppression, arrogance, and half-cooked civilization forever.... It's worth waiting for, worth endurance and patience and sacrifice."

"It is worth dying for," said Magda simply.

"If," added Linette, "one only knew how best to serve France by offering one's life."

"It is best to live if that can be accomplished honorably," said Madame Arlon. "France is in great need of all her children."

The three women spoke thoughtfully, naturally, with no idea of heroics, expressing themselves without any self-consciousness whatever.

After a silence Warner said to Linette with a smile:

"So you don't admire my new assistant, Monsieur Asticot?"

"Monsieur Warner! That dreadful *voyou* in *your* service!"

Warner laughed:

"It seems so. I didn't invite him. But I can't get rid of him. He sticks like a lost dog."

"Send him about his business—which doubtless is to pick pockets!" cried Linette. "Monsieur has merely to whisper 'Gendarmes!' to him, and he does not stop running until he sights the Eiffel Tower!"

Madame Arlon smiled:

"He really is a dreadful *type*," she said. "The perfume of Paris gutters clings to him. Monsieur Warner had better get rid of him before articles begin to be missed."

"Oh, well," remarked Warner, "he'll probably scuttle away like a scared rabbit when the Germans come through Saïs. I'm not worrying. Meanwhile, he carries my field kit and washes brushes—if I ever can make up my mind to begin painting again.... That heavy, steady thunder from the north seems to take all ambition out of me."

"It affects me like real thunder," nodded Madame Arlon. "The air is lifeless and dead; one's feet drag and one's head grows heavy. It is like the languor which comes over one before a storm.

"Do the guns seem any louder to you since last night?"

"I was wondering.... Well, God's will be done.... But I do not believe it is in His heart to turn the glory of His face from France.... Magda, if we are to make the preserves today, it will be necessary for you to gather plums this morning. Linette, is that type still

eating?"

"He stuffs himself without pause," replied the girl scornfully. "Only a guinea pig can eat like that!"

She went into the bar café and bent a pair of pretty but hostile eyes upon Asticot, who stared at her with his mouth full, then, still staring, buttered another slice of bread.

"Voyons," she said impatiently, "do you imagine yourself to be at dinner, young man? Permit me to remind you that this is breakfast—café-au-lait—not a banquet at the Hôtel de Ville!"

"I am hungry," said Asticot simply.

"Really?" she retorted, exasperated. "One might almost guess as much, what with the *tartines* and *tranches* you swallow as though you had nothing else to do. Come, stand up on what I suppose you call your feet. Your master is out in the road already, and I don't suppose that even you have the effrontery to keep him waiting."

Asticot arose; a gorged sigh escaped him. He stretched himself with the satisfaction of repletion, shuffled his feet, peeped cunningly and sideways out of his mousy eyes at Linette.

"*Allons*," she said coldly, "it's paid for. Fichez-moi le camp!"

There was a vase of flowers on the bar. Asticot shuffled over, sniffed at them, extracted the largest and gaudiest blossom—a yellow dahlia—and, with a half bold, half scared smirk, laid it on the table as an

offering to Linette.

The girl was too much astonished and incensed to utter a word, and Asticot left so hurriedly that when she had recovered her power of speech he was already slouching along down the road a few paces behind Warner.

The latter had hastened his steps because ahead of him walked Sister Eila; and he meant to overtake and escort her as far as the school, and then back to the Château, if she were returning.

As he joined her and they exchanged grave but friendly greetings, he suddenly remembered her as he had last seen her, kneeling asleep by the chapel pillar.

And then he recollected what she had murmured, still drowsy with dreams; and the memory of it perplexed him and left his face flushed and troubled.

"How is your patient, Sister?" he inquired, dropping into step beside her.

"Much better, Mr. Warner. A little care is all he needs. But I wish his mind were at rest." She glanced behind her at Asticot, plainly wondering who he might be.

"What worries Gray?" inquired Warner.

"The prospect of being taken prisoner, I suppose."

"Of course. If the Germans break through from the north they'll take him along. That would be

pretty hard luck, wouldn't it?—To be taken before one has even a taste of battle!"

Sister Eila nodded:

"He says nothing, but I know that is what troubles him. When I came in this morning, I found him up and trying to walk. I sent him back to bed. But he tells me he does not need to use his legs in his branch of the British service, and that if he could only get to Chalons he would be fit for duty. I think, from things he has said, that both he and Mr. Halkett belong to the Flying Corps."

Warner was immensely interested. Sister Eila told him briefly why she suspected this to be true, then, casting another perplexed glance behind her, she asked in a low voice who might be the extremely unprepossessing individual shuffling along the road behind them. And Warner told her, humorously; but she did not smile.

Watching her downcast eyes and grave lips in the transparent shadow of her white coiffe, he thought he had never seen a human face so pure, so tender—with such infinite capacity for charity.

She said very gently:

"My duties have led me more than once into the Faubourgs. There is nothing sadder to me than Paris.... Always I have believed that sin and degradation among the poor should be treated as diseases of the mind.... Poor things—they have no doctor, no medicines, no hospital to aid them in their

illness—the most terrible illness in the world, which they inherit at birth—poverty! Poverty sickens the body, and at last the mind; and from a diseased mind all evil in the world is born.... They are not to blame who daily crucify Christ; for they know not what they do."

He walked silently beside her. She spoke again of crippled minds, and of the responsibility of civilization, then looked up at his gloomy visage with a faint smile, excusing herself for any lack of cheerfulness and courage.

"Indeed," she said almost gayly, "God is best served with a light heart, I think. There is no palladin like good humor to subdue terror and slay despair; no ally of Christ so powerful as he who laughs when evil threatens. Sin is most easily slain with a smile, I think; its germs die under it as bacilli die in the sunlight. *Tenez*, Monsieur Warner, what do you think of my theories of medicine, moral, spiritual, and mundane? Is it likely that the Academy will award me palms?"

He laughed and assured her that her views were sound in theory and in practice. A moment later they came in sight of the school.

"It is necessary that I make some little arrangements with Sister Félicité for my absence," she explained. "I scarcely know what she is going to do all alone here, if the children are to remain."

They went into the schoolroom, where exercises

had already begun, and the droning, minor singsong of children filled the heavy air.

Sister Félicité greeted Warner, then, dismissing the children to their desks, withdrew to a corner of the schoolroom with Sister Eila.

Their low-voiced consultation lasted for a few minutes only; the little girls, hands solemnly folded, watched out of wide, serious eyes.

On the doorstep outside, Asticot sat and occasionally scratched his large ears with a sort of bored embarrassment.

Warner went out to the doorstep presently and looked up at the sky, which threatened rain. As he stood there, silent, preoccupied, Sister Eila came out with Sister Félicité, nodding to Warner that she was ready to leave. And, at the same instant, two horsemen in grey uniforms rode around the corner of the school, pistols lifted, lances without pennons slanting backward from their armslings.

Asticot, paralyzed, gaped at them; Warner, as shocked as he, stood motionless as four more Uhlans came trotting up and coolly drew bridle before the school.

Already three of the Uhlans had dismounted, stacked lances, abandoning their bridles to the three who remained on their horses.

As they came striding across the road toward the school, spurs and carbines clinking and rattling, a child in the schoolroom caught sight of them and

screamed.

Instantly the room was filled with the terrified cries of little girls: Sister Eila and Sister Félicité, pale but calm, backed slowly away before the advancing Uhlans, their arms outstretched in protection in front of the shrieking, huddling herd of children. Behind them the terrified little girls crouched under desks, hid behind the stove, or knelt clinging hysterically to the grey-blue habits of the Sisters, who continued to interpose themselves between the Uhlans and their panic-stricken pupils.

The Uhlans glanced contemptuously at Asticot as they mounted the door steps, looked more closely at Warner; then one of them walked, clanking, into the schoolroom, lifting his gloved hand to his helmet in salute.

Sister Félicité tried vainly to quiet the screaming children; Sister Eila, her head high, confronted the Uhlans, both arms extended.

"Stop where you are!" she said coolly. "What do you wish, gentlemen? Don't you see that you are frightening our children? If you desire to speak to us we will go outside."

An Uhlan clumsily tried to reassure and make friends with a little girl who had hidden herself behind the stove. She fled from him, sobbing, and threw herself on her knees behind Sister Eila, hanging to her skirts.

"Pas méchant," repeated the big cavalryman,

with a good-natured grin; "moi, père de famille! Beaucoup enfants à moi. Pas peur de moi. Vous est bon Français."

Another Uhlan pointed inquiringly at Warner, who had placed himself beside Sister Félicité.

"*Anglais?*" he demanded.

"American," said Sister Eila calmly.

"Oh," he exclaimed with a wry grin. "Americans are our friends. Frenchmen have our respect. We salute them as brave enemies. But not the English! Therefore, do not be afraid. We Germans mean no harm to peaceful people. You shall see; we are not barbarians! Tell your children we are not ogres."

He stood tall and erect in his grey, close-fitting uniform, looking curiously about him. The plastron of the tunic, or *ulanka*, was piped with yellow, and bore the *galons* and the heraldic buttons of a *Feldwebel*. The shoulder strap bore the number 3; the boots and belt were of tan-colored leather; all metal work was mat-silver; spurs, saber, were oxidized; and the oddly shaped helmet, surmounted by the mortar board, was covered with a brown holland slip bearing the regimental number.

The children had become deathly silent, staring with wide and frightened eyes upon these tall intruders; the Sisters of Charity stood motionless, calm, level-eyed; Warner, wondering why the Uhlans had entered the school, had drawn Sister Eila's arm through his, and remained beside her watching the

Germans with undisturbed curiosity and professional interest. Afterward his well-known picture of the incident was bought by the French Government.

The *Wachtmeister* in charge of the peloton turned to him with a sort of insolent civility.

"Wie viel Kilometer ist es bis Ausone?" he inquired.

Warner made no reply.

"Wie heisst dieser Ort?" The Wachtmeister had raised his voice insolently.

"Saïs," replied Warner carelessly.

"Sind hier deutsche Truppen durchmarschiert?"

Warner remained silent.

"Sind deutsche Truppen im Walde?"

"There is no use asking an American for information," said Warner bluntly. "You'll get none from me."

Instantly the man's face changed.

"So! Eh, bien! Qui cherche à s'esquiver sera fusillé!" he said in excellent French. "Unlock every door in the house. If there are any dogs tie them up. If they bark, you will be held responsible. Don't move! Keep those children where they are until we have finished!"

He nodded to a trooper behind him. The Uhlan instantly drew a short hammer and a cold chisel from his pouch, knelt down, and with incredible rapidity ripped up a plank from the hardwood floor, laying bare to view the solid concrete underneath.

"Sound it!"

The trooper sounded the concrete with the heavy butt of his chisel.

"All right!" The non-com touched his schapska in salute to the Sisters of Charity. "Take your children away before noon. We need this place. German troops will occupy it in half an hour." Then he swung around and shot an ugly glance at Warner.

"If you are as neutral as you pretend to be, see that you are equally reticent toward the French when we let you go.... You may be American, but you behave like an Englishman. You annoy me; do you understand?"

Warner shrugged his shoulders.

"What do you mean by that gesture of disrespect?" demanded the Uhlan sharply.

"I mean that you ask improper questions and you know it!"

"I ask what I choose to ask!" he said angrily. "I think I shall take you with us, anyway, and not leave you here!"

"You'll only get into trouble with my Government and your own——"

"Take that man!" shouted the Uhlan in a passion. "I'll find out what he is——"

A shot rang loudly from the road outside; the Uhlans turned in astonishment, then ran for the door where their comrades flung them their bridles. They seized their lances and scrambled into their saddles,

still disconcerted and apparently incredulous of any serious danger to themselves. Then another Uhlan who had cantered off down the road suddenly fired from his saddle; the others, bending forward, scanned the road intently for a moment; then the whole peloton swung their horses, spurred over the ditch and up the grassy bank, trotted in single file through the hedge gate, and, putting their horses to a gallop, headed straight across the meadow toward the river and the quarry bridge beyond.

They had reached the river willows and were already galloping through them when, far away toward the south end of the meadow, a horseman trotted into view, drew bridle, fired at the Uhlans, then launched his horse into a dead run toward them, disengaging his lance from which a pennon flew gayly.

After him, bending forward in their saddles, came two score riders in pale blue jackets, lances advanced, urging their wiry horses, spurring hard to intercept the Uhlans.

But the Germans, who had gained the bridge, were now galloping over it, and they disappeared amid a distant racket of shots.

To the spectators at the school door, it all looked like a pretty, harmless, unreal scene artistically composed and arranged for moving-picture purposes; the wide, flat green meadow was now swarming with the pale blue and white laced dolmans of French

hussar lancers. Everywhere they were galloping, trotting, maneuvering; a section of a light battery appeared, drew rapidly nearer, went plunging across the meadow hub-deep in wild flowers, swung the guns and dropped them at the bridge, making the demi-tour at a gallop.

Back came the caissons, still at a gallop; the dark, distant figures of the cannoniers moved rapidly for a moment around each gun; a tiny figure held up one arm, dropped it; crack! echoed the report of the field-piece; up went the arm, down it jerked; crack! went the other.

From a front room overhead Warner and Sister Eila were leaning out and watching the lively spectacle along the river.

"It looks to me," he said, "as though the Germans were in the cement works.... By George! They are! The yards and quarries are alive with their cavalry! Look! Did you see that shell hit the stone crusher? There goes another. The big chimney on the Esser Works is falling—look!—down it comes! Our gunners have knocked it into dust!"

Another section of artillery came plunging into view across the meadows, the drivers spurring and lashing, the powerful horses bounding forward, and the guns jumping and bouncing over the uneven ground.

It was like a picture book—exactly what the layman expects of a battle—a wide, unobstructed

view over a flat green meadow, artillery at a gallop with officers spurring ahead; brilliantly uniformed cavalry arriving in ever-increasing squadrons, some dismounting and deploying, others drawn up here and there under serried thickets of lances. But there was no smoke, only a dusky, translucent haze clinging for a moment to the gun muzzles; no enemy in sight save for a scrambling dot here and there among the quarry hills where, from the cement works, a cloud of dust rose and widened, veiling the trees and hillsides.

For a while the lively rattle of the fusillade continued, but in a few minutes a six-gun battery arrived and went into ear-splitting action, almost instantly extinguishing the German fire from the quarry. A few more ragged volleys came, then only dropping shots from their carbines as the hussars rode forward and broke into a gallop across the quarry bridge.

More cavalry was arriving all the while, dragoons and *chasseurs-à-cheval*, all riding leisurely toward the quarry. More artillery was coming, too, clanking and bumping up the road, a great jolting column of field batteries, not in a hurry, paying little attention to the lively proceedings across the river, where the German cavalry was retreating over the rolling country toward the eastern hills and the blue hussars were riding after them.

The artillery passed the school and continued on

toward Ausone. Behind them came infantry with their swinging, slouchy stride, route step, mildly interested in the doings of the cavalry in the meadow, more interested in the Sisters of Charity leaning from the schoolhouse windows and the excited children crowding at the open door.

Not very far beyond the school a regiment turned out into a stubble field and stacked arms. Other regiments swung out east and west along the Route de Saïs, stacked arms, let go sacks, and went to work with picks and spades.

More artillery rumbled by; then came some engineers and a pontoon train which turned out toward the river opposite the school after the engineers had opened a way through the hedge stile.

Sister Eila and Warner had returned from the upper story to stand on the doorstep among the children.

"One thing is certain," he said in her ear; "Sister Félicité will have to take the children away tonight. The infantry yonder are intrenching, and all these wagons and material that are passing mean that the valley is to be defended."

The young Sister nodded and whispered to Sister Félicité, who looked very grave.

Some odd-looking, long, flat motor trucks were lumbering by; the freight which they carried was carefully covered with brown canvas. Other trucks were piled high with sections of corrugated iron,

hollow steel tubes, and bundles of matched boards and planking.

For these vehicles there was a dragoon escort.

"Aeroplanes and material for portable sheds," said Warner. "They intend to erect hangars. There is going to be trouble in the valley of the Récollette."

He turned and looked out and around him, and saw the valley already alive with soldiers. Across the river on the quarry road they were also moving now, cavalry and artillery; and, as far as he could follow eastward with his eye, red-legged soldiers were continuing the lines of trenches already begun on this side of the river.

An officer of hussars rode up, saluted the Sisters and Warner, glanced sharply at Asticot, who had flattened himself against the vines on the schoolhouse wall, and, leaning forward from his saddle, asked if the German cavalry had been there that morning.

"Six Uhlans, *mon capitaine*," said Warner. "They ripped up a plank from the floor; I can't imagine why. You can see it through the door from where you sit your saddle."

The officer rode up close to the steps and looked into the schoolroom.

"Thank you, Monsieur. You see what they've done, I suppose?"

"No, I didn't understand."

"It is simple. The Esser cement works across the

river built this school two years ago. It's a German concern. While they were about it they laid down a few cement gun platforms—with an eye to this very moment which confronts us now."

He shrugged his shoulders:

"The Esser cement works over there are full of gun emplacements in cement, masquerading as pits, retaining walls, foundations, and other peaceful necessities. A British officer discovered all this only a few days ago——"

"Captain Halkett!" exclaimed Warner, inspired.

The Hussar glanced at him, surprised and smiling.

"Yes, Monsieur. Are you acquainted with Captain Halkett?"

"Indeed, I am! And," he turned to the Sisters of Charity, "he is a good friend of all of us."

"He is my friend, also," said the Hussar warmly. "He has told me about Saïs and how, masquerading as a quarry workman one evening, he discovered gun platforms along the Récollette and among the quarries. You understand they were very cunning, those Germans, and the cement works and quarries of Herr Heinrich von Esser are all ready to turn those hills yonder into a fortress. Which," he added, laughing, "we may find very convenient."

Sister Eila, standing beside the horse's head, stroked it, looking up at the officer out of grave eyes.

"Is Captain Halkett well?" she asked calmly.

"I think so, Sister. I saw him yesterday."

"If you see him again, would you say to him that Captain Gray is at the Château des Oiseaux recovering from an accident?"

"Yes, I will tell him, Sister; but he must be around here somewhere——"

"Here!" exclaimed Warner.

"Why, yes. Our aëroplanes have just passed through. A British Bristol biplane is among them in charge of a flight-lieutenant—Ferris, I think his name is. Captain Halkett ought to be somewhere about. Possibly he may be superintending the disembarkment and the erection of the sheds."

He pointed northwest, adding that he understood the sheds were to be erected on the level stretch of fields beyond the school.

"However, I shall give him your message, Sister, if I meet him," he said, saluted them ceremoniously in turn, cast another puzzled and slightly suspicious glance at Asticot, and rode away.

"I should like to find Halkett," said Warner. "I certainly should like to see him again. We had become friends, you see. Shall we walk back that way across the fields, Sister Eila?"

Sister Eila turned to Sister Félicité. Her color was high, but she spoke very calmly:

"Had I not better remain with you and help you close the school?"

Sister Félicité shook her head vigorously:

"I can attend to that if it becomes necessary. I shall not budge unless I am called to field duty."

"But the children? Had I not better take some of them home?"

"There's time enough. If there is going to be any danger to them, I can arrange all that."

Sister Eila hesitated, her lovely head lowered.

"If we could find Halkett on our way back," said Warner, "I think he would be very glad to hear from us that Gray is alive."

Sister Eila nodded in silence; Warner made his adieux; the Sisters of Charity consulted together a moment, then the American and Sister Eila went out through the rear door and through the little garden. And at their heels shuffled Asticot, furtively chewing a purloined apple.

CHAPTER XXXI

As they reached the plateau above the school and halted for a few moments to look back across the valley of the Récollette, Warner began to understand.

The cannonading in the north had ceased. On every road, in whichever direction he looked, troops, artillery, and wagons were moving eastward. This was no mere cavalry reconnoissance; it was a serious offensive movement in force toward the east.

Eastward and south lay the Vosges; beyond, the lost provinces stretched away in green valleys toward the Rhine.

There lay the objective of this movement which was based on the great Barrier Forts from Verdun to Toul, from Toul to Nancy and Luneville, southward to Epinal, to the great, grim citadel of Belfort.

This was no raid, no feint, no diversion made by a flying corps along the frontier. A great screen of cavalry was brushing back every hostile scout toward the mountains; the contact at the cement works was a mere detail. Nor was this movement directed toward the north, where the Grand Duchy was crawling alive with Prussians already battering at the "Iron Gate of France."

No, the guns of Longwy were not calling these French horsemen north, whatever was happening at Verdun or along the Moselle. Their helmets were moving toward the east, toward the passes of the Vosges where Alsace lay, and Lorraine. Metz, Strassburg, Colmar, Mülhausen, beckoned from every tall tower, every gable, every spire. It was invasion! Armed France was riding toward the rising sun.

Sister Eila's pale, intelligent face was lifted to the distant horizon; her clear, exalted gaze made it plain to him that she, also, had begun to understand.

As for Asticot, he was finishing the core of his apple and watching details in the vast panorama out of his tiny mouse-eyes; and whether he understood

or cared to understand no man might say. For the minds of little animals must remain inscrutable.

Near them, on the grassy plateau, soldiers were unloading portable sheds in sections and erecting them; others were leveling hedges, felling small, isolated trees, uprooting bushes, and clearing away a line of wire pasture fencing.

Evidently this plateau was to be a base for some of the airmen operating along the Vosges or possibly, also, north and east from Verdun.

As they moved forward he looked about for a British uniform, but saw none. A soldier informed them that there were no British troops attached to the army of General Pau as far as he knew; two or three cavalry officers politely confirmed the statement, taking Warner to be an Englishman.

It was not until, following the deeply trodden sheep-walk, they passed the silver birch woods that they had any news of Halkett.

A squadron of hussars was already bivouacked there; their wagons were coming across the fields from the Dreslin road; officers, men, and horses had taken advantage of the woods to escape observation from air-scouts; and three batteries of artillery were parked in the Forêt de Saïs, where the cannoniers had already begun to cover everything with green branches.

As they passed through the Forêt de Saïs, out of which a shepherd with his shaggy dogs was driving

his flock, they overtook an officer of hussars on foot, sauntering along the same path, a lighted cigarette between his white-gloved fingers.

He stepped aside into the bracken, courteously, in deference to Sister Eila, and lifted his hand to his shako in salute. But when he caught sight of Warner he stepped forward with a quick, boyish smile and held out his hand.

"Do you remember me?—D'Aurès? This is Monsieur Warner, is it not?"

They exchanged a handclasp; Warner presented him to Sister Eila.

"This is exceedingly nice," said the American cordially. "We—Sister Eila and I—are returning to the Château. I hope you will come with us."

"If I may venture to pay my respects——"

"You will be welcome, I know." He added, laughing: "Also, the ladies will be most interested in the fate of their horses and their automobiles."

The Vicomte d'Aurès reddened, but laughed:

"The Countess was most gracious, most patriotic," he said. "But one could expect nothing less from a De Moidrey. Nevertheless, I felt like a bandit that evening. I left them only a basket wagon and a donkey."

"Which have been greatly appreciated, Monsieur," said Sister Eila, smiling. And she told him about the removal of Captain Gray from the school to the Château.

"Oh, by the way," exclaimed D'Aurès, "we have a British aviator with us—a friend of yours, Sister Eila, and of Mr. Warner."

"Halkett!"

"Yes, indeed. It appears that Captain Halkett has specialized in this region, so he has been assigned to us. I have the honor of a personal acquaintance with him."

"Where is he?" asked Warner.

"He is near here somewhere. His machine, a Bristol, is to be parked with ours on the plateau yonder. I think they are erecting the hangars now."

They entered the wicket of the lodge gate and advanced along the drive toward the house.

Warner said:

"All this movement means the invasion of Alsace-Lorraine, I take it."

D'Aurès nodded.

"Could you give me an idea of the situation as it stands, Captain?"

"I can only guess. Briefly, we are moving on Strassburg from the Donon peaks to Château-Salins. As I understand it, our armies now stretch from the Sambre to the Seine, from the Meuse to the Oise.

"I can tell you only what is gossiped about among cavalry officers. We believe that we are leading a great counter-offensive movement; that it is our General Joffre's strategy to drive the Germans out of upper Alsace, block Metz and Strassburg, and,

holding them there in our steel pincers, let loose our army on their flank and rear."

"And Longwy? And this drive just north of us at Ausone?"

D'Aurès smiled.

"Can you still hear the cannonade?"

They halted to listen; there was no longer that deadly rumor from the north.

"Verdun and Toul are taking care of that raid, I think," said D'Aurès pleasantly. "It comes from Metz, of course. Verdun must look out for the country between it and Longwy, too. That is not *our* route. Ours lies by Nancy toward Vic and Moyenvic, and through Altkirch to Mülhausen, and *then*—" he laughed—"it does not become a Frenchman to prophesy or boast. There were too many dreamers in 1870.

"I am telling merely the gossip of our camps. It is human to gossip when the day's work is over. But for the rest—route step and plod ahead!—That is what counts, not bragging or splendid dreams."

When they reached the terrace Warner fell back to speak to Asticot.

"I've arranged for you at the Golden Peach. Madame Arlon knows." He handed Asticot a key. "There's plenty to do in my studio down there. Get some wood and make cases for my canvases. Cover the *chassis* with *toile* and prime them with white lead. Use an ivory palette knife and let them have

the sun when there is any and when there is no wind and dust. That will keep you busy until I send for you. Do you comprehend?"

"Yes, M'sieu'.... May I not walk behind M'sieu' when he takes the air?"

Warner scowled at him, but he looked so exactly like a shiftless, disreputable and mongrel dog who timidly desires to linger, yet is fearful of a kick, that the American laughed.

"A fine bargain I have in you!" he said. "You prefer rambling to work, it appears!"

"I prefer the vicinity of M'sieu'," said Asticot naïvely.

"Go back to the inn and see if you can do an honest hour's work!" retorted Warner; and he turned and rejoined Sister Eila, who had taken D'Aurès up the steps of the terrace.

It appeared that the ladies were on the north terrace. On the way through the hall, Sister Eila excused herself and mounted the stairs for a look-in on Gray. At the same moment, Peggy Brooks came out of the billiard room, saw D'Aurès, recognized him.

"Oh," she said, extending her hand, "I am so glad you have come back! How is my Minerva runabout?"

"I'm sorry I don't know," he replied, blushing; "I didn't steal it for myself, you see."

"You *didn't* steal it! It's a gift. It's mine to give. I give it to *you*! My sister took all the credit of giving

away the horses and cars. But I insist on your having my Minerva runabout. It's a charming car. You'll fall in love with it if they let you drive it. Come out to the terrace and speak to my sister and to my dearest friend, Philippa Wildresse."

Warner, much amused to observe the capture of this young man, followed them out to the south terrace.

He certainly was an ornamental young man of enchanting manners, and his popularity was immediate.

To Warner Philippa came presently:

"Where have you been?" she asked. "And couldn't you have taken me?"

"Dear child, I was out before sunrise prowling about the hills with that vagabond at my heels—Asticot."

"What did you see?"

"Uhlans on Vineyard Hill, across the Récollette. Wildresse was with them."

"He!"

"Yes, the miserable spy! If he's not gone clear away some of D'Aurès' men had better try to round him up and get rid of him.... After that, Sister Eila and I went to the school. More Uhlans came sniffing around, but they cleared out in a hurry when our cavalry appeared. Our artillery shelled the Germans out of the Esser quarries—you must have heard the firing?"

"Yes. We all thought that the Germans had arrived. Poor Mr. Gray looked so disgusted!"

"Philippa, Halkett is here somewhere."

"Oh!" she exclaimed happily.

"He's here with his machine—an aëroplane of sorts—Bristol, I believe. No doubt he'll come up to the house when he has a chance. I suppose Sister Eila has gone up to tell Gray."

They had strolled around to the eastern parapet and now stood looking out over the tree tops.

"What has happened at Ausone?" she asked. "The cannon have stopped firing."

"I saw Ausone burning from Vineyard Hill. It's all knocked to pieces, Philippa. What I think has happened is this: troops from Verdun and Toul—perhaps from Chalons—have entered Ausone in time to save the fort. I suppose our infantry are intrenched along the Récollette and that there is going to be more fighting in Ausone Forest, which must be full of Germans."

"You don't think they'll come here?"

"I don't know. The army which you see below us everywhere in the valley is probably on its way to invade Alsace. D'Aurès thinks so. I suppose this line will be defended. We shall hear more cannonading, I fancy. Anyway, they are digging trenches to fall back on."

"Where?"

"Along the Récollette."

From where they were leaning on the stone balustrade, they could see pontoons spanning the river. Across them troops and wagons were passing; through every ford cavalry were splashing; the quarry bridge and road were packed with motor trucks escorted by cavalry; and on the Saïs highway artillery was still passing toward Ausone.

Her cheeks framed by her hands, elbows on the parapet, Philippa gazed at the moving host below. She wore a thin white gown; a scarf fell from her shoulders; her thick, beautiful hair was full of ruddy gleams, accenting the snowy neck and throat.

"If I set up my easel will you let me have a try at you?" he asked.

"Yes, but you've had no luncheon. I'll bring you something, and you can arrange your canvas while I'm gone."

But they found Sister Eila had arranged for him to lunch with Gray, so he sat with that battered and patient Englishman, chatting, watching the troops in the valley from the open window, and lunching comfortably.

Sister Eila glanced in, smiled, then went lightly away toward the eastern wing of the house, where fresh consignments of bandages were to be sterilized and stored in Red Cross boxes—gauze rolls, plugs for bullet wounds, body bandages, fracture bandages, arm slings, rolls of unbleached muslin, of cotton, of gauze.

As she passed the open door of the chapel, she halted, faced the altar and made her reverence. Then, crossing herself, she rose erect, turned to continue her way, and encountered Halkett face to face.

A bright flush leaped to her cheeks; his own face reddened to his hair under the bronze coat of tan.

"I am so glad to see you," she said steadily, offering her hand. "We heard you were in Saïs with your aëroplane. How did you happen to come into the east wing? It must have been closed when you were here before?"

"I have never before been in this house. I saw you cross the court as I mounted the terrace steps." He tried to ease the constraint in his voice. "I wanted to speak to you—first of anybody—in Saïs.... Are you well?"

"Perfectly. And you, Captain Halkett?"

"You seem thinner. You do not spare yourself."

"We scarcely have time to think of ourselves," she said, smiling. "I am trying to fit up a little hospital here; Madame de Moidrey offers the house."

"I understand that my friend, Captain Gray, is here?"

"Poor boy! I must not detain you any longer. You will desire to pay your respects to Madame de Moidrey and her sister and to the beautiful Miss Wildresse——"

"Philippa! Here?"

"You know her? Is she not lovely? I find her charming. And—so should all young men," she added with a little laugh. "Therefore—I shall no longer detain you, Captain Halkett——"

"May I—hope to see you again?"

"I hope so, indeed," she replied cheerfully. "Do you remain for a while in Saïs?"

"For a while, I think."

There fell a silence, which became a little strained. Sister Eila looked up at him from lowered eyes; then her face went white and she laid her hand flat against the chapel wall beside her, as though for support.

"Then—if I may hope to see you again—inspect your hospital, perhaps——"

She nodded, still leaning on the chapel wall.

So he went away swiftly, very straight in his field uniform, and she saw him cross the court, head erect, looking directly before him as though he saw nothing.

An immense fatigue seemed to weight her; still supporting herself against the wall, she turned and looked at the chapel door. Even on that grey day the light within was golden from the old glass.

Into that mellow stillness crept Sister Eila, her young head drooping, the metal crucifix swinging at her girdle from its rosary of wooden beads.

The painted saints stared at her; the painted angels all stood watching her; the Mother of God

looked out from the manger, brooding, preoccupied, wonder-eyed; but the Child at her breast was smiling.

Then down on her knees fell Sister Eila; her slim hands clasped, clung, tightened, parted, and covered her face convulsively.

Very far away in the valley a trumpet spoke.

CHAPTER XXXII

Warner began the full-length portrait—which has now become famous under the title "Philippa Passes"—in the main hall of the Château.

A clear light fell through the northern and eastern windows; from the golden gloom above generations of De Moidreys looked down upon the fair girl who stood in their great hall as tranquil and unconscious as though born within the carved gray walls which they had built or added to in years long dead.

He had chosen for the pose a moment when, as she was in the act of passing in front of him, a word from him had checked her and caused her to turn her head.

There he held her as she had paused, poised on the very edge of motion, her enchanting head turned and the grey eyes meeting his.

Already on his canvas he had caught her; an odd sensation of cold, clear-minded exaltation seemed to possess him as he worked—a calm, strange certainty of himself and of the work in hand.

There was no hesitation, no doubt within him, only a sustained excitement under unerring control. He knew what he wanted; he knew that he was doing methodically what he wanted to do with every unhurried brush stroke.

There was no halting, no searching, no checks; his mind had never been so absolutely in control of his hand; his hand never so automatically obedient, his intelligence never before so clear, so logical, so steady under the incessant lightning of inspiration.

Conscious of the tremendous tension, he knew he was equal to it—knew that no weakness of impulse or of sentiment could swerve him, unsteady him, meddle with his brain or his nerves or his hand.

Nothing could stop him from doing what he had to do, nothing could tamper with this newborn confidence which had suddenly possessed him with its unlooked for magic.

He was painting Philippa as he had known her from the beginning; as he had prophesied; as she had been revealed—a young girl with grey eyes and chestnut hair, fine of limb, with the shadow of a smile on her wistful lips, and "her soul as clean as a flame."

So certain was he of what he was about that to

Philippa he seemed to work very leisurely, wiping brush after brush with unhurried deliberation, laying on stroke after stroke with that quiet decision which accumulates and coördinates component parts into a result so swiftly that an ensemble is born as though by magic.

A few great pictures are painted that way; myriads of bad ones. If he thought of this it did not trouble him. Already, on his canvas, the soul of a young girl was looking at him through those grey eyes; on the fresh lips, scarce parted, hovered the shadow of a smile, virginal and vague.

He felt the splendid tension; experienced the consciousness of achievement, steeled every nerve, wiped his brushes with deliberation, drew them across the edges of the colors needed, scarcely glancing at his palette, laid on the brush stroke with the precision of finality.

From where he had slung his tall canvas between two ancient, high-backed chairs as an improvised easel, he could see the northern terrace and the people gathered there—Madame de Moidrey in animated conversation with Halkett; Peggy knitting fitfully and looking over her clicking needles at the youthful Vicomte d'Aurès, who had pushed aside the tea table in order to obtain an unobstructed view of this American girl who was making his boyish head spin.

Beyond them, on a steamer chair, lay Gray.

Sister Eila sat beside him sewing. There was conversation between them and Madame de Moidrey and Halkett—across and across, cat-cradle fashion—but it passed through Peggy and D'Aurès unheeded, as wireless in the upper air currents; and the Countess glanced occasionally at her sister or let her eyes rest on D'Aurès now and then with a pleasant, preoccupied air, as though considering other things than those which were passing under her pretty nose.

From time to time Philippa came around to where Warner stood before his canvas, and remained beside him in silence while he studied what he had done.

Once he looked up questioningly; the girl took possession of his right arm with both of hers and rested her cheek lightly against his shoulder. No words could have praised or reassured him as eloquently. And he understood that what he had done was, to her, worthy of all she believed him to be—matchless, wonderful, and hers.

The light had failed a little in the early August sky, but the clouds had cleared and the sun glittered in the west. There was light to work by, yet.

He clothed his canvas in a mystery of cobweb shadow: behind her there was a dull gleam of duller tapestry; delicate half-lights made the picture vague, so that the "clean flame" of her seemed the source of all light, its origin, making exquisite the clear, young eyes.

He knew that what he had painted was already a fit companion to be placed among the matchless company looking down on them from the walls through a delicate bloom of dust.

What he had done belonged here, as she herself belonged here between these old-time walls and the ancient roof above. And every corridor, every room, every terrace, would be the sweeter, the fresher, for her lingering before she passed on her life's journey through an old and worn-out world.

"Philippa passes," he said, thinking aloud.

She looked up, smiled.

"Only where you lead her, shall Philippa pass," she murmured.

"It is to be the title of your portrait.... Would you care to look at it now? There is not so much more to do to it, I think...."

She came around and stood silently beside him.

"Is it you?" he asked.

"My other self.... I had not supposed you knew her—so deeply—so intimately—more intimately than I myself seem to know her."

He laughed gently.

"Heart of a child," he said, half to himself.

"Heart of a man," she answered. "What have I done to deserve you? How can you be so patient with me? ... You, a man already grown, distinguished, ripe with wisdom.... I don't know why you should annoy yourself with me.... It is too

wonderful—why you should be my friend—my friend——"

"There is something far more wonderful, Philippa—that you should be my friend. Didn't you know it?"

She laughed.

"I wonder if you know what I would do for you? There is nothing you could ask of me that I would not do——"

She ceased, her voice threatening unsteadiness, but her eyes were clear and she was smiling.

"Words are idle things," she added calmly, "and not necessary, I think, between you and me.... Only, sometimes I feel—a need of telling you—of my devotion.... There have been lonely years—friendless—and a heart sickens under eternal silence—needing an opportunity for self-expression——"

"I know, dear."

"I know you do.... You are very kind to me."

"Philippa, I care more for you than I do for any living person!"

The lovely surprise in her face flushed her to her hair. She looked at him out of confused, incredulous eyes, strove to smile, caught her trembling lip between her teeth.

"Didn't you know it?" he said in a low voice.

She tried to answer, turned sharply and faced the windows with blurred eyes that saw only a glimmering sheet of light there.

He stood motionless, looking at her, intent upon the sudden confusion in his own brain, realizing it, trying to explain it, analyze it coolly, calmly account for it.

If it were any emotion resembling love which was so utterly possessing him, he chose to know it, to inform himself as to the real significance of this loss of logical equilibrium, this mental inadequacy which began to resemble a sort of chaos.

Was he in love with this girl? Was it love? Was this what it all had meant—all, from the very beginning, through all its coincidences, accidents, successive steps and stages?

And suddenly a terrible timidity seized him. Suppose she knew what he was thinking about! What would she think? What would she do? Where would her confidence go? What would become of her trust in him? What would happen to her implicit faith in him?

Of one thing he was suddenly and absolutely certain; love had never entered her mind, never lodged in her heart, never troubled that candid gaze, never altered her fearless smile. With all her devotion to him, all her passionate attachment of a child, never had anything as deep—never had any emotion as profound as love disturbed the mystery of depths where dwelt in virginal immaturity the soul of her, "clean as a flame—"

As for himself—where he now stood—whither

he was being led by something which was not reason, not intention, he did not seem able to understand.

The light in the room had become too uncertain to paint by; he released his canvas and carried it away behind a tapestry, setting it slanting, face to the stone wall.

The brushes, mediums, palette, he left on the palette table and pushed it into a corner behind a sofa, where nobody was likely to fall over it before he gave brushes and palette to Asticot to clean.

All the while Philippa stood looking out of the window over the tree tops, her young heart and brain on fire with happiness and throbbing with the wonder of her first innocent passion.

With it, for the first time, had come something she never before had known with Warner—something indefinite, new, inexplicable—a vague sense of shyness almost painful at instants—a consciousness of herself that she had never known—a subtle, instinctive realization of her own maturity which left a faintly delicious sensation in her breast.

Now, for the first time since she had known him, her instinct was not to go to him, not to face him. She did not understand why—did not question herself. From the window she looked out over the forest; she heard him moving quietly about behind her; listened with an odd content in his proximity, but with no desire to turn and join him—no wish to

move or stir from the spell which held her there in the enchanted silence of a happiness so wonderful that sky and earth seemed to understand and share it with her.

"Philippa?"

She turned slowly as in a dream.

It was perhaps as well that he had a record on canvas of what she had been—of the young girl he had been painting in all her lovely immaturity. Perhaps the girl who faced him now from the window was even lovelier, but she was not the Philippa of "Philippa Passes."

Truly that Philippa had passed, vanished silently even as she had stood there with her eyes on the window; faded, dissolved into thin shadow, leaving, where she had stood, this slender, silent, deep-eyed girl looking at him out of the new and subtle mystery which enveloped her.

He thought that it was he himself who saw her differently and with new eyes; but she herself had changed. And, for the first time, as they passed slowly toward the terrace together, he was conscious of a freshness that seemed to cling to her like a fragrance—and of the beauty of her as she moved beside him, not touching him, keeping clear of contact, her head a trifle bent.

CHAPTER XXXIII

Warner, dressing for dinner, stood looking down from his window at the Saïs road. Halkett, in his smart but sober field uniform, sat sideways on the window sill, chatting with his friend and surveying the lively panorama below, where, through the fading light, endless columns of motor lorries rolled ponderously eastward.

In every direction bicycle and motor cycle messengers were speeding, north and south on the Saïs road, west toward Dreslin by the mill, eastward over cow-paths and sheepwalks, and across the pontoons, or by the school highway and quarry bridge, southeast toward a road crowded with motor lorries, and through that gap in the foothills which narrows into the Pass of the Falcons.

Warner, leisurely buttoning his waistcoat, stood looking out of the window at the scenes passing under the plateau, and listening with the greatest interest to Halkett's comments on these preliminaries for a campaign about to open.

"Then, in your opinion, it is invasion?" he said.

Halkett nodded:

"I can make nothing else of this movement, Warner. Our General, Pau, is at Nancy. What you see down there is part of a perfectly complete and coherent army, and it is certainly moving on the

Vosges passes.

"Metz, Strassburg, Colmar, lie beyond; our alpinists are swarming around the Donon. Under it lie the lowlands of Alsace and Lorraine.

"Already we have seized the pass of Saales; Thann and Danemarie are menaced; the valley of the Bruche lies before us, Saarburg and the railroad to Metz invite us.

"Does it not all seem very logical, Warner?"

"It sounds so."

"It is good strategy. The logic is sound logic. If we carry it through, it will be applauded as brilliant strategy.

"The Germans want a decisive battle on French soil in the vicinity of Rheims. If they beat us there, they pivot on Verdun, half-circle on the Oise, and Paris lies before them. They have today a million men within striking distance of the French frontier."

"Are we fully mobilized?"

"Our concentration is slower; we are massing between Bar-le-Duc and Epinal. We have, so far, only seven *corps d'armée* concentrated, and twenty-one more on the march. But do you know what we have done already?

"Listen; this isn't generally known yet, but we have taken the passes of Bonhomme and Sainte Marie; *we have taken Mülhausen*——"

"*What!*"

"Yes, it's ours. More than that, we have entered

Dinant. At Mangiennes, Moncel, Lagarde, we drove the Germans. Our line of battle stretches two hundred miles from a point opposite Tongres to Nancy. We smashed the Germans at Altkirch and left them minus thirty thousand men!

"And this great counter-offensive which our General is planning is already exercising such a pressure on their advance toward Brussels that they have begun to detach entire army corps and send them post haste into Alsace. What do you think of that, Warner?"

"Fine!" exclaimed the American. "It's simply splendid, Halkett. You see, we here in the valley couldn't know anything about it. All we had to go by was that the German guns were booming nearer and nearer, that Ausone is in ruins, that Uhlans were riding the country as impudently as though they were patrolling their own fatherland. I tell you, old chap, it's a wonderful relief to me to hear from you what is really going on."

He turned to his mirror, lighted a cigarette, and began to fuss with his tie.

Halkett said, grimly amused:

"Oh, yes, we all ought to feel immensely relieved by capturing a mountain and a couple of unfortified German towns, even if there are today in Europe seventeen million men under arms and seventeen million more in reserve, all preparing to blow each other's heads off."

Warner came back slowly to the windows:

"It *is* a ghastly situation, Halkett. The magnitude of the cataclysm means nothing to us, so far. Nobody yet has comprehended it. I don't think anybody ever really can—even when it's over and the whole continent is underplowcd and fertilized with dead men from the Channel to the Carpathians—no single mind of the twentieth century is ever going to be able to grasp this universal horror in all its details. In a hundred years, perhaps——" He shrugged, threw away his cigarette, and picked up his evening coat to inspect it before decorating his person with it.

Halkett said:

The scale of the whole business is paralyzing. Here's a single detail, for example: Germany is in process of launching six huge armies into France. The Crown Prince, the Grand Duke of Württemberg, Generals von Kluck, von Bülow, von Hausen, and von Heeringen command them.

"Three of them have not yet moved; three are on their juggernaut way already—the Army of the Meuse, based at Cologne, is marching through Belgium on a front thirty miles wide, its right flank brushing the Dutch border at Visé, its left on Stavelot, its center enveloping the Liége railroad.

"The Moselle army, based on Coblenz, has made a highway of the Grand Duchy and is in Belgium. The Rhine army has its bases at Strassburg and Mayence, and started very gayly to raise the devil on

its own account, but we've stung it in the flank already and it's squirming in uncertainty.

"And that is the situation so far, old chap, as well as I can understand it. And I understand it fairly well because of my position with this French army. You don't quite understand how I happen to be here and what I am doing, do you?"

"Not exactly. I know you have a Bristol aëroplane here and that you are attached to the British Flying Corps."

"Oh, yes. In our service I am squadron commander, and Gray is wing commander. But I have a flight-lieutenant yonder at the sheds and a mechanic.

"As a matter of fact, Warner, I am the British Official Observer with General Pau's army, and Gray, when he can get about, is to act with me. That is what I am doing."

"You make no flights?"

"Oh, yes, we shall fly, Gray and I—not doing any range finding for the artillery and not making ordinary raids with bombs. Observation is to be our rôle. It's interesting, isn't it?"

"It's fascinating," said Warner, linking his arm in Halkett's as they left the room.

"As a matter of fact," he added, "in spite of the horrors in Belgium, the slaughter there and in Alsace, this war has not really begun."

Halkett turned a drawn and very grave face to

him:

"Warner," he said, "this war will not really begin until next spring. And there will be a million dead men under ground by that time."

Dinner that evening at the Château des Oiseaux was a most cheerful function. The passing of an army for miles and miles through the country around them was a relief and a reassurance which brought with it a reaction of gayety slightly feverish at moments.

The Countess de Moidrey gave her arm to Gray, tall, slim, yellow-haired, and most romantically pale: Captain the Vicomte d'Aurès took out Peggy Brooks —they turned to each other with the same impulse, as naturally as two children coming together—and the words designating them to other partners remained unspoken on Ethra's lips.

Philippa, in an enchanting gown of turquoise, looked up at the Countess, flushed and expectant, but the elder woman, much amused, designated Halkett, and the girl took the arm he offered with a faint smile at Warner, as though to reassure him concerning matters temporarily beyond her own control.

The Countess saw it, stood watching Warner, who had drawn Sister Eila's arm through his own, and was taking her out—saw Halkett and Philippa halt and draw aside to let them pass; saw the expression in Sister Eila's face as her glance met Halkett's, wavered, and passed elsewhere.

Before she and Gray had moved to close the double file, the Curé of Dreslin was unexpectedly announced, and she turned to receive him, asking him to support Gray on the other side. Always Father Chalus was a welcome guest at the Château; every house, humble or great, from Dreslin to Saïs, was honored when this dim-eyed old priest set foot across the threshold.

The dinner was lively, gay at times, and always cheerful with the excitement lent by the arrival of the army—an arrival verging closely on the dramatic, with the echoes of the cannonade still heavy among the northern forests, the evening sky still ruddy above Ausone, and the August air tainted with the odor of burning.

Through the soft candlelight servants moved silently; the Countess, with the old Curé on her right, devoted herself to him and to Gray.

As though utterly alone in the center of some vast solitude peopled only by themselves, young D'Aurès and Peggy Brooks remained conspicuously absorbed in each other and equally oblivious to everything and everybody else on earth.

"How is Ariadne?" inquired Halkett of Philippa,

"Poor dear! I have not seen her since she soiled a whisker in Jim's ultramarine!"

Sister Eila's lowered eyes were lifted; she tried to smile at Halkett.

"I saw Ariadne the other day," she said. "The cat

is quite comfortable in the garden of the Golden Peach."

Halkett said lightly:

"Ariadne introduced me to Sister Eila. Do you remember, Sister?"

But Sister Eila had already turned to Warner, and perhaps she did not hear.

Later Warner bent toward Philippa:

"You are enchanting in that filmy turquoise blue affair."

"Isn't it a darling? Peggy *would* make me wear it. It's hers, of course.... Do I please you?"

"Did you ever do anything else, Philippa?"

She colored, looked up at him confused, and laughed:

"Oh, yes," she said, "I have annoyed you too, sometimes. Do you remember when I ran away from Ausone and told you about it in the meadow by the river? Oh, you were very much annoyed! You need not deny it. I realize now how much annoyed you must have been——"

"Thank God you did what you did," he said under his breath.

"What else could I do?"

"Nothing.... I must have been blind, there in Ausone, not to understand you from the first moment. And I must have been crazy to have gone away and left you there.... When I think of it, it makes me actually ill——"

"Jim! You didn't know."

"I should have known. Any blockhead ought to have understood. That was the time I should have heard the knocking of opportunity! I was deaf. That was the time I should have caught a glimpse of that clean flame burning. I seemed to know it was there—words are cheap!—but my eyes were too dull to perceive a glimmer from it!"

"Jim! You saw a girl with painted lips and cheeks insulting the sunlight. How could you divine ——"

"I couldn't; I didn't. I was not keen enough, not fine enough. Yet, that was the opportunity. That was the moment when I should have comprehended you—when I should have stood by you—taken you, held you against everybody, everything—— Good God! I went away, smug as any Pharisee, and with a self-satisfied smile left you on the edge of hell—smiling back at me out of those grey, undaunted eyes——"

"Please! You were wonderful every minute from the beginning—every minute—all through it, Jim ——"

"*You* were! I know what I was. Halkett knows, too. I was not up to the opportunity; I did not measure up to the chance that was offered me; I was not broad enough, fine enough——"

"What are you saying!—When you know how I feel—how I regard you——"

"How can you regard me the way you say you

do?"

"How can I help it?" She looked down at her glass, touched the slender stem absently.

"Out of all the world," she said under her breath, "you alone held out a comrade's hand. Does anything else matter? ... Think! You are forgetting. Remember! Picture me where I was—as I was—only yesterday! Look at me now—here, beside you.—here under this roof, among these people—and the taste of their salt still keen in my mouth! Now, do you understand what you have done for me—you alone? Now, do you understand what I—feel—for you?—For you who mean not only life to me, but who have made possible for me that life which follows death?"

Her cheeks flushed; she turned breathlessly toward him.

"I tell you," she whispered, "you have offered me Christ, as surely as He has ever been offered at any communion since the Last Supper! ... *That* is what you have done for me!"

CHAPTER XXXIV

Dinner was ended.

Gray had retired to his room, persuaded by Madame de Moidrey, who bribed him by promising to read to him when he was tired of talking shop to

Captain Halkett.

Sister Eila had returned to the east wing, which was convenient to her business as well as to her devotions.

Also, she had need of Father Chalus, who had come all the way from Dreslin on foot. For it was included in the duty of the parish priest to confess both Sister Eila and Sister Félicité; only the sudden perils and exigencies of home duties in Dreslin had detained him since the war broke out.

He was old, lean, deeply worn in the service of the poor—a white-haired man who looked out on the world through kindly blue eyes dimmed by threescore years of smoky candlelight and the fine print of breviaries—a priest devotedly loved in Dreslin, and by the household of the Château, and by every inhabitant of the scattered farms composing the little hamlet called Saïs.

It appeared that Sister Eila had great need of Father Chalus, for they had gone away together, into the eastern wing of the house. And the Countess, noticing their departure, smiled to herself; for, like everybody else, she was skeptical regarding the reality of any sins that Sister Eila might have to confess.

The young Vicomte d'Aurès had taken his leave with all the unspoiled, unembarrassed, and boyish cordiality characteristic of his race; also he departed in a state of mind so perfectly transparent to

anybody who cared to notice it that Madame de Moidrey retired to the billiard room after his departure, looking very serious. She became more serious still when Peggy did not appear from the southern terrace, whither she had returned to mention something to Monsieur D'Aurès which she had apparently forgotten to say to him in the prolonged ceremony of leavetaking.

When fifteen minutes elapsed and no Peggy appeared, Madame de Moidrey rose from her chair, flushed and unsmiling. But before she had taken a dozen steps toward the southern terrace her younger sister reappeared, walking rapidly. When she caught sight of the Countess advancing, she halted and gazed at her sister rather blankly.

"Well, Peggy?"

"Well?"

"I am not criticising you or that boy, but perhaps a little more reticence—repose of manner—reserve ——"

"Ethra," she said in an awed voice, "I am in love with D'Aurès."

"*What!*"

"I am. It came."

"Good heavens, Peggy——"

"I know! I said 'good heavens,' too—I mean I thought it. I don't know what I've been saying this evening——"

"When? Where?"

"Everywhere. Just now, on the terrace——"

"Peggy!"

"What?"

"You didn't say anything that could be——"

"Yes, I did. I think he knows I'm in love with him. I meant him to know!"

"Peggy!"

"Oh, Ethra, I don't remember what I said.... And I think he cares for me—I think we're in love with each other——"

The girl dropped into a chair and stared at her sister.

"I'm bewitched, I think. Ever since I saw him that first time it's been so. I've thought of him all the time.... He says that it was so with him, also——'"

"Oh, heavens, Peggy! Are you mad? Is he? You're acting like a pair of crazy children——"

"We *are* children. He's only a boy. But I know he's growing into the only man who could ever mean anything to me.... He's writing to his father now. I expect his father will write to you. Isn't it wonderful!"

Ethra de Moidrey gazed at her sister dizzily. The girl sat with her face between her hands looking steadily at the carpet. After a moment she glanced up.

"It's the way *you* fell in love," she said under her breath.

Madame de Moidrey rose abruptly, as though a

sudden shaft of pain had pierced her. Then, walking over to her sister, she dropped one hand on her dark head; stroked the thick, lustrous hair gently, absently; stood very silent, gazing into space.

When Peggy stood up the Countess encircled her waist with one arm. They walked together slowly toward the southern terrace.

A million stars had come out in the sky; there was a scent of lilies lingering above the gardens. Sounds from distant bivouacs came to their ears; no camp fires were visible, but the Récollette glittered like snow in the white glare of searchlights.

"That boy," said Peggy, "—wherever he is riding out there in the night—out there under the stars—that boy carries my heart with him.... I always thought that if it ever came it would come like this.... I thought it would never come.... But it has."

Halkett, returning from a conference with Warner and Gray, came out on the terrace to take his leave. They asked him to return when he could; promised to visit the sheds and see the Bristol biplane.

Part way down the steps he turned and came back, asked permission to leave his adieux with them for Sister Eila from whom he had not had an opportunity to take his leave, turned again and went away into the night, using his flashlight along the unfamiliar drive.

Ethra de Moidrey went into the house to keep

her promise to Gray, and found him tired but none the worse for his participation at dinner.

Philippa and Warner had come in to visit him; the Countess found the book from which she had been reading to him since his arrival. He turned on his pillow and looked at her, and she seated herself beside the bed and opened the book on her knees.

"Do you remember where we left off?" she asked, smiling.

"I think it was where he was beginning to fall in love with her."

The Countess de Moidrey bent over the book. There was a slight color in her cheeks.

"I had not noticed that he was falling in love," she observed, turning the pages to find her place.

Philippa said to Warner:

"Could we walk down and see the searchlights? They are so wonderful on the water."

"Probably the sentinels won't permit us outside our own gates," he replied. "I know one thing; if you and I were not considered as part of the family of the Château, the military police would make us clear out. It's lucky I left the inn to come up here."

The Countess had begun reading in a low, soft voice, bending over her book beside the little lamp at the bedside, where Gray lay watching her under a hand that shaded his pallid face.

Something in her attitude and his, perhaps—or in her quiet voice—seemed subtly, to Philippa, to

exclude her and the man with her from a silent entente too delicate, perhaps, to term an intimacy.

She touched Warner's arm, warily, not taking it into her possession as had been her unembarrassed custom only yesterday—even that very day.

Together they went out into the corridor, down the stairway, and presently discovered Peggy on the southern terrace gazing very earnestly at the stars.

That the young girl was wrapped, enmeshed, in the magic of the great web which Fate has been spinning since time began, they did not know.

Still stargazing, they left her and walked down the dark drive to the lodge where, through the iron grille, they saw hussars *en vedette* sitting their horses in the uncertain luster of the planets.

Overhead the dark foliage had begun to stir and sigh in the night breeze; now and again a yellowing leaf fell, rustling slightly; and they thought they could hear the Récollette among its rushes—the faintest murmur—but were not sure.

He remembered her song, there in the river meadow:

> Hussar en vedette
> What do you see?—

And thought of the white shape on the bank—a true folk song, unfinished in its eerie suggestion which

the imagination of the listeners must always finish.

Yet he said:

"*Was* he killed—that *vedette* on the Récollette, Philippa?"

She knew what he meant, smiled faintly:

"Does anybody see Death and live to say so?"

"Of course I knew," he said.

They turned back, walking slowly. He had drawn her arm through his, but it rested there very lightly, scarcely in contact at all.

"What a fine fellow Halkett is!" he said.

"Your friends should be fine, Jim. Our friends ought to reflect our own qualities and mirror our aspirations.... That was written in one of my school-books," she added with that delicate honesty which characterized her.

"You reflect my aspirations," he said, unsmiling.

"Oh, Jim! I? Do you imagine I believe that?"

"You might as well. It's true enough. You have just mirrored for me my hopeless aspiration toward that perfect and transparent honesty which I haven't attained, but which seems always to have been a part of you."

Sister Eila passed them in the starlight, her young head bent over the rosary in her hands, moving slowly across the lawn.

Their passing on the drive did not seem to arouse her from her meditation; she seated herself on a stone bench under a clump of yews; and they

moved on in silence.

As they reached the terrace a shot sounded down by the river; another echoed it; the rattle of rifle fire ran along the valley from, north to south; a rocket rose, flooding the hill beyond the quarry road with a ghastly light.

Peggy Brooks, white as death, came over to Philippa and took her hands into both of hers.

She had begun to learn what love meant, with the first blind shot in the dark, and all the passion and fear within her was concentrated in wondering where those leaden messengers of death had found their billets.

She said in a ghost of a voice:

"Is there going to be a battle here?"

"Not now," replied Warner. "Probably it's nothing at all—some nervous sentry waking up his equally nervous comrades.... What a horrible light that rocket shed!"

The shots had died away; there was no more firing.

Vignier had come around; he was an old soldier, and Warner spoke to him.

"Perhaps a cow," he said with a shrug, "—the wind in the bushes—a hedgehog rustling. Young soldiers are like that in the beginning. And still, perhaps they have caught a prowler out there—an Uhlan, maybe, or a spy. One never knows what to expect at night."

"Do you think that our valley will see any fighting, Vignier?"

"Does that not depend, Monsieur, on what is to happen beyond the Vosges? They have dug line after line of trenches across the valley and the plateau as far as Dreslin. Those are positions being prepared in advance, to fall back upon in case of disaster in the east."

"I thought that was what this trench digging meant."

"That is what it means, Monsieur Warner. They tell me that our soldiers are going to operate the cement works day and night to turn out material for platforms and emplacements. I know that they have gone into our western woods with loads of cement and crushed stone. The forest is full of *fantassins* and *chasseurs-à-pied*. It is certain that some general will make our Château his headquarters *en passant*."

He had scarcely spoken when, far away in the darkness, a noise arose. It came from the direction of the lodge gate, grew nearer, approaching by the drive.

The Countess, reading to Gray, heard it, laid down her book to listen. Gray listened too, raising himself on his pillows.

"Cavalry have entered the grounds," he said quietly.

"I shall have to go down," she said. At the door she paused: "Will you remember where we left off,

Captain Gray?"

"I shall remember. It is where he has completely fallen in love with her."

The Countess de Moidrey met his calm gaze, sustained it for a moment, then with a smile and a nod of adieu she turned and went out into the corridor. As she descended the stairs she placed both hands against her cheeks, which burned slightly.

The hall below was already crowded with officers of somebody's staff; the pale blue tunics of chasseurs and hussars were conspicuous against the darker dress of dragoons. The silver corselet of a colonel of cuirassiers glittered in the lamplight; twisted gold arabesques glimmered on crimson caps and sleeves; the ring of spur and hilt and the clash of accouterments filled the house.

As the Countess set foot in the hall, a general officer wearing the cross of the Legion came forward, his red cap, heavy with gold, in his gloved hand.

"Countess," he said, bending over the hand which she smilingly extended, "a thousand excuses could not begin to make amends for our intrusion ____"

"General, you honor my roof. Surely you must understand the happiness that I experience in reminding you that the house of De Moidrey belongs to France and to the humblest and highest of her defenders."

The General, whose clipped mustache and

imperial were snow-white, and whose firm, bronzed features denied his years, bent again over the pretty hand that rested on his own.

Then, asking permission to name himself, in turn he presented the members of his military family.

Included was a thin blond man of middle height, with a golden mustache twisted up, cinder-blond hair, and conspicuous ears. He wore a monocle, and was clothed in a green uniform. General of Division Delisle presented him as Major-General Count Cassilis, the Russian Military Observer attached to division headquarters.

For a few moments there was much bending of tight-waisted tunics in the yellow lamplight, much jingling of spurs and sabers, compliments spoken and implied with a gay smile and bow—all the graceful, easy formality to be expected in such an extemporized gathering.

Peggy and Philippa appeared, followed by Warner; presentations were effected; servants arranged chairs and brought trays set with bottles of light wine and biscuits, preliminary to an improvised supper which was now being prepared in the kitchen.

General Raoul Delisle had known Colonel de Moidrey; he and the Countess formed the center of the brilliant little assembly where half a dozen officers surrounded Peggy and Warner.

But the effect of Philippa on the Russian Military

Observer, General Count Cassilis, was curious to watch.

From the instant he laid eyes on her, he had continued to look at her; and his inspection would have had all the insolence of a stare had he not always averted his gaze when hers moved in his direction.

When he had been named to her, he had bowed suavely, and with characteristic Russian ceremony and empressement; but the instant her name was pronounced the Russian Observer had straightened himself like a steel rod released from a hidden spring, and his fishy blue eyes widened so that his monocle had fallen from its place to swing dangling across the jeweled decorations on his breast.

And now he had managed to approach Philippa and slightly separate her from the company, detaining her in conversation, more suave, more amiably correct than ever.

Already in her inexperience with a world where such men are to be expected, the girl found herself vaguely embarrassed, subtly on the defensive—a defensive against something occult which somehow or other seemed to menace her privacy and seemed to be meddling with the natural reticence with which, instinctively, she protected herself from any explanation of her past life.

Not that Count Cassilis had presumed to ask any direct question; she was not even aware of any hint

or innuendo; yet she was constantly finding herself confronted with a slight difficulty in responding to his gay, polite, and apparently impersonal remarks. Somehow, everything he said seemed to involve some reference on her part to a past which now concerned nobody excepting herself and the loyal friends who comprehended it.

And, from the beginning, from the first moment when this man was presented to her, and she had looked up with a smile to acknowledge the introduction, she experienced an indefinite sensation of meeting somebody whom she had seen somewhere years before—years and years ago.

As he conversed with her, standing there by the table with the lighted lamp partly concealed by his gold-slashed shoulder, the vague impression of something familiar but long forgotten came at moments, faded, returned, only to disappear again.

And once, a far, pale flicker of memory played an odd trick on her, for suddenly she seemed to remember a pair of thin, conspicuous ears like his, and lamplight—or perhaps sunlight—shining behind them and turning them a translucent red. It came and vanished like the faint memory of a dream dreamed years and years ago. As she looked at Count Cassilis, the smile died out in her eyes and on her lips, and the slightest feeling of discomfort invaded her.

Toasts were offered, acknowledged,

compliments said, glasses emptied.

The General of Division Delisle spoke diffidently of quarters for himself and his military family, and was cordially reassured by the Countess.

There was plenty of room for all. It was evident, too, that they had ridden far and must be hungry. Servants were summoned, rooms in the east wing thrown open to the air; the kitchen stirred up to increased activity for the emergency; the officers piloted to the rooms assigned them.

Down on the drive a shadowy escort of hussars waited until an orderly appeared, shining, with his breast torch, the path to the stables.

Then three sky-guns jolted up out of the darkness and halted; a company of infantry tramped by toward the garage; the horses of the staff were led away by mounted gendarmes; and three big military touring cars, their hoods and glass windows grey with dust, began to purr and pant and crawl slowly after the infantry.

Everywhere sentries were being set, taking post on every terrace, every path and road, and before the doorways of the great house.

A single candle burned in the chapel. Beside it sat Sister Eila, intent on her breviary, her lips moving silently as she bent above it.

The fifth part of the breviary, Matins, Lauds, and the Little Office of the Blessed Virgin, absorbed her.

The whole of the breviary services, the duty of

publicly joining or of privately reading aloud so as to utter with the lips every word, is generally incumbent upon all members of religious orders.

But Sisters of Charity, forming as they do an *active* religious order, are excepted.

Nevertheless, they are always bound to some shorter substitute, such as the Little Office, or to some similar office. And though the hours for devotion are prescribed, the duties of mercy sometimes interrupt the schedule which must then be carried out as circumstances of necessity permit.

Philippa, entering the chapel, caught sight of Sister Eila, and knelt without disturbing her.

The girl had experienced an odd, unaccustomed, and suddenly imperative desire for the stillness of an altar, for its shelter; for that silent security that reigns beneath the crucifix and invites the meditation of the pure in heart.

How long she had been seated there in the shadows she did not know, but presently she became aware of Sister Eila beside her, resting against her as though fatigued.

The girl put her arm around Sister Eila's neck instinctively, and drew the drooping head against her shoulder.

They had not known each other well.

That was the beginning.

CHAPTER XXXV

The growling and muttering of German guns in the north and northeast awoke Warner in his bed.

Sunrise plated his walls and ceiling with gold; the morning air hummed with indefinite sounds and rumors, the confusion and movement of many people stirring.

He stood for a moment by his window looking down over the plateau and across the valley of the Récollette.

Everywhere cavalry, infantry, artillery, baggage trains, automobiles, bicycles, motor cycles were moving slowly eastward into the blazing eye of the rising sun and vanishing within its blinding glory.

Two French aëroplanes had taken the air. They came soaring over the valley from the plateau, filling the air with the high clatter of their machinery; pale green ribbons of smoke fell from them, uncoiling like thin strips of silk against the sky; flag signals were being exchanged between officers gathered on the terrace below and a group of soldiers at the head of the nearest pontoon across the river.

Poles supporting field telephone and telegraph wires stretched across the lawn, running south

toward the lodge gate. Another line ran east, another west.

Parked on the lawn were a dozen big automobiles, the chauffeurs at the wheels, the engines running. Behind these, soldier cyclists and motor cyclists sat cross-legged by their machines, exchanging gossip with a squadron of hussars drawn up on the other side of the drive.

There were no tents visible anywhere, but everywhere in the open soldiers were erecting odd-looking skeleton shelters and covering them with freshly cut green boughs from the woods. Under one of these an automobile was already standing, and under others hussars stood to horse.

Across the rolling country, stretching over valley and plateau, the face of the green and golden earth was striped, as though some giant plow had turned furrows at random here and there, some widely separated from the rest, others parallel and within a few yards of one another. A few dark figures appeared along these furrows of raw earth, moved about, disappeared. It was evident that the trenches of these prepared positions were still in process of construction, for carts were being driven to and from them and men were visible working near some of them.

Warner had completed his toilet when a maid brought café-au-lait. He ate, listening to the grumble of the northern cannonade and watching the

movement of the columns along dry roads, where unbroken walls of dust marked every route, seen or unseen, across the vast green panorama.

He had finished breakfast and was lighting a cigarette in preparation for descending to the terrace, when the noise of an altercation arose directly under his window; and, looking out, he beheld Asticot in dispute with the sentry stationed there, loudly insisting that he was a servant of the establishment, and demanding free entry with every symptom of virtuous indignation.

He was a sight; his face and hands were smeared with black—charcoal, it looked like—his clothes were muddy and full of briers, his beloved lovelocks, no longer plastered in demicurls over each cheekbone, dangled dankly beside his large, wide ears.

Over his shoulder he carried a sack, and to this he clung while he flourished his free hand in voluble and impassioned argument.

Warner spoke sharply from the window above:

"Asticot!"

The disheveled one looked up with a joyous exclamation of recognition; the sentry also looked up.

"He's my servant," said Warner quietly. "Asticot! What do you want?"

"M'sieu' Warner, I have something for you and for Mademoiselle Philippa——"

"Very well. Go to the harness room; make something approaching a toilet, put on the clean suit I gave you, and report to me."

"'Fait, M'sieu'!"

The sentry scowled after him as he departed, and Asticot pulled a hideous face at him and thrust his tongue into his cheek in derision.

Warner, immensely amused, reassured the soldier on guard, folded his arms and leaned on the sill to watch the interminable columns of motor lorries moving through the valley.

The scenes everywhere were so intensely interesting that he had not had enough of them when Asticot reappeared, cleansed, reclothed, his hair sleekly plastered, still lugging his sack and looking at the sentinel with the sad air of outraged innocence bestowing forgiveness.

"Let him pass, please," said Warner from the window. After a few moments a disgusted maid knocked, requesting enlightenment concerning "an individual pretending to be a servant of Monsieur Warner."

"It's true, Babette," he said, laughing. "Show him up, if you please."

Asticot entered, cap in hand, bowed, scraped the carpet with a propitiating and crablike shuffle of his right foot, and set the sack upon the floor.

There always had been something about the young ruffian which inclined Warner to mirth. He

waited a moment to control the amusement which twitched at his lips, then:

"Well, Asticot, where have you been and what is in this bundle?"

"M'sieu'—may I close the door? I thank M'sieu'.... One cannot be too careful about being overheard in these miserable days of martial law."

"What? Have you been doing something you are ashamed of?"

"No; nothing that I am ashamed of," replied Asticot naïvely. "I have been to Ausone."

"To Ausone!"

"M'sieu', figurez-vous!—It occurred to me last evening—*tiens!* there ought to be a few odds and ends to pick up in Ausone—a few miserable *chiffons* which nobody wants—little fragments of no value, you understand—what with the bombardment and all those ruined houses——"

"You went *looting*!"

"M'sieu'!" he said in pained surprise. "It was nothing like *that*! No! I said to myself, '*Tenez, mon vieux*, to rake over a pile of rubbish is no crime in Paris. On peut ramasser des bouts d'cigares comme ça. Eh, bien, quoi?' I said to myself, 'Asticot, en route!'

"So I borrowed a boat——"

"Borrowed? From whom?"

"I could not find any owner, M'sieu'. So, as I say, I offered myself a boat, and I took the fishing pole

which was in it, and I rowed boldly up the river.

"I suppose, seeing the fishing pole, nobody stopped me. Besides, there were a few freshly caught fish in the boat. These I held up, offering to sell to the soldiers I saw—a precaution, M'sieu', which rendered my voyage very easy."

"It's a wonder you did not get yourself shot!"

"It was dark enough after a while. And there are no troops beyond the second mill; and no vedettes disturbed me.

"At the Impasse d'Alcyon I tied my boat. The alley and the square were full of the poor people of Ausone, returning to look among the ruins for what had been their homes. Me, I said I was looking for mine, also——"

Warner said:

"That is villainous, Asticot; do you know it?"

"M'sieu'! I journeyed there only for what was rightfully mine!"

"Yours! What do you mean?"

"*Tenez*, M'sieu'; that wicked traitor, Wildresse, employed me, did he not? Bon! Would you believe it —never yet has he paid me what he owes me! M'sieu', such trickery, such ingratitude is nauseating! Besides, now that I know he has sold France, I would not touch his filthy money. No!"

He scowled thoughtfully at space, shrugged, continued:

"The question nevertheless remained: *how* was I

to reimburse myself? Tiens! An idea! I remembered that in the cellar of that cabaret my friend, Squelette, and I had discovered a safe.

"That very night, after M'sieu' had escaped us, taking with him M'amzelle Philippa, Squelette and I we drilled into that safe——"

"What!"

Asticot shrugged:

"Que voulez-vous! C'est la vie! Also, M'sieu' should trouble himself to recollect that I had not become honest and God-fearing under the merciless blows of M'sieu'. I was still full of evil in those days, alas! not yet sufficiently remote——"

"Go on," said Warner, controlling his laughter.

"M'sieu', we got the safe door open, Squelette and I, but found no opportunity to rummage. Then we were sent here, M'sieu' knows the rest—the bombardment and all.... So last night I went back to the cabaret—or what remains of it—four walls and a heap of brick. The fire was out. The cabaret was ruined, but the café had not been destroyed.

"And now, M'sieu', comes a real vein of luck. And what do you suppose! Face to face in the dark I came upon a pioupiou on guard as I crawl through the café door.

"And I thought his bayonet was in my bowels, M'sieu', when he turned his breast torch on me. One makes short work of looters—not that I can rightly be called that. No! But still I thought: 'Dieu! Je

claque! C'est fini!' When, 'Tiens!' exclaims my soldier. 'C'est mon vieux co'pain! What dost thou do here, Asticot, smelling around these ruins?'

"M'sieu', I look, I expel a cry of joy, I embrace a friend! It is One Eye—my comrade in the Battalion of Biribi! I am within the lines of a Battalion of Africa!"

He licked his lips furtively, and leered at Warner.

"*Voyez-vous*, M'sieu', when old friends meet an affair is quickly arranged. I file away at full speed; I gain the cellar, I flash the safe, I pull some old sacks under me and sit down at my leisure. It was most comfortable.

"Can M'sieu' see the tableau? Me, Asticot, seated before the open safe of Wildresse, who has wronged me and my country, leisurely revenging myself by knocking off the necks of his wine bottles and refreshing myself while I examine the contents of the traitor's safe!"

He smirked, doubtless picturing to himself his recent exploit, with himself, Asticot, as the heroic center of a deed which evidently gave him exquisite satisfaction.

He reached for the sack on the floor, squatted down on the rug in front of Warner's chair, untied the sack, and drew from it bundle after bundle of papers.

"His!" he remarked. "All private. I think, M'sieu', that a few of these will do away with any necessity

for ceremony when we catch Wildresse."

He passed the packages of papers to Warner, who laid them on the table, looking very serious.

What Asticot did not extract from the sack he had already removed and hidden in the straw under his blanket in the harness room—a bag of Russian gold coins and a bag of French silver money.

Now, however, he produced a pillowcase. There were old, rusty stains on it, and in the corner of it a heraldic device embroidered.

Asticot deftly untied it and dumped out of it upon the floor a strange assortment of things—toys, and picture books in French, articles of clothing, ribbons, tiny slippers, the crumpled frocks and stockings of a little girl, and fragments of a little cloak of blue silk edged with swansdown, and a little hat to match.

"What in the world——" began Warner, when Asticot opened one of the picture books and silently displayed the name written there—"Philippa."

"M'sieu', because you are fond of M'amzelle, when I discovered her name in these books I brought everything as I found it—tied up in this pillowcase—toys, clothing, all, just as I discovered it in the safe—thinking perhaps to please M'sieu', who is so kind to me——"

"You did right! What are those things—photographs? Give them to me——"

"M'sieu', they are the pictures of a little child. To

me they resemble M'amzelle Philippa."

Warner examined the half-dozen photographs in amazement. They were more or less faded, not sufficiently to prevent his recognizing in them the child that Philippa had once been. He was absolutely certain that these photographs represented Philippa somewhere between the ages of five and seven.

One by one he studied them, then turned them over. On every one was written "Philippa," and the age, "four," "five," "six," on the several pictures. All were written in the same flowing feminine handwriting. The name of the photographer was the same on every picture, except on that one where the age "six" was written. That photograph had been taken in the city of Sofia in Bulgaria. The others bore the name of a photographer in the French city of Tours.

Asticot, squatting on the floor cross-legged, watched him in silence.

Finally Warner said:

"Thank you, Asticot. You have behaved with intelligence. I double your wages."

"M'sieu' is contented with his Asticot, grateful and devoted?"

"Indeed, I am!"

"Will M'sieu' permit me to go now?"

"Certainly. Do they feed and lodge you properly at the inn?"

Asticot murmured that it was heavenly, and

hastily took his departure, burning with anxiety concerning the safety of the treasure he had concealed under the straw and blanket in the harness room.

As for Warner, he was intensely interested, excited, and perplexed. Here, apparently, in this old, stained pillowcase which Asticot had found in the private safe of Wildresse, were the first clews to Philippa's identity that anybody, excepting Wildresse, had ever heard of.

These photographs were without doubt photographs of Philippa as a child, two taken in Tours, one in Sofia.

And the girl's name was Philippa, too——

Suddenly it occurred to him that, according to Wildresse, Philippa had been left at his door as a Paris foundling—as an infant only a few weeks old. So Wildresse himself might have named her. Perhaps his wife had written Philippa's name on these pictures. And yet—how had Philippa come to be in the Bulgarian city of Sofia? Was it possible that Wildresse could ever have taken the child there?

He looked down at the toys, at the clothing. Had they belonged to Philippa as a child?

Between his room and Gray's there was a pretty sitting room. He put everything back into the pillowcase, went out into the corridor, found the sitting room door open and the room full of sunlight.

A maid, who sat sewing in the corridor, went to

Philippa's room with a request from Warner that she dress and come to the sitting room.

Warner emptied the pillowcase on the center table, then, folding it, gave it to the maid, who returned to say that Philippa was dressed and would come immediately.

"Take this pillowcase to Madame la Comtesse," he explained. "Say to Madame that there is a device embroidered on the case, and that I should be infinitely obliged if Madame la Comtesse would be kind enough to search for a similar device among such volumes on the subject as she possesses."

The maid went away with the pillowcase, and a moment later Philippa appeared, fresh, dainty, smiling, an enchanting incarnation of youth and loveliness in her thin, white morning frock.

She offered her hand and withdrew it immediately, as though this slight, new shyness of hers in his presence forbade that contact with him which, before that day when he painted her, had never seemed to embarrass her.

He ushered her silently into the little sitting room; she went forward and stopped by the center table, looking down curiously at the motley heap of toys and clothing which covered it.

He watched her intently as she turned over one object after another. Presently she glanced around at him interrogatively.

"Examine them," he said.

"What are they?"

"You see—a child's toys and clothing. Pick up that broken doll and look it over carefully."

She lifted the battered French doll, examined it as though perplexed, laid it aside, picked up a Polichinelle, laid that aside, looked at a woolly dog, a cloth cat, a wooden soldier in French uniform with scarlet cap askew and one arm missing.

"Well?" he asked.

"I don't understand, Jim."

"I know. Is there among these things any object which seems at all familiar to you?"

"No."

"Nothing that seems to stir in you any memory?"

She shook her head smilingly, turned over the heap of garments, shifting them to one side or the other, caught a glimpse of the little cloak of pale blue silk and swansdown, lifted it curiously.

"How odd," she said; "I have——" She hesitated, looked intently at the faded silk, passed one slim hand over the swansdown, stood with brows bent slightly inward as though searching in her mind, deeply, for something which eluded her.

Warner did not speak or stir; presently she turned toward him, perplexed, still searching in her memory.

"It's odd," she said, "that I seem to remember a cloak like this.... Or perhaps as a very little child I dreamed about such a pretty cloak.... It was long

ago.... Where did you get it, Jim?"

"Do you seem to remember it?"

"Somehow, I seem to."

"Is there anything else there which appears at all familiar to you?"

She sorted over the toys and garments, shook her head, picked up a picture book and stood idly turning the pages——

And suddenly uttered a little cry.

Instantly he was beside her; the page lay open at a golden scene where the Sleeping Beauty had just awakened, and the glittering Prince had fallen on one knee beside her couch.

"Jim! I—I remember that! It was all gold—all—all golden—everything—her hair and his—and the couch and her gown and his clothes—all gold, everything golden!

"I *know* that picture. Where in the world did you find it? I was a child—they showed it to me; I always asked for it——" She looked up at him, bewildered.

"Turn the pages!" he said.

She turned; another soft little cry escaped her; she recognized the picture, and the next one also, and the next, and every succeeding one, excitedly calling his attention to details which had impressed her as a child.

Of the other books she seemed to retain no recollection; remembered none of the toys, nothing of the clothing except the faded silken cloak with its

border of swansdown. But this book she remembered vividly; and when he showed her her name written in it she grew a little pale with surprise and excitement.

Then, seated there on the table's edge beside her, he told her what Asticot had told him and showed her the photographs.

She seemed a little dazed at first, but, as he continued, the color returned to her cheeks and the excitement died out in her grey eyes.

"I cannot remember these events," she said very quietly.

"Is it possible he could have taken you to Bulgaria without your recollecting anything about it?"

"I must have been very, very young." She sat on the table's edge, staring at the sunny window for a while in silence, then, still gazing into space:

"Jim.... I have sometimes imagined that I could remember something—that I am conscious of having been somewhere else before my first recollections of Wildresse begin. Of course, that is not possible, if he found me, a baby, at his door——"

"He may have lied."

She turned slowly toward him:

"I wonder."

"I wonder, too."

After a silence she said, speaking with a deliberation almost colorless:

"Whether they were dreams, I am not quite certain, now. Always I have supposed them to have been dreams—dreamed long ago.... When I was very, very little.... About a lady with red hair—near me when I was sleepy.... Also there comes a voice as though somebody were singing something about me—my name—Philippa."

"Is that all?"

"I think so.... She had red hair, and her cheeks were warm and soft.... I was sleepy. I think she sang to me.... Something about 'Philippa,' and 'dreamland.' ... The golden picture in that book makes me think of her voice. The cloak with the swans-down reminds me.... Do you think it could have been a dream?"

"God knows," he muttered, staring at the floor.

After a while he rose, drew a chair to the table, and Philippa seated herself. Leaning there on one elbow, her cheek on her palm, she opened the book she had remembered and gazed at the golden picture.

Warner watched her for a while, then went quietly out and along the corridor to the hall that crossed it. Madame de Moidrey's maid announced him.

"May I come in a moment, Ethra?"

"Certainly, Jim. It's all right; I'm in negligée." And as he entered: "Where in the world did you find that soiled old pillowcase?"

"Did you discover the device embroidered on it?"

She pointed to a volume lying on her dressing table:

"Yes. The arms of Châtillon-Montréal are embroidered on it. It's rather a strange thing, too, because the family is extinct."

"What?"

"Certainly. As soon as I found out what the device was, I remembered all about the family. Sit down there, if you want to know. You don't mind Rose doing my hair?"

"You're as pretty as a picture, Ethra, and you are perfectly aware of it. Go on and tell me, please."

"It's a well-known family, Jim—or was. The early ones were Crusaders and Templars, I believe. Their history ever since has been mixed up with affairs oriental.

"There was a De Châtillon who had a row with Saladin, and I think was slain by that redoubtable Moslem. The daughter of that De Châtillon married a paladin of some sort who took her name and her father's quarterings and added a blue fanion and a human head to them; also three yaks' tails on a spear support the arms. Why, I don't remember. It's in that book over there, I suppose.

"Anyway, it seems that some king or other—Saint Louis, I believe—created the first son of this paladin and of the daughter of De Châtillon a Prince of Marmora with the Island of Tenedos as his domain.

"Of course one of the Sultans drove them out. Fifty years ago the family was living in Tours, poor as mice, proud as Lucifer of their Principality of Marmora and Tenedos—realms which no Châtillon, of course, had ever been permitted to occupy since the Crusades.

"The family is extinct—some tragedy, I believe, finished the last of the Châtillons. I don't remember when, but it probably is all recorded in that book over there."

"May I borrow it?"

"Certainly. But where in the world did that exceedingly soiled pillowcase come from?"

"Don't have it washed just yet, Ethra. A man discovered it in a safe which was the private property of that scoundrel, Constantine Wildresse.

"When your hair is done, will you please go into the sitting room on my corridor? Philippa has something to show you."

The Countess looked at him curiously as he took his leave.

"Please hurry with my hair," she said to her maid.

CHAPTER XXXVI

As Warner returned to his own room, two thoughts

persisted and dominated all others: Philippa's parents were known to Wildresse; Wildresse must be found.

Somehow or other he had already taken it for granted that Philippa's father or mother, or perhaps both parents, had been engaged in some capacity in the service of this family called De Châtillon. There was no particular reason for him to believe this; her parents might have been the friends of these people. But the idea of some business association between the two families seemed to obsess him—he could not explain why—and with this idea filling his mind he entered his room, seated himself by the open window, and picked up the packages of personal papers belonging to Wildresse and taken from his safe by Asticot.

There were three packets of documents, each packet tied separately with pink tape and sealed twice.

Running over the first packet like a pack of cards, he found that every paper had been endorsed on the outside and dated, although the dates were not arranged in proper sequence.

On the first document which he read without unsealing the packet was written, "Affaire Schnaeble, 1887." On the next he read, when he parted the papers, "Affaire de Clermont-Ferrand, 1888." The next, however, bore the inscription, "Affaire Panitza" and bore an earlier date. Beneath this caption was written: "Prince Ferdinand and the Oberanovitch

Dynasty. Dossier of Draga. The Jockey Club and King Milan. Queen Natalie and her dossier. The Grand Duke Cyril."

He turned over document after document, all bearing endorsements, but the majority of the captions meant nothing to him, such as "Abdul Hamid and Marmora," "The Greco-Italian Proposition for an International Gendarmerie," "Ali Pasha, Saïd Pasha, and the Archives of Tenedos," "The Hohenzollern-Benedetti Affair."

There seemed to be nothing in this packet to justify his breaking the seals before he turned over the documents to the military authorities.

Nor, in the next packet, could he discover anything among the motley assortment of endorsements which seemed to justify his forestalling the French authorities in their examination.

But in the third packet he found that, no matter what the endorsement might be, under each caption was written, "The De Châtillon Affair."

This packet he locked in his desk until he should return; he gathered up the other two, took his cap, buttoned and belted his Norfolk, and went downstairs.

The man he sought had not yet left the Château; General Delisle was seated at a table in the music room looking at a series of big linen maps which had been hung up on the opposite wall.

A dozen officers were seated in a semicircle

around him; an officer with a pointer stood by the maps as demonstrator, another sat at a table near by, under a portable switchboard. In the little room adjoining was seated a military telegraph operator.

Through the open French windows cyclist messengers were constantly mounting and descending the terrace steps; every few moments motor cycles arrived and departed; now and then a cavalryman galloped up in an old-style storm of dust, or a trooper vaulted into his saddle and departed *ventre à terre*. The growling of the cannonade was perfectly audible in the room.

At first General Delisle did not see Warner, but the Russian Military Observer did, and he rose and came quietly over to shake hands and inquire concerning the health of the ladies.

Several times his big, fish-blue eyes wandered curiously all over Warner's face and figure, as though insolently appraising the American and trying to come to some conclusion concerning the nature of the man and of the packet of papers which he had stuffed into the pocket of his Norfolk jacket.

A moment later Delisle caught sight of him, rose with pleasant courtesy, and extended his hand, asking after the health of the ladies, and making a similar inquiry concerning himself.

"General, could I see you for one moment alone?" said Warner.

The General moved out from the seated circle of

officers, joined Warner, and moved with unhurried step beside him through the house toward the billiard room.

When they had reached the billiard room, Warner had told him all he knew concerning Wildresse, concluding with the appearance of the man escorted by Uhlans on Vineyard Hill.

Then he drew the papers from his pocket and gave them to the silent officer, who stood quite motionless, looking him through and through.

It was evident that General Delisle had no hesitation about breaking the big, sprawling seals of grey wax; he ripped both packets open so that the documents fell all over the scarf covering the billiard table; then, rapidly, he picked up, opened, scanned, and cast aside paper after paper.

There was not the slightest change in the expression of his face when he came to the "Schnaeble-Incident"; he scanned it, laid it aside, and said quietly as he picked up the next paper:

"That document is sufficient to settle the affair of this man Wildresse. If we catch him, ceremony will be superfluous.... The nearest wall or tree, you understand—unless he cares to make a statement first.... I always have time to listen to statements. Only one out of a hundred proves to be of any value at all, Mr. Warner, but that one is worth all the time I waste on the others——"

And all the while he was opening, scanning, and

casting aside document after document.

"Oh, almost any one of these is enough," remarked the General. "Here's a villainous center of ramifications, leading God knows where——"

He checked himself abruptly; a dull color mounted to his bronzed cheekbones. Warner glanced at the caption of the document. It read: "Dossier of Count Cassilis and the Battenberg Affair."

The General read it, very slowly, for a few minutes. He could not have gone much further than the first paragraph when he folded the paper abruptly, shot a lightning glance at Warner that dazzled him like a saber flash; and suddenly smiled.

"This seems to indicate a rather bad business, Mr. Warner," he said pleasantly. "I count on your discretion, of course."

"You may, General."

"I mean even among my entourage. *Do you understand*?"

"Perfectly."

"Who has any knowledge of these papers excepting yourself and myself?"

"Nobody but Wildresse, as far as I know."

The General motioned to the sentry who stood guard by the three sky-guns on the north terrace:

"Colonel Gerould; say to him I am waiting!"

A few moments later the big Colonel of Cuirassiers came clanking into the billiard room. General Delisle handed him the papers, said a few

words in a low voice. As he spoke there was something quietly terrible in the stare he turned on Colonel Gerould; and the latter turned visibly white and glared blankly into space as the General laid his hand on his arm and spoke low and rapidly into his ear.

The next moment the Cuirassier was gone and General Delisle had taken Warner's arm with a quiet smile and was leisurely sauntering back toward the music room.

"It was very friendly of you, Mr. Warner—may I add, very sagacious? But that is like an American. We French feel very keenly the subtle sympathy of —" he laughed—"neutral America."

"Are these papers of real importance, General?—Is it proper of me to ask you such a question?"

"They are of—overwhelmingly vital importance, Mr. Warner."

"What!"

The General halted, looked him pleasantly in the eyes:

"The most vitally important information that I have ever received during my entire military career," he said quietly. "Judge, then, of my gratitude to you. I cannot express it. I can only offer you my hand—with a heart—very full."

They exchanged a firm clasp. As they went into the music room, Count Cassilis, who had seated himself at the piano, and who was running over a

few minor scales, turned and looked at them, rising slowly to his feet with the other officers when the General entered. He had his monocle screwed into his right eye.

The cannonade had now become noisy and jarring enough to interrupt conversation, and it was plain to Warner that French batteries somewhere along the Récollette had opened.

Out on the terrace he could see aëroplanes in the northeastern sky, no doubt trying to find the range for the French batteries. They were very high, and the clots of white appeared and dissolved far below them.

But now the steady tattoo of machine guns had become audible in the direction of the Ausone Forest, and the racket swelled swiftly into a roar of rifle fire and artillery—so rapidly, indeed, that every head in the vicinity was turned to listen—hussars, cyclists, infantry, the cannoniers lying beside their sky-guns, the military chauffeurs, the sentries, all looked toward the northeast.

Two more French aëroplanes took the air over the plateau, rose rapidly, and headed toward the Ausone Forest.

Down on the Saïs highway the slowly moving file of motor lorries drew out to the right-hand edge of the road, and past them galloped battery after battery, through a whirling curtain of dust—guns, caissons, mounted officers, flashing past in an

interminable stream, burying the baggage vans out of sight under the billowing clouds. Columns of cavalry, also, appeared in the river meadows on both banks, trotting out across the stubble and splashing through the reeds, all moving toward the northeast.

The quarry road, too, was black with moving infantry; another column tramped across the uplands beyond; horsemen were riding over Vineyard Hill, horsemen crossed the Récollette by every ford, every pontoon—everywhere the French riders were to be seen swarming over the landscape, appearing, disappearing, in view again increased in numbers, until there seemed to be no end to their coming.

The uproar of the fusillade grew deafening; the sharper crack of the fieldpieces became dulled in the solid shocks from heavier calibers.

General Delisle came out on the terrace and stood looking across the valley just as the British biplane soared up over the trees—the Bristol machine, pointed high, racing toward the northeast.

Warner, looking up, realized that Halkett was up there. The roaring racket of the aëroplane swept the echoes along forest and hillside; higher, higher it pointed; smoke signals began to drop from it and unroll against the sky.

Looking upward, Warner felt a light touch on his elbow; Sister Eila had slipped her arm through his.

Gazing into the sky under her white coiffe, the Sister of Charity stood silent, intent, her gaze

concentrated on the receding aëroplane.

When the first snowy puff ball appeared below it, her arm closed convulsively on Warner's, and remained so, rigid, while ball after ball of fleece spotted the sky, spread a little, hung, and slowly dissolved against the blue.

Down on the Saïs road four Red Cross motor ambulances were speeding in the wake of the artillery. A fifth ambulance came up the drive. Sister Félicité, seated beside the chauffeur, signaled to Sister Eila.

Warner said:

"Are you called for field duty?"

"On the telephone a few minutes ago. They need us this side of Ausone."

He went with her to the ambulance and she swung on board. As the chauffeur started to back and make a demi-tour, Warner jumped on the vehicle and shook hands with Dr. Senlis.

"Do you want a bearer?" he asked.

"Yes, if you don't mind."

Sister Eila picked up a brassard bearing the conventional emblem, and tied it around his left arm above the elbow.

He had not yet noticed the other figure in the ambulance; now he looked around, stared, and suddenly a violent desire to laugh seized him.

"Asticot!" he exclaimed.

"Oui, c'est moi, M'sieu'," replied that smirking

gentleman, with a demureness that struck Warner as horrible.

"But *why*?" he asked, in frank amazement.

"Ah," rejoined Asticot complacently, "that is the question, M'sieu'. I myself do not know exactly why I am here."

But he knew well enough. First of all, he had gotten all over any terror of bullets in Africa. Five years and fifty skirmishes had blunted that sort of fear in him.

What he wanted to do was to see what was going on. More than that, the encounter with One Eye in Ausone had strangely moved this rat of the Faubourgs. He desired to find that Disciplinary Battalion again—the Battalion which had been for him a hell on earth—but he wanted to look at it, pushed by a morbid curiosity. If One Eye were there, perhaps other old friends might still decorate those fierce and sullen ranks.

There was a certain lieutenant, too—gladly he would shoot him in the back if opportunity offered. He had dreamed for months of doing this.

But there was still another reason that incited Asticot to offer his services to Sister Félicité as a bearer. The ambulance had been called to the Ausone Forest. Somewhere within those leafy shades lurked Wildresse.

Never before had such a hatred blazed in the crippled intellect of Asticot as the red rage that

flared within him when he learned that he had been employed by a spy who had sold out France.

Anything else he could have understood, any other crime. He was not squeamish; nothing appalled him in the category of villainy except only this one thing. Scoundrel as he was, he could not have found it in his heart to sell his country. And to remember that he had been employed by a man who *did* sell France aroused within him a passion for revenge so fierce that only a grip on the throat of Wildresse could ever satisfy the craving that made his vision red as blood.

He wore a brassard, this *voyou* of the Paris gutters, set with the Geneva cross. And in his pocket was an automatic pistol.

From the rear seat Sister Eila could still see the Bristol biplane in the sky, circling now high over Ausone Forest and the cultivated hills beyond. She never removed her eyes from it as the ambulance rolled on through the dust beside the slower moving line of lorries.

Later the motor lorries turned east; a column of infantry replaced them, trudging silently along in the sun, their rifles shouldered. Then they passed a battalion of *chasseurs-à-pied* in green and blue, swinging along at a cheerful, lively pace toward the crash of rifles and machine guns.

Across the river they saw the first German shells explode in the fields, and dark columns of smoke rise

and spread out over the bushes and standing grain.

For some time, now, Warner had recognized the high whimper of bullets, but he said nothing until Sister Eila mentioned the noises, guessing correctly what were the causes.

Asticot shrugged and cuddled a cigarette which Warner had given him, enjoying it with leering deliberation.

He was inclined to become loquacious, too, whenever a shell exploded across the river.

"Baoum—baoum!" he sneered. "Tiens! Another overripe egg! The Bosches will starve themselves with their generosity! Pan! Pouf! V'lan! Zoum—zo ——um! That is shrapnel, M'sieu', as you know. As for me, I do not care for it. Anything else on the *carte du jour*, but not shrapnel for Bibi! No! For the big shells, yes; for the machine guns, yes; for the Démoiselles Lebel, all right! But no shrapnel, *if* you please——"

Sister Eila looked at him in smiling surprise.

"You would do well in the wards, with your cheerfulness," she said. "I always was certain that I should find in you some quality to admire."

Asticot looked at her, mouth open, as though thunderstruck. Then, to Sister Eila's amazement, a blush turned his expressive features scarlet.

To be spoken to like that by a *Sainte* of Saint Vincent de Paul! To be admired by a Sister of Charity! He, Asticot, was commended, approved of,

encouraged!

It was too much for Asticot. He turned redder and redder; he started to relieve his terrible embarrassment by cursing, caught himself in time, choked, passed his red bandanna over his battered visage, tried to whistle, failed, and turned his ratty and distressed eyes upon Warner for relief.

"Cheerfulness *is* a virtue," said Warner gravely. "You seem to possess others, also; you have physical courage, you have exhibited gratitude toward me which I scarcely expected. It is a wonderful thing for a man, Asticot, to be commended at all by Sister Eila."

Sister Eila smiled and flushed; then her face became serious and she leaned forward and looked up at the Bristol biplane. Under it the white fleece of the shrapnel was still floating.

The ambulance stopped; hussars came riding on either side of it; an officer gave an order to the driver, who turned out among some trees.

The road ahead was crowded with infantry deploying at a double—a strange, gaunt, haggard regiment, white with dust, swinging out to whistle signal into the patches of woodland and across the willow-set meadows to the right.

Sullen sweating faces looked up everywhere among the bayonets; hard eyes, thin lips, bullet heads, appeared through the drifting dust.

Here and there an officer spoke, and there

seemed to be a ringing undertone of iron in the blunt commands.

They came running in out of the stifling cloud of dust like a herd of sulky vicious bulls goaded right and left by the penetrating whistle calls and the menacing orders of their officers.

"One Eye!" yelled Asticot, waving his cap vigorously. "He! Mon vieux! How are you, old camp kettle?"

A soldier looked up with a frightful leer, waved his arm, and ran forward.

"C'est un vieux copain à moi!" remarked Asticot proudly. "M'sieu', voilà le Battalion d'Afrique! Voilà Biribi qui passe! Tonnerre de Dieu! There is Jacques! Hé! Look yonder, M'sieu'! That young one with the head of a Lyceum lad! Over there! That is the *gosse* of Wildresse!"

"*What!*"

"Certainly! That is Jacques Wildresse of Biribi! Hé! If he knew! Eh? Poor devil! If he knew what we know! And his scoundrel of a father out there now in those woods! C'est épatant! Quoi! *B'en*, such things are true, it seems! And when he looses his rifle, that lad, what if the lead finds a billet in his own flesh and blood! Eh? Are such things done by God in these days?"

An officer rode up and said to the chauffeur:

"Pull out of there. Back out to the road!"

But, once on the road again, they were ordered

into a pasture, then ordered forward again and told to take station under a high bank crowned with bushes.

No shells came over, but bullets did in whining streams. The air overhead was full of them, and the earth kept sliding from the bank where the lead hit it with a slapping and sometimes a snapping sound, like the incessant crack of a coach whip.

Firing had already begun in the woods whither the Battalion of Africa had hurried with their flapping equipments and baggy uniforms white with dust. In the increasing roar of rifle fire the monotonous woodpecker tapping of the machine guns was perfectly recognizable.

Branches, twigs, bits of bark, green leaves, came winnowing earthward in a continual shower. There was nothing to be seen anywhere except a few mounted hussars walking their horses up and down the road, and the motor cyclists who passed like skimming comets toward Ausone.

Sister Eila and Sister Félicité had descended to the road and seated themselves on the grassy bank, where they conversed in low tones and looked calmly into the woods.

Asticot, possessed of a whole pack of cigarettes, promenaded his good fortune and swaggered up and down the road, ostentatiously coming to salute when an automobile full of officers came screaming by.

The military chauffeur dozed over his steering

wheel. Two white butterflies fluttered persistently around his head, alighting sometimes on the sleeves of his jacket, only to flit away again and continue their whirling aerial dance around him.

For an hour the roar of the fusillade continued, not steadily, but redoubling in intensity at times, then slackening again, but continuing always.

Hussars came riding out from among the trees. One of them said to Warner that the ambulances across the Récollette were very busy.

Another, an officer, remarked that the Forest was swarming with Uhlans who were fighting on foot. Asked by Asticot whether the Battalion d'Afrique had gone in, the officer answered rather coolly that it was going in then with the bayonet, and that the world would lose nothing if it were annihilated.

After he had ridden on up the road, Asticot spat elaborately, and employed the word "coquin"—a mild explosion in deference to Sister Eila.

More cavalry emerged from the woods, coming out in increasing numbers, and all taking the direction of Ausone.

An officer halted and called out to Sister Eila.

"It goes very well for us. The Bat. d'Af. got into them across the river! The Uhlans are running their horses!—Everywhere they're swarming out of the woods like driven hares! We turn them by Ausone! A bientôt! God bless the Grey Sisters!"

Everywhere cavalry came trampling and crowding out of the woods and cantering away toward the north, hussars mostly, at first, then *chasseurs-à-cheval*, an entire brigade of these splendid lancers, pouring out into the road and taking the Ausone route at a gallop.

More motor cycles flashed past; then half a dozen automobiles, in which officers were seated examining maps; then up the road galloped dragoon lancers, wearing grey helmet slips and escorting three light field guns, the drivers of which were also dragoons—a sight Warner had never before seen.

An officer, wearing a plum-colored band of velvet around his red cap, and escorted by a lancer, came from the direction of Ausone, leaned from his saddle, and shook the ambulance chauffeur awake.

"Drive back toward Saïs," he said. "They are taking care of our people across the river, and you may be needed below!" He saluted the Sisters of Charity: "A biplane has fallen by the third pontoon. You may be needed there," he explained.

Sister Eila rose; her face was ashen.

"What biplane, Major?" she asked unsteadily.

"I don't know. British, I think. It came down under their shrapnel like a bird with a broken wing."

He rode on. Warner aided the Sisters of Charity to their seats. Then he and Asticot jumped aboard.

As they turned slowly, two wheels describing a circle through the dusty grass of the ditch, half a

dozen mounted gendarmes trotted out of the woods with sabers drawn.

Behind them came four mounted hussars. A man walked in the midst of them. There was a rope around his neck, the end of which was attached to the saddle of one of the troopers.

At the same moment a sort of howl came from Asticot; he half rose, his fingers curling up like claws; his expression had become diabolical. Then he sank back on his seat.

The ambulance rolled forward faster, faster toward Saïs, where a biplane had come down into the river.

But Asticot had forgotten; and ever his blazing eyes were turned backward where, among four troopers, Wildresse walked with a rope around his neck and his clenched fists tied behind him.

CHAPTER XXXVII

The hussars conducted him toward headquarters. His huge hands were tied behind him; there was a rope around his neck, the other end of which was fastened to a hussar's saddlebow.

The troopers rode slowly, carbines poised forward with butt on thigh.

Fantassins along the road looked on, somber-

eyed; the murmured word "spy" passed from lip to lip; the wounded turned their big, hollow eyes on him; drivers, cyclists, cannoniers, looked upon him; but nobody reviled him. Their silence was more terrible.

He spoke only once, looking up at the horseman beside him, his deep, harsh voice breaking the rigid silence:

"Hé! Vous là-haut! Supposition that I confess? ... That I make a statement involving others.... That Cossack there at headquarters! Do I benefit?"

The cavalryman did not even glance at him.

"Tas de casse-geules!" rumbled Wildresse, and spat into the dust.

They crossed the pontoon, the troopers dismounting and leading their horses, then into the saddle again, across the river meadows, and so around to the lodge gates.

Across the road they were opening trenches for dead horses, and on the plateau hundreds of soldiers' graves were being dug.

Wildresse glanced at them askance, and his bull neck roughened with shivers as he thought of the quick-lime.

It was then that the first convulsive twitch jerked his face and left the right eye turned slightly outward in a sort of cast. After that something seemed to loosen in his cheek, and his jaw was inclined to sag unless controlled with conscious

effort.

Fantassins on guard passed forward prisoner and escort with monotonous formulae; the sentry on the terrace summoned assistance; a staff officer came; two line soldiers arrived later, halted, fixed bayonets, and loaded their pieces.

Half a dozen staff officers in the music room rose and stepped aside, opening a lane to the table where General of Division Raoul Delisle sat at the telephone. A cool-eyed major of dragoons relieved him of the apparatus; the General turned and looked up at Wildresse.

"You are Constantine Wildresse?"

"Yes, General."

"Otherwise Constantine Volmark?"

"Well—yes! My name is Volmark."

"Which name do you claim?" asked Delisle dryly.

"Volmark. It is useless to deny it—no good to deceive anybody."

"You are Austrian?"

"And Greek, on my mother's side."

"Greek?"

"That is—she was Eurasian."

"From—Tenedos?"

But Wildresse had suddenly caught sight of Count Cassilis.

"You!" he cried. "Now, then, will you do anything for me?"

Cassilis stared.

"*Will* you?" demanded Wildresse loudly.

Cassilis glanced at Delisle and tapped his forehead with a bored air.

"Oh!" shouted Wildresse. "So that's it, eh? I am crazy, am I?"

He passed a thick, dry tongue over his lips, made an effort; looked hard at Delisle:

"Yes, *mon Général*; I am Constantine Volmark, born in Tenedos. What then, if you please?"

"You are known. No court is necessary. You will be shot immediately."

"Circumstances—in extenuation——"

"None!"

"And if I confess——"

"It is useless."

"A statement involving others, unsuspected——"

"What?"

"It is important. Nations are involved," muttered Wildresse. "An officer in your entourage—eh? Is there any immunity in such things, General?"

"No."

"No—immunity?"

"No."

"I am not permitted to make a statement?"

"I am here to listen. I always have time to listen."

"Then I may speak freely?"

"Yes, you may make a statement if you choose."

"Accusations?"

"If you choose."

"It will not help my case if I prove to you of what filth chancelleries are made? If I expose to you what the faith of governments amounts to?—If I show you a man who has betrayed everybody since his boyhood—an officer here—your comrade and friend? All this will not help my case?"

"No."

"And yet I may make my statement if I choose? Is that the situation, General?"

"Yes."

"And I may denounce whom I please? I am free to accuse, am I? Free to confess and involve others?"

"Yes."

"Hé! Nom d'un nom! Comme vous est un bon bougre!!" broke out Wildresse in his harsh and dreadful voice. "I am to die, am I? So that's it, is it? Then I'll pull down everybody and everything I can while I have the chance. Men? Does it matter so much about a man or two if one can set the treacherous nations flying at one another's throats? There's a real revenge! I'll poison the belief in nations in you all!—You with your alliances and leagues and ententes!—That's where you'll not forget me! That's where your half crazy Kings and diseased Emperors will turn cross-eyed with suspicion! That's where there'll be a ratty scuttling to cover in your dirty chancelleries! I'll strip the orders and epaulettes off one or two idols before I finish. And I want

witnesses! I demand witnesses to confront me——"

"Be quiet, Wildresse. Whom do you desire to confront?"

"You—for one! Then, the educated Kurd, yonder! That Cossack there—that man over there in a green uniform, who pretends to be a Christian!—That bashi-bazouk of Abdul—Major-General Count Cassilis, Russian Military Observer at division headquarters!"

"Very well."

"And I demand to be confronted with others, too. That Yankee painter, Warner. Let him carry the poison I spill back among his own people. They won't forget. And I want the British officer here, Captain Gray! Let him report to his Government what I say, and see if it can swallow it! ... That's a sufficiency of men.... And for my supplement I want the Countess de Moidrey—so that the noble faubourg shall feel the poison in its veins.... And, as proof documentary of the statement I shall make, I demand to be confronted with the girl Philippa!"

"Is that all?"

"No.... The mercy, the extenuation denied me by the military autocracy of France, I shall seek from another. I require two things only before I die: understanding and absolution from—my son."

"Who?"

"My only son, Jacques Wildresse, 6th Company, Battalion of Africa!—Jacques—of Biribi! That's all I

want—so that he understands and pardons. As for you others—*je m'en*——"

The staff officer at the telephone suddenly bent over and whispered to the General. He listened, nodded, looked calmly at Wildresse.

"The soldier Wildresse, 6th Company, Battalion d'Afrique, was unable to bear your disgrace. He is this moment reported dead by his own hand."

A terrible spasm shot like lightning across the prisoner's visage, drawing his whole face to one side. Slowly the flaccid muscles resumed their natural places; the screwed up features loosened.

"That's a lie," mumbled Wildresse; and his big, hairless head doddered for a moment.

At a nod from Delisle a soldier picked up the wrist rope, coiled it, and gave it a slight pull.

"March!" he said briefly to his prisoner.

Count Cassilis came over, faintly amused at the scene, to judge by his expression.

"There's a good place under the north terrace," he said languidly. "You don't intend to listen, I fancy, to this statement he wants to make.... Do you?"

"Oh, yes," said the General. "It's my business to listen always."

He sent an aid to find Warner and Gray, and to beg the honor of Madame de Moidrey's presence and of Philippa's. Then he smiled pleasantly at Count Cassilis.

"Yes," he said, "statements always should be

listened to. It's the man who doesn't care to hear who makes the most terrible mistakes in life. I can't afford to make mistakes. I'd rather risk being bored. So, if you don't mind, my dear General——"

"Not in the least," said General Count Cassilis languidly.

They had conducted Wildresse into the small, semi-circular library in the northeast tower, the entrance to which gave on the terrace and billiard room.

Gray and Warner appeared presently with the Countess and Philippa; General Delisle went to them immediately, and remained in close consultation with them.

"It may prove of some military importance to us; it may prove of no value whatever—this statement he desires to make," concluded the General. "Of course it is not possible for me to guess.... And yet, Madame, if there is a chance that the statement might be of value, may I not venture to hope that you and Mademoiselle are willing to submit to this disagreeable proceeding in the interests of France?"

"Certainly," said the Countess, and linked her arm in Philippa's.

The girl was a little pale, a trifle nervous, too. She glanced at Warner, tried to smile, then stood with lips slightly compressed and head high, looking steadily at the soldier who stood before the closed door of the little library.

"If you are ready," said the General quietly.

So they went in, one by one, very noiselessly, as though somebody had just died in there. But their entrance did not arouse Wildresse from his abstraction.

Two red-legged *fantassins*, with fixed bayonets and loaded rifles, stood behind him.

The man himself sat huddled on a chair in a corner, his great, blunt, murderous-looking hands hanging crossed between his knees, his big, hairless head of a butcher wagging slightly as though palsied.

There was not an atom of color left in his face, except for the pockmarks which were picked out in sickly greenish grey all over his flabby features.

He did not look up when they entered, his little, wicked black eyes, which had become dull and covered with a bluish glaze, remained fixed as though he were listening, and his heavy lower lip sagged.

"Wildresse," said General Delisle.

There was no response; a soldier stirred the prisoner to attention with the butt of his piece.

"Stand up," he said.

Wildresse, aroused, got to his great feet stupidly, looked around, caught sight of Philippa, and silently snarled—merely opened his mouth a little way till his upper lip curled back, emitting no sound whatever—then he caught sight of the green uniform of General Count Cassilis, and instantly the old glare

blazed up in his eyes.

"By God, the Cossack!" he growled; and the heavy voice vibrated ominously through the room.

Warner led Philippa to a chair as General Delisle seated the Countess. Wildresse, his heavy arms hanging inert, stood looking from one man to another, as they found scats in turn, on sofas or on chairs—Delisle, Warner, Cassilis, Gray.

"Make your statement," said General Delisle dryly. And he added: "If it is a long one, you may seat yourself."

Wildresse shot a terrible look at the Russian Military Observer.

"For the last time," he said hoarsely, "will you do something for me? ... For the last time?"

Cassilis lifted his expressive eyebrows and glanced rather wearily at Delisle.

"You know!" bellowed Wildresse in a sudden fury. "You know what I can say! If I say it, Russia and her allies will have an enemy instead of another ally! If I speak, your country will earn the contempt of France and of England too; and their implacable enmity after this war is ended. If I speak! Will you do something for me?"

Cassilis, polishing his monocle with a heavily scented handkerchief, shrugged.

"Very well!" roared Wildresse. "It is death, then, is it? You filthy, treacherous Cossack, I'll do what I can to ruin you and your lying Government before I

pass out!—You Moslem at heart—you bashi-bazouk ——"

"Moderate your voice and your manner!" said General Delisle very quietly.

Wildresse turned his great, hairless head; his face had become suddenly chalky again; he seated himself heavily; his big hands, doubled into fists, fell on either knee.

For a moment the slight, palsy-like movement of the head began again, the black eyes lost their luster, the heavy lip became pendulous. But he made an effort, and a change came over him; the muscles tightened visibly; he lifted the bulk of his great shoulders and sat erect, looking questioningly from one to another.

Then he began to speak without preamble, reciting his statement in an accentless, pedantic way which seemed to lend to what he said a somber sort of truth—the corroborative accuracy of unimaginative stupidity, which carries with it conviction to the minds of listeners.

He said:

"Count Cassilis knows. Like every Cossack he is at heart a Mussulman and a bashi-bazouk. Ask Enver Bey. He knows more than any white man, this Cassilis. He knows who sent the bashi-bazouks into the province of Philippopolis in '76, where half a hundred villages were burnt and twelve thousand Bulgarian men, women, and children were murdered.

It was this man's father who did that!"

"A lie," remarked Cassilis, politely concealing a yawn. "General, if this rambling statement interests you——"

"Pardon, Count——" interposed Delisle, with cool courtesy. And to Wildresse: "Go on!"

Without even lifting his eyes, and as though he had been unconscious of the interruption, Wildresse went on reciting:

"It was the Sultan's business—that affair in Bulgaria. Your father played double traitor; the Sultan never knew; the war provoked by Count Serge Cassilis followed; Russia beat Turkey into the mud and slush. Count Serge got double pay. Your Czar wanted Bulgaria to become a free state full of gratitude to Russia; and he tried to carry things with a high hand at San Stefano. You were not there! It was Count Serge. Where I first laid eyes on you, and you on me, was at Slivnitza. And after that I did your dirty jobs for you..... Very well; it warms up; Bulgaria becomes free—except she must tip her hat to the Sultan. Eh! You Russians didn't like that! All the same, Bulgaria becomes free to choose and elect her own Prince. Only—she doesn't want the Russian candidate—*you*!

"Alexander of Battenberg—Cousin of the Hesse Grand Duke—he was the first. Your Czar didn't like him, eh? They made a god of him, didn't they, in Sofia? And you Russians began to hate him. So did

that rickety old gambler of Servia, King Milan. Who started that Servian fool after Alexander of Battenberg? And what did he get for his foolery? He got his empty head broken at Slivnitza—he and his swineherd army—kicked headlong through the Dragoman Pass! And that settled the Roumanian question. Eh? Swine and swineherd kicked into the lap of Holy Russia.... And yours was double pay!

"Then *you* came sneaking back into the scene, Count Cassilis. I did your filthy work for you. You taught me how double pay is earned!

"Prince Alexander of Battenberg was the idol of Bulgaria. I don't know who gave you your orders, but I got mine from you! Was it Abdul Hamid—Abdul the Damned—who gave you your orders?

"Russian roubles paid *me* and the men I used. Maybe the Bank of Constantinople paid you.... And so we broke into his palace—the young prince Alexander's—and carried him across the frontier. You sat on your big horse among your Cossacks and saw us bring the Prince of Bulgaria into Russia. And your pockets full of Turkish sweetmeats!—Like a prostitute!

"That time you meant murder; but others were afraid. Alexander of Battenberg was allowed to abdicate.

"Then, for the world, history went on to the summer of '87, when that Saxe-Coburg Prince was elected—Ferdinand, who now talks to himself for

want of an audience, and who calls himself the Czar of all the Bulgars—he of the long nose and beard, and the eye of a wild pig.

"Russia pretended to hate him. Does she? *You* know!

"But history gives us only two Bulgarian princes from 1879 to 1915. How is that, Count Cassilis? Were there *only two?*—Alexander of Battenberg, whom you were afraid to murder, and this fat-jowled Ferdinand of today——"

"The man is crazy, I think," remarked Count Cassilis to the Countess.

Wildresse merely gazed at him out of lackluster eyes, and went on speaking with monotonous and terrible simplicity:

"History has lied to the world. There was another prince after Alexander. Every chancellery in Europe knows it, but never mentions it. A few others outside know it; you among others.... And I.

"England and France found him. The Templars of Tenedos were not all dead. The race of the hereditary Prince of Marmora was not extinct—the race of that man whose head Saladin cut off with his own hand—the race of Djani the Paladin, and of Raymond de Châtillon—the Princess of Marmora! England found him—Philip de Châtillon—and forced him on Russia and Germany and Austria in secret conference. The Porte promised assent; it *had* to. Before he was presented for election to the Bulgarian

people—a matter of routine merely—he was crowned and consecrated, and you know it! He was already as truly the ruler of Bulgaria as your Czar is today of all the Russias. And you know that, too! And *that* time, whoever gave you your orders, and whatever they may have been, *my* orders from you spelled murder!"

There was a moment's silence; Cassilis had turned his sneering, pallid face on Wildresse as though held by some subtle and horrible fascination, and he sat so, screwing up his golden mustache, his fishy blue eyes fixed, his lips as red as blood, and his wide, thin ears standing out translucent against the lighted lamp behind him.

Delisle, Warner, Gray, watched Wildresse with breathless attention; the Countess de Moidrey sat with Philippa's hand in hers, staring at this man who was about to die, and who continued to talk.

Only Philippa's face remained outwardly tranquil, yet she also was terribly intent upon what this man was now saying.

But Wildresse's head began to wag again with the palsy-like movement; he muttered, half to himself:

"That's how Philip de Châtillon died—Prince Philip of Bulgaria—that's how he died—there in the palace with his young wife—the way they did for Draga, the Queen—and Milan's son—the Servian swine who reigned before this old fighter, Peter!—

You know, Count Cassilis! So do I—and Vasilief knew. We both knew because we did it for you—tore the bedclothes off—God! How that young man fought! We stabbed his red-haired wife first—but when we stretched that powerful young neck of his, the blood spouted to the ceiling——"

The Countess made a gesture as though she were about to rise; Philippa's hand crushed hers, drew her back.

"That's how they died—those two young things in the bedroom of the Palace there.... I know what my orders were.... There was a child—a little girl six years old.... Vasilief went to the Ghetto and cut the throat of a six-year-old.... That's what we buried with Prince Philip of Bulgaria and his wife.... I took the little Princess out of her bed and kept her for myself.... In case of trouble. Also, I thought she might mean money some day. I waited too long; it seems she was not worth killing—no use for blackmail. And the French Government wouldn't listen, and the British were afraid to listen.... What's proclaimed dead remains dead to Governments, even if they have to kill it again.

"That is my statement. Vasilief and I killed Prince Philip of Bulgaria, and his red-haired Princess, too.... In their bedroom at the Palace it was done.... But I took their little girl with me.... I had to knife Vasilief to do it. He wanted too much. I strangled him and turned my knife inside him—several times.

And took the little girl away with me—the little six-year-old Princess Philippa——" He lifted his heavy head and stared at Philippa: "*There she sits!*"

Philippa stood straight up, her grey eyes fixed on Wildresse in terrible concentration.

He wagged his head monotonously; a tic kept snatching at the upper lip, baring his yellow dog-teeth, so that he seemed to be laughing.

"There's a bag full of the child's clothing—your clothing—toys—photographs—God knows what. There's a safe in the cellar of the Café Biribi. The fire won't harm it. I kept the pieces of identification there—against a time of need. England wouldn't listen and wouldn't pay anything. France was afraid for her alliance. There was nothing in it for Germany. Russia shrugged and yawned—as *you* do, Count Cassilis—and then tried to kill me.

"As for the long-nosed wild pig of Bulgaria—do you think I had a chance with him? Not with Ferdy. Non pas! I couldn't reach the people. That was the trouble. That is where I failed. Who would believe me without my pieces of identification? And I was afraid to take them into Sofia—afraid to cross the frontier with them—dared not even let France know I had them—or any other Power. They'd have had my throat cut for me inside of forty-eight hours! Eh, Cassilis? You know how it is done.... And that's all.... They've burned the Café Biribi. But the safe is in the cellar.... I've done what I could to revenge myself on

every side. I've sold France, sold Germany, sold Russia when I was able. Tell them that in Petrograd! I had no chance to sell England.... At first I never meant to harm the girl Philippa.... Philippa de Châtillon! Only when she turned on me, then I meant to twist her neck.... I waited too long, talked too much. That man—the Yankee, yonder—saved her neck for her——"

His head was wagging by jerks; the tic stretched his loosened mouth, twitching it into awful and silent laughter, and the *rictus mortis* distorted his sagging features as the soldiers took him by both arms, shaking him into comprehension.

He shambled to his feet, looking at everybody and seeing nothing.

"Philippa de Châtillon, Princess of the Bulgars!" he mumbled.... "The girl Philippa, gentlemen, *caissière de cabaret*! ... Her father died by the Palace window, and her mother on the black marble floor! —Very young they were, gentlemen—very young.... And I think very much in love——"

They took him out, still mumbling, the spasm playing and jerking at his sagging jaw.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

The sun was a crimson disk through the dust; a haze

possessed the world; forest and hill, meadow and river, faded to phantoms in the unreal light.

The Château des Oiseaux was very quiet. General and staff had departed; sentries, telegraphers, wires, switchboard—the sky-guns on the northern terrace, the great racing automobiles, cyclists, motor cyclists, *fantassins*, cavalry—all were gone into the magic glory of the east.

The park was empty and still; only traces remained where green leaves curled up and grew brittle, and drooping boughs withered on rustic scaffoldings; where lawn and drive showed the fresh scars of wheels and hoofs; and where trusses of hay and straw and glistening heaps of spilled oats marked the abandoned lines.

So far to the north and east had the sound of cannon receded that only at intervals, when the wind was right, was it distinguishable at all as a soft, almost inaudible thudding along the horizon.

No gun shots troubled the August quiet; the shrill chirring of insects from every stubble field accentuated it.

Very few soldiers were to be seen; *fantassins* mounted guard by the pontoons; vedettes were visible along the river meadows and on the low hills beyond the Récollette. Patrols rode slowly on the Saïs highway; wagons still rolled eastward through the sunset light, or went into park in sheltered places; few cyclists went south, fewer still whizzed

by into the north and east.

Just at sunset a squadron of hussars passed the lodge gate, walking their horses. An officer turned his mount, spurred through the open gate, and galloped up the drive to the Château.

He dismounted at the foot of the terrace; his horse stood, turning a beautiful, gentle head around toward the distant gate where his comrades were slowly passing.

His rider, mounting the terrace steps two at a time, encountered Madame de Moidrey and Warner, paid his respects almost breathlessly, but with perfect restraint of an impatience impossible to conceal.

"And Captain Halkett?" he inquired. "I hear that he was not injured when his biplane came down into the river?"

"He was stunned, that's all," said Warner quietly. "His mechanic was badly bruised, but not seriously. The plane is a wreck."

The Vicomte d'Aurès stood a moment, twisting one glove between his fingers, then, with winning dignity, but turning very red, he said to the Countess:

"I have come also to make my adieux to—Peggy—if I have your permission——"

The Countess nodded:

"She is in there.... You have my permission ... and approval."

He saluted her hand very simply, straightened

up, took faultless leave of Warner, turned, and entered the house. Peggy rose from the music stool and came toward him in the dim rose light. They met as naturally and unconsciously as two children; he took both her hands; she released them and drew them around his neck and laid her face against his breast.

They had only a few moments.

Ethra de Moidrey and Warner saw his departure from where they were strolling along the parapet of the lily garden. He left the park at a fast gallop, never turning to look back. Twilight swallowed the gallant, gay young figure. For a few moments the double gallop of hoofs sounded through the evening air, then died away.

The Countess, seated on the parapet, laid her hand appealingly on Warner's sleeve:

"Jim, do you like him?"

"He's all right, Ethra. If I had a younger brother I should wish him to be like that boy."

"Yes.... He is nice.... He is going into battle.... That is hard.... Poor little Peggy. Womanhood comes swiftly when it comes, Jim. The reagent is sorrow. We all pass that way, we women. Sorrow is the philosopher's stone.... Else we remain only children until we die."

Warner gazed at the dusty glory still glowing above the western hills:

"What a day it has been!" he murmured.

"God guide those men who are riding into the east," said she. "What a strange day it has been, Jim! Did you understand that painful incident between General Delisle and General Count Cassilis?"

"Perfectly. The Russian Military Observer was given his congé. Did you not see what happened? The rattle of the volley that ended Wildresse meant also the end of the world for Count Cassilis.

"I saw General Delisle walk across the terrace and say something to Cassilis in a low voice. I saw the Russian's face. It was like death. The end was also in sight for him. He knew it. He knew what his dismissal from French division headquarters meant. He knew he must go home. He knew that his arrest would follow the instant he set foot across the frontier of his own Empire.

"But his good manners did not desert him. You saw him take his leave, stiff, correct, calm as though the ceremony meant nothing to him except familiar routine.

"There was no exchange of handclasps, nothing of cordiality, merely the faultless observance of convention. Then he went away."

"He is a traitor?" she asked, in an awed voice.

"Undoubtedly. Think what it has meant—think what it would have meant to this army if his treachery had not been discovered!—A spy at headquarters! But his own Emperor will punish him. As surely as I stand here, Ethra, that man is doomed

to die on the scaffold. He knows it.... Did you notice him light a cigarette when he got into his limousine? I could not keep my eyes off him—that man already practically dead—that traitor impassively saluting the hussars' fanion as his automobile rolled by! And even while I looked at him I seemed to see him suspended there in his shroud, a dead weight on the gibbet, turning gently in the morning breeze—God! The fellow got on my nerves!—Knowing the guilt that lay black within him—the murders in Sofia——"

"Horrible," said the Countess with a slight shiver. "And the man, Wildresse—did it—with those dreadful hands of his. I thought I should faint when he was telling of it—what he did in the bedroom—"

She shuddered, rose abruptly:

"Philippa is in her room, still poring over those papers. I can't bear to leave the child all alone, and yet it seems like intrusion to disturb her. Could you take her for a little walk, Jim, before dinner?—Take her out of her room—out of the house for a while? I'm afraid she's remembering that murderer's confession. She ought not to brood over such things."

"Yes, I'll try to take her mind off it. Suppose I walk down to the inn with her! Halkett's there. It might divert her; she's fond of him." He smiled slightly. "There's a cat there, too. It will seem like old times—she and Halkett and Ariadne and I together at the Golden Peach. I believe it will divert her."

"Why not remain and dine there with Mr.

Halkett, as you used to, in your somewhat unconventional way?" suggested the Countess, smiling. "I am very sure that would appeal to Philippa."

"I'll ask her," nodded Warner.

They walked slowly into the house together. Gray lay in the corner of an upholstered lounge beside a lighted lamp, a book open on his knees, his cheek resting on his hand.

At the sound of their approach he looked up quickly, and his face brightened.

"I thought I wouldn't read any further," he said frankly. "We have enjoyed so much reading it together. Do you mind going on with it to the end?"

The Countess laughed and a pretty color rose in her cheeks.

"Do you think," she said, "that I expect to spend the remainder of my days reading romances with you?"

And, as Warner turned and mounted the stairs:

"Besides," she added, "there is really nothing more to read in that silly novel."

"Why not?" he inquired, his face expressing candid disappointment.

"Because they have already fallen in love," she explained carelessly. "And the end of such a proceeding is always obvious, Mr. Gray."

She glanced up at the stairs. Warner had disappeared.

After a moment, casually unconscious, she seated herself on the broad, upholstered end of the lounge, looking down over his shoulder at the open book on his knees.

"In fiction," she remarked, "there is only one end to such situations.... But, if you like, I don't mind beginning another book with you, Mr. Gray."

Her hand, which rested among the cushions, supporting her, happened to come within the range of his wandering vision. He looked at it for a little while. Presently he placed his own over it, very lightly.

Neither moved. But it was a long time before he ventured to turn his head and look up at the woman with whom he had read through his first long love story. She had read such stories before, understood something of their tricks, their technique, their reality, and their romance. And had supposed there was nothing further for her to learn about them and that her interest in them was dead.

"If you don't mind," he said, "reading on with me, for a while——"

"I might tire."

"Try not to."

Her flushed face became thoughtful. Already the prospect of reading another romance with him seemed interesting.

Warner and Philippa, silently descending the stairs together, glanced around at the two figures

together there under the lighted lamp.

The Countess was saying calmly:

"We might as well finish the love story we have begun, if you really insist on following through to the conventional end."

"Yes," he said. "I do insist. Let us follow through together—to the end."

Philippa, slim and white, moved silently through the house beside Warner, out across the terrace and down to the drive.

The last hint of color had died out in the west. Below, in the valley, no searchlights flooded the river; only a moving lantern here and there glimmered through the misty dusk.

"It will be jolly," he was saying, "for us to dine again together before Halkett leaves. Don't you think so, Philippa?"

"Yes. When is he going?"

"Tomorrow, I believe. They are sending the wrecked machine to Verdun by rail. I suppose he'll follow in the morning. What a miracle that he was not killed! They say the big Bristol behaved exactly like a wing-tipped grouse when the shrapnel hit her —coming down beating and fluttering and fighting for equilibrium to the end. It was the skill of his pilot that brought her safely wabbling and planing into the river, where she waddled about like a scotched duck."

"Was the pilot badly hurt?"

"Not badly. Sister Eila is looking after him. They're going to bring him up to the Château hospital in the morning. He's at the inn now."

"Why didn't they bring any wounded to us, Jim?"

"The ambulances from Ausone and Dreslin took them. I believe we are to expect fifty wounded tomorrow. Sister Félicité was notified after our ambulance returned from the Bois d'Ausone."

Twice they were halted, and the permit from General Delisle which Warner carried was minutely inspected by flashlight. Then they moved on slowly through the fragrant night toward the unlighted windows of the Golden Peach.

There, as in the Château, all lights were masked by shutters and curtains, so that no night visitor soaring high under the stars might sight anything at which to loose the tiny red spark—that terrible, earth-shattering harbinger of death and annihilation.

At the front door they knocked; Linette welcomed them into a darkened hall, but as soon as the door was closed again she brought out a lamp.

Madame Arlon followed, delighted that they were to dine there with Halkett.

He was somewhere about the garden, she said, and Sister Eila was upstairs with the wounded pilot.

Moving along the familiar path in the garden, they presently discovered Halkett seated alone in the little arbor, with Ariadne dozing on his lap.

"We've come to dine with you, old fellow!" said

Warner. "—Philippa and you and I and Ariadne again. Does the idea appeal to you?"

"Immensely!" He had saluted Philippa's hand and had offered her the cat, which she took to her breast, burying her face in the soft fur.

"Darling," she murmured, "it is so nice to have you again! One needs all one's old friends in days like these."

They returned to the house, Philippa walking between the two men, caressing Ariadne, who acknowledged the endearments with her usual enthusiasm.

Dinner was all ready for them in the little room by the bar: a saucer was set beside Philippa's chair for Ariadne; Linette went upstairs to summon Sister Eila, and returned with word that she would be down after a while, and that dinner was not to wait for her.

Warner said to Halkett:

"How did you feel when you were falling, old chap?"

"Not very comfortable," returned the other, smiling.

"You thought it was all up with you?"

"On the contrary, I realized it was all down."

Philippa smiled faintly.

"You didn't expect to come out alive?" inquired Warner.

"I didn't think of that. Bolton, my pilot, said: 'I'm

trying to make the river, sir.' I was attempting to find out how badly we were damaged. It seemed an age; but we both were busy."

"You probably did some very serious thinking, too."

Halkett nodded. He remembered that part vividly—the thinking part. He recollected perfectly where his thoughts were concentrated as he came fluttering down out of the sky. But on whom they were centered he never would tell as long as he lived.

Sister Eila came in.

Halkett placed her; she and Philippa exchanged faint smiles; then the two men resumed their seats.

"Monsieur Bolton is now asleep," she said, speaking to Halkett and looking at her plate. "Tomorrow we shall move him to the east wing of the Château. We shall have many wounded tomorrow, I believe."

"Yes. Sister Félicité told me," said Warner. He looked at her for a moment. "Are you well, Sister Eila?"

"Why, yes; I am perfectly well."

"You look very pale. Do you ever find time to sleep?"

"Sufficiently, thank you," she replied, smiling. "You know we are very tough, we Sisters of Charity. There is a saying that nothing but death can kill a Grey Sister."

Warner laughed, Halkett forced a smile.

"I think," added Sister Eila, "that British airmen ought to be included in that proverb. Don't you, Mr. Halkett?"

"Nothing can kill me," he said. "I'm even wondering whether old man Death could do the job."

Philippa turned to Warner:

"Isn't the conversation becoming a trifle grim for our reunion?"

They all smiled; Philippa fed tidbits to Ariadne, who had forsaken a well-garnished platter on the floor to sit up beside Philippa and pat her gown from time to time with an appealing paw.

"That's very human," commented Warner. "Ariadne wants only what is not meant for her."

"I can understand her," said Halkett carelessly. "May I smoke, Sister Eila? Do you mind, Philippa?" He struck a match: "With your permission," he said, and lighted his cigarette as Linette entered with coffee.

"Yes," he said musingly, "it seems to be the game in life—to desire what is not meant for one. The worst of it is that philosophy doesn't help one to understand and become reconciled."

Sister Eila said, looking at her plate:

"Religion helps."

"Only a favored few, Sister."

"Yes, for everybody the refuge of faith is waiting."

"Belief may explain; but it can not reconcile," rejoined Halkett quietly. "Except for the mystery of God, there is no other mystery like man. None has yet explained him; not even himself. If his riddle is ever to be solved, I don't know when that will be, unless it is to happen after death."

There was a silence.

Halkett spoke again:

"Unbidden love comes; it abides as long as it chooses—a day, a lifetime—and after life, perhaps. But if it chooses to go, no one ever born can control its departure.... This is one mystery of man—only one among many.... I believe something of this sort occurred to me while—" he laughed—"I was coming a cropper in the sky this morning."

Sister Eila's eyes were fixed on space; Halkett laid aside his cigarette and picked up Ariadne.

"Well, old lady," he said, "there is only one solution to everything; go on with the business in hand and do it as thoroughly as your intellect permits. Your business, I suppose, is to look ornamental, have kittens, and catch mice. *Bonne chance*, little lady!"

He set her on the table and she marched gingerly among the coffee cups toward Philippa.

Sister Eila rose; all followed her example.

Halkett, looking around at them, said pleasantly:

"It was a happy thought—this reunion. I had meant to say good-by tonight at the Château——"

"Tonight!" exclaimed Warner.

"Yes. Orders have come. An automobile arrives later, to take me to the railroad station at Dreslin. My wrecked machine has gone——" He looked smilingly at Sister Eila: "What's left of me is to follow tonight, it seems.... And so I shall go over to the Château, now, I think, and make my very grateful adieux, and have a last word with Gray. Shall I say good-by to you now? Will you be here when I return in an hour?"

Philippa said in a low voice:

"We are going to walk in the garden. Look for us there."

He turned to Sister Eila.

"I shall be with my sick man," she said smilingly. Her face was deadly white.

So Halkett took his cap and went away up the road all alone, and Sister Eila mounted the stairs to inspect her patient.

As Warner stood for a moment by the open door looking after Halkett, a familiar voice came to his ears—the voice of Asticot, bragging of his prowess and cheerfully predicting even greater glory for himself.

"Nonsense!" came the voice of Linette, sharply. "You had nothing more to do with the taking of that spy than had Ariadne!"

"M'amzelle! It was I who accomplished that! Behold your Asticot, a hero, modest and humble

——"

"Tiens! You are not *my* Asticot! Be kind enough to remember that!"

"M'amzelle, you know me——"

"No, I don't!"

"But you are perfectly at liberty to become acquainted with me——"

"I do not desire to!"

"My master, M'sieu' Warner, trusts and respects me. He is the most wonderful gentleman in the whole world, M'sieu' Warner. And he believes in me!"

"*I* don't!" retorted Linette.

Asticot heaved a terrific sigh:

"And I with thirty thousand francs which I have labored to save—fruits of my toil—souvenirs of years of self-denial——"

"What! Thirty thousand francs! Bah! Thirty thousand debts, you mean——"

"I mean nothing of the sort," said Asticot simply. "If you doubt my word, I will show them to you some day. Linette, you know me——"

"I tell you I don't!"

Warner could hear Magda laughing, and Madame Arlon making caustic comments concerning the financial solvency of Asticot and the manner in which he wore his hair.

"As for that," rejoined Asticot, "I can trim my hair to please Linette——"

"That," exclaimed Linette, exasperated, "is

impossible! Only a machine that will trim your neck close to your shoulders might interest me, Monsieur Asticot!"

"Woman!" said Asticot, unruffled. "Tenez, M'amzelle! *That* is what I think of woman—charming, capricious, enchanting woman! I salute your incomparable sex!" And Warner heard him kiss his own palm with a vigorous smack.

"Imbecile!" cried Linette. "Put on a uniform before you have the impudence to make love to an honest girl!"

"I am going to," said Asticot triumphantly.

Warner closed the door, turned back into the hallway, and entered the little dining room. Philippa was no longer there; so he went through the house into the dark garden, where the air was sweet with the perfume of clove pinks and lilies.

She was there, a pale shape in the darkness, moving slowly among the flowers. As he came up she lifted her head and looked at him, her grey eyes still vague with memories which the place evoked.

And, after a few moments' wandering along the paths with him:

"Why are you so silent?" she asked.

"I thought perhaps I might disturb your thoughts, Philippa."

"You are always part of my thoughts. I have no thought that I would not share with you.... But—you have never understood that."

"I understand you, Philippa."

"Do you?"

"Yes. You are everything a woman should be; nothing a woman should not be. That is my understanding of you."

She shook her head gently:

"That is an impossible woman. You are kind to me in your thoughts. And—you have not understood me after all."

"What have I not understood, Philippa?"

"My—my heart and mind."

"Both are wonderful, matchless——"

"You are wrong! There is your mistake. They are not wonderful; and both may be matched by the hearts and minds of any woman! ... Has it never occurred to you that I am very human?"

He remained silent; they walked on for a while, turned, and retraced their steps along the border of clove pinks.

"Have you gone over all your papers?" he asked in a hesitating voice.

"Yes."

"Is there anything I can do to help you—advise—aid——"

She turned almost impatiently:

"Always you are thinking of my well-being, my worldly benefit. It is for that you give me your companionship, your protection. I—I don't know—sometimes I think I have never been—so—lonely

——"

Her voice broke; she turned sharply from him and stood with slender hands clenched in the starlight.

"Philippa?" he said gently, in his kindly, even voice. And it seemed to break the barrier to her reserve.

"Oh!" she faltered. "—It is something else a woman—hopes for—something different—when her heart—is empty——"

He dared not understand her, dared not touch her. He heard himself saying: "There is nobody but you, Philippa," and dared not speak—dared not say what he should have said before either he or she had learned who she really was.

Perhaps a faint idea of what held him to an aloofness, a formality unaccustomed, occurred to her during the strained silence. Perhaps she divined, vaguely, what might be in his mind.

After a while she turned, not looking at him, and took his arm! It was the first time she had done so since that day when he painted her.

Even yet she could scarcely realize, scarcely comprehend the great change which had come to her. She knew it was true; she understood that it must be the truth—that she was no longer nameless —not the foundling, not the lonely child of chance who had looked out blankly over the world, without aim, without interest, having nothing to expect,

nothing to hope for from a world which had not even bestowed upon her a name.

And now—now, suddenly hazard had snatched aside that impenetrable curtain which, as long as she could remember, had hung between her and all that she desired most passionately to know.

From the loose, half palsied lips of a murderer had fallen the words she had never expected to hear. He had gone to his death, shambling, doddering, mumbling to himself. But the papers which had belonged to him had confirmed every word he uttered.

She knew now who she was, Philippa de Châtillon. She knew how her mother had died; and her father.

As yet, the wonderment of it all had not been too deeply embittered by the tragedy. It was still only wonder, and a striving to realize—a dream, strange, terrible, beautiful by turns; but still a dream to her.

Something far more real, more vivid, more vital, possessed her. She knew it; felt it always now. The consciousness of it shared with her the veiled emotions which the solving of her life's mystery evoked.

As she stood there in the brilliant starlight, both arms wound around one of his in the old, unconscious way, Halkett came into the garden, walking swiftly:

"The car is here. Don't come to the door. I had rather say good-by and God bless you here in this garden—where I first knew you, Philippa—where you and I became friends, Warner.... So—good-by. If I come out of it, I'll come to you—to both of you, I hope."

"Yes," said Philippa calmly.

He took her hand, held it, looked at Warner, and took the hand he offered.

"Good-by!"

"Good-by!"

He turned and walked swiftly into the house. As he passed the stairway, he saw Sister Eila standing there as white as death.

They looked at each other in silence; she laid one hand on the banisters as though to steady herself. With the other she held out to him a flower.

When he had gone with his flower, and when the whir of his motor car had died away in that silent house, she turned to ascend the stairs again, stumbled, dropped by the rail, and lay there huddled in a heap, both hands pressed desperately over her quivering face.

Then in the room above, the sick man groaned; and she straightened up and rose as though a trumpet had sounded. And slowly, steadily, she mounted her Calvary, drying her eyes naïvely and like a little girl who has been hurt and whose grief seems hopeless, inconsolable, and never ending.

Slowly, side by side, his arm once more in her possession, Warner and Philippa returned to the Château.

When they reached the terrace, the stars overhead had become magnificent; millions and millions of them sparkled up there, arching the dark earth with necklaces of light.

He turned and gazed out over the panorama of the night. Far in the east the silver pencil of a searchlight swept the heavens.

Into the mysterious east he stared in silence, thinking of Wildresse.

The Orient had hatched out Wildresse; Biribi had caught him; Biribi had utterly extinguished his race at last.

The mysterious irony of it—the death of this man's only son—the fate that had delivered the father into the crime-blotched hands of that terrible battalion—the hazard of Asticot's discovery in the safe—the sudden, dramatic unmasking of Cassilis—could these things be happening in this year of 1914?

Stranger things than these were happening, and he knew it.

Westward the spray of a grey sea dripped from the muzzles of a thousand guns.

Eastward the coldly logical strategy of a great commander was developing, and the first fierce drive at Alsace-Lorraine was being launched.

From farther eastward still the two allies, listening, caught already the low growling of the Russian bear.

Germany, poised high above the glare of battle, waiting to snatch up, one by one, heroic and dying nations to her bosom—Germany clutching the dripping sword of conquest, heard also the rumbling of the Asiatic monster behind the Caucasus.

She turned her armed head and stared over her mailed shoulder toward the east, haughty, incredulous, magnificently barbaric—the last of the Valkyries left amid the dying gods of old, standing there alone, glittering, motionless amid the hellish conflagration of the Götterdämmerung.

Warner looked up at the stars.

The glimmering writing on Heaven's wall was plain to read.

Plainer, it seemed, than his own heart, which had grown heavy as he stood there beside the woman to whom it was now too late to speak.

For he should have spoken before, long ago, almost in the beginning. Because he had always loved her. He had known it for days, now; and yet with that blind delay and distrust of self to which some men are fated, he had waited too long to ask of her what his heart had so long, so blindly desired.

Now it was too late: He should have spoken before.

He should have spoken when she was lonely,

friendless, nameless.

Now it was too late.

He turned toward the house, but she did not move, they came face to face under the high stars.

"*Can't* you—love me?" she faltered.

"Philippa!——"

She flung both arms around his neck.

*** END OF THIS PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE GIRL PHILIPPA ***

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