The MAIDS of PARADISE

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PART ONE.

CHAPTER I.

At the Telegraph.

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

On the 4th of August I lost all traces of Mr. Buckhurst near the frontier, in the village of Morsbronn. On August 5th, about eight o'clock in the morning, the military telegraph instrument in the operator's room over the temporary barracks of the Third Hussars clicked out the call for urgency, not the usual military signal, but a secret sequence understood only by certain officers of the Imperial Military Police. The operator on duty therefore stepped into my room and waited while I took his place at the wire.

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

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

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

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

Jarras—"Have you caught Buckhurst?"

I—"No."

Jarras—"How did he get away?"

I—"There's confusion enough on the frontier to cover the escape of a hundred thieves."

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

Jarras—"The Empress desires to know where the chateau called La Trappe is."

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

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

I—"Perfectly."

Jarras—"If Buckhurst is found you will bring him to Paris at once. Shoot him if he resists arrest. If the community at La Trappe has not been warned of a possible visit from us, you will find and arrest the following individuals: Claude Tavernier, late professor of law, Paris School of Law; Achille Bazard, ex-instructor in mathematics, Fontainebleau Artillery School; Dr. Leo Delmont, ex-interne, Charity Hospital, Paris; Mlle. Sylvia Elven, lately of the Odeon; the Countess de Vassart, well known for her eccentricities.

"You will affix the government seals to the house as usual; you will then escort the people named to the nearest point on the Belgian frontier. The Countess de Vassart usually dresses like a common peasant. Look out that

"Look Out That She Does Not Slip Through Your Fingers."

she does not slip through your fingers. Repeat your instructions." I repeated them from my memoranda.

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

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Where the Vosges mountains towered in obscurity a curtain of rain joined earth and sky. The rivers ran yellow, brimful, foaming at the fords. Somewhere in that spectral forest Prussian cavalry were hidden, watching the heights where our drenched divisions lay. Behind that forest a German army was massing, fresh from the combat in the north, where the tragedy of Wissembourg had been enacted only the day before, in the presence of the entire French army—the awful spectacle of a single division of seven thousand men suddenly enveloped and crushed by seventy thousand Germans.

The rain fell steadily but less heavily. I changed my civilian clothes for a hussar uniform, sent a trooper to find me a horse, and sat down by the window to stare at the downpour and think how best I might carry out my instructions to a successful finish.

The colony at La Trappe was, as far as I could judge, a product of conditions which had, a hundred years before, culminated in the French Revolution. Now, in 1870, but under different circumstances, all France was once more disintegrating socially. Opposition to the Empire, to the dynasty, to the government, had been seething for years; now the separate crystals which formed on the edges of the boiling undercurrents began to grow into masses which, adhering to other masses, interfered with the healthy functions of national life. First among these came the International Society of Workingmen, with all its affiliations—the "Internationale," as it was called. In its wake trailed minor societies, some mild and harmless, some dangerous and secret, some violent, advocating openly the destruction of all existing conditions.

With one exception, all those whom the police and the government regarded as inclined to violence left the group. There remained, with this one exception, a nucleus of earnest, thoughtful people whose creed was in part the creed of the Internationale, the creed of universal brotherhood, equality before the law, purity of individual living as an example and an incentive to a national purity.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Instantly absolute secrecy was ordered, so the news of the robbery never became public property, but from one end of France to the other the gendarmerie, the police, local, municipal, and secret, were stirred up to activity.

Within forty-eight hours, an individual answering Buckhurst's description had sold a single enormous dia-

"Across the Meadow," Said the Young Girl.

mond for two hundred and fifty thousand francs to a dealer in Strasbourg, a Jew named Fishel Cohen. An hour after he had recorded the transaction at the Strasbourg Diamond Exchange he and the diamond were on their way to Paris, in charge of a detective. A few hours later the stone was identified at the Tuileries as having been taken from the famous crucifix of Louis XI.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

CHAPTER II.

The Government Interferes.

"There is a short cut across that meadow," said the young girl, raising a rounded, sun-tinted arm, bare to the shoulder. "And, after that, you will come to a thicket of white birches."

"Thank you, mademoiselle."

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

A deadened report shook the summer air—the sound of a cannon fired very far away, perhaps on the citadel of Strasbourg. Without turning my head I said: "It is difficult to believe that there is war anywhere in the world—is it not, mademoiselle?"

"Not if one knows the world," she said, indifferently.

"Do you know it, my child?"

"Sufficiently," she said.

She had opened again the book which she had been reading when I first noticed her. From my saddle I saw that it was Moliere.

"Why do you tend turkeys?" I asked.

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

"For that same reason you read Monsieur Moliere?" I suggested.

"Doubtless, monsieur."

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

"Parbleu! There are my turkeys, monsieur."

"Perhaps," said I, "but I have asked you a question which remains parried. Who are you?" I demanded.

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

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

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

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

"And if I refuse?"

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

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

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

"It is one o'clock," I said, closing the hunting-case with a snap.

She looked me steadily in the eyes.

"Will you come with me to La Trappe?"

She did not stir.

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

She was clever enough not to try to dismount, woman enough not to make an awkward struggle or do anything ungraceful. In silence, I led the horse forward through the open gate out into the wet meadow.

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

So we went on. The spectacle of a cavalryman in full uniform leading a cavalry horse on which was seated an Alsatian girl in bright peasant costume appeared to astonish the few people we passed.

We met a dozen people in all, I think, some of them peasants, one or two of the better class—a country doctor and a notary among them. "Why do all the people I meet carry bundles?" I demanded of the notary.

"Mon Dieu, monsieur, they are too near the frontier to take risks," he replied.

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

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

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

The lazy road-side butterflies flew up in clouds before the slow-stepping horse; the hill rabbits, rising to their hind-quarters, wrinkled their whiskered noses at us; from every thicket speckled hedge-birds peered at us as we went our way.

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

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

"May we enter?" I asked, politely.

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

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

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

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

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

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

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

His Plea.

The Hon. John R. Boomwaller, the well-known statesman, having arisen in the middle of the night and discovered Ink Judson, an undesirable citizen of Senegambian descent, in his henhouse, proceeded to upbraid him lustily.

"But, uh-hol' on, hon'able! Loogy yuh a minute; dem loogy yuh, anh!" expostulated the malefactor. "I owns right up dat you's kotch me in de act—yassah, I 'knowledges de cawn—but dess lemme 'scusably ax yo', sah: As yo' is a membuh o' de legislater—and a pow'ful pompous one dey tells me, too—how kin yo' find it in yo' heart to holler dis-uh-way at a po', mizzable, ignunt nigger, for tryin' to make a dishonest dime or so in de on'y way he knows how?"—Judge.

Peculiar Japanese Frog.

The Japanese frog is a creature measuring between fifteen and twenty-five inches. The skin of its back is pale blue and by night looks dark green or olive brown. The frog remains motionless during the day, with eyes sheltered from the light and with belly up, clinging to its support by adhesive cushions and by its belly, which is provided with a sticky covering, and it is hardly distinguishable from the objects that surround it. At nightfall it begins its hunt for the mammoth crickets on which it feeds, making leaps covering seven feet of ground.—Harper's Weekly.

NATIONS OF WIDE DIVERGENCE

Albanians and Turks Have Not, and Seemingly Never Can Have, Anything in Common.

"Perhaps one of the reasons that the Albanians have never really submitted to the Turks lies in a fundamental incompatability between the Albanian and Turkish character," says a returned traveler from the Balkan. "The Turks are melancholy, even tragic. The Albanians declare for happiness. The story is told of some Albanian soldiers who saw a performance of Karaguez, in which a love story was acted, but without bringing the lovers together at the finish. The Albanians wouldn't have it for a minute. They flourished their revolvers and yelled: 'Make them happy! Make them happy!' And happy they had to be made before peace could reign again. The Albanians live in a high, mountainous country, with deep valleys in between ranges. Even in times of peace they are in constant warfare with the Turks. There will be a 'frontier incident,' and then over the border into Montenegro flee the Albanians. The Montenegrins help them in their efforts at reprisal against the common foe, the Turk. Albanians are great on blood feuds. The Italian vendetta is a mild diversion beside the Albanian blood feud. The English woman, Mary Edith Durham, traveler and war correspondent, is a friend of the Albanians. She often lives among them and is their trusted friend.

Overwhelmed With Work.

Along in the '60s Pat Casey pushed a wheelbarrow across the plains from St. Joseph, Mo., to Georgetown, Colo., shortly after that he "struck it rich;" in fact, he was credited with having more wealth than anyone else in Colorado. A man of great shrewdness and ability, he was exceedingly sensitive over his inability to read or write. One day an old timer met him with:

"How are you getting along, Pat?"

"Go 'way from me, now," said Pat, genially, "me head's burstin' wid business. It takes two lid pincils a day to do me wurruk."—Everybody's Magazine.

Selfish Automobilist.

In an argument about world politics—welt politik—Senator Lodge said the other day in Boston:

"The morality of too many governments seems as frankly selfish and as frankly unjust as the man Smithers.

"As Smithers, Havana in mouth, came out of an expensive restaurant and started to get into his automobile a creditor held him up.

"'I tell you what it is, Mr. Smithers,' said the creditor, 'you wouldn't go riding round in a fine automobile like that if you paid your debts.'

"'Ha,' said Smithers, 'quite right! My point of view exactly! Glad to know you're in agreement with me. The golf club, Alphonse.'"

Everything Higher.

The Old Skipper—Don't you come tellin' me none of your cock an' bull yarns about waves 80 feet high. Why, I've been at sea, man an' boy, for nigh on fifty years, and I never saw none higher than 40.

The Young Sailor—Ah, but see 'ow things 'ave growed up since then!—Punch.

Fascinated.

Bill—Is she a good dancer?

Jill—Well, she looks good to me when she dances.

Doubtful.

"How is your mother, Tommie?"

"She's better, but not so better as she was yesterday."