

'Ah! you have reference to a jealous rival, I shall have to meet him some morning at sunrise in the Forest de St. Germaine, or perhaps the Bois de Boulogne, with swords or pistols. I suppose I can depend on you, my friend, to second me, for I shall fight, if challenged, just for the adventure.'

'Hast the luck, Captain Tom; you run on like a Derby winner. Hark man! This danger does not come from within, but from without. It is the military authorities you have to fear.'

The words, though thrilling in their nature, do not seem to arouse any alarm in the breast of the American, who merely shrugs his shoulders in the French style he has learned so well, and remarks:

'Is that all? Please explain, milord.' 'It is known that you have been intimate with this beautiful lady for some time. You have sent her flowers, driven her in a carriage, and even forced her to accept presents of food that are worth their weight in silver during the siege.'

'In brief, I have treated her as a lady friend for whom I have a warm admiration. I am rich. Whose business is it if I choose to send flowers to one of the fair sex?'

Captain Tom is indignant. He feels that some one has been meddling in his private affairs, and this is an interference he never will brook without being heard from.

Before speaking further the Englishman pokes his head out from the niche, and takes a survey of their surroundings. A fierce dashes past as though containing a messenger who bears important tidings. Down the boulevard a crowd of citizens advance, singing the 'Marseillaise,' and shouting that the Republic has come. 'Vive la Republique!'

In another quarter a detachment of gendarmes, under a commissaire of police, sweep the boulevard of all gathering crowds. Already the authorities of Paris feel the mutterings of the coming storm. The enemy within will play greater havoc than the Prussians ever can. The dreaded hydra-headed Commune is nearly in the saddle, after a retirement of over twenty years. Paris will soon be under the heel of the oppressor.

In their immediate vicinity all is quiet, and Lord Eric sees no cause for apprehension. What he has to say can be told without danger of being overheard, at least so far as he can discern.

The American has had his natural curiosity aroused by this time, and the strange actions of his friend are calculated to augment such feelings on his part.

'Still he asks no more questions, satisfied that Lord Eric will tell him when he has gone through his little stage business. Perhaps the American has seen him carry on in this way before, and make much out of a mole-hill.'

'I need not tell you how I have obtained my information, my friend. It is a beastly shame, you know, but, all the same, I have no doubt regarding its accuracy. When I tell you that the secret police have received positive instructions from military headquarters to watch your every movement, you can understand why I am so particular about being seen in your company, and at this hour.'

'Confusion! Lord Eric, you harp on in the one strain. Tell me why I am under suspicion.'

'Because you admire the fair Alstian. You send her costly presents, ride with her, in a word, because you are her friend.'

'Answer me plainly, man. What do they say she is?' and his hand grips the Briton's arm until he winces under the pressure.

'Listen, then, my friend. They have learned that the lovely Alstian is a German spy!'

CHAPTER II.

'HIVE HER UP, OR YOU SHALL SHARE HER FATE.'

THE words 'German spy' are almost hissed in the ear of the American, who has maintained his clutch upon Lord Eric's arm.

'The deuce you say!' he answers, and it is evident that milord's announcement has not awakened as much wonder as the other had expected.

'Whether you are guilty or innocent will not matter much, once you fall into the hands of the authorities, Captain Tom. It is a march to the Prison La Roquette, and the guillotine by morning, or perhaps a file of zouaves, a box for a coffin, a brief order, and you are no more. There are stirring times in Paris. See these citizens approaching. If I were to step out and denounce you as a Prussian spy, do you think they would ask for my proofs or wait to hear your defence. The chances are your head

would adorn the end of a pike carried by some rough from Belleville inside of thirty minutes.'

'Perhaps,' returns the other, quietly, 'unless I put the whole of them to flight.'

The Englishman surveys his companion in the dim light of the distant bonfire, as though astonished at his nonchalance.

'Bless my soul, Pilgrim, I believe you would be equal to it. I haven't forgotten your adventures in the catacombs with the gang of robbers. But make your mind easy, Eric Bullard; by the last man in Paris to betray you, even if you are guilty, I'd sooner cut my hand off than prove false to a friend.'

'A thousand thanks, milord; those words do you honour. I need not question your motives in seeking me.'

'They were to warn you so that you might visit the fair Linda no more, since death lies in the cup, pleasant though it may seem.'

'From my heart I thank you. One favour I have to beg, rude though it may seem.'

'Name it. If in my power—'

'There is no question about that. Since I am under suspicion I beg that you will no longer appear to be my friend.'

'You fear that I may be dragged in also?'

'No good can come of it. If we both live through the siege we may renew our friendship.'

It is a singular request, but milord understands that something underlies it.

'As you say, my friend. It would be better if you accompanied me to the Minister of the Interior, explained your position, and gave your solemn word of honour that you would never again see the lovely Alstian.'

Captain Tom shakes his head.

'That were impossible, milord.'

'Why so?' impatiently.

'Because I go from this spot to see the woman the authorities have declared to be a German spy.'

The Englishman seems shocked.

'It is a shame for such a bright, jolly fellow to invite annihilation, for that is the inevitable result when a man runs against the machinery of the Paris police. I am bound to believe that you are either a reckless dare-devil, ready to risk your life for a sou, or else what they suspect is true.'

'And that I am a German spy!' laughs the American, carelessly.

'Hush! for Heaven's sake, man. If the ears of that rabble caught your words nothing could save us from their fury.'

'Bah! they are a lot of jacks. A few well directed shots among them would scatter the pack and send them howling down the boulevard. However, I have no desire to invite such attention. While I thank you again for your friendly warning, milord, do not believe that I am insensible to the fact that for three days and nights I have been shadowed; at the Mabile, such as it is in these desolate times; dining at

the Cafe de Madrid, where conspirators are wont to meet; even when accompanying the remains of my friend Dural, who fell in the last useless sortie, to Pere la Chaise, the noble cemetery, risking the fire from the Prussian guns—I have been aware of the fact that some one was watching me.'

'Yet you will defy fate by visiting again at the house of that enchantress. Well, man is a strange creature,' remarks the other, in a philosophical way, 'that draws out another of those cheery laughs from Captain Tom.'

'Perhaps at some future time, when you know all, you will understand what now seems a dark mystery,' he says, soberly.

'Then you confess there is a mystery? Why not take me into your confidence? Make me a sharer in your secrets.'

'That is generous of you, milord, but I must firmly decline your offer. We part here. I know not whether the fortunes of war will ever bring us together as friends again. Remember your promise to cut my acquaintance until such time as this affair is all over.'

'Do you mean to hold me to that?'

'Most religiously, milord. If we meet again I shall scowl at you like an Italian bandit, and expect you to do the same.'

'Perhaps so,' mutters the puzzled Englishman, as he returns the warm handshake.

Standing in the niche he watches the stalwart form of the American moving down the boulevard, and shakes his head sadly.

'Blast the luck! I like that chap. He is a man any one might go wild over; strong as a horse, bold as a lion, and yet no woman could have been more gentle than Tom Pilgrum when he hauled my wounds after that bear hunt in the Black Forest. Yes, confound it, I love him because he is a man after my own heart; but I'm afraid he's been foolish enough to mix up in some business here that may cost him his life. It is not love that takes him to the side of that fair Alstian, but what then? I can't even guess, unless— Great Heaven! I wonder if he is in the employ of the French general? Nonsense. The idea is too absurd I'll go inside and get a little sleep, though the poor devils in the region of the Latin Quarter will have small peace with that infernal din about their ears.'

Saying which the philosophical Briton once more enters the great caravansary and seeks his desolate room. Provisions have long since grown so scarce that the hotels could not supply their guests, who may still lodge in them, but must seek their food elsewhere.

Captain Tom saunters along with the same careless step. He again approaches the region where the German shells are falling at the rate of one a minute. In spite of the danger, crowds are in the streets, and each explosion is the signal for a great rush toward the scene.

Various sights greet his eyes, and he finds much to engage his attention. All the while he is advancing with a certain object in view.

He meets groups of soldiers hurrying in the direction of the forts—mobile, zouaves, or it may be a squad of mounted chasseur. There has been secret word brought in of a contemplated Prussian advance from the north, while the Krupp guns on the heights of Chatillon keep up the bombardment, and Governor Trochu seeks to strengthen the defences there.

Excitement grows as the night becomes older.

Down the street comes a howling mob of men—yes, and women, such Amazons as the Revolution made notorious.

What is the cause of the tremendous racket?

A single, exhausted figure lies before them.

Hear what they shout—'Death to the spy. To the lamp-post with the Prussian.'

Now they overtake the wretch. He is a coward, and shows no fight. Innocent or guilty, it matters not; the name is as good as the game to these desperate communists, and in a twinkling the poor devil is swinging from the nearest lamp-post.

Captain Tom sees and shrugs his shoulders, for he remembers what his friend Lord Eric has warned him of. Such a fate as this would be his should the mob find out that he has been signalling to the Germans in any way—by the use of coloured lights, for instance.

He does not avoid the terrible figure, but walks straight forward. No one knows the nature of a Parisian crowd better than this man, who has made a study of them. Some of the leaders glance at him, but he bears his American citizenship in his face, and they do not question him. Americans are, as a general thing, the friends of France in this unhappy war.

A new clamour breaks out, and Captain Tom turns his head to discover the cause. He is electrified to see a number of the mob, mostly the Amazons, chasing a female.

Where she has come from, what she has done, he cannot say. All that he knows is the fact that the poor creature flies toward him. She does not shriek or fill the air with her cries, but looks like a fluttering bird endeavouring to escape its tormentor. The American feels all his manhood

aroused by the sight. Whichever he has been appealed to for help, especially by a woman in distress, he has generously thrown himself into the breach.

Straight up to him the girlish figure flies, as though she has an intuition that here she may find a rock of refuge.

Captain Tom feels a wave of indignation sweep over him when he takes note of the delicate figure that crouches at his feet.

Oh, sir, you are a gentleman! Have me from these terrible creatures!

She speaks in French, but Tom is almost as familiar with the language of diplomatic correspondence as with his mother tongue. He sees the beseeching attitude, and imagines a sister of his own in such a position.

In an instant his decision is taken. He will save this poor girl from her enemies, no matter what the personal risk. At times like this a really brave man never stops to consider the danger. He does not say 'how many,' but 'where are they?'

With an involuntary movement he steps in front of the poor girl and faces her foe, who by this time have almost overtaken her.

At the sight of a man before them instead of a weak, terror-stricken girl, the mob abruptly pauses and glowers upon him. The constituent members of this mob are like a lot of wolves, hungry and desperate. Already the horrors of the siege have been felt among the lower classes. The rich were wise enough to lay in a supply of food in time, but the poor have to take the pitiful allowance doled out by the authorities, and upon the faces of many a haggard look has come—the imprint of famine's gaunt hand.

To face such a crowd of half crazed, vengeance-seeking people is something few men would care about doing.

Captain Tom might be averse to it under ordinary circumstances, but men are often brought into action through certain means over which they have no control.

His manner is that of a gladiator. With the girl behind him he stands there and waves back the dozen 'citizens' who have pursued.

'Stop!' he cries, in French. 'What has the girl done? Why do you chase her?'

A babel of voices answer him. Each Amazon shrieks out some accusation, and the hoarser voices of the men join in.

'She is a witch. We would burn her!'

'She is a Prussian spy! The governor would shoot her on the Tracadero.'

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