

***GERTRUDE  
FRANKLIN HORN  
ATHERTON***



***THE WHITE  
MORNING***

**Gertrude Franklin Horn Atherton**

# **The White Morning**

**A Novel of the Power of the German Women in  
Wartime**

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THE WOMEN OF GERMANY

An Argument for my "The White Morning"

THE WOMEN OF GERMANY

An Argument for my "The White Morning"

# I

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# 1

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Countess Gisela Niebuhr sat in the long dusk of Munich staring over at the beautiful park that in happier days had been famous in the world as the Englischer Garten, and deliberately recalled on what might be the last night of her life the successive causes that had led to her profound dissatisfaction with her country as a woman. She was so thoroughly disgusted with it as a German that personal grievances were far from necessary to fortify her for the momentous rôle she was to play with the dawn; but in this rare hour of leisure it amused her naturally introspective mind to rehearse certain episodes whose sum had made her what she was.

When she was fourteen and her sisters Lili and Elsa sixteen and eighteen they had met in the attic of their home in Berlin one afternoon when their father was automatically at his club and their mother taking her prescribed hour of rest, and solemnly pledged one another never to marry. The causes of this vital conclave were both cumulative and immediate. Their father, the Herr Graf, a fine looking junker of sixty odd, with a roving eye and a martial air despite a corpulence which annoyed him excessively, had transferred his lost authority over his regiment to his household. The

boys were in their own regiments and rid of parental discipline, but the countess and the girls received the full benefit of his military, and Prussian, relish for despotism.

In his essence a kind man and fond of his women, he balked their every individual wish and allowed them practically no liberty. They never left the house unattended, like the American girls and those fortunate beings of the student class. Lili had a charming voice and was consumed with ambition to be an operatic star. She had summoned her courage upon one memorable occasion and broached the subject to her father. All the terrified family had expected his instant dissolution from apoplexy, and in spite of his petty tyrannies they loved him. The best instructor in Berlin continued to give her lessons, as nothing gave the Graf more pleasure of an evening than her warblings.

The household, quite apart from the Frau Gräfin's admirable management, ran with military precision, and no one dared to be the fraction of a minute late for meals or social engagements. They attended the theater, the opera, court functions, dinners, balls, on stated nights, and unless the Kaiser took a whim and altered a date, there was no deviation from this routine year in and out. They walked at the same hour, drove in the Tiergarten with the rest of fashionable Berlin, started for their castle in the Saxon Alps not only upon the same day but on the same train every summer, and the electric lights went out at precisely the same moment every night; the count's faithful steward manipulated a central stop. They were encouraged to read and study, but not—oh, by no means—to have individual

opinions. The men of Germany were there to do the thinking and they did it.

Perhaps the rebellion of the Niebuhr girls would never have crystallized (for, after all, their everyday experience was much like that of other girls of their class, merely intensified by their father's persistence of executive ardors) had it not been for two subtle influences, quite unsuspected by the haughty Kammerherr: they had an American friend, Kate Terriss, who was "finishing her voice" in Berlin, and their married sister, Mariette, had recently spent a fortnight in the paternal nest.

The count despised the entire American race, as all good Prussians did, but he was as wax to feminine blandishments outside of his family, and Miss Terriss was pretty, diplomatic, alluring, and far cleverer than he would have admitted any woman could be. She wound the old martinet round her finger, subdued her rampant Americanism in his society, and amused herself sowing the seeds of rebellion in the minds of "those poor Niebuhr girls." As the countess also liked her, she had been "in and out of the house" for nearly a year. The young Prussians had alternately gasped and wept at the amazing stories of the liberty, the petting, the procession of "good times" enjoyed by American girls of their own class, to say nothing of the invariable prerogative of these fortunate girls to choose their own husbands; who, according to the unprincipled Miss Terriss, invariably spoiled their wives, and permitted them to go and come, to spend their large personal allowances, as they listed. Gisela closed her beloved volume of Grimm's fairy tales and never opened it again.

But it was the visit of Mariette that had marshalled vague dissatisfactions to an ordered climax. She had left her husband in the garrison town she had married with the excellent young officer, making a trifling indisposition of her mother a pretext for escape. On the night before her departure the four girls huddled in her bed after the opera and listened to an incisive account of her brief but distasteful period of matrimony. Not that she suffered from tyranny. Quite the reverse. Of her several suitors she had cannily engineered into her father's favor a young man of pleasing appearance, good title and fortune, but quite without character behind his fierce upstanding mustache. Inheriting her father's rigid will, she had kept the young officer in a state of abject submission. She stroked his hair in public as if he had been her pet dachshund, and patted his hand at kindly intervals as had he been her dear little son.

"But Karl has the soul of a sheep," she informed the breathless trio. "You might not be so fortunate. Far, far from it. How can any one more than guess before one is fairly married and done for? Look at papa. Does he not pass in society as quite a charming person? The women like him, and if poor mama died he could get another quick as a wink. But at the best, my dear girls, matrimony—in Germany, at least—is an unmitigated bore. And in a garrison town! Literally, there is no liberty, even with one's husband under the thumb. We live by rote. Every afternoon I have to take coffee at some house or other, when all those tiresome women are not at my own. And what do you suppose they talk about—but invariably? *Love!*" (With ineffable disdain.)



"Nothing else, barring gossip and scandal; as if they got any good out of *love*! But they are stupid for the most part and gorged with love novels. They discuss the opera or the play for the love element only, or the sensual quality of the music. Let me tell you that although I married to get rid of papa, if I had it to do over I should accept parental tyranny as the lesser evil. Not that I am not fond of Karl in a way. He is a dear and would be quite harmless if he were not in love with me. But garrison society—Gott, how German wives would rejoice in a war! Think of the freedom of being a Red Cross nurse, and all the men at the front. Officers would be your fate, too. Papa would not look at a man who was not in the army. He despises men who live on their estates. So take my advice while you may. Sit tight, as the English say. Even German fathers do not live forever. The lime in our soil sees to that. I notice papa's face gets quite purple after dinner, and when he is angry. His arteries must have been hardening for twenty years."

Lili and Elsa were quite aghast at this naked ratiocination, but Gisela whispered: "We might elope, you know."

"With whom? No Englishman or American ever crosses the threshold, and Kate has no brothers. The students have no money and no morals, and, what is worse, no baths. A burgess or a professional would be quite as intolerable, and no man of our class would consent to an elopement. Germans may be sentimental but they are not romantic when it comes to settlements. Now take my advice."

They were taking it on this fateful day in the attic. They vowed never to marry even if their formidable papa locked

them up on bread and water.

"Which would be rather good for us," remarked the practical Elsa. "I am sure we eat too much, and Gisela has a tendency to plumpness. But your turn will not come for four years yet, dear child. It is poor us that will need all our vows."

After some deliberation they concluded to inform their mother of their grim resolve. Naturally sympathetic, a pregnant upheaval had taken place in that good lady's psychology during the past year. Her marriage, although arranged by the two families, had been a love match on both sides. The Graf was a handsome dashing and passionate lover and she a beautiful girl, lively and companionable. Disillusion was slow in coming, for she had been brought up on the soundest German principles and believed in the natural superiority of the male as she did in the House of Hohenzollern and the Lutheran religion.

But she suspected, during her thirties, that she was, after all, the daughter of a brilliant father as well as of an obsequious mother, and that she had possibilities of mind and spirit that clamored for development and fired the imagination, while utterly without hope. In other words she was, like many another German woman, in her secret heart, an individual. But she was not a rebel; her social code forbade that. She manufactured interests for herself as rapidly, and as various, as possible, preserved her good looks in spite of her eight children (the two that followed Gisela died in infancy), dressed far better than most German women, cultivated society, gave four notable musicales a season, and was devoted to her sons and daughters,

although she never opposed her husband's stern military discipline of those seemingly typical *mädchens*. It was her policy to keep the martinet in a good humor, and after all—she had condemned herself not to think—what better destiny than to be a German woman of the higher aristocracy? They might have been born into the middle class, where there were quite as many tyrants as in the patrician, and vastly fewer compensations. At the age of forty-four she believed herself to be a philosopher.

Six months before Mariette's marriage and shortly after the birth and death of her last child, Frau von Niebuhr suddenly returned to her bed, prostrate, on the verge of collapse. The count raged that any wife of his should dare to be ill or absent (when not fulfilling patriotic obligations), consult her own selfish whims by having nerves and lying speechless in bed. But he had a very considerable respect for Herr Doktor Meyers—a rank plebeian but the best doctor in Berlin—and when that family adviser, as autocratic as himself, ordered the Frau Gräfin to go to a sanatorium in the Austrian Dolomites—but alone, mind you!—and remain as long as he—I, myself, Herr Graf!—deemed advisable, with no intercourse, personal or chirographical with her family, the Head of the House of Niebuhr angrily gave his consent and sent for a sister to chaperon his girls.

The countess remained until the eve of Mariette's wedding, and she passed those six months in one of the superlatively beautiful mountain resorts of Austria. She was solitary, for the most part, and she did an excessive amount of thinking. She returned to her duties with a deep disgust of life as she knew it, a cynical contempt for women, and a

profound sense of revolt. Her natural diplomacy she had increased tenfold.

When the three girls, their eyes very large, and speaking in whispers, although their father was at a yearly talk-fest with his old brothers in arms, confided to their mother their resolution never in any circumstances to adopt a household tyrant of their own, she nodded understandingly.

"Leave it to me," she said. "Your father can be managed, little as he suspects it. I'll find the weak spot in each of the suitors he brings to the house and set him against all of them."

"And my voice?" asked Lili timidly. But the Frau Gräfin shook her head. "There I cannot help you. He thinks an artistic career would disgrace his family, and that is the end of it. Moreover, he regards women of any class in public life as a disgrace to Germany. My assistance must be passive—apparently. It will be enough to have no worse. Take my word and Mariette's for that."

The Gräfin, true to her word, quietly disposed of the several suitors approved by her husband, and although the autocrat sputtered and raged—the Gräfin, her youngest daughter shrewdly surmised, rather encouraged these exciting tempers—arguing that these three girls bade fair to remain on his hands for ever, he ended always by agreeing that the young officers were unworthy of an alliance with the ancient and honorable House of Niebuhr.

The battles ended abruptly when Gisela was eighteen and a fat Lieutenant of Uhlans, suing for the hand of the youngest born, and vehemently supported by the Graf, had just been turned adrift. The Graf dropped dead in his club.