

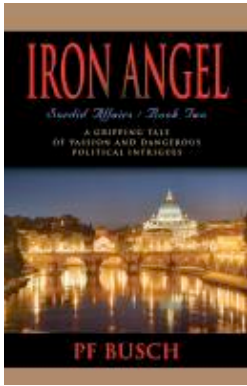
# IRON ANGEL

*Sordid Affairs / Book Two*

A GRIPPING TALE  
OF PASSION AND DANGEROUS  
POLITICAL INTRIGUES



PF BUSCH



*A gripping tale of passion and dangerous political intrigues. In 1870, amid political tensions running high in Rome, Captain de Pleyssis is at the heart of secret negotiations centered on the unification of Rome to the Kingdom of Italy. Deprived of her husband's attention, Gabriella de Pleyssis is tempted by the affections of an Italian aristocrat, Count Jacopo De Castriodrianni, whose intentions are dubious. Will Gabriella jeopardize the negotiations and succumb to the mysterious Jacopo?*

## **Iron Angel**

### **Sordid Affairs**

#### **Book II**

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**IRON ANGEL**  
**SORDID AFFAIRS**  
**Book II**

**A Novel**

**By**

**P.F. BUSCH**

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P.F Busch

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## Chapter 2

Somewhere in the Méditerranée

Jean-Louis-Pierre de Pleyssis and his American wife, Gabriella de Conte Thorsen, sailed across the deep blue waters of the Méditerranée. Accompanied by a large French delegation of diplomats and high-placed, influential ecclesiastics, their destination was the port of Pisa on the Italian coast. From there they would sail northeast on the Arno River to Florence where the Duchess' maternal ancestors owned large estates. Cardinal Philippe Thorsen, Gabriella's cherished cousin, awaited their arrival. They would tour the lovely villages in and around their lands and then continue on to Rome. The Cardinal had pre-arranged for a Papal audience with Pius IX.

In the lavish dining room of the vessel, Jean-Louis-Pierre de Pleyssis, Duke de Bourbonne, sat in a large leather and mahogany framed chair, his arm wrapped around his wife's shoulders. Both listened intently to the trusted advisors who spoke about the complicated task ahead.

“As we're all aware in this cabin, the annexation of most of the Papal States took place in the late 1860's. Now, nine years later, WE, the French, who protected the Pope's assets, re-established the Holy See's temporal power, and returned him to Rome in 1850 after his flight to Gaeta; WE, now dear friends, are sent there to mollify both sides!” Gérard de Guarnier, a former naval officer who had been a close friend to the Emperor during his exile in England, proclaimed sarcastically. He raised both of his hands toward the heavens, exasperated. “Let it be known that France is not opposed to Victor Emmanuel's actions. In fact, it is greatly in favor of the

reunification process. All of us present know quite well, how difficult it was for Louis Napoléon to let the Italian liberals down in '49. *Sacré-bleu*, sixteen years earlier the Emperor had been a member of the Carbonari!" de Guarnier clarified grandiosely to Gabriella and the men assembled in the cabin as if revealing a cherished secret. "Yet, it would have been a catastrophe in France if the support from the Catholic electorate in the provinces waned. We had to rebuke the Italian militant troops. Eighty per cent of our population is Catholic. It was not a good time to entice the provinces against the Emperor. Regardless, we want our troops to return home and that is the last order from Paris," he continued, exasperated by the turn of events. He stared at the Duchess as if the last statement was directed at her.

"The Pope no longer trusts the defending French troops, we were told that His reasons for the long awaited return to Rome in 1850 were our overtly modern view of the world. The Papacy had always sided with the Monarchy, and Charles Louis's demand of a less theocratic State disturbed the Pontiff immensely. Yet, he owes us much," Mathieu Garnelle, another former retired officer intoned. "Consequently, we need to pacify both sides. Victor Emmanuel's fervent supporters want the King to be situated in central Italy and they are quite weary of the power Rome still possesses over the Italian nation."

"Envoys from Emmanuel II will attend the delicate negotiations," Colonel Jean-Marie Bouverin remarked in a professorial tone. "Essentially, the King's final quest is Rome as the capital of Italy."

The Duke sat silently taking in the statements. He straightened his large body in the armchair as he assessed the expertise of the men assigned to work with him.

"The French army collaborated with the Holy See," he interrupted, "and French troops have protected their forces

from Garibaldi, who was intent, let's not forget, on taking over the Papal States. This time, the French will not stand in the way. Instead, we'll serve as pacifier. We will facilitate the task on both sides and France will gain in the negotiation," Jean-Louis-Pierre de Pleyssis stated. "I am determined to close the deal. Defeat is not an option. Our task is to prepare the Pope for the eventuality of the loss of His lands and of Rome itself. Another area of contention we should expect from the reunification forces," he paused and finished the brandy in his glass, "will be to excise for the Pope small pockets of land in and around the city. Furthermore, the opposition should accept His absolute control over Vatican City and of all the Cathedrals in the surrounding hills. Financial reparations will be expected, but how much, no one knows." The statuesque French man lifted his shoulder to his ear and pressed his lips together as his chin jutted forward. "This as well, gentlemen, will be an area of contention with the King's forces," the Duke stated flatly.

"We need a show of force," Arnier continued, "perhaps by the French garrison in Civitavecchia. But it is inevitable, Italy will seize the remaining lands."

"Again," the Duke opined, "France is not adverse to the idea. In fact, the Emperor's turn against the Prime Minister of Piedmont, Count Camillo Benso di Cavour after France and Piedmont's victory over Austria was, in my view, a major mistake. The Piedmontese had agreed to give up Nice and Savoy—and they did. Had Austria been forced to give up Venetia, as called upon by the informal treaty between the Emperor and di Cavour, I doubt that Italy would have supported Prussia in '66 in its war against Austria. Now, we have to be concerned about a very powerful force on our North Eastern border. I would have advised otherwise had I been in France when this major miscalculation was undertaken," the Duke snapped pretentiously. "The Catholics in our country

would have aligned themselves with the policy of the Emperor, and the Papal States would have been under Italian control earlier and with fewer lives lost,” he asserted.

“The Papacy will no longer accept democratic forces working for the advancement of modernity after the revolutions of 1848 and 1850.” The Count de Bregnanne, a corpulent man continued, “for God’s sake, the Pope had to escape his lands under the cover of a simple priest chasuble and seek solace in the fortress of Gaeta!”

“Trust or not, the Pontiff should not forget that the French army re-established the Holy See’s temporal power!” Jean-Marie Bouverin retorted angrily.

Gabriella de-Conte-Thorsen-de Pleyssonis stood. She ambled away from the group, seating behind the Duke’s desk. Intently, she listened to the discussion.

“Distrust of the French is not a novel reaction from the Italians,” Gabriella responded in her informal American demeanor. It was a clear contrast to her husband’s formality. “The Emperor’s intent, Napoléon I that is, was to abase the church after his excommunication from the Catholic Church over his marriage to Joséphine. The arrest of the Pope and the announcement that the Pope had no formal temporal authority was not an endearing gesture to the Pontiff and his archbishops in the Holy See!”

“That’s ancient history, Gaby,” the Duke reminded her flippantly.

“Eh bien, Mon Cher, Italians have a long memory! But let me remind you of more recent events. In exchange for French protection in ‘49 and the expulsion of Garibaldi from Rome, Charles-Louis Napoléon,” she caught her *faux pas* and smiled, “the Emperor asked for a general amnesty, more liberal laws and the continued institution of the Code Napoléon! Frankly, even Philippe, who possesses quite liberal values, was shocked



by the obligations placed on the Pontiff.” She held the stare of each of the men present—very much aware that her husband had imposed her presence upon them.

“Not for long,” the Duke presaged. “The sole objective now is to reflect an image of solidarity with the Pontiff in order to assuage the eventual loss of his properties. I think we will be able to accomplish that reasonably well,” he concluded, his glare fixated on one of the bishops whose gaze of sheer irony focused on the Duchess. “The nationalists want the King in close proximity to the heart of Italy—not solely on its Northern provinces. The anti-clerical ideas sweeping Europe are going to work in favor of Victor Emmanuel.”

Although Jean-Louis possessed great distaste for the man, Cousin Philippe would be an astute diplomat. Rome would fall promptly when the French garrison left the peninsula.

“Gentlemen, the reunification of the Pope’s former land-based properties to the Kingdom of Italy is of great importance to the Emperor’s projects of modernization and trade. However, it has to be done diplomatically. Retaliation against the French would be counterproductive. The generals who counsel the Emperor are presently innervating more than one power with their ill-advised rhetoric. Let us not add to the conflicts.”

Garnelle lifted his head, clearly miffed. “There are many reasons to keep the oratory. If the Prussian King Wilhelm I and his Chancellor, Otto von Bismarck, decide to place a Hohenzollern on the throne of Spain, we will be cornered on all sides, Jean-Louis-Pierre.”

“We need to succeed, and succeed we will,” the Duke insisted, obliterating the remark. “We will not overtly display the alliance with Victor Emmanuel II. I have chosen Venice for the talks. We have appeased the Carbonari. The burgeoning and potentially powerful class of wealthy bourgeois and

intellectuals no longer want to pledge their allegiance to the titled landowners. This very reason essentially still wields political and economic influence in Rome and in the former Papal States,” the Duke clarified curtly. He paused and looked around the table for a possible question. Silence reigned. “The masses in Rome regard us as the protector of the Pontiff and of his lands. And although we have been, the world situation now is such that we no longer want nor need that role,” the Duke stated flatly. “Victor Emmanuel has his eyes on Rome. He will not regress, and he will conquer the city and its port by force if need be.”

He may not try it initially, but Jean-Louis sensed that, in less than a year, Rome would be the capital of the Kingdom of Italy. It was his job along with the delegation, under a stealth agreement that France would help the Italian Monarch repossess Rome with a signed agreement from the Pontiff. The Church essentially had homes through its Cathedrals all over the world. There was no need, in his view, for the Pontiff to exert any secular power over any government. Gaby regarded the situation differently. Many altercations over this very issue had come to pass with his American wife.

France had to walk a delicate line. Some supporters of the Church in the former Kingdom of Naples might make the current negotiations go south. He was prepared—or as prepared as he could be.

The conference continued late into the night. The mission would change the course of history. Each one of them knew it, and they had dedicated their lives to its success. There would be no turning back.

## Chapter 3

Two days later, the Duke, perched on the side corner of the Captain's chair, cast a skeptical glance at his wife. He sensed that her intent was to sway his orders by sweet-talking the Commanding Officer, Cunnan Adams Holmes. Having the last word was a way of life for Gaby. He would have to be doubly cautious and take extra safety measures to protect her.

Free at last from all the conventions she had had to suffer while in Paris, Gaby was now in seventh heaven. She enjoyed the independence being at sea afforded her. This time around she had his permission to roam around the ship freely. Recently, she had begun to train in the martial arts that had slowly filtered from the Asian continent. She never ceased to amaze him.

"Mon Dieu, living on a Southern plantation during the Civil War was no piece of cake. I have sharp shooting skills, you know that, Cunnan. Why this constant practice? Gustav taught me not to miss my targets," she argued vehemently. "Throughout the length of the Civil War, I used their well honed lessons of survival and vigilance," she countered repeatedly, lifting her shoulders, while she stared, annoyed, at the heavens. Gustav, her servant and former slave, was married to Tita, another former slave who had been given her freedom papers by Gaby's mother. The couple had practically raised Gaby.

Undaunted by her complaints, he and the first in command still made her practice daily on the ski shoot on the ship.

"Practice makes perfect, Gaby!" Cunnan would repeat when she pleaded with him to let her be. He loved Gaby like a daughter. Her charm and spontaneity were uncommon in this time and age.

Gaby knew that she could sway Cunnan's resolve sometimes. With Jean-Louis, it was useless to even try. She had respect for the position she was about to be initiated into. Despite her constant push to acquire more freedom, she listened and obeyed all of their orders to the best of her abilities.

"Rule number one," she would giggle as she mimicked the men in her life, "stay aloof, and do not become overly friendly with anyone." *Eh bien*, she had had to learn that one quite well in Paris! Her artist friends, the ones she had met in Paris were acceptable—others less so. She had learned to make herself less approachable in France—and that was a good thing.

## Chapter 4

Venice appeared magnificent from afar. Ensnared in Jean-Louis' arms behind the steering wheel, Gaby admired the magnificence of the emerging coast.

"Life will be wonderful, Jean-Louis, I know. I will be supportive, and I will try to stay out of your way whenever possible." She glimpsed up, rotated from her torso and stretched to reach and kiss his lips. You made the right decision by letting me share this adventure with you. It would have been dreadful if I'd stayed in Paris."

He pressed her closer to his chest. "My life would have been miserable without you, Gaby," he replied solemnly.

"Look at the crowd! Is that for us?"

"Yes," he replied, none too happy.

"Are they expecting an aria from me?" she questioned, amused by his reaction. "I just can't wait to meet with the director of La Fenice. I will attend as many concerts as I can in the Teatro, Jean-Louis. You know, Verdi composed and played his opera *La Traviata* in this very theatre. I understand that it was a glorious rendition of Dumas fils's novel, *La Dame aux Camellias*. I love that opera, and I sing its arias magnificently!" She smiled coyly. "I also heard in one of the salons in Paris that the Russian composer Tchaikovsky comes to Venice during the winter. A very wealthy Russian Baronne is supposedly financially mentoring his musical career!" She stopped her monologue, entranced by the sight of the magnificence upon her.

Jean-Louis had told her to be as careful as possible, but to also enjoy the city.

“Remember *Chérie*, that you will be surrounded by security guards at all times, therefore do not be overly suspicious. Enjoy and appreciate. It is a culture like no other.”

“My mother inculcated in my youthful spirit Italian traditions,” she retorted, a bit miffed at his statement. After all, she was the one with the Italian lineage. “Naturally, Venetia was still under Austrian rule when she left Florence to marry my father. I had to learn how to speak and write the language, you know that, but I now wish I had been a great deal more assiduous. I should have listened more intently when she spoke to Ayden about the history and culture of Venice.”

She noticed Jean-Louis’ questioning glance.

“Ayden Bartley . . . her lover. I overheard them talking at times.” Gabriella did not divulge more.

He never questioned Gaby about her past. She always appeared sad when she recalled events from her childhood. He couldn’t fathom a mother who had been hanged for her beliefs! He did not know his mother—she had died in childbirth. But hearsay had it that the Duchess had been a lovely and surprisingly enough, for the culture of the times, an adoring wife. Let bygones be bygones. They did not need family. They had each other.

“These days, Gaby,” the Duke continued, “the rich merchants’ intent on copying the traditions of the most learned aristocrats has surpassed them many times over. They hire the very best painters, sculptors, musicians, dancers, and singers to work and play in their homes. Many of these families live like Counts and Kings because of the great wealth they’ve accumulated through trade with the East. Italy is clearly a respected center for your friends, *les artistes!*” he chuckled.

A stunned gaze flashed on her face, followed by a sideways inflamed glance directed at him. She lapsed into silence. A smile lit his icy blue eyes. He gathered her in his

arms and pressed her body even closer to his. “I love you, Gaby, be patient with me, Chérie.” She heaved a long sigh and continued to stare at the crowd on the Piazzetta. The 18<sup>th</sup> century paintings she had studied as a child came alive. Flabbergasted, she gawped, a vision of the paintings from the *vedudisti*, the painters of views she’d studied with her Italian tutor as a child, flared before her eyes.

The influential merchants and aristocrats that she was about to meet were on the Piazzetta, waiting.

He lowered the telescope so that she could focus on the large group as he reiterated much of the intelligence he had received. They were ready. He stayed close to her a while longer.

“Oh, by the way, my love, most of these people will use my title when addressing me . . . and you, obviously. Do not look the other way when you are called Duchess!”

As he doubled over, she cringed. It had been an embarrassing faux pas in England. She recalled all too clearly, one of Luke Edomberg’s friends had called her Your Grace; she had looked behind her to glimpse at the person he was speaking to. She turned crimson at the thought.

“Well, as you can see, my wife truly embraces the spirit of the Revolution. She does not even respond to a title. A real *citoyenne*, don’t you think?” Jean-Louis had quipped.

She could have murdered him! The only redeeming factor of this most difficult moment was that it stayed, inculcated in her mind—never to be repeated again!

“I will absolutely love the title,” she retorted pretentiously, rolling her green eyes to the sky. “I am ready to storm Venice, Monsieur le Duc!”

Years ago, Jean-Louis had visited Venice. Actually, he had been an honored guest to the wealthy Austrian aristocrats who governed the *Bellissima*. The knowledge that he had

experienced this beautiful city without her, most likely with another woman, was difficult to concede. However, Gaby reminded herself that she was the only woman in his life now. After all he had never lied about his less than saintly love life before their encounter.

She grasped the telescope and focused once more. Philippe stood on the embankment along with a large group of dignitaries. All obviously awaiting their arrival.

The Cardinal, the Beloved, Jean-Louis reflected caustically, must have arrived a couple of days earlier. He had stayed in Rome after they had departed for Venice. Now his presence on the Piazzetta de Saint Marco indicated that he would represent the Catholic Church in the negotiations. Next to him stood another group of men in robes—the Vatican’s delegation.

The King of Italy, Victor Emmanuel II stood tall and alone as he gazed at the *Tempête*, which sailed into the lagoon. Venice, the richest, largest and most influential city of the Kingdom had been under his control since 1866, a gift from the Prussian King, Wilhelm I. After the Austrians’ defeat, Victor Emmanuel II had received Venetia from the soldier aristocrat himself. It must have been quite difficult for the proud Venetians to realign themselves behind one leader—a Sardinian king of all things. Like Giuseppe Garibaldi, the Venetians would have preferred a Republican government after a long bout under Austrian rule. Alas, for the sake of the nation, Garibaldi had opted for peace with Victor Emmanuel.

The opposition would be fierce. Jean-Louis trembled at the very thought that Gaby could come to harm. He’d heard about a shrewd noble, “a man not unlike myself—a dashing aristocrat,” he’d mocked, as he’d recounted to Gaby the intelligence that had been forthcoming, “his name is Count



Jacopo de Castriodrianni. I have been told that women fall for him at the very sound of his name,” he’d scoffed.

“Eh bien, Mon Cher, beware!” she’d intoned rapidly. “I was told when we visited Rome that the Count has a *maitresse attirée*, whom he loves passionately. Regardless, it does not stop him from loving every pretty woman he chooses to have in his bed at night!”

“The Count is quite difficult to read, Jean-Louis,” Philippe, Cardinal Thorsen, Gabriella’s cherished cousin, had inserted in the few significant words they’d shared while the group was still in Rome. “Presumably now, he’s aligned with the King . . . and the Pontiff.”

“And the Pontiff?” Jean-Louis echoed.

“And the Pontiff,” Philippe asserted. “De Castriodrianni’s family has governed, for almost one hundred and fifty years, the two largest Papal States. Under the Risorgimento, he has been ousted from his lands . . . somewhat.”

The Cardinal must have read his mind, Jean-Louis recalled, for immediately, Philippe had explained. “He likes his privileged standing. His financial power over the states is still astronomical. The man talks the talk and walks the walk. At the end of the day, he gives up nothing of his original requests—and there are many; he then makes you feel that you have gotten your way.”

“A sly fox!” Another diplomat attached to the King had added. “When you review your treaty, he has given up nothing of substance and you are shut off. Talk to the Austrians, they will tell you about Jacopo de Castriodrianni. By the way, with this fellow watch the Duchess as well. He will pray on her, both physically and emotionally—that’s a given!” Domenici de Burro had told Jean-Louis bluntly.

Jean-Louis had not deigned to elevate the impertinence with a specific question.

A grave mistake he would regret. Jealousy and pretension sometimes blind the very best!

By and by, the advisors strove to cover all pertinent information. Jean-Louis needed to sway many to his side of the fence. Rome as the capital of Italy, Victor Emmanuel would not compromise, and the modernization of the old continent, less religious powers and more trade, were the Monarch's goals. The peninsula was very well suited. The king had done it all before. He would not lose the final battle.

The Duke shared with Gaby the information that he received daily. It was in her interest and for her safety to be aware of the full situation. Besides, he wanted to discuss the prevailing situation away from the negotiating table. Her judgment was trustworthy. Brilliant, with a prodigious memory, Gaby listened intently and she spoke fluent Italian.

She had not been surprised when he had relented and asked her to accompany him. He remembered that day quite well in Normandy.

"Were you surprised when I decided to take you with me?" he'd asked her again a few days before their engagement.

"No, I would have been horrified, if you had not," was her fiery response. "Mon Dieu, what in the world would I have done in Paris without you and you without me? Jean-Louis, were you serious or was it some kind of *badinage*?" She'd expected an answer that he had not given.

Saying no to her would have been unachievable. He would have succumbed-again. Might as well let her assume that he had pondered the idea. He smiled as he looked down at her. Overall, he did not remember ever saying no to her about anything. Well, one time, her singing—it had been an immense sacrifice. He was well aware of that. But he had not forbidden the pursuit of her beloved musical skills. After all in Paris, in his privileged circle, it was unheard of to have a wife who

wanted to pursue a profession, artistic or not? Instead, he'd built a splendid theater in their home. She still attended her courses at the *Conservatoire* every day and was directly involved in most rehearsals. The only restriction was the stage at the opéra. But here again, the theatre that he had built for her as a wedding present was the envy of every maestro in Europe. She had it all, he thought. A lucky woman, a very lucky woman, indeed! He gathered her closer. Perhaps, to reassure himself that he was absolutely correct.

"Gaby, our relationship may suffer at times. Under duress and pressure, I might become a less affable man, perhaps even more controlling than I have been in the past. Venice is not Paris," he candidly shared.

She shot him a questioning gaze.

"It goes with the territory, Gaby. As you know, I'm an amiable and adaptable person to live with," he countered. "I may be less agreeable at times. Nevertheless, the challenge and excitement of the endeavor will surely make up for my difficult moments."

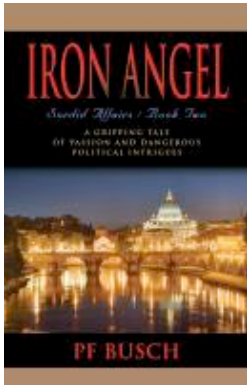
Amused at the pretentious assertion, she giggled. A confused expression flashed on his manly face.

"Jean-Louis, I adore you, you are the most charming, stimulating, fascinating man that I have ever encountered. Consequently, on this note, I wish that I had been the only chosen one to experience or to acknowledge all of your graces. But *mi amor*, adaptable, that's decidedly pushing the bar to another level, maybe two or three! Darling, you are the most controlling person I ever had the pleasure to spend time with." She noticed his contrite expression. "And the only man I cannot fathom to live without!"

She slid her hands under his shirt, lifted it and pressed her lips to his taut abdomen. When he stood and towered over her, that part of his body she controlled. His response was

predictable. Dazed with passion and longing, he would encircle her in his arms and usually took her to bed!

Human behavior? How oddly simplistic it was to expose, when the sweet sensation of passion flowed madly in the veins of a couple in love. In a fleeting instant, the mind would part ways from the most complicated, multifaceted mental intrigues, solely to be absorbed by an effortless animalistic response that dispersed all intellectual complexities. The body reacted to sensual impulses and the mind trailed it. Or . . . was it the other way around? She did not know. She did not care.



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