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# The Helmet of Navarre

BY BERTHA RUNKLE

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(Continued.)

"Twenty pistoles were a fair price for the packet, but monsieur forgets that I was and am on my conscience about it."

"Conscience, qu'est-ce?"

"Certainly, monsieur. I am in my way as honest a man as you in yours. I have never been false to the hand that fed me. If, therefore, I divert to you a certain packet which of rights goes elsewhere, my sin must be made worth my while. My conscience will sting me sorely, but with the aid of a glass and a lass I may contrive to forget the pain."

"Nirrh, my love, and Folly-dear, in Baggage, you're welcome here!"

"If fix the injury to my conscience at thirty pistoles, M. le Comte. Fifty in all will bring the packet to your hand."

"It had been a pleasure to M. le Comte to fling a tankard in the fellow's face. But the steadfast determination to win the papers for Monsieur, and possibly, to avenge for Peyrol's weapon, withheld him."

"Very well, then. In the cabinet of the Bonne Femme at eleven. You may do as you like about expecting. I shall be there with my fifty pistoles."

"What guaranty have I that you will deal fairly with me?"

"The word of a St. Quentin."

"Sufficient, of course."

"The scamp rose with a bow."

"Well, I have not the word of a gentleman to offer you, but I give you the opinion of Jean Peyrol, sometime Father and brother, that he and the quarter will be true. This has been a delightful call, monsieur, and I am loath to let you go. But it is time I was free to look for the packet."

M. Etienne's eyes went over to the chest.

"I wish you all success in your search."

"It is like to be, in truth, a long and weary search," Peyrol sighed. "My ignorance of the perpetrators of the outrage makes my task difficult indeed. But rest assured, monsieur, that I shall question every man in Paris, if need be. I shall leave no stone unturned."

M. Etienne still persistently regarded the chest.

"If you leave no key unturned, I will be more to the purpose."

"You suggest yet to nurse the belief that I have the packet. But as a matter of fact, monsieur, I have not."

I studied his grave face, and could not for the life of me make out whether he were lying. M. Etienne said nothing.

"Come, Felix."

"You'll drink a glass before you go?"

Peyrol cried hospitably, running to fill a golden middy with his last pouring.

But M. Etienne drew back.

"Well, I don't blame you. I wouldn't drink it myself if I were a count," Peyrol said, getting the draught to his own lips. "After this noon I shall drink it no more all summer. I shall live like a king."

Kiss me, Folly; hug me, Nirrh. Life without you's nothing worth!"

Monsieur, can I lend you a hat?"

"You have boasted," M. Etienne went on, "that your side was up and mine down. Did you not reflect that some day you may be up and yours down, you would hardly be at such pains to deny that you ever bore blade against the Duke of St. Quentin?"

"I have made my declaration in the presence of two witnesses, far too honorable to falsify, that I knew nothing of the attack on the duke," Peyrol repeated with apparent satisfaction. "But of course it is possible that my receding Paris might get on the scent of your packet. Twenty pistoles though, that is not much."

M. Etienne stood silent, drumming his fingers on the table, not seeming how to bettle it. Had he been sure of our suspicions we would have charged him, pistol or no pistol, trusting that our quickness would prevent his shooting, or that the powder would miss fire, or that the ball would fly wide, or that we should be hit in no vital part; trusting, in short, that God was with us and would in some fashion

save us. But we could not be sure that the packet was with Peyrol. What we had heard him lock in the chest might have been these very pistoles that he had afterward taken out again. Three men had fled from M. de Mirabeau's ally; we had no means of knowing whether this Peyrol was the man who came up, the whom I had encountered, or the who had engaged M. Etienne. And did we know, that would not tell us which of the three attacked and plundered Hugnot. Peyrol might have the packet, or he might know who had it, or he might be in honest ignorance of its existence. If he had it, it was a crying shame to pay out honest money for what we might take by force; to buy your own goods from a thief were a sin. But suppose he did it not? If we could seize upon him, disarm him, bind him, threaten him, rack him, would he—would he know—would he whereabout?

Why large in his shoes was every manner of inquiry, but not one lot of cowardice. He might very well hold us fast, from on down, while the papers went to Mayenne. Even should he tell, we had the business to begin again from the very beginning, with some other knave perhaps worse than this.

Plainly the game was in Peyrol's hands; we could play only to his lead.

"If you will put the packet into my hands, seal unbroken, this day at eleven, I engage to meet you with twenty pistoles," M. Etienne said.

I had already opened the door and was holding it for my master to pass, when Peyrol picked up from the floor and held out to him a battered and dirty toque with its dragged feather hanging forlornly over the side. Chafed as he was, M. Etienne could not deny a laugh to the rascal's impudence.

"I cannot rob monsieur," he said.

"I shall buy me better out of my fifty pistoles," M. le Comte said.

But M. Etienne was out in the passage following, hanging the door after him to Peyrol's last cry:

"Nirrh! I'll keep, though riches fly, While Folly's sure to linger by."

"Thank you, you'll get the packet!" he cried.

"Yes, I think he wants his fifty pistoles. Monsieur! it's getting late for this dog's terms."

"Monsieur," I cried, "perhaps he'll not be at once. I'll run home for Vigo and his men, and we'll make the most of the game."

"Now, you are more zealous than honest, boy."

"I had not been afraid to try conclusions with him, pistols or not, were he had the packet. I believe he has, yet dare is the chance that, after all, in this one particular he speaks truth."

"I cannot take any chance; I must get those papers for Monsieur."

"Yes, we could not have done otherwise. M. Etienne, you remember, will you fight to this point? M. le Comte is a man in jeopardy; he may not keep rendezvous of the enemy's choosing."

"I might not keep one of Luce's choosing. Though," he added, with a smile, "I think I should. But it is not this fellow knows of the warrant against me. Paris is a big place; news does not travel all over town as quickly as at St. Quentin. I think I shall have more to gain by playing fair than playing false, and appointing the cabinet of the Bonne Femme has a very open, pleasant sound. Did he mean to trap me, he would scarce have set that place."

"It was not Peyrol alone I meant. But Monsieur is so well known. In the streets or at the dinner-table, some one may see you who knows M. Etienne is after you."

"Oh, of that I must take my chance," he made answer, no whit troubled by the warning. "I go home now for the ransom and I will be on the spot at the pains to doff this gear for something darker."

"Monsieur," I pleaded, "why not stay at home to get your dose of sleep? Vigo will bring the gold; he will put the matter through."

"I ask not your advice," he cried laughingly; then with instant softening: "Nirrh, this is my affair, Felix. I have taken it upon myself to recover Monsieur his packet."

pen. I must carry it through myself to the very omens."

I said no more, partly because it would have done no good, partly because, in spite of the strange word, I understood how he felt.

"Perhaps you should go home and sleep the suggested condition."

"Nirrh, cried I. 'I had a cat-nap in the lane; I'm game to see it through.'"

"Then," he commanded, "you may stay hereabouts and watch that door. For I have some curiosity to know whether he will need to fare forth after the treasure. If he do as I guess, he will spend the next few hours as you counsel me, making up arrears of sleep, and you'll not see him till a quarter of six before the eleven. But whenever he comes out, follow him. Keep your safe distance and dog him if you can."

"And if I lose him?"

"Come back home. Station yourself now where he won't notice you. That's all there should be."

We had been standing at the street corner, sheltered by a balcony over our heads from the view of Peyrol's window.

"Monsieur," I said, "if do what you would bring Vigo back with you?"

"Felix," he laughed, "you are the most courteous, I ever saw."

I crossed the street as he told me, glancing up at the third story of the house of the Gilded Sinner. No watcher was visible. From the archway, which was entrance to a court of tall houses, I could well command Peyrol's door, which in deep shadow M. Etienne nodded to me and walked off whistling staring full in the face every one he met.

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