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# "THE HELMET OF NAVARE"

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Household

(Continued from Last Sunday.)

"YOU wanted me madame?" she asked Mme. de Mayenne. "No," said the duchess with a tartness of voice she seemed to reserve for Mlle de Montlic; "twas Mme de Montpensier."

"It was I," the fair-haired beauty answered in the same breath. "I want you to stop looking over there, in the corner. Come look at these baubles and see if they cannot bring a sparkle to your eye. Fle, Lorraine! The having too many lovers is nothing to cry about. It is an affliction many and many a lady would give her ears to undergo."

"Take heart 'o' grace, Lorraine!" cried Mlle de Tavanne. "If you go on looking as you look today, you'll not long be troubled by lovers."

She made no answer to either, but stood there passively till it might be their pleasure to have done with her, with a patient weariness that it wrung the heart to see.

"Here's a chain would become you vastly, Lorraine," Mme de Montpensier went on, friendly enough, in her bright and careless voice. "Let me try it on your neck. You can easily coax Paul or some one to buy it for you."

She fumbled over the clasp. Mlle Etienne, with a "Tant pis, madame," took it boldly from her hand and hooked it herself about mademoiselle's neck. He delayed longer than he needed over the fastening of it, looking with burning intensity straight into her face. She lifted her eyes to his with a quick frown of displeasure, drawing herself back; then all at once she came, she clutched her bosom, on the verge of a swoon.

He threw out his arms to catch her. Instantly she stepped aside, and turning with a little unsteady laugh to the lady at whose elbow she found herself, asked:

"Does it become me, madame?"

The little scene had passed so quickly that it seemed none had noticed it. Mademoiselle had stood a little out of the group, monsieur with his back to it, and the ladies were busy over the jewels. She came from mademoiselle's side, a bit nosed, loud-voiced lady, older than any of the others, answered her bluntly:

"You look shade too green-faced today, mademoiselle, for anything to become you."

"What can you expect, Mme. de Brle?" Mlle. Blanche promptly demanded. "Mlle de Montlic is weary and worn from her vigils at your son's bedside."

Mme. de Montpensier had the temerity to laugh and shake her head. "A little green in her cheeks," she said, "is no harm. Mlle de Mayenne bade sharply, 'Peete, Blanche!' Mme. de Brle, red with anger, flamed out on her and Mlle de Montlic accordingly.

"You impudent mixtures! 'Tis enough that one of you should bring my son to his death, without the other making a mockery of my grief!"

"He's not dying," began the irrepressible Blanche de Tavanne, her eyes twinkling with mischief; but whatever naughty answer was on her tongue, our mademoiselle's deeper voice overbore hers:

"I am guiltless of the charge, madame. It was through no wish of mine that your son, with his hand guard at his back, set on one wounded man."

"I'll warrant it was not," muttered Mlle. Blanche.

"Mar has turned traitor, and deserves nothing so well as to be spitted in the dark," Mme. de Brle cried out.

Mademoiselle waited an instant, with flashing eyes meeting madame's. She had spoken fully before, but now, in the face of the other's passion, she held herself steady.

"Your charge is as false, madame, as your wish is cruel. Do you go to vespers and come home to say such things? M. de Mar is no traitor; he was never the man to do such a thing as to Navarre when he will."

It was quietly spoken, but the blue lightning of her eyes was too much for Mme. de Brle. She opened her mouth to retort, flared, dropped her eyes, and finally turned away to find some one to feign interest in the trinkets. It was a rout.

"When you are the traitor, Lorraine," chimed the silvery tones of Mme de Montpensier. "It is not denied that M. de Mar has gone over to the enemy; therefore are you the traitor to have intercourse with him."

She spoke with a calm, without any appearance of ill feeling. Hers was merely the desire, for the fun of it, to keep the flurry going. But mademoiselle answered with a look that defied the fiercest glance at M. le Comte, when he forgetting he knew no French, feasted his eyes recklessly on her, pitying, applauding, adoring her. I went softly around the group, currying pleases, and we were lost if any turned to see him.

"Madame," mademoiselle addressed her cousin of Montpensier, speaking particularly clearly and distinctly. "I mean ever to be loyal to my house. I came here a penniless orphan to the care of my kinsman Mayenne; and he has always been to me generous and loving."

"If not madame," murmured Mlle. Blanche to herself.

"As I in my turn have been loving and obedient," it was only two nights ago he told me that he would be dead to me. Since then I have held no intercourse with him. Last night he came under my window; I was not in my chamber, and with the least naught of the affair till M. de Brle was brought in bleeding. It was not by my will M. de Mar came here—it was a misery to me. I sent him word of his boy that other night to leave Paris. I implored him to leave Paris. If, instead, he comes here, he racks my heart. It is no joy to me, no triumph to me, but a bitter distress, that any honest gentleman should risk his life in a vain and empty quest. M. de Mar must go his ways, as I must go mine. Should he ever make attempt to reach me again, I should speak to him. I should tell him just what I have said now to you."

I pressed monsieur's hand in the endeavor to bring him back to his sense; he seemed about to cry on her. But mademoiselle's earnestness had drawn all eyes.

"Fshaw, Lorraine! banish these tragedy airs!" Mme. de Montpensier

rejoined, her lightness little touched, water, but the ripples tinkle on. "M. de Mar is not likely ever to venture here again," he had too warm a welcome last night. My faith, he may be dead by this time—dead to all as well as you. After he vanished in Ferou's house, no one seems to know what happened. Has Charles told you, my sister?"

"Ferou gave him up, of course," Mme. de Mayenne answered. "Monsieur has done what seemed to him proper."

"You are darkly mysterious, sister," Mme. de Mayenne raised her eyebrows and smiled, as one solemnly pledged to say no more. She could not, indeed, say more, knowing nothing whatever about it. Our mademoiselle spoke in a low voice, looking straight before her.

"If heaven willed that he escaped last night, I pray he may leave the city. I pray he may never see me more. I pray he may depart instantly—at once, then, if he is not to be perceived, so be it we hear no more of him." Mme. de Montpensier retorted, tired of the subject she herself had started.

"Mar was never tedious himself, M. de Mar, but all this system prating about him is duller than a sermon." She raised a dainty hand behind which to yawn audibly. "Come, mesdames, let us go to the purchase of the jewels. I wish to buy these jeweler folk know no French."

Mlle Etienne was himself again, all smiles and quick pleasantries. I slipped over to my post in the background, trying to get out of the eye of Mlle de Tavanne, who had been staring at me the last five minutes in a way that made my goose-flesh rise, so suspicious, so probing as it. On my retreat she did indeed move her gaze from me, but only to watch M. le Comte as he bounded watches a thicket. It was a miracle that none had noticed on him before. "Pray, monsieur, do not speak with sickening certainty that Mlle de Tavanne had guessed something amiss. She fairly bristled with suspicion, with a look that was waiting for a breath-moment to moment for an announcement. There was nothing to be done; she held us in the hollow of her hand. We could not do anything but wait quietly till she spoke, and then submit quietly to arrest; later most like, to death.

Minute followed minute, and still she held us. Hope flowed back to me again; perhaps after all, we might escape. I wondered how high were the windows from the ground.

Mlle de Brle stole across the room to see Mlle de Montlic, and she came back with the group and glided unnoticed out of the door.

It was thirty feet to the stones below, a death that way. But she had given us a reprieve, something might yet be done. I seized Mlle Etienne's arm in a grip that should tell him how serious was our pass. Remembering for a marvel, my foreign tongue, I bespoke him:

"Brother, it grows late. We must go. It will soon be dark. We must go now—now!"

He turned to me with an impatient frown, but before he could answer, Mme. de Montpensier cried, with a laugh:

"And do you fear the dark, wench? Marry, you look as if you could take care of yourself."

"Nay, madame," I protested, "but the box. Come, Giovanni. If I linger, we may be robbed in the dark streets."

"Why do you stand where you stand, wench?" he retorted, striving to shake me off. "The ladies have not yet dismissed me."

"I shall be robbed of the box," I persisted, "and the night air is bad to your health, my Nimo. If you stay longer you will have trouble in the throat."

He looked at me hard. I tried to make my eyes tell him that my fear his throat was in peril here and now. He understood me; he cried with merry laughter to Mme. de Montpensier:

"Pray excuse her, her lack of manners, duchessa. I know what moves the maid. I must tell you that in the house where we lodge dwells also a beautiful girl, my sister, whose name is Marie. It's little of his time he spends at home, but we have observed that he comes every evening to array himself grandly for supper at some one's palace. We are sure that we can meet him, by accident, on the stairs."

They all laughed. I with my cheeks burning like any silly maid's, set to work to put up our scattered wares. But despair weighed me down; if I had to remember ceremony we were lost. The ladies were protesting, declaring they had not made their bargains, and my sister was striking and bowing, as if he had the whole night before him. Our one chance was to bolt; to charge past the sentry and flee as from the devil. I pulled monsieur's arm again, and muttered in his ear:

"She knows us; she's gone to tell. We must run for it!"

At this moment there arose from the Rue de la Solerte. His mother-shriek, the howls of a young child frantic with rage and terror. At the same time sounded other different cries, wild, unchristian chattering. I saw the baby—it's Toto! Oh, ciel! Mme. de Mayenne gasped. "Help, mesdames!" She rushed from the room, Mme de Montpensier at her heels, all the rest following after.

All that is, but one. Mlle de Montlic started as the rest, but at the threshold passed to let them pass, she flung the door to behind them, and ran back to monsieur, who drew with terror, her hand outstretched. "Monsieur, monsieur," she panted. "Go, you must go!"

"O Lorraine! Lorraine!" She laid her left hand on his for emphasis.

"Go! go! you love me, go!"

For a moment she pressed her hands before her, covering those sweet hands with kisses.

The door was flung open; Mlle de Tavanne stood on the threshold. They started, and monsieur leaping to his feet, mademoiselle springing back with choking cry. But it was too late; she had seen us.

She was noisy with running, her little face brimming over with mischief. She flitted into the room, crying:

"I knew it! I knew it was M. de Mar! The gray eyes! M. le Duc has done what he has done, proper, forsooth! Well, I have done as I thought proper. I unchained Mlle de Montpensier's monkey and threw him

into the nursery, where he's scared the baby nearly into spasms. Toto carried the cloth-of-gold coverlet up to the top of the tester, where he's picking it to pieces—the darling! They won't be back—you're safe for a while, my children. I'll keep watch for you, Mlle de Mayenne, till you're safe. Kiss her well, monsieur."

"Mademoiselle, you are an angel!"

"No, she is the angel," Mlle. Blanche laughed back at him. "I'm but your warder. Have no fear; I'll keep good watch. Here, you in the petticoats, that were a boy the other night, go to the farther door. Mme. de Nemours takes her nap in the second room beyond. You watch that door; I'll watch the corridor. Farewell, my children! Peste! think you Blanche de Tavanne is so badly off for lovers that she need grudge you yours, Lorraine?"

She danced out of the door, while I ran across to my station. Mlle de Montlic standing bewildered, radiant, grateful, half laughing, half in tears. I pray he may depart instantly—at once, then, if he is not to be perceived, so be it we hear no more of him."

"Lorraine, Lorraine!" Mlle Etienne murmured tremulously. "She said I should kiss you."

I put my fingers in my ears and then took them out again, for if my ears were sealed, how was I to hear Mme. de Nemours approaching? But I admit I should have kept my eyes glued to the crack of the door; that I ever turned them is my shame. I have no business to know what mademoiselle bowed her face upon her lover's shoulder, her hand clasping his neck, silent, motionless. He pressed his cheek against her hair, holding her close; neither had any will to move or speak. It seemed they were well content to stand so the rest of their lives.

Mademoiselle was the first to stir; she raised her head and strove to break away from his locked arms, but only to watch M. le Comte as he bounded watches a thicket. It was a miracle that none had noticed on him before. "Pray, monsieur, do not speak with sickening certainty that Mlle de Tavanne had guessed something amiss. She fairly bristled with suspicion, with a look that was waiting for a breath-moment to moment for an announcement. There was nothing to be done; she held us in the hollow of her hand. We could not do anything but wait quietly till she spoke, and then submit quietly to arrest; later most like, to death.

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I put my fingers in my ears and then took them out again, for if my ears were sealed, how was I to hear Mme. de Nemours approaching? But I admit I should have kept my eyes glued to the crack of the door; that I ever turned them is my shame. I have no business to know what mademoiselle bowed her face upon her lover's shoulder, her hand clasping his neck, silent, motionless. He pressed his cheek against her hair, holding her close; neither had any will to move or speak. It seemed they were well content to stand so the rest of their lives.

Mademoiselle was the first to stir; she raised her head and strove to break away from his locked arms, but only to watch M. le Comte as he bounded watches a thicket. It was a miracle that none had noticed on him before. "Pray, monsieur, do not speak with sickening certainty that Mlle de Tavanne had guessed something amiss. She fairly bristled with suspicion, with a look that was waiting for a breath-moment to moment for an announcement. There was nothing to be done; she held us in the hollow of her hand. We could not do anything but wait quietly till she spoke, and then submit quietly to arrest; later most like, to death.

Minute followed minute, and still she held us. Hope flowed back to me again; perhaps after all, we might escape. I wondered how high were the windows from the ground.

Mlle de Brle stole across the room to see Mlle de Montlic, and she came back with the group and glided unnoticed out of the door.

It was thirty feet to the stones below, a death that way. But she had given us a reprieve, something might yet be done. I seized Mlle Etienne's arm in a grip that should tell him how serious was our pass. Remembering for a marvel, my foreign tongue, I bespoke him:

"Brother, it grows late. We must go. It will soon be dark. We must go now—now!"

He turned to me with an impatient frown, but before he could answer, Mme. de Montpensier cried, with a laugh:

"And do you fear the dark, wench? Marry, you look as if you could take care of yourself."

"Nay, madame," I protested, "but the box. Come, Giovanni. If I linger, we may be robbed in the dark streets."

"Why do you stand where you stand, wench?" he retorted, striving to shake me off. "The ladies have not yet dismissed me."

"I shall be robbed of the box," I persisted, "and the night air is bad to your health, my Nimo. If you stay longer you will have trouble in the throat."

He looked at me hard. I tried to make my eyes tell him that my fear his throat was in peril here and now. He understood me; he cried with merry laughter to Mme. de Montpensier:

"Pray excuse her, her lack of manners, duchessa. I know what moves the maid. I must tell you that in the house where we lodge dwells also a beautiful girl, my sister, whose name is Marie. It's little of his time he spends at home, but we have observed that he comes every evening to array himself grandly for supper at some one's palace. We are sure that we can meet him, by accident, on the stairs."

They all laughed. I with my cheeks burning like any silly maid's, set to work to put up our scattered wares. But despair weighed me down; if I had to remember ceremony we were lost. The ladies were protesting, declaring they had not made their bargains, and my sister was striking and bowing, as if he had the whole night before him. Our one chance was to bolt; to charge past the sentry and flee as from the devil. I pulled monsieur's arm again, and muttered in his ear:

"She knows us; she's gone to tell. We must run for it!"

At this moment there arose from the Rue de la Solerte. His mother-shriek, the howls of a young child frantic with rage and terror. At the same time sounded other different cries, wild, unchristian chattering. I saw the baby—it's Toto! Oh, ciel! Mme. de Mayenne gasped. "Help, mesdames!" She rushed from the room, Mme de Montpensier at her heels, all the rest following after.

All that is, but one. Mlle de Montlic started as the rest, but at the threshold passed to let them pass, she flung the door to behind them, and ran back to monsieur, who drew with terror, her hand outstretched. "Monsieur, monsieur," she panted. "Go, you must go!"

"O Lorraine! Lorraine!" She laid her left hand on his for emphasis.

"Go! go! you love me, go!"

For a moment she pressed her hands before her, covering those sweet hands with kisses.

The door was flung open; Mlle de Tavanne stood on the threshold. They started, and monsieur leaping to his feet, mademoiselle springing back with choking cry. But it was too late; she had seen us.

She was noisy with running, her little face brimming over with mischief. She flitted into the room, crying:

"I knew it! I knew it was M. de Mar! The gray eyes! M. le Duc has done what he has done, proper, forsooth! Well, I have done as I thought proper. I unchained Mlle de Montpensier's monkey and threw him

into the nursery, where he's scared the baby nearly into spasms. Toto carried the cloth-of-gold coverlet up to the top of the tester, where he's picking it to pieces—the darling! They won't be back—you're safe for a while, my children. I'll keep watch for you, Mlle de Mayenne, till you're safe. Kiss her well, monsieur."

"Mademoiselle, you are an angel!"

"No, she is the angel," Mlle. Blanche laughed back at him. "I'm but your warder. Have no fear; I'll keep good watch. Here, you in the petticoats, that were a boy the other night, go to the farther door. Mme. de Nemours takes her nap in the second room beyond. You watch that door; I'll watch the corridor. Farewell, my children! Peste! think you Blanche de Tavanne is so badly off for lovers that she need grudge you yours, Lorraine?"

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