

MORNING

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FEUDAL TIMES;

OR, TWO SOLDIERS OF FORTUNE.

A Romance of Daring and Adventure.

(Translated especially for
the FAVORITE from
the French of Paul
Duplessis.)

CHAPTER XLIX.

RAOUL HAPPILY DIS- PLAYS HIS HORSE- MANSHIP.

On returning to the
Stag's Head, Raoul re-
turned to his room, and
wrote the following
letter:

"MONSIEUR SIBIL-
LOT,—You have been
so good as to promise
me your protection
should I ever find my-
self in an embarrassing
position. The moment
has come to hold you
to your promise. I must
have an audience of
the king to-morrow,
without fail. A day's
delay may cost me my
life.

"Present, I beg, my
most humble and re-
spectful homage to your
beautiful, gentle, and
virtuous demoiselle,
Catherine.—Your most
devoted servant.

"SFORZI."

After having hastily
written these lines,
Raoul was preparing to
carry his letter to the
Louvre, when De Mau-
revert, who had placed
himself as a sentinel
on the door-step, stop-
ped him.

"Dear friend," demanded the adventurer, "is
it your intention to ride forth again?"

"No; I am going on a very pressing errand."

"Well, whether you are going one yard or a
mile matters little; from the moment you set
foot out of doors it is all one. Be good enough,
dear companion, to wait a moment."

"What am I to wait for, captain? I repeat
that I am in a hurry."

"My dear Raoul!—Do you take me for a man
who, without rhyme or reason, would spend
nearly fifty livres a day? Allow you to go
abroad alone, when I am keeping at great cost
a troop of fifteen brave fellows! Not a bit of it!
You shall not risk yourself any more. Wherever
you go, you shall be well guarded."

"But, captain,—"

"I will allow no discussion. Hallo, my
villants—to horse! The Seigneur Sforzi has
need of your services."

At the voice of the captain, the fifteen scoun-
drels in his pay rushed, some from their sleep-
ing-rooms, some from the kitchens and out-
houses of the hostelry.

"I must find a trumpeter to sound the 'boot
and saddle,'" murmured De Maurevert. "These
shoutings are altogether irregular and calculated
to destroy discipline. Very well! very well, my
brave fellows!—you fall into this line in a
manner that wins my approval. Raoul, if my
company will not in any way derange your pro-
jects, will you allow me to place myself at the
head of the escort?"

"Really, captain, I know not whether I ought
to thank or quarrel with you," said Raoul, in a
tone half in jest, half serious. "I will to-day
accept the strange company you impose on me;
but I warn you that, from to-morrow, I intend
to return to my full liberty."

"You count without your host, Raoul. So
long as you are in danger, I shall—whether you
like it or not—have you followed by my brave
fellows. You may swear and storm as much a

you please; I care not. You complain!—Do
you know that there are many gentlemen of
high birth, who would give ten years of their
lives, to have such a respectable and handsome
accompaniment! Fifteen vallant swords, com-
manded by the brave and gallant Captain de
Maurevert in person. *Tudieu!*—a princely
luxury! Come, all is ready. By the by, where
are you going?"

"To the Louvre, captain."

"Very good, dear companion; your answer
pleases me much."

Three-quarters of an hour later Sforzi passed
through the gate of the Louvre, situate on the
quay, and entered the courtyard of the royal
residence.

"Companions," said De Maurevert to his brave
fellows, as he called them, shortly before reach-
ing the palace, "just make your horses prance
and curvet presently, to show that they do
justice to their oats."

This direction was altogether to the taste of
the scoundrelly band, and was executed with so
much spirit and effect that the windows of the
palace were speedily filled with spectators, the
cavalcade being taken for the escort of a prince
at least.

Raoul, as much embarrassed as vexed by this
curiosity, hastened to dismount, and accosted a
guard at the door:

"Monsieur," he said, "will have the goodness
to cause this letter to be delivered secretly to its
address. It concerns the preparation of a diversion
and surprise for his majesty."

"With pleasure, seigneur," replied the guard,
politely.

Desiring to escape the general attention,
Sforzi promptly remounted; but a retreat so
precipitate was not what De Maurevert desired.
Seeing a group of gentlemen of his acquaintance,
the captain instantly took advantage of the op-
portunity thus afforded him to delay his depart-
ure.

He dismounted and went over to the party.
Sforzi, red with anger and impatience, shook
the bridle of his horse roughly, and made him
rear and plunge. He was what is called a
perfect horseman. The struggle once com-
menced between him and his horse—a fiery and
ill-tempered brute—he altogether forgot where
he was. Fearing that the enraged animal might
take the bit between his teeth and bolt, the
guards and idlers who filled the courtyard fled
on all sides; but, soon reassured by the skill and
easy address of the chevalier, they returned and
formed a close circle about him.

It was within a space about thirty feet square,
which naturally augmented the difficulty of his
task, that Raoul had to overcome his steed.
Twenty times the impetuous beast tried to
spring over the living barrier which enclosed it:
twenty times, with iron grasp and legs of steel,
the young man checked it in the act of spring-
ing. At length, covered with foam, with bleed-
ing flanks and snorting nostrils, the animal
trembled in all its limbs, bowed its head, and
recognizing the superior power of its master, re-
mained motionless, obedient, vanquished. Loud
applause rose on all sides; for at this time the
hippe art was held in the highest esteem in
France.

Success—however poor the scene on which it
has been realized—possesses the gift of gaining
spontaneous and unlooked-for friendships. Ten
gentlemen, of whose names Raoul was ignorant,
whom he had never set eyes on before, addressed
him after his victory.

"*Morbleu!*" said De Maurevert, pushing his
way through the crowd, "if you were intimate
with Monsieur le Chevalier, you would not think
of complimenting him on so small a matter. I
have a hundred times seen him mount an un-
broken steed which had never before felt the
contact of a man, and ride on it through the
most populous streets of Paris. I pledge my

hangings of silk embroidered with gold, which,
fastened to the ceiling, fell in massive folds to
the floor, were his Majesty Henry III., and the
Dukes de Joyeuse and D'Epemon. Not far
from the king and his two *mignons* sat Maitre
Sibillot in a recess, tearing into small pieces a
letter he had just finished reading.

The distress which the chevalier would have
experienced if he had known himself to be the
object of this august curiosity, would certainly
have been still further augmented, had he been
able to hear the conversation of the king and
his favorites: the happiness of his entire life
was suspended on a thread—his fate was in the
balance!

Fortunately for him, Sforzi was wholly
ignorant of this. He was able, therefore, to
reply politely to the observations addressed to
him by the courtiers, confident in his star, with
protestations of devotion and friendship. De
Maurevert, though he affected not to notice his
companion, did not lose one of these gestures or
words. The warm attention of which Sforzi
was the object filled him with joy.

"By Mercury!" he said to himself, "my gentle
Raoul certainly possesses that most precious
and indescribable gift of attracting attention,
and, at the same time, of preserving in the
midst of a throng both his countenance and his
individuality. To succeed at Court one needs to
do something more than to put one's self
forward. Whether one is thought well or ill of
matters little; the all important, the essential
point, is that one shall be talked about. I do
not conceal from myself that it will be difficult
for me to bend his character completely, to
correct that fiery and unfortunate pride which
leads him to exhibit so much foolish disinterest-
edness; but I count greatly on the power of
corruption. Let him once dip his lips in the
cup of favor, he will quickly lose all his old
ways of feeling. He will cease to know that he
drinks. He will confound good with evil, and



"GET UP, BELOVED AND ILLUSTRIOUS COUSIN!"

word that for riding and
fencing, Monsieur le
Chevalier de Sforzi has
not his equal."

For bringing him into
notice in this manner,
Raoul inwardly anathe-
matized his companion,
and darted at him a
look of reproach. De
Maurevert, however,
appeared to be utterly
unconscious of the
young man's ill-humor,
and replied with the
most amiable smile.

The name of Sforzi,
so artfully thrown into
the ears of the crowd,
produced an extra-
ordinary effect. Several
of those who were
nearest to Raoul moved
quickly away from
him; others, on the con-
trary, who had been at
a distance, pressed
forward towards him
warmly. The first feared
to compromise
themselves with the
Duc d'Epemon; the
second, with that keen
insight given by the
habit of intrigue,
already speculated on
the future credit and
power of this young
man, who appeared to
be so happily gifted
with the qualities most
pleasing to the king—
beauty of face, grace of
figure, courage, skill in
violent exercise, sup-
pleness, and agility of
body.

Raoul's irritation, at
seeing himself the
centre of general ob-
servation, would cer-
tainly have changed
into actual distress, had
he perceived at one of
the windows of the
palace three heads
turned towards him
and examining him
with the closest atten-
tion.

These three persons,
half-concealed by heavy