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"TWO WORKMEN RODE FORTHLESSLY OVER THE DRAWBRIDGE."

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 VI.

MESSIEURS DE TOURNOIL.

After parting with the Marquis de la Tremblais, Captain de Mauververt returned to the reception-room. He was thoughtful and anxious. "My dear friend," he said to Raoul, taking him apart, "the day has begun badly. Why the devil did this old Huguenot here meddle with our affairs!—on a question of ransom, too, about which she knows nothing! However, it's no use thinking any more about that. What we have to do is to arrange some plan to extricate ourselves from the abominable dilemma we are in."

"What has been the result of your conference with the marquis?" asked Raoul.

"It has resulted in nothing."

"Yet he appeared desirous to ingratiate him-

self with you. It is strange he did not make some proposition."

"Yes, it is strange," replied the captain, deceitfully keeping to himself the fact of his sublime refusal of the five hundred crowns offered to him by the marquis. "Come here, mademoiselle," he said to Diane, who was seated a short distance apart, and lending an eager ear to the conversation that was passing between them. "The subject of which we are treating," he continued, as soon as, after a moment's hesitation, she had re-seated herself near them, "concerns you as much it does us. The question to which we want to find a reasonable answer is, how to oppose the designs of the Marquis de la Tremblais. Two means are open to us—force and stratagem. If we had time we might turn to account the grievances of the common people, shamefully despoiled by the rapacity of the marquis—form a kind of league against him, in fact. The smaller nobility, whom he has rendered hostile by his arrogance, would also give us their assistance. Unfortunately, we have no time at command; for our enemy is not a man to sleep on an injury. We have nothing for it, therefore, but to be before him. If we fail to take the initiative, we are lost. In default of force then, we have only stratagem to rely on. Now, have you anything to suggest in that way, chevalier?"

"Absolutely nothing, captain," replied Raoul.

"Then I have," said de Mauververt—"something which I venture to think eminently ingenious, and in the execution certain of success.

In the first place, pray observe that the primary cause of all the trouble between the Marquis and the Dame d'Erlanges is the refusal of mademoiselle here to favor his love proposals. Suppose, now, that mademoiselle should take an opposite view of the matter, and discover that she feels a violent attachment to him?"

"Captain!" exclaimed Raoul, in a tone almost of menace.

"That's right—fly into a rage!—and much good that will do! If I am not permitted to advance a mere innocent hypothesis, I give up the attempt to explain my scheme, and leave you to get out of the scrape you are in, in the best way you can."

"Proceed, captain," said Diane, in a soft and supplicating tone. "Chevalier Raoul, listen, I conjure you, to Monsieur de Mauververt's proposition. His experience alone can save us."

"I suppose, then, for an instant," continued de Mauververt, quietly, "that mademoiselle's sentiments are changed, and that she loves the marquis passionately. In proof of the violence of her feelings, she accords to him a rendezvous in the neighborhood of the chateau, to which rendezvous the marquis, delighted out of his wits, will hasten with breathless speed; then we rush, sword in hand, out of an ambushade, in which we have been lying close, charge the marquis boldly, and leave him dead on the spot. What do you say to the idea?"

"That its execution is not to be thought of; because its accomplishment would be a crime that would for ever dishonor us."

"You look at the question in that light, do you?" said the captain, with a smile of pity. "In that case, Chevalier Sforzi, I leave you to take your own course, while I, on my side, shall do as seems best to me."

The sort of cough held by De Mauververt, Sforzi, and Diane was interrupted by the arrival of the Dame d'Erlanges.

"Monsieur Sforzi," she said, "I am greatly indebted to you, and beg you to accept my thanks for the support you have rendered me; nevertheless, I will not conceal from you that I deplore the violence you have exhibited. Anger is a great sin, chevalier."

"Thousand thunders!" cried the captain, "this is too much! Please to understand, madame, that the generosity—or, to speak more plainly, the folly—of the chevalier will, in all probability, bring him to some pitiable end. If, instead of siding with you—whom he hardly knows—he had arranged with the marquis, not only would Monsieur de Sforzi be at this moment out of danger, but, what is more, the master of two hundred golden crowns. Thousand thunders! I repeat, if you cannot show yourself grateful, at least spare us your sermons!"

The Dame d'Erlanges listened to this violent uranage with majestic calmness. De Mauververt, warning more and more, proceeded:

"May Monsieur Satan fly away with me, if I see in the least how to save the poor chevalier! I cannot bear to see my friend and companion cut to pieces, however. Explain yourself, my dear Raoul—what do you intend to do?"