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"The Helmet of Navarre"

BY BERTHA RUNKLE

(Continued from Last Sunday.)

THE men were impressed. They had a respect for me, since I had been closeted with Monsieur. Yet they dared not disobey Vico for their lives. In this dilemma the poor squire, fearful of getting into trouble whatever he did, sent up an envoy to ask Monsieur. He was frightened then, I had uttered my speech in sheer bravado, and was very doubtful as to how he would answer my impudence. But he was utterly careless. I saw what I did, for presently the word came down that I might pass out.

The sun was setting as I hastened along the streets, but dark, also there was no hope for me. A man in his senses would have known there was no hope anyway. Who but a madman would think of venturing back, forsworn, to those three villains, for the killing of one? It would be a miracle if caught resulted but failure and death. Yet I felt no jot of fear as I plunged into the mesh of crooked streets in the Compagnons' quarters, only anxious to reach my goal. When, on turning a corner, I came upon a group of idlers chocking the narrow ruelle, I said to myself that a dozen Parisians in the way could no more stop me than they could stop a charge of horse. All heels and elbows, I pushed into the crowd. But, to my amazement, promptly was I seized upon by a burly porter and hidden, with a cuff, to mind my manners. Then I discovered that I was not alone, but a little procession of choristers out of a neighboring church—St. Jean of the Spire it was, though I knew them no name for it. The boys were singing the watches quiet, bareheaded. They sang as if there were nothing in the world but duty and love. The last level rays of the sun crowned them with radiant aureoles, painted their white robes with glory. I shut my eyes, dazzled; it was as if I beheld a heavenly host. When I opened them again the folk at my side were kneeling as the cross came by. I knelt, too, but the holy sign spoke to me only of the crucifix I had trampled on of Yeu-gris and his lies. I prayed to the good God to let me kill Yeu-gris, prayed, kneeling there on the cobblestones with a fervor I had never reached before. When I rose I ran on at redoubled speed, never doubting that a just God would strengthen my hand, would make me any cause His.

I entered the little court. The shutter was fastened, as before, but I had my dagger, and could gain free the bolt. I could creep upstairs and maybe stab Yeu-gris before they were aware of my coming. But that was not my purpose. I was no bravo to strike in the back, but the instrument of a righteous vengeance. He knew me, and I knew him. One to three, I had no chance. But if I knocked openly it was likely that Yeu-gris, being my patron, would be the one to come down to me. I was the opportunity, man to man. If it were Grammont or the lackey, I would boldly declare that I would give my news to none but Yeu-gris. In pursuance of this plan I was pounding vigorously on the door when a voice behind me cried out, "Back to the door!"

"So you are back at last, Felix Broux!"

At the first word I wheeled around. In the court entrance stood Yeu-gris, smiling and debonair. He had laid aside his sword, and held on his left arm a basket containing a loaf of bread, a roast canon, and some bottles of wine. "Yes, I am back," I shouted. "Back to kill you, partridge!"

He had a knife in his belt; the light was even. I was upon him, my dagger raised to strike. He made no motion to draw, and I remembered in a flash he could not; his right arm was powerless. He sprang back, flinging up his burdened left as a shield, and my blade buried itself in the side of the basket. As I stabbed I heard feet thundering down the stairs within. I jerked my knife from the wicker and turned to face this new enemy, "Grammont," I thought, and that my end had come.

The door flew open, and shoulder to shoulder, like brothers, rushed Grammont and—Lucas!

My fear was drowned in amazement. I forgot to run, and stood staring in sheer blank bewilderment. Crying "Demi-traitor!" Gervais, with drawn sword, charged at me.

I had only the little dagger. I owe my life to Yeu-gris's quick wit and no less quick fingers. Dropping the basket, he snatched a bottle from the air and hurled it at Gervais. "Ware, Grammont!" shouted Lucas, springing forward. But the missile flew too quickly. It struck Grammont square on the forehead, and he went down like a slaughtered ox.

We looked not at him, but at Lucas. Lucas, the duke's deferential servant, the coward and skulker, Grammont's hated, standing here by Grammont's side, glaring at us over his naked sword.

I saw in one glance that Yeu-gris was no less astounded than I, and from that instant, though the inwardness of the matter was still a riddle to me, my heart acquitted him of all dishonesty, of all complicity. His was not the face of a partridge.

"Lucas!" he cried, in a dearth of words. "Lucas!"

I was staring at Lucas in thick bewilderment. The man was transformed from the one I knew. At M. le Duc's he had been pale, nervous and shaken—senseless and contemptibly scared, as I thought, since he was warned of the danger and need not face it. But now he was another man. I can think only of those lanterns I have seen, set with colored glass, they look dull enough all day, but when the taper within is lighted shine like jewels. So Lucas now. His face was brilliant, his eyes sparkling, his figure instinct with defiance. A smile crossed his face.

"Aye," he answered evenly, "it is Lucas."

M. le Comte appeared to be in a state of stupor. He could not for a space find his tongue to demand:

"How, in the name of Heaven, come you here?"

"To fight Grammont," Lucas answered at once.

"A lie!" I shouted. "You're Grammont's friend. You came here to warn him off. It's your plot!"

"Relic! The plot?" Yeu-gris cried. "The plot? to murder Monsieur. Martin let it out, thought it was you and Grammont. But it is Lucas and Grammont."

Lucas hesitated. Even now he de-

bated whether he could not lie out of it. Then he burst into laughter.

"It seems the cat's out of the bag. Aye, M. le Comte de Mar, I came to warn Grammont off. The duke will be here straightway. How will you like to swing for parricide?"

Yeu-gris stared at him, neither in fear nor in fury, but in utter stupefaction.

"But, Gervais? He plotted with you? But he hates you!"

We gaped at Lucas like yokels at a conjurer. He made us no answer, but looked from one of the other of us with the alertness of an angry viper. We were two, but without sword. I knew he was thinking how easiest to end us both.

M. le Comte cried: "You! You come from Navarre's camp, from M. de Rosny?"

"Aye, I have outwitted more than one man."

"Mordieu! I was right to hate you!" Lucas laughed. Yeu-gris blazed out: "Traitor and thief! You stole the money. I said that from the first. You drove us from the house. How you and Grammont—"

"Come together? Very simple," Lucas answered with easy insolence. "Grammont did not love Monsieur, your honored father. It was child's play for me to make a child of him. He was a simpleton, and I made him so."

"First blood for me!" cried Lucas. "That serves for today M. le Comte. I repeat, I cannot wait to kill you, but that will come. It is necessary that I go before M. le Duc arrives. Clear the way."

M. le Comte stood his ground, but after them. The rest stayed without to catch the horses and keep off the gathering crowd.

One of the men had a torch which lighted the red pavement. Vico saw this first.

"Mordieu! Is it shames?"

"That is wine," I said.

"They spilled wine for affect, they spilled so little blood!" Thus Lucas, speaking with as cool devilry as if he still commanded the situation. Vico could not know what he meant, but he asked no questions; instead, bade Lucas hold his tongue.

"I am dumb," Lucas rejoined, with a mock meekness more insolent than insolence. But we paid it no heed, for M. le Comte came forward out of the shadows. He held his head well up, but his face was white above his crimsoned doublet.

"You will die when the knife is out," said Lucas, wrenching himself free. He turned again to M. le Comte, and his eyes gleamed as he saw the blood trickling down his sleeve and the sword tremble in his hand.

"Come on, then," he cried to Yeu-gris.

But I sprang forward and seized the sword from M. le Comte's hand.

"Ah!" cried Vico, triumphantly. He and two of the men rushed at Gervais.

"You would not take me so easily, but for a cursed knife in my back," Grammont muttered thickly. "For the love of Heaven, Vico, draw it out!"

With amazement Vico perceived the knife.

"Who did it?"

"You, Felix? In the back?" Vico looked at me, as if to demand again which side I was on.

"He lay on me, throttling me," I explained. "I stabbed any way I could."

"I told you are a dead man," Vico told Grammont. "Nevertheless, here comes the knife."

It came, with a great cry from the victim. He fell back against Vico's arm, clapping his hand to his side.

"I am done for," he gasped faintly.

"That is well," said Vico, carefully wiping off the knife.

"You are the second!" Grammont gasped.

"He will die a worse death than you," said Vico.

Grammont looked from the one to the other of us, the sullen man in his face feeding to a puzzled helplessness. He said feebly:

"Which—which is Etienne?"

He could no longer see or plain. M. le Comte came forward silently. Grammont struggled for breath in a way pitiable to see. I put my arm about him and helped the guardman to hold him straighter. He reached out his hand and caught at M. le Comte's sleeve.

"Etienne—Etienne—pardon. It was wrong toward you—but I never had the pistols. He called me thief—the duke. I beseech—you pardon."

M. le Comte was silent.

"It was all Lucas—Lucas did it," Grammont muttered with stiffening lips. "I am sorry for—I am dying—I cannot die—without a chance. Say

if you love your life! I'll keep them at the duke's mouth as long as I can."

Not waiting for his answer, I rushed down the passage. At the end of it I ran against Lucas, who, in his turn, had bowed into Vico.

XL

I knew of old that it was easier to catch a weasel asleep than Vico absent where he was needed; yet I did not expect to meet him in the alley. Monsieur, then, had changed his mind.

"Well caught!" cried Vico, winding his arms round Lucas, who was struggling furiously for liberty. "Here, Maurice, Jules, I have number one. Ah, you young scoundrels! with you new again? I thought as much. Tie the knots hard, boys. Better be quiet, you snake; you can't get away."

Lucas seemed to make up his mind to this, for he quieted down directly.

"So the game is up," he said pleasantly. "I had hoped to be gone before you arrived, dear Vico."

"We had both been deprived promptly of our swords, and Lucas' wrists were roped together, his only bond was Vico's hand on my arm."

"Where are the others?" he demanded. "No tricks, now."

"Here," I said, and led the way down the passage. Maurice and Jules, with their prisoner, pressed after us, and half a dozen of the duke's guard

after them. The rest stayed without to catch the horses and keep off the gathering crowd.

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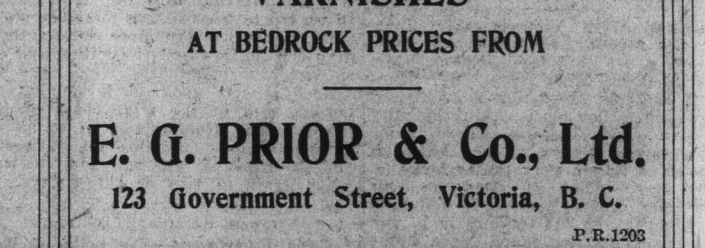
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May 22, 1906

NOTICE

A meeting of the Board of missionaries will be held on the 14th inst. at the Court House, Kingston, B. C.

CANCELLATION OF R.

NOTICE is hereby given that the notice established covering land at the northwest end of the island has been cancelled.

SEIT, P. N. Deputy Commissioner of Lands and Works Department.

May 9, 1906.