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"THE HELMET OF NAVARRE"

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By Bertha Runkle

(Continued from Last Sunday.)

HER eyes traveled first to us, in anxiety; then with relief to Mayenne, sitting over the jewels; last, to Lucas, with satrtlement. She advanced without hesitation to the duke.

"I am come, monsieur, to fetch you to supper."

"Pardieu, Lorance!" Mayenne exclaimed, "you show me a different face from that of dinner-time." Indeed, so she did, for her eyes were shining with excitement, while the color that M. Etienne had kissed into them still flushed her cheeks.

"If I do," she made quick answer, "it is because, the more I think on it, the surer I grow that my loving cousin will not break my heart."

"I want a word with you, Lorance," Mayenne said quietly.

"As many as you like, monsieur," she replied promptly. "But will you not send these creatures from the room first?"

"Do you include your cousin Paul in that term?"

"I meant these jewelers. But since you suggest it, perhaps it would be as well for Paul to go."

"You hear your orders, Paul."

"Aye, I hear and I disobey," Lucas retorted. "Mademoiselle, I take too much joy in your presence to be willing to leave it."

'M'onsieur," she said to the duke, ignoring her cousin Paul with a coolness that must have maddened him, "will you not dismiss your tradespeople? Then we can talk comfortably."

"Aye," answered Mayenne, "I will. I am more gallant than Paul. If you command it, out they go, though I have not half time to look their wares over.

Here, master jeweler," he addressed M. Etienne, slipping easily into Italian, pack up your wares and depart.

M. Etienne, bursting into rapid thanks to his Highness for his condescension in noticing the dirt of the way, set about packing. Mayenne turned to his lovely cousin.

"Now for my word to you, mademoiselle. You wept so last night, it was impossible to discuss the subject propperly. But now I rejoice to see you more tranquil. Here is the beginning and the middle and the end of the matter: your marriage is my affair, and I shall do as I like about it."

She searched his face; before his steady look her color slowly died. M. Etienne, whether by accident or design, knocked his tray of jewels off the table. Murmuring profuse apologies, he dropped on his knees to grope for them. Neither of the men heeded him, but kept their eyes steadily on the lady.

"Mademoiselle," Mayenne deliberately went on, "I have been over-fond with you. Had I followed my own interests instead of bowing to your whims, you had been a wife these two years. I have indulged you, mademoiselle, because you were my ally Montluc's daughter, because you came to me a lonely orphan, because you were my little cousin whose baby mouth I kissed. I have let you cavil at this suitor and that, pout that one was too tall and one too short, and a third too bold and a fourth not bold enough. I have been pleased to let you cajole me. But now, mademaiselle, I am at the end of my patience."

"Monsieur," she cried, "I never meant to abuse your kindness. You let me cajole you, as you say, else I could not have done it. You treated my whims as a jest. You let me air them. But when you frowned, I have put them by. I have always done your will."

"Then do it now, mademoiselle. Be faithful to me and to your birth. Cease sighing for the enemy of our house."

"Monsieur," she said, "when you first brought him to me, he was not the enemy of our house. When he came here day after day, season after season, he was not our enemy. When I wrote that letter, at Paul's dictation, I did not know he was our enemy. You told me that night that I was not for him. I promised you obedience. Did he come here to me and implore me to wed with him, I would send him away."

Mayenne little imagined how truly she spoke; but he could not look in her eyes and doubt her honesty.

"You are a good child, Lorance," he said. "I could wish your lovers as docile."

"He will not come here again," she cried. "He knows I am not for him. He gives it up, monsieur — he takes himself out of Paris. I promise you it is over. He gives me up."

"I have not his promise for that," Mayenne said dryly; "but the next time he comes after you, he may settle with your husband."

She uttered a little gasp, but scarce of surprise—almost of relief that the blow, so long expected, had at last been dealt."

"You will marry me, monsieur?" she murmured. "To M. de Brie?"

"You are shrewd, mademoiselle. You know that it will be a good three months before Francois de Brie can stand up to be wed. You say to yourself that much may happen in three months. So it may. Therefore will your bridegroom be at hand tomorrow morning."

She made no rejoinder, but her eyes wide like a hunted animal's, moved fearsomely, loathingly, to Lucas. Mayenne uttered an abrupt laugh.

"No; Paul is not the happy man. Besides bungling the St. Quentin affair, he has seen fit to make free with my name in an enterprise of his own. Therefore, Paul, you will dance at Lorance's wedding a bachelor. Mademoiselle, you marry in the morning Senor el Conde del Rondelar y Saragossa of his Majesty King Philip's court. After dinner you will depart with your husband for Spain."

Lucas sprang forward, hand on sword, face ablaze with furious protest. Mayenne, heeding him no more than if he had not been there, rose and went to Mlle de Montluc.

"Have I your obedience, cousin?"

"You know it, monsieur."

She was curtesying to him when he folded her in his arms, kissing both her cheeks.

"You are as good as you are lovely, and that says much, ma mie. We will talk a little more about this after supper. Permit me, mademoiselle."

He took her hand and led her in a leisurely fashion out of the room.

It wondered me that Lucas had not killed him. He looked murder. Haply had the duke disclosed by so much as a quivering eyelid a consciousness of Lucas' rage, of danger to himself, Lucas had struck him down. But he walked straight past, clad in his composure as in armor, and Lucas made no move. I think to stab was the impulse of a moment, gone in a moment. Instantly he was glad he had not killed the Duke of Mayenne, to be cut himself into dice by the guard. After the duke was gone, Lucas stood still a long time, no less furious, but cogitating deeply.

We had gathered up our jewels and locked our box, and stood holding it between us, waiting our chance to depart. We might have gone a dozen times during the talking, for none marked us; but M. Etienne, despite my tuggings, refused to budge so long as mademoiselle was in the room. Now was he ready enough to go, but hesitated to see if Lucas would not leave first. That worthy, however, showed no intention of stirring, but remained in his pose, buried in thought, unaware of our presence. To get out, we had to walk round one end or the other of the table, passing either before or behind him. M. le Comte was for marching carelessly before his face, but I pulled so violently in the other direction that he gave way to me. I think now that had we passed in front of him, Lucas would have let us go by without a look. As it was, hearing steps at his back, he wheeled about to confront us. If the eye of love is quick, so is the eye of hate. He cried out instantly:

"Mar!"

We dropped the box, and sprang at him. But he was too quick for us. He leaped back, whipping out his sword.

"I have you now, Mar!" he cried.

M. Etienne grabbed up the heavy box in both hands to brain him. Lucas retreated. He might run through M. Etienne, but only at the risk of having his head split. After all, it suited his book as well to take us alive. Shouting for the guards, he retreated toward the door.

But I was there before him. As he ran at M. Etienne, I had dashed by, slammed the door shut, and bolted it. If we were caught we would make a fight for it. I snatched up a stool for a weapon.

He halted. Then he darted over to the chimney, and pulled violently the bell-rope hanging near. We heard through the closed door two loud peals somewhere in the corridor.

We both ran for him. Even as he pulled the rope, M. Etienne struck the box over his sword, snapping it. I dropped my stool, as he his box, and we pinned Lucas in our arms.

"The oratory!" I gasped. With a strength born of our desperation, we dragged him kicking and cursing across the room, heaved him with all our force into the oratory, and bolted the door on him. "Your wig!" cried M. Etienne, running to recover his box. While I picked it up and endeavored with clumsy fingers to put it on properly, he set on its legs the stool I had flung down, threw the pieces of Lucas' sword into the fireplace, seized his box, dashed to me and set my wig straight, dashed to the outer door and opened it just as Pierre came up the corridor.

"Well, what do you want?" the lackey demanded. "You ring as if it was a question of life and death."

"I want to be shown out, if the messer will be so kind. His Highness the duke, when he went to supper, left me here to put up my wares, but I know not the way to the door."

It was after sunset, and the room, back from the windows, was dusky. The lacky seemed not to mark our flushed and rumpled looks, and to be quite satisfied with M. Etienne's explanation, when of a sudden Lucas, who had been stunned for the moment by the violent meeting of his head and the tiles, began to pound and kick on the oratory door.

He was shouting as well. But the door closed with absolute tightness; it had not even a keyhole. His cries came to us muffled and inarticulate.

"Corpo di Bacco!" M. Etienne exclaimed, with a face of childlike surprise. "Some one is in a fine hurry to enter! Do you not let him in, Sir Master of the Household?"

'I wonder who he's got there now' Pierre muttered to himself in French, staring in puzzled wise at the door. Then he answered M. Etienne with a laugh:

"No, my innocent; I do not let him in. It might cost me my neck to ope that door. Come along now. I must see you out and get back to my trenchers."

We met not a soul on the stairs, every one, served or servants, being in the supper-room. We passed the sentry without question, and round the corner without hindrance. M. Etienne stopped to heave a sigh of thangsgiving.

"I thought we were done for that time!" he panted. "Mordieu! another scored off Lucas! Come, let us make good time now! T'were wise to be inside our gates when he gets out of that closet."

We made good time, ever listening for the haro after us. But we heard it not. We came unmolested up the street at the back of the Hotel St. Quentin, on our way to the postern. Monsieur took the key out of his doublet, saying as we walked around the corner tower:

"Well, it appears we are safe at home."

"Yes, M. Etienne."

Even as I uttered the words, three men from the shadow of the wall sprang out and seized us.

"This is he!" one cried. "M. le Comte de Mar,, I have the pleasure of taking you to the Bastille."

XXVII.

The Countersign.

Instantly two more men came running from the postern arch. The five were upon us like an avalanche. One pinned my arms while another gagged me. Two held M. Etienne, a third stopping his mouth.

"Prettily done," quoth the leader. "Not a squeal! Morbleu! I wasn't anxious to have old Vigo out disputing my rights."

M. Etienne's wrists were neatly trussed by this time. At a word from the leader, our captors turned us about and marched us up the lane by Mirabeau's garden, where Bernet's blood lay rusty on the stones. We offered no resistance whatever; we should only have been prodded with a sword-point for our pains. I made out, despite the thickening twilight, the familiar uniform of the burgher guard; M. de Belin, having bagged the wrong bird once, had now caught the right one.

The captain bade one of the fellows go call the others off; I could guess that the job had been done thoroughly, every approach to the house guarded. I gnashed my teeth over the gag, that I had not suspected the danger. The truth was, both of us had our heads so full of mademoiselle, of Mayenne, and of Lucas, that we had forgotten the governor and his preposterous warrant.

They led us into the Rue de l'Eveque where was waiting the same black coach that had stood before the Oie d'Or, the same Louis on the box. Its lamps were lighted; by their glimmer out captors for the first time saw us fairly.

"Why captain," cried the man at M. Etienne's elbow, "this is no Comte de Mar! The Comte de Mar is fair-haired; I've seen him scores of times."

"The Comte de Mar answers to the name of Etienne, and so does this fellow," the captain answered. He took the candle from one of the lamps and held it in M. Etienne's face. Then he put out a sudden hand, and pulled the wig off.

"Good for you, captain!" cried the men. We were indeed unfortunate to encounter an officer, with brains.

"We'll take your gag off too, M. le Comte, in the coach," the captain told him.

"Will you bring the lass along, Captain?"

"Not exactly," the leader laughed. "A fine prison it would be, could a felon have his bonnibel at his side. No, I'll leave the maid; but she needn't give the alarm yet. Do you stay awhile with her, L'Etrange; you'll not mind the job. Keep her a quarter of an hour, and then let her go her ways."

They bundled my lord into the coach, box and all, the captain and two men with him. The fourth clambered up beside Louis as he cracked his whip and rattled smartly down the street.

My guardian stole a loving arm around my waist and marched me down the quiet lane between the garden walls. He was clutching my right wrist, but my left hand was free, and I fumbled at my gag. In the middle of the deserted lane he halted.

"Now, my beauty, if you'll be good I'll take that stopper off. But if you make a scream, by Heaven, it'll be your last!"

I shook my head and squeezed his hand imploringly, while he, holding me tight in one sinewy arm, plucked left-handedly at the knot. I waited, meek as Griselda, till the gag was off, and then I let him have it. Volleying curses, I hammered him square in the eye.

It was a mad course, for he was armed, I not. But instead of stabbing, he dropped me like a hot coal, gasping in the blankest consternation:

"Thousand devils! It's a boy!"

A cecond later, when he recollected himself, I was tearing down the lane.

I am a good runner, and then, anyone can run well when he runs for his life. Despite the wretched kirtle trying my legs, I gained on him, and when I had reached the corner of our house, he dropped the pursuit and made off in the darkness. I ran full tilt round to the great gate, bellowing for the sentry to open. He came at once, with a dripping torch, to burst into roars of laughter at the sight of me. My wig was somewhere in the lane behind me; he knew me perfectly in my silly toggery. He leaned against the wall, helpless with laughing, shouting feebly to his comrades to come and share the jest. I, you may well imagine, saw nothing funny about it, but kicked and shook the grilles in my rage and impatience. He did open to me at length, and in I dashed, clamoring for Vigo. He had appeared in the court by this, as also half a dozen of the guard, who surrounded me with shouts of astonished mockery; but I, little heeding, cried to the equerry:

"Vigo, M le Comte is arrested! He's in the Bastille!"

Vigo grasped my arm, and lifted rather than led me in at the guard-room door, slamming it in the soldiers' faces.

"Now, Felix."

"M. Etienne!" I gasped—"M. Etienne is arrested! They were lying in wait for him at the back of the house, by the tower. They've taken him off in a coach to the Bastille."

"Who have?"

"The governor's guard. You'll saddle and pursue? You'll rescue him?"

"How long ago?"

'About ten minutes. The coach was standing in the Rue de l'Eveque. They left a man guarding me, but I broke away."

"It can't be done," Vigo said. "They'll be out of the quarter by now. If I could catch them at all, it would be close to the Bastile. No good in that; no use fighting four regiments. What the devil are they arresting him for, Felix? I understand Mayenne wants his blood, but what has the city guard to do with it?"

"It's Lucas' game," I said. Then I remembered that we had not confided to him the tale of the first arrest. I went on to tell of the adventure of the Trois Lanternes, and, reflecting that he might better know just how the land lay with us, I made a clean breast of everything—the fight before Ferou's house, the rescue, the rencounter in the tunnel, today's excursion, and all that befell in the council-room. I wound up with a second full account of our capture under the very walls of the house, our garroting before we could cry on the guards to save us. Vigo said nothing for some time; at length he delivered himself:

"Monsieur wouldn't have a patrol about the house. He wouldn't publish to the mob that he feared any danger whatever. Of course no one foresaw this. However, the arrest is the best thing could have happened."

"Vigo!" I gasped in horror. Was Vigo turned traitor? The solid earth reeled beneath my feet.

"He'd never rest till he got himself killed," Vigo went on. "Monsieur's hot enough, but M. Etienne's mad to bind. If they hadn't caught him tonight he'd have been in some worse pickle tomorrow; while, as it is, he's safe from swords at least."

"But they can murder as well in the Bastille as elsewhere!" I cried.

Vigo shook his head.

"No; had they meant murder, they'd have settled him here in the alley. Since they lugged him off unhurt, they don't mean it. I know not what the devil they are up to, but it isn't that."

"It was Lucas' game in the first place," I repeated. "He's too prudent to come out in the open and fight M. Etienne. He never strikes with his own hand; his way is to make some one else strike for him. So he gets M. Etienne into the Bastile. That's the first step. I suppose he thinks Mayene will attend to the second."

"Mayenne dares not take the boy's life," Vigo answered. "He could have killed him, an he chose, in the streets, and nobody the wiser. But now that monsieur's taken publicly to the Bastile, Mayenne dares not kill him there by foul play or by law—the Duke of St. Quentin son. No; all Mayenne can do is to confine him at his pleasure. Whence presently we will pluck him out at King Henry's good pleasure."

"And meantime is he to rot behind bars?"

"Unless Monsieur can get him out. But then," Vigo went on, "a month or two in a cell won't be a bad thing for him, neither. His head will have a chance to cool. After a dose of Mayenne's purge he may recover of his fever for Mayenne's ward."

"Monsieur! You will send to Monsieur?"

"Of course. You will go. And Gilles with you to keep you out of mischief."

"When? Now?"

"No," said Vigo. "You will go clothe yourself in breeches first, else are you not likely to arrive anywhere but at the mad-house. And then eat your supper. It's a long road to St. Denis."

I ran at once, through a fusilade of jeers from soldiers, grooms, and house-men, across the court, through the hall, and up the stairs to Marcel's chamber. Never was I gladder of anything in my life than to doff those swaddling petticoats. Two minutes, and I was a man again. I found it in my heart to pity the poor things who must wear the trappings their lives long.

But for all my joy in my freedom, I choked over my supper and pushed it away half tasted, in misery over M. Etienne. Vigo might say comfortably that Mayenne dared not kill him, but I thought there were few things that gentleman dared not do. Then there was Lucas to be reckoned with. He had caught his fly in the web; he was not likely to let him go long undevoured. At best, if M. Etienne's life were safe, yet was he helpless, while tomorrow our mademoiselle was to marry. Vigo seemed to think that a blessing, but I was night to weeping into my soup. The one ray of light was that she was not to marry Lucas. That was something. Still, when M. Etienne came out of prison, if ever he did—I could scarce bring myself to believe it—he would find his dear vanished over the rocky Pyrenees.

Vigo would not even let me start when I was ready. Since we were too late to find the gates open, we must wait till ten of the clock, at which hour the St. Denis gate would be in the hands of a certain Brissac, who would pass us with a wink at the word St. Quentin.

I was wroth with Vigo that I would not stay with him, but went up-stairs into M. Etienne's silent chamber, and flung myself down on the window-bench his head might never touch again, and wondered how he was faring in prison. I wished I were there with him. I cared not much what the place was, so long as we were together. I had gone down the mouth of hell smiling, so be it I went at his heels. Mayhap if I had struggled harder with my captors, shown my sex earlier, they had taken me too. Heartily I wished they had; I trow I am the only wight ever did wish himself behind the bars. And promptly I repented me, for if Vigo had proved but a broken reed, there was Monsieur. Monsieur was not likely to sit smug and declare prison the best place for his son.

The slow twilight faded alsogether, and the dark came. The city was very still. Once in a while a shout or a sound of bell was borne over the roofs, or infrequent voices and footsteps sounded in the street beyond our gate. The men in the court under my window were quiet too, talking among themselves without much raillery or laughter; I knew they discussed the unhappy plight of the heir of St. Quentin. The chimes had rung some time ago the half-hour after nine, and I was fidgeting to be off, but huffed as I was with him, I could not lower myself to go ask Vigo's leave to start. He might come after me when he wanted me.

"Felix! Felix!" Marcel shouted down the corridor. I sprang up; then, remembering my dignity, moved no further, but bade him come in to me.

"Where are you mooning in the dark?" he demanded, stumbling over the threshhold. "Oh, there you are. Dame! you'd come down-stairs mighty quick if you knew what was there for you?"

"What?" I cried, divided between the wild hope that it was Monsieur and the wilder one that it was M. Etienne.

"Don't you wish I'd tell you. It's the prettiest lass I've seen in a month of Sundays—you in your petticoats don't come near her."

"For me?" I stuttered.

"Aye; she asked for M. le Duc, and when he wasn't here, for you. I suppose it's some friend of M. Etienne's."

I supposed so, indeed; I supposed it was the owner of my borrowed plumage come to claim her own; angry perhaps because I had not returned it to her. I wondered whether she would scratch my eyes out because I had lost the cap—whether I could find it if I went to look with a light. None too eagerly I descended to her.

She was standing against the wall in the archway. Two or three of the guardsmen were about her, one with a flambeau, by which they were all surveying her. She wore the coif and blouse, the black bodice and short striped skirt, of the country peasant girl, and, like a country girl, she showed a face flushed and downcast under the soldiers' bold scrutiny. She looked up at me as a rescuing angel. It was Mlle. de Montluc!

I dashed past the torch bearer, nearly upsetting him in my haste, and snatched her hand.

"Mademoiselle! Come into the house!"

She clutched me with fingers as cold as marble, which trembled on mine.

"Where is M. de St. Quentin?"

"At St. Denis."

"You must take me there tonight."

"I was going," I stammered, bewildered; "but you, mademoiselle—"

"You knew of M. de Mar's arrest?"

"Aye."

"What coil is this, Felix?" demanded Vigo, coming up. He took the torch from his man, and held it in mademoiselle's face, whereupon an amazing change came over his own. He lowered the light, shielding it with his hand, as if it were an impertinent eye.

"You are Vigo," she said at once.

"Yes; and I know not what noble lady mademoiselle can be, save—will it please her to come into the house?"

He led the way with his torch, not suffering himself to look at her again. He had his foot on the staircase, when she called to him, as if she had been accustomed to addressing him all her life:

"Vigo, this will do. I will speak to you here."

"As mademoiselle wishes. I thought the salon fitter. My cabinet here will be quieter than the hall, mademoiselle."

He opened the door, and she entered. He pushed me in next, giving me the torch and saying:

"Ask mademoiselle, Felix, whether she wants me." He amazed me — he who always ordered.

"I want you, Vigo," mademoiselle answered him herself. "I want you to send two men with me to St. Denis."

"Tomorrow?"

"No; tonight."

"But mademoiselle cannot go to St. Denis."

"I can, and I must."

"They will not let a horse-party through the gate at night," Vigo began.

"We will go on foot."

"Mademoiselle," Vigo answered, as if she had proposed flying to the moon, "you cannot walk to St. Denis."

"I must," she cried.

I had put the flambeau in a socket on the wall. Now that the light shone on her steadily, I saw for the first time, though I might have known it from her presence here, how rent with emotion she was, white to the lips, with gleaming eyes and stormy breast. She had spoken low and quietly, but it was a main-force composure, liable to snap like glass. I thought her on the very verge of passionate tears. Vigo looked at her, puzzled, troubled, pitying, as on some beautiful, mad creature. She cried out to him suddenly, her rich voice going up a key:

"You need not say 'cannot' to me, Vigo! You know not how I came here. I was locked in my chamber. I changed clothes with my Norman maid. There was a sentry at each end of the street. I slid down a rope of my bed-clothes; it was dark—they did not see me. I knocked at Ferou's door—thank the saints, it opuened to me quickly: I told M. Ferou——God forgive me!—I had business for the duke at the other end of the tunnel. He took me through and I came here."

"But, mademoiselle, the bats!" I cried.

"Yes, the bats," she returned, with a little smile. "And my hands on the ropes!" She turned them over; the skin was torn cruelly from her delicate palms and the inside of her fingers. Little threads of blood marked the scores. "Then I came here," she repeated. "In all my life I have never been in the streets alone—not even for one step at noonday. Now will you tell me, M. Vigo, that I cannot go to St. Denis?"

"Mademoiselle, it is yours to say what you can do."

As for me, I dropped on my knees and laid my lips to her fingers softly, for fear even their pressure might hurt her tenderness.

"Mademoiselle!" I cried in pure delight. "Mademoiselle, that you are here!"

She flushed under my words.

"Ah, it is no little thing brought me. You knew M. de Mar was arrested?"

W eassented; she went on, more to me than to Vigo, as if telling me she was telling M. Etienne. She spoke low as if in pain.

"After supper M. de Mayenne went back to his cabinet and let out Paul de Lorraine."

"I wish we had killed him," I muttered. "We had no time or weapons."

"M. de Mayenne sent for me then," she went on, wetting her lips. "I have never seen him so angry. He was furious because M. de Mar had been before his face and he had not known it. He felt he had been made a mock of. He raged against me—I never knew he could be so angry. He said the Spanish envoy was too good for me; I should marry Paul de Lorraine tomorrow."

"Mordieu, mademoiselle!"

"That was not it. I had borne that!" she cried. "Mayhap I deserved it. But while my lord thundered at me, word came that M. de Mar was taken. My lord swore he should die. He swore no man ever set him at naught and lived to boast of it."

"Will—"

She swept on unheeding:

'He said he should be tried for the murder of Pontou—he should be tortured to make him confess it."

She dropped down on her knees, hiding her face in her arms on the table, shaking from head to foot as in an ague. Vigo swore to himself, loudly, violently: "If Mayenne do that, by the throne of Heaven, I'll kill him!"

She sprang to her feet, dry-eyed, fierce as a young lioness.

"Is that all you can say? Mayenne may torture him and be killed for it?"

"I shall send to the duke—" Vigo began.

"Aye! I shall go to the duke! I can say who killed Pontou. I know much besides to tell the king. I was Mayenne's cousin, but if he would save his secrets he must give up M. de Mar. Mother of God! I have been his obedient child; I have let him do so with me as he would. I sent my lover away. I consented to the Spanish marriage. But to this I will not submit. He shall not torture and kill Etienne de Mar!"

Vigo took her hand and kissed it.

"Shall we start, Vigo? Once at St. Denis, I am hostage for his safety. The king can tell Mayenne that if Mar is tortured he will torture me! Mayenne may not tender me greatly, but he will not relish his cousin's breaking on the wheel."

"Mayenne won't torture M. Etienne," Vigo said, patting her hand in both of his, forgetting she was a great lady, he an equerry. "Fear not! you will save him, mademoiselle."

"Let us go!" she cried feverishly. "Let us go!"

Gilles was in the court waiting, stripped of his livery, dressed peaceably as a porter, but with a mallet in his hand that I should not like to receive on my crown. I thought we were ready, but Vigo bade us wait. I stood on the house-steps with mademoiselle, while he took aside Squinting Charlot for a low-voiced, emphatic interview.

"Must be wait?" mademoiselle urged me, quivering like an arrow on the bow-string. "They may discover I am gone. Need we wait?"

"Aye," I answered; "if Vigo bids us. He knows."

We waited then. Vigo disappeared presently. Mademoiselle and I stood patient, with, oh! what impatience in our hearts, wondering how he could so hinder us. Not till he came back did it dawn on me for what we had stayed. He was dressed as an under-groom, not a tag of St. Quentin colors on him.

"I beg a thousand pardons, mademoiselle. I had to give my lieutenant his orders. Now, if you will give the word, we go."

"Do you go, M. Vigo?" She breathed deep. It was easy to see she looked upon him as a regiment.

"Of course," Vigo answered, as if there could be no other way.

I said in pure devilitry, to try to ruffle him:

"Vigo, you said you were here to guard Monsieur's interests—his house, his goods, his moneys. Do you desert your trust?"

Mademoiselle turned quickly to him:

"Vigo, you must not let me take from your rightful post. Felix and your man here will care for me—"

"The boy talks silliness, mademoiselle," Vigo returned tranquilly. "Mademoiselle is worth a dozen hotels. I go with her."

He walked beside her across the court, I following with Gilles, laughing to myself. Only yesterday had Vigo declared that never would he give aid and comfort to Mlle. de Montluc. It was no marvel she had conquered M. Etienne, for he must needs have been in love with some one, but in bringing Vigo to her feet she had won a triumph indeed.

We had to go out by the great gate, because the key of the postern was in the Bastille. But as if by magic every guardsman and hanger-about had disappeared—there was not one to stare at the lady; though when we had passed some one locked the gates behind us. Vigo called me up to mademoiselle's left. Gilles was to loiter behind, far enough to seem not to belong to us, near enough to come up at need. Thus, at a good pace, mademoiselle stepping out as brave as any of us, we set out across the city for the Porte St. Denis.

Our quarter was very quiet; we scarce met a soul. But afterwards, as we reached the neighborhood of the markets, the streets grew livelier. Now were we gladder than ever of Vigo's escort; for whenever we approached a band of roysterers or of gentlemen with lights, mademoiselle sheltered herself behind the equery's broad back, hidden as behind a tower. Once the gallant M. de Champfleury, he who in pink silk had adorned Mme. de Mayenne's salon, passed close enough to touch her. She heaved a sigh of relief when he was by. For her own sake she had no fear; the midnight streets, the open road to St. Denis, had no power to daunt her: but the dread of being recognized and turned back rode her like a nightmare.

Close by the gate, Vigo bade us pause in the door of a shop while he went forward to reconnoiter. Before long he returned.

"Bad luck, mademoiselle. Brisscac's not on. I don't know the officer, but he knows me, that's the worst of it. He told me this was not St. Quentin night. Well, we must try the Porte Neuve."

But mademoiselle demurred:

"That will be out of our way, will it not, Vigo? It is a longer road from the Porte Neuve to St. Denis?"

"Yes; but what to do? We must get through the walls."

"Suppose we fare no better at the Porte Neuve? If yourBrissac is suspected, he'll not be on at night. Vigo, I propose that we part company here. They will not know Gilles and Felix at the gate, will they?"

"No," Vigo said doubtfully; "but—"

"Then can we get through!" she cried. "They will not stop us, such humble folk! We are going to the bedside of our dying mother at St. Denis. Your name, Gilles?"

"Forestier, mademoiselle," he stammered, startled.

"Then are we all Forestiers—Gilles, Felix, and Jeanne. We can pass out, Vigo; I am sure we can pass out. I am loath to part with you, but I fear to go through the city to the Porte Neuve. My absence may be discovered—I must place myself without the walls speedily.

"Well, mademoiselle may try it," Vigo gave reluctant consent. "If you are refused, we can fall back on the Porte Neuve. If you succeed— Listen to me, you fellows. You will deliver mademoiselle into Monsieur's hands, or answer to me for it. If any one touches her little finger — well, trust me!"

"That's understood," we answered, saluting together.

"Mademoiselle need have no doubts of them," Vigo said. "Felix is M. le Comte's own henchman. And Gilles is the best man in the household, next to me. God speed you, my lady. I am here, if they turn you back."

We went boldly round the corner and up the street to the gate. The sentry walking his beat ordered us away without so much as looking at us. Then Gilles, appointed our spokesman, demanded to see the captain of the watch. His errand was urgent.

But the sentry showed no disposition to budge. Had we a passport? No, we had no passport. Then we could go about our business. There was no leaving Paris tonight for us. Call the captain? No; he would do nothing of the kind. Be off, then.

But at this moment, hearing the altercation, the officer himself came out of the guard-room in the tower, and to him Gilles at once began his story. Our mother at St. Denis had sent for us to come to her dying bed. He was a street-porter; the messenger had had trouble to find him. His young brother and sister were in service, kept to their duties till late. Our mother might even now be yielding up the ghost! It was a pitiful case, M. le Captaine; might we not be permitted to pass?

The young officer appeared less interested in this moving tale than in the face of mademoiselle, lighted up by the flambeau on the tower wall.

(To be Continued.)

HE LEANED AGAINST THE WALL HELPLESS WITH LAUGHING, SHOUTING TO HIS COMRADES.