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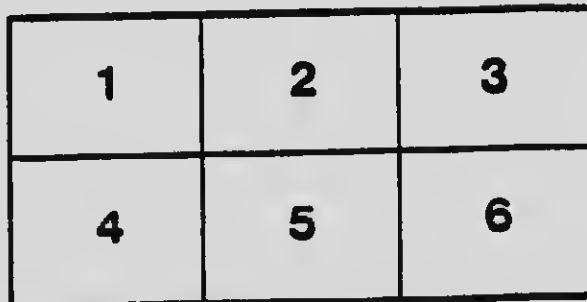
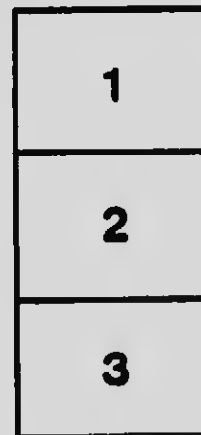
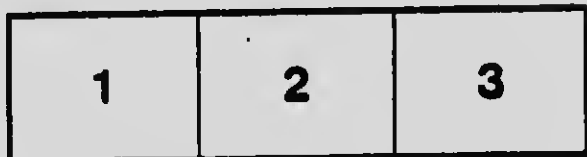
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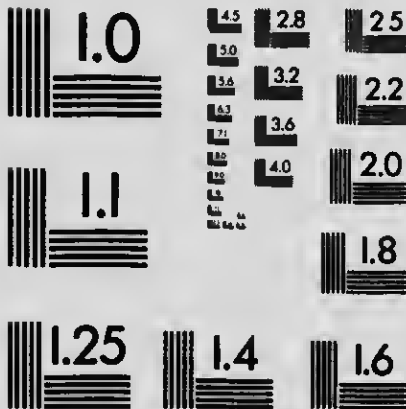
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Richard Lutz.

Shea,

Shea, of the Irish Brigade

SOME SUCCESSFUL BOOKS

By RANDALL PARRISH

MY LADY OF THE NORTH

Seventieth Thousand

MY LADY OF THE SOUTH

Sixtieth Thousand

BOB HAMPTON OF PLACER

Sixty-fifth Thousand

SWORD OF THE OLD FRONTIER

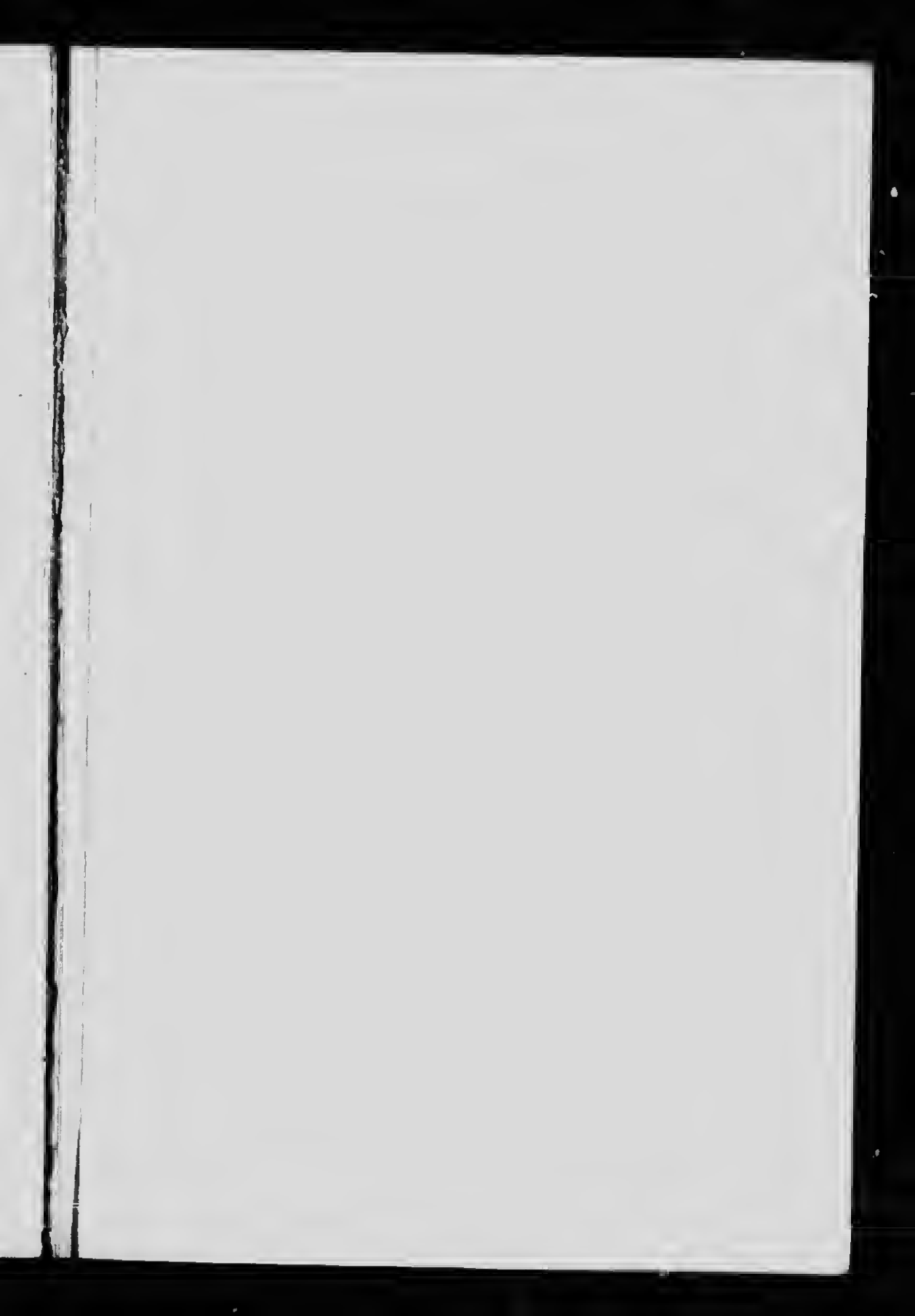
Fifty-second Thousand

BETH NORVELL

Fifty-third Thousand

WHEN WILDERNESS WAS KING

Fifty-fifth Thousand





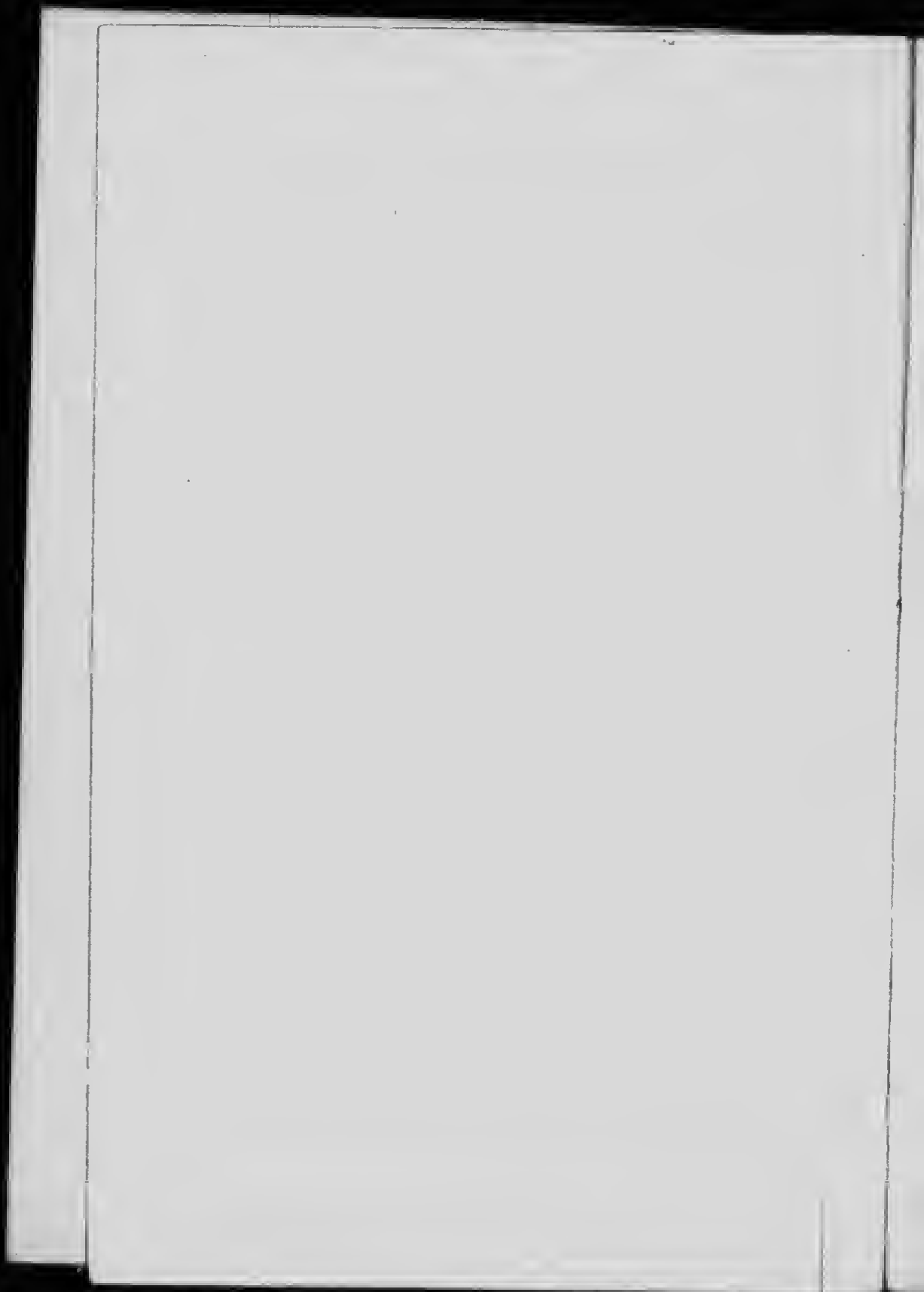
ALONSO KID

"What new indignity is to beffer



is to be offered me now, Monsieur?"

[Page 24]



SHEA
OF
THE IRISH BRIGADE

A Soldier's Story

By

RANDALL PARRISH

Author of "When Wilderness Was King," "The Maid of the Forest," etc.

Frontispiece in color by
ALONZO KIMBALL



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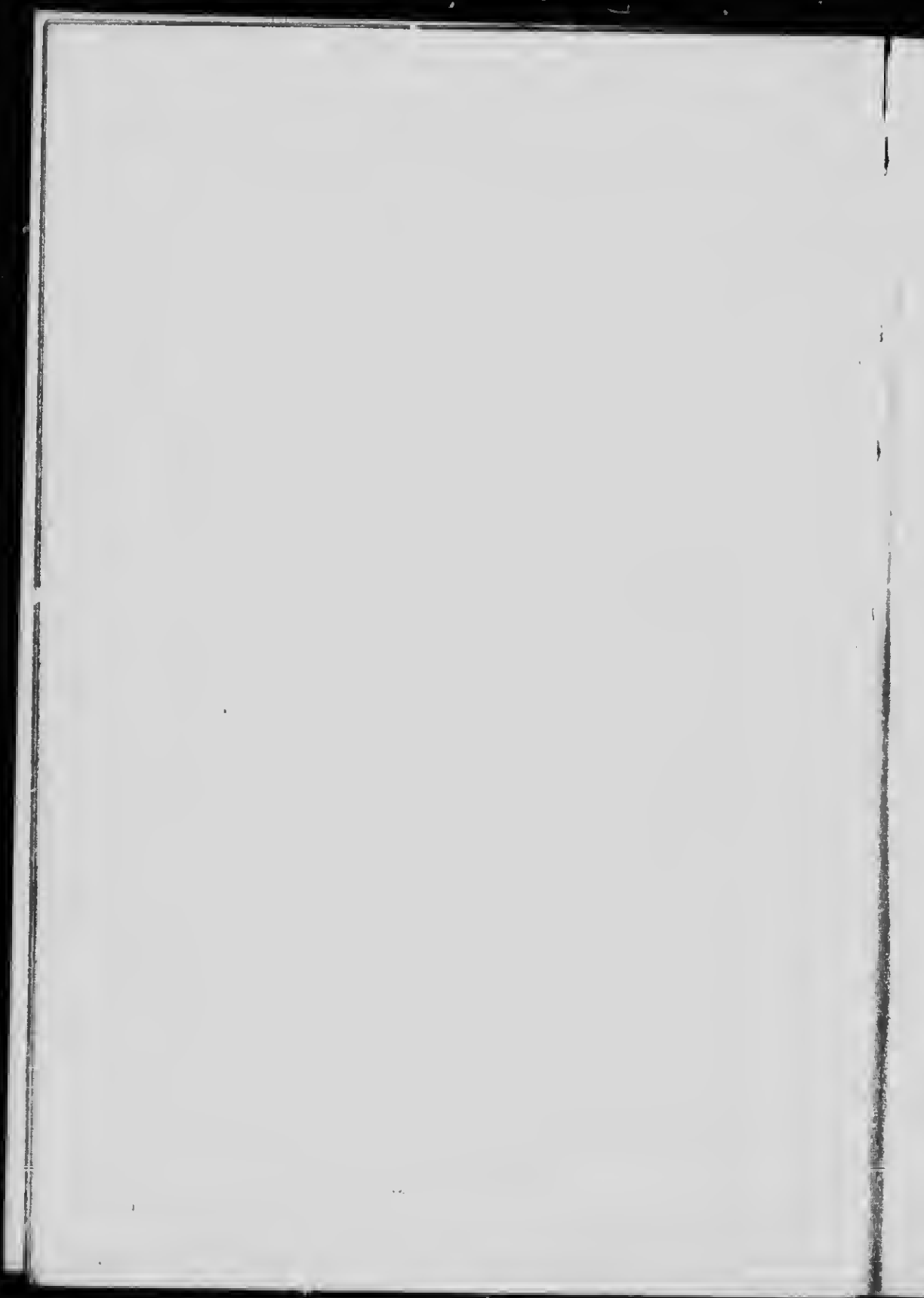
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"Oh, the fighting races don't die out,
If they seldom die in bed,
For love is first in their hearts, no doubt,"
Said Burke, then Kelly said:
"When Michael, the Irish archangel, stands,
The angel with the sword,
And the battle-dead from a hundred lands
Are ranged in one big horde,
Our line, that for Gabriel's trumpet waits,
Will stretch three deep that day,
From Jehosaphat to the Golden Gates —
Kelly and Burke and Shea."
"Well here's thank God for the race and the sod!"
Said Kelly and Burke and Shea.

JOSEPH I. C. CLARKE.



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Shea, of the Irish Brigade:

A Soldier's Story

CHAPTER I

THE FUGITIVE

THE night was so dark and the road so bad, that in spite of my desire to move swiftly I dare not spur my horse. It must have been an ill-kept road at best, but now, rutted deep by the wheels of passing cannon, and dug up by cavalry hoofs, it had become almost impassable. Here and there along the way I had been obliged to circle broken-down wagons, and now and then a lifeless horse, while many a discarded musket and saddle littered the path. That the troops marching this particular route had been Austrian — Konigskegg's devils — I knew well, and I had no wish to fall into their hands. The uniform of the Royal Irlandais would be no passport to their favor.

And it was plain to see the mood in which

SHEA, OF THE IRISH BRIGADE

they marched, for not a living thing had been left behind. In all that wide plain only desolation remained. Here and there the night wind fanned into glow the embers of a burned hut, and once, as I rode aside in search of water, it was only to find the dead body of a peasant, shot running with a child in his arms. The same bullet had sufficed for both. A few steps away lay a dog bayoneted. I hastened from the spot, leading my horse, and listening, but there was no sound except the wind. The very silence weighed on me.

Yet it was not those who had already passed I feared. I knew where they would be by now — across the river, no doubt, in touch with the English guards — but there were others to follow — Austrian, Hanoverian, Dutch — all straining for the same goal, the investment of Tournay. They would come this way; at any instant I might hear the rattle of their accouterments, the heavy tread of feet; and soon it would be dawn. It was this knowledge which spurred me to decided action. I no longer felt fear of pursuit, for,

THE FUGITIVE

even if my absence had been reported, Saxe would never venture to send a small party so far afield. It was the allies, through whose lines I was seeking passage, that I needed to avoid. And to escape discovery I must find a safe hiding place before dawn. The rough walls of a home of some pretensions loomed black to the right, but the stones had been shattered by cannon shot, and offered no protection. Yet I found here the trace of a road leading southward, and I mounted again and rode forward with greater confidence, meeting with no evidence that troops had passed that way.

I must have covered two miles, and faint light was already visible in the east, when the road skirted the edge of a wood, and turned sharply to the west. Just at the turn, dark, seemingly deserted, appeared a small hamlet. Not to exceed a half-dozen houses were huddled there, the most of them small peasant shacks; but the one closest to the road was a larger, square building, with a creaking sign in front. Beyond doubt, and not long

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since, it had been an inn. Now, not a figure moved about the place, nor a light gleamed from the windows. My horse stood with drooping head while I explored on foot, passing entirely around the building, and even entering the hovel nearby. There was no sign of life to be discovered, nor any evidence of damage. Apparently the near approach of the armies had caused the inhabitants to flee in terror, leaving their homes deserted. Possibly troops had advanced this way, but if so they must have turned aside, for not a door was broken, or sign of damage visible. Dread of the allies, a rumor of their approach, had been sufficient to send the people flying for their lives.

I tried the doors, finding them locked, but finally located a window shutter with a broken clasp which assured entrance. There was a trough, half filled with water, beside the road, and after permitting my horse to drink I led him to the shack behind, and shut him securely in. There was light enough by then for me to uncover an armful of fodder with which to

THE FUGITIVE

make him content in his new quarters. In the gray dawn I was enabled to distinguish more of my surroundings, although the wood shut off all view to the south and east. The remainder of the circle was a flat plain, terminating in a rocky ridge through which the road ran, with a large building, having the appearance of a monastery, topping its summit. Even at that distance I could perceive it had been gutted by fire, and was roofless. In no direction was there sign of human life, yet I knew not what furtive eyes might be watching me from the wood shadow. Nevertheless, I must hide here if at all, and my needs demanded both food and a couch. Every muscle of my body ached from fatigue.

No sound reached me, not even a movement of my horse; by now, no doubt, munching away in content, well satisfied with his new quarters. The leverage of a billet of wood served to open the shutter, and I clambered easily enough onto the window ledge. Nothing within deterred me, and my feet touched the floor. Except for the faint gray find-

SHEA, OF THE IRISH BRIGADE

ing entrance through the open window, the interior remained dark and obscure. Yet the few dim objects near at hand told me I was in the taproom, which apparently remained just as deserted. That the flight of its former occupants had been hurried was proven by several overturned glasses on a table, and the spigot of a cask loosened, so the contents had flooded the floor. The breath of wine was in the air, a sickening odor. I stepped cautiously forward, glancing into every dark corner to assure myself, and then taking swift survey of the entire room.

It was an apartment of size, containing three or four rough home-made tables, and a number of benches. A huge fireplace occupied one end; the broad mantel above being ornamented with numerous German steins, while a comfortable woven chair was in front. The ashes on the hearth were black and cold, although the broken blade of a sword, evidently utilized as a poker, lay half hidden in their fragments. Along one side were kegs — two of them tapped — with a narrow table

THE FUGITIVE

in front holding an array of pewter mugs. Beyond, a door stood ajar leading into a smaller room which proved to be the kitchen, while a ladder led upward through a trap to the floor above. The ceiling of rough hewn timber was low, blackened by smoke and age, the floor dirty and strewn with straw.

Here all was indeed a picture of dirt and squalor, yet forced by hunger I rummaged the pantry, finding a black loaf and a bit of cold roast, on which I made a hearty meal, washing it down with a glass of fair Burgundy, taking stock as I did so, of my surroundings now more plainly revealed as the day dawned. What had driven mine host away so suddenly, and depopulated the viliage, I could only surmise. Little doubt however but some threatened inroad of Austrians had caused a panic during the night, and if so the owners would likely come creeping back again as soon as the return of day gave them courage. Well, let them come: I must hide and sleep, and these people would be French. Even if discovered, the attic failing to conceal me, the uni-

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form I wore would protect me from violence.

I fastened the window by which I had gained entrance and crept up the ladder, the rungs creaking under my weight, and, with head above the rough flooring surveyed the surroundings. The ill-thatched roof admitted plenty of air and light. There were no furnishings except some disreputable coverlets on the bare floor, and a pile of straw in the further corner. I had drawn myself to my knees, before I noticed the body of a man lying outstretched beneath the eaves. His face was toward me, that of a man of middle-age, full-jowled with black beard, streaked with gray. His clothes were well worn, but of good cut, and I took him, at first glance, to have been an upper servant to some house of quality. There was pest in the camps, but I had little fear of it then, for no disease had killed this fellow, and I turned him over, finding what I expected, a knife thrust in the back. Faith! he had never known what killed him.

Five years of service had left me careless of death. I had slept on battle fields strewn with

THE FUGITIVE

corpses, forgetful of all but my own need. Now I was in little better stress, being worn with fatigue, my eyes held open by effort. The man was not a soldier; he was nothing to me, nor had I any interest in the taproom quarrel wherein he was shuffled off. So I drew a quilt over him, crossed to the other side, and lay down on a pile of clean straw. I could not see the hidden form from where I lay, nor did I give another thought to its presence, looking to the priming of my pistols, and loosening my swordbelt that I might rest with more ease. Yet, weary as I was, I lay there for some time, staring up at the roof, my mind busy with events.

All that had occurred to place me in this predicament passed before me in review. Up to this moment I had had no time for thought except to escape, to penetrate the closing lines of the allies. But now memory returned and I saw again the mess-tent, the table strewn with cards, the faces of the men crowding about me; I heard the oath and felt the blow; I looked once more into the hated features

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of d'Enville, and felt the thrill as our sword blades touched. Ay! it was a good fight, and a fair one, but to kill d'Enville — a captain of the staff — meant death. There would be no mercy from his friend, Lord Clare. And I had killed him! even now the stain of the chevalier's blood was on my sword.

As he lay there on the floor, Bain, Kelly, O'Brien flung themselves between, as some started to seize me, and won me free passage to the door. Dazed as I was I knew what must be done. Whose horse I took God knows, but there were loaded weapons in the holsters, and the steed bore me well. A bullet followed, but by then we were speeding off in the night.

Twice they stopped me — at Antoine and Fontenoy — but I had the word: 'T was what O'Brien had whispered in my ear, and, thinking me an aide to Saxe, I found free passage. Oh, well, that was all over. However fierce the chase it could never come thus far afield, for the Austrians were between. I could rest until night, and then ride on, trusting the

THE FUGITIVE

darkness. Perchance I might find a peasant who would guide me by some secret path.

It was quiet outside in the dawn: no sound disturbed me, and I fell asleep.

CHAPTER II

A SQUADRON OF GUARDS

I MUST have slept for hours undisturbed, for when I did awake the sun was in the west, and a ray, stealing through a crevice of the roof into my eyes, aroused me. All was so wondrously still as to seem strange to one long inured to the ceaseless noise of camps. Feeling hungry again I descended to the deserted room below, helping myself to food and drink, and pushing open the shutter that I might look up and down the road. It lay white and undisturbed in the sunlight. There were no deep ruts visible, such as passing artillery would have left, and no hoof marks to show that any considerable body of horse had lately passed that way. Why then had the villagers deserted their homes? What fear could account for this inn being left unguarded? Surely the dead body upstairs could not be the sole reason. A murder might bring

A SQUADRON OF GUARDS

momentary terror to those concerned — although God knows death by violence was common enough thereabout in those days — yet it would not prevent return. The guiltless would swiftly come back as soon as reason asserted itself. There must be some terror here of which I was ignorant, some knowledge of the movement of troops this way, or, perchance, a superstitious horror more deadly still.

I shrugged my shoulders, sipping the wine, careless of what the cause might be. I was young, a soldier, content to take things as they came, confident in my strength and wit. Whatever came I would meet the onset as best a man might, and meanwhile here was food and shelter — what could I ask more? It was some hours yet until night, and I lay down on a bench to wait the shadows, pillowing my head on my jacket while endeavoring to revive some definite memory of the country I must traverse through the dark. It was vague enough, that road to Paris, only I would be safer to ride between Douai and Valenciennes,

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both of which would contain garrisons. Once beyond Lourches I might proceed at ease, save for a watchful eye after stragglers, who would cut my throat for a song. Sooth! it did not look to be so hard a task, and I closed my eyes again.

I must have slept, for the trampling of horses without, and the tone of a loud voice, giving some indistinct order, startled me to my feet. It was already dusk within, although I caught a gleam of light through the broken shutter. I grasped my jacket, hesitating, as uncertain what to do as to what had happened. There were men outside, and horses — how many I could not judge, yet surely quite a squad from the jingle of accouterments, and the restless tread of hoofs. Whoever they were they must be soldiers and enemies, and I backed slowly toward the ladder leading to the loft, scarcely venturing to breathe, and listening for every sound. There was no way out, no path of escape: I could only hope to hide in the darkness above. If they had no suspicions there would be little search. I was

A SQUADRON OF GUARDS

half way up when a hand roughly shook the door; then a heavy boot crashed against it.

"They've barred the door, sir," said a coarse English voice, and the boot crashed again against the hard oak panel.

"Then your kicking is waste of good leather," and I could distinguish the jingle of a steel scabbard, as the leader swung down from his saddle. "Look about for something with which to force the lock. St. Anne! the place is as bare as a stripped chicken! Hear you any sound of the rascals within?"

"Not a peep, sir. 'T is my faith they've taken to the hills at sight of us."

"And let us hope left us an inn stocked to our needs," with a laugh. "'T is God's mercy, and not to be frowned at. What find you, lads?"

"There is naught here, sir," replied another voice, "of size for a ram."

"No? then pry away at the shutters with your swords. Lift Saunders on your shoulders — so! Once inside, and we have the castle. Ah! easily done, men; now rip it out."

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I could see the fellow outlined against the streak of sky, as he thrust a forked beard into the narrow opening. He was wrenching still at the obstinate shutter, and, taking swift advantage of the noise to conceal my own movements, I crept into the attic, and snuggled down under the straw. I could hear as plainly as in the room below, but the flooring, although warped and ill-laid, prevented my seeing anything. My heart beat rapidly, for I fully comprehended now the peril which would follow my discovery. The Austrians, or Hollanders, would have served me better than these brawling English. They would show small mercy to one wearing my uniform. And what could they be doing here? 'T was said in camp the Duke of Cumberland was to the north, yet here surely was a squadron of Guards, and very much at home.

I could distinguish the movements below, as the fellow dropped from the window, crossed the floor, striking against the table in the dark, and swearing vigorously, as he unbarred the door.

A SQUADRON OF GUARDS

"What is it, Saunders?" called out the voice of the officer. "Ah! a cracked shin: scarce occasion for so much fuss. Start a fire in the grate, man, and Austen make a search for lights. What think you has become of mine host?"

"Frightened away by our last visit, no doubt, Captain," replied another, laughing. "He was a cowardly fool, and the Lambs were frolicksome."

"Yet he had no knowledge of our return."

"No, but suspicioned that others of our trade might be abroad to ride this way. I wonder what the louts did with the body."

"Ah! faith, but I had forgotten that, Dorn. Here two of you men: flash a lanthorn up the ladder there, and see if there be a body above. If so, pass it outside."

I could see the faint glimmer of light as the fellows came through the opening, grumbling at their unpleasant task. I lay motionless, scarcely daring to breathe, for I recognized them now as a detachment of Shepard's Lambs, and knew my death warrant signed

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were I once discovered. They flashed the lanthorn my way, but the pile of quilts caught their attention first, and thus they came upon the corpse with no delay. And they made little enough of their job, thrusting the dead body down the ladder into the grasp of others below, joking coarsely as they did so, and then clambering after, without even a glance behind. The captain halted the squad, and must have stepped up to have glimpse at the dead man's face, for I heard him say:

"Enough of that horseplay, lads. It's the fellow, Dorn: I wish he 'd lived that I might question him about the mission of my lady, for never was there a hussy with a tighter lip. Ayl bury him; back a bit from the road. Go with them yourself, Dorn, and then bring in the princess — or whatever the witch may be — for 't is my humor she sup with the two of us here. There seems to be wine in plenty, and it may loosen her tongue."

"Am I to bury the body first, Captain Awl-right?"

"St. Christopher — yes. She does n't know

A SQUADRON OF GUARDS

the man is dead, nor what he may have told us: nor do I mean she shall. I 'll match her wits, the vixen, before she faces the duke. It's my faith there is a tale here worth telling. Oh! Saunders, bring me a bottle, and search the larder: there will be three at table here."

Encouraged by the shuffling of feet, I crept out of the straw covert, and across to the head of the ladder. Here, crouched in the darkness, I could gaze down on the scene in the room below with slight danger of discovery. The lanthorn sat upon the large table, but it was the glow of the fire which lighted the apartment. A soldier still poked this into brighter flame, while another, short and slender as a boy, was busy at the row of kegs. I could not see distinctly the faces of either, but their uniform was that of the English Guard.

The officer sat alone, half sprawled on the bench, bottle and glass already before him, his jack-boots spattered with mud, and his face shaded by one arm. He was a man of forty I judged, a big fellow, with bronzed cheeks, and

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a prominent nose. His dark moustache forked out in soldierly fashion, and he possessed the look of one who had seen hard service, and could give and take stout blows. His uniform, neat enough, yet well worn by campaign, had evidently been cut by a master-tailor, and I cataloged him as a bit of a dandy when occasion served. Yet there was nothing weak in the look of his plain leather scabbard, nor in the brown, muscled hand that gripped the glass of liquor. And the day must have gone well with him, for he was in rare good humor, humming a merry tune, with eyes roaming idly about the room. Nor was he averse to joking with his men.

“Some tang to that stuff, Saunders,” he commented gaily. “These Frenchmen know good wine, if only they show you the right bottle. You must have found mine host’s private stock. ’Tis to be hoped it holds out until the princess comes. Zounds, but a nip of this ought to loosen even her closed tongue. What have you there in the shape of food to serve at the table?”

A SQUADRON OF GUARDS

"Poor enough, my lord: a bit of lean pork with oaten bread."

"Not to be sneezed at by a hungry man. 'Tis more than we might expect to find had the Austrians passed this way. I take it the road was not on their field map — praised be the gods! Ah! what is it, Watson?"

The guardsman who had stepped inside the door, saluted stiffly.

"A horse with French cavalry equipment is in the building at the rear, sir. Lieutenant Dorn sent me to tell you, sir."

"What! only one? Surely we can have little to fear from a stray trooper. Is the animal warm, as though lately ridden?"

"Not warm now, my lord, but the beast had been hard drove enough before being stabled."

"And no trace of the rider?"

"None; we have searched."

"Piff! the animal may have been stolen from some dead trooper, and hidden there. But have a guard set at the door, Watson, and patrol the road. Another bottle, Saunders —

SHEA, OF THE IRISH BRIGADE

't is so good the one but wets my appetite, and I would fain be in fettle for conversation, so as to do the honors for my lady. Save us! but she is a disdainful witch, full of a proud conceit. 'T will be a pity to turn her over to such mercy as Lord Hay might vouchsafe — ay! set the glasses here, and the plates. By faith! 't is indeed a fair tankard, worthy of the brew. Campaigning in Flanders would not be so bad man, could we strike a tavern every sundown. So, 't is well spread — now tell Lieutenant Dorn to bring the fair one hither.”

The soldier disappeared, leaving the outer door ajar. Back and forth in the glow of firelight streaming from within a sentry paced. I could glimpse his limbs, and the glitter of his scabbard, and somewhere out in the darkness beyond a tenor voice was singing an English song. Then suddenly the guard stood motionless, and a man and woman appeared together in the opening.

CHAPTER III

WHAT I OVERHEARD

THE lady stepped first across the threshold, the man, Dorn no doubt from his officer's uniform, pausing to close the door. Wrapped as she was in a long gray riding cape, with hood drawn up, I could only observe the light firmness of her step, and the proud poise of what seemed a slender, girlish figure. But, as she halted in the full glare of the firelight, facing the man at the table, who still retained his seat, she loosened the clasp at her throat, pushing back the concealing hood with a white hand. I felt the blood leap in my veins in sudden recognition. Where before had I seen that face, those dark, disdainful eyes, that mouth which seemed to smile even in its anger? Somewhere surely, and yet, for the life of me, I could not recall where, or when. I stared at her, forgetful of my own peril, of discovery, groping vainly in the dim past. I could not remember I had

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seen the girl before, nor could I believe I would ever have forgotten had there been once a meeting. Yet the face fascinated me with its strange familiarity — a tantalizing memory to which I could not give a name. Was it merely a resemblance to some one else? If so, who? Every slight movement served to deepen my perplexity, yet failed to awaken my sluggish recollection. It must have been years ago, if at all, and that could not be, for the girl was young, scarcely twenty to my judgment. 'T was odd how the impression clung; yet struggle, as I would, I could not escape its haunting.

The memory attached to her voice also, full, clear, thrilling with indignation, as she stood there, her eyes on the sprawling captain.

“What new indignity is to be offered me now, Monsieur?” she asked in French, ignoring Dorn who waited, grinning at her shoulder.

“None whatever,” and the officer, as though suddenly aware of his graceless posture, took his muddied boots off the bench, and stood up,

WHAT I OVERHEARD

bowing in semblance of gallantry. "Rather we contemplate an act of courtesy rare enough in this campaign. We have, by the fortunes of war, come into possession of food and wine, together with a cheerful fire, and a roof. 'T is our pleasure to share these with our fair guest —"

"Your prisoner, you mean."

"Indeed, Mademoiselle, I do not know which you may prove to be. To be sure, we are in duty bound to detain you. Yet, if your tale proves true the tables may quickly be turned."

"My tale?" in marked surprise. "I have told no tale."

"Of which I am fully aware; yet surely you have one worthy our ears. 'T is not like a gentlewoman, such as I perceive you to be, to ride alone these Flemish roads without a reason. 'T will be easier far to tell the story to me than to Cumberland — he is a rough old hound."

"There is no need why I should repeat it to either," she responded shortly. "'T is no

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crime to be a French woman, nor to ride. Your men have searched me, and found nothing to their purpose, and if you have brought me here," she glanced about contemptuously, "to question, 't will be waste of time. I will not answer you: no! nor your Duke of Cumberland."

The captain laughed.

"Let that be as it may," he answered, in seeming good humor. "The world wags, and the duke can look after himself. I am but a blunt soldier myself, wearied with campaign, and glad enough to look again on so fair a face as yours. 'T was that we might sup together that I had you brought here — ay! the three of us with much good cheer. Come, Mademoiselle, the chair is yours; we will share the bench."

She did not move, although her slight form seemed to straighten.

"You mistake, Monsieur; I choose my company."

"Ay! but could you do better? Though I am only a Captain of Guards, yet they call me

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Lord Dalhousie in England, and Dorn here has an estate in Kent, with a castle on it, where a king has been guest."

She turned her eyes from the one face to the other.

"You are ranked as gentlemen in your own country?"

The captain bowed.

"'T is not questioned."

"Then why not act the part here, Messieurs? I am a woman alone: I will not say of gentle blood, but of respectability. I am no woman from the camp, to be treated with insult. I beg you consider before it be too late: there are those who would draw sword for me."

"Ay! I know that beyond a doubt. Prithee! I would do it myself; yet 't is not likely the threat of a sword point would greatly frighten one brought up to the trade — what say you, Dorn?"

"That I would rather enjoy the exercise," responded the lieutenant, a dapper young blood, disposing himself carelessly on the

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bench. "'T is a week, or more, since I crossed blades in quarrel."

"With best of excuse," and Awlright laughed, "for 't is that length of time we have been on scout, with not a cowardly Frenchman to be seen. Mademoiselle, perchance you could tell us where they have gone for cover?"

"Perchance I could, but I will not. 'T is my thought you will discover to your cost."

"May the gods be good. It has been like a fox chase thus far, and I have forgotten I am a soldier."

"Nor is that all you have forgotten, Monsieur."

"You mean to be a gentleman? Forsooth, that is no more than a point of view. To my mind now, there is little enough you can complain about. You are under guard, of course. I could do no less to one striving to pass our lines in secret. The orders are strict, and Lord Hay does not take kindly to excuses. I've had my lesson, Madam. Yet I have been gentle — no man of my troop has laid hand on you, nor spoke uncouth. Is this not true? What then?"

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Is it because I ask you here to bear us company at the best meal we have had for a month past?"

"I was not asked, Monsieur, I was compelled. When I requested to be excused I was threatened and driven."

"I knew that not. Yet why seek excuse? There are ladies of the court who would gladly sup with me: ay, a many of them."

"Of the English Court: I have heard they were not particular."

The captain choked back a swift oath, his cheeks reddening to sudden anger.

"'T is enough, you little spit-fire. I'll no longer play gentleman with you. By Gad! I'm the master here, and more used to camps than courts, I'll admit. So sit you down, Madam. Whether or not it be your choice to companion with us, I care nothing. Stolen fruit is the sweeter they say, and I'm in a mood to have amusement. Ay! you'd better do as I say without more words, or I'll find ways to make you — your eyes do n't frighten me."

I thought for the instant she would refuse,

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and I am sure it was no sense of fear which finally led her to action. There was naught but contempt in her face, as her hand gripped the back of the chair, yet she sat quietly down, fronting the two of them, but far enough back from the table to afford an opportunity for attempt at escape.

"So then, I am here for your amusement, Monsieur," she said coldly. "'Tis a frank confession."

"The word may have been ill-chosen: my French is not of the best. Rather it is information I seek. Saunders," and he waved his hand, "you may serve; a bottle of wine first."

The young woman remained silent, watching the soldier, as he came silently forward and filled the empty glasses. Her head was bowed slightly, concealing her features from me, crouching as I was almost directly above them. Evidently the captain felt that he had won his point, for he lifted his glass, admiring the rich coloring of the wine, and his voice, although still loud, had lost its sting.

"I can recommend this, as I sampled it

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before you came," he said boastingly. "To our better acquaintance, Mademoiselle."

"A toast in which I have no desire to join," she returned firmly. "Come, Monsieur, let us be through with this nonsense. I am your prisoner, nothing more. I will neither eat, nor drink with you. Besides I have no information to give."

The man leaned forward, staring into her face, and brought down his fist crashing onto the plank.

"You are a fool then!" he retorted angrily. "By Gad, you think I am hard; wait 'till you front the others. They're not likely to care for your pretty face, or your fine manners. See here, my girl, listen to what I say, and show some sense. I'm in command here: it is my word which holds you, or sets you free. Tell me your tale, and, if it be possible, I'll let you go — ay, I'll send an escort with you. Is that fair offer enough?"

The change in the man puzzled her; I could see that by the little frown between her eyes, the compression of her lips. Saunders

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came forward with plates and cups, and neither spoke until he had gone. Dorn leaned back against the wall, evidently enjoying the situation, and indifferent as to its termination.

“Well?” growled Awlright impatiently.

“What is it you wish to know?”

“Your name and residence, Mademoiselle; why you were endeavoring to ride through our lines at night, and who the man was that was killed?”

“And if I answer I go free?”

“That must depend,” he laughed. “You say I am no gentleman, Mademoiselle; but, by Gad! I am a soldier.”

“Very well, Monsieur: I will try if you be even that,” she replied quietly, determined on her course. “I am Henrietta Valois, a maid of Cambrai, daughter of the Commissionaire — you know him?”

Awlright shook his head.

“’Tis not a town I have ever seen — a French village?”

“To the south ten miles,” her face brightening. “I was at Douai with my aunt —

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Madame D'Estelle, by the east gate, Monsieur — when the news came that my father was about to die. It was the Austrians who had shot him at his own door, and the man who rode to tell me was our servant — Francois La Barge. He knew the road, and would guide me back. We rode at night, deeming the passage would be safer as the country between was patrolled, and we possessed no passes. We chose an obscure way, and were unchallenged until we met you. It was Francois La Barge who was killed.”

She hid her face in her hands.

“’T is a sweet tale,” commented Awlright mockingly, with a glance toward his lieutenant. “did we not chance to recognize the innocent servant. Saints alive! the fellow was our prisoner three days ago, but escaped us.”

There was the tramp of horses' hoofs without, the challenge of a sentinel, and the gruff sound of a voice speaking German. Both officers were instantly on their feet, and, at a word of command from Awlright, Dorn slipped through the door into the darkness.

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The captain swore, staring at the girl who had also arisen, her hands clasping the back of the chair.

“By St. George, a detachment of Dutch,” he exclaimed. “Little as I think of your story, it will not do for them to find you here. They are scavenger wolves. Wait — ah, I have it! Dorn will hold them there a minute. Up the ladder with you to the loft, and draw it after; then lie down, still as a mouse, until I get rid of the fat hogs. ’T will not be long, or I miss my guess — I have no stomach for the Dutch as comrades. Hey! Saunders, clear the table here, and be quick about it. If those swine smell food they never will leave. Shut the door tight — and now, Madam!”

The lady ignored his extended hands, holding her skirt closely, as she stepped to the foot of the ladder. Without doubt she fully recognized her danger — rude as these English had been, Dutch or Austrian troops would be infinitely worse — and thought at that moment only of escaping discovery. I drew silently back into the deeper shadows, and

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huddled beneath the eaves. The light streaming up through the opening enabled me to see her, as she bent over and drew up the light ladder, laying it quietly aside, a portion of its weight on my foot. Yet I never stirred; my eyes watching her face as revealed by the yellow flare of the candle below.

CHAPTER IV

I MEET THE LADY

I HEARD Awlright speak hastily and in low tone, likely a last word of warning, and then the rattle of a scabbard as he rebuckled his sword belt. From where I now crouched no view of the room below could be obtained, but I knew the captain stood waiting. It seemed to me the others were awhile coming, the faint sound of voices outside betokening some controversy. In the silence I dare not reveal my presence to the young woman, for, in her first startled surprise, she might make some alarm for Awlright to overhear. If the newcomers entered, and they got into conversation below, then the attempt at communication might be made with less peril.

Why I should address her, or permit her to know of my presence, was a puzzle. I was myself a fugitive, marvelously fortunate

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thus far to escape discovery. Indeed, as things stood, there was small choice whether I fell into the clutch of the allies, or that of the French. If the former my fate would be likely that of a spy, the sentence swift and merciless; while if the latter I would face a court martial, with a result scarcely less serious. Yet in spite of all this I was a soldier wearing the uniform of France. If I had deserted the colors, it was merely to save my own life, animated by the hope that my story once told to the King would bring pardon. That was my only chance, for Saxe, sick and irritated, would never forgive or forget. But Louis XV — he had pledged me once his favor, and I would ask it now. There lay my only chance. Still it was not this, altogether, which decided my action. I remained in spirit, and through training, a French soldier. With small knowledge of the cause for which I fought I yet remained loyal to my comrades. Never could I aid either English or Austrian, or be guilty of treachery. 'T was not in my blood. And this girl was serving France!

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How, in what measure, I could not determine, but her desperate ride through the night, seeking to pierce the lines of the allies; the fact that she had refused to account for herself to this English captain, and then later told him a false tale, left me in no doubt as to her mission. If I could serve her I would serve France. The service, if of sufficient importance and peril, might even atone for my breach of discipline; would, at least, add potency to my plea for pardon.

Ayl and I wanted to serve her. Whoever she was, and whatever the cause leading to her predicament, her personality appealed oddly to me. It was more than a mere haunting recollections of her face — a vague feeling we had met before — it was the woman herself which appealed. I felt that she was worthy; that she possessed character, true womanhood. I had been brought up in a rough school of war, and had met few of gentle blood whom I could call friends, yet I recognized my own class — the evidences of good birth. She was no peasant, no daugh-

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ter of a commissionaire, in some obscure village. The purity of her speech, the proud manner in which she parried with the Englishman, her low, modulated voice, all conspired to make her disguise of clothing the more manifest.

I watched her face in the candlelight she bent above the opening in the floor and looked down. I could see her now more clearly than when she had been below — a slender, rounded girl of twenty, with dark hair and eyes, the latter shadowed by long lashes, the lips arched, the skin clear and white, the contour of the face cleanly outlined. My heart beat faster as I looked, and the red blood pulsed in my veins. Right or wrong, for France or what not, it was not in my nature to leave her to the tender mercy of such wolves as scoured the land. Awlright was but biding his time, and making sure of a clear field, to prove himself a beast: and as to Dorn — I shut my teeth hard at memory of his sarcastic grin, and waxed moustache. By all the gods! they should never boast in English

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camp of this night's play, nor hold her up to laughter. Not until they won over my sword point, at least. It was a vow to the Virgin.

The door below opened noisily, and several men came in, their swords clanking on their spurs. I watched her draw farther back, out of the direct radius of light, yet remaining close enough to the opening, to gaze down at the scene as though fascinated. I felt that I could imagine what she saw by the changing expression of her face, and I needed this guidance, for the men were speaking German in a gruff rumble which prevented my distinguishing so much as a sentence, except as Awlright occasionally interjected a bit of vigorous English.

So far as I could determine the captain knew nothing of German, but apparently Dorn spoke it with fluency, and acted therefore as interpreter. I had no difficulty in recognizing his nasal voice even in the foreign tongue, and, between his explanations and Awlright's sharp questioning, I made shrewd guess at what was transpiring below. The

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troop was not Dutch, but Austrian, and had taken the wrong road, and the men were cross and in ill-humor from long marching. All they desired was food and a guide, but asked these in such gruff tone of command as to anger both Englishmen. There was little love, but much jealousy, between the allies, who, in truth, sincerely hated each other, and, for a moment, I actually thought the fellows would come to blows. There was swearing a plenty in three languages, but the guardsmen finally came to their senses, and this exchange of sentiment quieted down. Beyond doubt Awlright realized that the easiest and quickest way to be rid of the party was gracefully to accede to its demands. The Austrians must have outnumbered his force two to one, and were in a mood to help themselves. I thought Dorn told him that in English, for I distinctly heard the disgusted reply of the still irate captain.

“By Gad! I guess you’re right — it’s the only way to be rid of the swine. A battalion, you say? Let them forage for themselves

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then; ay! anywhere in the village — they know the trade. I'll have Saunders attend to these, and when they are full they can go to the devil for all I care. Tell them so in their beastly language. A guide? yes I'll give them a guide, and anything else that will help to get their ugly faces out of my sight."

I heard Dorn explaining all this, in more diplomatic speech, no doubt, and with many guttural questions interrupting him. Then the door opened and closed, while chairs and benches scraped on the floor, and sidearms rattled, indicating that the party was making itself at ease. Awlright called to the trooper, who came forth from the back room, and received his orders. There was a growl of voices in conversation, a loud laugh over some joke, and the clink of glasses. I could distinguish one fellow making effort to talk French, probably trying his accomplishment on the captain, but I was not sufficiently interested to learn the result. Enough for me to know they were all busily engaged over good liquor, and unsuspecting of any concealment

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above. Awlright knew where his prisoner was hiding, but would have no fear of her. Indeed, his very knowledge of her hiding in the loft would prevent his exhibiting any uneasiness which might arouse the suspicions of the others. His only desire was to feed the unwelcome callers, and get them on their road as soon as possible.

I sat up, drawing my foot forth from its imprisonment beneath the ladder noiselessly. The girl, intent on what was occurring below, and deeming herself utterly alone, remained unconscious of my presence. She was breathing quickly, her eyes shaded by an uplifted hand. What would she do when she heard my voice? Would the sudden alarm startle her into an exclamation? I hesitated an instant, and yet there was no other means of approach. If I should move forward, unannounced, the result might prove even more disastrous. To hear something unseen stirring in the darkness would be far more apt to frighten her than the sound of a friendly voice. They were jabbering away below, their

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tongues already loosened by wine, while the rattle of dishes told that Saunders was busy at the table. I must assume the risk, and trust to the discretion of the lady — there was no other choice.

“Mademoiselle,” I said softly in French, “do not cry out, or be frightened. I am a friend.”

Her head was uplifted, her face turned toward me at the first sound. She gave one quick gasp of astonishment, and I could mark the effort with which she controlled herself, as she stared into the dark. I doubt if she could even perceive my dim outlines in the gloom, but the tone of my voice must have given courage.

“Monsieur, where are you?” she questioned, the words trembling, and so low I barely heard.

“Here,” and I moved slightly to where the reflection of light gave her a dim glimpse of me. “I was indeed afraid I might frighten you, but you are brave.”

“No; I think not that, Monsieur; I — I

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was startled at first — yes. But there is more for me to fear down there. Tell me first who are you — a Frenchman?”

“Not by birth, yet a soldier in the army of France.”

“Of what command, Monsieur?”

“Royal Irlandais.”

I could perceive the slight semblance of a smile about her lips, a relaxation of expression to her face.

“Oh, an Irishman,” as though in relief. “That is what I caught in your speech — the accent. I thought maybe you deceived me. But now I know how it is. I have met those of the Royal Irlandais — the Count Dillon, the Lord Clare —”

“You have met those?” I asked, it being my turn to express astonishment. “How could that be, Mademoiselle? You have seen them? heard of them, perhaps?”

“Ayl and talked with them. I spoke without thought, Monsieur. The words came in gladness when I learned who you were. But surely there is no harm for me to confess I

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have acquaintance with your officers. Why not?"

"Because I overheard your conversation with the Englishman, when you named yourself Henrietta Valois, the daughter of the Commissionaire at Cambrai."

"And if I failed to tell him the truth is it a crime?"

"No," I hastened to say. "Indeed I thought it unlikely. You did not seem of that rank to me."

"For which I thank you, Monsieur; you thought me what then?"

"A gentlewoman, none else."

"Yet, the situation puzzled you, no doubt. And I cannot judge you, for I can barely see your outline. The advantage is all yours. What is your rank, Monsieur?"

"A volunteer lieutenant."

"Ah! let me see; I have heard Lord Clare explain the grade. 'Tis if I mistake not, a position of honor given to cadets of good family. You bear a name then?"

"Not one likely to mean much to you, Ma-

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demoiselle. Let me draw nearer where the light give you glimpse of my face. I am not a cutthroat, nor do I believe I look like one. You can see me now? My name is Arthur Shea, a cadet of the house of Berwick."

Our eyes met, and I could seem to read in the expression of her own, the confidence with which she regarded me. It was a dim light at best in which to judge character, and strange condition amid which to make acquaintance, but her hesitancy lasted scarcely a moment. Impulsively she held forth her hand.

"I do not know whether you are young or old, Monsieur," she said slowly. "The light baffles my eyes, and you have the look of one who has passed through much of peril and hardship."

"The trials of war," I answered soberly. "I became a soldier at fifteen."

"And now?"

"I am twenty-seven; twelve years of service ages a man."

"Yes, I know. My brother is a soldier, an

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officer in the Regiment du Roi. Yours, I take it, will be the regiment of Berwick?"

I bowed, surprised at her knowledge of military affairs, and eager enough by now to learn her identity. Yet I would not ask the question, although it trembled on my lips. In spite of her effort to speak freely, the lady had a proud way with her that repelled familiarity. If she wished me to know, the truth would be told in its own time. A moment she remained silent, her glance down the opening into the room below, and then back to my face. She seemed in doubt what to do, and in the silence I could hear the gruff voices of the Austrians, one of them making an attempt to sing a sentimental ditty.

"You do not recognize me, Monsieur?"

"No; I confess your face haunts me with its strange familiarity. I may have seen you at some time, although I am sure we have never met."

"'Tis not likely; the Irish Brigade has seldom been at Paris."

"But twice during my service, and then

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merely in garrison for a week to be reviewed by the King."

"I remember; and you yourself?"

"I bore message once from the Netherlands, a dispatch of some import," I explained, "and was given royal audience that I might be questioned for details. 'T was my fortune later to do a service to the King."

"At Casse de Fer, Monsieur?"

"Yes — you heard?"

"The tale was told about Paris. Louis himself made much of the matter. So I know you now, Monsieur, and can trust you. I am Camille d'Enville."

CHAPTER V

A MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING

IFELT as if she had struck me in the face. For the moment my heart seemed to stop its beating, and yet I doubt if I moved a muscle, or if the expression of my face changed. In that moment the whole situation flashed across my mind. Camille d'Enville! Ay! that was it. It was her brother I had killed back in the camp yonder — ran him through in quarrel over the gaming table! Of course, I remembered now, the man was an officer of the Regiment du Roi, serving on Saxe's staff. And it was memory of his face which had haunted me — why, now I could trace the resemblance, the dark glow of the eyes, the smile of the mouth, the peculiarity of manner. Yes, it was all plain enough — Camille d'Enville! I tried to remember what I had heard of her. There were scraps of camp gossip that had found lodgment in my mind — rumors of pre-

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ferment, of kingly favor. My brain grasped vaguely at these, piecing them together. After all it was little enough — the d'Envilles were from Chalons. I remembered that well, for once we had marched the road from Orleans into Luxemburg, and Berwick had pointed out the place, a great gray castle crowning a hill to the left as we passed. The old marquis was living there then alone, and Berwick told of having served with him in Italy, and of how the younger d'Enville had found favor with the king, and his sister had been appointed to a position of honor at the court. And her name had been spoken again in my presence at Paris. What was said, and who said it, I hardly knew, a mere rumor that Louis would marry her to the Duke de Saule, the colonel of his guard, and that the lady had laughed in his face, and declined the honor, with some word of witty response which had made the king laugh in spite of his anger. 'T was told then she had been sent back to Chalons in disgrace, and d'Enville ordered to his regiment. I could not recall what it was

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she had said, but I had seen the Duke de Saule, a pompous man of much flesh, with sour, solemn face, and the sting of the retort gave me a hearty laugh.

And this girl, hiding here beside me in the loft of this old tavern, a prisoner facing insult, claiming to be the humble daughter of a Commissionaire, seeking her sick father, was Camille d'Enville. It was difficult for me to realize the truth, thus swiftly to adjust my mind to these new conditions. A vastly different problem confronted me now in the presence of this gentlewoman, this court beauty, than had she been the humble creature she had claimed to be before the captain. I cannot truly say my interest in her safety, her escape, was greater, or that this discovery of her identity increased the depth of my admiration. Rather it added responsibility, for surely she was never in such a situation as this without grave cause. Beyond doubt it was the king's service which had led to that lonely night ride, and her desperate attempt at evasion. Otherwise — if there was nothing to

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conceal — she would have told Awlright her name and rank, and demanded her release. Reckless as the fellow was he would hesitate to offer insult to such as she, or even hold her prisoner without good cause. I must know the whole truth if I was to serve her, to venture my very life in her defense; she must tell me the facts.

“You are Mademoiselle d’Enville?” I asked, as though in doubt, “the daughter of the Marquis at Chalons?”

“Yes, Monsieur; you know of me then?” and her eyes were uplifted to my face. “I could scarcely hope for recognition.”

“I was in Paris, you remember, at a time when it was rumored you had displeased his Majesty, and won banishment.”

There were dimples in either cheek as she smiled.

“Oh, and you would mean the affair of de Saule, Monsieur? ’T was not serious: the king’s anger lasted scarce a fortnight. True, it cost me a journey to Marne at a bad season, but he was scarce better off. Three messen-

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gers came before I returned — the last bore a letter in Louis' own hand."

"You are back in court then, and in full favor?"

"I was, Monsieur," with a swift glance about and below, and a shrug at the shoulders, "but 't is hardly so now."

"Yet there is surely a reason, Mademoiselle," I made haste to insist. "Why I find you in this sad stress. You can trust me — my discretion, my loyalty."

"Would I have told you my name if unconvinced? I must tell you all, and implore your service. I bear a message from Paris, so important they dare not intrust it to a soldier. I overheard the plans, and volunteered to bear it. 'T was a wild project, no doubt, yet they saw no better way, and consented. I was given a guide — a man who knew every bridle-path — and, but for an accident to one of the horses, Monsieur, we would have been safely through the lines of the allies last night. We were compelled to stop at this tavern to obtain a fresh mount, and there was a traitor

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in the village. I know not how it occurred, but suddenly the English came. There was fighting, and my guide, La Barge, killed. He died to permit my escape, but I was helpless, my horse wounded, and, with small knowledge of the roads, I rode straight until my horse fell, and was then made prisoner. At first I would not speak, or say who I was, or why I was abroad. It was the Lientenant Dorn who brought me back here, and he hesitated to search me because I treated him with such contempt. But his captain was of another kind — ”

“ Did he dare to rob you? ”

“ No, Monsieur, not yet, but he will. He sought other means first, but when they fail he will be brute enough. I have parried with him thus far, but he knows my tale is false. Only the coming of the Austrians saved me from rudeness. The man was losing his temper, and has little of the gentleman, if he be a noble as he claims. His way is the way of camps.”

“ And you will meet him — how? ”

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"I knew not a moment ago. I was in desperation, but I fear the man no longer. Here, Monsieur, take this."

I think she extracted the paper from her shoe, but it was accomplished so quickly in the darkness that I could not be sure. My hand held it, and I could feel the wax of the seal.

"I? You give it into my care?"

"Why not? Are you not Arthur Shea, of Berwick's Regiment. Do you not see what will happen, Monsieur, when those Austrians go! The Englishmen will order me down: but they will never know you are here."

"Yes; there is a chance if I remain quiet," I admitted, "that I get away free. But what will become of you?"

"Of me?" indifferently. "Why nothing much, I think, Monsieur. It matters not, for they will find no paper; perchance I may be taken to their Duke of Cumberland. That will be no great harm. Voila! he will not burn me alive!"

"No; they say he is stern, but just. 'T is

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not Cumberland you have to fear, but these Guardsmen. I like neither of them overmuch — the one a bully, and the other a sneak. The plan is not to my liking!”

She leaned forward, and I felt the touch of her hand on my arm.

“I like you better for saying that,” she said softly, “but you must do as I say — it is for the king.”

“And I am to leave you here alone to the tender mercies of these devils?”

“Yes, Monsieur; there is no other way, and, besides, I do not count for so much. I am but a woman of France, and there is so little we can do. You must not think of me, Monsieur; you are a soldier, and will do your duty. Pledge me to deliver the dispatch.”

“To whom?”

“The king, or failing him, Saxe.”

There was a moment of hesitation, her eyes on my face, her hand grasping my sleeve. I was not afraid, although the case was desperate enough. To venture back into the

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French lines meant my arrest, trial, and probable conviction. Yet I could not refuse her — d'Enville's sister.

"You will go, Monsieur?"

"Yes," I answered, placing the paper in an inside pocket of my blouse. "I was thinking what you had better do."

Her face brightened.

"Why waste thought on me? I am not afraid, now that the paper is safe and if necessary I shall tell the Englishmen just who I am."

"And you believe that will protect you?"

"Will it not, Monsieur?"

"I wish I knew," I answered soberly, "for then I could determine my own duty. We are a rough lot in the army, Mademoiselle, when on campaign. You have met soldiers in Paris, but they are not the same in the camps, where women are playthings. I like not the manner of either of those fellows below. 'Tis my idea they will make sport of your claim. You are armed?"

"A small pistol."

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"Then have the explanation below while I can overhear. Not even for the king will I leave you alone in such hands."

"But, Monsieur, it is not I; it is the cause of France," she pleaded. "I have your pledge as a soldier."

"A pledge I shall keep to the uttermost, Mademoiselle d'Enville. It will cost more than you dream, but will be kept; yet if I am a soldier I lay claim also to being a gentleman — I cannot leave you unprotected in the claws of these wolves."

Her eyes were on mine thoughtfully, seeking to gauge my resolution.

"You insist I tell them my name and rank? that I demand release?"

"Yes, and an escort to Douai."

"You think it will be refused?"

"I do not know, Mademoiselle, but I suspicion the character of the English captain."

"And if he be obdurate?"

"I must be free to act in any way that will best serve you; I was a man before I was a soldier."

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I thought she was not going to answer she was silent so long. I could hear the faint sound of her breathing between the discord of the noises from below. They were drinking hard, and ever pounding the table with their glasses to summon Saunders to bring more, and talking with loosened tongues. She sat on the straw facing me, apparently unmindful of the din, her whole attention concentrated on my meaning. Suddenly she outstretched both hands.

"I — I thank you, Monsieur," she said brokenly. "I am not ungrateful: do not think that. But you will learn I can protect myself — the Englishman will not dare touch me." She paused, as though hesitating to ask the question. "But I cannot help wondering how does it happen you are here, Monsieur? Surely it will be miles to the French lines, and the roads patrolled. Were you upon a scout?"

I wet my lips, mustering courage for a falsehood. She would surely learn the truth sometime, but not now. Let it be told her

A MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING

by other lips, after I had paid the penalty. If I confessed the duel with her brother she would refuse me her trust, would turn from me in despair, and leave me helpless to assist. Better evasion than that, hard as I found it. I felt the perspiration bead my forehead, and my eyes wandered from her dimly revealed face to the opening in the floor. I could scarcely muster the words of explanation to my lips.

“Yes, Mademoiselle, I am on scout — ah! be quiet now! the Austrians are going.”

CHAPTER VI

THE MERCY OF THE CAPTAIN

THE bustle below, the scraping of chairs as the men arose from the table, were a relief to me. Action was to follow, and I was ever better at that than words — my mind clearing instantly, and every instinct awakening to new life. I felt the clasp of her hands tighten, and had no wish to loosen them. Let her trust me while she could; there would come a time when she might justly hate my memory. But now I felt the very touch of her increase my resolution. Without causing a sound in the loose straw I moved myself forward just far enough to gain glimpse of the scene beneath. They were already on their feet, departing as I thought, exhibiting many a sign of the liquor drank. Nor were Awlright and Dorn in much better condition than their guests. I could not see the lieutenant, but clearly heard his disagreeable voice uttering incoherent speeches of farewell.

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The captain stood just below us, gripping the table for support with one hand, his other arm flung about the neck of a red-faced Austrian. The one was talking English, the other German. At last the white uniform tore itself loose, and Awlright sank back into his chair, and kept repeating, "Shee you tomorrow; shee you tomorrow," over and over, until the last Austrian had staggered out through the open door. Then the two guardsmen sat staring silently at each other across the sloppy table.

Without were loud voices drunkenly giving orders, a sound of movement, and, soon after, the noise of departing horses. Someone shouted a derisive word, and, as though suddenly aroused, the English commander straightened up, and his semblance to drunken stupor departed instantly. He cast a glance upward toward where we crouched, then about the rough apartment. The sight of his face told me the man had drunk just enough to be in evil mood. Dorn's head had fallen forward and was pillowed on his arm. Awl-

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right looked at him sneeringly, shook him once, but received no response. Saunders was stirring up the fire, and the slight noise attracted the captain's attention.

"Saunders."

"Yes, sir." The soldier stood stiffly at attention.

"Help Lieutenant Dorn into the other room, and fix him a place to sleep on the floor. Then you may go."

"Yes, sir; for the night, sir?"

"Of course! What are you standing there like a fool for? Come! hurry up, and get out."

The man, a short, slender fellow, managed to make the befuddled lieutenant help himself, although he fell heavily twice before they disappeared through the rear door. Awl-right laughed, stroking his moustache, but making no offer to assist. Nor did he move when the trooper came back.

"Is that all, sir?"

"Yes, curse you!" savagely. "Shut the door after you, and tell Weber we march at

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sunrise. Do n't stand there staring at me. Do you think I 'm drunk? "

" No, sir."

" Never saw me drunk, did you, Saunders? No, and you never will, my man. I 'm not that kind of a fool."

The soldier closed the door and all was silent except the crackle of burning wood in the fire-place. Awlright remained motionless, his head bent forward so as to conceal his face. Two candles, half consumed, fluttered and smoked on the table, dimly illuminating the disordered apartment. The captain's belt and sword lay on the floor, and he touched them with some movement of the foot causing the metal to rattle. The slight noise aroused the man to reach down and pick them up. As though scarcely realizing what he did he buckled the belt about his waist, reached over for the nearly empty bottle, and drank again, smacking his lips with satisfaction. Then he looked up toward where we crouched beyond his view

" Come on down you — you — what's the

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name? Oh yes — Mademoiselle Valois," he said, endeavoring to make his voice confidential. "Come on down, an' — an' we'll talk the matter over. Come on — blasted Austrians all gone."

I felt her hand on mine, gripping tightly, as though the clasp was a question. The drunken condition of the man, his evident purpose in thus disposing of witnesses, gave me an instant of doubt. Yet there was no other way but for her to return below, and face him fairly. The man knew she was there, and if she refused to obey, he had only to call his men to drag her out by force. This would likely lead to my own discovery, and ruin everything. Besides, we could deal far more easily alone with this drunken brute than confronted by his whole command.

"Say! you girl up there," he cried again, a touch of anger in his voice at the delay in her appearing.

"Put down the ladder — Lord! you do n't need to be afraid of me!"

"Yes," I whispered. "You will have to

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take the chance: there is no other way. Here, I'll help you."

The ladder was light, and easily managed between us. As its end neared the floor, the impatient Englishman grasped the rungs, and stood there staring up at the black hole through which it protruded. The smile on his lips was unpleasant, as he exclaimed,

"Well, what are you waiting for now?"

"For you to step aside, Monsieur Captain," she answered in a voice without tremor. "I prefer to descend unaided."

He gave utterance to a muffled oath, yet stepped back against the table. Her hand pressed mine significantly.

"Good-by Monsieur," she whispered softly. "Do not fear for me; guard the dispatch." Then carefully grasping her skirts with one hand, she descended the creaking ladder until she stood securely on the floor, and turned her face toward him. I bent lower so that I might see clearly, confident the eyes of the man would not be turned upward. If the lady experienced any feeling of fear there

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was no manifestation of it in either face or manner. She stood erect, gazing straight at him, one hand still grasping the ladder, the light of the candle full upon her. Her attitude betokened neither doubt nor indignation; it was rather expressive of indifferent disdain. Awlright, his mouth half open, hesitated to utter the words of banter upon his lips, his mood changing from drunken insolence to anger. As she stood there silent, looking directly at him, he lost all control.

"Don't try your fine lady on me, you wench," he growled threateningly, "or I'll teach you a lesson. You're not the first woman I've had to tame; nor are you likely to be the last. Come over here."

"I prefer to remain where I am," she replied coldly, her fingers tightening their hold on the wood, but with no other sign of nervousness. "And I advise you to do likewise."

"Oh, ho! And so you threaten me, do you!" he laughed. "And of course, I am afraid. Why! you little fool, I could crush you with one hand — see!" and he extended

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a huge fist, opening and closing the fingers suggestively. "Suppose I took your neck like that; Bah! and who would know, or care?"

She made no movement; there was no change of expression, her eyes frankly meeting his.

"Captain Awlright," she said steadily, her voice clear. "It is useless for you to try frightening me. I am a woman, but not that kind. You have the strength, of course, but it will never serve you in my case."

"And why not?" insolently.

"Because," the very quietness of her tone bringing conviction. "If you attempt to lay hand on me I shall kill you — do you understand?"

"You little vixen! Do you think you can kill me with your eyes? I'm too old a bird to be caught so easily." He paused. "And besides, you were searched!"

"I was not."

"Then Dorn lied to me! By heaven, I believe you were; that you are working some game. I'll call your hand my fine lady!"

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“All you need do is to try me and see. Take another step, Monsieur, and I will show you. What is that? Your men? I would face them now more willingly than you alone; and as for that sneaking fox of a lieutenant, he can bark, but not bite. Now listen, Monsieur — I have spoken falsely to you once, but not now. If you touch me you die — I swear it. Hear what I say. You think me a defenseless woman, the obscure daughter of a Commissioner with whom you can do as you please. I told you that when you were sober and in command of your men.”

“I’m sober enough now.”

“Ay! you can stand and walk, but your brain is maddened with drink. I saw and heard, and I knew what you would attempt. And I made up my own mind how to meet you. I told you a false tale; I am not Henriette Valois, but a lady of France, a friend of Louis. If you touch me with insult there are those who will sheathe their swords in your body though it cost them their lives. That is the truth.”

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Had the man been sober he would have believed, her words were spoken so directly, with such conviction, as to have left no doubt. Even as it was the fellow hesitated, unable for a moment to decide what to say. Then the thought came into his muddled brain that this was all a trick, a bit of womanly wit. The idea tickled him, and he laughed half angrily.

"A fine story, but not to be believed," he insisted. "Nor am I afraid of all the French swords that would be drawn for you, my beauty. Pshaw! I've fronted them these twenty years. So let's have done with such talk. And you're not Henrietta Valois? Well, I never thought you was. Maybe you'll name yourself."

"I am Camille d'Enville."

"Oh ho! you aim high!" Prithee! but 't is some jump from where you started. Why not be the queen herself? — 't would be just as easy. So you are the beauty of Louis' court, hey? Well, I confess your looks might bear you out. Faith, 't will be a joke to tell of this.

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And how happens it you are here, Mademoiselle Camille d'Enville? The Court, I take it, is still at Paris."

"Louis is at Charleroi," she answered calmly, ignoring his rough jesting, "or was two days since. There are ladies of the court in camp with him, and it is not strange that I should join them."

"Alone, through the lines of the enemy?"

"Not alone; I traveled with escort, Monsieur. An accident separated us. Nor should I have been alone in the French camp, for my brother is on Saxe's staff."

"The young Chevalier d'Enville?"

She bowed gravely.

"The name then is not unknown to you?"

"Ay! I've been told of him before; we met once at Ostend — a wild young blade he was then, but he has shown some stern stuff since. I might not recall the lad had I not heard his name spoken again this same night."

"His name? how? in what connection?"

"Why, let me see. 'T was mayhap an hour before we ran against you and your friend,

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that we exchanged shots with a French scouting party. 'T was no affair of consequence, a bit of blind firing in the dark, neither party knowing the strength of the other. However, the Frenchmen wheeled their horses and rode off, leaving one man behind for dead. Our sergeant found him still living, a soldier of the Regiment of Normandy, and before he died, he said the squad was out in search after a fugitive who had killed an officer of the Regiment du Roi."

She stood with parted lips, and bloodless cheeks, listening, all pretense at indifference gone.

"The Regiment du Roi, Monsieur! And he named the officer?"

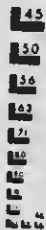
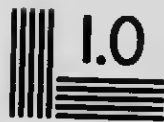
"Captain d'Enville."

There was silence, so deep and still I could hear the breathing of the two, and the crackling of the flames. Her head sank upon her hands where they grasped the support of the ladder. For the moment the girl had forgotten where she was, the very presence of the man. I was trembling from head to foot,



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every nerve throbbing, but my eye remained riveted on the face of Awlright. His expression told me he believed she but acted a part, was attempting to play out the character she had assumed.

“He was killed, Monsieur?” she questioned at last. “You are sure the soldier said he was killed?”

“So the sergeant reported. I did not see the fellow. It was a messroom fight over the cards, and d’Enville fell, run through by his opponent’s sword. ’Tis a story common enough, so I gave it small thought.”

“And the man who killed him? You heard his name also?”

Awlright paused in an attempt to remember.

“’Tis not in my memory now that the sergeant spoke his name — only that he was an officer of the Irish Brigade: oh, yes, the Regiment of Berwick.”

She gave utterance to a quick sob, but I had no thought at the moment except for the Englishman. There was no sympathy in his face, no faith in the truth of her emotion.

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Into his drunken brain only one conception found entrance — she was trying to make a fool out of him. Well, he was too wise a bird to be caught, and now was his time, when she was off her guard. I saw him move forward, cautiously, silently. Then he sprang, and caught her in his arms, one hand over her mouth, to shut off alarm, the other gripping her slender figure as in a vise. There was a struggle, short, useless, a gurgling sound as though she strangled, and then he flung her helplessly back against the table. The shock, the rough handling dislodged her pistol, which fell to the floor. Awlright kicked it aside contemptuously, grasping her wrists, and staring down into her upturned face.

“How now, my beauty!” he laughed half savagely. “Think you there are any French swords here now with which to frighten me? Come, I beseech a kiss, fair lady. No! then I take it, whether you will, or not.”

CHAPTER VII

I FIGHT THE CAPTAIN

IT WAS no time for hesitancy or questioning. Whatever the dispatch might contain which had been given me to guard, my paramount duty now was the defense of this woman, struggling just below, in the grip of that drunken brute. There was no hope of descending through that narrow opening unobserved, and yet I realized instantly the importance of swift, sure movement. There must be in our encounter no firing, no loud clash of steel if I hoped for escape. The encampment of guards was not far away; there might, indeed, be a sentinel posted just without the door, and the lieutenant lay in the rear room — stupefied by drink to be sure, yet possibly to be aroused by sounds of conflict. Awlright was a larger man than I, a big-boned fellow, hardened by long campaigning, yet I must meet him with bare hands.

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The thought no sooner swept through my mind, than I put it into execution. I was down the ladder, scarcely touching it, my feet firm on the floor, my hands gripping the man. He had barely time in which to whirl about and face me, flinging the girl heavily to the floor in the violence of movement. I knew she struck a chair as she fell, and lay motionless, yet even this was scarce more than an impression, for my whole attention was held by my adversary. I had the collar of his jacket twisted tight, my other hand gripping his wrist. For a single instant he gave back, held fast against the edge of the heavy table, struggling desperately, yet hardly realizing the nature of the attack. I had dropped down upon him as from the sky, and for the moment, he scarcely knew whether I was man, or beast. There was terror in his upturned face, as he stared at me, seeking to tear loose my hand grip at his throat. Then he grasped the truth, and rallied to a fight for life.

With a mad strength I had never before supposed any man possessed, he lifted himself,

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inch by inch, forcing me to yield way. His fingers seemed to fairly crush the bones of my arm as he jerked his throat free, and, with savage curse, struck at me. The blow missed me by the breadth of a hair, its violence causing him to stumble across the bench. As he fell I struck, and he went over onto the floor. Again I had him, but his strength was too much to withstand, and I was lifted bodily and forced back against the table. His face was battered by my blow, blood dripping into his eyes, but he realized now that he was contending with a man, and fear had given way to a fierce anger.

“Oh, ho! so the lass knew what she was talking about, hey!” he growled. “The baggage had a card up her sleeve. Now, you French montebank, I’ll teach you a lesson.”

He had me before I could rise, but my arm protected my throat, and the weight of us both caused the table to give way, and we went down together, clawing and struggling like two wild beasts. I know not what flung me on top; I think the grip I had on his hair,

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but I got a knee into his stomach, desperate enough then to be careless how I fought, and reached out for a pewter mug on the floor beside us. I got it none too soon, for he flung me sidewise, fairly wrenching my hand loose, but in that second I struck once. Had I been free, and able to lift my arm a foot higher, that would have been a death blow. As it was he fell back, still clutching me, and lay motionless. An instant I held the mug poised, scarcely realizing what had occurred, and then pulled myself free, and sat upright. The fellow breathed, but that was all; my blow had taken him fairly on the side of the head, and it was scarce likely he ever knew what hit him. I caught hold of the table and got to my feet, trembling still from the exertion of the struggle.

I expected the noise would have been heard, and my hand gripped my sword hilt as I stood over the big body, and waited, staring at the door. There was no sound of alarm, nothing to indicate an attempt at rescue. The candle on the table had been thrown to the

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floor and extinguished, but the other, over the fire-place, continued to burn. There was light enough for me to see from wall to wall, to discern the dark stain of blood on the floor. My first thought was for Dorn. Surely the overturned bench, the splintered chair must have created sufficient racket to have aroused him. But there was no sound from the inner room, and my eyes wandered from the closed door, and encountered those of the woman, where she rested on one knee.

I saw her clearly in that moment as I had not been permitted to before. She faced the sputtering candle, and her hair, disarranged by the struggle with Awlright, was thrust back, and hung unconfined to the floor. I could not describe if I would the charm that held me. 'T is something words will not express to another. It was not prettiness but beauty which confronted me, yet the look upon her face told me at once her distrust.

"Mademoiselle," I said, conscious of a strange sound to my voice. "I think the way is clear for us to go."

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"For you, Monsieur," and she attained her feet, ignoring my hand, "the way is clear, for I am a woman without strength to stop you. I can ask but one favor — give me back the paper."

"The paper! Why? Am I not now to be trusted with its delivery?"

My tone of surprise must have been noticed, for the expression of her eyes changed.

"Do you imply you ever meant to deliver it?" she asked swiftly. "Ever intended to ride into the French lines?"

"I gave you my word, Mademoiselle."

"To deceive me; to cause me to trust you. And you also claimed to be upon scout, an honorable soldier."

"And now you hold me unworthy?"

"How else can I hold you? You were above listening; you heard this man's tale. Are you not that Irish officer, Monsieur, who killed my brother? Is that not why you were hiding here, to escape those who would avenge him?"

I bent my head, struggling for courage to

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face her, and explain. 'T was no easy task, for she could not be made to know the man as I did — his arrogance of manner, his words of insult, his bullying methods, his disdain for all of lesser rank. Nor could I tell her how the quarrel arose, nor of those hard words he spoke which drew my blow. She was the man's sister, and might not understand. Nay! she would believe I lied; that I made up the tale to shield myself. Yet I could not leave her here alone; nor see her ride forth into the dark night unattended.

Not a league of those dull plains about us was safe by either night or day — the roads patrolled by soldiers to whom mercy was unknown; the fields and woods sheltering fugitive peasants capable in their misery of any crime. No more had I any purpose of denying to her that I was the man who had fought Charles d'Enville. I could not force myself to face her eyes of reproach, and lie. Deep in my heart arose a conviction that this was no woman who would ever forgive deceit. She would respect me far more if I

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dealt with her fairly, if I squarely confessed the whole truth.

"Well, Monsieur?"

"Yes, I am the man," I answered, striving to speak with restraint. "Yet you cannot justly blame me for not admitting this until it became necessary. I wished you to trust me, and I would rather the story was told you by others."

"You attempt no defense? You make no excuse?"

"No, Mademoiselle. My comrades will tell you how the affair occurred. All I shall say is that we fought fairly; it was point to point, his life or mine, and he the better swordsman. I do not even know that I killed him; only that my weapon slipped up his sword blade, and I thrust home. He fell, and those of my corps urged me to fly; forcing me from the room."

"But," she insisted, her eyes ever on my face, "if you were justified why was it necessary for you to seek refuge in flight? Dueling is not uncommon in the camp."

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“Your brother was my superior officer, a favorite of Marshall Saxe, and a noble of France. My only hope for justice lay in an appeal to the king.”

She was silent for a long moment, her head drooping. When she lifted her face to look at me again there was a mist of tears in the dark eyes. I stood motionless, scarcely daring to hope, yet fully decided as to my own course of action.

“And you insist that you would have carried the dispatches to Charleroi?”

“Yes, Mademoiselle.”

“The act would have endangered your life? led to your arrest?”

“Yes, Mademoiselle.”

“Then why would you dare to run such a risk — for France?”

“Partially, Mademoiselle; I am a soldier, and loyal to my cause, yet I cannot say that I would have made the sacrifice for France alone. There was another motive.”

“What?”

“A woman’s honor, and a woman’s trust.”

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A bit of red crept into her cheek, her hands clasping tightly.

"You do not say that merely to be gallant. You are not a courtier, Monsieur Shea. I do not in the least know why I should be so, but — but still I almost believe you. I — I — read the truth in your eyes." She hesitated as though doubting the propriety of saying more, but her better judgment conquered. "Perhaps, I should not say this, but we have met strangely, and are here together in the midst of peril. I do not know what these dispatches contain, yet we may have entrusted to us the fate of France. We must trust each other — not even the killing of my brother can justify my refusal to accept your aid now. You have fought for me —" she shuddered as she looked at Awlright — "and — saved me, Monsieur, from that beast. I must be grateful; besides —"

"What Mademoiselle?" Is it not best for me to know?"

"If my words are not misunderstood — yes. Yet they are not easy to speak. I loved

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my brother, Monsieur. He was ever kind to me, yet I know him to have been hard and overbearing to others. Perchance this affair was his fault, and not yours. You may have done no more than defend yourself. I will not condemn until I know."

I touched her hand, and, while there was no response, she made no attempt to repulse me.

"You have given me new heart," I said earnestly. "Now I know I can rely on you to the end, but I will not expect more, nor attempt to deceive. I have no defense Mademoiselle; I was hot of head, and ready enough to quarrel. Yet now, in this affair, I have your confidence?"

"Yes," she answered gravely. "I am going to trust you. See!" stepping back, and releasing her hand, "the Englishman moves! he is not dead!"

"It was a light blow I struck, but will give us time. Yet we have talked overlong already. Pick up your pistol, Mademoiselle; now we will have a look at the lieutenant."

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She followed me closely, as I crossed the room, and opened the door leading into the shed. It revealed a small apartment, used merely for purposes of cooking, unoccupied except for Dorn, who lay huddled against a side wall in drunken stupor. I bent over him, half believing he feigned sleep, yet the heavy regularity of his breathing convinced me otherwise. I turned away from the fellow in disgust, and cast a quick glance about. There was one window, closed by a wooden shutter, and a door. Surely this rear exit was more likely to be unguarded than the front entrance, for all sounds had evidenced that the troop of guards had made camp beside the road. I closed the interior door, plunging the rear room into darkness, and grasped my companion by the arm.

"Do you know how we are to escape?" she asked, in a whisper. "Have you a plan?"

"Hardly that; we must learn first how the land lies. Come, as I guide you."

I lifted the latch noiselessly, and peered cautiously out. The red gleam of a camp fire,

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not far off, but concealed by the side of the house, cast a revealing light over objects immediately at hand. Not far away could be distinguished the building in which I had concealed my horse; the door was to the right, and I knew a sentry would be there; indeed, I could imagine I made out the soldier's shadow as he approached the corner, turned sharply and disappeared again back into the gloom.

Convinced that I had located the camp, our path of escape must lie in the opposite direction, and yet it would be useless for us to flee on foot. Even although we possessed several hours yet of darkness, mounted men would easily track us down with the first brightening of dawn. And Awlright would not remain long unconscious; he would awaken actuated by a mad desire for revenge. Besides we had to fear the possibility of encountering bands of peasants, who roamed and terrorized the country between the military lines. They were everywhere, looting deserted homes, torturing and slaying the helpless, desperate

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from lack of food, and uncontrolled by any form of discipline. They were like venomous snakes ready to strike any victim, and the flat land offered no concealment, except within the shadow of small groves, likely to hide the very danger we had most reason to avoid. On foot we should be helplessly exposed to discovery and attack — our fate might never be known.

Memory told me there were other houses to the left — mere huts to be sure, thatched with straw. These might be occupied by soldiers, yet that was hardly probable, as the dirt within made the camp in the open more preferable. Both armies had long since learned that disease lurked in the filth of peasant cabins, and officers seldom permitted their men to make use of such dwellings. But, even if there were some sleeping behind those walls, the outside shadows would help conceal our movements. The girl could be left there safely, while I sought the horse herd, and discovered some means for procuring a suitable mount.

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I watched again closely for the shadow of the sentry, and the instant I felt convinced the fellow had turned his back, I urged her forward with a word of explanation. As silent as though we were specters we ventured out and along in the shade of the tavern wall, crossed a narrow open space, where there had once been a garden, and crouched breathless beside the black shadow of a hut. Neither spoke, every instinct alert to know whether our swift passage had been observed. I still retained my clasp upon her hand, and, in the deep silence, I could hear her subdued breathing, and feel the tightening grip of her fingers.

“You are not frightened, Mademoiselle?” I whispered, because I felt that I must speak.

“No; I — I think not. I hardly know, Monsieur. It is all strange to me, such adventures. I am not a soldier like you, accustomed to danger. They will follow us?”

“The moment an alarm is raised. Awl-right is not one to forgive that blow I dealt him. Yet I fear these English guards less than some other perils of the way.”

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I could scarcely perceive her outline, closely together as we crouched, and yet knew her face was turned toward me.

“What, Monsieur?”

“The hordes of peasants driven out of their villages to starve, and rob. The country between the lines swarms with vermin, and there is no crime at which many among them would hesitate. We must procure horses, or we shall be in their hands before we have traveled a league. I have seen some savage sights since I rode out of Charleroi.”

The thoughtless mention of the place brought back her memory, and, she drew away her hand, and held slightly aloof from me. I felt the swift action, and as instantly comprehended the cause.

CHAPTER VIII

IN DESPERATE STRAIT

IT WAS a dark night, the sky overcast, not a star visible. The camp fire gave feeble light, barely enough to enable me to distinguish dimly the outlines of near-by objects, yet yielding to these a grotesque and unusual appearance. And there were noises; some I could hear clearly and understand, but others were weird and far-off, mere echoes borne to us by the night wind. There were voices grumbling hoarsely beyond the tavern, the words indistinguishable, doubtless the idle conversation of the sleepy picket guard. A sentry out in the road called, and there followed a crunch of feet in the direction of the voice. An owl hooted, and, as if in answer, a dog wailed forth his misery far out beyond the village.

Somewhere away to the right, there was a steady tapping, as though someone hammered

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on wood, and once I thought I heard a shriek as of one in mortal agony. But the sound I listened for was the restless movement of horses, and at last, I located the herd, picketed across the road, to the front of the tavern. Now that I knew where to look, I could even distinguish the shadowy forms of those nearest me. There was some disturbance among them, and the men called by the vidette were endeavoring to quiet the startled animals, soothing them with speech, and refastening their halters. I made the fellows out dimly as they returned to the road, and paused an instant to exchange words with the man on guard, before tramping back to the comfort of the fire. The latter resumed his beat, thrashing one arm, as though the night air had chilled his blood. When he disappeared behind the end of the tavern my eyes concentrated themselves on the shadowy blotches representing horses. The troop animals were evidently bunched closely together, and to endeavor to detach even one from among them would alarm all the others. But there was a

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single animal—the captain's, no doubt—tethered a few rods away, munching grass at the end of a long rope. By creeping forward cautiously, I might succeed in leading this creature unobserved beyond sight of the sentry. I wanted two, but even one was far better than being afoot.

“Mademoiselle, you will wait here until I return,” I said, turning my head to glance at her.

“Alone, Monsieur?”

“Yes; there is nothing to fear if you remain quiet. Only do not change position, for I shall need to find you quickly. I am going to attempt cutting out a horse for our use—the one alone there to the left.”

She gazed in the direction I pointed, shading her eyes with one hand.

“There is no other way? Will you not be seen? Is that your horse, Monsieur?”

“There is a chance of success. No, my horse is in the hut yonder, and under guard. I imagine the animal yonder to be Captain Awlright's mount. You wish me well?”

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“Surely, Monsieur.”

I do not know why, but there was an indifference to the tone in which she answered me that hurt. I could not see her face, but I felt that her mind yet dwelt upon the fate of her brother. She accepted my aid because there was no other to be had; she was trying to be gracious and obedient but the former feeling of confidence, so much in evidence when we were together in the loft of the inn, had entirely vanished. She could not forget, nor would my heart blame her, although the knowledge of her doubt brought me a twinge of pain. However, I would do the best I could in her service — something she would know and understand.

“I thank you, Mademoiselle,” I replied courteously. “You can watch me from here.”

Either my words, or their manner of utterance, must have exhibited my feeling, for she touched my sleeve with an extended hand.

“Do not go feeling that I am ungrateful,” she insisted anxiously. “For, indeed, I am

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not. I realize how easy it would be for you to escape alone, and that this risk is assumed in service to me. If I spoke indifferently it was not at all because I fail to care for your safety."

"You may never know how your words hearten me. I will do my best; wait here and be ready."

I crept out into the open space, sinking my body into a slight depression which I discovered by chance, and advancing with extreme caution. I must have been out of view almost at once for, when I paused an instant, and glanced back, I could barely perceive the black smudge of the hut, with no evidence of the girl's presence. The night was somewhat lighter ahead, because of the glow of fire to the left, but the depression in which I hid circled in the opposite direction, and I followed it for better protection. This brought me to the road at a safe distance from the sentry, whom I could perceive now clearly, silhouetted against the flame. I waited until his back was turned, then slipped across the

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open road, and burrowed in the grass and weeds on the other side.

By this time I was well to the right of the solitary animal I was seeking to approach, and began to fear that if I crept forward I would only frighten the beast and create an alarm. A bold approach would be far better, and, with this end in view, I moved on hands and knees until the body of the horse was between me and the sentry. Then, safely sheltered, I stood up, waited until the man turned again on his beat and walked quietly forward. The horse turned his head, and smelt of me, but with no exhibition of fear, and concealed safely behind his shadow I made hasty examination of his condition and equipment. He was a long-limbed rangy animal, well able to carry Awlright's weight, and had on a saddle cloth, and bridle, although the bits were not in the mouth. A strong rope about the neck led away into the darkness, and was, apparently, a long bit of cord. I sawed this through strand by strand, with my knife blade; held tightly to the severed end,

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an peered across the animal's back, figuring out the safer course of action.

I cou'd see the camp fire now, and the men sleeping about it, with a little group huddled against the tavern walls out of the wind. The man on guard stopped in his tramp to exchange a word, and then paced slowly the distance to the opposite corner, past the closed door. The candle inside the house yet burned, for I could perceive a faint gleam of light through some unguarded chink, but all remained quiet within. The fellow came to the end of his beat; cast a careless glance out into the darkness, shifted his gun, and wheeled about. To all appearance he had no thought of danger — his trick at sentry a mere routine. My mind grasped instantly the chance offered by such carelessness. If there was no noise the probability was that he would never even miss the presence of this lone horse. Even if he did, he would most likely imagine the animal had wandered to the end of the picket rope, or laid down in the long grass. There was small chance he would investigate. Im-

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pressed by the truth of this, I stepped backward, the horse following to my grip on the rope. There was no noise, except a faint rustling of the grass underfoot, and I watched closely the movements of the guard. As he wheeled to retrace his beat we waited motionless, but the moment his back was turned we were off once more. This second attempt brought us well beyond his vision and down a slight declivity where the darkness was intense. I felt for passage foot by foot over uneven ground; then ventured to cross the road, and seek a way back into the village.

It was more by sense of touch than sight that I advanced, for among the huts the gloom of the night was like a black wall. Yet I found a projecting log, slipped the bit into the horse's mouth, and fastened the rein securely. To return to the point from which I started was not an easy journey, but the distant glare of the camp fire served as a guide, and afforded a sense of direction. Once near the hut where we had hidden it could not be mistaken, because of its close proximity to the

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tavern. Eager to make all possible haste, and confident the village was totally deserted, I ran forward, almost recklessly, to the spot where she had left her. It was unoccupied — Mademoiselle had disappeared. For a moment I could not realize the truth, searching with my hands in the darker shadows, and circling the entire hut, thinking she might have merely changed her position for concealment. But the stern fact of her absence was only too apparent. She had gone, left me without a word of explanation, broken her pledge and disappeared. But why had she done this? And where could she have fled?

I stood there stunned, bewildered, staring helplessly about, fearing every instant to hear sounds of alarm from the tavern; not knowing where to turn or search.

There was little doubt in my mind as to the reason for this act; she distrusted, feared me. Her fair words of confidence had been falsely spoken, and she had grasped eagerly the earliest opportunity to escape from my power. I was her brother's murderer! That

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one thought must have obscured all else in her mind, and left her desperate enough to dare any other danger rather than continue to companion with me. This conception, this knowledge, thus sharply brought home, cut me like a whip. The very pain with which I acknowledged the truth told me instantly the depth of my own feeling toward her. The girl had appealed to me strangely, her personality had touched me with an odd power. Perchance it was the way we met, her dependence, her seeming trust; yet the memory of her face, the sound of her voice haunted me as none other had ever done. And she preferred the night alone, the dread danger of the unknown, to my companionship. She had hidden herself in this foul village rather than wait my return. My presence was more hateful to her than all else.

But was it? Could there not be some other explanation? Surely it was not in her nature to lie, to pretend a faith she did not feel. I could not rid myself of the belief that she was true of heart, loyal and outspoken. Not

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once had she seemed to shrink from me except in that first moment. She had accepted my statement graciously and frankly; had even given me her hands in an impulse of gratitude. It was not in her nature to assume to be other than she was. I doubted if this lady could have acted the part so as to deceive anyone. Yet what explanation was possible? Could she have been discovered, and either borne, or enticed away? Not by violence surely, for in the still night I would have heard sounds of any struggle. The other thought was preposterous — for who could be here to entice? Why should she trust herself to any strange prowler?

I dare not attempt a light, yet I thrust open the door of the hut, and spoke her name. There was no answer, but I could not desist feeling about within from wall to wall, discovering not so much as a chair or table to relieve its barrenness. Driven by desperation I invaded two other of the miserable structures, my only reward the release of a half-starved dog, which snapped viciously at my

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legs, and then fled, with a howl of terror, into the night. The noise the brute made startled me into a realization of my own peril. This blind search was useless; it could lead to nothing, save through pure accident. However the lady had fled, whether alone, or in company, there was no hope of my finding her amid that darkness. Ah! and every moment of delay, every sound I made, might occasion alarm. Besides she had left with me those dispatches for the king. Their safe delivery into his hands at Charleroi would bring me pardon, perhaps reward. Every instinct bade me mount and ride away on the duty of a soldier. But to do so would mean her desertion to an unknown fate.

I stood there racked by doubt; my own selfish concerns urging me to escape, my aroused interest in the lady holding me irresolute. Suddenly the alarm burst; a hoarse voice called out some hasty order, and I heard the sound of running men. I could see figures, outlined dimly by the fire glow, hastening toward the horse herd. Realizing now that

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I no longer had a choice, I turned, and ran swiftly through the darkness toward where I had left the stolen horse. For the instant a desire to escape capture dominated my entire thought. I ran blindly, recklessly, down the narrow passage between the huts, conscious of the shouting of the guards, even recognizing the bellowing voice of Awlright amid the din. Then I stopped suddenly, dismayed and bewildered. I had come to the place where I had secured the animal, but there was no horse there.

CHAPTER IX

THE CASTLE OF ROISEL

VOICES shouting out orders into the night, the sound of tramping feet in every direction, were evidence the pursuit was on in earnest. Dazed as I was by the discovery that the horse had disappeared, I could not linger there, nor make search after the missing animal. I had been too long a soldier to hesitate, to stand idle waiting capture, while a possibility of escape remained. I realized fully what it would mean for me to fall alive into the hands of Awlright. The memory of the man gave wings to my feet, and I leaped recklessly forward into the darkness, gripping my sword in one hand, and running with all possible silence. My course took me between the line of houses, toward the woods at the rear of the village.

The direction was through, no choice of mine, but seemed the only route left unguarded; besides the row of low huts, deserted

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and unlighted, afforded shadow, and impeded pursuit. If some of the guard were mounted they would never venture into these crooked, narrow lanes, and I could run as swiftly as any of the soldiers afoot, spurred on as I was by a desire to preserve life. I fell twice, tripping over some unseen obstacles, and ran full tilt into a post, receiving a serious bruise, but was instantly up again, speeding desperately forward. I came forth into an open field well in advance of my pursuers, accepted the chance of being seen, dashed across the fifty feet of pasture, and plunged into the black fringe of woods.

Although I felt safe until the coming of daylight, I burrowed yet deeper into the covert, forcing passage through a dense undergrowth, until I emerged into what appeared to be a narrow glade devoid of brush. I sank exhausted, breathing heavily from exertion, and sought to locate my enemies by the sound of their voices as they called to each other. They were evidently searching the huts, for I could see far off through the screen of bushes

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and trees little flashes of fire, as of torches flaming in the air. Then a squad of horsemen rode along the edge of the wood, swearing grimly and shouting to the men on foot. The search of the village was being conducted carelessly and in haste, and I overheard scraps of conversation borne by the wind proving the guards believed we had already escaped on the stolen horse, and were well beyond reach. Only the fierce insistence of the maddened Awlright, hoping against hope, kept the men at their task, while Dorn, roused from his drunken stupor, led his mounted squad through the fields in wide circuit seeking to intercept us. As my labored breathing ceased, and I felt a return of strength to my limbs, a renewed confidence came, and I could think clearly.

Of one fact I was certain — Mademoiselle had assuredly escaped from the village; otherwise the search of the huts would have revealed her presence. The searching parties had found nothing. And she must have appropriated the horse, dodging in that direc-

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tion, while I was seeking her. But why? What purpose could she have had in thus running from me? It could not be the dispatch, for I still retained the paper in my possession — I could feel it crinkle in the pocket of my jacket. Nor could I conceive that it was distrust of my faith, a mere desire to escape my presence, which accounted for the action.

However possible this, indeed, might be, considering her discovery that I had been the cause of her brother's death, yet it did not seem reasonable that a woman of her high spirit would flee heedlessly into the night merely to escape my company for a few hours. All considerations of safety would urge a different course, and, if she sought revenge, it could be achieved much quicker by denouncing me to the first French picket. That would be the easiest way for her, and the surest; there was nothing to be gained by leaving me alone, or by a solitary ride through dangerous country.

Yet the more I thought the deeper became my perplexity. What could be the expla-

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nation of her sudden disappearance? I had seen no one, heard no one, about the village. My absence from her involved but a few minutes, nor had I gone any distance. Had there been the slightest struggle the sound would surely have reached my ears through the silence of night; while the conception that friends had come, with whom she had gone away quietly, was, to my mind, beyond all possibility. Well, if I could not penetrate the veil of mystery, I might feel assured that she was already well beyond pursuit of these English guardsmen. She was not hiding in the village, and so, without doubt, was safely in the saddle, riding straight for the French lines.

The searchers had now disappeared from sight, the collection of huts having been ransacked without result, and the voices of the men sounded farther away. The squad of horsemen had vanished in the darkness around the edge of the wood, and I was safe enough from discovery until daylight. Then, it was likely, a detail would be sent to scour

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the forest also and, if possible, discover some trail. I imagined there was already a tinge of gray along the eastern sky, and that I could perceive more clearly the objects about me. Surely the night must be nearly spent, and dawn close at hand. I drank at a stream running through the glade in which I hid; then crossed, and clambered up the opposite bank, moving slowly, and feeling passage through thick woods until I came to the summit of a low hill. Here trees had been felled, and I discovered the ruts of a road. Without in the least knowing where it led — indeed, having lost all sense of direction — I decided to follow it, as affording easier walking. I chose to turn to the left, as that course pointed away from the village, although I soon learned the road circled and turned like a great snake in the avoiding of obstacles. However, it kept to the forest, and I stumbled forward through the darkness for fully an hour, my limbs bruised by stumps, my face scratched by branches before the way suddenly emerged at the edge of the woods. By

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this time a sickly dawn was in the sky and I became aware that I was traveling southward.

Beyond this knowledge there was little to guide me. The landscape faintly revealed by the dim twilight had no familiar features. I stood under the tree shadows, listening and looking, puzzled to know where to proceed, my whole body aching from fatigue. So far as I could determine the mere trace of a road, overgrown by weeds, ran directly forward across a morass, the rank, coarse grass high on either side. Beyond this were hills, some of them rock-faced and precipitous, thinly fringed with trees, but appearing bare and desolate. Nowhere could I perceive any sign of human habitation — not even a squalid hut, or smoking chimney. There was no sound, no moving figure, nothing that bespoke life. The light of the dawn increased as I gazed, widening my vista, and revealing objects more definitely. Grotesque forms took shape, enabling me to determine their nature.

At last I realized that what I had originally mistaken for a mere rock-faced hill was in

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reality the ruins of an old castle. Far away as it was I could trace the walls, the barbette, the tower, and could even discern the black shadow where the gate had been. I stared at it fascinated, tracing its dimensions, half convinced my eyes played me a trick. Even in its ruins the place was impressive; even at that distance I recognized it as having been a great stronghold in its day, and ransacked my memory to recall the legends of the neighborhood.

Eglinton, Boisieux, Maubeuge — no! these were to the north and east, and were never of such dimensions. *Roisel!* God knows where the name came from, out of what cell of memory it leaped, who it was who had ever told me the story — yet I knew I had named the spot, and with the word came a swift flood of indistinct chronicles. *Roisel!* Ay! that was where some king of France had fled for refuge, and held court while terror swept the land. And they besieged him there, tunnelled the great walls, and killed him, fighting sword in hand, in the banquet hall.

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'T was said a thousand knights died that day. Why that would be three hundred years ago! I could not even remember the name of the king, or the cause of the quarrel. *Roisel!* The picture of those old days seemed to arise before me; there were gay times before the besiegers came — laughter and merriment, dancing, wine, and song. The stone flags of the court-yard rang to the tread of armed men in suits of mail; men-at-arms guarded the walls, and the great halls were scenes of riotous revelry. Cavalcades came and went amid jest and laughter, the prancing of gaily caparisoned steeds, the fluttering of pennons. The sun glinted on helmets, on breast-plates of steel, while snowy arms waved from the barred windows.

The scene thus presented was a vivid one, yet I could not remain there to reflect upon it, or evoke visions of the past. I must find shelter, some place in which to hide from Awl-right's searching parties, until darkness came again. These drear ruins of Roisel promised protection, if nothing more. Even if the

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guardsmen rode that way, there would be places amid that pile of masonry where I could hide from any possible discovery. The matter of food must take care of itself, yet it might be I would find frightened peasants cowering among the crumbling stones — inhabitants of the not distant village — who would share with me whatever they possessed to sustain life. They would be French, and my uniform, torn and disreputable as it was, was still recognizable. Not one among them would dare affront a *Royal Irlandais*, and the iron hand of Lord Clare. They might hate, but fear would prove the stronger. The Brigade ever paid its debts, and few in those parts had not learned the lesson.

At least I had no other choice, as to remain in the open would expose me to every danger. I crossed the cleared space quickly, stooping low at a run, but felt far safer when the tall, swamp grass concealed my movements from either side. The road was an old one, long disused, overgrown with weeds, and narrowed by encroaching vegetation. There had been

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a time however, when it must have been the scene of heavy traffic, for the ruts were deep, and horses' hoofs had left permanent imprints in the soil. But these were all ancient, not even a broken grass blade revealing any late passage. It was a crooked causeway, following a slight crest through the swamp land, and some of the distance appeared to be of artificial construction.

Once or twice I came to spots where the water had undermined the earth leaving barely a footpath, yet found no serious difficulty in pressing steadily forward. The road emerged at the opening of a ravine, and thence disappeared up a low hill to the right of the castle, becoming more indistinct as the ground grew rocky. A dim path circled the foot of the hill, apparently leading toward the gray walls, and, after a moment's hesitation I followed it.

It required but a few steps to place me in full view of the ancient pile, and I stood still in surprise, gazing curiously at the gray mass, the walls, overgrown with vegetation, looking

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desolate and grim in silent desertion. Evidently the place had been harried, but not destroyed; indeed it would have required years to have razed those walls of stone. Fire had done its work; neglect and frost had made breaches; growing trees had pried great stones asunder, and there were evidences in plenty of the destructive efforts of men. Yet the Castle of Roisel still stood there mighty and awe-inspiring even after the desertion of centuries, as grimly defiant as when it sheltered an army, and was the safeguard of a king.

My eyes traced the stupendous sweep of the walls, solid and unbroken, rising to the battlements above. Overtopping these were towers, with long embrasures through which hung creeping vines, vividly green against the gray stone. The wide entrance was open, the huge gates, once guarding it, destroyed, while the drawbridge had been burned, a bare remnant remaining to tell its fate. There was water in the moat, but of no great depth, and the path I followed led directly down the steep bank. Opposite was a low stone building,

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built on a rocky shelf, the castle wall forming its inner side, apparently designed as a guard house, but now overgrown with clinging vines. It promised shelter, however, and preparing myself for the adventure, I waded the moat, finding the water scarcely knee high, and clambered up to the surface of the rock. A tree, of considerable size, blocked the doorway, yet sufficient room remained for entrance, and I squeezed through into the semi-darkness of the interior.

It was an eerie place, shrouded in gloom by the growth of vegetation which shadowed every opening, and as bare as one's hand. There was a fireplace at one side, and a stone bench, but nothing else, if I except a huge rowel spur in one corner, the leather green with age, the steel a mass of rust. That alone was evidence of the time which had elapsed since the spot had been visited; and, as I pushed it into a corner with my feet, the rotten leather fell apart. Yet, but for dust, the place was clean, and safe. I could rest there without fear, and I rolled up my coat for a pillow,

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and lay down on the bench, which was broad, and slightly hollowed. The stone made a hard bed, but I was not unaccustomed to that, and very tired. There was no sound save the wind in the leaves, and I was not long in falling asleep.

CHAPTER X

WITHIN THE WALLS

SLEEP was deep and long for my fatigue had been extreme, and when I roused up at last, aching in body from my hard bed, the sun was setting. I heard no sound. I sat up with difficulty, and was at once conscious of hunger. Standing in the entrance to the building, sheltered from observation by the tree, I gazed out across the morass toward the wood which had protected my escape the previous night. The distance was too great for any certainty of identification but dark specks, possibly a squadron of horse, was moving north beside the edge of the forest. I watched carefully until assured it had passed beyond the road, perhaps on march for the camp of the allies at Cambrai. One thing was certain, whether seeking me or not, the force was not one of French troops. It was with relief I saw the last straggler disappear behind the

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green veil, and realized my place of refuge remained undiscovered.

But where should I turn, and how proceed? I must procure food, and I needed a horse, yet where to go in search of either was a problem. Nowhere had I seen the slightest sign of any inhabitants. Indeed, the entire surrounding country appeared deserted; if it had ever been occupied the people had been driven away, and were now hiding from observation. Fear of the allies, and distrust even of their own troops, had depopulated villages, and sent the peasants fleeing to the hills and woods for refuge. The possibility that some of these hapless refugees might have sought shelter amid the ruins of the castle, urged me forward along the edge of the moat to investigate more closely what was hidden behind those silent gray walls. I confess to a feeling of dread as I drew near the gaping entrance, the vastness and somber silence of the place affecting me strangely. It was as though I invaded a huge tomb, and I think I should have turned away, reluctant to explore further, con-

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vinced there was nothing amid those gloomy ruins to reward effort, had I not suddenly noticed the fresh prints of a horse in the dirt of the causeway.

This unexpected discovery startled me into new life. I stared at the hoofmarks, scarcely realizing their significance for a moment, yet now plainly seeing that the animal had evidently been ridden up the bank, and in through the unguarded entrance. They were easily traced, but, once within the courtyard, the hard paving stones permitted no impress, and the trail vanished utterly. Ordinarily this would not have seemed so strange, for some peasant farmer might have chosen the place in which to hide his horse from the foragers, but the imprints were of small hoofs, well shod, undoubtedly the mount of a cavalryman. And whoever it was, the rider had entered the grim portals, and was still within.

The outer walls were bare, and, in places, crumbling. Great stones, fallen from the top lay below, and others tottered in readiness to fall. Except for piles of debris these afforded

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no opportunity for concealment. There must once have been heavy oaken platforms the entire length — strong enough to mount culverins, and sustain soldiers prepared to resist assault — but these had long since disappeared, although here and there appeared the wreck of the framework rotten with age. The courtyard also was full of debris, the nature of which it was hard to distinguish — rocks and dirt, the rotting trunks of trees, flags upheaved by frost, and stones, fallen from the battlements. Shrubs grew between the loosened stones, and even trees of considerable size had found lodgment in the exposed soil.

I cannot fitly describe the drear desolation the place presented in the grim shadow of those half ruined walls shutting out the sunshine. The knowledge of what had once occurred here, the tragedy of battle and death, the scenes of carnage and despair witnessed by those gray stones, the silence brooding everywhere, affected me more than I can tell. Soldier though I was, accustomed to battle and bloodshed, I felt almost the timidity of a

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child in the dark. Not only the spectres of the past lurked in the shadows, but a present mystery also confronted me. Somewhere amid these ruins hid the rider of that horse, and, whether he prove enemy, or friend, I could not remain indifferent to his presence. My own necessities compelled me to seek him out; through friendship or force, I must obtain the use of the animal. Ay! and that was not all! The thought had come to me that this might even be the horse stolen from the village — Awlright's — and if so its recovery would reveal the mystery of the disappearance of Mademoiselle.

But in which direction should I turn in search? There was nothing to guide me, and I must conceal my own movements with utmost caution. Directly facing the gate arose the solid walls of the deserted and ruined castle, outwardly showing few signs of the wreck of centuries, although there were evidences aplenty of fire, and the great doors and shutters had disappeared. It was a massive pile, not high, except for the towers, but so strongly

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built from great blocks of stone as to defy destruction. These were stained by wind and weather; creeping vines festooned their front, and altogether it possessed a grim, menacing aspect, that left me dreading to explore its black interior. Stone steps, some of them crumbling, so as to leave but a narrow passage, led upward to the main entrance, beyond which my eyes could not penetrate. All about, from wall to wall of the battlements, were smaller stone structures, all of them gutted by fire. The vacant windows, and doorless entrances permitted me vague glimpses of interiors bare as the courtyard without. Some of the roofs had fallen, and the floors were piled high with debris.

A glance told me the nature and former use of most of these buildings. Here, close to the gate, was the ancient guardhouse, and on either side of the great castle itself stood the one-storied barracks, roofless now, and more completely wrecked than any of the other structures. I could see the interiors . om side to side, and the trees growing within. Be-

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yond these were the stables, almost entirely demolished, and what might have been the arsenal, a round building, windowless, and of solid stone, showing no sign of injury except for its yawning entrance.

Much had been destroyed, only the stone structures remained intact, survivors of assault, fire and rapine, although many a shapeless mound told where some less substantial structure had once stood. Surrounding all were the battlements, massive and unbroken. Whether or not, these were pierced behind the castle I could not judge, but I saw no opening except the one through which I had found entrance. Nor did I perceive anywhere a movement, or hear a sound, which told of any other presence. The silence, the desertion of the centuries, seemed all about me. I knew I was not alone; something within me sensed danger, and held me vigilant and cautious; and yet, except for those hoofprints, I would never have believed man had been there for a hundred years.

But I could not remain where I was crouch-

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ing behind the walls of the guardhouse. I took fresh hold on courage, and with teeth clinched stole forward to examine the portion of courtyard concealed from where I had formerly stood. This new view afforded me little satisfaction, for whatever buildings had originally occupied that vacancy, must have been of temporary construction, and had been destroyed. There were great piles of debris against the outer walls, concealing any possible gateway leading back into the hills. There was indeed a breach, but far too high up to offer any possibility of exit. No hoofprints were visible anywhere.

High above me arose the unbroken walls of the castle. It alone furnished sufficient concealment, and, although I could not comprehend how a horse might be led up those crumbling steps, I could perceive no other place where an animal might be safely stabled, and remain undiscovered. The other buildings were such utter ruins, and choked with debris, and filled with vegetable growth, as to be impassible. Besides, the theory that the animal

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had been compelled to mount the solid stone steps would alone account for the sudden disappearance of hoofprints. The dust and dirt of the courtyard, had a turn been made to either right or left, would surely have revealed a plain trail, impossible of concealment. I could plainly see where I had stepped; every imprint of my boot showing clear and distinct.

Convinced of this, and feeling confident I had not thus far been observed, I retraced my steps through the fringe of bushes growing close against the wall, and approaching the steps. There were only four or five, broad slabs of stone, somewhat worn and chipped, yet so massive as to have successfully defied all attempts at destruction. One, indeed, had been forced aside in some manner, yet enough held in position to permit comparatively easy passage. The wind had swept these bare of dust, so they betrayed no sign of recent use. I gazed up at the wide entrance, bare except for two huge iron hinges mortared into the wall, and through into the gloom beyond. All

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I could distinguish was a section of vaulted roof, and an immense timbered beam. With a hasty glance about, I mounted the steps, and slipped silently through the opening.

I found myself in a vast hall, stretching the full length of the building, with three narrow, but high windows at the opposite extremity. These were unshuttered, and the light thus admitted rendered the whole apartment visible. Yet there was little enough to see, except the bare flags composing the floor, the rounded arch of the ceiling, the nature of which I was unable wholly to determine, and the stone benches, some overturned and broken along the side-walls. Immense beams, evidently trunks of great trees, squared by the broad-axe, and ingeniously spliced with bands of copper, ran crosswise, close enough together so their combined shadow obscured the view above. Darkened by age, and not a few among them blackened and charred by fire, these added to the gloom of the place. The flames had eaten through one log, and the two charred ends hung dangling nearly to the floor. Of

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furnishing there was none; not even a suggestion as to how this vast hall was once decorated in those far off days when a king had held proud court between these walls.

No doubt vandal hands had borne away or destroyed the gorgeous tapestries, the couches of leather, the robes of rare skins, the glittering armor, with which once this space had been resplendent. Only the bare stones remained, sombre and gray, discolored in places by smoke, with here and there a green patch of moss clinging desperately to the surface. It was a gloomy, eerie place, so desolate as to chill the blood, silent as death, its vastness enhanced by the arched openings leading from either side — dark, mysterious corridors, stretching far away past regal apartments, long since deserted and voiceless, all their former occupants dead and gone.

I was young, ever bold enough in any venture, but here I faltered, staring about me in the semi-darkness, afraid to advance, awed by the silence, and in dread of the unknown. It was as though I must face specters of the past,

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not living flesh and blood, and I shrank from my own imagining, seeing everywhere grotesque shadows, and hearing sounds that thrilled me with horror. The wind moaned through the narrow window slits, and my quick breathing seemed to echo back from the bare walls. Tread softly as I might the noise of my boots on the stone floor was alarming, and the slight, unexpected jangle of my sword, as I turned suddenly, sent my heart throbbing. I know not of what I was afraid; but it seemed as though phantom hands clutched me, and dead lips laughed in my ears. My feet seemed like lead, and the blood in my veins almost ceased to circulate. Yet I retained sufficient manhood to swear at this momentary cowardness, and to force my body forward. It was as though I commanded another, and compelled obedience.

Why I chose the opening I did I may never know; perchance merely because I faced that way, or it might have been Fate leading me on with unseen hands. Yet I approached, and, leaning forward, peered fearfully along the

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darkened passage leading to the left. It was a long hallway, some ten feet in width, the roof beyond reach of my hand, the floor uneven, a flight of stone steps half-way between me and the further wall. Misty twilight left the whole scene ghostly, and obscured details, for the single narrow slit at the end of the passage was entirely overgrown with vines. I could perceive nothing to alarm, no occasion for fear, yet I trembled like a craven as I advanced, starting at every shadow.

CHAPTER XI

I RELEASED A PRISONER

COURAGE returned as I moved forward, encountering nothing unusual. There were chambers on either side; those to the right dark and unlighted, indeed scarcely more than cells — dismal holes in the wall, unventilated, each containing only a stone sleeping bench. To what original use such miserable quarters could have been dedicated it was difficult to imagine, unless occupied by servants or guards. Some formerly had doors, for an occasional hinge remained; huge remnants of iron, roughly hammered out by hand, proof of the massive oaken slabs they once were obliged to support. Not a fragment of the wood remained, although there were heaps of ashes.

Other entrances were arched, possibly at one time protected by heavy curtains, and in one of these cells, considerably larger than its fellows, near the foot of the steps, was a rude

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stone fireplace, though where the smoke found egress I could not determine. Beyond this I was startled to discover the skeleton of a man half upheld against the wall apparently in the very posture in which he had died. These investigations were carried on more by sense of touch than sight, the dim light affording but slight assistance. Yet I was too practiced a soldier to venture forward without assurance no enemy hid in the rear, for it was the living and not the dead whom I had cause to fear.

On the opposite side, however, there was more light, the apartments being spacious and of much greater interest, although equally barren of furnishing and decoration. Indeed I could expect nothing of such sort to remain, even in ragged remnant, for had it escaped the sack — the rapine of foul hands — the lapse of time alone would have left but rotting shreds, or heaps of dust. Yet I could perceive where tapestries had hung, and in one apartment found by chance the spring of a secret door that opened on a stair down

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which I stared into pitch darkness, imagining I could hear the faint trickle of water far below.

Beyond this room, the connection an arched doorway, was an apartment almost circular in form, with a stone basin in the center, surrounded by steps, no doubt a bath, although I could trace no entrance of water pipes. These rooms had high windows, protected without by rusted iron bars set solidly in the stone. The floors were stained and discolored. Beyond the bath the apartments were smaller; although spacious enough to be regal, if furnished, and hung with drapery, as I imagined they once were, the ceilings high, and the floors curiously inlaid with various colored stones. So far as I could perceive there had been no serious destruction by fire here, but the clipped walls exhibited signs of violence, while not a shred remained in evidence of old time occupants. The barrenness was depressing, the whole place seemed like a charnal house, filled with ghosts and hideous memories.

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I stood again in the dimly-lit hall at the foot of the flight of stairs, feeling the futility of further search in that direction and almost convinced the ruin was uninhabited. Not for years, so far as I could see, had even chance visitors invaded these silent rooms. Nowhere in the dust appeared the imprint of a foot, or the slightest evidence of human presence. The silence was profound, impressive. I could count my heart beats. Surely there was nothing more to seek, or discover, along that deserted passage — only similar bare, desolate rooms, and perchance other skeletons to yield thrills of horror. Yet I crept on up the stair that I might gain a glimpse of what was beyond, before turning back.

At first glance I perceived nothing other than what had greeted me below — then I stared wonderingly at an iron door — an iron door closed by an oaken bar. Surely the centuries had never left that untouched. Here was something modern, an evidence of living man! I slipped along the wall, alert once more, and cautious, until I could reach the

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wood with my hand. Until then I had almost distrusted my eyes, but with contact became convinced it had been freshly cut, and fitted to the sockets. I stood breathlessly listening, my ear close to the iron barrier. As I lived there was movement within — the faint scuffling of feet on the stone floor, the clearing of a dry throat, the rattle of a small chain. Something told me the prisoner within was a man, and I drew my sword so as not to be taken unawares, should he prove free and desperate. Then, noiselessly as possible, I lifted the stout wooden bar from the sockets, set it down against the wall, and swung open the heavy door.

What I beheld left me poised in the entrance, the point of my blade dropped, my eyes surveying the interior. There was sufficient light streaming in through the bars of a high, narrow slit in the wall, to enable me to perceive every detail at a glance: a great carved chair of oak, massive in its frame, but sadly hacked and splintered; a stone couch covered by a huge skin; a litter of straw in one

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corner, and a round block of wood, the butt of a log, on which rested a pewter platter containing food and a panikin of water. Standing facing me, at the full length of a chain, was a man with hair disheveled and uncombed, his beard black and straggling, his dress an undershirt and a pair of military trousers. I stared into his eyes, unable to speak, at first glance believing him insane. I saw his lips move helplessly, then the words came tremblingly in French:

“Monsieur! Oh, *Mon Dieu!* Monsieur!”

“Yes,” I answered swiftly, “you are a prisoner?”

“A week — a year — I know not; I have not the words to explain, Monsieur. You are a man? a Frenchman? a soldier?”

“Ay, of the Irish Brigade — and you?”

“Of the Regiment of Touraine.”

Our hands met, and he clung to mine convulsively, his eyes full of tears.

“The good God must have sent you, Monsieur,” he went on falteringly. “There was no hope — none! It is not that I am not

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brave, Monsieur, I, Emil Cassier. I was a captain in the campaign of Italy, and wear the medal. *Non! non!* but the chain! the bare wall! the 'Fire Devils'!

"The what!" and I started back from him in sudden horror. "What Fire Devils? Not the foul brood of La Porte?"

"If no, then the black villains lie. I have not seen their master, yet those who have tortured me are well worthy to serve him. And why not, Monsieur? Is not this the country from whence they first came — this St. Quentin?"

Ay, so it was, and I glanced about apprehensively, unable to control the sudden spasm of fear which swept over my body. This was something real, tangible; no phantoms of imagination those ruffians, but flesh and blood, yet with a reputation for devilish cruelty and malignant murder sufficient to make the blood run cold. They were the pitiless scourge of France, with branches everywhere, even in Paris, but originally coming forth from this province of St. Quentin. Who they were no

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one seemed to know — a lawless organization of peasants, led, no doubt, by some genius of crime for purposes of his own, desperate men, hesitating at no outrage, and waging ceaseless war against society and government with the firebrand as weapon. With them it had ever been night work — swift, merciless, revengeful.

There were stories floating about of torture, of prisoners held for ransom, of unmentionable cruelties perpetrated on helpless victims. And France, struggling against the allies, every man needed at the front, could accomplish little in the suppression of such banditti. A few had been captured — more by accident than otherwise — miserable creatures, ragged and half-starved, but the leaders remained free, and laughed at the impotency of the government. They ravaged whole districts, operating almost as if under some form of military discipline, leaving devastation and death behind, and the sky reddened by flame. Their chief, known only as La Porte, kept his identity concealed — indeed it was reported

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that not one of his followers had ever beheld his face. But that he was a veritable monster of cruelty, a genius at crime, was unquestioned. All this flashed across my mind instantly as I stared at Cassier, convinced already that he spoke the truth.

“How came you a prisoner to these devils?”

“I was guarding a wagon train, Monsieur, with twenty soldiers, and they ambuscaded us at night in the wood of Le Nouviou. It was all over like that,” and he snapped his fingers. “I saw not one of my men after the first fire, but I was wounded and fell. There were many who attacked us, maybe fifty, but only a few had guns.”

“What then?”

“They looted the wagons, and burned them. In the firelight I was found alive, and would have been killed but for the fellow, who seemed to command — a big giant of a man, with gray beard. He recognized me as an officer, and made his rabble hold me prisoner for ransom. Two nights I traveled on horse-

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back until we came here. There were with me only the graybeard and five others. I know not what became of the rest."

"You came on a horse then," I exclaimed. "It was his hoofprints I saw at the edge of the causeway."

"Where, Monsieur?"

"Before the gate: at the end of the draw-bridge."

He shook his head.

"No; I was dismounted beyond the walls, and driven here on foot. It was dark, and I could see little for they struck me if I came to a halt. Perhaps the hoofprints you found were left last night."

"What happened then?"

"I do not know, Monsieur. The man who brings me food will not speak a word. But I woke up once to hear voices outside. It was dark and still as a tomb, yet I heard a man swear, and a woman cry out as though hurt. That was all except a scuffle and a blow. I lay awake a long while, but there was no other sound."

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“No one passed along this corridor?”

“I think not, Monsieur; I should have heard if they had.”

“The words they spoke were French? the man swore in that tongue?”

“Yes, Monsieur.”

There was not so much as a doubt left in my mind as to whom the unfortunate woman was. Beyond question it must be Mademoiselle d'Enville who had fallen into the hands of these wretches. So assured was I of this fact that knowledge of her predicament, the probability that she was being held prisoner somewhere amid these ruins, served to banish all personal fear. I was there to serve and save her, and it counted but little what might happen to me, or this captain of Touraine. He must have read the change of purpose in my face.

“What is it, Monsieur? you have a plan to carry out, and at once?”

“No, not yet; only a purpose. Here, take this knife, and pry apart a link in your chain. Ay, it is good steel, and will stand the work.

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The food here — may I share it? I am nearly famished.”

He sank back onto the floor and fell to testing the links, barely glancing aside at me as he gave answer:

“Eat as you will; I want none of it.”

I watched him, as I ate hurriedly, my mind busy enough, and wondering what sort of a comrade he would prove when the test came. He was a tall, angular fellow, yet with strength enough, and a homely face, somewhat freckled, and oddly shaped at the mouth. But I liked his eyes, which were brown and full of audacity.

“When does your jailer visit you?” I asked.

“Once a day; those things were placed there an hour ago.”

“Then he will still be in the castle?”

He shrugged his shoulders, pressing hard on the blade.

“That I know not; he comes and goes with never a word. He is a negro, and may be dumb.”

I waited until he slipped the link apart, and

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let the end of the chain fall to the floor; then turned so I could look into his face.

“Now listen, Captain Cassier,” I said earnestly. “This is no longer merely a question as to whether we get safely out of the clutches of these wretches, or not. That is as it may be; but we must decide now whether we’re ready to do our duty as soldiers and gentlemen.”

His eyes widened in astonishment.

“You mean fight the fellows?”

“Ayl if necessary, although we’ll try first what can be accomplished by wit and good luck. We cannot leave a woman in their hands.”

“A peasant hussy — some plaything of the camps.”

“No, not if my guess be right — but a lady of quality, Mademoiselle d’Enville.”

“Who?”

“Camille d’Enville.”

He chuckled heartily, and the sound angered me.

“Oh, hol the king’s dainty lady! That

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means a pretty ransom for the scoundrels — a rare chance at Louis' private purse."

"Enough of that!" I interrupted sternly, already on my feet. "Now see here, Captain Cassier, pay heed to me, or you are likely to find this no laughing matter. 'T is true Mademoiselle is one of the ladies of the court, and has received favor of the king. Yet what of that? I have been at Paris and at court, but never to hear her name lightly spoken by any lip before. Nor am I of a mind to listen quietly now. If you seek quarrel there is no easier way, for to my thought the reputation of the lady is well worthy swordplay."

"I meant nothing, you young hot-head," he muttered, striving to control his own temper, which, I suspicion, was quick enough. "'T is only that rumor has it that Louis holds her in high esteem, and would pay well for her safety."

"Then we will serve Louis, and you may claim the reward of his gratitude. As for me to aid the lady will be enough. Let me tell you first my own story."

CHAPTER XII

IN THE BANQUET HALL

CAREFUL to make brief reference as to why I had fled from the French camp, I reviewed swiftly the details of the past night. He listened eagerly enough, asking a number of questions, and, at the end of the narrative, agreed with my conclusion that it would probably be Mademoiselle who was thus held prisoner. By this time, spurred possibly by the thought of the king's gratitude, the captain seemed as interested as myself in an attempt to discover her place of concealment. Yet he knew even less than I did of the ruined castle, or whether it was occupied by any considerable number of men. He had been visited only by the negro who refused to utter even a word, and seen no one but those miscreants who thrust him there.

However, we agreed upon the probability that a guard of some kind remained in

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the place, yet it was my belief that they used some more secret entrance than the widely-open front gate — some passage leading in through the hills at the rear, by means of which they could approach and depart unobserved. If this was the rendezvous of the gang — or even merely utilized as their prison, wherein safely to hold victims for ransom, the secret would be guarded well, and there must be more or less passing back and forth of both men and horses. Yet there was no beaten trail along the front causeway, no evidence in the courtyard that it was ever traversed. To be sure the ruffians had little to fear from the surrounding peasantry, doubtless allied with them, and in full sympathy with their guerilla tactics, but both contending armies were close at hand, patrolling the roads, and occupying the villages, and, whether French, or allies, would alike hold such banditti enemies.

We talked it over briefly enough, only to arrive at the decision to explore cautiously, and thus learn all that was possible, before

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planning any bolder action. Cassier was without arms, but retained my knife, thrusting it into his belt and expressing an eagerness to be off. Together we stepped out into the corridor, and silently closed the iron door behind us. Only a few rooms remained unexplored along that passage, yet I insisted on visiting all before retracing our steps to the main hall. We found them bare and unoccupied, although one had a barred door, and may at some time have contained a prisoner; indeed there were rags on the floor, bearing some semblance of a uniform, together with a straw litter. Convinced, however, that further search was useless, and discovering no cross passage, we cautiously retraced our steps back to the entrance. Now that I had a companion by my side, I no longer felt the dread silence of the place, or its desolate barrenness. Not ghosts, but blood-thirsty men, haunted these corridors, and my whole thought concentrated on the discovery of their presence. I heard Cassier's gasp of astonishment as he stared up at the vaulted ceiling, and sur-

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veyed the immensity of the hall which had so impressed me when I first entered.

"Saint Denis! 't is no small ruin this, my Irish friend," he whispered, awe-struck. "Know you aught of its history?"

"Only a bit; 't was a ruin three centuries ago, sacked by a mob of mutinous soldiery from Paris. The king sought refuge here, fleeing with his court and guards when the people rebelled. I have no memory of the cause, but 't is said he died like a gallant gentleman, sword in hand, in the big banquet hall above, and many a knight and lady died with him. Then was the castle given over to the axe and torch, and left a shell of gray stone."

"And 't is called what?"

"Roisel — but come, we cannot stand gaping here. Take that corridor yonder, while I explore this one. Be careful — this is no boy's play, although I have small expectation of finding those devils here."

He disappeared down the passage I pointed out, while I chose the one beyond, but, when

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we met again, neither had much to report, except that he had picked up the rusted head of an old battle-axe. There were two other narrow hallways we explored before we finally came to the great stairs. Beyond these, which we passed by, resolved first to make certain of the entire lower floor before venturing above, we arrived at what must have been the kitchens, and storerooms. The latter were black and windowless, but the former proved extensive enough, although gutted by fire, and exhibiting no evidence of late use. There were two vast fireplaces, but both chimneys were choked with dislodged stones, and the floors strewn with powdered ashes. In these were no imprint of feet, and we realized at a glance that no one had been there for years. The windows, protected by bars of iron, were lower than those at the front of the castle, and curiosity led me to cross over, and glance out into the courtyard below. At first I perceived nothing more interesting than the gray stone outer wall, broken down in places, and revealing the forest clad hills beyond. Shrubs

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clung to the crevices, and trees protruded above the summit, yielding to it all the picturesqueness of utter ruin.

Then my eyes focused on a single-storied building, the walls of stone, the roof thatched with straw, half-hidden under the wall shadow. It was the roof, evidently newly covered, which first riveted my attention, and I had stared at it for fully a minute, doubting my eyes, before I distinguished a group of men barely visible beyond the entrance. There was a growth of shrub concealing their presence, and had not one fellow risen to his feet and entered the door, I doubt if I would have observed their presence. I motioned with one hand for my companion to join me.

"See yonder," I said, gripping his shoulder, and pointing through the bars, "where the great breach is in the wall — a dozen men are there sitting about a fire."

We both looked in silence, and I could hear his quick breathing.

"Ay!" he said, at last, "those are the villains. There must be an opening in the wall

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to their back. Can you make aught of them. My eyes fail me at the distance."

"Little enough; only they are not soldiers. The fellow who went inside, however, wore a cavalry jacket — ah! there he is now — the leader likely."

I felt Cassier's hand grip my arm.

"'T is the same big brute who brought me here," he whispered. "Can you count the others?"

"Ten within sight, but there may be more behind the angle of the wall. Ay! there's another now — a messenger."

The newcomer, slender as a boy, dressed only in ragged shirt and trousers, and bare-headed, stood before the fellow in cavalry jacket, talking and gesticulating. The words were indistinguishable, indeed we could barely hear the sound of a voice. In response the giant said something briefly, and three men instantly left the group, and disappeared in company with the messenger. The leader remained, leaning carelessly in the doorway. I turned, and gazed into the face of Cassier.

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“And how do you figure it all out, Monsieur?” he asked doubtfully.

“In this way. The castle is used by these robbing villains as headquarters, where they hide from pursuit, and confine their prisoners. They are safe enough here, for, no doubt, the place has the reputation of being haunted, and no one living in the neighborhood will even venture near. That is why they need no guard at the front. 'T is likely they play ghost at times themselves, whenever they have cause to fear discovery. Below is the nucleus of the gang, and the others join them whenever needed — there are plenty ready to share in the spoil.”

“And what shall we do?”

“Complete our search, of course. Would you leave prisoners helpless in their hands? There must be others hidden away here somewhere — the woman, at least. 'T will be safer for us to wait until dark before departing, and you say the negro jailer makes but one visit a day.”

“'T is all — but, who knows?”

"We take the chance. These fellows below suspect nothing, and would seem to have other plans on foot. If there be no guard here 't is scarcely probable any are posted on the floor above. We are free to explore, with small peril. I would make use of what daylight remains."

I glanced forth again, paying small heed to what he muttered in reply, assured in my own mind that the man would remain beside me. The big leader had disappeared within, no doubt to concoct some fresh villainy, but the group of men still rested idly about the fire, their very attitudes evidencing unconcern. There was no reason why we should remain watching them.

Cassier followed me back into the corridor, to the foot of the stairs without protest. No doubt he read determination in my face, and had no wish to be left alone. But whatever might have been his motive, no mere curiosity inspired me to further exploration. I expected to find above the same barren solitude revealed by those cell-like rooms below

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— gray stone walls, fire blackened, the floors covered with the undisturbed dust of centuries.

There was scarcely a hope left in my mind that Mademoiselle — if, indeed, she proved the woman whose voice Cassier had heard — would be imprisoned anywhere within the building. If she was captive to these ruffians it was far more likely that she was under guard yonder; yet I must know, know positively; never would I be content to achieve my own escape without first assuring myself as to her presence, and the possibility of again serving her. To do less would be a stain on honor, even had I felt no personal interest in the lady herself. And I did feel such interest. I made no attempt to analyze my feeling, to even reflect upon what it might mean, yet I was fully conscious that already she was more to me than any other woman had ever been. Her face remained in my memory, and the very thought of her quickened the beat of my pulse. Her gratitude, a word of praise from her lips, a smile of welcome in her dark eyes, would be sufficient reward to me for any

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sacrifice, and, not even at the cost of my life would I desert her now to the violence of such wretches. Cassier could do as he pleased, but I meant to search every inch of these ruins — yes, and remain here until I learned the truth.

The stairs were composed of broad stone flags, somewhat hollowed by the passage of mailed feet, but still staunch and sound enough to upbear an army. Whatever handrail there might have been originally had long since disappeared, yet the width of the steps rendered the passage safe enough, in spite of the dim light, and the appearance of darkness above. I led the way, grasping the scabbard of my sword to keep it from striking against the stone, aware that the captain followed. At the top we found ourselves plunged into semi-darkness, through which we could distinguish our immediate surroundings only with difficulty. The floor was of oaken timber, blackened by age, yet exhibiting no especial evidence of decay. It had even resisted fire, although there were places where the ancient flames had burned deep before dying out, while

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heaps of ashes proved clearly how all former furnishings had been completely destroyed. It was a scene of utter ruin, yet I stared about fascinated. What light there was came from above, but the openings, which no doubt had originally flooded that interior with sunshine, were now almost completely covered over with vines, through which only an occasional ray penetrated.

I groped my way forward from the stair-head, fearful of the burnt spots in the floor, and hampered by the piles of debris. At first, in the dimness of light, I was obliged to touch objects with my hand, before fully determining their nature, but as I thus slowly advanced, my eyes better accustomed themselves to the gloom, and I could perceive more of our surroundings. We were in a vast hall — larger even than that below, but with lower ceiling — a huge apartment, appearing almost monstrous indeed in its bare nakedness, the only relief being indestructible stone benches ranged along the side walls, and an immense fireplace at the farther end. Opposite this,

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and close by the stair-head, was a stone dais, three steps high, projecting slightly from out an arch in the wall. Several openings, arched over by massive oak timbers, yawned to right and left, leading to contiguous rooms, but the center of the vast apartment was bare.

Beyond question this had been the main banquet hall. Here, driven up the wide stairs, all that remained of that ancient garrison had gathered gallantly in defense of their king. Here they had died, fighting valiantly to the last, and, on those dais steps, their leader fell, his blood staining the stone. I could seem to hear the crash of steel, the shouts of hate and defiance, the shrieks of fleeing women, the cries for mercy, with which those walls had once echoed. I could see once more the faces agonized with fright, stern with determination, hideous with ferocity—the mob of blood-crazed assailants rushing about in search of more victims, dragging the tapestry from the walls, and endeavoring to destroy by fire whatever could not be hacked with their steel.

Half terrorized myself at this picture of ra-

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pine, feeling almost convinced that ghosts of that old day must still haunt the gloomy shadows, I found a passage across the blackened floor, and around the stone step of the dais. Then I stopped, clutching at Cassier, and staring down at a dead body.

CHAPTER XIII

THE SECRET STAIRS

THE man lay on his face, one arm outstretched over the first step, the other beneath his body. Beyond him rested the broken blade of a sword, and his head had been crushed in as though struck by an iron bar. The discovery for the instant left me speechless; it seemed something born of the imagination a phantom of the mind. Then Cassier exclaimed:

“Saint Helene! 'T is the uniform of the Regiment de Roi! *Mon Dieu!* how came the man here?”

The words aroused me to reality, and I stopped, and turned the dead man's face up to the dim light. He was a man of middle age, of dark, grimy complexion, a prominent nose which had been broken, and deeply set eyes. A scraggly beard covered his cheeks, and his hair was matted and coarse. The corpse was

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indeed clothed in the uniform of the Regiment du Roi — an officer's uniform — but the wearer had been no officer, no soldier even. His face, his unkempt appearance, were sufficient evidence to convince me of that at first glance. Then what was he doing here, dead, garbed in that blue and gold finery? From what hapless victim had he stripped these clothes? and how had fate finally overtaken him? My eyes met those of Cassier.

"'T is no soldier that!" he said, pointing downward.

"No;" I answered shortly. "His is the face of a villain if ever I saw one, Monsieur. But how came he here, togged out in an officer's suit? and who dealt him the death blow? Saint Denis! there must be others besides us skulking in these ruins."

"Ay!" and he bent down to touch the fellow gingerly, "and it happened not long since — the blood has not even hardened; see."

It was true as he said, but there was nothing visible about us in evidence of human presence. Dim as the light showed, I could still

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see the full length of the great hall, and there was nothing there to cast even shadows — the silence so profound that even our whispers came back in echo. Yet assured as I was that we were alone, and unobserved; that the slayer had already fled, there lingered in my mind the impression that we were watched — that somewhere along those blank, bare walls an eye followed our every movement. It was an eerie feeling, which I struggled vainly to throw off, angry at my weakness, and watchful as a lynx. Cassier also stood erect staring about him into the dim, distant corners, as though dreading the same apparition, one hand gripping the hilt of his knife.

Confident of his watchfulness, I bent down, unbuttoned the uniform jacket, and ran a hand into the inner pocket, bringing forth a few scraps of paper and a letter. The latter was sealed and addressed simply "The Duke de Saule, Rue de Vie, Paris." I looked at it, turning it over in my fingers, surprised, but unable to comprehend. Saule! No man at the court had greater influence with the king,

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and no man, I was convinced, was a greater villain. Ayl and he was the same one to whom his Majesty wished once to give Mademoiselle d'Enville. I recalled her swift words of scorn, the gesture with which she had dismissed him. How came the letter here in that jacket pocket unopened? Was it a secret message dispatched by some officer who had been captured and robbed? If so, why did the seal remain unbroken? Had the man been struck down before he could escape? Then how could I account for the letter being left in his possession? Who was it from? For what purpose had it been written? Did it have any bearing on the fate of the lady?

I hesitated to tear it open, for, although the outer wrapping was unmarked by any stamp of royalty, it nevertheless might be a king's message. In perplexity I turned to examine the other papers, but they helped me not at all — one was a list of names, with different sums of money credited to each; another was a consignment of wine to a mess sergeant, while the third contained a list of names of

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various officers, some of whom I knew, and, next to the last, I read with astonishment my own, and after it was affixed a red cross. Three others in the list were similarly distinguished. Clearly there was no help here, only a deeper mystery. For what purpose was that list prepared? Why were those three names checked in red? Who was the officer to whom this uniform originally belonged? He must have known me and had some design upon me. If I only dared to open the sealed envelope its contents might reveal the whole tale. Yet to do so involved a danger greater than that which now confronted us. If, as I suspected, it was indeed a secret message from Louis to de Saule, no meddler could ever hope for pardon. My position was already too precarious to assume such desperate risk. The king's anger was more to be feared than any peril from his enemies. I thrust the missive into my own pocket, and arose to my feet. Cassier was watching my movements, his guard relaxed, and, as I came upright, my eyes glanced beyond him toward an arch in the

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long wall. As I did so a shadow — so dim I almost doubted its reality — glided across the recess, and disappeared. What it was — man, or beast, or merely flickering light, I could not tell; yet something moved. With the instant my every nerve was alert, and my fingers gripped Cassier.

“Stand there at the stair head,” I whispered fiercely, “and watch. There is movement yonder.”

I sprang forward, drawing my sword, intent now only on the one object — that of overhauling the fugitive. The recess revealed another room, maybe a third as large as the apartment in which we had found the body. The walls retained traces of decoration, and broken stone images strewed the floor. Possibly at one time it had been lined with sculptured figures, and was a scene of splendor, but now the ruin was complete. I did not pause to examine, my eyes perceiving only a narrow opening in the further wall, where a single slab of stone swung outward. Reaching this I paused, staring up a flight of stone

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stairs ending in utter darkness. There was no sound, no sign of guidance. Yet if that was a man I pursued he must have vanished here, for the room contained no other exit. The walls were of unbroken stone, except for one high-grated window. And the stairs! where did they lead? Either to the tower, or the roof probably, but, if so, the passage upward must be obstructed, for it was impenetrable with darkness. I could only grope my way, exposed to any attack from an enemy concealed above. And, whoever he was, he was a man to be feared — that fellow with crushed skull proved this — a man desperate enough for any deed of violence. Yet there was a chance he had no suspicion that his stealthy movements had been perceived; he might not suspect that he was followed. I was reckless enough to grasp this hope, for to call Cassier would be to create alarm, and leave the great stairway unguarded. I must chance it alone, or else let the fellow go.

With every caution I crept forward, step by step, until almost swallowed by darkness.

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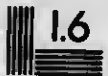
The stairs were narrow and spiral, shut in by solid walls of stone, and I could feel small niches here and there in which candles might have once been set for guidance. In one I touched a bit of metal shaped like a cross, possibly the hilt of a broadsword. I had to trust my groping hand for guidance, but felt no fear of other danger than that which I might encounter in human form. I counted the steps, finding thirty before my eyes perceived a gleam of light still far above me. It was the slightest ray, cutting through the dense pall, seemingly no more than a reflection, yet, to my eyes, trained by darkness, revealed what was before me. From that point the steps led straight up to a platform, the opening of which was closed.

The single bar of light streamed through a slight aperture between two stones, scarce wider than a finger. Yet there was nothing to obstruct my passage; no evidence that my presence was suspected, and I crept on, with fresh courage, until I touched the obstruction above. It was a thin stone, fitted



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into grooves cut in the solid rock, and I lifted one end without much difficulty, or the slightest noise. I stood crouched on the second step, the slab of rock tilted just enough to permit my eyes to peer through the crack, and sought to learn something of the situation above. There was ample light, yet I could distinguish little but a rounded segment of wall, which, however, convinced me the opening led into the tower. No shadow obscured the sunlight, and no sound of movement reached my ears. I waited, listening intently, and then, convinced no one could be near, pressed back the stone out of the way, and lifted my head through the opening.

There was revealed the interior of a round turret, with narrow window slits, permitting a view outward, and a wider opening leading to the roof, which was protected by a wall of stone. The place was empty but for a dismounted culverin, red with rust, and, as I drew myself upright, my eyes gazed afar off through one of the windows, across meadow and woods to the distant horizon. It was a

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magnificent view, yet nowhere revealing evidence of habitation. Beautiful, and fertile as the country appeared, it had been swept bare by war, its houses burned, its fields laid waste. Here and there I could perceive signs of what had been — gaunt outlines of chimneys, smokeless and in ruins, with bare and blackened spots where homes had stood. The forest hid the village, but the memory of its desolation only served to render the melancholy picture more complete.

Far away, ten miles, at least, a considerable column of troops moved slowly along a ribbon-like road, through a rising cloud of dust. There was nothing else to attract the eye, and the sun sinking into the west already cast long shadows. All this I saw in a glance, my real interest as quickly consolidating on the purpose which brought me there. Someone had preceded me up those stairs: I had been following no vision, no imaginary figure — there, in the dust of the floor were footprints, but they were those of a woman, or a child. Could the fugitive be Mademoiselle! My heart

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leaped eagerly at the thought; for the instant I did not doubt, but rushed recklessly to the door.

There I stopped as though shot, shrinking back behind the cover of the stone, and gazing cautiously forth on a strange, bizarre figure, which at first glimpse I could in no way associate with anything human. The creature had climbed into a crevice of the parapet, and was leaning over, gazing down into the courtyard below. All I could see was a humped distorted form, oddly attired in sheepskin, a great bushy mat of hair crowning the head, a long arm, all out of proportion, extended along the stone, and a hairy hand gripping the rock. It might have been an ape, dressed up by human hands, for the figure was dwarfed, misshapen, even hideous in its deformity. Then the apparition straightened up, and turned partly around, revealing the face. I crouched back in my covert, yet continued to stare, my nerves steady, a dim recollection becoming clearer to memory. It was the face of a man of sixty, distorted by

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ugliness and creased with age, a big face, sufficient for a giant, the mouth a wide gash, the eyes like wells, the nose flattened as if by a blow. And I knew the loathsome monster, recognizing him in a flash, although I had only once before, and that for a brief moment, gazed curiously on his grotesque ugliness. He was the dwarf Gospele, with whom de Saule had horrified Paris.

CHAPTER XIV

THE DWARF'S STORY

THERE could be no mistake — no two such monstrosities lived in the world. I had seen the imp, gaily enough decked out then, in the very anteroom of the king at Versailles, strutting pompously back and forth, indignant at the slight delay in his reception, and railing at the guard who barred his passage. 'T was but for a moment, and when the curtains were drawn aside, this devil's brat, flinging back some foul word of contempt across his misshapen shoulder, passed first of all into the presence of Louis. I recalled asking who he was, shocked at the fellow's air of impudence, and hideousness, and, with shrug of shoulder which told more than words, the whispered reply:

“ De Saule's private messenger, Monsieur; a spawn of hell! picked up in Spain, they say; yet what would you? Is not the duke the king's first friend? ”

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And now the dwarf was here, hiding to all appearances; on some foul mission for his villainous master, no doubt; but what? What possible interest could de Saule have in this ruined castle of Roisel? this rendezvous of brigands? these malcontents striving to rob France and conspiring against her king? Could he be hand in glove with such villains, playing a double game, selling his honor for the spoils of crime? *Parbleu!* I would not put it past the fellow from all I had ever heard of him. Yet it was more like the dwarf would be a prisoner, drawn into the thieves' net by some raid, and eager as I to find a safe way out of the place.

Well, there were means whereby I could learn the truth shortly. I had naught to fear from the imp, and the roof, except for him alone, was empty. A word would unlock his tongue, and, if not, my fingers on his ugly throat would win response. Ay! and I had the will to use them. Not even yet had I forgiven the look of contempt, the sneer of triumph, with which he had vanished into

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Louis' chamber, leaving us to wait and sulk behind.

I stepped forward, and he saw me, sliding down from his perch, and uttering a snarl like that of a beast. His was a fine rage, not un-mixed with terror, his shifting eyes seeking some scheme of escape even as he fronted me in pretense at defiance.

"Ho — another!" he snapped. "What have we then — a nest of hornets?" and I saw a short iron bar gripped in his hairy hand. "Ah, ha! a *Royal Irlandais*, on my life. Well, know you who I am, sirrah? Do you dare threaten me?"

"Yes, I know," I said coolly enough, amused at his effrontery. "No one would ever forget your ugly face, and I have seen it before.

"And where, Monsieur?"

"At Versailles, Cospele — but now it is my time to question, and yours to answer. What are you —"

He darted forward across the roof, perhaps seeking some means of escape at the further

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corner. Yet my thought was that his purpose might be to alarm the guard below, and my hand gripped his sheep-skin robe before he had taken a dozen steps. The little devil fought like a rat, striking at me with his iron bar, until I wrenched it from his hand. He possessed strength, and a malignant hate which made him dangerous, yet it was no trick to master him, and I forced him to his knees, the coward in him whining for mercy. I held him to his feet, shaking the fellow until his teeth rattled.

"Now will you answer me?" I asked, roughly enough, frowning down into his eyes. "What do you here, Gospele? on some mission for your master? Come, speak, or I'll close on that throat of yours like a tiger cat. Are you a prisoner? or in league with these villains?"

His eyes, searching my face, had in their green depths a look of cunning as he hurriedly cried:

"I am prisoner, Monsieur."

"Ah, indeed! Yet you sought to reach the

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guard with an alarm — you feared them less than me?”

“I was frightened, Monsieur; I knew not who you might be, and you came at me fiercely.”

“*Pouf!* would you expect me to be gentle as a lamb? You deal with a soldier, Gospele; so give heed to your answers. Is de Saule here?”

“No.”

I know not why, but some swift instinct told me he lied, and my hand twisted in his garment.

“Not here! Absurd! I never heard of your being far apart with any deviltry afoot. How came you in this nest of villains?”

He whined it out, writhing under the pressure of my fingers, cursing in strange Spanish oaths, and making so much detail, as to convince me the tale was all false. I listened to the end of his story of fancy, glaring into his face, and seeking somewhere to detect a gleam of truth. Yet I cared so little for what the fellow said that I retain now but vague

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recollection of it. I knew he lied, hoping to escape my grip; but his words only served to strengthen my purpose. By his story it was some message of de Saule to the king which had brought him into these parts, and made him prisoner to this band of cut-throats. Ah! he cursed them well, dwelling upon his sufferings, and seeking thus to awaken my sympathy, yet when he finally paused for breath, I only loathed him the more for his foul mouth.

"Enough of that," I said at last shortly. "'T will serve you best, Gospele, to answer me briefly. Who is the woman these villains hold?"

"The cook, you mean?"

"No; not the cook; I doubt if they have one, and, mark you! I'll have the whole truth, you imp! The woman brought here last night on horseback — who was she?"

"How should I know, Monsieur — I, a prisoner?"

"Well, you do know, and your lies serve you little. Let your fairy tales go, and answer

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me yes or no — was the lady Mademoiselle d'Enville?"

He could not answer, his great mouth open gasping for breath, his eyes full of terror. But there was no need; his very fright was evidence my guess was correct. I shook him as a terrier would a rat, determined now to learn the whole truth so far as he knew it. The fellow was an arrant coward, and would never risk his own precious skin to protect another.

"Ah! I am on the right trail, I see. Now, Gospele, listen — that is a pistol pressing hard into your ribs, with powder and ball behind it. One more lie and I kill you like the dog you are. Tell me now, where is the lady?"

He rolled his eyes up to mine, but discovered there no expression of mercy.

"You would kill me, Monsieur?"

"Ay, with great pleasure; come, speak."

"But if I do not know —"

"You do know; so have done with it. See here, Gospele, I am not alone: The great staircase below is under guard. There is only

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one way in which you can save your life. You have more reason to fear me than de Saule, and I speak you now for the last time. Another excuse means the bullet—where is she?”

He gulped, barely able to articulate, but the words came.

“They are there below—they are both safe, Monsieur; I swear it.”

“They?” I stammered. “What do you mean, you little viper? Is she with de Saule?”

Quick, secretive as he was, I detected the sly menace of his eyes; the sudden hope he felt that even then a lie might possibly save him. I did not know then as much as he had supposed.

“I—I did not mean that, Monsieur,” he began, desperately. “You frighten me so I know not what I say. ’T is the lady alone—”

“All right! If you will not answer me I have no more use for you. Now I am going to kill you, Gospele—”

“*Mon Dieu*, no! I will tell you!” he shrieked. “What care I if you know?”

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"Then say quick — is the other de Saule?"

"No, Monsieur."

"Who then?"

"The lady's brother, Chevalier d'Enville."

For an instant I was fairly stricker dumb, staring down into the ugly upturned face. I could not believe, yet what purpose could it serve for him to say that.

"You lie again, you dog — the man is dead."

"Dead!" he echoed, his face fairly ghastly as he interpreted the expression of my eyes.

"No, no, Monsieur, he is not. I saw him within the hour. I — I gave him food." His voice broke, as he realized the mistake of such a confession. "They made me do it, and we conversed. He is not dead, Monsieur."

I was not even half convinced, but by now had control of myself, and felt it better to humor the fellow.

"Then it was his uniform on that dead ruffian below. How came that villain killed?"

He looked at me, his eyes void of expression.

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"Where was that? I saw nothing."

"In the big hall at the head of the stairs, lying before the dais. You were there, for I saw your shadow and followed. Do you mean to say you did not see us?"

"I saw two men, Monsieur, but they were both alive, and on their feet. I could not tell in the light who they were, but I did not wish anyone to see me, so I slipped away, and came up here. There was no dead man to be seen anywhere."

"Well there was one, a black-bearded, dirty-faced fellow, togged out in the uniform of an officer of the Regiment du Roi. He had been struck from behind, and his skull crushed. 'T was such a blow as you could give with that bar in your hand. And you know naught of it?"

He shook his head doggedly.

"Nor who he might be?"

"Black-bearded, and dirty-faced you say. Small doubt the fellow was the jailer, Deslins. *Sacre!* I am not sorry, but how he came there, or why he wore the chevalier's uniform, I

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cannot tell. 'T was not this bar, Monsieur, that crushed his thick skull."

"Then there will be others abroad. You say the chevalier, and his sister are together?"

He hesitated, but I choked the answer out of his throat.

"Not together — no. Let go! I cannot speak. I will tell the truth. They do not even know."

"And you did not tell them?"

"How could I, Monsieur? I was with Deslins, who made me bear the food. Had I told, the villain would have killed me. It was his threat when he bade me go along."

I stared down into the dwarf's face undecided, yet fully convinced that he lied in every way he dared the venture. He told me merely what he must tell in order to save his own miserable neck, but was concealing the real truth. There must be a purpose. It was my judgment the imp was no prisoner. He was alone, unguarded, apparently perfectly free to go and come as he pleased. Even by his own confession he had been on friendly

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terms with the jailer Deslins. Whether he had killed the man or not — and on that subject I was by no means satisfied — he was thoroughly acquainted with the castle, had explored its secret passages, and knew where the prisoners were confined. 'T was little likely this happened by chance.

The little devil was a villain at heart, easily recognized by his kind, and no doubt willing enough to promise anything to save himself. That might be the way of it. He had been captured, as he said, while on some venture for his master, but had seen here good sport, with a chance for spoil, and, unhampered by any conscience, had easily become one of the gang. Then another suspicion came to me — was it not possible the servant was there on his master's business? It was by no means impossible that de Saule had connection secretly with this band of marauders. He was of reckless character, of no known family, a mere adventurer whose source of income was but a matter of guess. Paris rang with stories of his profligacy, his wild excesses, his continual

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duels. It was only the friendship of the king which gave him place at court — ay, and title — and this, so it was freely whispered about, came only through his willingness to pander to the vices of his royal master, and to discover for him new pleasures. To such a man there would be nothing abhorrent in crime, and his loyalty to Louis would never restrain him. Besides, it could be no mere coincidence that the chevalier and his sister would both be held prisoners here, unknown to each other, and kept separated. There was some purpose in it; and who, besides de Saule, could have any object in such an act?

It was not clear to me what purpose could have actuated even de Saule in such a deed, but I did know that the man had persistently sought marriage with Mademoiselle, exerting all his influence with the king to win her consent. But not even the authority of Louis had been sufficient to win it from the lady. There were strange tales about of how she had taunted the fellow, of how she had even refused to recognize him in the very

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presence of the king, of how Louis, in anger, had banished her from court in disgrace, and she had only laughed at his threats, and gone away gaily enough. And there were rumors that de Saule had followed her, only to be refused audience, and permitted to cool his heels at an inn, in spite of his bearing a king's letter of command; ay! and it was whispered about that the chevalier, hearing all this in camp gossip, had journeyed hastily to Paris, and slapped de Saule's face with his glove, but the cur refused to fight, pleading in excuse for such cowardice his love for the lady and fear of harming her brother.

These were the indistinct recollections which flashed instantly through my mind. Whether the stories were true, or false, I knew not—I had paid small attention to them. But if true then here surely was a sufficient motive for de Saule to resort to force after all other effort had failed. The man was reckless, and desperate enough to take the chance, and whether the fellow was in love with *Made-moiselle*, or the broad acres of her inheritance,

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the game was well worth the candle. And at that he did not risk so much, for, with the king aiding him, he had little to fear in way of punishment, and Louis dearly loved intrigue.

After all, it might be the king's own suggestion, easily enough carried out with his abetting. Of course I had no belief the chevalier was there. That was a lie, thoughtlessly uttered by Gospele, who knew nothing of what had occurred two nights before in the French camp. Why he had told it I could not conjecture, yet my memory of our fight was far too vivid for me to believe now that I had not run the man through, and left him dying when I fled. Much as I regretted the hasty quarrel, and its fatal result, I could not question its reality. D'Enville was dead, and it was my sword that had killed him; it was this act which had made of me a fugitive, which had brought me here. So I knew Gospele lied — if there was another prisoner besides Made-moiselle confined in the castle it was not her brother. Who he was I meant to know.

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My eyes were on the dwarf, my grip holding him helpless.

"Come," I said sternly. "We have talked long enough. Now lead on."

"Where, Monsieur?"

"To where you say the chevalier is confined; and don't venture to play any tricks on me."

CHAPTER XV.

THE EMPTY CELL

EVEN with a pistol grasped in my free hand I dared not release my grip of my guide's collar. That he was treacherous, furtively seeking every opportunity to break away, I well knew. Whether in league with these devils, or only anxious to escape from them as well as myself, I could not determine, but that he had lied to me was certain, and hence I suspected the worst. My only safety lay in keeping the imp under complete control.

He shuffled forward, unwillingly enough, sputtering angrily, and squirming under the pressure of my fingers, until we reached the top of the spiral staircase. With little of gentleness I thrust him through the narrow opening, following down so closely that any hope he might have entertained of escape vanished. By this time he had become silent and sullen, his eyes alone revealing hatred. I had no fear of him, but watched him as a cat

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would a mouse. We came to the foot of the stairs, emerging into the light of the first apartment. It appeared just as when I had passed through there before, grim and silent in its desolation, and I hustled my prisoner forward, under the connecting arch out into the great hall. The sun had sunk further into the west, and the shadows were dense, leaving much of the vast apartment obscured. I picked a passage through the debris, until we came to the dead body, now lying face upward, just as I had left it. Gospele shrank back from contemplating the dread object, but I compelled him to look, determined to be satisfied as to the man's identity.

"Well," I asked, "is he Deslins?"

"Yes, Monsieur," the two words choking in his throat.

"And the clothes — they belonged to the prisoner?"

"I — I think they must — but I cannot tell that. Do not hold me here, Monsieur. I cannot bear to look. The man who was with you — where is he?"

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The question was in my own' mind, for if Cassier was still at the head of the great staircase, where I had left him on watch, he would certainly have perceived us before now, and endeavored to learn who we were. The light was not sufficient for me to see clearly, yet there was no movement to indicate his presence. The gloom and silence combined made me suspicious of some new disaster, as I stared about, secretly dreading to discover the truth.

"He should not be far away," I answered, assuming a confidence I was far from feeling. "Perhaps he has gone down the corridor. Come along: we shall soon see."

But the man was not there, nor was there any sign of him upon the stairs or along the bare, desolate hall. I did not dare call his name, not knowing who might be lurking in the shadows within sound of my voice, but I searched the near-by rooms, pistol in hand, dragging the protesting Gospele continually after me, afraid to release my hold on the fellow, to no result. What could have become

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of the soldier I could not conjecture. He was certainly not the kind to run away, and desert a comrade in danger, but I could discover no evidences of any struggle. Possibly he had become tired of waiting for my return, perhaps had grown suspicious that I had met with disaster, and gone exploring on his own account.

"Who was he, Monsieur?" asked the dwarf, as I stared helplessly about. "One of your own men?"

"No, an officer of the Regiment of Tournaine."

His little pig eyes widened.

"Ah! the Captain Cassier! You found him in a cell below?"

"Yes; so you knew he was there did you? It seems to me there was not much going on about this castle that you did not know."

"The jailer made me —"

"Never mind that," I interrupted almost savagely, tired of his lying. "You never brought food to the man below, nor did Deslins. He told me the only fellow he saw

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was a negro. If you knew he was captive there you found it out in some other way than through being obliged to serve him. Look here!" and I shook him angrily. "You have lied to me from the very first word, and I know it. It is not a safe game to try to play with me, for I care no more for saving your life than I would for that of a venomous snake. Now answer what I ask you, and if I catch you in another lie you'll rue it, my friend. I promise you that, and I happen to know more about this affair than you suppose. You are not a prisoner and your falsehoods only make it worse for you."

He looked into my face, wetting his dry lips with his tongue, unable at once to frame an answer, puzzled as to how much I actually knew, or how far he might still venture. Cowardice was in his eyes, and I gave him no time to decide.

"So you are not! What then — on some dirty work here for your master? Is de Saule here?"

He shook his head, afraid to reply.

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"Spéak, you dog. Where is he?"

"In Paris, Monsieur; but 't is true he sent me."

"Ah! so you confess that! So much the better for you, for I was losing patience. He has connection with these brigands then, and makes use of them to carry out his schemes of deviltry? Well come, you know why you were sent, so make a full breast of it. Was it the plan to kidnap Mademoiselle d'Enville?"

He squirmed under my hand, but it was useless, and he read no weakness or mercy in my eyes.

"Why you think that, Monsieur?"

"No matter why I think it; I have reason enough. The rumors of the court are not unknown in the French camps. So speak up for you have more reason just now to fear me than de Saule."

"'T is not that I fear him, Monsieur."

"Who then?"

"The king."

"Ah!" I exclaimed. "Now we get down to facts. *Parbleu!* I thought as much. It is

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a conspiracy then. Louis would have his way with the maid in spite of her refusal to obey. I begin to understand some things that looked dark before. 'T was arranged, no doubt, that she should leave Paris with dispatches for the army, and be taken en route, and brought here. Sacre! 'T was a good plan, for the lady was of a spirit thus readily to sacrifice herself. And then, I suppose, when things looked the darkest, de Saule was gallantly to appear as the rescuer, offering to save Mademoiselle from these banditti for the small reward of the lady's hand. A sweet scheme, surely, worthy of a royal brain. Odd luck it did not miscarry, and but for me it would. For by chance she fell into English hands first, instead of these villains who were seeking her, and it was only through my attempt to win her escape that she was ever made prisoner here. The devil helps his own. And so, Gospele, it was your duty to keep watch over the lady, and inform your sweet master when she was in proper mood, hey? Well, how found you Mademoiselle this morning? Not yet pining

THE EMPTY CELL

for the duke I venture a guess; yet surely she knew you, and had some word to say. What was it?"

"Only to ask how I chanced to be there," with a grimace. "It is few gracious words she has ever given me."

"'T is scarce likely she would be more indulgent to you than your master. She has the wit to know you for two of a kind. And she was not even glad to look on your ugly face in her present predicament. She asked nothing?"

"Only that I get out of her light. Sacre! she is a high-strung damsel, and was in no mood then for converse. I had my tale well thought out, or she would have tripped me with her sharp tongue. I was not sorry to get out again when the chance came. I never could abide dealing with a woman."

"Likely not: they are apt to be too keen witted for such brains as yours, and with an instinct to tell them what you are. In spite of your glib tongue I'd lay a wager Mademoiselle read the lie in your face. But we

SHEA, OF THE IRISH BRIGADE

have talked enough. Whatever has become of Cassier there is plenty fronting me while day lasts. Where is it you say the chevalier is confined?"

He pointed forward, down the gloomy passage, but never once took his eyes from my face.

"Yonder, Monsieur, next to the end," he said with all politeness.

"And the lady?"

There was just an instant of hesitation, scarcely perceptible had I been less watchful and suspicious, but the tightening of my fingers compelled an answer.

"In the tower room above, Monsieur: the stairs are at the end of the corridor."

"There is no guard?"

"Only below in the court. What need? No one comes here," and he crossed himself piously. "'Tis haunted by the dead this castle; at night they walk here, and show ghastly lights. No peasant of St. Quentin would ever venture to put foot within these walls. So what is there to fear? Soldiers!

THE EMPTY CELL

Bah! Why should they search ruins, where there is no spoil? There are no roads leading here, save that half concealed path across the marsh. A sentinel on the rock above guards that, so no one can approach here unseen."

"Yet I did."

"Ayl and I wonder at it. You crossed the marsh? At what hour?"

"The edge of dawn. I saw no one."

"'T was rare good luck. The watcher must have slept, or it was the time of relief. You will not be so fortunate again, Monsieur." An ugly sneer curled his lips, his eyes no longer making any attempt to conceal his hatred. "What care I what you discover here, or what you make me tell you by threats! 'T will serve you little in the end, for you will never go away alive. Bah! you are as much of a prisoner now as if you were locked in a cell and loaded with chains. There is no escape possible. You think I tell you what I have because I fear you? *Parbleu!* I tell it because it can do no harm for you to know. Were it not so you could skin me alive, and I

SHEA, OF THE IRISH BRIGADE

would not speak. Find the chevalier and the lady — St. Christopher! I will take you to them gladly enough. But what good will it do? You cannot get away. I hate you, Monsieur, but I laugh, for I am going to see you when you are dead; ay! and am going to mark you for every word of insult you have given me. I know how to pay my debts.”

I could have killed the fellow — it was in my heart to do so, and my hand was at his throat. Yet his words, vibrant with sudden anger, and ringing true, brought to me a chill which stayed my fingers. In a flash I realized the desperation of the situation, the peril surrounding me, the small chance of my being able to serve Mademoiselle. There was no need of a guard in such a place. What I had supposed was carelessness, and lack of discipline, on the part of these banditti, was only supreme confidence in the security of their retreat, so protected by nature, and superstition, as to be unapproachable by any enemy. Some strange freak of fortune had won me entrance unobserved, but escape,

THE EMPTY CELL

either alone, or with the lady, would seemingly be impossible. Yet desperate as I now knew the situation to be I was of no disposition to despair, nor permit this crooked devil to gloat over me. I would fight it out to the end trusting the saints to guide me, and keeping a clear head and ready hand. So it was that I stared back into the fellow's face until the smirk of triumph died on his lips.

"You do well to have your laugh first," I said coldly, "for when I am dead there will not be much life left in you. I have been in toils before this, my dear Gospele, and always found a way out; so save your breath. I'll prove your story first, and then make my own plans. So lead on friend, and be still about it."

"Lead on where, Monsieur?" his face sober enough now, "to the lady?"

"No, I told you before — to the chevalier. I believe you lied as to his being here at all. I would assure myself as to that before seeking Mademoiselle. Come show the way, and attempt to play no trick about it."

SHEA, OF THE IRISH BRIGADE

He led me straight enough, and watching him the thought became convincing that all he had just said was true. The fellow now really cared but little what discoveries I made, confident that my escape was impossible, and that any knowledge I might thus acquire of his master's foul scheme would die with me. But this only served to render me more determined to persevere. I was left alone, unaided; Cassier had strangely disappeared, and whether he had fled in sudden terror, striving to escape from those gloomy corridors, ghostly in their shadows, or had been foully dealt with, I could only conjecture. All I really knew was that he had disappeared, leaving me to fight the battle. Very well, I would fight to the very end, and while a drop of blood was left in my body. I'd pit strength and wit against these villains, in an effort to save Mademoiselle, and if I did go down, I would go down fighting like a man and a soldier. I would neither ask mercy, nor yield it—and as to this little dwarfed devil, I would soon be rid of him!

THE EMPTY CELL

and my hand tightened its grip as the thought came. Ay! I would be free of him, and take my own chances. Courage and wit might solve this riddle, and they were the cards I could ever play best. But first I must be rid of this spying Gospele.

We came to an oaken door, the wood of which looked freshly cut, and tightly enough fitted between the stones of the wall. The dwarf made an odd noise at discovery that it stood ajar, but I pressed him roughly through the opening and took hasty survey of the interior. It was unoccupied, although there was every evidence that it had lately held someone, for there was food in a stone dish on the floor, and a panikin of water stood on a rude bench beneath the single window. The latter was high up the wall, a deep, narrow embrasure, safe-guarded by iron bars, through which vines thrust a shadow of green leaves. There was little light, yet enough to reveal an overturned stool, the heavy bar which had secured the door on the floor in one corner, and beside it a dirty, well-worn

SHEA, OF THE IRISH BRIGADE

cap. I stared at these things, and then at Gospele, who shrank back before the anger in my eyes.

“As I thought he is not here.”

“But he was here, Monsieur: I swear it. Deslins has been in here since I came with him; that is his cap lying yonder.”

CHAPTER XVI
WITH MADEMOISELLE

I KICKED it with my foot.
“Ay! it is plain enough there was a prisoner here,” I said. “I am not questioning that, but I want to learn who the man might be. I am only sure he was not Charles d’Enville, in spite of your assertion. Do you know the chevalier?”

“I have seen him often.”

“And still swear it was no other? What if I tell you I know d’Enville to be dead?”

“He may be now, Monsieur, but he was not two hours ago, when I spoke with him.”

The fellow said this with such earnestness as to almost convince me. I hoped it was true, and yet was unable to conceive its possibility. Could it be possible that some other officer of equal rank might have fallen into the hands of these men, bearing sufficient resemblance to the one they sought to deceive

SHEA, OF THE IRISH BRIGADE

even Gospele who had seen him before? The dwarf had, in all probability, but merely viewed him at a distance, and thus gained only a vague impression of the real appearance of the man. Wishing to believe him d'Enville even a slight resemblance might have proven sufficient to convince, and it was not at all likely that any of the others in this crew of outlaws would know the difference. If Gospele named him as the chevalier, no one among them would question the identification. But, whoever he was, what had become of the man? Had he escaped? or been foully murdered? That was Deslins' cap on the floor, and Deslins himself was lying dead in the big hall without clothed in the prisoner's uniform. The jailer had been killed by a blow struck from behind, but if the officer had dealt this in a desperate effort at escape, how did the dead man become possessed of the uniform he wore? Where was the prisoner hiding? and what had happened to Cassier? These unanswerable questions poured in upon me, the situation

WITH MADEMOISELLE

becoming more complicated the longer I thought.

There was no solving the mystery standing there. I must leave it to unravel itself, find Mademoiselle, and do the best I could to save her. That was my duty now. Ayl and the work must be done quickly, for already it was growing dusk in the corridors, and a glance at the high window told me the sun was low in the west. I would trust Gospele no longer, be no longer bothered by guarding the fellow. He had told me where the girl was, and I could find her alone. If he had lied I would come back, and wring the truth out of him. Now I would be better off rid of his company, and free to act without keeping grip on his collar. I flung him from me onto the floor, and picked up the oak bar.

"You will wait here, Master Gospele," I said sternly, "until I have some further need of you. 'T is not likely you will starve, or suffer greatly, before some of your friends come, even if I should not return. But if you have lied to me, I shall have a debt to

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pay, and you will see me soon enough, I warrant."

He grovelled on the floor, making no attempt to rise, but his eyes stealthily watching my movements.

"You leave me locked in here, Monsieur, while you seek the lady?"

"Yes; you have told me where she is confined, and if I find her there all right, you have won your life; but if not —" I stopped significantly.

"She was there two hours ago," he broke in swiftly. "But I cannot tell now. So was the chevalier here, Monsieur, but now he is gone. I can only tell you what I know, what I believe. It may be he has found, and released his sister."

"That is something I shall soon discover. You said the tower up the stairs at the end of this corridor? Is that the place?"

He was too much frightened, reading the fierce threat in my face to answer, but there was a look in his eyes which somehow convinced me that what he had said already was

WITH MADEMOISELLE

true. I stepped backward, clinging to the heavy bar, and closed the door behind me. The wood fitted tightly into the rude iron sockets, and I paused an instant in the gloom of the corridor listening. There was no sound either from within or without. The vast pile seemed as deserted, and desolate, as it had been through the centuries. If aught ever moved in these silent halls it must be the ghosts of the dead, stirred by memories of the past. I could almost imagine they were there, all about me, lurking in the shadows. Yet I knew better; knew that what I really had to fear were heartless and cruel men, whose very whereabouts I could not guess, but whom I must avoid by all the wit and skill I possessed. I was struggling in the midst of cross currents of human passion, striving to find my way blindly through them in the dark. The end was with God, and I could only do my best, and trust in Him.

Discovery now meant death to me, and worse than death to Camille d'Enville. And time was flying; perhaps even now the guard

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below, careless as they apparently were, were beginning to wonder at the delay of Deslins' return. 'T was not likely any of the fellows cared to explore these black corridors at night, and, if they sent a searching party, it would be while some shred of daylight lingered in the west. A half hour later and the cowards would scarcely dare enter the haunted halls for any purpose. Then we might be safe enough, but I could not wait for that — I must find the lady, and learn her condition, while there remained sufficient light to guide my way. Nothing could be seen or heard to deter me, and I advanced up the passage, my heart beating fiercely in the terror of imagination, yet firmly determined on my course.

The foot of the stairs were easily found at the extremity of the corridor. They were scarcely two feet wide, and seemed to me to be hollowed out of the very wall, and as solid as the stones themselves. No gleam of light illumined them, and they rose so steeply that it was like climbing a ladder, but the very fact that they were so easily found heartened me

WITH MADEMOISELLE

to the attempt. Thus far, at least, the dwarf's tale was true, and my faith became sensibly stronger. No better place of concealment surely could be found, even in the midst of that ruin.

Hampered by my sword I left it lying below, and mounted the steps on hands and knees noiselessly. I was compelled to feel my way in the intense darkness, and was only aware I had attained the top when a groping hand suddenly came in contact with an oaken scuttle which barred further passage. It required some minutes of investigation to determine the exact nature of this barrier, but finally I found by feeling, that it was held firmly into place by two bolts of heavy oak sliding into clefts of the rock. I listened with ear against the wood, but no sound reached me from above, and, determined to learn the mystery of the place, I slipped the bolts back, holding the wood firm with my other hand. It gave silently, supported by hinges, and thus hung dangling, leaving a clear opening. Yet I could perceive

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nothing in the vacancy above. There was a dim light, or rather the darkness overhead was less pronounced, but the difference was not sufficient to enable me to distinguish objects from where I stood staring upward. I ventured a step higher, my head barely projecting through the narrow opening. Instantly a voice spoke.

“Go back! or I strike you with the stool — go!”

My heart leaped in swift exultation. It was Mademoiselle! ay! and alone; ready to defend herself. Instinctively I flung up my hand in guard, knowing her words to be no idle threat.

“Do not strike, Mademoiselle!” I cried hastily, “it is a friend who comes.”

“A friend! What friend have I here?”

“The man who served you last night — Arthur Shea” I answered, not yet daring to move.

I caught the echo of her sudden breath of relief, and heard the uplifted stool touch the floor.

“Of the Irish Brigade! Can it indeed be

WITH MADEMOISELLE

you? Oh! *Mon Dieu!* I am so glad, Monsieur — so glad! Give me your hand.”

Helped by the warm grasp of her fingers I stood erect on the floor, aware of her presence, yet unable even then to clearly distinguish the outlines of her figure. If there were windows to the tower they were so overgrown with vines as to be useless. While darkness was not absolute, as on the stairs below, yet it was impossible for me to make out the surroundings, or realize anything except the mere fact of her presence.

“You are alone?” I asked to assure myself.

“Yes, Monsieur, I am now,” and I could distinguish a tremor to her voice, and feel the tighter grip of her hand. “But he was here an hour ago. I — I thought he was coming back — he — he swore he would come when the darkness had terrified me. I was terribly afraid but it was not of the dark.”

“He? Whom do you mean?”

“Do you not know, Monsieur? Do you not know who is here? who is the head of these bandits?”

SHEA, OF THE IRISH BRIGADE

"You mean the villain La Porte?"

"That is what they call him — yes. But did you ever meet anyone who really knew who that arch fiend was? We spoke the name often enough in Paris, imagining the man some crazed peasant, a wild monster. Then his was but a name of terror to be spoken in whispers, the name of a being too horrible to be even human. We dreamed not who he really was. Did you in the camps ever hear of anyone who had seen him?"

"No, Mademoiselle. 'T is said he takes no part in the raids, and horrors perpetrated under his name — that he merely plans, and that even his lieutenants never look upon his face unmasked. This is what makes it so hard to wipe out his gang of desperadoes — their leader is unknown. And do you mean to say you have seen the fellow? that you recognized him?"

She breathed hard, holding my hand clasped closely in both her own, the words she would speak trembling on her lips.

"Yes, Monsieur," she whispered, as though

WITH MADEMOISELLE

fearful of the very shadows. "He is here; he has talked with me unmasked; he has threatened me. He came first in disguise, thinking I would not know who he was, but from the very first word he spoke I knew him. Then when he laid hands on me, after I laughed at his threatening, I tore the mask from his face in struggle to break free. *Mon Dieu!* he was angry, and I think will kill me if I do not do as he wishes. I had to lie to him, to pretend, 'ere he would leave me at all."

"But you have not told me,—who is the man? Do I know him?"

"The king's friend, the Duke de Saule. I accused him of being that fiend in human form, and at first he only laughed. Then he boasted of it, and of his power. Told me how helpless I was to resist him—how his men would do whatever he said, even to murder. This man is a brute, a fiend incarnate—the courtier in him is veneer; his smile treason."

"I doubt it not," I said soberly. "I was

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ready to believe, for I met his man, the hideous dwarf, Gospele, below, and made him tell me where you were. No doubt he thought I would meet his master here, or some of his villains, guarding the stair. Yet by good luck the way was clear of the vermin and we came unhindered."

"And the dwarf — he has gone to tell?"

"Not he! I took no such chance as that. The imp is shut up tight enough to be safe, in a cell below. The fellow told me no more than he had to, even under threat. He denied that de Saule was here."

"You questioned him about his master?"

"Ay! because I connected him with you at once. There were tales about you both floating around Paris. 'T was said the man desired to marry you, and had the aid of the king, but that you flouted them both, and was banished from court for your sin. So, when you disappeared so strangely, and I found you here a prisoner, with Gospele enjoying liberty, I could not help but remember these tales of idleness, and connect de Saule

with your misfortune. The dwarf swore he was also a captive to the outlaws, but he was too free to come and go at will to bear out the story. And what is the duke's purpose in this outrage?"

"To compel me to marry him. He has discovered force to be the only means by which he can hope to attain that end. He told me laughingly, as if it were a good joke, the whole plot. I was a victim of his plans before I even left Paris. It was arranged that I should overhear the discussion about the dispatch, and the difficulty of getting it safely to Louis. They counted on my daring, and loyalty, and the duke even boasts that the king agreed to the plan. There was no dispatch; only a blank sheet of paper, enclosed in an envelope, stamped with the official seal of France. All they wished was to get me alone away from Paris, here into St. Quentin, where I would be helpless, and without friends. The very guide they sent with me was in de Saule's pay, with instructions where to be at a certain hour. It was the unexpected coming of

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that English scouting party which disarranged the plot.

“De Saule’s party was not large enough to attack them, and could only skulk about in the dark, seeking some chance to lay hand on me. Then fortune favored them. They were hiding in the very hut beside which you left me. I was endeavoring to watch you in your efforts to secure a horse, and heard nothing. The first I knew I was seized roughly, and a cloth flung over my face. I could not scream, or make the slightest outcry.

“They dragged me with them -- there were five in the party — and they must have had a horse, for I was lifted to the back of an animal, and bound there with ropes. The cloth was removed from over my face, but the night was too dark for me to see much, or distinguish except to slight degree the appearance of my captors.

“Only one addressed me, and then only to threaten me if I made an outcry. He appeared to be a very large man, with a beard, and was evidently in command. The fellow

WITH MADEMOISELLE

who led the horse was a negro, as I could tell by his voice.

“ We came through a thick wood, and then along a narrow road where the men marched in single file. It was all desolate and dreary; I had no knowledge of where I was. At last, and while it was still dark, we arrived at this old castle — they call it Roisel, Monsieur — and they kept me down below until daybreak, because they were all afraid of ghosts, and none would venture up the dark stairs. Then the big man, and another named Deslins, who later brought me food, led me up here, and locked me in. Not until I saw the dwarf, Gospele, did I ever dream of why I had been captured. I thought only it might be for ransom. Then I suspected de Saule might be behind it all.”

“ And he was! he came himself! ”

“ Two hours ago. He said he left Paris yesterday. I will not repeat what he said to me, Monsieur, but he protested love, and pledged me instant release if I would marry him. I did not promise, yet what could I do? I

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must learn all, and so I spoke to him fair words, which saved me from anger, and won me some knowledge. I am sure he told me more than he meant to tell, but he thought I would admire him if he boasted of what he had done, and could do. The man was ever a braggart, and a coward at heart."

"Did he tell you he held your brother prisoner also?"

"Yes, but I knew that was not true, although I did not tell him. Where did you hear, Monsieur — from Gospele?"

"It was part of his tale, and I actually think the fellow believed it true. He guided me to the room where the man had been confined, but the prisoner had in some way escaped. The jailer, Deslins, is killed; we found his body."

There was a moment's silence, in which I could distinguish her breathing. She stood motionless, her hand withdrawn from my grasp.

"Who - who could it be, Monsieur?" she asked at last. "Surely not Charles, and

WITH MADMOISELLE

yet both Gospele and de Saule know him well."

"I cannot deem it possible," I replied regretfully. "Believe me, Mademoiselle, I do not know that your brother is dead. We fought, and my sword penetrated his guard and he fell. The next instant the officers of my regiment had pushed me from the room, and bade me ride for my life. This is all I know. It may indeed be that the captive of d'Enville was also a part of the plot, yet it is scarcely believable that even if he was merely wounded by my thrust, he would be in condition to be here. It is rather my judgment that these fellows have by some devil's luck made prisoner of a man resembling the chevalier — of the same rank — and have taken it for granted it is he. Gospele has seen your brother, but perhaps only at a distance, and it is quite probable that de Saule has not yet visited the captive. He came to you first, as soon as he arrived."

I caught the sound of a half suppressed sob, and her hand grasped my sleeve.

SHEA, OF THE IRISH BRIGADE

“ Oh! I hope that is true, Monsieur; I hope he is not here in the power of these cruel men, and I pray to the Virgin that he be alive. I — I cannot bear to think that — that you killed him.”

“ You care then? and for my sake? ”

“ How could I help it, Monsieur? You have been my friend; you are here now, periling your life to aid me. I am grateful; more, I am a woman, and I care as a woman must. I cannot bear to think that Charles d'Enville died from your hand. I will not think it — hush! what was that? ”

It was some movement below us on the dark stair.

CHAPTER XVII

WE FACE THE SITUATION

I KNEW instantly that some intruder was cautiously feeling a passage up those black steps, yet it was the quick wit of the woman which caused her to speak first, her fingers still gripping my arm in terror.

“It is de Saule, Monsieur. Move back here! He may think I have already escaped when he finds the scuttle open.”

The chance was indeed a desperate one, but there was no time in which to devise a better. I could only yield to the pressure of her hand, hidden in the gloom, and listening for every sound which indicated the man's approach. He came slowly, as though uncertain of his way, yet the slight noise of his progress indicated that he had already attained the opening. That the fellow uttered no exclamation upon discovering the unfastened scuttle was a surprise. Could it be de Saule? Surely he would never have taken the matter so quietly.

SHEA, OF THE IRISH BRIGADE

Yet if not the duke, who could this prowler be? I thought of Cassier, of the escaped prisoner of the lower corridor. But I had scarce time in which to think at all, as the man barely paused for an instant before he climbed to the floor level, and stood erect peering about him through the gloom, as though doubtful of his surroundings. I could hear his quick, half suppressed breathing. Then he started forward, apparently feeling his way along the wall, slowly and cautiously, as though fearful of encountering some pitfall. It occurred to me the man was seeking to discover some opening which would lead to the roof, and his actions convinced me he could not be de Saule. Yet this did not prove him a friend.

The man was more likely to be one of the gang below on some exploration for himself, bold enough in his search for loot, or what else, to even venture amid these haunted ruins. Whoever he was I could take no chances, for it was not my life alone which hung in the balance. So I remained silent, and motion-

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less, waiting results, but ready enough to take hold if occasion warranted.

He must have found nothing but solid wall, for step by step he circled the tower, blindly groping his way, until he was within arm's length of us. I was between him and Made-moiselle, and took one step forward to have clear space for a struggle which was now inevitable. Then his fingers touched me, and he uttered a muffled exclamation in French, stifled by the grip of my hand on his throat. Yet even as I pressed him against the wall, struggling madly in his first alarm to break free, I became convinced of who he was.

"Cassier?"

"Ayl" he sputtered, as my fingers relaxed. "Let go of me. Saint Denis! you have the clutch of a wild beast. Are you the Irishman?"

"Yes, how came you here? What may be the purpose of all this? I left you at the stair-head to keep guard, but found you not when I returned. Did you then desert me like a coward?"

SHEA, OF THE IRISH BRIGADE

“Not I,” growling out the words in sudden anger at my tone. “But it was not my thought that you wished me to be seen, and there were others prowling through these ruins. I feared as much, and so hid within an alcove where I could see and not be seen. I knew the dead man had not killed himself. It was well I did hide, for you had not gone ten minutes, when a man slipped out of a side room, and stole silently to the top of the stairs. I could not see well, but he was roughly dressed, and seemed to be trying to escape unseen. I believed him to be the murderer, one of the outlaws who had thus paid off a personal grudge, and thought of nothing then but how to get safely away before his crime was discovered.

“I could only crouch in the corner and watch. But the fellow appeared to be afraid to venture down the steps, and he waited too long. Suddenly there was the sound of steps in the corridor, as though someone approached making no attempt at concealment. The fugitive must have heard them first, for he faced

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about, and then sprang back into the shelter of the same alcove which protected me. We came face to face, the mutual astonishment and surprise so great we remained motionless, staring into each other's eyes in startled recognition. Neither dared move a foot, or utter a word, yet neither was wholly sure of the other. The face confronting me, roughened by exposure, and a sprouting beard, bore strange resemblance to the Chevalier d'Enville. Yet, in view of what you had told me, I could not believe the testimony of my own eyes. But seemingly he knew me also, and gave a swift signal for silence. Thus we stood while the man outside drew nearer, his footsteps sounding loud in the stillness. But, Monsieur, you are not alone!"

"'T is Mademoiselle d'Enville," I said shortly. "You need not fear her," and added: "This is the man I released from imprisonment — Captain Cassier, of the Regiment of Touraine."

"And you thought the stranger might be my brother, Monsieur?" she questioned

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eagerly, stepping in front of me as though seeking to see his face through the gloom.

“There was a resemblance,” he replied reluctantly, unaware of what she might know regarding our quarrel. “I could not tell with certainty — the light was bad.”

“You knew Charles d’Enville?”

“I have seen him often, Mademoiselle, but always in uniform, and at his best.”

“Let us not waste time,” I broke in hastily. “There is nothing to hide from the lady, Captain Cassier. I have told her all that occurred in the camp, and why I am a fugitive. Was the man the Chevalier d’Enville?”

“As God is my witness I do not know. How could he be if you killed him, Monsieur? All I can say is that he looked like him, so much as to startle me, but he was roughly dressed, and unbarbered —”

“Were his clothes those of the jailer, think you?”

“Likely enough, although I never saw the man you mean, for it was a negro who waited on me. Could I have talked with him I would

WE FACE THE SITUATION

have learned who he was — but all I really know is that he was seeking escape, and that he resembled d'Enville."

"You exchanged no word?"

"No more than a whisper imploring silence. We both realized we were hiding from discovery, and must help each other. There was no opportunity to speak; we could only stare into each other's faces, and listen, fairly holding our breaths. I could not even see what was occurring in the corridor from where I stood, yet the sound of the newcomer's steps told me he was within a few feet of where we hid. He came to the stair-head, and called a name."

"What name?"

"Gospele, or Gos — something; I could not tell clearly, but the other man drew a deep breath, and his lips set, as though the sound stung his ears. Do you know such a name, Monsieur?"

"Ay! we both know it, and can guess the speaker. But go on. We must know what happened to you two."

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“’T was all soon over with. There was no reply, and he called again, his voice heavier with anger. Yet no one answered; and I think the man walked across the corridor into the great hall. He was gone scarce a moment, not long enough for us to venture to slip away, and then came back, and bawled down the stairs to some guards below, bidding them come up, for there was a dead body on the floor. Instantly a half dozen men swarmed up the steps. We could hear their voices, and the crunch of their heavy boots. The man above swore as he gave his orders, bidding two of them pick up the dead man, and the others search after the murderer. He seemed to be afraid; I heard him call: ‘Move quick now while there is light, you rascals! It is Deslins who has been killed. *Mon Dieu!* there is treachery here, and you will answer to me if you do n’t find the murderer! Search every black corner, and bring the villain here, dead or alive! Stop; have any of you seen the dwarf?’ A deep voice answered, ‘No, Monsieur, he has not come down.’ The other

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swore again 'Where then is the fellow? Do n't stand there: do as I order you!' There was no time for us to think or plan. We knew that without a word. In another moment they would have us helplessly trapped. Nor was there a way of escape, except through the door of the alcove. I hesitated, but the other man gripped the chance desperately. I felt his hands on my shoulder, his lips at my ear. 'We must go through them,' he said. 'Come on!' I leaped after him, Monsieur, but there was little for me to do save run for my life. Never have I seen such a thunderbolt. He was like a crazed man, and they were so surprised that they ran as from a ghost. One he struck, and another he flung bodily down the stairs, and then I saw him land with his fist straight into the face of the better dressed man among them, and over he went, like an ox floored by a butcher. There was only one fellow between me and the dark corridor, and I gave him the prick of my knife, jumped across him and ran! 'T was nothing to me what became of the other. He must look after

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himself. My hope was that in the excitement the cowards might not know there were two of us, if I could only get quickly out of sight. So I ran, leaving them striking and cursing behind me."

"You deserted a comrade!" burst in Mademoiselle indignantly. "And boast of it!"

"That fellow! Faith, he was no comrade of mine. One of the brood himself, no doubt. I cared nothing for his skin. Neither of us had interest save to get away, and I took the chance, and won."

"You escaped then unhurt?"

"Only for a bruise when I struck against a projection of wall in the dark."

"And the other man?"

"I know nothing of what may have happened to him," and his voice sounded aggrieved, as though he could not comprehend why she should question so persistently. "Because he chanced to resemble your brother, Mademoiselle, meant nothing to me, for I knew he was not here. So I ran the best I could. It was dark in the corridor, and no one

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followed me, but I had no knowledge where the passage led, and turned into the first opening which offered shelter. It was a large room, with not even a window in the wall, and I crouched down behind a stone bench and waited. They were still fighting outside, although the noise reaching me was faint. I could hear voices, blows, and the shuffling of feet, but this did not last long. I do not know what the end was, but a little later I heard the voice of the man who seemed in command of the ruffians, telling some among them to search the big banquet room for the fellow whose name he called at first, and ordering others to carry the body of the dead man downstairs."

"He was killed then?"

"I did not know which he meant, Mademoiselle. "It might have been Deslins. All I could determine clearly was that the fellows would not go. It was growing dark, and they were afraid. They spoke ugly about it, and, finally, they all went down the stairs, cursing like a lot of pirates. I could n't make out just what the trouble was."

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“It is plain enough to me,” I said, as he paused as if his story was done. “They think this old pile is haunted, and not one of the foul brood would venture up here alone at night. Not even de Saule could bribe them to it, and I doubt his own nerve for such a trip.”

“De Saule! the king’s favorite?”

“Ay, man! It was de Saule beyond a doubt. He is either at the head of these villains, which I begin to believe, or is so connected with their operations as to use them freely on occasion. He has been here, in this tower, talking to, and threatening Mademoiselle. He would compel her to marry him, and she was captured, and brought here, according to his plan. It is all a foul plot, into which you and I have drifted by accident. I know not whether the third man be d’Enville — God knows I hope it prove so, for I want not the stain of his blood on me.”

“But you said you killed him?” he exclaimed, and I felt the clasp of her hands on my sleeve.

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“ I fled thinking so, yet it might not have been a mortal wound. One knows little where a sword thrust goes in heat of battle. However this is no time to discuss the affair. The man was de Saule, and it was the dwarf Gospele for whom he called, an imp of darkness well fitted for his purpose. The outlaws have departed then? ”

“ Not far, Monsieur. I waited until it was dark and all was still before I crept out again, and then stole along the corridor to the head of the stairs. They were there in the great hall below, a dozen, or more, of the fellows. They had lights, and were on guard. There was a sentry at the foot of the steps, staring up into the darkness above, as though he expected a ghost to descend, and another at the other side. Some of the villains had blankets, and were lying on the stone floor. Faith! they had me blocked — a mouse could not get through unseen.”

“ And de Saule — was he with them? ”

“ I saw nothing of the man, although there was a fellow off in a corner by himself with

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his head tied up, as though nursing a wound. The man who walked about, and seemed to give orders, was a giant with a scraggy beard, and who swore like a fiend."

I understood the situation clearly enough now, and it was sufficiently desperate to call for all my wit if I would solve it. The trap was set, and there seemed no way out. So far as I knew those stairs alone led to the entrance, and the open air. There was no other way of escape. That this was true was now confirmed by the action of the men seeking to capture us. Afraid to explore the upper galleries in the night, they felt perfectly safe so long as they guarded the stairway, knowing that whoever might be above could find no other passage. Probably they had no conception of the real situation. As I thought of it all I came finally to this conclusion: the man who might be the chevalier, must have succeeded in breaking away from his antagonists, and had fled somewhere into the dark passage. That was why de Saule had endeavored to make his men search the big room. The

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fugitive had gone that way. And the fellows refused to follow in the dark. It was therefore in hope of capturing him the guard was set below. He was the only one of whose presence they were aware. Yet the killing of Deslins, the mysterious disappearance of Gospele, and the reckless fight the man made to escape capture, would convince them of his desperate character.

They knew nothing of my being in the castle — thanks to some rare good fortune — nor of the release of Cassier. They might not even be aware that two men had attacked the party at the head of the stairs. It was all the riot of an instant, and in such fighting one scarcely knows what has occurred. No, it was the stranger they were after, and they were convinced there was no other way by which he could get out. They could simply wait there until he walked into their trap. He could do that, or kill himself, just as he pleased. Either choice was satisfactory to those fellows — the end the same.

And how much better off were we situated?

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There were three of us, for the lady was of fighting race and would bear her part, and we would possess the advantage of surprise. For arms we had a pistol, a knife, and my sword lying at the foot of the tower stairs. Mademoiselle's weapon had been taken from her. If we could manage to unite with the strange man hiding somewhere amid these branching corridors, we could show a battling strength not to be despised. We might, at least, defend ourselves from attack, although it would be a desperate deed to attempt forcing passage through that guard of ruffians below. Yet, from all appearance, we possessed the night in which to explore, and perfect some plan.

There was hope that some other way out might be revealed, even although unknown to our besiegers. Surely in those days of treachery and intrigue when this castle was built some secret passage must have been constructed some means of escape provided other than that main staircase. We must seek blindly in the dark, but the thought

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brought with it a faint glimmer of hope. At least I knew where a stairway led to the roof. These reflections flashed across my mind, and even as I reached a decision the hand of the girl tightened its grasp on my sleeve.

“What are we to do, Monsieur?” she asked, her voice trembling, yet with a confidence in me that somehow strengthened my own heart. “Where are we to go?”

CHAPTER XVIII

THE DEATH OF CASSIER

CLASPING the hand on my arm, I held it tightly, my veins throbbing in swift response to her confident appeal. She trusted me, and somehow, God helping me, I meant to prove worthy. I felt already a difference in the attitude of the girl, as though the doubt of her brother's death at my hands had removed a barrier between us. If the strange man hiding in the ruins was indeed Charles d'Enville it was worth all possible effort to discover the fact. How strongly I wished this might prove true came to me in sudden revelation, almost choking back the words I sought to utter coolly.

“I have not yet thought it all out, Mademoiselle,” I replied, with all the assurance I could muster. “But first I would view the situation with my own eyes. Then perhaps we can plan some way to overcome the villains. I am not one to yield without trying.

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Come, Cassier, we will go below, and find out what can be done. You have a weapon?"

"Yes, but only the one load."

He appeared reluctant to proceed, yet followed as I slowly descended the steps and helped the lady to find safe footing. At the foot I recovered my sword, and buckled the belt about my waist; then, holding tightly to her, stole stealthily along the dark passage way, the gloom so dense no object could be discerned. However there was nothing to fear, unless we might accidentally come across the escaped prisoner, and get to hand grips before an explanation could be made. Such a possibility did not deter me, for this was the corridor down which Cassier had run, and the other man had probably disappeared in the opposite direction, if he also had really succeeded in breaking away from his opponents. As to those fellows below it was plain they had no intention of venturing up stairs again until the return of daylight. They were more afraid of ghosts, and the phantoms of their imaginations, than of any human enemy.

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Of course de Saule might be above such superstitious fear, but he was scarce reckless enough to explore those black corridors alone, and his chance of getting volunteers to follow his lead was small.

The night air blew chill through the passage, and the walls felt damp and cold. We moved silently, feeling our way, until we came to where a reflection of light from the great hall below stole up the broad stone stairs, and faintly revealed our surroundings. Then for the first time I was enabled to perceive the face of Mademoiselle, whom I held close to me. Her cheeks were colorless, yet she smiled bravely back into my eyes as our glances met. I could not withhold an ardent expression of admiration and sympathy.

"I am glad to see you keep a strong heart," I whispered, unwilling Cassier should overhear, "and feel confidence in me. This is a hard task for a woman."

She managed to smile, but I thought her eyes were misty.

"I am so hopeful he is alive, Monsieur,"

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she answered in the same low tone, "and that we shall find him."

"It is all for his sake then you keep such courage?"

"No, Monsieur," reproachfully, "it is for your sake also. Could I wish my brother's blood to stain your hands? You have been my friend, and yet this deed of anger lies between us. You will understand."

"Yes, I understand, and hope as you do. If Charles d'Enville lives we shall know tonight. I pray it may be so for your sake, as well as mine. I would not have his death upon my soul, and — and besides —

I hesitated, surprised at the words trembling on my lips.

"And what, Monsieur?"

"I hardly know; I dare not say," I blurted out. "Only I care so much because of you, because of our friendship. It would ever be a barrier between us."

I felt her hand touch mine gently.

"Yet I do not blame, Monsieur," she said softly. "I believe what you have told me.

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It was a fair crossing of swords, and had Charles not fallen, he would have struck you down."

"It was a quarrel of hot-heads, and whether I was justified or not, it would be impossible for his sister to forgive and forget."

"I could forgive, Monsieur, for I know soldiers, and how easily they draw sword. I am not a girl unacquainted with life. I believe you did only as any high spirited man would do."

"You mean you trust me?"

"Implicitly, Monsieur; you may hold me your friend."

"Whether Charles d'Enville be dead or alive?"

"Yes," her eyes falling before mine. "I do not say I can forget, or wholly blot out the memory. That would be asking too much, would it not? But I am not vindictive, or revengeful; I know his temper, and doubt not he was more to blame than you for the quarrel. So I am going to trust you, Monsieur."

"And like me?"

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“That has never been hard,” the words came swiftly enough, but with an instant of hesitation. “Perhaps that is why I can forgive so easily. Do not question me any more, Monsieur. Is it not enough that I confess this? that I give you my—my confidence? We are in peril, in great danger still.”

“I know, yet it is those very words you have spoken which give me courage to face whatever may come. I will think clearer, and fight better, because of your faith. You give me heart and hope, Mademoiselle.” I bent, and touched my lips to her hand. “This old castle, if history be true, witnessed courage and devotion before, even to death; and to-night it shall know that the same spirit survives. Somehow we shall thwart those villains. But let us move forward and gain glimpse down the stairs.”

There were torches below and lanterns, but the greater light came from a fire, kindled in a slight depression of the stone floor. A pile of fagots lay near by, and as I attained a position where I could see clearly what was trans-

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piring below, two men came forward from the direction of the main entrance loaded with more of the fuel, which they flung noisily down. This alone was sufficient proof that the fellows anticipated a long night's vigil, and were preparing against the cold dampness of the great chamber. The red glare of the leaping flames rendered the scene peculiarly fantastic and demoniac. Mademoiselle pressed closely beside me as we leaned forward to look, and I heard Cassier give utterance to an oath in the excitement of his first glance. The vast apartment was — in spite of the size of the fire — illumined only in part, shadows lurking along the walls. But its bareness was apparent, and its ruined condition accentuated by the revealing glow of flame. I counted fourteen men in the party, including the fagot bearers who disappeared for another load, roughly dressed fellows, many of them bearded, and to all appearance peasants, undisciplined, yet of good enough fighting material. There was no semblance of uniform, or aught to indicate rank.

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The man who appeared to exercise command, was, if anything, more disreputably attired than his followers, and a more desperate looking villain — a huge fellow, a bit round-shouldered, with long gray hair uncombed, and a beard reaching nearly to his waist. He wore a short jerkin of leather, discolored and ragged, and a belt containing two pistols and a knife. The men were all armed, even as they lay lounging about the fire, their equipment, however, being mostly ugly looking knives, unsheathed. I could perceive few firearms, although the sentinels bore guns, and there were two others leaning against the lower stair. Most of the men, with pipes in their mouths, were lying down, a few with blankets to protect them from the hard stones. Others were seated, as close to the fire as they could stand the blaze, and one was industriously polishing his knife blade. There was little conversation, although one of them seemed to be telling a story to a group of which he was the center, and the big leader occasionally called out some gruff order,

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usually accompanied by an oath. That he was feared, and ruled his motley crew by sheer terror, was evidenced by the swiftness with which the fellows obeyed. Once he struck a man who failed to jump instantly at his bidding, and kicked him brutally with a booted foot, but the others scarcely glanced about to view the trouble, and the fellow thus misused slunk away in cowed silence.

The sentinel at the foot of the stairs never removed his eyes from the darkness above, or changed the posture of his gun. A moment later the messenger thus roughly dispatched, returned within the fire gleam, accompanied by de Saule. I knew the fiend instantly — even without the swift warning grasp of Mademoiselle on my arm — although his face was so wrapped in a cloth as to scarcely reveal more than the eyes. Whether this was worn for concealment, or to hide a wound, I do not know, but the insolent, swaggering gait of the fellow, and the arrogant tone of his voice, were sufficient to reveal his identity. He came up to the graybeard angrily and

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domineering, speaking in a voice plainly audible even where we lay hugging the floor above.

"What does this mean, Guiteau? That rapsallion says you refuse to order a search. *Mon Dieu!* do you forget so easily who I am? Do you not know this is the king's business, and no mere task of robbery? Answer me!"

"'Tis not that I refuse, Monsieur," replied the other, his voice strangely softened. "But the men will not go. They are more afraid of what they may meet with up yonder than of my threats and blows."

"What! of one man, and he unarmed!"

"It is not one man, or a dozen, Monsieur. The thing which frightens is not of the earth — spirits of the dead haunt those corridors."

De Saule laughly harshly, yet I noted his glance strayed upward, and his hand clinched.

"Ghosts! Good Lord! I might believe such superstition could scare those fellows, but not you and I, Guiteau. We have got over that long ago."

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The graybeard hesitated, twisting himself about, and tugging at his knife hilt.

"I am no coward, Monsieur, as you well know, and have done your will more than once when there was danger. But there are ghosts here — I have seen them."

"Ghosts! Bah! you have seen shadows, and strange lights, no doubt. Perchance some rascal playing a trick, but that would be all. I tell you the dead are dead, Guiteau, and can do no harm to the living. What is it you saw that has changed your blood to water?"

"Monsieur le Duke," returned the other solemnly. "You have known me long, and found me faithful — is that not true?"

De Saule nodded, his glance still up the stairs. "I have served you as a soldier, and since then as your lieutenant here. I have no fear of man, nor of death and wounds. There was a time when I also laughed at phantoms and sneered at ghostly presence. But 't is not so now. Not the king, not even you, Monsieur, could make me range those passages above in this black night. Nor will I

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send others to the task. This pile is haunted by the spirits of the dead; I have seen them, and I know."

The gravity with which the fellow spoke even affected de Saule, and he stood staring into the rough face, half convinced already.

"You have seen them. Bah! you dream. Where? What were they like?"

"You may not believe, but I will tell you what I know," and the men about the fire, attracted by their voices, sat up listening, several of them creeping closer in eagerness to hear. "We have rendezvoused here for six months now, and not a night but what strange lights have been seen at the windows above. And we have heard noises—the sound of steel on steel, with laughter and shouting. Sacre! it got on the nerves of the best of us, for we could not make out what it was, or the cause. Again and again in the daylight have I searched the passages from dungeon to towers, and found nothing. There is not a room, or cell, or secret stair that I have not explored, nor hole I have not peered into. Everywhere

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they were vacant and cold — not so much as a rat ran across the floor. Yet when night came there were men and women here, shadowy, spectral things, making merry in a strange light that dazed the eyes.

“One night, Monsieur, I dared them, and crept up these stairs in the dark, as far as the great room where they say a king died. I had given Jules and Francois here a handful of gold each to go with me, and we had pistols in our hands. We were at the dias, staring about us through the dark, hearing and seeing nothing, but with our hearts beating like mad from fear, when, all at once they came. They seemed to issue from the very walls, shadowy and white. I saw faces, and long locks of hair, and arms outstretched. There was a sound like the beating of a drum. *Mon Dieu!* I took one look, and ran. I know not how we got down those stairs alive, or out into the air, but Francois was all cut falling on the stones, and Jules’ hair has been white ever since.”

“Imagination; the three of you went creep-

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ing up there scared half to death in the dark. Did no one of you fire?"

"Ay, Francois did, and we found the next day where the bullet struck the wall. God save me! I threw a knife at one glistening with mail, and it just went through him like he was a shadow."

"Huh! to my mind that it what he was," asserted de Saule, sneeringly, and staring about him at the fellows' faces. "The three of you filled up with liquor, no doubt, to get courage enough to go at all, and then frightened each other. But I've heard enough of this. I am a soldier, and have seen enough dead men to heap this room full. It is no ghost that will stop me. Come, lads, what say a half dozen of you to earning a handful of good gold pieces by standing at my back? Speak up now! there is nothing to fear; we'll carry lights with us, and that will scare the spooks away. How is it with you, Guieteau?"

I know not what caused me to move, but I straightened up suddenly, and by some accident my foot struck against Cassier. No doubt

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his mind was half crazed by the visions conjured up from overhearing the talk below, and the silence and darkness all about us. Perchance he thought the sudden pressure of my foot proof of some horrid presence, for he leaped upward, with a shriek that rang out in the silence as though from the lips of the fiend himself. I sought to grip him, but was too late. He staggered on the stair ledge, and then went down, his body whirling over in the air, until it crashed onto the stones below.

CHAPTER XIX

FUGITIVES IN THE RUINS

AS THE man's body plunged down through the air, his lips giving utterance to another unearthly shriek of terror, the horror of it seemed to paralyze my every faculty. But as his form struck the stone floor beneath, sufficient presence of mind returned to enable me to clasp the shuddering girl in my arms, and hold her safely out of observation from below. Her face was hidden on my shoulder, but I could see plainly enough, and the unspeakable horror of the scene held me with its fascination. Scarcely breathing I stared downward, every nerve in my body throbbing as if from physical pain.

Yet I knew the cause, realized how the dreadful accident had happened. Dazed as I still was from its suddenness, sick at heart with horror, there was no terrorizing mystery to chill my heart. Not so with those base cowards below. Already terrorized by their

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imagination, and Guiteau's weird tale, every shadow assumed ghostly shape, and the slightest noise caused them to start, and look about. To their ears those agonized shrieks were the wails of a lost soul, and as the body whirled down among them, out of that black haunted void above, they fled madly, trampling each other, cursing and crying out in terror. The battered form struck the stones at the very feet of the sentry, who flung his gun at it and ran, uttering a scream that was instantly echoed, and re-echoed by his frightened companions. Scarcely had the first cries of alarm died away before the great hall below was deserted to the dead body, with the exception of de Saule, and his lieutenant, who, clinging to each other for courage, had slunk back against the wall, their eyes staring in horror up the black stairs. In the glare of the fire I could see their faces, white with terror, and note the frenzied grip of their hands. It seemed to me they would never move, never dare to investigate. Yet de Saule was a hard headed fellow, with little superstition to deter

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him, and as the first spasm of fright passed, he laughed harshly, pushing Guiteau aside roughly, and taking a step forward.

"St' Annel it is only a man's body!" he roared, angry at his own terror. "'T is the fellow we sought come to his own end."

"Ayl that may be," returned the other, making no attempt to move. "But what drove him to take such a leap? 'T was the fiends he saw in the dark."

"Well there are none of them here to frighten us — only a poor devil crushed to death." De Saule raised his voice. "Come back here, you skulking cowards! Now, Guiteau, let's see what the fellow looks like."

He crossed the floor boldly, although I noted a pistol clasped tightly in his hand, and that his eyes were watching the stairs. The giant, half ashamed of his fear, started to follow, but stopped in the full glare of the fire, and shouted loudly for his men. He was there still, cursing and commanding, when de Saule reached the motionless body, and turned the face up to the light. The skull was

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crushed, yet in spite of the disfiguring blood, the dead man's features were plainly recognizable. De Saule stared into the upturned face, then took a quick step backward, his gaze on the black void above. His expression was that of a man puzzled, and uncertain in the presence of mystery.

"*Mon Dieu!*" he exclaimed, in his first surprise. "This is n't the man, Guiteau; this is n't the same fellow who struck me. I never saw that face before. Come over here, you big coward, and tell me if you know who he is. Come on! what in the name of all the fiends of hell are you afraid of? Coward! I'll try this pistol on you, if you hang back any longer."

The big lieutenant came forward reluctantly enough, and managed to bring his eyes down to glance at the dead face. Some of the scattered men were by this time beginning to edge back within the radius of the fire, but kept well away from the neighborhood of the staircase. Guiteau's huge hand opened and shut nervously, but de Saule gripped his arm.

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"Well, who is he? Do you know?"

The giant let out an oath.

"Yes; 't is the officer I told you about—the one we picked up near Lourches; but how came he there?" and his eyes turned upward again. "Hey, you, Manuel, come here!"

A negro crept cautiously forward, trembling in every limb, yet afraid to disobey.

"Yes, Monsieur, I 'se here; what you want o' me? I don't know no ohost."

"There is none here if you did," broke in de Saule harshly. "We want to know who this dead man is. Do you recognize him?"

The negro ventured a look, and flung up his hands.

"Yes, Monsieur," his teeth chattering so the words were hardly distinguishable by us as we intently listened. "He's the man I tended to in the south wing. He—he said his name was Cassier."

"When did you see him last?"

"Long this mornin' when I took him something to eat."

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“He was confined in the south wing? on this floor? You left him locked in securely?”

“I sure did, Monsieur; I’se awful careful ’bout that. I members distinctly poundin’ down the bar.”

De Saule looked at Guiteau, and then about at those others skulking by the fire. His jaw was set, and there was an angry gleam in his eyes.

“Now see here, men,” he roared threateningly, “there is something rotten here. I am tired of this ghost talk; I’ve had enough of it. Ghosts do n’t lift bars out of sockets in broad daylight. Somebody set this man free, and, by all the gods, I am going to find out who it was. This is the king’s business, and I am not going to be balked by man, or devil. And you are going with me, Guiteau, you and your men. I’ll kill the first dastard who attempts to get away.” He swept his leveled pistol in their faces menacingly. “Come on now, you fellows have more reason to fear me than anything up yonder. A half dozen of you light torches; the rest arm yourselves.

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Jump, curse you; there 'll be no more talk!" He sprang on the lower step, and faced about savagely. Whatever fear he might have felt at first had vanished in fierce determination. This was the work of men, and his only thought was to capture, and crush.

"Guicteau, do you hear me?" he snapped. "Good God, man, when did I ever give an order twice! I'll blow a hole through your thick skull if you stand there and stare at me a minute longer. Get back of those fellows and drive them up here. There that's more like it. Come on, you fellows with torches. I'll lead, and you follow. If one of them skulks, Guicteau, shoot the dog down. You have more occasion to be afraid of me, you hell hounds than of any ghost that ever walked. Come on, now!"

No one of them had any stomach for it, not even de Saule himself, in spite of his bold words, but the latter had wrought himself into a state of anger which drove him forward, reckless of consequences. The others held back still, irresolute, lacking a leader, yet

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finally driven to advance by the menacing pistol flourished in their faces by Guiteau, who experienced a revival of courage now that he knew he was to be safely in the rear. That such a cowardly crew would penetrate far along those dark, echoing corridors was unbelievable. The slightest mysterious noise would bring panic, and send them in headlong flight. But the stairs were well lighted, and de Saule, and his lieutenant would drive them up the broad steps. If I was to play ghost the better place for such an exhibition would be farther back, where the gloom would be impenetrable, and the fellows' nerves would be on edge.

I yet held tightly to the lady, never for a moment indifferent to her presence; now I turned and glanced into her face, our eyes meeting.

"We must keep out of the coming light," I said swiftly. "There is no time to lose; they will mount this far anyway."

I helped her to her feet, both of us still watchful of the movements below.

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"Where shall we go, Monsieur?" she asked, a slight tremor in her low voice. "Do you think they will follow us?"

"Not far in the dark," I answered reassuringly. "They are ready to run at the first alarm. I have a scheme which will frighten the hearts out of them. You are not afraid of shadows?"

She glanced backward into the dense gloom of the passageways.

"Yes," she confessed. "I am afraid, but not so much as of those men below. It is not that I am superstitious, Monsieur, but this place is so grim and desolate, that — that I cannot help dreading the dark, and — and they told such awful tales —"

"Ay! 't was enough to frighten a brave man. 'T is no task I like overly well, but there is no choice. Ah! they are coming — take my hand."

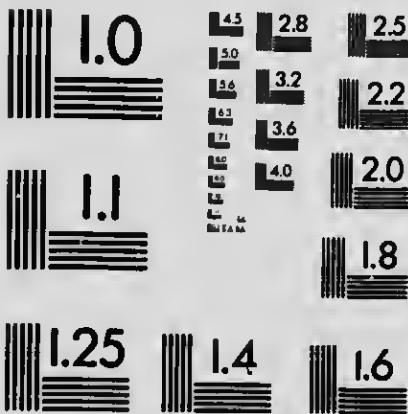
"Where do we go? which way?"

"To the left, through the big hall. We can reach the tower roof by a narrow stairway one man could hold against an army, if it come



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to blows. Besides I know the passage, and a secret door which may deceive them."

We ran lightly through the arch, plunging at once into impenetrable darkness. With one hand pressed against the rough stones, the other clasping her's, I led the way. Once or twice we stumbled over debris, and we could hear de Saule's voice in our rear cursing Guiteau for not driving the men faster. It was not until I discovered the entrance to the second apartment that either of us spoke. Then her voice at my ear was but a whisper.

"Is not this the direction in which the other man fled?"

"It must be; for there are only the two passages, and he did not follow Cassier."

"Then we may meet him?"

"'T is likely enough."

Her hand clasp tightened.

"But you will not fight, Monsieur," she implored earnestly. "He may be my brother."

"Not if I can make him understand," I replied. "Whoever he is we should be allies in this affair. But if we meet it will be

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in the dark, and he may spring forth desperately, fighting for his life. I would then need defend myself. 'T would be your part to let him know the truth."

We were halted in the angle of the wall, for I hesitated to go on, my memory of the way before us vague and uncertain. De Saule, and his gang, had attained the head of the staircase, and the glow of the torches cast a faint reflection across the great room we had just left. I could perceive the dimness of the opposite wall, but the high roof was hidden in darkness.

The voices of our pursuers were echoing in noisy cadence, each man apparently taking a part in the chorus of protest. The duke alone kept grimly to his purpose, his harsh tone vibrating above the others, and finally hushing the tumult. His fierce anger at the cowardice of his following gave him a courage foreign to his real nature, and all that was brutal in him rose to the surface.

"Well, by the gods, you will!" he shouted.
"Take the position I say. Here, you torch

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bearers, come forward here — yes you go in front of me, and I'll kill the first dog who tries to run. I'll give you something to be afraid of, you cowardly hounds! Now, Guiteau, bring up the others. What are you two hanging back for? I'll try the flat of my sword on you, Francois, if ever I see you skulking again. Ah, you would, hey Jules! Perhaps that will teach you to remain where I tell you." There was the sound of a blow, and a falling body. "Get up, or I'll run the sword point through you! Now stand there. I am captain here tonight. To the left, you men — now forward!"

The flicker of torches gave warning of their advance, although it was equally evident the bearers were fairly creeping along, driven by de Saule, and the far less eager Guiteau. I could still hear the voice of the latter threatening the laggards, his abusive tongue cutting like the lash of a whip. The increasing light revealed Mademoiselle's face, and afforded me a dim view of the apartment in which we were. Her eyes implored me.

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“ Please, Monsieur, please; do not delay longer! ”

“ No — come! I needed this light to make sure. I have only been this way once before, but we shall be safe now in a moment. There are two stairs: one leading up, the other down — but I have no knowledge where the latter ends. We will try the roof.”

Alarmed as the girl undoubtedly was at the near approach of our pursuers, I think she dreaded even more the possibility of encountering the other fugitive in the darkness. There was a mystery about him that could not be ignored — who he was, what desperation gave him such recklessness, and from what black corner he might leap out upon us before we were aware. The full measure of the danger behind us we knew, but I retained faith that we would yet outwit de Saule, and his mongrel following. Ay! he was only laughable, seeking us with lighted torches, which gave full knowledge of where he was, and thus enabling us to keep well out of sight. The very vehemence with which he was compelled to

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curse his rabble forward was warning enough, besides being proof that the slightest alarm would send them skurrying backward, leaving him alone. I had a wild thought to bring this end about, and fight the issue out face to face. Yet I hesitated, for if some accident should happen, and his sword should win, the position of the lady would be too terrible to contemplate. I could not assume the risk — there was nothing for it but to hide, and wait the turn of the wheel. I put away the dream of so insane a venture. I felt her pressing against me, her pleading eyes on my face, and thought she sensed the temptation which for the instant assailed me.

“Please, Monsieur!”

“I am a soldier — it is easier to fight.”

“I know — I know! but remember me, Monsieur. If you should fall, I would be all alone. I am afraid.”

“Afraid! you? Why you have proven your courage; 't is not the first time swords have been drawn for your sake, if all I hear be true. You are Camille d'Enville.”

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"No, no, Monsieur. I am only a frightened girl. See how I cling to you, trust you. I cannot let you go. Promise you will not leave me."

"'T is an easy pledge. Quick then; I can see the passage now, and we have ample time."

We crossed the room in swift silence, the red glare of the slowly advancing torches lighting the stone walls. The secret door stood slightly ajar just as I had left it. If the stranger had come this way he must have missed the narrow opening in the wall and found concealment elsewhere. There was no time to speculate as to his whereabouts, however — the torch-bearers were already at the wide entrance. I drew her within the opening, and closed behind us the stone door.

CHAPTER XX

THE VISION ON THE ROOF

WE WERE instantly plunged in darkness and profound silence, the heavy stone fitting so closely into place that not so much as a ray of light penetrated the crevices. While a century, or more, may have elapsed since that secret door had been swung by human hand its mechanism remained perfect, and responded to my lightest touch. Except for a faint click, as the lock caught, there was no noise, not even the creak of a hinge, and the babel of voices with which our pursuers sought to bolster up their courage ceased as by magic.

We remained there a few moments, breathing heavily, not from exertion but suspense, my arm still supporting her as she rested against me in unreserved confidence. The narrowness of the stairs afforded us no room, while the intense darkness made the place seem like a grave. The sudden thought

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occurred to me that it might indeed prove to be one, for although I ran my fingers here and there along the smooth face of the stone, I could find nothing resembling an inner spring by which the door might be reopened, and if the scuttle above — of stone also — should be found closed we were sealed there for all eternity. It was scarce likely those fellows without either knew, or would discover, the hidden passage, nor could they hear through those thick walls our cries for release. Even if we attained the roof safely it might be we would be marooned there, finding no other means of descent. However upward lay our only perceptible chance for rescue, and the dismal foreboding of possible disaster cou'd not help us now.

We must press on, and meet whatever fate lurked in the darkness above. I could hear the stifled sobbing of my companion, and realized how much she needed all the reserve strength of my courage to enable her to bear what was before us. She was no longer the court beauty, conscious of her own power of

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position, and reigning like a queen, but a frightened girl, clinging to me in terror. I would not even let the thought come to her that there was other peril fronting us.

“Come,” I said, as heartily as possible, “we are free from those rascals now. Do not be afraid, Mademoiselle; there is nothing here which can hurt you.”

“Can they not find the way, and follow us? Was that a secret door?”

“Yes, a solid stone fitted into the wall, yet so fastened as to swing on hinges. I never saw it closed, but ’t was the work of an artist — see, not a ray of light reaches us, or the slightest sound. Doubtless many a lord and lady — ay! even a king — have found safe refuge here in years gone by.”

“To what does the passage lead?”

“To a tower opposite the one in which you were confined. ’T is not unlike in appearance, only it is not entirely walled up, and an opening leads to the roof. I had no time to explore, for it was there I met the dwarf Gospele, and took him prisoner. Yet surely

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there must be some other means of descending."

"And you believe those men will not know of this passage? will discover no way in which to open the door, and follow us?"

"Not they. I doubt if de Saule has ever before been here, and the others, even if they suspect, will say nothing. All those cowards want is some excuse to go back. If Gospele was among them it would be different: he would know, and his brain has the devil's own cunning. But there is nothing to fear now from that mob. Shall we go on?"

I felt the pressure of her hand.

"Yes, Monsieur."

"I cannot thank you enough for your trust in me," I whispered fervently, inspired to boldness by the firm touch of her fingers.

"Why should I not trust you?" she questioned. "You have always been my friend."

"Only such a little while, and I have done so little — no more than any real man would do. Then you cannot forget that I may be the slayer of your brother."

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“Yet I have forgotten, or rather I do not believe. Some instinct tells me my brother lives. Gospele knew him too well to be mistaken, or misled by any chance resemblance. He told you he actually talked with the man, and even a word would reveal the deception to the quick wit of the dwarf. Monsieur, the man hiding here is Charles d’Enville, and the foul plot in which I was entangled involved him also.”

“How? What need?”

“I have thought it out like this: de Saule said enough to implant the suspicion in my mind. Both he, and the king, know me well enough to be assured that I would not yield easily to any threat, or personal danger. They were afraid nothing would move me, so they conceived the idea of capturing Charles also. Then his life would be the stake, and I would be driven to consent to save him.”

“The thing sounds reasonable. ’T is your thought that the king —”

“Ordered him out on some special mission where capture was certain. It was all prear-

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ranged. No doubt he had the orders with him when you two fought. Your sword thrust was not fatal, perhaps not even serious, and the moment he was able he rode forth on the king's service."

"It may be," I acknowledged doubtfully. "The scheme would be one de Saule would be like to concoct, but Louis —

"You do not know Louis, Monsieur," she interrupted quickly. "'T is not in camp or field you learn the traits of a king. It is at the court, and in Paris, he reveals himself. To my mind it was rather his scheme than de Saule's. He was very angry with me, and would plan revenge."

"And if this should not be true?" I asked earnestly. "If the man here should not prove to be your brother?"

"That shall make no difference, Monsieur, between us," she answered frankly. "Not now. I have trust in you."

"Always?"

"Yes, always. Even when I first saw you in the dim light of the garret, before I even

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knew you to be a soldier of France, I believed you a true man. We learn to judge men in the life I have led — a life where everyone wears a mask. I can tell the false from the true. I have faith in you, Monsieur; I will have always.”

I did not speak, for I could not utter the words trembling on my lips. Suddenly there yawned between us the chasm of rank and wealth. She was a frightened, trustful girl now, relying on me for help, confiding in me, and forgetful of all else in this moment of her need.

Yet I must not forget that she was of the old nobility of France, rich, and of a proud family, a beauty of the most ceremonial court of Europe, a toast of the well born and powerful. Tomorrow she might go back to her own, with only a laugh at the remembrance of our intimacy. 'Twas but an accident which had thrown us together, and her kindly words, after all, might signify no more than natural gratitude. I was to her only a friend in time of need. Just as swiftly I would slip

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out of her life. And why not? What was I to expect anything else?

Why should I presume that this proud lady of the court would ever really care for me? She could laugh at a king's wish, and scorn his favorites, while I — with clinched teeth I remembered what I was. A volunteer lieutenant of the Irish brigade, an exile in the army of a strange nation, a mere adventurer fighting under an alien flag, selling my sword for gold. True I was the cadet of a great house, the blood in my veins not to be despised by any man, but with ruined fortune, and impoverished acres only as inheritance. In sooth, 't was absurd, and almost unconsciously I laughed aloud.

"What is it, Monsieur? that you should laugh?"

"Only at a stray thought," I explained, but unable to keep the bitterness from my voice.

"Nothing to interest you."

"Oh! but it would I am sure. If it would make you laugh at such a time, perhaps it might hearten me. What was it?"

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“ I just thought of us here so close together for a short time,” I said reluctantly, “ and then remembered suddenly how wide apart we really were.”

“ Are we, Monsieur? ”

“ I cannot conceive how the chasm could be broader, Mademoiselle. You are Camille d'Enville, and I Arthur Shea. You may not perceive the vast difference, but, believe me, I do. 'T is a wide space which separates the daughter of the Marquis d'Enville from a sub-officer of the Royal Irlandais.”

“ You told me once you were of the house of Berwick,” she protested quickly. “ And my Lord Clare has in my presence called it a princely line.”

I smiled in the darkness, yet with bitterness at my heart.

“ True enough, but our glory is all in the past. There is nothing left but memory. To-day only a few impoverished acres, and a ruined castle remain for all the grandeur that was. The sons of Berwick have nothing left but their honor, and their swords. I claim

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only, Mademoiselle, the name of a soldier of France; my total income the stipend of the king."

Her hand closed over mine warmly.

"Some of the truest men I know, Monsieur," she said softly, "have bravely met the same misfortune. It is the accident of birth, and can in no way change my thought of you. Tomorrow the Marquis d'Enville might be stripped of all his honors and wealth by some turn of the wheel, yet I would be Camille d'Enville still. And you are Arthur Shea, of the house of Berwick, although you wear a sub-lieutenant's uniform. It is the man I see."

"You speak bravely; the glamour of the court has not spoiled you."

"Not if you mean a failure to see beneath the clothes. I have witnessed the meanness of kings, Monsieur, and the cruelty of a courtier's smile. And I have learned to recognize men when I meet them. It is no longer a question do I trust you, but do you trust me. I would always be your friend, Monsieur."

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“And I yours,” I answered eagerly. “Yet I felt I must tell you who it was you consorted with. I have the pride of my race, Mademoiselle.”

“And I of mine,” she replied firmly. “But it has naught to do with clothes or wealth. What was that noise above?”

“I heard none; but we should be moving upward. The delay here only increases our peril. Retain your clasp of my hand — the stairs are narrow, and curve.”

We advanced slowly, for although I deemed the passage clear, yet the darkness was intense, and a certain fear of encountering the unknown rendered me cautious. Even at the last turn there was no guidance of light from above, but my groping hand discovered the guarding stone thrust back in its grooves. Whispering to her to wait, I crept through the opening, and drew my body to the floor of the tower. The solid walls surrounding me, with only the one narrow doorway leading to the roof, and that partially obscured by vines, left the place scarcely less dark than the

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gloomy stairs below. Straining my eyes, and listening intently, I could perceive no object, or hear sound, more alarming than the wind rattling the leaves. Convinced that the tower, at least, was unoccupied, I reached back, and assisted her up beside me. For a moment of indecision we rested there, holding our breath, and listening for any warning noise. Her form pressed closely against me, and the sensation of that near contact made me oblivious to all else. At last she questioned.

"Is there a door, Monsieur? I can see nothing."

"Yes, it is over there. I can see the glimmer of a star through the opening from where I lie. I do not believe there is anything to fear, and I know the way."

"But where could the other man have gone?" she urged, her mind still hopeful of finding him to be her brother. "Was there some other passage?"

"I found none," I confessed, "when I came this way before, but there must be one. I did not search with care, for I was following

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Gospele, but I am certain the man is not here. He must be in hiding somewhere below. Are you ready? Shall we explore the roof?"

The pressure of her hand answered me, and I arose to my feet, gripping the hilt of my sword. I felt not the slightest anticipation of encountering any antagonist, yet my instincts were those of a soldier, guarding against surprise. I stepped ahead, feeling the clasp of her hand on my sleeve, and stood erect in the opening, holding aside the vines so as to see more clearly. Dark as the night was a dim gleam of far off stars, peering through rifts of cloud, gave faint illumination. It was a ghostly, spectral light, concealing more than it revealed, and rendering grotesque the most familiar objects. Someway it was more frightful than the darkness through which we had been groping, and the startled girl clutched me in terror, staring about at the odd shadows. I had a glimpse of her face, and its expression of despair and appeal served to steady my own nerves.

“’T is nothing but the flicker of the stars,

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Mademoiselle," I whispered quietly. "We are alone — see, nothing moves."

"Oh, but it does move!" she sobbed. "Look over yonder! *Mon Dieu!* can you not see! It — comes here!"

I saw the thing now, my gaze following her pointed finger, and my heart seemed to stop its beating. Saint Christopher! What was it! For the instant I could not tell, so strange, so bizarre was the figure; then a star gleam caught it in a spectral ray — it stood upright, encased in ancient armor!

CHAPTER XXI

WE LAY THE GHOST

NEVER have I known a Celt wholly free from faith in the supernatural. It is the inheritance of our race, and, although I might laugh at the experience of others, yet, for the instant, peering through the dim spectral light which barely rendered that roof scene visible, I never doubted but what that ghostly moving figure was a visitant from beyond the grave. What else could it be, save some returning spirit of the ancient past, guarding these ruined battlements? There still rang in my ears memory of those words of fear uttered by frightened men in the hall below — men who claimed to have seen with their own eyes such ghostly guardians, and who had fled before them in terror. I had believed then they were but superstitious cowards, victims of imagination. Yet I had not forgotten the drear tale of Guiteau, nor the verification of Francois, and Jules. It had

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haunted me as I burrowed in the dark of those gloomy corridors, and was never absent from memory, as I gazed back at those approaching torches, and read the uncontrollable fear marking the faces of their bearers. It was ghosts, not men, they shrank from, and, in spite of every effort, the same dread terror of the unknown chilled my blood. And now I faced the thing! This was no dream, no mere shadow, but a horrible reality. The stars gleamed on a suit of mail, on closed helmet, on the blade of a great two-handed sword. Ay! And the thing moved toward me in silent, menacing grimness. It was there!— there! and drawing nearer! I could rub my eyes, could shade them with my arm, but the awful figure was still there! Nothing would blot it out, obliterate its horror, or convince me of its unreality. The ghastly apparition faced me, advanced, seemed to challenge me to mortal combat.

Men have called me brave, but I had no courage then. By the saints, I was afraid, beads of cold perspiration on my face, my

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very breath stopped, my limbs shaking as with palsy. The good God knows what held me to my place; perchance I was rooted there by fear, paralyzed by terror. Yet it could not be that alone, for I retained the strength to act, the conception of duty. Mademoiselle sank to the roof, giving utterance to one sharp cry, and hiding her face in her hands. Scarce knowing what I did, or why, I took a step forward, my sword drawn, and stood between them, fronting — I knew not what!

And the thing — real or unreal, spirit of the dead, or vision of the living — came straight toward me. I thought I could see the spots of rust on the steel breastplate, the gleam of eyes through the bars of the visor. Yet there was no sound to break the spell — no voice to challenge me: no heavy foot crunched on the stone of the roof. The figure moved, but did not appear to walk, seeming rather to glide forward effortless, a mere spectral shadow. I even imagined I could perceive a star gleam through the very body of it, as if the whole figure was but floating vapor.

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Only that huge, two-handed sword moved, and was held aloft by hands grasping the hilt. I think the certainty of this was all that kept me sane; alone served to convince me that I fronted a masquerade — that this was no spirit from another world, but a human being that confronted me.

As the suspicion flashed through my brain, manhood reasserted itself. I stood erect, alert and ready, my blade thrust upward to ward a blow. It was instinct, training, discipline, which put me instantly on defense. I was scarcely conscious of my own actions, yet my eyes sought the opening in the visor, and my sword leaped to the guard. The great blade was poised to strike; the hands that held it now so close I was sure they were of flesh and blood. Anger took the place of fear in my heart, and I took a step forward, driving my point at what I took to be a crevice in the armor. I must have missed, for the blade struck solid, bending to the force of the blow, the point flying up, and slashing the exposed wrist. The huge broadsword fell with a clang

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at my feet, and the armor clad figure staggered back. But I knew now I faced a man — knew it by the resistance of that steel breastplate, and by the smothered French oath which burst from his lips. I flung myself at him, the weight of my body hurling the fellow back, but my hands slipped from the smooth armor, finding no finger grip. We went down together, I on top. He lay motionless, arms outstretched, the armor encasing him black and shapeless. Even with my ear at the visor of his helmet I could distinguish no pulsing of breath. Yet surely the fellow could not be dead. The blow dealt had not penetrated the mail, nor been of sufficient weight to do much injury. His unconsciousness must arise from the violence of his fall, and heavy pressure of the armor.

Confident that he was helpless to do farther harm I arose to my knees, and glanced about to distinguish Mademoiselle. She was within the darker shadow of the tower, scarcely discernible, but at my movement her voice spoke.

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"Is it you, Monsieur? You are not hurt?"

"By not so much as a scratch," I answered, now entirely myself again. "The man was so burdened he could not fight."

"A man! That was a man?"

"So I make it, for he cried out lustily enough, and in rare French, when my blade rasped him. But the ears alone bear witness thus far, as the eyes only reveal the steel casements. He seems smothered, and I possess small knowledge how he is fastened together. Can you come here, Mademoiselle?"

She came forward quickly enough, but once beside me hesitated, staring reluctantly down through the darkness at the motionless black object at her feet.

"You think him dead?"

"No, but likely to be, unless we loosen this helmet, and give him air. He must have struck heavily as he fell, and is stunned. This is the clasp here, is it not? this leather thing! Faith, 't is as hard as iron."

Her hands helped me, and the prisoner stirred, and gave utterance to a groan, as we

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tugged at the rusted buckle. It yielded slowly to our combined efforts, but even then it was a task to press back the face of the helmet. The man drew in a long breath, yet still lay motionless, the faint light not sufficient to reveal his features. The girl clung to my arm in uncertainty.

“Who is he? Can you see?”

“Only a dim outline, but I have no doubt he will prove to be the fugitive. None of La Porte’s gang would venture here alone at this hour. To my mind, now that I have my senses again, the whole thing is natural enough. The man knew the superstitious fright of those fellows below, and planned to play ghost to win a way out. Not so bad a scheme either. Saint Denis! but he had my blood turned to ice. Not until my sword struck did I believe it to be a man who fronted me.”

She drew in her breath quickly, hiding her face on my sleeve, and I drew her more closely to me, the very recurring memory of that moment of horror causing us to forget all else.

“I — I was never so frightened before,”

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she confessed brokenly. "I—I could not even stand, but— but you—"

"I! Do not make any hero of me, Mademoiselle, in this affair," I confessed lightly. "Faith! I lacked strength to run, that was all. A child could have overcome me with a feather. 'T was only that the fellow could not fight in his armor that gave me victory. He was worse off than I."

"But not so frightened."

"No, he had that advantage, although he probably had no thought of coming to blows when he donned that suit of mail. He must have found it somewhere in his flight, and managed to get into it, believing the fright of his appearance would scatter all before him. Why he should be up here puzzles me: ay! and how he ever held up that broadsword. Feel the weight of it, Mademoiselle. Whoever the fellow is, he is no weakling. I'll turn him over, and see what I can do with this breastplate."

The movement must have aroused the man to consciousness, or else it pained him into

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expostulation, for he swore a round oath, and made a vain effort to sit up. I helped by bracing my shoulder under him, and the starlight gave me an unsatisfactory glimpse of his face.

“Unloose the old iron!” he said heartily, striving to make me out through the darkness, but evidently unaware of the near presence of the girl. “It is worse than being in jail — not that I have ever tried it, although I suppose you have — but, anyway, this is bad enough. Come, my good fellow, help me out of the cursed thing.”

“How does it open, friend?” I asked, feeling in vain for some clasp, and tempted to laugh at his impatience. “I can find nothing to lay hold upon.”

“Saint Agnes! how should I know? There ’s a catch there somewhere. ’Ay! in the back, or side. By my faith, the affair went together easily enough; just a click, and I was trussed up like a fowl. Turn me over, and you may find the spot — the thing is so tight I can scarcely breathe. Hah! that ’s better.

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Heaven preserve me! What's here? — a woman?"

"Yes," I said rather shortly, not altogether pleased with his tone of command. "A woman, and it might be well for you to mind your words."

"Piff!" he returned carelessly, "little anything I may say will hurt her, I imagine. If she consorts with these ruffians —"

"Now see here," I broke in roughly enough to hush him. "You are not talking to any of La Porte's gang, and I have small inclination to take orders from you, whoever you may be. Bear that in mind, will you. Now then lie still — here is something at last not unlike a clasp."

He turned obediently enough to the pressure of my grip, but continued to stare at me through the darkness. At last his temper broke loose.

"If I was free from this I would make you answer, my fine fellow."

"You are likely to have the chance, if you keep still a minute. Now I have it — sit up."

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He did, and I took off the heavy breast-plate, and cast it down on the roof.

"See what you can do with the rest of the harness. This is no time for talk."

Able to attain his feet once more, all the natural audacity seemed to return. The visor still concealed his face, and so muffled his voice I could barely distinguish his words. Not knowing what the fool might attempt I arose and faced him.

"Isn't it!" he sneered, his tone ugly enough. "Now see here, fellow, I am able to take care of myself, and I talk when I please. You've done me a good turn, but no ragamuffin of an outlaw can tell me to keep still."

"If you refer to me," I returned coldly, but with inclination to throttle him, "you waste breath with your threats. I am no outlaw; but a French officer."

"You! How came you here?"

"The story can wait. Enough that I am what I claim to be."

"And the woman?"

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"A high born lady of France, for whose honor I would fight you most gladly, Monsieur."

He turned toward her, no more than a dim, ill-defined shadow in the gloom, and bowed low, with excess of gallantry. Then he fronted me again, and laughed.

"Then indeed have I fallen into worthy hands," he commented sarcastically. "An officer and a lady, hey, in this black hole. It has the twang of romance. You also flee those devils below?"

"We were seeking some way of escape when we met you."

"And mistook me for a ghost—is that it! Well, you were scared badly enough. Ha! I know now what it was that held you—you were ashamed to play the coward before the girl. And that was what overcame me. I had no chance to fight in those things, but thought the very sight of them would send you flying. So it would, no doubt, had you been one of La Ponce's miscreants. In sooth, I'm sorry not to try it on them."

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He stopped suddenly, and then laughed again, as if a new idea had struck him.

"By Gad! I have it! A French officer, say you? Ah! and I'll make a guess at the name. Saint Anne! I thought I knew that voice, although to save me I could n't put a handle to it. Are you Shea, of the Irish Brigade?"

"I am," I answered, still on my guard, for the actions of the man puzzled me. "But you have the advantage with your face concealed. Let's have done with this masquerade, Monsieur, and find out if we are to be friends or foes. There is a lady here who needs defenders."

He had found the clasp of the helmet, and flung the heavy bit of armor aside, turning toward where she stood with a low bow.

"A duty in which I have never been known to fail, my hot-headed Irish friend," he said almost gaily. "Fait!, but this is an odd affair, so odd I take it to be the devil's own brewing. What say you if I name myself Charles d'Enville?"

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"Only that I sincerely thank God," I replied soberly, not so greatly surprised at his disclosure, yet immensely relieved. "I half suspected, Monsieur, although I fled the camp believing you seriously hurt. I do not understand, but I am glad."

"No doubt of that," and to my surprise he cordially extended his hand. "And it was no fault of you, or your sword blade. The blow was for the heart, had it not encountered a decoration, which turned it into a flesh wound. However, it was a fair fight between comrades, and no doubt I spoke harshly — 't is apt to be my way. Let's have done with the memory of it, and turn to our task, Monsieur. The lady is one you know?"

"I call her friend, Monsieur, and your sister."

He wheeled suddenly, still hampered in his movements by the heavy armor clinging to his lower limbs, but no longer careless, or feigning indifference. The very sound of his voice took on a new tone.

"My sister, you say? Camille you — you

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here! My God! this is strange! Tell me, how does it happen? You were in Paris three days ago."

She clung to him sobbing, scarcely able to control her voice.

"Do not ask me now, Charles," she managed to articulate. "It was all a foul plot, in which we were both involved. I — I cannot speak; I — I am so glad you are alive."

"Oh, ho, so this young jackanapes has been boasting that he split me on his sword, hey! 'T is not so easily done. But I would get to the truth of this matter. Is the Irishman friend or foe?"

She held his arm firmly.

"Do not mistrust him; he has been my friend. He is here now seeking to save me. It is de Saule who has plotted evil."

"De Saule! Ah! I have a glimmer of light. The fiend would win by force, what he cannot gain otherwise. And the king?"

"Aids him — Louis likes to have his own way."

"Listen to me, d'Enville," I broke in im-

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patiently. "And I will give you the story in a word. Mademoiselle is frightened and unstrung. 'T is like this, as I have picked it up. Louis would marry his favorite to Mademoiselle d'Enville, and the lady will have nothing of the match. She shows her good taste. But de Saule has power with the king, and a wit to devise other means than persuasion. With the help of the king he plots. Ayl and, only that I came in accidentally, the plan was not so bad. They induce Mademoiselle to leave Paris with dispatches, guided by a fellow in de Saule's pay. They convince her that only a woman can penetrate the lines of the allies. They know her spirit; that she loves France and will volunteer to go. That is easy. She is to be guided into an ambuscade, and taken prisoner by La Porte's rascals; and thus kidnaped — then brought to this castle of Roisel —"

"Is this Roisel?"

"Ayl a deserted ruin for three hundred years, by all the peasants hereabout supposed to be haunted. 'T is a fine rendezvous for

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such banditti. 'T was so chosen. De Saule himself was hand in glove with the villains in their infernal plot."

"With La Porte?"

"Small doubt of that. Mademoiselle says he is La Porte; that he has boasted of it to her."

"*Mon Dieu!* But go on. I begin to see where I come in on this scheme — 'T was the king's order that sent me afield on wild goose chase."

"I thought as much. It was all arranged to work smoothly, but luck intervened. 'T was a party of English guards who captured Mademoiselle, before La Porte's men had a chance. Her guide was killed, and she was brought to an inn in the village out yonder. It was there we met first, and endeavored to escape. But while I sought a horse the lady was spirited away, and brought here. Some fate led me right, and, under God, I found her."

D'Enville stood motionless, waiting for me to go on, his eyes turning from my obscured

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face toward his sister, as though he would assure himself.

"He has served you?" he asked finally, his tone hard, and insistent.

For answer she crossed to me, and held out both hands.

"He is a true man," she said simply, glancing backward across her shoulder. "I have every trust in Arthur Shea."

CHAPTER XXII

THE ATTACK

THE chevalier, moving his steel clad limbs awkwardly, managed to shuffle forward to where our dim shapes assumed some semblance to reality. It relieved me when his lips emitted a good-natured laugh.

“You must, indeed, have proven your worth, Monsieur, to win such words of confidence, from the lady,” he said stifling his amusement. “Faith! I know this sister of mine, and never have I heard her speak so frankly before. And her recommendation is good enough for me. Your hand again, Monsieur. Ayl and a good firm grip — I like that. It is the kind that holds a sword firm, and strikes home. Never dream I hold animosity for the prick you gave me. ’T was a fair battle, and you Irish are of a fighting race; ’t is in the blood. So we ’ll be done with that, and stand comrades now. What say you, lieutenant?”

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"With all my heart," I answered heartily. "We have enough of villainy to war against to wipe out our foolish quarrel. Why, friend, I hardly recall now what caused it — so let it go."

We stood silent, hand in hand.

"You say de Saule is himself here?" he asked as if still doubtful.

"I saw him myself in the hall below, and he led the way up the stairs in search after you. 'T was the man you knocked down when you ran, and you left your mark on him. There is no doubt about the fellow, for he held converse with Mademoiselle, and threatened her. Ay! the duke is here fast enough, and his humped-back dwarf is with him."

"The wretch Gospele?"

"That is the fellow. I found him here alone on the roof, and dragged a confession out of the scoundrel. The moment I recognized him I knew de Saule was involved, and suspected his purpose. The dwarf is locked safely in the same cell you occupied. Did you kill Deslins, Monsieur?"

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"If you mean the jailer—yes," he answered indifferently. "The thief wore my uniform, and before I could strip it from him someone approached, and I was compelled to hide."

"Gospele, no doubt; I caught my first glimpse of the fellow in the alcove of the big hall."

"It may have been, although I was not where I could see. However, there was more than one, for I heard voices. Once later I endeavored to reach the stairs, but there was a man there seemingly on guard. Then he disappeared somewhere, but I had no sooner stolen into the corridor than someone came tramping down upon me from the rear. You say this was de Saule?"

"He was the man, returning below after having conversed with Mademoiselle."

"I had but a glimpse of him, and it was already growing dusk. I sprang aside into a small room beyond, and found a man skulking there. He was more frightened than I, although neither of us dare speak a word.

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His was a face I had seen before, yet cannot recall where. Do you know who he was, Monsieur?"

"A captain of the Regiment of Touraine, Emil Cassier. I found him prisoner on the lower floor, and left him to watch, while I sought for a way out. He was the man on guard at the stairs. He is dead."

"Dead!"

"Ay! he toppled over, and fell to the stone flags below. The horror of his death cry rings in my ears yet."

"'T was the scream I heard. I thought it the wail of a ghost, and my blood ran cold."

I felt Mademoiselle's hands clutching mine in nervous terror.

"Monsieur," she whispered. "Let us not stand here and talk of all this. It can do no good, and it only frightens me to remember. I am not a soldier, Monsieur; I am just a woman."

"For which I am thankful," I returned in the same low voice, and glad to be aroused to action. "Come, chevalier, the whole af-

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fair is sufficiently explained. Get your limbs free from that harness, and we will soon discover if there be any other way down from this roof."

"I doubt if there is," he growled, tugging at the clasps. "I was seeking for some passage when you came, but had found none. Give me your help here — press the hook back; so. Now try the other one. Not you, Camille, 't will only hurt your fingers. Let me get hold with you, Shea. It was bad enough dressing up in this rig, but the getting out of it is a confounded sight harder. Ah! it gives — ah, I'm a man again, and can act the part."

I stood up, and glanced about, seeking to distinguish more clearly the objects surrounding us. I had been too busily engaged during my first visit to make any exploration, but now the necessity of knowing our exact situation became clearly apparent. I was no longer alone in my responsibility, and d'Enville possessed the reputation of reckless daring, and no small prowess in arms. Yet it was

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not reckless fighting, but wit, which would better serve us now. There was no sound of our pursuers — the chances were they had failed to discover the secret door leading to the stairs, or were unable to learn its mechanism. It was evident also they knew of no other means of attaining the roof. But for de Saule's leadership we would have little to fear, for his cowardly following would troop backward to the lower floor at the slightest excuse. But de Saule was of bull-dog breed, and would hang on. Ah! the man had too much at stake to let go; his thoughtless confession to Mademoiselle relative to his connection with these outlaws would alone render him desperate, for if once the truth reached the ears of the king, his days of favor were ended. And what course would he pursue when he found his way blocked? Where would he naturally turn? It was a riddle not hard to read. He had no reason to suspect my presence in the castle, and no knowledge of the release of Mademoiselle from her confinement in the tower.

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In our flight through the darkness he had gained no glimpse of our presence. But he was aware of the death of Deslins, and, might naturally suspect that d'Enville had killed the jailer. Indeed it was highly probable he had even recognized the latter in the fight at the head of the stairs. Then the first thing he would do, when he found pursuit useless, would be to retrace his steps, and learn positively if the chevalier had escaped from the cell in which he had been confined. That search would release Gospele, would reveal my presence, and, undoubtedly lead to the knowledge that the lady had also escaped. Such information would only serve to increase de Saule's anger, and render him desperate. He would have everything at stake, and would hesitate at nothing.

And Gospele could furnish him with the information needed. I felt no doubt as to that, for the dwarf had not wandered for days about those corridors without discovering their secrets. He would recall instantly the door leading to the stairs, and might even

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know how to manipulate the hidden spring by which it operated. And de Saule would drag the information from the slinking cur; would drive his gang of cutthroats through the darkness, and compel them to do his will. Ay! he was man enough for that — for he would realize that all his future depended on our capture. It was likely enough they were below there now, making ready to steal cautiously up the narrow stairs, and pounce upon us. We had enjoyed a respite, a breathing spell, an opportunity to gather our wits, and take counsel together. For a brief space we had baffled, and confused the villains, but soon, if not already, they would be on our trail, and we must depend upon ourselves; there was no outside help probable — no wandering patrol, French, or allied, would likely come to our rescue. I glanced at Mademoiselle, the outline of her sweet face barely visible, and my hands clinched with desperate resolve.

“You say, d’Enville, there is no other way down?”

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"Only that I found none, and I searched as best I could. 'Tis strange too the place should be left a cul-de-sac."

"There may be a secret way, not to be uncovered in the dark. 'Twas mere luck that revealed the other, the stone left ajar. However, 'tis plain there is but one plan left us, Chevalier, and that is to defend those stairs yonder until daylight gives us a chance to search. By this time the dawn cannot be very far away."

He glanced about uneasily.

"You believe they may discover the passage?"

"'Tis my reasoning that de Saule will prowl about until he finds that rascal of a dwarf locked up where I left him. The fellow undoubtedly knows the secret of those stairs. The rest is plain, Monsieur, for you know de Saule."

"A spawn of the devil!"

"And desperate withal; our escape will mean his ruin, and he will hesitate at no crime. Are you armed?"

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He laughed, as though the thought amused his humor, and stooped down to grasp the ancient broadsword at his feet.

"Only with this neat weapon. I know not the name it once went by, but the tuck calls for a man with two good hands to wield it. Try the weight of the metal, friend. Saint Anne! there must have been giants in those days to twirl a blade like this."

We were careless, I admit, idling there in talk, when our effort should have been to make secure our defense against those villains below. Yet there was nothing to cause alarm, no sound even of voices in the still night. The thought that Gospele released might know the secret of the stone door, and lead de Saule to the roof, was no more than a suspicion, and, if the men did discover the stair, their advance upward would surely never be a silent one. I doubted if even the duke could drive them to such a venture, before dawn made the passage clear, but, if he did succeed, it would only be attempted under the glare of torches, the light of which would instantly betray their

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coming. And the defense was likely to be no more than child's play; a single stout arm in the tower could drive back the whole crew. Besides the reckless nature of d'Enville had effect on me. He was an older man, a more experienced soldier, an officer of higher rank, and his careless good nature, and the spirit of badinage, served to transform a situation really serious into a bit of sport. To my suggestion that we stand on guard, he but laughed, and shrugged his shoulders, whispering some message to Mademoiselle, which might have been reflection on my courage. At least the supposition served to heat my blood, and silence my tongue.

Had we two been alone words might have led to quarrel, for there was an insolence about the fellow that rasped me, in spite of his pretense at comaraderie. It was not my nature to stand quiet before any reflection, veiled or open, and there was a sneer in the man's voice not to be ignored. My hand gripped my sword hilt, a hot retort on my lips — but she was his sister, and I loved her.

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We could not contend, not there, at least, in her presence, and my fingers relaxed, and I walked away from them into the deeper shadow of the high wall, struggling to conquer myself. She must have understood — a woman's intuition telling her the truth, for a moment later her shadow left his side, and came silently toward me. I remained motionless, leaning on a stone, until her hand touched my arm.

"Monsieur," she said softly. "It is only his way; he was ever careless of speech."

"And of manners," I could not help adding bitterly, although my fingers clasped her own. "Yet you need not fear, Mademoiselle, for although I am young of heart, and hot of blood, there shall be no exchange of words between us tonight. There may be all the fighting we need in defense of you."

Her hand clasp tightened, and the faint starlight revealed the contour of her uplifted face, the dark gleam of her eyes.

"I know," she said, as though the words came unsought. "You came over here to

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gain control. I saw your hand on the sword hilt. You are a brave man, Monsieur, and true. Yet — I — I thought my trust might strengthen you." She glanced about, as though to assure herself we were alone. "He is my brother."

"I shall not forget, but it is a mystery how you two are of the same blood. Surely he has no more cause for arrogant pride than you?"

"I am of the court; he, the camp — the environment develops different characteristics, Monsieur."

"True enough, no doubt; yet never did I suppose the court of Louis to be overstocked with modesty, or a school for gentleness."

"Nor is it, Monsieur," she returned soberly. "Nor am I a flower of such rare excellence. I am not devoid of pride, perchance even of arrogance. I have laughed at a king, and refused obedience. I am also a d'Enville. Others besides the L'ke de Saule have discovered that. 'T is not an angel, but a woman,

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Monsieur, whom you have succored yes, a woman of moods. Tonight I am your friend — tomorrow — ”

She paused, drawing in her breath quickly, and yielding to a swift impulse, I bent down, and kissed her hand.

“ Tomorrow you will still be to me, at least, Camille d’Enville. I am not afraid.”

“ What! not even of me, Monsieur? Now I know you for a bold man, yet the boast has been made before by others.”

“ But I am not others,” I dared to insist, bantered by her words. “ I am Arthur Shea, a soldier of fortune. I have all to win, and naught to lose — so why should I fear? Have I guessed wrong about tomorrow? ”

She hesitated, the long lashes hiding her eyes.

“ You may guess, Monsieur; I cannot tell. Tomorrow will be a new day. What I am tonight, I am — tomorrow, what I may be; I could not tell you, if I would Monsieur, for I know not the answer. There is in the shops of Paris, a changeable weave of silk they call

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Camille; at night it is rose-tinted, and by day a golden brown. I am Camille d'Enville; to those who know me well that is answer enough."

"But do they know you? Those who think they do?"

Her eyes flashed up into my face, although in that dim light I could not tell whether they laughed or frowned.

"They think they do, Monsieur; nor is it for me to say. The truth is for you to learn, yet Charles has always called me a will o' the wisp, and held me uncertain as a bubble of air — and one's brother should know, Monsieur."

I glanced beyond at the dimly revealed figure of the silent chevalier, whose very presence I had forgotten. He was apparently kneeling on the roof, although I could not determine what it was that occupied his attention so closely. Indeed I had no time in which to discover, for even as I glanced that way I beheld a moving figure behind him, a shapeless form stealing forward through the shadows — then another, and a third.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE FIGHT FOR LIFE

AT FIRST glimpse I failed to sense the reality of those spectral figures, half believing them visionary. So suddenly had they emerged upon view, without warning, that I stood staring in dazed wonderment, striving to collect my faculties, imagining my eyes played me some trick. I even took a step backward, the quick horror of that phantom-like approach bringing to me a twinge of fear paralyzing the mind. Then Mademoiselle gave utterance to a gasp, grasping my arm in terror, and I saw d'Enville rise to his feet, the great broad-sword lifted in both hands. Instantly in swift response to this movement of others, proof that the vision came not from disordered brain, the blood rushed back into my veins and the sword hilt leaped into the grip of my fingers. Those were men confronting us — men! Something to front and fight, wound and kill. The situation came to

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me in a flash — they had discovered the mechanism of the secret door, had crept silently up the unguarded stairs, and, taking advantage of our carelessness, had stolen out upon the roof. De Saule was among them, and Gospele, and the giant Guiteau, eager to get blow at us, no longer fearful of ghosts, and dragging their cowardly crew along by threat and promise. Ay! and they saw us; were circling out to trap us beyond escape — to meet them in the open was certain defeat. But here, in the angle of this broken wall, there was a chance — we in the blacker shadow, they in the starlight.

“Back here, d’Enville!” I cried desperately, thrusting Mademoiselle behind me. “Quick, man! Do n’t stop where you are!”

He heard me, and so did those others, but the chevalier hesitated, all discretion lost, all memory of his sister no doubt, the recklessness of his nature holding him stubborn.

“Close in, lads!” shouted a voice eagerly. “We’ve got them trapped. They are only men — two of them to fight you!”

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“Ah! so you think 't will be easily done de Saule?” and d'Enville laughed. “Come on then, and try, you snarling jackal. 'T is no duelling courtier you fight now, satisfied with a pin prick.”

I called again, my own brain clear enough, and realizing the odds against us.

“Not in the open! you have no chance there; come back here.”

I could see the turn of his head, the swift glance he cast toward where I stood shielding the girl.

“Ay! in a minute, but not till I leave my mark. Ah! I see you now, you black renegade.”

It was such swift action I could scarce tell what happened. Had I deemed best I could scarce have been of aid, but my plain duty was to remain where I was, crouched in the angle of the wall, the girl behind me, my sword blade ready. I felt the grasp of her hand on my sleeve, and heard the quick pulsing of her breath. I could not distinguish de Saule among the others, but the chevalier

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must have singled him out, for he leaped forward hurling aside a fellow who stood between, and struck viciously. There was a clash of steel, a spark or two as contending blades met, then a mingling of shadowy figures, and a sound of angry voices. I doubt if there was a minute of fighting, but it was fierce enough at that! D'Enville cut and thrust like a demon, wielding his ancient weapon with both hands, and making no effort to protect himself. Seemingly he had no thought, or purpose, save to reach the duke, and wreak vengeance, but the latter had no will for such encounter, backing away, and roaring out some order to his men. The chevalier struck them aside like flies, toppling one headlong with thrust of his shoulder; another fell with the sweep downward of the blade, and a sharp scream told me Gospele had felt the stroke. Then he met a real swordsman, and there was clang of steel on steel, a shout of derision, an oath, the noise of trampling feet. I could see little only the confused blot of rapidly moving figures engaged in desperate combat. But for

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my obligation to protect the girl kneeling behind me, her hands clutching my sleeve, I should have leaped forward, careless of my own safety, and hurled myself into that struggling mass. Yet I dare not leave her there alone. Already there were figures visible to right and left stealing forward, the sunlight glimmering on drawn weapons. I heard the heavy bass of Guiceteau, as he pointed us out to his creeping jackals, urging them to the attack. A moment more, and I would be at sword-points with the devils, and surely d'Enville was soldier enough to make good his retreat. I shouted to him a swift word of warning, but the man either failed to hear above the turmoil, or else his rage drove all other consideration from his brain. The great two-handed sword crashed and fell, rose again and was swept down with remorseless power. Twice the dark shadows of bodies on the roof broke before him.

I saw him stumble over them, as he pressed grimly on, seeking only the one antagonist he sought to kill. I doubt if he ever touched

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him, for now as they knew they faced living men, the villains proved their courage, confident of superior numbers, eager to bring down their prey. They fought like beasts, dashing in beneath the sweep of his weapon, and gripping at him with naked hands. He killed, but he paid. I saw the flash of a knife buried in his side, a glare of flame lit the horrid scene as a pistol flared, a dying man clung to him in frenzied agony. Once more the huge sword swept in deadly circle — then he tottered, sought vainly to retain his feet, and went crashing forward, his head against the stairs.

And now it was I — I alone! Yet as I live, I recall now no pang of fear; no sensation save of joy, of anticipation, as I faced them. The fierce ardor of fight was already in my blood, the eagerness to touch steel, the desire to slay. Ay! but my head was clear — I was not meeting that onrush like a mad fool in the open, but in the crevice of the wall, where they must front me. 'T would be a fair fight, and they held me a swordsman even in the army

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of France. Under God I would put my mark on those dirty devils — would leave a tale to tell. Ay! and there were not so many now. D'Enville had taken toll; there was many a splotch yonder where his ancient weapon had bitten deep — and, not only that; he had put fear into the craven hearts of the others that lived.

I heard de Saule and Guieteau cursing, and a blow struck, ere they ventured to move. Then they crept forward like snails, stepping across the dead bodies, breathing hard, and swearing and snarling like a pack of curs. Bah! they were canaille, prowling wolves, with no stomach for fighting. I could hiss at them, and they would slink away howling. But de Saule and his giant lieutenant were of different breed; ay! and with more at stake. This was to be no boy's play, but a passage at arms, and 't was said in Paris the duke wielded a blade in skill. With muscles tense, and sword advanced I waited, drawing in a long breath, every nerve braced and ready.

Mademoiselle's grasp on my arm relaxed,

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and I realized that she knew what was coming. She was a soldier's daughter, a soldier's sister, and understood I must be left free. I glanced aside at her, a mere shadow in the concealing niche of the wall. God! if those ruffians ever got to her, it would be when I was dead.

"Here, take this," I said, thrusting my pistol into her hands. "There is but one shot — keep it to the last."

"Yes, Monsieur," the voice firm, assured.

"There is going to be a fight, but I am good for it," I went on, scarce knowing why I spoke. "Crouch back as far as you can, and keep faith in me."

"I shall always do that, Monsieur. Are we left alone? is Charles dead?"

"He fell; and whether dead or alive, is out of it. They are coming now."

I could see the fellows, yet they were so bunched, the dim light confused my vision, and 't was hard to guess how many held their feet. I made it four, beside the leaders, although it seemed like yet another crouched

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beyond in the shadow. I could not be sure; nor did I care greatly, my teeth set, my blood leaping. 'T was not such dogs who would win — be they four or a dozen. My fight was with Guiteau and de Saule; ay! and the Irish heart of me was full of joy. If she was not there! if she was not there! But I would do the best I could — I a gentleman of the house of Berwick. The knotted muscles swelled in my forearm; the grip of my fingers viselike on the sword hilt.

It was all in an instant, this pause, this breathing space. Yet that which followed was so swift of action, so jumbled and indistinct as to seem more dream than reality. There is nothing clear, vivid about any of it. It was, as desperate fighting always is, a mad, fierce, heedless struggle, where instinct takes the place of thought, and the body moves knowing nothing of the why, or how. There was a blind rush forward, a shout of command, a roared out oath, a gleam of weapons in the starlight. I saw the dim forms of men bunched together, their faces vague, uncer-

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tain; I touched steel with my blade, pushed a foot forward, warded and lunged under the first fellow's guard. There was a cry of agony, a toppling back of his body, the clatter of a falling sword, and I stood over him, thrusting and hacking, careless of my own hurt, the joy of the fighting turning my blood to fire. Oaths, shouts, greeted the onset, bearded faces fronted me, the villains giving way in surprise before so fierce an attack. Bah! they were like children, and my point tasted blood.

Suddenly out from the confused muck, a blade struck mine — a blade with a wrist behind it. I felt the difference, and stiffened to the fight. It was Guiteau, his giant figure looming black and ominous before me. With one sweep of his free arm he hurled those others aside, one sinking helplessly to the roof, and drove his sword straight at me.

“Get back, you curs!” he yelled savagely, “till I show this fighting cock some sword play.”

'T was a vicious thrust, sped by a strong

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arm, and only by lightning speed, and rare luck, did my blade defend it, the sharp point tearing through my sleeve, and forcing me back against the wall.

“Well struck, you brute!” I answered between clinched teeth. “Now take mine!”

Faith, he was no swordsman, no fencer of skill. I knew that before we had thrust and parried twice, but the giant strength of his arm bore down my guard, forced me to desperate defense. I could prick him, and did, bringing blood from shoulder and thigh, yet I could not drive my blade home, his strength holding me back. Once he struck my head, a glancing blow, and once he drove the hilt of my own sword against my breast so hard it staggered me. Yet I came back at him desperate and reckless, realizing my task. I must kill, else he would wear me out by sheer power of muscle. There was but one way, and I took it. An instant I parried, turning his blade aside with all the skill at fence I could command, mocking him, seeking to drive the brute furious with rage.

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“Ayl and where did you learn sword play?” I cried, my blade darting like a venomous snake before his eyes. “In some farrier’s shop I warrant. You are more blacksmith than soldier. Wait! I have a lesson for you here — ha! does that taste good? And there is another stroke you never learned — a quarter of an inch more, and you would have been out of it — next time, my friend, next time. Bah! you are a big, surly cur, but your bark is worse than your bite; well, you’ve done your last robbery, and your last murder, Monsieur Guiteau. Do you know what I am going to do with you? I am going to kill you — now!”

I opened my guard, and he struck, foaming with rage, an oath bursting from his lips. By a quick turn of the arm, my hilt caught the descending blade, and I leaped straight at him, reckless of consequence, taking the one chance, and driving my point at his huge body. It struck, but we went down together, his hand gripping me, my leg caught under him. There was an instant of struggle; someone

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loomed above us with a drawn sword — then a flash of flame split the darkness, a sharp report rang out, and the fellow reeled backward, tripped on Guiteau's foot, and fell with a crash. I wriggled loose from the dead weight, my sword still gripped in my fingers, and staggered to my feet.

CHAPTER XXIV

CROSSED SWORDS WITH DE SAULE

DAZED as I was I realized what had happened — how my life had been saved. Mademoiselle had fired her one shot; had sacrificed her only defense to protect me from that sword thrust. Breathing heavily, my wounds burning, my eyes blinded with blood, the thrill of knowing what she had done, brought back instantly my strength, my zest for battle. I was her champion; alone I stood between her and these villains; God grant me stout heart and arm. I saw dimly, sweeping the blood from before my eyes, endeavoring to distinguish my adversaries. There were but two left, so far as I could see — one back close by the steps, as though ready to flee; the other fronting me, with sword poised for attack. There was no mistaking who he was — de Saule! My blade flew up eagerly and the steel met with a sharp clang.

“Stay where you are, Mademoiselle!” I

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called, in fear of what she might venture. "I am all right, and able to pluck this vulture of his feathers!"

"You crow loud enough!" he retorted hotly, "if noise were all. But you front a swordsman this bout, you Irish meddler. I'll show you some Paris tricks!"

"Go to, Monsieur; no better time to learn than now; and I'll teach you how we of the army fight — 't is no duel for points, where a pin prick means victory. *En garde*, Monsieur le Duke."

We were at it furiously, yet with no such recklessness as marked the bout with Guicteau. Here was a master of fence; I knew his skill before, but now I became doubly assured his was no common hand. The truth was in the steady, firm blade that met mine, the quick, baffling thrust, the swift recovery, the subtle twist of wrist. And the man knew his power, felt confidence in his skill. Ay! but he misjudged mine, and I retained the sense to keep him ignorant. I gave back, my nerve strengthening, my breath slower, ever

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gaining better control of my mental faculties. This was to be a fight to the death, and I could wait, assured of ability to defend myself. I would try the man out, test his temper, learn his tricks of sword play, and where his guard was weak. Yet it proved stern work at that, for he came at me like a demon, deceived by my retreat, and esteeming himself an easy victor.

There was faint gleam of light in the eastern sky, a mere brightening, yet sufficient to reveal the man's face. I could see the flash of his eyes, the self-satisfied smile curling his lips, as he drove his dancing point along my blade, as though thinking thus to dazzle and frighten me. Ay! and he knew the business, possessing a most pretty fence and guard, a long and deadly thrust, and many a sly trick I had never before seen. But he was a duelist, not a fighter, and mistook words for deeds.

"Ha! ha! my friend!" he cried, driving his glittering point the length of my blade. "I have met men of your school before. 'Twas a Royal Irlandais I gave the steel to at

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Paris a week back. Fools all! If this keeps up there will be small brigade left to stand beside Louis. Do you like that thrust? *Mon Dieu!* an eighth of an inch more, and I would have had you. I'll try another — what? you know the guard? Pah! I see; 't was only an awkward turn of the wrist."

My foot was against the wall, and I stood silent, meeting him fairly blade to blade. The time had come to end it — to change defense into attack. Cool as I felt, his voice, bitter, sarcastic, cut to my consciousness. The curl let him threaten and brag; I would teach him yet what real swordsmanship was. I had a soldier's contempt for a fencer; faith that I would outlast. Let the fellow talk, and waste his breath — a moment more, and he would need it.

"*Royal Irlandais,*" he mocked insolently, no doubt seeking to anger me, "a fine name for a lot of beggarly bog trotters. No doubt you came over seas to sell your sword with not so much as a rag to your back. A rare joke on the king, that. And now you're

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squire of dames! *Parbleu!* boy, and to what reward? a kiss from Mademoiselle's red lips? Bah! you 'll have none of it — there 's a man seeking that honey — ”

“ Save your breath, Monsieur,” I broke in coldly, the hot blood boiling through my veins. “ There 's work before you now.”

I advanced an inch, two inches, fighting in deadly earnest. He felt my strength, my grim, reckless purpose, and fell silent. All at once he seemed to realize this was to be no boy's play, but grim, desperate work. The look in his eyes changed, the sarcastic smile faded from his lips. They were pressed tightly together in thin line, as his groping steel touched mine with that soft, purring caress which pledges deadly action. And I forced him relentlessly, driving him to defense, permitting no opportunity for thrust. It was feint, and guard, stroke and parry, our nervous blades leaping in and out with the rapidity of lightning. I watched him like a hawk, our steel ringing a merry chorus, our feet shuffling across the roof. Twice we cir-

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cled, striving vainly to strike home; once he pricked my shoulder; twice I felt my lunge touch flesh! Yet neither paused, nor gave back. We were panting for breath, our faces grimly set, the perspiration dripping from our bodies. Saint Patrick! that was a bout at arms to make boast over — a fight, no fencing tourney; the growing light scintillating from off the deadly blades, as they darted back and forth in ceaseless thrust and parry.

He was the stronger man; ay! and the greater skilled; but I had youth, recklessness, breath, and a more subtle wrist. He fought like a demon, yet I wore him down, forcing him back, inch by inch, until his foot pressed the wall. It was there we ended it — he with high guard to block my feint toward his right shoulder; I with quick upward thrust beneath his steel which sent the point of my keen blade hurtling to his heart. His sword fell clattering at my feet, and his body crumpled into shapelessness, one gasp alone his death note.

An instant I stared down at that motionless body against the wall, gripping my sword

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hilt, swaying on my feet like a drunken man. All had occurred so quickly my brain reeled with dizziness — he was there fighting like a mad man; then he was nothing, a mere lifeless thing at my feet.

“Monsieur — the other man!”

Her voice called me, awoke me with its insistence. I glanced about, jerking free the sword blade, and swung around, blood dripping from the stained steel. The fellow was there, between us and the tower steps. The dim light of the dawn revealed the creased face of Francois, and he held a gun in his hands. Yet armed as he was, evidently halted by the sudden killing of de Saule, as he stole forward to bear a hand in the fray, his attitude was that of fright, of indecision. Nor did I give him time for thought. I sprang toward him, and he turned and fled, stumbling at the steps in such terror that he dropped his gun. St. Anne! I would have pricked him, had I not stumbled on a piece of d'Enville's discarded armor, and fallen headlong.

CHAPTER XXV

THE SUNRISE OF TOMORROW

I CAME slowly back to consciousness, to see golden sunlight reflected on the stones of the wall, and Mademoiselle's sweet face bending above, a look of welcome relief in her dark eyes. Her hands held mine, and as I endeavored to smile, the words of impulse dropped from her lips.

"Oh, Monsieur! it has terrified me so to see you. I knew not what to do; how seriously you were hurt."

"Bah! not at all," really ashamed of my awkwardness, and struggling to sit up. "I stumbled like a lout and fell, cracking my head. I'm dizzy yet, but 't is nothing to worry over. That last one got away?"

"Yes, Monsieur," her anxious eyes on me. "I have seen no more of him, but you — you are hurt. There are wounds, for you bleed."

"Mere scratches, Mademoiselle, to be

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healed by a dash of water. In faith, I have fared worse in a garrison fencing match. De Saule was the only swordsman among them; he gave me a pretty fight. Your hand again till I gain my feet — ah! see, the old strength will be mine presently.”

She clung to me, and I reeled a bit unsteadily, conscious of pain, my mind still dazed and uncertain. Yet a thrill stirred my blood, as my eyes left her face and glanced about over the roof now clearly revealed in the daylight. Ay! it had been a fight worthy any soldier, a tale of arms worth telling in camp or court.

D'Enville had left his deadly mark ere he fell, and I had borne my part well. The bodies, motionless, huddled in grotesque shapes just as they had fallen, occasionally lying one upon another — here, close to where I stood, those who had felt the sweep of the chevalier's ancient weapon, and over there by the broken wall the others who had lived to advance on me. I saw Jule's face black-bearded, scowling even in death, and the livid features of

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the hideous dwarf, his thin lips drawn back in a snarl. And d'Enville —

“Your brother, Mademoiselle?” I asked, my lips trembling. “Does he still live?”

“I know not, Monsieur. The time has not been long.”

“You have not left me?”

“No, Monsieur; I came when you fell. I was so frightened, I thought only of your hurt — of my being here alone. Yet — yet I think Charles is dead, Monsieur — he lies motionless.”

He rested with face buried on one arm, his limbs drawn under him, the very posture expressive of death, yet I crossed the narrow space between, stepping over a ragged peasant, a loathsome fellow, and looked closely. The single glance was enough; he had been stricken from behind, a hideous gash cleaving the skull. I drew a sharp breath, lifting my eyes to her face.

“He is dead, Monsieur?”

“Yes,” soberly. “But as he would have wished to die.”

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She was staring at him, leaning forward, her face white, her hands shading her eyes. Then she crossed before me and knelt down, making the symbol of the cross. I waited in silence, sword still in my hand, uncertain of the whereabouts of Francois, or if he had others to call to his assistance. It was so still about us I could hear the thudding of my heart, and the ghastly forms lying here and there were grim reminders of the horror of a moment before. I could scarcely believe the testimony of my own eyes, that these men were actually dead — that d'Enville and I had met them sword to sword, and conquered. The light was sufficiently strong by now to yield me glimpse of upturned faces; that was Guiteau just before the opening in the wall, his huge figure extended at full length, his ugly visage staring at the sky. De Saule lay curled up, his face hidden, but Jules was on his side, and seemed to grin with evil stare as I looked at him.

A shudder ran over me, and my head throbbed with a dull pain. Then I became

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conscious that Mademoiselle had risen from her knees. It was her voice which penetrated the haze of my brain, and aroused me to action.

"Monsieur — what — what are we to do now?"

"In truth," I replied, ashamed of myself, and seeking for words of encouragement, "You are the soldier, I the girl, it would seem. I was moping here with a brain paralyzed. What shall we do, Mademoiselle? Why we must find our way out, before that fellow who got away unscathed can find more villains to bar the passage."

"You think there are more?"

"That I do not know. Ay! there must be, unless they have fled, for a larger number than those who lie dead here were on guard in that lower hall. You saw them."

"Yes, Monsieur; there were others, four, or five, perhaps."

"That was my memory; no doubt the cowards slipped away unseen, afraid to follow. Well such as they will not serve to halt us.

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You fired your pistol, Mademoiselle. I had better load it again before we go."

While I was engaged at this task she moved nearer the wall, as though seeking to avoid the bodies. Suddenly she gave a little cry of surprise.

"Monsieur — who are they?"

She pointed to the southward, and, with a step, I stood beside her sharply gazing across the marsh toward the distant forest. A short column of horsemen, two abreast, even at that distance in fair sight, was riding along the narrow causeway, headed toward the castle gate.

That they were soldiers was evident to me at a glance, yet the distance prevented my eyes from distinguishing the uniform, and there was no wind to spread their pennons — a scouting party no doubt, or a squad of foragers. But belonging to which army! I stared long.

"Ay! they are soldiers, and coming here, but I cannot tell if they be enemies, or friends," I said at last. "This is neutral

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ground, scouted over by detachments from both camps."

"You cannot tell! you do not see!" her dark eyes shone, as they met mine. "Why, Monsieur, I can distinguish the uniform of the officer in front — it — it is like the one you wear; they are of the Irish Brigade."

I leaned out over the wall, and looked again, becoming dimly conscious that she was right — they were indeed Royal Irlandais, — and we were safe! The sudden reaction of this discovery left me, for the instant helpless and inert. My one thought was regret — it would mean our parting never to meet again. The barrier of rank rose inevitably between us, enforcing separation and a life apart. She, the daughter of the Marquis d'Enville, would go back to the court, leaving me to the old life of camp and field. The dream was done; the hope of love dead within me. I felt the light touch of her hand on my sleeve, and lifted my eyes to her face.

"What is it, Monsieur? You are not glad."

"For your dear sake, yes, Mademoiselle," I

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answered gravely. "I rejoice at your safety. But surely you must realize what this will mean? You will return to Paris, and resume your position. Louis will never dare avow his connection with this diabolical plot of de Saule's. He will smite and dissemble as a monarch can. And I — well all I shall retain of you will be the memory that once I was of service."

"And why, Monsieur?" her voice earnest and sincere. "Shall I not still remain Camille d'Enville?"

"Of whose nature you have told me — a creature of moods; changeable as the strange weave of silk given your name. Think you I have so soon forgotten the warning of what a difference the dawn of a morrow might bring?"

There was an instant of silence; the words she would speak hesitating on her lips. Her cheeks were flushed, her eyes lowered.

"This is the morrow, Monsieur."

"And you?"

"I — I have not changed; perhaps — per-

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haps, I did not tell you all the truth. It seems different now, since I have met a man."

Incredulously, scarcely understanding, I could but grasp her extended hands.

"Look at me," I cried eagerly. "I would see your eyes. You mean—"

The long lashes lifted shyly, a sweet smile in the depths of the eyes suddenly revealed.

"That I love you, Monsieur."

'T is the end of a soldier's story; just a chapter or two torn from out the history of a fighting race. The sunshine was on our faces, the light of love in our hearts, and down below my comrades rode steadily to the rescue. For me the world was won.

THE END

