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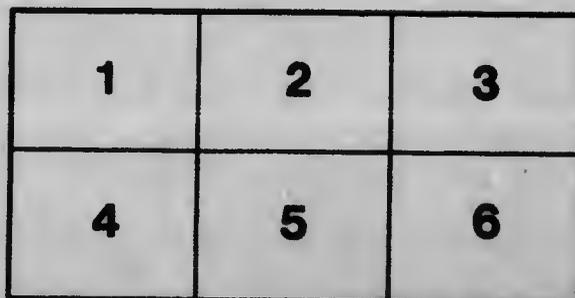
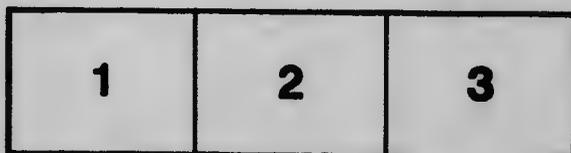
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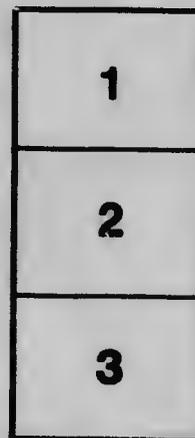
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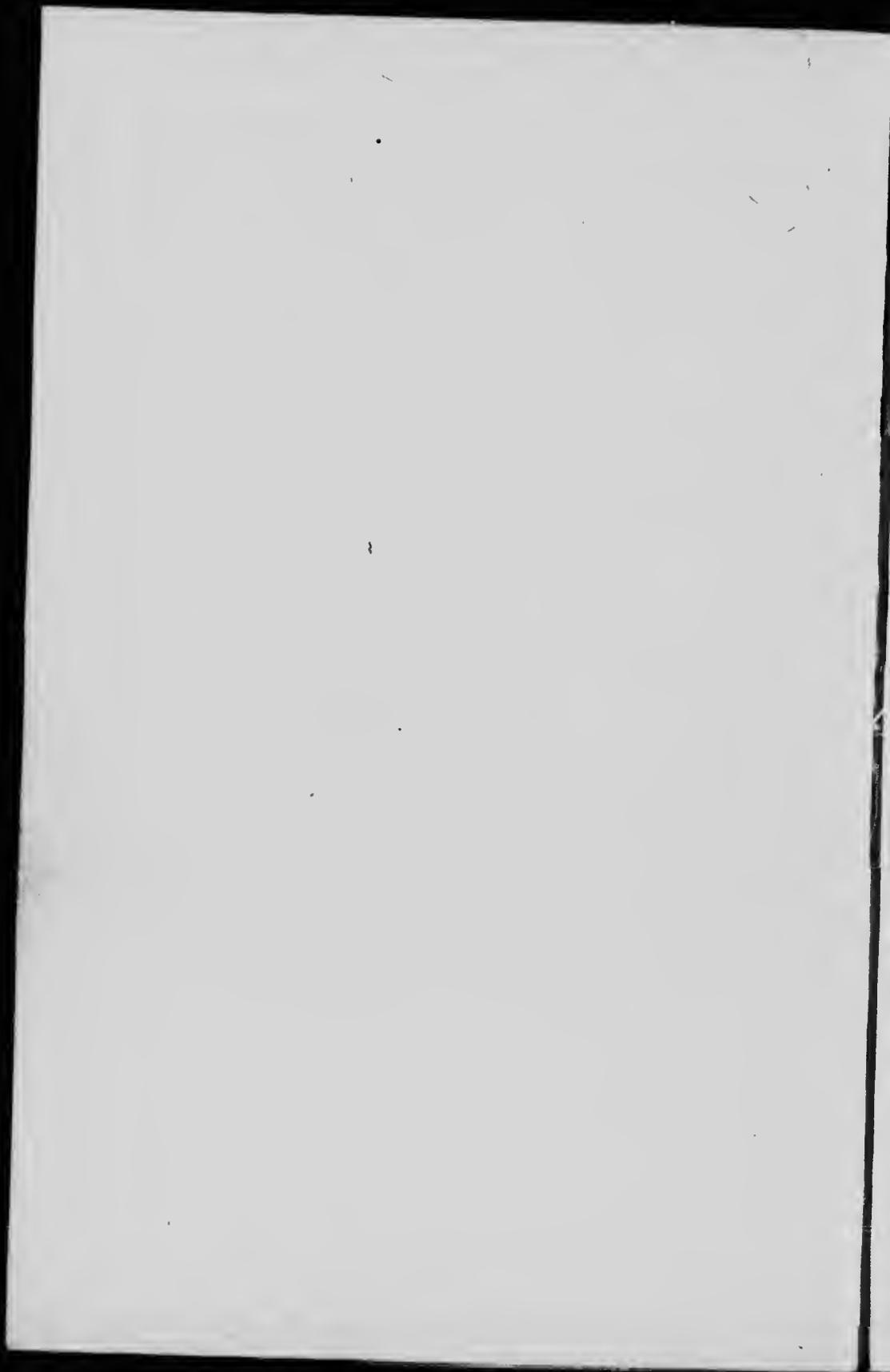
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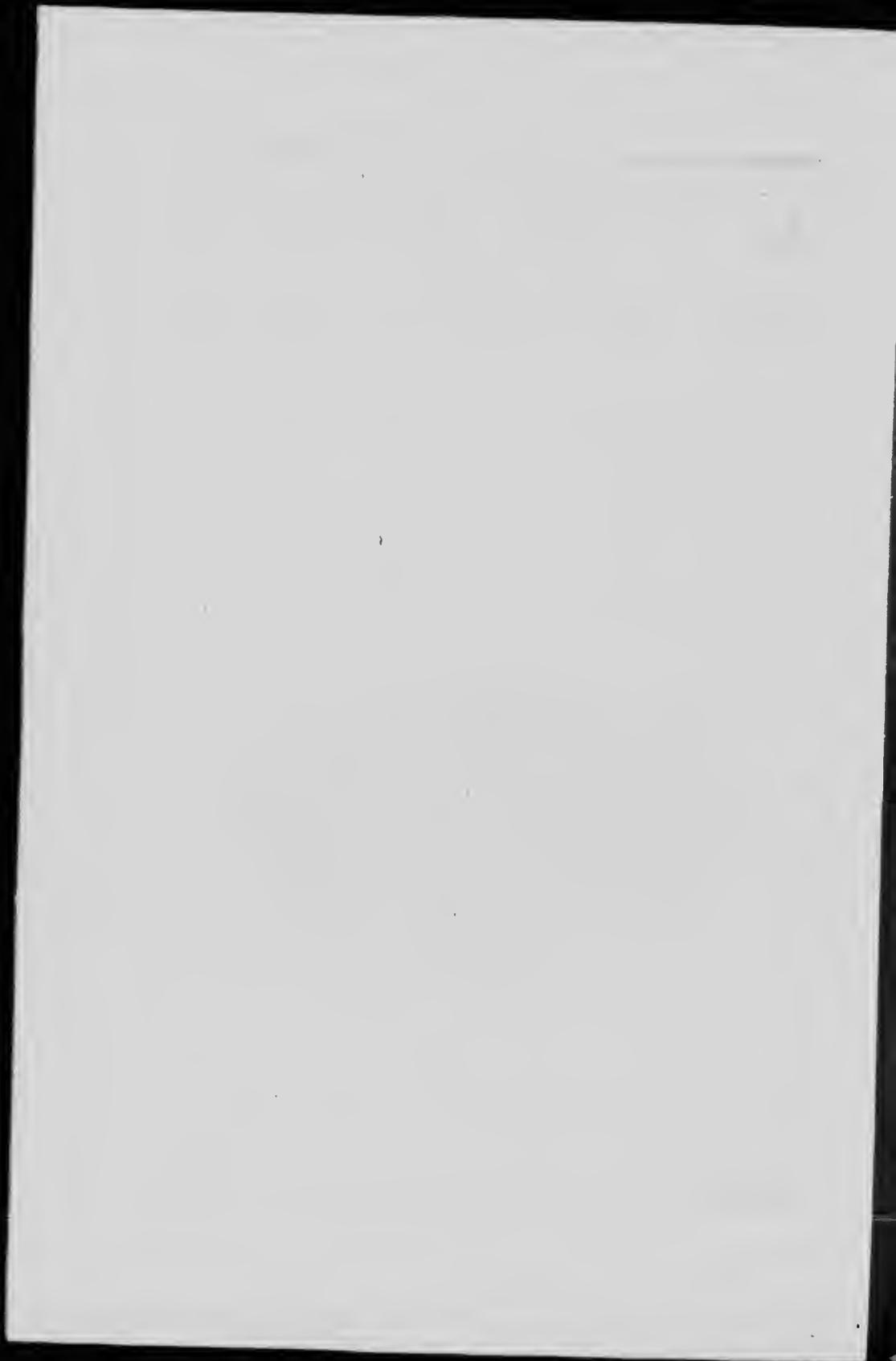


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A COURIER OF FORTUNE



A COURIER OF FORTUNE

By ARTHUR W. MARCHMONT

*Author of "THE QUEEN'S ADVOCATE," "BY SNARE OF LOVE,"
"WHEN I WAS CZAR," "IN THE NAME OF A WOMAN," ETC.*

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TO
RALPH STUART, ESQ.

MY DEAR MR. STUART: I dedicate this book to you as a memento of our delightful hours of travel and work together in writing the play—"A Courier of Fortune"—founded upon this story. The circumstances of our joint literary work were as unusual to me as they were fascinating; for, although the play was commenced in London, the last "curtain" was not written until my wife and I had crossed the Atlantic and journeyed with you on a tour of over ten thousand miles of railway travelling, through so many of the marvels of this wonderful Continent. St. Louis; Denver; Salt Lake City; San Francisco; the Pacific Seaboard north to Puget Sound; the fertile Palouse Country; Washington, Idaho, and Montana—those wealthy States of boundless promise and marvellous scenic contrasts; the cities of the Lakes, Duluth and Superior; then the young giant twins, St. Paul and Minneapolis; and by way of Milwaukee and Chicago to New York. A tour of momentous interest and a collaboration of close-knit sympathy, cementing a friendship which, I assure you, is one of the pleasantest things of my life.

Yours ever,

ARTHUR W. MARCHMONT.



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A COURIER OF FORTUNE

CHAPTER I

THE "TIGER OF MORVAIX"

THE hot noontide sun was pouring down into the market place of Morvaix and in the shadow cast by the great Cross of St. Jean in the centre, a handsome but very soberly dressed cavalier was sheltering from the fierce July heat and closely observing the townspeople as they clustered here and there to engage in eager animated discussion. Every now and then he cast sweeping impatient glances in all directions in evident search of some one whose delay irritated him.

It was plain even to a stranger's eyes that the townsfolk were greatly excited, and that the reason which had drawn the people from their houses was both urgent and disturbing. All classes were present—burghers, merchants, shopkeepers, workmen, 'prentices, down to the poorest of the labourers and peasants. Men, women and children alike were gathered there; the men set-faced and bitter, the women sad and anxious. Discontent, anger, fear and sorrow were the emotions evinced among all save the many soldiers who moved among the excited knots, with leers for the women and oaths for the men, and jibes and ribald laughter one to another.

The young cavalier's face darkened as he listened, and more than once he started as if he would interfere, but

checked himself. His keen, quick blue eyes were everywhere; and presently catching sight of two closely-cowled monks clad in the black habit of their order, who showed at a secluded corner of the square, he left his shelter and went toward them quickly but cautiously.

As he reached them one gave him a monkish greeting and the other a military salute.

"I half feared you had forgotten the appointment," he said, in a tone of authority; "and you are certainly forgetting your part, Pascal. Monks don't salute like soldiers."

"Don't I know it?" was the reply, laughingly spoken. "I haven't trained all our tough fellows in the monkish drill for nothing. I'll tell my beads against Dubois here for a stoup of wine"; and taking in hand the rosary which hung conspicuously at his side, he commenced to mumble a string of nonsense words, and laughed again.

"Peace, man, peace!" said the other monk, much older in years. "You'll be overheard and ruin all."

"Tush! they'll only think it's my priestly Latin."

"I fear I ought to have left you in Paris, Pascal," said the cavalier. "I was warned your unruly tongue would play the mischief with a scheme that calls for tact and silence."

"Nay, my lord——"

"Not, my lord, here. I am not Gerard de Bourbon for a few days. I have borrowed the name of that dicing scoundrel, Raoul de Cobalt, and am Gerard de Cobalt. Remember that, and watch your words until you have learnt that lesson."

"I shall not forget. This holy man here, Dubois, will keep me in order," answered Pascal with a smile.

"Tell me the news, Dubois."

"All has gone as you wished. The men have all arrived; and yesterday I sought an interview with the Governor and did all as you had directed."

"He swallowed the bait?"

"Readily. I told him that the Cardinal Archbishop had sent him a hundred fighting men for his troops, and craved permission for the hundred begging friars to remain in the city until the pilgrimage southward could be resumed."

"Good."

"I brought the monks in," interposed Pascal. "A hundred tough stalwarts, every man as sober as a begging friar should be; all telling their beads with unceasing unanimity, uttering 'Pax Vobiscum' with fervid zeal, and praying as only Bourbons can pray—for a fight."

"Have a care, brother," cried Dubois quickly, as a knot of the townsfolk passed.

"Have I not always care, holy brother?" cried Pascal, taking his rosary in hand again and mumbling his Pater-noster in tones loud enough to reach the passers' ears. "A fine achievement, M. de Cobalt, but it will not last."

"What mean you?" asked Gerard quickly.

"Soldiers are soldiers, and it takes more than a monk's gabardine to change them. When pretty girls come buzzing round, craving 'A blessing, holy father,' and looking so sweet and piteous, it's not in nature, at least in soldiers' nature, not to kiss 'em. Cherry lips lifted in supplication are strong enemies of this new discipline. I know it myself."

"For shame, Pascal!" cried Dubois sternly. "Are we to betray everything for a pair of laughing eyes?"

"Anything can happen when there's a shapely nose, a kissable mouth, and two soft cheeks to complete the face. Let there be haste, I say, or, Bourbons or no Bourbons, those lips will get kissed; and then there may be the devil to pay."

"There is reason in his madcap words, Dubois," said Gerard after a pause.

"Aye, even a fool can tell the truth," laughed Pascal.

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"But we must wait till I have proofs. When the news of this governor's evil doings came to my father's ears he sent me to learn the truth; and while bidding me act as I would, enjoined me to do nothing until I had clear proofs. A Bourbon does not act on mere rumours."

"Proofs!" broke in Pascal with a swift change to earnestness. "In the devil's name, what better proof of the man's deeds could you find than that which is writ large on the wretched, starving faces of the people? Look at them—faces that the devil grins to see when he would tempt men and women to sin."

"I came in during the night only, and have seen little or nothing yet," said Gerard. "What is the meaning of this gathering?"

"This devil spawn of a governor has a new ordinance to proclaim, a new tyranny to enact," said Pascal. "He will tax afresh to half its value every ounce of foodstuff that comes into the city. As if the poor wretches were not already half-starving. And this tax will finish them. Look at them and say if the Governor is not justly dubbed the Tiger of Morvaix? They are waiting his coming now with the heralds. Of a truth I would as lief dwell in hell as in Morvaix under Bourbon sway though it be in name, and Bourbon as I am to the core."

"We have had other and weightier matters to occupy us than the troubles of a small province so remote," said Gerard, with a frown at Pascal's words. "But if the tale of wrongs be warranted, the Governor, Duke de Rochelle though he be, will answer to me for them."

"By all reports he will answer to no man but himself."

"Enough, Pascal," said Gerard, with a wave of the hand. "There appear to be over many soldiers, Dubois."

"And report says theirs are the only mouths that take enough food," broke in Pascal. "Your fighting man must be fed, of course; but when it comes to feed-

ing him with the food for which all others starve, it is first cousin to cannibalism."

"The number of the soldiery has surprised me," said Dubois seriously. "They are far too many for our small band to do much. It is well your cousin's army lies so close to Cambrai. This governor will fight hard."

"If his soldiers are loyal to him, it argues in his favour," replied Gerard thoughtfully. "We know to what lengths the burghers of a town may be driven by their jealousy of us soldiers. We must wait."

"And if we wait but a little while there will be no grievances left. Those who have them will be dead," cried Pascal with a shrug of the shoulders.

"I need no taunts of yours, Pascal, to stir me to do great Bourbon's will," answered Gerard with some sternness.

"I meant no taunt, and spoke only my mind as friend to friend," said Pascal.

"The Governor is coming now," put in Dubois.

"We had better not be seen longer together. Where shall I find you at need?"

"The Duke has lodged Pascal and myself in his castle," answered Dubois, and the two were turning away when Gerard exclaimed, in a tone of excitement—

"See, Dubois, see, that man riding by the side of the Governor. Do you recognize him?"

"It is that villain, de Proballe."

"The old rat, so it is," declared Pascal. "If there is devil's work to be done in Morvaix he'll be in it. Paris was too hot for him. I thought he was in hell by now. By the saints, he is long overdue."

Gerard did not wait to hear the conclusion of the speech, but mingling with the crowd watched the proceedings with close interest.

It was a very strong force of soldiery, both horse and foot, that gathered in the market place round the

statue, large enough to brush away like so many flies the crowd of citizens, who fell back hushed and awe-stricken before the muskets and halberds which were used with much wilful violence.

The Governor of the city, the Duke Charles de Rochelle, seated on his charger, a magnificent coal black Flemish animal, drew up in the centre of the cleared space, and gazed with amused contemptuousness upon the shrinking burghers.

He made a striking centre-piece. Short and slight of figure, yet suggesting suppleness and strength, his fifty years sat lightly on him. His fair hair had scarce a touch of grey, and his pointed auburn beard and flowing moustache might have belonged to a man twenty years his junior. His features, strong and regular, would have been handsome but for the small close-set grey eyes, whose cold, hawk-like glitter was rendered additionally repulsive by a strong cast.

"The eyes of a wild beast," thought Gerard, who had been watching him intently. "Well named the Tiger."

At a signal from the Governor, the herald stepped forward amid a blare of trumpets and read the proclamation. The people listened in dead silence; but at the close, loud murmurs broke out which even the presence of the soldiery could not wholly check.

"It means starvation to us," cried one lusty voice, and a powerful fellow, a smith, wielding the heavy hammer of his trade, broke through the ring of the soldiers and made as if to approach the Governor.

"What dog is this that dares to bay?" It was the Duke who spoke.

"I am no dog, my lord, but a burgher of Morvaix, and I do but speak what all here know," answered the smith sturdily.

The Duke fixed his keen eyes on the man's face, and

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without a word signed to some of those about him. Three soldiers sprang toward the smith, who faced them fearlessly, and lifted his hammer.

"I have done no wrong. No man shall touch me," he said threateningly.

"Down with the rebel dog," cried the Duke; and at the words the soldiers, who had hesitated, rushed upon the smith. Two went down with broken heads from blows of the terrible hammer; but the third got his halberd in, and as the man lay on the ground some others dashed forward and one of them thrust home to his heart.

"So perish all rebels," cried the Governor, in a ringing tone to the crowd; and at the threat and the sight of the smith's blood the people shrank together and cowered.

The Duke smiled coldly on the crowd, and without another word signed for the procession to reform and march on, the people shrinking and cowering in silence from the troops as they passed.

Gerard's hot blood had fired at the scene, and he stood looking after the Governor with a heart hot with indignant anger at the foul injustice he had witnessed.

His two followers in monkish garb crossed to him and as the three whispered together, they were startled by the sound of a woman's wailing. It was the dead man's wife. She had heard the news and came rushing upon the scene in wild disordered distress, carrying her babe in her arms.

As she was nearing the body, a girl attended by a page, whose attire evidenced his mistress' high station, met her and with tender solicitude offered such consolation as was possible.

Gerard's gaze, attracted by the girl's beauty, followed the couple as together they approached the body, which

had now been lifted by some of the sympathizing townsmen; and then with a cry of anger he dashed hotly toward them, followed by his companions.

There was indeed cause for his anger. Several of the brutal soldiers had rushed upon the men carrying the corpse, and with oaths and blows and threats of the Duke's anger, seized the body from them and flung it on the ground.

The girl, courageously placing herself between the soldiers and the frightened townsmen, had turned upon the former and ordered them away; but the bullies, strong in the protection of their tyrant master and presuming on their license to deal as they would with the people, first jeered at her coarsely and then thrust her roughly aside while one of them ran and kicked the corpse with wanton brutality.

It was the attack on the girl which drove Gerard to interfere. He was by her side in an instant, flung the man who had touched her to the ground, and with eyes flashing and hand on his sword, dared the men to interfere further.

The soldiers were still present in the square in great force, however, and attracted by the tumult many came rallying to the side of their comrades. At the same time, inspired by Gerard's daring, a great crowd of the townsmen closed up behind him; and it seemed impossible that a conflict could be avoided.

There was a moment of hesitation, however, while the two opposing bodies glared angrily at one another, and Pascal with ready wit seized it to step between them, and with uplifted crucifix threatened the soldiers with the ban of Holy Church if they attempted further violence to either dead or living.

While he was haranguing them in loud and vehement tones, a number of men in monkish dress appeared almost as if by magic, and pushing through the citizens

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ranged themselves at his side, thus giving an impressive background to his exhortation.

The soldiers, abashed by this strange opposition, hung back in doubt, and the citizens having in the meanwhile borne the dead body away, the trouble ended in nothing more serious than muttered threats and oaths from the soldiers and stern remonstrances from the monks.

When the soldiers had drawn off, Gerard turned to seek the girl the attack on whom had provoked him to interfere, but she had vanished.

With an eagerness which brought a smile to Pascal's face, Gerard plied those about him with questions regarding her, and learnt that she was Mademoiselle de Malincourt, and had gone away to comfort the trouble-stricken woman whose husband had been the victim of the morning's tragedy.

"You did shrewdly, Pascal," said Dubois, when the two were alone.

"Our good fellows won't thank me, for, like myself, their fingers were tingling to be at some of the rascals' throats. Where's the young lord, Gerard?"

"Gone in search of——" Pascal's laugh interposed to finish the sentence.

"Aye, aye. We can understand. There's a woman in the thing now, of course. And we shall hear more of her, or I am a monk indeed, and no soldier, which God forefend."

CHAPTER II

THE MAISON DE MALINCOURT

SOME two or three hours after the scene in the market place a girl sat at her spinning wheel on the terrace of the Maison de Malincourt, opposite the head of the stately flight of steps leading down to the wide gardens. She had placed her wheel in an angle of the southern turret so that she could ply her task in comfort, protected from the rays of the July sun.

She was Lucette de Boisdegarde, the foster-sister and close friend of Mademoiselle de Malincourt, for whose coming she was now waiting with as much patience as her quick vivacious temperament permitted.

Her industry was only fitful. At times her shapely little foot pressed with insistent vigour upon the treadle and the wheel flew round rapidly, as if keeping pace with the thoughts that drew her dark pretty face into a frown of petulance and made her large eyes flash with gathering purpose. But the wheel was often still and she would sit back, idly fingering the threads of gleaming flax and thinking, while her gaze would roam over the blaze of lovely flowers in the garden, or stray away to the red roofs of the city which showed through the skirting trees beyond, or rest curiously on the vacant seat at her side on the cushions of which lay some needlework.

She was in one of these preoccupied moods when her sharp ear caught the sound of a footstep. In a moment she set the treadle of her wheel whirling swiftly, while

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she crooned to herself the air of a ballad of the time, and appeared too deeply engrossed in her work and song to have eyes or ears for anything else.

Yet young Denys St. Jean was worth looking at. Well-built he was, soldierly in bearing and self-reliant in mien, with a fair frank honest face, though now grave with thought and purpose, as he turned the corner of the Maison at a slow deliberate pace.

Seeing Lucette he started and his face brightened; and he smiled as he perceived her absorption in her task was overacted. He hesitated just an instant as if about to speak to her, but with a slight frown checked the inclination, walked on a few paces, lingered again, and then stopped.

Lucette meanwhile was treading her wheel vigorously and singing sweetly to herself—

There was once a maiden in Arcady,
Whose lover so feal and true
Came riding forth from the sullen north
Her sweet white hand to woo.

During the verse Denys stood with his back to the singer, his arms folded in an attitude suggestive of antagonism; but once or twice, when he half-turned toward her, the smile on his lips and the light in his eyes told of very different feelings.

When the song ceased he maintained his attitude of indifference, keeping his back to her and his arms still folded, waiting for her to speak; but when she gave no sign that she knew of his presence, he turned and stole up behind her softly, with a smile of expectation, and bent over her.

Her industry and absorption appeared to increase, however, and her foot pressed the treadle, the wheel flew round, and her white fingers flashed hither and

thither, tending the flax, gathering the thread, adjusting this and smoothing that, while all the while she crooned the old ballad.

Her patience beat him at length.

"You know I'm here," he whispered.

"Ah, Antoine, I knew your tread."

"Antoine!" exclaimed Denys with an angry start, "what do you mean by that, Lucette?"

The wheel stopped and she looked round, her face a pretty mask of coquettish surprise and her eyes beaming with mischief.

"So, it is not Antoine!" with just a suggestion of disappointment in the tone, a little shrug of the shapely shoulders, and a pout. "Only you. I thought *you* were gone for ever."

"You will drive me away, if you treat me like this. What did you mean about knowing Antoine's tread?"

For a second she let her roguish eyes rest on his, and then she smiled.

"His feet are so big and so clumsy," she said, and turned again to her wheel.

"Do you mean you meet him so often you can recognize them?"

"Recognize them! Mon Dieu, they are not feet to forget when once seen," she cried lightly.

"You can't pass it off like that, Lucette. Were you expecting him here this afternoon? Is that what you mean?" He was still angry and his tone very earnest.

"I didn't expect *you*, Monsieur Catechist."

"And you meant to amuse yourself with him in my absence?"

She turned and made a pretty grimace of dismay and spread out her hands.

"Is it an hour since you said you would never speak to me again? What then does it matter to you? Would you play the dog in the manger?"

"Will you answer my question?"

"Why do you come back at all when all is at an end between us? You said so."

"Don't you know why I come back?" The tone was full of feeling; but Lucette merely shrugged her shoulders.

"To see if you had made me miserable, I suppose? You have not;" and she burst again into her song, when Denys caught her by the wrist, and looked intently into her face.

"Do you mean you don't care, Lucette?"

"I care not to have my arm bruised with your great clumsy hands. Antoine would never——"

"To hell with your Antoine!" he burst in vehemently. "You play with me as a cat with a bird;" and throwing her hand from him he turned and strode away. He got no farther than the corner of the house, and looking back saw her leaning against the wall nursing her arm as if in pain. "Forgive me, Lucette," he cried remorsefully, hastening back. "I am a brute; you fire my blood when you make me jealous. If you love Ar'oine de Cavannes better than me, say so now, and let me go. But don't torture me."

She stood nursing her arm and looking up at him.

"Torture *you*, is it? Torture *you*?" and she held her arm up in reproach.

"You have only to say the word, and I'll never trouble you again. It can't be both Antoine and me. Choose!"

"Choose!" she repeated, mocking his serious tone. Then with a laugh and a change to coquettish hesitation: "Hot-tempered, handsome Denys or splay-footed, ugly Antoine, eh? It can't be both of you, eh? And if——" She paused teasingly.

"In God's name, can't you be serious?"

"When I am, I'll choose neither of you, but just

bury myself in a nunnery. So good-bye, my lord surly-face;" and she burst into a laugh.

"You mean that good-bye?"

"When did I wish you anything but good?"

"You'll drive me away from you and from Morvaix," he said angrily.

"Oh, you'll soon be back again."

"You think you can play with me as you will."

"Stupid! As if I cared where you go! But you can't leave Gabrielle. You can be many nasty things, but at least you can't be untrue to your trust."

His angry features relaxed somewhat at this.

"I wish I could read your heart."

"So does Antoine."

Angered again at this, a hot retort was stayed on his lips as Gabrielle de Malincourt stepped out of one of the tall windows of the terrace close to them.

"Ah, my good Denys, and, of course, Lucette," she said with a smile.

"It should be the other order, mademoiselle, I fear," he answered. "Lucette, and of course, Denys. It is Denys who is 'of course.'"

Gabrielle glanced at them both and understood.

"Quarrelling again! Lucette, Lucette. You treat him villainously. But never mind, Denys. I know what's in her heart whatever her lips may say."

"Gabrielle, I——" began Lucette in protest, when Gabrielle interposed.

"Yes, yes, I know what you would say. But I am not Denys. When the sea is very calm some people like to rock a boat to make pretence; but when the storm comes in reality it's all very different. Wait till there comes a bit of a storm, Denys, and you'll see the truth. If Lucette had been I just now in the market place and you had been at hand, you would have seen to whom she would have turned."

"Has anything chanced, mademoiselle?" asked Denys quickly.

"That which made me wish for you, good Denys. I had visited poor old Jacques Boulanger and was returning through the market place just when the heralds has proclaimed this new and shameful ordinance of the Governor's—a tax so cruel that it makes my blood boil. A terrible thing occurred. Babillon, the smith, sprang forward to protest, and the Governor, holding him for a rebel, had him done to death there on the spot by his brutal soldiers."

"How horrible!" exclaimed Lucette.

"But you, mademoiselle?" asked Denys.

"I had just heard the news when his wife came rushing through the place like one distraught, and I was seeking to comfort her in her anguish when the soldiers—oh, they are fiends, those men!—attacked the citizens who had lifted the smith's body to bear it home, flung the dead on the ground, and when, burning with indignation, I ordered them to desist, they turned on me, one of them thrust me violently aside, and would have done I know not what next, had not a cavalier, a stranger, rushed up to help me."

"Would I had been there, mademoiselle!" exclaimed Denys angrily. "Would you know the fellow again?"

"Do you mean the stranger cavalier?" asked Lucette, with a light of mischief in her eyes.

"Nay, Lucette, do not jest," said Gabrielle earnestly. "The man was punished for his act, Denys. The cavalier struck him to the ground and faced the whole of them fearlessly; and I dreaded for a moment that a conflict would follow, for there are not many in Morvaix who would see me harmed. But a monk intervened then and the danger was averted. Babillon's body was carried away, and I went with the wretched woman whom I have but now left, all desolate, broken

and whelmed by her sorrow. These are ill days indeed for Morvaix."

"But the men who maltreated you, mademoiselle, can be found, nay, must be found and punished," cried Denys warmly.

"It is of no matter now, Denys. It is over; beside the cruel wrongs done to the people, my little hurt is nothing. These soldiers, moreover, are but hirelings, and do no more than hirelings' work. But there is one quest—you must find the cavalier who served me."

Lucette looked up.

"You learnt his name, Gabrielle?" she asked quickly.

"Nay, for I left the place with Babillon's wife—wife alas! no more, but widow, poor soul."

"The cavalier, Gabrielle, was he handsome as well as brave?" asked Lucette after a pause.

A faint tinge of colour tinted Gabrielle's cheeks as she answered.

"In truth, I scarce had time to see, Lucette; but he seemed in all respects a manly man, a figure of distinction truly. Tall and knightly in mien; his face unbearded and full of strength, yet kindly and courteous; fair in colouring; and his blue eyes, keen and flashing fire as he faced the soldiery, were gentle and solicitous when viewing my plight; his voice resolute with the tone of one accustomed to command; yet tuned to gentle accents, as it seemed to me. I much mistake me if he be not a knight of loftier station than his sober brown attire would seem to bespeak him. A most gallant gentleman and a brave heart."

"You saw much, cousin, it seems, although you had no time, as you say;" and Lucette, with a smile to herself, turned to her spinning wheel.

"I will seek him out, mademoiselle," said Denys, "and no doubt shall find him. Shall I give him any message?"

"I could not even stay to thank him, and would wish to do so. Let him know as much."

"Before I go, there is a grave matter on which I would speak with you."

"Not now, Denys, but afterward. He must not think Gabrielle de Malincourt ungrateful. I beg you hasten at once in quest of him."

"I will go," he answered, and turning toward Lucette, said nervously: "Lucette, I——"

"We can finish our quarrel when you return," she interposed. "I may forgive you if you do Gabrielle's service quickly." Her tone was one of indifference, but he read the smile in her eyes and went with a light quick step upon his errand.

Gabrielle had dropped into the vacant seat by Lucette and now leant back thinking, her lips slightly parted and her eyes dreamy.

"He was a handsome man, coz, this cavalier of yours?" Gabrielle started at the question and then met her friend's half-quizzing look calmly.

"I have never seen a nobler, Lucette. I hope our good Denys will find him. Why do you plague that good fellow so sorely?"

"Nay, it is he plagues me. He is always quarrelling."

"*You* are always finding cause to make him, you mean?"

"He is a man, and must be kept in his place;" and Lucette shrugged her shoulders.

"By bickering and teasing and wrangling? Does it please you?"

"There is always the making up again;" and Lucette laughed roguishly.

"Beware how you try him too much. He is sterling mettle." She paused and suppressed a sigh as she added: "How happy you should be!"

Lucette glanced across at her and her manner changed.

"You are thinking again, Gabrielle. You are not sad?"

"Yes, I was thinking. I ought not to be sad, to-day of all days; and yet——" The rest of the sentence was an unmistakable sigh, deep and sincere.

"He may prove a gallant cavalier, Gabrielle, your Gerard; as gallant maybe as your hero of the market place. Don't look like that, dear."

"I am afraid, Lucette, horribly afraid. You cannot tell how it is with me. I am perhaps overwrought by this terrible scene in the market place, and—oh, I know not what I feel;" and with a shudder she covered her face with her hands.

"It will all come right, dear," whispered Lucette gently, after a pause; but the words seemed to jar upon Gabrielle, who lowered her hands, and with a look of irritation replied almost petulantly.

"You judge from your own little outlook. You tease Denys and force a sham quarrel, knowing he will make it up and all will come right, as you say. But how would it be with you if you were in my place, given to a man you had not seen since you were a child; betrothed to one you know nothing about, and who may turn out to be—oh, what am I saying?"

"I should hate him before he came to claim me, Gabrielle," said Lucette vigorously, tearing at the flax she held in her fingers. "Claim me!" she added, incensed by her own word. "I would make him feel that the claiming was no easy task. Oh, I should hate him! But you need not wed him. You are the mistress of Malincourt."

"You do not understand, Lucette." The girl looked up in genuine surprise at the change in Gabrielle's tone, suddenly calm, proud and cold. "It is my duty to n

family. My parents ordered it so, and it is not for me to disobey. I owe it to my house."

"I can't understand you, Gabrielle. At one moment you are a girl with all a girl's heart and feelings, and the next, you are the grand dame, cold, passionless, proud—just the embodied spirit of the traditions of your house."

"Were you a Malincourt you would understand. I have to live my life and must perforce be content."

"But pride makes an ill substitute for love in a marriage, Gabrielle. And your motive is pride. If this M. Gerard de Cobalt, this distant kinsman and unseen betrothed, should turn out to be a hideous depraved wretch——"

"Peace, Lucette; you do but plague me. M. de Cobalt will be here to-day or to-morrow; and you will remember he is my affianced husband."

"I am sorry my reckless tongue wounds you, Gabrielle. I love you so dearly;" and Lucette bent across and kissed her tenderly. "Pray God it may all be well with you. Forgive me."

"There is nothing to forgive, dear," answered Gabrielle sweetly. "You are right. I have two natures; and if the girl in me rebels sometimes, it is kinder to check than to encourage rebellion. To-day, somehow, it is harder than usual to check it. I shall be glad when M. de Cobalt comes. My uncle gives me good account of him, and speaks of him as brave and gallant."

"Does M. de Proballe know him?"

"No, he has never seen him—at least not for many years; but he has heard much of him, and from what he says all should be well."

"From what he says," commented Lucette, with a little frown of disdain.

"You trouble me, Lucette, with these reflections on

my uncle. You do not like him, and so would have me share your feeling. We'll say no more;" and with a sigh she leant back to think.

Lucette, seeing her mood, resumed her work and set her wheel speeding busily on; but chancing to glance round a moment later she stopped abruptly with an exclamation of surprise which attracted Gabrielle's attention.

A man was standing close behind Gabrielle's chair in an attitude of excessive humility. He bowed low and spread out his hands as she turned to him, while an expressive curl of contempt drew down the corners of Lucette's mouth.

"What is it? Why did you not say you were here?" asked Gabrielle sharply.

"I feared to interrupt miladi, and was awaiting your permission to speak my errand." His voice was soft and his manner deferential.

"What is it? Speak."

"My master, the Baron de Proballe, desires to know if it is convenient for him to wait upon you, miladi?"

"My uncle? Certainly. Where is he?"

"At present in his apartments, miladi."

"Tell him I will see him at once."

"I am miladi's most humble servant," was the reply with another deep bow, as he went.

"What a loathsome snake is that Master Dauban," exclaimed Lucette, looking after him.

"My uncle says he is a very honest fellow and as faithful as a man can be."

"I should need a higher character than that," said Lucette with another very expressive shrug.

"The Baron de Proballe is my uncle, Lucette," replied Gabrielle in a tone of reproach, as she rose to go into the house. And Lucette, by way of reply, turned her head away with a toss and made a grimace to herself as she bent over her wheel.

CHAPTER III

SINISTER HINTS

SCARCELY had Gabrielle left the terrace before Lucette's wheel stopped and she began to think instead of work. Little frowns and smiles chased each other alternately across her dark expressive face, and here even pearly teeth showed ever and again between the full, mobile lips.

"Has the day's adventure changed everything?" she mused. "He seems to have been very handsome, this gallant cavalier. I wonder. It would be a hard fight. I know how her pride can stand like a fortress; and I know how love can pull and pull and pull. Don't I know it?" and she smiled and sighed in turn. "Poor Gabrielle! What a struggle! Heart whispers, 'I love him'; pride answers, 'My pledge is given.' Ah me! he will have to be a manly man, as she says, if he will win her. But she will have a traitor in the fortress after all, if she really love him. Ah me! I know how it would end with me. But Gabrielle—well, she is Gabrielle."

At that moment a frown chased away the smiles, for Master Dauban, the man she had dubbed a snake, came out from the Maison and approached her.

He was one of those creatures on whom nature sets the outward marks of his inward character. His whole appearance and manner suggested slyness and secretiveness. His light brown shifty eyes were deep set in his sallow face, his cheeks smooth and round, and

his lips thin and straight; while his voice, unctuous and oily, and his glances, always quick and restlessly furtive, no less than the fawning gestures of his hands and his soft tread proclaimed him a born spy. At least so Lucette thought, and she hated him accordingly, as she hated all things mean and base.

But his feeling for her was very far removed from hatred, and as he came up now his glance was full of admiration.

"I am the happiest of men to find you alone, Mistress Lucette."

"I am not the happiest of women to find you anywhere—near me, Master Dauban," she retorted.

"You are as cruel to me as you are beautiful."

"And you are as handsome as you are honest," she cried with a shrug. He winced.

"Why do you always wrong me so?"

"In calling you honest, you mean?"

"You are in truth a sweet rose, Mistress Lucette, but the thorns of your wit are sharp and draw blood."

"They are meant to prevent snails and slugs from crawling too near me, Master Dauban."

"I take all you say in good part."

"In 'good part.' And what good part is there in you, I pray? I have never seen it."

"I can be a firm friend."

"To yourself, maybe."

"And an ugly enemy, too, at times."

Lucette looked him up and down, and her lip curled as she answered with almost savage contempt—

"Who has fallen so low as to fear you, Master Dauban? Have you been trounced by some scullion of the kitchen? You should beware how you offend any one with hands to strike with."

"It is easy to scoff, mistress," he returned sullenly, stung by her words.

"Aye, truly, where you are the object. If you do not like the truth, go away; you came of your own will and do not stay by mine. In truth, Malincourt would be none the worse for your going altogether."

"I have a strong reason for wishing to stay. You are the reason," he said, shooting a glance at her. "Why won't you let me be your friend?"

"There is but one act of friendship you could show to me."

"What is it?" he asked eagerly. "Try me; try me."

"Put a hundred leagues between us and never lessen the distance. It would indeed be an act of true friendship if you would never let my eyes rest on your face again."

"That is a hard saying. I could not live apart from you," he declared with much earnestness.

"I see no reason in that why you should not go away," she laughed. "The world could manage to exist without you; although your master might miss you."

He looked at her cunningly.

"You do not like my master, I fear, Mistress Lucette."

"Ah, has he set you to find out what I think of him?"

"I could tell you things," he said slyly, lowering his tone and glancing about him.

She paused a moment and her eyes questioned him. She checked the rocking reply which was on her lips, and asked, as if with an assumed indifference, covering real curiosity—

"What could you tell me?"

"I have eyes to see, ears to hear, and I know what I know of his plans—and you would like to know, too."

Lucette started and bent her head over her wheel

that her face might not be seen by his ferrety eyes. She resolved to get it from him.

"Bah! Am I a fool, Master Dauban, that you would fill my ears with lies about a good man? You say truly, the Baron de Proballe is in no favour of mine, but at least I know him to be an honest, fair-speaking, straight-dealing gentleman."

The man laughed unctuously, as from the enjoyable vantage point of superior knowledge.

"I know what I know," he said cunningly.

"You know no ill of him, and I will hear none. He is Mademoiselle Gabrielle's uncle and protecting friend, and a good man." Lucette's tone was full of reproachful indignation.

"Yes, he is miladi's uncle, and a good man." He laughed again with the same unctuous suggestion of intense enjoyment. "And all you people here in Malincourt are so sharp and clever—so sharp and clever—as clever as he is good."

"We are sharp enough to know an honest man when we see him, and clever enough not to listen to the tales of a maligner, Master Dauban," retorted Lucette with an appearance of great warmth. Her anger so delighted the man that he threw himself into the seat near her and laughed till his sides shook.

"What fools women are!"

"They are a match for a man's brilliant wits any time," cried Lucette very sharply. "Go away and leave me in peace."

"A match for us! ho, ho! a match," he laughed. Presently he grew serious, leaned forward and said in a lone tone: "You love miladi; you think my master a good man, eh? What would you give to know what I know?"

"I wouldn't know all the wickedness you know for

a duke's ransom," declared Lucette sharply. "I should have to hang myself if I did, in sheer self-shame."

"Pouf! women are worse than men; and you're no better than the rest, I'd be sworn. But you're such a pretty spitfire and say such waspish things; that's what I like in you. But for all your sharp tongue you are as blind as a three-day kitten, and can't tell milk from vinegar when it's under your very nose. You can't even smell it;" and he laughed again.

"Better a blind kitten than a wideawake rat with a keen scent for garbage, Master Dauban," she retorted with a shrug of her shoulders.

"Rats can find other things than garbage, Mistress Lucette. Shall I ask you a question?" He paused, and then with an accent of great cunning, asked—"Why do you think my good master is so interested in this marriage of miladi with M de Cobalt?"

Lucette laughed airily.

"That's easy to answer, of a surety. Because he is the brother of Mistress Gabrielle's late mother, and it is a family affair."

"There mewed the blind kitten," he cried with another of his triumphant laughs.

"And there squeaked a rat!"

"Does a good man like to see his niece, a pure woman, mated with a scoundrel? Does he work and scheme and strive and plot to force it on? Answer me that, kitten."

"Does even a rat seek to bite the hand that feeds it? Answer me that, rat."

"Feeds it? Out on such feeding," he cried with sudden malevolence. "Uses it, fools it, kicks it, and throws a few husks to it, keeping all the grain for himself. I know what I know, I tell you. And you should know it too if you—but never mind. Go on with your mewing, and when your gay gallant comes, set him

on another pedestal as high as my noble master's and fawn on him."

"What grudge have you against M. de Cobalt that you would set us against him?"

"Grudge? I have no grudge. I have never even set eyes on him. But I know what I know. And when your eyes get opened, remember to-day."

"And why should a rat squeak against a man he has never seen?"

But he was quick to discern the earnestness which Lucette allowed to appear in her tone; and he got up and smiled cunningly.

"I am not a well to be emptied by a woman's bucket, Mistress Lucette. You will see, some day."

"I don't believe a word you've said," she replied with a shrug of indifference.

"I could say much more if——" he paused.

"If what?"

He leered at her cunningly, and bending down close to her shoulder, whispered—

"If you'd give me such a kiss as I saw you give Antoine de Cavannes in the wood yonder when Denys St. Jean was at Courtal. 'Splay-footed Antoine,' as you called him to-day."

Lucette flushed with anger and vexation, genuine enough now, and a passionate retort rose to her lips, but did not pass them. She had to fight down her anger in a pause which he mistook for confusion.

"You have indeed both eyes and ears, Master Dauban," she answered with a quick glance of coquetry.

"But you will not tell on me?" she added, as if in dismay and fear of him.

"I may," he replied, enjoying her fear.

"You must not. You must not." Her accents were those of quick alarm.

"Do you love either of them?"

"A poor girl must have friends."

"Yet you would drive *me* away."

"Ah, Master Dauban, do you believe all a poor girl says?" and she sighed and cast a languishing look on him.

"You hate me and wish never to see me again. You said so."

"Must every maiden wear her heart on her sleeve, Master Dauban, for you handsome gallants to trifle with?"

"My name is Jacques, by your leave."

"'Tis the sweetest of names;" and Lucette sighed and looked down; then started and dashed a look at him and cried as if in distress—"Go away, Master Dauban. You make me so—oh, I don't know how to say it. I feel—oh, do go away. You make me feel so serious and so—so sad. Ah me!"

"You say those things to Denys and Antoine—and others."

For answer Lucette fixed her eyes upon him reproachfully and then sighed again; and her eyes could speak in a language few men could read unmoved.

"I knew you were cruel, but—oh, do leave me."

His hand sought hers. She let him take it and returned the pressure of his fingers, which trembled.

"You have never met *me* in the wood, Lucette," he whispered.

"You have never asked me, Jacques. I never thought——" and she faltered and broke down.

"Be there at set of sun this evening."

"No, no, I could not; I dare not. I could never do that—but I often walk there—Jacques."

"And this evening?" He was trembling again in his eagerness.

Her eyes said yes, the pressure of her tell-tale fingers confirmed it, and the sigh she gave sent him into an ecstasy.

"I believe you do but play with poor me," she whispered.

"I swear on my soul I am in earnest. I love you, Lucette, I——"

"Hush, not now, not now;" and she snatched her hand quickly from him as if in great confusion and picked up her spinning wheel. "I shall count the minutes till the sun sets—*now*, Jacques," she cried with a bright laughing smile, and passed into the house.

"Blind kittens are we, Master Rat?" she said to herself as she went to her apartment. "If I do not know all you have to tell me of this villainy against Gabrielle before the dusk is dark, may I never know a rogue when I see one." And then her fears on Gabrielle's account having been excited, her quick wits busied themselves with all manner of fanciful conjectures as to what the vaguely shadowed danger could be; and her impatience could scarce be held in check until the time arrived for her meeting with Dauban.

Meanwhile the interview between Gabrielle and her uncle had taken place and he had brought her news which for the moment had both deeply interested and greatly excited her.

The Baron de Proballe was a man whose aim in life had been to fill to the brim the cup of self-indulgent pleasures. Handsome, rich, unscrupulous and talented, he was endowed with most of the vices except cowardice, and while yet a young man he had soon made himself a reputation as a profligate among profligates until his excesses had ruined him. His fortune declined as his reputation grew, and for some years he had been driven to live upon his wits, which meant trading upon his skill as a gambler until a particularly disgraceful scandal had driven him from Paris, bankrupt in pocket and much broken in health, to seek refuge with his young kinswoman at Morvaix.

There his evil fame was unknown, and Gabrielle had welcomed him for her dead mother's sake; and in the small provincial city he had passed two hateful years, brooding upon the pleasures which were now denied to him and devising means to rehabilitate his shattered fortunes and recover some of his lost health.

Outwardly he had hitherto shown himself a model of a courteous gentleman and had lived almost an exemplary life in Morvaix, having put away from him with iron firmness the dissolute habits and evil practices of the old life in Paris. The desire for them burnt as strongly as ever in his blood, and his sole object in resisting it so strenuously was the hope of regaining such health, fortune and position as would enable him once more to indulge them freely.

But there was a flaw in his plans which threatened to ruin everything. He had ingratiated himself with the Governor, and the Duke, as keen a gambler as de Proballe himself, had won very heavy sums of money which could not be paid; and he had in this way obtained a hold over him which threatened to have critical consequences to all concerned.

The Duke had acted with deliberate intention. A man of reckless life and licentious nature, he had been fascinated by Gabrielle de Malincourt's beauty, and he had formed a scheme in regard to her which made her uncle's assistance of the utmost value and consequence.

De Proballe himself, despite his evil past and seared conscience, had at first refused indignantly to have any hand in the vile matter; but the Governor, never nice in his methods, had found means to over-ride this opposition; and then de Proballe sought to justify his act to himself by forming a counter-scheme against the Governor.

To further the plan, Gabrielle's uncle had concocted the story and fabricated the proofs supporting it, of

her parents' wish that she should marry a distant kinsman, Gerard de Cobalt, a young reprobate whose life had been if anything more disgraceful than that of de Proballe himself. His culminating act of villainy had been the treacherous murder of a friend at Cambrai, a town within the Governor's province, and for this he was a fugitive from justice. De Cobalt's reward for his part in the infamous scheme was to be a pardon for the affair at Cambrai; and he was to come to Morvaix and marry Gabrielle to provide a complacent cloak for the Governor's scheme.

Gabrielle, suspecting nothing of the intrigue which was in progress about her, and deceived by her uncle's consistently considerate and courteous demeanour to herself, had grown both to trust and like him, and met him now with a smile.

He noticed her disquiet and remarked on her troubled looks.

"It was the scene in the market place," she said, and told him what had occurred.

"I was there and saw it all, Gabrielle. I fear Babillon brought it upon himself. We live in troubled times, child, and authority must be maintained. The Duke is hasty in temper, and he thought, I am sure, as did I and others, that the smith meant to attack him. It is only in the first moments of an outbreak that it can be quelled; had this gone further much more blood than the smith's would have been shed. Remember that."

"He was but protesting," said Gabrielle.

"He nearly killed two of the soldiery with his protest, child."

"Not until they were ordered to attack him."

"Who raises his hand in violence must look for violence in return. I am not defending the act. Had I been Governor I would have listened first and punished afterwards, but that is not de Rochelle's method."

"It was a foul murder, and I care not who hears me say it," exclaimed Gabrielle vehemently. "And this infamous tax caused it."

"It is about that I have news for you. The Duke is considering your request to him and will wait upon you here at Malincourt, to-morrow. He is a staunch friend to you, Gabrielle, and your lightest word has weight with him."

"He should need no one's word to induce him to do justly," she said. "He grinds the face of the people with his hideous tyranny."

"You have this influence with him and can best use it in the people's cause. That is a great thought for you to ponder. You will not do best for them by incensing it, but rather by leading him to see these things as you see them." He watched her very closely as he said this in his gentlest and most persuasive tone.

"But I despise him," she said with a shudder. "I loathe him, indeed."

"In this world we cannot choose the means we would, but must use those which lie to our hands. Yours is a heavy load of responsibility for such young shoulders to bear, my child. The head of a great house, alone with none to advise save an unworthy old man who has wearied of the affairs of the world, and with the cares of an army of suffering people to plague and oppress you. Let us hope that your marriage will prove the relief it should. Gerard de Cobalt should be here to-day or to-morrow. Pray Heaven he carries a steady head on worthy shoulders—as indeed I hear he does."

Gabrielle sighed and lifted and let fall her hand; a half-despairing gesture suggestive of her distracted thoughts.

"You should be all smiles, Gabrielle. My dear sister, your mother, and your father, too, built so much upon this marriage. The Governor also is profoundly

interested in it, and will welcome your husband and give him an honoured place in his favour and esteem. You two are destined to do great things for Morvaix."

"Please God it may be so," returned Gabrielle earnestly. "But to take a husband I have never seen is——" The sentence ended in another gesture as hopeless as the first.

"I have made many searching inquiries concerning him, Gabrielle. A handsome gallant and as brave and fearless as comely."

"It may be for the best," she said lifelessly.

"It must and will be for the best," he returned. "Tomorrow you will hear from the Duke how he proposes to honour the man of your choice."

"Choice?" echoed Gabrielle, catching at the word.

"Yes. choice; what else? Whom else in Morvaix would you choose? You would not choose to disobey your dear mother's last earthly wish. And the obligations of a girl placed as you are at the head of a house such as ours might well have compelled a marriage with a far less welcome groom. I could tell you of scores of such ill-fated unions. Keep a light heart, child; for you may face the future fearlessly—a brilliant future too."

"I am foolish and rebellious at times, I know. But I am not unmindful of my duty to my house," she said proudly.

"Spoken like a Malincourt; like my sainted sister's own child. Keep that face for the Governor to-morrow, Gabrielle. Smile to him and upon him, and the rule of Morvaix and all in it will be inspired by your gentle heart."

And with that thought he deemed it judicious to end the interview.

CHAPTER IV

THE DUKE'S PROPOSAL.

THERE was one very bitter heart in the maison on the following morning. Jacques Dauban had spent a bad night, groaning over aching bones and head, brooding over his wrongs and setting his cunning wits to work to devise a scheme of revenge.

Very ill results had followed that meeting with Lucette in the pine walk. She had kept the tryst and had wheedled out of him a part of what he knew. He had not told her much; only warned her to do her utmost to prevent the marriage between Gabrielle and Gerard de Cobalt, hinting at dark deeds of which he dared not speak, and denouncing Gerard as both an unscrupulous scoundrel and a tool in the hands of others greater and more villainous even than he.

She might have got more from him, but it chanced that Denys St. Jean had also conceived a fancy for a stroll in the wood, and had come suddenly upon the pair in close and intimate talk. His quick temper had fired instantly, and the consequences to Jacques Dauban had been serious. Denys was strong in the arm, and his cudgel, snatched hastily from a tree, thick and heavy; and there was scarcely a bone in the writhing, wriggling spy's body which did not ache and stab and pain.

And Lucette had laughed.

The laugh was the worst of all. It was in his ears all through the paining hours of the night; maddening him, taunting him, and goading him almost to a frenzy of wrath and spite. He read it as the proof that she had fooled him; that she had laid the trap to bring the

hot-headed devil upon him; and had planned his humiliation and beating.

He would be revenged; and as he twisted and turned and groaned in an anguish of mind even more than of body, a scheme came to him; and in the congenial task of working it out and maturing it, his own sufferings were more than half forgotten.

His first thought had been to lay in wait for Denys and, catching him unawares, to thrust a dagger between his ribs swiftly from behind; but there was too much risk. He might fail to strike true, and then—the horrible fear of what would happen to himself in such a case killed the plan at once.

The next thought was to hire some one in Morvaix to do what he with his own hand was afraid to attempt, but his cunning made him hesitate to place himself in any other's power. And so that idea had in its turn to be abandoned.

But out of it had come the scheme which he saw was at once safe and sure. He would remain in the background all unsuspected even by Lucette, and might mask his work in any way he wished; and yet Denys would die as surely as if his was the hand which plunged the dagger home to his heart. Aye, much more surely.

He would tell the Baron de Proballe that Denys had in some way got scent of the scheme which had been laid against Gabrielle and that he meant to divulge it to her.

He had some ground to believe this, moreover. Earlier in the day Denys had put some searching questions to him, had hinted at ugly rumours, and asked significantly about strange letters which had passed between de Cobalt and his master. And Dauban knew the latter well enough to be sure what would happen. The Baron would tell the Duke, and the tiger of a Governor would find means to silence Denys for ever.

And when Denys was dead, he would tell Lucette that it was his hand that secretly had killed him; and that mocking laugh of hers would change to a gasp of fear of him. That would be something like a revenge, and he gloated in fancy over the picture of Lucette's fear-stricken face when she knew.

"Let her laugh then, if she can," he said to himself; and when the hour came for him to go to his master, he had his tale ready and told it artfully with a hundred touches which all calculated to appeal to de Proballe's imagination and spur his alarm.

"How know you this, Jacques?" asked de Proballe, when he had heard the news.

"I overheard him last night speaking to Mademoiselle Lucette and saying he had grave news which he must tell miladi at once about M. de Cobalt."

"That may not mean what you say."

"I fear that it did, m'sieu. The two are lovers, it seems, and like a woman she was trying to wheedle the facts out of him. He was loath to tell her and sought to put her off; but she got something from him. He said M. de Cobalt was a scoundrel—he has a scurrilous tongue this Denys—and, saving your presence, m'sieu, he said that de Cobalt was but a tool in the hands of greater scoundrels. Shamed I am that my lips should have to speak the words, but your lordship must know the truth—he named you and His Grace the Duke de Rochelle."

"In the devil's name, this is serious then," exclaimed de Proballe angrily. "How much does he know?"

"Indeed, m'sieu, I cannot say. He hinted at an intercepted letter, but he was called away soon. I can only infer he has made an important discovery. But the girl was terribly alarmed."

"It may ruin everything. Have you breathed a whisper to a soul?"

"Have I served you all these years to betray you?"

and he spread his hands out and spoke as if in sorrow that such a suspicion should even be named. "That she suspects something I know to be true indeed."

"Tell me. Quick, Jacques, I am uneasy."

"Purposefully I put myself in her way, m'sieu. She is a pretty girl enough and thinks, forsooth, that all men can be wheedled by her glances. She led round artfully to the subject and plied me with questions, all inspired, as I could see, by what this Denys had told her. She did not find me easy to draw, m'sieu," and he smiled with deprecating reference to his secrecy. "But 'twas easy to see what was in her thoughts."

"She may also be a source of danger. She may tell Gabrielle," exclaimed de Proballe quickly. "By Heaven; the thing must be stopped."

But it was not Dauban's wish to have Lucette harmed, so he made haste to check this thought.

"Of herself she knows nothing, m'sieu; all hangs on the man's story, and if both of them were removed from Malincourt, might not miladi herself take fright?"

"A shrewd thought, Jacques. We must deal with the man alone. Do you think he can have seen my niece yet?"

"No, m'sieu, I am sure. I watched him closely. But this morning he may seek her—nay, he will do so. He said as much."

"He must not," exclaimed de Proballe earnestly. "At any cost that must be prevented."

"It will be difficult, m'sieu, but should not be impossible."

"You have a thought, I see. Speak it."

"It is not for me to offer counsel to you, m'sieu. But yesterday there was a cavalier who afforded some assistance to miladi in the market place. She is anxious to find him, and sent this Denys yesterday in search of him. If you could have knowledge that the stranger was to

be found, say at some place a few leagues away, it might be possible to despatch Denys thither in quest of him, and thus enable time and perchance provide means and opportunity to deal with him. Miladi would appreciate any effort to find the cavalier, and some of the roads around Morvaix are not over-safe."

"You have a cunning brain, Jacques," exclaimed de Proballe suddenly, with a sharp glance at his secretary. "Have you aught against this Denys?"

Dauban did not shrink from the scrutiny, but answered deferentially—

"If my lord thinks I should place my feelings before my duty to him, I have served him uselessly all these years."

"I don't think it, Jacques. You too well know on which side your interest lies, and you know also that I should not be a pleasant man to betray."

"I am naught if not your faithful servant, my lord," replied Dauban. He knew he had said enough for his purpose and that his master would adopt the suggestion he had let fall. The seed he had sown would bear fruit; and he was astute enough not to appear too anxious and thus reveal his personal feelings.

His plan was carried out. De Proballe sent for Denys, and after inquiring about the guest of the previous day he said he had news that the cavalier could be found at Beaucamp, an estate some four leagues west of Morvaix. He expressed his desire to please and surprise Gabrielle by finding the stranger, and also spoke feelingly about the honour of the family being concerned to thank the stranger for the service rendered to its young head, and thus despatched Denys on the mission before he could get a word with Gabrielle.

As soon as he had seen him start, he hurried with his news to the castle, had an earnest interview with the Duke, and returned to Malincourt without Gabrielle even

knowing of his absence. Thus the train was all laid when at noon the Governor, in accordance with the arrangement of the previous day, came to wait upon Gabrielle.

"You have made all arrangements?" was de Proballe's greeting when they met for a moment and were going to Gabrielle.

"I am not likely to fail, m'sieu," was the drily-spoken reply. "Antoine de Cavannes and Henri d'Estelle have ridden out, and know me better than to return with any mission unfulfilled. My men serve me well or do not serve me long."

The next minute he was bowing over Gabrielle's hand, which he would have carried to his lips had she not adroitly and with unseeming intention prevented him.

"The sun never shines for me, mademoiselle, when I have no chance to look into your eyes," he murmured, with glances of bold, almost aggressive admiration.

Words and glance were alike detestable to Gabrielle.

"Your lordship is pleased to flatter, but flattery does not please me," she returned with a smile.

"It is no flattery, but the truth," he protested, his hand on his heart. "Your beauty is the fairest thing the earth holds for me."

"The good opinion of the husband of my dear friend, the Duchess de Rochelle, must of course be ever welcome, but I beg you to burden it with less wealth of language."

At the reference to his wife the Duke frowned, as he took a seat near her.

"We see too little of you, mademoiselle," he said next, "and rumour says you are often to be found in many of the humble houses in Morvaix."

"Alas! my lord, there is much distress and poverty among the people, and Holy Church requires that those who can should minister to them."

"Holy Church should do the work more thoroughly. I hold not with this constant tending and pampering of those whose chief employment seems to be to breed discontent."

"They have unhappily but too much cause for discontent," said Gabrielle firmly. "You have considered the petition which I ventured to send to you?"

He smiled indulgently.

"What do you know of these things?"

"My own eyes have seen their distress, their want, their sufferings. Men workless and despairing, women hopeless and languishing, children starving and crying for the food which the parents cannot give them. We who are rich and have plenty can but scantily measure the pain of those in want. Even when we see it for ourselves we cannot realize all its misery; and those of us who never see it cannot even believe in its existence."

"Would you have me don a monk's garb, then, and turn bread carrier to a set of worthless wastrels?" asked the Governor half in anger, half in sardonic humour.

"Nay, my lord, it is in no such spirit I would approach you. But you have the power to administer relief which all others lack. I would but have you recognize the evil and apply the remedy."

"You make a beautiful advocate, Mistress Gabrielle, and you, if anyone, can work your will with me. I would gladly see these things with your eyes—to please you," he said with a meaning glance.

"I am but of small account, and to please me is a very little thing, and at best a poor motive for doing right."

"It would be *my* only motive, poor or rich. But I fear you understand the art of government but ill. We must have money to administer the town. We must have troops, and troops must be paid and fed, fair advocate."

"Why? Is force in the hand of the ruler a surer

foundation of rule than content and prosperity among the ruled?"

"The world cannot wag without soldiers, mademoiselle, and Morvaix can only be ruled by force."

"Must a populace be starved that the soldiers may be fat? If I seem to speak boldly, it is because I feel deeply. And if I offend, I crave your pardon, monsieur."

"Nothing you could say or do could ever offend me, Mademoiselle Gabrielle. With you I am as clay in the hands of the potter."

"Nay, if you put it merely on grounds personal to myself, I can urge nothing," said Gabrielle, sadly and reluctantly.

"Yet they are the only grounds that will prevail with me," he answered. "The lot of these people is much to you, you say; then you would of a surety make sacrifices to help them? Is it not so?"

"I would do anything in my power," she said warmly.

"That remains to be proved," he retorted, smiling as he looked searchingly at her. "Perhaps I may take that as a challenge and put you to a test. Your petition here"—he drew it out and opened it. "You urge me to recall this last ordinance of mine and take off the new imposts on food."

"The people will starve if you do not, monsieur."

"Well, let them starve, then. I must have money, and money can only be raised by such means. But if I were to grant you this favour, make this sacrifice for you, what sacrifice would you make in your turn, what favour would you grant me?"

His eyes were glowing as he turned them upon her while waiting for her reply.

"I do not understand your lordship," said Gabrielle, meeting his glance with her calm innocent gaze.

"Or is it that you will not?" he asked insolently. "Supposing I agree that your influence shall prevail with me and that in the government of Morvaix you and I shall act together: you inspiring with your lofty motives, I executing with the powers at my command. If we try it for a year, two years, three years—any time you like to fix—what would be my reward?"

"The rich gratitude of a contented people, the respect of every man in Morvaix; hope in place of despair, prosperity instead of want, love where fear now lurks."

"Pshaw! I do not seek the love of such canaille, a mouthing mob as ready to shout 'Crucify' as 'Hosanna!' What reward would you yourself grant?"

"I should for ever bless and admire you."

"For ever is a long, indefinite time, and blessings and admiration may be but cold emotions. What would you *do?*" and he once more fixed his bold eyes upon her face.

"Again I say I do not understand what your lordship would have me say."

He paused in thought and then laughed abruptly, almost grimly.

"It is enough," he exclaimed, with a wave of the hand. "The thought pleases me, for I would gladly please you; believe that I will grant your petition——"

"Oh, I thank you——" she burst in, when he checked her.

"Wait. I will grant it if you will fall in with my plan, will lend me your aid in the perilous task of government; will work with me and inspire me with your sweet counsel; and if you will consider what favour you will grant me in return. I will have my answer in a week from now, and until then we speak no more of this. Now I have to offer you my congratulations upon your approaching marriage, in which I take deep interest."

He rose shortly afterwards, and when Gabrielle held her hand to him he carried it to his lips.

"Remember," he said, retaining her hand and looking up, his face quite close to hers. "Remember, we have made a compact, and you must make the offer worthy of my acceptance—or it may mean fresh and heavier imposts for your favourites in place of lighter ones," and with that smiling, half-jesting menace he went away, calling the Baron de Proballe to attend him.

Gabrielle stood gazing after him sorely bewildered by what had passed, distracted by doubts and striving earnestly to fathom the meaning of the question he had pressed with such insistence.

When he had gone she went to an inner room, accompanied by Lucette who had been present at the interview but out of earshot, and had followed the strange proceedings, watching the Duke intently and reading there something of the purpose which was hidden from Gabrielle's unsuspecting nature.

Lucette was skilled in reading love in the eyes of men, and with quaking heart and fearsome curiosity she waited now to hear what words the Duke had spoken to Gabrielle to inspire the looks which she had seen him cast upon her. And when she heard them, Lucette felt her cheeks alternately flame with rage and chill with deadly fear for Gabrielle's sake.

CHAPTER V

THE TIGER'S CLAWS

LUCETTE had had her own troubles as well. Never before had such a mischance occurred as that of the previous evening in the pine walk; and the fact that she was merely tricking Dauban in order to wheedle the truth out of him had not helped her with her lover in the least.

The thrashing administered to Dauban had relieved some of Denys' wrath; but the hard blows for him had been followed by some equally hard words for Lucette, with many hot and bitter reproaches; none the less stinging because for once undeserved. And she had not been able to make peace with him.

Worst of all, he had ridden away that morning without so much as a word to her; and she was angry at his obduracy and wounded by his neglect, and still more angry with herself for caring so much.

Gabrielle, quick to notice the troubles of those about her, had seen Lucette's woe-begone, doleful looks and questioned her before the Duke's visit; but now for the moment she was wholly engrossed by the perplexity in which that visit had left her.

"What can he want of me, Lucette?" she asked again and again, until Lucette had a suggestion to make, born of her own belief of the Duke's purpose and intended as a warning for Gabrielle.

"Why not take counsel of the Duchess? She is a true friend of yours, Gabrielle, and a good woman."

"It is a good thought. I will go to her to-day. I

would give half my wealth to do what he proposes—to have a voice even for no more than a few short years in governing the people. I could do so much good.”

“Would he keep his word, think you? I do not trust him. Truth and honour are not counted among his parts.”

“You are suspicious. Why?”

“To begin with, he is a man,” and Lucette nodded her head and stamped her foot petulantly.

“Not always a quick path to your disfavour, coz,” said Gabrielle with a smile. “Denys is a man.”

“Denys has a head of wood,” said Lucette, lapsing into her own wrongs for a moment.

“Seeing the infinite uses to which we turn wood, I know not why we always liken it to stupidity. Whatever our good Denys’ head may be, his heart is staunch and true.”

“We are not speaking of Denys but of the Duke, who has neither wooden head nor staunch heart—unless it be staunch to some cruel and treacherous purpose for his own game.”

“I fear there is truth in your words; yet he spoke me fairly.”

“Any man can do that,” exclaimed Lucette, with almost vicious emphasis. “But see the Duchess herself, tell her all that passed, and ask her. A wife should certainly know best how to interpret her husband’s words.”

The advice was given with so much eagerness that Gabrielle turned and looked searchingly into her friend’s eyes.

“Have you made a guess at his purpose and withhold it from me?” She asked so directly that Lucette winced, fearing that her own fears might be divined. She took shelter quickly in subterfuge, and lowering her eyes she dropped her head on Gabrielle’s shoulder and said with a deep sigh—

"Oh, Gabrielle, I am not myself; I am the most miserable girl on earth."

"What a thing of April weather is this love of yours! Smiles and tears, sunshine and drifting clouds; ever changing and plaguing, as it seems to me, coz."

"You will know some day, Gabrielle."

"I could hope not, indeed. It seems to me the world has sterner work for some of us women than to be plaguing our wits to please a man or pleasing ourselves by plaguing him. I would gladly give up all if I could help my people in Morvaix here. Little did the Duke think how nearly his offer touched me."

"Did you think so sternly yesterday, Gabrielle, after that chance encounter in the market place?"

"If my thoughts wandered from my duty for an hour, a night's reflection has corrected them," answered Gabrielle slowly.

"The night had nothing but bitterness for me," cried Lucette dismally. "And to-day Denys has ridden away without a word."

"You should not provoke his anger against you so lightly."

"There was no cause for it. He would be jealous of another man's shadow," said Lucette with a pout; and then with a quick change of mood, she cried: "Oh, how selfish I am; but how am I to tell you?"

"To tell me what?"

"I don't know what name to give it, or how to speak of it. I was talking with Master Dauban, your uncle's secretary——"

"So that was the cause of Denys' anger! Lucette, Lucette!"

"I hate him; he is a loathsome creature."

"Then why talk to him?"

"He made me talk to him by what he said."

"Now of a truth you puzzle me."

"It is true. He spoke of some danger threatening Malincourt and you, and I did but try to get it from him. That was all."

"You should not listen to tittle-tattle, coz."

"He spoke of your betrothal to this M. de Cobalt—that there was some sinister meaning in it; that M. de Cobalt was no true man but a villain; and that others greater than he were concerned to do you harm through him. What could I do but listen and seek the truth?"

"You could have bid him hold his tongue for a mischief-making meddler in concerns that are none of his. Tell me no more of it, Lucette."

"But he swore it was true, and that——"

"Peace, child; I will hear no more."

"Gabrielle, you must," cried Lucette, looking up. "It is true, and you must find^d out what it means."

"Shall I give my hand to a man not trusting him?"

"Can you marry him knowing he is not true?"

"Lucette, you will make me lose patience. Would you have me deign to fret myself over the worrying of an idle gossip-monger?"

"Oh, it is terrible."

"You are not yourself, child, and are frightened because you have angered Denys more deeply than usual. Come, let us go out into the bright sunshine and shake off these fretting fancies. You are always the slave of passing moods, Lucette," she said, as they crossed the terrace and passed down the broad steps into the garden. "But out here in the sunshine you can most easily recover your spirits."

"I am plagued with a fear of—I know not what," answered Lucette, sighing dismally. "I wonder where Denys has gone."

"He will come back, and as you are always telling me, all will come right, again." She smiled but the smile ended in something like a sigh.

She was indeed sorely perplexed by the course matters were taking, and although she would not acknowledge it, Lucette's recital of Dauban's warning had moved her considerably.

It fitted closely with her own feelings in regard to giving herself to a man she had never seen. Her pride of place and family had alone induced her to think of accepting the husband whom her mother had chosen for her; but it was not in human nature to acquiesce without murmurs and qualms and doubts and hesitation.

Moreover, the scene in the market place on the previous day had disturbed her profoundly, despite her stout assertion that the night's reflection had restored her. Her couch had been the ground of a fierce battle between certain wild new-springing emotions and the set and sober thoughts of duty; and the fight had raged through the whole of a sleepless night.

In vain she had told herself over and over again that the stranger cavalier was nothing to her and could be nothing; that it was treachery to her dead mother even to let a thought of him force itself upon her; that it was unworthy, unmaidenly, and cowardly to be moved by the remembrance that a man had looked kindly into her eyes and that she had faltered before his glance; and this at the very moment when he to whom she was betrothed was coming to her.

She upbraided herself bitterly for her weakness, and rising from her couch had passed an hour or more on her knees in fervent prayer for strength to overcome the temptation which she found so alluring, and for power to subdue these new feelings as subtly sweet as they were strange and exciting.

Her heart would not be denied, however, and despite her most resolute efforts the recollection of the strong handsome face, with the clear steadfast blue eyes would

force itself back upon her again and again and yet again, despite her most earnest efforts.

In the morning when her uncle told her that he had heard of the stranger's presence at Beaucamp and had despatched Denys in search of him, she was conscious that her heart fluttered almost wildly for the moment, and she had been compelled to turn her face away lest some of the emotion might make itself evident there.

"He must not think us thankless, uncle," she had replied, calmly enough in tone; but in her heart she was driven to hope he would not be found and that never would she have to undergo the ordeal of meeting him face to face. What might then happen she did not dare to think.

But all this emotion she had hidden from even the sharp eyes of her companion, so that, although for her own secret reasons she was as eagerly impatient as Lucette herself for Denys' return, her secret was locked away under an outward demeanour as calm and self-possessed as usual.

Twice she sent to inquire if he had come; pretending, even while despising herself for the pretence, that it was for Lucette's sake; and when noon came and passed and he had not returned, she masked her own disappointment under a concern for Lucette.

But he did return at length, despite the Duke's plans against him. Unconscious of the danger in which he rode he had by a mere chance change of direction evaded the two men sent to waylay him, and they had only ascertained the fact in time to admit of their following him to Malincourt in hot haste and mortal fear of the Governor's anger.

They had wandered into a distant part of the grounds when Gabrielle caught sight of him pricking fast toward the maison, and she was at great pains to conceal the start she gave on seeing he was alone. She told herself

that she was glad he brought no one with him; but a little stinging stab of disappointment deep down in her heart and an eager, hungry desire to learn the news he brought, told a very different story.

Then Lucette caught sight of him.

"Look, Gabrielle, look. There rides Denys," she cried excitedly.

"Where?" asked Gabrielle in a calm tone, feeling like a wicked hypocrite for her small pretence.

"There, there. I hope he will not see us," exclaimed Lucette, pointing in his direction and making herself as conspicuous as possible.

"You are showing yourself plainly, Lucette."

"Then he will know where not to come, if he is not in a better temper than this morning."

Denys had seen Lucette. Gabrielle saw him turn and look toward them and then ride on toward the house without making a sign.

"He might have waved a hand," said Lucette, pouting and shrugging her shoulders. "But I will punish him. Let us go away from here."

"But just now you implied that he would not come here."

"I will not forgive him easily if he does," said Lucette, with a shake of the head and a little stamp of the foot.

"I will leave you to meet him, coz; and take my advice, cease to play this foolish game with him."

"There are two other cavaliers riding this way," said Lucette suddenly, "and spurring hard in urgent haste, it would seem."

Had they not been so intent in watching these and speaking of Denys, they would have seen yet another cavalier who stepped for a moment from a belt of trees, looked eagerly in their direction, and then hurriedly hid himself.

Gabrielle, quite unconscious of this, continued to urge

Lucette to wait alone for Denys and seek to make her peace with him. But Lucette was obstinate; and when at length she caught sight of Denys in the distance, dust-stained with his long ride, walking in their direction, she drew Gabrielle hurriedly behind a clump of trees into hiding.

"We will see what he does," she whispered excitedly. "I shall know by his face what mood he is in."

When Denys reached the spot where they had been he paused and looked about him.

"It was here I saw her, I'll swear," he said aloud to himself. "I marked that old chestnut tree," and he glanced at it. "Which way can she have gone? Lucette," he called in a loud voice. "Lucette." As he looked about him he backed close to the low trees behind which the two girls stood. "She can't have wandered far. Lucette—Lucette," he called again, and waited for his voice to come echoing back.

Then Lucette, whose face had brightened at hearing him call for her, plucked a rose from her bosom and tossed it so that it fell upon him in its course to the ground. He picked it up and smiled.

"A rose from an almond tree," he said aloud. "Surely something of a strange portent. Where are you, Lucette; little witch, that changes the natural blooms of a tree?"

Lucette had stepped on a low bough of a tree and now looked through the bushes.

"I have dropped my rose, m'sieu. May I trouble you? Ah, M. Denys, is it you?" with a start of pretended surprise.

"Lucette," he said passionately.

"Monsieur!" This distantly.

"Come, Lucette. Let the rose make our peace. I have been thinking of you through all my long ride."

She came slowly toward him, parting the bushes and playing at indifference.

"It is my rose, if you please, m'sieu."

"But you meant it for me," and he kissed it and then tried to take her hands. But she drew back.

"Do we know each other, m'sieu?"

His answer was a smile and an attempt to take her in his arms. But she would not let him. Seeing his mood, she could not resist a chance to tease him further.

"Have you forgotten what you said last night? Did you not ride off this morning without a word—a single word? Do you think I forgive so easily, and forget?"

"I can answer that, Denys," said Gabrielle, stepping out now from her place of concealment. She was anxious to end the quarrel and learn the news he brought. "She has forgiven you and is sorry for what she did. She has been heart-broken all the morning at your absence."

"Gabrielle, I——" began Lucette in protest.

"It is true, Denys, every word. So make your peace with her. Come, Lucette, be true to yourself."

"Peacemaker as usual, mademoiselle," cried Denys, with a happy, grateful smile.

"Indeed, indeed, it is nothing of the sort. Denys said last night that——"

"Never mind what I said in my anger, Lucette; I am sorry."

"But it was so causeless, so unjust, so—so horrible," and she put her hands to her ears as if in horror at the mere recollection.

Denys captured them then in his strong hands and held her a prisoner, while Gabrielle turned away.

"Let me go, Denys, let me go; how dare you!" cried Lucette, as if in anger, and commenced to struggle, tapping her foot and averting her head as he strove to kiss her. "Let me go I say."

"Not till you say all that foolish quarrel is over, and you have kissed me."

"I will not. I will not. Let me go," she cried, keeping up the pretence of anger.

"Kiss me then."

"I will not. How dare you force me like this?"

And they were struggling in this way when a wholly unexpected and unwelcome interruption came.

"How dare you treat a girl like that?" demanded a man's voice; and Antoine de Cavannes, followed by Henri d'Estelle, who had dogged Denys' footsteps, rushed up and laid violent hands on his shoulder. "Oh, it's you, Lucette," continued Antoine, in anger and surprise. "Why didn't you call me?"

Denys frowned darkly. He released Lucette, who fell back a step or two in disconcerted amazement.

"This is no concern of yours, gentlemen," said Denys.

"Indeed, but it is. No cowardly cur shall maltreat a girl in our presence, eh, d'Estelle?" The two men exchanged meaning glances.

"Be careful of your words, m'sieu, if you please," said Denys, his hand going involuntarily to his sword belt.

"Careful with a blackguardly girl-beater like you. Be off about your business and leave mademoiselle with me."

"By God!" cried Denys under his breath. "You shall eat those words, or I am no man."

"Out on you for a braggart," said Antoine, while his companion gave Denys a violent thrust.

"Be off with you, I say," he exclaimed roughly.

In a moment Denys' sword was out of its scabbard.

"No, no, Denys, you must not," cried Lucette, now in dire consternation at the turn matters had taken.

"You've often told me of this fellow's blackguard ways," said Antoine. "It's time he had a lesson how to behave."

"Gabrielle, Gabrielle," cried Lucette, catching sight of her. "Come here. Come here."

"Another petticoat for the coward to skulk behind," said d'Estelle, with a coarse laugh.

"Gentlemen, you have made a great mistake," cried Gabrielle, hastening forward. "This is not what you think. M. St. Jean is betrothed to Mademoiselle de Boisdegarde."

"It had small appearance of it just now," said d'Estelle.

"And I know it to be false," declared Antoine.

"Monsieur!" exclaimed Gabrielle, drawing herself up.

"Mademoiselle!" answered d'Estelle, with insolent imitation of her tone.

The words were scarcely out of d'Estelle's mouth before Denys strode forward and struck him a swinging left-handed blow across the mouth.

"You dog!" he said fiercely.

The two men drew then and were for attacking him together, but Lucette threw herself before him. Her wits, at first dazed by the dread of trouble to herself from the meeting of Antoine and Denys, were now sharpened by her fear for Denys' sake from the unequal combat, and by a rapid intuition she jumped to the conclusion that the meeting was designed for her lover's hurt.

"It shall not be. It is not fair—two to one. You cowards!" she cried, facing the couple angrily.

"Stand aside, Lucette," said Denys, putting her away.

"The thing has gone too far," and choosing a spot which he deemed most to his advantage he put himself in an attitude of defence. "Now, messieurs, if you will."

Lucette wrung her hands distractedly.

"They will kill him. They have come to do it. I know—I know," she cried, until Gabrielle bade her run to the house and get help, when she set off with the speed of fear.

Denys was a good swordsman, and, having chosen his ground well, fought warily against the pair, who, over-eager to finish the thing before any help could come,

hampered each other, so that d'Estelle, getting in Antoine's way, tripped and fell. His sword flew out of his hand and rolled close to Gabrielle, who instantly set her foot upon it.

The man scrambled quickly to his feet and ran to his sword.

"It is not fair, monsieur, two to one," said Gabrielle angrily.

"Take your foot from my sword, mademoiselle," he answered, a menace in both tone and look.

"I will not," she answered as firmly as before.

"Then take the consequences," he cried fiercely, and with a thrust he pushed her away, and snatching up his weapon, ran to the assistance of Antoine, whom Denys was now pressing fiercely in single combat.

"Help, help!" called Gabrielle in a loud voice. "Will no help come?"

But help was unexpectedly at hand, for another's eyes had seen the dastardly attack of d'Estelle.

The stranger who had been in the wood had witnessed the last part of the quarrel, and when the two men commenced the attack upon Denys, he had started at a rapid run toward the scene.

A loud angry shout now proclaimed his arrival.

"You villain, to strike a woman. Two swords to one, gentlemen! This is murder, not fighting. Have a care, monsieur; that rascal is getting behind your back. Ah, a foul, treacherous stroke," he exclaimed next, as d'Estelle, having crept up behind Denys, ran his blade into his back.

As Denys fell, the stranger gave another loud cry and leapt forward. Antoine was about to deliver another thrust while Denys lay on the ground, when his sword was parried by that of the newcomer.

"To me, messieurs, to me," and the two men found themselves the objects of a rapid and vehement attack by

a swordsman vastly more skilful than themselves. In a minute d'Estelle was wounded with a slash on the sword arm, and facing Antoine, the cavalier cried in a voice of thunder: "Now, you assassin, it is your turn."

But Antoine, deserted by his comrade, who ran off as soon as he was wounded, had no heart to face the blade which played round him, threatening death at every flashing turn, gave ground and with a cry of terror, broke away and fled as fast as his legs would carry him.

His antagonist was following him, when there came a cry from Gabrielle.

"Monsieur—monsieur!"

He stopped at the words, turned, bared his head and bowed.

"Your pardon, mademoiselle. In my haste to punish a treacherous coward I was forgetting you were alone."

"Monsieur," said Gabrielle, now lowering her eyes in blushing confusion.

It was the cavalier who had rescued her the previous day in the market place; and the rush of thoughts held her tongue-tied in embarrassment.

CHAPTER VI

"I AM KNOWN AS GERARD DE COBALT."

GABRIELLE'S heart beat very fast in the few moments she stood trying vainly to find words to speak, and she was conscious of little save a whirl of strange emotions in which predominated a sort of guilty pleasure at meeting again the stranger who had so filled her thoughts in the last hours.

He broke the silence.

"I trust that scoundrel did not hurt you, mademoiselle?" he said, voice and eyes alike full of solicitude, as she noticed in her swift flitting upward glance when he spoke.

"No, monsieur," she replied, and could say no more.

"I have set a mark on him to know him by, and he will have a reckoning to settle. By your leave, I will see to this poor fellow's hurt. I am something of a surgeon. A soldier must be many things," and with a bow he went over to Denys and bent over him.

This act relieved Gabrielle's embarrassment, and fear for Denys made her less conscious of her own confusing thoughts. After a moment's hesitation she knelt down on the other side of the wounded man.

"My poor Denys," she murmured.

Her companion with quick deft touch found the wound, and after examining it, staunched the blood which was flowing freely.

"An ill sight for your eyes, mademoiselle," he said.

"I am a soldier's daughter, monsieur, and accustomed to the treatment of the sick. Is the hurt serious, think you?"

"To the best of my judgment, no, unless there be some internal injury, which is not likely, judging by the direction of the wound. It was a coward's thrust in truth, but like most coward's work, ill done, thank Heaven. It is mainly a flesh wound. But a surgeon should see it with as little delay as possible."

"There will be help from the maison directly. I have sent for it."

At that moment Denys opened his eyes and seeing Gabrielle he smiled faintly, and then frowned in surprise at her companion.

"You are not much hurt, my brave Denys," said Gabrielle, "and all is well with me."

Denys rolled his eyes round as if in search of some one, and Gabrielle was quick to understand.

"Lucette has gone for help, Denys; she will be back directly. All is well with her as with me." He smiled again, and making an ineffectual effort to speak, closed his eyes with a sigh of relief.

Then footsteps and voices were heard, and Lucette, with the Baron de Proballe and Jacques Dauban, came hurrying to the spot. Lucette threw herself beside Denys while de Proballe eyed the stranger with searching glances, and started slightly at the sound of his voice as he bade Lucette be cautious not to disturb Denys.

"There has been fighting, I hear, Gabrielle," he said.

"There has been murder attempted, uncle, and it would have been done but for the intervention of this gentleman, who drove the assassins off."

"We are deeply beholden to you, monsieur," said de Proballe courteously, "and on behalf of my niece, I thank you." While he spake he was searching his memory to recall where he had seen the stranger, whose face and voice he seemed to know.

"There is no need for thanks, monsieur," was the reply. "I did no more than any one would have done. But the

wounded man should be removed and a surgeon should see to his hurts. He has lost much blood."

"We will send for a litter. Run to the maison, Jacques, and——"

"With your leave, and a little help in lifting him, I could carry him if it be not too far," interrupted the stranger. And with Dauban's and Lucette's assistance, he picked Denys up and bade them show him the way.

"You are strong, monsieur," said de Proballe, with a smile at the ease with which he bore the heavy burden.

"I am a soldier, monsieur, and he who fights must needs have strong arms. It were best if your servant there were to run on and prepare for our coming."

Dauban's face scowled at the word servant.

"Run on, Jacques, and see to this," said de Proballe, adding: "He is my secretary, monsieur, not my servant."

Dauban hastened on then, and Gabrielle and her uncle walked in front, Lucette keeping by Denys.

"It is the cavalier who came to my assistance in the market place yesterday, uncle," said Gabrielle.

"Who is he? I am much mistaken if I have not seen him somewhere before," was the reply.

"I have not inquired his name."

"He belongs not to Morvaix, I think, and seems, as you said, a man of some distinction. I will ask his name and station."

"Had we not better wait until we reach the maison? Our poor Denys is a heavy burden even for his stalwart arms, and to cause him to talk just now might prove burdensome to him."

"You are always solicitous, Gabrielle," replied her uncle, with a smile and a shrewd glance. "I will leave it as you say."

Meanwhile Dauban had hurried on a prey to mingled feelings, in which desire to appear anxious on Denys' behalf and so hide his share in the matter was paramount.

He sent one servant speeding on horseback for a surgeon and brought out others with a litter, and met the little procession as they were nearing the terrace.

Denys was laid carefully and gently on the litter and borne up the broad steps into the house, Lucette walking by his side and holding his hand.

The other three remained at the foot of the steps, the stranger leaning for a space against one of the pediments of the marble balustrade to recover his breath.

"We shall be glad to know, monsieur, to whom we are indebted for this most timely service as well as for that rendered yesterday to my niece in the market place," said de Proballe. "It seems to me we have met before; but I am getting an old man, and my memory is apt to fail me at times."

The question appeared to be momentarily embarrassing and, to cover the pause, the stranger breathed heavily and made a gesture of fatigue.

"You will come in and rest, monsieur," said Gabrielle, noticing this.

But the hesitation passed, and glancing first at Gabrielle with a smile of thanks for her thoughtfulness, he turned to de Proballe and said firmly—

"I am glad to have been of service to mademoiselle, monsieur. I am known as Gerard de Cobalt."

"Gerard de Cobalt!" both exclaimed in a breath; de Proballe adding "Our Gerard. Then of a truth are you welcome indeed to Malincourt."

"To Malincourt!" exclaimed Gerard, amazed at the effect of the name he had given. He knew of course where he was and who they were who spoke to him; but why they should welcome him in this way passed his understanding. And when he turned from de Proballe to Gabrielle and saw that her cheeks were aglow with blushes and her eyes bright and dancing with gladness, his bewilderment was all the greater.

" 'Tis the work of Providence, surely," she said, holding her hand to him. He took it and pressed his lips to it.

" Aye, 'tis Providence," echoed de Proballe. " Now I see why you were no stranger to me. 'Tis the boy speaking through the man, Gerard, and a right gallant man too."

" The boy?" asked Gerard, not understanding.

" Of course. You were but a slip of a lad when we last met, with little promise of being such a stalwart fellow. But I will go and see to poor Denys. You two will not be sorry to be alone and learn something each of the other," and with a sharp inscrutable glance at Gerard, he passed up the steps and into the house.

Gerard felt profoundly ill at ease. It was clear that some egregious mistake had been made concerning him, and that he had been mistaken for some other Gerard whose real name was that which he had assumed at random for the purposes of his sojourn in Morvaix.

To avow himself Gerard de Bourbon, while his work was still scarcely begun, was impracticable. It might ruin everything indeed; for de Proballe would instantly acquaint the Duke de Rochelle; yet to deceive the lovely girl whose face had been in his thoughts from the moment he had first seen her was repugnant to every sense of right and instinct of honour.

There was another consideration. The Baron de Proballe was represented as Gabrielle's uncle; and knowing, as Gerard did, the man's real character and infinite capacity for ill-doing, fears for Gabrielle herself impelled him to maintain his assumed character until he had at least satisfied himself that de Proballe had no evil intent toward her.

He could not decide what to do for a moment, and his confusion and hesitation were apparent to Gabrielle, who set them down, however, to very different causes.

There was an alcove with a seat near the corner of

the balustrade, and sinking upon it with a sigh, Gabrielle exclaimed—

“Thank God you have come, cousin, and thank God more that you are what you are, a brave and gallant gentleman.”

“Cousin?” echoed Gerard, catching the word.

“Cousin, of course; what else?” and then as if perceiving some double meaning in her last words, she blushed vividly.

“I do not understand,” he murmured, and then: “That is the Baron de Proballe?”

“Of course, as surely as I am Gabrielle de Malincourt. My uncle and my one good friend and adviser—up to now.” She lifted her eyes and smiled as she emphasised the last words.

“Your good friend and adviser!” he repeated.

“How oddly you speak, cousin. Is it not by his counsel and urging that you are here?”

“That I am here?” he asked, this time with a start.

“Perhaps you are not glad to have been brought here.”

“Mademoiselle, I have seen you,” he answered with a bow.

Gabrielle laughed gaily. “How formal, cousin.”

“I am lost in wonderment. I know not what to say.”

“It is well that you are quicker with your sword than with your tongue, or it would have gone harder than it did with my poor Denys just now. But perhaps I understand. You are surprised in me. I am different from what you expected.”

“You are the fairest woman I have ever seen.”

She blushed again and smiled.

“Yet you could not look more scared were I the ugliest witch. Shall I tell you a secret? I have dreaded your coming.”

“Pray God I may never give you cause to repent it,

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mademoiselle," he replied with an intense earnestness which drew her gaze full upon him.

"Mademoiselle?" she repeated, after a pause, with a touch of coquetry. "Mademoiselle—from cousin to cousin?"

He started again uneasily, for the question put a fresh puzzle to him—how to address her. Then he put it by and asked—

"Why did you dread my coming, as you say?"

She first winced and bit her lip, and then, setting her head a little on one side, she glanced up at him with a mischievous smile.

"I once knew such a horrid Gerard de Cobalt; and if you had been like him, oh——" the sentence ended in a shudder.

"What, another Gerard de Cobalt?" he asked mystified.

She laughed outright then, merrily and without restraint.

"As if you did not know. How could there be any other Gerard de Cobalt but you? You were a horrid boy, you know; really horrid; cruel, rough, unkind just for unkindness' sake. And you used to hate me—at least you said so; and I was glad of it."

"I must have been worse than unkind—a fool, I think, mademoiselle. Boys generally are," he replied laughing.

"Mademoiselle again?"

"What should I say?" he asked, growing bolder the deeper he allowed himself to plunge into the mystery, and getting less and less willing to have it cleared up.

"My name is Gabrielle," she said half shyly, "unless you think mademoiselle prettier."

"Gabrielle." He spoke the name in a soft tender tone with such a sweet reverence that she lowered her gaze and sighed.

"So I was a horrid boy, was I?" he asked lightly, breaking the pause. She looked up then all smiles.

"Don't you remember? But of course you didn't think so yourself, and I daresay thought me a little spitfire. You used to pinch me slyly and kick me, and laugh when you hurt me. I wonder I have not the bruises to this day. And have you forgotten that time I flew at you and boxed your ears?"

"I wonder I can have forgotten," he laughed.

"Yes, you had snared a blackbird and were pulling out its feathers, and mad at the sight I rushed at you and struck you, and you let it go in your surprise. I hated you for that, Gerard, I did indeed."

"Serve me right, too."

"And you called me such names."

"Not Gabrielle?" he interposed.

"No, and not mademoiselle," she retorted laughing. "But cat, and beast, and fury, and everything, and you pulled my hair."

"That hair?" he asked, laughing again. "What sacrilege."

"Yes, this hair," she nodded gaily. "Oh, it is no wonder that when they told me you were coming to—well, you know why—that I was frightened lest you should be just an older edition of that cruel little ugly horror."

"Ugly, too?"

"Yes, ugly. You were not a bit good-looking even for a boy. I should never have guessed you were the same;" and then she put her finger to her lip in some dismay as if to check herself.

"I think I am glad to have disappointed you."

"And do you think I have changed?" she asked, with a challenge in her eyes.

"You are older."

"What, in fifteen years? How strange!"

"Is it fifteen years since you saw that pleasant youth you have described?"

"Is that to put off my question? Have I disappointed you as you have me?"

"I had not even an idea of how beautiful you would be."

"Nay, if you flatter me, I shall not like it."

"It is no flattery—Gabrielle," and the low earnest tone thrilled her with delight. She thought a moment and then, looking up, said simply as she smiled into his eyes—

"It is not unmaidenly, seeing why you have come to Morvaix, for me to say what pleasure such words give me, Gerard. Oh, I think I must be the happiest girl in all fair France to-day."

"Seeing why I have come?" he repeated questioningly.

"Gerard!" The tone was one of reproach, and she looked troubled. "You have come for—for a purpose, haven't you?" Her eyes were on the ground as she spoke hesitatingly.

"Yes, and with God's help, I will carry it through."

She looked up then, but the smile on her face faded quickly away as she seemed not to read in his eyes what she sought.

"And your purpose is—what?" she asked, in a strange tone, very subdued, quiet and anxious.

"Even to you I cannot tell it yet," he answered.

"Cannot tell it me, Gerard? But——" she broke off and repeated wonderingly: "'Cannot tell it me—yet?'"

"But you shall know it at the first moment I can open my lips, and from what I have learnt of you, I know your sympathy will be with me and it."

Gabrielle felt the colour leaving her cheeks. What could he mean? There must be some hindrance to the plan of their marriage. He had said nothing of this in his letters to her uncle—nor a word to her.

"You have turned pale, mademoiselle. Are you ill?" he asked kindly, seeing the change in her.

"No, no; but I fear I don't understand. I have been unmaidenly and forward. But I did not know. You have said nothing of this obstacle in your letters to my uncle or to me. I thought it was settled. But I was wrong, of course; we all have been. Yet I thought when you came with no word—oh, cousin, was it manly or honourable of you not to tell me at once, not to check me? Oh, I know not what to say."

He was as much disturbed by the change in her as he was troubled by the sight of her distress and puzzled by her words.

"Obstacle? What obstacle? What have I said to disturb you thus?" he asked. "I would do anything in the world for you."

"You shame me, cousin."

"Gabrielle, on my honour, I know not what you mean?" he cried, with whole-hearted earnestness.

She rose then and looked at him, with a great effort to be calm.

"As God is my judge, I would give my life to serve you," he protested passionately. "I repeat, I know not what you mean."

"What your purpose may be, I cannot guess; but matters have gone too far for us to fence with words or feign ignorance of facts. You can have had but the one purpose in coming to Morvaix and to Malincourt. You have already expressed it openly in your letters. It is to further my dead parents' wish for our marriage."

He fell back a pace in his intense wonderment, and an exclamation of astonishment rushed to his lips only to be checked with a supreme effort. But she saw the look and noted the gesture, and her pride took instant offence.

"I will leave you, monsieur; perhaps you will explain this obstacle to my uncle with more candour than you have deemed necessary to show to me."

He conquered his surprise, and the wounded pride in her eyes and voice roused him. To him she was more than aught else in the world, and instantly he took the resolve to sweep away the misunderstanding by explaining all—his purpose in Morvaix, and that he was not the man she believed. He could not let her go in anger, let the cost be what it would.

"One moment. As I live, there is no obstacle on my side to—our marriage. That I swear. But I will explain all."

She paused and turned, her foot already on the steps to leave him; and his heart leapt to see the light that his words brought back to her eyes.

"You have tried me sorely, cousin. I——" she faltered and smiled and then leant for support against the balustrade.

"God knows I would not cause you even a moment's uneasy thought," he said earnestly. "I have done wrong, I know, but the temptation was a sweet one. I had no thought to deceive you when I came——"

He got no farther, for at that moment de Proballe stepped from the house and crossed the terrace to them, saying cheerily as he approached—

"Well, are you getting to know one another, eh?"

"What I have to say is for your ears alone. I pray your patience and will give you ample reasons," said Gerard in a quick undertone; adding aloud: "Yes, monsieur, we are close to a complete understanding. Is it not so, cousin?"

"I hope so," she answered, mystified still, but smiling.

"Poor Denys is better, but very weak, and is asking for you."

"With your leave I will go to him," she said to Gerard.

"I sent her off that we may have a talk and an understanding, too," said de Proballe, when Gabrielle had gone

into the house. "Let us walk here in the open where no ears can catch our words."

He led the way to where a fountain stood among the flower beds surrounded by a broad path, and Gerard accompanied him, in bewildered curiosity as to what this new development was to be.

CHAPTER VII

AT MALINCOURT

DISTRESSED as Gerard had been by the necessity to deceive Gabrielle, into which he had allowed himself to be drawn, he had no such qualms in regard to her uncle. He was convinced that, as Pascal had said, if there was evil work on foot, de Proballe would be concerned in it.

That such a man should be found established at Malincourt, posing as the true friend of an innocent girl, and regarded by her as an honourable and confidential adviser, was in itself enough to rouse suspicion.

He decided at once, therefore, to fall in with de Proballe's mood, whatever it might be, and to lead him to talk as freely as he would.

"Why did you not come straight to Malincourt, Gerard, or at any rate let me know of your presence in Morvaix, that I might have word with you?"

"If I was doubtful of my reception by Gabrielle, can you blame me?" asked Gerard in reply, dropping readily into his assumed character.

"But I had told you exactly how matters were with her."

"But I had not seen her with my own eyes."

"Psh, a sentimental fool's reason," exclaimed de Proballe, contemptuously.

"Yet, I am no sentimental fool, monsieur."

"If you were no worse, you would be lucky. Your kinsman, Raouf, in Paris, gave me your history."

"He may have lied," answered Gerard, calmly, suppressing a start at the mention of the name and the coin-

vidence it suggested. "But let it pass. What I have done, I have done. If it comes to that, Raouf gave me no saintly account of you."

"Paris is not Morvaix, and what I do there or here is no concern of yours or his," was the curt, half angry reply.

Gerard laughed. "As I said, Raouf may have lied. It is of no account; but I cannot see that in choosing my own method I have done so ill."

De Proballe smiled unpleasantly.

"You played boldly. I did not know you had such courage—except in your cups. Yes, you have made a good impression on Gabrielle; but have none the less done ill."

"In what way?"

"In saving that fool to-day. You were too hasty. You should have let one of the swords find his heart, and then have played the rescuer of Gabrielle. The men wouldn't have touched you."

"Why not?" asked Gerard quickly. "They tried."

"Because you stood between them and Denys."

"Read me the riddle."

"Denys has found out something of the real purpose of this marriage; how much I know not; and his silence is necessary to our success. The Duke will not thank you."

"The Duke!" exclaimed Gerard hastily, bewildered by this unexpected reference to the Governor in connection with the marriage. A sudden sharp glance from his companion warned him that he had blundered, so he forced a laugh, and added: "The Duke should label his men if he does not want them hurt."

"Are you a fool?" retorted de Proballe, sharply. "Had you come straight to me, this would have been avoided. I tell you the man is dangerous. Is not that enough?"

"No; it depends on how much he knows."

"He knows that you are here to marry Gabrielle and that in doing so you are merely playing catspaw; and he suspects the real purpose, that it is to cover the Duke's plan in regard to her."

"Then he suspects what an infernal villain Gerard de Cobalt must be!"

"He is not alone in that suspicion," was de Proballe's sneering comment.

"True. I think I'm beginning to suspect it myself," answered Gerard drily.

"If you were anything else, you'd be little use to us; so let us have no cant here."

"I am here to play my part," said Gerard smoothly, repressing his anger.

"It is a part many a better man would gladly play. You will have wealth, a beautiful wife, a high position here, and a pardon for that Cambrai affair. Surely all that a man could wish." He regarded Gerard with a sly covert smile as he reeled off these advantages.

Gerard's face was as impassive as that of a statue, while his thoughts were busy seeking the real meaning beneath the words. He paused a moment, and then answered in a level tone—

"True, but you omit the price I have to pay."

"Price," cried de Proballe, with another sneer.

"Price! Honour rather, you mean. The Duke de Rochelle is all but of the Royal blood; and better men than you will ever be have been glad to pay no more for their careers than mere *maritz*' complaisance."

"By God!" exclaimed Gerard, his voice vibrating with feeling as he realized now the full infamy of the plot and the degradation of the part cast for him; then catching de Proballe's eyes fixed on him, he forced down his rage, and said coolly: "You are right, *monsieur*; Gerard de Cobalt cannot afford to be particular. He has that pardon to gain."

"Now perhaps you understand the harm you did in saving that meddler's life."

"I see now that if I had had all these thoughts in my mind I would have acted differently."

"You will see the Duke to-day, and will find him in a gracious mood."

"It is not the reputation he bears. They call him the Tiger, I hear."

"His enemies do; those who seek to thwart him. He saw Gabrielle to-day, and what passed between them pleased him greatly. She urged him to relax the rigour of his rule here; and he half consented. His plan is that he and she shall take frequent counsel together for the government of the people—when she is your wife. He will thus see much of her in many a private conference, and the people will have cause to bless her name for her good influence. Some of the blessings may come your way, Gerard, for the good change will date from the time of your marriage. You will be a popular man in Morvaix." He ended with another of his dry cynical laughs, and looked for his companion to join in.

But Gerard was too deeply moved even to simulate laughter.

"There is yet one thing that perplexes me—has perplexed me from the first. What is your part in this? Raouf did not paint you exactly as a type of self-denial, willing to stand aloof when others were reaping rich gains."

"My plans, like my reasons, are my own," returned de Proballe, with a frown. "You shall know them all in time."

"As you please. It is enough for me to know that you have them. And I have enough on my side to keep my wits busy."

"Had you but let the Governor's men work their way with that St. Jean all would have been well; but I scent

danger there. Some other means of silencing him must be found. For your part you have but to push your suit with Gabrielle with all speed, and hasten on the marriage. In that, the success you have gained to-day will help you. Your act yesterday in the market place almost turned her head; at any rate, it went to her heart. But now, tell me of yourself, something of the story of your life. She will surely question you, and you must have a gallant tale to tell."

"My past, like your reasons, is my own. Should she question me I shall know how to answer."

"From whence came you here, and how?"

"That I am here may suffice. I have come to do my task; and believe me I shall not fail to satisfy even the Duke himself of my thoroughness."

"You can be close-lipped, it seems," said de Proballe, irritably.

"No bad quality surely, when such work as mine has to be done."

"If you will not talk then, let us go into the house. You will of course bide at Malincourt. Have you a servant and apparel suited to your new position? You are but indifferently clad now."

"I am but a courier of fortune; but I have a servant, and can provide for all the needs of even my high position at Malincourt."

"You are a strange fellow, Gerard, and altogether unlike what your letters had led me to expect. But take your own way."

"I have done that always, and shall not change even in Malincourt. I have a matter that calls me to the town, and will return to the maison within an hour or so, by your leave," and without another word he turned and walked away, leaving de Proballe staring after him in high dudgeon at his unexpected independence.

Gerard plunged along at a quick pace, his brows pent

and frowning as he thought over the extraordinary situation in which he found himself involved. He made his decision with characteristic promptitude. He would return to Malincourt to see the thing through, to watch over Gabrielle, and to play out the part for which he had been thus unexpectedly cast.

There was no thought now of undeceiving her as to his real character. That was now out of the question, impossible, for a time at least, for her own sake no less than for his own.

The explanation need not be long delayed. Once let him get the proofs of the Governor's connivance at the scheme—and these he hoped to get in the interview which de Proballe said was to take place at once—and he would strike the power from the Governor's hands by virtue of the authority which his father, the Duke of Bourbon, as Suzerain of the province, had conferred upon him.

But the proofs must be very clear. The times were such that too close a scrutiny was not likely to be made into the private lives of those holding authority. The man who ruled his province in such a way as to relieve those above him of trouble, and who was always to be relied on to find troops should they be needed, could make sure of wide tolerance in any matters of his private life.

Moreover, the Duke de Rochelle was connected with the blood royal; he could count therefore upon high patronage and help; and there were in this connection many reasons why Gerard must walk warily. There had been trouble between the House of Bourbon and the throne; and the King and his advisers would welcome only too gladly any pretext to step in and wrest this last lingering remnant of Bourbon suzerainty from the once all-powerful family.

Gerard felt all the responsibility that rested on him; and it was in this respect that de Proballe's last words

were of such importance. The Governor was betraying himself by mixing up a personal intrigue with the work of Government. Not content with having misgoverned the people and overtaxed them to the verge of revolt—offences which might have been overlooked in view of the powerful force of soldiery he had raised and trained—he was now contemplating a complete reversal of policy in order to please Gabrielle for his own evil personal ends.

Here was Gerard's chance, and he was quick to see it and to determine to use it. He would continue the acted lie of his false character until he had secured from the Governor himself an admission of his real purpose, or had found other incontestable proof of it—de Proballe's word being less than valueless; and the moment he was satisfied he would strike.

To this end he sought out the young officer, Pascal, a close intimate friend, told him much of what he had learned, and prevailed on him to doff the monk's cowl and assume the character of his servant at Malincourt during the few hours or days he might have to remain there.

Pascal, to whom devilment in any form was welcome enough, entered readily into the spirit of the adventure, and agreed instantly. Together they obtained such apparel as was necessary, and returned to Malincourt together.

"I hope the old rat, de Proballe, won't recognize me," said Pascal. "I once won some three hundred crowns from him, and they say he never forgets a man who has beaten him with the dice box."

"I am full of anxiety over this, Pascal; for Heaven's sake avoid every chance of a mishap," replied Gerard earnestly.

"I'll keep out of his way. Have no fear for me. Lest he should know my voice, I'll play the dumb man."

"No, no, not that. No buffoonery, on any account."

"Well, then, you can say I have taken a vow of silence on account of the past trippings of my tongue. The reason would be true enough."

"There is need for nothing of the kind. Keep in the background with your eyes and ears open and your lips closed; shun the women as you would the plague, and all will be well. Especially, shun the women."

The handsome young fellow laughed.

"I'll shun them, if they be not too pretty; but there are limits, Gerard. I haven't touched a pair of lips since I've been in the city; although I must say a monk's cowl gives rare opportunities. Were I not a soldier, on my faith I think I'd be a monk."

Gerard was received at the maison with such ceremony as became a person of his consequence. Gabrielle and her uncle greeted him: Gabrielle with such smiles and gladness that Pascal ceased to wonder at his enthusiasm for his new rôle; and de Proballe with many significant shrugs and looks and equivocal phrases. The rest hailed him as the chosen husband of their beloved mistress; and the story of his bravery and prowess in the rescue of Denys having spread, they welcomed him with acclamation.

Pascal, as their new lord's servant, would also have been made much of; and seeing many ruddy lips and bright eyes among the women, he would gladly enough have responded had not Gerard's injunctions of caution been still strong upon him. He feigned fatigue, therefore, and asked to be shown at once to Gerard's apartments; and going there, he at once fell into much deeper waters than any which could have threatened him in any other part of the house.

The apartments were close to the room where Denys lay with Lucette in attendance. Denys was better; but when he had been told that his preserver was no other than Gerard de Cobalt, he had taken the news very

strangely and had broken out into a torrent of abuse of him. Then he had gone on to tell Lucette things which, added to what she had heard from Jacques Dauban on the previous evening, had frightened her profoundly.

But this sudden violent passion so weakened Denys that a relapse followed; and thus Lucette had been left with a half-told tale which he had conjured her to carry to Gabrielle at once. She was at her wits' end what to do, and when she heard that Gerard had arrived and was to be lodged in rooms adjoining, she found occasion to loiter about until she encountered Pascal.

Her pretty face and distracted looks went straight to his sympathies, and when of her own motion she spoke to him, he soon forgot all about Gerard's counsel.

"You are here with M. de Cobalt, monsieur?" she said.

"Certainly, mademoiselle, as certainly as that you are here with some trouble of another kind than a captious master. Although trouble may be a master of any of us for that matter."

Lucette was watching him, and found him good to look upon. Handsome, frank-faced and clear-eyed, with the stamp of truth.

"You, too, are a soldier, monsieur?"

"When I am not anything else, mademoiselle. But in times like these a man plays many parts." She has handsome eyes, and knows how to use them, was his thought.

"You have been long with M. de Cobalt, no doubt?"

"I don't know, mademoiselle," was his unexpected reply, given with an engaging smile.

He has a dangerous smile, this servant, and speaks with an air, said Lucette to herself.

She is going to try and pump me, was Pascal's unspoken warning to himself.

"Don't know, monsieur! How can that be?"

"It depends upon what we reckon long; whether by lapse of time—weeks, months, years—or by the events which have occurred. A man may know a maiden for years until he marry her, and then find that he has never known her at all."

"Ah, you are a wit."

"What I am I myself know not; but I know what I am not—and I am not a stream in which people, even pretty maids, can fish with a chance of catching much."

"There is another thing you are not, monsieur," retorted Lucette, smiling.

"There are many. I am not my master's diary, for others to read," he answered with a laugh and a shake of the head.

"Neither are you a servant, monsieur, unless you wear your master's jewels on your fingers."

"By my shroud, but you have keen eyes as well as pretty ones; but even sharp eyes may lead one astray. I wear this jewel by my master's whim," he replied unabashed.

"May I see it closer?"

"Why not—'tis but a paste," and he held it up.

"You take great care of your hands, monsieur, for a serving soldier man," was her comment, so unexpected that Pascal started and laughed.

"Do you think I do hard work?" he asked, shrugging his shoulders.

"Your clothes, too, are new and ill-fitting—they fit you so ill, indeed, that I would swear you have never worn the like before."

"Count not the misfit to me for my sin," replied Pascal gaily. "'Tis that of the rascal who made them. You interest me, mademoiselle; may I ask who you are?"

"Your voice, your manner, your tone, the very bow and air with which you asked that question, everything about you belies the servant, monsieur," continued Lucette. "I

am Mademoiselle de Malincourt's foster sister and friend, Lucette de Boisdegarde; and I am on my way to tell her of this discovery of mine and other things. You bar my path, monsieur," she said with dignity, as Pascal in some dismay put himself before her. "If you are in truth a servant, I order you to stand aside; if you are a gentleman, I ask you."

"If I detain you a moment, it is only to assure you that Mdlle. de Malincourt and yourself can have no more faithful friend and well-wisher than myself."

"Your name, monsieur?"

"Pascal de—Pascal Tourelle, at your service."

She was quick to see the slip, and pressed home a thrust at once.

"On your honour?"

"Pascal, on my honour; Tourelle, during my service with my master."

She smiled, partly at the evasion, but more at his manner of making it.

"If you were not in this service of which you speak so readily, how would you have finished that sentence? Pascal de—what?"

"That is my unhappy secret, mademoiselle; I beg your consideration," and his tone suggested a melancholy trouble.

But Lucette smiled.

"Had you been a servant truly, your honour would not have stayed you from deceiving me. If I do not go now to mademoiselle, will you tell me all you know of this M. de Cobalt?"

"I will tell you this, on my honour, and your honour will prevent your asking more," he answered after a moment's consideration. "A braver soldier, a more honourable knight, a more gallant gentleman, never trod this earth than he in whose service you now find me."

She looked at him searchingly, and believed him. But

this very belief only sufficed to perplex her the more after Denys' story.

"One question more I must put. Do you know if he was ever at Cambrai? Do not answer against your will, nor if you cannot speak truly on your honour."

"I can answer that, frankly. I have known him many years, and can say that until within the last few days, never. We passed through the place in coming here."

"Then is the puzzle inscrutable!" exclaimed Lucette. Denys had told her of the murder at Cambrai, the pardon for which was part of the price to be paid to de Cobalt, and had spoken of a letter which he had found that put the thing plainly. He had been in the act of telling her where the paper was concealed, that she might get it and carry it to Gabrielle, when the relapse had prevented further speech.

"I know not what to do," she cried, in sore perplexity and distress. "If I trust you, others are sadly misled. And yet I believe you have not deceived me."

"On my honour I have spoken no more than the truth," said Pascal earnestly. He was as much puzzled as Lucette herself. "If you would deal with me frankly, and say——"

"I cannot; I cannot," she broke in excitedly.

"Then may I suggest you speak to M. de Cobalt?"

"You know not what you say. But the matter must be probed to the bottom;" and afraid to say more she left him and hurried back to Denys' bedside.

Pascal looked after her, nodded once or twice in answer to his thoughts, and then, with a quizzical smile, muttered, as he turned back to his room—

"Now is the devil about to claim some of his dues for this mad business. I must find Gerard and tell him."

They had scarcely parted when the face of the spy Jacques Dauban peeped cautiously round an angle of the

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wall. Seeing the way was clear he came on with stealthy noiseless tread, chuckling slyly to himself as he rubbed his hands together. He paused just a moment to listen at the door through which Pascal had gone, and then passed on toward the room where Denys lay.

CHAPTER VIII

THE PLOT THICKENS

MEANWHILE Gerard himself, without any help from Pascal's misadventure, was finding enough embarrassments to tax his wit and resourcefulness.

De Proballe, anxious that Gerard should have the fullest opportunities to push his suit with Gabrielle, soon made an excuse to leave them together. He pleaded that he must send to the Governor to arrange for the interview between him and Gerard, and left them—a move that was not without its embarrassment to Gerard, since Gabrielle promptly took advantage of it to carry the conversation back to the point where it had been interrupted in the gardens.

"You have something important to tell me, Gerard, I know. You were about to tell me when my uncle came to us. But first, I have to make a confession and to ask your pardon."

"I am no priest, I fear," he said, meeting her smiling gaze.

"But this is a wrong done to you. When I was thinking over all we said to-day—and I have thought of nothing else since—I remembered to my shame, that I had never given you even a word of thanks for your help yesterday, and again to-day."

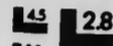
"Please say nothing of it."

"Oh, but you must have thought me a very miser of my gratitude. And I am not that. Indeed, indeed, I do thank you from the bottom of my heart," she cried, warmly, her eyes on his face.



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"Do you think I need more reward than the knowledge that it was you whom I could help? When I saw you yesterday, my heart leapt, and I vowed——"

"Well?" she asked, as he paused; and when he still hesitated, checked by the thought that he had no right to speak thus while the truth of his position was still unexplained, she added, with a little frown and a very winsome smile, "you break off at most irritating points, cousin."

"I vowed myself to your service for good or ill," he said deliberately.

"Take care what you say, cousin. Did you know who I was?"

"Not then, indeed."

"Then was that surely a most dangerous vow."

"How?"

She laughed merrily. "Supposing it had not been Gabrielle to whom you thus rashly vowed yourself; what would you have done?"

"I had not thought of it. No other woman would have drawn such a vow from me."

"You turn words well—so well that I could almost be afraid of your skill. Shall we go out on the terrace? The evening air is lovely. Tell me," she said, as they walked, "how came you to be playing trespasser so opportunely to-day in Malincourt. It has puzzled me."

"If I tell the truth, I was lurking in the wood, hoping to catch a sight of you again."

"You had learnt who this lady of your vow was by that time, then?"

"Else I had not been in Malincourt," he answered, without thinking.

She glanced at him quickly, her face wrinkled with this fresh puzzle.

"Is not that a worse puzzle?" she asked. "Knowing who I was, why not have come straight to the maison?"

"Of course, I might have done so," he replied. He saw the slip then clearly enough, and tried to cover it with a laugh. "Perhaps I ought to have come."

"But you did not. Why? I do not mind that you did not, but why should you choose so strange a course?"

"What answer can I give, save it was a whim?"

"You would have seen me sooner had you come and would not have been one whit less welcome; and would in truth have saved me some hours of anxiety. Do you know that, yesterday, I sent high and low in search of you; and only this morning my poor Denys went riding out to Beaucamp on a veritable wild-goose chase to find you?"

Gerard smiled. "Did you at the time know who I was?" he asked.

"Should I have sent away from Morvaix to find you, had I known?"

"Then you, too, were not without interest in a stranger?"

"It is not a fair hit," she laughed. "I would not have had even a stranger think me an ingrate for such service."

"Then it was merely to thank me, you wished."

"Gerard!" and she let her eyes drop to the ground.

"I should like to think that before you heard my name to-day, you——" He commenced in great earnestness, but checked himself again.

"Some day I will tell you," she replied in a low tone, after a pause; and then, in a tone as low, he asked—

"And what if I had been other than Gerard de Cobalt?"

"Thank God, it was not so," she cried, with a little shiver and a sigh.

"Why, Gabrielle?" He had his own strong reason for pressing the question.

For a time she kept her head bowed and remained

silent; but then raising her eyes to him frankly and trustfully she said—

“I think I should like to tell you. You will not think shame of me. I fear I could never have been Gerard de Cobalt’s wife. All night I wrestled with the problem, and prayed fervently for strength to do my duty, and keep the pledge made for me by my parents. But when I knew Gerard de Cobalt would come to-day, I dreaded to meet him. Can you not guess why?” She was all blushes and sweetness as the faltered confession dropped from her lips.

“You cannot think what this means to me,” he answered with passion. “But some day you will understand.”

“Why not now, Gerard? I have betrayed all my little secret—little, do I say—if you but knew how great, how all in all it is to me! I have shown you all my heart,” she whispered.

They were leaning on the marble balustrade, gazing over the lovely gardens which the risen moon was silvering with her glory.

“Why not now, Gerard?” she repeated, after a long pause, with sweet, gentle insistence. “What need of secrets between us two?”

He longed to respond to this frank confession of her feelings by telling her everything; and the impulse to speak was only curbed with great effort. But prudence stayed him, and the fear of unknown consequences which might imperil everything by forcing a disclosure to de Proballe.

“We will have no secrets one from the other, Gabrielle, when once this matter in my thoughts has been cleared up,” he said, his reluctance to refuse her plea causing him to speak with hesitation.

“Is it the same of which you spoke to-day so strangely?”

"The same, yes."

"But you were going to tell me—then." Her pause before the word, and emphasis in speaking it, did not escape him. But even the subtle temptation implied in the sweet accent did not prevail.

"Yes, I was going to tell you. If I do not, you trust me?"

"Gerard, of course. I should trust you always. But—I am only a woman, and—curious," she added, with a tender smile of reproachful invitation.

"And if I assure you it is for your own sake that I hold this back, you will bear with me?"

"For my sake? Now in truth you increase my perplexity, and do but whet my appetite. How can it be for my sake? You said to-day that it concerned the very purpose of your coming here; and when I spoke of that purpose as I knew it—our marriage, Gerard—you started back as if in alarm or overwhelming surprise. You pained me so that I was leaving you in anger."

"The pain was greater on my side than yours, Gabrielle."

"And then you suggested you had been led to deceive me in some strange way: I should not believe that, indeed; and, as if impelled by some sudden thought, you were about to tell me everything. And then my uncle came, and you whispered hurriedly that what you had to say was for my ears alone. Are we not alone now?" she asked with witching pressure; and she smiled tenderly, as she added: "You see I remember every word you said. Indeed, I could never forget them; but I cannot understand"; and she shook her head as if the puzzle were all beyond her solving.

"If you but trust me, what else can matter?" he answered, at a loss how to meet her.

"Nothing, nothing now," she cried joyfully, moving a little closer to him so that her shoulder was against his.

"Chide me if I seem too persistent. I have had so much of my own way in my life that I must be getting self-willed, I think. But don't make the chiding too harsh, Gerard. And do not keep me too long with this secret between us; I think I shall grow jealous of it. And—another condition," she laughed: "Do not tell any one before you tell me. I could not bear that."

"You are even harder to resist when you yield, Gabrielle, than when you plead, I fear."

"Am I? Then I will yield that I may plead. But I will wait your time. Of course I will. It is such delight to me to find you what you are, that all else is nothing. Besides, it is the first request you have made to me, and I should be a churl to refuse it. I did not think of that, and could be angry with myself for having forgotten it. I would not hear you now, if you were to offer to tell me." Her laugh at this was as that of a child in its pure delight.

"I am almost constrained to tempt you," he said, laughing in his turn.

"Nay, I have put my curiosity away—about that, but I have plenty left about you and your life and all you have done to change you from that boy Gerard whom I knew."

"I am very different from him, I trust. I have been a soldier since the time I was big enough to shoulder a musket."

"And have fought? Tell me, tell me. Where and with whom? I love to hear of brave deeds. I am a soldier's daughter, you know."

"I have been a courier of fortune, as all younger sons must be, and have carried arms under the Bourbons."

"We Malincourts, too, claim to be of the Bourbon blood; but—how do you mean—a younger son? I had not heard you had ever a brother, Gerard."

"All soldiers have brothers-in-arms," he replied;

hastily, and with some confusion. "I have had my own way to push—to prove that I was worthy to lead."

"Yes, yes. And you have proved that long since, I am confident. But tell me of the fighting. Oh, I would that I had been a man to bear my part as a soldier!"

"That had been hard on me, Gabrielle."

"True enough, too. And for that I am glad I am only a woman," she said, gently, nestling yet closer to him. And having thus led her on to the safe topic of his career as a soldier, he told her many of his experiences. She listened eagerly to his story, hanging on his words in rare delight, until he broke off, remembering that he was to see the Governor that night.

"I am forgetting—I could forget all in your company. But M. de Proballe has arranged that I see the Duke to-night. I had best seek him."

"You must be careful with the Governor, Gerard."

"Why? I do not fear him."

"He is all powerful here in Morvaix. You saw what passed in the market place yesterday. He is a man of iron."

"Yet what harm can he do me?"

"He is bad to the heart's core. His wife is my one intimate friend in Morvaix, an honourable, God-fearing woman, who has suffered unspeakable sorrows at his hands in her life. She is now bed-ridden, poor soul; and we have spoken freely together of the Duke."

"He is a tyrant—that I have learnt."

"And many worse things, I fear. I would not willingly speak ill of any man, but to you I should speak freely. He has but too well merited the term men give him—the Tiger of Morvaix. Could the grim walls and torture chambers of his castle bear witness against him, fearsome truths indeed would come to light."

"Tell me of them."

"Nay, not to-night. To-night we will not speak of

Morvaix horrors; rather let us hope that from to-night, from your coming, Gerard, better times will dawn for the city and the unfortunate citizens. The Duke is a hard, harsh, cruel man, who tolerates but one principle of rule: blind implicit obedience to his will, to be enforced by any measure of cruelty, however violent and harsh. He has ground down the people until the yoke has become intolerable; and yet there seems no remedy. I sent tidings privately to the Duke of Bourbon, as Suzerain of the province, praying him to come or send aid to us before the people should be driven to open rebellion. But no one comes, no one heeds; and we must work out our own rescue. I have a faint hope indeed, that matters will mend."

"How?"

"I saw the Duke to-day, and urged him to relax the severity of his rule—to take off this last cruel impost on the people's food, for one thing; and he half promised, making his consent contingent on some sacrifice from me. God knows there is nothing I would not give in such a cause. I would strip myself of all my possessions—even of Malincourt itself, dearly as I love every stone of the old maison. But I hold the welfare of the people dearer. He would not name the condition, however, leaving it to me to do so. And I know not what he wishes."

Gerard's face grew dark with anger as he listened, knowing full well from de Proballe's words what the condition was.

"We shall together find the means, Gabrielle," he said earnestly. "My hand and oath on that; and my life the forfeit if I fail."

"You will help me in this," she cried, joyfully and eagerly. "Oh, Gerard, did I not say to-day how glad I was that you had come! What great issues now depend on you. With you to help me, a strong man at Malincourt, to oppose the castle; not violently I mean, but with

the strength of all the people's sympathy behind us, what may we not achieve? But when you see the Duke, be wary of him; give him no cause present offence that we may be the stronger in the future."

"Does any one but you know that you sent to Bourbon for help? Your uncle, for instance?"

"No. I told no one; not even him. I deemed him too intimate with the Governor. He would not wittingly betray me, I know, for he has often spoken to me in sorrow of the Duke's government. You like him, Gerard?"

"I have seen but little of him; but I have indeed found him blunt in speaking of facts," was the cautious reply, drily spoken.

A footstep on the terrace disturbed them. It was Pascal.

"I was seeking you, monsieur, to know if you have any other commands for me," he said aloud in a respectful tone, adding in a whisper, as they stood apart: "I must speak to you at once. There's a devil of a mess."

"Wait but a minute," whispered Gerard; and then aloud: "I will see you directly, good Pascal. It is my faithful fellow in some trouble about me, Gabrielle."

"Then let us go in. Ah, here is Lucette," she added, as Lucette, looking very troubled, came out of the maison. "How is Denys, Lucette?"

"He was better for some time, but the fever seems to have come back upon him. The surgeon has seen him again, and given him a potion, and he is now asleep."

"He should be carefully watched all night, never left for a moment," declared Gerard quickly, remembering de Proballe's threatening words. "You will see to this, mademoiselle."

"The surgeon says he will sleep until the morning, and will need no more till then," answered Lucette.

"Let him be watched. At need I, or Pascal here, will remain by his bedside."

"By your leave, monsieur, that were not well;" and Lucette spoke so sharply that all looked at her.

"What mean you, Lucette?" asked Gabrielle.

"Denys has, for causes that may be plain afterward, conceived a violent dislike toward Monsieur de Cobalt; and if he woke and found him by the bedside, it might be very ill indeed."

"But I have never set eyes on him until to-day, mademoiselle."

"It is probably no more than a sick man's fancy," said Gabrielle.

"It may be so; yet it is very strong upon him, and he talks wildly and almost at random."

"I fear his wound is more serious than you deemed, Gerard," declared Gabrielle.

"It is the more reason for what I have urged—that he be watched closely and never left. His life itself may hang upon it."

"I will see that it is done," agreed Gabrielle readily.

"That what is done?" It was de Proballe who asked the question, coming out of the house in time to catch the last words.

"My poor Denys is very ill, it seems, uncle, and Gerard has just been saying that he should be watched ceaselessly."

"Poor fellow," he replied in a compassionate tone; and then with an upcast glance at Gerard he asked: "And why do you think he should be watched so closely?"

"I have had some skill in sword-wounds, monsieur, and Mademoiselle Lucette here says he has been talking wildly. When delirium follows such a wound as his there is every need for care."

It was an adroit answer, for it satisfied de Proballe and also bore out what he had said before. But Lucette's

eyes were very keen, and knowing all she did, she was watching closely enough to catch de Proballe's glance of meaning as he answered—

"You are right then, Gerard. I will see to this, Gabrielle. Denys is too good a fellow for us to run any risks with. My man, Jacques Dauban, has had some training in surgery, and would gladly keep such a vigil."

Lucette bit her lip and cast down her eyes.

"I think we need not trouble Master Dauban or cause him to lose a night's rest," she said. "My maid and I can watch, monsieur."

"Ever kind and considerate, Lucette," said de Proballe. "Well, we can see to it, as Gabrielle says. And now, Gerard, I have a word for your ear about the Governor. He cannot receive you to-night."

"I am sorry; but to-morrow will do for me."

"What is this about Denys?" asked de Proballe, eagerly, when Gabrielle and Lucette had left them. "You should not have urged that watching. If the man is alive to-morrow, everything may be ruined. What has he said to Lucette there?"

"Indeed, I neither know nor care."

"Are you mad?"

"To-night, perhaps yes; sanity may come in the morning. I have been talking long and earnestly with Gabrielle, and her purity and innocence may have maddened me. If that be so, it is sweet madness."

"Psh. Spare me such cant. Would you ruin everything? We are men with work to do, not fools to stuff our minds with folly."

"Nor villains to murder sick men. If harm should come to Denys I should never forgive myself—nor you, monsieur; and I should hold you responsible."

"Then you do not wish this marriage?"

"Not if the path to it be cold-blooded murder, Monsieur de Proballe."

"Does it lie in your mouth to speak of murder, after Cambrai? But your head is turned because you find your cousin has a pretty face; and if it is not to be turned next on the headsman's block, you will cease this folly."

"So it was held to be murder at Cambrai?"

"You try my patience beyond endurance. See to it that you have more reason in the morning; and that you may find it, I will give you something to ponder in the night. I have talked with the Duke to-night, and found him with another plan half-fledged in his thoughts; and if ever it gets full-feathered you may look to yourself."

"He seems a man quick at hatching schemes. I fear neither him nor them."

"Fool! Do you dream to oppose him? He is now half-minded to divorce his Duchess and make Gabrielle his wife. He finds that he stands higher in the favour of the Cardinal Archbishop than he deemed; his Eminence has sent him a hundred fighting men for his army; and he now thinks he can secure a dispensation to put away his wife. He is childless, and she a bed-ridden invalid; and the Church might not willingly see so noble a line as his extinct. If you do not hurry to make Gabrielle your wife, I would not answer for your head. Ponder that to-night, and mouth of sweet madness in the morning, if you have any mind left for such folly."

Waiting for no reply, de Proballe turned on his heel and entered the house; and as Gerard was gazing after him, Pascal approached and touched him on the arm.

"Of all the diabolical villains—What is it, man?" he broke off impatiently.

"What's the use of wasting breath in that way when there are things to be done? This precious maison is like a nest of spies. I've been found out for an impostor by that pretty sharp-eyed girl whose lover lies wounded upstairs; and I was wondering how to get to you to tell you when I came on some sneaking whelp of a man with

his ear jammed to the door of the chamber where she was watching."

"Did you break his head for him?"

"Nearly; but I did better. I played spy in my turn; and your honest man can beat a rogue at his own trade when he tries, even when that trade is spying. Presently the rascal went to the door of the apartments where we are to lie, and, after listening and waiting, he knocked, at first gently, and then more boldly, and finding no one within, entered, and I caught him ransacking among our baggage. Holy Peter! but he cut a sorry figure when he saw me peeping round the door at him;" and Pascal laughed.

"What did you do? I hope you were discreet."

"I first knocked him down and drubbed him soundly, and then tied him up with a roll of cloth for his supper, and locked him in a cupboard. Then I came for you that we may try him together."

"Who is he?"

"I gave him no time to say. But come, or he may be smothered—for I'm a novice with the gag—and in that case we shall get nothing out of him; which would be a pity."

"It's a curious turn," said Gerard uneasily, as they hurried away together.

CHAPTER IX

WHAT DENYS KNEW

PASCAL was all laughter and sallies as he led the way up to their apartments, but Gerard was in no such mood. He was very serious and full of misgivings at the course things were taking. There were more than enough complications in the position already without the additional embarrassment of the bestowal of a prisoner.

It was not without some sense of relief, therefore, that he saw Pascal start as he entered the room, and heard him exclaim in a tone of dismay—

“The sly devil has wriggled out, Gerard. By my shroud, I had not deemed it possible. I put him in there and shot the bolt upon him”; and he pointed to an empty closet.

“Never mind. Perhaps it is best so,” answered Gerard with a smile. “An honest man can’t always beat a rogue at his own trade, it seems.”

“Aye, laugh away; but he’ll not laugh if ever I set eyes on him again, the sneaking mongrel.”

“For not waiting for your return, you mean? He knows his business, at any rate.”

“Aye, that’s certain; but the point is how much he knows of yours?” retorted Pascal. “I’ll forgive him for knowing his own, but he shall pay the price for meddling in mine. Were I not a fool I had mounted guard over him and waited for you to come here.”

“Are you sure he was spying upon us?”

“Am I sure that we are on a queer quest here? Who can have turned him on to such a scent?”

"I should suspect de Proballe, were it not that he knows all my supposed unsavoury history as the real de Cobalt."

"He has no suspicion that you are not?"

"Not that I can think."

"Then it must be the girl who questioned me and said I was no servant—Mdlle. de Boisdegarde," suggested Pascal, with a shrewd nod of the head. "I mind me now. Are you supposed to have done some ugly thing at Cambrai? She questioned me on the point."

"Yes, a something which de Proballe spells murder, and for which I am to be pardoned."

"A thousand devils! I gave her my word of honour you had never been there, except as we passed through the place on our way here."

"How can she have got wind of it?" and Gerard pursed his lips thoughtfully. "Wait, wait. I see. De Proballe told me this good fellow Denys had his suspicions. He has told her. Phew!" he whistled. "The plot thickens."

"It's thick enough already to be a very devil's pie of complication," laughed Pascal. "I suppose, as usual you will listen to no counsel of prudence."

"Prudence, from Pascal de la Tour?" and Gerard laughed in his turn.

"Nay, for myself I care nothing. Let come what may it's all welcome, so long as there be but some fun in it. But your life is valuable. Would it not be wise to give up this de Cobalt business, leave Morvaix, and return as yourself with the troops from Cambrai?"

Gerard thought a moment, and then with another smile answered—

"You have seen for yourself how a certain matter stands. Were you in my place, would you act on your own counsel?"

"Not I, on my soul. If there are two ways to an end,

I would choose that which has the more spice in it, and devil take the danger. But you and I stand on different footings, Gerard, and I would not so counsel you."

"Counsel or no counsel, I stay, Pascal. We will have the troops up when the need calls for them. But I will follow the spirit of your advice. I'll write to my cousin d'Alembert, at Cambrai, bidding him be prepared to march hither at an hour's notice; and to-morrow early you must find means to despatch a messenger to him. Then seek out Dubois, and tell him to keep in close touch with the hundred we brought into the city as monks, so as to assemble them at any moment. Do you know how the hundred we played at presenting to this Governor have been bestowed?"

"That was a shrewd step," answered Pascal, with a laugh. "They are enrolled among the castle guards, in accordance with the suggestion Dubois handed on from his Eminence—yourself, Gerard. Pray Heaven, they do but keep discreet tongues. They are tough fighters, and every man would gladly give his life for you; but like soldiers, they love their liquor."

"To-morrow, or at any rate the day following, should see all in readiness for us to act. Now let me write my letter—a task I loathe."

While Gerard wrote, Pascal left the room, wishful in case of emergencies to learn his way better about the great house, and he came back just as the seal was set to the paper.

"Gerard, that sharp-eyed beauty, Mdlle. Lucette, wishes a word with you. I met her on the watch in the corridor as I returned."

Gerard went out to her.

"May I put a question to you, M. de Cobalt?" was how she met him.

"Certainly, mademoiselle. Can I help you? You look sorely troubled."

"Gabrielle trusts you so implicitly, monsieur, and 'twas she bade me ask you. Will you tell me why you were so anxious that Denys St. Jean should be watched so jealously?"

"I gave my reasons, mademoiselle. When fever and delirium follow loss of blood from a sword-thrust there must always be risk to the patient."

"There is no delirium, monsieur. When Denys spoke of you, he was perfectly calm and clear. At first, that is, and until his excitement grew. But what he said of you was said collectedly."

"But the fever is on him, and therefore he should not be left," said Gerard calmly.

She made a quick gesture of impatience.

"Can you not answer me frankly, monsieur? Oh, pardon me, but I am in such distress. You have some other reasons. I saw the look that passed between you and M. de Proballe."

"Would you ask me to interpret for you all M. de Proballe's looks, and to explain all you may have thought in your excitement?" and he smiled.

"Denys is so hot against you, and makes such charges."

"Should I warn you to set a watch over him if I myself were minded to do him any harm for that? In all honest truth, I care not what he may either think or say."

"But he declares——"

"By your leave, I would rather not hear what he says except from his own lips. I shall know how to answer him."

She lifted her hands despairingly and was turning away, when a further question occurred to her. "On your honour, monsieur, you have no other reason for this watching than what you have said?"

"That is a question which I would rather that you did not put to me."

"But we trust you so," she cried reproachfully.

He smiled again. "Then do as I have suggested."

"Oh, what a mystery is all this;" she exclaimed, and left him.

"One word more, mademoiselle," he said, following her a couple of paces. "We are soldiers and accustomed to long watches and little sleep. One of us will be on the watch out here in the corridor for the night."

She made no reply; and Gerard, going back to Pascal, told him what he proposed: that they two should watch in turns through the night.

"I hope that rat will come stealing back," said Pascal.

"If I don't pinch his throat for him, may my fingers forget the feel of a man's wizen;" and he agreed readily to take the first spell.

The rat did come back, more than once; but so cunningly and softly now, so warily and so keen of scent for the watchers, that neither Gerard nor Pascal knew of his coming; and in the morning both agreed that they had kept their vigil to no purpose. Could they have heard the report which Darniban gave to his master, however, they would have known otherwise.

De Proballe was ill at ease, indeed. He did not like the attitude which Gerard had adopted. He had looked for a pliant tool, afraid of his life; and he found instead, a man who showed independence and firmness, who had a will of his own, and who both said and did things that made against his plans.

For his purpose it was not by any means enough that Gerard should succeed in making a good impression on Gabrielle. That was right, so far as it went; but Gerard seemed to be captivated by her beauty; and that was altogether wrong. If there was to be love between them, the whole scheme might be jeopardised; and with it would go his own more daring and ambitious plans.

Were Gerard to marry Gabrielle and then turn against him, no one could foresee the consequences. The blunder-

ing interference in regard to Denys was unaccountable; and the manner in which he had flinched from the necessary step of dealing with one whose knowledge was so dangerous, was profoundly disturbing. It was enough to rouse the wrath of any one; and when Dauban brought word that a watch was actually being kept which rendered it impossible even to get to the door of the room, his perplexity equalled his ill-temper.

He had his own standards of judging men; and he could only come now to the conclusion that Gerard was in some way playing for his own hand. This thought kept him in a ferment of speculation the whole night.

Seeing Gerard in the gardens early, he went down to him, resolved to have an explanation.

"I want a word with you, Gerard," he said, bluntly. "We must understand one another, or this thing goes no farther."

Gerard had gone out early in the hope of seeing Gabrielle, and was anything but pleased to have de Proballe's company instead; nor did he at all relish the peremptory tone in which de Proballe spoke. Thus his answer was sharp and curt.

"What is there we do not understand, monsieur?"

"In the first place, you must understand that as I am the author of this marriage scheme, you must work for it as I direct, or it must come to an end."

"Is that so?"

"Yes, it is so; and you had better know it. I thought of it; I found the proofs of her parents' wishes to lay before Gabrielle; and what I made I can as easily unmake again. I have but to speak a word and the bubble will burst."

"Then it was a lie, M. de Proballe?" asked Gerard coldly and incisively.

"A lie, as you know perfectly well; one in which you have already taken part, and which you have come here

in person to continue to the end. It is useless for us to play like children at pretences. In your letters to me you have expressed your willingness to put yourself entirely in my hands, to do precisely what I tell you. Now, will you do it? If you will not, say so."

"My memory for such matters is short, monsieur, and in regard to all such communications I am as if I had never penned them"; replied Gerard, after a moment's pause.

"Then it is as I thought. You have some scheme of your own to further. What is it?" De Proballe was furious at the answer.

"If it be my own, as you suggest, should I be likely to disclose it to you?"

"You do not deny it?"

"I do not admit your right to question me."

"Do you intend to marry Gabrielle?"

"Without a doubt, if she will deign to marry me."

"Then why did you set a watch outside that babblers' door all through the night?"

"How do you know that I did?"

"No matter. I know it, and that is enough."

"I was right, then, in thinking you would choose the night for your work. I set the watch, monsieur, because I had no mind to be a party to your murderous scheme."

"You will repent this attitude."

"Very likely. Most of us spend our lives in either committing one blunder or repenting others."

"You tempt me to deem my act a blunder indeed in bringing you to Morvaix."

"That may be part of the better understanding, the reference to which opened our conversation. Need we say any more?"

"Before the day is done you may understand better," cried de Proballe, furiously.

"Shall we leave it, then, for the coming hours to de-

cide?" retorted Gerard, lightly and without more he turned his back and walked away.

De Proballe returned to the house more uneasy and more wrathful than ever. He seemed to see his schemes crumbling to pieces before his eyes, and to be unable to avert the ruin. He had built so much on Gerard's coming that he was loath now to carry his fears to the Governor, and thus stop the marriage altogether; and yet it was plain that if this was to be Gerard's attitude when he had married Gabrielle and was master of Malincourt, the very marriage itself might but make matters worse than they were at present.

He could not see what private scheme Gerard could have in reserve; and came at length to think that the success with Gabrielle had so turned Gerard's head that he believed himself master of the situation. From this delusion it would not be difficult to rouse him, however. A word or two from the Duke that his life was in danger would soon cure this swashbuckler mood; and such a word he could instigate at any moment. He could therefore safely let matters run their course for the present.

In this temper he awaited the hour fixed for Gerard's interview with the Governor; but early in the forenoon the latter arrived at Malincourt; and de Proballe found him in a dangerous temper.

"We were to wait upon you at the Castle, Duke," he said, suavely.

"Am I not welcome at Malincourt?"

"You can need no assurance from me, I trust, that your presence here is an honour and a welcome condescension."

"Umph!" and the Governor shrugged his shoulders. "Where is Mdlle. de Malincourt?"

"I have not seen my niece this morning. I will have her sent for."

"No, that is not my wish. Where is your villainous

jackal, de Cobalt? News has reached me that he made much impression upon your niece yesterday. Is that so? Speak plainly."

"He came as her betrothed, and he has done as we would have him do, seeing the purpose in hand."

"I have my doubts about this affair after all," was the answer, with a heavy frown. "It will not suit me that he win too far into her good graces. The thing has cost me a sleepless night of thought, and I have come now that I may see them together, myself unseen, and hear them speak one to the other, that I may judge how matters go. You will arrange this. I am consumed with a cursed gnawing plague of jealousy."

"You will of course understand——"

"I will understand nothing but that you must do as I say."

De Proballe spread out his hands and was about to expostulate again, when the Duke cut him short, and said very sternly—

"Will you do as I say, M. le Baron, or must I find some other way?"

"It shall be as you please. The best plan I can conceive is that we remain hidden here where we can watch any one on the terrace, and I will send word to de Cobalt that the hour is close at hand when he is to accompany me to the Castle, and ask him to wait me on the terrace. Then I can send for Gabrielle, and get her there."

"Give the instructions in my presence."

"Monsieur le Duc!" exclaimed de Proballe, in a tone of indignation.

"Monsieur le Baron!" He imitated de Proballe's tone, and then laughed coarsely. "I can trust my own ears, and mean to have no warning conveyed to either of them."

De Proballe started and bit his lip. He had contemplated doing the very thing the Duke insinuated, and

was bitterly vexed his thought should have been read. For a moment they faced each other, and then de Proballe with a shrug of his shoulders turned to obey. But at that instant the Duke caught sight of Gerard and Gabrielle strolling in the gardens, and frowned.

"There is no need to summon any one. I see them. You will remain with me, monsieur."

Standing back well out of sight, the Duke watched the two lovers with intent gaze, his expression changing gradually from eager scrutiny to one of jealous anger, and the heavy frown deepened every moment, till at last he burst out into angry speech.

"God of Heaven! it is even worse than the worst I feared. See how they linger together over the flowers; how she smiles to him, and he answers."

"He does but play his part, Duke."

"If that be play, then never saw I earnest. And she, how her face lights as he speaks to her; her colour deepens as she droops her head at his words. See how she lays her hand tenderly on his arm; and he, how he stoops over her hand and raises it to his lips, and she—by the God that made us all, she loves him. Look at the light in her eyes."

"He is our man, my lord, and sows but for us to reap."

"'Twill be a bitter crop for some of us, or I am no ruler in Morvaix. 'Twas not for this we sent for him. And you say they never met till yesterday?"

"Till yesterday."

The Duke turned from the window, and paced the room with quick angry strides, his face black as night and his eyes blazing with hot jealous rage. De Proballe watched him stealthily, wondering what this new dangerous mood portended.

"They are coming to the terrace," he said at length; and the two watchers concealed themselves close by the open casement.

The lovers approached, all unsuspecting that keen vengeful eyes were bent upon them from under the strained pent brows of a man half mad with jealous frenzy. And a handsome picture they made as they came up the broad steps laughing gaily in the sweet abandonment of new-found all-trusting love.

Gabrielle held in one hand the kerchief with which she had at first covered her head, and in the other was a posy of freshly plucked flowers, from which she had chosen a red rose to give to Gerard. Her face was radiant with smiles and her eyes glowed as she turned them ever and again upon her handsome lover by her side. At the head of the steps she stayed and leant in a graceful pose against the marble pillar on which stood the statue of a fantastically carved faun.

"And must you really go now to the Castle?" she asked.

"M. de Proballe named this hour, Gabrielle."

"I am loath for you to go, cousin; yet could wish you gone that I may look for your return, and long for it."

"You do not think I leave you willingly?"

A tender glance was the answer, and at the sight of it the angry man within the room close by drew in his breath sharply as if in pain.

"I believe I shall count the minutes till you return," she said. "Am I not foolish? But your coming has changed my world."

"If it be foolishness, then it is good to be foolish," returned Gerard.

"You will be careful with the Duke, remembering what I have told you, Gerard."

"I have to think of you, Gabrielle, and the thought will inspire me to caution."

"I would I could be present. Not that I doubt you; maybe," she smiled, "it is only because I do not like to be parted from you."

"The minutes will be no less leaden to me while I am away;" and again they smiled each to the other with such a glance that the Duke could endure no more.

"This must end," he whispered fiercely. "I will bear no more;" and he was moving impetuously when de Proballe stayed him and whispered in reply—

"I beg you have patience, my lord. He is but adopting my suggestion and wooing her that the marriage may take place the sooner."

"Then he must find some other way. It is hell to me."

"Stay; some one comes. By all the saints in heaven, it is Denys!"

He was walking with difficulty, and leaning on Lucette's arm for support.

"It is he who knows something of our plans, my lord, and should have been silenced by your men yesterday. He must be stopped, or he will poison her ears against him."

But the Duke, catching eagerly at the words, laid a strong hand on de Proballe's arm and held him as he whispered in tense accents—

"Let him do it, and I will thank him. Stay, monsieur, I order you."

In dire consternation de Proballe, now much agitated, fell back to his place, and both were again silent.

"Denys, Denys, what madness is it that brings you from your sick bed thus?" cried Gabrielle, in surprise and some alarm for him. "You are risking your life."

"It is no madness, mademoiselle, and my life would be cheaply spent in such a case," answered Denys, speaking with great labour and seeming even to breathe with difficulty.

"I could not stay him, Gabrielle," said Lucette, in response to Gabrielle's look of reproach.

"You would not come to me when I sent for you,

mademoiselle," said Denys slowly, when he had found breath. "So I came to you."

"I could not come then, and did but delay, good Denys. But what is this matter that could not wait?"

"That man is the matter—Gerard de Cobalt. I know the truth of his coming hither and his treachery, and not another hour was to be lost before I told you."

"Denys! How dare you speak thus? You presume upon my good will. It was M. de Cobalt who saved your life yesterday."

"Would God I had lost it rather than that it should be saved by him. As Heaven is my witness, I speak but the truth when I say he is a villain; and I can and will prove my words by his own testimony."

A moment's tense silence followed this fierce accusation; and in it the Duke whispered under his breath—

"It grows interesting. I hope he will make good his words. He is an honest sturdy fellow, and looks as earnest as he is sincere. A good witness, and welcome."

CHAPTER X

THE ACCUSATION

TO Gerard the turn of events was profoundly disturbing. He had heard from both Lucette and de Proballe that Denys had suspicions of the reasons which were supposed to have brought him to Morvaix, and knew something of the unsavoury past of the man whose name he had taken; and to have all this blurted out to Gabrielle might have very ugly consequences.

Almost any other moment would have been less inopportune, as it seemed; and he would have given much to be able to silence his accuser. Yet he could not appear to shun the charge or shrink from any proofs which Denys had obtained: could do nothing in fact. It was the irony of the thing that the very interference which he would have welcomed at the fitting moment should be so embarrassing now.

Gabrielle had, however, only one thought. To her it seemed treachery even to listen further to the accusation. She was very angry, and her face mantled with colour.

"You have been a faithful friend to me, Denys," she said, "and are ill with your wound. Were it otherwise, your present act would part us. There is no place in Malincourt, or in my service, for any one who maligns my friends. Lucette, it pains me that you are in this. Gerard, will you take me into the house?"

But Gerard's honour and instincts of fairness forbade acquiescence in this unjust rebuke.

"Nay, Gabrielle, I believe you are too hard upon M. St. Jean and upon Mdlle. Lucette as well. It is but his zeal for you that makes him indiscreet."

"The fool, the fool!" muttered de Proballe. "When she would have shut her own ears to the truth."

"You hear M. de Cobalt, Denys. Take lesson by his generosity. Go back to your chamber, and when you are well, in mind and body both, I will hear you. Lucette, see to this." She spoke with all the dignity of one who meant to be obeyed.

"I have no power to prevail with him, Gabrielle. He urged me first to come with this story to you, and when I would not, rose from his bed and insisted on seeking you for himself."

Denys appeared to be almost spent with his effort. He stood leaning against the parapet in such desperate straits that Gabrielle was touched with deep compassion.

"I am passing, I think," he said. His face was deadly grey as he clung to the marble with one hand while with the other he felt for a paper and drew it out. He seemed so near collapse that Gerard stepped forward to help him; but anger rallied him and he waved away the proffered help with a gesture of contempt.

"Pray God he falls before he can do more mischief, the meddling dog!" muttered de Proballe again.

"Lead him away, Lucette," said Gabrielle, in pain at the sight. But Denys would not go; and after an effort he said slowly with much effort and many a pause—

"My last strength can have no better use than in this for you, mademoiselle. This letter—from M. de Cobalt to M. de Proballe. Read it, for the love of God, read it."

"Denys, Denys, how can you ask such unworthiness?" cried Gabrielle indignantly, her eyes and voice full of reproach. "If it be M. de Cobalt's letter, give it to him. Would you have me imitate you and play the spy?"

"Speak not so harshly, Gabrielle," exclaimed Lucette.

But Denys stopped her and spoke again, moving a step toward Gabrielle.

"He would marry you but to betray you to the Duke. 'Tis my last word. He says it here." Holding the letter in his now trembling fingers he made a great effort to reach Gabrielle with it, his staring eyes fixed earnestly and imploringly upon her. But his fever-racked strength was gone. "For God's sake be warned," he mumbled half-incoherently. It was his last effort. As the words dropped from his lips, he fell prone to the ground, the letter fluttering from his nerveless fingers to Gabrielle's feet.

Lucette with a cry knelt beside him.

Gabrielle had shrunk from his approach, but now stood gazing down on him, pity, pain and distress in her eyes. And Gerard stooped and felt his heart.

"He has but fainted," he said, looking up. "Let him be carried back to the bed he should never have left. He is a noble faithful fellow and has freely risked his life for what he deems the truth."

"Good, Gerard! Splendidly played. Did you mark that, my lord?" whispered de Proballe, intensely relieved at Denys' collapse. "What an actor the villain is, Duke? Said I not he was but acting with Gabrielle? You could swear that tone of his was a note of honourable innocence.

But the Duke made no reply. He was staring with pent gloomy brows at the scene.

"You bear him no grudge for this, Gerard?" said Gabrielle with a smile of confidence.

"Should I feel enmity to one whose only motive was desire to serve you and who has drawn this further proof of your trust in me? He did and said no more than he deemed both right and true. I honour him for his courage."

"Then I will tear the letter that appears to have

cheated his fevered wits, and so end the matter;" and picking up the paper she was about to tear it when he stopped her.

"Fool! Idiot! Now indeed he goes too far;" muttered de Proballe, as he saw the gesture. "Let her tear it."

Gerard had the strongest reasons for not having the letter destroyed, however. It was the proof he needed to make de Proballe's guilt clear.

"I should not destroy it, Gabrielle. There must be much behind this which I do not yet understand; and if it is to be cleared, this letter may be needed."

"'Tis but the delusion born of fever madness."

"Men do not forge letters in delirium," answered Gerard quietly.

"You would not have me read it!" Gabrielle's eyes were wide with astonishment.

"What will the fool do next?" murmured de Proballe, in deep agitation. "Is he aiming this at me?"

Gerard paused a moment to think, and then answered calmly and firmly.

"Yes, I would have you read it."

"But it is designed to slander you."

"I am too sure of your trust to fear any slander, Gabrielle. I would have you read it, whatever it be."

"By the Cross! he plays a bold hand," muttered the Duke, drawing his breath. "What is in the letter?"

"It will ruin everything," whispered de Proballe.

"Then do I not understand him. He must indeed be sure of her, as he says;" and his frown grew deeper than before.

Gabrielle stood fingering the letter in hesitation some moments and then unfolded it.

"I will do your bidding, Gerard, although I had rather not." She read it then.

THE ACCUSATION

111

"TO M. LE BARON DE PROBALLE,—

"The messenger has brought me your last communication and the sum of money I asked for. My doubts are almost satisfied. I have some troublesome matters to arrange, and some little time must pass before they can be settled. But you can count upon my reaching Malincourt by the end of June or the first days of July, if in response to this you send me a declaration under the Duke de Rochelle's own hand that I shall receive his pardon for the affair at Cambrai. You must procure this; as without it I shall not trust myself with-
in his province.

"You require me to state my acceptance of your proposal specifically. I now do this. I will marry Gabrielle. She shall never learn from me that her parents never expressed any such wish for our marriage as she has been told. I will use my utmost efforts to compel her, if need be, to submit to the Duke's wishes. And I will act in every way faithfully as you may direct in any other plans you have.

"The fortune I shall receive with Gabrielle will be all I need—that and the pardon; for I seek no Court position, favour, or influence.

"Send me the written assurance of the pardon, and by the time the messenger can return hither, I may be ready to set out myself.

"GERARD DE COBALT."

"By the God above us all, what callous infamy!" exclaimed Gerard, passionately, stirred to the depths by the letter, whose full meaning he well understood. But it was otherwise with Gabrielle, who saw in it no more than an attempt to slander him; and she mistook his burning words for indignation at the effort to ruin him in her eyes.

"Infamy indeed," she said warmly. "Would that I

knew the author of so vile a slander! If I thought for a moment that Denys——”

“No, no, Gabrielle. Don't even speak such a thought,” cried Lucette.

“I had forgotten him,” said Gerard. “I will help bear him into the house. We will deal with this afterwards, Gabrielle.”

“Except to find the villain who forged the letter, there is no more to do in it, Gerard. They little know me who think I could be moved by so contemptible a lie. I could ask your pardon for having read it to the end—could almost be vexed with you, indeed, for having caused me to read it. Shall I tear it now?”

He was bending over Denys and looked up quickly. “No, I will keep it; and some one some day shall pay a heavy reckoning,” he answered as he took it. Then with Lucette's help he lifted Denys and took him into the house. Gabrielle was following, when the Duke said hurriedly to de Proballe—

“Go and detain her on the terrace. I must speak with her; but first will think a space. I am on the rack.”

He had been profoundly moved by the scene and was intensely agitated. He had let the letter be read without interference—involving though it did both de Proballe and himself—in the belief that the revelation of Gerard's baseness would change her feelings; and the unshaken confidence she had shown in Gerard's honour was to his jealousy as biting acid to an open wound.

With a bitterness beyond words to describe and far too galling for his selfish soul to endure, he saw now that in causing Gerard to be brought to Morvaix for his own purpose with Gabrielle, he had but plunged a sword into his own heart. The villain had played his part so well that he had won her love; and the wound burned and stabbed and maddened him with its pain.

But he would have his revenge. No man should be

suffered to come between him and his desires. If this de Cobalt had won her love, he should pay the price. His rival's life lay in the palm of his hand; and in Morvaix at least there was none to step between him and the object of his hate.

It was a treacherous betrayal; nothing else. Pretending to keep the letter of his pledge, Gerard had broken the spirit, and should be trusted no more. The pardon for the murder at Cambrai should be withheld, unless—and his eyes gleamed dangerously at a fresh thought and he smiled with a cunning pleasure.

Gabrielle loved this de Cobalt; and the love would put a weapon in his hands powerful enough to break her to his purpose.

His new resolve was quick to take shape. She should be his wife; and the price of her consent should be her new lover's life. The old scheme should be laid away; and with it would go at a stroke all need for de Cobalt's services. His next move was soon decided; and he stepped out and joined Gabrielle and her uncle.

"I make no apology for thus breaking upon you suddenly, because the reason for it is your own welfare," he began, speaking deliberately.

"I trust your lordship does not deem an apology necessary for visiting Malincourt," replied Gabrielle, courteously, but wondering at his manner.

"This is no ordinary visit of courtesy, mademoiselle; and if the manner of it is unusual and displeasing, as it may well be, the purpose will, I hope, prove its excuse. We have been close observers of the scene which has just occurred here—as M. de Proballe has perhaps told you." But de Proballe had done nothing of the kind, and he started in some dismay at the words. His start was lost by Gabrielle, however, in her intense surprise.

"Observers, my lord? I fear I do not understand," she replied with dignity.

"Yet my words explain my meaning. Very evil intelligence has reached me concerning this M. de Cobalt; and in my zeal for your welfare I came this morning to confer with M. de Proballe; and we arranged the scene that this man's character might be tested openly."

"I should prefer that M. de Cobalt be present, my lord." Gabrielle took fire instantly, and she made no attempt to disguise her indignation.

"It is not necessary. His presence or absence is a matter of no concern. What you have heard of him to-day and read in that letter of his is true."

"Do you mean——" she began hastily, then checked herself and said proudly: "But I will not deign to ask a question. Your lordship must be entirely in error. I have unbounded faith in M. de Cobalt's honour. It is a matter your lordship must excuse my declining to discuss." The Duke frowned, but repressed his anger.

"I can understand your feelings," he said calmly. "Would that the man were worthy of it! I honour you for this attitude and would gladly spare you the pain which the truth must cause you; but it must be told, mademoiselle."

Gabrielle would not answer, and the Duke turned to de Proballe.

"You will tell your niece, monsieur, that that letter was written to you by M. de Cobalt himself in reply to others from you to him."

"I think you and I had better discuss this further," said de Proballe, in a desperate shift at the new position.

"It is my wish, monsieur," replied the Duke coldly, with a glance of menace.

"Even my uncle himself will not shake my confidence in M. de Cobalt, although he may change my feelings toward himself," declared Gabrielle, firmly.

"M. de Proballe," said the Duke.

"I know not your intentions," he answered, in a fever

of disquiet. "I—I scarcely heard what the letter contained; and—and before I can say so much I—ought to see it—to examine it." He stumbled and hesitated over the words.

"Do I understand, M. le Baron, that you give me the lie?" and the cold cutting words were accompanied by a look that no one could misunderstand.

"God forfend; but I wash my hands of the whole affair," he cried, with a gesture of profound agitation and a sigh. "It is true, Gabrielle. The letter was written by Gerard to me some time since. It is one of several that have passed between us."

"I do not believe it;" and Gabrielle drew herself up in proud repudiation of the further attack upon the man she loved and trusted.

"On my honour it is so, mademoiselle," declared the Duke. "And now I must make my confession of the part I have played in this. It is no humour of mine to seek others' forgiveness, but for what I have done in all this distressful error, I do beg yours. It was at my instance that this de Cobalt was brought to Morvaix."

"Then do I thank you, my lord, and, believe me, I see nothing in the act which calls for forgiveness," interposed Gabrielle swiftly, as he paused. He took no notice of the interruption; he was too deeply engrossed in thinking how to put his case most plausibly.

"My motive you will at least admit was worthy—it was the good of the people of Morvaix. Next to myself, the House of Malincourt is the most potent influence here, and thus the subject of your marriage has given me much thought. It would have been a disaster had you fallen under the sway of some unworthy man and been prevailed upon to marry him, and so let the influence of your house pass into evil hands. To prevent this, we—for your uncle has shared my views and acted with me throughout—we planned to arrange your marriage with

a man who would place himself under our guidance in all matters."

"And your lordship and you, monsieur, chose a man whose life was so evil—if this lying letter were to be credited—that he only dared to come hither when he had been assured under your lordship's own hand of a pardon for some foul offence. Surely you would not have me credit this of you! I do not. I will not. For it involves a cruel slander upon my true and gallant cousin."

"What the Duke says is true in every word, Gabrielle," declared de Proballe, much relieved at the astute line the Governor was taking.

"We did not know the evil history of this man," continued the Duke in the same quiet deliberate tone; "or he would never have been brought here. I have but learned it within the last few hours. The affair at Cambrai was mistold to us; and I have but just gathered the full details of what I find to have been a foul and most treacherous murder."

A contemptuous smile of disbelief was Gabrielle's only answer to this; but it was more eloquent than many words of her unshaken and unshakable faith in Gerard. The Duke paused, and after a moment resumed—

"We had heard that he had repented of his old excesses and wrong living, and when we sent for him, believed this to be the case. But when we found that his repentance was but acted lying—in which he is an adept—there seemed no course open but to put him to the proof by confronting him with his own writing, so that your eyes might be opened and yourself convinced of the impossibility of a marriage with him."

"I have yet to be convinced, my lord; and know no power or means on earth strong enough to convince me. My parents' wishes——"

"Were but M. de Proballe's invention, mademoiselle," interposed the Duke, in the same cold deliberate tone.

"The story was designed to influence you to agree. That is all. In that we did wrong—grievous wrong, no doubt; for deceit with whatever motive used must always be wrong; and in this case it has ended disastrously. For that, as well as for the pain which, with all zeal for your real welfare, I have caused you, I crave your pardon."

"Had you indeed done the harm you fear, I would never forgive you. I never could," answered Gabrielle, firmly; then breaking into a smile she added: "but if indeed you have brought my cousin here, then do I thank you, as I say. Aye, thank you with all my heart."

"You do but jest in a very grave issue, mademoiselle. This marriage is impossible." There was less deliberateness and more sternness in the Duke's tone now, and it provoked Gabrielle's pride. Unmistakable defiance was in her look and mien as she answered:

"By your lordship's leave, I am head of my house; and if that part of what you have said be true—that my parents have expressed no wish for my marriage—I am free to choose without let or hindrance from any man. But here comes my cousin. He will know how to answer for himself."

As Gerard came out of the house he started at seeing who was present, and then came on with firm step and confident bearing, and smiled to Gabrielle as he reached her side.

CHAPTER XI

THE DUKE'S SENTENCE

GERARD saw at once by the faces of all three that some fresh complication had occurred during his absence.

"I am very glad you have come, Gerard," said Gabrielle. "M. le Duc de Rochelle and my uncle have made some charges which you will be glad to face."

"Certainly," he answered, with a bow to the Governor and a quick glance at de Proballe. The Duke took no notice of his salutation.

"We had a conversation yesterday concerning the reason for your coming to Morvaix," said de Proballe. "You have not forgotten it?"

"I am not likely to have forgotten. Do you wish it repeated now?" Gabrielle smiled confidently at the tone in which this was said. Gerard spoke as the challenger, not the challenged. There could be no mistaking that.

"Leave this to me," interposed the Duke abruptly.

"He admitted everything to me yesterday," declared de Proballe; but the Duke waved his hand impatiently.

"Now, monsieur," he said sharply to Gerard. "A letter of yours to M. de Proballe was read this morning. Where is it?"

"A letter was read. It is here;" and he took it from his pocket.

"The Duke and my uncle were listening to our conversation," said Gabrielle quietly. "They say that the statements in the letter are true."

"They may be," he said readily.

"Gerard!" Gabrielle's was a cry of consternation.

"Did you think he would dare to deny it, mademoiselle?" asked the Duke.

"There is no reason for any alarm, Gabrielle. On my honour you need but have patience."

"Honour!" exclaimed the Governor contemptuously.

"Does such a word seem strange to the ears of the Duke de Rochelle?" asked Gerard, quite unmoved as he met the angry look the question drew forth. "What are the charges your lordship brings against me?"

"Those contained in your own letter; the letter which confesses the truth. Do you deny you wrote that letter to M. de Proballe?"

For one moment Gerard hesitated.

"The statements contained in that letter so far as they touch me are absolutely false," he declared emphatically.

"That I affirm on my honour, Gabrielle; but for the moment I cannot explain the affair."

"I need no more. I was sure you would repudiate them," she answered exultantly. "I shall stay to hear no more."

"I should prefer you to remain, mademoiselle," said the Duke.

"I crave your lordship's permission to retire. I can hear no more of this attack upon my cousin. I am satisfied. I have his assurance;" and without waiting for any permission to be given, she went into the house.

Gerard was glad to be left to deal with the matter in her absence. He recognized the extreme difficulty of the situation and the utter impossibility of giving a rational explanation without telling the truth about himself; but he was anxious to have some plain speaking with the Governor, and he turned at once to him.

"Your lordship will perhaps see the desirability of explaining this new development to me," he said.

"You are an insolent rascal in all truth," was the fiery

reply. "It is from you I demand the explanation. See to it that it is satisfactory. I am not wont to be trifled with."

"I see no trifling in all this. Will you explain it, M. de Proballe?"

"You play the braggart well, Gerard, on my soul; and if I see your object may I be cursed. When with me yesterday you admitted everything; and now to-day you deny your own writing, and pledge your honour the very things you have written are false."

Gerard regarded him sternly. "Would you have had me tell that I was brought here to Morvaix to marry Gabrielle in order to ruin her?" he demanded.

"It is false!" cried the Governor.

A flush of anger mounted to Gerard's face at this insult.

"It accords ill with your reputation for courage, M. le Duc, that you insult a man to whom your position denies the right to call you to account. If you have no other tone to adopt toward me, I will retire. But with M. de Proballe the matter stands otherwise. You will guard your tongue, monsieur, or I shall hold you responsible."

"What an impudent swashbuckler is this murderer," sneered the Governor.

"I am no murderer, my lord," asserted Gerard, hotly.

"He means he holds your Grace's pardon for the deed," said de Proballe.

"It will not save you," declared the Governor, bluntly.

"You have broken your word and must take the consequences. I will waste no time with you."

"In what have I broken my word?"

"I will not stoop to bandy words with you. I have changed my plans; that is enough for you to know. You are no longer of use to me. But you can have one chance to save your skin. You came under the protection of my

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assurance. You can leave it again; and never dare in the future to show your villainous face within my province."

"I shall not leave," answered Gerard, every whit as firmly. "I have come for a purpose, and that purpose I shall fulfil."

"Do you dare to defy me?"

"My words are my words and I will not recall them."

"In God's name, you are a brazen scoundrel. But do not imagine that Mademoiselle de Malincourt can protect you. She is not to be polluted by a marriage with such as you. More of this, and I will withdraw what I have said and have you flung into gaol at once to pay the penalty for your crime."

"That must be as your lordship will. I will not leave Morvaix even at your bidding."

For the moment the Duke's fury seemed uncontrollable; but he mastered it and his tone when next he spoke was cold, tense, and full of menace.

"It may be better so, perhaps; but you shall have the chance I named. Understand me plainly. I will give you twenty-four hours in which to put as great a distance as you can between you and Morvaix. At noon to-morrow my troops will start to hunt you down; and whenever and wherever they find you I swear that you shall die for that Cambrai murder."

"Your hounds will not have far to seek. They will find me here in Morvaix," returned Gerard calmly. "I am not unwilling to witness your methods of trial and justice here."

"You shall not lack the chance, I promise you. One other condition for your life I make. Before you leave the city you will return the paper sent to you from me by M. de Proballe. For the rest, look to yourself; for as I live, it will need all your wits and more than all your effrontery to save you from my hands."

With that he turned his back on Gerard, saying to de Proballe that he would speak again to Gabrielle before leaving Malincourt. They walked away together, and Gerard turned and paced the terrace in busy thought.

One thing chiefly perplexed him—why the Duke had shewn this change of front and now wished to drive him from Morvaix instead of seconding the scheme for the marriage. It did not occur to him to set it down to the true cause—jealousy; and he racked his wits vainly to find a solution.

The only reason that suggested itself to him was one that strengthened his resolve to stay—that the Duke's object was to rob Gabrielle of even the slender protection which his presence afforded. If that were so, it followed that there was some fresh scheme on foot to do Gabrielle immediate hurt; and in that view no consideration whatever should induce him to leave.

But in such a case, why had not the Governor taken the simpler course of handing him over to his soldiers at once? In seeking the answer to that question Gerard came much nearer the truth. If he were to run away, his flight would be tantamount to a confession that these charges against himself were true; and Gabrielle would be led to hold him for the villain which the real de Cobalt unquestionably was. He would be seen to have pledged his honour to her, only to break it in a cowardly flight.

Had the villainous de Cobalt stood in his place, he would no doubt have gladly welcomed the chance of saving his life at the sacrifice of his honour and of Gabrielle; and the Duke had acted on that supposition.

Nothing should induce him to fall into the snare thus spread for him; but at the same time he felt that he must take measures for self-preservation. This Tiger in his passion was capable of going to any lengths; and means must be at hand to restrain him.

He was still pondering this when Gabrielle came out

from her interview with the Duke. Her bright looks had given place to a troubled expression, and she was very pale.

"The Governor is like a madman in his wrath against you, Gerard," she said. "I have never seen him so moved. Both he and my uncle are now as furious at the thought of our marriage as before they—or at least my uncle—was eager to promote it."

"And you, Gabrielle?"

"I know not how to act or what to say," she replied with a sigh of despair.

"The tension of this morning's scene has tried you," he said gently. "But you do not believe I am the dastard—"

"Gerard! No. I cannot. Every prompting of my heart bids me trust you. I think I would trust you if all the world bore witness against you. But there must surely be some explanation of so great a mystery."

"You love me?" he asked with sudden fervour, taking her hand and searching her eyes with his, in which the fire of love burned. She left her hand in his willingly and trustingly and met his gaze with a smile.

"Have I not shown it? Do you need any other answer?"

"With a love strong enough to face even this trial?" he insisted earnestly.

"I shall never change, Gerard. Nothing could change my heart—not even if all this were proven against you, as they both swear it can be. It would break my heart and blight my life; but my love would never change. And believe it I never would or will, unless your own lips tell me it is true; and even then my heart would rebel against your words."

"I shall never tell you that," he replied, vehemently. "Thank God there is no reason why I should not take your hand and look into your own innocent eyes and

swear on my soul that all this charge passes me by as an idle breeze. You will never have cause to regret your sweet trust. That on my honour."

"Why have they made these charges? I am so sorely perplexed."

"It will all appear in time, Gabrielle. There is dark and evil work behind, and I am resolved to drag it to the light of day."

"But when? They tell me you are going away again! Ah, Gerard, my heart fell at the news."

"'Tis but one more falsehood. Only one thing can drive me from Morvaix—your own sentence."

"Yet they urged me to counsel you to go, saying that if you stay here you will be imprisoned. What is this affair at Cambrai which they call by the fell name of murder? Do not let my question anger you; but if there be really danger, you must fly."

"The Governor would have me fly that you may be driven to deem me the guilty wretch he describes me. There is no danger to me, but rather to them; to the Governor himself indeed most of all."

"What would you do? No deed of violence, Gerard?"

"Violence there may have to be; but not of the kind in your thoughts. I am no assassin, whether at Cambrai or here."

"Then you have some scheme with which to combat him? Can you not tell me that?" she asked with almost wistful eagerness.

"It is one that would speak to your heart, Gabrielle, for it will touch the welfare of all in Morvaix."

"Now you frighten me. Would you further a revolt here? Heaven knows our wretched people are hot against him and ripe for a movement of the kind. But he is so strong in his soldiery, the end would be but useless bloodshed to be followed by even more grinding tyranny and misery for the city."

"Harbour no fears of that. Stay, what if I could lead a movement here which, without the evil things that make your woman's heart shrink, could yet break this Tiger's power and give good and just government to the people?"

"It is not possible, Gerard. You speak at random. You are not known in Morvaix; and the people would not follow an unknown leader. Yet I have dreamed of something of the kind since you came. Were you but once established firmly as lord of Malincourt and had had time to win the confidence of the people and their trust, as you would win it, then—but there, it is no more than a dream conjured up by finding you the man you are."

"May I test your trust still further? I have my reasons, God knows, for thus testing you. If I were in very truth the wretch the Duke has painted me, and yet had the means to do what I have said and came to you in the moment of my triumph and asked you to be my wife, how would you answer?"

"I would lay my hand in yours without a question, Gerard, sure that, whatever your past, you had redeemed it for my sake." She gave her answer without a falter or a second of hesitation.

"Thank God and you for those words and that trust, Gabrielle," he cried, with fervent passion. "If I am ever unworthy of it, may God deal with me for a traitor! The time for me to claim you so will come, and until it comes I will wait to seek from your lips the kiss of betrothal. Now am I sure indeed that all will be well with us."

"But you will not remain in Morvaix?" she asked, after a pause.

"Could I leave you after this?" he replied tenderly.

"I should understand the reason of your going."

"I have far stronger reasons to remain near you."

"I think you should not. I am safe; but I fear for you; and my fear will not pass while you remain here. I am going to-day to the Duchess and shall seek her aid and counsel—telling her all."

"To the Castle?"

"Of a surety to the Castle. She has sent an urgent message to see me."

"By whom?"

"The Duke."

"I scent trouble in it. I do not like you to trust yourself in that man's power. If you go, I shall go too."

"You are needlessly alarmed. She is my friend, and as good a woman as ever drew breath. I am often with her. I could not refuse; but it would be madness for you to think of going."

"The term madness does not hinder me. For the part I have to play a bold front is not only necessary, it is prudence."

"But you can serve no useful end by such a venture. The Duke might offer you violence, indeed, in his anger."

"I can find a pretext and would gladly have a chance to get within the walls."

"It may be less easy to find one to get out, Gerard."

"Even so the work I have to do would not be stayed. I am firm on the point."

"I do not like the look of it;" and Gabrielle's face clouded.

"The look may change on closer view."

"Harm will come of it, Gerard. Let me prevail."

"When my work is done you shall never prefer a request in vain. But this you must not press." She yielded then, albeit with anxiety and misgivings; and they went into the house.

Gerard hastened to his apartments to wait for Pascal

and to complete the arrangements for striking the blow upon which he had now decided.

When Pascal arrived the two had a long conference, and once again Pascal advised a policy of caution.

"Don't set your foot inside the Castle gates," he urged vigorously. "It can do no good and may work incalculable mischief."

"Would you go in my stead?"

"With all the willingness in life."

"And shall the leader shirk the risk which his followers would take? Is it thus we Bourbon leaders lead?"

"That is no reason. There are times, of course, when the leader should be first, but this is not one of them. You know what sort of wild beast government this is in Morvaix; you have now ample cause to do all you will against the Governor; ride out then to Cambrai and yourself bring up the troops."

"Shall a Bourbon give men cause to sneer at him for a coward? Nay, Pascal, you would but anger me to press such counsel further."

"But your life to me and to us all is too precious to be risked in such a venture. I know what Dubois would urge were he here. Still, let it be as you will."

"I am not risking my life, man. Do you think this Duke, daredevil though he be, will venture to harm Bourbon's son when once I declare myself? His own soldiers would revolt against it. No man shall call me poltroon; and none has ever before advised me to deserve such a term."

"There you wrong me, Gerard. But I say no more. Pray heaven no harm come of it. It was my duty to urge this counsel, but I knew you would not so act;" and Pascal smiled.

"To our plans then. Another messenger must be found to ride to Cambrai with all the haste possible

and carry this message to my cousin. In it I have urged him to bring up the troops with all despatch. If your courier of this morning gets first to hand, d'Alembert will be already preparing; if not, this urgent message will hurry him. If our messenger gets quickly to him some eight-and-forty hours should see him without the city here; and I have told him to ride straight in unless a messenger from me meets him with a further despatch. By nightfall, on the day after to-morrow at latest, he should be here; and within that short space no great harm can happen to either Mademoiselle de Malincourt or to me, let this Governor do what he will."

"'Twould be a shrewder plan to get her to ride with you to Cambrai and return with the troops," said Pascal.

"The thought has not escaped me; and it may come to it yet. We shall see. Failing it, I have this plan: Let Dubois or yourself choose some likely place in the city to which our fellows can be brought, so that at need, should trouble come, we can make a stand."

"That is more to my liking," said Pascal, gleefully.

"And lastly for yourself, Pascal. Don't return here, but don once more your monk's gown; and when the task I have given you is completed, go to the Castle and keep your eyes open. There, if anywhere, trouble may be looked for, and your ready wit will be most needed."

"You will at least let me be near you," said Pascal earnestly.

"I know your zeal and friendship too well to hesitate to send for you at the first touch of danger. But I look for none of any serious character. And now," he broke off, rising, "it is time for this visit to the Castle. I must find Mademoiselle le Malincourt."

Gabrielle was waiting for him and again urged him not to go.

"I have a presentiment," she said. "Let me dissuade you at the last moment from this ill-omened daring."

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"I should rather read the omens ill if I were to leave you or suffer you to go alone, Gabrielle."

"Is there nothing I can say or do that will urge you to fly?"

"Nothing, nothing; unless," he added with a half-serious smile—"unless you would share the flight. And that I cannot ask—yet."

She started and looked to read his face, and after a moment answered—

"I am a Malincourt, and my place, for good or ill, is in Morvaix."

"And where is mine if not by your side?"

Nothing more was said, and they set out, Gabrielle so chilled by a presentiment of danger that her look was serious and troubled.

CHAPTER XII

GABRIELLE'S FRIEND

THE Duke carried away from Malincourt a heart bitter with jealousy and black with anger, and he vented his passion upon de Proballe, whom he chose to regard as the cause of all the trouble.

"You have betrayed my confidence shamefully. You have doubtless your own ends to gain, as that letter hinted; but they will cost you dear, whatever they are, monsieur."

"Betrayed you? How?" asked de Proballe, exceedingly uneasy as he thought his ulterior plans might be suspected. "What have I done other than as we agreed?"

"Did we agree that this scoundrel was so to arrange the manner of his coming as to impress your niece in this way? Was he to flaunt himself as a man of spirit and courage and impose thus on a young, impressionable, high-minded girl?"

"Did I order the manner of his coming? You wrong me entirely. His secret coming was as much a surprise to me as an offence to you; and that he was able to make this impression on Gabrielle was not my doing but the blundering of your own men. Your soldiers first in the market place; your followers, de Cavannes and d'Estelle, afterwards in their attack upon Denys in Gabrielle's very presence when Gerard was at hand."

"Would God they had killed him!" exclaimed the Duke brutally. "But after the affair in the market place you should have told me."

"Nay, that is an even greater injustice than ever. Who of us even guessed that the man was de Cobalt?" De Proballe's tone was a good imitation of injured innocence.

"You have betrayed me, I say; and if the thing miscarries you shall suffer," returned the Governor, in no mood to listen to any reason. "You should have stopped the mischief as soon as you saw it was going so far."

"It happened but yesterday."

"God's Cross! man, what has that to do with it? Is a mischief like this to be counted by hours? Was it ever in our plan that the villain should win your niece's heart?"

"He had at least to make such an impression as would induce her to consent to marry him. It is but a passing fancy which the proof of his evil character will cure—and his flight will prove it better than aught else."

"Passing fancy!" exclaimed the Duke bitterly. "Are you blind? I know not when I have so keenly suffered. But if he do not fly, he shall suffer too."

"He is not fool enough to remain. It was a shrewd thought to give him time to cool and think; and if he have any mind to linger, I will find arguments to drive him away. He has yet to learn your methods of justice here in Morvaix: I can find in them ample reasons for him. Although why you let him go instead of dealing with him at once I do not see."

"If he flies, his flight will be, as you say, the proof of his guilt."

"He will fly," said de Proballe, confidently. "Did he not shun your province as a man would shun hell? Did he not refuse to come without that promise of pardon in writing? By a man's acts you shall know him, not by his words. Let him think of Gabrielle as he will, he will think more of his own life. But I would have kept him."

"When his flight has proved his guilt he can be retaken for me to use."

De Proballe laughed. "You have a mercy of your own, Duke. I had not thought of that. Stay, what if he were to use this interval of your mercy to prevail on Gabrielle to fly with him? He is daredevil enough."

"She would never stoop to that, surely!"

"Women are women, and when they are in—when a man influences them, I mean, the best will do strange things."

"Return to Malincourt and watch, de Proballe. Your niece is to come to the Castle two hours after noon. Make this flight impossible after then; and after that I will see to it that no chance offers for her to leave even the Castle itself. If the mad attempt be made, have the scoundrel seized and brought to me."

De Proballe was by no means sorry to get away from the Governor in his present mood, and returned to Malincourt to keep the watch; while the Governor hurried on to the Castle to take further steps designed to prevent this suggested flight; and some of them were to have important results in another direction.

He despatched a body of soldiers to watch round Malincourt, and at the same time sent urgent commands to the officers of the different gates of the city that no one was to be allowed to pass out without leave signed by him. Thus it came about that the courier whom Pascal was sending to Cambrai was stopped, and valuable time lost.

The Governor, having completed these arrangements, was closeted for an hour with his wife, and as soon as he heard, to his intense relief, that Gabrielle had arrived at the Castle and was with the Duchess, he sent for Dubois to sound him in regard to that part of the plan which called for the aid of the Church.

He was as hot now upon the scheme of divorcing his

wife in order to be free to marry again, as he had been formerly upon the other intention.

The ruse by which Gerard had succeeded in getting a hundred of his own soldiers enrolled among the Castle troops, by pretending that they came as a gift from the Cardinal Archbishop, was thus having singular results. The Governor read it as a proof that he stood so well with the Cardinal that he could hope to receive his Eminence's support in the matter of the divorce; and as he concluded Dubois had been chosen as the Cardinal's delegate because of the latter's confidence in him, here was the very man at hand to sound on the matter.

Dubois was a clever soldier and a brave fighter, and had been selected by Gerard for his present task because his influence with the men was most likely to keep them in bounds while in the Castle. He made a very brusque unmonklike monk, however; and he now found himself in a very awkward position. Moreover, he knew nothing of Gerard's experiences within the last few hours.

He listened quietly to the Duke, and, seeing no connection between the matter and any of Gerard's affairs, felt no interest in it at all, and gave his own opinion bluntly. He was a soldier, not a cleric; knew little and cared less about the theological views as to the dissolution of a tie cemented by a sacrament of the Church; and the only thought he had about it was that as the Tiger Governor was such a tyrant, it was a blessing and not a curse that he was childless—the point on which with him the Duke laid the chief stress.

"His Eminence would never sanction it, my lord," he declared brusquely. "It is against the Canon of Holy Church."

"But it has been sanctioned before now," replied the Governor, and went on to cite instances and to argue the matter. Dubois had, however, only one reply to everything.

"The Cardinal would never sanction it;" and his dogged insistence upon this began at length to enrage the Governor, not a little to Dubois' grim amusement.

"I would rather have the countenance of the Church, but in Morvaix I am the head of the Church as of all else. I am wont to act first and inquire afterwards in most things. It is simpler, and the end is the same. This may be such a case. If I should seek your help as the Cardinal's representative you would give it?"

"It is none of my affair," replied Dubois hastily.

"I repeat my question;" and the Governor looked at him meaningly. But Dubois was the last man in the world to be browbeaten; and thus he answered stolidly:

"And I repeat my answer, my lord."

"I am not wont to be set at defiance by monk or priest."

"Nor I to be driven from my duty, my lord. I am not setting you at defiance."

"My priests in Morvaix do not answer me thus."

"I am not your lordship's priest."

"You will at least keep silence about what has passed between us."

"Unless my duty demand that I should speak of it."

"What is that but threatening me and defying me?"

The Governor's anger was mounting fast in view of what he deemed the monk's contumacy, and Dubois was no less dogged and blunt.

"If what you propose to do be right, what need is there for silence; if it be wrong, why should my lips be sealed?" he answered.

"Secrets confided to the ears of you holy men are to be regarded as sacred."

"This is no such occasion. You sought my opinion and I gave it. That is all. My duty is my duty, none the less or more."

"Peace with your canting about duty. You are in

Morvaix now, and I will settle what is your duty. I rule here, absolutely."

"I am not disputing your rule, my lord; but I was not sent here to do your bidding or to cease to do what I deem my duty."

"Out of my sight. It is such canting hypocrites as you who sow discord and do mischief. See to it that you hold your babbling tongue, or I'll find means to silence you." But Dubois fired at this injustice and answered hotly—

"I am no canting hypocrite, my lord, nor am I a recreant coward to flinch and cringe before your angry looks and passionate words. They do but convince me that in this thing you have some evil purpose; and not in Morvaix, no, nor in all France, is there power to silence me if I think I ought to speak."

"Out of my presence before I send for my guards to drive you away for a pestilent ribald malcontent."

"I came of your seeking, not of my own wish," returned Dubois, not one whit abashed by the Governor's violence.

"If I have cause to send for you again you will repent it."

"I am in no ways persuaded of that," returned Dubois, sturdily; and he swung out of the room, little thinking that he had done harm to Gerard by his manful attitude. Yet in a way he had; for the Governor, revolving what had passed, determined not to take the risk of applying to the Cardinal, but to hurry on his marriage, and leave the Church to interfere when it would have the accomplished fact to face.

Had Dubois but known, he would have been more prudent to have appeared to consent to the Governor's plans and to have held out to him the hope of the Cardinal's consent, so that he might have been induced to incur the delay necessary to obtain it. He saw this

when Gerard pointed it out to him later. But it was too late then.

In the meantime the Duchess had received Gabrielle with even greater tenderness and love than usual; and it was some time before she began to work round slowly to the subject of the Duke's wishes.

"I am old, feeble, and bed-ridden, Gabrielle, and worse than all, childless. I am done with the world, dear, and willing to give place to one who can play my part better. It would have been better, far better, had I died years ago."

"Then I should have lacked the truest woman friend a girl could have," answered Gabrielle sweetly. "But you must not yield to this melancholy. You have been in greater pain than usual, I fear, and it has tried you."

"Not of body, child, but of mind, perhaps," and she sighed. "It is ill to lag on and on, a weary dreary nuisance to all around you. There comes a time when it is good to die."

"You are morbid. Something has distressed you. Tell me," and Gabrielle sat on the bedside and took her friend's hand.

"I have been a failure, child. I see it now; and see how the people under the Duke's rule have suffered in consequence. The Duke himself has shown me this."

"The Duke?" exclaimed Gabrielle in surprise.

"The influence of a woman's hand in his governing has been sadly missed. He loved me once, child, and then I could sway him, hard though he now seems. But when I bore him no children and my helplessness fell on me, an estrangement grew between us and from that followed, oh, so many evils." She sighed deeply, and paused before she added: "Yet he has shown me it is not too late, even now."

"I cannot follow you now, dear," said Gabrielle.

"A noble without a son to succeed him lacks one of

the great incentives to do right, Gabrielle. He turns his thoughts inwards, broods, thinks only of himself, and grows the harder for the galling grief and disappointment. It has been so with the Duke. If I had but died years ago, when first my calamity struck me down, he would have taken another wife who would have borne him children. Would God indeed that I had died!"

Gabrielle said nothing. Deep down in her mind the thought began to take shape that there was some purpose behind her friend's words—some new cause to bring this side of her sufferings to the light just now.

"I used to pray so earnestly for a son," the Duchess continued, after a painful pause; "but none came; and I was thus so unneeded, so less than useless; a clog, a drag, a dead weight in his life. I could not wonder he grew cold, and that in time the coldness hardened into cruelty. I stood for no more than the disappointment in his life." She spoke in a slow, leaden, hopeless, melancholy tone, infinitely touching to Gabrielle. "It is a dreary fate for a wife, child, to stir no other feeling in her husband's heart than that of disappointment and to see it hardening slowly into hate. Had I but dared at that time I would have taken my life. But I was a coward. I dared not find freedom in that way."

"Did the Duke know of these thoughts?" asked Gabrielle, keeping her face averted.

"Whether he could read mine as I could read his, I know not. I saw him only rarely. This has been so for many years indeed. That he should speak often of our childlessness, should even taunt me with it, was perhaps no more than natural—and yet every word was like a sword-thrust in my heart. More than once I made him a proposal."

"Yes?"

"It was my own thought," continued the Duchess, smoothing Gabrielle's hair and petting her. "Quite my

own. You know how the idea of self-sacrifice will sometimes seize upon us women till it becomes almost a desire. It was so with me. I knew it would be so well for Morvaix if he could have some one by his side, heart-warm in the desire to help the people, strong in influence to modify the ever growing sternness of his rule by gentle suasive counsel—he is at heart a man amenable to such influence, Gabrielle—and able to take a due part in the work of government: a helpmeet in all ways. So I urged him to gain the sanction of Holy Church to dissolve our marriage, on the ground of our childlessness, and seek—another and a better wife.”

“My dear, my dear,” cried Gabrielle, intensely moved. “Where could he find a better in all fair France than you? He refused you, of course.”

“Yes—then; and not kindly, but with a gibe—that he had not found marriage an experience he wished to double. It wounded me of course to have what I meant in all sincerity to be a help to him thus turned to jeering; but he did not understand my motive, I think. But now he has gone back to the plan; for there is one, a woman among women, Gabrielle, who would be all that Morvaix could desire as his wife. And the one of all others whom I could best bear to see filling my place.”

She paused for Gabrielle to speak; but no response came.

“Her heart, like mine, is for the people’s weal and her influence would be far greater than mine could ever have been with the citizens; real, powerful, active, where mine is now dead. You have often told me how you love the people, Gabrielle.”

“You must say no more,” answered Gabrielle, in a low firm voice. “I will not affect to misunderstand you, and I know you speak in all purity of thought and intent. But were all other considerations naught, I would never do you this wrong.”

"He and all would honour you if you were his wife, Gabrielle."

"Nay, I should dishonour myself. I beg you say no more."

"You would be all-powerful to rule in Morvaix."

"Were the throne of France the guerdon I would not consent."

"Your heart is free, child?" The gentle eyes were full on Gabrielle's face as the question was put, and the light that rushed to it did not escape them. "Gabrielle, my Gabrielle, I did not know;" and at that Gabrielle lowered her head and hid it on her friend's heart. "Pray heaven he is worthy of you. Tell me, child. Or is it a secret?"

"No secret," said Gabrielle, lifting her head proudly.

"My cousin, Gerard de Cobalt——"

"Gabrielle, not he, surely not he, I trust," interposed the Duchess, in a tone of dismay. "Oh, how I am punished for not having spoken my fears. Since last we spoke together of him and his coming, I have heard ill tidings indeed concerning him, but put off speaking to warn you until I could be certain. He is not worthy of you, child; far, far from it."

"You have not seen him and spoken with him, or you would not say that."

"When did he come?"

"But yesterday; or rather, two days past;" and Gabrielle told of the meeting in the market place and after at Malincourt.

"It is a tragedy," was the Duchess's comment. "And you love him! Oh, Gabrielle, Gabrielle, what sorrow is there not in store for you!"

"Not through him," was the confident reply.

"Alas! child, what do you know of men who judge them by a comely face and a fair speaking tongue? When could a man not speak a maiden fairly? Have

they not told you of his evil life? Of the crime for which he craved the Duke's pardon fore ever he set foot in the city?"

"My heart is closed to the voice of slander against him, dear," replied Gabrielle, in the same proud confident tone.

"How like a maiden in love! But alas! my child, I know these things are true. His life is forfeit for the one deed—but one among many in his black life. Oh, Gabrielle, how terrible, how terrible! It will break your life even worse than mine has been broken."

"I have neither fears for him nor doubts for myself."

"When the heart is young how easy to be confident. How sad and more than sad is all this! And here, then, is the reason why my words found your ears deaf, is it?"

"Only in part. Had I never seen Gerard, my answer had been the same."

The Duchess sighed and shivered slightly in fear.

"The Duke will hear, your decision unwillingly, Gabrielle; and it will harden his heart against the man who thus comes between you and him. Your cup of suffering will be full indeed even while you are so young. He had built upon this marriage; thinking by it to join the influence of your house of Malincourt with his."

"I recall now how he spoke of my having some influence in the governing of the city, and of some sacrifice to be made by me. This may have been in his thoughts; and yet almost in the same breath he had spoken of my marriage to my cousin. 'Twas inexplicable to me then, and is even more so now. Yet the thing was not more possible then than now. Did death itself gape full in front of me, I would not be his wife." There was no mistaking the unalterable firmness of her decision.

"You have an honest heart and soul, Gabrielle, and were I you, and so placed as you, I should decide as you."

"You uphold me, then?"

"I told the Duke I was sure what your reply would be when he laid on me the ungrateful task of questioning you. Yet in a way I am sorry; for if it be not you, it may be some one less worthy, to the hurt of all in Morvaix."

"And if need should come, you will stand by me as to my cousin?"

"Have I ever failed you when I had the power to help? But in this I am powerless. It would be wrong to give you fruitless hope. Were he but a good man, worthy of your sweet pure love, how gladly would I serve you, if serve any one I can in my helplessness."

Gabrielle smiled. "I will prove him worthy—nay, not I, he himself will prove it to Morvaix and the world; and then I will claim your promise."

"Nor claim it in . . . Gabrielle; that you know. And now let us speak of less trying matters. I am weary," said the Duchess, and they were thus engaged when the Governor entered.

Gabrielle rose, and the Duke first cast a sharp questioning glance at his wife's face.

"I am always glad to find you here, mademoiselle. I trust you have had long enough time to come to an understanding?"

"I have done my utmost, Charles," said the Duchess, shrinkingly.

"I ask no more. May I beg some words with you, mademoiselle?"

"Except on one subject, certainly," replied Gabrielle.

"We will discuss the exceptions in private," he returned with a frown.

"I beg you to excuse me, my lord."

His answer was characteristic. He opened the door leading to an adjoining room and held it for her to pass out.

"Pardon me my insistence. What I have to say must be in private and cannot wait."

For a moment Gabrielle rebelled, raising her head proudly and meeting his gaze firmly.

"I repeat, must be in private, mademoiselle," he said, adding as an afterthought: "And it cannot fail to interest you, seeing whom it concerns."

She went then and he followed, maintaining silence until they were alone.

"There must be no misunderstanding between us, my lord," cried Gabrielle, at once throwing down the gauge of defiance. "The Duchess, your wife and my dear friend, has at your instigation made me acquainted with your proposal—a proposal I deem infamous and unholy—and no power you can exert can bring me even to consider it. I pray you spare me the pain of any further reference to it."

"You are wrong to meet me thus at the outset with antagonism. You have heard as yet but one side only, and must bear with me while I speak of the other. I am far from being your enemy, Heaven knows."

"While matters remain as they are, I cannot count your lordship among my friends."

"Those are hard words to hear, mademoiselle. You mean?"

"I mean the slanders you have sanctioned against my cousin and the threats with which you have menaced him. His cause is mine; his enemies are my enemies."

He made a stern, angry gesture, but held his temper in check.

"The Duchess has told you my wishes—that of her own will and at her own desire our marriage should be dissolved, in order that you may become my wife. But my full motive she could not tell you because she does not know it. It is—that I love you, Gabrielle; love, aye, worship the very ground you tread and the very air you breathe. For me all France holds no——"

"Spare me this added shame, my lord," Gabrielle broke in, her voice vibrating and her eyes flaming with indignation.

"Shame!" he repeated, with an angry start.

"What is it but shame, the wrong you would do to the purest and sweetest wife man ever had; what else but shame that you should offer to prostrate your government to your own purposes; what but foulest shame that almost within hearing of the woman you would thus wrong you seek to pollute my ears with this infamous profession? If there be a spark of manhood in you, kindle it till it light up your soul sufficiently to save you and me from this unholy degradation."

"Your passion but whets my love, Gabrielle. I am not a man to be set aside from a purpose once formed. My purpose is now set—you shall be my wife; and neither man nor devil nor God shall turn me."

"I have but one word, then. I hold your offer to be vile and degrading, and I would rather die than falter for an instant in repudiating it."

"You will not turn me," he repeated. "I have offered you my love—a love that burns in me as a consuming fire—and you think to put it aside with indignation and contempt. But there are other emotions fighting for me than love. And fear is one of them."

"I do not fear your lordship," flashed Gabrielle, with lofty pride.

"Yet there is none in Morvaix to protect you from me."

"My cousin Gerard——"

"He has fled the city, like the craven, guilty, worthless wretch he is," he answered contemptuously.

"It is not true, my lord. He is here in your castle. He came with me, foreseeing more clearly than I the purpose with which you brought me here. He came for my protection. And he is no craven guilty wretch as

you say, but a good and true man: the man, my lord, whom I love, and whose wife I shall be, by the grace of God."

He stood fighting with the tempest of rage which this proud avowal provoked and was still striving for self-restraint, when an interruption occurred. Someone came to the door, and when, with an angry exclamation, he opened it, he found a messenger from de Proballe.

"Your Grace, M. le Baron de Proballe desires me to say that he seeks the favour of an immediate audience with you on matters of the most urgent importance affecting closely M. de Cobalt," said the man.

"He has not fled, you say?" cried the Duke, turning to Gabrielle, and jumping to the conclusion that that was the news. His manner was full of exultation, and he laughed unpleasantly as he added: "Come and see for yourself."

Together they went down to where de Proballe was waiting with strange news that had brought him in hot haste to the Castle.

At the sight of her uncle's face and the triumphant glance he cast at her, Gabrielle felt her heart sink in momentary fear for Gerard; but she rallied quickly and faced them both with a confident smile as she waited for the tidings.

CHAPTER XIII

DISCOVERY

WHILE Gabrielle was closeted with the Duchess Gerard had made the best use of his time to learn what he could of the Governor's Castle.

Well placed on rising ground just within the northern gate, it had in former times been a strong fortress, at once overawing Morvaix itself and commanding the approach from the north, the side which was most open to attack. Its outer fortifications formed a long portion of the boundary walls of the city; and in the more desperate times when that district had been constantly overrun by raiders, many a fierce and desperate conflict had raged round its gloomy walls.

Gerard saw, not without uneasiness, that the Governor had restored many of the old fortifications, had constructed several more modern works, and had thus greatly strengthened the place.

The reason was not far to seek. The Duke ruled by force. He ground the people under the iron heel of military discipline; and so long as he was sure of the strength of his Castle and could maintain his soldiers, the people were powerless. They might protest and murmur and even rise in revolt; but under the frowning menace of the Castle, they were helpless.

Every piece of the military machinery was kept in a high state of preparedness for eventualities, and Gerard's keen soldier's eye could not fail to note all the evidences of strength and to estimate them at their true value. Whatever the Duke might be, he was a good soldier.

Everything about the Castle was regulated with military precision.

Stranger though he was, no one attempted to interfere with him or even hinder him as he made his observations. He had been seen to arrive with Gabrielle, and as the Duke had never deemed it possible he would venture inside the fortress and had therefore given no orders concerning him, he was held to be a guest who had been made free of the Castle, and was allowed to go where he would.

The knowledge gained in this survey might prove invaluable. The plan of the whole Castle was soon clear in his mind and he detected the one weak spot in the defences against which, should the time come, an attack could best be delivered.

This was at a point on the city side of the walls where some works were still in progress. The ground outside rose to within a few feet of the parapet on the top, and gangs of men were at work there: some removing the ground and others deepening the foundations of the walls, while their ladders and tools lay about the place.

Gerard smiled with intense satisfaction at the discovery, which might well have vital importance. If a crisis arose which rendered it imperative for him to make a stand against the Governor for a time while awaiting the arrival of his cousin from Cambrai, Dubois could easily collect the men within the Castle and with them make a dash through this breach; or again, if he himself were put under any restraint by the Duke, here was the road of escape.

With these thoughts in his mind he made the most careful observation of the exact position of the spot, and then descended from the walls to the courtyards below to find the speediest and most direct road to it.

He had completed his survey and was entering the Castle when he encountered Dubois fresh from his inter-

view with the Governor and seething with indignation at his treatment.

"My lord!" exclaimed Dubois involuntarily, in surprise.

"Good day, holy friar," answered Gerard, with a gesture of caution. "I have heard of your good deeds and would confer with you," he added aloud for the hearing of a couple of soldiers who were passing.

"We can speak here," said Dubois, drawing aside into an alcove; and in rapid tones he told of all he had done since his arrival, and then described the interview with the Governor.

"You did well, but could have done better," said Gerard, after a moment's pause. "You should have led him to think the sanction would have been forthcoming from the Cardinal, and so have gained time. But it is vain to speak of that now. Listen to my plans." He told him the result of his observation, and instructed him to ascertain exactly what guard was kept at the works by night, to have some of their own men always watching near at hand, and above all to be sure that ladders were to be available there so that no time should be lost in case of emergency.

"I too have a plan," said Dubois. "The soldiers here are but a wild mercenary lot, dissatisfied with everything; disaffected toward the Duke and their officers; any man's men who will but pay them. With a few bags of crowns, many of them could be bought and the Castle itself seized. Even among those who could not be bought, the men of Morvaix itself and the district round, there are many who hate the Governor for his excesses and, in their sympathy with the people outside, are ripe to revolt."

"Splendidly done!" said Gerard. "I knew you would not be housed in the Castle without results. I like the scheme. 'Twould be a stroke indeed to vanquish this strutting cock with his own spurs. Push your inquiries

all you can in safety, using every discretion, and we will speak of it again."

"Ah, my fine cavalier, so we meet again. Seeking absolution from our new sir priest here, eh?"

Gerard turned quickly at the sneering voice to find that the two gallants whom he had surprised in their attack upon Denys, had come up unawares and now stood regarding Dubois and himself with sharp suspicious glances.

"Is the Duke dead that his serving men have come to power?" retorted Gerard. "Or is either of you minded to renew the affair of the gardens of Malin-court?"

"We are minded to see what the rats are about in the Castle, whatever the colour of their coats." It was d'Estelle who answered. He was pale and weak, and carried his arm in a sling.

"You are wounded, monsieur, and so licensed for a time in your insolence. But you, monsieur," and Gerard made a step toward Antoine. "You are still unhurt. Do you carry also an uncivil tongue? If I know not how your tongue runs, since I have not heard it yet, I know at least how your legs run, for I have seen them."

"This is no brawler's tavern," cried d'Estelle, insolently. "You are out of your element here."

"Peace," interposed Dubois, in his sonorous tones. "Be careful of such wanton provocation. I have known men's blood to flow for less. You should guard your tongue, young sir."

"All right, bald pate," cried d'Estelle with a flippant laugh.

"You have said nothing, monsieur," said Gerard to Antoine.

"Peace, my son, peace," said Dubois again, laying his hand on Gerard's shoulder. "Would you, too, provoke strife?"

"Good, old Tell-your-beads. What's sauce for the goose is sauce for such a gander," exclaimed d'Estelle, with another laugh.

"These gentlemen and I have met before, father," said Gerard. "I prevented them from murdering a man, and they bear me ill-will in consequence."

"It was no murder but a fair quarrel, monsieur," said Antoine.

"Fair? With two swords to one?"

"I caught M. St. Jean maltreating a lady who is dear to me, and did but seek to punish him as he deserved."

"When I see a liar I watch his lips and listen. I am watching yours, monsieur," said Gerard, contemptuously. "You were set to murder him and for that purpose rode after him yester morning." Antoine changed colour and d'Estelle was silent.

"Be careful what you say, monsieur," replied Antoine, hoarsely. "We are the Duke's followers and this is his lordship's Castle."

"If you do not like my words, monsieur, there is an alternative which men of honour understand," retorted Gerard, in a deliberate tone, and with a look which Antoine had little mind to face.

"If I do not seek a fight with you, it is not because I fear you," he answered, in none too firm a tone; "but because there may be a way more useful to my master to deal with you."

"I appreciate your discretion, and should I need a spy, may send in quest of your services." Then turning his back upon the pair he added to Dubois: "Now, father, we will resume our discussion of that point about Thomas à Kempis. I was arguing in regard to the warning against apostasy that——"

"Those vermin may be dangerous. They suspect," put in Dubois as they passed out of earshot.

"A risk or so more or less at this crisis does not count,

for much; but try to have them marked. They are two of this Tiger's claws and would scratch from behind given the chance."

Just then a noise behind them attracted Gerard's attention, and turning he saw de Proballe, with Dauban at his side, hurrying toward the apartments of the Governor.

"Ah, Gerard, I find you in good company here!" said de Proballe in a cordial tone, pausing on his way. "I have great news. It concerns you."

"How so, M. le Baron?"

"What a formal fellow you are, with your M. le Baron. We must get to closer terms than these. I'm taking my news to the Governor. Come with me. Give me your arm, lad."

"I thank you, monsieur, but it is not my wish."

"Oh, Gerard, Gerard," cried de Proballe, with a laugh. "You will never push your way in this good city of Morvaix while you show yourself so cold and indifferent. Well, well, come to the Duke or go to the—Church your own way. It's all one to me," and with a laugh he swept on. He was in high spirits.

"There is some meaning in this," muttered Gerard, gazing after him. "Go you, Dubois, and see to all I have said. I will make my way to the Duke. 'When de Proballe laughs there is the devil by his elbow,' was once a proverb in Paris, and it may be just as true in Morvaix."

Without appearing to hasten, he followed de Proballe, keeping a wary eye for all things as he passed along, and quickened his steps when he caught sight of the Governor in the distance in conference with de Proballe, while Gabrielle, her back toward him, was watching them closely.

The Governor had come down in response to de Proballe's urgent message in the firm belief that the news

was that of Gerard's flight and his first question was to that effect.

"He has gone?" he asked eagerly.

"A word first into your ear;" and de Proballe drew him aside. "Gone? No, thank Heaven! better than that, much better. He is here in the Castle. I have spoken to him this minute."

"Has he dared?" exclaimed the Governor with a frown.

"Dared? It seems he would dare anything. Wait, here he is," he cried, catching sight of Gerard. "Now you shall see a comedy. Come, Gerard, come; I was waiting for you. I want your help."

Hearing of his presence Gabrielle turned and ran to Gerard and stood by him.

"What is this?" demanded the Governor of de Proballe.

"Bear with me and have your guards at hand, and you will see," was the whispered reply.

"They are always at hand here," was the curt grim reply.

De Proballe went toward Gerard, a smile on his lips.

"So you have not followed our advice, Gerard, and fled. You like the city and the Castle? Perhaps you were seeking ghostly advice just now from that sturdy monk? I found our young friend in close consultation with a monk as I passed, Duke. Preparing, let us think, for that longer journey which you mentioned as the alternative to flight from the city."

De Proballe was obviously enjoying the situation and resolved to make the most of it.

"Who was the monk? Do you know him?" asked the Governor quickly.

"He who came from the Cardinal Archbishop, the delegate. Gerard, it seems, is particular as to who shall shrive him. Our Morvaix priests are not good enough.

The conference lasted long, too; at least so Antoine de Cavannes told me."

The Governor shot a sharp glance at Gerard, who said to Gabrielle—

"The monk is one of those whom I met two days ago in the market place, Gabrielle, when Babillon, the smith, was done to death at my lord's bidding." He spoke quietly and calmly. "You may remember him; a dark, swarthy, burly man who helped you. The companion of him who stepped between us and the soldiery."

"I remember him well," answered Gabrielle. She was oppressed by a sense of danger, impalpable and invisible, but yet real.

"That is all," said Gerard, with a smile to reassure her.

"Of what spoke you together?" asked the Governor.

"May not a man speak even with a monk in Morvaix without the Governor's permission? 'Twould seem not indeed; for even while we were in converse, those two jackals who sought to take your Denys' life, Gabrielle, came up with flouts and jeers and sneers, as though licensed to insult even men of a religious life. I think in truth this is a matter that concerns you closely, my lord."

"How dare you say that to me?"

"What daring is there in it? I answered the fellow—the one that is yet unwounded—told him my thoughts of him and offered him such reparation as he could take; when he turned upon me and hinted that such insolence as his was possible by your protection and permission. He is yonder; let him come and answer for himself;" and Gerard pointed to where Antoine and d'Estelle were standing at a distance.

"Enough of this insolence," exclaimed the Governor.

"So I told him," replied Gerard coolly; "scarce believing it possible such things could be done with your sanction."

De Proballe had been fretting at this interlude in which he was not taking the important part he desired.

"You need a curb to your tongue, Gerard," he said.

"Does M. de Proballe desire an opportunity of applying it?"

"What a fire-eater it is!" cried de Proballe, hiding his vexation under a laugh, "and what a wit! Where did you learn to be so free with your tongue?"

"Not in Morvaix of a truth, where every one must order his speech to suit the ears of his Governor, it seems."

"Gerard!" whispered Gabrielle, with growing alarm at his reckless answers.

"Yet there are things in Morvaix that we can teach persons of even your high character!" exclaimed the Governor sharply.

"I have already learnt many, my lord," was the dry retort.

"One you will learn. Thou shalt do no murder," added de Proballe.

"That is certainly a branch of knowledge with many expert professors here," returned Gerard, with the same reckless air.

His manner was intentionally assumed. He had not failed to discern from de Proballe's manner that some development was at hand, which boded danger; and he chose deliberately the attitude of reckless defiance of all authority. Intrepid by nature, he had often seen danger met and difficulties overcome by boldness, when no other means could have succeeded.

His bearing toward the Governor, despot though he was in Morvaix, was carefully calculated. As a Bourbon and the son of the Suzerain Duke, with full authority to act in his father's place, this Governor owed him allegiance, and he believed he had but to reveal his true character to bring the bully to his knees.

Moreover, his hot Bourbon blood was fired by the insults heaped upon him as well as by the infamous condition of affairs he had found in Morvaix.

But above all, and more than all, his chivalry was stirred on Gabrielle's account; and his new-born love for her filled his heart with fury against the two men who had plotted her ruin and had turned their venom against him only when they found he was no pliant tool in their abominable scheme.

The Governor on his side was no whit less angry, and only Gabrielle's presence had restrained him from replying to Gerard's taunts with violence. He meant to use Gerard as the means to force her consent to marry him; and had resolved that he should not leave the Castle until that consent had been wrung from her.

This very resolve, however, made him hesitate. To give him countenance with her, the crime which Gerard had committed must be the ground for imprisonment; and while he smarted and fumed and raged under the lash of Gerard's bitter words, he had held back. But the limit of his endurance was reached; and as a first step he resolved to send Gabrielle away.

There was a pause of some moments after Gerard's last words while the Governor made this decision, and then he turned to Gabrielle.

"Mademoiselle, I must ask you to return to my wife for a time."

"Do not go, Gabrielle, there is no need," declared Gerard.

"He is right, my lord, there is no need," said de Proballe.

"This must end," muttered the Governor.

"It shall end—now. Come, Gerard, I have spoken of your sharp wits. Let us see you use them now. Tell me the contents of this," and de Proballe held a paper before him.

"I am no wizard to read what I cannot see, monsieur."

"No wizard; you hear that, Duke. No wizard. Yet something of a wizard surely—to *write* what you have never seen."

Gerard on the instant understood what had occurred, but his face gave no sign and he stared steadily into de Proballe's sneering face.

"Come, Gerard, come. You must know it. It is your own letter just arrived from you."

The Governor understood it now, and with evidences of great excitement he tore the paper from de Proballe's hand and read it.

He glanced from it to Gerard, and smiled—a smile full of sinister meaning.

"Do you say you do not know this?"

Gerard maintained the same calm collected attitude. He was considering what course to adopt.

"You hear? Either you know what is written here or you are some lying impostor masquerading in a false name.

"Gerard! Gerard!" cried Gabrielle, intensely moved.

"Aye, Gerard—or some other name," sneered de Proballe. "Ask his name, Gabrielle."

"Now, monsieur, at once if you please," said the Governor, in a stern imperative tone. "Speak, or I call my guards. Do you know this paper? If not, who are you and why are you here?"

CHAPTER XIV

“ I AM NOT GERARD DE COBALT ”

OF all present Gabrielle was by far the most agitated. The Duke, perplexed, suspicious, and bitterly hostile to the man who had stepped between him and his passion, was chiefly concerned to find how best to turn the thing to his rival's hurt. De Proballe, angry at having been tricked, was for the moment too occupied in enjoying his personal importance in having thus unmasked the impostor, to think of much else.

But to Gabrielle the issue was all in all. If this were not Gerard her cousin, the man to whom she had been betrothed, how strangely forward and unmaidenly she must have appeared. She recalled with a sense of something akin to shame how she had almost pressed herself upon him in the first moment of his arrival; and at the recollection, her cheeks flamed so that she hid them beneath her hands and involuntarily drew away from his side.

It was but a little thing, that gesture of hers; but Gerard saw and understood it, and on the moment it stayed the words of avowal even as they were at his lips, and changed the whole course of his action. He had come to Morvaix to ascertain the truth as to the misgovernment and, if need arose, to depose and punish the powerful Governor; but his love for Gabrielle was now so much to him and filled so much of his purpose, that he set it first and before all else.

He had won her love by a trick, an imposture. He had been in great measure forced into it by circumstances, indeed, and by his very zeal in her cause. But it was none the less a trick; and he was too proud, having won it so, to hold it by mere greatness of rank. He would not avow that rank until he had justified himself in Gabrielle's eyes.

And even as he thought of this and formed the resolve, another consideration occurred to him. He could by this means still further test the methods of rule in Morvaix. He had had ample evidence of the Governor's willingness to wrest the considerations of justice to his own personal ends; but it would throw a fresh light upon matters to note his conduct when he knew that the man he had first used and then threatened was not the cowardly murderer the real Gerard de Cobalt was said to be.

"Do you intend to trifle all day with me?" demanded the Governor, when Gerard had remained silent some time.

"I am not trifling, but thinking," answered Gerard. At his calm strong tone Gabrielle took her hands from her face and with another eager, almost imploring glance, made a half step toward him, and then checked herself in deep embarrassment.

"You have need to think, I'll warrant," exclaimed de Proballe.

But it was to Gabrielle Gerard turned.

"You have no need to shrink from me, mademoiselle," he said with a smile, "although I can understand you. I fear I must plead guilty to having deceived you. I am not the writer of that letter. I am not your cousin, Gerard de Cobalt."

"So you see that game is over," sneered de Proballe. "What lie next, pray? You will not find us so easy to be fooled now."

"If I am not Gerard de Cobalt, monsieur," cried Gerard, sternly, "you will still find I am a man who does not take insults lightly. For your past words I forgive you, because of your natural irritation at this discovery. But for your future words and conduct I shall hold you responsible—every word and every act."

"You will of course explain your conduct, monsieur, and state as frankly as you can who you are and your purpose in my city. See to it that the explanation be as satisfactory as your present position is equivocal." The Governor's tone was curt and peremptory.

"The explanation is due to Mademoiselle de Malincourt, and I promise you it shall be frank enough in some respects to satisfy even you. I had a sufficient object in coming to Morvaix—what that is for the present I withhold—and to accomplish it I took a name not my own. I borrowed it at hazard from a notorious dicer and wastrel of Paris—Raouf de Cobalt."

"But you called yourself Gerard de Cobalt," said the Duke.

"In ignorance that he had a relative of that name—an even worse scoundrel, it would seem, than himself—whom you and M. de Proballe designed to use for your schemes."

"Do you think to carry off this imposture with insolence?" demanded the Duke angrily.

"It is not insolence. I have no cause to hide the truth, monsieur. I had been in Morvaix but a few hours when I was a witness of the scene in the market place, and we met for the first time, mademoiselle. I inquired concerning you, and learning that you were the Gabrielle de Malincourt whose praises were on all men's lips, I haunted the gardens of the maison in the hope of seeing you again. There we met, yesterday, for the second time—and you may remember my passing confusion when you questioned me as to the reasons for what

seemed such strange conduct in a man you believed to be your cousin and for whose coming you were prepared."

"You did not tell me all, monsieur," said Gabrielle.

"You shall know why. I was on the point of doing so when M. de Proballe interrupted us, and carrying me away, told me enough to disclose to me the peril which threatened you."

"Yes, yes, we know all about that," interposed de Proballe hastily.

"Mademoiselle de Malincourt does not. You read the letter yesterday of which your follower Denys had in some way possessed himself, mademoiselle, and I need only say that that contained in essence the story of this de Cobalt which M. de Proballe told me at length, adding that my marriage with you was to be no more or less than a cover for your ruin at the hands of the Duke de Rochelle."

"It is a lie," cried the Governor furiously.

"Then blame the liar, M. le Duc. There he stands," and Gerard pointed at de Proballe.

"It is a tissue of lies," said de Proballe. "You know me too well, Gabrielle, to believe this vile slander."

"There you mistake. It is I, not Mademoiselle de Malincourt, who know you. I know M. de Proballe's life and reputation in Paris."

"This shall go no further. Your name, monsieur?" demanded the Governor.

"Does not touch the truth or falsehood of what I say, and need not therefore be disclosed yet. I shall choose my own time to disclose it."

"You will tell it now, or suffer the consequences."

"I do not understand. Do you threaten me?"

"By your own confession you have come sneaking here in an assumed name; as a spy of some sort. We soldiers have a short shrift for spies."

"Monsieur——" began Gabrielle, in a tone of en-

treaty, alarmed for Gerard's safety, and a prey to many mingled emotions.

"I have committed no offence, mademoiselle, save in having misled you to believe I was a worse man than I am. For that I have to crave your pardon, pleading only in excuse the reasons I have shown. For the rest, I have done no wrong," he said, meeting confidently the Governor's threatening looks.

"You are a spy, monsieur, and as a spy shall be treated."

"It is no uncommon thing for strangers to travel without disclosing their names. Is that a crime in Morvaix which is a common practice all over France and Europe?"

"Do you say now you are naught but a traveller?"

"Far from it. I have a purpose in coming to your city."

"Then you are a spy, I say."

"I am no spy, monsieur. I am a soldier. A true son of France with none but pure French blood in my veins; and a loyal subject of His Majesty the King, of whom we are all subjects in common. I have fought under the great Bourbon, the Suzerain of this city and the territory of Morvaix. To hold me for a spy will argue ill of Morvaix and the rule that prevails here."

"You dare to threaten me, then?"

"Monsieur has doubtless his papers to support his statements and a safe conduct from his powerful friends," suggested de Proballe, with a sneer.

"Aye, of course, produce them," declared the Governor. "They may explain the suspicious manner of your coming."

"I can make good my words at any time," said Gerard, not relishing this thrust. "The manner of my coming was my own choosing. But since I have been here your lordship must have seen for yourself my acts have been far from those of a spy."

De Proballe stepped forward and whispered eagerly to the Governor.

"Is that so, indeed? I hear that even now you have been seen making careful observations of our Castle and the fortifications. You can of course explain so singular and apt a curiosity? Apt, I mean, as fitting with the conduct of a spy."

"Are the soldiers of France forbidden even to look at the fortifications of Morvaix's famous Castle?"

"Spies are so forbidden, monsieur, and when detected are dealt with as you, being a soldier, will understand."

"I repeat, I am no spy."

"Then prove it so, by declaring who you are."

"I am accustomed to have my word accepted, monsieur," answered Gerard proudly.

The Governor was about to answer when de Proballe laid a hand on his arm and drew him to one side.

"Why not declare yourself, monsieur?" asked Gabrielle, half-hesitatingly, as the others drew out of earshot. "You little know the Duke if you think you can safely hold him at defiance thus."

"I am not concerned for what he may think or do, mademoiselle. It is you, and you only, whom I fear to have estranged. I deceived you. Can you forgive me?"

"You should not have done it, monsieur," she answered, dropping her eyes. "You—you shamed me."

"God forbid you should believe such a thought as that could have been in my heart."

"But I—I deemed you were my cousin. Oh, when I think of it, my face flames with humiliation."

"Then in all truth am I bitterly punished. But you must see how hardly I was placed. When I heard the blunt confession of all that was designed against you I knew not what to do. Hating myself for every act and word of compelled deception, yet I could not speak without— But of course, you must blame me."

"You could have told *me*, monsieur, if you had trusted me;" and the reproach in her eyes as she glanced up stung him so that he winced.

"And you read in me no more than mistrust?" he whispered.

"Monsieur!"

"And you think I have been untrue to you?"

"Monsieur!" This time with a little accent of pain, adding under her breath, "I trusted you so completely."

"And now?" His tone was as low as hers, and when she made no answer he said, "First your words stabbed me, now it is your silence."

She caught her breath and lifted and let fall her hand with a gesture of perplexity: a pathetic little sign of her distress.

"But you, too, are silent—still," she murmured, after a pause.

"And I was so sure of you." The softly spoken words stung her so that she winced at the implied reproach in them. The reproach was unmerited, and while repudiating the injustice she was both wistful and yet unwilling to let him see how his words hurt her.

"Why will you not speak and end the uncertainty?" she asked.

"For myself and for others I care nothing, as I say; but can *you* find no reason?"

"It is for me?" she cried quickly, with a swift glance and an involuntary thrill of delight. She had not doubted him; but the confirmation of her trust which seemed to come from the assurance that it was still for her he was acting thus, brought inexpressible comfort. If it was for her that he still ran the risks involved in maintaining silence, it could be for only one reason.

He had been acting a part, and yet not acting merely with her. The words he had spoken, the glances he had

cast, the thousand little acts and signs he had given while she had deemed him her cousin, had expressed real feeling. He had not looked on her as unmaidenly, but—and as the thought grafted itself more firmly upon her faith in him, the colour came flooding again to her cheeks, but from such different causes, and her eyes glowed.

"I thought——" she said, about to give impulsive utterance to her new belief, when she checked herself, looked up with a smile of sweet confusion, and then again dropped her eyes.

Gerard had watched her closely trying to read the perplexing changes of her manner, fearing from her constraint and silence that she was angered; but gathered hope fast when she smiled.

"I would give much to know that thought," he said, when she faltered.

"You must not keep silence and run this risk for me," she said slowly, keeping her eyes upon the ground.

"Am I forgiven the deception I practised?" he whispered.

"Was it not done because you deemed it best for— for all things?"

She had meant to say "for me," but the words hung on her lips so that she could not utter them.

"For all things, no," he answered pointedly, "for you, yes; for you only."

It was sweet hearing. Her heart beat fast and her bosom rose and fell quickly in agitation. But she could not look at him, could not let him see yet how deeply he had stirred her. She had passed one crisis of racking pain when she feared that she had mistaken him; and shrank now from even a chance of misjudgment.

"I believe that," she said simply after a pause.

"And I am forgiven?" he pressed, eager for her to look at him, that he might read in her sweet eyes the knowledge for which his heart was hungering.

"Yes." It was a whisper, no more; and still she kept her eyes down.

"And you trust me as ever?"

"I may?" she questioned in a whisper.

"As God is my judge you may," he answered with intense passion.

"Could I forgive if I did not trust?"

"Thank God for that trust."

She smiled and was lifting her face to meet his ardent gaze, when the Governor and de Proballe returned.

Neither Gerard nor Gabrielle had had eyes or ears for them in the minutes of absence; and had not noted how at first they had talked together and had then sent for the two men, Antoine de Cavannes and d'Estelle, and having questioned them, had once again conferred alone.

It was de Proballe who now took the chief part, and he approached Gerard with a bland smile upon his sallow face, and said, in a smooth even tone—

"My lord has now committed this matter to my hands, Gerard, as a family affair; and I am confident it can be easily arranged." Gerard noticed the use of his name and the familiar manner, and read in it at once some change of purpose.

"I do not wish your interference, monsieur, and recognize no right of yours to take any such part."

"I am acting solely in Gabrielle's interest. I have put it to the Duke that this matter can best be settled between us. You see, Gerard——"

"What do you mean by the use of that name to me?"

"Is not your name Gerard?" He put the question casually and with just the necessary accent of surprise.

"You must see how equivocal the position is."

"I desire to hold no intercourse with you, monsieur," replied Gerard coldly.

"You are really making a bad matter worse," and

de Proballe spread out his hands deprecatingly. "You are either Gerard de Cobalt or some one else. If the former, then this is a family matter which the Duke, in his love of justice and regard for the honour of our family, is willing to see arranged. But if the latter, then your conduct throughout is open to great suspicion. You came to the city secretly; you took part in our private affairs without the faintest warrant; you led a violent revolt against the Governor's soldiers; you have wounded one of his followers—most unjustifiably; you have forced your way into the Castle here and, if not actually a spy, have acted just as a spy would have acted; you have been watched and observed to be in long confidential conference with another stranger—some pestilent contumacious monk; and thus have so gravely compromised yourself as to strain the Duke's clemency beyond endurance."

"And all this harangue means—what?" asked Gerard, bluntly.

"That you are in a very ugly fix indeed, in which my influence with the Duke can only with difficulty assist you. The monk with whom you spoke has been placed in confinement."

"You are right in one thing, M. de Proballe: I can read in this your influence with the Governor. But those who know you best know that never yet did your influence harm those against whom it was directed nor help those for whom it was cast."

At this moment a servant approached Gabrielle with a request that she would go at once to the Duchess. She had been taken ill suddenly and had asked urgently for Gabrielle.

"I will come soon."

"You need not hesitate on account of me," said Gerard with a smile.

"These soldiers here," replied Gabrielle in a tone of

alarm, as she pointed to a number of men who showed in the doorways. "See. I fear danger."

"'Tis the hour for the change of guard, Gabrielle," said de Proballe.

"I will not go yet," she declared firmly.

"You cannot stay here, mademoiselle," interposed the Governor bluntly.

"I will report to you all that passes, Gabrielle," said de Proballe.

"I will not go," she repeated.

"I think you had better," urged Gerard.

"It must be as you will," said de Proballe, when she shook her head resolutely. "Now that the men are here they will see that no violence is done. Our Gerard is so hasty, such a fire-eater, that he might be tempted to some fresh rashness which would be fatal to all settlement. Wait," he said as if struck with a sudden thought. "It will serve the same purpose if you will give me your sword, Gerard."

"That I will never do," was the quick indignant response.

"To me then, monsieur," said the Governor, stepping forward.

"To no man, my lord."

"Then it must be taken from you;" and the Governor signed to the soldiers.

In a moment Gerard's blade was out.

"Do you realize what you are doing, and where you are?" cried de Proballe. "Drawing upon the Governor of Morvaix?"

"Who dares to lay a hand on me may look to himself. I see your plan, monsieur," said Gerard to de Proballe, with a bitter smile.

"Disarm him," commanded the Governor, his eyes flashing. "This is treason against the constituted ruler, monsieur."

"Gerard, Gerard!" cried Gabrielle in dire alarm.

"Come, Gabrielle, you must not interfere in this," and de Proballe seized her hand and drew her aside.

Gerard sprang forward to interfere, but the soldiers interposed and prevented him.

"Cut him down if he resists," was the Governor's command, implacably given.

For some moments the fierce unequal combat raged, and two of the soldiers being wounded, the others fell back for a moment.

"My lord, stop this fighting," cried Gabrielle, struggling to free herself from de Proballe's grasp.

At her voice Gerard turned and made as if to go to her, but the soldiers, seeing that his eyes were turned from them, chose the moment to rush in again and one of them sprang upon him from behind. Thus hampered he was soon overpowered by the number who attacked him, his sword was wrenched from his grasp, and he was led away a prisoner.

CHAPTER XV

A PRISONER

GABRIELLE witnessed the attack upon Gerard with almost breathless fear lest he should be wounded or even killed in the fight; but when she saw him led away a prisoner every feeling was merged in fierce hot resentment at the outrage.

De Proballe retained his hold of her until Gerard had been taken away, and the instant he released her she turned upon him in magnificent indignation, she drew herself to her full height and looked at him with eyes flashing with anger.

"You have shown me your true character at last, M. le Baron, and from this point our roads part, and we are strangers."

"I did it for your own good, Gabrielle," he said apologetically.

"You did it because I am only a woman. Were I a man you should pay the penalty here and now. But there are those in my household who will not tamely see me maltreated, and if you consult your safety you will avoid Malincourt. If you come there, I will have you driven from my door."

"You are very angry and therefore very unreasonable."

She turned her back upon him without a word more and approached the Governor.

"For the moment you have your way, M. le Duc; but the day has not yet dawned when the influence of my

house of Malincourt stands for naught in Morvaix. You have foully outraged an innocent and honourable man, and if I have to carry my appeal in person to the King of France, I will have justice done."

"I will see you later, mademoiselle, when your indignation has somewhat spent itself and you can better appreciate what has occurred."

"My indignation will never pass, my lord, until justice has been done."

"Justice will be done, mademoiselle; have no fear on that score. What you have witnessed is but the needful preliminary."

"What I mean is justice according to the laws of France, and not according to the Tyrant of Morvaix," she cried fearlessly.

"In your present mood, I have no more to say;" and with a bow he moved away, leaving Gabrielle free to go where she would.

Remembering the message which had been brought to her and eager to have some one to whom she could pour out the tale of her wrongs and on whose sympathy she could rely, Gabrielle went to the apartments of the Duchess.

The two men watched her go, both moved by widely different feelings. Each had been much disturbed by her outburst.

De Proballe, thinking naturally of himself, was disposed to regret the part he had taken. With the doors of Malincourt shut against him he saw the plans for his own future advancement in danger of collapse. He had meant to climb on Gabrielle's favour with the Duke to greater things. For this reason he had welcomed the change of plan which was to make her the Duke's wife, and had thrown himself readily into the attempts to ruin Gerard in her eyes. But if he was to be deprived of the prestige which the Malincourt influence afforded, he would be

left dependent only on his own wits and the Duke's favour; and what a shifting sand the latter was, he knew only too well.

But the Governor was scarcely less furious than Gabrielle herself, and never being inclined to blame himself laid the whole fault upon de Proballe.

Gabrielle's fierce resentment had shown the mistake of attacking Gerard in her presence; and the fact that he himself had given the orders only heightened his rage against de Proballe. He left the latter no reason to misunderstand his attitude.

"I am to be an outcast, it seems, because of this," said de Proballe, in as nonchalant an air as he could assume.

"When a man blunders as you have he has no cause to quarrel with the consequences," was the blunt reply.

"As for that, I am too old a hand to quarrel when the luck's against me. But what blunder do you mean?"

"Everything you have done."

"Umph! I might have expected it," exclaimed de Proballe, with a sharp glance at the Governor's angry face.

"It was your plan. Had I not listened to you, matters would have gone very differently. When you learnt that the man was another than this Gerard de Cobalt, you should have given me the information privately and have left me to act. But you must needs meddle in it your own way—and this is the result."

"Did I know you would bring Gabrielle down to listen to it all? The mischief is that the man was arrested before her eyes. All women are hysterical fools at such times. But at least it was not I who ordered your men to attack him."

"That is not true."

De Proballe's reply was a significant shrug of the shoulders.

"Do you mean to give me the lie, monsieur?" cried the Governor passionately.

"You had no hesitation about giving it me."

"You!" A sneer this, of ineffable contempt, and de Proballe winced and bit his lip as his sallow cheeks paled.

"I have tried to serve you in this," he murmured.

"You had your wages to earn, that is all. Even this man knew of your old character in Paris. Do you think I am ignorant of it?"

The taunt cut deep, but de Proballe forced down his temper and answered with a laugh.

"Put not your faith in princes," he said, lightly. "If you mean that having first used me and now abused me you have no further need of my services, say so, and we'll make an end of things."

"I have no use for blunderers like you," declared the Duke, sullenly.

"Grant that a blunder has been made—as of course it has—and say if you like that I made it; whether is it better to waste time in wrangling over it or to see how to repair it?" He paused a moment to note how this was taken, and then added: "At least you have the man safe under bolts and bars."

"And in doing it have changed your niece's passive resistance into active violent hatred."

"Oh, if it comes to that, it would never have been a love match on her side;" and he laughed.

"To hell with your sneers," cried the Governor fiercely.

"Life's too sour a thing to be taken so seriously. I meant no taunt; no more than a fact. You would have had to force it; and will have to do no more now. Her rage will cool. As I say, you have the man and can treat him at will, either as the scamp de Cobalt or the spy I was able to prove him. Give her some few hours to think over his danger, and then see how far she'll be ready to go to save his life."

"Who can the fellow be?" De Proballe took heart

at the question. He was not going to be thrown overboard at once; and he answered with gathering assurance.

"Nay, rather, what does it matter who he is? He came here as Gerard de Cobalt; he owned it to me; I can swear to that. Treat him as no other. I called him by his name that your people might hear; what I said to you before the arrest stands as good now as then—deal with him for that murder at Cambrai. You have him tight enough by that rope and can answer his repudiation by simply disbelieving it and regarding it as made when he found himself in a mess. Gerard de Cobalt he was, and Gerard de Cobalt I should let him remain."

"But who is he? And what does he here?"

"Have you no persuasive methods in this Castle of yours? I have heard that many a prisoner has before now been led to confess his crime and so save an infinite amount of trouble in collecting proofs."

"My mind misgives me," murmured the Governor uneasily.

"Ah, that's Gabrielle's influence;" and de Proballe smiled, not pleasantly. "This is no woman's work, Duke." He felt that his words were beginning to have influence again.

"But if he be, as I suspect, a spy, in what interest is he here?"

"Even spies can be induced to speak in old Pierre's chamber. Have him placed there, and you and I can visit him later."

"Do I seek your advice where to place my prisoners?" asked the Governor, angrily. "But I will have him sent there," he added, after a pause.

"Ah!" and de Proballe smiled again cunningly. "All will soon be well again, then, and this little mistake made good. Few men can long resist the creaking arguments of the rack."

The Governor was silent long enough for de Proballe to think of another scheme.

"There is, of course, another way. The lever you have with Gabrielle is this precious fellow's life and safety, and if he chanced to get maimed in the progress of inquiry, she would take it very ill. Promise her his life if she will consent to marry you at once. Then send him out of the city—with an escort. Escorts have been known to quarrel with their charges before now," he added drily. "This man, if he be in truth a spy, may be dangerous. There is that monk, too, who should also be put to the question. Perchance he knows all that you need to learn."

"I had forgotten him."

"I had not, and one man is as good as another when it comes to getting information. Leave this to me, Duke. I shall not blunder again. Meanwhile, you can go to Gabrielle with a free hand, to give her any assurances she may ask."

"We will speak of it later; I must think," said the Governor.

De Proballe looked after him as he walked away, and laughed softly to himself. "What a cauldron of trouble does this plaguery love brew for us fools of mortals!" he muttered. "Here are the whole affairs of a city tumbled topsy-turvy, hither-thither, because Gabrielle has a pretty face and yonder sour-visaged loon is sick to kiss it. Aye, aye, and blood will flow too, and men's pates will be cracked and their throats slit before his heart ceases to ache, or I am no reader of signs; and 'twill be luck more than judgment that will carry one safe through the hurly-burly."

Meanwhile Gabrielle had carried her storm of wrath to the Duchess and had poured out her story with half-incoherent vehemence until her friend, whose sudden faintness had been invented by de Proballe as a lure to get Gabrielle away, was like to be overcome in truth.

But even a girl's wrath, however righteous, cannot last for ever; and thus in time Gabrielle's began to abate

its hurricane force, and gradually her furious indignation hardened into a stern determination to secure Gerard's freedom and to thwart and punish those who had so maltreated him.

"You have been so vehement, child, I could scarce understand you," said the Duchess. "I know how it eases trouble to give it free vent; and so I would not interrupt to get you to clear the tangled skeins for me. But now let us see what we can do."

"I am nearly mad when I think of it," cried Gabrielle. "If this shameful deed is not prevented, I believe I shall go mad indeed. If aught of harm comes to him, I will spend my life in avenging him."

"But now tell me, who is he?"

"I do not know nor do I care. For me he is the best, the bravest, and the noblest man that ever lived."

The Duchess smiled, but did not let Gabrielle see the smile. She loved the girl dearly, and her heart was still young enough to sympathize even with such a rhapsody. But the contrast between this whirlwind mood and Gabrielle's former calm and unmoved indifference to all men, and especially to all lovers, was too startling not to appeal to her.

"He should have proclaimed himself, Gabrielle, and then all this trouble might have been spared." This was good common sense, but love and youth are contemptuous of common sense. To Gabrielle it savoured of distrust of Gerard.

"He did rightly. He could not do wrong, Duchess," she cried. "His motive was nobleness itself. We drove him into assuming my cousin's part; he did it for my sake and mine only; and he could not make himself known in his own name until he had justified himself in my eyes. You would not have had him do otherwise. I would not, not for a thousand worlds."

"It would have been less romantic, but very much

simpler, my dear child," was the practical reply, very kindly spoken. "But we have to deal with the matter as it stands. Tell me why did the Duke have him placed under arrest?"

"For no cause except—oh, I burn with shame when I think of it. The Duke believes that he cares for me."

"And doesn't he?" she asked all innocently, mistaking Gabrielle.

"Don't you understand?" exclaimed Gabrielle, quickly. "I mean the Duke himself; he—he forced the words on me after I saw you to-day. Oh, it is shameful."

"Gabrielle, it is a terrible charge you are bringing."

"It is the truth; and in such a pass as this, nothing less than the truth will serve. If it is terrible merely to speak of, what is it actually to do it? Gerard's life is in danger because he loves me and I love him. That is the infamy of it all."

For some moments her friend made no reply.

"I cannot believe it, Gabrielle," she said at length, in a voice of such pain that Gabrielle turned and threw herself at her side and kissed her.

"Forgive me, dearest friend, oh, forgive me. I did not think what I was saying. In my mad selfish sorrow I forgot the suffering I was causing you."

"This then was the reason why he urged me to-day. I understand now. It comes as the last of many wrongs, the crown of so many sorrows;" and a deep and bitter sigh escaped her.

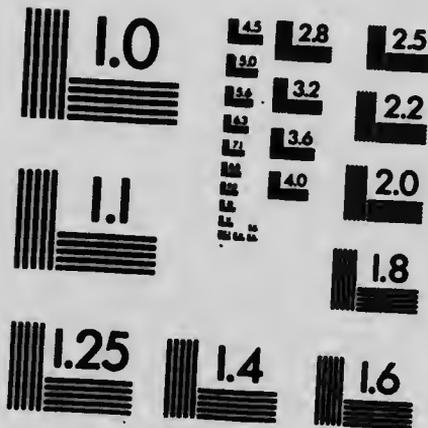
"Forgive me, dearest and truest, forgive me," whispered Gabrielle.

"It is not you need seek forgiveness, Gabrielle—and he need never ask it. He hid this from me, pleading every other ground—policy, expediency, the good of the people, the needs of Morvaix—anything and everything but this. Ah, Gabrielle, the bitterest hour of a woman's life is when she wakens to the knowledge that her worst enemy is her own husband."



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"My dearest, my dearest," murmured Gabrielle. "I am so sorry."

"No, Gabrielle, we will not grieve, we will act. Together we will plan and save your lover, be he true man or false: for false a man may always be."

"Not Gerard. Never!"

"In God's mercy we will hope not, for your sweet sake. For though he be true as steel, yet is he in a sorry plight; and we, you and I together, sweetheart, will save him. We must first get him out of the Castle and the task may test our wits. Think, child, think; don't waste time in useless repinings over the inevitable. We have work to do."

"I knew I could rely on you," said Gabrielle.

"First we must find out where they have bestowed him. Pauline can do this. She is old Pierre's daughter—you know how together we saved her from ruin—and she will serve us both to the death; and so too will her father. Call her, and she will be at hand."

Gabrielle hastened away to return in a minute with the maid.

"Pauline, we are going to trust you," said the Duchess. "You will be faithful, I know; and will do what we need cleverly and secretly—for Mademoiselle de Malincourt's sake as well as mine."

"With all my heart, miladi," answered the girl, a bright-eyed shrewd brunette.

"There has been an arrest in the Castle, within the past hour or so, of a M. de Cobalt. Go and find out where he has been bestowed. Your father can tell you. No one else must know that I have even asked. And be quick."

"You give me hope already," said Gabrielle, as the girl left.

"I will do more than that; child, I will give you your lover. I am feeble and bedridden, but not yet helpless.

As soon as we know where he is, we will have a plan to set him free. I know the secrets of every cell in the Castle; and unless he has been placed in one of the underground dungeons of the keep, there is not one I cannot help him out of."

Their impatience and anxiety made the interval before Pauline's return seem long; but when she came, she had done her errand well and brought the expected news.

"The gentleman is placed in one of the cells in my father's ward, miladi," she said, "and very strict orders have been given as to his close watching."

"Which cell, Pauline?" The girl's eyes signalled trouble at the question.

"Oh, miladi," she exclaimed, distressfully. "He was at first placed elsewhere and has just been moved by the Governor's orders into the—the turret cell." She shuddered as she mentioned it and glanced toward Gabrielle who noticed the look and the gesture.

"What is the turret cell?" she asked. Pauline bit her lips and was silent.

"A place from which he must be rescued, Gabrielle, as soon as we can form the plan;" and the Duchess warned Pauline with a glance to be silent. "While the daylight lasts nothing is possible; but as soon as darkness falls the attempt must be made. Pauline, you must go to your father again, and tell him from me that no harm must befall this prisoner, and that at the least sign of danger, notice must be brought to me. The escape must be managed to-night; and say that later I will send full instructions how he is to act. If he can offer a suggestion, let him send it by you. I will protect him from the Duke's anger."

"My father would give his life for you, miladi," said Pauline earnestly, and hurried from the room again.

"Have no fear, Gabrielle, your lover shall be free to-night. We can get him from the cell where he lies; but

it is more difficult to get him from the Castle. Yet where can he remain until the chance offers? Come, child, let us set our woman's wits to work."

"What is this turret cell that both you and Pauline were afraid even to mention to me? I saw the looks that passed between you."

The Duchess paused for a moment and thought anxiously.

"You had best know, perhaps, Gabrielle, for you may have to use the secrets of the place. It is the place which you may have heard called the 'Tiger's Den.' A place of devilish contrivances where prisoners are put to the question and where many dark deeds have been done."

"Do you mean they would dare to torture him?" cried Gabrielle.

"I tell you merely that you may know the urgency of the matter. But diabolical as the place is, it may yet serve our purpose better than another. It stands high up in the north turret, and its one barred window overlooks the courtyard, sixty feet below. Death waits for the unhappy prisoner who thus seeks escape; and many a man has gone that way to his death. But with a stout rope, a clever climber can reach the bottom safely; yes, yes, I have the idea," she cried. "Let me think."

"Tell me. I am on fire."

"One devilment of the place is this. A part of the wall with the portion of the floor next to it is false. On this the prisoner's pallet is laid; and when the wretched man is asleep the floor and the wall together can be turned outward with sudden swiftness by the hidden mechanism, and the sleeper is shot out and down to his death on the stones below. The wall is then replaced and by another hidden trick the bars of the windows are made to appear as if wrenched from their places, and thus the suggestive evidence is ready to show that the prisoner has killed himself in an attempt to escape."

"Can such things be possible?"

"There is no limit to man's cruelty to man, child; we can use this window trick for our end. I can tell you how to find the spring that moves the bars; you can take to your prisoner such a rope as would enable him to escape, open the bars, leave the rope dangling from the casement to suggest he has so fled; and then bring him here, where he can lie hid until we can find means to smuggle him out of the Castle and Morvaix."

"Would God it were dark already," exclaimed Gabrielle eagerly. "Till the time comes, the seconds will be as hours."

At that moment they were interrupted and news was brought that Lucette was asking for Gabrielle.

CHAPTER XVI

PASCAL AND THE SPY

LUCETTE'S visit to the Castle in quest of Gabrielle was the result of several causes which had important bearing upon the position.

In the first place Gerard's plan to send a second messenger in hot haste to Cambrai, urging his cousin in command of the Bourbon troops there to hurry on to Morvaix, had been delayed. The messenger had been stopped at the city gate.

Pascal, in his monk's garb, was present and had been greatly disconcerted and not a little alarmed by the mischance. If it meant nothing more serious it must involve delay. The message must be despatched somehow, that was certain, because everything depended upon the troops being brought up at the earliest opportunity.

To attempt this in the daylight seemed impracticable; since the messenger would have to drop from the walls at some favouring point, and the cover of darkness was necessary for such a venture. Moreover, a spot would have to be found where the thing could be done; and neither Pascal nor any of his men knew enough of the city to select one. There was, further, the imminent risk that the courier, being on foot, might be intercepted and so the whole plan fail.

But in this dilemma, help came most unexpectedly. A stranger accosted Pascal, and recognizing him as the monk who had stood between the citizens and the crowd

in the market place, offered his assistance. He was, he said, the brother of Babillon the smith, the murdered man.

After a few pointed questions Pascal decided to accept his help, and left him in the care of his men, while he made fresh plans. He resolved that two couriers should go to Cambrai by separate paths, each carrying a despatch; and in view of the grave risks he decided to be one of them.

He returned accordingly to Malincourt, in his character of servant, to find Gerard and get the despatch duplicated; but on learning that Gerard was still at the Castle, he assumed once more his monk's garb and went after him.

The news that met him greatly increased his uneasiness. Both Gerard and Dubois had been arrested by the Duke, for what reason no one knew for certain, although it was rumoured that his assumed character had been discovered. Pascal knew enough to guess more, and he was not long in deciding how to act.

It was clear that with both Gerard and Dubois in confinement he himself could not leave the city and could not get a second despatch from Gerard; and, further, that without waiting for the cover of darkness a courier must be got out of the city at once.

He could act very promptly at need, and he did so now. He added a letter to the leader at Cambrai telling him what had befallen Gerard and urging the utmost haste; and wrote two other despatches for d'Alembert describing the situation. By the aid of Babillon two men were despatched at once from different points with orders to procure horses at the earliest moment after getting free of the city and to ride with all speed to Cambrai; and he impressed upon both that the life of their young lord might depend upon their zeal. The third despatch two carefully picked men were to carry, and were not to start until dark had fallen.

The next problem was the much more difficult one of getting Gerard out of the Governor's hands. This must be done by force if necessary and in the last resort; and a place must be provided to which he could be brought, where a stand could be made with some hope of holding the Governor at bay until d'Alembert could reach the city with the troops.

Malincourt was obviously the best place for such a stand. It was strongly built, had ample room for the necessary force of men, and was sure to contain a store of provisions which could be increased without any suspicion being raised. Moreover, he believed there were arms there.

He instructed the men in the city, therefore, to go in their monk's gabardines and purchase each for himself enough provision for three days, on the plea that they were setting out on a pilgrimage on the morrow; after which they were to remain in readiness for a summons to meet him at any hour.

Having the first steps arranged, he returned to Malincourt, omitting in his haste to put off his monk's gown. He meant to see Gabrielle and tell her plainly what his plans were, and consult with her as to the best means of rescuing Gerard and Dubois.

Here came a check, however. Gabrielle was not at the maison; and as he stood in the great hall considering how he could best find her, he was seen by Jacques Dauban. The spy had been sent back to Malincourt by de Proballe to fetch away certain papers which now, that the maison was shut to him, were too incriminating to be left there.

It was Dauban who had carried the news to the Governor's Castle that Gerard was not really de Cobalt, and having been a witness of Dubois' arrest, was struck by the fact that another monk, of the same order apparently, should be found at Malincourt. Scenting a mystery he resolved to follow it up.

Pascal, unwilling to be recognized in his disguise, would have avoided him, but Dauban made this impracticable, and thus Pascal was reduced to the device of drawing his cowl close so as to hide his features so far as possible.

"Give you gooden, good father?" began Dauban.

"*Pax vobiscum*, son," replied Pascal, deepening and altering his voice.

"Can I help you, father? I am of the household here—the secretary."

"Then truly you may. I have a message I would deliver to miladi of Malincourt, and would have speech with her."

"I know her business well and am high in her confidence. Is it a matter of urgency? I am even now on my way to her."

"Could you get to her at once, or deliver a letter secretly?"

"That would be easy enough—the letter I mean."

"Can I trust you?" Dauban met the piercing eyes fixed on him through the close drawn cowl, as if in suspicion, and answered as he thought with cunning frankness.

"That must be as you please. Miladi herself does. But you must decide quickly, for she waits for me."

The monk appeared to hesitate and glancing round lowered his tone.

"Do you know aught of this business of the so-called Gerard de Cobalt?"

"Not so loud, father. I know of his arrest and am even now engaged in the task of procuring his release." It was a clever lie and seemed to impose on the monk.

"Good," he said. "Lead me where I can write. Life and death depend on your good faith."

"Follow me," said Dauban, and led the way to de Proballe's apartments. On the way they chanced to meet

Lucette, who looked at the pair with curious eyes. Wondering what Dauban could be doing in such company, she followed at a distance and resolved to watch.

"Are we alone here?" asked Pascal.

"Quite. You need have no fear on that score."

"Those doors—are they locked? If not, lock them and bring the keys here."

All unsuspecting and wishing to win his companion's confidence, Dauban did so and laid the keys on the table before him. As if still doubting, Pascal glanced round the room for himself, taking advantage of the minute to loose his habit stealthily.

"Paper, monsieur," he said, and while Dauban's back was toward him he slipped off his habit and laughed.

At his laugh Dauban turned, and the colour fled from his face in the fright of the recognition.

"Now, Master Spy, we will have a little talk and an understanding," said Pascal. "Sit down there," pointing to a seat, "and if you give but one faint sign of resistance, I'll first break half the bones in your body up here, and then pitch you from the casement yonder for the courtyard stones to break the other half."

The spy sat staring open-eyed and agape at him, cursing himself for his blindness in not having recognized Pascal; and cudgelling his wits how to get out of the trap into which he had walked, and in abject fear for himself.

"You thought to trap me, Master Spy, and instead I've trapped you. Now understand, I'm in too dangerous a mood to bear any trifling and am in desperate haste. Do all I tell you and do it at once, and answer my questions plainly, and you'll save your life; but try to fool me and—well, I've told you what I'll do, and I'm a man of my word."

"I've no desire——"

"Silence, till I bid you speak. This is your master's

room and you are in his confidence. You know the part he has played in all this business about M. de Cobalt. Find at once and give to me every paper that concerns it."

"I know nothing, monsieur, I swear; and there are no papers. I'll swear it on the holy crucifix."

"If you keep me dallying in this way the next cath you take about it will be in hell," growled Pascal sternly.

"I declare on my soul——" But before he could say more Pascal had him by the throat and shook him till his teeth rattled and the stars came out in myriads in the firmament of his dazed sight.

"Now perhaps you're frightened enough to tell the truth," he cried, with a fierce oath, as he flung him back on the seat. The spy fell doubled up against the table and as Pascal jerked him up again he heard the crackle of papers under his doublet.

"So you have them on you, you sly devil, have you? Strip, to the skin, and let me see what's there. If I play valet for you you'll find little play in it, on my oath."

"I'll tell you all, monsieur," gasped Dauban, faintly.

"Let me but get my breath."

"I want no more of your lies. Give me the papers."

"They are there," and Dauban pointed to a desk.

"Thank you, master liar, but first I'll have those on you. Quick or——" and another threatening gesture finished the sentence.

Slowly and with a groan of anguish, Dauban took out some of the papers he had concealed in his clothes, and laid them on the table.

"The rest," said Pascal, putting these out of the spy's reach. "Strip and don't try my temper farther, or I'll not answer for myself."

Trembling so that his aching teeth chattered, Dauban obeyed the command; and as each garment was drawn off Pascal examined it for any concealed documents, and a quick glance at what he found showed him the nature

and value of his discovery. He had the proofs not only of de Proballe's infamy but also of the Duke's complicity in everything.

"Now open these places and, while I search, put on your clothes again. Quick!" he thundered.

Then Dauban formed a plan. Terror-stricken though he was, he had yet sense to reflect that he could never face his master with such a confession. He donned his clothes rapidly and going to the cupboard said—

"There is a secret hiding place here, monsieur."

But Pascal was as sharp as a dagger's point, and on the instant detected a change of tone, and was ready for a trick.

"Open it," he said, curtly, and without turning his head shifted his position just sufficiently to watch the spy. Dauban made a pretence of opening some secret recess and Pascal saw him snatch up something and conceal it.

"It is open, monsieur," said the spy.

"Good. Fright makes a ready servant of you," replied Pascal; and as if unsuspecting of treachery, crossed the room turning his back to give the spy his chance.

With a quick stealthy rush Dauban sprang forward only to find himself foiled, his uplifted right hand caught in a grip of iron, the weapon taken from it and himself pinned against the wall with fingers of steel playing on his windpipe and Pascal's eyes gleaming close to his. He wriggled and fought with the strength of despair; but the air was shut from his lungs, his sight grew blurred, a blood red mist surged about him, and then all was dark with the darkness of death.

"The sly treacherous devil," murmured Pascal, as he let the inert helpless body of the spy slip to the ground. "Who'd have thought he'd even enough pluck for such a thing?"

What to do with him was a difficulty, however. Pascal

had already lost time which could ill be spared and having had one experience of Dauban's cleverness in slipping out of his bonds, he was loth to trust again to mere cords.

A hurried search of the room offered no solution, and for the moment there seemed nothing for it save the desperate step of plunging the knife into his heart. He had earned death by his last murderous attack, and Pascal picked up the weapon; but he shrank from the deed, and with the object of obtaining the assistance of some of the household, he opened the door.

In the corridor he found Lucette strolling near the room with an assumed air of indifference. On seeing him she made as if to hurry away, and he called her.

"Mademoiselle, you must help me," he said, somewhat brusquely and with a touch of command in his tone.

"Where is the monk, monsieur?" she asked, shrinking from him, "and Jacques Dauban? What is the meaning of that knife?" and she pointed at the knife which unwittingly he retained in his hand.

"I am the monk, mademoiselle. For God's sake don't run off in that way." He turned and tossed the knife back into the room. "Did you think I had murdered myself and with an unstained knife?" he asked, and smiled. "I am here on M. de Cobalt's business and miladi of Malincourt's, and I must have help."

Reassured by his tone she returned then.

"What has happened?" she asked.

"That which may help to straighten all this devil of a tangle. I have tricked that spy of de Proballe's and pinched half the life out of him, and must have help to get him safely caged. He proved too slippery for me once before."

"I don't understand."

"I'll show you;" and he opened the door so that she saw Dauban.

"Is he dead?" she asked, shrinking again.

"He would be if he had his deserts."

"But what does it all mean?"

"Such a cauldron of troubles as the devil loves to set a-bubbling, mademoiselle. M. Gerard de Cobalt has been found to be not Gerard de Cobalt and the Governor has clapped him into one of his Castle cells; this cur here and his mangy master are at the bottom of it—I have just laid hands on the written proofs of their part. I have had a busy afternoon and am in search of Mademoiselle de Malincourt, and must find her at once. I have no time to fill in the details for you; so smother your curiosity and just say if you will help me?"

"You have a commanding way with you, monsieur, for a serving man," cried Lucette with a smile.

"I am no serving man, but just a soldier; and by your leave have no time for badinage. There is much to be done, and talk must wait on action. I want irons and a guard for this carrion here. Can they be got in the maison? If not, I must take the knife to him, much as I dislike it. But his babbling tongue must be silenced, or we shall all be in peril."

"You would not kill him in cold blood?" cried Lucette, with a look of horror.

"I would kill any one and any thing that stood between me and my master's safety."

"I can get what you need," she said, and hurried away, to return quickly with a couple of men with manacles. Pascal gave them his orders, and placing the gyves on Dauban's wrists—none too gently, for the spy was hated by every one—they carried him away.

"Now, mademoiselle, you must find a place of security for these," said Pascal, giving Lucette the papers. "De Proballe may come in search of his precious spy, and he must not find these, nor must any one know aught of the spy's whereabouts. If my advice be followed I would clap the master in the next cellar to this man; but that

as you please. Now, how to find Mademoiselle de Malincourt?"

"She is still at the Governor's Castle. You can seek her there."

"Nay, by your leave, that can I do only in the last extreme. Suspicion is all over the place, and if they were to clap me by Dubois' side there would be more to pay than we can just now afford."

"Dubois? Who is he?"

"Another of this Governor's prisoners, and while he's in I must keep out. Will you go to miladi?"

"Of course I will. What shall I tell her?"

"That the liberty and perhaps the lives of the prisoners depends upon her seeing me instantly."

"Who shall I say you are?"

"Say what you like—that I am close in my master's confidence and have a plan for liberating him, if she will but come to me quickly."

It was this conversation which sent Lucette hurrying in hot haste to seek Gabrielle at the Castle, while Pascal employed the time of her absence in examining Malincourt with an eye to putting it in the best condition of defence.

CHAPTER XVII

GABRIELLE PLEADS

GABRIELLE heard Lucette's story with intense interest, and saw that with help from Pascal outside it might be possible to get Gerard away from Morvaix, without concealing him first in the Duchess's apartments; and she resolved to go immediately to Malincourt to consult with Pascal.

But she found the Duchess opposed to this.

"If you go and then return to me, Gabrielle, it may provoke notice and start suspicion."

"But I must see Pascal," she urged.

"Then safer to see him here. Let him come as if to me. I have frequent messengers from friends; and his coming will cause no talk. He can come as with a message, say, from the Count and Countess d'Auvaine, and no questions will be asked."

"He is known to some in the Castle. M. de Proballe, for instance, and others; and recognition would be ruin."

"It would be worse, child, if a watch were set on yourself and so the way to the prison quarters blocked. If this gentleman is loath to risk coming here, let it be known that you are staying with me for a few days—as you have done before—and let Lucette carry your messages. There is reason for her passing to and fro, as you will need many things for your stay here."

"You are right; I will go and tell Lucette."

She was about to leave when Pauline returned.

She had seen her father, she said, and he had readily agreed to do anything that was asked of him. He ad-

vised that the best hour for making any attempt would be about ten o'clock at night; as the guard would be changed at eleven, and they were always less vigilant in their last hour of their watch.

"My father says there will be a great risk, miladi," said Pauline; "and urges the utmost caution. He declares it will be far safer for all concerned if the prisoner makes his escape by the window and avoids the hazard of encountering any of the soldiers or servants in attempting to leave by any other way."

"It could be done," said Gabrielle, readily, "now that this Pascal can help from outside. I will send him word by Lucette of the time, and tell him to find means of getting to the courtyard."

She hurried to Lucette and told her the plan and the reasons why it was not deemed prudent for her to leave the Duchess, and they were discussing this when the Governor entered.

"You will know what I shall need for a few days, Lucette," said Gabrielle, with a swift warning glance; "and if I have forgotten anything in my haste, you can bring it or even return for it. How is Denys?"

"Much improved, but very weak, of course, and fretting at his weakness."

"I wish to speak with you, mademoiselle," interposed the Governor.

"I am remaining some days with the Duchess, monsieur, and am sending instructions in regard to matters at Malincourt."

"That is good news; it is as I would have it."

"One thing more, Lucette, and the most important of all—M. de Proballe is not to be allowed to enter the maison until my return."

"That is a harsh injunction, mademoiselle."

"I am the mistress of Malincourt, my lord, and am firmly resolved on the point."

"I shall hope to change that resolve amongst others," he replied, as Lucette went away. "It is for that I wish to speak with you."

Gabrielle made no reply for the moment. The storm of her indignation against the Duke had passed, as he noticed with satisfaction; but he could not read her present mood; and mistook a deliberate intention to outwit him for a readiness to listen with some complacency to the alternatives he had come to propose. The hope of setting Gerard free spurred her woman's wit to the utmost. She was, indeed, ready enough to listen to him, schooling her temper and keeping it under control, so as to learn his plans. She was fighting the cause of the man she loved against the man she hated with hate incapable; and she would fight warily and coolly, with every weapon in her armoury, and with a full knowledge of all the danger that might follow a false step.

"I have spoken with your uncle."

"He is no longer kin of mine, my lord," she interposed, coldly. "He has wronged me beyond endurance."

"Well, with M. de Proballe then, and have convinced myself that he has had no motive save that of serving your best interests."

"As head of my house, monsieur, it is for me to say whom I count upon my side and whom I deem against me. Never again will I speak to or see M. de Proballe. I hold him for my worst enemy."

"And what of me?" he asked quickly.

"You have done a bitter injustice and a cruel wrong to an innocent and gallant gentleman—but it is in your power to repair it. Will you speak the word that will undo it?"

"Innocent?" he carped. "Was it innocent to steal among us in a false name and character. Was it gallant to act such a lie?"

"He was forced into it."

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"How forced and by whom?"

"Need we pretend that we do not know?"

"I do not know," he replied bluntly. "Who is he, if he be not indeed this de Cobalt? I have clear proof that he was spying in the Castle here. If he be not de Cobalt, then is he a spy. Am I to suffer my Castle to be overrun by spies?"

"He is no spy; of that I am assured."

"Then if an honest man, why this mystery?"

Gabrielle knew the reason, recalling with a little thrill of delight how he had said it was for her sake; but she answered—

"Is every honest man who comes to Morvaix to be treated as a spy and thrown like a dog into a prison cell?"

"If you were Governor here you would see this as I do; but I am indeed almost persuaded that he is still only deceiving us."

"I do not understand."

"I believe he is in truth what he avowed himself at the first—Gerard de Cobalt."

"But you yourself and M. de Proballe held it disproved."

"The letter may have been but a trick, like other things. He had deceived us as to the flagrancy of that act of his at Cambrai; and knowing it to be too vile to be pardoned, had this further lie enacted, meaning to pass for some one else and so save his head. But he will not save it."

"You mean he will be tried for the crime?"

"I mean he'll lose his head for it," was the blunt answer.

"You will not do this foul injustice," said Gabrielle, with a touch of indignation.

"Who murders, dies, mademoiselle; that at least is law all over France; and Morvaix is no city of shelter."

"He must not die; you cannot be so cruel." Half pro-

test, half entreaty was in her tone; and the Governor paused and bent his eyes upon her before he replied.

"For your sake more than any other's, it is best that he should."

"I do not understand you," cried Gabrielle, with a catch of the breath as in fear.

"He has impressed you so deeply that, were his life spared and his liberty given to him, you would never be safe from him. He is a murderer, a man of the vilest life, who would never cease to persecute you, after what has passed."

There was an even deeper depth of vileness in this man than she had deemed, was Gabrielle's thought; and for a moment it cost her a supreme effort to remain calm. But the thought of Gerard's peril came to her aid.

"Do you mean you would kill him out of consideration for me?" she asked, as if incredulous.

"I would do anything for you—either kill or pardon, but you will not let me," he answered, with the first touch of passion.

He had led round to his object cunningly; but not so cunningly that she did not understand him.

"Yet I *may* ask you," she replied. "Prove to me his unworthiness first; and then——" she stopped.

"What then?"

"You cannot prove it, monsieur," she cried, as though she had first wavered in her faith and then rallied it. And so he read her words. "He is what I have said, an innocent and gallant gentleman."

"If he be Gerard de Cobalt he is a murderer of the vilest and most treacherous type. I have the fullest proofs."

"But if he be not M. de Cobalt?"

"Then he has shown himself a spy; and spies when they are caught must take their chances. But he is more than a spy."

"How?"

"He has deceived you with specious lies, has won upon you until the scene below to-day showed your feelings. You are the head of a noble house, mademoiselle, whose influence here in Morvaix is too great to be at the mercy of either a treacherous scoundrel or a hireling spy. And while you remain unmarried and at his mercy, because of your gentle trustful heart and of the feeling he has stirred within you, such a man cannot be at large. The interests of all in Morvaix render it impossible."

"Again you make the strange suggestion that this is done for my sake," said Gabrielle.

"And it is true, Gabrielle. Were it not for you, the prisoner might go free this moment." Every word spoken was now chosen to bring him nearer to his object.

"But if he be the unworthy man you say, do you hold me for a thing too feeble and weak to withstand his evil influence?"

"Worthy or base, it is as I say. His freedom rests on you."

"In plainer words?"

"Consent to do as I have asked you, and the man's fate is for you to determine. As my wife, Gabrielle, your lightest wish would be my law."

"And if I still refuse?"

His answer was a shrug of the shoulders and a lifting of the hands. He looked for another storm to burst; and was surprised when Gabrielle remained quiet, cold and thoughtful. He read the sign to be favourable to him. Hitherto she would not even listen. He felt the strength of the weapon he wielded, and was glad.

She paused as if in deep distress and fear, and sighed as she asked—

"Do you think such a union as you suggest could

bring happiness to either of us, or having such a beginning could end in aught but ruin to all?"

"I love you, Gabrielle; that will suffice for all," he declared passionately.

"Spare me that, I beg of you," she cried quickly and very earnestly. "When you spoke of this to me before, I answered you out of my indignation. I am cooler now; but can you not think how such a declaration sounds to me? It is not one jot less terrible because I school myself to listen without temper. Can you not feel what treachery it is to my dearest friend, your wife—surely the purest wife ever given to a man?"

"She is willing for our marriage to be dissolved."

"Does that make my treachery to her less ignoble? If the thing stood on any other ground than where you put it by these words, it would still be wrong—a cruel, cowardly wrong to her; but to plead for it no more than mere passion, is to clothe it with its vilest dress."

"There are other reasons—many," he said sullenly. "You wish to wield influence in the rule of the people; I give you a chance. 'Twas but yesterday I put the matter so to you."

"The baseness of the act is not lessened by wrapping it about with specious pleas. And I will be frank with you; for frankness in such a crisis is best. I could never feel to you as a wife should feel toward her husband. The shame of this wrong to my friend would ever be a canker to blight all other thoughts, and make my life—our lives—one lengthened monotone of remorse and pain."

"I would leave that issue to time and my love. You did not think thus until within the last few hours."

"I will deal with you frankly, as I said. I understand you; and in some part you are right. I love this man who is in your power. I believe him good and true and noble; I am not ashamed of my love. Love

comes to every woman at some time in her life, and she is powerless to resist it. That is our nature. This has come to me. Could I then wed another man while yet the love for him burns like a fever, filling my heart with thoughts of him, gladdening it with hopes for him; and forming already more, far more, than half my life?"

"You are frank, as you say; but such frankness is ill hearing."

"If it be ill to hear me speak of it—and I am calm enough to speak without temper and say this not to anger but to prevail with you—if it be ill for you to hear me speak of it, what would it be in the after time to live ever with the knowledge of it? Think you that happiness lies that way? You with the knowledge that my heart is given to another man; I with the bitterness of remorse for the wrong you would have me do, relieved only by the ever aching sorrow of a broken heart?"

"I wish to hear no more."

"Nay, but you must hear me. Only a coward would shut his ears to the truth; and you at least are no coward. You have not thought what kind of thing this really is that you would do. Were I to wed you as you now wish, we should grow to hate one another. Your passion would cool and you would come to feel the bitterness of the mistake, the galling yoke of the load on your life and would look on me as the cause."

"You little know me, Gabrielle."

"Then at least I know myself. I am but a girl and very human; and in the long dark hours of my misery and unavailing remorse, my spirit, unbroken—for we Malincourts are not easily broken—would revolt against you as the cause. Would yours be happier? Have you thought what life would be to be mated with a woman who hated you, as we Malincourts can hate?"

"I love you. I think of naught else," he said doggedly.

"Love! Love! What sort of love is that which would

blight and destroy the object that has kindled it? What is it in me you think you love? My face? My form? Would these retain their comeliness in your eyes when you knew that beneath them burnt the fire of hate? When I could never suffer you, without a shudder, even to look into my eyes? When at your approach you found me shrink; when your lightest touch would seem to be repugnant? Oh, put this cowardice away from you, and understand the truth as it is. If there be this feeling for me that you deem, have courage to see that it is wrong and evil. If it were love it would be selfless, and you would seek my happiness, not your own mere desires. The flame will burn out and die down; and if you will but act as a man should act, you will grow to hate the thing you now desire, and thank me for having kept you true to a man's better part."

"Do you mean you would have me see you marry this man? I would see you dead sooner. And he shall die," he cried fiercely. "My mind is made up. If you will not save him, his blood will be on your head."

Gabrielle had not hoped to move him, and his decision stirred no surprise. She had pleaded urgently and sweetly; but with another thought than that of prevailing with him. She had to disarm his suspicion so that time might be gained, and now began to let her alarm make itself evident.

"He must not die; he must not," she said, after a pause.

"You can save him by a word."

"I must have time. I have told you I love him; and I swear to you that if he were to die now I could not—nay, I would not survive him. I would take my own life. My God! I could not bear it yet," she cried, wildly and vehemently.

He had not looked for this; and the thought, impressed as it was by the conviction that she was in deadly earnest,

alarmed him and kept him silent. Before he could find any words to reply, she continued with equal vehemence.

"Yes, yes, it shall be so. You are right, you are right. His blood will be on my head. I shall be his murderess. His murderess!" She changed her almost hysterical passion to a low tone of intense earnestness as she repeated the words. "His murderess! Then it is right that I should die. Who kills, dies. It is the law of the universe. And how I should welcome death! Do this thing. Kill him; kill him. Do not stay to give me time to learn that he is unworthy; and let me die, loving him, trusting him, and believing him to be the noblest and best man in all fair France. Then indeed can I die happy and be happy to die."

The outburst prompted just the thought she designed.

"If I prove him first to be the scoundrel that he is?"

"You cannot. That you cannot do. Oh, I can bear no more," she cried in a voice vibrating with pain and distress. "He is in your power to do with as you please. Do what you will and so let me free. If he be the man I believe, he will welcome death before my dishonour; and if he be not, at least you can spare me the pain of knowing it. You will not be merciful in one way, then, for the sake of God, be merciless in all. The sooner the end, the more welcome death in such a case."

"I must think of this," he said sullenly.

"What would you do?" Eyes and face and manner all full of fear.

"You shall know this man for the scoundrel he is. You must not cast your life away for a worthless villain. I will have the truth made plain to you."

"Ah, now I see how you hate him," she cried distractedly. "You would blacken his name even in my memory. How hard and harsh a man you are!"

"It is right you should know the truth."

"I do not seek to know it. Spare me. I cannot bear

the suspense. My very courage to die may be killed by delay; already I can feel it waning. A week of suspense and I should be coward enough even to wish to live."

"You shall know the truth. I will find it out; and when his rank unworthiness is proved to you, you will see the folly and madness of this last wild resolve. You will live to thank me yet, Gabrielle."

"Oh, why did I speak it, fool and coward that I am!" she cried, despairingly.

"It is well you did," he answered; and with this he left her.

CHAPTER XVIII

IN THE "TIGER'S DEN"

WHILE all these plans were being hurried forward for his release, Gerard took his imprisonment very philosophically. There was but one circumstance which caused him uneasiness—the doubt whether Dubois could have had time before he was placed under arrest to pass on the instructions he had given him.

But he had no serious fear. If Dubois had been able to set things in motion there would soon be some effort on foot to secure his liberty; while if not, the worst could only be that he himself would be driven to announce his real rank to the Governor.

He was indeed more than half disposed to regret having maintained silence at the moment of arrest. He had measured the lengths to which the Governor was prepared to go; and the brutal command to cut him down if he resisted was one not to be forgotten. That and the indignity to which he, Bourbon's son, had been subjected by this tyrant should be paid for heavily.

He had a recompense, however. Gabrielle had answered nobly to the test he had made. She loved him. He was sure of her now; and with that as a consolation to sustain him, the hours of his retirement passed lightly.

When his gaolers entered and led him from the cell in which he had first been placed to one in which stood the instruments of torture, he regretted no longer that he had not avowed his identity.

Rumours of the Governor's savage treatment of his

prisoners had reached him, garnished with many a horrible story of torture and violence. He had now the evidence of this before his own eyes; perhaps to be threatened even against himself; and these things he might never have been able to prove had he declared himself earlier.

That they were there to intimidate him he was soon to know, for a warder entered and began to make them ready for use.

Gerard watched him curiously from the spot where he sat bound, and at length broke silence.

"You ply a strange trade, my friend," he said.

"Prisoners must be silent," answered the man. It was Pauline's father, Pierre, who had received orders from de Proballe in the Duke's name to have the ghastly instruments in readiness, and to do the work before the prisoner's eyes.

"Silence, too, eh? Is this another of your Governor's pleasant methods of hospitality?"

"I tell you to be silent," replied Pierre gruffly. He had been both troubled and alarmed at the command which his daughter had brought from the Duchess. Fully prepared to do her bidding, he was nevertheless anxious so to do it as to prevent suspicion falling on himself. To him the event might mean life or death; and however strong the Duchess's intentions might be to shield him in the event of discovery, she might lack the power, should the Governor get proof of his treachery.

"So you are the Governor's torturer," said Gerard next. "I don't envy you your trade."

"A man must live," returned Pierre.

"A pretext for villainy and cruelty as long as the world has been a world, I suppose. Yet were I a lusty fellow like you, I'd find some honester use for my muscles than to maim my fellow-men and drag their joints asunder, Master Torturer."

"I am no torturer," said Pierre. "I am the warder."

"Warder only, eh? You get the torture ready and stand aside for some one with a tougher stomach to do the mangling. Yet by the look of your face, I think I'm wronging you. Those eyes of yours have a light in them that speaks of a better nature than your words imply."

"I have to obey my orders. You are a soldier they say, and should know that. Why are you placed here?"

"That's a question I could better put to you. To watch you set those instruments running smoothly for my poor bones, maybe."

"'Tis a sight many a brave man has quailed at seeing. But I mean, what is your crime; what have you done?"

"As much as many of the Governor's prisoners probably; that is, nothing."

"Then these are to find the offence."

Gerard laughed lightly.

"You've a pleasant wit, warder. What's your name?"

"Pierre Delmont."

"And so you think, Pierre, that I am to be put in the embrace of some one of those pretty toys of yours in order to induce me to confess to something I haven't done? And I suppose you speak after some experience."

"I have counselled many a man to confess to some light crime rather than face these; and more than one has scoffed at my words to his after sorrow."

"Then you are here to frighten me with thoughts of the torture."

"You are a brave man, I am told; yet many a man brave enough on the field of battle has made his first acquaintance with fear in this cell. God forgive the cruelty of it!"

"I am in no danger, Pierre."

"Yet not for any reasons you know of."

"Surely that sentence has a double sound."

Pierre left his work, crossed toward Gerard, and answered in a low tone.

"It means what I did not purpose to tell you yet—that I am your friend at the bidding of others. We shall set you free, you and the other prisoner, the monk. My work here I must do; otherwise I might be suspected; and I meant to hold my tongue until it profited to speak."

"Who are those others?"

"Some one is coming. Silence," said Pierre hastily, as he withdrew to the other end of the cell and busied himself again with his gruesome task.

Presently a knock sounded on the door, and Pierre let drop the irons he held with a clanking sound. The knock was repeated; and he opened the door.

The Governor and de Proballe entered.

"Why did you keep me waiting?" demanded the former angrily.

"I was working yonder, my lord, and did not hear you."

"I heard the clanking of irons," said de Proballe.

"I ordered him to have all in readiness."

Pierre went back to his work, and the two stood looking down at Gerard.

"You can see now what comes of defying the Governor and playing me false, M. Gerard de Cobalt," said de Proballe, with an evil smile. "And this is only the beginning; unless you are in another mood."

"It is worthy of the Baron de Proballe to gloat over a helpless man," answered Gerard contemptuously.

"Exactly, helpless is just the right word, prisoner."

"The Duke of Rochelle has surely some other motive in coming here than to allow this carrion to insult me," said Gerard, turning to the Governor.

The Governor smiled at de Proballe's start of anger.

"I have come to you with a merciful object."

"I seek no mercy at your hands, monsieur. If you have come to do tardy justice it will suffice for me, for you will order the gaoler there to unbind my hands and set me free."

"Not so fast, prisoner, not so fast," cried de Proballe.

"I addressed you, monsieur," said Gerard to the Governor.

"What would it be but mercy that should impel me to pardon the murderer, Gerard de Cobalt?"

"I am no murderer, neither am I M. de Cobalt."

"Admit that you are he and no harm shall come to you. I will keep my word and pardon you for the affair at Cambrai."

Gerard paused. The turn in things surprised him; and he could not see the motive of it. The Governor mistook his silence for hesitation.

"Write the admission that you are Gerard de Cobalt and guilty of that crime, and on my oath you shall go from Morvaix a free man."

"Why?"

"It is not for you to question. But I gave my word before you came and I will keep it even now."

"Why should I confess to a crime I never committed and blacken—ah, I think I see. You would show the confession to Mademoiselle de Malincourt. Is that the motive for this unexpected mercy, as you term it? I might have guessed it."

"Your answer?"

"I would sooner cut my hand off than write the lie."

"It is well that I told Pierre to be prepared," said de Proballe. "We know that you are Gerard de Cobalt, and that you devised the scheme of that letter to make us doubt you when you saw the danger in which you stood. But we have means at hand that will make you speak."

"Who, then, do you say you are?" asked the Governor.

"For what crime am I made a prisoner and threatened with the torture?"

"Prisoners are to answer, not question."

"Is it your custom here in Morvaix to imprison men first and ascertain their crimes afterwards? And to use the rack and the boot to drive them to make a false confession? This is not the law of France, my lord Duke, and you will beware how you threaten me with such iniquity."

"Will you speak and say who you are?"

"I bear a name, my lord, which, were I to mention it, would make even you pause in the contemplation of this outrage. It is enough that I say I am a soldier and a man of honour and standing, with full right to be in your city. If I withhold my name now, it is only that I may see how far report has belied the evil reputation of your rule, and to what lengths you will go in wronging an innocent man."

"Brave words, brave words," sneered de Proballe.

"As for you, monsieur," said Gerard, turning upon him. "Your notorious life in Paris prepared me to find you playing the part I see you filling in Morvaix. Having wormed your way with lies into your niece's confidence, you were ready to betray her in the vile scheme your own lips confessed to me. Coward, bully, cheat, liar, and scoundrel, the part of procurer was still open to you in baseness; and you filled it with a treachery worthy even of you. Have no fear: you shall have your reward."

"Fore God, this is too much," cried de Proballe, rushing forward to strike Gerard in the face. But the Governor prevented him; he was none too sorry to hear de Proballe abused.

"Stay, monsieur," he said with cold contempt. "You take the truth badly. If you are minded to strike that blow, I will have the prisoner set free for your benefit."

"I have not deserved this at your hands, my lord,"

said de Proballe; but the Governor let the protest pass with a sneer.

"Your name, prisoner?" he said, sternly.

"You shall hear it, my lord, never fear; and hearing it, shall understand all that this means to you."

"I hold you for the man you have already declared yourself. As Gerard de Cobalt you came here; you yourself gave that name, and in it you won your way into Malincourt; and as Gerard de Cobalt I will treat you. I give you two hours to decide whether you will admit this to be the truth, or compel me to have it dragged from you."

"Stay, my lord Duke," cried Gerard sternly, as he was turning to the door; "let me have this in plainer terms. If I do not admit that I am Gerard de Cobalt, you propose to put me to the torture to drag such a confession from me?"

"I will have the truth one way or the other. Use the time of grace well and be thankful that I concede it;" said the Governor with a heavy threatening frown, and motioned to Pierre to open the cell door.

"As there is a God, I had not believed that any man, even you, could be capable of such infamy," exclaimed Gerard, as the two went out. The Governor whispered a word or two of instruction to Pierre who came back and resumed his work, making much noise over it.

Presently he crossed to Gerard, holding a set of heavy irons which he clanked loudly.

"In his present mood he is a fiend, monsieur. He ordered me to seek to break your nerve with the full view of these things, and then to leave you in solitude that your fears should gather."

Gerard smiled.

"Clank them as much as you will, I heed them not. My nerves are tough enough to withstand a greater strain than that."

"He would keep his word, monsieur. In this mood he is iron."

"Are you in truth an honest man? The breed seems rare in the Castle."

"I hope so—as men go, monsieur."

"And you heard what passed?—my last question and his reply."

"I could not help it."

"I am not this Gerard de Cobalt, and he knows it; yet you heard him declare that if I would not confess to this lie he would torture me until I did confess. If all else slips from your memory, at least remember that; for the time may come when I may need your testimony. Now do what you will; I am tired and would sleep;" and Gerard lay back on the pallet.

"Not there where you lie, monsieur, safer here;" and to Gerard's surprise Pierre made him shift his position. Presently Pierre left the cell, and Gerard fell asleep, to be wakened by a sound at the door. He sat up thinking the two hours had passed and that the Governor had returned; then started with an exclamation of delight and surprise, as he saw Gabrielle enter, dressed in a loose black cloak.

"Gabrielle! You!"

"I have come to set you free," she said, pausing with blanched cheeks as her eyes ran round the cell. "What a fearful place."

"You have run this risk for me!" and he smiled.

"I run no risk; but if risk there were, you must be free."

"Shall I go, mademoiselle? The door must be locked," said Pierre.

"Yes, go, good Pierre. Keep watch and warn us of any danger."

"There is a full half-hour and more, mademoiselle. But I will watch;" and he went out and locked the door behind him.

"How you trust me, Gabrielle," said Gerard.

"We must not speak save in whispers; and there is much to do and to tell you." As she spoke she slipped off the cloak and disclosed a somewhat bulky roll fastened cunningly about her. Then she took a knife from a sheath, and with it cut the bonds which bound Gerard's arms and legs.

He tried to rise, but fell back helpless.

"You are ill!" she cried in quick alarm; and glancing at the torture implements, which showed gaunt and gruesome in the slanting rays of the moonlight, she caught her breath and added—"They have not dared——"

"No, no. It is but the rush of blood through my numbed veins. It will pass in a moment."

She sighed in relief and then cut loose the roll.

"A ladder of fine silk rope that will reach to the courtyard below," she exclaimed, as she laid it on the pallet, while Gerard was chafing his arms and legs. He glanced at the window bars. "They can be moved," she added, catching the look; and gave him rapidly a description of the place.

"Another devil's trick, indeed," he muttered, with a frown; and watched her while she sought for the spring to release the bars. Before she found it he had regained the use of legs and arms, and went to her help.

"I have it," she said at length, and pressed upon it with all her strength while he tugged at the bars. Success soon crowned their efforts, and then a place was found where the grappling hooks of the ladder could be fastened.

"Now the way is clear," said Gerard.

"Not yet. There is a guard below. But we have done our part so far. Your friend, whom you call Pascal, will be here soon—should be here now indeed, to surprise the man and clear the path for you below. He will come in by the breach made for the repair of the walls, and he

has friends posted there. Look if you can see anything of him. Cautiously, or the moonlight on your face may betray you."

Gerard peeped from the casement.

"There is no sign of Pascal. There is a guard below; he is leaning on his musket just underneath this spot. Listen!"

Listening almost breathlessly, the sounds from below came up. They heard the soldier stamping his feet as if chilled with the night air; then his musket was grounded; and a moment later the stillness was broken as he began to sing in a sweet tenor voice the ballad which Lucette was fond of carolling—

"There was a maiden in Arcady
Whose lover both feal and true,
Came riding forth from the sullen north
Her sweet white hand to woo."

As the simple words were borne to their ears they both smiled.

"Apt words," whispered Gerard gently, as he captured Gabrielle's hand and carried it to his lips.

"How shall I thank you, Gabrielle?"

"You are not yet free, monsieur," she answered, withdrawing her hand.

"Monsieur?" he whispered. "Was it not you who once reproved me for calling you mademoiselle?"

"If I think of you as Gerard, yet do I not know how to call you now."

"I am Gerard, in truth."

"Oh, I am so glad," and she sighed.

"And sigh for gladness?"

"Sigh partly for gladness—that is a woman's way, Gerard; yet not all for gladness, but partly in fear lest even now this plan of ours should in some way miscarry. Your Pascal lingers, and yet I urged him so. Pray look again."

"He will come surely. Never yet has he failed me. But if he were prevented, it would be no grave matter."

"No grave matter?" she repeated anxiously.

"I have learnt all and more than all I came to learn, and there is no longer need for concealment. Parlous as my plight seems, yet I am not in such peril as you deem, Gabrielle."

"I do not understand. What came you to learn?"

"You do not ask me who I am."

"You will tell me in your own time, I know."

"What a trusting heart is yours, Gabrielle! What proof you have given me of your love! Yet I know how I must have tried you. Have you not even guessed why I came?"

"I have tried, but failed hopelessly," she said with a smile. "For me it is enough that you did come."

"You sent certain messages to the Duke of Bourbon. Have you not wondered that no answer came?"

"Are you from great Bourbon? And this Pascal? And the monk who is a prisoner? And the others of whom Pascal spoke? You are to go to Malincourt, where he has gathered a force of men—monks they were, Lucette told me. Is this all a part of it?"

"All," he replied. "We came to gather for ourselves the truth as to this Tiger's doings."

"And you are the leader, then. Oh——" she paused and looked in his eyes.

"I am Bourbon's son."

At this she fell back from him in great concern.

"My lord——"

"Nay, Gerard to you, Gabrielle, my dearest; always Gerard to you, as you will always be Gabrielle to me. My Gabrielle;" and he stretched out his arms and folded them about her.

"I am frightened, my lord," she cried, burying her face on his shoulder.

"My lord cannot hear that, Gabrielle," he whispered tenderly.

"Gerard," she murmured, and lifted her face and gazed upon him with eyes of love.

"Thus then I break my pledge. I said I would not seek a betrothal kiss till I came for it having freed Morvaix from the claws of its Tiger; but—" and stooping he kissed her on the lips. "My Gabrielle."

"My Gerard, my knight, my love," she whispered, and of herself with love's sweet rapturous abandonment sought his lips in return.

They stood thus in silent happiness too deep for words, when the stillness without was broken.

"Who goes there?" It was the voice of the guard.

"Pascal has come," said Gerard.

"And we shall have to part. I could almost grudge his coming. But look down, Gerard, and see what passes."

"There are several soldiers," he reported, his head at the casement. "Ah, it is a ruse. Good Pascal."

The sound of a moment's struggle came up; a weapon fell with a clang upon the courtyard stones; the press of heavy footsteps; and then again silence.

"Done without bloodshed," said Gerard; "and well done, Pascal. He sees me and motions. Give me the rope, dearest;" and he flung it out far into the night.

"Go, Gerard, go," cried Gabrielle, excitedly.

"And you, Gabrielle? Where do you go?"

"Back to the Duchess. She has planned this and is our staunch friend. To-morrow I shall return to Malincourt."

"I would rather you went with me. You would be safe at Malincourt. This rope would bear us."

"I shall be safe with my friend. Go, Gerard, for the love of God, go. Every moment is precious."

"I do not like to leave you."

"No harm can touch me with her."

"But first I must know that you are safely out from this cell. Call Pierre. I cannot leave you here. The rack would be a gentler punishment than the suspense till I knew you were safe."

"I will go then."

"God keep you, dearest, till we meet at Malincourt."

He threw his arms round her and they kissed again; and then both started back in alarm.

Some one tried the door of the cell, and a voice harsh and stern called loudly—

"Pierre, Pierre, come here at once and open the door."

"God have mercy upon us both, it is the Duke's voice," whispered Gabrielle, clinging to Gerard. Then with intense agitation in her voice she added—"Fly, Gerard, if you love me; fly, or it will be too late."

"Nay, it is too late. I cannot leave you now," he answered, in a tone of calm strength.

"Then let us go together."

"That also were useless. He would be in before ever we could reach the courtyard; and he would either cut the rope and we should go to our death, or summon his soldiers and we should be caught. I will await him here."

The Governor's voice was heard again then, oathing and cursing at Pierre's delay and calling to him in strident tones to hasten.

CHAPTER XIX

A LIFE AND DEATH STRUGGLE

IT was indeed a desperate situation in which Gerard and Gabrielle found themselves, and for a few moments Gabrielle could do no more than cling to her lover and stare at the door, overcome by terror. Then, shaking off her lethargy, she once more begged him in an impassioned whisper to fly.

"You must not ask it, Gabrielle; nor will he dare to harm either of us when I tell him I am Bourbon's son."

"He will; he will, I know him and you do not," she urged strenuously. "Within the last few hours he swore to have your life, if I would not consent to marry him. If he finds us together he will have you slain before my eyes. For the love of God, fly while there is yet time."

"Will you risk it with me?"

"Yes, yes, anything; anything rather than that he find you here," she answered desperately.

At this moment they heard the key fitted into the lock and Pierre's voice as he replied to the Governor's reproaches. But before the key could be turned, Gerard dragged the pallet to the door and wedging it against an angle of the wall, improvised a barrier which jammed the door fast.

The key was turned and those outside strained to thrust the door back; and Pierre's deep voice was heard declaring that the lock was wedged.

"Come, Gabrielle, quick." Gerard drew her to the window and, getting out, stood upon the ladder and held his arms waiting in a fever of impatience for her to follow. She went to the window and looked out, but with a gasp of fear shrank back, appalled by the far descent, and shuddered.

"Heaven help me, Gerard, I dare not," she cried. Her nerve failed at the look of yawning darkness, and when at the same moment a great knocking sounded against the cell door, she fell on her knees on the floor and buried her face in her hands.

"Come, Gabrielle, courage," said Gerard. "Trust yourself to me and all will be well."

"I cannot, I cannot, I dare not. I cannot die that way. I am a coward, Gerard. But do you go! Oh go, if you love me."

"That I will not," he answered and climbed back into the cell, to the dismay of Pascal and his companions who were watching below.

Then the clamour at the door ceased.

"What does it mean, Pierre?" asked the Governor.

"The lock has jammed, my lord," was the reply. "I have known it so once or twice before and reported it. With your lordship's leave I can get another key that may open it."

"Quick then, man, quick. And have up some men with bars to break the lock in lest you fail."

"His entrance will be your sentence of death, Gerard," whispered Gabrielle. "When roused he is too recklessly desperate in his fury to let aught stand in his way."

"He will not dare to harm me, Gabrielle," he answered calmly.

"When he finds that I have come to rescue you, he will kill you. He would do it were it the King of France himself who stood in his way."

They heard the Governor muttering to himself as he

fumbled at the lock impatiently while awaiting Pierre's return; and then a plan leapt into Gerard's thoughts.

"We will see," he said. "Quick, Gabrielle! Rouse yourself, my dearest. I have a plan that will yet save us both. Where is the knife you brought? He shall come in."

"What would you do, Gerard?" she whispered, in a voice of awe, rising and peering into his face in the dim light.

"Not murder; but I have a plan. Stand over there in the shadow and be ready with the knife when I call to you. Give me your cloak. Quick, now, for the love of God. Seconds are priceless."

Gabrielle slipped off the cloak and handed it to him, and stood back where he had directed.

"When I have moved the pallet stand as still as death, till I call to you."

Making as little noise as possible he wrenched the pallet from the door and placed it ready for use again, and holding the cloak in readiness took his stand behind the door.

As he did so he heard Pierre in the distance.

The Governor tried the door again then and, finding it yield, pushed it open and entered the cell, all unsuspecting of any danger.

In a moment Gerard threw a cloak over his head and, smothering his cry of alarm in the folds of the cloak, dashed him violently to the ground. Then leaving his prisoner for a moment he thrust the bed once more against the door just in time to prevent those outside from entering, or indeed seeing what had occurred.

The Governor finding himself free, however, began to shout for help, when Gerard sprang upon him again, gripped him by the throat, and clapped a hand roughly over his mouth.

The Governor was a powerful man, and he fought

with frantic efforts to free himself from Gerard's grip. A desperate struggle in the darkness followed—Gerard bent on preventing a single cry from escaping his adversary's lips, and the Duke writhing and straining to cast off the sinewy hands which clutched his throat and mouth, threatening to suffocate him.

The silence, broken only by the hard breathing of Gerard and the convulsive movements of the pair as they were locked in the deadly embrace, added to the weird terror of the scene.

"The knife," whispered Gerard at length, as he felt the strength of his enemy beginning to give out; and Gabrielle, whose courage had now returned, crept across the cell as near to him as she dared, and held it out. Waiting his opportunity he released the grip on his opponent's throat, and taking the knife held it over the weakening man's heart.

"My lord, my lord!" called Pierre, puzzled at not finding the Governor at the door. "Where are you?"

Then the other men whom Pierre had summoned came up and spoke to him.

Tearing the cloak from the Duke's face, Gerard let him see the gleam of the knife in the moonlight.

"My lord Duke, a single sound from your lips other than I direct, and as I am a man, the blade goes straight home to your heart."

To further the threat he pressed the dagger until the sharp point entered the flesh; and withdrawing it, he dragged him to his feet and held him.

At Gerard's fierce tone and menacing gesture, and still more at the slight wound inflicted, the Governor's courage gave, and he stood trembling in deadly fear for his life.

At that moment the clamour began again at the door.

"You are in my power; but I do not seek your life unless you force me by treachery," breathed Gerard into his ear.

"What do you want?" The harsh strident voice was feeble and husky as the question came from trembling lips.

"Send those men away, all of them. Say all is well, and bid them cease their efforts."

Realising his helplessness and too appalled by his imminent peril to attempt treachery, he turned toward the door and called to Pierre by name. But his quavering voice was drowned by the din and clatter those outside were making.

"Louder, louder," whispered Gerard.

"Pierre, Pierre," called the Governor; but the call was still unheard, and with the hilt of the knife Gerard knocked angrily at the door.

The clamour ceased and all was still as the grave.

"Are you there, my lord?" asked Pierre.

"Yes, Pierre. Cease your efforts."

"Is that really you, my lord?"

"Louder, and in your natural tone, or—" threatened Gerard.

"Who should it be, fellow? Send those men away, I say," cried the Governor with an effort.

"It is the Governor. You are to go away," they heard Pierre say to the others; and their footsteps were heard as they went, growing fainter until the distance swallowed them.

"Tell him to go too, but to leave the keys in the door," prompted Gerard next.

"Are you there, Pierre?"

"Yes, my lord."

"I told you all to go away. Leave the keys."

"You have saved your life," said Gerard, releasing his hold; and the Governor fell prone on the prisoner's bed, as Gerard gave a deep-drawn sigh of relief. The first part of the struggle was over and had ended in victory.

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But there was yet much to do, and what course to take was a hard problem to solve.

Could Gabrielle have ventured to trust herself with him on the rope, the way would have been easy enough; but her nerve had so failed her that he feared to ask her again.

There was nothing for it, therefore, but to put a bold face on things and to find their way out together as best they could. Leave her he would not, come what might. After what had occurred, nothing should induce him to let her stay within reach of the mad fiend this Governor would be when once he was liberated from the cell.

He had prevented her being seen, it was true; but the Governor would set such inquiries on foot that her presence in that part of the Castle would be surely discovered; and what would follow the discovery no one could attempt to say.

Yet the time was pressing with cruel insistence. Any minute might bring de Proballe upon the scene with the men who were to apply the torture. And under the spur of this thought, Gerard made his plan.

With a threat to his prisoner to lie still on pain of death, he gave Gabrielle her cloak with a sign to put it on, and tearing off his coat, he whispered to her to take it, find Pierre, get Dubois liberated, and tell him to give her his monk's garb.

"Lose not a second," he whispered earnestly. "It may mean our lives."

He opened the cell door, saw her speed away on her errand, and turned to finish his preparations.

Hauling in the rope ladder, lest it should be seen and rouse suspicions, he cut the ropes, and having bound the Governor securely hand and foot, improvised a gag with part of the bedclothes.

He had just finished his task, working with desperate

haste, when he heard a heavy footstep in the corridor. Fearing it might be de Proballe, he seized the knife and stood in readiness behind the door.

With intense relief he saw Pierre's bearded face. In silence Gerard pointed to where the Governor, thus bound and gagged, lay in a corner of the cell, and then donned the monk's gabardine which Pierre had brought. In this guise he left the cell, locking the door and taking the key with him, and followed Pierre along the gloomy corridor.

"They are close here, monsieur, watching," whispered Pierre; and a moment later they came upon Dubois and Gabrielle.

A hurried consultation followed as to the least hazardous means of getting out of the Castle. Gabrielle was for going to the apartments of the Duchess; but Gerard, all unwilling that she should remain a minute longer than was necessary, would not consent.

"No, we must get you beyond this Tiger's reach, at any hazard. What say you, Dubois?"

But Dubois having heard the Governor was a prisoner, had another and much bolder scheme.

"I am with mademoiselle, so far as staying here," he said. "I would take the bold line, my lord. Keep the Governor a prisoner; let me collect our men together, declare yourself openly, and by a bold stroke seize the Castle itself in the name of your father. At best we should have half the garrison on our side; and at worst should only have to hold this part of the Castle for some two days. With our hundred men we could maintain it against half an army, especially with the army disorganized and leaderless. Mademoiselle could remain with the Duchess in perfect safety, because the Governor would be in our hands."

"It is like you, Dubois, and might succeed; but I see a thousand difficulties."

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"There are difficulties every way; but as I told you to-day, I know the disaffection among the men here; and the difficulties stoutly faced would yield."

Gerard thought earnestly a moment and then shook his head.

The hazard is too great. If we can but once reach the courtyard, Pascal is there with a force enough to get us through the breach in the wall I noticed to-day; and we can then leave the city. Can you guide us by a safe way to the courtyard, Pierre?"

"It may be done, my lord; but 'tis now close on the hour for the change of guard."

"Then I decide for that," broke in Gerard. "Lead the way."

"It is full of risks, my lord. There is an iron door on every landing, and a sentry posted at each."

"Go you on ahead then; and if any difficulty is made about our passing, leave it to us to force the way."

They started at once—Pierre some little distance in front, Dubois next, and Gerard with Gabrielle following. The stairway, narrow and pitch dark, wound down the western tower of the prison fortress; and the light from the lantern which Pierre carried scarcely reached those above.

Not a word further was spoken, and each of the three trod as lightly as the broken uneven stairs would allow.

Soon they saw Pierre's light stop and heard some one speak to him.

"Who goes? Is that you, Pierre?"

"Who else, Armand?" was the gruff reply. Then a faint chink of something falling on the stone and an exclamation from Pierre. "Diable! I've dropped my key. Lend me your eyes, Armand."

A musket was set down; and a moment later the sound of a heavy blow and a low groan, at which Gabrielle caught her breath and shuddered.

"Quick, my lord," called Pierre; and running down they found him bending over the unconscious form of the sentry. "There was no other way," he said. "He would have fired his musket and roused every guard in the Castle had he caught sight of you."

"'Twas cleverly done," said Dubois. "Make sure of him;" and he picked up the soldier's musket, glad to get a weapon so easily.

"Not cleverly; treacherously, monsieur," replied Pierre regretfully; "but there was nothing else for it;" and he opened the iron door for them to pass.

"You will have to leave with us now, Pierre," said Gerard.

"Pray Heaven we are as lucky at the next gate," he answered, and again went on ahead.

Fortune was with them at the next gate. The sentry was asleep, and Pierre opened the gate and let them through.

"Naught but luck put the sot Crateau on guard to-night of all nights," he said. "If the Governor hears of it his head will ache no more with liquor. There is but one more gate, my lord, and there we may have trouble; but once passed, a few steps only remain till we reach the courtyard."

They continued the descent as rapidly as practicable until Pierre stopped them.

"I think you had better come on with me, monsieur," he said to Dubois; "and leave my lord and mademoiselle to follow when we have seen the way is clear."

The two went down together, and Gerard felt in the darkness for Gabrielle's hand.

"You are not frightened, Gabrielle?" he whispered.

"I am with you," she answered, pressing to his side.

"You are trembling, sweetheart."

"It is for you, dearest. If we were but free of this dreadful place!"

"Courage, dear one; all will come right."

"Pray God it may," she said fervently. "What peril I have caused you."

"Nay, it is I who have brought you to this pass. But you may trust Dubois to carry us through."

"It is you I trust, Gerard. Ah! something is happening!"

Pierre was right in anticipating trouble. As they neared the gate they heard the voices of several men.

"Assembling for the change of guard, monsieur," he whispered to Dubois. "They will let me pass, and I shall say you are one of the new officers who joined the Castle force recently."

"I am one, Pierre."

"I thought as much," was the pithy reply. "Some of your men may be amongst them. But I know not what to do."

"Put a bold face on it and leave it to me," Dubois; and the next moment they found themselves among half a dozen men clustered by the gate. "It is a fine prison, friend Pierre, but I don't envy you your warding," said Dubois aloud, in an easy tone, as he reached the bottom. "And these men, who are they—the guard?"

At the sound of his voice the soldiers looked round, and two of them drew themselves up instantly and saluted. With intense satisfaction Dubois recognized them as his own men, returned the salute, and addressed them.

"On guard, Vauchamp, and you, Dentelle, learning your new duties? Good. Open the gate, Pierre."

"Who is this, Pierre?" demanded the sergeant in command.

"What, don't you know your own officers, Vauban?" returned Pierre, in a surly tone. "Out of the way and let me obey my orders."

"Not so fast, surly-tongue," growled the man angrily. "No one passes here."

"Surly-tongue yourself, you uncivil beast," returned Pierre, and as if with sudden passion, he dealt him a blow on the head which sent him reeling to one side, and thrust the key in the lock.

Recovering his surprise and furious at the blow, the man sprang at Pierre to be met with the butt end of Dubois' musket full in the face.

"Back, you mutinous dog," cried Dubois, in a voice of command, as the man fell stunned and bleeding. "Is this the way you Castle men treat your officers? You know better at least," he said to his own men. "See that there's no more of this mutiny. Bring down the visitors, Pierre."

But there was no need to fetch them, for Gerard at the first sound of trouble had hurried down with Gabrielle.

The sergeant's men, taken by surprise stood in doubt what to do; but as two of their new comrades had recognized Dubois for an officer and sided with him, and being as they saw outnumbered, they offered no resistance, and the little party were through the gate, and the gate itself was locked before their surprise had passed.

The stairway now was broader and led straight to the open doorway, which let out upon the courtyard; and they were hurrying down, Gerard and Gabrielle leading, when the figures of two men showed in the doorway, and Gabrielle clutched Gerard's arm in sudden fear.

"De Proballe," she whispered, shrinking against the wall.

At the same moment there came the sound of shots and angry voices in the courtyard, and all the evidences of a fierce battle.

"It is the guard changing, my lord," said Pierre. "They have discovered something wrong."

"They have run up against Pascal's force," he replied. "Dubois, we must clear that doorway; or we shall be caught like rats in a hole."

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"I'll do it," answered Dubois sternly, gripping his weapon.

"Stay, monsieur, by your leave. I have a thought," urged Pierre; and without waiting to explain what it was he ran on down the stairway to de Proballe.

CHAPTER XX

A DASH FOR THE WALLS

DUBOIS looked after Pierre with some misgivings as he saw him accost de Proballe.

"I suppose he is to be trusted," he muttered.

"Hasn't he given proof of it?" replied Gerard.

"I would trust him with my life," said Gabrielle.

"And I would trust few men of Morvaix with anything," returned Dubois. "I am minded to go and hear for myself. While that din rages outside I could get up unheard and would soon have the way clear."

But there was no need for suspicion of Pierre. He went up to de Proballe and addressed him openly.

"By your leave, my lord, I was seeking you. The Governor sent me to find you for the work in the turret cell."

"Where is he?" asked de Proballe.

"I left him with the prisoner, my lord, and he ordered me, if I should find you, to ask you to hasten to him at once by way of the upper gallery. Jean of the Mask has gone thither and I am in search now of the surgeon."

"Then the prisoner will be racked?" asked de Proballe, in a tone of satisfaction.

"Rack for the one, my lord, and the weights for the priest," answered Pierre, so glibly and readily that de Proballe never thought he was lying. "The Governor is full of impatience, my lord," he added; and de Proballe hurried away, making an excuse to his companion.

"What is the trouble, captain?" asked Pierre.

"A quarrel with some of the new soldiers which will end in work for you, I fancy, Pierre."

"It seems serious, captain; and I've work enough with my last birds not to need more. They are to be questioned to-night."

"Who are they, Pierre?" asked the officer eagerly.

"If you will walk with me I'll tell you. I am seeking the surgeon."

He led the officer away with this pretext, and the doorway being thus cleared, Gerard and the others ran down into the courtyard.

"Which way now?" asked Dubois.

"I can find the road," said Gerard. "But where is Pierre? We cannot leave him after what he has done."

"If we wait for him we shall have the place swarming with men," answered Dubois.

And this seemed true enough indeed. Attracted by the news of the fighting, soldiers were beginning to pour out of the doorways into the courtyard, laughing and oathing as they ran in the direction of the now receding sounds of conflict; and Gerard saw to his disquiet that the stream was setting in the direction of that part of the walls through which he hoped to make his escape.

"Pascal has had to retreat," he said. "But we must go, Pierre or no Pierre," and giving a last glance for the absent gaoler he set off at a brisk pace across the courtyard.

No one seemed to heed them and they were turning a corner of the building when Pierre came running after them.

"This way, my lord; not a moment must be lost," he said, breathing hard. "I had to get rid of the captain yonder and to find you swords. There may be some fighting to be done."

They raced along for a short distance at full speed,

Pierre guiding them through deserted ways until at a turn of the walls they came in full view of the fighting, when Pierre stopped abruptly.

"We are too late," he said hurriedly. "It would be madness to attempt it. See, they are already close to the breach."

He was right, as Gerard recognized at a glance.

"What can we do?" he asked. "Is there another spot by which we can get out?"

"I know of none, my lord."

"How say you, Dubois? Dare we risk it?"

"With mademoiselle it is hopeless," he replied.

"Then leave me, Gerard. You can get through alone, and I can find my way safely either to the Duchess or out through the main gateway. No one will stop me."

"You wrong me in that thought, mademoiselle," said Dubois hastily and earnestly. "God forbid that I should think of leaving you."

"We would not dream of it," declared Gerard. "We must wait where we are until matters have quieted down, and then go."

"There is an old guard-house close by, my lord, where we can wait unseen," said Pierre. "Unused now, save as a storehouse for the workmen."

"I see the plan of the fight," said Dubois. "It is Pascal, right enough. See, he is drawing off his men in good order. He knows his work when put to it, gabble-tongue though he be."

"We may be spied out and suspected, my lord," said Pierre. "Any minute may find the escape known now," and he told how he had got rid of de Proballe. "If the Governor be found in your cell, hell will soon be loose in the Castle."

"Come, Dubois, to cover," said Gerard.

"Good, good," cried Dubois, the soldier in him rejoicing; "they are through the walls to a man," and

reluctantly he obeyed Gerard's injunction and followed him to the shelter.

"You can watch matters from here, monsieur," said Pierre, as they entered the place. "The window up there commands a view of that part of the battlements."

In a moment Dubois had clambered up, and the others waited anxiously to hear his report.

"All seems well," he said, after a minute's observation.

"Pascal must have made off. The Castle men are not following. They are clustered round the place like bees, but hesitate to follow for some reason. Pascal must have had more men posted there. That's it. Some of the men are straggling back. Yes—yes. Good! What's that?" he broke off suddenly as guns were fired from the Castle, followed by a trumpet sounding the assembly.

"The escape is known," said Pierre. "Now, Heaven help us all."

"The men are rushing back in a body," reported Dubois.

"We must take the risk and go," said Gerard.

"Let me go first and see the way is clear," replied Dubois, jumping down and darting into the night.

"Cautiously," whispered Gerard.

As they left the old guard-house they saw the soldiers running back to the Castle in hot haste to obey the call and learn the news; and in a minute the place where they had swarmed in such numbers was deserted except for sentries.

"We must take our chance," said Dubois, staying for the others. "Come on with me, Pierre;" and the two ran forward, followed at a few paces distance by Gerard and Gabrielle.

The Castle itself was now the scene of great commotion. Lights were flashing everywhere, men hurrying in all directions, trumpets sounding, and guns booming at intervals. Everything showed that events of deep

import had occurred and preparations on a great scale were in progress.

Dubois, with Pierre at his heels, crept up the steps and with the utmost coolness made his observations and laid his plan. Four men were standing together close to the breach talking eagerly.

"There are but four men," he whispered to Gerard; "and we have the advantage of a surprise. We had best attack before any more come up."

Gerard nodded his assent, and dashing up the three sprang forward and attacked the soldiers. Two of them went down before Gerard and Dubois, and the others broke and ran for the Castle with shouts to raise an alarm as they sped.

But the way was won, and before the men could reach their comrades to tell their news the four were safely out and speeding away through the moonlight toward the city.

The distance was short, fortunately; but short as it was, Dubois, knowing that pursuit would soon be hot on their heels, cast many an anxious look behind him at the Castle.

"Would to Heaven we could have met with Pascal," he muttered.

"He has gone to Malincourt," said Gerard.

"Should we not follow him? The pursuit will spread out like a fan and every inch of the ground will be scoured."

"We could not reach Malincourt, I fear," was Gerard's verdict, and then Gabrielle was ready with a suggestion.

"I can find shelter and help in a hundred houses while we make our plans. In the city I am sure of my people."

"Our plans should not take long to form," answered Gerard. "To leave the city by the gates is impossible, of course, and we need but a guide who will lead us to some spot by which we can get out. Once outside we can trust to ourselves to find the road to Cambrai."

"To Cambrai?" asked Gabrielle. "Why to Cambrai?"

"Because at Cambrai lies a Bourbon force strong enough to break the Governor's power."

"Would we were safely housed in Malincourt to await him," said Dubois.

"Better were we safely out of Morvaix altogether," replied Gerard.

Under Gabrielle's guidance they hurried through the streets, in which the citizens were beginning to assemble, attracted by the Castle guns. Groups of townfolk stood at the corners and in the roadways discussing the meaning of the unusual disturbance in more or less eager tones and with many a sign of fear lest it boded ill to the city and themselves.

Now and again a soldier or two, who had been loitering late in their revels in the city, would dash past them scurrying Castlewards. Everywhere excitement and uneasiness prevailed.

Many curious glances were cast after the four as they hurried on their way, and once or twice, when Pierre chanced to be recognized, a question would be flung after him as to the meaning of the trouble at the Castle. But no one sought to stay them, and a good distance had been safely put between them and the Castle when Gabrielle stopped before a long, low-gabled house in a dark by-street.

"I can get the guide we need here," she said. She knocked at the door and entered, to return in a couple of minutes.

"There is bad news, I fear," she said. "You remember the man who was slain in the market place, Babillon the smith. This is the house of his brother; he is entirely to be trusted. He knows every inch of the city walls and is often passing in and out by secret ways when the gates are shut. He says that something has

occurred which has put the guard on the alert, and that to-night it is scarcely possible to pass."

"Let me question him," said Gerard, and they went in together.

"Greeting, good friar," said Babillon, a strong, lithe, hard-faced, keen-eyed man, saluting Gerard respectfully.

"I am no monk, my good fellow," said Gerard, "but a soldier, and together with mademoiselle here need your help to get from the city. What is this you say has occurred?"

"A command was sent by my lord the Governor, to-day, monsieur, that the gates were to be closed and no one permitted to leave without a license from himself. Soon after that I was at the south gate and having been stopped was hanging round in curiosity, when a courier rode up and was stopped likewise. A monk, whom I recognized, was with him, and seeing both were much disconcerted, I followed them and offered my services."

"Can you describe either?" asked Gerard quickly.

"The monk was tall, erect, spare of figure, with a blue eye sharp to read your thoughts, quick of tongue, and customed to command, as I found afterwards. A noble, monsieur, and yet of winning condescension and with a laugh where many another would have a curse."

"It might be Pascal," said Gerard to Gabrielle. "What next, Babillon? You say you recognized him?"

"I had seen him before, my lord. It was he who stood between you and the soldiers when my brother was killed, mademoiselle. He told me that if I could get him two men in secret from the city he would reward me well; and when I showed him it could be done, he carried me with him and left me in charge of some monks—at least they were dressed as monks, monsieur, though my ears being trained to catch sounds readily, I heard more muttered oaths among them than one looks to hear from men of holy life. I served him, monsieur, and he paid

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me well; but 'twas this work which has caused the city to be shut like a bear's cage with the door barred."

"You got them away then?"

"Two separately while the light lasted and two together after nightfall, but the last piece was hazardous. They were seen, and I escaped capture by no more than a hair's breadth. And since then at every doubtful point where such a thing could be attempted soldiers have been posted."

"This is both good and ill news you give, friend. You have done that which will earn you a higher reward than at present I can name. But now, can you increase my gratitude, and get us past these guards? Think. It is Pascal, of course," he said to Gabrielle, while Babillon stood thinking. "He has trebled the messengers to Cambrai. Now, Babillon, how say you?"

"There is the river," he answered, shaking his head doubtfully. "Men might do it, but——" he glanced toward Gabrielle and shook his head again.

"Tell me," said Gerard quickly.

"It runs for some three hundred yards by the walls between the north and east gates: the walls are high there and no one would look for an attempt at such a spot; and so the guards are but sparsely set. I have done it, but I have swum the stream. I can scale the walls and could plant a rope ladder for you all—but there is the stream," and once more he shook his head as he glanced toward Gabrielle.

"You can go that way, Gerard," she said instantly.

"I can lie hid if need be——"

"We shall not part," he answered. "Could we not get a boat or even some planks?" he asked Babillon.

"It would be full of hazard, monsieur. With such a watch set as there is to-night we should almost surely be seen before we had crossed. They would fire upon us and, even if we escaped their shots, they would send

round a party from the eastern gate to cut us off. But if you wish it, I am willing."

"When the disease calls for it, only a coward shrinks from the knife," said Gerard. "We must make the attempt and leave the issue to Heaven."

"You had best wait here, monsieur, while I make such preparations as I can. I may be away some time," said Babillon, and he hastily outlined his plan.

Dubois and Pierre were brought into the house and Babillon left. Gerard explained the nature of the desperate position to Dubois, and the three men discussed it anxiously with many secret misgivings, while Gabrielle went to Babillon's wife, Gerard urging her to seek rest.

"I doubt we should do better to seek refuge at Malincourt," was Dubois' judgment. "This is a scheme for men, and not for a dainty girl like Mademoiselle de Malincourt."

"We can but try it," was Gerard's reply.

Babillon was absent so long that all began to grow uneasy; but when he came he explained that he had had much to do, and he brought less cheerless news.

"I have been to the spot, monsieur, and found, as I hoped, that it is scarcely watched at all. I have got help, too. A man on whom I can rely as on myself, a fisherman, has his boat on the other bank of the river some distance from the spot, and he will help us. He scaled the wall while I was by and swam the river without being seen, and he will have his boat moored ready for us right under the place where we shall leave. I hope now that we shall win the way out."

"Are there many soldiers abroad?" asked Dubois.

"Yes, monsieur, search parties, I learnt, hunting for some of your prisoners, friend Pierre, who have escaped from the Castle. But they will not trouble us," answered Babillon. "I can lead you by ways they will never suspect. Have no fear on that score."

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Gabrielle was roused, and after some words of caution from their guide they set out, Babillon leading them through narrow devious streets and alleys where they met no one.

"We are close to the spot now," he said at length. "Remain here in the shadow and I will go forward to see that all is well."

He was absent some few minutes.

"All seems quiet, monsieur," he reported to Gerard, and they started again. "The wall is yonder," he said, pointing to it. "I shall climb it and fix the rope in position, and I need not urge you to make all haste in following and to keep silent."

They watched him dart across the intervening space at top speed, stand for a moment in the deep shadow of the wall, and then begin the ascent. Gabrielle's heart began to beat fast with excitement and hope, and even the men's pulses quickened as his black shadow crept nearer and nearer to the parapet at the top.

"What is he doing?" whispered Gabrielle for Babillon stopped suddenly and flattened himself against the black wall.

"It is nothing," answered Gerard. "See, his head shows above the top now. He is as cautious as he is daring, and does but seek to make sure all is well. Wait, he sees some one. Ah, and he has been seen, too!" he exclaimed, catching his breath. The call of one man to another came to their ears, and the figures of two soldiers running toward Babillon were silhouetted against the sky line.

At the same moment a jingle of arms was heard close at hand.

"One of the search parties," said Dubois in a deep undertone.

At that moment they saw Babillon spring on to the parapet, rush at one of the soldiers, and deal him a blow

which felled him to the ground. Then seizing his musket he turned upon the man's comrade. But the latter, instead of staying to meet the attack, fired his musket to rouse the alarm, and in an instant Babillon had fastened the rope to the parapet and came sliding to the ground.

But the search party now came up at the run, attracted by the gunshot, and just as two of them dashed off to intercept Babillon the leader caught sight of Gerard and Dubois, who had stepped forward incautiously into the moonlight in their anxiety at their guide's peril.

"Who goes there?" he challenged, and in a moment the guns of the rest of the soldiers were levelled point blank at them.

CHAPTER XXI

AT MALINCOURT AGAIN

WE can't let him be taken, Dubois, after what he has done," said Gerard under his breath.

"By Heaven, I should think not. They are only five to four, and we have them divided."

"Feign a surrender," answered Gerard, and they walked calmly up to the soldiers, Pierre following.

"What is it, sergeant?" said Dubois, in a quiet tone of authority.

"Ho, it's you again and Master Pierre, is it? You don't fool me twice with your tale of captain. You are our prisoners now." It was the sergeant, Vauban, whom Dubois had knocked down in the escape from the Castle, and his tone betokened intense satisfaction.

"You mutinous dog! do you dare to speak to me like that?" was Dubois' reply in a voice of thunder.

"Mutiny or no mutiny, you will come with us and explain to the Governor. If you're not one of the escaped prisoners, I'm no man."

"There can be no objection to that, monsieur," said Gerard quietly to Dubois.

"And who are you?" demanded the sergeant roughly. "With so many of your cursed brood in the city, there's no room for honest men."

"Rough words are no proof of honesty, my friend," answered Gerard so quietly that the man had no inkling of his intention.

"A little change of language will do your holy ears good, if you are a monk," was the answer.

"Where do you wish to take us?"

"Why, to the Governor."

"Come, then," said Gerard in a tone of almost submissive readiness.

"Have they caught the rascal yet, Louis?" asked the sergeant, and the man addressed turned his head to look.

"Now," cried Gerard, and on the instant hurled himself on the sergeant, who was taken entirely by surprise. Gerard wrenched his musket from him and clubbing it, knocked him senseless to the ground. Dubois, divining Gerard's intention, had edged close to the second man and dealt with him in much the same fashion, while Pierre engaged the third.

The struggle lasted scarcely more than a few seconds, and as soon as it was over, Gerard and Dubois ran to the assistance of Babillon, whom the soldiers had captured.

Seeing help coming, they released him and levelled their muskets at the onrushing men. But Babillon with ready wit jostled one against the other so that the shots were fired in the air.

The rest was easy. The two men broke and fled, but were soon caught and treated like the rest of the party, in order to prevent the danger of pursuit.

"Now for the wall," said Gerard.

"It is impossible, monsieur. The boat must have been seen, and the further bank of the river is alive with soldiers," said Babillon, "and they have seized the boat. It was that made me return."

"We must get away, then. Those shots will soon bring a whole company to the spot. Did the men know you, Babillon?"

"No, monsieur."

"Good! then lead us back to your house. You have

served us magnificently, my good friend; and that last trick of yours may have saved our lives."

They ran to Gabrielle and explained the failure of the venture, and started to return to Babillon's.

It was a galling disappointment, but neither Gerard nor Dubois was likely to waste time in fruitless repining; and by the time they reached Babillon's house, both had thought their way to the same decision. They must make for Malincourt.

Gabrielle wished it also.

"The two points are—what has happened there, and can we hope to reach there safely?" said Gerard, as he and Dubois sat discussing it, Gabrielle having again gone to seek rest.

"I would that I had been in the cell with the Governor," growled Dubois. "It would have gone hard with me if I had not found a way to end his power to do us more evil."

"We are soldiers, Dubois," said Gerard.

"We shan't be soldiers long if the Tiger can get his way with us."

"My cousin will be up in forty-eight hours."

"Forty-eight minutes may suffice for what he may do if he but gets his hand on us."

"He will not dare to use violence to me," said Gerard.

"His head would pay for it."

"But it wouldn't put either yours or mine back on our shoulders, my lord, if he'd struck them off first. And as for daring—what won't a madman dare? And a madman he is. My advice is to keep out of his clutches so long as we can."

"And what we have to consider is the best way of doing it. Tell me, Babillon, what chance have we of reaching Malincourt undiscovered, and what is the distance?"

"Twenty minutes would take us there, could we go

direct, monsieur; but the road is a very open one, and I——" he finished the sentence with a doubting shake of the head.

"Is there no other road?"

"Yes, monsieur, but it trebles the distance; and miladi is already overwrought."

"And the devil of it is that we don't know what we should find when we get there," said Dubois. "Mademoiselle can't tramp the city all night. I have a thought. Let me go and find out what is passing there, and smell out the chances of safety. Could the rest lie safe here, think you?" he asked Babillon.

"For the night, I should think, yes," was the reply.

"But I can best go. I could get into the house and carry any message."

"You can guide me," said Dubois, "and get me a workman's blouse. It is best so," he added to Gerard. "If Pascal is there holding the house, I can gauge the chances of our getting in and arrange for him to send out to meet us. What say you?"

"I could do it all and better alone, messieurs," urged Babillon. "One can get through where two may well be stopped. And if they were to arrest me, I am known to be frequently at Malincourt. I have a daughter there in miladi's service; and if I were seen every one would deem it but natural for me to be anxious for her at such a time."

"There is wit in what he says, Dubois."

"True," he assented, and then murmured, "but there is little to please my wit in sitting inactive here."

"Shall I cry you patience, good friend? Go, Babillon, and make all speed," decided Gerard. "It will not be long now before the dawn breaks, and we must be inside the house while it is yet dark, if we are to get there at all."

"If all goes well, an hour will see me back."

"He is a shrewd, nimble-witted fellow," said Gerard when the man had left.

"And you will be shrewd, my lord, if you fill the time by snatching a soldier's nap. I'll keep watch."

"By your leave, my lord, let me watch," put in Pierre.

"Watching is my business," and with that the other two lay down on the floor and were soon asleep.

Babillon was as good as his word, and in less than an hour and a half he was back and brought good news.

He had seen Pascal and learned that the house had already been searched by the Castle troops, and a small body of soldiers left to guard it. These Pascal was prepared to overpower at any moment. Babillon had found the road thither fairly clear also and had ascertained the best route to take.

"In half an hour at most we can reach the woods of Malincourt, my lord, and the captain will be there with a strong force to meet us."

"Then we'll be off at once," said Gerard; and once more Gabrielle was roused and they set forth.

Misfortune appeared to have dealt her last blow at them for that night, in foiling the attempt to escape; and under Babillon's guidance they reached the woods of Malincourt without mishap.

"You will come to the maison, Babillon," said Gabrielle. "You may be in danger in the city, and you have rendered us a service I shall never forget."

"By your leave, miladi, I will return. Suspicion will not fall my way; but should there be danger I can then seek your protection. Trouble is already in the making in the city, and when the men of Morvaix learn how your ladyship has been treated, I know nothing of their tempers if there be not deep resentment and wrath."

"A timely thought," interposed Dubois, overhearing this. "A diversion in the town would help us much at Malincourt."

"But it might lead to violence and perhaps to bloodshed," said Gabrielle. "I would not have that on my account."

"By your leave, I would rather return," repeated Babillon.

"How shall we thank you?" asked Gerard.

"Miladi's safety is enough reward for any Morvaix man, my lord," he answered sturdily, and with that he turned and went.

"Such a fellow changes one's judgment of the men here," declared Dubois.

"Ah, monsieur, we have many such men, true as steel to their friends and honest as the daylight," replied Gabrielle warmly, as they hurried on to the house.

There was much to be explained on both sides, and when Gerard had told Pascal briefly how things had gone with them, he questioned him as to his doings.

"It's a wonder we were not trapped at the Castle. But no one seems to have looked for an escape, and we had very little difficulty in gaining admission to the courtyard. We were taken for a party of the new troops. Had you come, we should have got away without suspicion, for I had the sentries safe. But when I saw the rope ladder pulled up back to the cell, I knew something must have miscarried, and despatched one of the men to those whom I had in waiting outside the walls, telling them to creep as close as they dared."

"I see it," exclaimed Dubois.

"Yes, it saved us from capture. We were waiting in the shadow of the wall, with a growing impatience I cannot describe, when the fresh guard turned out and came on us. The officer at first mistook us for his own men and was more angry than suspicious; but he soon saw something was amiss and was for arresting the whole of us there and then. There was nothing for it but to rush through him. They fired a volley for assistance and

attacked us; and soon a swarm of men came rushing out of the Castle. But we managed to draw off to the breach in the wall, and when they saw we were in force they stopped where they were—to my fellows' disappointment. And that's all."

"But what did you do next?"

"Then there came a deuce of a commotion in the Castle, caused, as I judged, by the fact that you had escaped some other way and the fact had been discovered. So I drew off and made my way here. I was sorely puzzled, on my word. I heard you had not come to Malincourt, and I posted the men in the woods. I judged that Malincourt would be the first place to be searched for you, and thought that if we could let the Governor feel satisfied no one was here, it might make it all the safer as a hiding-place when you did come; whereas, had I resisted the search, I should only have brought his troops swarming here and so have made it impossible for you to get in at all, besides subjecting the house to be knocked about for no good."

"It was cleverly thought, Pascal," said Gerard, with a smile.

"It was more a lucky guess than aught else, but the guess was right. His men came and satisfied themselves you were not here and left a guard behind strong enough to overawe the household, but weak enough for me to deal with in a few moments. I was growing desperate at the approach of daylight and still no news of you, when that good fellow, Babillon, who had helped me before as it turns out, arrived with your message. Then I had up a force strong enough to put the Governor's guard in the cellars and came to meet you."

"Can we hold the house?" asked Dubois quickly.

"The walls are strong and we have close upon a hundred men, but——" and he shrugged his shoulders.

"But what?" was Gerard's eager answer.

"I would give half the men and choose a weaker house for more arms and powder."

The other two were silent for a while at this ominous reply.

"Do you mean we can't stand our ground even for the hours until my cousin can arrive?"

"We are men and can try. But it depends on the Governor—if he learns that you are here, and when he learns it, and what he does when he knows."

"He thinks we are in hiding in the city. We had a brush with a search party near the walls, and they will soon carry the news to the Castle."

"Let us pray that he remains in that belief; for if he swoops down on this place with a strong force it will be an ugly business. We could not hope to resist for many hours."

"Let us go round and see, Dubois," said Gerard.

Dubois and Pascal went out and Gerard stayed a moment with Gabrielle, who had listened with intense interest to the discussion.

"So even Malincourt is not to be a refuge, Gerard," she said.

"We are far from beaten yet. Have courage."

"I have courage; but how bitterly I regret that moment of cowardice when I could not face that descent with you."

"It would have made no difference. The watch was already set on the city walls and we should have come straight here with Pascal—when matters would have been at an even worse pass. We have gained hours that may prove invaluable."

"You are brave to be so hopeful."

"If it comes to regrets, Gabrielle, it is I who am to blame. Had I taken Dubois' bold counsels and tried to seize the Castle when the Governor was in my power, I believe it would have been best. But at that rate, I

may as well go farther back to the mad thing I did in coming to Morvaix in the way I chose."

"True—all might have been very different," she said, and glanced up and down again, and then smiled as she added, "And would you have me regret that too?"

"I did not mean that," he said quickly, taking her hand.

"I care not what happens," she answered softly.

"Nor the trouble and danger I have brought to you?"

"There is something other than danger or trouble, Gerard; it is of that I think. At this danger we shall smile together when it is over; and I know you will find a way to safety."

"Which means that I had better hurry after Dubois and Pascal," and he smiled again.

"Nay, it means rather my unbounded trust in you. So confident am I, that I am going to be quite prosaic and seek rest. And I shall sleep, secure in my faith in you."

"God bless you, Gabrielle, for this faith of yours," he said, drawing her to him and kissing her.

"And God bless you, my Gerard, for all you are to me."

It was a long and anxious conference that followed. The men that formed their guard were picked and seasoned soldiers who had fought under Gerard in more than one tough campaign; his to a man, heart and soul, ready to do anything at his bidding, willing to lay down their lives in his cause, and burning with resentment at the treatment he had suffered.

They were glad to have laid aside now the monkish garb and to scent the prospect of a fight; and he found them grouped together laughing and jesting in the intervals of abusing the Governor.

Had all else been as reliable as his men, he would have had no doubt of the course to take, and none as to the result. But Pascal's fears were only too well

grounded. Without ammunition the house was little better than at the mercy of the Governor should he send a strong force to attack it. And they had neither enough muskets to arm the men, nor enough powder for the scanty guns.

"At the last gasp we shall have to take the chance of a fight, of course," he said when he had completed his inspection; "and the fighting must be done from the north wing of the house. But we must first exhaust every other means."

"In that wing we could keep them at bay for a month if it were only hand to hand work; but the Governor has cannon," said Dubois.

"We must hope that the news of our presence does not reach him until too late. See to it that nothing about the place raises suspicions, and if any messengers come from him let them enter the house and be detained."

"Would God he would come himself," exclaimed Pascal.

"Ah, it's easy to 'would God' a good many things," growled Dubois. "You had better rest, my lord, at any rate until the day is warmed. I'll have you called at the slightest sign of need. You may want all your strength for the morrow's work. We'll set the watch and let the men sleep too, Pascal. They'll fight the better for it, if it has to come to fighting in the end."

The two left him then, and as they stood in the great hall Pascal said—

"You mind my words in the market place, Dubois, that a woman had to be reckoned with now. He has the fever badly. I know the symptoms."

"You ought to, you've had it yourself often enough," returned Dubois.

"And shall again, I hope. 'Tis a sweet malady, you old sour-heart; but it doesn't help a man to act; and it won't help us now. Do you follow me?"

"Have I no eyes? I put a plan to him to-day—to hold this Governor a prisoner when we had him safe, and seize the Castle itself. A week ago he would have thought of it for himself, but to-day he would scarcely hear it mentioned. He only hesitated out of fear for her. Love's best for a soldier when it crosses him."

"She's a sweet and lovely creature; were his case mine I should feel the same."

"I don't gainsay it, but I've been married," Dubois answered drily, with a short grim laugh.

"And that has made you the cynic you are, eh? I'm wiser than you, Dubois. I stop short of the plunge into the abyss of disillusion; it's the easier side to laugh on. But now we must do something."

"There'll be plenty doing before the day ends."

"And I propose to find out what is to happen. I'm going to the Castle to spy out things."

"You'll take your life in your hands."

"So long as it stops in mine, what matters? I can go as one of the new soldiers and take my chance. Better that than taking cold here waiting for something to happen."

"It's a dare-devil step, but it's a good one," and after discussing it earnestly they agreed upon it and agreed also not to mention it to Gerard, and Pascal was soon on his way.

CHAPTER XXII

PASCAL PLAYS SPY

PASCAL dressed himself in the uniform of one of the Castle troopers, and his intention was to pass as a soldier who had been merrymaking in the city and, having just heard of the excitement at the Castle, was hurrying thither to report himself.

His aim was first to get into the Castle, then to find the Bourbon commander, Captain Bassot, and explain the position at Malincourt, and to learn such news of the Governor's intentions as he could, and arrange with the captain some little plan of action.

He had but little fear of discovery in his soldier's dress. Scarcely any one in the Castle knew him, and even if the Castle men failed to recognize him as one of the new troops, it would be no serious matter, because the captain, when consulted, would soon set that right.

As for the danger, it was to his liking. He was brave to the verge of recklessness, and the thought of tapping the Governor's plans under his very nose as it were, pleased him hugely.

As he was indifferent about encountering any of the search parties who were patrolling the city, he made no effort at concealment, and covered the distance between Malincourt and the Castle at a quick speed, thinking over the matter and laughing at the venture as a kind of pleasure jaunt.

He resolved to make for the main entrance of the Castle, and had reached within short distance of it when he encountered one of the patrols. He was hurrying by, but the man in command challenged him.

"Ho, there! Who are you and where are you going?"

"To a mess of devil's broth I expect, probably to arrest. I've just heard hell's loose at the Castle, and I'm going for my share."

"Who are you?"

"Not one of your men, sergeant. Ambroise Tourelle, of Captain Bassot's command."

"What were you doing in the city?"

"Just seeing how you enjoy yourselves in Morvaix. You don't manage badly. Is the gate open?"

"Don't you know the news? Some prisoners have broken out and half killed the Governor. The whole garrison's in arms. You may look for a warm welcome if old Tiger hears you've been absent."

"Here's deafness to him, then," answered Pascal with a laugh. "I'll hurry on."

"I'll send a man back with you lest you lose your way," returned the sergeant drily, and detailed one for the purpose.

"Did you say you're one of the new lot?" asked the soldier, as they went to the Castle. "I don't know your face."

"Yet it's one your Morvaix girls will know soon, I warrant," laughed Pascal. "It's more to the matter if you know what the punishment is for being out of the Castle without leave."

"It mayn't be noticed at such a time, especially as you're a new man. If you take my advice you'll go straight to your captain and just tell him the truth."

"Yes, but where the devil shall I find him? To hell with the liquor and the women, say I; they get us into all the troubles."

"Ah, and leave us to scramble out for ourselves. I know it."

"I take to you, friend; we must see more of one another," said Pascal, with a genial laugh.

"I could show you some things in Morvaix," chuckled the soldier. "Where have you been to-night?"

"The devil seize me if I know, but you breed some pretty faces in this city of yours. Do you know a blue-eyed wench named Marguerite?" and Pascal went on to invent a story for his companion's benefit, making him laugh and swear that Pascal was a man after his own heart.

As they approached the Castle gates Pascal urged the soldier to go in with him and find Captain Bassot, and in this way he passed the gate and entered the guard-room without difficulty or question.

But the captain could not be found, and, as his companion had to leave again to hurry after his party, they separated with mutual promises to meet again, and Pascal was left to his own devices.

He stayed some time in the guard-room, and from the talk of the men he ascertained that the soldiers were patrolling Morvaix on foot and that mounted men in great numbers had been despatched to scour the country round, lest the fugitives should have escaped from the city.

No one took any notice of him beyond casting an occasional glance of curiosity in his direction, and finding himself thus free to go where he would, he left the guard-room and made his way into the Castle in search of his captain.

The excitement had largely subsided under the strict military discipline, and so many of the troops had been despatched on the work of search that he found the lower rooms of the Castle comparatively empty. The few persons he met he asked for Captain Bassot, for whom he now said he had news.

He was sent fruitlessly in various directions, and at last when passing through one of the corridors he met Lucette. She was hurrying by with bent head and did

not see him, so with a glance to make sure they were alone, he accosted her.

"Your pardon, mademoiselle, can you tell me where I can find Captain Bassot?"

"No, monsieur," she answered, and glancing up as she recognized him. "You?" she exclaimed.

"I'm glad they are no other than your bright eyes that see me, mademoiselle," he answered smiling.

"We must not speak here. Follow me," and she hurried back along the corridor until she came to a low doorway, through which she passed, giving a quick glance about to see that no one was observing her.

Pascal followed and found himself in a small antechamber bare of furniture and overlooking the courtyard.

"Tell me the news, monsieur," urged Lucette. "This suspense is killing. Where is Mademoiselle de Malincourt?"

"First tell me why I find you here," he said, cautiously.

"Ah, you suspect even me," she answered quickly, with some indignation.

"Suspect is far too strong a word, but I am curious, I admit."

"You are grossly unjust. I am a prisoner. After I saw you for the last time last night, I came here to be with Gabrielle, and was with the Duchess awaiting her return from the prison, when the escape of the prisoners was discovered; and since then I have been in a fever of suspense to know that she is safe and where she is. The Duke was like a madman. He came to the Duchess' apartments in search of Gabrielle, and raged like a fiend incarnate at not finding her. I thought he would have flung us all into prison; and he threatened me with the rack if I did not tell him where Gabrielle was."

"He is a chivalrous gentleman," said Pascal.

"He told us his life had been attempted, charged the Duchess with having been a party to the escape, vowed that he would have the truth out of us and make us pay bitterly in his revenge. The Duchess is a noble woman and showed splendid courage and dignity; but oh, monsieur, I was never so frightened in my life."

"But he has not actually ill-treated you; surely, he is not so base as that."

"He vows that unless the prisoners and Gabrielle are in his hands within twenty-four hours he will put me to the question; and he ordered me not to leave the Castle and placed me in charge of one of his own officers. But he shall kill me before I will say a word."

"You shall do better than that, mademoiselle; you shall leave the Castle. But where is your gaoler?"

The suspicion of a smile hovered about her lips for a moment, and her eyes lighted as she answered—

"I will tell you that directly, monsieur. When the Duke had terrified us in this fashion he called in his men, and actually had the whole apartments of the Duchess searched. Oh, it was shameful! Even the rough soldiers themselves were ashamed of their task, and hurried it. And when he found nothing, there being nothing to find, he grew even more violent, and taunted and insulted that noble woman till my heart ached for her and my blood boiled at his cowardice and brutality. And when at last he left us, it was only to send message after message telling of the steps he had taken to recapture the prisoners; with lie after lie; first that they had been taken, then that they were dead—any tale which could serve to frighten us, coward that he is. But I have managed to learn the truth in spite of him, monsieur."

"Through your gaoler?" he asked quickly.

"Yes, monsieur. He put me in the care of Antoine de Cavannes," said Lucette demurely.

"And who is Antoine de Cavannes?"

"Ah, you do not know. He used to think I—I would marry him, monsieur."

"Oh, those bright eyes of yours, mademoiselle," laughed Pascal.

"But he is hateful, this Antoine. It was he who with M. d'Estelle tried to kill Denys St. Jean when—when M. Gerard met Gabrielle."

"The devil he is! and you fooled him, so that he lets you go where you will?"

"He made me promise not to leave the Castle, and he keeps watch in the courtyard by the gate. I was going to him for news—the Duchess is almost dead with anxiety."

"Tell me what he has told you."

"They think the prisoners have got out of the city. They have searched Malincourt and found no one there, but have left a guard in possession of the house. They do not think that even Gabrielle will return there, and believe either that the prisoners have escaped from Morvaix with her or that they are hiding in the city."

"Long may they hold that belief!" exclaimed Pascal.

"There have been many arrests, monsieur. You see Gabrielle is known to almost every one, but M. Gerard and the monk to very few; so every one who cannot be recognized is arrested to be identified. At first they were brought here, but now they are taken somewhere in the city. Where are they, monsieur?"

"At Malincourt," he replied readily.

"Oh, and I cannot go to Gabrielle!" cried Lucette distressfully.

"We will see about that. You are doing splendid service here, but you must not stay lest this Tiger should seek to carry out his threat. Besides, Mademoiselle de Malincourt would gladly have you with her. Could you get this lover of yours to leave the Castle with you for a walk, say in the grove on the way to Malincourt?"

"He would take me to Malincourt itself if I asked him, I think," she replied with the air in which she had referred to Antoine before; and Pascal smiled. "He offered once, asking if I did not need some things from there."

"Good! Be there at noon at the gate by the cedars at the south end of the gardens, and I will see to the rest. And now, you had better go. Wait—one question. Do you know aught of de Proballe?"

"He is with the Governor, and both are away in the city."

"And that spy of his, Dauban. When the soldiers searched Malincourt they found him where I had put him in one of the cellars, and carried him away with them."

"He is here in the Castle, monsieur. I've seen him."

"The devil he is! He must not see me. Twice he has slipped through my fingers, but it shall go harder with him the third time. He is dangerous."

"He is not dangerous to me, monsieur."

"What, another?" cried Pascal, laughing. "Why, mademoiselle, I begin to fear for myself."

"Monsieur!" said Lucette, using her eyes.

"You are a witch, Lucette, with those eyes of yours. But if you can get hold of this Dauban, lead him away from these lower rooms for an hour while I am still here, or you may have one admirer the less."

"You mean—M. Dauban?" she asked coquettishly.

"On my soul, it's in your very blood, mademoiselle. But I am shot-proof," he laughed, shrugging his shoulders.

"At noon, then, by the cedar gate—that is how we call it."

"Yes, at the cedar gate; and till then—good fortune to you."

With a last coquettish glance and a smile, Lucette went to the door, opened it cautiously, peeped out, and stepped back hurriedly.

"Antoine and Jacques Dauban are together at the far end of the corridor, monsieur, coming this way. Have a care," she whispered hurriedly.

"Is there a hiding-place here?" he asked.

"Alas! no, monsieur."

"Very well; then if they come in some of us will not go out again," he answered coolly, and stepping behind the door he loosened a knife he had concealed under his coat. "Leave the door open."

Lucette stood where she could not be seen by any one passing; and they waited thus in suspense as the sound of footsteps on the stones without came nearer. She turned pale and clenched her hands and began to mutter a prayer as the steps came close and the murmur of the two men as they talked in low tones reached their ears.

They were discussing the one absorbing topic—the prisoners' escape and the subsequent events, and they paused close to the open door.

"I tell you it is not possible, Master Dauban," Antoine said. "There is not a spot in the walls ten yards wide that has not one or more soldiers."

"Aye, now that they are safely outside. Did they not get out of here? Answer me that, monsieur. And if out of here, why not from the bigger cage? I tell you they are many a league from Morvaix long ere this."

"But the whole belt of country for leagues round has been scoured by our horse. And they were away from the city within an hour after the prisoners had fled."

"Have it as you will, monsieur; but those who could not hold may be no better at finding. A hen's egg would be hard to find hidden in this Castle, but not harder, methinks, than two men and a woman concealed in a belt of country leagues wide and where every man and woman would be their friend. I speak but what my master thinks and what the Governor thinks too."

"Nay, they will be found in Morvaix, Master Dauban; and if I were but given leave I could find them," and Antoine laughed confidently. "There is one in the Castle, in my charge, too, who knows the secret, I'll wager; and I am but waiting."

"There will be a fat reward for the man who tracks them. I heard the Duke and my master speak of it. A thousand crowns will be offered: a goodly sum, but fifty thousand won't find in Morvaix what is not there to seek."

"A thousand crowns!" repeated Antoine in a tone of greed. "A valiant sum, in all truth, and I know how it may be earned, and with it my revenge."

"Two heads are better than one in a thing of this kind, Master Antoine," said Dauban cunningly.

"But one pocket can hold the reward and would be fuller than two, Master Dauban," replied Antoine with a laugh, and they passed on.

"There is one in the Castle who knows the secret, eh, Antoine?" muttered Lucette when they had passed out of earshot. "If I do not read that I am no woman," and her eyes had a light that boded no good to Antoine de Cavannes.

"Something of the huckster in this admirer of yours, mademoiselle," laughed Pascal. "He would turn this admiration of his for you to a profit. You must act warily, for if he suspects the object of your visit to Malincourt he may get the tidings to the Duke."

"You may trust me, monsieur," said Lucette confidently.

"This Dauban, too. You heard how he pricked his ears at what was said. Mark me, he will watch your Antoine, or I am no reader of a man's voice. And he is a born spy."

"Be at hand at the cedar gate at the hour you named, and maybe I will bring them both, monsieur," and with that she peeped out cautiously and then sped away.

Pascal waited a few seconds and then sauntered back in the direction of the gate. He had learned enough and was anxious to get away. As he crossed the courtyard luck favoured him: Captain Bassot with another officer came out of his quarters.

"I have to report myself, captain," said Pascal, with a salute.

"What madcap folly now?" said the captain sternly, repressing astonishment at seeing Pascal.

"Nothing serious this time, captain."

"Well, let me hear it," and with an excuse to the officer he turned aside with Pascal. "In the name of the saints, why do you venture here? How is it with the young lord Gerard?"

"All well, so far. Housed safely at Malincourt yonder, where, had we but powder, we could hold out against the Governor's forces for days. Can you think of any means of getting us some?"

"What, in broad daylight from here?"

"Without it we are like to be in a sorry plight."

"There is no thought of his being at Malincourt. They are searching for him in the city but believe he has fled. Hundreds of horsemen are out on the hunt on every road and in every direction."

"And our men?"

"Are mostly here. It was held they were too new to the place to be much good in hunting for the fugitives."

"How many men other than ours are here?" asked Pascal eagerly.

"Some two or maybe three hundred."

"God, what a chance!" cried Pascal. "See, Bassot, couldn't we get the men together and while the Duke's away seize the Castle itself? It is Dubois' plan. While you are getting ready here I could fetch the rest of our fellows from Malincourt. It would be a stroke worthy of us."

"A firebrand scheme; but it could be done if the Duke will only keep the men away."

"D'Alembert will be up with the troops by to-morrow night, and we could hold the Castle till then. We've every reason, too, to look for a rising in the city among the burghers; and in that case my lord Tiger Duke would find his claws nicely cut, and his tail trodden on at the same time."

"There is a breach in the walls here. I had forgotten. A hundred men would be useless there against his thousands," said Bassot.

"There is a flaw in every plan. We should have two hundred, not one; and besides, if they carried the walls, there is the Castle. We will try it," said Pascal decisively. "Find me a horse and I'll ride to Malincourt and in an hour we can be back."

At this moment a mounted man rode up to the gates at a gallop and the soldiers clustered round him for his news. The captain went across to learn it, and came back crestfallen.

"The Governor is returning with a strong force. The man says they have news that the fugitives have been traced to Crevasse, a hill village away to the north, and their capture is now looked upon as certain."

"A thousand devils!" exclaimed Pascal in his disappointment, and then with a shrug of the shoulders he added lightly, "Ah, well, there died a good scheme, and we must find another. Get me out of this, Bassot, before the Duke arrives. Just walk with me through the gates, and I'll manage the rest."

They passed out together, the captain appearing to be giving him some orders, and as soon as they were clear of the Castle, Pascal started at a quick pace to carry his news back to Malincourt.

CHAPTER XXIII

LUCETTE AS DECOY

THE Governor returned to the Castle in a somewhat less violent mood. The report that the fugitives had been seen and identified at Crevasse was so precise and definite that he was confident they would now be recaptured, and it was in this confident mood that he himself carried the news to his wife.

Lucette was with her and had just told her that Gabrielle was safe at Malincourt, when he arrived, gloating at the thought of his coming triumph and brutally profuse in threats as to the punishment he would inflict. As soon as he had left, Lucette slipped away to put her own plan into operation.

She did not go to Antoine at once in the courtyard, but hung about until she saw Dauban and then put herself, as if by chance, in his way, and when she was sure he had seen her she made a great show of surprise and turned as if to hurry away from him. It was well acted.

"So you avoid me, mademoiselle?" he said, going after her.

"How dare you speak to me?" she cried indignantly.

"Fine airs for a prisoner," he retorted.

"You are a noble fellow, indeed, to taunt a poor girl, Master Dauban. But have a care what you say. If I am a prisoner, I am in the charge of one who won't see me insulted. Antoine de Cavannes is a man with a stouter arm than Master Dauban, any day," and she tossed her pretty head and turned again on her heel.

This had just the effect she had calculated. He had

been pondering over Antoine's words, speculating who it was in his charge who knew the whereabouts of the runaways, and he chuckled now at his own cleverness in making the discovery.

"Not so fast, mademoiselle; I mean no harm. I am sorry for you and would help you. On my honour, I meant no insult," he said, following her.

She stopped, but with an air of reluctance.

"Yet you did taunt me," and she gave him a reproachful glance, with just enough suggestion of tenderness in it to make him uncomfortable. But with a sudden change her eye flashed and she cried contemptuously—

"You help me! Why you are too great a coward! I thought once——" and she stopped.

"I am no coward," he answered, with none too easy a laugh.

"I would have sworn that once," her tone was now regret with the suspicion of a sigh, "but you let even Denys beat you." It was a daring reference, but she felt very sure of her power with him.

"You lured me then," he declared, with an angry flush. This was her cue.

"Master Dauban! How can you!" and she fixed her large dark eyes upon him with a look of pained reproach, changing gradually to indignation as she added, with mounting vehemence, "Did I not say you were a coward? To blame a poor girl for what was none of her fault, and never to have spoken a word to her since. Oh!" and she stamped her foot now almost viciously, "were I not a girl you should pay for the cruel slander and—aye, and all your neglect." Then as if the thought of his neglect wounded her, her anger passed and she sighed in sore distress.

He was visibly disquieted, and in an indecisive, self-exculpating manner he asked—

"But you did lure me, knowing he was there, didn't you?"

"Oh, Master Dauban, how can you say such cruel things! I would have thought the words would burn your lips. Do you think I would have had *you* maltreated; you?" and again with excellent inconsequence she took fire again, using her eyes all the while with deadly effect. "But I am glad now. Yes, I am glad, glad, glad; do you understand? You are one of those men who think they can play with a girl as they will; and you shall pay for it. Aye, you shall, if I have to go on my knees to beg some one to do me justice. You shall fool me no more."

He was thoroughly perplexed, as well he might be, indeed.

"I don't understand you. You are going to marry Denys."

She laughed recklessly, almost wildly, stamped her foot at him again, and flashed glances of anger at him.

"Marry Denys! Yes, I will marry any man now; any man who will avenge me with you. Look to yourself, I warn you. Oh, my God!" and as if in passion she hid her face in her hands and turned away.

"Lucette, Lucette," he said, laying a hand on her shoulder. She shook it off angrily and started from him. Other feelings were roused in him now than greed and cunning, and he found them very flattering to his vanity and very delightful. "Don't do this, Lucette. I had no idea, on my soul, I hadn't," he said.

The words appeared to add fuel to her anger, and uncovering her face she turned upon him, the traces of tears in her eyes.

"What a coward's speech; oh, what a coward's speech!" she cried vehemently. "Who but a coward would make such a plea! But I ought to have known you better—aye, as I know you now. You spoke me

gently, gave me soft speeches, led me to think I know not what, you won my—but I will not lower myself to say more; and then like a coward and all unlike the man I deemed you, you fawn on me with your ‘I had no idea.’ Shame on you, shame on you. I could hate you for such words.”

“*Could* hate me, Lucette; but you do not?” It was plain, indeed, from both her words and agitation.

“If I do not,” and she held him with an intent look for a pause until she appeared to master her emotion, and said quietly, “I have forgotten my resolve. I meant not to speak to you again, Master Dauban. It will be better so; and in time I may forgive and—forget,” the last word died away in a sigh which went straight to his heart.

“As God is my judge, Lucette, I had no thought of this. I wronged you. I believed you did but play with me and took me that evening to the pine-walk that Denys St. Jean should see us. Why, I love the very ground you tread on.”

“No, no, I won’t hear it. I won’t believe it; I cannot.”

“It’s true, it’s true, I swear it is.”

Again she looked at him long and searchingly until the lustre of her eyes seemed to daze him.

“And condemned me without a word,” she said, with a sigh of exquisitely tender reproach. “Is that how a man trusts the girl he loves? Nay, Jacques, you may think you love me, but you would have come to me in candour and trust, not have flung an angry taunt at me.”

“Did I not trust you? Did I not warn you against this Gerard de Cobalt? Was I not ready to betray even my master for your sake? Was I not telling you everything that evening?”

She continued to hold him with the magnetism of her look, and when he stopped she answered slowly and deliberately—

"I shall marry Antoine de Cavannes. He loves me, I know, and is as true as steel in his love. He guards me here and will see I come to no harm."

He moved uneasily under her glance, and then looking about him lowered his voice.

"He is not true to you, Lucette. He is going to betray you."

"Jacques, Jacques, how dare you! Would you slander him, too? Have a care lest I tell him."

"Listen to me; what I say is the truth. He thinks you know where Mademoiselle de Malincourt can be found and the prisoners; there is a price of a thousand crowns on their heads, and he means to use you to find them and win the money."

"Holy Virgin! now am I a miserable and desolate girl," cried Lucette in a fresh paroxysm of distress. "Oh, it cannot be true, it cannot!"

"It is true, I swear it," he replied very earnestly, and gave her a garbled account of what had passed between himself and Antoine.

As she listened her agitation mounted, and when he finished she exclaimed, as if unstrung in her emotion—

"I will never tell him, I will never tell him." Then as if realizing she had betrayed herself, she stared at him in distress and alarm, and protested with excited, voluble earnestness: "I did not mean that, Jacques; I did not mean that. Do not misunderstand me. I meant nothing," and she clung to his arm with piteous entreating glances. "What I meant was I know nothing. You understand that, don't you, don't you? Oh, thank Heaven, you warned me. Jacques, dear Jacques, I thank you from my soul, I thank you. Oh, what might I not have done in my blindness!"

So she did know after all, thought Dauban; and his selfish love being satisfied by what she had done and said, his greed began to grow stronger again.

Her sharp wits read him like an open book, and with a dexterous change of tone and manner she said as if speaking her thoughts aloud—

“A thousand crowns! And for a scoundrel like this Gerard de Cobalt!”

“Miladi is infatuated with him and should be saved from him,” said Dauban, with a cunning glance. “Else she may be ruined.”

“No, no, Jacques; don’t tempt me with such thoughts. Yet, how true, how shrewdly true! No, no, it would be vile baseness.”

“You would save her from a villain,” he urged.

“And for my reward she would never look at me again. Oh, Gabrielle, Gabrielle!”

“Our reward would be a thousand crowns, Lucette. A thousand crowns would be a fortune for us.”

“A million crowns would not tempt me to such treachery. How dare you, Jacques! I am not thinking of money, but of Gabrielle. Oh, if she is now in his power!”

“The money is on his head, not hers,” he said. “If he were taken, miladi could be left free—and she would be saved from him. You know where she is?” He put the question very gently.

“Yes, no; oh, I am longing to go to her. I don’t know what I am saying, or whom I can trust. Oh, Jacques, if I could but trust you!” and she clung to him again in her distress and looked wistfully into his face.

“I swear on my life I am true to you, Lucette. Let us go to her. She is in the city?” he asked, pushing his point a little further.

“When I think what she must be suffering I am mad. If I could but get to her with what she needs from Malincourt, I might save her yet. I could take her some disguise and fly with her. But I am a prisoner.

A prisoner, my God, a prisoner at such a time!" Her agony at the thought was perfectly acted.

"I could go to Malincourt," he suggested.

"But there is Antoine; and even were I free from the Castle and got what I need from Malincourt, I could not pass the city gates. Oh, what can I do! What can I do!"

"I have a permit to leave the city when I will, and could take you. See," he answered in the same sleek, smooth voice, as he took it out and showed it to her. "Then she is not in the city?" he added, when Lucette seemed to hesitate. "They say that all have been seen at Crevasse."

"But they will not be found, save by those who know where to look. If I could make sure that only he would be taken, I should not mind then. And there is the money, Jacques. Oh, was ever a poor girl so troubled!"

"I could manage it, Lucette, and manage Antoine, too. Listen. Go to him and pretend that you need certain things for yourself from Malincourt; say nothing of miladi, and we will all go together. If both Antoine and I are with you, no questions will be asked as to where you go. You can then get the disguise and whatever else you need for miladi, and I'll find a pretext to get rid of Antoine, and you and I alone will go to miladi."

"How cunningly you plan, Jacques; how shrewd! You make it seem so simple," and Lucette thanked him with a radiant smile. Her face clouded again instantly, however, as she added, "But Antoine is a dangerous man, Jacques."

"I will manage that. At need, I will have him recalled from Malincourt, or we will return to the Castle and then I will get him away. But mind, not a syllable about miladi."

"You give me courage, Jacques. Let us go to him.

He keeps his ward of me in the courtyard, that I may not pass. You speak of Malincourt to him. You can hide your thoughts; and he would read mine."

They went then together and found Antoine lounging in the courtyard chatting with a group of soldiers. He left them at once and crossed to Lucette, looking displeased that Dauban was with her.

"You have kept me waiting," he said.

"And is that a crime, M. Gaoler?" she answered mockingly, with a toss of the head. "Maybe I was in better company," and she glanced at Dauban, who smiled self-complacently. "Perhaps you would like me to be gyved to you by the wrist."

"Nearer the finger-tips than the wrist would suit me better, Lucette," he laughed.

"Well, a gaoler should be a judge of fetters, but I wear none."

"Not fetters, Lucette; a ring for the left hand," he answered, looking at her with a bold admiration that was little to Dauban's taste.

"We have come to ask you a question, Antoine," he said.

"We?" echoed Antoine, with a sharp glance at Lucette.

"I said 'we.' Lucette has need of certain things from Malincourt and would fain go there in quest of them. I told her there would be no difficulty were you and I to escort her there and back."

"It was very thoughtful of you—but she is my prisoner."

"She will be nobody's prisoner the moment the fugitives are brought in from Crevasse."

"Then she will need no things from Malincourt," returned Antoine sharply, with a knowing smile. But Lucette struck in at once briskly—

"Do you mean I cannot go? Say so openly, if you

do, and I shall know what to think. It is when a poor girl is at such a pass as I am that she can judge her friends. Master Dauban, who knows more of these things in one tiny corner of his brain than you do in your whole body, said there would be no difficulty."

"Dauban hasn't been put in charge of you and isn't responsible to the Governor. I am," said Antoine sulkily.

"Master Dauban would take some risk to give a poor girl some pleasure, wouldn't you, Jacques?" Antoine winced at the name thus glibly spoken.

"There is no risk; but if there were I'd run it, readily enough."

"I know you would, Jacques. I know a friend when I see one. I don't want to go now, monsieur," she said to Antoine angrily. "If I know my friends, I also know my enemies. You are my gaoler, very well; you are afraid to do a little thing like this, very well. You make big promises and refuse this, again very well. Perhaps my gaoler has some orders to give?" and she looked at him with angry defiant eyes.

"Lucette, I——"

"No thank you. I don't want to hear you. I won't hear a word you say," she cried, with a stamp of the foot. She could put a deal of meaning into that stamp of the foot. "I suppose a prisoner can go back into the Castle. Come, Jacques," and she made as if to turn away.

"I didn't say you couldn't go, Lucette. You've such a fiery temper," said Antoine, all unwilling that she should leave like this.

"Then you must find it very disagreeable to be with me," she rapped back. "Come, Jacques," and laid a hand on Dauban's arm.

But Dauban was now less set upon love-making than seeking to gain the thousand crowns, and he would not go.

"Antoine did not say you should not go, Lucette; he only said there was more risk for him than for me. And that's true."

"But I don't wish to go now. I know now who is not my friend; and that knowledge is cheaply gained by the lack of just a few things I wished. It does not matter to him what happens to me: he has his duty to think of and his master, the Governor. Like Tiger, like whelp. He would like to see me stretched on the rack."

"Lucette, don't say that, don't," cried Antoine.

"You could listen to my groans as my joints were stretched, and chuckle to think how well you had done your duty. I know you now."

"For God's sake don't talk at random in that way," he protested. "If it comes to that I'd be the first to help you to escape. I would, on my honour."

"Hear him, hear him," exclaimed Lucette disdainfully. "The man would not let me fetch a few tie ribbons from Malincourt, and yet would risk his life!" Her contempt was splendid.

"I'll go with you to Malincourt; aye, and get you out of the city, Lucette, if you but bid me."

"You hear, Lucette, he will take you," said Dauban, stopping the angry tirade which was hovering on her lips.

She paused a moment, and then with a smile and a curl of the lip, said—

"No, monsieur, you had better not. I am a girl and you two are only strong men and armed, and you might be hurt. I might kill you both with my empty hands, and then escape. Pray be cautious."

Antoine laughed and shrugged his shoulders.

"What a little devil you are, Lucette. May I be hanged if I know whether you want to go or not. But if you do, you can."

"Let us go," said Dauban practically.

"Are you sure you both feel safe?" asked Lucette

with mock sweetness, and then glanced at Antoine with a smile which completed his conquest.

"Come," he answered; "you always get your way."

They crossed the courtyard at a leisurely pace and passed slowly through the gate, the two men exchanging words with the guards, and then turned in the direction of Malincourt.

"If the Governor asks for me while we're away, there'll be trouble for me," said Antoine somewhat ruefully.

"If he asked for me and I wasn't away, there would be greater trouble for me," she retorted. "But if you repent, we'll go back."

"Don't spit such fire at me, Lucette; I meant nothing."

"We'd better hasten, I think," said Dauban, and they quickened their steps to a rapid pace. Lucette played the one man against the other with great adroitness until they were near Malincourt and the cedar-gate was in sight, when she began to set them by the ears.

"Jacques tells me there is a price of a thousand crowns on Gerard de Cobalt's head. Is that so, Antoine?"

"Yes. It was announced in the Castle and has been proclaimed in the city."

"Is it true you have a mind to earn it?"

"A thousand crowns is a thousand crowns."

"And blood money is blood money, too. Is it not so, Jacques?"

"If it has to be earned by somebody, why not one as well as another?"

"I see no flaw in that reasoning either," and Antoine laughed.

"Is that why you told Jacques you could use me to earn it?" asked Lucette, looking at him fixedly.

"Did he say that?" asked Antoine, glancing angrily at Dauban. He bore him no good will for having forced himself into this walk, nor for the angry words Lucette had spoken to him, and her looks.



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"Indeed, he did. Didn't you, Jacques?" and her sharp eyes were on him now much to his uneasiness.

"I didn't say that exactly," he replied.

"Jacques!" cried Lucette in an indignant tone.

"You mistook me."

"Well, what did you say then?"

"Aye, Master Dauban, let's have that. Let's hear what you did say," and Antoine frowned darkly.

"I don't remember exactly what I said. And it doesn't matter."

"By your leave, but it does matter." Antoine was growing more angry.

"Now, don't begin to quarrel," exclaimed Lucette, pouring oil on to the flames with a dexterous hand. "Master Dauban only said that you meant to use me as a decoy to find mademoiselle, and then I agreed to help him to get the money for himself if he promised to save mademoiselle and only capture this de Cobalt."

"A thousand devils! Is that true, Master Dauban?" cried Antoine in a voice of rage at this proof of treachery.

"Oh, what have I said!" exclaimed Lucette in distress. "Oh, Antoine, don't look at him like that. You frighten me. You must not harm him."

"Why are you so zealous for him? Do you care? By Heaven! look to yourself there, you Dauban," and out flashed his sword.

"Oh, Antoine, Antoine, dear Antoine, you must not, you must not," she cried, clinging to his sword-arm. But he shook her off and turned upon Dauban, who was deadly white.

They stood now just within the gate of Malincourt. "Come, Master Dauban, if you've anything to say, say it," said Antoine in a very threatening tone.

"I—I can explain all this," answered Dauban anxiously. "There has been a mistake. Let me speak alone with you."

"None of your lies for me, thank you. Speak out now," and Antoine made a step toward him and raised his weapon.

As the sword flashed in the sunlight, Lucette shrank back as if terror-stricken and gave a loud scream. At the sound some half-dozen soldiers came running up from among the trees.

"Ah, messieurs, messieurs, help, help! Stop them, or there will be bloodshed," cried Lucette.

"What does this mean?" asked one of the soldiers.

"Who are you?" said Antoine, looking at them in surprise.

"We're guarding the place for the Governor," was the reply. "What's the trouble?"

"Nothing that concerns you. Go your way," he answered angrily.

"Not so fast, my dunghill cock. Put up that weapon and come to the house. And you, too, mistress, if you please."

"Don't you dare to interfere with me," protested Antoine.

"Yes, we'd better go to the house," said Dauban, secretly rejoicing at the interruption.

"Go you on with mademoiselle, then," said the soldier, "and do you come with me, monsieur," and at a sign from him three of the men closed round Antoine, and made it perfectly clear that they meant to use force if necessary.

At that moment Lucette turned and smiled.

"You would have used me as a decoy, monsieur? Come then to the house and we will see how it can be best done."

With a great oath in his mortification and bewilderment, he sheathed his sword and seeing resistance was useless, marched on between the soldiers.

CHAPTER XXIV

SUSPENSE

JACQUES DAUBAN, in his pleasure at escaping from Antoine's very angry threats, hurried forward to the house with Lucette, unsuspectingly, and said little beyond a word or two of rebuke for her disclosure of their mutual plan.

"You should not have said anything. It may increase the difficulty of getting rid of him."

"But I would not have him think he could use me as a decoy."

"It would have been safer to have told him afterwards."

"Safer? You do not mean you are afraid of him, Jacques," and look and tone and gesture were alike eloquent of indignant repudiation of the thought.

"Afraid of him? Indeed, no," he replied stoutly, but with a timorous glance over his shoulder.

"If you were a coward, oh——" and her disgust was intense.

"I am no coward, but prudence is always valuable," and in this way she plagued him till they reached the house, and as they entered the door they were met by Pascal.

Lucette gave a little cry of pretended alarm, and Dauban changed colour in alarm that was very far from pretence.

"Ah, you recognize me, I see," said Pascal, with an ominous smile.

Dauban gazed at him a moment and then at Lucette, and in that moment the truth dawned upon him. He saw how he had been fooled, and with a cry of rage and despair, he raised his arm and rushed at Lucette to strike her. But Pascal caught his hand and thrust it back.

"Stay, little spy, stay. If you've a fancy for striking some one, strike me, not a girl."

"So you are not a coward. Is this the proof?" asked Lucette. "Master Dauban has brought me to Malincourt, monsieur, in order that I may get a disguise for Mademoiselle de Malincourt, and then go with him to Crevasse to find the fugitives there and hand over M. Gerard and the monk to the soldiery after enabling miladi to escape. He will be able to get me out of the city with a permit which he has thoughtfully brought with him."

Pascal laughed.

"You she-devil!" cried Dauban, white and trembling with his passion.

"Both you and Antoine had a frenzy to use me as a decoy; well, you have had your way—and a lesson," and with a laugh she went away.

"You seem to have made a mess of things, spy," said Pascal. "Give me the permit she spoke of."

"She lied, as she has lied all through. I have no such thing."

"Come, no nonsense," said Pascal sternly. "Hand it over. I am in good humour as yet, and may not hurt even you. But don't put me in a bad one."

"What does this mean?" asked Dauban.

"That you have come back to Malincourt. Will you give me that paper or shall I have it taken from you? I think you know whether I am safe to trifle to with," and he held out his hand.

With trembling fingers Dauban drew it from his pocket and handed it over; and Pascal called up a couple of men and gave him into their charge. Antoine he did not even

trouble to see, but gave orders that he should be kept in safe custody, and then carried the permit to Gerard to consult with him as to making use of it.

Lucette first hurried to Denys, whom she found sufficiently recovered to have been able to leave his bed, and having told him all that had occurred at the Castle she went to Gabrielle.

"How calm and strong you are, Gabrielle," she said, when the first greetings had been exchanged. "And I am in a perfect fever of restlessness."

"We can do nothing yet but wait, Lucette."

"But what will happen? Can't we do something? Tell me everything that has happened. I am dying to know everything—everything."

Gabrielle told her as shortly as she could what had occurred in the cell and afterwards in the futile attempt to escape from the city, and then the return to Malin-court.

"They think you are all at Crevasse."

"So M. Pascal brought us word when he told us to expect you. I am so glad you have escaped, and to have you with me again. Now tell me how you managed it."

Lucette made her recital very brief indeed, saying little or nothing of the means she had employed to cozen the two men.

"They must have been mad indeed to think you would betray me," said Gabrielle.

"They were thinking most of the thousand crowns, and when a man's head is set money-wards, he is most easily blinded to other things."

"What a philosopher you are, Lucette—about men."

"And so M. Gerard is M. Gerard still, Gabrielle, but not de Cobalt," said Lucette, changing the subject.

"How glad and proud you must feel."

"If only this danger were over; but the suspense is racking," replied Gabrielle, with a sigh. "Any hour,

any minute may bring the Governor to Malincourt with a strong force."

"But are we not also strong?"

"In numbers, perhaps, strong enough; but our men are virtually without arms."

"If he comes you can hold out as long as possible and then fly."

"Do you think he would leave us a way out?"

"What do you mean, Gabrielle?"

"Why, that Malincourt would be surrounded, of course, and every chance of escape stopped. We have indeed been considering within the last hour, whether it wouldn't be best to risk a flight and seek concealment in the city while there is yet time."

"Of a truth, it is well I came back," exclaimed Lucette excitedly, jumping up. "Where are your wits, Gabrielle? They say love sharpens them in a woman and blunts them in a man; but this does not look like it."

"Lucette!" cried Gabrielle, flushing partly in confusion at the words and partly with the gathered infection of Lucette's excitement.

"Yes, you ought to blush for your forgetfulness when the man you love is at such a dangerous pass."

"What do you mean?" cried Gabrielle, searching her memory vainly for some clue. "What have I forgotten?"

"Why, the passage that leads from the chapel crypt to the old burial ground and out to the woods beyond. Were the Duke's soldiers swarming in thousands round the house, that way would still be clear for every man and woman inside to pass out in safety."

"My wits must have been dull indeed not to think of it," cried Gabrielle, as excited now as Lucette. "You have saved us all, Lucette. We must tell them at once. That it should have been left for you to remind me of it!"

"I have been in it: you have only heard of it; and it's easy to remember what one's actually seen. I'll go

for them," and she was hurrying out when Gerard and Pascal came.

Gerard held the permit taken from Dauban, and greeted Lucette with a smile and many thanks for what she had done.

"This will clear the way for us, Gabrielle," he said then. "We can get out of the city, and I have decided to go at once if you are willing to run the risk."

"Ah, but Lucette has done more than bring that," Gerard. She has reminded me of what, to my shame, I had forgotten," and she told him of the underground passage. "We can wait now in confidence for the coming of the Duke and use that permit in the last resort."

"We are never to be out of your debt, it seems, Lucette," said Gerard.

"Shall I go and see that the way is clear?" asked Pascal. "Perhaps Mademoiselle Lucette will show me?"

"How quick and ready-witted she is," said Gerard, when the two had left.

"And how dull I am not to have thought of it," replied Gabrielle. "I feel almost humiliated. Lucette hit me harder than she deemed with her words."

"She has a sharp tongue. What said she?"

Gabrielle's colour heightened and she smiled.

"That with you in such peril my wits should have been specially sharp; yet that very peril dulled them."

"There is no such peril. I have no doubt as to the end. See, we have first the chance that the Governor may not discover our presence here until it is too late for him to force us to yield before my cousin gets up from Cambrai. Next, we have means of resistance for some hour or two at worst. Then we have the means to get from Malincourt should he drive us out. Then again, we have this permit to pass the city gates. And besides, we have yet to see that he will dare to resist me when he knows that I am here in Bourbon's name. I have no

fears of the issue; my distress is that you have had to endure so much."

"But don't you know we women like such trials, Gerard, even if our hearts are not so stout to face them as yours? It is for you I fear—yet not fear; I have too much confidence in you. Besides, there is always a last resource."

"We are very far from any last resource," he answered cheerily. "But what is the one you have in mind?"

"It is I who am the cause of all, Gerard; and in the last extreme I could avert all ill even from you."

"We would die here in Malincourt one by one before that sacrifice could even be thought of, Gabrielle," he answered earnestly. "Do you think there is a man of us Bourbons who would purchase his life at such a price?"

"I would let no harm come to you," she answered, her tone as resolute as his.

"How you must love me," he whispered tenderly, taking her in his arms and kissing her. "You would suffer worse than death for me; but you shall do better than that, dearest, you shall live for me."

"Pray God it may be so; but this Governor is a hard enemy."

"And we Bourbons are no easy ones. But how sweet to me this thought of your infinite love." She smiled up to him and whispered with rueful self-reproach—

"Yet it could not spur my wits to remember what Lucette thought of on the instant."

"Lucette is not as my Gabrielle. Her heart is under the discipline of her judgment."

"And mine is all in all to me—all I have to live for; or so it seems almost. I cannot understand this sweet wild change in me. I am as one in a dream when I think of you, Gerard; self-centred, absorbed, self-lost. I had

not thought it possible—for me. And yet that great blank past, when you were not in my life, is but a few hours ago. I seem to have stepped out of the wilderness with a single stride into a world all rich and lovely with delight. And it is real.”

“It shall always be real to us, dearest.”

“When these other shadows are past,” she sighed

“But they will pass I know. If I have my moods of doubt it is only the dread lest the dream shall be broken and I shall lose you.”

“Nothing shall part us, Gabrielle, not even death,” he declared earnestly.

“No. Not even death. For if I lost you, I should die. I should wish to die, indeed. And it is that which fills me with courage and energy to fight out with fight and conquer.”

“Spoken as I would have my Gabrielle speak and think,” he said.

Some one came then saying that Babillon was asking for Gabrielle, and he was brought in to them.

“You have some news, Babillon?” asked Gabrielle.

“I have not been idle, miladi. The news of your trouble has roused the burghers of the city, and at a word from you they will rise in your defence.”

“Have you said aught that mademoiselle is here?” asked Gerard quickly.

“No, my lord. The tale has spread from the Castle that you have all escaped from the city and are hiding in the hills to the north. That miladi should be thus driven to such extremities to avoid the persecutions of the Governor has caused the present tumult, and I am supposed to be able to communicate with her. Miladi has many adherents even among the troops of the Governor, and from them has gone abroad the story of her wrongs. The burghers have long had their bitter grievances and have been arming themselves; and now

this last news is like to act as tinder to dry shavings and kindle the flame."

"I would that we had but some of their arms here in Malincourt," exclaimed Gerard. "It would save all other anxieties. Could you get us muskets and powder and ball, Babillon, think you?"

"Alone, I am helpless. A word from miladi would do all; but that might involve the disclosure of her presence here."

"It is worth any risk," said Gerard decisively. "If there is to be fighting, it can best be done from behind these walls."

"There must be no rising in the city, Babillon," said Gabrielle.

"Indignation, on the top of wrongs so long endured, burns very strong, and is spreading like a forest fire, miladi."

"It will be useless and worse, far worse than useless. Men untrained to fighting, lacking in leaders, and ill armed, cannot prevail against the Duke's soldiers. The citizens would be massacred and their houses sacked. It must not be," she declared.

"It need not be, if Babillon can but get the arms we want to Malincourt. How soon could you do this?" asked Gerard anxiously.

"We could get all in readiness, and as soon as night falls to give the cover of darkness they could be brought here."

"By nightfall," exclaimed Gerard in a tone of disappointment.

"My lord, it would be hopeless to make such an attempt in daylight with the city overrun as it is by troops."

"Stay, let me suggest," said Gabrielle. "Push on the preparations, Babillon, to do my lord's wish, and if aught should occur to spoil the venture and we should

have to abandon Malincourt, have prepared some place where we can lie hid, safely protected by the men of the city, until the danger has passed."

"A shrewd thought," said Gerard readily. "And now come with me, and we will perfect the plan for getting the arms. I will speak with Dubois and Pascal," he added to Gabrielle, and led Babillon away.

Dubois was found and a long conference followed, in which Pascal, who had been strenuously engaged in clearing the secret passage, was presently called.

Both Pascal and Dubois agreed in urging that the citizens should be encouraged to rise, but Gerard, in deference to the wish Gabrielle had expressed, would not agree, and the utmost he would yield was that Dubois should go with Babillon, taking with him written authority from Gabrielle to consult with the chief burghers on the whole position, to judge the chances of success, and to offer himself as a leader of any movement. But he was to sanction no revolt without first communicating with Gerard; and his chief efforts in the meantime were to be bent upon getting the arms and ammunition so sorely needed.

The gruff old soldier protested that it was no more than a one-handed scheme.

"We cannot fight a man like this Governor with one hand in irons, and that the sword hand," he said. "A rising to-night in the city would mean everything to us here. There might be blood shed it is true; but blood has been shed before and will be shed again in many a worse cause. Nor could anything really serious happen before d'Alembert reaches the city."

"We will fight if we are forced in self-defence, Dubois, but we will not force the fighting from our side," was Gerard's reply. "This is Mademoiselle de Malincourt's matter more than ours, and her will must prevail."

"It will fail, my lord," was the answer bluntly spoken.

"Then we'll try something else that will succeed. I am quite resolved. Let it be as I say."

"So much for a woman's leadership," growled Dubois to Pascal as he was starting with Babillon.

"He might take another view if he'd had as much married experience as you," laughed Pascal.

"If he lives to marry her," was the gloomy response.

"To think he should sacrifice a chance like this for the sake of a squeamish girl."

"Get those arms, man, and we may have yet a tough bout or two here," but Dubois shook his head discontentedly. Pascal looked after him and shrugged his shoulders, as he muttered to himself: "Your husband never sees the same light in a pair of bright eyes as your lover. Save me from marrying, say I, Pascal de la Tour."

A soft laugh broke in on his soliloquy, and he turned to find Lucette looking at him, her face severely demure but her eyes dancing with quizzical light.

"Are you then in danger, monsieur?" she asked in a tone of deep solicitude.

"Any man might well be at such short range as this," he answered, meeting her gaze and laughing. "So you heard me?"

"I heard you calling on some one else to save you from some dreadful fate, and the thought of any one in deep trouble appeals to me."

"Danger it might be and yet not deep trouble. I can well imagine there would be compensations—when I look at you. You're a born coquette, I fear, Lucette. I shall have to read you a lecture or two."

"The experience of professors in any art is always to be welcomed, monsieur."

"Do Dauban and de Cavannes agree in that? They've had a pretty fair taste of the experience, at any rate," he laughed.

"Do you rate yourself on the same footing with them?"

"In your eyes, do you mean?"

"They are canaille, Monsieur Pascal."

"Some fishermen are so keen at the sport that when they can't hook the trout they are glad to take the minnows."

"And some minnows are so self-ignorant they do not know they are not salmon," she retorted, with a flash of the eyes.

"A fair hit, mademoiselle. Shall we cry a truce?"

"I came to ask what has been decided?"

"Babillon has been here"—and he told her what had passed.

"Ah, you soldiers always want to be killing something or somebody," she answered. "Gabrielle is right. She is always right. She will be able to escape to this hiding place at any moment and can lie hid in safety till the storm passes. Men never think a woman can be right except when she says ditto to what they may decide."

"Until I met you I may have held to some such heresy. But did we not cry a truce? I am waving the white flag of surrender."

"You are very provoking, Monsieur Pascal."

"And you are very charming, Mademoiselle Lucette."

At this moment a soldier came hurrying to them.

"Another messenger has arrived from the Castle, Lieutenant. We managed to mislead him long enough to get him to deliver his message. He reports that the hunt for the fugitives at Crevasse has proved fruitless; the men have returned from there to the Castle empty-handed and he was despatched at once to ascertain whether anything had been seen of them here."

"Well?"

"We were sending him back with a message that all was quiet here when his suspicions were aroused and we had to detain him like the rest."

"Did you question him?" asked Pascal, looking very grave.

"Yes, monsieur. He would say but little; he made a dash to escape and when we stopped him, declared that there would be plenty of his comrades here to know why he had not returned."

"Keep him safe. That is all," said Pascal; and when the man had gone he turned to Lucette. "The beginning of the end, mademoiselle. We shall soon know now which plan is right, the soldier's or the woman's?"

They carried the ominous news to Gerard, who was with Gabrielle.

"It had to come some time," said Gerard. "Thank God it hasn't come earlier. Have all in readiness, Pascal, to close the house the moment there is any sign of the Duke's approach."

And when all had been made ready against a surprise, they waited, all filled with anxiety for what was to follow.

They had not long to wait. In less than a hour the men on the look-out reported the approach of a strong party of troops, and Gerard and Pascal hurried away to decide upon the next step.

CHAPTER XXV

A RUSE

THERE was unfortunately no reason to doubt the correctness of the ominous news, and for a moment Gerard looked very grave when he learnt that the approaching force numbered between fifty and a hundred troops.

"Are there likely to be any of our own men?" he asked Pascal.

"I fear not. Bassot told me that they were not held of much use in this search work owing to their ignorance of the place."

"Yet we might venture it. It would be a stroke. What say you, Pascal? Shall we let them all enter and risk a struggle to capture them? We should get some of the arms we want so badly. They are all carrying muskets."

"That is more like you, Gerard," cried Pascal enthusiastically. "A stroke worth making, indeed, and if well planned easy enough."

"Quick, then. Here is the plan. Post men to command the great hall; it is there we may take the main body of them, and dispose the rest as secretly as you can in the upper floors. Let no one but men of the household be about when they come to the door. Let them show fear and surprise, and, delaying as long as they can in safety, admit at last that we are in the house. The soldiers will not all enter at once, but if a search has to be made for us, most of them will have to be brought

in for it. Let the search go on, and when the soldiers are straggled in parties over the house, we can deal with them. Mademoiselle de Malincourt and Lucette must go to the chapel crypt to be ready to fly should the plan fail."

"One suggestion I have," said Pascal quickly. "The shrewdest tongue in Malincourt is between Mademoiselle Lucette's white teeth, and if she would meet the men on their entry she would be best for the purpose."

"I will sound her. Go you and post the men," and Gerard hurried back to Gabrielle and Lucette and explained his scheme. Lucette gladly agreed to play the part asked, and listened carefully as Gerard gave her all the necessary instructions.

"Delay them all you can," he said. "Every minute is precious. There are but some two hours now to dark, and if we can hold the place through the night the delay may save everything."

He led Gabrielle to the chapel crypt while Lucette ran down to the great hall to wait for the coming of the troops. Their own men were hurrying to their hiding places under the directions of Pascal and the officers, all laughing gleefully enough at the prospect of the coming tussle. But the dispositions were made very rapidly, and Lucette had been alone some minutes before the tramp of the men outside was heard, followed by a loud summons for admission.

Lucette told one of the servants to open the door, and he was pushed brusquely to one side as an officer with some dozen men filed into the house.

Lucette gave a cry of surprise and alarm.

"What is the meaning of this, monsieur?" she asked.

"I am sorry if I disturb you, mademoiselle," said the officer, saluting her, "but my orders are imperative."

"Are you going to shoot us all, monsieur?" He was young and good-looking she found, as she brought the

battery of her eyes into action, and he answered her smile with another.

"Not quite that, mademoiselle; pray be reassured. But some strange things have happened——"

"This is surely one of them, monsieur," she interposed, with a shrug of her pretty shoulders and a little grimace of dismay.

"You know that we are looking for some prisoners who escaped last night from the Castle and——"

"Prisoners! And you look for them in Malincourt Monsieur!" Admirably assumed indignation it was and every interruption meant a gain of time. "Do you think we harbour thieves and malefactors here?"

"These are no ordinary prisoners, mademoiselle," he replied with another smile. He found Lucette's eyes very pleasing to gaze into

"And you are no ordinary thief-catcher, monsieur. A gallant captain like yourself must find such work little to your taste."

"We have to obey orders, mademoiselle."

"And frighten poor girls out of their wits, it seems. I thought all soldiers were as gallant as most of them are handsome," and she pointed this with a very telling glance.

"You need be in no fear, mademoiselle, if you will but let us do our duty."

"Then you are not going to arrest me?" and she laughed, and added as she made more havoc with her eyes: "I think I could trust myself to you, monsieur."

"Is Mademoiselle de Malincourt here?"

"Mademoiselle de Malincourt!" This in a tone of intense astonishment. "What will you ask me next? Is she one of your escaped prisoners?" and Lucette burst into a peal of merry laughter.

"His Excellency the Governor is anxious to see her at the Castle, and we are to escort her there."

"You speak in riddles, monsieur. Do you mean that the Duke de Rochelle invites guests to the Castle with a file of soldiers to see that they accept the invitation? Surely I am dreaming."

"One of the prisoners who escaped was a friend of mademoiselle, and she is asked for at the Castle in regard to the matter."

"Oh, you mean you would make her a prisoner. Then, if she were here, I would refuse to tell you."

"It will be better to answer me directly," said the officer.

"Did you ever know a woman who could, monsieur?"

"By your leave I must press for a decided reply to my question."

"And by your leave I deny your right to question me and expect any reply."

"As you please, of course," he answered courteously.

"There is another matter. A guard of men was left here this morning when the house had been searched——"

"Searched?" broke in Lucette. "Searched? Malincourt searched! There has been no search of Malincourt while I have been here. True, I was absent in attendance upon the Duchess de Rochelle this morning, but Malincourt searched! Surely you are misinformed."

"It is as I say. The house was searched in the belief that the prisoners were here, or Mademoiselle de Malincourt herself, and a guard was left in case they should seek refuge here."

"Mademoiselle de Malincourt seek refuge in her own house! Monsieur!"

"I think you must know of this," he answered smiling.

"I am sure you are too frank to deceive me. I would trust you."

"You are very good. I do not like this errand, it is true, but I have no option save to perform it."

"I can understand that, monsieur," she said, with a

glance that made him wish any one else had been chosen for the task. "You have too good a heart to wish to frighten a poor girl like myself, or to persecute a noble innocent girl like Mademoiselle de Malincourt."

"Several messengers have been sent here during the day and none of them have returned. I have come therefore to learn the reason."

"Certainly, monsieur. It is very strange," and Lucette looked at him, almost sympathetically. "What do you wish me to do?"

"I must see the guard for myself, mademoiselle."

"Certainly, monsieur. Where are they?"

"Pardon me. You are either keeping matters from me—which I assure you will be useless—or you are strangely ignorant of what has occurred here."

"I think it must be both, monsieur, don't you?" and they laughed together at the reply.

"I beg you tell me."

"Oh, am I the guard? Very well. What shall I tell you?"

He made a gesture of impatience.

"Where are the soldiers? My orders are to use a despatch."

"Oh, then I am not the guard," she cried with a laugh and then seriously: "I give you my word, monsieur, I have been in the house some hours and have seen neither the guard nor the messengers."

"Have you seen the prisoners, mademoiselle?"

"Monsieur. That question is almost an insult!"

"I mean no insult to so charming a lady, I assure you; but you leave me no option save to search the house."

"What, again?" she cried in a merry bantering tone. "I did not know the great Duke was organizing a game of hide and go seek. But, seriously, monsieur, do you think your party is strong enough? We have a number of very savage old men among the Malincourt retainers, and some younger girls than I."

"There will be none prettier, mademoiselle, and none with more biting tongues. I should wish to do it with the least inconvenience."

"Then I beg you have in all your men and search all the wings at once," said Lucette quickly. "I shall see you again when it is over," a true saying with another meaning than the young officer understood, and she went away, having successfully used up an invaluable half hour.

Pascal and Gerard had heard it all from their post above stairs and were ready with their plans. The officer lost no time now in bringing in all but a dozen of his party, and he despatched them through the house with orders to search every room closely from roof to cellars, thus falling straight into the trap laid for him and them.

He himself remained below by the door until he heard the scuffling sound of a struggle somewhere on an upper floor. A voice called to him: "They are here, lieutenant," and at that he dashed up the stairs, the rest of his men close at his heels.

It was but a ruse to draw him away, and the moment he had gone, Gerard sent a man to the door who beckoned excitedly to the troops outside to enter, and as they dashed in, mistaking the man for one of their comrades, they were seized, disarmed and hurried away in custody—the blow being cleverly, quickly, and almost silently struck.

Another false alarm was now raised in a different wing of the house, and those soldiers who rushed to follow the sound were caught in the same way. Other false alarms followed in various directions, until the searchers, utterly bewildered and confused, ran first one way and then another, only to be caught in the net so warily and cleverly spread.

At length the young officer with the remainder came

down to the central hall, and with a ringing shout called his men to him. At this Pascal stepped toward him.

"I am sorry, monsieur, but I have found it necessary to detain your men for a time."

At a word from the officer every musket was leveled point blank at him, but he remained perfectly cool.

"Who are you?" demanded the officer. "But whatever you are, you are my prisoner, and if you move men will fire."

"Your men can fire if you order, monsieur," answered Pascal calmly, "but it will be quite useless. You are covered by forty muskets," and he waved his hand round the place where his soldiers now showed themselves. "For your own sake I urge you to avoid bloodshed."

"By God, I'll not be trapped like this," cried the officer furiously, and drawing his sword he rushed to cut Pascal down.

"I am unarmed and you are too brave a man to strike me," said Pascal very quietly, as with folded arms he awaited the attack, looking him steadily in the face.

His daring had its effect, and his opponent's arm dropped even as he was in the act of striking, and the next moment he and his men were surrounded by three times their number.

"I owe you an explanation, monsieur," said Pascal. "Those you seek are here in Malincourt, and it was impossible to allow you to obey your orders. We are a strong force and, save for this ruse, we should have resisted to the death. As it is, no harm will come either to you or your men. On that you have my word as a soldier. But for the present at least we cannot let you carry news back to the Castle. You will give me your word not to resist or try to escape, and I will not ask you for your sword. Your men's muskets we have had to take, as we are short of arms."

The officer made a great effort to imitate Pascal's

coolness, but he was very young, and this humiliation before his men was unendurable. He had to struggle for self-control and well nigh broke down.

"I give no parole," he said, his lips trembling.

"I respect your courage," said Pascal, with both dignity and feeling, "and I beg you to spare me the distress of resorting to the only alternative."

"Not the only alternative, by God," cried the officer desperately, and turning suddenly he hurled himself at the soldiers who stood between him and the door.

But they were tough campaigners, much too wary to be caught by surprise, and in an instant his sword was knocked out of his hand by a blow from a clubbed musket which disabled his arm and he found himself in the grip of those who knew how to hold him.

"I am very sorry, monsieur, but the fault is with you," said Pascal, and with a sign to the men he was led away. As he passed, Lucette met him, but he would not look at her, and hung his head that she might not see the traces of mortification in his face.

"I am sorry, monsieur," she said gently, "but I was fighting for those dearer to me than life."

"I do not fight with women, mademoiselle, and pardon your deceit."

"But you are hurt; let me bind your arm," she said solicitously, seeing that it dangled at his side.

He drew himself up and looked at her steadily as he replied—

"Thank you, mademoiselle; the wound to my arm is nothing, but you have killed my trust in the word of a beautiful woman," and he signed to the men in charge of him to take him on.

"I am sorry for him," she said to Pascal.

"He brought it on himself, the hot-headed young fool," was the reply.

"How brave you are, monsieur! I saw him rush at

you and believed he would have killed you. And you were so cool."

"We had to avoid bloodshed, somehow, and thank God we did so. And now, what will be the next move from the Castle when this party like the rest don't return? How shrewdly you held him in talk, mademoiselle. You wasted half an hour at least, and now another is gone. It will be dark before the Duke gets here after all."

"I am almost ashamed of my part," murmured Lucette.

"Nay, 'tis all fair in war, and—some other thing. But I am getting more afraid of you than ever," answered Pascal, laughing and turning to meet Gerard who had been to tell Gabrielle the news, and now came up with her. She congratulated Pascal on the success.

"We are strong enough now to hold the place throughout the night," said Pascal to Gerard.

"Strong enough, too, to speak with force behind us. If the Governor comes, I shall declare myself to him."

"He will come after this," said Pascal drily. "While the light remains with us we can best use it by settling the plan of defence."

They were engaged in this when, as the dusk was falling, the approach of more troops was announced. The house was soon found to be surrounded and the Governor himself was seen, with de Proballe at his side, giving orders to the troops.

After some anxious minutes a demand that the door should be opened was made in a loud voice. No answer was returned, and a second demand followed, accompanied with the threat that it would be forced.

Then Pascal showed himself at an upper window.

"By what right do you threaten force?" he asked.

"I threaten it," cried the Duke, "as Governor of Morvaix."

"You have no right, my lord Duke. I am holding it by command of the Lord Gerard de Bourbon under the authority of your Suzerain, the Duke de Bourbon, whose officer I am."

"Where is this Lord Gerard?"

"I am here," said Gerard, stepping forward.

The Governor laughed contemptuously, and de Proballe joined him.

"Come out to me, then, that I may pay my homage," he sneered. "Why didn't you announce yourself before, that I might have rendered it when you were a prisoner in the Castle?"

"I shall receive your homage in my own time, and when I come for it it will be with sufficient force at my back to exact it."

"Your noble lordship's caution is timely, yet a little suspicious, considering all things. If you will not come out to me, open the door of Malincourt that I may come in to you. I am more than wishful to render you your due. I am anxious, I promise you."

"I am the bearer of a despatch to your lordship from my father, which will prove the commission I hold from him."

"By all means bring it me."

"I am sending it that you may see great Bourbon's seal and signature," and as he spoke a young lieutenant who had left the house secretly made his way toward the Governor and handed him the paper.

The Governor took it with a scowl and glanced at it.

"Have you any other forgeries?" he demanded.

"I await your answer and submission."

"Submission, in God's name! And pray what are your noble lordship's commands for me?"

"That you at once dismiss the force that you have wrongfully brought against this house and leave me and all here in peace."

"Hell's peace!" roared the Governor. "Here is answer," and he tore the paper in two and flung it at the messenger's face, bidding two of the soldiers to strike him. "I have a further answer yet. If you do not surrender yourself and all in the house within an hour, I will order my troops to take it by force and burn it to the refuge of a murderer."

"We are in great strength, and shall resist you. We will refuse my demands at your peril."

The Governor's reply was a threat, emphasized by an oath as he wheeled his horse round and rode off.

"There goes the last chance of avoiding a conflict," said Pascal, as he and Gerard watched him.

"I am not so sure," answered Gerard thoughtfully. "We have taken him by surprise and set him a problem, and he is not so dull-witted as to think the solution will be found with just a threat and a curse."

CHAPTER XXVI

AT THE CITY GATES

GERARD'S judgment that the unexpected position at Malincourt would be found much too formidable to be dismissed with a curse and a threat was quite correct.

The Governor was furiously angry, and as sternly resolved as ever to carry his purpose through; nothing should be suffered to come between him and it; but the last few hours had revealed certain obstacles to the importance of which even his selfish rage could not blind him.

He had had convincing proof that in threatening Gabrielle he would provoke far greater and more dangerous antagonism than any he had yet encountered at any time of his government.

The first sign of this had come from the Duchess herself. She had sent for him soon after Lucette had left the Castle, and after avowing her share in procuring Gerard's escape, had met his storm of invective with a stubborn resistance culminating in a solemn declaration that if harm was done to a hair of Gabrielle's head, she would have herself carried in her bed out into the streets of Morvaix and denounce him and his acts to the citizens, and if that did not avail she would take the matter, if it cost her her life, to the King of France himself.

He had laughed at her threats, but they had gone home, none the less, and had rendered him ill at ease.

More was to come, however. Babillon was right in saying the city was roused by the news that Gabrielle

was a fugitive from the Castle troops. She was beloved in Morvaix by people of every class, rich and poor alike, and hundreds of them were ready to spend their lives for her defence.

Those who had not had personal experience of innumerable acts of charity and kindness were bound to the House of Malincourt by ties of allegiance which had stood the test of many years of turbulence and crisis. In former troubles their attitude had been decided in favour of that of the Maison, and when Malincourt had stood aloof in any quarrel, they had been neutral. And now every member of every family was stirred to the depths by the report of her danger.

The Governor's agents in the city had brought the word of this, and the citizens themselves had been flocking to the Castle to seek assurances of her safety from the Governor. Hot words had passed on both sides, but the Governor had found it discreet to appease them by giving them the assurances of her safety and explaining that the object of the pursuit was merely a prisoner, a murderer who had escaped from the Castle.

Hints had been given him, too, discreetly and almost timidly, by some of his officers that the concern of Gabrielle's account was not confined to the city, but had also spread to such of the troops as were Morvaix men, and that reliance upon them in any attack upon her could not be fully placed.

Considerations of this disquieting character could not but produce an effect even upon the iron of his will, but he still saw a way to gain his end without open conflict with the forces supporting the Malincourt influence. He could coerce Gabrielle through her lover. If Gabrielle could be recaptured he would have once more the means of secretly compelling the consent which it might be dangerous to force from her by open violence. He would consent to be his wife to save Gerard.

And here it was that he found the position at Malincourt so disconcerting. He did not doubt that Gabrielle was in the Maison with Gerard and he had gone there anticipating no more opposition to his entry than the presence of a large body of troops could at once remove. But instead of that, he found the maison barred against him and held by a force which his soldier's eye showed him was both powerful and ably disposed for purposes of defence.

That he could carry the place with the resources at his command was not, of course, open to question; although there would be a stout resistance involving bloodshed and the loss of many lives on both sides. It was not this which made him hesitate. But to batter the maison to pieces and burn it while Gabrielle was inside with the defenders, was at once to subject her to imminent personal danger and to rouse every one of her supporters in the city to active interference.

There was another course open, however: to starve those in Malincourt to surrender. It involved delay, always distasteful to his impetuous overbearing will, but it was less dangerous and in the end would be equally effective. Thus he decided to adopt it, and at the same time to keep up a sufficient show of force to intimidate those in Malincourt. He could easily surround the house so that not a soul could leave it, and by an occasional feint could harry those defending it and thus hasten their submission.

First, however, he would make sure that Gabrielle was really in Malincourt, and at the end of the hour of grace he had allowed, he caused another summons for admission to be made, and when as before Pascal appeared in answer to it, he demanded to speak with Gabrielle.

She came at once, with Gerard at her side, and very proud and defiant she looked.

"I wish you to understand the nature of the resistance

you are offering to me, mademoiselle, and the consequences," began the Governor.

"I understand it perfectly, my lord," she answered resolutely.

"You are harbouring at Malincourt a prisoner of mine, and this neither the laws of France nor I myself can permit."

"There is no one in Malincourt, my lord, who might rightly be termed your prisoner. Whom do you mean?"

"The man who stands at your side, at whose escape from my prison you connived."

"You mean the Lord Gerard de Bourbon. It is against his commands that the doors of Malincourt are closed against you. And they will remain closed, my lord."

"They cannot remain closed against the forces at my disposal."

"If you as Governor of Morvaix think you dare to use violence against the son of your Suzerain, the great Duke de Bourbon, you must act as you will."

"I demand that that man be given up to me."

"And I decline to listen to a demand I deem unworthy of a man so famous."

"I wish no harm to come to you, mademoiselle, and if you will give him up, I will at once withdraw my troops from Malincourt."

"No harm can come to me, my lord Duke. I am watched by those who know how to protect me."

"The blood of those who may suffer if you drive me to use force will be upon your head. I have told you that you can go free."

"The blood of the Bourbon soldiers here will be shed freely in defence of their master, and for the rest the responsibility is yours, my lord, not mine."

"I give you this last chance to avoid a conflict."

Gerard whispered to her before she answered.

"You ask me to surrender, and I am authorized to refuse."

my Lord Gerard de Bourbon to answer you thus. Cry a truce for forty-eight hours and we will come to you voluntarily to the Castle."

"I will not give you forty-eight seconds," was the angry reply, and with that the Governor turned away.

He rapidly completed his dispositions for the feinted attack which commenced almost immediately. It was delivered with much show of force from four different points round the house, and was accompanied by a great deal of musketry firing on both sides. But this, owing to the darkness, did little or no harm to either party.

The result satisfied the Governor that there really was a considerable body of men opposed to him, and he drew off his troops and surrounded the maison, and left instructions with the officer in command to keep up the pretence of an attack and to make one or two demonstrations during the night. Then he rode back to the Castle, carrying with him the conviction that in a day or two at most Gerard would be again in his hands.

Inside Malincourt a very different view of the position was taken. The attack was regarded as the proof of the Governor's intention to make good his threat to storm the maison and burn it; while the ease with which it was beaten off only served to rouse the suspicion that it was no more than the preface to a much more serious effort.

"His object is to test our strength," said Gerard to Pascal, "and to see whether we really are in any force. We may look for the real fighting later. If we had known, we would have saved our powder."

"We could ill spare it. Slight as the thing was, it has made grievous inroads on our supply."

"We need not be anxious. It will last out till morning, and then we shall go. They are likely to try and harry us through the night, so that we must be on our guard, but the real attack will be delivered in daylight, and before it comes we must be out of the house. We

have gained our end, the delay of a night, and for-morrow we can safely trust ourselves to the burghers.

"I would rather have trusted to these walls if only Babillon could have got up with the arms."

"But he cannot, in the face of the soldiery round the house."

"There is the secret passage. I could go and find him and guide him by that way."

"But the risk, man. If a suspicion were roused we should have the one chance of escape stopped. Not for an armoury full of guns and powder would I have the way discovered."

"True enough; it is perhaps too great a risk," agreed Pascal.

"My plan is this," explained Gerard. "We will hold the maison through the night—unless I am wrong and we are to be driven from it by force—and in the morning we will slip away secretly, Lucette and you accompanying us, and make first for the gates to leave the city with the pass we took from the spy, and if we fail we shall place ourselves in the hands of the burghers."

"And the men here?"

"Must remain until the last possible moment as a ruse. D'Artois will stay in command, and every show of continued resistance must be maintained. You'll see my thought. The Governor knows we are here and thinks he has us safely caged. In that belief the restrictions about passing in and out of the city will probably be relaxed; the search parties will be recalled from the city and I am mistaken if a bold front and a slight disguise will not be all that is necessary for us to get away. The next day by nightfall we shall be back with the troops to read the Governor a lesson."

"D'Artois had better continue the resistance here?"

"Only in form, of course. No lives need be thrown away. The only need is to blind the Castle people. But

when the attack grows serious he can either surrender or escape by the same means we shall use, the men scattering and resuming the monkish disguise. Even if they are captured and taken to the Castle nothing will be done to them before we are back with d'Alembert."

They were still discussing their plans when the second feint was made by the Castle troops, and the ease with which this was also repulsed confirmed Gerard in his belief that the night would see no serious attack, and when matters had quieted down and the last shot had been fired, he prevailed upon Gabrielle and Lucette to attempt to get some sleep. They should be roused at the first sign of any real danger, but what they had to do during the coming day made it imperative that they should at least lie down, even if sleep were impossible.

And impossible it was for all in the maison. A most vigilant watch had to be kept, and Gerard and Pascal were constantly moving from point to point, that no single precaution should be slackened and not a movement of the troops outside pass unobserved.

So matters remained until the dawn. When the light broke at length, the great strength of the Castle force was immediately apparent, spreading as it did all round the maison in imposing numbers that filled Gabrielle and Lucette with consternation.

Gabrielle was for instant flight, indeed, but Gerard decided for some further delay.

"We have to wait until the Governor shall have had time to give fresh instructions to the captains of the city gates, or we cannot get through."

Then Lucette suggested a serious objection.

"Gabrielle is so well known that she will be recognized at the gates, and although she might pass, any one with her would be at once suspected and stopped."

"I am hoping that the gates will be open to all," replied Gerard, "and that no one will be stopped. But

he will be disguised. We shall all be, in fact—Pascal and I as monks.”

“But if they are not open?”

“Then we have this pass of Dauban’s and the disguises.”

“Monks do not act as cavaliers to ladies, monsieur,” objected Lucette, and despite the gravity of the situation they smiled.

“There is M. de Proballe’s wardrobe,” suggested Gabrielle.

“Aye, we might pass for rogues, Gerard,” laughed Pascal. “But for my part, I’d rather take the risk and play monk.”

“May I suggest?” asked Lucette. “A plain burgher’s or merchant’s dress would be safest, with the monks’ gabardines carried for use in case of need. And these could easily be furnished here in the maison.”

“We must have weapons, Lucette,” said Gerard.

“They could be covered with wrappings to look like staves or some part of your merchandise. There is no difficulty there, surely. The real difficulty is Gabrielle’s face, I fear.”

“I like the plan,” was Pascal’s emphatic verdict. “But I would have a change in it. Let Mademoiselle Lucette and myself, if she will trust herself to me, try to leave the city first. If we are turned back, or even held by the guard, it will be no grievous matter; and you and mademoiselle can see how it fares with us. If we have to show the pass to get through, we can go a short distance and I can return on the plea that something has been forgotten, and can hand it to you.”

This scheme was discussed at length to be finally adopted, and Gabrielle and Lucette were left to settle the best device they could fashion to conceal what Lucette had termed the real difficulty—Gabrielle’s face.

Lucette solved the problem by means of a large hooded

cloak, such as was not uncommonly worn by the burghers' and merchants' wives in travelling. Drawn over the head and low down over the brow, it fastened under the chin, but a little alteration by Lucette's deft fingers so arranged it that much of the lower part of the face was also hidden, and when she was ready to start, both Gerard and Pascal smiled at the little device.

"A burgher's spouse to the life," exclaimed Pascal, whose irrepressible spirits were as high as if they were all bent on a picnic. "And on the pillion no one will know miladi of Malincourt!"

"If Babillon can get us the horses, that is," said Gerard, for they were first to make for Babillon's house.

"Crowns are crowns in Morvaix, Gerard, and speak the same language as everywhere else; and if he cannot, I will. Shall we start?"

"We have told d'Artois everything?"

"Oh, yes. I supplemented what you said with an hour's lecture."

"Pray God we get away and do not find the Castle men have spread out too far."

"I have made sure of that," answered Pascal. "I've been out to look for myself."

"Come then," and they started.

"I would poor Denys could be with us," said Gabrielle.

"I have seen him and told him all," replied Lucette.

"He is much better, but knows he has not strength enough for this."

Gerard was very grave and anxious in his concern for Gabrielle, and as they passed through the chapel, down into the crypt and along the dark, mouldy, gloomy passage, scarce a word was spoken. But as soon as they emerged into the fresh air, Pascal, who had gone on first to make sure no one was about, began to talk. He walked with Lucette, Gerard and Gabrielle being ahead.

"We mustn't look like a funeral procession, mademoiselle."

"If you were as anxious for me as M. Gerard is Gabrielle, you too might be solemn, monsieur."

He glanced at her and smiled.

"Hadn't we better settle the parts we mean to play?"

"What are they?"

"Well, to begin with, we'd better stop this 'monsieur' and 'mademoiselle' to each other. My name, as you know, is Pascal, and yours is Lucette, and they are neither of them names to be ashamed of. What do you—Lucette?"

"Just as you wish—Pascal," and she copied his part and tone, and laughed.

"Good. Now we must be something to each other because we may be asked. Strangers don't go riding about together as we have to; and we're not strangers either."

"I am beginning to know something of you, at a rate."

"And an excellent education I hope you find it. Now what do you say to brother and sister?"

"We might have to quarrel with one another in the case, or at least be discourteous. Is that what you wish—Pascal?"

"That's an excellent imitation of a sister's manner—Lucette. But as we don't want to quarrel, and I am a plain burgher and you Madame Burgher, we might be husband and wife."

"It would be a loveless marriage, wouldn't it?"

"I've heard of them before," he laughed drily. "But it would certainly be a marriage of convenience."

"And many of those are but little more acting than this. But I think in such a case I should be a scold."

"I am afraid you would, but as my back will be to you when you're on the pillion, I don't know that that will matter. How clear the roads are," he said, breaking into earnestness for a moment. His eyes had been

cast sharply in all directions, despite his laughing manner and words.

"Do you think we shall get through? Poor Gabrielle is so anxious."

"Aye, that's one of the troubles. She's too anxious to play her part well, I fear. She's not like—Madame Burgher."

"Nor is M. Gerard like—Monsieur Burgher."

"Well, let us hope the husband and wife will get their two charges safely through. We shall reach Babillon's, at any rate," he said soon afterwards, as they came in sight of the house. "I pray we shall find better luck than last time."

But they did not. The house was closed, and when they knocked and Babillon's wife admitted them, it was to say that her husband had not been home all night.

"It's not a serious matter," said Pascal, making light of it, as he did of all difficulties. "Wait here, and I'll go and find a couple of horses somewhere."

"But Babillon could have given us news of how matters stand at the gates and a hundred other things," replied Gerard uneasily.

"All of which we shall now have to find out for ourselves instead," and learning where he was likely to procure horses, Pascal went off on his search. He was soon back, riding one horse and leading another.

"The city is much quieter this morning. I had a talk with the man where I got these," he reported, "and he says all the soldiers who were searching the city have been recalled to the Castle."

"And about the gates?"

"He knew nothing, and I could ask no more than a general question, or I might have stirred suspicion. Now, Madame Burgher," he said to Lucette, and there was some laughing between them over settling her in the pillion. But Gerard was in no mood to see any objects

for jesting, and Gabrielle was so pale and anxious Lucette declared it was a good thing indeed no more her features could be seen.

"Now for a bold face on things and a laugh if you can, Lucette," cried Pascal, "and we'll soon see whether an honest burgher and his wife cannot ride abroad together in this uncomfortable fashion on a fine July morning."

They rode slowly toward the city gate, Gerard and Gabrielle following some distance behind. Pascal laughed and gestured over his shoulder to Lucette, upon coming in sight of the gate he said exultantly—

"God be thanked, it's open, Lucette. We shan't be long with our husband and wife much longer, if all goes well."

"A thought which seems to give you consummate relief," she answered.

"Aye, the responsibilities of a husband weigh heavily on me, good wife—as heavily, maybe, as the double burden on this good patient beast. Good morning, monsieur," he broke off, as a soldier stepped in the way and held up his hand. But Pascal made no effort to check the horse, and was passing on with a nod and a smile when the man laid a hand on the bridle and brought the horse to a stop.

"What is it, monsieur?" asked Pascal. "Cannot a poor honest man and his wife pass on his business?"

"Yes, monsieur. All those who are known to us can pass. Dismount, if you please, and come to the office of the gate."

Pascal mumbled something in a discontented tone and then dismounted.

He gave Lucette one glance with an ominous lift of the eyebrows. She understood the look—that the check was a very ugly one—but with an admirably feigned air of extreme vexation, she exclaimed—

"How you bungle things, Pascal. To bring me out

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like this! One might as well have a wooden head for a husband."

"Peace, scold, peace. It is no fault of mine," he answered crossly.

And the soldier smiled.

CHAPTER XXVII

HUNTED

PASCAL was agreeably surprised when the one to whom he was conducted, a man of some thirty years of age with a frank face, commenced with a quasi apology.

"This is not a very pleasant duty of mine, monsieur, but you'll understand it is a duty. I am here in place of Captain Boutelle, and my instructions are not to allow any one to pass the gate who is not known. But I know scarcely any one while he knows many, it is rather a hardship for the citizens. Your name, please?"

"Pascal Tourelle." The officer wrote it down, saying the while—

"I am sorry I do not recognize you, M. Tourelle. Your occupation?"

"Merchant—chiefly in steel wares."

"You are not of Morvaix; your accent tells me that."

"I am of Paris; my master's affairs have brought me to this district."

"Ah, Paris!" exclaimed the officer. "I envy you, monsieur. Married?"

"My wife rides with me," said Pascal.

"Her name?"

"Lucette." The officer looked up with a quick smile.

"Pardon the smile," he said, "but the name is unusual and recalls associations for me."

"The devil it does! Can she have been flirting here as well!" was Pascal's thought, but he looked stolid.

at the questioner as he replied, producing Dauban's pass—

"I can save your time, monsieur, I think. I have a pass."

"The date is yesterday's," and the officer shook his head. "Did you mean to start yesterday? I am afraid it is no use to me. But I need not trouble you further except in one very simple thing. There will be plenty of citizens who know you, and I will send a man with you to any one who will identify you. I don't distrust your word, of course, but I am compelled to do this work. And the Governor of Morvaix, as you may have heard, is somewhat exacting. I am really sorry," he said, rising. "Perhaps Madame Tourelle will await you here."

It was most courteously suggested, but none the less embarrassing on that account.

"I think not, monsieur. She has some matters to see to, I believe, which our earlier departure caused her to put off until our return this evening, and will no doubt prefer to see to them now while I fetch a citizen to vouch for me. For the present, monsieur, good morning. Accept my thanks for your courteous discharge of an unpleasant duty."

But the officer was not to be shaken off.

"I should have been glad to speak with her of Paris. It is some years since I was there. Ah, Paris!" and he sighed as if in pity for himself.

"When I return, monsieur, it will give me pleasure to see you again. I will not trouble you to send a man with me, but will bring back some one who will satisfy you as to me."

"Nay, monsieur, it is no more than a form. I will send a man," and while he turned away to give the necessary instructions, Pascal hurried out to Lucette.

"Go back to Gerard, and tell him the way is blocked. I'll find you at Babillon's. Go at once, for God's sake.

The officer here pricked up his ears at your name may know you."

Lucette drew the end of the shawl which wrapped neck and shoulders across the lower part of her face the officer came out and looked curiously at her.

"I know him, indeed," she said.

"Ah, these flirtings of yours, Lucette!" whispered Pascal, as she wheeled the horse around. "Yes, in an hour, here," he added aloud, "and don't keep me waiting. It is as I thought, monsieur, my wife will return to meet me here," he said lightly, turning to the officer who was looking very intently indeed after Lucette.

"Umph! Curious! A strange resemblance!" These words were muttered in a low whisper, but not so low as to escape Pascal's sharp ears, and the officer gave him a quick suspicious glance. Pascal's easy indifference appeared to reassure him, however. "Here's the man, monsieur," he said.

And again Pascal cursed his luck. It was the soldier with whom he had made friends in going to the Castle the preceding day. But he put his usual bold face on the matter and with a salutation to the officer went on leaving the man to follow him.

The officer looked after him thoughtfully, re-entered the guard-house, read over the replies to his questions and pondered them.

"I must be wrong," he mused. "But if so no harm can be done in having her followed. 'Pascal Tourville of Paris—and Lucette!' I'll send the names to Beaulieu at the Castle too, and be prepared against their returning—if they do return. No, there might be trouble that I didn't detain them. But I'll have the wife followed." He gave directions for this at once, and then laid a train that was to lead to serious consequences.

Meanwhile Pascal was cudgelling his wits how to get rid of his companion, and felt none too easy under

sharp glances which the man kept casting at him, as they walked side by side.

"Did I hear your name was Pascal Tourelle, monsieur?" asked the soldier suspiciously.

"I don't know what you heard, my man, but it is my name. Pascal the First, that is."

"You've been a soldier, monsieur, haven't you? I judge by your bearing."

"In the Paris train bands. But one twin was as much as my father could spare to the army."

"Twin?" questioned the man doubtfully.

"Yes, twin. Pascal the Second," laughed Pascal. "A good soldier he is too; and, like a good soldier, with a palate for good wine and an eye for a pretty face. Lately come to Morvaix. His presence brought me here. He's at the Castle."

"I know him," was the reply, with a smile and a nod and a knowing wink.

"What! You know Pascal the Second!" and he stopped and held out his hand. "Any comrade of his is my friend, and I can do what he very frequently can't, pledge the friendship in a flask of good wine."

"You're wonderfully like him, and to bear the same name is curious too." He spoke as if still suspicious.

"Ah, if you knew the devils of messes he's got me into in Paris with this same name which my father's whim gave us, and this strange likeness! But come, where shall we have the wine?"

The soldier soon found a wine shop, and Pascal plied him freely with liquor, a second flask quickly following the first. When the second was still half full he rose and said—

"We've no time to finish it, I fear. We must find M. Grimaud, the leather merchant, who will vouch for me at the gate." He coined the name at a venture.

"'Tis a pity to leave it," said the soldier, eyeing the flask wistfully. "I don't get such liquor every day."

"It's a good reason for your staying to finish it, I fetch M. Grimaud."

"You'll come back?"

"Nay, if you wish it, I'll stay," and he threw him back on to his seat with an air of impatience. "Quick, my good friend."

"You'd better go. It's too good stuff to swallow gulps," and the soldier winked appreciatively, as he emptied his glass leisurely in sips and re-filled it.

"Well, we'll have a third reason in, then. Luck winks on odd numbers," and he ordered the third flask, finished the reckoning, and took half a glassful.

The "third reason" carried conviction, and when Pascal next rose to leave, the soldier no longer raised an objection.

What step to take next was a question of some difficulty. The experience at the city gate had shown that Pascal could only hope to leave if some burgher of importance could be found to vouch for him, and the first thought was to try and find some one who would do this. But where to go? He could not tell who were friends of the Castle and who for Malincourt, and to look for a Babillon was pretty much like looking for a bullet that had missed its mark and buried itself somewhere in the ground.

He was standing in the market-place gazing about him vaguely and debating the thing when a stroke of fortune came his way. He caught sight of Dubois and hurried after him.

The old soldier was in a gruff mood.

"These burghers are fools: you know the sort, Pascal. Babblers, gabblers, brawlers, windbags, with never an ounce of resolution in the lot," he said in reply to Pascal's question as to how he had fared with them. "A cataract of talk and nothing else."

"Well, I want one of them to come and talk now,"

and Pascal told him what had occurred and what was needed.

"They'll come and make you a speech, a round hundred of 'em," said Dubois, with a gesture of contempt. "But I would not trust to one of them to act like a sensible man."

"But can you find one to identify Gerard and get him away?"

"No. They'd think I had some underhand plan and waste half the day in talking about it, and another half in making up their minds and——"

"Stay, man, don't take example by them or you'll split my ear drums with your growling. Can it be done?"

"Babillon might do it."

"Where is he?"

"I don't know."

"Where are you going?"

"Anywhere out of the reach of their cackling. They're going to meet again at mid-day for some more babble—babble. Why did you all leave Malincourt?"

"The Governor surrounded it and made two attempts to get it in the night."

"These wise men say they waited on him after the firing and he assured them there was to be nothing more done, and that he intended simply to sit down before the maison and wait for you all to come out. To starve you out, that meant. He's recalled all the search parties; you can see that for yourself."

"Well, we're out now, and want to leave the city."

"Where are you to be found?"

"At Babillon's house. You know that?"

"You'd have been safer in the maison. I'll do this. I'll try and find Babillon, and if I succeed in getting some one to vouch for you, will come to this house. You had better go there and explain things, and what mouthing numskulls these precious burghers are."

"You'd better arrange some place of safety in case we have to leave Babillon's and can't get from the city."

"You'll be safe enough where you are, if what the say is true, that the Governor thinks you are all still in the maison and means to keep you there."

"You'll lose no time?"

"Am I a burgher?" and with this last growl he went away, while Pascal, with a laugh, hurried to Babillon and reported how matters had gone, and that there was nothing to do but to wait.

When a chance offered he spoke to Lucette alone.

"I have said nothing yet, but I am not quite easy about that officer, Lucette. He was very curious about Madame Burgher; do you think he can have recognized you? Does he know you well?"

"Is it M. Burgher questioning now?" she asked, with a glance.

"No. We've dropped that; and we're waiting to see what next. Just now it's some one a good deal earnest."

"Yes, he used to know me very well."

"Is he another of them?" He could not resist the jest, and she laughed back with a toss of the head.

"I don't of course understand that. I won't, I mean."

"Do you think he can have sent any one after you to make sure you were Madame Burgher?"

"Do you think so?" She was serious now. "I don't know."

"How did you get rid of the horses?"

"M. Gerard did that."

"I must speak to him then. A very little slip may have very big results to-day." He called Gerard aside and told him his doubts.

"I took the horses back to where you hired them. I dared not leave them standing here. I passed a couple of soldiers, but they took no notice of me; and of course I made sure that no one followed me here."

"It may be nothing, but when that soldier gets back and this tale gets carried to the Castle about the two Pascals and the one Lucette, it may be something—especially if de Proballe's cunning ears get wind of it. I wish you were away."

They were very soon to have proof that Pascal's uneasiness had only too solid grounds. They waited with much impatience for Dubois' coming, and when he came, about an hour after noon, he brought a grave face and very serious news.

The city gates had been shut again and the Governor's troops were once more searching the city; this time systematically from house to house, and the efforts of the search parties were being in the first place concentrated on that part of the city in which Babillon's house stood.

"I passed them at their work," he said, "and only wonder I was not stopped. You cannot stay here, or you will be trapped."

"There is but one course then," decided Gerard. "We must get back to Malincourt."

"There is a better plan," said Gabrielle. "Do you go alone, Gerard, in your monk's gabardine. He has passed the soldiers, and you will do so. I will wait for their coming. We know from what Babillon told us yesterday and what Captain Dubois has heard from the burghers, that no harm can come to me. Please."

"No," answered Gerard firmly. "One thing I will not do. I will not leave you within that madman's reach."

"But it is you he seeks. Would it not be safer, Captain Dubois, for him to go alone? And you, M. Pascal, what say you?"

"It would be safer," agreed the captain.

"Dubois!" exclaimed Gerard.

"I speak but my opinion, my lord. I should take miladi's advice. I will answer for her safety."

"I cannot consent."

"It will be too late to do anything if we dally in talking," said Dubois.

"We will go together, but I will change my burgher's dress for a monk's," and he hurried from the room.

"I am only a monk outwardly, and it may be well to have an officer among the party," said Dubois, slipping off his gabardine and revealing his uniform under it.

"It's too late," said Pascal, who was at the window as Gerard re-entered. "The soldiers are already in the street. The chance is gone."

Gerard looked very grave and Dubois smothered an oath in his moustache.

"We are going to pay a heavy price for our mistake in leaving Malincourt," exclaimed Gerard. "Still, we can but make the attempt. Come, Gabrielle."

"Monsieur, may I suggest?" put in Lucette hurriedly. "There is a chance that these searchers may not know Gabrielle. Let M. Pascal and me remain here to wait for them, playing your parts, while you hide somewhere in the house. When they find us, they may be satisfied to search no further than this room, and you will be free to leave when they have gone. If M. Pascal will?"

"It is well suggested," declared Pascal. "If they will not know you, mademoiselle," he added, with a quizzing glance.

"I do not know all the officers, monsieur," she retorted.

Gerard and Gabrielle both protested against the plan on the ground of its danger to Lucette; but this was overborne, and the two were left alone, while Gerard, Gabrielle and Dubois went with Madame Babillon to an upper part of the house.

"Rather reversing the due order, this, Lucette," said Pascal lightly.

"Due order?"

"Man and wife an hour or two back, and now we're only betrothed, you see."

"M. Pascal!" she cried, laughing and blushing.

"By your leave, not Pascal, but Gerard—Gabrielle."

"I wonder what we ought to be doing when they come. I fear my heart is beating rather wildly."

"Fitting its beats to the occasion, that's all. As to what we should do, can't you find a suggestion out of your experience?"

"Cannot you?"

"I think we ought to be making love—Gabrielle. That's what Gerard would be doing, I expect."

"We're doing one thing that's right, at any rate. We're talking nonsense—Gerard."

"Well, I think we ought to play our parts thoroughly."

"Do you treat everything as a jest?"

"Not when I'm Gerard to your Gabrielle. It's a part I could play in real earnest."

"I think Gerard is an extremely ridiculous person."

"And I think Gabrielle a very charming—coquette."

"I wish they would come, and get it over. I'm a sad coward, and am getting more frightened every minute."

"Ah, you're anxious to break the engagement. You'll break your Gerard's heart." He was listening intently for the coming of the soldiers, and jested merely that he might distract her thoughts and keep up her spirits.

"It will be awkward, by the way, if the officer in charge happens to be—another of them."

"You seem to think the list a long one," she retorted with a shrug.

"Let me see. To begin with"—and he made as if to tell them off on his fingers.

"Never mind, thank you. I can count for myself."

"Your eyes make me almost wish I could count myself," he laughed.

"If my eyes were speaking my thoughts——"

"Well?" he asked, for she stopped.

"They would be asking how many hands would be needed to count—my Gerard's."

"Oh, my hands have long been full. Wait. I heard them," he broke off, in the midst of a laugh. "You had better be in my arms and, when the door opens, break away and utter my name—I mean Gerard; and then act as though it was what it will be—a mistake."

The tramp of men entering the house was heard, and he put his arm round her.

"Look sad," he whispered hurriedly. "For God's sake, don't smile like that."

"Oughtn't I to like to have your arm round me? You are very clumsy about it, you know—Gerard. One might think you had had no practice."

"You seem to know how things should be done," he laughed.

"My heart is beating like a wild thing."

At this moment a heavy hand was thrust against the door, which was flung open, and the soldiers entered.

"Gerard!" cried Lucette, "look, look, the soldiers," and then staring wildly at the men, she clapped her hand to her lips and with a cry of fear fell into a seat.

"Courage, Gabrielle, it is nothing," he whispered, in a tone loud enough to be heard, and bent for a moment over her as if in deep concern. Then he turned to the men. "What does this mean?" he demanded angrily. With intense satisfaction he recognized two of his own men among the five who were in charge of a sergeant, and he shot at them a warning look.

"It means that we're in luck, monsieur, I think. You must come with us."

"Come with you? Why? Cannot an honest merchant be about his business without you soldiers hunting him?"

"Your name, monsieur."

"Tourelle. Leave me in peace."

"Christian name, please?"

"Pascal. You are an insolent fellow."

"And mademoiselle's name?"

"It is no concern of yours."

"I heard it, monsieur, and yours too. Gerard the one and Gabrielle the other. That is enough for me. You must come with me."

"I will not. Don't you dare to lay a finger on me," and he made as if to offer a resistance.

"You can explain to those at the Castle, monsieur. I can only obey orders."

"You touch me at your peril. I am an honest burgher."

"It's no use, monsieur. You can see that," and at a sign from him two of the men stepped forward.

"You shall pay dearly for this outrage, and if I had a weapon——"

"Ah, but you haven't," was the blunt reply; and the two soldiers laid their hands on him.

"And you also, mademoiselle, please."

The little comedy was well acted to the end, and Pascal, full of protests, and Lucette in tears, were led away; the sergeant unable to repress a smile of intense satisfaction at the capture.

They had not been gone long before the others came back to the room.

"The ruse has answered, then," said Gerard.

"How brave of Lucette," exclaimed Gabrielle. "I trust no harm will come to her for this."

"It cannot. It is but a few hours now before we shall be in command of the town and the Castle itself. And those hours will be consumed by this search. Can we go, Dubois?"

"I should wait a while."

"I am in a fever to reach Malincourt," replied Gerard anxiously.

"I should not counsel our going so far. Could you not find shelter in some house already searched? Indeed why not remain here?"

"I could find shelter anywhere in Morvaix," declared Gabrielle.

"Then think of some place, mademoiselle. They have been working from east to west, so that all east of this is safe. There were two of our men in the party just now," said Dubois, turning to Gerard. "They must be using them to make up the number necessary."

"Good. I decide for Malincourt and should like an escort of them to take us there," he answered, and then asked again whether they could start.

Dubois went to the window.

"A thousand hells!" he exclaimed! "They are coming back here. They must have found out the mistake of Quick, my lord, to your hiding place again! No, no, Heaven! what fortune. Four out of five of the men are ours. I see a way. Hide, but close at hand."

He threw himself into a chair while Gerard and Gabrielle left the room.

The soldiers came hurrying in.

"Well, what is it?" he asked coolly.

"Who are you?"

"I think that's a question I should put to you."

"I am the officer in charge of the search party. We are looking for the escaped prisoners, and my sergeant has just been fooled in this house. Now, monsieur, who are you? And do you know of this?"

"I am Captain Dubois, comrade of Captain Bassot in charge of the recently arrived troops. These are some of my men, I see."

The men saluted.

"Do you know anything of this trick?"

"Monsieur!" exclaimed Dubois angrily. "Of what do you accuse me?"

"I make no accusation, captain. But I have to search the house."

"Well, send your men to search it," and Dubois got up and stood by the door, thus barring the way out of the house. If the officer sent the Bourbon men they would find nothing, he knew; if he went himself, he would find more than he would be allowed to take away.

The officer hesitated a moment and then decided—

"I'll search for myself and trust my own eyes this time."

"It's all one to me," answered Dubois with a shrug.

Three men were called on to accompany the officer, and all four were leaving the room, when Gerard, who had heard what had passed, met him at the door.

"Ah!" was the officer's significant exclamation at sight of him, "as I thought," and he turned with a smile of triumph to Dubois.

But the smile died away instantly.

Dubois was standing before the door with his drawn sword in his hand.

It was he who smiled now, and a grim, significant, dangerous smile it was.

CHAPTER XXVIII

A RISING AND ITS SEQUEL

THE officer stared with growing anger, first at Dubois, then back at Gerard, and lastly at the four of his men who had moved away and left him and the one Castle soldier alone in the middle of the room.

"Is this mutiny?" he cried furiously, drawing his sword.

"I'll answer that," said Dubois. "It would be a mutiny if they were to turn against their own officer. And they will not. This is my doing, and the responsibility is mine. I will not let you take your prisoners away."

"We'll see to that. Jean, if that man does not step from the door you will fire at him." The musket was levelled. "Now, monsieur, if you please, stand from the door," he cried sternly.

But the musket was not fired. Gerard stepped forward behind the man, seized his weapon and dragged it from him.

"We can have no firing here," he said quietly.

"You will resist capture at your peril;" and the officer turned on him.

"I am quite prepared for that, captain," interposed Dubois; "but it is you who are in peril, not we. I will give me your sword."

The officer appealed almost fiercely to the four men.

"Do you mean to stand by and witness this? You will pay for it if you do with your lives."

"My soldiers are not trained to man-hunting, n

sieur," said Dubois. "Come, we have wasted enough time. Will you surrender to us?"

The answer was a swift rush and an attack, which Dubois parried with the coolness of a wary and practised fencer. The four soldiers looked on stolidly, and the one who had been disarmed watched the duel with the staring gaze of bewilderment and alarm.

It lasted but a minute or two, when Dubois, forcing the fight with irresistible vigour, drove his antagonist back till, stepping on the fallen musket, he tripped and fell, and his sword went clattering out of his hand over the boards.

Dubois picked it up, and sheathed his own weapon. At that moment the Castle soldier made a dash for the door to escape, only to be stopped by two of the Bourbon men.

"You should not have driven me to this, monsieur," said Dubois in a tone of quiet authority. The officer had risen and stood with folded arms, his face flushed with anger and his brow sullen with the chagrin and humiliation of his ignominious failure. "You must accompany me. No harm will come to you if you obey. But we are resolute men, and our lives may be at stake." He signed to his own soldiers to bring the prisoner along, and all left the room.

"What is he going to do, Gerard?" asked Gabrielle.

"How terrible he looked in that fight."

"He's a strenuous antagonist to face at such a time; but he meant only to disarm the other. He could have killed him half a dozen times had he been so minded. He has done splendidly."

"But what next? We cannot stay here now."

"No, indeed, for we shall have more of the Castle men here soon to learn the cause of the delay."

"What can have happened to Lucette? Dear, brave Lucette."

"We are fast nearing the end of our troubles, Gabrielle. D'Alembert should be up by nightfall at latest. All has gone well with our couriers, and we ought to be in Malincourt within an hour, where we can wait for him in safety."

Dubois and the four soldiers returned then, Dubois dressed in the uniform of a Castle man; and Gabrielle could not restrain a little cry of astonishment at recognizing him, while Gerard smiled as he divined his intention.

"My plan is, my lord, that we use our men and the guard to escort you and mademoiselle as prisoners through the streets. We have secured the captain's man, so that they can give us no trouble."

"And a good plan it is, Dubois," agreed Gerard. "We are well through an ugly business, thanks to you. The sooner we start the better."

It was about two hours after noon when they reached Babillon's house; but while they had been sheltered there, events had occurred which had set the whole of the city in a ferment.

The first cause had been slight: a very trifle; more than the young lieutenant's curiosity at Luce's name at the attempt to pass the gate. He had, in the first place, sent men to follow her; and although she had reached Gerard and Gabrielle and got well away uncovered, the pursuit had been far from fruitless. Some of the men loitering about had seen Gerard when he returned with the horses.

They were making their report of this when the soldier whom Pascal had tricked returned without him, and a semi-intoxicated muddle had told the story of the Pascals. Alarmed by this, the lieutenant had sent a messenger once to the Castle, with the result that instant and vigorous measures were taken to trace the fugitives. The fact that the horses had been obtained at no great

distance from Babillon's house caused that district to be searched first, while large numbers of patrol parties were sent through the city.

This step roused the citizens again, and despite Dubois' opinion as to the indecision of the burgher leaders, they had resolved to take active measures; while the bulk of the citizens, inflamed by their long-standing wrongs, were quickly on fire when the soldiers turned out and the news spread that they were hunting for Gabrielle.

All the elements for a collision were thus present, and the streets were thronged with the people, who eyed the soldiers with lowering looks of deadly hate, and needed but a little provocation to drive them to open and violent revolt.

And that provocation the Governor himself afforded at the very time when Gerard and his little party were endeavouring to escort Gabrielle to Malincourt.

The Governor, hearing of the danger of trouble in the city, hurried from the Castle with the intention of conferring with the chief burghers and renewing the assurances already given that no harm threatened Gabrielle; and he chanced to reach the market-place just when the crowd was in its most dangerous temper.

In the centre of the market-place the officers who were conducting the search had taken up a position, guarded by a number of troops, and to them all the prisoners captured by the patrols and search parties were brought for purposes of identification. The crowd, constantly swelling in numbers, watched the proceedings with intense indignation. Jeers and groans greeted the arrival of every prisoner, and loud flouting laughter went up whenever a prisoner was identified and released, accompanied by threatening murmurs of discontent and anger.

At length stones began to be thrown, and when one struck the officer in command in the face the crowd

raised a wild shout of delight. Smarting under the blow, he ordered the crowd to be charged. Several were wounded, and the sight so enraged the rest that volleys of stones came from other directions just as the Governor rode up.

His first command was for the market-place to be cleared. This was done, for the crowd broke and fled before the weapons of the troops; and a great number of the citizens were caught, stones in hand, and brought back to the Governor. His temper was up now, and threatening them with heavy punishment, he ordered the whole of them to be marched to the Castle by the troops.

The fear of a rescue necessitated the escort being very heavy, and this step left the troops round him comparatively weak in numbers. When the crowd began to return, some one was quick to perceive this weakness and called on the rest, who came surging back in great strength. A very ugly rush followed almost immediately, which the troops found great difficulty in resisting, as the crowd had now armed themselves with staves and bars and such crude weapons as they had been able to snatch up in the hurry. Some very hot fighting ensued, in which fierce blows were given and taken on both sides, and the soldiers seemed likely to be overpowered.

It was at this juncture, just as messengers had been sent to bring up more troops, that Gerard's little party reached the market-place close to the point near the statue, where the Governor stood watching the fray with very anxious eyes as he saw his soldiers being beaten down one by one. The crowd seemed to grow in numbers and fierceness every moment, until after a last desperate rush the soldiers turned and scattered in all directions to be hustled, struck down and lost in the surging mass of the people, whose leaders had possessed the

selves of the soldiers' weapons, and now threatened the Governor himself and the handful of men who were clustered round him.

"Long live Malincourt! Long live Malincourt! Down with the Tyrant! Remember our wrongs!" were the cries in hundreds of strenuous voices on all sides; and after a hot exchange of words between the leaders and the Governor, one of those near him was struck, and the blow was the signal for an attack on the rest, who were beaten back helpless against the resistless anger of the populace. It appeared certain that the next moment would see the Governor himself in the hands of the crowd, whose passions, nurtured on their long endured wrongs and whetted now by their victory, were roused to such a pitch of fury that they would have torn him to pieces.

The Governor, now fear-filled and terror-cowed, stood shrinking against the statue from the sea of angry menacing faces which glared round him when Gerard, who had forced his way through the throng, sprang between the cowering figure and the mob, and with uplifted hand cried in a commanding voice that rose above the din—

"Mademoiselle de Malincourt is safe. She is here."

He pointed to where, on the fringe of the crowd, Gabrielle stood with Dubois; and for a moment there was a lull in the storm as the crowd craned their necks for a glimpse of her.

But the sense of wrong, the thirst for vengeance, the hate of the Tyrant and the sight of him now almost within touch of the hands outstretched to seize him, soon re-kindled the flame, and the clamour broke out again, and now was directed also against this daring monk who stood between them and their prey.

"Down with the monk! Death to the Tyrant!"

The cry began near at hand, and was caught up by

those round until it swelled into a loud roar, vehement menacing and perilous.

"Save me, save me," said the Governor, cowering now between the statue and Gerard, who, undaunted by the angry faces and clenched and threatening hands, faced the mob, and again sent his voice ringing like a clarion among them.

"Peace! Are ye men that would do this violence? Miladi of Malincourt is safe."

Once more his commanding presence and fearless calm stilled them for a pause; and before the storm could break out again a strange change came.

Gabrielle had seen Gerard's peril, and believing that he would be the next victim of the mob, had made herself known to the people around her, who broke out in shouts of joy, and amid a storm of cries and cheers she passed through the ranks, mounted the steps of the statue and took her stand by Gerard's side.

A thunder of cheers greeted her appearance, and the air was rent with cries of "Long live Malincourt!"

But the danger was not over yet, for when the Governor, gathering some courage from the changed temper of the mob, showed himself for a moment at Gabrielle's side, the cheers changed with ominous suddenness to shouts and execrations and groans in the same deafening clamour.

"For God's sake, save me from them," he said, shrinking again behind Gerard. "They will tear me to pieces."

"May we promise them an end to their sufferings?" asked Gabrielle.

"Yes, yes, anything. I will do anything. My God, anything!"

"Down with the Tyrant. Give him to us. Death to the Tiger of Morvaix!" came the cries, with ever fiercer vehemence.

Again Gerard stood with uplifted hand.

"Peace!" he called. "Miladi of Malincourt will speak to you."

At this the cheers came again as Gabrielle, with heightened colour, waited for silence.

"I beg you listen to me. I bring you peace, and in the name of the Governor I promise you an end to your wrongs and sufferings."

The cheers rang out again, and as they died down some voices called: "We are starving. What of the tax on our food?"

"It shall be repealed," said the Governor.

"The Governor pledges his word it shall be repealed," cried Gabrielle. A deafening storm of wild joyous shouts burst out with mighty cries of "God bless Malincourt! Long live Miladi of Malincourt!"

"Will he keep his promise?" cried a stentorian voice.

"I pledge my honour."

Gerard repeated this in his ringing tone.

"The Governor pledges his honour as a noble of France to repeal the tax—a pledge no man dare break."

"You have saved my life, mademoiselle, you and this monk," said the Governor, not recognizing Gerard, who had kept his face carefully averted, and now drew his cowl closer.

"We have saved the people," answered Gabrielle, whose eyes were shining with the excitement of the scene.

"Get me away if you can," said the Governor next.

"Oh, thank God, thank God, at last!" he cried with a sudden change of tone, as a volley of musketry was heard, and a large body of mounted troops dashed through the crowd and mustered in force round the statue, on the base of which the three stood.

With the troops round him, the Governor's courage returned, and as his fears vanished his true nature reasserted itself. He scowled at the crowd.

"Charge them, charge them, the canaille!" he cried passionately. "Cut them down, the dogs. To threaten me! Give them the steel!"

"My lord, is this keeping your pledge?" asked Gerard indignantly.

"You did well, sir monk, you saved my life, and shall have fitting reward; but this is my business."

"You pledged your honour as a noble of France, my lord Duke," protested Gerard.

At this moment de Proballe broke through the troops and came hurrying to the Governor.

"You are not hurt, my lord, I trust," he cried.

"It is not your fault that I was not torn to pieces by the mob. But for mademoiselle, your niece, and the good monk, who stopped the mob in the moment of frenzy, I should have been."

"My God!" exclaimed de Proballe, recognizing Gerard. "Do you know who that monk is? The vicar of the town of Cobalt!"

The Governor, who stood close to Gerard, stepped back hastily, as if in fear of some treachery, and when at a safe distance scowled at him with eyes of hate.

"It is well," he said between his teeth. "I promise you a fitting reward. You shall have it." He smiled and turning to the soldiers near him, he ordered "Arrest him."

"You will not do this, my lord. You cannot be so cowardly," cried Gabrielle, putting herself before Gerard. But this act only served to infuriate him.

"Arrest him, I say," he repeated. "It is my rule here, mademoiselle, not you. You shall not protect him and cannot save him from the fate he merits. You have done enough ill for the people already."

"This injustice shall not be done," declared Gabrielle indignantly.

"You will answer for this to me, my lord Duke, a

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the son of your Suzerain," said Gerard, stepping forward.

"Yes. I will answer to you and for you; and answer now, in this way."

He signed to the soldiers, who then laid hands on Gerard.

"I will appeal to the people," cried Gabrielle vehemently.

"There shall be substance for your appeal, too," he replied. He was like a man beside himself with passion.

"He shall not escape me again. Have a space cleared there," he thundered to his men. "Bring up a file of men. This man is a spy and the ringleader of all the tumults to-day. He is condemned to death, and shall die now."

Even his officers stood aghast at this.

"I demand, at least, the appearance of a trial," said Gerard calmly.

"You have been tried already. I know your crimes, and have tried and condemned you. Do as I say," he thundered to the officers, "or by the God of Heaven I shall know how to deal with those who mutiny against me."

"I am the son of the Duke of Bourbon, and in his name I command you to disregard the Governor's order," said Gerard in a loud, firm tone.

"It is a lie, a lie. Disobey me at your peril."

Two of the officers approached and were venturing upon a remonstrance, when the Governor, mad with his rage, struck one of them a violent blow on the face and himself called up a file of the soldiers.

"Bring that villain here," he said to the men who held Gerard. They were too frightened to disobey him.

Gabrielle watched with bated breath, and was springing forward to again interfere when de Proballe put himself in her way.

"My lord, my lord," she cried in an agony of distress and fear. "I urge you, I beg you not to do this thing."

But the Governor was deaf to her entreaty, and having drawn up the file of men, stood by them, and himself gave the command in a voice thick with rage.

Gerard faced the men without a tremor.

"There will be a heavy reckoning for all concerned in this," he said; and his voice was as calm and steady as before.

The Governor's command rang out stern and sharp, and the guns went up to the men's shoulders.

Then, with a scream, Gabrielle tore herself from de Proballe, and snatching a sword from an officer as she passed, rushed in front of Gerard and held it to her heart.

"If he dies, I will plunge this to my heart, and my blood, with his, shall cry for vengeance upon you."

The Governor listened, his angry eyes fixed on Gabrielle.

"And if he lives?"

"I will do all you have asked."

"No," cried Gerard loudly. "I will not take my life on such a condition."

A moment's pause of acute suspense followed. Then the Governor nodded and said curtly—

"It is enough. You have saved his life, mademoiselle. He shall go free. But first take him to the Castle."

And in a few minutes the troops were on their way to the Castle, with Gerard in their midst, once more a prisoner.

CHAPTER XXIX

IN THE HALL OF AUDIENCE

SOME three or four hours after the rioting in the market-place, Pascal and Lucette, who had been hurried to the Castle from Babillon's house, were led to the Great Hall of Audience and placed in the midst of the large crowd of townfolk who had been taken prisoners by the troops.

They were all herded together in a space about midway down the southern side of the Great Hall, in a space set apart by strong barriers and guarded by a ring of soldiers. Two other companies of soldiers were present, each about fifty in number, and they were drawn up one on each side of the dais at the eastern end, where stood the Governor's seat of audience and judgment.

Nearly all the prisoners had been injured in the conflict, and carried some grim evidences of the strife. Those whose wounds were serious wore such blood-stained bandages, dressings and slings as they had been able to improvise; but for the most part the wounds were undressed, and the men appeared just as they had been taken, with hair and faces grimed with blood and dirt, and clothes torn and jagged by the soldiers' weapons, making a gruesome sight, which moved Lucette alternately to shrinking repulsion and tender pity.

"There must have been terrible fighting," she said to Pascal, for they knew nothing of what had passed, and had been told merely that they were to be tried immediately with the rest of the prisoners, for their

share in the day's work. "I wonder what has happened."

"We can find that out; I will question some of the men," he replied. "But I would rather know what is going to happen."

"I am afraid we shall find that out too quite as quickly as we wish;" and Lucette glanced nervously about her at the men who were guarding the prisoners. She gave a little shiver of fear as her eyes fell on the Governor's seat, and speculated anxiously what the ceremonious and somewhat terrifying preparations boded to them all. From that her gaze passed to the soldiers gathered about the dais, whom she scrutinized closely; and just as Pascal returned from questioning their fellow-prisoners, she uttered an exclamation of surprise and pleasure.

"Monsieur Pascal," she whispered eagerly, "there is Captain Dubois."

"Dubois? Where?"

"There, among the soldiers on the right of the Governor's seat: thirteenth, fourteenth, fifteenth—yes, fifteenth in the second row, counting from the dais to the right. I am sure it's he. Do you see him?"

"See him? I see more than him. Every man in the ranks there is ours, and Bassot himself is in command. We shall see something before we are many hours older, or I am no Bourbon."

"Where can Gabrielle be? And M. Gerard?"

"So far as I gather, he is a prisoner; but the men here know little. There has been a riot in the marketplace; and these are some of the rioters. They have been told only that they are to be tried now."

"Then they cannot have reached Malincourt. Oh, wonder what they will do to us," cried Lucette.

"I know how I would punish you were I the judge."

"I would trust you," she smiled.

"You wouldn't like the punishment any more than

like the results of your act." His tone was half earnest half jest; and she looked up puzzled.

"What is my crime?"

"You have given us splendid help in many ways; but I'm sadly out if our last mischances are not to be traced to that habit of yours—of making fools of us men."

"*Sadly* out! I'm sadly out if you did not say that with a rare spice of relish. Sadly, indeed! Is this one of M. Burgher's curtain lectures?"

"If you were still Madame Burgher, it might be," he laughed.

"But I've gone back to Lucette, thank you, monsieur."

"Aye, the Lucette whom the officer at the gate recognized."

She understood him then. "You don't think——?" she said eagerly.

"What I don't think is not of much account. But I do think that any man who has once been under fire from your dark eyes would not readily forget them. He had not forgotten them, and they set him thinking too."

"Oh, how cruel you are! To blame me in this way."

"Blame you? It is the fortune of things. But if you think there's a lesson in the thing, that good fellow of yours, Denys St. Jean, mightn't be sorry if you learnt it. A thing of that sort is pretty much like a forest fire: you can start it easily, but you never know what may be burnt or how far it may spread before it's put out."

"I ought to be grateful to you for first frightening and then lecturing me at a time like this," cried Lucette angrily.

"My punishment to you would be to sentence you to stop it for the future. That's all. And now I've said my say," he answered; and then, with a reassuring laugh, added: "As for this, it will be nothing. Have no fear.

We may have a farce of a trial and a sentence after Tiger's manner; but before he can do anything, tables will be turned on him, and he is not unlikely find himself where we are. Have no fear, and don't be surprised at anything that happens."

Lucette was silent for a while, her manner a mixture of vexation and regret.

"Shall I say I have learnt my lesson, monsieur?" asked with a look half mocking, half serious. "Your words have hurt me."

"I fear you've but a poor memory for lessons, Lucette."

"Ah, you are unendurable! I don't like this tutor's mood of yours."

"Then it's fortunate I don't wear it often. You are too brave and true a girl at heart, Lucette," he said earnestly, "not to make your good will worth having for any man. And now I'll be serious no more."

But Lucette looked serious then, and twice turned to him as if to say something; although in the end she shrugged her shoulders and remained silent.

"Something is going to happen now," said Pascal after a minute, as a number of the Governor's servants entered and ranged themselves near the dais. Both were watching them when Lucette cried suddenly—

"There is Gabrielle. Oh, how sad and pale she looks!"

"She takes it all very seriously," replied Pascal; and pushing through the prisoners, he forced a way for Lucette and himself to the front. Gabrielle saw, and hurried to speak to them, when one of the guards stopped her.

"You cannot speak to the prisoners, mademoiselle," he said.

"Nonsense, fellow," exclaimed Pascal angrily.

"Silence, prisoner."

"Not at your command, I promise you;" but Gabrielle making a hasty gesture to them, fell back, and at the moment there came a blast of trumpets heralding the approach, as they thought, of the Governor.

But to their amazement, it was Gerard, dressed in Bourbon uniform and preceded by two courtiers, who backed before him, bowing deeply as if in profound respect. One of them was d'Estelle, whose sallow sardonic face wore a smile of mockery; and as they entered, a herald called in loud tones—

"Place, there, place, for the most noble Lord Gerard de Bourbon."

At the announcement the men about the Governor's seat made a profound obeisance, and formed a lane to the steps leading to the dais.

Gabrielle trembled, and showed such agitation and pain that Lucette was full of concern for her, while Pascal smiled and muttered to himself: "In the name of the devil, what can this mean?"

Gerard bore himself with great dignity, though understanding the thing little better than Pascal. He saw the smiles of derision which the Governor's favourites exchanged one with another, but paid no heed to them, and acted as though the scene were no mockery, but earnest.

He was bowed to the Governor's chair, and as he took his seat the Bourbon colours were suddenly unfurled, one on either side.

"His Grace the Duke de Rochelle entreats your lordship to be seated here, and will wait upon you to make his homage to your lordship as the representative of the illustrious Duke de Bourbon, the gracious Suzerain of Morvaix." It was d'Estelle who said this, and his cynical smile was answered by the sneers of every courtier near.

"I shall be glad to receive his homage," said Gerard

as he stood by the Great Seat and looked about him. In his surprise he had not noticed Gabrielle when entering; but in a moment he saw her and went to her.

"What can this mockery portend, Gerard?" she asked nervously.

"Nay, I know not. The Governor seeks to amuse himself, I gather; but I care not so long as he does but waste enough time over it."

"It has some sinister meaning."

"So he will find, if he will but mock long enough," he answered drily. "Meanwhile, we will play up to him in a way he will find little to his liking. Come. I will have a seat placed for you by my side."

"No, no. Let us not anger him further," she said, shrinking. "It is not prudent."

"His anger is nothing to us. In an hour or two at most he will be on his knees to us, in no mocking mood. I promise you. Come;" and he took her hand, and leading her to the dais he ordered d'Estelle to place a chair for her by him.

"I have no commands of the kind, most noble lord," he sneered.

"I command here now. Do as I bid you," answered Gerard sternly; and after a second's hesitation it was done.

The moment after Gabrielle had taken her seat the soldier next Dubois let his musket drop, and at the clanging noise Gerard looked round and saw Dubois. It was a device to attract his attention to the fact that the whole of Bassot's company were present.

Dubois, with a meaning glance, looked across to the prisoners, and Gerard, following the direction of his eyes, saw Pascal and Lucette. His face maintained its grave set expression; but his eyes were full of meaning as he met Pascal's and glanced first at the prisoners and then at the men guarding them.

"We are well prepared, indeed, Gabrielle," he whispered to her. "Dubois has conceived a plan daring even for him. Pascal is among the prisoners."

"I have seen him, and Lucette too; but they would not let me speak to her."

"It needs no speech. He understands. He will lead the prisoners when the moment comes, and they will overpower the men in charge of them."

"But the soldiers here."

"Are Bourbons to a man and Dubois is among them—eating out his heart, I will wager, for the moment when he can strike. Ah! here comes the Governor."

"I have seen the Duchess, Gerard, and she is coming hither," whispered Gabrielle quickly.

"Good; it will all help to waste time."

The Governor, with de Proballe and others in attendance, entered then, and he gave a start of anger at seeing Gabrielle by Gerard's side. He suppressed it quickly, however, and made his way with an affectation of respect toward Gerard. De Proballe, save for an occasional smirk, was preternaturally grave as he followed close to the Governor, bowing at every step with a grotesque, exaggerated obsequiousness that drew smiles from all.

Not an act or gesture of all this escaped Gerard, who saw through the childish contemptible burlesque by which it was designed to insult and humiliate him; but he continued to act precisely as he would have acted had the ceremony been genuine. He remained seated while the Governor approached the dais and said, with a last low bow—

"I desire to offer my most humble greetings to my lord Gerard de Bourbon, and to bid you welcome to Morvaix."

"Your recognition of my right and rank as the son of Morvaix' Suzerain comes somewhat late, my lord Duke, and my previous reception at your hands was but

an indifferent preface to this more fitting sequel. The preface yet remains to be explained."

"I had not then convinced myself that you were indeed Great Bourbon's son."

"You are, then, now convinced?"

"Should I be here and you where you sit were it so, most noble lord?"

"What, then, has convinced you? Your answer does not satisfy me."

"That is a matter to be more conveniently discussed between us in private. All is well with our illustrious Suzerain?"

"My purpose in Morvaix is not concerned with the passing of mere idle compliments, and I bear no other greeting to your lordship than that you have already received and destroyed—an act you may now be anxious to explain."

"Your noble lordship's—condescension amazes me," said the Governor, with a pause before the word, easy for all to understand. "You speak of a purpose. Will you be good enough to explain it?"

"I am indeed glad to do so to all present," answered Gerard readily, rising. He welcomed the chance of letting the prisoners hear it. "My father, the Duke of Bourbon, the Suzerain of Morvaix, had heard ill reports of your government here: that your rule was harsh; that the people were oppressed by your soldiers; that justice was denied to the citizens, who were crushed and ruined by the imposition of iniquitous taxation; and further, that many dark and evil practices prevailed. He has sent me here, therefore, bearing full powers to inquire into the methods of your government and to redress the grievances of the suffering people."

The Governor and those round him sneered and laughed; but the prisoners listened intently to every word, and not understanding that the scene was no more than burlesque, one of them cried in a loud voice—

"God save your lordship! Long live Bourbon!" and the cry was caught up by the whole body of prisoners and of Bourbon troops swelling into loud shouts, which, for the moment, the guards tried in vain to silence.

The Governor paled with anger.

"Your lordship knows how to appeal to the passions of such canaille," he said, when silence had been partly restored.

"The passions have first been provoked by your misrule, my lord Duke," answered Gerard in his stern ringing tone, to the delight of every one of the prisoners, who believed that justice was indeed at last to be meted out to the ruler they detested. Gerard observed the change in them, and saw, with intense satisfaction, that their mood was now such as would make them ready helpers in the scene to follow. "Who are these prisoners?" he asked the Governor.

"Their presence here is in accord with half my present purpose, most noble lord. I have deemed it best that they should be tried before you, illustrious Bourbon's son, that you should know their crimes and yourself decree their punishment, you being, as I know you to be, the essence of justice and purity itself."

At this de Proballe laughed audibly; and the sneer passed round the courtiers. It was he who had suggested to the Governor this mocking masquerade and the burlesque treatment of Gerard, and the irony of the scene delighted him.

But Gerard gave not a sign that he even saw the sneer.

"It was well arranged, my lord," he said gravely.

"And the other part in your purpose?"

"Is a personal affair, personal to the lady at your side and myself." His look conveyed his meaning, and Gabrielle flinched.

"I think I know your meaning," answered Gerard with unmoved composure, "and shall be glad to assist

in furthering such a matter. But first, the prisoner. What is the charge and the evidence?"

De Proballe stepped forward here.

"Most noble and puissant lord Gerard of Bourbo he began with an insolent air, when Gerard interrupted him.

"Stay," he said, with an imperious gesture. "I will not hear the Baron de Proballe. I know him to be incapable of telling the truth."

De Proballe fell back at this insult, and in a voice vibrating with passion exclaimed—

"Will your lordship endure this insolence longer?"

But the Governor was rarely troubled when any other than himself was humiliated. He was now, in truth, rather inclined to rejoice at de Proballe's disclosure, and replied with more than a dash of contempt.

"We must not forget, monsieur, that the lord Gerard comes from Paris with special knowledge we do not possess in Morvaix;" and the favourites round, taking their cue from this tone, sneered one to another with significant shrugs and glances.

"The evidence, my lord?" said Gerard with a show of impatience.

The Governor called up one of his officers then, who spoke of the affray in the market-place; and Gerard, under cover of a desire to get at the truth, questioned him at considerable length, and so consumed much valuable time. Two other officers followed, and some of the soldiers who had been injured by the crowd.

Having prolonged the matter as long as practical, Gerald said—

"There is one point on which none of the witnesses have spoken. The provocation which drove the people to revolt? I would hear that."

"There was none," answered the Governor, who was now wearying of the farce. "And, moreover, these proceedings have lasted long enough."

"We will, then, hear the prisoners themselves."

"That is not the law in Morvaix," was the curt reply.

"They were caught red-handed, and can make no defence."

"Is that your Morvaix justice, my lord? I am not surprised there is discontent, therefore. I will consider the matter I have heard, and give my judgment on the morrow. Meanwhile the prisoners will be released."

They broke out into joyous shouts at this, and again the cries of "Long live Bourbon!" rent the air, to the intense mortification and anger of the Governor.

"This is too much," he said with a scowl. "Your lordship will not be here on the morrow. I am sending you to-night on your way with an escort."

But Gerard having his own end in view, affected not to hear him.

"And now the second matter you mentioned, my lord?" he asked; "affecting Mademoiselle de Malincourt here and yourself."

"It is one that will doubtless please you," answered the Governor. The burlesque so far had brought him far less pleasure than mortification; but he was now sure of his ground. He intended to make Gerard the medium of announcing his betrothal to Gabrielle, and the thought of this triumph of ingenuity appealed to him. "Mademoiselle de Malincourt has been pleased to consent to betroth herself to me, most noble lord; and your gracious presence makes this a fitting opportunity for the fact to be announced. You will be good enough to announce it."

His tone was a threat, and as such Gerard understood it.

"Betrothal?" he repeated, with an excellent simulation of surprise, as if ignorant of the whole matter.

"But is there not already one Duchess de Rochelle?"

"You know the facts well," answered the Governor, dropping all form in his anger. "Do what I say, or there may be bitter reasons to regret it."

But Gerard was a far better actor than he, and replied in a very loud tone, as if more surprised than ever.

"Do you wish me to announce to all present that, having already one wife, you propose to take a second? This is against the laws of France, my lord. I cannot make such an announcement."

The Governor bit his lip and frowned, and said, in a threatening undertone—

"If you wish to leave Morvaix to-night with your head on your shoulders, you will announce it."

"You are tearing off the mask, then, at last," said Gerard, as calmly as before, with a smile.

"The Duchess herself has agreed to a divorce, so that this marriage may take place."

"It is a union I cannot and will not sanction," declared Gerard in a loud firm voice. "In the name of the Sovereign of Morvaix I forbid it. It must and shall not be."

"We will see to that and have an end to this matter," cried the Governor, turning to give an order to his officers. But before he could deliver it an interruption came. The Duchess de Rochelle was borne into the hall on a litter.

Dead silence fell on all as her litter was set down at the foot of the steps.

"Here is the Duchess to speak for herself," said Gerard.

She was pale and fragile, but her eyes were burning and her soft voice thrilled all as she spoke.

"I have heard what has passed, my lord," she said to Gerard; "and I have come here to protest against this contemplated wrong—the last of many I have endured at my husband's hands. I will not have an innocent girl sacrificed. I protest solemnly against this infamy, in the name of God, the Holy Church, and the laws of France."

The effort seemed to exhaust her strength, and as

fell back faint and white, Gabrielle ran and knelt beside her.

Gerard paused for the Governor to speak, but rage deprived him of words.

"What say you now, my lord?" asked Gerard.

"This is a plot against me—a damnable scheme to try and put me to shame here," cried the infuriated Governor. "You shall have an answer, never fear; and one little to your liking. Seize that man," he cried to his officers, pointing to Gerard with a hand that shook with rage.

"Should not the hall be cleared?" said de Proballe, roused to great alarm for himself now at the fiasco of his plans.

The answer came from Gerard in a loud tone that resounded through the vast hall.

"No," he cried; "not until the infamy of this thing has been made public."

A profound hush of expectancy fell upon the great throng, each man holding his breath in wonderment and suspense; and before it was broken, an officer entered hurriedly and approached the Governor—

"My lord, my lord," he said excitedly; "I crave your lordship's pardon. Captain Boutelle has sent me to report that a large force of troops are approaching the city."

"At last," whispered Gerard under his breath, with a deep sigh of relief.

The Governor turned to two of his captains near him—

"Go at once, Des Moulins, and you, Courvoir, and see what this means. Close the gates against them, and hold them in parley till I come."

The men hurried out in company with the officer who had brought the news.

"Clear the hall, Captain Fourtier; drive these canaille back to the prisons until I can deal with them."

"Stop," cried Gerard, springing to his feet. "No one leaves the hall except at my orders. The force you hear of is a Bourbon army coming here under my command. Your power is broken, my lord Duke. Who disobeys me now will answer to the Suzerain Duke, Great Bourbon, for his disobedience. Bear the Duchess away, Gabrielle, you had better leave with her."

"By God, you shall rue this insolent presumption. Let the hall be cleared, I say. It is I, the Governor, who order it."

The Great Hall became now the scene of intense excitement and commotion.

The guards commenced to obey the Governor's command to drive the prisoners back to the cells. Groans and hooting broke out, and in the confusion Lucette contrived to slip past the soldiers and hasten to Gabrielle and with her left by the side of the Duchess' litter.

"Pascal, now," called Gerard. "Captain Dubois, post your men at the doors, and see that no one enters."

"To me, those who are for Bourbon," shouted Pascal. "Down with the guards!" and he flung himself upon the soldier nearest to him, and wrenching his musket from him, began to use it vigorously. This was the signal for a fierce conflict between the prisoners and the guards; and in the meanwhile Dubois, sending half his men to guard the entrance to the hall, drew up the remainder as a bodyguard to protect Gerard, who had left the dais and was now threatened by the officers and courtiers of the Governor.

The two bodies faced each other with fierce menacing looks: the Governor heading his courtiers, and Gerard his men, Dubois close at his side; while the din and clamour of the fight between prisoners and soldiers rendered it impossible for a word to be heard.

The struggle was not long. The prisoners outnumbered their opponents by three or four to one, and fought

with the courage of men fighting for their freedom. They had Pascal to lead them, moreover; and he had clubbed his musket and laid about him with an energy and strength which none could resist wherever he went. And he was everywhere where the fight was thickest; and the stronger men, inspired by his example, seized the soldiers' weapons and fought shoulder to shoulder with him with terrible effect.

The tables were soon turned, and the guards were beaten and overthrown or held prisoners by the men who a few minutes before had been cowering before them.

Before it ended, however, another struggle commenced. The Governor, mad with rage, called upon those with him, and drawing his sword, rushed at Gerard to cut him down, unarmed as he was. But Dubois had anticipated this, and his sword met that of the Duke, who sought with all his skill and trick of fence to break through the other's guard.

The two were soon left fighting almost alone, for the Bourbon soldiers, maddened by the treacherous attempt upon Gerard's life, attacked the courtiers with a right good will, and drove them back speedily to the wall with the fury of their onslaught. There they were speedily disarmed, but not until several of them had been wounded.

As the din of the conflict within the hall died down at the ignominious defeat of the Governor's supporters, there came from outside the sound of heavy firing and the loud shouts of many men engaged in desperate fighting.

"It is d'Alembert; I hear the Bourbon cry," shouted Pascal, hurrying to one of the entrances.

Gerard called to the Governor to yield; and Dubois, hearing this, changed his defensive tactics for those of vigorous attack, and as he was driving the Governor before him, he stepped back suddenly, and so brought the duel to an end.

"Now, my lord, you must see the uselessness of further resistance," said Gerard. "You will give me your sword."

"To a treacherous dog like you? Never!" was the fierce answer.

"Do you speak of treachery? I saved your life to-day in the market-place, thinking that some spark of honour might remain to you to be roused by the act—and your reward was an order that I should be shot. And but now you sought to drive your sword into my heart, unarmed though I was. I will have no mercy for you: nothing but justice. Come, your sword. You are powerless."

The Governor had a curse on his lips, but checked it as a great shout came from Pascal and the Bourbons with him.

"The Castle is ours, my lord. D'Alembert is here," cried Pascal; and the Bourbon soldiers came streaming into the hall, with d'Alembert at their head.

The Governor glanced round him with the look of a hunted beast, and then said sullenly—

"I have no option, it seems." He held out his sword as if about to give it up; but, with a sudden change, he uttered a cry of rage, and lunged forward swiftly at Gerard's heart.

Only just did the thrust miss as Gerard, fortunately suspicious, had noted the change of look and leapt aside.

With a curse at himself for his failure, the Governor sprang from the men who rushed up, and plunged the sword into his own heart.

CHAPTER XXX

THE TROOPS MARCH

THE week that followed was a wild one indeed for Morvaix, and the citizens, freed suddenly from the blighting curse of the Tiger's rule, gave themselves up, all classes alike, to a carnival of revelry and rejoicing.

The news of the strange occurrences which had culminated in the Governor's death was carried far and wide through the city the same night by the liberated prisoners, who streamed out of the Castle in a gay throng, laughing and jesting, straining their throats with shouts and cheers for Gerard and Gabrielle, Bourbon and Malincourt, and jostling and shouldering one another in the mad race to be first to tell the glad tidings.

A garbled and distorted tale it was they told in describing the scene, the true meaning of which, although they had witnessed it, they could but imperfectly understand. But the main fact spoke for itself. The Tyrant was dead—had died by his own hand, rather than face the anger of the Great Bourbon who had brought an army to punish him and save the city.

They had seen this with their own eyes, and with their own ears had heard the words with which Gerard had afterwards dismissed them, promising solemnly good government for the future, relief from the grinding taxation and redress for their long suffered wrongs. And the whole livelong night was spent in rejoicing.

The morrow found the great news confirmed. A proclamation was issued from the Castle announcing

that the Duc de Rochelle was dead, and that Gerard de Bourbon would act for the time as Governor, and this was followed by Gerard's first decree as Governor, repealing some of the Tyrant's ordinances, and detailing a number of measures to be taken immediately for the relief of the poorer citizens.

Nor was this all. The leading burghers were summoned to the Castle and informed of the forthcoming alliance between the Houses of Bourbon and Malincourt through the marriage of Gerard and Gabrielle; and told that Gerard hoped to remain permanently in Morvaix as the Governor of the Province. The burghers were also requested to take urgent counsel together as to the best means to be adopted to restore the impaired trade and fortunes of the city; and were thus sent on their way rejoicing with lighter hearts than they had known for many a long year.

A few days wrought wonders in changing the look of the little city and the demeanour of the people, who had many a substantial proof of the spirit of the new rule; and before the week was out it was known that couriers had passed between Morvaix and the Duke de Bourbon and that they had brought back from the Suzerain confirmation of Gerard's appointment as the new Governor.

A crowd of smiling men and women were gathered in the market-place cheering and rejoicing over this fresh good news, when two horsemen came riding from the Castle toward the south gate. They were de Proballe and Jacques Dauban; and of all the great throng their faces alone were dark and gloomy. Gerard had held de Proballe a close prisoner, intending to punish him severely; but at Gabrielle's intercession had released him, on condition that he and Dauban left the city never to return to it.

"We are so happy, let us forgive," she had pleaded;

and herself had provided her uncle with a sum of money. But Pascal had not forgiven Dauban, and learning when he and his master were to be released, had whispered a word to Babillon which had results.

As the two men reached the farther end of the market-place, where it narrowed into the street leading to the city gate, they found the press of people so great that no more than a walking pace was possible; and just at that moment they were recognized. Cries and hooting, coarse jests and gibes, took the place of smiles and cheers; clenched fists were raised in menace, as the people closed round the horses, rough hands being laid on the bridles.

De Proballe scowled in anger, and when one man seized the bridle of his horse and jeered at him to his face, he was foolhardy enough in his rage to raise his whip and strike the man across the mouth.

It was the spark to the tinder, and the flame burst out directly. In a moment he and Dauban were torn from their horses and jostled and shouldered and thrust from hand to hand, in the midst of a rough but not over ill-tempered crowd.

Babillon was close at hand, and himself raised the cry of "No violence on such a day as this. No violence." And the cry was caught up by the people, and followed by bursts of thunderous jeering laughter at the sour looks and angry faces of the two men. It was rough jesting, however; and just when the people were tiring of it and the pair were getting back to their horses, a cry was raised by some one of "The pond, the pond;" and this, too, swelled into a roar.

Dauban was seized first by half a dozen stalwart fellows, and, writhing, struggling and kicking in futile resistance, was borne along and tossed into the middle of the pond which was near. He emerged a minute later, a shivering, soaked, half-drowned and all-bedraggled

figure to be greeted, as he shook himself and stood squeezing the dirty water from his clothes, with such a roar of raucous laughter as might have been heard through half the city.

De Proballe's turn came next; and despite his angry, vehement protests, he was seized in the same manner, and carried, fighting and screaming out impotent threats and curses, in the direction of the pond.

But before his ruthless captors reached the pond, an interruption came. Gerard and Gabrielle, with some others in attendance, had been riding, and were returning, when their attention was attracted by the sounds of the disturbance, and they came in full view of the proceedings just when Dauban stood shivering after his ducking and the crowd had seized upon de Proballe.

Gerard was for letting the thing be settled by the people, but Gabrielle would not, and with a touch of the spur, put her horse in the way.

Her appearance was the signal for a rousing cheer, and as soon as she could be heard, she said to those about her—

“You do not best show yourselves my friends in this. If you will please me, you will let M. de Proballe free. If I have forgiven him, cannot you?”

A shout of assent was the answer; and in a moment he was set at liberty; the two horses were brought up, and he and Dauban mounted, a wild burst of laughter at the figure which Dauban made being mingled in the cheers for Gabrielle and Malincourt.

De Proballe said not a word of thanks, and would not even look at Gabrielle; and as he passed close to Gerard it was with a scowl and an oath. Then he dug his heels into his horse's flanks and rode out of the city and into the open country, closely followed by Dauban, who kept glancing timorously over his shoulder in fear of yet further trouble.

"I would not have had either of them hurt," said Gabrielle, when Gerard joined her and they resumed the ride to the maison.

"A kindness worthy of your gentle heart, Gabrielle. But I am differently cast, I fear. It would not have hurt him. He has stirred much dirty water in Morvaix, and if he had had to carry away a little of a different kind in his mouth and on his clothes it would have served him right. But he has had a good fright, and that's something; and if you are glad no worse has chanced to him, why I am glad also. I would rather he had a dry skin than you be displeased."

"It is best as it is, Gerard, although—it would have served him right;" and she laughed and added: "I could almost have wished we had not ridden up in time."

"Nay, it gave the people a chance of seeing more evidence of your sweet nature, Gabrielle. How they cheered you! 'Twas a good-humoured crowd, too."

"You have changed the temper of the people almost as if by the wave of a wizard's wand."

"Not I. 'Twas you they cheered. They know whom to thank. Your popularity is so great that you set me a difficult task to rival it."

"How different from that angry sullen mob that faced the soldiers when we first met—and but little more than a week ago." And in this easy happy fashion they chatted until Malincourt was reached.

On the terrace they found Lucette and Denys, now fast on the road to recovery, in converse with Dubois.

"I was chiding Captain Dubois for leaving us, Gabrielle," cried Lucette smiling. "But he has an iron will—shot-proof against any arguments."

"I wish you could persuade him to remain, Lucette," said Gerard. "I have tried to bribe him with the offer of the command of the troops here, but he is, as you say, iron, and insists on leaving to-morrow with d'Alembert."

"I am a soldier, mademoiselle," answered Dubois, and there is news of some fighting yet to be done. My place is with Bourbon's army."

"Ours will be a Bourbon army, too, friend."

"I beg you, my lord, urge me no more. I have arranged the matters on which we spoke. The mercenaries who were in the late Governor's troops have for the most part been enrolled in the companies that march to-morrow, and so many of the Bourbon men as you desired have taken their places. But your force will be chiefly Morvaix men—a sort of citizens' army; and to command such a force is no more to my liking than it is fitted to my powers. I should but cause you infinite trouble by being constantly at loggerheads with your burghers."

"You take them too seriously, captain. They are worthy men," said Gabrielle.

"As men most worthy, doubtless, mademoiselle; as talkers, unsurpassed in France, I think; but I am a plain soldier."

"I should like details of your arrangements now they are completed, Dubois. Come into the house and give them to me. Denys may well assist at the conference, for he will now be high in my esteem and confidence. Come, Denys—if Lucette will spare you to me."

Denys flushed with pleasure, and Lucette smiled.

"What a wonderful change in everything, Gabrielle," she exclaimed when the three men had left them. "How happy you look. And what a little cheat you were."

"I? When?"

"Innocent! Why the day after M. Gerard met you in the market-place. When you said that if for a moment you had swerved from thoughts of duty, a night's reflection had sobered you. Sobered you! Intoxicated you, you should have said."

"I did not know that Gerard was——" Lucette broke in with a merry laugh, and Gabrielle blushed.

"Was Gerard de Cobalt? Nor was he. But do you remember my words, when you were such a philosopher about the plagues of love? I told you you would learn to know it all some day. Oh, Gabrielle, what a lecture I might read you now! You cannot find him near you without a dozen tremors and a fleeting tide of colour in your face and light in your eyes; and when he is not by your side, how restless is Gabrielle, with glances here and glances there, listening for his footstep or his voice, and impatience, oh, such impatience, at all that keeps him from you."

"If I plead guilty, has the court no mercy for me?"

"My dearest, I love you for it. But I told you how it would be; and God knows neither you nor I would have it otherwise. Ah, here is M. Pascal," she said as he came round the house.

"Mademoiselle, I have hastened from the city to crave your pardon," he said to Gabrielle.

"You are already assured of it, monsieur, for I know the offence will be but a trifle."

"You must not trust all men, Gabrielle," put in Lucette briskly.

"Yet unwittingly I may have offended. It was I who instigated the baiting of M. de Proballe and the scurvy knave he calls his secretary. I knew when he would leave, and set on Babillon to frighten him. I have heard it was against your wish, and would not have you blame your citizens for the act of a rough Bourbon soldier."

"What happened to them?" asked Lucette. And when Pascal told her of Dauban's treatment, she laughed and clapped her hands.

"May I tack a condition to my pardon, monsieur?" asked Gabrielle, smiling.

"Were I one of your cautious burghers, I would urge that the condition be first specified."

"It is that you do not leave with the Bourbon forces to-morrow, but remain to be a friend and help to us all."

"Then I pray you undo the tacking. Remember how sad a place Morvaix must ever be in my memory."

"Sad?" exclaimed Lucette. "Monsieur!"

"I mean because of my many bereavements here."

"Bereavements, monsieur?" said Gabrielle, with a frown of perplexity.

"Bereavements truly; what else? 'Twas here in Morvaix I lost my wife, after a union of but a few minutes; and after that my newly betrothed was snatched from me by inexorable fate."

They both laughed, and Lucette said—

"Then you are desolate?"

"In truth could I be otherwise? I am always, and in earnest what Gerard was in masquerade for a few hours—a courier of fortune; and without the hope that the fortune I chased may prove as charming and delightful."

"I would you could have stayed, monsieur; and I thank you for your pretty compliments," said Gabrielle, smiling and blushing.

"You go to Paris, monsieur, I understand," said Lucette. "Doubtless there you will find consolation."

"In Paris there may be distractions, even if not consolation," he answered gaily.

"Try to persuade him to remain, Lucette," said Gabrielle, going into the house.

"Why will you not remain, M. Pascal?" asked Lucette half nervously and more seriously than usual with her.

"Is not the answer there, with her, Lucette, and here perhaps with you?" He spoke lightly, but his eyes were serious.

"I am not sure that I understand you."

"And I am sure there is no need that you should. They will be a happy pair, I hope with all my heart; as I hope indeed that you will be happy with M. St. Jean—

a prince of worthy fellows—even if a trifle disposed to jealousy. I have had much talk with him in the last few days.”

She was silent a moment turning over a ring on her finger.

“I hope you will be happy also.” Her voice was soft and low and trembled slightly.

“I am a soldier and love my colours. I have health and strength, a sound body and a modicum of wits, trust in myself and strong hope, and kindly memories to carry with me from Morvaix. Why should I not be happy?”

“Despite your bereavements?” And she smiled.

“Or perhaps because of them, Lucette.”

“A double-edged sentence that, surely.”

“And therefore best suited to the thought behind it.”

She lifted her eyes and looked at him searchingly, and he met the look with an easy smile.

“I wonder what you mean?” she said, so earnestly that her tone was almost sad.

“Your wonder is not greater than my own,” he laughed.

“In our worst troubles recently you laughed. You have a laugh for everything.”

“The finest mask with which Nature ever fitted man or woman is a laugh, Lucette. Yes, I can laugh at my own follies and wishes and troubles and—aye, even at my own bereavements.”

The gaiety of his tone was just as bright and free; and he continued to smile when Lucette again looked at him earnestly.

“Is that smile a mask, too? I would gladly know what is behind it,” she said.

“I think I myself shall know better when, say, there are twenty leagues between Morvaix and me.”

They stood looking one at the other a moment, and then Denys came out and joined them.

"Come to my rescue, Denys," cried Pascal gaily. "Here is Madame Burgher trying to cross-examine me."

"Aye, come and take a lesson in word fencing, Denys," said Lucette.

"You may need many lessons when you fence with Lucette, my good friend."

"I know it," replied Denys with a smile, as he slipped his arm into hers and glanced at her.

"They would keep me in Morvaix," laughed Pascal.

"And not they alone, Pascal. Do you know, Lucette, I have tried by the hour to persuade him to stay. But he tells me there are—shall I say it?" and he looked at Pascal, who shrugged his shoulders. "There are a woman's eyes calling him away."

"Warning me away, was what I said, friend."

"'Tis the same thing," declared Denys.

"Maybe; but 'twas the term I used. I think I have learnt to read more warnings than beckonings in women's eyes. But 'tis the same in the end."

Lucette watched him steadily as he spoke, and then surprised Denys by saying very seriously, and with something very much like a sigh—

"If that be the reason, it is well that you go, Pascal."

"What, have you changed sides, Lucette?" cried Denys, rallying her.

"'Tis a woman's way, Denys, and ever will be," laughed Pascal.

"Wherever you go, Pascal, I wish you Godspeed with all my heart," said Lucette in the same earnest, almost strenuous tone; and gave him her hand, which he carried to his lips.

"Denys will not mind that, at any rate," he said.

Lucette shivered.

"Take me in, Denys, I am chilled," she said; and without saying more or looking again at Pascal, she hurried in.

"'Tis a woman's way, Denys, only and always a woman's way," he said, as Denys lingered a moment and then hurried after her.

Pascal watched them with a smile until they had gone, and then turned grave, nodded once or twice, smiled again, and again was grave, until, with a shrug of the shoulders, he turned and swung away.

The next morning all was bustle and commotion at the Castle, for the Bourbon troops were marching out. Gerard and Gabrielle and all from Malincourt were there to bid them farewell. They stood together, the centre of a large group, watching them start, and Lucette and Denys were a little apart from the rest.

Dubois, taciturn and quiet as usual, was busy seeing that everything was in due order; and Pascal, activity itself, moved gaily here, there and everywhere in the ranks, with eyes for everything and everybody, laughing and jesting in uncontrollable spirits.

His company was the last to start, and all his soldiers, although many of them were leaving behind friends in Morvaix and breaking pleasant associations, seemed to take the infection of their leader's gaiety, and faced the parting with laughs and jokes and pleasantry.

The merriest and most cheerful of all the companies was Pascal's, and he himself the merriest and most cheerful of them, as they saluted Gerard and cheered Gabrielle and then marched away with sturdy, stalwart stride.

Pascal waited to mount his horse until almost the last ranks were on the move.

"What spirits he has," exclaimed Denys to Lucette as they stood watching the men. "I am sorry he is going."

But Lucette was silent.

The last rank passed, and then Pascal, turning in the saddle, waved his hand and smiled. His eyes rested for a moment on Lucette's, at least so it seemed to her; and she raised her kerchief and waved back to him just as he touched his horse and moved after his men.

She continued to wave and to stare after him, but he did not look back until, quite in the distance, he turned and again, as she thought, looked at her; and again she answered, waving to him.

He did not look back any more, and when, the last sign of the troops having disappeared and she was still staring after them, Denys touched her arm, she started almost as one awakened from a dream.

"I am glad he has gone," she said, sighing; and then Denys saw that her eyes were dimmed with tears.

"Tears? Lucette?" he cried.

"It strains one's eyes to stare so long. Give me your arm, Denys dear, and be patient with me to-day. I—I—oh, Denys dearest, I am so glad you are well again," and she walked away clinging closely to his side.

And Denys, not understanding this mood of hers, was almost as much perplexed by her humour as he was delighted by her tenderness.

THE END.

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