The Helmet of Navarre

BY BERTHA RUNKLE. GROSSET & DUNLAP Publishers: New York.

(Continued.)

"Monsieur had a box for weapon yesterday, but as I prefer to fight in the established way, I ventured to provide him with a sword."

"Thoughtful of you, Lucas. Is this the make of sword you elect to be killed with?"

"M. de Mar. may have his choice."

M. de Mar professed himself satisfied with the blade given him.

"Have you summoned your seconds, Lucas?"

Lucas raised his eyebrows.

"Is that necessary? I thought we might settle our affairs without delay. I confess myself impatient."

"Your sentiments for once are mine."

"It is understood you bring your spaniel with you. He will watch that I do not spring on you before you are ready," Lucas said, with a fine sneer.

"And who is to watch me?"

"Oh, monsieur's chivalry is notorious. Precautions are unnecessary. It is your privilege Monsieur to appoint the happy spot."

"The spot is near at hand. Where you slew Pontou is the fitting place for you to die."

"It is fitting for you to die in your own house," Lucas amended.

Without further parley we turned into the Rue des Innocents, on our way to that of the Coupejarrets.

Now, I had been on the watch from the first instant for foul play. I had suspected something wrong with the sword, but my lord, I knew, had accepted it. Then, when Lucas proposed no seconds, I had felt sure of a trap. But his inviting my presence at the place of our choice smelt like honesty.

M. Etienne remarked casually to me.

"Faith, there'll soon be as many ghosts in the house as you thought you saw there—Grammont, Pontou, and now Lucas. What ails you, lad? Footsteps on your grave?"

But it was no thoughts of my grave caused the shudder, but of his. For of the three men of the lightning-flash, the third was not Lucas, but M. Etienne. What if the vision were after all, the thing I had at first believed it—a portent? An appearance not of those who died by steel, but of those who must. One, two and now the third.

Next moment I almost laughed out in relief. It was not Pontou I had seen, but Louis Martin. And he was living. The vision was no omen, but a mere happening. Was I a babe to shiver so?

And yet Martin, if not dead, was like to die. He was in duress as a Leaguer spy, to await King Henry's will. All who entered this house lay under a curse. We should none of pass out again, save to our tombs.

We entered the well-remembered little passage, the well-rememberd count, where shards of glass still strewed the pavement. Some one—the gendarmes, I fancy, when they took away Pontou—had put a heavy padlock on the door Lucas and Grammont left swinging.

"We go in by your postern, Felix," my master said. "M. Lucas, I confess that I prefer that you go first."

Lucas put his back to the wall.

"Why go farther, M le Comte?"

"Do you long for interruption?"

"We were not noticed coming in. The street was quiet."

He crossed the court abruptly and went down the alley to look into the street.

"Not a soul in sight," he said, coming back. "I think we shall not be interrupted. Still, it is wise to use every care. We will fight, if you like, in the house."

He opened with his knife the fastened shutter, and leaped lightly in. Monsieur followed. I, the last, was for closing the shutter, but he stopped me.

"No, leave it wide. I have no fancy for a walk in pitch darkness with M. Lucas."

"Do we fight here?" Lucas asked, facing us in the wide, square hall. "We can let in more light."

"You seem anxious, my friend, to call attention to your whereabouts. As I am host, I designate the fighting-ground. Upstairs, if you please."

"I suppose you insist on my walking first," Lucas sneered.

"I request it, monsieur."

"With all the willingness in the world," his rogueship sneered

his rougeship answered, setting foot straightway on the stair, and mounting steadily never turning to see how near we followed, or what we did with our hands. His trust made me ashamed of our lack of it. I almost believed we did him injustice. Yet at heart I could not bring myself to credit him with any fair dealing.

We went up one flight, up two. We had left behind us the twilight of the lower story, had not reached dawn again at the top. We walked in blackness. Suddenly I halted.

"Monsieur!"

"What?"

"I heard a noise."

"Of course you did. The place is full of rats."

"It was no rat. It was footsteps."

We all three held still.

"There, monsieur. Don't you hear?"

"Nothing, Felix; your teeth are chattering. Cross yourself and come on."

But I could not stand it.

"I'll go and see, monsieur."

"No," Lucas said, striding back from the foot of the next flight. "I will go."

We saw a glint in the gloom, monsieur's bared sword.

"You will go neither one of you. Hush! If we show ourselves, there'll be no duel today."

We kept still all three leaning over the banister, peering down to where the white tiles picked themselves out of the floor of the hall far beneath. We could see them better than we could see each other. All was silent. Not so much as a rustle came up from below. Suddenly Lucas made a step or two as if to pass us. M. Etienne wheeled about, raising his sword toward the spot where from his footfalls we supposed Lucas to be.

"You show an eagerness to get away from me, M. de Lorraine."

"Not in the least, M. de Mar. This alarm is but Felix's poltroonery, yet it prompts me to go down and close the shutter."

"On the contrary, you will go up with me. Felix will close the shutter."

They confronted each other, vague shapes in the darkness, each with drawn sword. Then Lucas raised his in salute.

"As you will; so be some one sees to it."

"Go, Felix."

Lucas first, they mounted the last flight of stairs, and their footsteps passed along the corridor to the room at the back. I, as I was ordered, set my face down the stairs.

They might mock me as they liked, but I could not get it out of my head that I had heard steps below. Cautiously, with a thumping heart, I stole from stair to stair, pausing at the bottom of the flight. I heard plainly the sound of moving above me, and of voices; but below not a whisper, not a creak. It must have been my silly fears. Resolved to choke them, I planted my feet boldly on the next flight, and descended humming, to prove my ease, the rollicky tune of Peyrot's catch. Suddenly, from not three feet off, came the soft singing:

Mirth, my love, and Folly dear

My knees knocked together, and the breath fluttered in my throat. It seemed the darkness itself had given tongue. Then came a low laugh and the muttered words:

"Here we are, M. de Lorraine. Are you ready?"

There was a stir of feet on the landing before me, behind the voice. The house, then, was full of Lucas's cutthroats, the first of them Peyrot. In the height of my terror, I remembered that M. Etienne's life, too, depended on my wits, and I kept them. I whispered, for whispering voices are hard to tell apart:

"Not yet. The two of them are up there. Keep quiet, and I'll send the boy down. When you've finished him, come up."

"As you say, monsieur. It is your job."

I turned, scarce able to believe my luck, and, not daring to run, walked up-stairs again. Prick my ears as I might I heard no movement after me. Actually, I had fooled Peyrot. I had gone down to meet my death, and a tune had saved me.

When I reached the uppermost landing, I rushed along the passage and into the room, flinging the door shut, locking and bolting it.

They had not begun to fight, but had busied themselves clearing the space of all obstacles. The table was pushed against the wall in the corner by the door; the chairs were heaped one on another at the end of the room. Both shutters were wide open. M. Etienne, bareheaded, in his shirt, stood at guard. Lucas kneeling on the floor, picking up with scrupulous care some bits of a broken plate. He sprang to his feet at sight of me.

"What is it?" cried M. Etienne.

"Cutthroats. They'll be here in a minute."

Even as I spoke, I heard tramping on the stairs below. My slam of the door had warned them that something was wrong.

"Was that your delay" M. Etienne shouted, springing at his foe.

"I play to win!" Lucas answered, smiling.

The blades met; the men circled about and about. Lucas, though he preferred to murder, knew how to duel.

We were doomed. With monsieur's sword for our only weapon, we could never hope to pass the gang. In another minute they would be here to batter the door down and end us. Our consolation lay in killing Lucas first. Yet as I watched, I feared that M. Etienne, in the brief moments that remained to him, could not conquer him, so shrewd and strong was Lucas's fence. Must the scoundrel win? I started forward to play Pontou's trick. Lucas sought to murder us. Why not we him?

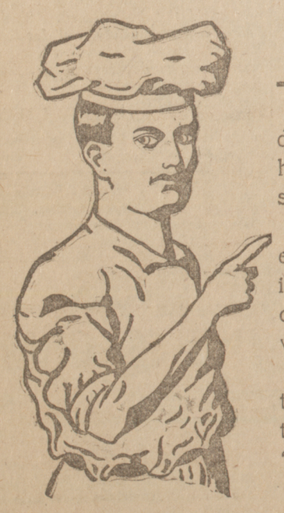
One flash from my lord's eye, and I retreated in despair. For I knew that did I touch Lucas, M. Etienne would let fall his sword, let Lucas kill him. And the bravos were on the last flight.

(To be continued.)



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NOVELTIES FOR LAWN FETES

Whether or not the Japanese are to be regarded as the "yellow peril" of the coming day, they certainly supply us with a good many artistic inspirations for the present one. What the garden party would be without Japanese decorations and accessories one cannot imagine, they have become so indispensable to the American hostess.

In planning a lawn party for these midsummer days, the hostess turns naturally to the Land of the Flowering Almond for suggestions. If she aims at novelty the whole affair is given a Japanese aspect throughout, even to the costumes of those present. What could be more appropriate for hot weather wear than the "comfy" flowing kimonos of silk or crepe that the little yellow people wear so effectively? Of course, the men might raise something of a fuss, for there is nothing the masculine hates more fervently than "dressing up," but perhaps even mere man would prove amenable to persuasion if the party were held under the protecting shades of evening.

For the Japanese lawn party the piazza generally provides a basis for the decorative scheme. Japanese matting covers the floor and an arrangement of Japanese umbrellas combined with American and Japanese flags, in paper, ornaments the ceiling. For the rest the whole porch may be turned into a grove of cherry blossom or wistaria. The Japanese importing houses now make specialty of artificial flowers for such purposes, and when a quantity is bought special rates may be obtained.

If the porch be too small to admit of much decoration, the flower sprays may be hung from the trees and shrubs in the garden, or a temporary arbor may be erected and the scheme carried out in that.

Butterflies and moths of all sizes and descriptions, which can be manufactured at home out of colored paper, wire and cotton batting, may be suspended on silken threads from the trees or poised lightly by means of fine wire on the floral sprays. These winged creatures give a very pretty effect as they sway to and fro in the breeze.

Then, to add brilliancy to the scene, Japanese lanterns, large and small, must be hung wherever there is a hanging space. The newest of these to American eyes are the grotesque fish lanterns, made to represent the Japanese fish god. The lanterns, of course, are lighted only in the evening, but they present a striking effect even under daylight, especially when interspersed with big peonies made of white or crimson crepe paper.

It is a petty custom to present each guest, on arriving, with a Japanese fan—or at an afternoon party with both fan and umbrella. Also there are numberless curios costing anywhere from five to fifty cents apiece, which may be given away as souvenirs or as prizes if games are played. Dwarf Japanese plants, growing in little jardinieres of glazed ware are also very desirable for either purpose.

Refreshments should be served from Japanese trays, with Japanese paper doyleys and napkins. The correct viands are wafers and sweetmeats of various kinds with Japan tea either hot or iced, and sake, a Japanese drink made from rice.

Should the hostess prefer to emulate the noble red man instead of the suave Oriental, the lawn may be temporarily transformed into a miniature Indian encampment. A near-Indian tepee, looking enough like the real thing to deceive any ordinary being, can be purchased already for setting up; and in this—or from it—the refreshments may be served. Navajo blankets, Indian baskets and pottery papoose slings, tomahawks of papier mache, pieces of wampum and a pipe of peace are among the characteristic decorations for an Indian lawn party, while souvenirs of birch bark will prove acceptable to the guests.

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"Why?" asked the passenger.

"I went for her fare just now," said the conductor. "She handed me a dollar. I didn't have much change so I asked: 'Is that the smallest you've got'"

"What did she say?" asked the passenger.

"She smiled and said: 'No, I've got a baby only six months old at home,'" replied the conductor.—Denver Post.

Dr. Vernon C. Stewart has been unanimously elected medical inspector of the public schools of Woburn (Mass.), by the school committee. The salary of his office is $200 a year. His election to the office of inspector is the first under the new regulations adopted by the board establishing the department. Dr. Stewart is the son of Rev. Dr. Wm. Stewart, of St. John, formerly pastor of Main street Baptist church. He is a graduate in arts and medicine of Columbia College, New York.

Dr. and Mrs. Merrill returned to the city Saturday.

A. B Marshall, of Bear River, was registered at the Dufferin yesterday.

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