# The Helmet of Navarre

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

(Continued.)

"—as I in my turn have been loving and obedient. It was only two nights ago he told me M. de Mar must be dead to me. Since then I have held no intercourse with him. Last night he came under my window; I was not in my chamber, as you know. I knew naught of the affair till M. de Brie was brought in bleeding. It was not by my will M. de Mar came here—it was misery to me. I sent him word by his boy that other night to leave Paris; I implored him to leave Paris. If, instead, he comes here, he racks my heart. It is no joy to me, no triumph to me, but a bitter distress, that any honest gentleman should risk his life in a vain and empty quest. M. de Mar must go his ways, as I must go mine. Should he ever make attempt to reach me again, and could I speak to him, I should tell him just what I have said now to you."

I pressed monsieur's hand in the endeavour to bring him back to sense; he seemed about to cry out on her. But mademoiselle's earnestness had drawn all eyes.

"Pshaw, Lorance! banish these tragedy airs!" Mme. de Montpensier rejoined, her lightness little touched. A wounded bird falls by the rippling water, but the ripples tinkle on. "M. de Mar is not likely ever to venture here again; he had too warm a welcome last night. My faith, he may be dead by this time—dead to all as well as to you. After he vanished into Ferou's house, no one seems to know what happened. Has Charles told you, my sister?"

"Ferou gave him up, of course," Mme. de Mayenne answered. "Monsieur has done what seemed to him proper."

"You are darkly mysterious, sister."

Mme. de Mayenne raised her eyebrows and smiled, as one solemnly pledged to say no more. She could not, indeed, say more, knowing nothing whatever about it. Our mademoiselle spoke in a low voice, looking straight before her:

"If Heaven willed that he escaped last night, I pray he may leave the city. I pray he may never try to see me more. I pray he may depart instantly—at once."

"I pray your prayers may be answered, so be it we hear no more of him," Mme. de Montpensier retorted, tired of the subject she herself had started. "He was never tedious himself, M. de Mar, but all this solemn prating about him is duller than a sermon." She raised a dainty hand behind which to yawn audibly. "Come, mesdames, let us get back to our purchases. Ma foi! it's lucky these jeweller folk know no French."

M. Etienne was himself again, all smiles and quick pleasantries. I slipped off to my post in the background, trying to get out of the eye of Mlle. de Tavanne, who had been staring at me the last five minutes in a way that made my goose-flesh rise, so suspicious, so probing was it. On my retreat she did indeed move her gaze from me, but only to watch M. le Comte as a hound watches a thicket. It was a miracle that none had pounced on him before, so reckless had he been: I perceived with sickening certainty that Mlle. de Tavanne had guessed something amiss. She fairly bristled with suspicion, with knowledge. I waited from breathless moment to moment for announcement. There was nothing to be done; she held us in the hollow of her hand. We could not flee, we could not fight. We could do nothing but wait quietly till she spoke, and then submit quietly to arrest; later, most likely, to death.

Minute followed minute, and still she did not speak. Hope flowed back to me again; perhaps, after all, we might escape. I wondered how high were the windows from the ground.

As I stole across the room to see, Mlle. de Tavanne detached herself from the group and glided unnoticed out of the door.

It was thirty feet to the stones below—sure death that way. But she had given us a respite; something might yet be done. I seized M. Etienne's arm in a grip that should tell him how serious was our pass. Remembering, for a marvel my foreign tongue, I bespoke him:

"Brother, it grows late. We must go. It will soon be dark. We must go now—now!"

He turned on me with an impatient frown, but before he could answer, Mme. de Montpensier cried, with a laugh:

"And do you fear the dark, wench? Marry, you look as if you could take care of yourself."

"Nay, madame," I protested, "but the box. Come, Giovanni. If we linger, we may be robbed in the dark streets."

"Why, my sister, where are your manners?" he retorted, striving to shake me off. "The ladies have not yet dismissed me."

"We shall be robbed of the box," I persisted; "and the night air is bad for your health, my Nino. If you stay longer you will have trouble in the throat."

He looked at me hard. I tried to make my eyes tell him that my fear was no vague one of the streets, that his throat was in peril here and now. He understood; he cried with merry laughter to Mme. de Montpensier:

"Pray excuse her lack of manners, duchesa. I know what moves the maid. I must tell you that in the house where we lodge dwells also a beautiful young captain—beautiful as the day. It's little of his time he spends at home, but we have observed that he comes every evening to array himself grandly for supper at some one's palace. We count our day lost an we cannot meet him, by accident, on the stairs."

They all laughed. I, with my cheeks burning like any silly maid's, set to work to put up our scattered wares. But despair weighed me down; if we had to remember ceremony we were lost. The ladies were protesting, declaring they had not made their bargains, and monsieur was smirking and bowing, as if he had the whole night before him. Our one chance was to bolt; to charge past the sentry and flee as from the devil. I pulled monsieur's arm again, and muttered in his ear:

"She knows us; she's gone to tell. We must run for it."

At this moment there arose from down the corridor piercing shriek on shriek, the howls of a young child frantic with rage and terror. At the same time sounded different cries, wild, outlandish chattering.

"The baby! It's Toto! Oh, ciel!" Mme. de Mayenne gasped. "Help, mesdames!" She rushed from the room, Mme. de Montpensier at her heels, all the rest following after.

All, that is, but one. Mlle. de Montluc started as the rest, but at the threshold paused to let them pass. She flung the door to behind them, and ran back to monsieur, her face drawn with terror, her hand outstretched.

"Monsieur, monsieur!" she panted. "Go! you must go!"

He seized her hand in both of his.

"O Lorance! Lorance!"

She laid her left hand on his for emphasis.

"Go! go! An you love me, go!"

face brimming over with mischief. She flitted into the room, crying:

"I knew it! I knew it was M. de Mar! The grey eyes! M. le Duc has done with him as he thought proper, forsooth! Well, I have done as I thought proper. I unchained Mme. de Montpensier's monkey and threw him into the nursery, where he's scared the baby nearly into spasms. Toto cursed the cloth-of-gold coverlet up on top of the tester, where he's picking it to pieces, the darling! They won't be back—you're safe for awhile, my children. I'll keep watch for you. Make good use of your time. Kiss her well, monsieur."

"Mademoiselle, you are an angel."

"No, she is the angel," Mlle. Blanche laughed back at him. "I'm but your warder. Have no fear; I'll keep good watch. Here, you in the petticoats, that were a boy the other night, go to the farther door. Mme. de Nemours takes her nap in the second room beyond. You watch that door; I'll watch the corridor. Farewell, my children! Peste! think you Blanche de Tavanne is so badly off for lovers that she need grudge you yours, Lorance?"

She danced out of the door, while I ran across to my station, Mlle. de Montluc standing bewildered, ardent, grateful, half laughing, half in tears.

"Lorance, Lorance!" M. Etienne murmured tremulously. "She said I should kiss you—"

I put my fingers in my ears and then took them out again, for if my ears were sealed, how was I to hear Mme. de Nemours approaching? But I admit I should

For answer he fell on his knees before her, covering those sweet hands with kisses.

The door was flung open; Mlle. de Tavanne stood on the threshold. They started apart, monsieur leaping to his feet, mademoiselle springing back with choking cry. But it was too late; she had seen us

She was rosy with running, her little have kept my eyes glued to the crack of the door: that I ever turned them is my shame. I have no business to know that mademoiselle bowed her face upon her lover's shoulder, her hand clasping his neck, silent, motionless. He pressed his cheek against her hair, holding her close; neither had any will to move or speak. It seemed they were well content to stand so the rest of their lives.

Mademoiselle was the first to stir; she raised her head and strove to break away from his locked arms.

"Monsieur! monsieur! This is madness! You must go!"

"Are you sorry I came" he demanded vibrantly. "Are you sorry Lorance?"

His eyes held hers; she threw pretence to the winds.

"No, monsieur; I am glad. For if we never meet again, we have had this."

"Aye. If I die tonight, I have had today."

Their voices were like the rune of the heart of the forest, like the music of deep streams. I turned away my head ashamed, and strove to think of nothing but the waking of Mme. de Nemours.

"I thought you dead," she moaned, her voice muffled against his cheek. "No one would tell me what happened last night. I could not devise any way of escape for you—"

"There is a tunnel from Ferou's house to the Rue de la Soierie. His mother—merciful angel—let me through."

"And you were not hurt"

"Not a scratch, ma mie."

"But the wound before? Felix said—"

"I was put out of combat the night I got it," he explained earnestly, troubled even now because he had not obeyed her summons. "I was dizzy; I could not walk."

"But now, monsieur? Does it heal?"

"It is well—almost. 'Twas but a slash on the arm."

"Oh, then I have no anxiety," she murmured, with a smile that twinkled across her lips and was gone. "I cannot perceive you to be disabled, monsieur."

"My sweeting!" he laughed out. "If I cannot hold a sword yet, I can hold my love."

"But you must not, monsieur," she cried, fear, that had slept a moment, springing on her again. "You must go, and this instant, while the others are yet away. I knew you, Blanche knew you; some other will. Oh, go, go, I implore you!"

"If you will come with me."

She made no answer, save to look at him as at a madman.

"Nay, I mean not now, past the sentry. I am not so crazy as that. But you will slip out, you will find a way, and come to me."

Silently, sadly, she shook her head. His arms loosened, and she freed herself from him. But instantly he was close on her again.

"But you must! you will, you must! Ah, Lorance, my father is won over. He bids me win you. He has sworn to welcome you; when he sees you he will be your slave."

"But my cousin Mayenne is not won over."

"Devil fly away with your cousin Mayene!" M. Etienne retorted with a vehemence that made me shudder, lest the walls have ears.

"Ah, you are free to say that, monsieur, but I am not. I am of his blood, and dwell in his house, and eat at his board."

He was looking at her with passionate ardour, grasping her actual words less than their import of refusal.

"Are you afraid?" he cried. "Are you frightened, heart-root of mine? You need not be, mignonne. You can contrive to slip from the house—Mlle. de Tavanne will help you. Once in the street, I will meet you; I will carry you home to hold you against all the world."

"It is not that," she answered.

"Am I your fear?" he cried quickly. "Ah, Lorance, my Lorance you need not. I love you as I love the Queen of Heaven."

"Ah, hush!"

"As I love the Queen of Heaven. I will as soon do sacrilege toward her as ill to you."

He dropped on his knees before her, kissing the hem of her gown. She stood looking down on his bowed head with a tenderness that seemed to infold him as with a mantle.

He raised his eyes to hers, still kneeling at her feet.

"Lorance, will you come with me?"

She was silent a moment, with heaving breast and face a-quiver.

"Monsieur, I am sworn. That night when Felix came, when I was in deadly terror for him and for you, Etienne, I promised my lord, an he would lift his hand from you, to obey him in all things. He bade me never again to hold intercourse with you—alack, I am already foresworn! But I cannot—"

He leaped to his feet, crying out:

"Lorance, he was the first forsworn! For he did move against me—"

"He told you—the warning went through Felix—that if you tried to reach me he would crush you as a buzzing fly. Oh, monsieur, I implored you to leave Paris! You are not kind to me, you are cruel, when you venture here."

"You are cruel to me, Lorance."

Sighing, she turned from him, hiding her face in her hands.

"Mayenne has not kept faith with you!" monsieur went on vehemently. "He has broken his oath. I mean not last night. I had my warning; the attack was provoked. But yesterday in the afternoon, before I made the attempt to see you, he sent to arrest me for the murder of the lackey Pontou."

"Paul's deed!" she cried in white surprise. "He spoke of it—we heard, Felix and I. What, monsieur! sent to arrest you? But you are here."

"They missed me. They took by mistake Paul de Lorraine."

"He was not here last night!" she cried. "Mayenne was demanding him of me."

"Then he slept pleasantly in the Bastille. May he never look on the outside of its walls again!"

"But he will, he does. He must be free by this time; they cannot keep Mayenne's nephew in the Bastille. And oh, if he hated you before, how he will hate you now! Oh, Etienne, if you love me, go! Go to your own camp, your own side, at St. Denis. There are you safe. Here in Paris you may not draw a tranquil breath."

"And shall I flee my dangers? Shall I run, in the face of my peril?"

"Ah, monsieur, perhaps your life is nothing to you. But it is more to me than tongue can tell."

"My love, my love!" He snatched her into his arms; she held away from him to look him beseechingly in the face, her little clutching hands on his shoulders.

"Oh, you will go! you will go!"

(To be continued.)

"Monsieur, go! You must go!"


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