

The Helmet of Navarre

BY BERTHA RUNKLE.

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(Continued.)

"Monsieur, in my opinion—"
"You are not to hold opinions, Felix, but your tongue."
I did, at that, and stood back from the bed to let him do as it liked him. He rose and went over to the chair where his clothes lay, only to drop into it half swooning. I ran to the door and dashed half the water in it into his face.

"Peste, you need not drown me," he cried testily. "I am well; it was but a moment's dizziness." He got up again at once, but was forced to seize my shoulder to keep from falling.

"It was that damnable potion he made me drink," he muttered. "I am all well else; I am not weak. Curse the room; it reels about like a ship at sea."
I put my arms about him and led him back to bed; nor did he argue about it but lay back with his eyes shut, so white against the white bed linen I thought him fainting for sure. But before I could drench him again he raised his lids.

"Felix, will you go get a shutter? For I see clearly that I shall reach Mlle. de Montluze this night in no other way."

"Monsieur," I said. "I can go. I can tell your mistress you cannot walk across this room tonight. I can do my best for you, M. Etienne."

"My faith! I think I must let you try. But what to bid you to say to her—pardon! I scarce know what I could say to her myself."

"I can tell her how sorely you are hurt—how you would come, but cannot."
"And make her believe it," he cried eagerly. "Do not let her think it a flimsy excuse. And yet I do think she will believe you," he added, with half a laugh. "There is something very trust-compelling about you, Felix. And assure her of my lifelong, never-failing service."

"But I thought monsieur was going to take service with Henry of Navarre."

"I was!" he cried. "I am! Oh, Felix, was ever a poor wight so harried and torn between two as I? Whom Jupiter would destroy he first makes mad. I shall be gibbering in a cage before I have done with it."

"Monsieur will be gibbering in his bed unless he sleeps soon. I go now, monsieur."

BLOOD HUMORS

PIMPLES
BLOTCHES
ERUPTIONS
FLESHWORMS
HUMORS

Many an otherwise beautiful and attractive face is sadly marred by unsightly blotches, pimples, eruptions, fleshworms and humors, and various other blood diseases.

Their presence is a source of embarrassment to those afflicted, as well as pain and regret to their friends.

Many a cheek and brow—cast in the mould of grace and beauty—have been sadly defaced, their attractiveness lost, and their possessor rendered unhappy for years.

Why, then, consent to rest under this cloud of embarrassment?

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"And good luck to you! Felix, I offer you no reward for this midnight journey into the house of our enemies. For recompense you will see her."

XIII.

MADEMOISELLE.

I went to find Maitre Menard, to urge upon him that some one should stay with M. Etienne while I was gone, lest he swooned or became lightheaded. But the surgeon himself was present, having returned from bandaging up some common skull to see how his noble patient rested. He promised that he would stay the night with M. le Comte; so, eased of that care, I set out for the Hotel de Lorraine, one of the inn-entrants with a flambeau coming along to guide and guard me. M. Etienne was a favorite in this inn of Maitre Menard's; they did not stop to ask whether he had money in his purse before falling over one another in their eagerness to serve him. It is my opinion that one gets more out of the world by dint of fair words than by a long purse or a long sword.

"Now what brings you back?"

"This, maitre," said I, drawing him into a corner. "M. le Comte has been in a fracas tonight, as you perchance may have divined. His arch-enemy gave us the slip. And I am not easy for monsieur while this Lucas is at large. He has the devil's own cunning and malice; he might track him here to the Three Lanterns. Therefore, maitre, I beg you to admit no one to M. le Comte—no one on any business whatsoever. Not if he comes from the Duke of Mayenne himself."

"I won't admit the Sixteen themselves," the maitre declared.

"There is one man you may admit," I conceded. "Vigo, M. de St. Quentin's secretary. You will know him for the biggest man in France."

"Good. And this other; what is he like?"

"He is young," I said, "not above four or five and twenty. Tall and slim—oh, without doubt, a gentleman. He has light brown hair and thin, aquiline face. His tongue is unbound, too."

"His tongue shall not get around me," Maitre Menard promised. "The hog of the Three Lanterns was not born yesterday let me tell you."

With this comforting assurance I set out once more on my expedition with, to tell truth, no very keen enthusiasm for the business. It was all very well for M. Etienne to declare grandly that as recompense for my trouble I should see Mlle. de Montluze. But I was not her lover and I thought I could get along very comfortably without seeing her. I knew not how to bear myself before a splendid young noblewoman. When I had dashed across Paris to my trouble I should see Mlle. de Montluze. I had not been afraid; but now, going with a love-message to a girl, I was scared.

And there was more than the fear of her bright eyes to give me cause. I was afraid of Mlle. de Montluze, but more afraid of M. de Mayenne's cousin. What mischief devil had driven Etienne de Mar, out of a whole France full of lovely women, to fix his untimely desire on this Li-gueuse of Mayenne's own brood? Had his father's friends no daughters, that he must seek a mistress from the black duke's household? Were there no families of clean hands and honest speech, that he must ally himself with the treacherous blood of Lorraine?

I had seen a sample of the League's work today, and I liked it not. Mayenne were, as You-gis surmised, Lucas's backer. I marvelled that my master cared to enter his house; I marvelled that he cared to send his servant there. Yet I went none the less readily for that; I was here to do his bidding. Nor was I greatly alarmed for my own skin. I thought my self too small to be worth my Lord Mayenne's powder. And I had, I do confess, a lively curiosity to behold the interior of the greatest house in Paris, the very core and centre of the League. Belike it had not been for terror of this young demagogue I had stopped along cheerfully enough. Though the hour was late many

people still loitered in the streets, the clear summer night, and all of them talking politics. As Jean and I passed at a rapid pace the groups under the wine shop lanterns, we caught always the names of Mayenne and Navarre. Everywhere they asked the same two questions: Was it true that Henry was coming into the Church? And if so, what would Mayenne do next? I perceived that old Maitre Jacques of the Amour de Dieu knew what he was talking about: the people of Paris were sick to death of the League and their intrigues, galled to desperation under the yoke of the Sixteen. Mayenne's fine new hotel in the Rue St. Antoine was lighted as for a fete. From its open windows came sounds of gay laughter and rattling dice. You might have thought them keeping carnival in the midst of a happy and loyal city. If the Lieutenant-General found anything to vex him in the present situation, he did not let the commonalty know it.

The Duke of Mayenne's house, like my duke's, was guarded by men-at-arms; but his grilles were thrown back while his soldiers lounged on the stone benches in the archway. Some of them were talking to a little knot of street idlers who had gathered about the entrance, while others, with the aid of a torch and a greasy pack of cards, were playing lansquenet.

I knew no way to do but to ask openly for Mlle. de Montluze, declaring that I came on behalf of the Comte de Mar.

"That is right; you are to enter," the captain of the guard replied at once. "But you are not the Comte de Mar yourself? Nay, no need to ask," he added with a laugh. "A pretty count you would make."

"I am his servant," I said. "I am charged with a message for mademoiselle."

"Well, my orders were to admit the count, but I suppose you may go in. If mademoiselle cannot land her lover it were cruel to deny her the consolation of a message."

A laugh went up and one of the gamblers looked round to say:

"It has gone hard with mademoiselle lately, sanglier! Here's the Comte de Mar has not set foot in the house for a month or more, and M. Paul for a quarter of a year is vanished off the face of the earth. It seemed as if she must take the little cheese or nothing. But now things are looking up with her. M. Paul has walked calmly in, and here is a messenger at least from the other."

"But M. Paul has walked calmly out again," a third soldier took up the tale. "He did not stay very long, for all mademoiselle's graces."

"Then I warrant," I was mademoiselle sent him off with a flea in his ear," cried another. "She looks higher, than a bastard, even Le Balais's own."

"She had better take care how she flouts Paul de Lorraine," came the retort, but the captain bade me march along. I followed him into the house, leaving Jean to be edified, no doubt, by a whole history, false and true, concerning Mlle. de Montluze. We bow down before the lofty of the earth, we underlings, but behind their backs there is none with whose names we make so free. And there we have the advantage of our masters; for they know little of our private matters while we know everything of theirs.

In the hall the captain turned me over to a lackey who conducted me through a couple of antechambers to a curtained doorway whence issued a merry confusion

of voices and laughter. He passed in while I remained to undergo the scrutiny of the pair of flunkies whose repose we had invaded. But in a moment my guide came again, lifting the curtain for me to enter.

The big room was ablaze with candles set in mirrored sconces along the walls, set also in silver candelabra on the tables. There was a crowd of people in the place, a hundred it seemed to my dazzled eyes; grouped, most of them, about the tables up and down, either taking hands themselves at cards or dice or betting on those who did. Bluff soldiers in breastplate and jack-boots were not wanting in the throng, but the larger number of the gallants were brave in silken doublets and spotless ruffs, as became a noble's drawing-room. And the ladies! mon Dieu, what an I to say of them? Tricked out in every gay colour under the sun, agleam with jewels—eh, bien, the ladies of St. Quentin, that I had thought so fine, were but serving-maids to these.

I stood blushing, dazed by the lights and the crowd and the chatter, unable in the first moment to note clearly any face in the congregation of strange countenances. Nor would it have helped me if I could, for here close about were a dozen fair women, any one of whom might be Mlle. de Montluze. My heart hammered in my throat. I knew not whom to address. But a young noble, near by, dazing in a suit of pink, took the burden on himself.

"I heard Mar's name; yet you are not M. de Mar, I think."

He spoke with a languid but none the less teasing derision. In truth, I must have resembled a little brown hare, and he, in his short, stocky figure and square face there was a force which his comrade lacked. He regarded me with a far keener glance as he asked:

"Poste! he must be in low water if this is the best he can do for a lackey."

"Perhaps the fellow's errand is to beg an advance from Mlle. de Montluze," suggested the pink youth.

"Who speaks my name?" a clear voice called; and a lady, laying down her hand at cards, rose and came towards me.

She was clad in amber satin. She was tall, and she carried herself with stately grace. Her black hair shadowed a cheek as purely white and pink as that of any yellow-lipped Friesian girl, while her eyes, under their sooty lashes, shone blue as corn-flowers.

I began to understand M. Etienne.

"Who is it wants me?" she repeated, and catching sight of me stood regarding me in some surprise, not unfriendly, waiting for me to explain myself. But before I could find my tongue the man in pink answered her with his soft drawl:

"Mademoiselle, this is a minister plenipotentiary and envoy extraordinary—most extraordinary—from the court of his Highness, the Comte de Mar."

"Oh, that is it!" she cried with a little laugh, but not, I think, at my uncountedness, though she looked me over curiously.

"He has not come himself, M. de Mar?"

"It appears not, mademoiselle."

She did not seem vastly disconcerted for all she cried in doleful tones:

(To be Continued.)

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