

By Percy Drebner.

CHAPTER X

The Folly of a Soldier.

It was not until he had run some distance along the lane that Ellerey stopped to listen, and fully to realize that his companion was not beside him. There were no sounds of pursuit, but the darkness about him was not so complete in so short a time, either they had come no farther than the door in the wall, or had turned in the opposite direction, perhaps following his companion.

With his sword still in his hand, held ready for deadly work at a moment's notice, he retraced his steps, his senses sharp set to detect the slightest sound or movement near him. Heavy clouds had engulfed the moon now, the darkness was extreme, and the silence of the night unbroken. He went forward carefully, his feet light as a feather, his eyes fixed on the ground.

"You got out then? Thanks heaven!" "Yes; I didn't speak because I thought you were one of them, and I'm no match for a babe in arms." "He was leaning against the wall a few feet from the gate, Ellerey had supposed him farther off by the faintness of his voice.

"Nothing serious, I think, but I've had a good deal of blood let out of me. I should have occupied that grave in the garden for a certainty had it not been for the baron's who stood over me. He was a fine fellow, and the blackguards retreated from the door, but he outside. This wasn't the baron's doing."

"Perhaps not," Ellerey answered. "Can you find your way back?" "Yes, if you'll let me hang on to you, and we don't have to go far. When I was put outside something was said about going to the left."

"We'll go to the left, then; but I haven't a notion where are the woods." The wounded man was weaker than he imagined. Before they had gone fifty yards he began to reel, and even as he suggested that Ellerey should go on and get help, he fainted, and he was thrown down by his arms and carried him. His one idea was to get as far away from the scene of the night's adventure as possible, but his progress was slow. His comrade revived as quickly as if, although he tried to walk again, his task was beyond him. So Ellerey carried him, resting at intervals, all through the night.

As dawn Stefan stretched out his hands, and a heavy rain fell, and he was wakened by the sound of water on the roof, and he was wakened by the sound of water on the roof, and he was wakened by the sound of water on the roof.

"Aye, he never sleeps at all!" "I live too high the city for fairy-tales," said the boy. "Will you bring me to this same Stefan? I have a message for him."

"Do you know the palace, my friend?" "Yes." "To the right of it there is a large square."

"I know it," answered the boy; "the foreigners who hate us live there." "I would curb that young tongue of yours, or you'll be using it against me for ever under the volp."

"Run quickly then, and afterward come to me in the Grande Place. You know the statue of King Ferdinand there? I shall be beside it. Away with you. The quicker you do your errand, the greater your reward."

"No!" the boy answered. "It's a fearsome sound, like a whisper bubbling up through water. I'd be sorry to hear it from you. Off with you!" "Stefan watched the boy out of the door, then he went to the kitchen, and he saw the charred fragments on the hearth.

"Here's news that's an excuse for wine," he said, pouring out a liberal draught into the tankard. "A man gets rusty as an old lock with waiting. This will grease the action somewhat."

"It's early hours for such refreshment," said a voice at the door. Stefan winked one eye over the rim of the tankard at the intruder, but did not pause in his drinking until three parts of the liquid was gone. Then he drew the back of his hand across his eyes and sneezed and sighed with satisfaction.

"Never too early to drink thanks for good tidings, Monsieur Francois!" The Frenchman, with a quick glance round the room, stopped in his smile upon his lips. He had told his master more than once that this servant of Captain Ellerey's was a drunkard and a fool, and that little was to be got out of him, because nothing was ever said to him.

"And what are the good tidings?" he asked. "You'll be laughing at me, because you don't understand my disease, Monsieur Francois. I hate women."

"Well, there it is—I hate them," said Stefan, "but there was one woman who would not hate me, do what she would. She was a bonny wench, so far as I am concerned, and with an arm of muscle to appeal to a soldier like me. At the street corner she'd wait awhile to see me pass, and she'd remark on the cut of my coat and the state of my legs."

Early in the morning men riding in the Bois had inquired of one another whether the story concerning Baron Petrescu were true. One had heard this, another that it was untrue, and a third that he had seen the man in a duel with a member of the British embassy, who had also been seriously wounded; and again, that he had wounded his adversary and had then been nearly killed by his swordman, a man of the name of Ellerey, who had inquired the name of the woman and another where the duel had been fought, for there was a law against duelling, although it was seldom enforced. The true story did not become known until the fact that the Baron's wound was a slight affair after all, and that the duel had not been fought with a member of the embassy. Captain Ward had certainly been hurt, but the fact that he was the result of an accident; they had Dr. Goldberg's word for it. It was then that the younger viscount smiled. Baron Petrescu was an easy lover, and had been punished for some time. He would name her fast enough, like you might at a hungry sparrows in winter good tidings, Monsieur Francois, believe me, though I doubt the taming and plying the woodcutter. Why, the muscles in her arm wouldn't stretch to draw the bow of mine, and a woodcutter would have to cut deep into the forest before muscles stood out like these." And with a great laugh Stefan bared him brawny arms for the Frenchman's inspection.

"I believe you. Too good to waste in fondling a woman! Ugh! What brings you so early to the western side?" "I have a message for the Captain."

Stefan frowned his low laughter in a copious draught while Francois sipped with the air of a connoisseur. "For a king's palate," he murmured. "To his wine and to his secrets, eh?" "Stefan frowned his low laughter in a copious draught while Francois sipped with the air of a connoisseur. "For a king's palate," he murmured.

"Say rather for the gods, Nectar, Monsieur Francois! My secrets bubble to my tongue as the wine bubbles to yours." "Turn them into good money, Stefan. After all, what is this English captain to you?"

"The soldier set down his tankard and lowered his voice into a confidential whisper. "There are men who take me for a fool," he said, coming nearer to his companion. "The captain did not return last night, and there have been watchers in the street."

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"I only carry messages for my master."

"I'll deliver it. Tell me quickly, and you shall taste a drop of real Burgundy to keep the King's impetuous out of your return journey."

"What?" thundered Stefan, "I am not to be trusted, then?" "You know the value of caution in these times," said Francois. "You spoke of it just now, Monsieur De Frolette is over-cautious. Stefan; that is the truth."

"It is a weakness of all masters," the soldier replied, "and so they overreach themselves. Give me a little confidence, and I am content, but distrust me, and my ears are ever on the stretch to catch news which I may use to my advantage. But I have no quarrel with you. The captain is out, you must await his return, and while you wait you shall taste his Burgundy."

"You have your wine in safe keep-

ing. He said as Stefan went down into a cellar, hiding Francois to wait until he had struck a light. "You would have us keep it in the dovecot, or some such place, when Sturatsberg comes down now? Sit you on that empty barrel there. Here's wine should make you dream to your heart's content. The captain thinks that he has looked upon me as a secret, Monsieur Francois, to have such wind in hiding and never ask a soldier comrade to pass an opinion. So we help ourselves." "To his wine and to his secrets, eh?"

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