



The Black Douglas By S. R. Crockett.

Synopsis of the preceding chapters. William, son of Douglas, falls in love with the niece of the marshal de Retz.

I will make you suffer if you fail me—I command you! cried Gilles de Retz, bonding himself toward her and pressing his fingers against her brow so that the points dented her white skin.

CHAPTER LIV—Continued.

"Sybilla de Thouars, as you are in my power, so I bid you work my will!" It was the deep, stern voice of Marshal de Retz which spoke.

"Where are the three men from the land of the Scots? Tell me what you see! Tell me all!" the marshal commanded, still standing before her in the same posture.

"I see a boat on a stormy sea," she said. "There are three men in it. One is great of stature and very strong. The others are young men. They are trying to furl the sail. A gust strikes them. The boat keels and goes overboard. The men are struggling in the pit of waters. There are cliffs white and crumbling above them. They are calling for help as they cling to the boat. Now there is but one of them left. I see him trying to climb up the slippery rocks. He falls back each time. He is weary with much buffeting. The waves break about him and suck him under. Now I do not see the men any more, but I hear the broken masts of the boat knocking hollow and dull against the rocks. The last of the three men is whipped about it. But the three men are gone!"

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THE THREE SCOTS TELL DUKE JOHN OF MARSHAL RETZ.

sever for these offenses in the city of Nantes and that he will!" She ended abruptly like one who is tired, and Gilles de Retz drew a long sigh of relief.

CHAPTER LV. The Red Milk. Darkly and swiftly the autumn night descended upon Machedou. In the streets of the little feudal burg, there were few passers by, and such as there were clutched their cloaks tighter round them and scurried on. Or if they raised their heads, it was only to take a hasty, fearful glance at the vast bulk of the castle looming imminent above them.

From a window high in the central keep a red light streamed out and when the clouds flew low, strange dited shadows were wont to be cast upon the rolling vapor. Sometimes smoke, acid and heavy, belled forth and wild cries of pain and agony floated down to chill the hearts and silence the footsteps of the home-returning rustics and barghests trembling in their beds.

Clerk Henri counted them twice over and looked carefully to see what did the young Scots lad, who had so mysteriously escaped from the dread room of his master, Laurence McKim played X's and O's upon a board with Blaise Renouf, the precceptor's son, and at some hitch in the game he incontinently eluded the Frenchman upon the car. Whereupon ensued trouble and the spilling of much ink.

voked the quarrel, was slinking away when the "peasants" (as the other master was called in lower Brittany) ordered him to sleep in separate rooms for the better keeping of the peace.

"And do you, Master Laurence, perform your vigil of the night upon the pavement of the chapel. For you are the most rebellious and troublesome of all—indeed, past bearing. Go! No word, sirrah!"

"The dead and cold to Laurence that at the head of the stairway from the chapel was the prison chamber of Maude Lindsey and her ward, the little maid Margaret of Galloway.

He told himself at least that this was his main object, and doubtless he had the master in his mind. But a far stronger motive was curiosity and the magic influence of the mysterious and the unknown upon the mind of youth.

More than to deliver Margaret of Galloway, Laurence longed to look again upon the iron altar and to know the truth as to the strange sacrifices which were consummated there. And he yearned to see again that rough-eared image graven after the fashion of a man.

And the reason was not far to seek. For if ever the worship of the high God according to the practice of the most enlightened nations grounds itself upon blood and sacrifice what wonder if in the worship of the lords of hell the blood of the innocent is a sacrifice well pleasing and desirable.

Revered and intractable in the desire, in man's heart to know good and evil—but particularly evil. And so Laurence now desired to see the sacrifice laid between the horns of the altar and the image above lean over its head to gaze upon the sweet savour of its burning.

Long and carefully Laurence listened before he ventured forth. The chapel of the innocents was dark and silent. Only a reflection of the red light which burned in the keep struck through the chere-story upon the great cross which swung above the altar. This being dispersed like a halo about the sign of Christ's redemption, rendered the corner where was placed the door into the secret stairway light enough to enable the youth to insert therein Clerk Henri's key.

CHAPTER LVI. The Shadow Behind the Throne. Within the grim walls of Black Angus Duke John of Brittany and reigning sovereign of western France was holding his

vital energy and new youth to my veins, to make me strong as a young man in his strength, and wiser than the wisdom of age. Hear me, O great Master of all the evil of the Universe, Thou great Equal and Co-adjutor of the Most-Gracious God, hear and manifest thy so mighty power! Hear me and answer, O Barran-Sathanas!"

Gilles de Retz took the cup from the hands of the servants. He seemed so weak with his head reeling that he could hardly hold it between his trembling hands. He lifted his head, and again cried aloud.

"See, I am weak, my Satan—see how I tremble. Strength is departed from me. Youth is dead. Help thy faithful servant, aid him to lift up this precious oblation to thee."

And as the great dusky image seemed to lean over him with a hoarse cry, Gilles de Retz lifted the cup and held it high above his head. As he did so a beam sudden as lightning, red as fire, fell upon it, and with a quick instinctive horror Laurence saw that it was filled to the brim with blood fresh and red.

The marshal's voice strengthened. "It is coming! It is coming! Barran manifests himself, O great Lord, to thee! I drain this draught," cried Gilles de Retz. "The red milk, the precious milk of innocents, to thee I drink it!"

And he set the cup to his lips and drank deep and long. And the terrible lord of Retz, exhausted by his own fury, cast himself at the feet of the gigantic image which, bending over him, seemed with the same grimace sarcastically to mock alike his downfall and his exaltation.

But Laurence heard no more. For sense and feeling laid wholly departed from him, and he lay as one dead behind the door of the temple of Barran-Sathanas, lord of evil, in the thrice-accursed castle of Machedou.

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discourtesy upon Sholto instead of upon the natural leader and spokesman. Behind his chair Pierre de l'Hopital let his deep, inscrutable eye drop once upon his master and his spare and sinewy wrists twitched as he held his arms by his side. He seemed upon the point of dealing dual dignity a box on the ear both sound and improving.

"I am the Lord James of Douglas and Avondale," said the leader of the Scots, with grave dignity. "And I had three years ago the honor of breaking a lance with you in the tilt yard of Poitiers, when in that town your grace met with the king of France and the duke of Burgundy."

"At this John of Brittany looked up quickly. "I do not remember," he said, "and I never forget faces. Even Pierre will grant me that!"

"Your grace may possibly remember, then, the dint in your shoulder that you got from the point of a spear, caused by the breaking of the links of your shoulder piece!"

A light sprang into the duke's eyes. "What!" he cried, "you are the young Scot who fought so well, and kept his shield up all day over the door of a common sergeant's tent, having no pavilion of his own, till it was all over dints, like an ale house tankard?"

"As were also the knight who dined it!" grimly commented Pierre de l'Hopital. "The Lord James of Avondale bowed.

"I am that knight!" he said, quietly and with gravity. "But," cried the duke, "I know not that you were of Douglas. That is a great name at Poitiers, and had we known your race and quality we had not been so ready with our shield-rapping!"

"As that time," said James Douglas, "I had not the right to add 'of Douglas' to my titles. But during this year my father hath succeeded to the earldom and estates."

"What—then is your father duke of Touraine?" cried the duke of Brittany, much astonished. "Nay, my lord," said James Douglas, with some little bitterness. "The king of France hath caused that to revert to himself by the success which attended a certain mission executed for him in Scotland by his chamberlain, Marshal de Retz, concerning whom we have come far to speak with you."

in the hands of the bishop of Nantes and if your grace will not move he has promised to see justice done."

"The hiring—the popular motto after favor—I know him!" cried Duke John, angrily. "What accursed demon sent you to him! In this, as in other matters, he will strive to out me from the hearts of the people. He will be the people's advocate and will gain great honor from this trial, will he? We shall see. But Guards, there! Turn out! Summon those that are asleep. Let the full muster be called. I will lead you to Machedou myself. And these gentlemen shall march with us. But, by heaven

the bones of St. Anne of Aunay, if in one job they shall fail to substantiate against Gilles de Retz those things which they have testified, they shall die by the rack and by the cord and by disemboweling and by fire. So swear I, Duke John of Brittany."

"It is good!" said James Douglas, and "It is good!" said also Malise and Sholto McKim.

"But before any dies in Brittany, Gilles de Retz or another, I will judge the case," said Pierre de l'Hopital, president of justice and grand councillor of the reigning sovereign. (To Be Continued.)

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