The Lace 'Kerchief

By S. Levitt Yeats.

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Affairs were going badly at court. I was seized with a fit of the blues and for once, leaving Pompon, my ape, behind, made my way from the Louvre across the river, to a little inn called the Chapeau Rouge, where the wine was old and the cookery excellent. I ordered a wing of capon and a flask of burgundy to be brought to me in the summer house in the garden, and when I had supped I leaned back in my seat, inhaling the fragrance of the roses, and for a space went back in dreamland to my home in the Quercy.

A slight noise—a restrained cough—arrested my attention, and through the space between the leaves of my shelter I caught a glimpse of a face at a gable window of the inn, directly overlooking me, a face that peered out for a second and was gone. So thick, however, was my cover, that I was totally concealed—an unsought for but fortunate circumstance.

But although the face was immediately withdrawn, I had recognized it at once. The man in the room above me was Chantonnay, the Spanish ambassador in France.

In a moment my megrims vanished. I felt that there was something here worth prying into, and that perhaps the poor gentlemen of the Quercy, the king's jester and the grandee of Spain, might have another rubber to play against each other—we had played one once before.

I determined to wait. Fortunately, I had paid my score, and was at liberty to stay all night where I was if I listed. Fortunately, also, there was an execution that evening at the place Maubert, which had drawn all the population of the students' quarter to the other end of the city, and but for my gentleman upstairs and myself below there were, as I thought, no other guests in the Chapeau Rouge.

About an hour passed and it became dusk. Then, to my surprise, three figures appeared at the door of the inn; one was the innkeeper, the other was Chantonnay, and the third was a lady, closely veiled. Her features were not distinguishable, but under her cloak there seemed to be a tall and graceful figure, and the foot and ankle—I am a judge of these matters—left no doubt in my mind that the lady was young and probably handsome.

Monsieur put something in mine host's hand, who bowed to the ground, and, giving his arm to his fair companion, they both left the inn together.

"Ho! ho!" I laughed under my breath. "At his age, too! St. Siege! But he has a pretty taste."

And, half-laughing, half-disgusted with myself for having wasted my time, I emerged from my lair, and, exchanging some light words of badinage with the innkeeper, I also left the Chapeau Rouge and hastened homeward.

I took the road by the barrier, outside the moat of St. Germain, but it was not until I reached St. Peter's chapel that I saw my turtle doves once more. They were pressing on toward the river, but no longer arm in arm.

At the quay the pair stopped and exchanged some earnest words together, the Spaniard once laying his hand on the lady's shoulder, as if to emphasize what he was saying. Finally Chantonnay sounded a low whistle and after a moment's delay two other figures, emerging from the darkness, joined my pair. Chantonnay appeared to give them some orders, and then, bowing to the lady, he turned sharply around and began to walk back in my direction. At the time I was standing in the shadow of some piles of wood. I slipped around these as he came near and let Chantonnay pass, which he did at a round pace—though once he stopped, and, striking the palms of his hands together, laughed a low, cackling laugh to himself.

"Every man his own way of wooing," I muttered, and when he had disappeared continued my route. The lady had gone straight on toward the river with the two men who had joined her when Chantonnay left and my way lay in the same direction. As I passed the spot where the couple parted something white lying on the roadway caught my eye. I picked it up and found it was a delicate lace kerchief. I handled it for a moment. In one corner there appeared to be a monogram, or crest, but it was too dark to see; so, thrusting it into my vest pocket, I pursued my way.

During this I had a little time to reflect, and, considering all things, I was almost forced to the conclusion that it was not quite a love affair my don was engaged in, and then somehow I began to think of my old friend, Blaise de Lorgnac. His power of rapid action would have been much to me now. It was he and I together who had checkmated the Spaniard once before, but Lorgnac was away at Marienbourg with Conde, trying to heal his heart wounds by getting other wounds on his body, and this would be a single hand I was to play.

My apartments were in the wing of the palace overlooking the Rue St. Thomas du Louvre. As I approached them I saw that the door was half open and that the room within was light. Some one within, too, struck a chord on my lute—it was Lorgnac—Lorgnac come back. I knew, and a moment after we had clasped hands in warm greeting.

"You are well?" I asked, looking into his eyes.

"As ever," he smiled back at me.

Making Lorgnac be seated, I pulled out some wine and bade him give me the news of the war.

In the excitement of the moment and our meeting I had no opportunity to speak about my adventure of the evening, but at last some allusion was made to Chantonnay and I told him the story. As I finished I pulled the kerchief from my vest pocket and threw it on the table. "Here," I said, "is the toy I picked up—and now to look at the crest and the monogram. It should tell us who she is."

I stretched out my hand, but Lorgnac was before me. "No, no! this is not your way or mine, de Besme. Why should we pry into a woman's secrets?"

"You forget I am La Fouine—the ferret—and the secret is Chantonnay's as well as hers."

He hesitated for a moment, and then, insisting on his point, "Even so! Let it be, old friend."

"As you will, Sir Amadis of Gaul!" I replied, a little petulantly, putting the kerchief aside, adding, "but I will make my Spaniard dance tonight at the mask. You are, of course, coming?"

"I leave Paris at dawn for Marienbourg."

"Where Conde, they say, lies ill?"

"Ill, yes—but not with the fever. I was there—thank God! And, de Besme." Here he rose from his seat and began to pace the room, as he continued, "Nothing would satisfy the prince but that I should ride to Paris—see her—our queen—and ride back and tell him I had seen her. So I was not to exchange a word. On my faith as a gentleman I bore no message."

"And you have seen her—the queen of Scotland?"

"Yes. But she saw me, too; it was on the ladies' terrace that we met."

"Alone?"

"No! One of her tirewomen was with her—and the short of it is that I—ass and fool—have promised to bear a letter to the prince."

My blood ran cold.

"You!" I burst out. "You!" And then I rose, too, and in bitter jest handed him my cap and bells.

"Take that! My baton, and the ape, too, if you will! Ass and fool, you called yourself, and I agree. Take my office! You are better fitted for it than I."

"Be still!" he said hoarsely. "I could not say no. She is a woman and a queen."

"And Blaise de Lorgnac, seigneur of Lorgnac of Tully, and Malezieux, knight of the King's Order, is a man of honor."

I put my hand on his shoulder and he stood glowering at me. I felt his frame shiver, and then he mumbled as if speaking to himself. "I have given my word. This once and no more!" He had dropped to my side. "And this letter—you have it?"

"Not yet! I receive it in an hour, and time presses—au revoir!" He wrung my hand and was gone.

For a moment I listened to his departing footsteps, and then, bolting the door carefully, came back to my seat. Taking up the kerchief I put it before me and began to reflect.

"Enfin!" I exclaimed, speaking my thoughts aloud. "Why not look at that kerchief? There are a thousand chances to one that it belongs to someone you never knew or heard of. In which case there will be no harm. On the other hand, if it does belong to someone you know it might give a clue to a somewhat mysterious affair. It seems to me that stilted notions of honor have no place here, and you will be an idiot as well as a fool to miss your chance."

With this I held up the pretty lace thing and it fell in a light, loose fold in my hand. I swear if it had not been for Chantonnay I would have troubled no more about the matter, but as it was, I seemed to hear that low cackle of his, a presentiment of evil to come seized me, and without more ado I spread out the kerchief and examined it carefully.

It was, as I have said, of lace. It was scented with musk and in one corner was an embroidered O and nothing more. There was no crest and I could make nothing of it. Amidst the galaxy of fair dames at the court I could think of no one whose name bore this initial and there was no crest to serve as a pointer. Some little bourgeoise, after all! A vulgar intrigue! Half-unconsciously I put the bit of lace in my pocket, and, picking up my lute, made by way to the Pavilion du Roy, with Pompon at my heels.

I was far from easy in my mind. This affair of Lorgnac's was bad and if discovered meant the scaffold for my friend. There was yet another thing that moved me powerfully and perhaps those who read may guess what it was. She is dead and gone and Lorgnac is gone, but the memory of a sweetness and grace, such as the world has never seen, is still with me. My queen! my queen!

And so it was with a bitter heart that I sought the gay revels, so bitter that all thought of my jest on the Spaniard was gone. I stood a little apart, under the lee of a pillar of veined marble, watching hungrily for a face I longed to see. The king was there, tall and grim; the queen was there, too, and Madam Diane in converse with the sickly young Dauphin, but Mary of Scotland was not there, nor was Chantonnay. I peered into the leaving throng in the hope of seeing Lorgnac, though he had said he would not be there, and then I suddenly caught sight of Chantonnay at the far end of the room, making his way slowly toward the king.

Perhaps chance might give me the opportunity of touching him on the raw. I moved forward, too, reaching the dais a trifle before the Spaniard, who was a little impeded by the crowd, and without looking at the king began to put Pompon through his performance. The ape was almost human in his intelligence and a crowd soon gathered around us.

As Chantonnay approached I made Pompon walk gravely up to the king and salute him. "The high and mighty sieur Pompon, ambassador from Barbary, desires audience of your majesty."

"An honor that I, too, claim in the name of the most catholic king, my master," said a haughty voice beside me, as Chantonnay stepped up to the king. And then there was a suppressed titter, for Pompon turned sharply around on the Spaniard and began to jibber angrily at him.

"My ambassador is explaining to monseigneur here that he claims precedence," I went on, not heeding the don's black looks, but the king turned to me angrily.

"Peace! And a truce of your ill-timed jests." And then to Chantonnay: "Monseigneur! It is always a pleasure to hear from my cousin from Spain. You will have your audience with the morning. We hunt in Fontainebleau tomorrow. Will you accompany us?"

Chantonnay expressed his thanks and then begged permission to retire, as he had to complete a memorial he said he would present to his majesty in the morning—a memorial, as he said, of vital import to the peace and good will of two nations.

While he was thus expressing himself in pompous phrase I pretended to depart with Pompon in a huff, secretly, however, rejoiced at having been able to vent some of my spleen on my old enemy. I gained my pillar once again, and as I did so someone pulled me quietly by the sleeve.

I turned and saw young De Lorges, Montgomery's son, who was then a page to the dauphiness, Mary of Scotland. His face was pale and the hand that rested on my sleeve was trembling.

"What has happened?" I said, interrupting him before he could speak.

"I do not know," he said, "but you are wanted at once—come!" and without another word I followed him. We left the Pavilion du Roy without notice and then went down the long corridors that led to the apartments of the dauphin. Beyond them lay those of his wife, Mary of Scotland, the "little queen," as she was called.

During all this time we exchanged no word together, until at last we stopped before a door and the boy turned to me.

"The queen's apartments," he said. "You are free to pass. I remain on guard here." So saying, he drew his little sword and pointed with it at the door.

There were three people in the room—one was Mary of Scotland, standing near a table; the other was du Lorgnac, booted and spurred as if for a long journey, and the third was a young woman, who was leaning against the open window, her face buried in her hands, and sobbing bitterly. All this I took in at a glance as I entered, and, kneeling before my queen, I said:

"Madame! I have come."

She bade me rise. "Monsieur," she said, "I have come to you for help. Once before you saved me from a great danger. I am in a greater danger now. I want your help."

"Madame! All that—"

But she interrupted me. "Lorgnac here tells me that you know of the object of his coming to Paris."

"Yes, madame!" And, in spite of myself, my voice hardened.

She saw the change and looked at me in pitiful entreaty. "Monsieur, I do not speak to you as a queen, but as a woman—"

"Ah! madame! Say not a word more!" I burst out. "My life is yours!" And as I spoke the girl at the window burst out into fresh weeping.

"Tell me," I said, turning to de Lorgnac, "what has happened. We waste time in talking if there is serious business afoot."

"The letter I spoke of is lost."

"Who lost it? You?"

He laughed harshly. "No! It was given by her highness to Mlle. Odou there to deliver to me in the garden below the ladies' terrace, and the short of it is that the letter is gone."

In a flash it all came to me, and I thanked God in my heart that I had looked at the 'kerchief. The O stood for Odou. I could swear it. I looked at the girl. She had ceased weeping as De Lorgnac spoke, and was looking at him with a flushed face and dry eyes. There was not a tear in those bold black orbs. I knew the type. She was Arlesienne, and as I looked at the straight dark brows and full, passionate mouth I understood the nature I had to deal with. All this went through my brain like lightning as, turning to her, I said:

"Will mademoiselle tell me how it was she lost this letter?"

"Sit down, Odou!" said Mary, kindly. "Sit down and tell us all you know."

This brought on a fresh burst of sobbing as mademoiselle sank on to a tabouret, and began to rub her eyes with another little square of embroidery, which appeared uncommonly like my find.

"Traitress!" I muttered under my breath, but to her, "And tell us of the letter."

"I—I lost it in the garden," she began, and then, hesitating, went on with an effort, "it was near the oak toward the riding school."

"Bon! Now, mademoiselle! You will please accompany M. de Lorgnac and myself, and show us the spot where you missed the letter—come!"

"Is this all you can do?" said Mary, with a ring of despair in her voice.

"Rest assured, madam," I said, "that we will trace your letter—come, mademoiselle!"

"What good would it be?" She began pettishly, but I interrupted her, seeing into her plan to delay matters.

"It is gone compline and time we were away," and, leaning forward, I whispered, "for your own sake—come."

The shot told. She glanced at me and then turned aside, red to her neck, and her hands began to tremble, but she made no further attempt at parley, and of her own accord now led the way, Lorgnac following her.

A minute later we were on the ladies' terrace and crossing it descended the gallery that led to the garden. It was broad moonlight, so bright and clear that one might have read a scroll by it. As we went on we looked hither and thither, but saw no trace of the lost letter. What was passing in the tire woman's mind I know not, as for me the puzzle was whether mademoiselle had the letter or not. If she had delivered it to the Spaniard the matter was over, whatever revenge we might afterward take, but I had my doubts about this and if she had it still—there was our chance.

We had a little distance to go, but at last came close to the dark, solid outline of the old oak and Lorgnac turned to mademoiselle.

"It was here we met, madamoiselle, and you said you lost the letter."

"Hum!" I said, "A most curious loss!" And there was a note in my voice that could not be mistaken.

"Yes," she answered hotly. "I did lose it. It must have dropped somewhere here," and then, with a sudden gust of southern anger, "Messieurs! I like not your manner of speech and I know not why I should be dragged here like this. The letter is gone and I have lost it. I own to it. It was an accident. It slipped from my pocket and fell here somewhere and any breeze might have blown it anywhere—and now let me go. I shall stay here no longer."

She stood at bay, a splendid creature, her dark eyes flashing through the night. The time had come for me to play my trump card.

"Eh bien! Madamoiselle! We do not seek to detain you. We will do the search, but let me tell you as a friend that the moment you go back you will be arrested!"

"Arrested!" said she and De Lorgnac in the same breath.

"Yes," I went on coolly, "arrested—that is the word. Mademoiselle, you are very unfortunate in losing things. You recognize this? You lost it today, or this afternoon, rather, across the river."

With this I pulled out the kerchief and showed it to her. As for the girl she made no answer, but stood there, white as a sheet, and I could hear her breathing thick and fast.

"Mademoiselle! You have forgotten how long the arm of God is. You were seen this afternoon at an inn called the Chapeau Rouge with Chantonnay. You know who persuaded you to be a traitress—what your price was for your shame I know not nor care to know, but you made your bargain and on your way back you dropped this kerchief."

She began to sob now and cry. The tears were real enough this time and I believe she would have fallen had not Lorgnac supported her.

"De Besme! De Besme!" he said, his tender heart melting. "Remember she is a woman."

"Yes, and I want her to remember it, too. Mademoiselle, you are young and strong and beautiful—too beautiful for the rack."

"O, have pity—have pity!" she gasped, and now I changed my note.

"Mademoiselle, you see that little cloud passing across the moon! Before it crosses I must have that letter in my hand. If other wise, you know what awaits you."

Lorgnac had stepped aside from her and we all stood gazing at each other. The little cloud had darkened the moon, so that for a moment I could not see the girl's face, half covered with one hand, while the other was clutching at her neck. She was fighting with herself; a hundred emotions were at play within her. But I was sure of my game now and at last the end came.

"Mademoiselle, the cloud has nearly passed. Give me the letter and you are safe. If not—"

With a low cry she thrust her hand into the bosom of her dress, and pulling out the letter, handed it to me, with a whispered "Take it," and as my fingers closed over it, I heard Lorgnac's deep—

"Thank God!"

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We returned as we had come, and regained the queen's apartment. As we entered she came running to meet us.

"The letter!" she cried.

"Madam!" And I placed it in her hands. She looked at us two for a moment—mademoiselle had stayed in the anteroom—and she was about to hand the letter to De Lorgnac, when he pointed to the tall wax candles that burned on the table.

"Madam," he said, "there is a fire there and it leaves no trace." She made no answer, but held the letter over the candle, and as it leaped into flame, cast it into the fireplace, where it burnt to a cinder.

And then we knelt and took leave of her in profound silence.

Providence, or chance, call it what you will, had won us the game; and it will not be a matter of surprise to note that it was Chantonnay who had the megrims the next morning and that he was unable to accompany his majesty to Fontainebleau.

"MADAMOISELLE, YOU ARE VERY UNFORTUNATE IN LOSING THINGS. YOU RECOGNIZE THIS?"

AN INTERESTING EXPERIMENT.

Bursting a Strong Cask with Half a Pint of Water.

That a small quantity of water, say half a pint, may be made to burst a strong cask, seems a startling statement to make, says the Brooklyn Eagle, and yet it is true. It is a well known law of physics that the pressure exerted by liquids increases in proportion to their depth. Suppose, therefore, that we have a strong cask filled with water and standing on end. The staves of this cask may be made to burst apart by adding a very small quantity of water to what is already in the cask.

As the cask is already full, some way of adding the water must be devised. To do this a hole is bored in the end or head of the cask and a long tube of small diameter is inserted upright. At the upper end of the tube is a small funnel, into which water is poured until the tube becomes full, and when that point is reached the cask will burst.

This seems almost incredible, but it is only a demonstration of the law that has been cited. When the water is poured into the tube it unites with the water in the cask, and the depth of the water is several times as great as it was in the cask alone. The fact that there is only a small quantity of water in the tube makes no difference, for it is now all one body, and its depth is gauged from the top of the tube to the bottom of the cask.

As a matter of fact, this experiment is only an artificial reproduction of what we know takes place in nature. Some of her greatest convulsions are caused by this very process. Suppose, for example, that there is a great mass of rock, under which there is a cavity filled with water that has no outlet. Suppose, moreover, that there is a crack extending from the surface of the ground through this mass of rock to the water-filled cavity underneath.

A rock in this condition is a common thing in nature, the crack being caused by some disturbance of the earth, or by its splitting in the natural order of things. Now, when it rains enough to fill that crack, thus increasing the depth of water in the cavity, the pressure will become so great that the rock will be torn into 100 fragments.

Executors and Administrators.

The power of executors to give a warranty deed of land is held in Bauerle against Long (Ill.) 52 L. R. A., 643, not to be given by a will authorizing them to sell it at public or private sale on such terms as they deem most advantageous, and they are not liable in their representative capacity for breach of a contract to make such conveyance.

Hacks.

The drivers and proprietors of a public carriage, who enter railroad grounds under a license to get passengers ordering the carriage, are held, in Boston & A. R. Co. against Brown (Mass.) 52 L. R. A. 418, to become trespassers by so placing the carriage and conducting themselves as to solicit other passengers.