

The Black Wolf's Breed

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By Harris Dickson

Gaston's distress was pitiful; as his moist eyes now and again sought mine, I could not find it in my heart to censure him. Having distanced my poorly mounted pursuers I stopped to water my horse at the spring before riding the few hundred yards to the gates of Cartillon. While yet waiting by the spring I was horrified to see men descending on top of the great tower. Their flight was brief and decisive. Five of them, one being Maurice my most trusted man at arms, were thrown violently to the courtyard below. Of the others some were killed, some overpowered and carried below stairs.

All of this took only an instant, for it appeared but the end of a desperate encounter which had been raging elsewhere. The time, however, was long enough for me to see that those of the larger party wore the white sash and cross which distinguished my assailants in Rouen.

"God in heaven, what murder's work have we at Cartillon?" I cried aloud in my misery. Then one who could answer came running toward me from the castle, gashed, with snapped sword in hand.

"Oh, master, master, the Catholics, the Catholics" was all he could speak out before he fell a senseless mass at my horse's feet.

Cartillon was not now a refuge. Immediately the distant sound of hoof beats came loud and louder yet, from the direction of Rouen. Ortez was coming.

"Quick, Gaston, we must fly." My overtaxed horse faltered me now, pulling the reins I sank slowly to my knees, and after a few spasmodic twitches, stiffened out forever upon the rocky road. I stood erect a moment, child in arms, irresolute. There was short shrift to think. My blood rebelled at flight.

"Here, Gaston, take the boy; hide in the wood. Carry him to the Abbot of Vaux, and conjure the good priest, by our fathers' love and ours, to save my baby."

Gaston had hardly passed from sight among the trees before a dozen well-armed horsemen, bearing the same white cross on their surcoats, came winding a curve in the forest road, coming suddenly upon me beside my fallen steed. Sword in hand, I fronted them, determined, come what would, to fly no further. The evil face of Ortez shone with gratification at so unexpectedly finding me alone.

"Now, rick, these, sirrah," he cried, as his men surrounded me. A quick thrust through the body of his horse, brought him to the ground.

"Not yet, thou slayer of women; here upon equal footing, thy life shall pay for those of wife and child."

I veily rebuked the Almighty vengeance was in my blade, and doubt not I should have slain him despite his troopers, but for a crushing pike blow over the head, so swiftly did it all come about.

My brain reeled; the sword dropped dangling from my nerveless hand. When I recovered myself I found myself bound upon a horse behind one of the men.

"On with him, men, to Cartillon; there we rest this night in the king's name."

In this wise we rode along; Ortez openly exulted in his and scornful. "Aha, my fine brother," he spoke low at my saddle, "thy father's son has thee in his power now. And shall I not revenge thee the wrong our father did my mother for thine? Didst know the story?"

I made no reply, but he went on un-mindful. "To my mother he gave his love, but dared not give his name; to thy mother he gave his name but could never give his love. So thou art the proud lord of Cartillon, and I the outcast soldier of fortune, the nameless adventurer, slayer of women—what thou wilt. But things are changed now. Before many hours I will be the Count d'Artin, and thou a dishonored corpse, sweet brother."

"Thou, Thou my brother?" I turned upon him a look of incredulous contempt, yet, for I had heard some such tale of my father's youth, I asked: "Thy mother was—?"

"Nanon Escules, whom thy father abducted in Spain to desert in France." My heart sank; I had seen the woman, and knew her son for one of the most courageous and unprincipled adventurers who hung about the court and held their swords for hire. When the noisy troop rode up to the gates of Cartillon their leader paused, a head appeared upon the battlements.

"Guisse," cried Ortez, "giving the watchword of that day of slaughter. The drawbridge lowered, and open swung the gates.

about it, either, thou chicken-hearted bullic; pitch him in." The men started to obey this savage order.

"Hound of hell!" I screamed, tortured beyond endurance, and struggling at my bonds.

Ortez slipped me in the face with his gauntlet, then laying his hand upon my shoulder said with assumed gentleness: "Calm yourself, my dear brother; think of your unbanded wounds; they may bleed afresh."

Philip was conscious as the men bore him to the edge of the well, but powerless to resist four stout fellows who cast him headlong amongst the dead and dying to mingle his groans and blood with theirs. Oh, that God should permit men to such deeds, and grant that men should witness them! When the last body had been disposed of, Ortez led the way to the banquet hall, inviting all his rabble to join the feast.

The banquet hall, used as it was to scenes of turbulence, never perhaps had looked upon such a throng as that which occupied the head of my own table, strapped helpless in my seat. On either side were vacant chairs. Ortez sat at the foot. Between, the soldiery ranged themselves as they pleased. One of the troopers coming in late would have taken his place beside me, but his captain stopped him.

"Not there, Gardier; we have other and fairer guests for whom those seats are kept."

Almost as he spoke the chairs on either side of me were slipped away, and after awhile as silently returned to their places.

"Your wife and child, d'Artin, our charming family reunion would be incomplete without them." And the woman laughed aloud.

My brain burned; something seemed to strain and give way. I lost all sense of pain, all capacity to suffer. How long I lasted I know not. When the revelry was at its height, when the wine had dulled every human instinct in these rough "soldiers of the church," Ortez raised his voice above the tumult; he knew his men were in the humor for a diversion he was about to propose.

"Your comrades," he said, "for the crowning joy of this most blessed day, now for our last sacred duty to mother church."

He came round the table and taking a cord from the hands of one of his men he threw the noose over my head. With feet bound together, hands free, I stood amidst them, this throng of butchers, each with the white cross of Christ in his cap, the white scarf of Guise upon his arm, drunk and eager for blood.

"Henri Francois Placide d'Artin, what hast thou to say why we shall not declare thy blood attained, thy name dishonored, thy estate forfeited, why we shall not hang thee for a Huguenot dog, traitor to king and church? Speak."

All the defiance of my race burned fearless in my eyes; I felt my face flush an instant at the shame of such a death, but replied as steadily as might be: "Not a word to you, thou infamous one, thou baseborn coward, murderer of the helpless; not to you!"

The cool, polite manner of Ortez fell from him like a mask. He seized the cord with his own hand, jerking me prone upon the floor and commenced to drag me from the hall. A dozen willing hands lent aid. I clutched instinctively everything which came in my way, being torn from each hold by the ruthless villains at the rope.

Desperate I grasped the leg of a trooper, but a savage kick in the face wrenched him free, and down the stair they started for the open court. At the end of the cord came tumbling, rolling, bumping down the stone steps, this almost senseless heap which was yet a man.

Arrived beside the well, whose great overhanging sweep offered a convenient scaffold, Ortez paused to look at his victim. My breath came slow, I could hardly hear their words.

"Think you his senses will return?" "Possibly, sire," replied the man to whom this was addressed.

"Then we will wait; my sweet brother would weep to miss so brave a spectacle as his own hanging."

He sat there upon the edge of the well, whence came the groans of the dying, the hot, fresh odors of the dead, and waited, fendish in the patient ferocity of his more than mortal hate.

After a little I opened my eyes and stared about me, scarcely comprehending where I was or what had happened. Ortez called upon my men to raise me. Being placed erect the cord was drawn just taut enough to sustain me standing. Now the ghastly woman I had seen in the hall pushed her way through the crowd.

castle's court when the ruthless deed was done. Verily man knoweth not the rebellious vagaries of an unhinged brain; knoweth not what but unmeaning phantasies, or what be solemn revelations from the very lips of God. In the deep gloom the ruined castle loomed darkly a ghastly monument of evil deeds. I looked about for the madman but saw him not. The weirdness of the place, the horror of its secret, crept into my blood. I became afraid. Down the bleak road I picked my way, glancing fearfully over my shoulder. I found my horse re-equipped. Still shuddering I mounted, scarce daring to look backwards at the cursed pile. Then, with the madman's story surging in my brain, I dug savage spurs into my steed and galloped desperately onward through the night.

CHAPTER XX. FROM THE PATH OF DUTY.

It was about 10 o'clock when I roused Diappe. Soon thereafter I was well aboard. Dauphin, Serigny himself meeting me at the vessel's side.

"Hullo, Placide," he cried. "All goeth well, and the passing night gives promise to us of a brighter day."

Later in his own cabin, he told of a brief meeting he had with Louis.

"For the time we are safe. The king is restless about the safety of the province, and he trusts Bienville as a soldier. The Spanish intrigue keeps our enemies so busy they have not time to disturb us. The king has no man who can take Bienville's place. Well it's all happily over, and I am as delighted as a child to be at sea again. We would sail at once, now that you are come, were it not for de la Mora; he, with his wife and another lady, are to bear us company. The chevalier is a thorough soldier, and I welcome him, but like not the presence of the ladies. We may have rough work before us."

I knew my face grew pale, and thanked the half-light for concealment, or he must have noticed. Who that "other lady" was, possessed for me no interest, and I never asked.

De la Mora. This was terrible, and so I asked. But we knew I could not spend five long weeks in daily contact with Agnes and give no betraying sign. I must needs have time to think, and that right speedily.

"When do they come, sire?" "Any moment; they left—or should have done so—the same time as yourself. For the time we are safe. Yes! Rapidly as a man could think, so thought I.

"How long will you wait for them?" "Until dawn, no longer. Then we sail."

A glimmer of hope—de la Mora might be delayed. Without any clearly defined purpose I went on and carefully gave Serigny every detail of information which could be valuable touching the expected trouble in the colonies. Of this my hands should, in any event, be clean. I even handed him the king's new commission directed to Bienville, whereof I was so proud to be the bearer. Whilst ridding my mind of these matters I could not have said what course I meditated. A boat grating against the vessel's side set me all tremble, but it was only a letter of instructions. Making some poor excuses to Serigny for the moment I entered the yawl as it left the ship to go ashore. A surprised voice hailed us ere we made the land.

"Aho, there, the boat," and through the shadows I made out the form of him I dreaded most to see.

"Boatman, can put three of us aboard yonder vessel?" "Aye, sir, it is from her I have just come."

"This dished down the hope he had left his wife behind.

"Aye, sir, it is a safe craft, but not a fine ladies' barge. We can go with care and run into no danger. The wind is low."

"'Twill serve." I jumped ashore and would have slipped by speaking had he not recognized me.

"By my soul, de Mourst, it is you; and we are to be companions on the voyage. Bravo."

He approached me frankly, with outstretched hand and hearty greeting. I would fain avoided touching his honest palm, but there was no way out of it.

"I see you are surprised. Yes! I was suddenly ordered to sail in le Dauphin, and report to your good Governor, Bienville. A most sturdy soldier from all report. Heaven send us a sharp campaign, I am weary of these puny quarrels. We will have brave days in the colonies."

The open-hearted way about him struck a new terror to my heart; I could face his sword but not his confidence. His cheeks glowed with martial enthusiasm and I almost caught again the hot lust of battle.

"And Agnes, with her little sister, is at sea in the yawl. Yes, he continued, noting me step back a pace in protest, "it is rude life enough for tender women, but they come of stock that fears no danger, and it's better there than at the court of Louis."

PANTOMIME FAIRIES.

How They Learn the Difficult Task of Ballet Dancing in London. London Mail: Nobody has the least idea of what training for pantomime means until a visit has been paid to Mme. Lanner's school of ballet dancing. There dancers ranging in age from sweet-faced tiny mites of 6 to beautiful women whose age one will not be ungallant enough to think about, daily and patiently go through a course of training, acquiring steps and deportment that later on will be seen at the Garrick, Vaudeville, Empire, Alhambra and elsewhere. Mme. Morris, one of Mme. Lanner's teachers, told the writer that a finished dancer is the product of many years' strenuous work. A child of 6 can learn to dance in a few months, but to acquire the grace and agility of the finest Spanish dancers now performing in London requires twenty years of unremitting practice. There are very few boys ever trained as pantomime dancers. The reason is that the male sex is awkward, their joints are hopelessly stiff, and they can never hope to aspire to anything of a higher grade than step dancing. It is one of the prettiest sights on earth to watch a score or so of little girls assemble in the dimly lit room where Mme. Lanner's classes are held. Huge mirrors are arranged round the walls, a piano stands in a corner, but seldom gets played, because for a long time the novice has to practice nothing but steps to a monotonous "one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, hop!" spoken by the teacher.

"All ze girls please togazier!" commands madame, and promptly tiny tots of 6 and graceful young women of 16 or so, all garbed to a girl in short white muslin skirts, pink sashes and elights, grip with one hand a rail fixed to the wall, extend the other arm on a level with their shoulders and deftly kick their hands seven times in succession. Watch the children and one sees that they thoroughly enjoy the training. Every movement of the first, second, third and fourth positions, under which headings the various steps are grouped, has been studied by the little ones, and each member of the class endeavors to give her individual rendering harmonious movement of the whole body.

Many of the little dancers can stand on their toes and prouettes like tops, and then, with modesty, elegance and ease go down until their knees almost touch the ground, rising up again with a graceful wave of the hand and a sunny smile. To give suppleness to the limbs a series of exercises are gone through with first one leg, while the whole weight of the body rests on the other. The positions are reversed every few minutes, and in this manner both limbs receive equal attention and obtain equal suppleness. A watering can plays a prominent part in a ballet class room. It would seem that the thousands of steps indulged in have a tendency to raise the dust and bring about an epidemic of coughing. Therefore, a little judicious sprinkling at intervals has the effect of allaying this.

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