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CHAPTER XX. The Mystery of the Crystal.

Maurice stood for a long minute, dazed and drunk with a great astonishment. By his own folly he had lost the only girl he ever loved.

So at last he told himself, while Billy Marshall continued to remind him that he had told him so, and the Camisard sentinel by the gate solemnly resumed his beat, as if washing his hands of the whole matter.

It was a freezing night, and a light drift of snow blowing, and the surface of the Causeway hard as the anther millstone.

No tracks would lie for a minute upon such a night, and they must do the best they could with the senses God had given them, which, as Maurice thought, with some reason, were, in his case at least, no great matter for boasting.

And it was on such a night in a thin black dress of some soft stuff that Flower-o-the-Corn had fled into the darkness of the bleakest though not the highest Causeway in France.

If it would have done Frances Wellwood the last good thing Faith would gladly have put a pistol to his head there and then and shot himself. But he knew that the girl was gone on his account, and it was his duty to bring her back if possible.

A thought occurred to him. At the time it seemed like an inspiration. Of course, it was an impossible thing to be laughed at, yet nevertheless somehow he could not get it out of his head.

"Catinat!—Yes, Catinat! Stranger things had happened. There might be something in his second sight after all. He had heard of it in Scotland. At least it was worth the trying!"

"Let us go and knock up Catinat!" he said hoarsely.

To his surprise Billy caught eagerly at his suggestion.

"Ye has mair sense than I lokit for!" he cried. "If any body can jallie, where a craft lassie' wad hidder herel, it's him! I hae heard tell that when was a younger among the laddie boys he was a gye yin! That was afore he took up wi' the phoppatin' an' sic like! But Catinat's the yerra man for ye; that is, he's mair like to ta' ye through a word-for-word exposetion' o' the Bulk o' Solomon his Sang, than to help ye to get back you ain sweetheart! Aye, a diel sicht mair like!"

Nevertheless since the thing was worth trying to Catinat they went. It was, as Billy had prognosticated, somewhat difficult to get the prophet down to matter of fact.

The minister's daughter had run away in a fit of fear, and that hysterical nervousness which comes so easily to woman. Well, he had heard of such like, but there was no exact parallel for it in the scriptures that he knew of, unless it were in the Song of Songs, which is Solomon's—

"Didna I tell ye?" whispered Billy, triumphantly over his chief's shoulder.

"She ha' been tairn ably upon the military chief of La Cavalerie," answered he this afore he touch the matter with finger. Hee anything of stain upon your conscience—ought that you would be more loath to tell to the girl's father than to me!"

"No, I swear it!" said Maurice, lifting up his hand solemnly.

"Swear not at all!" said Catinat, catching him by the wrist and putting his hand down again. "What is a man but his naked word. If I had not believed in your word would I have perished these poor sheep to obey you for so much as an instant?"

And, having come to a standstill, Maurice Faith, who was all on fire within, demanded of the prophet if he could tell where at the moment the girl was.

Catinat looked at Maurice and shook his head. Then he glanced at Billy Marshall and asked, "Is he innocent—simple—like his look and speech? Or is he even as other men, come up from beneath the grinding wheels?"

"He is even as other men!" said Maurice, wonderingly.

"Then he will not do for me—any more than you," he answered. "I have not the second sight myself (he went on to explain, as it is said that your Scots mountaineers have)—though the power of making others see—though I own not as Cavalier hath who can make a thousand men and women see and believe the thing he will. But abide you, I will bring one who will see all your desire!"

Catinat dwelt in a plain-faced little house with one stable to the main road, mean and poor, with plowmen and plowwomen, and himself to the door, he went across the court and returned shortly with a half-grown lad, his eyes starting from his head, his hair a more haystack, his lower lip dropped into the shape of a V, slack and pendulous, yet always more or less on the quiver like jelly turned from a shape. He appeared to be about 17 or 18, knock-kneed and needing weekly additions to his small clothes. Of his simplicity there could be no question. Indeed, Catinat explained the matter of his want in his own presence in plain phrases.

"This is one Antoine Oliver—a mere idiot, an innocent, almost a cretin, but left here of the Spanish gypsies, therefore not to be trusted along with silver or gold! Otherwise he hath not the sense to conduct himself reasonably—Antoine—turn round!"

The lad turned himself unwillingly about like one who is about to be whipped in the presence of his school-fellows. A patch of viscous cream appeared vividly impressed on the forehead part of his small clothes.

"There!" cried Catinat. "What did I tell you? Go fetch the rod, Antoine—the rod of many birches which stands behind the farmhouse door. You have been at it again. Otherwise he hath not the sense to conduct himself reasonably—Antoine—turn round!"

"The great of bursts out into a loud boo-boo of lament.

"Indeed, sir," he pleaded, "they were not your eggs this time; you are much richer in yolk! Look you they are those of old Elise at the gatehouse, whom I desired to punish for her drunkenness!"

"The point is well taken," said Catinat. "But I will only consent to overlook the fault if it be that you will look in the crystal for me!"

The youth gave a yet louder cry and promptly began to untruss.

"I would rather have the birch," he said, "the birch smarts and is done with, but after the crystal ball Antoine is not his own man for so many as three days!"

"He probably hath hit on the truth there!" whispered the prophet.

"But, Antoine," said Catinat aloud, in a soothing voice, "see this man. He is the commander of the soldiers here, and can keep them from taking you away to serve in the trenches. Also, I will let you go from a whole week of attendance at early service in the church! Also—"

He displayed a silver coin suggestively in the lamplight.

"I will do it—I will do it!" cried the

had expected other things from him. And now—she had found him—well, she could not picture to herself how she had found him for the pain in her heart. Besides, she had not crowned his iniquity by carrying her off literally. She had been held in his arms at the very moment when she came to herself. And as for Yvette Foy—how could any girl be so false, so wicked? O, were there no true folk at all in the world, women or men? Except her father, that is? She did not doubt him ever.

She clasped her hands upon each other as Antoine had seen her in the crystal stone, and they were as cold as ice. Then there came upon Flower-o-the-Corn a wild, unreasoning fear—the terror of pursuit. She seemed to be followed by a pack of hounds as in the gray fearful dream-sleeps of the Changestier. She could hear their yelping chorus, now the higher and now the lower as they one or the other took up the leadership.

She turned abruptly and ran on. Perhaps it was well she did so. At least, the action kept her from freezing to death. She continued till the breath was blown out of her body. Before her, under the pulsing green glow of the Aurora the toothed edges of the volcanic crater stood up. She paused, less because she was out of breath than because she seemed to have some dim sort of previous knowledge of the place, to which, all unwittingly, her feet, had carried her.

Once again she heard a crying as if of wolves across the waste, the long-drawn howling as of many dogs in pain, which (once heard) is never forgotten. Anything less like the "giving tongue" of a pack cannot well be imagined.

But to Frances Wellwood, who had that night slept so full of terrors, this brought no new anxiety, though the sound would have sent every Caucasian for shelter to the nearest house, even if it had been that of his worst enemy.

But Flower-o-the-Corn stood there, only conscious of the deadly insult and shame that had been put upon her. The bitter upland night, the frost-tingling stars, the howl of the wolf pack—these were as nothing.

Thus she was standing growing slowly chill and chiller, when all at once she was startled by the sound of uproarious mirth about her.

A sudden flashing of lanterns, a sudden explosion of laughter, neither very wise nor very kind, brought the girl to herself. Rough hands seized her. She cried out, and the first words she spoke were a confession of weakness.

"Maurice—Maurice!" she said, involuntarily. And then at the mere sound of her voice she started to recall the gay bright eyes of the Brabant corn and herself standing elbow deep in it, with the young soldier blushing beneath her, his hands parting the yellow broom.

"A pretty maid, eh, Joseph? By my faith, yes," cried one rough-looking soldier with a great bandolier across his breast. "Tell me that you do not believe in the grotto of the fairies after this. Why, we could not be better off if we were farmers general. The Marchal himself, with his Madame la Marchale, will sleep so more comfortable than we! Besides which, we will not give the wench marching leave quite so often."

"Nay, old scrubby goat!" cried another. "See, the little thing is a-coo! Do you not understand, you are a brute to stand there, cloaked to the gray mustache and never offer along an inch of shelter. She shall come, not an inch to you, but to the kindest of the company. Here, my pretty one, is a good hat of a soldier's cloak to be comfortable in. Aye, many a pretty lass, many a dainty, hath snuggled down there, and liked very well that same old Brandenburg redingote! Come, my pretty! So!"

"I tell you, no," cried another, holding up his lantern to Flower-o-the-Corn's pretty frightened face (for now she had fallen among the wolves, indeed). "Neither one of you has the least claim. E'en let the maid choose for herself. I outrank you both, for the matter of that, for I carry the colors! You have nothing but great old gray mustaches, an odor of rum and much talk of what you have done in your youth."

As if that had any weight with a young thing fit to be the granddaughter of any of you! For shame to fright a child so with your rough talk! Come hither to me, my dear, and you and I will talk apart. I promise you none of them shall harm you. And you shall have no troublesome questions to answer, either—such as 'How came you at night out upon the wild Causeway near a Camisard haunt of rebels and traitors? I can save you from all that. Why else should I be trusted with the banner by my officer but that it should cover a bosom as innocent as this?'

"Stand out of the way, Victor Cayet," cried still another abruptly, shouldering the speaker, his lantern and his folded banner out of the way. "I tell you here comes the Marchale herself! And it is as much as our heads are worth to have any rough jesting in her presence."

"Tut! As to that she is but the Marchale of the campaign, I warrant you—a Camisard marchale think you no noble de Montrevel would saddle himself?"

"Hush, ladies, here she comes!"

"Wretches, assassins, I will have all of you hanged by the provost marchal," cried

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speaking more frigidly than the cold that was stiffening her even through her wrappings of fur and horse blankets. "Yvette kept her arms tightly about the girl in spite of the fact that her friend remained as unresponsive as a doll carved out of wood. "But I think I can show you cause why you should think less ill of me," she said gently, like one who suffers long wrongs she cannot help. "But I trust you with the secret—my life is in it, and the lives of far more and far worthier than I. Yet I trust you, I, poor Yvette, have also a right to be called Madam la Marchale de Montrevel, even as you heard them call me just now!"

"It is only one more of your deceptions—there is no end of them. I have good reason to know that," retorted Frances, and yielding the heat from her stiffened attitude of disdain.

"Nay, but not this time," pleaded Yvette. "It has been necessary, I allow. I know you have good reason to distrust me. But that has been the fault of circumstances rather than any lack of keeping faith. I am—do not forget it!—the wife of the marchal commanding the French troops in these mountains. You, who have such high ideals of duty and affection, tell me what is better or else higher than that a wife should arrive in all ways to serve the interests of her husband. And have I not done so? Was I not ordered to find out the secrets of the foolish young officer of Marlborough? And if you had not interrupted us would I not have turned him inside out like an empty sack—aye, this very night, and the dispatch would have gone to my husband in the morning? It was for this that these cadets of the cross who are now watching us (for they guard you as a valuable prisoner of war) are out of the face of the Causees to support the regular soldiers that I might carry to de Montrevel what I know in person that I am here. Do you not see? Wherefore allow should a girl like me remain alone in a priory village, listening to psalms chanted light and morn like the howling of dogs with their noses pointed at the moon, and prophets phonying like old space-wives afraid of the last judgment. What but my wifely duty would have kept me there?"

Flower-o-the-Corn was looking at her with great wide open eyes. Blue eyes open wider and show more surprise than any other.

"But he was kissing you?" she objected. "And—and you were letting him!"

"You dear little simpleton!" laughed Yvette. "Why that is nothing! I will tell de Montrevel tonight and he will laugh heartily himself. It is only part of the rules of the game."

"Then I do not think it at all a nice game," said Flower-o-the-Corn. "If you did not really love him, of course, that might make a difference!"

"Of course you think so, dear innocent," said Yvette, gaily. "But women of the world have other standards. And now—well, we have wasted time enough on this matter. It is folly anyway. All kissing is unless you get something by it! The main thing is that you are a prisoner of war, and that your father will have to pay 43,000 or 24,000 for his daughter's liberation—or—"

"Or what?" cried Frances with her blue eyes yet wider open. "My poor old father never had 3,000 once to bless himself with—what is the other alternative?"

"Well," said Yvette slowly, "you are a young girl and I am a married woman, but to be honest with you I cannot put the alternative into words. Unless you have heard in the village of La Cavalerie what

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CHAPTER XXI. Maurice. Maurice was making for the door, but Catinat checked him with a look and a shake of the head. "He is a cretin," he said, "do not expect too much. Ye shall get at the truth presently if we do not hurry him!" "I see them, I see them—the man was in a soldier's uniform, tell you," cried the boy, "the man who came last year and tried to kill us all—when poor Antoine hid so long in the cow-shed! But they have gone out of sight. I can see them no more. Let me go!" At this moment the touch of Catinat must have tightened either in actual grip or in electric tension, the back of the boy's neck, for he squeaked like a mouse. "I will look—no, I will speak true. I will look all the way from the Millau road even to the reservoir on Nant!" "Look, then, boy and carefully!" said Catinat, and his voice even to the eager Maurice sounded wrapt and far-away. "The boy continued to gaze, his eyes growing fixed and luminous as they concentrated themselves on the crystal globe. "Ah, now at last I see her," he said, wearily, as indeed he did everything. "She is alone in a black dress, running sometimes and sometimes standing and holding her hand to her breast." Maurice grasped, but Catinat remained calm with his hand on the boy's neck. "Yes—good boy, Antoine, you speak truth this time. It will not last long. You see one girl alone, you say—her hand on her breast—no French officer with her—" "But I saw these others, too—yes, I saw them, even if you birch me for it I saw them!" "Go on!" said Catinat, sternly. "We have no time to wait all night on you!" The boy continued between suppressed sobs of dismay. "I see only the white waist—I cannot see the girl—either the one with the hand to her breast, who waited and looked around—or—the other!" "There was no other," said Catinat, firmly. "Very well, then," said the boy, wincing away as he was not there, but I thought it. Tell me what I am to think, and I will think it. Are you not my master?" "No," said Catinat, severely, "tell me what you see and that exactly. Look further ahead. You have seen her once. You have seen in what direction she was moving. Look again—"

"No, I swear it!" said Maurice, lifting up his hand solemnly.

"Swear not at all!" said Catinat, catching him by the wrist and putting his hand down again.