

Dagger and Sword

by Rafael Sabatini, 1875-1950

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Chapter I

WHEN two men chance to love the same woman, they seldom love each other. Don Rafael de Molina and I, however, contented ourselves with scorn—all the more bitter on my part, since I was the less favored suitor; all the more lofty and disdainful on his, since his wooing prospered passing well.

There were dark rumors abroad concerning the presence in Paris of this sleek and courtly Spaniard. 'Twas said on every hand, when he was not by—for he wielded a tolerable rapier—that he was a ruffler of the court of Spain, who, having fallen upon evil days, had pocketed his pride and taken secret service of a not overhonorable character under Anne of Austria.

I took scant interest in the knave until he had the audacity to raise his eyes to Mlle. de Navéry. Then, of a sudden, I began to lend an ear to those who styled him a foreign spy. When I saw him succeed with mademoiselle, where I had all but failed; when I saw the bold glance of unmasked meaning in his dark eyes when he addressed her, and the fatuous, self-complacent smile wherewith he listened to her answers, I felt convinced that what was said of him was true.

I might have picked a quarrel with him, but I had naught to gain by doing so; for, even if I succeeded in killing him, I should have to reckon with the all powerful cardinal, whose edict against duelling was not a thing with which one might make too free. I might have told his eminence what title the Spaniard bore; but such a proceeding was too unworthy, and not to be dreamed of by Léon de Bret.

We were in the month of June, and the king was on the eve of leaving Paris for Blois. It was incumbent upon me, as one of the gentlemen in waiting, to accompany the court.

I made bold to ask Mlle. de Navéry's unnecessary permission, and she answered me, with scant waste of compliments and a pretty toss of her fair head, that it was no affair of hers, and that I must follow my inclinations. Yet, when I told her that to follow my inclinations I must follow her, and that, since she went to Blois in the suite of Anne of Austria, I would accompany the king, she bit her lip and dubbed me „impertinent.“ She dubbed me impertinent, pardieu, for uttering words which would have brought a blush to her delicate cheeks and a smile to her red lips had they been uttered by that graceless Molina!

It was with a heart full of bitterness that I left the Louvre that night, and turned my steps homeward through the slippery streets, for a misty rain had prevailed since noon, and the mud lay deep upon the ground. Wrapped in my cloak, and a prey to thoughts that took no pleasant turn, I trudged moodily along until I reached the colonnade that borders the Place Royale. I was about to pass on, when, chancing to raise my head, my attention was arrested by the sight of two men pacing slowly to and fro in the middle of the square.

Now, as I have said, the night was rainy; moreover, had those two gentlemen, in spite of that fact, still desired to enjoy an innocent promenade, methought it was unlikely that they should choose the precincts of the Place Royale to indulge their fancy, saturating their boots and risking a cold by stepping from one pool of water into another. So I concluded that this was an assignation, and I waited to see another couple arrive, pitying the gentlemen who would have to strip in such weather.

Presently, however, the twain stopped, and from where I stood I could just make out their voices raised in altercation, although I heard not what was said.

Then, of a sudden, they sprang apart. Their cloaks flew from them. There was a familiar rasp, and the white glitter of steel followed by a clash, as, with scarcely a word of warning, the two men engaged.

Astonishment and curiosity held me to the pillar against which I leaned, and for some moments I watched them as best I could in the uncertain light. I saw the left hand of one of the combatants drop from its upheld position. I watched it running around the waist, then pause, then rise again clutching a short, shining object.

For a moment I marveled at this. Then suddenly I understood, and with a loud cry I dashed forward to prevent what I saw was about to resolve itself into an assassination.

But I had understood too late; for even as I sprang into the square, the victim stretched forward with a lunge. His opponent's sword moved not to the parry, but his left hand shot out, and the dagger it held turned the other's stroke aside, while simultaneously he bent forward and transfixing his man by a vigorous thrust.

Then, hearing my footsteps, he freed his rapier. Gathering his cloak about him, and lifting it so as to conceal his face, he darted a glance at me from over his shoulder as he turned to run.

„Stop, assassin!“ I shouted wildly, as I prepared to give chase.

As I reached the scene of the encounter and cast a sidelong glance at the prostrate figure, something familiar in its outline drew my attention and made me pause. I turned, and, stooping, raised the mud-bespattered head. A pair of eyes, wide open and mutely appealing, looked at me from out of the well known countenance of Raoul de Navéry, mademoiselle's brother.

Horrified at my discovery, I dropped upon my right knee, and, pillowing his head upon my left, proceeded to examine the nature of his hurt. 'Twas as I had expected. The murderer's sword had entered his breast full on the left side, close to the heart. He was bleeding inwardly, and in a few minutes would be dead.

I loosened his doublet, so that he might breathe with as little pain as possible. As I did so, I caught a faintly murmured word of thanks.

„Who was it, Ferdinand?“ I inquired, taking his hand in mine.

„Molina,“ he whispered hoarsely. A spasm of pain crossed his face. „Foul stroke! He used a dagger.“

„I know it, mon ami,“ I answered. „I saw the parry. The dastard shall account to me!“

He smiled feebly.

„Thanks, dear friend,“ he said. Then, after a pause: „Bend lower, Léon,“ he murmured. As I obeyed, I faintly caught from the dying lips: „He is a spy in the pay of the queen mother. There is a plot to poison the cardinal. Warn him. Take care of my sister. She is—“

He stopped abruptly, and a shudder convulsed his body for a moment. Then, with a long-drawn sigh, he became still.

I was at length aroused by the tramp of feet and the jangle of accouterments, and presently saw a body of men approaching across the square. At a glance I recognized the uniforms of Richelieu's guards. Some one carried a lantern swinging on a pike, and by the scant rays it shed I discerned with glad astonishment—for I imagined that he was under arrest—the swart face and pointed beard of Rafael de Molina.

Even as I looked, however, his arm went up and his finger pointed toward me, while in his soft southern accent came the words:

„Tenez, M. de Bret is still there.“

The next moment, and before I could grasp the situation, I was confronted by an officer and six troopers, and in their wake a morbid, curious crowd of all grades from courtiers to mendicants, which rapidly encircled us and well nigh drove me frantic with its babbling.

Molina stood beside the officer, surveying me with a glance of malicious triumph which I was puzzled to understand.

„This is a sad business, M. de Bret,“ said the officer, with an ominous shake of the head, as, stooping, he put his hand to poor Navéry’s heart. „Dead!“ he muttered. „Worse and worse—and so irregular. No seconds! I am afraid it will fare badly with you, monsieur.“

A light began to break upon my mind.

„Diable!“ I ejaculated. „What do you mean?“

He drew himself up, and his foot struck against my sword. I had drawn it when I sprang to Navéry’s rescue, and had heedlessly dropped it when I stooped to tend the fallen man.

„There is a witness, M. de Bret,“ the officer answered, respectfully but firmly. „This gentleman,“ he continued, indicating Molina with his thumb, „saw you fight and recognized you—unfortunately when it was too late. Did you not, monsieur?“

„I did,“ the Spaniard answered slowly, „and I ran to summon you.“

„Ventre St. Gris!“ I cried, springing to my feet and facing them. „This is preposterous!“

„I am afraid that it is serious,“ answered the officer coldly. „I must trouble you for your sword.“

For the moment I thought of opposing him and insisting on a chance to give my version of the story. Then, realizing how futile this would probably prove, and that I might but flounder deeper into the quagmire wherein I stood already, I resolved to keep my narrative for the cardinal’s ear, and to deliver it along with Navéry’s message. Richelieu knew me and held me in some esteem, and I could rely upon his justice.

With a proud glance at Molina, I lifted my baldric unconsciously over my head, nor did I understand the officer’s puzzled stare until I saw that from it hung an empty scabbard.

The officer looked about him, while the swelling crowd set up a curious murmur, and some callous ones laughed, even in the presence of the dead, at my embarrassment.

Then, noting that Navéry’s sword lay under him, the officer stooped, lifted my naked rapier from the ground, and returned it to its sheath.

„The evidence is complete,“ he muttered, and again he shook his head. „M. de Bret, I pity you. ‘Tis a hanging matter.“

He turned his back upon me, and, bidding two men take up the corpse, ordered the others to surround me.

„Way there! Make way!“ cried the guards who preceded me, and with the butt end of their pikes they persuaded the crowd to let us through.

Chapter II

MY position was an unenviable one, and as I sat ruminating in the dark upon my prison bed I realized it to the full. The news would be all over Paris by then that Léon de Bret had killed a man in the Place Royale. The king would know, and the cardinal would know—which troubled me but little; and Renée de Navéry would know—which troubled me overmuch.

What would she think? Had the Spaniard carried the news to her, and had he perchance—since he accused me of killing the man whom he had killed—also accused me of his full crime? Would he dare to say that I had struck a foul blow, and that I had not merely killed Raoul de Navéry, but murdered him?

The grating of a key in the door interrupted my miserable thoughts and reminded me of supper. I turned to greet my jailer with an oath for having kept me waiting so long, when, to my surprise, a cloaked and hooded figure entered the dismal chamber, and I heard a woman's voice, which I recognized in a moment, and which set my nerves tingling with excitement.

„Thank you, monsieur le capitaine,“ she said. „You may leave us.“

Quéniart, the officer in command of the guardhouse, set down the lantern upon the dirty deal table.

„For five minutes,“ the order says, madame,“ he murmured, bowing.

I watched him in a dull fashion, wondering what she had come to say, and what new torture Heaven willed me to endure. At length, when the door had closed upon the officer, she tore back her hood, and, removing her mask, showed me a face white and drawn with pain and a pair of eyes red from weeping.

„M. de Bret,“ she said in trembling accents, „what does it mean?“

I started, for in her voice I detected the old ring of the days before that accursed Spaniard came between us, when she had not been so sparing in her favors. I was bewildered, and justly might I have asked her the very question that she put to me.

„What does it mean, M. de Bret?“ she repeated.

„What does all Paris say?“ I asked at length.

„That you—you have killed my brother,“ she answered brokenly.

„And you believe it?“

„Believe it?“ she echoed in amazement. „Do I believe it? Should I be here if I did?“

„Thank God!“ I cried fervently.

„But you were there, M. de Bret, when he died. Do you know who killed him?“

„He told me,“ I answered. „It was—“

„Molina!“ she cried. „Ah, you see I know! Am I not right?“

„You are, indeed,“ I said, marveling from what source she had derived her information.

„Aye, 'tis as I thought. Oh, why did not Raoul heed my warning? I told him so often that Molina was a spy of the queen's, and that naught would deter him from ridding himself of such an opponent as Raoul might become if he were able to prove what was being whispered everywhere, for Raoul was a Cardinalist. As God lives, I will avenge my brother,“ she ended passionately. „That Spanish hound shall not live to see to-morrow's dawn!“

„Hush, child,“ I cried. „Tis not for frail women to talk of vengeance.“

„But I have no one in the world, M. de Bret,“ she wailed, „and Raoul has no one but me to avenge him.“

„Since when has Léon de Bret ceased to be counted among your friends—yours and your poor brother’s? Moreover, mademoiselle, Raoul entrusted me with a secret before he died, and with a mission which I shall fulfil to-morrow. Then others shall reckon with Rafael de Molina, and if he escapes the wheel I do not know Monseigneur de Richelieu.“

„But you, dear friend!“ she cried. „Oh, I had forgotten your position! Forgive my selfishness. I am distraught with grief at what has happened. You are a prisoner.“

„True,“ I muttered, „but I shall have something to say to-morrow to Monseigneur de Richelieu. If only I could prove my own innocence conclusively—“ I paused abruptly as a thought occurred to me. „I have it!“ I cried presently. „Ma vie, but you may count upon me! I shall be freed to-morrow.“

We were interrupted by a knock, and she was forced to say farewell. As I led her to the door, after she had readjusted her mask, I whispered:

„Do nothing, mademoiselle, until you hear from me. Your brother will be avenged.“

There was more that I might have said, but her grief commanded respect and circumspection, and so I contented myself with kissing her hand and cutting short her grateful words by throwing wide the door.

When she was gone, I found that I had much to ponder over. I had said that her brother would be avenged, and it was incumbent upon me to discover a manner wherein my promise might be fulfilled; but I could not do it. A score of times I tried to drive my thoughts into such a channel. Unconsciously they would drift back again to Renée de Navéry, and again I would see the flash in her eyes; again I would hear her call Molina a Spanish hound—

And in the dark I rubbed my hands softly together and chuckled gleefully to myself, for love is a monstrous selfish thing. I remembered only that none stood between Renée and me, and I gloated fiendishly over the discovery that she had feigned a preference for Molina in order to unmask a traitor, and to defend her brother from the danger that threatened him.

She had found me gloomy, sullen, and despondent—ready for the airy death dance of Montfaucon. She had left me elated, joyful, and confident that to-morrow would restore me my liberty, my sword, and the right to woo her.

’Twas a pleasant enough dream, and it abode with me until I fell asleep.

Chapter III

MORNING found me cheerful and much refreshed in spirit, but famished in body, for those sons of dogs who kept the guardhouse had left me supperless.

I was beginning to fear that Quéniart had made too sure that I should be hanged, and with a saintly solicitude for the welfare of my soul had deemed it best that I should fast a while in preparation; but in the end my breakfast came. A scanty one, ’tis true—half of a tough capon, from which soup had been boiled for every other inmate of the guardhouse before it was roasted, and a

demi-litre of wine, which was first cousin to vinegar. Still, I partook of it; and if it did not give me strength, at least it duped my hunger for the while, and paved the way for a hearty meal which I hoped to reckon with anon.

Scarce had I finished when Quéniart returned, and after a hasty toilet I announced myself ready to accompany him to the Hôtel Richelieu.

A coach was hired at my expense, for Quéniart was too well known in Paris to render it pleasant for a gentleman to walk swordless beside him.

„Hi, Master Quéniart!“ I exclaimed, as we were leaving. „Will you be good enough to bring my sword? I am indeed mistaken if his eminence does not order it to be returned to me within the hour.“

The captain's eyebrows were lifted in surprise.

„You are sanguine, monsieur,“ he ejaculated. Then, bending his head, he added: „It may serve as evidence.“

„And what of that?“ I cried.

„There is blood upon it.“

I started, despite myself, at the unwelcome news.

„When did you see the blade?“ I inquired sharply.

„Last night, when it was handed to me by the officer who arrested you.“

He spoke the truth, I knew. I concluded that the blade must have received its stains while lying on the ground beside the wounded man. I pondered for a moment, and then I lifted my eyes to his face.

„Bring the sword,“ I said decidedly. „What signifies a little blood when there is one who swears he saw me slay the man, and a score who saw me with the body in my arms before it had gone cold?“

He shrugged his shoulders, and turned to do my bidding, although he tired not of telling me how mad I was until we stood in the presence of the cardinal.

Never was an audience granted me with such dispatch. Scarcely had we been announced when the crimson portière that masked the door of Richelieu's cabinet was lifted by an usher.

„His eminence will see M. de Bret immediately,“ the man cried.

Quéniart's great fingers closed over my hand.

„Good luck!“ he whispered.

I pushed my way through the idle crowd of clients, and the next moment I stood in the cardinal's presence and face to face with Rafael de Molina.

Richelieu, who was seated at his writing table, raised his head as I entered, and darted a quick glance at me.

„M. de Bret,“ said he, „I am sorely disappointed in you. What have you to say?“

„That your eminence has been misinformed,“ I answered stoutly.

He perked his head on one side, and studied me attentively through eyes that wore a sleepy look—an infallible sign that he was wide awake.

„Do you mean that you did not kill M. de Navéry?“ he inquired slowly.

„I did not, monseigneur.“

Richelieu turned to Molina, and the words he spoke made my heart bound within me.

„I know M. de Bret for a man of honor,“ he said quietly. „In the face of your accusation, I looked for an excuse from him for having broken the edict, but never for a denial such as you have heard.“

A deprecatory smile, full of significance and venom, swept over the foreigner's swart countenance.

„However,“ continued the cardinal, „let us hear what M. de Bret may have to say. Perchance it would puzzle him to explain satisfactorily how he came to be found in so compromising a position by the guard.“

Briefly I told him what I have set down here concerning it, suppressing, however, the facts that a dagger had been employed, and that in the man who returned with the guard I had recognized the perpetrator of the deed. I also omitted, for reasons of my own, Navéry's dying message.

When I had done, the cardinal, whose eyes had been riveted on my face while I spoke, turned again to Molina.

„Are you certain that it was M. de Bret whom you saw?“ he inquired with marked coldness.

„Por Dios y la Virgen!2 cried the Spaniard, forgetting in whose presence he stood. „Have I not said so? Think you I should accuse a man unless I were positive? Moreover, since my word appears to be insufficient, was not his sword found drawn?“

„True,“ mused the cardinal, looking at me again. „Still, M. de Bret has explained that he drew it to rush to the assistance of M. de Navéry.“

„Has your eminence forgotten that there is blood upon his sword?“ exclaimed Molina with a sneer.

The cardinal frowned, perchance at the Spaniard's tone, perchance at the fresh piece of evidence.

„There is more upon my sword than you will relish, monsieur l'étranger!“ I cried hotly, whereat his eminence looked pleased, and the foreigner changed color slightly, for he could not tell how much I knew of the encounter. „I dropped my sword,“ I continued, „when I raised Navéry from the ground, and the blood that flowed from his wound must have stained it where it lay; but we are wasting words. Since my sword has been mentioned as evidence, let it be produced. At my request Captain Quéniart has brought it with him. He waits now in the antechamber. If your eminence will order it to be brought in, I imagine it will tell us something that will surprise M. de Molina.“

The cardinal raised his eyebrows, and glanced from one to the other of us. Then, without a word, he touched a small hand bell.

„Call Captain Quéniart,“ he said to the lackey who answered the summons.

A moment later the burly soldier appeared.

„Now, monseigneur,“ I said, taking the weapon, which, at a sign from the cardinal, Quéniart surrendered to me. „Your eminence has wielded a rapier yourself, if fame speaks truly, and you are well acquainted with the points and the virtues of the weapon.“

He smiled, evidently pleased by the memories I had aroused in his priestly heart.

„It was my good fortune,“ I went on, „to take this sword to an armorer's a week ago, so that a new blade might be fitted to it. Will your eminence be good enough to look closely at the edge, and see what it has to say concerning last night's doings?“

I drew the sword as I spoke, and I now presented the hilt to Richelieu. He took it from me with a puzzled air, while Molina and Quéniart, actuated by different feelings, went nearer than deference ordained.

Richelieu looked at the blade. Then, with a slight exclamation, he rose and walked over to the window.

The sun shone through the leaded panes and fell upon the steel, which glittered brightly save here and there where a shiny patch of reddish brown had deadened its lustre. For some moments he examined it attentively; then, turning, he bent his dark, penetrating eye upon the Spaniard.

„You have been overzealous in the cause of justice, M. de Molina,“ he said coldly. „This sword has not been used since the new blade was fitted to it.“

Had a thunderbolt fallen at his feet Molina could not have been more taken aback. He turned pale to the lips and darted a furious glance at the cardinal. There was a moment's silence; then Richelieu spoke.

„M. de Bret, you are released,“ he said. „Quéniart, we must look elsewhere for the culprit; you may go. M. de Molina, you also may retire.“

„Might I suggest that M. de Molina should submit his rapier to a like examination?“ I ventured to inquire.

The Spaniard drew himself up stiffly.

„We do not carry swords for ornament in Spain,“ he answered proudly, „as I shall be happy to prove to you if you have reason to doubt the fact.“ Then, before I had time to reply: „There may be dents upon the edge. Does your eminence desire to see them?“

„It would be useless,“ the cardinal answered carelessly. „You may go.“

Chapter IV

WHEN we were alone, I gave the cardinal the fullest details of what I knew.

„I half suspected it was thus,“ he said, when I had finished. „And he used a dagger, you say? The dastard! But what am I to do? He has killed Navéry—that I am assured. He may be plotting against my life—that also I do not doubt; but what proofs can I offer the court of Spain? He is a spy of the queen's, and that makes it more dangerous still. I would consign him to the wheel if I dared, but?“

He paused, frowned, and lapsed into thought.

„If, peradventure, M. de Molina were to involve himself one of these evenings in a brawl, and receive a thrust in the windpipe or in low quarte, methinks your eminence's riddle would be well solved, and Raoul de Navéry most fitly avenged.“

„True,“ he mused. „'Twould be a great blessing.“

„But an unlikely one, while the edict is so strictly observed.“

His glittering eye rested upon me for a moment. Then he laughed.

„I understand,“ he said. „Well, if you know of any one inclined to avenge Navéry, and to save me from poisoning, the edict shall be forgotten for once.“

I thanked him, and told him I thought I knew of such a man; whereupon he dismissed me with his blessing.

„You are a tolerable swordsman, I know,“ he said, as I took up my hat, „and I have every confidence in your skill; but what if he should use a dagger again?“

„I trust he will, monseigneur,“ I answered. „I am reckoning upon it.“

From the Hôtel Richelieu I wended my way toward the house of my late friend, Raoul de Navéry. Renée welcomed me with a glad cry, and with a smile that lighted up the sorrowful darkness of her countenance. I did but remain

until I had told her what had taken place, and what was likely to follow. Then, leaving her, I went to dine, grim memories haunting me of my last repast.

To take Molina at his word, and ask him to prove to me that they did not carry swords for ornament in Spain, would have meant a duel—a duel with seconds, wherein he would have been compelled to follow the rules of honorable play. That I could have killed him under such circumstances I did not for a moment doubt; but it would be too easy an end for him. To let him feel himself mastered, to compel him to have recourse to that assassin's trick of his, and then, when he imagined himself triumphant, to beat him with his own cards—that would be something like revenge; and for that a brawl was needed.

Toward nightfall, therefore, I repaired to the Green Pillar, in the Rue St. Honoré, which I knew he frequented. The gods were with me, for I found him there at play with half a dozen others.

I seated myself apart, unnoticed, and awaited an opportunity.

Presently it came.

„Come, host, another bottle of Armagnac! Let it be of the best, rascal, for we will drink to Don Rafael de Molina's safe journey home!“

This was news that caused me no great astonishment.

„Does M. de Molina contemplate leaving Paris?“ I inquired, turning toward the party. „I am not surprised, for such an interview as he had this morning with the cardinal is apt to make one's liver pale. I am glad to learn it in time, however. I should have been deeply grieved had he left us without learning the opinion which I have had an opportunity of forming of this worthy gentleman, and which I imagine will be shared by all honorable men when the truth is known.“

I had risen and stood facing the Spaniard, giving him back scowl for scowl.

„You mean—?“ he inquired in a voice of suppressed wrath.

„That you are a liar and a murderer, monsieur l'Espagnol.“ I answered coolly, „and that Raoul de Navéry met his death at your hands.“

A charming scene of confusion followed, as with a vigorous „Madre de Dios!“ the Spaniard kicked aside his chair.

„Outside, monsieur!“ I shouted, pointing to the door, and making myself heard above the din. „Sortons!“

Then, with many an oath and angry word, we burst through the door *pêle-mêle* into the courtyard beyond. We fought as we stood, in hats and cloaks. There were no formalities. Molina was in too great a hurry, and I guessed his reason.

For a good five minutes I played the fellow in the uncertain light of a couple of lanterns, and showed him that I was his master, yet forebore to press him too hard; but waited, with my eyes keeping good watch over his left hand.

At last it came. The onlookers stood ranged against the wall to the right. Away from these Molina led me, retreating under my attack, and I following as if his designs were unknown to me. At last the other side of the quadrangle was reached, and in the shadow that enveloped us he thought himself safe from detection.

His left hand dropped as on the previous night. I saw not the glitter I looked for, and yet I knew that he had drawn his dagger; but there were many eyes upon him, and even in the darkness a lack of caution might betray his foul play. He must be wary, lest they should interrupt the fight in the very moment

of his victory. Possibly he did not care whether he was discovered or not, if only he had time to kill me before the interruption came.

I pressed him hard, and while I did so I loosened the fastenings of my cloak with my other hand, as if I desired to cast the garment from me. Then I fainted, and lunged under his guard. My sword was within an inch of his breast when his poniard met it and sent it past him. Simultaneously he offered me his point, a triumphant leer upon his face.

But he had reckoned without my knowledge of his ways. I had dragged the loosened cloak from my back, and held it on my arm. With a sweep of it I dashed his blade aside.

I saw the look of terror come into his upturned face. I heard the cry of horror that burst from the onlookers. Before they could interfere, however, Don Rafael de Molina lay writhing in the throes of death.

So cautious had he been that not one of those who stood there so much as suspected his foul play. When they saw him fall beneath my murderous stroke, a dozen swords leaped from their scabbards, and with angry cries of „Shame!“ and „Murder!“ they flung themselves upon me.

When I shouted to them to look at his left hand, however, they paused to do my bidding; and when they saw the dagger which was grasped by the nerveless fingers of the dead, they sheathed their swords and hushed their angry cries. When I told them that ‘twas thus that Molina had killed Raoul de Navéry, there were some among them who spat upon the corpse.

Half an hour later I stood sword-less, and under arrest, in Quéniart’s guardroom, awaiting the custodian. When the captain entered and beheld me, he rubbed his eyes and spluttered out an oath.

„What, again?“ he ejaculated. „Ventre St. Gris, M. de Bret, but you are like to hang this time, whether the edge of your sword be battered or not!“

Nevertheless, it came not to pass as he predicted, for the next day I was liberated, and I knelt at the requiem mass for Raoul de Navéry.

I did not deem it a propitious time for the advancement of my suit, so I determined to accompany the court to Blois next day, and leave my wooing until I should return, when, perchance, Renée’s grief might have abated.

I paid her a visit that evening. She received me kindly, and overwhelmed me with words of praise and gratitude, until I felt myself as great a historical personage as Bayard or Bertrand du Guesclin; but when I came to say farewell she looked surprised.

„You are going to Blois?“ she said.

„Yes, mademoiselle. I accompany the court.“

„You craved my permission three days ago,“ she murmured, studying the pattern of the carpet with great intentness, „and I cannot remember granting it.“

My heart beat fast and furiously.

„Will you grant it now?“ I inquired.

„No, monsieur,“ she said, lifting her eyes to mine, „I will not. I cannot spare you.“

