

***STANLEY JOHN
WEYMAN***



***FOR
THE CAUSE***

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EAN 8596547210023

DigiCat, 2022

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Paris had never seemed to the eye more peaceful than on a certain November evening in the year 1589: and this although many a one within its walls resented the fineness of that night as a mockery, a scoff at the pain of some and the fury of others.

The moonlight fell on roofs and towers, on the bare open space of the Place de Grève and the dark mass of the Louvre, and only here and there pierced, by chance, a narrow lane, to gleam on some foul secret of the kennel. The Seine lay a silvery loop about the Ile de la Cité--a loop cut on this side and that by the black shadows of the Pont au Change, and the Petit Pont, and broken again westward by the outline of the New Bridge, which was then in building.

The city itself lay in profound quiet in the depth of the shadow. From time to time at one of the gales, or in the lodge of the Châtelet, a sentinel challenged or an officer spoke. But the bell of St. Germain l'Auxerrois, which had rung through hours of the past day was silent. The tumult which had leaped like flame from street to street had subsided. Peaceful men breathed again in their houses, and women, if they still cowered by the hearth, no longer laid trembling fingers on their ears. For a time the red fury was over: and in the narrow channels, where at noon the mob had seethed, scarcely a stray wayfarer could now be found.

A few however were abroad: and of these some who chanced to be threading the network of streets between the Châtelet and the Louvre, heard behind them the footsteps of a man in great haste, and saw pass them a youth, white-faced and wearing a sword and a student's short cloak and cap--apparently a member of the University. He for his part looked neither to right nor left: saw not one of them, and seemed bent only on getting forward.

He slackened his space however near the corner of the Rue de l'Arbre Sec, where it shoots out of the Rue de Béthisy, and then turning it with a rush, caught his foot in some obstacle, and plunging forward, would have fallen violently, if he had not come against a man, who seemed to be standing still in the shadow of the corner house.

"Hold up!" exclaimed this person, withstanding the shock better than could have been expected. "You should have a pretty mistress, young man, if you go to her at this pace!"

The student did not answer--did not seem to hear. He had staggered against the wall, and still stood propping himself up by it. His face, pale before, was ghastly now, as he glared, apparently horror-struck, at something beyond the speaker. The latter, after muttering angrily, "What the plague do you go dashing about the streets like a Shrove Tuesday ox for?" turned also and glanced behind him.

But not at that to which the student's eyes were directed. The stranger seemed constrained to look first and by preference at the long, low casement of a house nearly opposite them. This window was on the first floor, and projected somewhat over the roadway. There seemed to be no light in the room; but the moonlight reached it, and

showed a woman's head bent on the sill--a girl's head, if one might judge from its wealth of hair. One white wrist gleamed amid this, but her face was hidden on her arms. In the whole scene--in the casement open at this inclement time, in the girl's attitude of abandonment, there was something which stirred the nerves. It was only after a long look that the stranger averted his eyes, and cast a casual glance at a queer, dark object, which a few paces away swung above the street, dimly outlined against the sky. It was that which had fascinated his companion.

"Umph!" he ejaculated in the tone of a man who should say "Is that all?" And he turned to the other again. "You seem taken aback, young man!" he said. "Surely that is no such strange sight in Paris nowadays. What with Leaguers hanging Politiques, and Politiques hanging Leaguers, and both burning Huguenots, I thought a dead man was no longer a bogey to frighten children with!"

"Hush, sir, in Heaven's name!" exclaimed the young man, shuddering at his words. "He was my father!"

The stranger whistled. "He was your father, was he!" he replied more gently. "I dare swear too that he was an honest man, since the Sixteen have done this. There, steady, friend. These are no times for weeping. Be thankful that Le Clerc and his crew have spared your home, and your--your sister. That is rare clemency in these days, and Heaven only knows how long it may last. You wear a sword? Then shed no tears to rust it. Time enough to weep, man, when there is blood to be washed from the blade."

"You speak boldly," said the youth, checking his emotion somewhat, "but had they hung your father before his own

door----"

"Good man," said the stranger with a coolness that bordered on the cynical, "he has been dead these twenty years."

"Then your mother?" suggested the student with the feeble persistence by which weak minds show their consciousness of contact with stronger ones, "you had then----"

"Hung them all as high as Haman!"

"Ay, but suppose there were among them," objected the youth, in a lower tone, while he eyed his companion narrowly, "some of the clergy, you understand?"

"They had swung--though they had all been Popes of Rome," was the blunt answer.

The listener shook his head, and drew off a pace. He scanned the stranger curiously, keeping his back turned to the corpse the while, but failed by that light to make out much one way or the other. Scarcely a moment too was allowed him before the murmur of voices and the clash of weapons at the far end of the street interrupted him. "The watch are coming," he said roughly.

"You are right, and the sooner we are within doors the better," his companion assented.

It was noticeable that throughout their talk which had lasted many minutes no sign of life had appeared in any of the neighboring houses. Scarce a light shone from a window though it was as yet but nine o'clock. The fact was that fear of the Sixteen and of the mob they guided was overpowering Paris--a terror crushing out men's lives. While the provinces of France were divided at this time between

two opinions, and half of each as a rule owned the Huguenot Henry the Fourth--now for six months the rightful sovereign--for king, Paris would have none of him. The fierce bigotry of the lower classes, the presence of some thousands of Spanish soldiers, and the ambition and talents of the Guise family combined at once to keep the gates of Paris closed to him, and to overawe such of the respectable citizens as from religious sympathy in rare cases, and more often out of a desire to see law and order re-established, would fain have adopted his cause. The Politiques, or moderate party, who were indifferent about religion as such, but believed that a strong government could only be formed by a Romanist king, were almost non-existent in Paris. And the events of the past day, the murder of three judges and several lower officials--among them poor M. Portail whose body now decorated the Rue de l'Arbre Sec--had not reassured the municipal mind. No wonder that men put out their lights early, and were loth to go to their windows, when they might see a few feet from the casement the swollen features of a harmless, honest man, but yesterday going to and from his work like other men.

Young Portail strode to the door of the house and knocked hurriedly. As he did so, he looked up with something like a shiver of nervous apprehension at the window above. But the girl neither moved nor spoke, nor betrayed any consciousness of his presence. She might have been dead. It was a young man, about his own age or a little older, who, after reconnoitring him from above, cautiously drew back the door. "Whom have you with you?"

he whispered, holding it ajar, and letting the end of a stout club be seen.

"No one," Portail replied in the same cautious tone. And he would have entered without more ado, and closed the door behind him had not his late companion, who had followed him across the street like his shadow, set his foot against it. "Nay, but you are forgetting me," he said good-humoredly.

"Go your way! we have enough to do to protect ourselves," cried Portail brusquely.

"The more need of me," was the careless answer.

The watch were now but a few houses away, and the stranger seemed determined. He could scarcely be kept out without a disturbance. With an angry oath Felix Portail held the door for him to enter; and closed it softly behind him. Then for a minute or so the three stood silent in the darkness, while with a murmur of voices and clash of weapons, and a ruddy glimmer piercing crack and keyhole, the guard swept by.

"Have you a light?" Felix murmured.

"In the back room," replied the young man who had admitted them. He seemed to be a clerk or confidential servant. "But your sister," he continued, "is distraught. She has sat at the window all day as you see her now--sometimes looking at *it*. Oh Felix, this has been a dreadful day for this house!"

The young Portail assented by a groan. "And Susanne?" he asked.

"Is with Mistress Marie, terrified almost to death, poor child. She has been crouching all day by her, hiding her face

in her gown. But where were you?"

"At the Sorbonne," replied Felix in a whisper.

"Ah!" the other exclaimed, something of hidden meaning in his tone. "I would not tell her that, if I were you. I feared it was so. But let us go upstairs."

They went: with more than one stumble by the way. At the head of the staircase the clerk opened a door and preceded them into a low-roofed panelled room, plainly but solidly furnished, and lighted by a small hanging lamp of silver. A round oak table on six curiously turned legs stood in the middle, and on it some food was laid. A high-backed chair, before which a sheep-skin rug was spread, and two or three stools made up with a great oak chest the main furniture of the room.

The stranger turned from scrutinizing his surroundings, and started. Another door had silently opened; and he saw framed in the doorway and relieved by the lamplight against the darkness of the outer room the face and figure of a tall girl. A moment she stood pointing at them with her hand, her face white--and whiter in seeming by reason of the black hair which fell around it--her eyes dilated, the neck-band of her dark red gown torn open. "A Provençal!" the intruder murmured to himself. "Beautiful and a tigress."

At any rate, for the moment, beside herself. "So you have come at last!" she panted, glaring at Felix with passionate scorn in word and gesture. "Where were you while these slaves of yours did your bidding? At the Sorbonne with the black crows! Thinking out fresh work for them? Or dallying with your Normandy sweetheart?"

"Hush!" he said quailing visibly. "There is a stranger here."

"There have been many strangers here today!" she retorted bitterly. "Hush, you say? Nay, I will not be silent. They may tear me limb from limb, but I will accuse them of this murder before God's throne. Coward! Do you think I will ask mercy from them? Come, look on your work! See what the League have done--your holy League!--while you sat plotting with the black crows!"

She pointed into the dark room behind her, and the movement disclosed a younger girl clinging to her skirts, and weeping silently. "Come here, Susanne," said Felix, who had turned pale and red under the lash of the other's scorn. "Your sister is not herself. You do no good, Marie, staying in there. See, you are both trembling with cold."

"With cold? Then do you warm yourselves! Sit down and eat and drink and be comfortable and forget him! But I will not eat or drink while he hangs there! Shame, Felix Portail! Have you arms and hands, and will you let your father hang before his own door?"

Her voice rang shrilly to the last word; and then an awkward silence fell on the room. The stranger nodded, almost as if he had said, "Bravo!" The two men of the house cast doubtful glances at one another. At length the clerk spoke. "It is impossible, mistress," he said gently. "Were he touched, the mob would wreck the house to-morrow."

"A little bird whispered to me as I came through the streets,"--it was the stranger who spoke--"that Mayenne and his riders would be in town to-morrow. Then it seems to me

that our friends of the Sorbonne will not have matters altogether their own way."

The Sorbonne was the Theological College of Paris; at this time the headquarters of the extreme Leaguers and the Sixteen. Mayenne and D'Aumale, the Guise princes, more than once found it necessary to check the excesses of this party.

Marie Portail looked at the last speaker. He sat on the edge of the chest, carelessly swinging one knee over the other; a man of middle height, rather tall than short, with well bronzed cheeks, a forehead broad and white, and an aquiline nose. He wore a beard and moustaches, and his chin jutted out. His eyes were keen, but good-humored. Though spare he had broad shoulders, and an iron-hilted sword propped against his thigh seemed made for use rather than show. The upper part of his dress was of brown cloth, the lower of leather. A weather-stained cloak which he had taken off lay on the chest beside him.

"You are a man!" cried Marie fiercely. "But as for these----"

"Stay, mistress!" the clerk broke in "Your brother does but collect himself. If the Duke of Mayenne comes back to-morrow, as our friend here says is likely--and I have heard the same myself--he will keep his men in better order. That is true. And we might risk it if the watch would give us a wide berth."

Felix nodded sullenly. "Shut the door," he said to his sister, the deep gloom on his countenance contrasting with the excitement she betrayed. "There is no need to let the neighbors see us."

This time she obeyed him. Susanne too crept from her skirts, and threw herself on her knees, hiding her face on the chair. "Ay!" said Marie looking down at her with the first expression of tenderness the stranger had noted in her. "Let her weep. Let children weep. But let men work."

"We want a ladder," said the clerk in a low voice. "And the longest we have is full three feet short."

"That is just half a man," remarked he who sat on the chest.

"What do you mean?" asked Felix wonderingly.

"What I said."

"But there is nothing on which we can rest the ladder," urged the clerk.

"Then that is a whole man," quoth the stranger curtly. "Perhaps two. I told you you would have need of me." He looked from one to the other with a smile; a careless, self-contented smile.

"You are a soldier," said Marie suddenly.

"At times," he replied, shrugging his shoulders.

"For which side?"

He shook his head. "For my own," he answered naïvely.

"A soldier of fortune?"

"At your service, mistress; now and ever."

The clerk struck in impatiently. "If we are to do this," he said, "we had better see about it. I will fetch the ladder."

He went out and the other men followed more slowly, leaving Marie still standing gazing into the darkness of the outer room--she had opened the door again--like one in a trance. Some odd trait in the soldier led him, as he passed out, to lay his hand on the hair of the kneeling child with a

movement infinitely tender; infinitely at variance with the harsh clatter with which his sword next moment rang against the stairs as he descended.

The three men were going to do that which two certainly, and perhaps all, knew to be perilous. One went to it in gloom, anger as well as sorrow at his heart. One bustled about nervously, and looked often behind him as if to see Marie's pale face at the window. And one strode out as to a ball, glancing up and down the dark lane with an air of enjoyment, which not even the grim nature of his task could suppress. The body was hanging from a bar which crossed the street at a considerable height, serving as a stay between the gables of two opposite houses, of which one was two doors only from the unhappy Portails'. The mob, with a barbarity very common in those days, had hung him on his own threshold.

The street as the three moved up it, seemed empty and still. But it was impossible to say how long it would remain so. Yet the soldier loitered, staring about him, as one remembering things. "Did not the Admiral live in this neighborhood?" he inquired.

"De Coligny? Yes. Round the corner in the Rue de Béthisy," replied the clerk brusquely. "But see! The ladder will not reach the bar--no, not by four feet."

"Set it against the wall then--thus," said the soldier, and having done it himself he mounted a few steps. But then he seemed to bethink himself. He jumped down again. "No," he exclaimed, peering sharply into the faces of one and the other, "I do not know you. If any one comes, my friends, and

you leave the foot of the ladder I shall be taken like a bird on a limed twig. Do you ascend, Monsieur Felix."

The young man drew back. He was not without courage, or experience of rough scenes. But the Louvre was close at hand, almost within earshot on one side, the Châtelet was scarcely farther off on the other; and both swarmed with soldiers and brutal camp-followers. At any moment a troop of them might pass; and should they detect any one interfering with King Mob's handiwork, he would certainly dangle in a very few minutes from some handy lamp-iron. Felix knew this, and stood at gaze. "I do not know you either," he muttered irresolutely, his hand still on the ladder.

A smile of surprising humor played on the soldier's face. "Nay, but you knew *him*!" he retorted, pointing upwards with his hand. "Trust me, young sir," he added significantly, "I am less inclined to mount now than I was before."

The clerk intervened before Felix could resent the insult. "Steady," he said; "I will go up and do it."

"Not so!" Felix rejoined, pushing him aside in turn. And he ran up the ladder. But near the top he paused, and began to descend again. "I have no knife," he said shamefacedly.

"Pshaw! Let me come!" cried the stranger. "I see you are both good comrades. I trust you. Besides, I am more used to this ladder work than you are, and time is everything."

He ran up as he spoke, and standing on the highest round but one he grasped the bar above his head, and swung himself lightly up, so as to gain a seat on it. With more caution he wormed himself along it until he reached the rope. Fortunately there was a long coil of it about the