

CHAPTER XXXI

THE ATTACK ON THE MOUNT

The rock loomed black before them, as the troopers, escorting the Governor's daughter, rode up to the Mount. Entering the town, at its base, dark walls on either side of them shut out the broad map of the heavens and left but a narrow open space above; few lights were visible, so that many of the houses seemed tenantless; even at the tavern, unwonted stillness prevailed. Apparently was the return well-timed; in twisting street and tortuous byway, where hostile faces had been prone to frown upon the soldiers of his Excellency, emerging from, or ascending to, the stronghold of the summit, now only chill drafts of air swept down to greet them; passed on with shrill whisperings, and died away in the distance.

Nearing the massive portals that opened wide into his Excellency's realm, my lady suppressed a shiver; but the Marquis, in a low tone ventured to jest on the depressing and melancholy aspect of the Mount at that hour. To these light remarks she returned no answer, and he had just begun to rally her on a certain quietness of spirits, apparent on the beach and irreconcilable with the circumstances of the moment, when a sharp exclamation fell from the girl's lips.

In front of them, between the soldiers and the entrance to that upper part of the Mount, many dark forms had suddenly darted forth; at the

same time from near-by houses came unmistakable sounds of life and activity; doors were thrown open and windows raised. The town they thought asleep had merely been watching; now showed its bright eyes in a multitude of menacing lights around them; below, where likewise a mysterious marshaling had occurred, from alleys, corners, and hovels, immediately after the passing of the Governor's party!

"What does it mean?" Again she heard the Marquis' tones, less confident now, as he turned to the commandant.

"Treachery!" The commandant's voice rang out. "They've broken faith with us!"

"Dogs!" My lord gazed uncertainly ahead; dubiously behind. "What are we going to do?"

"Do?" The commandant suppressed an imprecation. "Push on to the upper gates!"

"To the gates!" cried the Marquis; then wheeled quickly. "But you--Elise!"

"Never mind me!" she returned, with steady lips and eyes.

There was no time for further words; a sharp order from the commandant and the troopers spurred forward toward the entrance in the wall and

those whose purpose it was to oppose them.

What happened thereafter the girl was but vaguely cognizant of; reports of guns, flashing of steel surrounded her; the clattering of hoofs mingled with the loud shouts of men.

"The Bastille of the North! Down with it!"

This was their battle-cry; on every side she heard it, though hardly realizing the purport of the words; confused, she listened to her father's name--her own--bandied about. She wondered why those on the wall, the soldiers within, did not fire and repel all these people.

Then almost at once came the answer. The troopers' comrades were mixed in the melee without; she and they, too--so adroitly had the moment for striking been planned--might be swept down in the volleys from the ramparts. A cannon boomed above; but its deafening reverberations were answered only with laughter and jeers-- Mon dieu! Did his Excellency think to frighten them with sound, as if they were timid children fleeing from thunder? Was his Excellency aiming at stars?

And again that cry: "The Bastille of the North! We, too, will take our Bastille!"--dominated the clashing of arms and the tumult of strife.

For what seemed an interminable period, the Governor's daughter saw, through flashes of light, men struggling, striking; then launched

suddenly forward, by an irresistible movement of the horses, found herself within the gates. The Marquis who had early been separated from her in the strife, was nowhere in sight. Behind now sounded the fray; a short distance from the wall, and she looked back; fiercer than ever, soldiers and people contended within the entrance; beneath the portals. As she strove to restrain her horse she heard the voice of her father.

"Mon pere! Mon pere!" she cried eagerly, divining his face in the light of lamps on that side of the wall. He answered only with a laconic command to go at once to the palace; and, regarding his features, tragically appealing to her at the moment--so strange and different they seemed!--she prepared to obey. But ere turning: "You think the soldiers can hold the gate?" she asked.

"Yes; yes!" he replied sharply, as if annoyed at the question.

"But if--"

"There is no 'if!'" said the Governor, and as the girl rode away, his look, hard, steely, shifting to the soldiers, made quick mental note; they were holding the gates. Satisfied with the front his men presented, and, delivering a few brief orders to the commandant whose valor in rallying his forces had been commendable, his Excellency walked toward the great stairway leading up to the open space near the church. Arrived at this high point from which the town unfolded itself

in the starlight and flicker of lamps, he sought, as best he might, to acquaint himself further with the situation; to judge the numbers of the assailants and the extent of their preparations.

The scene that met his eyes was not so reassuring as he had expected; that which until now he had considered but a spasmodic outbreak of a comparatively few townspeople, excited by the news of the Bastille and bent on any petty mischief, resolved itself into more than an orderless, desultory uprising. To his startled gaze the rock, like an ant-hill disturbed, seemed swarming with life. Even as he peered down, new relays of men poured upward from dark byways to the reinforcement of those already gathered at the portals, and, for the first time, his confidence, bred of contempt for the commonalty, became slightly shaken. Fate, which had struck him sharply in the capture of his daughter and the enforced negotiations leading to the release of one he would have dealt with after his own fashion, now gripped him closer. What did it portend? Whence came all these people?

Not all of them from the immediate neighborhood! Voices, among the assailants, had called out in what was surely the Parisian dialect of the rabble; here to propagate the revolution; extend the circle of flame! And they had seen that arms were not wanting! Muskets, pikes, swords, must have been kept concealed for some time in the town at the base of the Mount or on the shore. In his mind's eye, too late perhaps, his Excellency could see now how the assault had long been planned, how all these people had only been waiting. For what? The

opportunity afforded by a treacherous word! Spoken by whom?

But a moment these reflections surged through his brain; an instant, and his gaze swung around, at towers--turrets--as a magician might apprehensively survey a fabulous architectural creation, handiwork of his dark craft, threatened, through an influence beyond his control, with destruction; then with a quick start, his Excellency wheeled; walked toward the stairway. About to descend, the sight of a figure coming up, caused him, however, to pause; in the flare of the light below, something in the manner of the man's advance impressed the governor as peculiar.

The movements of this person, who was under-sized, wiry, were agile and cat-like; first would he stop, look around him and listen; afterward spring forward a few steps as not quite sure of his course. But still he came on, keeping as closely as might be to the cover of shadows, until a growing impression he had seen the fellow before resolved itself into positiveness in his Excellency's mind. And with the conviction and a sudden remembrance of the place and the character of their previous meeting, a definite disinclination to encountering the figure on the stairs caused the Governor abruptly to draw into the entrance of the church. There, concealed, impatiently he waited for the man to pass on, thus affording him the opportunity to slip by and return to the gate.

Meanwhile, the Lady Elise had repaired to the palace; a prey to

harassing doubts her father's words had failed to remove, she listened to those sounds of the strife she no longer saw. But that she wished to obey her father unquestioningly now--at, perhaps, a supreme moment for both of them!--she could not have remained where she was. Never had the palace looked so blank and deserted; she rang her bell; no one answered. The servants had apparently all left--gone, it might be, to look down on and behold this guerre a la mort waged near the gates. Or, perhaps, had they all, except the old nurse, fled from the palace, never to return?

As she asked herself these questions, in the distance the noise of the conflict grew louder; the shouts of the people more distinct, nearer! With a sudden premonition of disaster close at hand, the desire to see what was happening--to know the worst--seized her. No longer could she remain in her apartments; she must return to the ramparts--to her father; and then, if need be-- The thought drove some of the color from her cheek, but in a moment her braver instincts spoke; there awoke within her the courage and the spirit of her Norman ancestry.

Pale, yet determined, she hastened down the long, dimly lighted corridor, and was nearing the door leading to the street when it suddenly opened and a man, tall and dark, showing in his appearance many signs of the fray, stepped in. At sight of her a quick exclamation fell from his lips; his bold, anxious eyes lighted. "My Lady!"

"You!" Her startled glance met his.

"I heard the firing; hastened to the Mount--here! I trust not too late!"

"Too late!" she repeated wildly. "Where else should the Black Seigneur be than here, at the Mount--at such a moment!"

"True!" he returned quietly. "Where else?"

She noted not the accent; behind him, through the open space a bright fork of flame, in the direction of the soldiers' barracks, shot into the air, and, at the same time, she saw that the officers' quarters and out-buildings glowed red. The knowledge of what it meant--that her apprehensions had been realized, sent a shudder through her, and quickly as the door closed, shutting out the sight, she ran toward the threshold, one thought in her mind--her father, and where she had last seen him! That she was seized, held, restrained, seemed but a natural, though terrible, incident of the moment.

"Pardon, my Lady! In a moment they will be here, and they will not spare you! Your father is not at the gate; he left before the soldiers gave way! Believe me, or not--it is the truth! As true as that, if you go out, they will kill you!"

And did he not want that; why else was he here? The young man's face

darkened; he made an impatient gesture. They were but wasting time; already were the people close without; one of the assailants, a woman, had been shot in the assault; the others? Her Ladyship would understand; if she wished to save herself? His tones vibrated with strange eagerness. The palace had a rear entrance, of course? Then had they better flee upward to some place of concealment, and, later, when the people were concerned most in pillage, endeavor to find a way to leave the Mount. After that, it would be easy; his ship was waiting-- Her wild words interrupted; her father--she would go only to him! She would never leave him now!

That which she proposed was impossible, quickly the young man answered. The mob--the terrible mob! Did she realize to what she would expose herself? Did she know the terrible danger? More plainly he told her. As for her going, it was not to be thought of; he must see she did not persist in her purpose.

"You?" My lady flashed him a glance. "You!" she repeated. "Whose men broke faith--"

"That may be!" His voice rang bitterly. "Yet," with stubborn resolution, "your Ladyship must not go!"

"Must not! And you presume--dare tell me that! You, the--"

"I would there were no need to cross you, my Lady," he returned, when

behind him the door, leading from the street, suddenly opened; closed.

"Elise!" The voice of the Marquis, who had hurriedly entered, rang out; changed. "Mon dieu! What is this?" In the dim light, an instant my lord stared hard at the man before him; then with drawn blade threw himself upon him.