

FRIEDRICH HEINRICH
MOTTE-FOUQUÉ

THE TWO CAPTAINS

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de La Motte-Fouqué
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Содержание

CHAPTER I	5
CHAPTER II	8
CHAPTER III	10
CHAPTER IV	12
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	13

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The Two Captains

CHAPTER I

A Mild summer evening was resting on the shores of Malaga, awakening the guitar of many a merry singer among the ships in the harbor, and in the city houses, and in many an ornamental garden villa. Emulating the voices of the birds, the melodious tones greeted the refreshing coolness, and floated like perfumed exhalations from meadow and water, over the enchanting region. Some troops of infantry who were on the shore, and who purposed to spend the night there, that they might be ready for embarkation early on the following morning, forgot amid the charms of the pleasant eventide that they ought to devote these last few hours on European soil to ease and slumber; they began to sing military songs, to drink to each other with their flasks filled to the brim with the rich wine of Xeres, toasting to the long life of the mighty Emperor Charles V., who was now besieging the pirate-nest Tunis, and to whose assistance they were about to sail. The merry soldiers were not all of one race. Only two companies consisted of Spaniards; the third was formed of pure Germans, and now and then among the various fellow-combatants the difference of manners and language had given rise to much bantering. Now, however, the fellowship of the approaching sea-voyage and of the glorious perils to be shared, as well as the refreshing feeling which the soft southern evening poured over soul and sense, united the band of comrades in perfect and undisturbed harmony. The Germans tried to speak Castilian, and the Spaniards to speak German, without its occurring to any one to make a fuss about the mistakes and confusions that happened. They mutually helped each other, thinking of nothing else but the good-will of their companions, each drawing near to his fellow by means of his own language.

Somewhat apart from the merry tumult, a young German captain, Sir Heimbert of Waldhausen, was reclining under a cork-tree, gazing earnestly up at the stars, apparently in a very different mood to the fresh, merry sociability which his comrades knew and loved in him. Presently the Spanish captain, Don Fadrique Mendez, approached him; he was a youth like the other, and was equally skilled in martial exercises, but he was generally as austere and thoughtful as Heimbert was cheerful and gentle. "Pardon, Senor," began the solemn Spaniard, "if I disturb you in your meditations. But as I have had the honor of often seeing you as a courageous warrior and faithful brother in arms in many a hot encounter, I would gladly solicit you above all others to do me a knightly service, if it does not interfere with your own plans and projects for this night." "Dear sir," returned Heimbert courteously, "I have certainly an affair of importance to attend to before sunrise, but till midnight I am perfectly free, and ready to render you any assistance as a brother in arms." "Enough," said Fadrique, "for at midnight the tones must long have ceased with which I shall have taken farewell of the dearest being I have ever known in this my native city. But that you may be as fully acquainted with the whole affair as behoves a noble companion, listen to me attentively for a few moments.

"Some time before I left Malaga to join the army of our great emperor and to aid in spreading the glory of his arms through Italy, I was devoted, after the fashion of young knights, to the service of a beautiful girl in this city, named Lucila. She had at that time scarcely reached the period which separates childhood from ripe maidenhood, and as I—a boy only just capable of bearing arms—offered my homage with a childlike, friendly feeling, it was also received by my young mistress in a similar childlike manner. I marched at length to Italy, and as you yourself know, for we have been companions since then, I was in many a hot fight and in many an enchantingly alluring region in that luxurious land. Amid all our changes, I held unalterably within me the image of my gentle mistress, never pausing in the honorable service I had vowed to her, although I cannot conceal from you that

in so doing it was rather to fulfil the word I had pledged at my departure than from any impelling and immoderately ardent feeling in my heart. When we returned to my native city from our foreign wanderings, a few weeks ago, I found my mistress married to a rich and noble knight residing here. Fiercer far than love had been was the jealousy—that almost almighty child of heaven and hell—which now spurred me on to follow Lucila's steps, from her home to the church, from thence to the house of a friend, from thence again to her home or to some noble circle of knights and ladies, and all this as unweariedly and as closely as was possible. When I had at length assured myself that no other young knight attended her, and that she devoted herself entirely to the husband chosen for her by her parents rather than desired by herself, I felt perfectly satisfied, and I should not have troubled you at this moment had not Lucila approached me the day before yesterday and whispered in my ear that I must not provoke her husband, for he was very passionate and bold; that not the slightest danger threatened her in the matter, because he loved and honored her above everything, but that his wrath would vent itself all the more furiously upon me. You can readily understand, my noble comrade, that I could not help proving my contempt of all personal danger by following Lucila more closely than ever, and singing nightly serenades beneath her flower-decked windows till the morning star began to be reflected in the sea. This very night Lucila's husband sets out at midnight for Madrid, and from that hour I will in every way avoid the street in which they live; until then, however, as soon as it is sufficiently dark to be suitable for a serenade, I will have love-romances unceasingly sang before his house. It is true I have information that not only he but Lucila's brothers are really to enter upon a quarrel with me, and it is for this reason, Senor, that I have requested you to bear me company with your good sword in this short expedition."

Heimbert seized the Spaniard's hand as a pledge of his readiness, saying as he did so, "To show you, dear sir, how gladly I will do what you desire of me, I will requite your confidence with confidence, and will relate a little incident which occurred to me in this city, and will beg you after midnight also to render me a small service. My story is short, and will not detain us longer than we must wait before the twilight has become deeper and more gloomy.

"On the day after we arrived here I amused myself with walking in the beautiful gardens with which the place abounds. I have now been long in these southern lands, but I cannot but believe that the dreams which transport me nightly back to my German home are the cause for my feeling everything here so strange and astonishing. At all events, every morning when I wake I wonder anew, as if I were only just arrived. So I was walking then, like one infatuated, among the aloe trees, which were scattered among the laurels and oleanders. Suddenly a cry sounded near me, and a slender girl, dressed in white, fled into my arms, fainting, while her companions dispersed past us in every direction. A soldier can always tolerably soon gather his senses together, and I speedily perceived a furious bull was pursuing the beautiful maiden. I threw her quickly over a thickly planted hedge, and followed her myself, upon which the beast, blind with rage, passed us by, and I have heard no more of it since, except that some young knights in an adjacent courtyard had been making a trial with it previous to a bull-fight, and that it was on this account that it had broken so furiously through the gardens.

"I was now standing quite alone, with the fainting lady in my arms, and she was so wonderfully beautiful to look at that I have never in my life felt happier than I then did, and also never sadder. At last I laid her down on the turf, and sprinkled her angelic brow, with water from a neighboring little fountain. And so she came to herself again, and when she opened her bright and lovely eyes I thought I could imagine how the glorified spirits must feel in heaven.

"She thanked me with graceful and courteous words, and called me her knight; but in my state of enchantment I could not utter a syllable, and she must have almost thought me dumb. At length my speech returned, and the prayer at once was breathed forth from my heart, that the sweet lady would often again allow me to see her in this garden; for that in a few weeks the service of the emperor would drive me into the burning land of Africa, and that until then she should vouchsafe me the happiness of beholding her. She looked at me half smiling, half sadly, and said, 'Yes.' And she has kept her

word and has appeared almost daily, without our having yet spoken much to each other. For although she has been sometimes quite alone, I could never begin any other topic but that of the happiness of walking by her side. Often she has sung to me, and I have sung to her also. When I told her yesterday that our departure was so near, her heavenly eyes seemed to me suffused with tears. I must also have looked sorrowful, for she said to me, in a consoling tone, ‘Oh, pious, childlike warrior! one may trust you as one trusts an angel.’ After midnight, before the morning dawn breaks for your departure, I give you leave to take farewell of me in this very spot. If you could, however, find a true and discreet comrade to watch the entrance from the street, it would be well, for many a soldier may be passing at that hour through the city on his way from some farewell carouse. Providence has now sent me such a comrade, and at one o’clock I shall go joyfully to the lovely maiden.”

“I only wish the service on which you require me were more rich in danger,” rejoined Fadrique, “so that I might better prove to you that I am yours with life and limb. But come, noble brother, the hour for my adventure is arrived.”

And wrapped in their mantles, the youths walked hastily toward the city, Fadrique carrying his beautiful guitar under his arm.

CHAPTER II

The night-smelling flowers in Lucila's window were already beginning to emit their refreshing perfume when Fadrique, leaning in the shadow of the angle of an old church opposite, began to tune his guitar. Heimbert had stationed himself not far from him, behind a pillar, his drawn sword under his mantle, and his clear blue eyes, like two watching stars, looking calmly and penetrating around. Fadrique sang:

“Upon a meadow green with spring,
A little flower was blossoming,
With petals red and snowy white;
To me, a youth, my soul's delight
 Within that blossom lay,
And I have loved my song to indite
 And flattering homage pay.

“Since then a wanderer I have been,
And many a bloody strife have seen;
 And now returned, I see
The little floweret stands no more
Upon the meadow as before;
Transplanted by a gardener's care,
And hedged by golden trellis there,
 It is denied to me.

“I grudge him not his trellised guard,
His bolts of iron, strongly barred;
Yet, wandering in the cool night-air,
 I touch my zither's string,
And as afore her beauties rare,
Her wondrous graces sing,
And e'en the gardener shall not dare
 Refuse the praise I bring.”

“That depends, Señor,” said a man, stepping close, and as he thought unobserved, before Fadrique; but the latter had already been informed of his approach by a sign from his watchful friend, and he was therefore ready to answer with the greater coolness, “If you wish, Señor, to commence a suit with my guitar, she has, at all events, a tongue of steel, which has already on many occasions done her excellent service. With whom is it your pleasure to speak, with the guitar or the advocate?”

While the stranger was silent from embarrassment, two mantled figures had approached Heimbert and remained standing a few steps from him, as if to cut off Fadrique's flight in case he intended to escape. “I believe, dear sirs,” said Heimbert in a courteous tone, “we are here on the same errand—namely, to prevent any intrusion upon the conference of yonder knights. At least, as far as I am concerned, you may rely upon it that any one who attempts to interfere in their affair will receive my dagger in his heart. Be of good cheer, therefore; I think we shall both do our duty.” The two gentlemen bowed courteously and were silent.

The quiet self-possession with which the two soldiers carried on the whole affair was most embarrassing to their three adversaries, and they were at a loss to know how they should begin

the dispute. At last Fadrique again touched the strings of his guitar, and was preparing to begin another song. This mark of contempt and apparent disregard of danger and hazard so enraged Lucila's husband (for it was he who had taken his stand by Don Fadrique) that without further delay he drew his sword from his sheath, and with a voice of suppressed rage called out, "Draw, or I shall stab you!" "Very gladly, Senor," replied Fadrique quietly; "you need not threaten me; you might as well have said so calmly." And so saying he placed his guitar carefully in a niche in the church wall, seized his sword, and, bowing gracefully to his opponent, the fight, began.

At first the two figures by Heimbert's side, who were Lucila's brothers, remained quite quiet; but when Fadrique began to get the better of their brother-in-law they appeared as if they intended to take part in the fight. Heimbert therefore made his mighty sword gleam in the moonlight, and said, "Dear sirs, you will not surely oblige me to execute that of which I previously assured you? I pray you not to compel me to do so; but if it cannot be otherwise, I must honorably keep my word, you may rely upon it." The two young men remained from that time motionless, surprised both at the decision and at the true-hearted friendliness that lay in Heimbert's words.

Meanwhile Don Fadrique, although pressing hard upon his adversary, had generously avoided wounding him, and when at last by a dexterous movement he wrested his sword from him. Lucila's husband, surprised at the unexpected advantage, and in alarm at being thus disarmed, retreated a few steps. But Fadrique threw the weapon adroitly into the air, and catching it again near the point of the blade, he said, as he gracefully presented the hilt to his opponent, "Take it, Senor, and I hope our affair of honor is now settled, as you will grant under these circumstances that I am only here to show that I fear no sword-thrust in the world. The bell of the old cathedral is now ringing twelve o'clock, and I give you my word of honor as a knight and a soldier that neither is Dona Lucila pleased with my attentions nor am I pleased with paying them; from henceforth, and were I to remain a hundred years in Malaga, I would not continue to serenade her in this spot. So proceed on your journey, and God be with you." He then once more greeted his conquered adversary with serious and solemn courtesy, and withdrew. Heimbert followed him, after having cordially shaken hands with the two youths, saying, "No, dear young sirs, do not let it ever again enter your heads to interfere in any honorable contest. Do you understand me?"

He soon overtook his companion, and walked on by his side so full of ardent expectation, and with his heart beating so joyfully and yet so painfully, that he could not utter a single word. Don Fadrique Mendez was also silent; it was not till Heimbert paused before an ornamented garden-gate, and pointed cheerfully to the pomegranate boughs richly laden with fruits which overhung it, saying, "This is the place, dear comrade," that the Spaniard appeared as if about to ask a question, but turning quickly round he merely said, "I am pledged to guard this entrance for you till dawn. You have my word of honor for it." So saying he began walking to and fro before the gate, with drawn sword, like a sentinel, and Heimbert, trembling with joy, glided within the gloomy and aromatic shrubberies.

CHAPTER III

He was not long in seeking the bright star, which he indeed felt was destined henceforth to guide the course of his whole life. The delicate form approached him not far from the entrance; weeping softly, it seemed to him, in the light of the full moon which was just rising, and yet smiling with such infinite grace, that her tears were rather like a pearly ornament than a veil of sorrow. In deep and infinite joy and sorrow the two lovers wandered silently together through the flowery groves; now and then a branch waving in the night-air would touch the guitar on the lady's arm, and it would breathe forth a slight murmur which blended with the song of the nightingale, or the delicate fingers of the girl would tremble over the strings and awaken a few scattered chords, while the shooting stars seemed as if following the tones of the instrument as they died away. Oh, truly happy was this night both to the youth and the maiden, for no rash wish or impure desire passed even fleetingly across their minds. They walked on side by side, happy that Providence had allowed them this delight, and so little desiring any other blessing that even the transitoriness of that they were now enjoying floated away into the background of their thoughts.

In the middle of the beautiful garden there was a large open lawn, ornamented with statues and surrounding a beautiful and splashing fountain. The two lovers sat down on its brink, now gazing at the waters sparkling in the moonlight, and now delighting in the contemplation of each other's beauty. The maiden touched her guitar, and Heimbert, impelled by a feeling scarcely intelligible to himself, sang the following words to it:

“There is a sweet life linked with mine,
But I cannot tell its name;
Oh, would it but to me consign
The secret of that life divine,
That so my lips in whispers sweet
And gentle songs might e'en repeat
All that my heart would fain proclaim!”

He suddenly paused, and blushed deeply, fearing he had been too bold. The lady blushed also, touched her guitar-strings with a half-abstracted air, and at last sang as if dreamily:

“By the spring where moonlight's gleams
O'er the sparkling waters pass,
Who is sitting by the youth,
Singing on the soft green grass?
Shall the maiden tell her name,
When though all unknown it be,
Her heart is glowing with her shame,
And her cheeks burn anxiously,
First, let the youthful knight be named.

‘Tis he that on that glorious day
Fought in Castilla's proud array;
‘Tis he the youth of sixteen years,
At Pavia, who his fortunes tried,
The Frenchman's fear, the Spaniard's pride.
Heimbert is the hero's name,

Victorious in many a fight!
And beside the valiant knight,
Sitting in the soft green grass,
Though her name her lips shall pass,
Dona Clara feels no shame ”

“Oh!” said Heimbert, blushing from another cause than before, “oh, Dona Clara, that affair at Pavia was nothing but a merry and victorious tournament, and even if occasionally since then I have been engaged in a tougher contest, how have I ever merited as a reward the overwhelming bliss I am now enjoying! Now I know what your name is, and I may in future address you by it, my angelic Dona Clara, my blessed and beautiful Dona Clara! But tell me now, who has given you such a favorable report of my achievements, that I may ever regard him with grateful affection?”

“Does the noble Heimbert of Waldhausen suppose,” rejoined Clara, “that the noble houses of Spain had none of their sons where he stood in the battle? You must have surely seen them fighting by your side, and must I not have heard of your glories through the lips of my own people?”

The silvery tones of a little bell sounded just then from a neighboring palace, and Clara whispered, “It is time to part. Adieu, my hero!” And she smiled on the youth through her gushing tears, and bent toward him, and he almost fancied he felt a sweet kiss breathed from her lips. When he fully recovered himself Clara had disappeared, the morning clouds were beginning to wear the rosy hue of dawn, and Heimbert, with a heaven of love’s proud happiness in his heart, returned to his watchful friend at the garden gate.

CHAPTER IV

“Halt!” exclaimed Fadrique, as Heimbert appeared from the garden, holding his drawn sword toward him ready for attack. “Stop, you are mistaken, my good comrade,” said the German, smiling, “it is I whom you see before you.” “Do not imagine, Knight Heimbert of Waldhausen,” said Fadrique, “that I mistake you. But my promise is discharged, my hour of guard has been honorably kept, and now I beg you without further delay to prepare yourself, and fight for your life until heart’s blood has ceased to flow through these veins.” “Good heavens!” sighed Heimbert, “I have often heard that in these southern lands there are witches, who deprive people of their senses by magic arts and incantations. But I have never experienced anything of the sort until to-day. Compose yourself, my dear good comrade, and go with me back to the shore.” Fadrique laughed fiercely, and answered, “Set aside your silly delusion, and if you must have everything explained to you, word by word, in order to understand it, know then that the lady whom you came to meet in the shrubbery of this my garden is Dona Clara Mendez, my only sister. Quick, therefore, and without further preamble, draw!” “God forbid!” exclaimed the German, not touching his weapon. “You shall be my brother-in-law, Fadrique, and not my murderer, and still less will I be yours.” Fadrique only shook his head indignantly, and advanced toward his comrade with measured steps for an encounter. Heimbert, however, still remained immovable, and said, “No, Fadrique, I cannot now or ever do you harm. For besides the love I bear your sister, it must certainly have been you who has spoken to her so honorably of my military expeditions in Italy.” “When I did so,” replied Fadrique in a fury, “I was a fool. But, dallying coward, out with your sword, or—”

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