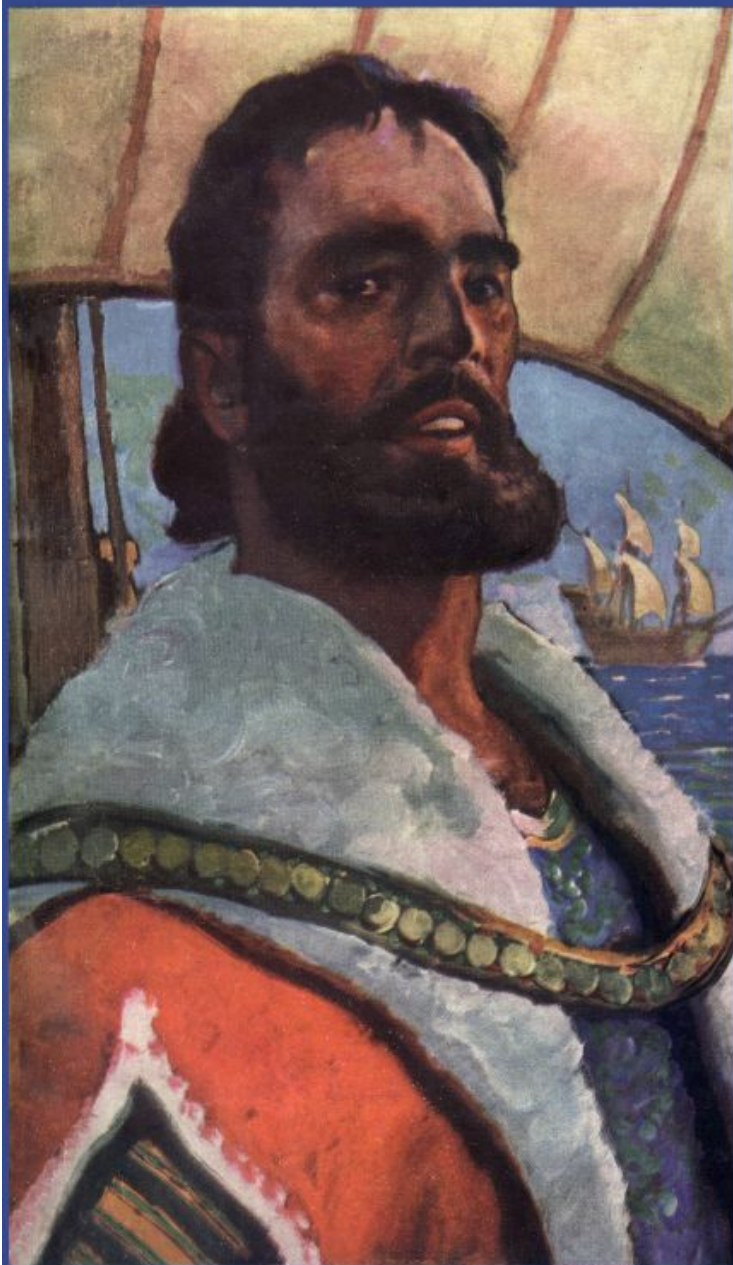


BLUE BOOK

OF FICTION AND ADVENTURE



FEBRUARY

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"The Hand
Invisible"

*The first of a
fascinating series,
Strange Escapes
by*

GORDON KEYNE

•
FULTON GRANT

H. BEDFORD-JONES

L. B. WILLIAMS

**BEATRICE
GRIMSHAW**

**WILLIAM
MacLEOD RAINE**

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•
"Horse Money"

*A lively novelette
by* **RICHARD
WORMSER**

•
Fully Illustrated

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The Hand Invisible

By

HENRY BEDFORD-JONES

Writing under the pseudonym

GORDON KEYNE

Illustrated by Earl Blossom

First published *Blue Book Magazine*, February 1938.

Most exciting of all adventures is that of the escaping prisoner—the life-or-death chance taken by a lone fugitive against tremendous odds. The able author of “Gunpowder Gold” has therefore chosen for his next theme “Strange Escapes”—a series of six brilliant stories of which the first follows herewith.

Cotterel stared defiantly at his cell-mate. A flush was in his thin cheeks, a burning light in his eyes.

“They can’t keep me here!” he snarled under his breath. “They can’t! I’ll get away. It may take months, years—but I’ll do it. They can’t keep me here for life. I’m innocent, I tell you! I didn’t do it!”

He had been working up to this point of explosion for days. Normally a young man of definite charm, of winning personality, he had become sullen and glowering. Wise old Manning, who had spent half his life in prisons, knew the symptoms and was worried. He had come to like young Cotterel rarely. He had come to believe that this “lifer” was really not guilty of the crime that had sent him here.

To the old man’s notion, this prison was a “pipe.” The two were allowed to talk. Manning could have his beloved brushes and sketching materials—an expert forger, he was a creator of exquisite pictures; and in comparison with some places, the regulations here were lax. But as old Manning was well aware, they were not careless.

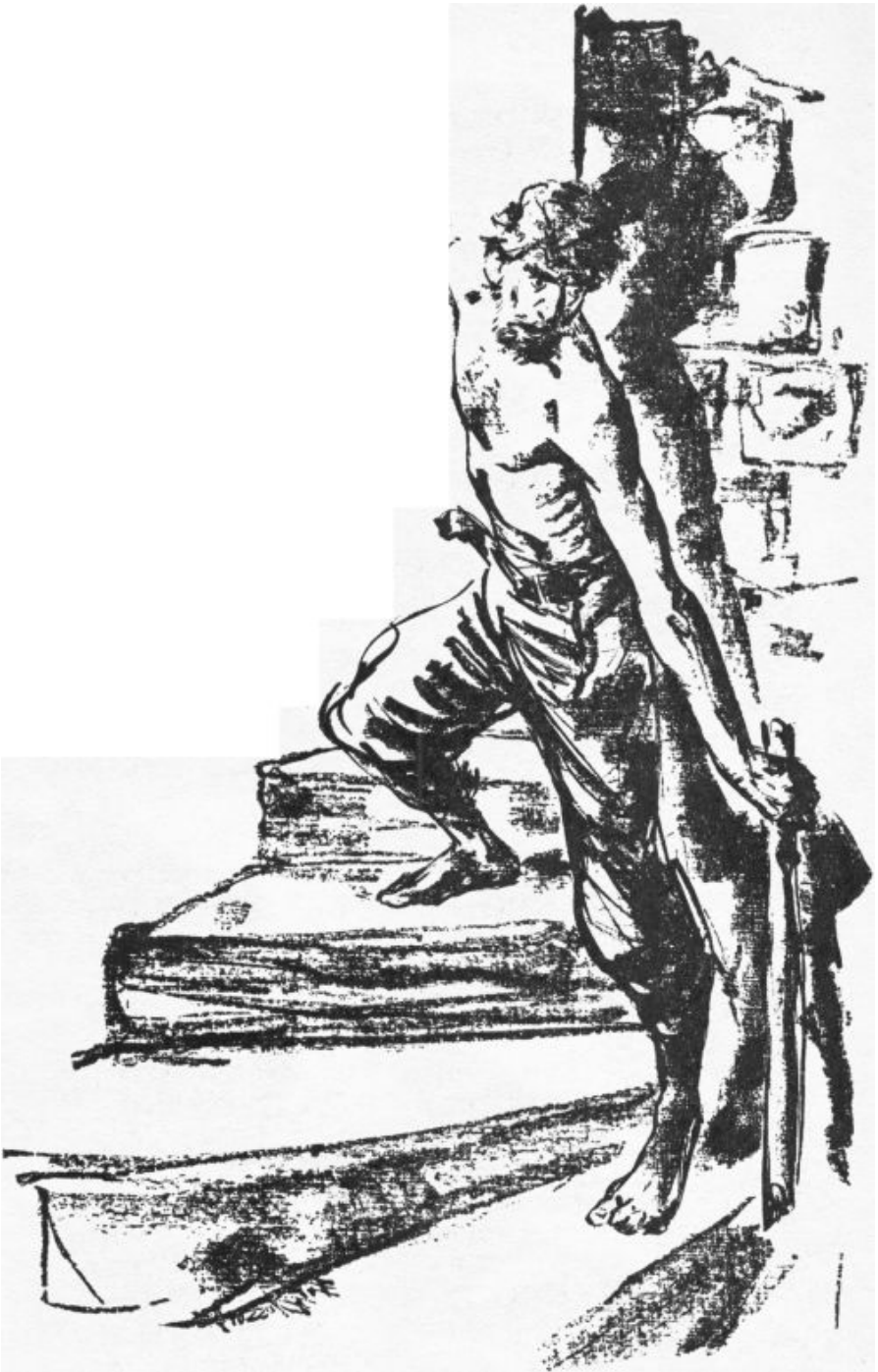
“I tell you, I’m leaving!” Cotterel went on. “I’ve got it all figured out. You needn’t hand me any bunk about getting transferred to Alcatraz if I fail. I don’t intend to fail. It may take me months, but I’m not going to stay here.”

Manning said nothing, for the best of reasons: his vocal cords were paralyzed. But his long, slender fingers spoke for him.

“Suppose you get bumped trying it?”

“I’ll take that gamble,” said Cotterel. Since being incarcerated here, he had had plenty of time to learn the finger-talk employed by Manning. “I’ve made up my mind.”

Manning regarded him anxiously. A wise, shrewd old man was this forger; a man of the keenest intelligence in many ways. He had come to feel a real affection for young Cotterel. Time and again he had acted as a buffer, a windbreak. He had saved Cotterel from many an ill-judged impulsive action.



Kermen crouched, immobile. The sentinel was approaching.

His fingers began to work nimbly.

“You have a plan? You are sure of every detail?”

“Absolutely,” said Cotterel with defiant conviction; and Manning nodded.

“Good. I knew you had a brain. You’ve provided against everything, even the invisible hand and the unexpected message? Splendid! In that case, you’re sure to win. Nobody has ever escaped from this place, but you’ll do it. Congratulations!”

Cotterel gazed at him with a slight frown.

“I figured you’d try to argue against it. You really think it can be done?”

“Absolutely,” said the swift fingers, “under the given circumstances.”

“Hm! What d’you mean by that invisible-hand stuff? Radio?”

Manning’s wrinkled, prison-gray features relaxed in amused laughter. They sat on the lower bunk together; the indefinable, repugnant odor of clean but massed humanity drifted in upon them, the murmur of sounds from this cell-house hung in the air about them.

Cotterel waited, sensing that the older man’s mind was pregnant with unuttered things. He had grown to hold Manning in a peculiar esteem and respect that was beyond mere friendship; criminal or not, the man had a fund of deep, sure wisdom—all the deeper, perhaps, because he was now behind the bars. He himself—guiltless of crime, yet condemned—owed a heavy debt of friendship to this man, and recognized it.

“No, not radio.” Manning’s fingers were hesitant. “The invisible hand and the unexpected message—two things that nearly every man forgets. One is a certainty; the other a bare possibility. One is here, waiting for you every day. The other may not come for years. By some miracle of the law of averages, they do show up together—well, perhaps once in a century, as they did with the *Sieur de Kermen*.”

Cotterel looked at him, puzzled.

“Damned if I know what you’re driving at. Invisible hand? Have you gone nuts all of a sudden, or have you turned spiritualist?”

Manning uttered a silent chuckle. “Neither. . . . Here, I’ll show you where that chap *Kermen* lived. Hand out the sketches, will you?”

From under the bunk Cotterel produced an album of sketches by the hand of old Manning. The latter produced one—apparently the sketch of a fairy island, a solid mass of masonry rising from the sea with its pinnacle in heaven. Battlements lifted from the water; towers lifted farther, buttresses curved in a breath-taking sweep upward, to culminate in a cluster of spiring walls.

Cotterel stared at it, fascinated.

“Well? What’s this place?”

Manning caught up a pencil and wrote a few words, for which his nimble fingers then made the symbols.

“One of the most famous prisons in the world; on an island off the Breton coast, the Alcatraz of a bygone day. In fact, they got the idea of Alcatraz from this place. While in the nominal charge of monks, it had a royal commandant and a garrison of soldiers, received the secret prisoners of the King, and was the most dreaded prison in all France. Architects called it the *Marvel*; France called it the *Ocean Bastille*; on the maps it was known, and still is, as *Mont St. Michel*.”

“Oh!” said Cotterel. “I’ve heard of it. Who was what’s-his-name?”

“*Kermen*? The *Sieur de Kermen* wrote a witty verse about *Madame de Pompadour*, and that finished him. He was a young Breton noble. He was hauled out of his home between two

days and plumped down in Mont St. Michel.”

With his pencil, Manning pointed to a spot halfway up the top cluster of masonry.

“There, in this tower, was a cell. In the cell was a massive cage, eight feet square. In the cage was Kermen—for life. This was in the late fall of 1762. Five months later, Kermen escaped. He was one of the few persons who ever accomplished such a feat.”

The eyes of Cotterel lit up suddenly.

“Tell me about it! I might get some pointers, eh?”

“You might,” was the silent reply. “There was one difference between this place and Alcatraz of the present day. Mont St. Michel was situated on sands that dried for miles about it at low tide—quicksands, in many spots. The prisoners were warned of this, but were not warned of anything else. They mocked at the warning. First, they knew it was impossible to escape. Second, all the communication between the Mont and the mainland passed over the sands when the tide was out; therefore they knew it would be possible to get away, if they could leave the prison. But even did they reach the savage woods of the Breton coast, they would be run down like wild animals.”

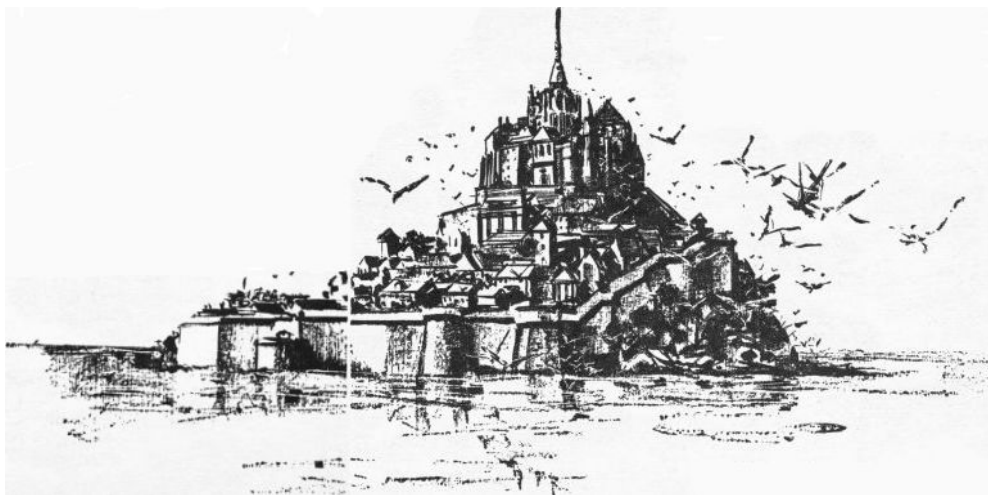
“Not an encouraging prospect,” observed Cotterel. “Still, there might be worse. If the right man tries it, if he plans each detail perfectly, anything is possible.”

“So Kermen thought,” was the response of old Manning. “Although he was in solitary, there was no rule against his talking. He fell into the habit of talking every day with his guard, Dupont; and of all things, they discussed escape. Dupont was a soldier, a hard, dry, merciless man. He liked to torment the prisoner. But I must tell you more about the prisoner, about his prison, about the impossibility of any escape—”

Cotterel watched those deft, slender old fingers with fascination. He never tired of watching them. Their skilled weaving of words helped to occupy his brain and kill the timeless hell that surrounded him.

Now they were more fascinating than ever, as they sketched *Sieur de Kermen*—that ardent, eager, hotly impulsive young Breton whose life had so suddenly ended in this cage. It was a cage of massive wooden bars two inches thick, hewed out of oak long centuries ago, a cage more for punishment than for restraint, a final prison within the very heart of a prison. At one end was the thick stone wall with its tiny window.

Kermen was black-browed, resolute, alert of eye and keen of brain. Plucked from his own chateau in the heart of the Breton forests, he knew next to nothing of Mont St. Michel, but he learned. The danger-lines of his square chin and mouth were masked by a growth of beard. His knotted shoulder muscles were masked by rags; but beneath his quiet acceptance of destiny lay a raging spirit. Like an eagle with clipped wings, he bided his time.



“This Alcatraz of a bygone day received the secret prisoners of the King; it was the most dreaded prison in all France.”

Twice a day, Dupont appeared, opened his cage door, gave him food; the second time, at dusk, Dupont led him out for a half-hour walk on the platform of the tower, watching him narrowly as he paced up and down the stones. From his window he had a view of the distant coast-line and the sands or water about the islet. Those gleaming sands beckoned him to liberty, three hundred feet below.

“Bah! I’ll not be here long,” he assured Dupont. “My sister has influence. She’ll see to it that I get a pardon. Before Christmas, I’ll be out!”

Christmas came and passed. The straw covering the stone floor was rotten and alive with vermin. The walls were scaly from the damp sea air. The huge iron lock of the cage door, although kept well oiled, was a rusty shell from the same cause.

Dupont liked to jeer at him. “Once out of the cage, the cell remains, my friend! Once out of the cell, there’s still the tower; the walls below have soldiers. If you leave the cage, the cell, the tower, and flutter like an angel from the walls to the shore underneath—there’s the sea to pass. Pleasant prospect! And if you wait for the tide to go down, you have the quicksands replacing it. Tell me when you want to try it, and I’ll enjoy the spectacle.”

Dupont would enjoy it, yes. His hard, cruel features backed up his words. He lost no opportunity to sear and scald the prisoner with his burning tongue. There was no kindness or pity in the man.

Kermen never lost his temper, never showed his hatred. He was a model prisoner. When the prior of the abbey came each week to visit him, he never had any complaints. No letters came to him; he wrote none. When he stretched out on the old bed or cot across one end of his cage, and shivered in the wintry wind under his blankets, he did not break into curses and railings against fate.

It did not occur to anyone that the silent man is the dangerous man. . . .

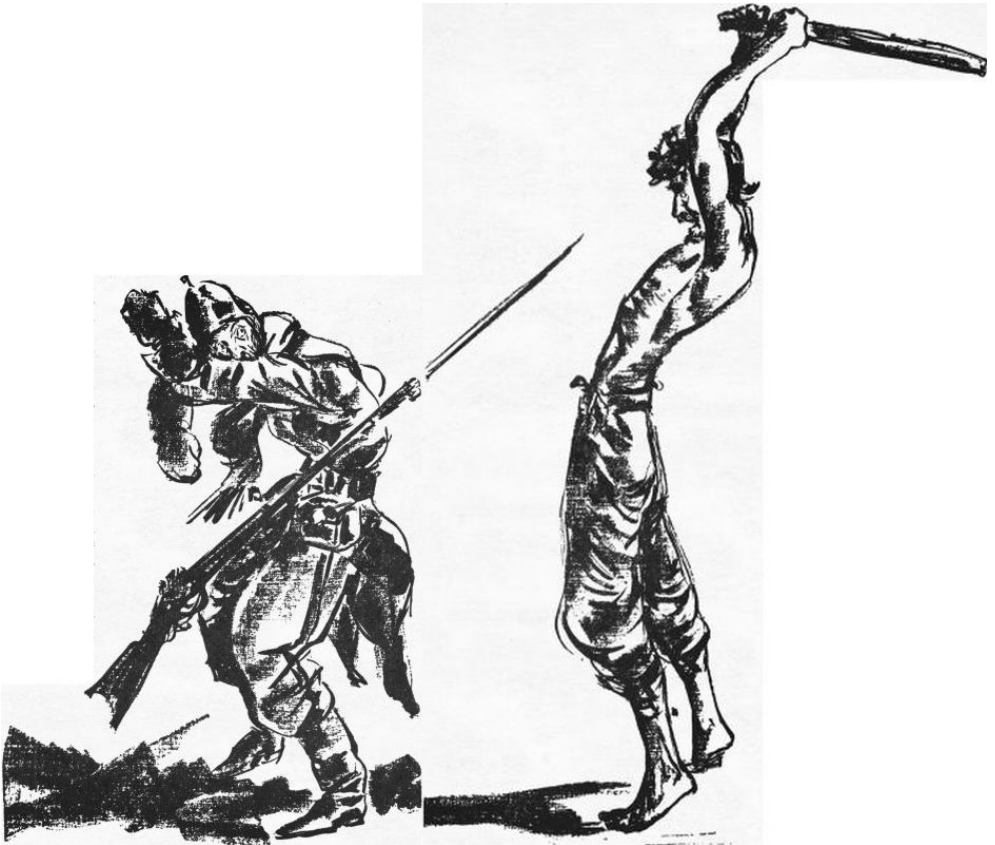
Christmas gone, he gave up hope of hearing anything from his sister. The jeers of Dupont sank into his soul. He had dared to mock the favorite of the king, and he would be here until he died. Unless he escaped.

He resolved to escape. . . .

From the platform of the tower, the hopelessness of such an attempt was more apparent. Suppose he stood here, free—what then? Below were watch-rooms and a massive gate, from which ran a curved descent of stone stairs to the lower walls—an immense open stairway thirty feet wide, with landings and rest-benches. Anyone gaining the upper buildings had to come by this approach. There was no other. And even if he descended it, the walls below were guarded by soldiers.

Any other descent had to be by air. These upper walls plunged straight down and down. Built as a fortress, this place had never been captured by an enemy.

The platform of the tower communicated by a battlemented approach with one flank of the abbey buildings where there was nothing at all underneath—nothing but a tremendous gulf that ended on the sand outside the walls. One evening as he paced up and down, Kermen heard a strange noise he had often heard, and now he saw the cause.



Kermen, springing up, rushed at him. The man glanced around; before he could cry out, the oak bar descended with crushing force.

A tremendous creaking and groaning filled the air—a sound sufficient to wake the dead. This squealing shriek came from the abbey buildings on a level with his tower platform, probably two hundred feet away. Here had swung into sight an immense crane and wheel,

over which ran a rope. This rope, dropping straight down to the sand at the foot of the Mont, was hauling up a tremendous net filled with boxes and barrels.

Dupont, seeing his interest, came closer to him with a thin laugh.

“That’s how you’re fed, my friend; that’s how everything comes up here from below. An interesting invention, eh? I see the idea appeals to you. Easy to come up that way—easy to go down. Yes?”

“So it would seem,” Kermen replied.

Dupont chuckled.

“A prisoner tried it once, ignorant that three men are required to work the winch in the kitchen. He went down like a plummet. There’s no way of slowing up the rope, you see. Remember it, my friend, remember it!”

Kermen shivered a little, and turned away.

“Thank you for the warning,” he said in a disconsolate voice, and Dupont laughed in cruel delight at his dejection.

But, in his heart, Kermen felt a pulsing thrill that he could scarcely repress. The one problem that had baffled him was suddenly solved. Now he had only to overcome a few trifling details.

Details—each one exact, carefully figured out, perfectly timed. Each day as he paced the tower platform during his little round of liberty, he eyed those ramparts leading to the kitchens of the abbey and above them. He learned every stone in them, every narrow place, every nook and cranny. He watched where the sentinels paced. He spent long night hours figuring out the time and tide. From his little window, he could tell when there was water around the Mont and when the sands were bare; no more, but this was quite enough for his purpose.

In the cold days and shivering nights of January, he settled down to work. All his hope of any intervention with the king was gone; the utter silence of his sister, of his friends, showed that they were afraid to work on his behalf or write him. Anyone who insulted the king’s mistress got short shrift in those days. Kermen was not aware that he had been ordered shut up in strict incommunicado; no letters would have reached him, in any case.

His rotted old bed-frame had yielded precious treasure—part of a rusted iron clamp that had served to hold the frame together. This he sharpened on the stones of the wall, rubbing and rubbing eternally until one edge of it was razor-keen. With it he attacked one of the wooden bars of his cage, not to make an opening for egress, but to obtain the lever and weapon he needed.

It was slow work; the ancient oak was almost as hard as the iron. He had the one inestimable advantage of not being watched. The daily inspection of Dupont was a mere casual look around, the weekly visit of the prior held no danger. Thus, he was entirely free to work as he willed, and with the edge of his iron fragment continually re-whetted on the stone, he made progress. He had nothing else to do—except be sure of each detail.

Here he was positive and left no loophole for chance to defeat him. Over and over, his brain covered each phase of each detail; he even made separate plans in case the weather changed suddenly, if rain came or wet fog from the sea. For any contingency that might arise, even discovery of his work and plans, he was fully prepared.

Even to the quicksands. True, he was only allowed out here on the tower platform after darkness had fallen. He could see nothing of the sands around the island. But twice he was out

here at ebb tide, when the sands were bare, and he saw the lights of people going to the mainland or returning. He had only to reach the one entrance to the Mont, and then follow a straight course. He took his bearings of that course by the lights, and knew he could laugh at any quicksands. His mind was at rest there.

Thus he satisfied himself; nothing was neglected or overlooked.



When Kermen leaned over him, he found that the man had died instantly.

With breadcrumb-paste and dirt, he filled the holes he cut in the cage bar before Dupont came each day; not that it was necessary, perhaps, but he could not afford to take the least chance. The holes deepened until a mere shred of oak held the bar in place. He was ready.

His calculations were exact as to time and tide. The mainland was only a mile and a half distant, but to follow the route marked in his mind, from the entrance of the Mont to the little town of Pontorson, was farther. He must so time his escape from the cage, the cell, the tower, the island itself, that when he set foot on the sands below he would have time to reach the mainland, yet not leave time enough for pursuit to follow him. If he reached shore, and the water cut off any pursuit, he could be in safety before it really started after him. While he knew nothing of local conditions, he was certain, by universal geographical knowledge, that from ebb tide to flood tide would require six hours; and on this accepted fact he based his calculations.

These were marvels of ingenuity. He had, of course, no watch, but he had means of marking the time roughly. In minutes, by his own pulse-beats; in hours, by the voice of the sentinels on the ramparts, and by the bells from the abbey up above. Those monks were Benedictines, vowed to silence. Until they retired to sleep, Kermen knew the hour by the sound of the bells. After that, the sentinels would serve him.

There were further complications—to indicate just one, he knew he must kill or remove a sentinel. It must be done immediately after that sentinel had voiced his hourly “All’s well!”; thus, his action would not be discovered for at least an hour. This action, however, must fit exactly with all the other details of his plan, lest it disarrange them. And careful figuring was needful.

He set his escape for the night of January twenty-fifth. At precisely eight o'clock of this night, he would break out the bar of his cage—after that, every least detail was figured exactly and precisely. In the event of fog, which frequently came in very suddenly and thickly, he must postpone the matter until the next night.

The day came. Another man might have been excited, in a fever of impatience, all day long; but not Alaine, Sieur de Kermen. So great was his mental poise, so confident and assured was he, that he awaited the evening with patience; he even slept during the day, in order to be fresh that night.

At seven o'clock, Dupont brought his supper and took him out on the platform for his daily airing. Darkness had fallen; the stars were clear and cold. No fog. No snow or rain. No moon. Everything was perfect, as perfect as he could have wished.

Then, as though to give him a good omen, came a curious incident proving his own mental accuracy. Dupont's lantern flickered and went out while they were on the platform. Dupont came back into the cell, tried to relight the lantern, failed, and set it down. When he locked Kermen into the cage, he departed with his usual stinging taunt, and forgot his lantern.

Kermen called after him, called loudly, and he returned, with an oath.

"You forgot your lantern," said Kermen. "I'll not need it when I leave, to-night, so you may as well take it along."

Dupont snarled at him, in evil humor, caught up the lantern, and the cell door clanged shut again.

Kermen drew a deep breath; the unexpected had happened, and he had been equal to it. Unless he had brought Dupont back now, the guard would have returned later for the lantern, probably disrupting all his plans. He had acted well, he felt.

In the darkness, he polished off his simple meal, and restrained himself. Until the moment set, he would not so much as touch that cage bar. As he sat, however, he began to quiver a little; trembling seized upon him, and the agony of suspense was terrible. Yet he endured it. Until the voices of the sentinels floated in, announcing that the moment had come, he did not stir.

Eight o'clock. He needed no light; he knew as though it were daylight just where each object was. He had rehearsed every move and act. He went to the cut bar, tried it, put his weight upon it—and broke it.

In his hand was a two-foot section of oak, hard and heavy as iron, two inches thick. He had selected that particular bar with the greatest care.

He turned and went to the cage door. The enormous iron lock had been bolted to the oak a good two centuries ago or more; tradition said the cage dated from the time of Louis XI. Kermen set the bar in his hand exactly as he had planned, against the side of the lock, and put his weight on it. He had judged aright. There was a crackle of rusted metal, and the entire lock broke clear.

He was out of the cage. The first step was accomplished.

He went to the door of the cell. Here his task would have been impossible, had not his careful attention to the least detail made it absurdly easy. He had a fulcrum for his lever, but here his lever must have a point in order to be of any use. So he had cut one end of the bar on a slant. He inserted this flat point with the greatest care in the spot previously selected by daylight. The lock, which was probably two centuries older than that on the cage, crumpled

with a mere wheeze of ancient metal. Another twist, and it came away *in toto*, dragging the bolt with it. There was no bar outside the door.

The second step was accomplished.

Kermen tried the door, found that it opened freely—and left it closed. His iron will conquered the impulse that tore at him in every nerve. Despite the chill of the winter night, sweat streamed down his cheeks as he deliberately went back into the cage and sat down on his bed; his knees were shaking, his fingers were uncertain.

He forced himself to wait here, gradually regaining his composure. At this moment, he knew the sands around the island were dry. Possibly belated visitors were coming or going. If he could gain those sands now, he would not have the slightest difficulty in following them to the mainland. Yet, if he were to reach the sands, he must stick to his plan. And this called for taking care of one sentinel at nine o'clock, not before. He must not risk the least detail.

He waited, grimly. He had given himself this extra time in case of trouble in breaking the locks; no use taking any chances. He attempted to count the passage of time, but failed. This alarmed him. With a stern effort, he got himself in hand, quieted his brain, and settled into a cold concentration. Again luck favored him. A bell sounded; it was the abbey bell denoting that the hospice, or quarters of guests and pilgrims, was closed for the night. He had forgotten all about this bell, which very seldom reached his ears. Eight-thirty, then.

He could begin to count the minutes now, and did so. At ten to nine, he took his bar of oak, left the cage, and went out on the platform. He turned to the ramparts, those which led above the kitchen of the abbey.

A sentinel was there, pacing up and down in the starlight; now close at hand, then to the far end of the section. Kermen crouched, immobile. Once more luck was with him. The sentinel was approaching when the first of the hourly calls floated up from other sentries on the lower ramparts.

The man came close to where Kermen waited, turned, and then uttered his own call to show that he was awake. It was taken up in turn by another, and passed on; but this sentry came to a sudden halt. Kermen, springing up, rushed at him. The man glanced around; before he could cry out, the oak bar descended with crushing force.

When Kermen leaned over him, he found that the man had died instantly.

From the dead man, he took firebox, knife, and the crossed belts of his uniform, with the belt proper. These, with his own belt, gave him four; he buckled them together and then moved on along the parapet, taking musket and bayonet.

He paused. Directly below him was the huge crane and wheel by which provisions and luggage were brought to the abbey from far below. Around one of the projections of the battlement, he passed the four belts and made them fast. Holding to this encircling strip of leather, he let himself out and down until his feet came to rest on the crane.

Ten feet below was the huge window-opening into which the net of goods was swung; it was far beyond his reach, as he had figured it must be. With the fixed bayonet of the musket, however, he could reach the rope that passed through the wheel and went into this window below.

He clung to the belt by one hand, and reached out. He stood above a sheer gulf, straining far by one hand; if that string of belts gave way, he was gone on one plunge. Even though the night was windless, air circled around him and tore dangerously at him. Twice the bayonet

found the rope, only to let it slip. His arms were growing weary, the frightful strain of his position was overcoming him, when the bayonet caught the rope and drew it.

For an instant his heart leaped, as the wheel creaked; then the rope came up to him, drawn not from the wheel, but from the window. Desperately, he inched his hand along the musket, balancing its weight, until he got his fingers on the rope. Then he drew himself back to the parapet. Giddy, trembling in every muscle, he fell across the stone and let the rifle down inside.

For five minutes he lay there, weak and a little sick, but holding to the rope. Recovering, he pulled himself over and began to drag in on the line. It came up to him from the coils inside the window, below—a stout, thick rope, but flexible with age and long use.

He pulled it in—in—until he had as much as he could carry—more than enough to serve his purpose. Then, with the soldier's knife, he sawed through it, shouldered the coil, and went back to the parapet of his own tower. He had now to manage the third step; his escape from this tower.

About one of the projections of the battlement,—a very particular one,—he passed the rope, and then lowered it. Directly below was the ascent going up to the impregnable entrance of the abbey proper, one of whose guardian towers was this on which he stood. No guards were posted on the huge, curving sweep of masonry, the giant staircase leading down from the abbey to the lower walls; but sentinels were dotted along those walls below, which rose up straight from the rocks of the sea. So Kermen had to exercise caution.

He let down the rope, and from the sense of feel, could tell that it reached the stones below and hung there. Not enough. Leaving it in place, he returned to where he had obtained it. Against just such need, he had weighted the end of the cut line with the soldier's musket. Now he hauled up more rope and more, from the tremendous lengths coiled in the kitchen opening below. Again having enough, he cut it, shouldered the coil, and went back to his tower platform.

No alarm below; his dangling rope had attracted no attention. Now he lowered the second length, came to the end, let it go altogether, slipping and slithering down through the air and over the starlit masonry below.

No more time to kill now—on the contrary, everything depended on fast work. Kermen let himself over the dizzy edge, swung down on the rope, caught it with his feet, and descended. Easily said; but a mad thing for a man innocent of ropes to attempt. He banged against the tower, burned his hands on the rope, and the enormous strength of his arms and shoulders hardly compensated for his lack of skill. He went down the final ten feet with a rush, but lay quiet when he struck the huge stairs. No alarm was given. No bones were broken. He came to his feet, caught up the rope that lay loosely on the descent, and peered ahead.

One more step was accomplished. Now to leave the island itself.

He knew exactly where he wanted to use the second rope. In the starlight, the figure of the nearest sentry was visible; out beyond, the sands lay bare. His rope coiled, Kermen crept down along the wall of the towers until he reached the outer line of battlements. He gained them, saw the sentry a little beyond, watched him pace up and down. When the man's back was turned, Kermen crept out and swiftly made fast the rope about a parapet, sent the coil slithering over, came back to cover.

When the sentry faced about again, he himself followed, regardless of bleeding hands. He was through the embrasure and out of sight, before the sentry turned. Here was his last risk, his final gamble with destiny, as he thought. If that sentry heard him, he was lost. If not, then he won.

When he scraped and swung against the lower wall, he desperately clung to the naked stones, lest he be heard. As he slipped on down the rope, his heart turned over at a sudden sharp voice above—then came a laugh, and he relaxed. Two sentries had met and were standing talking together. Kermen's nostrils caught a faint reek of tobacco smoke. At the same instant, his feet touched something solid.

He was on the rocks below the walls. His escape was accomplished.

Now for safety! Mindful of the two guards talking above, he seized the chance to leave the walls themselves unobserved. The starlight would not betray him to these careless sentries, except at close quarters.

Without hesitation, he struck straight out from the Mont; he had to risk the quicksands here, but found none. . . . Straight out, fearing at each instant that his figure might be noticed in the light of the high stars; but it was not. No alarm sounded.

He circled around swiftly and struck into the line whose bearings he had noted, heading for the village of Pontorson on the far shore. The sands stretched dry, outspread, level for miles and miles.

And then, all of a sudden, the invisible hand clutched down. Kermen, looking at the sands ahead of him, saw a river appear where, an instant before, had been nothing. Across the night, he heard the rushing ripple of water.

The invisible hand! The one thing against which all cleverness was useless. The one unknown quantity which always obtains, when matched with men's wits.

Old Manning leaned back; his deftly flying fingers fell in his lap; their speech was, for the moment, at an end. Cotterel, who had been following the story with absorbed intentness, spoke out impatiently.

"But I don't understand! You say he had escaped—he was correct in everything he planned! And you spoke of a message."

Manning nodded.

"Yes," said his fingers, clicking out the words. "Yes. With the next low tide, a courier arrived. A pardon had been obtained by his sister; he was to be set free. But he was already free, poor fellow!"

"What the devil are you driving at?" demanded Cotterel impatiently.

"The invisible hand had freed him—the one thing which always puts the cleverest brain to naught," came the response. "There is always something unforeseen, something unguessed, something unknown. In this case, you will remember that Kermen had based all his calculations on the fact that it's six hours from the ebb tide to the flood tide."

"Of course. Any fool knows that," Cotterel interjected.

Manning regarded him for a moment, and smiled a little.

"Of course. But Mont St. Michel happens to be one of the few places in the world where the tide may rise in an hour, in twenty minutes, in five minutes! Sometimes it comes in across the miles of level sands, suddenly fills the channels of unseen rivers, springs out of the sand

itself, comes rushing and flooding at a speed nothing can escape! This was one of those times.”

“You mean—good Lord! Then this fellow was caught by the tide?”

“Precisely. As every man who matches his wit with the invisible is caught—by something. The man who is so sure he cannot fail, the man who guards against every contingency, the man who refuses to accept what fate has brought to him—that man is the victim of the invisible hand, of the unexpected message. In Kermen’s case, the two came together. They rarely coincide, like that, but they did in this instance.”

Cotterel stared at him for a moment with slowly whitening face.

“I see,” he said in a low voice. “I see what you’re driving at. You’re telling me there’s always hope, that I may be pardoned when I least expect it?”

“That’s always the possibility; but what I’m telling you is to warn you against what you can’t see, my friend.”

“Yeah; I get that too,” Cotterel rejoined, and his head drooped. “There’s always something—the invisible hand! Well—I’ll think about it, Manning. Maybe you’re right, at that.”

And he stared thoughtfully, soberly, reflectively, at the floor of the cell.

[The end of *The Hand Invisible* by Henry Bedford-Jones (as Gordon Keyne)]